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NELLIE'S MEMORIES



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NELLIE'S MEMORIES

A Domestic Story

BY

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"WOOED AND MARRIED," "BARBARA HEATHCOTE'S TRIAL"
ETC.



A NEW EDITION

LONDON

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON

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1898

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1898

TO THE MEMORY OF THAT BELOVED PARENT,
TO WHOSE AFFECTIONATE SCRUTINY
SO MANY OF THE FOLLOWING PAGES WERE SUBMITTED,

THIS SIMPLE STORY

Is Dedicated

BY HIS SORROWING

DAUGHTER.

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NELLIE'S MEMORIES.

CHAPTER I.

'She was a soft landscape of mild earth,
Where all was harmony and calm and
quiet,
LUXURIANT, budding, cheerful without mirth;
Which, if not happiness, is much more
rich in
Than are your mighty passions.'—*Byron.*

'She doeth little kindnesses
Which most leave undone or despise;
For nought that sets one's heart at ease,
And giveth happiness or peace,
Is low esteemed in her eyes.'—*Lowell.*

I DO not think there is a prettier room to be found in England than our drawing-room at Sunnyside, and I know I would not change it and its dear old shabbiness and faded chintz covers for the most superb apartment in Belgravia. To me your gilded saloons and rainbow tapestries are an abomination; grandeur and gentility may move therein hand in hand, but give me the well-littered homelike parlour, where the girls may sew their lengths of calico unhindered, and the boys put down their papers unrebuked. A long, low, wainscoted room is our drawing-room at Sunnyside, reaching from end to end of the house, with one window looking out on the lawn and the cedar-tree in the middle, and the other on the flagged stone court and iron gate and the lilac and laburnums that grow round it. A room full of sweet scents and sounds, and faint this afternoon with the fragrance of the white syringa which Louie has so tastefully grouped in the tall china jars; with picturesque snatches of light and shade playing on the well-worn carpet, and hiding in the quaint nooks and crevices with which it abounds.

And here I must plead guilty to a little weakness: I hate change, I cannot bear breaking up old associations in the minutest degree, even by the removal or readjustment of an article of furniture. I like to look round and say, 'It was here she last sat,' or 'in that couch my poor mother loved to lie and watch the boys playing on the lawn.' My poor mother! it is just six months since she faded quietly away, and left me, a weak girl of one-and-twenty, to take up the burden of her responsibility. Poor mother! she was ever a grave, sad woman, somewhat stern, and so reserved with her children that it was not till her dying hour that I

ever guessed or imagined that I was more to her than the rest ; till she took me by the hand, and called me her good, her favourite child, and solemnly committed my brothers and sisters to my care, bidding me watch over them with a mother's love, and over my father with the tenderness of a wife. Well, Heaven knows I have striven to do so, but were it not for Dudley I should be utterly weary ; he is my sole help and support, for our father is still sadly cast down, but we are all trusting to this London visit to work wonders for him.

This time in the afternoon I call my quiet hour : Louie is always out, and the boys in school, and I can sit and sew undisturbedly in my low chair by the open window, with the pleasant sounds of the house-martens twittering under the eaves, and the happy incessant humming of Louie's bees. There is not a sound in the old house ; in another hour there will be the tramp of eager feet, caps and satchels will be cast down on the hall table, and a perfect strife of tongues will prevail. There are seven of us girls and boys ; Dudley and Bruce come first, then I and Louie. Dudley is not so handsome as his brother, who is considered a perfect Apollo in our village, but to me Dudley's grey eyes and grave, sweet smile are worth all Bruce's chiselled features and languid, aristocratic air, which always chafes me with its proud assumption, though Dudley says I am rather hard on him, as he is a downright good fellow in the main, and an excellent man of business ; and perhaps, after all, the fault lies with the girls who spoil him dreadfully ; and, as they say at home, I am not impartial. For Dudley is my darling and my friend ; ever since I can remember anything, he and I have been inseparable in all our childish joys and sorrows, and since the day our mother died he has been more than brother to me, and however sad I may feel, or weary like Martha with 'much serving,' the sound of his ringing laughter seems to lighten my heart like magic. They say I am like Dudley in person ; I know I have his eyes and hair, but there all resemblance ceases. Louie and Bruce are the beauties of the family, and they know it. Louie, though younger than I, is invariably supposed to be my senior. She is a tall, fair woman, with large soft eyes, and a splendid head covered with rippling, ruddy masses of hair. A loveable, indolent, graceful creature, with a majestic air that has won for her the endearing name of 'Queen Loo,' lazy, ease-loving, sweet-tempered ; and withal as proud and imperial as her name. A veritable mass of contradiction is our Loo ; she is a Lady Bountiful in our village, and is all but worshipped by the poor, whom she is ever ready to assist by word or deed. I have known her go miles in the severest weather to visit a sick child, or carry food to a starving family, yet will refuse invariably to fulfil the lightest domestic office, terming it drudgery ; and it is a household proverb that whatever Queen Loo says or does is right. She is the possessor of a small legacy from an aunt, which is divided between her poor and her dress : were it

not for this, I believe we should have been long ago ruined by her extravagance and vagaries.

Next to Louie came a pale, crippled boy who died some eight years back, and then our bonnie handsome school-boy Halcot, and then my pet Charlie with his sweet violet eyes and sunny smile, the plague and darling of the house. I do not know how it is, but Charlie is always in scrapes and getting out again from morning to night; not a day passes without some complaint, yet he is so delicate and sensitive a child that we dare not punish him; besides which I can scarcely withstand his wistful eyes and his eager explanation and entreaties for pardon; as for the windows he has broken, their name is 'Legion;' weekly there is a smash of broken glass, and 'Please, Miss, master Charlie has broken the nursery window and woke baby,' then the entrance of a curly head and rosy, tear-stained face, and there is the lecture to be gone over again. How Charlie would ever manage to get on at school without Halcot I cannot imagine; I expect his life would be a perfect martyrdom: lately Dudley has taken him in hand, and I trust he will do some good with him; for the little fellow minds him more than anybody else.

Lastly comes our mother's last legacy, our little Rill, for so Dudley called her one day when he heard her sweet babbling talk to the daisies on the lawn, and Rill we have called her ever since, though her real baptismal name is Maud. And yonder totters the little maid with naked rosy feet across the stone hall, socks and shoes solemnly tucked under her arms.

'Oh, naughty little Rill, naughty baby to take off her socks,' I cry, catching her up in my arms; Rill answers by making her mouth into a great rosebud which she gives for a peace-offering, and this being received graciously, bursts into a perfect shout of baby laughter, and as I bend over to rub the little cold toes, begins squeezing my face and head, and uttering sweet inarticulate murmurs.

'Oh, my bonnie bairn,' I say, kissing the dimpled fat hands, and then I hear a quick step, and 'Nellie, Nellie, where are you?' 'Here, Dudley, here, my dear,' and somehow as I answer I have a strange feeling that were I lying in my quiet grave the sound of that light tread over the daisies at my head would reach even my lifeless ears and stir me into life.

'Well, Nell, playing as usual the part of little mother,' and Dudley drops down on his knees before baby, after giving me the usual afternoon kiss, and buries his face in the creasy neck. 'Pigs, pigs,' cries Rill, protruding her forward little toes, and Dudley goes to market accordingly, eliciting screams of delight.

'Oh, Dudley, take care,' for Rill is snatched from my arms and lifted aloft on Dudley's shoulder, as he scampers round the room and across the hall, neighing loudly to imitate Billy the blind pony.

There is another rush, and then he and Rill disappear together into the depths of an easy-chair.

'Oh, she will be the death of me!' said Dudley, tossing his hair from his brow; 'on a June afternoon, too. Oh! I am so hot:' whereupon baby commences to be very sympathetic, and taking out a doll's handkerchief begins a minute course of rubbing down, while she croons out a little song over him, which has the effect of sending him to sleep, while I take up my work again, smiling to myself. Hark, the old church bell chimes the quarter; I must go and make tea, for he will want it, poor fellow, when he wakes.

As I pass through the hall on my way to the dining-room, I can see Bruce lounging under the cedar-tree, cigarette in hand, and Louie standing near him in her broad-brimmed hat. These two conspire to spoil each other; and as far as tastes go, they are wonderfully alike—they both enjoy the *dolce far niente* so thoroughly, and both take life in the same indolent, gracious way. Our dining-parlour is the same size as our drawing-room, wainscoted with dark oak, and filled with heavy cumbrous furniture, which task little hands sorely to remove it.

Our tea-table is our great institution, the most genial meal of the day. Dinner is always a hurried piece of business, despatched as quickly as possible, with little or no conversation, save a few business remarks exchanged between Dudley and his brother, or a languid protest from Bruce at the boys' voracious appetites. But tea-time is a different affair; it is our great social gathering—the pleasantest hour of the day; work is over, and the boys' lessons done, leisure and ease prevail, and there is one buzz of happy talk round the singing urn. Every one has his or her piece of news to impart, anecdotes of school-fellows and school-fellows' doings from Halcot and Charlie, little scraps of gossip from Louie and Bruce, and good-humoured jokes from Dudley; it used to be the habit of every one to talk at once, but happily this has been greatly remedied.

As I stood on the threshold, on this afternoon in which I first took up the warp and woof of our life—our sweet home life—in order to piece its fragments into a retrospective whole, I gazed for a moment half sadly at the homely table, which looked gay enough with the evening sun streaming on snowy cloth and glistening silver, and thought how long it seemed since I first took my mother's old seat at the tea-tray, and little Rill in her black frock was placed in her high chair beside me. What if I should fail in my duty to one of these little ones, was the constant burthen of my fear; but when I hinted at such a doubt to my father, he said, 'Keep a brave heart, Nellie, and do your best; neither your dear mother nor I would ever ask more,' so I mean to take Dudley's favourite motto, 'Nil desperandum,' for my own, and not meet troubles half-way, as is my usual stupid custom.

'Nellie, may Seymour come in to tea?' 'Yes, Halcot, if his mother can spare him,' I answer, pausing in the everlasting bread-and-butter cutting to turn to the voice. Certainly our Halcot is a

handsome lad, but he is nothing to be compared to the noble type of English boy who stands beside him, with his fair Saxon face, and proud, free bearing ; and Seymour Egerton is as superior to Halcot in intellect and strength of character as he is in looks. Nevertheless, they form a striking instance of true-hearted boyish friendship, of a friendship so strong and so unselfish, that it can scarcely be expressed by the rough school terms of chums and mates, but contains the germs of something higher and nobler. It is not only that they are inseparable as playmates and school-fellows, or that the one cares for no pleasure of which the other is not a partaker ; but there is a singular beauty in the earnestness of their affection for each other, which, generally undemonstrative, after the manner of boys, comes to the surface only at seasons of great excitement. Dudley has noticed this as well as I ; years ago he christened them the family Damon and Pythias—terms which, being at that time but very young students, thoroughly perplexed and disgusted them ; and to the infinite delight of his elder brother, poor Halcot was heard to exclaim, ‘that he thought a person need not go down as low as the infernal regions for a name for a fellow ;’ of course, since then our Damon has kept his name, and I am happy to say is more reconciled to it. Most of Seymour’s half-holidays are spent at our house, and many an evening besides, so that we look upon him as one of ourselves ; therefore my acquiescence in Halcot’s request is considered as certain.

‘Thanks, Nellie, I will come in then, as my mother and father are dining at the Harrisons’ to-night ; she is so much better, and they have urged it so, that father is to carry her across ; so I will just run over, and be back in a moment. Don’t wait for me.’

‘No, old fellow ; I’ll leave you your share of the cranberry jam,’ shouted Halcot ; ‘only be quick ; we’ll get Bruce to join us in a game of cricket on the lawn after tea.’

‘All right,’ echoed down the lane, as the straw hat and blue ribbon disappeared in a twinkling.

‘Halcot,’ I said, after a pause, during which I continued bread-and-butter cutting—I am certain Werther’s Charlotte never cut such piles as I did daily—‘this is the third time Seymour has taken tea here this week. I believe you would like him to live with us altogether.’ Halcot turned from the window, where he was quietly whittling wood, with an apologetic laugh.

‘Why, you see, Nellie, it is so awfully slow for him at home ; no brothers and sisters, his mother always ill, and his father shut up in his study—of course he likes to come here.’

‘Of course he does ; only I was speaking of you, not him.’

‘I—well, ’tis all the same ; what he likes I do, and what I like you do,’ finishing this elegant argument by giving me a schoolboy’s hug ; after which he refreshed the general tone of his mind by such an application to the tea gong as quickly brought the stragglers from all parts, and in a moment the table was surrounded.

'Hallo, Loo!' cried Dudley, as she entered in her train of bombazine and crape, and kissed him in her usual calm and stately manner, 'where have you been while Rill has been mesmerizing me to sleep?'

'Under the cedar-tree with Bruce—Take care, Seymour, boy,' as he rushed in breathlessly and took the chair beside her—'arranging with him about to-morrow.'

'To-morrow, to-morrow!' mused Dudley; 'what of to-morrow, Loo?'

'To-morrow, Dudley! Why, you remember you promised us an afternoon's fishing,' interrupted Halcot and Seymour; 'we have been looking forward to it this week past, and the weather's glorious.'

'Ay, ay, young gentlemen; it had slipped my mind, though. Well, I will be ready for you by two o'clock. Who else goes with us?'

'Oh, Charlie, of course.'

'I don't think Charlie will,' said Dudley, looking gravely but kindly at the little face by his side, which grew suddenly red as he spoke. 'I think we said Charlie had forfeited his holiday this week; hey, Charlie?' Charlie's eyes filled with tears, but he did not answer, and Halcot and Seymour both knew too well the perfect justice of the sentence to interfere; so the conversation went on with arguments between the boys as to the best manner of making flies. But the little heart was too full of the disappointment to contain itself: for a few minutes the boy's spirit battled with the child's, and I saw him bravely gulp down his feelings twice or thrice; then one tear rolled down, then another, and then he put down his head on Dudley's arm and burst out crying. Poor Charlie's sobs would have been terribly echoed by Rill's shrill little voice had not Seymour, by a pleasing and well-timed application of jam, turned her attention into a sweeter channel, and afforded a charming opportunity for smearing her white pinafore unperceived that was not to be despised. I signed a piteous protest to Dudley as to whether justice were not to be tempered with mercy, and receiving no marked discouragement proceeded to my soothing task.

'Listen, Charlie boy; don't cry so, and we will think of something we may do to-morrow, as you must not go fishing. Don't you think if we were to go to Holme Lee Wood, you and I, to gather some early strawberries for dear father when he comes home, —he likes wild strawberries, and they must be ripe by this time; we will take Rill and blind Billy and a basket, and—'

'Picnic in the woods this delicious spring weather, and not ask me to be of the party, you naughty little woman,' cried Dudley; 'boys, you had better make friends with Bruce, he is a far better fisherman than I, and let me off.'

'Oh no, Dudley, you promised; oh no, it would be no fun without you,' pleaded the lads.

'Don't trouble yourselves,' said Bruce, 'Loo has booked me for the afternoon for better sport than fishing.'

'Indeed, what is your little game, Loo?'

'Oh, we are going to ride with the Thornton girls to see the far-famed ruin that they pretend to have discovered, and Bruce has promised to escort us.'

Dudley arched his eyebrows. 'What animal do you propose to bestride?'

'Oh, Hazlewood's, of course; he always puts Larkspur at my service when he is in the North. Really, Dudley, it is a noble beast: I wish the governor would buy him for us; it is perfectly ridiculous to see all our empty stalls, with plenty of money to fill them, only the governor is so old-fashioned in some of his notions; neither Hazlewood nor Dick Thornton has a bit more right to ride their own horses than we, with our business.'

'My father is of another way of thinking,' replied Dudley, gravely, 'and I think I agree with him that for the present it is best to avoid any unnecessary outlay.'

'There, Louie,' retorted Bruce, biting his moustache with an annoyed air, 'as Dudley and the governor rule the roast, I can only inform you that you had better postpone your intention of buying White Lily, for it is morally impossible for you to ride alone, or be dependent on stray escorts.'

'Never mind, Bruce, I will talk my father over one day, and then I promise you we will have our way in spite of Dudley's long face.'

'Very well, Queen Loo,' laughed Dudley, 'work your own wicked will. But now about this piscatory scheme: must I go with those boys, Nell?'

'I am afraid you must; but let us see, can we not manage some better way? Supposing you and Hal and Seymour start at two, as you say, and Charlie and Rill and I meet you at a given spot, and all take tea in the woods and come home together? will not that suit every one?'

'Of course,' cried the boys; 'Holme Wood and Abbey Farm are not half a mile apart, and we can have a regular jolly evening, can't we, Dudley?'

'Oh yes, that is a brilliant suggestion on your part, Nellie; Charlie, your punishment is half remitted this once, you see; you must thank your sister for it.' Charlie rushed round the table to give me a good squeeze, and to whisper his thanks; proceedings that were strongly disapproved of by Rill, who immediately curled herself up on my lap, with a jealous look at the interloper, while the boys rushed out to their cricket, carrying off the grumbling Bruce in triumph. Louie followed as umpire, and Dudley came up to the window-seat beside me. 'Nell, I am glad you have managed to compensate poor Charlie for the disappointment; it goes to my heart to punish him. He has the sweetest disposition in the world.'

I wonder what sort of man he will turn out !? What sort of man ? Oh Charlie, dear sweet Charlie, with your loving eyes and winsome ways, who can answer that question ?

CHAPTER II.

'She hath no scorn of common things,
And though she seems of other earth,
Round us her heart entwines and clings,
And patiently she folds her wings
To tread the humbler paths of earth.'

—*Lowell.*

'The idea of her life shall sweetly creep
Into his study of imagination ;
And every lovely organ of her soul
Shall come apparelled in most precious habit,
More winning, delicate, and full of life
Into the eye and prospect of his soul.'

—*Shakespeare.*

SUNNYSIDE was an old gabled house standing in a long grassy lane, where the birds sang lustily, and the cuckoo might be heard the whole day through in early spring-time. In bird's-nesting and blackberry seasons many a straggler from school found his way lither on depredatory errands, much to our boys' disgust, who would fain have waged war against the sturdy little rebels ; but the linnets' and robins' nests were far too great temptations to be resisted ; and in spite of Halcot's hot denial of any right of way, many pairs of feet crossed our stile that had no business there. Sometimes a nightingale would sing from the old elm-trees in front, but they were mostly to be heard in the coverts down by the Priory ; and many a moonlight night have we crossed the low-lying meadows, and entering the deserted lodge gates, wandered up and down the beech avenue listening to them. A lovely old place was the Priory, especially when the evening sun streamed redly on its gabled roof and mullioned windows ; or the moon threw a sheet of pure white light on Gothic arches and stone terraces. Truly a noble old place, for it claimed the whole of Holme Lee Wood, and most of the out-lying farms. The Priory gardens were our favourite resort ; often and often when our lawn was riotous with boy cricketers, and our pleasant mossy arbour untenable from Bruce's cigars, have Dudley and I strolled to our favourite seat in what used to be termed the rosary, where, surrounded by broken Dryads and Fauns, we enjoyed the stillness of evening, only broken upon here by the cawing of rooks and the chiming of the church bells in the distance. There have we sat and marvelled much, why the owner of so fair an estate should leave it to ruin and desolation, while he carried on his weary antiquarian researches in Southern Italy. Some said that grief at the loss of his wife had exiled him ; but however that might be, his loss was our gain, for old Richards the gamekeeper and his wife were notable friends of ours, and gave us free access to the grounds whenever we chose.

The country round Sunnyside was as varied as it was beautiful ; every window in our house commanded a fresh view : at our back, as I said before, lay the Priory meadows belted in by woods, where all day long the cattle gathered themselves in cool shady places under trees and by the side of half-dried ponds, forming groups pleasing to the eye of any landscape painter. In front were corn-fields, and beyond, scattered villages, breezy uplands, and purple-hued hills ; and to our right the spires and house-tops of our pretty town of D——, which lay in the broken hollow of the hills like a dove in its nest. At the end of our grass lane stood the church and parsonage, where our friends the Egertons lived, and just opposite, the Hermitage, as the Thorntons styled their place, and Dr. Waldegrave's house, with its cool green verandah ; and then came the long straggling street we called the village, but which really formed the outskirts of the town.

From Sunnyside we could see the chimneys of father's factory rising through the trees ; but our eyes were spared the sight of the hideous red fabric itself, as our ears were defended from the incessant whirr of its machinery. How the boys could bear their days being passed in such a place was a perpetual astonishment to me. I never entered its walls, so strong was my dislike to the monotonous sound, the incessant movement, and the oily odours that pervaded it. Louie, on the contrary, delighted to visit it, and seemed to take as much interest in its various details as Dudley and Bruce themselves. She knew the operatives by name, and their wives and families, and was as much 'Queen Loo' in the factory as at Sunnyside.

On the morning of the day when we were to have our excursion to Holme Lee Wood, I was standing at the nursery window sorting out a heap of boys' linen, which nurse had brought me somewhat ruefully, with the apogetic remark that 'Boys will be boys, and wear out their clothes sooner than girls ; but that master Charlie's things were in such a state that she really could not keep him tidy nohow.' Now, there are limits to everything, and though work was my natural element, a pleasure as well as a task, yet the pile of dilapidated little shirts before me, and the remembrance of countless wristbands lying on my table downstairs, cooled even my courage, and I was getting rather hot and dolorous over every fresh garment brought to light, when nurse suggested that Mrs. Egerton might know of some one to assist me.

'Just the very woman, nurse,' I exclaimed in a tone of great relief ; 'I will run down and talk to her this minute.' So I tied on my bonnet, kissed little Rill, who was paddling after me with a hairless stump of a doll hugged close in her fat arms, and sped down the lane to the parsonage.

Mr. and Mrs. Egerton were the strangest couple in the world, and the most worthy. She was a sweet little brown-eyed woman, with a tender, tremulous voice ; a constant invalid and always suffering, yet never complaining ; a mere fragment of a woman, so fragile and

delicate to look at, that one marvelled to see what she could and did endure, month after month and year after year. So very young and fair too, that one could scarcely believe her to be the mother of the tall strong lad who so revered and petted her.

In the strongest contrast to this wee woman was her husband. Mr. Egerton was a perfect son of Anak, a Saul among men; tall, broad-shouldered, with a massive head and forehead, and great calm eyes that looked down into yours from the pulpit as if they were holding the very torch of truth to your heart. A genial warm-hearted Christian man, with only one weak point about him, and that was his wife, whom he cherished with a love that was just short of idolatry. The only absurdity I ever saw in Mrs. Egerton was in her persisting to call the good-humoured giant by the ridiculous name of 'Tiney.' Why such a nickname was ever chosen for him I never knew, but Tiney he was always called; and laugh as you might, and protest as you would that his baptismal name John was far preferable in every way, she would only smile and say he liked his pet name best, and I believe he did. The shady verandahs before the parsonage windows looking out on the trim beds of scarlet geraniums were vacant, though from the scissors and gardening gloves lying on the seat, some busy hands had been engaged in trimming and pruning the roses that clustered in such profusion round the porch.

The dining-room was empty, and so was the warm sunny drawing-room; so, doubting not that they were in what Seymour termed their summer parlour, I stepped through the window and on to the lawn. Nor was I wrong in my surmise; there was the chintz sofa as usual, drawn up under the acacia tree, and there lay its patient little occupant in the midst of her flower-beds and beehives, her two canaries hung up in the branches, and her laziest of lazy spaniels sunning himself at her feet. A table strewn with papers stood beside her; and there, in his loose dressing-gown and slouched garden hat, was Tiney writing his sermon, while from the distance came the incessant monotonous cooing of Seymour's doves from behind their wire aviary.

'Why, here comes Nellie,' cried Mr. Egerton, rising and giving me a cordial grasp of the hand, 'looking as bright and cool as the morning itself. You do not often honour us with so early a visit, and I'll warrant you there is business at the bottom of it.'

I smiled as I stooped to take his wife's hand—the thin little hand that I always held so tenderly from a sort of dim idea, I believe, that its pink-and-white transparency might prove brittle—and asked how she was.

'It is one of Grace's bad days,' replied her husband; 'she has been suffering from her last night's exertions, and feels worn and exhausted, but this pleasant morning air has somewhat revived her;' and as he spoke he looked at her with such tender pity in his eyes as though he would have borne all for her—this strong, gentle, man.

'So Tiney brought me out here to learn lessons of wisdom and patience from the bees and the flowers ; but instead of that I have been dozing away my precious hours in spite of the flies, who have been buzzing about me the whole time, restless busybodies that they are. Take the other corner of my sofa, dear Nellie, or shall Tiney bring you out your favourite low chair ?'

Declining the chair, I fitted myself dexterously into the small space allotted to me, and gazed around me well pleased. The Egertons' garden was small, but very pretty, consisting only of a lawn studded with flower-beds and flower-baskets ; but just at the bottom it sloped down to a belt of Scotch firs, under which Seymour and his father had constructed the prettiest little fern-garden imaginable ; where on the hottest summer's day one could find a shady cool nook to sit in. There were no high walls, as at Sunny-side and the Priory, to shut out the view ; nothing but a fence divided it from the cornfields and, beyond, the sweep of purple moor, sleeping as it did to-day under a cloudless, brilliant sky.

'Mr. Egerton,' I said, 'it is a perfect marvel to me how you can write your sermons out here ; the air and sunshine always appear to possess narcotic properties for me. I cannot even read in the open air ; a dancing butterfly or the song of a bird would lure me on to a day-dream, from which I should assuredly vanish into dreamland itself ; how can you correctly follow out a train of thought and reasoning ?'

Mr. Egerton smiled his grave, dreamy smile. 'Why, Nellie, I am one of those men who can abstract themselves from the outside world even in a crowd ; but this quiet garden-seat is my favourite place of study, where I can learn the most—the insect world at my feet, the birds, and the flowers, all suggest countless images to me of the great truths that I seek to illustrate to the youngest and feeblest of my flock.' Here his blue eyes grew calm and steady as he spoke. 'I love to follow the course of the seasons, seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, and in some measure they influence as well as embellish the matter of my discourses. According to my ideas, preachers in general are too chary of borrowing from Nature ; they content themselves with lengthy arguments on abstract truths, over which brains wax drowsy, and the mind of the many desirous of rest on what is the day of rest, refuses to exercise itself in following out step by step the weary mass of combative eloquence, and so brings away at the end a very confused notion of the whole. Why raise stumbling-blocks in the people's way just to throw them down again, as many men do, by way of testing their own skill ? Mere moral essayists, they have not learnt the way to the human heart ; no, nor never will. I tell you, Nellie, were I to live twice my life I could not exhaust the resources that Nature supplies me with, ay, and thrice a lifetime too.'

'He says,' whispered Mrs. Egerton softly, 'that his autumn sermons are the best, and his winter sermons the worst.'

'Oh, Mr. Egerton,' I exclaimed, 'there are no worst, none can go to your church hungry and be sent away empty; or sick or sad, that will not come away strengthened and refreshed; and, what's more, each one can take away some crumb of comfort just applicable to his own case. Our mother said so, and she was right.'

A warm gratified smile played round his mouth a moment, and he patted my hand kindly.

'Nell, Nell, thou art but as one of the babes, but we have a few hard and stubborn ones amongst us; and it is for them that the shepherd works and wrestles in soul-conflict, that haply he may win them;' and, pushing his papers from him, he rose and paced across the lawn, musingly. We watched him a moment, then drew nearer together and spoke of other things, parish matters, women's work, and lastly my own little scrap of business, which was settled to my heart's content in five minutes; and cheered by the mental vision of labour alleviated, my spirits rose, and we talked on blithely till—

'Mrs. Egerton, that was not the factory bell!'

'My love, I fear it was; but if you run away at once, you may reach home as soon as Dudley and Bruce. Good-bye. Don't trouble about finding Tiney; I'll tell him how it was.'

Late for dinner! I, who was noted at home for punctuality—the amount of chaff would be unendurable. I hastened down to the stile; there they were, sauntering round the corner, Bruce, hands in pocket, cigarette in mouth;—then, what impelled me I know not, but, waving my hand in answer to Dudley's hailing shout, I flew down the lane at a pace of which I did not believe myself capable. The breeze flew freshly in my face from the moor; my feet seemed winged and weighted with air; really, when grown-up people condescend to children's romps, they bring to it twice a child's enjoyment. Never in my life did I appreciate a race more, knowing, as I did, that I was distancing two pairs of feet: hurrah, I was in at the iron gate, which I burst open with a force that poured on me a shower of half-withered laburnum leaves, and was panting on the hall steps as Bruce, still with hands in his pockets and as cool as possible, ran lightly up to me.

'Well run, by Jove; but what in the world ails the girl? You look as wild as a March hare.'

I had no breath to answer with, but casting hat and cloak aside, led the way to the dining-room, where, seated at the top of the table, to my infinite disgust, was Dudley, who rose and bowed to me.

'Dudley,' I said, shaking him, 'have you flown in?'

'Yes, at the window,' he replied, and offered me a chair; of course there was nothing to be said after that.

The balmiest of afternoons had settled down on Holme Lee Woods, when Charlie and I, with Rill and half-a-dozen well-filled baskets packed neatly on blind Billy's back, entered the glade appointed for our trysting-place. It was five o'clock, and for three

hours Charlie and I had been searching in the nooks and recesses of the wood intent on strawberry-gathering, till fairly tired, and warned by lengthening shadows, we scrambled through by-ways and no-ways, dragging poor Billy after us. It was a lovely spot that we had selected for the gipsying—a still, deep glade, so narrow that the beechen branches nearly met overhead, with dark soft shadows alternating with yellow patches of light, and carpeted with short velvety turf. As we entered, some score or so of rabbits were busily scampering about, or sitting up on their haunches inside the hollow trunks, but the moment we appeared, Billy's stumbling feet and Charlie's joyous shout drove away all the long-eared pussies, and in a moment a strange stillness settled down on the old place, only broken by a falling leaf or a chirping grasshopper.

'It is something like church,' Charlie whispered, and as I glanced down the long green aisle, and remembered how one day I heard the wind play a glorious symphony on the tree-tops, I could not help smiling assent. But there was much to be done, so while Rill was gathering bouquets of buttercups and dandelions, and proffering them to Billy, who snorted disgust in return, Charlie and I set out the prettiest of teas among the beech trunks—milk, rolls, butter, and cakes, and piles of sweet wood-strawberries in nests of green leaves, interspersed with bouquets of wild flowers; and when all was done we sat down and told wonderful fairy tales, till we heard the voices of the returning party as they burst through the trees in a wild state of excitement, and applauded loudly the cozy scene before them. They had had good luck, they said, and the unhappy trout were taken out, looked at, admired, and weighed; while Rill, to her infinite delight, smoothed their shining bodies, and poked curious fingers into their cold, fish eyes, murmuring, 'Pretty, pretty.' It was hard to disabuse the little maid's mind that they were not playthings; but by dint of coaxing and persuasion, she was induced to let the 'dead beasties' be, and sit by Seymour's side, and eat out of her leafy plate.

It really was a most festive little affair: the boys laid themselves out to enjoy themselves and talk nonsense; they told ridiculous stories, at which they laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks, and sang songs and choruses till they were fairly hoarse; and then we grew more quiet, and listening to the chirping good night of the birds, talked softly of summers' days and happy summers' junketings, till the sudden crackling of branches to our right startled us all. The boys sprang to their feet and I held Dudley's arm rather nervously, till a tall young man in a Scotch cap with a plaid flung over his arm came rapidly in sight.

'Cousin Keith,' shouted the lads. 'Bravo, Keith! what brings you here, old boy? I thought you were safe in your chambers in town;' and Dudley grasped his hand gladly, and the warmest greetings passed between the unexpected visitor and our little party.

'Seat yourself, my good fellow, and tell us what pleasant wind has wafted you down to Holme Lee this evening.'

'Willingly,' cried Keith, tossing his plaid to the ground and stretching himself upon it. 'The fact is, my appointment is signed, and my time of departure fixed I believe for the 28th of August : at that date I shall start by the good ship Neptune for Calcutta ; so I am now *en route* for the north, to be with the old folk as long as I can ; and as the journey is long I thought I would break it by a night at Sunnyside, hoping to pay you a longer visit a month or six weeks hence, when I suppose I must say good-bye.'

'Ay, time enough for that ; we are none of us too ready to part with you, Keith. Well, so finding the old house empty, you came out to seek us here ; did you stay to take refreshment?'

'Oh yes ; old Charlotte spread the board richly on my behoof ; even Nellie herself could hardly have catered better for my entertainment. But where are Bruce and Louie ? I see they are not of your party.'

'No, they are with the Thorntons as usual ; they are inseparable, as you know of old !'

'Do they exclude you, Nellie?' said Keith kindly.

'Oh dear, no ; they are always wishing me to join them, but the girls are too gay for my quiet, demure taste.'

'No, they are not your sort,' returned Keith ; and then Dudley and he fell to a discussion on the merits of Dick Thornton. But I was silent, for I felt a quick sharp pain at the sudden news of Keith's departure, which, though it had been mooted for some time, had been deferred from month to month ; but now he was really going, had taken his berth in the ship, and we should miss him so, our good, noble-hearted cousin Keith. And here I may as well say what must come out hereafter, that Keith and I were more than cousins to each other ; at least I was to him, but I never knew how much till about three months before poor mother's death he asked me to be his wife. But my parents were very unwilling that I should share his dubious prospects here in England, and still more that I should accompany him, as he wished, to India ; nor would they hear of an engagement that might fetter me for years ; and when they referred him to me I coincided in their opinion, ay, and firmly too, though when I saw the bitterness of his grief it was hard indeed to persist in it. But dearly as I loved him, so dearly that had he asked me to share ever so humble a home with him in England I would have done it, I could not place the ocean, for his sake, between me and Dudley,—no, it would have broken my heart, I did not love him well enough for that. Now I have always thought that if a woman does not love a man well enough to leave her country and home and be ready to follow him, even to the ends of the world if need be, deeming all nothing in comparison to his love, she should not marry him, therefore I felt that I was not worthy of Keith ; but when I told him so, he—well, it does not matter what he said—but I never

knew before how deep and strong and pure a good man's love can be. Since then we have tried to return to the old cousinly ways, and though it was hard at first—hard for me, and doubly hard for him—yet his gentleness and kindness soon put me at my ease; and Dudley helped us, dear old Dudley, who told me afterwards how much he had always feared that Keith would carry me off; and I remember there was a strange tenderness in his tone as he pressed me to him, and said that 'Keith Cameron was the only man who was worthy of me, but that he could not spare me even to him yet.'

'Nay, never fear, Dudley; you may leave me, but I you, never.'

But the sun was setting on Holme Lee, and Rill, heavy with sleep, was nodding drowsily on Charlie's shoulder, who, poor boy, oppressed with her weight, was sitting bolt upright, staring hard at Keith, a martyr to cramp and an aching arm. I took poor baby from her stiff supporter to my softer lap, where she travelled off, thumb in mouth, to her child's paradise, while I quietly followed the conversation of the young men.

'I do not envy you,' Dudley was saying; 'fancy changing this cool, bracing air for the heat and glare of the tropics. Keith, I fear you will sicken for your Scottish moors again.'

'I do not doubt it; but it is a sickness to which all exiles are liable. Why should I not suffer as well as they? You would not believe how I take in every feature of the dear old spots, that I may print them indelibly in my memory; I know them so by heart, that I shall only have to turn over my portfolio to look at the picture I love best.'

'Pictures! have you got pictures, cousin Keith?' cried Charlie, eagerly. 'You have never shown them to us.' Dudley and the boys laughed.

'Pictures! Charlie, lad? ay, and scores of them. Some of them so large, and warm, and life-like that, when I bring them out, they will light up the walls of my dusky bungalow, and make it feel like home.'

Charlie appeared deeply impressed.

'Cousin Keith, do you mind telling me a little about them? What are they like?'

'Yes, tell us one or two of them,' echoed Seymour and Halcot.

'Shall I indulge these boys, Nellie?'

'Do. I cannot imagine what you mean.'

'Go on, old fellow,' yawned Dudley, putting down his head beside baby's; 'it will be novel and amusing. See if I do not annotate all you say.'

Keith glanced dreamily at the tree-tops, which now cut clear and dark against the evening sky.

'I have so many that I do not know which to choose. I have added one more to my stock this evening; but stay, I have one, here it is——'

'A long, low room, full of sweet scents, with the odour of fresh-

mown hay coming in at the open window ; a room, bright, and warm, and sunny, and in a low chair, by a little table with a vase of half-blown roses on it, a girl in white, with a breast-knot of blue ribbons, stitching busily ; a rosy child playing at her feet with a rag doll ?——

'That was the day, Keith, when you came down from London so tired,' broke in Dudley, 'and you were sitting opposite Nellie, drinking a glass of new milk that Charlie had brought when I came in from the factory.'

'How did you know that was the afternoon? Not from my description.'

'Yes, I did. I put two and two together, and they make four,' retorted Dudley, as he drowsily composed himself again. 'Go on, old fellow.'

'My second,' continued Keith, 'is a different scene,'—

'A room, this time ruddy with firelight and lamplight, drawn crimson curtains, snowy table-cloth with silver branches shining upon it ; garlands of glistening holly-berries ornamenting the dark wainscot ; round the hearth a merry group ; with'—said Keith, his voice slightly quivering—'not one vacant chair ; next year there will be two !'

I half laid my hand on Dudley's ; it was grasped, and held.

'Well, Keith?'

'My third is a cornfield, gay with scarlet poppies and blue corn-flowers ; a fresh, free wind sweeping across a sea of golden grain, and sporting with us ; waving Louie's hair, and playing pranks with Nellie's gipsy hat ; a group of five gathered round a stile, listening to a lark's song ; a sun in the west sinking in a mass of crimson clouds—I can hear that lark's song now.'

'Ay, Keith ; and we all walked up to the Priory to hear the nightingales, but they would not sing that night ; but you must shut up your portfolio for the present, for the dew is falling heavily on my little Rill's head, and Nell's dress is perfectly damp ; give me baby, I will carry her ; and, boys, go and unfasten Billy. 'Stay a moment,' and Keith deftly wrapped his plaid round Rill's bare little legs, so that she lay couched in Dudley's arms as warmly as in her crib at home, as he marched off in triumph with her, whistling gaily, while the boys, mounting Charlie on the pony, ran races down-hill, and Keith giving me his arm brought up the rear.

We walked a few moments in silence ; somehow, cousin Keith and I never seemed to have much to say to each other now, and it appeared to me that he broke an awkward pause with difficulty by saying—

'Any message for the home folks, Nellie?'

'My dear love to Katie and aunt Margaret, and ask Katie when she means to pay her long-promised visit to Sunnyside ; do you think she would come this summer, Keith, if I were to write to her again?'

'Not if I know Katie ; nothing will induce her to leave home ; she will have work enough there for the next six months to cheer up my mother and father, for they will miss me sorely, Nellie, I fear ; my father especially, he so wished me to settle down near him.'

'I do not wonder at it ; it is hard for them to lose their only son ; and for poor Katie too.'

'It is, indeed ; but I know she will be staunch and true-hearted as ever—never giving way, but keeping up their spirits, and her own too, bravely. Could you not manage to pay them a visit, Nellie ? It would be a real charity if you would, and they are all so fond of you.'

I shook my head. 'My place is at home too, Keith : I cannot leave my children.'

In the gathering darkness I felt him look at me.

'Poor Nellie, poor child, you are young to have such cares ; very, very young.'

At that moment, Dudley stepped back to ask him some question relative to the plan of his departure ; and as they talked my thoughts travelled to Keith's home in the north. I had spent three happy months there once, and I remember as if it were yesterday how charmed I was with every feature of the wild Scotch scenery, and especially with the little rock-girt glen, crossed by its brawling stream, where the old stone manse stood in the midst of its trim pleasaunce and clipped yew walks. I thought of the grave minister, who at first somewhat inspired me with awe, but whom latterly I had learnt to look upon as a dear friend ; of aunt Margaret, with her pleasant, household ways, and bonnie, laughing Katie—the moving spirit of the old house, the last of many fair daughters that the minister and his wife had followed to their rest in the kirk-yard. No marvel the minister's brow was rugged, and aunt Margaret's eyes so sad, for the 'pestilence that walketh in darkness' had ravaged their home and made havoc of their flock ; and it was many years before they dared to hope that Katie would be spared to them, and now they were going to lose Keith.

At this point of my reverie we reached the stile that guarded our grass lane, from which we could see the lights of Sunnyside glimmering through the trees ; in a few minutes more we were merrily exchanging salutations with Louie and Bruce, who came out to meet us, while Rill, scarlet with sleep and murmuring drowsily, was laid in her nursery cot by the loving arms of Dudley himself.

CHAPTER III.

'Rainy and rough sets the day,
There's a heart beating for somebody ;
I must be up and away,
Somebody's anxious for somebody.'

Thrice has she been to the gate,
Thrice hath she listened for somebody ;
Midst the night, stormy and late,
Somebody's waiting for somebody.'
—*Swain.*

HENRY KINGSLEY speaks much in one of his books of the strange capability some few people have of remaining long in one position in perfect repose, and he makes it one of the chief charms of his little bright-eyed heroine Eleanor, that 'she possessed this art of sitting absolutely still for any length of time with the most perfect grace,' a most difficult and rare accomplishment, he affirms, and also a most useful one. Now with all due respect to Henry Kingsley, I presume to differ with him. It always appeared to me that the little heroine aforesaid might have been more profitably engaged in embroidering altar-cloths for her beloved Margaret Street, than in sitting with placid hands perpetually folded in her lap, as if carved in stone.

Now Louie possessed this, to me, most provoking faculty ; in certain moods, generally when in trouble or doubt on any matter, she would silently seat herself opposite my work-table, and crossing her large white hands over each other, remain so sometimes one hour, and sometimes two, in perfect silence. It was useless to attempt to rouse her by comments or questioning ; brief monosyllables, not always to the purpose, were the sole results ; I have even found shaking, argument, and scolding all equally heating and useless, and have only ended by fidgeting myself out of the room.

This morning Louie had been sitting so for at least three quarters of an hour ; but I had not noticed it so much, feeling somewhat quiet and depressed myself, perhaps from the gravity of Keith's farewell words, which had somehow touched me more than I cared to acknowledge, but I comforted myself with the reflection that we should soon meet again. Rill was enjoying a nap on the carpet at my feet in company with Nettle : all the morning the little maid had been standing at my knee, following, with chubby knuckles and coquettish thimble, the workings of a marvellously sticky needle through a stiff piece of lining, which was intended as a covering for the unfortunate waxen creature, who, having been operated upon by Charlie in his character of 'Doll's physician,' and condemned to lose half her sawdust, was lying with weakly body and sickly-looking legs over a chair just by.

'Nellie, Bruce and I are going out again this afternoon ;' the remark was made as if the silence had been before broken.

'I fear father will take it unkindly, Louie, as he comes home to-night !'

'I do not see that ; he cannot be due at Sunnyside till half-past

nine, and we shall be home punctually at ten ; he will understand it is an engagement.'

'Is it another riding party ?

'No, a water excursion ; we shall start at four, and as we have declined returning to the Hermitage for supper, we cannot fail to be home at the time I mention.'

'And what if you are detained ?

'In that case father must be content with profuse apologies, and a tardy welcome ; never fear, Nellie, he will not be angry with a little wilfulness on the part of Queen Loo, he is too much accustomed to it ; and Bruce is so set on my going with him.'

'Perhaps so,' I returned drily ; 'but do you not think, putting the other considerations aside, that these endless junketings and water-parties are bad things for Bruce, taking him too much away from the factory ? It is not fair of him always leaving Dudley to do all the drudgery.'

'Nay, Nellie, there you are unjust. You know Bruce would never leave his post while there is really work to be done ; but these are slack times ; and it is not because Dudley is such a steady old coach, and will not stir from the premises while father is away, that my poor Bruce need stay and help him do nothing too.'

'No, but he might offer to remain in his place and give him the chance of a holiday,' I persisted. Louie shrugged her shoulders.

'I don't believe he would go if Bruce were to ask him ; he does not care for the Thornton set like we do.'

'Is Colonel Grey to be of the party, may I ask ?

'Of course ; it is got up for him, to show the London man of fashion the beauties of our rural life.'

'He has had ample time for seeing them over and over again. I understood he was to have left last week ; why is he staying on like this ? Louie, don't smile so provokingly ; pray, pray speak out.'

'Why, do you suppose I am answerable for the colonel's movements, Nell ? He may remain a month or two more for aught I care,' and Louie hummed a gay snatch to herself. I laid down my work with a dissatisfied feeling ; really she was a most provoking creature.

'Louie, you do know, and you do care. What are Colonel Grey's intentions ?'

'I suppose to flutter mothlike round the flame till he gets his wings singed for his pains,' she returned saucily and perfectly unabashed.

'Really, Louie,' I replied, 'I verily believe you are the vainest as well as the most heartless of girls ; do you mean to entrap that unfortunate man into a declaration of affection, and then refuse him as you did the others ?' Louie laughed long and merrily.

'What nonsense you talk, Nellie, as if you did not know me better than to suppose I should take the trouble to entrap any one ; why, they may all go for what I care. Entrap them, indeed !'

'But you smile upon them in your own gracious way till they think you like them ; oh, Loo, you should take care. You do not mean to flirt, I know, but think how your manner deceived poor young Hazlewood, and the years he was getting over his disappointment ; and Frank Lingram too?' Now Frank Lingram was the Rev. Edgar Dale's young curate, who, presuming on his white hands and fair face, had had the coolness to lay himself and some ninety pounds per annum at Louie's feet ; an offer I need not say most graciously declined. The young clergyman and his romantic attachment had furnished a fruitful source of fun to the boys, and now as I mentioned his name a whole world of comic humour shone in Louie's eyes, eyes often more beautiful than true.

'So you would have seen me the wife of Frank Lingram, would you? You would have judged me fitly mated with that feeble effeminate boy?' and she shook her wealth of ruddy hair from her face with a proud, scornful smile.

'On the contrary,' I replied, 'I think more highly of you and of your taste than that ; what I mean is, that you commit a grave error in giving tacit encouragement to men, whom nothing would induce you to love ; they offer you homage, you accept it smilingly, and as if you appreciated it ; is this fair or honest? Certainly beauty is a dangerous gift, but——'

'Oh Nell, Nell, I never knew you begin a long sermon on propriety and feminine decorum, without taking as your text the dangerous attraction of beauty or the amount of responsibility it incurs. I know I ought to listen to the lecture out of gratitude for the compliment ; but I am not in the humour for it to-day, so please spare me.'

'I did not mean to lecture you,' I replied, somewhat nettled.

'No, I am sure you did not : look here, Nell,' and she came and knelt at my feet, laying violent hands on my work, 'don't be hurt with me for my wilfulness. I know all you say is perfectly right and true ; I know Louie is a sad creature, always has been, and always will be ;' then, in graver tones, folding her hands on my lap, and looking up into my face with her large calm eyes, 'Of course I plead guilty to all these crimes of which you accuse me. I am vain, selfish, and I dearly love admiration, though I would not court it ; I could not live unappreciated. What were Queen Loo without her kingdom and her subjects, Nell?' I stroked her hair without speaking.

'I own all this, dear, and I am not ashamed to own it, but when you speak of these lovers of mine, for such I know you regard them, you do not touch me, you excite no pang or feeling of remorse. I am but a sceptic, I believe, in love affairs ; these men admire, court, and like me, but which of them loves me with the honest, manly, self-denying love which Keith bears to you—a love true through life to death, the only love worthy of a woman's acceptance ?

Come, don't cry, little sister, I did not mean to wound you, we will not talk of poor Keith any more.'

'Young Hazlewood,' I faltered.

'Has transferred his allegiance to Belle Thornton ; so much for his broken heart. Frank Lingram has joined the High Church party, and advocates celibacy of the clergy. Colonel Grey, if he does me the honour to propose, which I greatly doubt ; gentlemanly, accomplished as he is, and the owner of five thousand a year and a London house—' she paused.

'Well, Loo, are not these strong recommendations ? You said you would never marry a poor man.'

'I will never marry Colonel Grey,' she answered shortly.

'Why, what fault has he, Queen Loo ?'

'He—so cold, so passionless, so faultless, so—don't speak of him, I loathe his name !' then, after a long pause, 'Nell, I believe I shall never marry.'

'Fie, what heresy ! You an old maid ! the saints forbid, as old Bridget says.'

'I shall never marry,' she repeated firmly, 'because I shall never love any one well enough. I do not think there is a person in the world for whose sake I could resign my own will, to whom I could bear to submit myself ; yes, I see it clearly, I have no heart to lose.'

What could I say in answer to such strange words, but that time would prove, that the right person would come some day, and such-like homely adages, with which I strove to rouse her from the musing fit into which she was falling ? At that moment little Rill gave a semi-waking cry, and stretching out her arms drowsily, inflicted such a blow in poor Nettle's eye, that it made her limp off howling. Loo stooped down, and lifted her into her lap, and as she did so, and sat cradling the sleepy child in the sunlight, there came such a yearning, loving light into her eyes. I had seen that look before : I had seen it once when she took an infant from its dying mother's breast, and stilled its hungry wailings, and once when she stood beside a sick boy's cot ; an expression I can only describe by terming it 'the divine look of maternity.' Many years afterwards I stood in an ancient picture-gallery, and saw that look on the meek face of a Madonna there. I left her crooning out a low plaintive song, and gathering up my work, went about my household business ; but our conversation had left a weight on my mind. Was it, could it be true, what she said about having no heart ? or was it that she had given it all to us ? No, I would not believe it ; from my daily intercourse with her, I felt there were depths in her unfathomed yet, a vast wealth of love, of which none dreamt, no, not she herself.

My fit of perplexity lasted till Dudley's cheery whistle summoned me to my place at the table, but I felt inexpressibly chafed on entering the room, to see Louie bending with a placid smile over a

bouquet of exquisite hothouse flowers, which filled the place with their fragrance, and admiring them with undisguised pleasure.

'I told Colonel Grey I adored flowers ; they are very beautiful, very, and most tastefully arranged. Don't pull the scented geranium-leaves off, Bruce, I will give you a piece after dinner ; I must put them in water now.'

I turned away, feeling positively aggrieved ; she would accept those flowers then from a man she had just told me she abhorred, and when I looked up my thoughts were reflected in Dudley's eyes. I think there was a slight shade pervading our circle that day ; Louie, to be sure, laughed and talked enough for all, but there had evidently been a few words between the brothers, very few of course, for they were generally on excellent terms ; but Bruce was huffy with the boys, and Dudley very quiet.

When we had finished, Louie went upstairs to prepare for the water-party ; the boys grasped satchels and caps and raced off to school, and Bruce lounged against the open garden door and whistled softly to himself. I had filled my apron with food for the chickens, and was passing him, Rill as usual toddling after me, when he caught me by the arm.

'Stop a minute, young woman ; what a hurry you are in ! I want to speak to you.' I stopped obediently.

'I say, Nell, it is such an awful bore about this water-party ; I don't a bit want to go, but the Thorntons pressed me so, and Loo seemed to want me, and so I promised, and now I can't get out of it.'

'I do not quite understand you, Bruce ; do you wish to get out of it ?'

'No, not exactly that either, only—well, the fact is, Dudley and I had some words about it ; he said something about my shirking work when the governor was away, or something that sounded like it, and it riled me tremendously. You know there are things a fellow can't stand even from his own brother, and I was hot and spoke up, and now I am afraid Dud is in an awful way.'

'Oh, Bruce,' I said, the tears coming into my eyes, 'I know you have hurt him, I noticed directly how grieved he looked ; how could you ?'

'He had no right to lecture me,' he replied sullenly, 'no right at all, I am as much master as he ; but he has such old-fashioned notions about everything : he is as bad as the governor himself, or worse.' I sighed heavily.

'Dear Bruce, you have always got on so well together, don't, pray, have any unpleasantness during father's absence, for him to notice on his return. You know it was your fault ; I am sure he never meant to hurt your feelings, he who never says an unkind word to anybody ; do, please, make it up.'

At that moment Dudley's foot sounded on the stairs, and before I could get away, he was beside us. Oh, how bright and good he

looked, with that pleasant smile on his face as he walked up to us and laid his hand on Bruce's shoulder !

'I am afraid I vexed you, old fellow, this morning ; I know I spoke hastily, don't remember it, please.' Bruce turned round with a smile, and they shook hands. Such a few words, such a brief reconciliation ! but I believe the brothers never loved each other so well as at that moment.

'Nellie, I have an hour to spare, and a most interesting book ; be quick with your chickens and let us go into the orchard and enjoy it together.'

Who so happy as I, as I trudged off, and threw my heap of corn to the first comer in the poultry yard, a supercilious old cock, my pet aversion, never waiting to see if my favourite little bantam mother and her brood got a bit, and then ran back to Dudley, who was walking down the shrubbery, with Rill holding tightly on one finger !

A green door in the garden-wall admitted us to the orchard, and a very quiet and peaceful spot it looked this afternoon, so cool and shady under the apple-trees ; so bright with yellow buttercups and daisies. Little Rill was all in haste to gather the golden treasures, and it seemed to afford her great delight to make up endless nosegays with blades of grass and lay them on my lap, to be repaid with kisses. Dudley selected the shadiest nook, and depositing me and my work-basket in what I called 'my green velvet chair,' being a little grass hillock under our famous King Pippin tree, laid himself down at my side and opened his book ; but what with baby's ceaseless interruptions, and the lazy beauty of the afternoon, we had little or no reading. Somehow I had much to say to him which he seemed pleased to hear ; so we talked of Louie, and Keith, and father's return, and Dudley's last pet scheme for the amelioration of labour at the factory, till the afternoon slipped away like magic, as all happy hours do in this world of ours.

Sometimes now I shut my eyes and try to realize those happy scenes of my old home life ; the sun-flecked orchard, and my mossy throne under the apple-trees, Dudley's dear love, and my little Rill's tripping feet ' among the daisies ; oh, those little tripping feet ! oh, my sunny-haired darling !

Dudley had to run to the factory before tea, so I went in and put some finishing touches to father's room, and then sat down and played one of Dudley's pet airs on the piano—how seldom I seemed to have leisure to play and sing now !—and before I had finished, he was standing beside me and humming an accompaniment.

After tea the boys beguiled us into a game of rounders on the lawn ; and then the dew fell, and the twilight came on, and one star after another peeped out between the dark old garden trees ; and over the ivied walls of Sunnyside there stole a large white moon ; then Rill and Charlie went to bed, and Seymour bade reluctant good-night, while Halcot, pleading fatigue and a heavy day, crept

off after them ; and still Dudley and I walked up and down the lawn where the moonlight had spread for us a narrow path of light.

'How lovely the old Priory garden must look to-night, Dudley, with its white statues and urns ; if you had not to go to the train I should make you take me there !'

'By-the-by, Nellie, that reminds me that time is going on ; let me look at my watch—I thought so ; in another five minutes I must be off to meet father. You will have supper ready, mind !'

So in we went from the moonlight to the warm radiance of lamp-lighted rooms. As I stood at the hall door watching him out, he suddenly came back and kissed me.

'Nellie, you are looking more like yourself than you have done for six months past ; all your colour has come back ; father will be delighted to see you ; come, Nettle, old girl,' and master and dog ran down the court together.

When the gate closed, I went to the glass to see the change Dudley had noticed ; yes, it was true, the pallor I had gained from the fatigue of nursing poor mother was replaced by my old freshness of complexion. I turned gaily away and arranged the supper table, half hoping Bruce and Loo might return, and then went my nursery rounds.

They were all sleeping soundly, poor Halcot with a pile of lesson books heaped on a chair beside him, ready for an early study ; his little silver watch ticking peacefully at his head : so I descended to the dining-room and took up my work again. My thoughts were busy, and time passed unheeded, till I woke up from my reverie with a start, and glanced at the timepiece ; it was half-past ten ; surely it must be wrong—no, my watch and the chiming of the old church clock corroborated the fact ; half-past ten, and they were due at half-past nine ; father must have missed his train, and, if I remembered rightly, Dudley had said that there would not be another till half-past eleven ; poor boy, how tired he would be ! surely he would never wait at the station all that time ; and Bruce and Louie too, after all, they had been beguiled into a supper at the Hermitage—incurable truants that they were.

Hush, surely that was not Dudley's key moving in the hall door,—yes,—no, that was not his footstep, his never lagged so, nor was it father's sharp quick tread. I laid down my work in some perplexity, and rose, and at that moment Dudley opened the door. Do you know what it is to sit quietly sewing by your own fireside, with 'the low beginnings of content' just stirring pleasantly at your heart, and then to lift your head at the sound of an opening door, and see on the face you best love on earth the wordless anguish of one who brings ill tidings ! Can you realize the awful start—the 'death in life,'—the hand of ice clutching and tearing at your heart-strings, and binding down your tongue—can you realize this ? thank Heaven if you cannot.

'Oh, Dudley, oh, my dear, what has happened ?' for he was

standing white as death in the middle of the room, just moving his dry lips without a sound, and with such a look in his eyes. 'Oh, brother, brother, don't look like that, do anything but look like that; only tell me what has happened, and I will try to bear it—anything but this suspense.'

I know he tried to speak, to tell me what had happened, but in his dumb agony could utter no articulate sound; he only held me to him with a grasp like death, and a sobbing sound came heaving up from his chest. What could I do but wait till the awful hysterical emotion should pass and leave him calmer—then!

'Tell me, dear, only one word—one word, for pity's sake—my father!'

He shuddered violently, then raised his eyes to heaven, and when they met mine I threw myself upon his breast with a great and bitter cry. Ah me! I needed no word to tell me that we had no father now. I think the sight of my despair restored Dudley a little to himself, and in another moment he had recovered himself and was striving to soothe me.

'Hush, Nell, hush; don't sob so, you frighten me; we must try be calm, you and I, we have the children to think of' (the children, poor things, they were asleep). 'Oh, my child, my child, you are breaking my heart.'

He placed me in my low chair, and would have rushed off to fetch me some restorative, but I would not let him go; I held him tightly, and when he saw that, he took me in his arms again and soothed me like a child, soothed me even in the midst of his own terrible anguish. My tears gave me relief, and when I could speak I gasped out,

'How did it happen? when, were?'

Dudley's brow contracted but he forced himself to speak.

'A railway accident—a collision—death almost instantaneous! thank Heaven at least for that.'

'How do you know?' I laid my hands on his breast heavily. 'There might be some mistake; who identified, who saw him?'

'I did. Oh, Nell, don't ask me, don't speak of it, so changed so pitifully mutilated, so—' and then he broke down and laid his head in my lap, and for a long long time we wept together.

Yet while I writhed beneath this heavy unforeseen calamity, the mere presence of Dudley and the sight of his greater grief calmed and strengthened me; and though the bitter tears still flowed, the tension of my heart seemed relaxed. If my grief were great, his was greater still, for on him devolved a new and awful responsibility; in future we should have none to whom to look but to him—father now as well as brother, our sole support and head. Thank Heaven, I remembered all this; it strengthened me. I raised his poor head from my lap, and in a whisper bade him rise; then I went into the other room, and though the sight of the bright supper-table, the light and the flowers and the little festive preparations made me

shudder and turn cold, I would not give way, but got bread and wine and brought them to Dudley, and putting the latter to his lips made him take some.

'They will be in directly,' I whispered, 'Louie and Bruce.' Dudley put down his glass.

'I can't tell them, Nellie, I can't, something rises and chokes me when I try to speak of it; what shall we do?'

'No need to tell them, dear Dudley, oh, no need; your face and mine will speak to them enough. Hark! is not that their ring?' It was; we could hear the opening of the hall door and the sweep of Louie's silk skirts across the passage, her cheery voice and Bruce's answering laugh, and they entered, as I knew they would, radiant and smiling.

'What! father not here? naughty man, he has punished us then and gone to bed. Do you think he is still awake, Nellie? may I go to him?' Dudley sank back in his chair with a groan, and covered his face, and, scarcely knowing what I did, I threw up my hands with a wild gesture for silence, and then they saw my face; and as they did so, all Louie's happy bloom faded; while Bruce, impatiently putting her aside, exclaimed—

'What has happened? good heavens! will nobody speak? Do you wish me to go mad, Dudley? Nellie, will one of you open your lips?'

I laid my hand on Dudley to keep him silent, then in a voice that did not sound like mine, but like somebody else's speaking at a distance, I told them all; and when I had finished Bruce was kneeling down by my little table with his face hidden in his hands; while Louie, giving me a long look of agony, turned and left the room. I sat down on the floor and hid my face against Dudley's knee, and for a long time we remained thus, till one of the servants came in to ask if she should fasten up the house. Dudley answered her—

'Yes Hester, shut up, and all of you go to bed;' then lifting me from the ground—

'Nell, you must go to bed too, and try and get some sleep; we shall be having you ill next, and then what will become of us?'

'Can I not stay a little longer with you?' I pleaded.

'No,' he answered, in those firm quiet tones of his; 'I want to speak to Bruce, you must leave us alone together. Good-night, Nellie darling.'

So I went, but before I closed the door I looked back: Dudley was kneeling with his arm round his brother, and Bruce's wild grief seemed hushed.

CHAPTER IV.

'There is no flock, however watched and tended,
 But one dead lamb is there ;
 There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,
 But has one vacant chair,'—*Longfellow.*

DO you know what is more intolerable than the first hours of a great sorrow? I will tell you. It is the first waking up after it and finding it all true. Alas! I know it, I have realised it, and I know that calamity comes on one at first with a stunning force—its very weight and intensity seems to deaden its anguish. We say over and over again to ourselves that it is impossible, we must dream it; and still weeping on in our agony, we say, 'God help us, that it is not so.' And then sleep comes and lulls us into oblivion, or cheats us into delusive dreams; so that we smile, poor fools, ay, smile while our dead are lying under that straight white sheet in the room below, till we wake and find they are really no longer with us, that it is all no ghastly dream, but a living reality. Oh, the awfulness of that waking; when even before the heavy-lidded eyes open to the light of day, while yet in a transition state between sleeping and waking, we are conscious somehow of an oppressive weight, a sense of something wrong; and then the truth rushes upon us, and we turn our faces to the wall in the utter helplessness of despair!

But I did not turn my face to the wall on that sad waking of mine; I could not lie with the cool morning air blowing over my face, and the birds singing in the garden below, and weep my heart out with the sad contrast of my thoughts. Not mine could be such luxury of sorrow; I must be up and doing, the household must be told the heavy tidings—that at least should be spared Dudley. So I arose, but never did dressing seem such tedious labour to my trembling hands; again and again I had to pause and struggle against the faintness that kept creeping over me, or shake off the icy chills that threatened to fetter my limbs.

Down in the orchard below a thrush was carolling his morning song, and on the dewy lawn there lay the shimmer and sparkle of the bright June sun, while far beyond in the meadows I could hear the damp cool rustle of the mowers' scythes in the grass: such a sweet calm hour for a heart at rest. But for me! I turned away from the window wearily, and at that moment there came a low tap at my door. I knew who it was, for I remembered I had told Charlie to bring his lessons to recite to me as soon as he was dressed; so I bade him enter, without hesitation.

'May I come in and say my lessons, sister? I know them all quite perfectly except one, where I can't pronounce the names;' then, as he caught sight of my face—

'What's the matter, Nellie? are you ill?' For reply I stretched

out my arms to him, and as the little fellow sprang into them, and nestled his curly head upon my shoulder, I told him guardedly and gently what had happened, and why he found me weeping. He was quite still for a minute or two, and then began kissing my neck and stroking my face like a child.

'Poor Nell, poor Nell.'

'Poor Charlie, too,' I said through my tears, 'for you will miss father too!'

'Yes, but not so much as you will, Nellie; you have known him so much longer than I have, for I am but a little boy, you know; besides, I have Dudley and you to take care of me, but who will take care of you?'

'We must do that for each other; but, O Charlie, Charlie, think what it will be never to look upon his dear face again, never to hear his kind tones, his merry, gentle voice.'

'Hush, don't cry so, Nell; we shall meet him in heaven, shall we not?—father and mother, too. Don't you remember what you told me about the golden gate?'

'No, Charlie; what did I say?'

'Oh, you told us a great deal about the great door with its shining golden leaves, which always stands open, and is never to be shut till after the Judgment-day; and where, as people went up the ladder—good people, you know, like father and mother—their friends waited for them at the top, and helped them up and took them into the city. You told us about it when little Christian died, and when Halcot and I were so sorry.'

'Yes, I remember; and, oh, my child, we must try and live so that we may meet him there; and though dear father has gone without one word of farewell, without leaving his dying wishes, you and I must think what they would have been had he been spared to speak them. We must try and imagine what he would have said to each one of us, the youngest as well as the oldest; oh, Charlie!'

Charlie raised his large, innocent eyes to my face with a look that reminded me of a picture I had seen of the child Samuel.

'I think I know what he would have said to me.'

'What, my pet?'

'He would have told me to be a good boy, and to mind what Dudley and you say to me, and not to be naughty and always in mischief, as I have been, but more obedient and thoughtful.'

'Ah, if you would, you do not know how it would lighten our daily load, how it would give pleasure, even in our saddest hours, to find our little Charlie grown a better and more thoughtful boy.'

'Would it, Nellie—would it really? Does my naughtiness, then, grieve you so much?'

'You little know how much or how unhappy it makes me to see you, my child, so often punished, so often in trouble.'

'Oh, I won't make you unhappy, I won't vex you any more; oh,

dear, dear Nell, I won't indeed.' And Charlie threw his arms round my neck. 'I will always be good, always, always!'

'God grant that you may, my darling; and, now I have not said my prayers this morning, shall we say them together?' So side by side we knelt, his little hand holding mine tightly; and when we rose I felt more strengthened for the duties of the day.

That instant there came an impatient knock at the door, and Halcot's voice querulously demanding admittance.

'I say, Nell, the buttons are come clean off my wristbands, and nurse won't sew them on because she is bathing Rill, and how in the world am I to get dressed?'—

'Come in, Halcot.' He entered in a semi-apologetic manner.

'I am sorry to disturb you; but I have my Latin exercise to write, and there's not another shirt in the drawer, and I must go down. It is an awful shame, nurse's buttons always fly off like squibs on the fifth of November. Hallo! what's the matter, Nellie? Is Charlie naughty again?'

I told him hastily and in as few words as possible what had befallen us; but we none of us knew the loving heart and sensitive nature of our Halcot, rough schoolboy as we thought him; and when I saw him turn sick and pale, and sink down half-fainting by the bed, I knew—Heaven forgive me!—that I had blurted out the truth too hastily; that I had spared myself, not him. I laid him on my bed directly; and while Charlie stood looking sorrowfully at his brother's white face, I bathed his forehead and chafed his cold hands till he came to a little, and opened his eyes and looked at me, and then he turned his face to the wall and began moaning piteously. I felt terribly frightened, and at first thought of sending for Dudley, only I could not bear to harass him further; and Louie, I knew, was at the bottom of the garden. So I could do nothing but sit beside him holding his hand and listening to his moans. All soothing seemed vain for some time, and I was dreading some lasting injury would result from the shock, when he presently grew calmer, and then an idea occurred to me.

'I must go down and make the breakfast now, dear Halcot, but I will not leave you alone; shall I send for Seymour?'

A faint smile passed over the boy's face—'Please, Nellie.'

'Well then, dear, lie still; stay, let me put this pillow more comfortably under your head. Be sure you do not move, and I will send you up some breakfast directly.'

'Wait a moment, Nellie,' holding me back, 'don't let Dudley and Bruce know that I was such an ass as to do this sort of thing—faint, I mean; you won't tell them, will you, Sis.?' Oh, Halcot, with such pride and such a tender womanish heart! I promised him faithfully I would not, and then he let me go.

I sent a lad to the parsonage to say I wanted Seymour directly, and while waiting for him I gave Hester to understand what had happened; and before I had done speaking to her Seymour came

in. I never loved the boy so well as I did that morning ; his deep sympathy expressed more in looks than words ; his mute caress and his anxiety to spare me unnecessary pain of detail, all touched me to the heart ; and when I took him up to poor Halcot, it was more affecting still ; for Seymour lay down on the bed beside his old schoolmate and put his arm round him, and literally ' wept over him.' I turned away with a heart that was full to bursting and took my seat behind the tea-urn, dreading each fresh arrival, and fearing to see the change that last night might have wrought in each one's face.

Sitting there, I became aware of a little scene being enacted at the other end of the room, which at any other time would most certainly have provoked a smile. Charley was sitting very dejectedly, poor little fellow, on a low stool by the window wiping his eyes with the cuff of his jacket, and trying hard not to cry, and Rill was standing before him with one arm rolled up tightly in her pinafore, while with the other she administered several smart slaps and cuffs to him, every now and then, running away a few paces, and then returning to administer some more. A much harder blow than usual arrested my attention, and I rose to interfere.

'Charlie naughty boy ; bad boy, Charlie ; Charlie very bad boy !' persisted Rill, red in the face from her exercise.

'Charlie is not a naughty boy ; I think it is baby that is naughty, to beat poor brother so.'

Rill pursed up her lips decidedly ; 'Charlie cry, Charlie must be naughty.'

A light broke in upon me. Rill had so often seen the boy in disgrace for some fault or other, that directly she saw him crying, she immediately thought it must be because he had been naughty, and took the task of correction on herself ; but when I explained to her that Charlie was unhappy and yet good, she took her arm out of her pinafore, and putting her thumb in her mouth, regarded him with perplexed and troubled eyes, till I bade her kiss and comfort him ; upon which she ran to him, and put her arms round his neck, and hugging up his head to her fat little bosom, commenced by-byeing him in her sweet baby voice, till I thought it better for Charlie's patience to call her off to the table.

Louie was the first to come into the room ; she was very pale, but calm and self-possessed as usual ; then Bruce, looking white-lipped and heavy-eyed, and complaining bitterly of headache, which made him sit throughout breakfast with his hand shading his eyes even from the softened light that came through the closed blinds ; and then Seymour, to fetch Halcot's breakfast, speaking and moving quickly and nervously to hide his embarrassment, and catering delicately as if for an invalid.

'Do sit down and have a cup of coffee, Seymour, and something to eat.'

'No, thanks, Nellie ; I have had my breakfast at home,' and with a cheerful nod he went.

And lastly, Dudley entered, coming round and speaking with his old voice and manner, not omitting the usual morning greeting, as the others had, but with a kindly word and look for each. Pausing for a moment with his hand on my shoulder to ask me how I was—but, oh, it went to my heart to see his white face, and the dark lines under his eyes that told of a sleepless night. He paused before sitting down, and scanned all narrowly.

‘Where is Halcot, Nellie?’

‘Upstairs, in my room; he is not well!’

‘Not well! What ails the lad?’

‘I don’t know;’ then forgetting my promise, ‘a sort of faintness came over him when he heard—when I told him about it. I was too quick, I’m afraid.’

‘Why did you not tell me? I will go to him at once. In your room, did you say?’

‘Yes. Seymour is there with him, giving him his breakfast. Don’t go to him, Dudley, it will only disturb him; he is much better quiet.’

Dudley sat down with a trembling lip, and then recovering himself, pressed us all to eat, while his own food remained untasted on his plate. Once only he addressed his brother, who, with shaded face, seemed anxious to escape all observation.

‘Is your head so bad, Bruce?’

‘Yes; confound it,’ groaned Bruce, pressing his other hand upon his throbbing forehead.

‘Then you must give up all thoughts of going to the factory this morning; I will try and manage without you; go and lie down somewhere quietly, and Louie will find you her aromatic vinegar, won’t you, Loo?’

‘I should be no good if I went,’ said Bruce; ‘but it will be very hard for you to get through it all alone.’

‘I shall manage, somehow,’ returned Dudley, in his quiet tone.

I did not dare say a word in objection, for Dudley was not one who liked to be interfered with in what he considered a matter of duty; and unfit as he was for the wearying details of that trying day, his will alone was sufficient to carry him steadily through.

At that moment, breakfast being over, Charlie, as was his wont, placed the books before him. I saw him start and flush up for an instant, and make a movement as if to push them away; but then, recollecting himself, he opened them, only putting up his hand to motion Charlie from the bell that summoned the domestics. Oh, how I wished he would have spared himself when I heard the involuntary trembling of his voice over the opening verses, and how thankful I was when the brief psalm was read, and we had knelt down to say the old familiar prayer, ‘We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep!’ and then there was a sudden silence—an awful pause, and we knew that Dudley had broken down, and was laying his head on the book, and round the room there rose

a sound of stifled sobbing instead of prayer : ah me ! it was many weeks before Dudley suffered them to put those books before him again. When we rose from our knees he had left the room, and I dared not follow him. Louie was the first to regain calmness and composure ; she soothed the frightened children, and sent them out to play in the orchard, and then coaxed Bruce to come with her into the oak parlour, and let her bathe his aching head.

‘ I will be with you directly, Nellie, and shall be at your disposal the whole morning.’

I thanked her mechanically, and then wandered aimlessly up and down the hall, trying to make up my mind as to whether I might go to Dudley or not ; and feeling, as all of us do once or twice in our lives, as if the mere burden of existence were too heavy to bear, and as if we must drop it or die. ‘ Hither shalt thou come, and no further, and here shalt thy proud waves be stayed,’ is the fiat often of the merciful Taskmaster ; yet, when the dread tide of trouble surges up, laying at our feet one wrecked hope after another, we are apt to despair—to say there is no mercy in heaven, no hope upon earth—that we are sinking—until He sends ; He draws us out of many ‘ waters,’ and behold, our feet are upon a rock. Sometimes we are called upon to sit for three days and nights in an awful darkness—‘ a darkness that might be felt,’ a darkness more terrible, more soul-subduing than the Egyptian one of old, of suspense, of fear deferred, of agony ; then we rise up, and behold, our first-born is dead ! But, ‘ at eventide there shall be light ;’ not for long shall ‘ we grope for the wall like the blind ;’ a merciful dispensation will not suffer us to be tried beyond our strength ; and we shall one day go our way saddened and cast down indeed, but not in despair.

Louie passed once, and looked at me without speaking, then turning suddenly, came back and kissed me ; but I only wrung my hands and walked on. Then Seymour ran down the staircase.

‘ I am going off to school now, Nellie ; can I take any message to Dr. Merton ?’

‘ Tell him the reason of the boys’ absence ; but, Seymour, how is he now ?’

‘ Oh, much better ; he’ll soon be pretty right : Dudley is with him.’

‘ Dudley !’

‘ Yes ; they are talking very comfortably. I’ve promised to come in after dinner and sit with him, as it is half-holiday, and then I’ll get him out into the garden ; don’t you fret about him, Nellie :’ then hesitatingly, ‘ I must stop at the parsonage, and tell father and mother ; is there anything they can do for you ?’

I shook my head and turned away, and then I heard Dudley’s step on the stairs and sprang to meet him.

He came down very slowly, and taking his hat from the peg began brushing it.

'Oh, Dudley, don't go without letting me speak to you. Must you really be at the factory to-day?'

'To-day of all days in the year, my child.'

'I know it is useless dissuading you if you consider it your duty to go, but you are not fit for it. Did you have no sleep last night?'

'We talked till nearly two; I dropped off, I believe, about five, but the waking was better than the sleeping, Nell.'

I took his strong brown right hand, it felt limp and weak as a sick child's, and then dropped it with a bitter sigh.

'Will you never spare yourself? oh brother, brother, can I do nothing to help you?'

'Nothing now; good-bye, dear child, don't fret more than you can help;' and disengaging himself gently he opened the hall door, and then we both started back, for Mr. Egerton's tall figure blocked up the entrance. The sight of his kind familiar face made my heart beat violently, and I believe I was about to run away, when he stopped me, and taking both my hands in his, looked at me with eyes brimful of compassion.

'What, Nellie! you are not afraid of your old pastor?' then releasing me he wrung Dudley's hand without speaking. There was nothing for it but to go back into the dining-room with him, and listen to what he had to say to us. He did not follow us for an instant, but stood at the hall door as if looking out, but in reality brushing away the drops that hung on his eyelashes, and clearing his throat huskily, while Dudley leaned against the table, still smoothing his hat mechanically, his face working and quivering with pain; and presently Mr. Egerton came up and laid his hand on his shoulder.

'My poor boy, you must not think I have come in this morning to mock you with any attempt at consolation; no, no, I am not one of those that hold that in multitude of words there is strength, that ply you with texts while your hearts are breaking! it is not thus that I would comfort the children of my old friend. My lad, I love you, and you know it; there is not one of you that I have not held in my arms at the font; I will weep with and for you, but not bid you be comforted whom He has chastened.'

'Heaven is dealing very hardly with us, Mr. Egerton.'

'Oh, my child, my dear Nellie, say not so; mysterious and awful indeed is your present dispensation, but we dare not ask, Why is this so? Shall man be wiser than his Maker? oh no, weep we must, but we dare not rebel.'

As if Dudley understood more of the dark workings of my passionate grief, he stretched out his hand and took mine. 'And now,' continued Mr. Egerton, 'I have come to work, not to talk. What can I do to help? is there no one you would wish to send for, no relative?'

'No one, is there, Nell?'

'None but Aunt Margaret, and we cannot ask her to undertake such a long journey; besides, I would rather be alone.'

'She is right, we shall do better alone; besides, there is nobody else whom we should care to have with us at such a time.'

'Grace sent her dear love, but her great affliction prevents her from helping others in theirs; but I am at your disposal, Dudley; I can write business letters and see people for you; or stay, you are going to the factory, shall I accompany you?'

'If you would, sir, you could help me with some painful arrangements; but we will talk further on our way.'

'Good! let us go; farewell, Nellie, my child; I shall see you again soon.'

I watched them across the court-yard, feeling indeed thankful that Dudley should have such a kind supporter through the day; and then, after looking in on Halcot who was quietly asleep, and Bruce who was nearly so, Louie and I went up to the nursery, and proceeded to our dreary work of reviewing our children's wardrobe and putting on fresh crape where the old had faded. And here I must remark, that it is well that at such times we are compelled to rouse ourselves from our stupor to attend even to such things as these; for if we were to sit brooding over our grief with folded hands it would drive us well-nigh mad. Better the meanest task, the most weary trifles of every-day life, than this, ay, even while they goad and irritate us—anything, even the stated meal time, is a relief; grief knows hunger, thirst, ay, and sleepiness too, and thank God for it. So all that bright summer morning, while the birds were singing on the trees as though they would burst their throats with their ecstasies of joy, and while the children wove daisy chains in the orchard below, Louie and I sat working, yet speaking never a word. Every now and then my tears fell so fast as to spoil the crape trimming I was putting on Rill's little frock, but Louie never wept or spoke, but sat with her fair face white and passionless as marble. As the news passed through the little town many sympathizing callers left cards and kind condolences at our door; Belle Thornton called and begged to see Louie, but was refused.

'Bring up no more messages, Hester,' I said at length, 'and tell every one that asks that we are as well as can be expected.'

When she had shut the door I broke out into nervous tears, 'Oh Louie, why cannot they let us alone? what good do all their enquiries do us?'

'They mean it kindly, I suppose,' she answered in a weary voice. 'Hark! the factory bell is ringing, let us go down.'

So down we went, Halcot came out of his room as we passed, looking pale and weak, and came with us. Bruce was still asleep; Dudley only appeared when half the dinner was over, and then went out again directly.

As soon as the miserable meal was despatched we went back to our work ; little Rill toddled after us and sat at our feet, every now and then beguiling a smile with her winsome ways. Oh how slowly those bright summer hours wore away, how wearily the day lagged on to its close ! till the factory bell sounded again, and then the familiar click of the door, at the sound of which I rose and went down-stairs. Dudley met me on the threshold.

'Give me a cup of tea, Nellie, quick, or milk, or something,' and then threw himself down in an easy-chair.

'How have you got through the day?' I whispered, kneeling down by him.

'I never hope to go through such another ; some of the poor fellows at the factory were quite cut up, and cried like children when we told them. "Such a good master," they said, "we shall never have such another." I tell you, Nellie, if it had not been for Mr. Egerton I don't know what I should have done.'

'My poor boy !'

'Nellie, is the room ready?'

I understood him. 'Yes, Dudley.'

'Let all be in perfect readiness by eight o'clock, for it—it—the coffin will arrive by that time, four of my men are going to carry it home.'

I shuddered. 'Then we shall see him ! oh, Dudley.'

'See what ? are you mad, Nellie?'

'Is it fastened down ? Oh, Dudley, you could not be so cruel as not to let us see him again ?'

He put out his hand to stop me. 'Child, child, you do not know what you are talking about ; you do not, you will never know that which you are desiring to look upon. Bless God rather, Nellie, that all you can remember of his dear face was its smiling look of love at you ; and not carry about with you, as I must, the hideous memory of how I saw it last !'

And then he broke down again. Oh what a shock his nerves must have suffered before he could lose his self-possession so completely ! When we were a little calmer the others came in to tea, and afterwards Dudley lay on the sofa in the twilight, and I went and sat near him ; I think he liked to see me there, for he put out his hand once to feel if I were near. Bruce paced the room up and down, and Louie stood in the window looking at the rising moon. When the clock struck eight, Dudley bade me ring the bell and summon the servants and children ; I obeyed him tremblingly, and we all went out. The last rosy streaks of evening were fading away, and the pale moon poured a flood of silver light through the open windows ; Charlie clung shiveringly to me and hid his face in my dress, and I do not know which face looked palest as the footsteps sounded up the stone court, and in another moment we could see the black pall that covered our father's coffin. As it crossed the threshold Dudley knelt down, and we all followed his example ; and

so it passed through kneeling servants and children, and was laid on the same bed where six months before we had placed our poor mother.

CHAPTER V.

'What though no rule of courtly grace
To measured mood had trained her pace?
A foot more light, a step more true,

Ne'er from the heath-flower dashed the dew;
E'en the slight harebell raised its head
Elastic from her airy tread.'

Scott's Lady of the Lake.

'LOOK, Nellie, how finely my butter is turning.'

'Bravely, Katie, it will be a rare crock this time; why, you bid fair to be as good a dairy-woman as Aunt Margaret herself.' Katie smiles with an air of conscious triumph.

'She has long left the dairy to me, has my dear mother; she finds it too fatiguing, for her arms have somewhat lost their old strength of late, so here, as in the poultry-yard, I am undisputed mistress;' and baring her round white arm Katie resumes her churning and song together, leaving me to gather up my work and go back to the low dairy step where I was sunning myself.

Where am I, gentle reader? where but in the old stone manse, in the pretty Scottish glen I once mentioned, in Keith's and Katie's home? Sunnyside, with its grass lane and broad low meadows, is more than a hundred miles away, and a far different scene lies before me. I am looking out on a steep little lawn, girdled by firs and cypresses, at the foot of which runs a tiny rivulet chafing and brawling among its boulders, now forming deep still pools for the trout to lie in, and now foaming into miniature cascades, where the bare-legged callants love to dabble; and beyond, far as eye can reach, is the glorious Scottish moor. Yes, we are here, Dudley and I and our little Rill, and yonder he stands out in the middle of the stream on a little rocky island, trout-fishing, his pet sport; and somewhere in the recesses of the old house, probably in the still-room with Aunt Margaret, I can hear the babbling voice of Rill.

It is just three months since we stood round our father's grave, and it seems as many years. Brief shall be my record of those months—brief, because even after this long lapse of time I feel it painful to dwell upon them, and also because no words are adequate to describe the utter desolation of our home. The first thing that roused me from my listless brooding was when Dr. Waldegrave, our old physician and friend, came into the room where Keith and I were sitting—for Keith had been with us frequently during that weary time—and told us that Dudley must have instant change of

air and scene, as his nerves were fearfully shattered ; and that two months or so in Scotland or at the seaside, were not only needful but imperative. Then Keith made me promise that we would come to the manse, and as since the hour of her birth my baby sister had never been absent from me for more than a few days, we brought her too. But four days, and already a faint colour is returning to Dudley's worn face, and a little of the old elasticity to his step and voice. Keith is such a cheerful, pleasant companion ; and as for Katie, why, she is just bonnie. I should like to describe her as she stands at her churn, with the sun giving warm ruddy lights to her brown hair ; but somehow it is not easy to describe Katie. She is neither pretty nor handsome, 'nothing but a freckled Scotch lassie,' as her brother calls her ; yet I think that Keith would agree with me in thinking she had the most winsome loving face in the world. Such a bright good face, just fair enough to be pleasant, with honest eyes like her brother's ; but Keith is handsome, and Katie is not. One charm she possesses, and to my mind the best a woman can have next to being 'of a fair countenance,' and that is a sweet low voice ; sweet alike in speaking and singing, and this voice is Katie's gift. At this moment the churn ceased, and Katie, taking up a grey stocking she seemed interminably knitting, came and sat down beside me.

'Nellie, you and I have not had one long talk together, and you have been here four whole days.'

'Whose fault is that, Katie? If you will always be pottering about in still-room, dairy, and kitchen, on hospitable thoughts intent, and leave me to Keith and Dudley for amusement, you cannot expect much of my conversation.'

Katie pouted. 'It is mother's fault, not mine ; goodness knows there is nothing in the house good enough to be set before her favourite nephew ; what a fuss she makes over the laddie, to be sure ! It is, "Dudley likes girdle cakes ; Kitty, you must run and bake some for tea ;" or, "the poor fellow would like a glass of warm milk and some scones for his lunch," and so on from morning till night ;' and here Katie glanced up under her eyelashes, hoping to procure a warm retort, but meeting my gratified smile, went on—

'Do you notice he has the best patchwork quilt in his room, the one lined with lavender satin ; I tried hard to get it for you, but mother said, "Nellie never minds what she has, I am sure she would like her brother's room to look nice."'

'Aunt Margaret is perfectly right,' I replied ; 'but speaking of Dudley, do you find him much altered since you saw him at Sunnyside seven years ago ?'

'Seven years ! is it as long as that ? Yes, I believe it must be, it was the summer before poor Dorothy and Emma died ; I came to you in May, and did not return home till the middle of December ; it was a glorious six months, the happiest in my life. What were you saying, Nellie ? Oh, you asked if I thought you and

Dudley changed, did you not? You, not a bit; you were even then a grave thoughtful girl for your age, too quiet for our noisy games. Do you remember, Charlie was the baby then, and poor Frank was alive, and Halcot such a pretty boy in a braided frock. I think Halcot was my favourite, he was such a thorough rogue; which is Dudley's?

'Oh, Charlie, to be sure; we call him Dudley's shadow, but I do not know if Rill will not cut him out, the little maid has such coaxing ways.'

'No wonder. Nellie, I do like cousin Dudley, very, very much. I think when I was with you at Sunnyside I was rather afraid of him, and when I first saw him this visit he looked so grave and pale, that my childish fears half returned, but now I see with you and mother how gentle and good he is.'

'Thanks, Katie.'

'And now about my playmate, Louie,—Queen Loo, we used to call her.'

'She has richly earned her name; a fair imperial creature is our Loo; people call her very beautiful, and I think they are right.'

'She promised to become so even then. Do you remember, our old tutor, Mr. Arundel, used to call her his Saxon Princess; and she was so amiable, I do not think in all those months I ever saw her angry or roused.'

'No one has, I believe; Dudley says she is too indolent to take the trouble to be angry, but truly the serenity of her temper is wonderful.'

'Keith tells me she is a most loveable creature. But now I want to hear about Bruce, the handsomest boy, and the greatest tease in the world; is he still as good-looking?'

'Quite as much so in his way as Loo in hers; the girls in the neighbourhood spoil him dreadfully.'

'Girls! why, he never could bear them!'

'That was seven years ago, and I can assure you that in the Bruce of to-day you would hardly recognise the headstrong daring boy, who teased you in the school-room, and incited you to mischief in the playground, though I believe that under the quiet exterior more than a trace of the boy-spirit remains. You should see his moustache!'

Katie curled her lip in disgust.

'Such a long silky one, and he is so proud of it, almost as much as he is of the cut of his coat.'

'I won't believe it, you are quizzing me,' and Katie waxed indignant. 'I will never believe that my old playmate has changed into an empty-headed fop—ridiculous!'

'I never said his head was empty, Katie.'

'It must be, if he be vain of a moustache or a well-cut coat; and what were you saying about girls?'

'I said they admire him so, that it makes him more conceited than he would be; we must make allowances for him, Dudley says.'

'Don't tell me what Dudley says; why has he not turned dandy too? he has not a bit of humbug about him. Does Bruce like any of these girls?'

Never was 'girls' pronounced in such a disdainful tone!

'What do you mean by like?'

'Why, love to be sure.'

'Love! oh that is too serious a word to apply to Bruce's harmless little passions. I know he will go ten miles to see a pretty face which he will weary of in about as many weeks; but I do not believe he has ever loved seriously.'

'What was his last fancy, as I suppose you call it in the south?' asked Katie, grimly.

'His last? let me see; last winter it was Gertrude Manners, the solicitor's daughter, a pretty little fair-haired thing, but she ran away with a young subaltern, much to Bruce's disgust; then he took up with Belle Thornton, and, if I mistake not, was rapidly turning over to her sister Ada; but of course there is a truce now to such follies,' and I sighed.

'Worse and worse; oh, I am so disappointed,' and Katie's eyes as she spoke filled with tears; on seeing which the amusement I had been secretly enjoying at her expense vanished as a matter of course.

'Nay, now you are taking my words too severely, and sitting in harsh judgment upon them; you must not condemn poor Bruce so bitterly, for a few foibles which he shares in common with other young men of his age. He is a capital man of business, and has an honest affectionate nature, though he sometimes tries to mask it with a show of indifference, and he is generous to a fault. Often and often he is the secret almoner of Louie's bounties among her poor; though,' I added mischievously, 'he stoutly refuses to carry the basket for her any time before dark.'

Katie smiled half-satisfied, then changing the subject, proposed that we should go and seek Dudley. As we rose, Keith's head appeared over the low stone wall that guarded the manse garden, which he cleared at a bound, and alighted at our feet, closely followed by Snap, his Skye terrier.

'Girls! girls! have you been whipping up scandal with your syllabubs? for as I passed the dairy wall just now, I heard such a babbling of women's voices as drowned even the noisy little river itself; and just look at Katie's hot cheeks, if they do not corroborate me—confess, lassie, what mischief has the little evil member been brewing?'

'Whisht ye for a fause loon, as Mother Jefferson says,' and Katie turned her sparkling face on him, full of mock anger; 'give over pulling my ear, tease, that you are, and help poor Nellie across

those rough stepping-stones ; see how dubiously she is eyeing them.'

Rough stepping-stones indeed they were ; full a yard apart, pointed and jagged, and slippery from the constant lapping of the wavelets over them.

'You do not mean me to step over these, Katie?' I remonstrated, for there was mischief in her face.

'Yes I do, my fair Southerner—don't look so scared, or I will make Keith carry you across ; come, tuck up your dress, and follow me so,' and springing with the fearless grace of a young fawn from stone to stone she reached Dudley's side, on the large boulder they had named 'Stony Isle.'

I turned to Keith in utter despair. 'I will stay here, thank you.'

'Nonsense, what a timorous little creature you are ; come, summon up your pluck, and give me your hand, both of them. Now jump ; that is right,' and so with what Katie termed 'one tremble, three jerks, and a palpitation,' I was safely landed at her side.

'Pretty fair for the first time, Nell ; before our six weeks are over, I'll warrant you will have improved greatly in grace and agility ; there, sit down by cousin Dudley, and I will recline at your feet.'

'But it is all wet and slimy, Kate, just feel ;' and I gathered up my dress in horror.

'So it is ; now, fair sirs, if there be among you a knight of the old Kaleigh type, this little defect can be remedied ; come, that is chivalrous,' as Keith laughingly threw off his coat and spread it on the rock, 'now we are comfortable,' and leaning over, she commenced dabbling her little brown hands in the water. At this moment poor Snap, who had been challenging us from the shore with short eager barks, put boldly to sea, and jumping on us, discharged such showers of bright drops from his rough little coat as to provoke universal disgust. Thrice was the shivering little wretch thrown back into the water, and thrice he returned, till incensed with our ingratitude and coldness, he made a short swim back, and commenced rolling on the grass on his back in a fit of canine fury, every now and then jumping up to scratch himself and howl.

'Poor brute,' said Keith ; 'do you know, Katie, that little animal follows me about like my shadow. A short time ago you were his favourite ; but somehow now, I fancy his doggish instinct suspects an impending separation between us. Last night I heard him panting at my door, nor would he rest till I got up and let him in. Poor old Snap ! I wonder whether you will be dead and buried when your master comes home again !'

Katie ceased dabbling, and looked grave ; her brother continued—

'Another fortnight, Dudley, and I shall be looking out on the

great waste of waters. Heigho ! time is passing rapidly, I shall soon look my last on these brave Scottish moors.'

'Not your last, old fellow,' said Dudley, cheerily ; 'recollect you are to come back as rich as Cræsus from the El Dorado of the East ; and not with an impaired constitution as so many of the old Cræsus do ; better comparative poverty in Scotland than wealth and an enlarged liver ; don't stay long enough for that, my boy.'

'No, no, a thousand times,' echoed Katie ; but Keith remained silent, and his dark eyes wore a look of pain ; then suddenly rousing himself, and changing the subject abruptly, he said—

'By-the-bye, Dudley, what's become of Herwald Delorme all this time ? I never hear you speak of him : you used to be such friends. Do you remember our pleasure trip to London ? Herwald and you, Bruce and I—let me see, it was nine years ago—and my uncle taking us to the play, to see Hamlet ; what fun we had, and what jokes Herwald made that night ; he was a pleasant fellow, to be sure. Have you seen him lately ?'

'I heard from him about three months ago, he was then in Cairo "unriddling the Sphinx," as he said, and learning hieroglyphics ; but we have not seen him for eight years.'

'Good heavens ! you don't say so, and you were such chums. Why, what on earth has separated you so completely ? I thought he was as one of you.'

'And so he was, from the time he first came to us a homeless, motherless boy, and won our hearts by his gentleness and cleverness ; all those three years which he passed with us wholly at Sunnyside, he was as a brother to us.'

'Was that the pale pleasant-looking boy whose picture used to hang in the oak parlour' interrupted Katie, 'and who had left you suddenly the summer before I came to you ?'

'Yes, he was my poor father's ward ; he was his sole guardian till Mr. Delorme came over from India, where he held some office in the Civil Service. You remember, Keith, he arrived in England some two years before he was expected, in consequence of a large family estate falling to him—Hurst-hall in Whalley, Lancashire ?'

'Oh, I remember hearing of that, and of Herwald's going away with his father, but he could not have liked leaving much, he seemed so thoroughly domesticated at Sunnyside.'

'No, poor fellow, he was bitterly cast down, nothing would console him but a promise, that his guardian should visit Whalley the following year and bring him back.'

'Did my uncle go ?'

'Oh, yes, and Herwald did the honours of Hurst-hall most graciously.'

'Lucky dog !' groaned Keith.

'Unfortunately, the day before they were to start for Sunnyside, some wretched dispute arose between my poor father and Mr. Delorme ; he was a crochety old fellow, I believe. Herwald, in the

piteous letter he wrote my mother afterwards, said it was on the subject of politics they differed, but from a few hints dropped from my father I suspect it was on a more personal matter than that. Anyhow there was an awful row, to quote Herwald ; and not only was the poor lad deprived of his promised visit to Sunnyside, but any future intercourse with his old friends strictly forbidden ; a cruel thing, for the poor boy was most warmly attached to my mother and sisters.'

'What a consummate old tyrant !' was Keith's comment.

'Only on that one point, though ; on every other matter he was all that a doting parent could be. Herwald often said in his letters that his father seemed to have Aladdin's lamp, for he never breathed a wish that was not gratified ; and I know he lived like a young prince at college, and was an envy to the Cantabs.'

'I wonder he did not give his father the slip there, and run over to Sunnyside to see you.'

'In saying that, you prove that you do not know Herwald's character ; there's not a more honourable fellow breathing, I believe, nor one who scorns more to do an underhand thing ; indeed, he is scrupulous to a fault. Come to us without his father's knowledge he would not, but he always meant on coming of age to brave his anger, and mair'rain his right to visit when he pleased.'

'Well ?'

'Well, he came to his majority some fourteen months ago, when his father and he were taking the grand tour ; and the day that his tenants were celebrating so festively at Hurst-hall was spent by the young heir by his father's dying-bed, spread in a wretched Arab hut at the foot of Lebanon.'

'Mr. Delorme dead ?'

'Yes, he fell down in a fit of apoplexy while riding on his mule. Herwald was awfully cut up'—here Dudley paused, and his whitening lips showed the natural course of his thoughts.

'Of course, of course ; then Herwald is master of Hurst-hall ; truly "his lines are fallen to him in pleasant places," and a dark cloud gathered on Keith's brow.

'He seems in no hurry to take possession of his inheritance, though, but keeps loitering about in one place or another, as if making the most of his liberty ; he was ever an indolent fellow ; you remember his cool indifferent manners even in those days. Yet, his talent and aptitude in learning were wonderful—he beat you and me hollow.'

Keith did not answer, only hurriedly raised his head and looked at me ; then, it all at once occurred to me what I had long forgotten ; how in those happy old days of ours, Herwald and Keith were boyish competitors for my young favour, and how even in those early times I gave the preference to the stalwart and handsome Keith—and at that point, colouring painfully at my own thoughts, I asked Dudley in a low voice where he had written to Herwald last.

'To Whalley. of course ; he fixed the eighteenth for his return.'

'That is a fortnight ago, Dudley, and you have had no answer?'

'He may have directed it to Sunnyside ; I will wait a few days longer before I write again. Hallo ! there's Aunt Margaret and Rill.'

Yes, there was Aunt Margaret, her kerchief tied neatly over her pretty white curls, and her nice black silk guarded, in housewifely way, by her snowy muslin apron, and there, with chubby arms embracing poor dejected Snap, was Rill. Snap's paws and rough tongue, so different to Nettle's gentle ways, greatly discomposed our little maid ; so she soon toddled away from him to be followed and barked at and danced round by the grateful animal.

'Look, Dudley, in the water, look,' and Rill's outstretched finger formed such a tempting bait for Snap, that he grabbed at it, nearly upsetting Rill into the water in her sudden terror, and making her cry out.

'Down, Snap, down, naughty dog ; never mind, baby, don't cry, brother's coming,' and Dudley leapt over the stepping-stones to snatch up his darling, and then brought her back in triumph to us, Rill hiding her wet little face in his neck, half in fondness and half in fear at the water.

'Oh, Dudley, how could you venture the stepping-stones with baby in your arms?' but Dudley did not answer, for he was drying the tearful face with his handkerchief, and talking to her in his coaxing tones.

'Naughty Snap, shall we drown Snap, Katie, for biting poor baby's hand?' here Rill with a dubious whine held up an apology for a thumb, and moist with much sucking, to be kissed.

'Kiss the place and make it well,' chanted Dudley, not refusing the morsel ; 'now give brother another nice one, because his arm aches with carrying baby across.' Rill amiably complies, and then at her own request is permitted to wash the sore place in the stream, Dudley holding her safely by her chubby legs, till a further ablution of face and curly head being insisted on, the small washerwoman is lifted up to dry on Nell's lap.

At this moment Aunt Margaret's voice sounds from the garden, 'Katie, Katie !'

'Yes, dearest mother.'

'Did you not promise hot buns to Dudley for lunch?'

'You did, mother, but I will come and bake them.'

'You spoil me, auntie,' cries Dudley ; while Kate, giving me a mischievous glance, as much as to say 'I told you so,' disappears into the house, and we all more leisurely follow her.

CHAPTER VI.

'And wilt thou leave me thus,
That hath loved thee so long,
In wealth and woe among?
And is thy heart so strong
As for to leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay!

'And wilt thou leave me thus,
That hath given thee my heart,
Never for to depart,
Neither for pain and smart?
And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay!

Sir Thomas Wyatt.

'MINISTER, minister!'

The minister raised an iron-grey head from the book over which he was poring, and carefully placing a forefinger on the passage in hand, looked up inquiringly. A rugged face had the minister; I never looked at it without comparing it, in my own mind, with a bit of granite wall with the sun shining upon it, such as one sees in the north of England; and I am sure the minister's face, massive, strong, and irregular, with just a glint of sunshine in the eyes to redeem it from sternness, carried out the illustration.

'Eh, Maggie, what ails you?' Aunt Margaret, laying down the cambric handkerchief she was marking, and smoothing with tremulous hands the snowy plaits of her apron, repeats her question with a sigh.

'Mayhap ye'll go with the lad yourself, minister?'

'So he has wished, and ye would not have me say him nay?'

'Surely no; what day does the ship sail?'

'Saturday, the twenty-third. Duncan must take my Sunday duty; as for thee, mother, thou must make up thy mind to part with thy boy some two days earlier.'

'How so? does he not leave the manse on Friday, as arranged?'

'No; he and I have business to settle in London, that whereof I informed thee, Maggie, a night ago; and this morning he arranged to start two days earlier, did he not tell thee?'

'Never a word,' and Aunt Margaret's tears dropped fast on the spotless cambric, though she vainly tried to brush them away; 'oh, weary is me; one brings forth children but to lose them; who would have minded that our lad would put the ocean between him and us? and he such a bright good lad;' and Aunt Margaret fairly wept. The minister bent his head down to his books in silence. His was a strangely reserved nature, but I could see his broad brows knitting themselves painfully; and, as if the thread of his study were broken, he soon rose and left the room, but first he laid a kindly hand on his wife's shoulder.

'Cheer thee up, mother, every cloud has a "silver lining," and in time we may yet discern some good even in this, only have faith.'

Curled up on the broad low window-seat of the manse study, and looking out on lawn and brook and sunshiny moor, I seemed to listen vaguely to what passed with a dim unconscious sort of pain. I scarcely dared to ask myself what the manse would be without

Keith ; but now a sudden pang brought it home to me ; would it not have been better to have refused to come, for these days of uninterrupted intercourse would make me miss him more ? Suddenly I started, for Aunt Margaret was standing beside me and stroking down my hair, while she eyed me half wistfully, half sadly. Arresting the fair thin hand, which so reminded me of my mother's—though hers used to sparkle with brilliants, while Aunt Margaret's was unadorned save by its simple gold guard—I pressed it to my lips, for my mother's sister was very dear to me.

'Nellie, my child, how comes it that you are not out on the moors this bonnie day with the boys ? but sit sewing, sewing, for all the world like a little mouse ; you are too quiet, niece.'

'Katie was busy, auntie.'

'That was no reason for biding at home,' and Aunt Margaret's eyes dwelt searchingly on my face ; 'you did not use to be so proper, child. When last you were at the manse, hours upon hours did Keith and you spend upon the moor yonder, till the minister reckoned that you would be lost. I like not changed ways and quiet looks, Nellie.'

I felt myself colour up as I bent lower over my work ; Aunt Margaret rested her hand caressingly on my head.

'Nellie, love, tell me the truth ; are Keith and you quite as good friends as you used to be ?'

'Yes, auntie dear, I hope so.'

'And I hope so too ; but it is long now, since I saw the light die out of my boy's face. Ay, child, you start ; but since Keith paid that long visit to you at Sunnyside, I have noticed a different look about him ; older, graver, perhaps a little sad. When I noticed it to him once or twice, he just turned it off with a jest, for he has a bright, bold spirit, has Keith. Answer me frankly, niece ; has anything passed between you and him ?'

'Don't ask me, auntie, please, for Keith's and my sake don't ; only believe us to be what we are at heart, the best and truest friends.'

'Nothing more !'

'Nothing more, auntie.'

Aunt Margaret replied, 'Nellie, do you know what has been my dearest wish, since you and he were little ones together, ever so many many years ago ?' I was silent.

'I did hope that you would have been his wife.' I shook my head.

'It may never be, auntie ; do not think it, do not hope it ; Keith is going away, and I have my children and Dudley, and for the future—' I paused ; 'for the future I dare say nothing ; it is the present we must live for ; oh, auntie, auntie, between him and me are my parents' graves.'

'Hush, my child, we will speak another time of this, for I see my boy crossing the lawn, and looking towards us.'

Yes, it was Keith coming in search of me. I would have escaped if I could, but he had already perceived us, and hastened his steps.

'I have come to fetch you, Nellie ; it is too bright an afternoon to waste within-doors, so I have left Dudley to wander down stream by himself, till we can catch him up.'

'That's right, Keith, take her out, she is looking pale and tired with sitting over her work,' and Aunt Margaret left the room. I was attempting a lame excuse, which apparently fell unheeded on Keith's ears ; for he quietly took the work from my hands, fetched me my hat and scarf, and whistling to his dog, left the room, inviting me by a silent though somewhat peremptory gesture to follow. His was the stronger will, so I obeyed, and we silently went down the steep little lawn to the stepping-stones which we must cross to get to the open moor beyond. To my surprise, however, Keith turned aside, following the pathway of a meadow to our right ; then making an abrupt turn, led me to the narrowest bend of the river, where was a slight rustic bridge, roughly formed of a few planks with a rope for a hand-rail. Uttering an exclamation of relief, I was about to put my foot upon it, then I stopped.

Keith watched me smilingly.

'Well, Nellie, never speak ill of the bridge that carries you over the water ; it is but a rough affair, I know, but you may safely venture across.'

'But this was not here the day before yesterday, for Katie and I returned by this way from the village ; how came it here, who put it ?'

'A very unskilful workman, I fear, for he has left a jagged nail in to tear the lady's dress ;' and going on his knees he wrenched it violently from the wood-work, and then came up laughing to show the rusty mark on his hand.

'Oh, Keith, have you really made this pretty little bridge, and for me, because I was so foolishly afraid of the stepping-stones ?'

'Nay, Dudley and Donald helped ; you don't suppose I am such a Hercules as to move that plank myself ; look, it is quite firm and safe ;' and he crossed and recrossed, stamping as he did so to prove his words.

'Yes, I see it is quite so ; oh, how kind and thoughtful you are, Keith, how very, very good !' The tears came in my eyes ; I do not know whether he saw them, but we walked on very silently for some time, till he stopped.

'There is a nice smooth stone, Nellie ; we will sit down and rest till Dudley comes up.'

'Why not go on to meet him ?' I said, 'he cannot be much farther ?'

'No, he is just behind that great boulder there, you can see the top of his straw hat ; but I do not wish to join him just yet ; I want to talk to you a little ; we shall not have much more time together.'

I hesitated, foolishly, I own, and in another moment a firm, quiet hand had placed me in my seat, and Keith had thrown himself on the grass, and was looking at me with stern sad eyes that seemed to look me through. I was fairly startled, and hung my head, as I felt myself crimson to the roots of my hair.

'Nellie,' he said, in a tone of grief, 'in what have I offended you? What have I done that you should avoid me like this?'

'Offended me, cousin Keith!' I faltered, 'what do you mean?'

'Nay, it is what do you mean, Nellie? where is your old frankness and truth, where your generosity? Why are you for ever interposing barriers between us, putting yourself under the wing of my mother, or Katie, or Dudley, as if you feared to trust yourself alone with me—with me, your old playmate, cousin, and friend? Ah, I can read your thoughts, this very minute you are longing and watching for Dudley to appear and break up what you consider an embarrassing *tête-à-tête*; nay, you cannot deny it, you know you have invented a hundred pretexts to prevent this happening: but mine was the stronger will, and it prevailed, and now what is it you fear from me? speak plainly, and tell me.'

'Oh, Keith, don't be so bitter, you know I never meant to hurt your feelings; only I thought it better to—to—' I paused in sheer confusion.

'Finish your sentence, cousin; well, you thought it better to—what? to keep your rejected lover at a distance, lest he should dare to nourish any more presumptuous hopes, lest he should renew a slighted offer? I don't think I deserve this at your hands, Nellie; I do not think I have ever by word or deed shown myself to be anything more than a cousin or friend might be; in this you have wronged me.'

'Spare me these reproaches, Keith: have I not sorrow enough to bear without your adding to it? why will you so cruelly misunderstand me? you must, you ought to know such ungenerous thoughts could never enter my head; how can you look and speak so harshly to me?' and I broke into a fit of sobbing.

My hands were taken down from my face not ungently; and then Keith said in a voice that was changed and kind—

'Forgive me, my dear cousin. I spoke roughly to you just now; I had no right to grieve you, but if you know how I suffer at the thought of leaving you, it is sometimes more than I can bear.' Then in a low tender tone—'My child, do you think I would add a feather's weight to your trouble? I was angry, hurt, wounded just now, but you need not fear me again.' I put my hand in his without speaking, and for a little while we were silent; when he turned his face to me again, it wore its old kind expression.

'Nellie, are we friends now?'

'Quite, Keith.' A troubled look still lingered in his eyes.

'But I have not yet said what I intended. What if you misunderstand me, or worse still, refuse to listen to me? for I am going

to touch on an old sore subject ; but I implore you to believe that no selfish considerations influence me in what I am going to ask ; nothing but the purest, truest desire for your good. Do you believe this ?

‘ Most certainly, I do.’

‘ I need not ask you if you remember a long conversation held some ten or eleven months back in the drawing-room at Sunnyside, for I do not think that it can ever be forgotten by you and me ; it was hard for you to speak such words, it was the bitterest hour of my life to have to listen to them.’ He paused a moment and then went on quietly—‘ You told me then that your parents were averse to a long engagement between us ; and you added that even did they give their consent to your accompanying me to India, that you did not feel that you loved me well enough to leave home, family, and country for my sake : I think those were your words.’ I assented silently. ‘ I had been fool enough to think I possessed your heart, or else I should never have urged you to such a sacrifice ; and the bitterness of finding myself mistaken was great : but even then I believed you cared for me more than you yourself knew ; and that if it had not been for Dudley and your parents’ strong opposition, that you would have consented : was I right in thinking this, Nellie ?’

‘ I have cared very much for you all my life, you know it well, Keith.’

‘ Then, if you do,’ and his face suddenly lighted up, ‘ give me the right to call you mine ; let me, when I return home after these long years of exile, come back to claim you, my betrothed wife.’

‘ Cousin, cousin, what do you mean ? Am I not as much bound as I was ten months ago, ay, and doubly, trebly bound ? for the wishes of the dead are sacred.’

‘ You are not bound, the dead cannot judge for the living ; human life must be governed by circumstances. While your parents were with you, they advised and controlled your actions, they cannot do so now, my poor Nellie, you are left to your own impulse.’

‘ Which is to keep implicitly to what I believe they would wish.’

‘ Decidedly, and I think, speaking with all reverence, that were they now on earth, they would wish this.’ I gazed at him wonderingly. ‘ Listen to me, Nellie ; while they were with you, you needed no other protection than theirs ; you were safe and happy under their wing ; and they had a right to forbid anything they thought would be contrary to your interests. But now you have lost your guardians——’

‘ I have Dudley and Bruce——’

‘ Let me finish, Nellie—you certainly now have your two brothers, but in a few years they will take to themselves wives, and leave you alone in the old house, for Louie will not be long there and the boys will go out into the world, and then—then, it will be

pleasant for you to think that you have some one to turn to—and on whom you have a certain right——’

‘I do not deserve this generosity and goodness, Keith ; what have I done to receive such love at your hand? but I dare not accede to your request—I dare not ; my conscience forbids me. Alas, alas, how do I know what shall happen with these children about me? I may never be able to marry!’

‘They will be my children as well as yours, Nellie ; we will watch over and care for them together.’ I shook my head again sadly.

‘You are a poor man now, Keith, and you must reap golden harvests indeed if you are to be cumbered with my family. No, no, leave me here in my quiet home, unbound, save by those old ties that have ever united us ; and if it be my lot, as you say, to be left lonely in the old place—well then—when you come home, if you still think me worthy to share your life, how gladly will I do so ! Will not this content you?’

‘How can it, when I think your scruples Quixotic in the extreme? Let me refer this matter to my parents ; and you consent to be guided by their advice?’

‘I cannot.’

‘Dudley, then?’

‘No, no, my own conscience shall guide me in this ; Keith, you should not urge me so ; Dudley cannot judge for me in this case.’

‘Who calls Dudley? because here I am’—and to our infinite surprise, he stood before us with his fishing tackle over his arm. ‘What is the matter, child? you look flushed and hot, and Keith too—come, what is it?’

I could not have told him for my life, but I clung to him and hid my face on his shoulder like a child ; the very touch of his hand on my hair seemed to tranquillize and soothe me. Then Keith spoke ; and when Dudley had listened to all with a grave face, he drew me closer to him, and kissed me ; and then I knew I had done right.

‘I am sorry for you, old fellow, more sorry than I know how to tell you ; but Nellie has done wisely in this matter, wisely and well, and as I would have advised her. It is sometimes painful to do one’s duty ; but one must not shrink from it ; she has had the moral courage to go through with hers. Go your own way, Keith ; when you come back you will find her ready and willing, take my word for it.’

‘My fate has spoken, I will abide by it ;’ and Keith stretched out his hand to me with a brave, sweet smile. ‘I have already waited seven years for you, like Jacob did for Rachel, and they were as nothing for the love he bore her, and now I must serve five more.’

And as Rachel might have looked upon young Jacob’s face, as

day by day he led forth his flock to the watering, so I looked on Keith ; and in the strong new flood of love and gratitude pressed my lips to his hand. As I did so I heard something like a sob ; and Keith had pulled his cap over his eyes and strode away.

How very good my brother was to me that night ! We saw little of Keith during that and the next two days he was with us, and on the third he was gone ; and the last words he spoke to me were dearer than any he had said before.

CHAPTER VII.

'All too weak for childish pastime,
Drearly the hours sped ;
On his hands, so small and trembling,

Leaning his poor aching head,
Or through dark and painful hours
Lying sleepless on his bed.'

Adelaide Anne Proctor.

'LETTERS, letters, and a perfect budget of them,—one, two, three, and one for Dudley,' and Katie's voice rang cheerily through the old manse.

Dudley dropped his paper, and ran out into the hall to fetch them, and then came back to our favourite nook in the old window-seat.

'Let me see, only one for you ; stay, I know that hand—Whalley, Lancashire ; who lives there ?'

'Herwald, of course, you little muff,' and Dudley eagerly snatched it from my hand. 'By Jove, I am glad the old fellow has written to me at last ; from whom are yours ?'

'Louie and Bruce, and, oh, one from Halcot ; Dudley, you really must speak to the boy about his writing, it is simply dreadful.' Dudley looked over my shoulder and laughed.

'Why, it is a good enough sort of hand, rather inebriated, it's true ; and certainly crazy with respect to flourishes. Come, let's have the home news first, Nell,' and he thoughtfully poised the black-edged envelope in his hand.

'And leave Herwald's as a tit-bit to the last, that's what you mean ? It is all very well joking the lads about Damon and Pythias, but when one has glass houses—'

'Shut up, and read your letters, or hand them over to me.'

Thus admonished, I opened Louie's ; it was like herself, kind, gracious, and pleasantly prolific of home scenes and village gossip, quaintly and happily rendered. A lengthy postscript however went near to spoil it all in my opinion ; it ran thus :—

'Colonel Grey has left for London ; he called several times at Sunnyside, in your absence ; and I may as well tell you, proposed to me before his departure. Of course I refused him, the man's in-

sufferable conceit left me no other course ; but Bruce seems unaccountably annoyed, and talks much of my having missed a splendid match, accusing me at the same time of having led him on ; the idea is perfectly absurd, though perhaps, after all, you may have been in the right, and I a little to blame, but I never really meant it to come to this ; pray don't tell Dudley. Belle Thornton is uncommonly cool and huffy. I can't help thinking from her aggrieved manner that she wanted the Colonel herself.'

'Oh, Dudley, is not this dreadfully wrong of Louie?'

Bruce seemed to be of my opinion, for after a few curt, business-like remarks, he wound up his letter by making an insufficient apology for his sister.

'It is certainly a foolish affair, Nellie, and annoying in the extreme ; Colonel Grey has a right to feel himself both injured and aggrieved, as I told the wilful child myself yesterday ; but as she seems tolerably penitent, perhaps the matter had better drop. Loo owns she is horribly afraid of what Dudley may say.'

'Dudley will say nothing at all in the matter ; such self-willed lassies must gang their own gait ; I never saw Colonel Grey, and shall not interfere, and as Bruce has encouraged her in cementing the intimacy, they must bear the brunt of the annoyance together. As I told you before, the Thorntons are not desirable acquaintances for either of them, they are too fast and headstrong by half, and Belle is my decided aversion, with her loud voice and masculine manners ; how Louie can tolerate her is past my understanding.'

'She is a very handsome girl, Dudley, and really very good-natured.'

'When it suits her own ends—faugh—don't let us talk of her ; what amuses me most in the matter is, that Queen Loo owns to being a little to blame. She may laugh at my old-fashioned notions in holding that flirting is a heinous fault ; but I will ask you what right has any woman to go out riding and driving with a man continually, accept his flowers, wear his gloves, and entice him by a thousand little winning smiles and graces across that mysterious border-land of doubt—which a man must cross before he dares to stake his all on a proposal—and then turn round and say him nay ? It is downright swindling, Nellie ! Let a girl carry true colours, and show her likes and dislikes in her face. Loo is a dangerous siren.'

'Yet a true-hearted woman.'

'Query, friend Nell.'

'Dudley, Dudley, you have a naughty determined twist about the corners of your mouth, that shows you are not pleased ; we will not talk of our home "Lorelie" any more ; come, read the boys' letter.'

The boys' letter, jointly compounded by Halcot and Charlie, was a mass of schoolboys' rubbish ; and save that Bruce was a brick, and boated, fished, and cricketed with them to their hearts'

content, contained little or no news. Dudley's brow smoothed over the lads' innocent prattle.

'Now for Herwald's,' he said, breaking the seal carefully; it ran as follows:—

'Hurst-hall, Whalley.

'MY DEAR DUDLEY,

'Your second letter has just come to hand, your first, after vainly seeking me in Pall-Mall, where I have been staying some weeks in order to settle affairs with my solicitor concerning some complicated London leases, arriving simultaneously with it. This, and the knowledge that I have been settled at Hurst-hall but four days, must be my sole excuses.

'On reading the first letter, my impulse was to ring the bell and order my portmanteau to be packed, and in another hour should certainly have been en route for the South and Sunnyside, but your second, informing me of your stay in Scotland, obliged me to desist; for how could I make sure of my welcome at the manse? and, though no coward, could hardly have dared to intrude myself there an uninvited stranger, so, though I am longing to see your dear face again and to grasp your hand, I must be patient and bide my time.

'And now, my dear old friend, what can I say, what ought I to say, after what you have told me? how express my sympathy for your sudden and awful bereavement? Alas, in great grief as in great happiness, words are barren of results, wholly inadequate to express our feelings and our thoughts; actions, not words, must test a friend's heart—and I cannot come to you.

'But nine months ago, and news of your mother's death reached me in Switzerland, and now my poor guardian is gone; oh, if I had but been in England, if I had not loitered by the way to nurse a selfish grief, I might have seen his cheery face again! But how fruitless are regrets over a closed-up grave! and how vain all I am writing now! I meant to comfort, and do but mourn over a few feeble fancies. Pity me, Dudley, and pardon me, for I too have lost a father; and fourteen months have hardly healed my grief.

'You have many for whom to live and work, and hope; I, no one—not one on God's dear earth claiming blood and kinsmanship with me.

'My coming back three days ago was a mere mockery; acres upon acres of goodly land, tenants crowding round and calling me master; but not one face to bid me welcome home. I was but a poor fool, Dudley, but I give you my word, that when, sick at heart, I had listened to the long-winded speeches of the old steward and housekeeper, I just went to the old library and laid my head on my father's chair and cried like a child; and now, resting in this same dusky room, I feel the shadow on my friend's heart passing to my own. Enough, you know Herwald Delorme, without further words.

'And now I crave a hearing—a hearing and a favourable answer;

I cannot come to the manse, but you can come to me, you and Nellie (ah! her good heart will not refuse me), and the little river, streamlet, brook, what do you call it?—Rill, whom I have never seen, too. Come, I will take no refusal, the factory cannot want you yet; let Bruce fag for both. Come, I can give you glorious scenery, bracing air, capital game, horses, dogs, billiards, any and every rural delight; and the warmest welcome you have ever known.

'Mrs. Arundel shall care for Nellie's comfort, and the old blue nursery shall be fitted up for the little "river;" surely you cannot refuse me; consider my loneliness, and come; come and renew the old friendship so rudely broken; come and let each judge whether Herwald or Dudley be most unchanged.

'Write by what train to expect you, and I will be at the station to meet you.

'Remember me to your aunt and uncle Camcron; best love to Nellie.

'Adieu,

'HERWALD DELORME.'

I had read the foregoing letter over Dudley's shoulder, for after the first few sentences he had finished it to himself.

'Well, dear, what do you say?'

'That Herwald is a noble fellow, a downright brick—and that, if you think it possible, we will go and see him.'

'You are sure it will be right to leave home for so long?'

'Our six weeks are not up till next Wednesday——'

'And Dr. Waldegrave ordered you two months.'

'He did, but I am all right now; still, business is slack, and Bruce in capital working order, and Loo seems able to manage the boys; what do you say, Nell?'

'That we will go, dear, for I see you are longing for a sight of your old chum; but here comes Katie, let us ask her.'

Katie proved to be in what Dudley termed her chronic state of hurry, and could listen to nothing; and it was tea-time before our plan was laid before her and Aunt Margaret.

'Go by all means,' was the universal opinion; so Dudley wrote a long letter of acceptance, and Katie and I walked over the hills to post it, on our way to some outlying pensioner of hers.

On our return down the village street, Katie begged me to go to a Mrs. Graham about some work she had given her.

'She is a young Englishwoman, Nellie, and very reserved and pretty: I hear she has an invalid child. I have never been round to her room yet; she lodges with old Marjory. I should like you to go and see them for me if you would, while I enquire how poor Donald's leg is getting on.'

Katie had so rarely asked a favour of me that I could not refuse; besides, I was rather ashamed of her knowing how timid I was of entering poor people's cottages: and how Louie at home could

never induce me to accompany her. Somehow or other I lacked the happy faculty of saying kind and pleasant things to strangers ; of patting curly heads, and gaining the hearts of slatternly mothers by praises of their dirty-faced babies ; and I trembled before the rough-voiced men for whom Louie had always a word and smile. Both Louie and Katie possessed the winning art ; perhaps Katie was a trifle more earnest, and Louie more tender, but both were true Sisters of Mercy, and beside them I felt sadly deficient in this Christian duty.

Obediently then I followed my cousin's behest ; I knew well where she was going : the Donald of whom she spoke, whose fractured leg was the result of a horrible accident, was the black sheep of the parish ; a drunkard, liar, and poacher, who lay all day upon his bed of pain, cursing, swearing, and blaspheming, so as to turn those sick with horror who listened to his awful ravings. And she would stand beside this godless creature, and take his hand, and speak consoling and holy words to him ; awing him by her gentleness and goodness, and shaming him into very silence.

The wicket at old Marjory's stood open, no one was in the little red-brick kitchen, so I went upstairs and tapped at the first door I came to ; no voice bade me enter, so I lifted the latch and went in.

Such a poor room, so barely and yet so cleanly furnished. Some delicate needlework lay carefully folded on the round table, and I was stooping to examine it, thinking myself alone, when two bright specks of eyes peered at me from over the top of a high crib. It was the child. I went up to it and stood perfectly appalled ; anything less human and childlike could scarcely be imagined. Such a little white skeleton face, such deep dark lines of suffering under the wan eyes ; such an old weary look ! I touched the hot feverish hand.

'My little girl, are you suffering? and why has your mother left you alone?'

'Boy,' was the sole response.

'Boy, is it? then you are Mrs. Graham's little boy ; will your mother be long? can I wait for her?'

Only a stare out of the heavy eyes ; no answer. I sat down by the cot, and asked him again in a low tone if he expected his mother shortly.

'I want to sleep,' was the reply, in a querulous sharp voice, and twitching at the bed-clothes with small bony hands, the weird creature turned its face to the wall. I sat still and looked about me, noting the perfect cleanliness and order of the poor room ; the bare look of the half-opened cupboard, and the fireless grate.

Presently the thing raised itself up with a little sigh, and felt for a rimless plate and tin mug that stood beside it : alas ! both were empty.

'Are you hungry or thirsty, little one? can I find you something?'

No need to ask, the wistful starved eyes followed me to the empty cupboard; no fragment of bread, no sup of milk was there.

'Never mind, little man, I will see what I can do: wait, I will be back directly.'

There was an all-sorts shop round the corner; and in a few minutes the mug was filled with new milk, and a fresh roll crumbled into it. The child ate like a hungry cub, and then asked for more, every now and then saying gravely, 'Very good, lady; very good indeed.'

When he had finished, I said—

'My boy, now that I have given you a nice supper, will you not be friends with me, and let us talk a little? I should like to know your name.'

'Hennie.'

'Well, Hennie, you seem very dull lying here alone, should you like me to bring you a pretty toy to amuse you when I next come?' A faint smile stole over the wan face, then in an eager whisper—

'I have a doll, look here,' and groping under his pillow, he triumphantly produced his treasure. Such a doll! such a wooden battered old creature, deprived of a leg and arm: and all the black and ruddy paint worn off by frequent ablutions. Yet this hideous stump was the joy of Hennie's heart; to see him hug it to his bosom, and talk to it in his sharp little voice, would have been a lesson to many a nursery aristocrat rejoicing in their waxen darlings.

'I see you are fond of dolls; what should you say if I were to bring you a beautiful one made of wax, with blue eyes and rosy cheeks and long curling hair?'

'A lady doll, do you mean?'

'Yes, a lady doll, dressed in a pretty muslin frock and sash, if I can find one.'

'Ah, I know,' he replied, in his eager whisper, 'I saw one once, such a grand lady, in a pink hat and green frock like a queen; will mine be like her?'

'Very like her, I expect;' and with a little crow Hennie fell to embracing his old dolly afresh, and smoothing its rags with touching tenderness.

Just then the door opened, and a young woman, shabbily but neatly dressed in mourning, entered, and dropping a curtsy, passed on to the cot with loving and troubled eyes. Hennie stretched out his thin arms yearningly, and as she stooped to kiss him and fold him to her breast, he laid his tired face against hers with a sigh of perfect contentment.

'My pretty boy, my own pet, how have you been this long time? have you been wanting me?'

'My pain has been bad, Lucy, very bad!'

'Has it, dear? and you have been bearing it all alone.'

'No, I told dolly all about it, you know, and she was very sorry for me, and told me to go to sleep and forget it—and so I did, till this lady came and gave me some supper; I was so hungry, oh, so hungry!'

Standing there beside her afflicted boy, and lifting up to me eyes eloquent with gratitude, I think I never saw a sweeter face than Lucy Graham's. Little more than a girl yet, with her smooth round cheek, worn and pale with labour and privation, not to say with many a secret care, she still looked so young and fair that she seemed the boy's sister rather than his mother.

'You have been very kind to my poor child, ma'am; it seems very cruel to go and leave him all the long day, and he such a little creature; but I cannot always get work at home; and we must not starve.' She lifted the corner of her shawl and wiped the tears from her patient eyes.

'It is not cruel at all, Lucy; I am thinking all the time how nice it will be when you come back; and what we shall have for supper; don't cry, don't, it makes me ache all over; open your basket and tell me what you have brought to-night.'

'Guess, Hennie.'

'Periwinkles,' cried the boy, his large eyes brilliant with excitement.

'No, not periwinkles,' and Lucy clapped her hands and laughed.

'Sprats, then?'

'No.'

'Saveloys, hot bread?'

'No, no, you will never guess; look here,' and she opened her basket and showed Hennie a large slab of seed cake and half-a-dozen mellow plums.

'Such a kind dear lady gave me this for my little boy; you never thought of anything half as good, did you, pet?'

'Sit down, sit down directly, Lucy, and take off your shawl, you are so tired and hot, and let me see you eat; let me feed you; I have had my supper, you know, but we will make believe feast, you and I and dolly.'

'Directly, darling; I must speak to this lady, first,' and she came up to where I sat smilingly watching the little scene.

'Are you not his mother, Mrs. Graham? why does he call you Lucy?'

'It is just his way; he is only an infant, you see, ma'am; and he used to hear my poor aunt call me so; and so it has always been Lucy with him, never mother; and I like it somehow; for no one calls me by that name now.'

'It must be a great sorrow to you having a child so afflicted.'

'It is not the only trouble I have known, ma'am,' she answered in her subdued voice; 'life is just full of sorrow.'

'But has he always been so?'

'Always, ma'am; when he was a baby, many and many a time

I would have prayed God to take him, but for leaving me so lonely. It is the old that should suffer, ma'am, not infants; yet he is a happy little creature when the pain leaves him, and is very patient, are you not, my poor crippled darling?'

Hennie looked up from his plums.

'What are you talking about, Lucy? When the little old man who stole my legs brings them back again, I shall walk about, you know.'

'What do you mean, Hennie?' I said.

'It is just an old tale I told him one day to make him laugh, when he was fretting because he could not run about like Darby Jones, old Marjory's grandson; and what else did I tell you, my own?' Hennie smiled brightly.

'Oh, you told me the angels would bring me one day a pair of snow-white wings that would carry me further than Darby's legs could carry him; but they are long a-coming, Lucy!'

'Heaven grant it,' she whispered, as she pressed her lips to his hair, 'for I shall want a pair too, then, Hennie.'

It was growing late, so I rose to go, and after explaining to her the work I had come about, took my leave, promising to return on the morrow. My heart was full as I walked down the village street; Katie, who was somewhat alarmed at my long absence, was looking over the manse wall with Dudley, keeping watch for me. Both were deeply interested with my story, and Katie promised to go with me the following evening to see them.

'Look here, Nellie,' she said, holding out a small slip of paper, 'a message from the sea; a few lines from Keith, dropped into a home-bound vessel.' I took it; it contained but a few words, but it said he was well and hopeful, and that was enough for me.

The following evening Katie and I went over to pay our promised visit. Rill accompanied us, and to her was deputed the honour of carrying the promised doll; which doll had given us the trouble of a long walk over the hills to the nearest presentable toy-shop; and half an hour's ludicrous uncertainty, owing to Dudley's being unable to decide between blue eyes and black; and when that was settled, between a white tarlatan trimmed with blue, or a pink edged with white. The red face of the toy-woman grew redder and redder, and her fat sides fairly shook, as Dudley gravely pointed out the deficiency of chin in one and the insipid smile of another.

'Don't be so absurd, Dudley,' Katie kept saying, 'they are all alike; take any, Nellie, he does not mean to choose.'

'I do, if you will give me time; you can't hurry these valuable purchases, can you, ma'am?' to the grinning old toy-woman; 'what do you say, baby?'

Baby was as undecided as her brother, and selected first one and then another, and finally, with an eye to her own interests, urged the purchase of both.

'Black eyes and blue eyes; no, no, Rill, the little boy does not want two. Perhaps, ma'am, we had better say the young lady with the fine colour, it will wash off if he does not like it.'

So the doll was bought—Clementina Clarissa, as Dudley tried hard to make Rill call her; it came out Clem-issa through her rosy lips; and to the little maid was given the charge of carrying it safely to the sick boy.

This piece of benevolence, however, cost us much; every five minutes our steps were retarded by Rill's insisting to stop and have a peep at the blue eyes she coveted, or work her fat fingers through the knotted string in hopes of getting to her toes.

Old Marjory was spinning in the sun at her door, her grandson Darby, he of the legs, sitting beside her scratching his red head over his lesson book. Hennie's voice answered 'Come in' to our knock, and in we went.

'Well, Hennie, I have kept my promise and brought you your doll; come, Rill, give it to the poor little boy.'

But Rill was shy, and hung back, hugging up the large brown parcel and shaking her shoulders.

'Come, baby, come,' but baby would do nothing of the kind.

Hennie hung half out of his crib perfectly fascinated; Rill's rosy cheeks and curly head allured him more than a hundred dolls in paper.

'Oh, what a pretty little girl! Come here, little girl.'

'Shan't, boy.'

Hennie drew back saddened by the unexpected rebuff; and I was going to interfere, when Katie whispered—

'Let them alone, children soon come round with one another.'

After a minute's silence, Hennie said, winningly—

'I have a doll, little girl, come and look at it,' and he held it out towards her. Rill's disgust at the mutilated scarecrow was highly amusing.

'Ugly old thing, nasty doll!' and Hennie, reddening, hid his darling out of sight.

'I've a much prettier one,' said Rill, defiantly shaking her curls over her eyes. Hennie was charmed at the overture. 'Such a pretty one, boy.'

'Show it me.'

'Can't undo the knots.'

'Oh, but I can; come and sit on my crib.' The little lady graciously condescending, was lifted on to the bed; and Hennie's thin fingers were soon working away at the knots.

'Don't look,' and Rill spread her hand over his eyes, while Katie promptly removed the covering; Hennie's pleasure was speechless. Propping up the glorious creature with his knees he looked and looked his fill.

'Do you like it, boy? is it pretty?'

'It is an angel,' whispered Hennie.

'Angels wear white, not pink,' replied Rill, contemptuously; 'it is a lady doll, kiss it?'

'She might not like it such a grand creature as that.'

'Yes, she will;' and thus encouraged, Hennie pressed his lips timidly to the waxen brow.

'Funny boy,' crowed Rill, 'funny boy.'

At that moment Mrs. Graham entered, and was made sharer in her boy's happiness, and afterwards Katie and she had a long conversation together. Every evening during my stay at the manse I went to see Hennie and his mother, and as we grew more familiar her reserve became less; and one evening, as I sat helping her with some work she wanted to finish before night, she told me the story of her life.

CHAPTER VIII.

'Had we never met so blindly,
Had we never loved so kindly,

| Never met and never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.'

Burns.

'THINGS have not always been with me as they are now, Miss Mortimer,' and Lucy Graham glanced down at her threadbare dress; 'hard work and the bare crust indeed have come to me in these latter days, but my youth was prosperous, yes, prosperous and happy. My father was a well-to-do-farmer in Hertfordshire, not a yeoman, but a farmer, feeding his own flocks and herds on his own broad acres, and every one for twenty miles round knew Pear-tree Farm, for it was a pretty place and well kept and tended.

'How strange it is, ma'am, that one dreams so seldom of the present, so often of the past; ever since Hennie was a baby I have never fallen asleep without seeing the old place, oh, ever as clearly as I see you; always dreaming of the old happy life, never of the care and the sorrow that came after. It is many a long year since I saw it, but it seems but yesterday. I mind it well; a long low white building, with the pigeons tumbling and cooing over the thatched roof, with barns and outhouses, and well-littered farm-yard, the garden bright with hollyhocks and roses, where mother used to gather her lavender and tend her honey bees; and the pretty honey-suckle arbour where Dorothy and I used to do our lace work.

'I can see it all, the blue parlour with its diamond-paned windows, looking out on the beds of lupins, pansies, and London-pride; and the red-tiled hall leading to the dairy, where were the great pans foaming with new milk and shining like burnished gold. Or, standing at the lattice of my little white-curtained bed-room, I can see the kitchen-garden and the herb-garden with their sweet-

briar hedge, and the apple-orchard and the grass meadow and the pool under the alder-trees where the black cattle came to quench their thirst. Oh, the dear home place, with its humming bees and cooing doves and young white lambs, what would poor Lucy give to see you all again, but that is not possible.'

'Why not,' I asked, 'are your parents dead, then?'

'Yes, dead; dead ere ever the trouble came.'

'And Dorothy?'

'I will tell you of Dorothy,' she answered, and her large blue eyes grew troubled. 'I am going to tell you of Dorothy. I was mother's only child, but not my father's. When mother came to Pear-tree Farm to live she found a girl of twelve years old, the child of his dead wife, and that was Dorothy. I shall find it hard to speak mercifully and well of her, for all the trouble I have ever known has somehow come from her. She was an evil-tempered jealous girl even at that time. When my mother went home a young wife to the farm, angry at the new mistress, the new mother, she held herself aloof from her kindness and caresses, and sore was my mother's trouble in those days. And when the new baby came to comfort her, she could see no trace of softening in my step-sister, no tenderness for the little stranger; and as the days went on, and I became the spoiled pet and darling of the house, so did a bitterness that I think now must have amounted almost to hatred spring up in my step-sister's heart.'

'As I grew up I was considered handsome; and as Dorothy, though tall and strong, was never anything but passable-looking, the young lads and farmers' sons paid me compliments while they slighted her: somehow this did not mend matters; and many a taunt and angry word have I had to bear when father and mother were not by, and many a weary task imposed, that tried my strength, but which I bore patiently for my parents' sake, for they dreaded Dorothy's temper as much as I did. This she knew, and ruled us all with a rod of iron.'

'I have said before that Dorothy's jealousy was great when the farmers' lads came as suitors to Pear-tree Farm; but she might have spared her taunts, for I was always kind of shy-like of them, and cared nothing for their ways and their wooing. When Enoch Barsley, the son of old Cressus Barsley, as he was called, and who was favoured by father and mother, came round on Sunday evenings in his red plush waistcoat and spotted blue neck-cloth, with sleek shining hair, and brought me his absurd little posies, I always turned on him the cold shoulder, and, as often as not, when I saw him coming, would slip down the hollyhock walk and out by the wicket-gate in the wall leading to the lane, preferring a solitary stroll and a hunt for glowworms to listening to his clumsy speeches and compliments in the house-place. And so with Silas Underwood and Harry Marsden. Poor mother used to chide me sometimes and say that "lasses in her time loved to be courted, and did not use to

hold themselves aloof from a trim wholesome lad when he came a wooing." Then Dolly would look up sneeringly with her cold eyes and answer—

"Leave Lucy alone, mother; don't you see she has set her cap higher than our poor wits would think of? It is not likely she'll look at Enoch or any other likely lad that will make her a good respectable husband, after Frank Thornicroft has walked his horse all the way from Wharncliffe manor; it's my Lady madam that she'll be."

'Which was cruel of Dorothy, and wholly untrue; for though the young squire was always ready with his jest and word when we met, and, as she said, walked his horse beside me through the shady lanes, and often called at the farm for a cup of new milk and a chat in the dairy, it was only just because he liked to be doing something when he was home from college, and was a blithe bonnie-hearted young gentleman. It might have been that I should have heeded his compliments, but I had been once up at the Manor-hall, at the great bail given on the young master's coming of age, and had seen madam in her velvet and point lace, and master Frank dancing with young Lady Alice Travers, and saw the diamonds sparkling in her brown hair; and somehow, then, I understood that between him and me there was a great gulf fixed, which neither could bridge with honour. And though he came up afterwards and whispered "that he would rather be dancing with his pretty Lucy than all the countesses in the world," I gave no heed to him, but just kept myself to myself.

'And right glad I was that I had not set my heart on the bright-faced young master, for ere another year was out the village bells were pealing lustily, and young Lady Alice came to reign at the old hall.

'About a year after that, a great event happened at Pear-tree Farm. Dolly was engaged to be married, and late enough too, for she was long past thirty, and was getting pinched and thin and more soured than ever.

'Dolly's suitor was an attorney in the neighbouring county town, a little shock-headed man with grey twinkling eyes that never seemed still. It must have been the broad acres of the farm that proved the bait, and not Dolly's angular figure and sharp face; though what she could have seen in Josiah Beazley, with his leering smile and shambling gait, I could never tell. Neither father nor mother could bear him; but they dared not oppose Dolly, as she seemed set on it.

'Somehow, mother looked worn and delicate in those days, the continued harass of my step-sister's ways seemed to weary her beyond measure.

'One early afternoon I was sitting sprigging muslin in the porch, and mother near me on the door-step shelling peas, when Dolly came creaking downstairs in her snuff-brown silk and new lavender shawl.

“I am going to D——, mother, to get some things, and I want Lucy to come too and help me carry them; I can't manage alone.”

I looked at my mother in dismay; it was a scorching day, and the road to D—— was full three miles and a half long; and a dusty walk in the sun and Dolly's company was anything but desirable.

“Had not Timothy better drive you in father's gig, Dolly?”

“No, thank you, ma'am, I would rather walk than be beholden to Timothy for anything; so get your hat on, Lucy.”

“It is dreadfully hot,” I pleaded.

“So it is, child,” replied my mother. “She had better not go with you, for she is not strong enough to bear that broiling sun, and all that way too; you know she is but delicate.”

“Delicate, indeed! I should think she was, mother, with all your molly-coddling; why, the girl has nothing to do all day but nurse her fine fancies and save her hands. Delicate, indeed! you ought to be ashamed of yourself, and father too, to spoil her so; she will be fit for nothing soon. Why should the walk be worse for her than for me that have been toiling since dawn? one would think her a wax doll to melt in the sun;” and so on and so on, till by nagging and worrying Dorothy as usual got her way, and with a heavy heart I tied on my gipsy hat and kissed my mother.

As I opened the little wicket-gate a strange feeling came over me, a reluctance to pass through that gate and follow Dolly into the lane; and so strong was this fancy of mine, that I almost think that in another moment I should have defied her anger and returned to the porch, had not her harsh voice, bidding me not stand dawdling there but come on, made me hasten after her.

“A foolish fancy,” I said to myself; but oh, ma'am, if I had stayed at home that bright sunshiny afternoon!

The walk to D—— was toilsome and hot; and the endless purchases when we got there more wearying still. Dolly prided herself on being a good market-woman, and as she seemed to think half an hour's haggling nothing in making a bargain, the business seemed interminable; and when at length it was over, instead of returning homewards, she stopped at a dull little house in the high street, and knocked at the door, I resigned myself to fresh misery. No need to ask her purpose, for Josiah Beazley's name was on the brass plate.

A slatternly maid with curl-papers opened the door, and Josiah, jumping off a high stool in the front room, which appeared to be his office, for it was littered with red-taped documents and heavy-looking boxes, led the way to a dark little back parlour with a drab paper; and looking out on the blank wall of a brewery.

Josiah seemed delighted to welcome his bride elect, and then turned to me with many flourishing compliments, at which Dolly frowned visibly. Seeing this, the little attorney with many tender words pressed her to take tea and return to the farm in the cool of the evening, which, to my great relief, she declined, though I was

certain she had fully intended to do so, and had called with the purpose ; for I had caught sight of her best lappets pinned under her shawl.

‘In vain the little man pressed and implored, Dolly was inexorable, being evidently in a bad humour, for some inconceivable cause. So the attorney was forced at last to desist, though, to test his politeness, he put on his hat and accompanied us to the outskirts of the town, where with many protestations he parted at length with his beloved.

‘On leaving the house I had gathered up the heavy parcels with which we had both been laden, and followed them out ; but Dolly, in spite of my hints, showed now no intention of relieving me, but walked on grimly with satchel and parasol, and took no notice whatever. My arms ached dreadfully, and so did my head, and even when we had left the dusty road and turned into the green shadowy fields, I felt little relief.

‘“Dorothy,” I said, imploringly, “Dorothy ;” but she marched on ahead, taking no heed.

‘We had entered a little blind copse ; at the end was a stile, and a row of pollard trees guarding a cool deep pool. As we came near, from the margin of the water where he lay, there sprang up a young soldier in undress uniform, who, touching his cap military wise, assisted Dorothy over the stile.

‘From his clanking spurs and heavy cavalry moustache I saw he belonged to the regiment quartered at D——. As he relieved me of my parcels, laying them carefully on the grass one by one, and then turning gave me his hand, I saw his dark eyes rest on my features with respectful admiration and pity.

‘“You are sadly laden and look weary ; dare I inquire if you have far to go?”

‘“Another mile to Pear-tree Farm,” and I sighed.

‘“Another mile ! pardon me, but you do not seem fit for it ; may I help carry these ?” he spoke hesitatingly and with a flush on his handsome face.

‘“Come on, Lucy, and don’t stand talking there,” cried Dolly, querulously ; “I never saw any one so slow as you are.”

‘The young soldier looked at her and then at me, and seemed about to speak ; then changing his mind and giving me a pitying glance, placed in my hands the lightest package, and shouldering the rest prepared to follow us.

‘“Now, young man,” said Dorothy sharply, “we don’t want any of your interference, though you do seem mighty polite to be sure. I’ll thank you to give my sister those parcels, and mind your own business.”

‘“Madam,” he replied, reddening to the temples, while I stood sick and white beside the stile, “I will gladly give them into your hands, but not into this young lady’s ; if you have any feelings see how unable she is even to accomplish that distance unladen.”

“Well, I’m sure, sir,” commenced Dorothy, in the high shrill key I dreaded, “well, I’m sure, sir !”

“Oh, Dolly, Dolly,” I cried, “don’t you see I am ill? give me some water, please ;” and as I spoke the sun now setting seemed eddying in a crimson mass, while the green fields heaved and rose and swam in billowy circles round me ; and when all was calm again, I found I was lying on the cool grass by the pool with the young stranger beside me bathing my temples, while Dorothy, now really frightened, was kneeling beside me chafing my hands. Her first words, however, were hardly more gracious than usual—

“Now, Lucy, don’t be a fool ; make an effort and shake it off.” Alas ! it was not to be shaken off ; even the attempt to rise renewed the sickening dizziness, and I was forced to cling to the young soldier for support.

‘Dorothy took hold of my arm roughly. “Now, young man, as you seem to have a mind to be useful, just pick up the things, and I will help Lucy.”

“On the contrary, ma’am, I was about to trouble you to see after them yourself, for this poor child I will take care ;” and without waiting for an answer he took me off the stile, where I had sunk from Dorothy’s iron grasp, and lifting me lightly in his arms carried me off. I made no opposition, for I felt too weak ; and all that long mile he bore me, patiently and tenderly, only pausing once to rest by the way.

“Am I very heavy?” I asked faintly.

“I should like to carry you to the world’s end,” was the answer, and he spoke no more till he placed me down in my father’s porch, when, waiting for no thanks, he lifted his cap and went away.

‘I was weak-like for many days after that walk, and as I lay on the couch in the blue parlour those words came ringing in my ears, which he said while bearing me so swiftly through the green fields : “I should like to carry you to the world’s end,” and every night that I lay down in my little tent bed I dreamt foolish girl-dreams of the young soldier.

‘The first time I went out was to the village church on Sunday afternoon, and there in the free seat facing our large family pew he sat, looking handsomer than ever in his full-dress cavalry uniform. Dolly saw him, for she gave a toss of her head and a little snort ; but after two or three shy glances I did not turn my head again that way, for every time I did so, those frank dark eyes were looking full in mine. After that afternoon he sat regularly in that seat, and I never took an evening ramble without seeing him strolling through the lanes, or leaning on some stile near Pear-tree Farm ; but as a touch of the cap and a pleasant good evening was all he vouchsafed, my sense of propriety was not alarmed, for I knew that for a farmer’s daughter to hold converse with a common soldier would be accounted a heinous crime.

‘A common soldier, I could scarcely believe it ; for his chivalrous

manners and low, well-attuned speech seemed to belong to higher rank. Enoch Barsley and Harry Marsden were not to compare with him in point of breeding, and he was better-looking than even Frank Thornicroft himself. In spite of this I would not own to myself that I was even interested in the stranger; and though the quick beating of my heart and the flush on my cheek when I met him, should have warned me of danger, I said, Peace, peace, till there was none left for me.

‘One evening a sudden storm drove me into Dame Martin’s cottage, and I had just seated myself and was drying my gray cloak at the cheery blaze, when he entered, and removing his cap courteously to the dame, begged for half-an-hour’s refuge. This being cheerfully accorded, he came to the fire, and then and not till then did he see me; and when he did so he merely gave good evening, and taking the cloak from my hand, knelt down and held it carefully to dry. The storm, which had showed signs of lulling, now broke out afresh, the lightning played vividly through the lattice and about the brown rafters, while the thunder pealed in awful crashes over our head.

“Are you frightened, Miss Lucy?” he said, turning to me with a bright smile.

“Very, for surely it is a fearful storm.”

“Nothing to those I have witnessed in the tropics;” and then drawing his chair closer, while the firelight played over his bronzed face and wavy hair, he told us of awful hurricanes and tornadoes; and then growing animated, went on to speak of foreign lands and hard-fought campaigns, till we became so rapt and interested that he was the first to call my attention to the fact that the rain had stopped. I rose hastily, for it was late and dark.

“Too late for you to go safely alone,” he said, answering my thoughts, “I fear you must bear with my company.”

‘There was no help for it, so I acquiesced, and we went on, chatting pleasantly. He told me his name was Allan Graham, and that he was but a private in the regiment where he served.

“Only a private! but you do not look or speak like one.”

‘He smiled. “I have had a good education, Miss Lucy. I am the son of a well-to-do schoolmaster, holding a good position in a large town. He taught me with his other pupils, with the hope of fitting me to become his assistant; but teaching was not my vocation and soldiering was; and as he could not or would not buy me a commission, I ran away and enlisted. A foolish thing,” said Allan, “and one which I have bitterly regretted; for my father died before he had forgiven me my disobedience, and left all his money to a distant cousin.”

“What a pity; oh, what a pity! but it was very wrong to run away.”

“Very, I know, but my expiation is more bitter than my fault, and is lifelong; and now good-bye, Miss Lucy, for here is the

farm ; and now, as you see we are of equal rank, may I offer you my hand ?”

‘ I gave him mine willingly, and we parted ; that night, I do not know why, I sobbed myself to sleep.

‘ The following Sunday I went to church as usual, and looked eagerly at the front free-seat, but he was not there ; and when afternoon came, and it was still vacant, a nameless terror filled my mind ; what could have become of him ? After tea I was sitting disconsolately in the porch, when I saw Enoch Barsley and Silas Underwood coming down the lane ; and more disinclined than ever for their slow clumsy compliments, I fetched my hat and ran down the orchard, and on to the grass meadow and the pool. There was a little clump of elder-bushes at the far end of the pool, with a little seat under them, where I loved to sit and read sometimes on Sunday afternoons ; and I was making my way to it, when I heard a muffled sound apparently proceeding from that direction. I stepped cautiously and peeped between the bushes, and then my heart stood still ; for I saw Allan lying on the grass, with his face to the earth.

‘ In sudden terror I cried, “ Allan, Allan, what ails you ? ” and at the sound of my voice he sprang to his feet as swift as a dart, and drawing himself up proudly stood facing me.

“ What ails you, Allan ? ” I said again, for his eyes were wet and his face pale and drawn. For answer he stretched out his arms to me.

“ Good-bye, Lucy, good-bye, my dear ; sorrowful be the day I ever saw your sweet face. When I am gone many a richer man will woo, and one will win ; but none, none can love half so truly and so well, dear, as the penniless soldier ! ”

‘ Then stroking the trembling hand he held, “ I bless God I have seen your dear face again ; for may be I shall see it no more, for we are ordered away to-morrow, Lucy ; and I dared not come and say good-bye ; ” and then again he stretched out his arms to me, and, forgetful of all save what he had told me, that I should see his face no more, I laid my head on his breast, and he kissed me twice and left the place.

‘ And so the shadow of a hopeless love passed over my life, and weary days and weary nights were appointed me, to be spent in fruitless longings for a face that I should never see more.

“ What ails our Lucy ? ” was my mother’s daily comment ; “ she does not seem as blithe-like and pert as she used to be, but goes about the house drooping, for all the world like a little bird with a broken wing.”

“ With a broken heart you mean, mother ; with a broken heart ! ” But a mightier grief was at hand. One night, market night it was, when the farm was still, and the inmates asleep, save the mother who sat knitting in the house-place, biding the father’s return, our gray mare galloped riderless into the yard. In a moment the house was astir ; half-dressed sleepy farm-servants

went hither and thither with torches and lanterns searching the lanes and by-paths, and it was not long before they found him lying in the road with his face to the moon, and the blood welling out from a deep wound in his head. The dancing shadows had probably caused Gipsy to shy, and so threw her master, perhaps at that moment sitting unconsciously reckoning his gains with the bridle thrown on her neck, and then his poor head had struck against a sharp flint-stone, which had given him his death-wound.

'As they lifted him up and bore him to the farm the last struggling breath was drawn, and the gray hues of death settled down once and for ever.

'When my mother, standing on the horse-block straining her eyes into the darkness, saw amid the flaming torches the awful straightness of the form they bore, the light and colour died out of her face for ever. Slowly from that day, yet surely, following her husband's footsteps down to the place of shadows, she faded painlessly from life ; and one morning in the early autumn, when the laden corn-wains passed to and fro, and the children went nutting in the lanes and copses, they came to me and whispered that she was dead ; and so there were none left but me and Dorothy.

'Ah, those hard bitter days, when Dorothy went about and bustled in the house-place and left me alone to my sorrow ! There was no will, my father had never made one ; perhaps with the superstitious feelings belonging to his class that it might hasten his death ; but of course the substance should have been fairly portioned out between us. Dolly, however, seemed to assume the whole as her right, and talked of taking me with her to live when she was married—for, oh, heartless that she was, before the grass was green on mother's grave, she had given up the farm on advantageous terms, and prepared for the flitting.

'Life with Dorothy and Josiah in that odious little house in the high street was worse than death to me ; and when Dorothy told me her intention in her austere decided way, I rebelled for the first time in my life, saying that hers and Josiah Beazley's home should never be mine.

'This unlooked-for outburst on my part was followed by a torrent of taunts and sneers ; and at last with cruel passionate words she dared me to assert my will against hers. Alas, my weakness was no match for her strength, and at last, half maddened by grief and despair, I rushed from her presence and out from the porch into the dark chill garden.

'Down my mother's rose-tree walk, and out of the wicket-gate under the lilac tree, and along the damp grassy lane, I cared not whither. Blinded by tears I heeded not the obstacles in my way, and was just stumbling over a fallen log, when a strong arm caught and replaced me on my feet, and then turning my face to the uncertain light, cried, "Lucy, Lucy." It was Allan. As a drowning man clings to a plank, so I clung to him I thought never to see again.

“Take me away, Allan, take me away; I will never go home any more, I will never see her cruel face again.”

“Hush, love,” he said gravely, in the low tone one would use to a frightened child, “let me hear what all this means;” and drawing me to the log, he listened to my incoherent story, broken by bursts of hysterical weeping. “You have lost your protectors, Lucy; what can I do with you?”

“Take me away,” I pleaded, burying my face on his shoulder; “you say you love me, Allan, take me away.”

“Love you!” he said, pressing his lips to my hair, “love you! ay, so dearly, that I can ill bear poverty for you.” Then with a sad smile, “You a poor soldier’s wife, Lucy, with those little delicate hands! and yet how leave you to that merciless woman, with her hard face and voice to crush the dear life out of you?”

“I will die,” I cried passionately, “rather than live with her and Josiah; I will not, Allan, I will not!”

And so at last, after many tears and many words, it was agreed that I was to meet Allan on the morrow, at a given place, and he was to take me to a friend of his, a corporal’s wife in the southern town, where the regiment was quartered, and there to remain till he could legally claim me as his wife.

And so before a month was out, I married Allan, and in spite of many a hardship and privation was as happy as the day was long. Though our room was poor it was very neat, and I was so proud to see my husband ride out on his splendid black horse to parade, and so childishly pleased with the novelties about me, and Allan was so kind and dear, that I never wished myself back at the farm. I used to eke out our scanty means by doing needlework for the officers’ wives; and they used to be very good to me and give me little presents, and so for seven months the happy life went on.

Our regiment was ordered to India, but as I was accompanying Allan, this news did not trouble me, though Allan seemed to fear the tedious voyage for me.

About a week after this we had a letter from D—— that strangely and joyfully excited us. A distant relative of mine had died and left a small legacy to be divided between Dorothy and me; small as the sum was, it seemed princely to us; and Allan opened his eyes incredulously at the moment.

The attorney who wrote the letter was Josiah, and he added a not uncivil message from Dorothy, to the effect that I should come up to D—— immediately to receive my share, and put up at their house.

“What shall we do, Lucy? I cannot get leave of absence, and yet we want the money.”

No doubt of that, for our outfit for the voyage was scanty in the extreme, and so reluctantly I made up my mind that I must be the one to go.

“You need not be longer than two days; indeed, next week we

may have orders to put on board ; so three or four days are all I can spare to my little wife."

"Oh, they are far too many," I said, and then we talked of ways and means, and then I settled to go. I was very miserable when I said good-bye to Allan at the station, and not much happier when I reached D—. The little drab parlour was dingier than ever, and Dorothy more angular and sharp ; married life had not agreed with her ; for, if report spoke true, she had found a match in Josiah.

Dorothy was rough and sharp, but not unkind, till we opened the subject of money matters, when I found she and Josiah had made up their minds to cheat me, if possible, out of my proper share. But brave for my husband's sake, I held to my rights, and insisted on my fair share ; and then Dolly's temper was roused, and warm and insulting speeches were heaped on Allan and myself, which I bore patiently, and then returned to the old subject—would they give me my own honestly ? No, they would not ; and when at last, seeing me stand firm, and inclined to call in other and worthier advice, they were compelled to yield, such obstacles were placed in my way that I was well-nigh in despair. Three days, and still half the money withheld ; four days, and then Allan bade me come without it, and instantly, for they had orders to sail.

This letter had been withheld from me a day, more from carelessness than spite, though I accused Dolly of the latter ; another day and the regiment would embark ; and frantically I rushed to Dolly, and implored her to have Josiah's gig put to for me directly.

"Gig indeed !" cried Dolly scornfully ; "as you have come you may go back to your beggarly husband—gig indeed !"

I pleaded again and again, but I might as well have tried to soften a stone ; and at last, maddened by her continuous ill-usage, I started off on foot, while she called to me from the threshold in her shrill mocking tones, "I sha'n't send the rest of the money after you," but I gave no heed.

It was a scorching sun, and eight miles to the nearest station to catch the up train ; it was madness to walk, and with those bitter angry feelings tearing at my heart, but I did. Oh, ma'am, to my sorrow and trouble, I did. A waggoner seeing me plod on wearily offered to take me up, but there was a rough-looking fellow on the top, and I had money about me, and did not dare accept the welcome rest. Oh, ma'am, it was a fool's gait that day, but I was little more than a child, and did not know the mischief it might do.

Ere ever that long walk was over the old faintness attacked me ; some one driving rapidly past in a gig saw a woman lying insensible on the grass by the roadside, and lifted her up—it was Josiah Beazley. He drove me home, I was too ill to know where I was going, and ere many hours had passed my trouble came on me, and my poor baby was born. I was terribly ill for months and months, my brain was affected ; and when I came to know all about it my husband had sailed that very night nine months ago.

'Many a letter had he written, poor fellow, many a loving, anxious letter; praying Lucy for one word to ease his cruel anxiety; but would you believe she never answered them, but just flung them on the bed, with the words, maybe I should soon be able to answer them myself.

'I wrote that night, and again and again, but I have never heard from Allan, never, never! I do not know whether he be dead or living;' and here Lucy Graham broke down in a fit of sobbing.

'Dolly was sorry when she saw what she had done, but somehow it seemed hard to forgive her, so I just took my sickly baby and went to an aunt in Scotland, with whom I lived for some time. I have written and written, till hope deferred has become fear deferred; my letters have been returned to me, and our colonel's lady, to whom I at last wrote, said in her kind letter, that Allan Graham had gone home on sick leave a year and a half ago. A year and a half, and had never reached England!

'Ah, how can I hope that my Allan is still alive! and yet I will never believe he is dead, never, never, till I see his cold face and touch his lifeless hand. Dolly and Josiah stayed in D—— for two or three years, and then they left. While Auntie lived we were comparatively comfortable, but things have gone badly with us lately. I have paid much to a clever physician in Edinburgh who hoped to cure Hennie, though he has been worse-like since; and so, though I have worked and worked, we have gone near to starve, Hennie and I.'

And then, overcome by her recital, poor Lucy knelt down by her boy's crib, and hiding her face on his pillow wept long and bitterly.

CHAPTER IX.

'And one, an English home, gray twilight
frown'd

On dewy pasture, dewy trees;
Softer than sleep all things in order stored,
A haunt of ancient peace. . . .

Full of long corridors it stood,
That over-vaulted grateful gloom,

Thro' which the livelong day my soul did pass
Well pleased from room to room.

Full of great rooms and small the palace
stood,

All various, each a perfect whole
From living nature, fit for every mood
And change of my still soul.'

Tennyson's Palace of Art.

THAT night I could not sleep. Lucy Graham's sweet face and soft plaintive voice haunted me, while the sad details of her story so filled my imagination, that I could not chase the painful images away, but lay brooding over them long restless hours.

'Truth is stranger than fiction,' I muttered as I turned for the fifteenth time my well-warmed pillow, and tossed the floating hair

from my brow. Who would have dreamed on looking at that childish figure and meek young face, that such agonies of doubt and fear had been passed, such months of brain-sick horrors, such years of more than widowed loneliness? And yet she can smile and play with her afflicted boy, spending on him such wealth of despairing love; clinging to him, poor soul, as the one waif and stray spared to her out of her great heart-wreck.

And as I lay and pondered, a great tenderness awoke in my heart for the young mother and child. I felt it impossible to go away and leave them to their poverty; something must be planned; and then a bright thought flashed across me, making me more wakeful than ever, and it was not till I had settled all the *pros* and *cons* of my new scheme that I fairly resigned myself to sleep.

The next morning I secured an interested and willing listener in the old window seat; and Katie and Aunt Margaret being summoned to the council, it was agreed that we should go that evening to Lucy Graham to unfold the plan, to which Dudley had given a well-pleased assent.

It was our last evening but one at the manse, and Dudley accompanied us, partly, as he said, to have a last walk with Katie, and partly to get a peep at 'Nellie's new hobby,' as he irrelevantly termed Lucy. Hennie was alone as usual, and was sitting up in his cot by the open window playing with his lady doll, the old stump being all huddled up in a disgraceful heap at the foot of the crib, with its face to the wall.

'Oh, Hennie, Hennie, the new friend cut out the old already! poor Dollie in disgrace.'

'She's naughty,' said Hennie, in his shrill little whisper, 'she's jealous of the new lady, and calls her names, so I put her in the corner.' Then eyeing Dudley suspiciously, 'Who is that man?'

'That is my brother, Hennie; the good brother of whom I told you.'

'Oh,' said Hennie, 'then shake hands.'

Dudley, much amused, and more touched, took the wasted child's hand in his and patted it gently.

'Poor little man, we must be friends, you and I, good friends, shall we?'

'Yes,' answered Hennie, gravely; then decidedly, 'yes, you have a nice face, I shall like you; but where's missy?'

'Missy is warm asleep by this time; do you like my pretty baby sister, Hennie?'

A quaint bright look crossed the boy's face.

'Like is too little a word, find a bigger;' then with a low, happy laugh, 'Here's Lucy, I know it's Lucy, and we can all be comfortable.'

Had Lucy Graham been a lady she could not have been met by more respect and courtesy than Dudley paid to the poor sempstress; and so gentle were his words and manners that she soon began to

blush less painfully, and the shy look disappeared, and when Hennie said, 'The ladies have come to talk to you, Lucy,' she took the only chair, which Dudley had just vacated for her, by my side, and waited smilingly for me to speak.

'This is the good-bye visit, Lucy, that I promised you ; the day after to-morrow we start for Lancashire.'

'Yes, I know, I am very sorry,' she answered in the subdued voice that sounded as if the sore heart had no room for lesser troubles.

'Hennie will miss you and the dear little girl too ; he is always talking of her.'

'How would you like, Hennie, to live with the little girl always?' I said, stooping down to the thin face now laid wearily on its pillow, — 'with me and Dudley too, in the dear old house I told you of, to lie on the lawn all day, under the shady trees and among the flowers and birds, with Lucy to sit and sew beside you?'

Hennie opened his eyes gleefully, but did not speak ; while Lucy clasped her hands involuntarily.

'Because if you would, you must help us to persuade Lucy to leave this poor room, and the hard work and the little pay, and come back with us to live at Sunnyside.

'Sunnyside?' cried Lucy, in a tone as if she were asleep ; poor girl, her path lay too much in the dark shade to know what I meant by the Sunnyside.

'That is the name of our house, Lucy, of my own dear home, and it richly deserves its name. Sunnyside it has always been to us till the last sad months, and we hope we shall again learn to call it so. Hennie, shall you like it?'

For answer, his two little arms clasped me tight, and the boy's dry hot kisses fell on my cheek ; it was the first time he had ever shown any token of feeling for me.

'I am serious,' I continued, turning to his mother, 'and it is for your child's sake as much as for yours that I make this offer, for it is easy to see that this close dark attic, meagre diet, and want of daily and hourly nursing, have added fearfully to the real disease from which the boy is suffering. Give him light, air, cheerful companionship, and good nourishing food, and much may be done ; therefore, Lucy, if you are willing I will take you and the boy, and care for you both.'

'But how can I accept such generosity, and be a burden to you? No, no, I cannot.'

'You will be no burden,' I answered, 'for I will show you how you can repay me, and indeed maintain your honest independence as much as you do now.'

'Ah, if that be so,' she answered, crimsoning brightly with surprise and pleasure ; 'how can I serve you, ma'am?'

'I will tell you. Our nurse, who has lived with us since Rill was born, is about to get married. She has put it off twice, because she

would not leave us in our trouble ; but Louie writes that her good man's getting restless ; and, in short, Ann will be thankful if I take the initiative and ask her to go. There is no nursery work now, for Rill is my especial charge, but there is more needlework than she and I know how to get through ; and it is by your deft nimble fingers that you can serve me, Lucy. The old nursery is a large cheerful room, and that and the adjoining bed-room shall be given up to you and the boy. Do you think you can be happy there ?

With a burst of grateful tears she took my hand and pressed it to her lips.

'I will work, ma'am, for you as I never worked in my life. Oh, how dared I hope for such blessings for my boy ? I only live for him now, and if he be happy I shall know peace ;' and then, as if she could not contain herself, and heedless of Dudley's presence, she rose, and laying her head down on Hennie's pillow, clasped him to her breast. Something in that hungry yearning clasp, in the bent golden head, seemed to touch Dudley, for with tears in his eyes he rose and left the room.

We lingered to speak more comforting words to Lucy, and to give directions for her and Hennie's outfit, and then we left.

'What do you think of her, Dudley ?' I asked as I took his arm in the porch.

'I don't want to think of her, I want to get them both out of my head ; poor girl, poor girl !' and seeing him so deeply affected I said no more, only asking him if I had done right.

'Perfectly, you always do,' and so the matter dropped.

The next day was a very busy one, for it was our last at the manse. After packing, Katie and I went down to the village to choose some neat print dresses for Lucy, and a tidy bonnet and shawl, and sundry other necessaries for her and Hennie. These Katie promised should be all made ready for her, and she herself would see them to the station, and make arrangements for Hennie's safe removal.

This and much more did Katie promise, sitting on my bed in the little chintz room, with her bonnie brown hair all unbound and falling round her bright face.

'It is a promise, Katie, mind, a real downright promise, to spend Christmas with us ; nothing will induce me to let you off, and Dudley is as anxious as I.'

'I am coming, I said ; mother and father will be in Edinburgh, and I shall feel free. It's ill I like parting with you, Nellie, but the looking forward to see you and dear Sunnyside again will cheer me up, now Keith is gone.'

And trusting to that promise both Katie and I took heart while the last lingering good-byes were said at the old manse gate on the morrow ; and though the tears stood in her eyes and trembled in her voice, yet bright were her last smiles and words to us, bonnie-hearted Katie !

'What a peaceful time it has been, Nell,' said Dudley, leaning back in the carriage, 'a pleasant restful time; but I am very thankful that we are not going home, but have a fortnight's respite yet.'

It was easy to see how he dreaded that going home, poor fellow, and I for him; but when I saw the healthful glow on his cheek and the renewed life in his eyes, I had hopes that it might prove less painful than we either of us thought.

We were to sleep a night on the road, so Dudley and the minister arranged; and it was early on the afternoon of the following day that our train drew up puffing and snorting at the unpretending and shabby little station for Whalley and Sabden. Long before it lay at rest, Dudley's head and Scotch cap were thrust out of the window, in eager search for the expected figure; while I peeped curiously through the blue-curtained pane of glass at my side.

Both pairs of eyes, however, were disappointed: the sole tenants of the platform were an old woman with a market basket, two whistling boys, and a sickly-looking girl with a baby; and leaning against a gate-rail at the farther end a tall soldierly-looking man with two superb deerhounds in a leash.

'That is not he, surely, Dudley?'

'Who—Herwald Delorme? Nonsense, child; do you suppose he wears an oriental beard like that? no, he is not here, I can see; so jump out while I look after the luggage.'

No, he was not come as he had promised, and it was very disappointing; Dudley, I could see, thought so too; and then I started, for I felt a touch on my arm.

'Miss Mortimer, I believe,' and I turned round to see myself accosted by the bearded man of the deerhounds.

'Yes, that is my name.'

'And that is Mr. Mortimer standing by the luggage?' Again I assented.

'I am the bearer of my master's apologies for the non-performance of his promise to meet you; very troublesome business has summoned him to L—, and when he found that he would be too late for the train, he sent me on; he hopes, however, to be up at the Hall in another hour, and seems dreadfully vexed at not being able to receive you there himself. If you will follow me you will find the carriage at the foot of the steps.'

I obeyed after summoning Dudley, whose face lighted up on hearing that business only detained Herwald; and when he had spoken a few civil words to our tall guide, and had caressed the magnificent animals that drooped their heads well pleased to his touch, we entered the carriage, and in a moment the high-spirited bays were carrying us away at a speed that seemed to bid defiance to the Lancashire hills.

'Who is that fine-looking man, Dudley? he does not wear

livery or seem to speak like a servant, and yet he said his master had sent him.'

'I cannot tell who he is, but did you ever see such dogs, Nellie? Herwald was always a capital judge of animals. Look, there is one coming up after us now, at such a pace; ah, he has whistled him back, you can't see him.' And Dudley relapsed into silence, while I looked eagerly out at the new country through which we were passing.

Down the long roads bordered by the low stone walls, which in the North take the place of hedge or fence; the fresh, keen air blowing from many a breezy flat, till the scenery from being uninteresting became varied and picturesque, growing into beauty that pleased and riveted the eye. We had been ascending gradually for some minutes; and then we uttered a simultaneous exclamation at the glorious scene below and around. There lay the Calder flowing peacefully between its grassy banks; on either side park-like meadows, with trees of every shade, hue, and variety, now blending together their rich autumnal tints.

Here and there through the leafy foliage peeped some white house, but this was rare; no signs of life showed themselves, only some black cattle grouped together on the farther bank. Suddenly we stopped before a lodge, but only for a moment, and then went rapidly on through a long winding avenue. Such a glorious old avenue, now quite dark and shady from the branches meeting overhead, and now in wide glades of light, with here and there a purple shadow lying on the smooth turf and bosky knolls and patches of yellow moss, and every now and then opening glimpses into shadowed dells and long grassy aisles.

'This beats the Priory, Nellie,' said Dudley; and as I nodded assent, it gradually widened and broke into a circling line that belted in a long smooth lawn of softest turf, which ran up to the very door of a noble white-winged house, which already stood open for our welcome.

The gray-headed butler, so respectable-looking that I almost took him for a clergyman, came forward to receive us, and leading us across the hall, ushered us into a pleasant-looking room.

'I will send Mrs. Arundel to show you to your apartments, ma'am, unless you prefer taking any refreshment first?'

'No, thank you, we would rather rid ourselves of the dust of the journey before your master arrives,' returned Dudley, answering for me; 'so send Mrs. Arundel by all means.'

Mrs. Arundel arriving, proved a trim motherly-looking person in black silk, hardly as formidable as her name, who, dropping a respectful curtsey, made many kind enquiries after our comforts; and then taking Rill by the hand, bade us follow her.

We passed through the noble hall with its tessellated pavement and great stained windows, and up the wide stone staircase with carved oak balustrades and quaint niches, filled up by many an

armorial suit and plumed helmet ; till we reached the roomy landing-place prettily fitted up with couches and flower-stands and with two bronze figures at the head of the stairs, holding lamps in their hands. On either side were two arched curtain recesses, to one of which Mrs. Arundel pointed.

'These are Mr. Delorme's apartments, ma'am, and the old master's too ; bless his dear heart, he was never far from his father, and sadly he's drooped since he's gone. Maybe as you are honoured guests, as Allan says, he'll show them you ; for Mr. Clive, that's our clergyman, calls them the gems of the house.'

'Then they won't be withheld from us,' was Dudley's whispered comment, as he helped Mrs. Arundel to undraw the heavy crimson hangings from the opposite arch. This done, we found ourselves in a long lofty corridor lighted by high narrow windows, and with busts on crimson-draped pedestals, alternating with curiously-shaped flower-urns, which lent a quaint and tasteful effect to the whole.

Opening one red-baized door, Mrs. Arundel announced that this was Dudley's apartment ; and a pleasant room it was, with a southern aspect, and a large bay window with a writing-table and arm-chair within it ; a large bath-room adjoined.

'This is called the "green room," sir ; every apartment in the house has its name. Master Herwald, I mean Mr. Delorme, calls it the "bachelors' room," for his college friends always sleep here. Miss Mortimer's is next to it.'

Leaving Dudley gazing longingly at the marble tank, she ushered me into the prettiest chamber I had ever seen.

A rosy room, rosy from the ceiling to the floor, delicate rose chintz on the couch and easy-chairs, roses twining on the walls, roses lying piled up on the mossy carpet ; real roses, white and blush, in the Dresden vases on the toilet table, and roses clambering in at the two open windows filling the room with fragrance. Could it be possible that Herwald had remembered my old predilection for roses ? and, as if answering my involuntary thought, Mrs. Arundel said—

'Yes, it is a pretty room, ma'am, and glad Mr. Delorme will be that you like it. When he knew you were coming, he made me show him the lilac room where our ladies always sleep, which is farther down the corridor, and has five windows ; and he said it was too large and bare-looking, and that he would rather have this fitted up for you ; he went to Liverpool himself to choose the furniture.'

'I am sorry to have caused him so much trouble,' and then I turned as rosy as the room, for I saw her honest brown eyes were kindly but keenly scrutinizing me from the dusty crape trimmings on my dress to the tired-looking face reflected in the gilded mirror opposite, and I said somewhat quickly—

'I ought not to have been surprised at such kindly attentions from your master, for it is only like him to pay them. You know, Mrs. Arundel, he was my poor father's ward, and at one part of his

life was as a brother to us, and indeed was considered by us as such.'

'Yes, ma'am, so I have heard,' was Mrs. Arundel's brief comment; 'and now shall we take the dear little missy to her room? tea is ready for her.'

I followed to inspect the blue nursery, which was large enough and gorgeous enough for twenty Rills, and after having spoken to the pleasant-looking young woman who was to take charge of her, and seen the wee lady sitting up in her high chair with her round eyes fixed on the cakes and jam, I returned to complete my own toilette. A lingering one it was too; it was so long before I could tear myself away from the window, and again and again I returned to look at the paradise below.

At the back of the house was a broad stone terrace communicating by three flights of steps with the gardens; the central one being ornamented by vases and urns filled with the rarest flowers. The garden itself was a wilderness of sweets, flower-beds, masses of gorgeous colour, grassy banks and cool splashing fountains fringed with ferns, with here and there a miniature lawn bordered by rose-trees, the whole shut in by a dark massy shrubbery, through which the eye could not penetrate; but on either side, only divided by slender palisades, was the open park, with its giant oaks and elms and smooth-barked beeches, under which a few deer were daintily grouped. Oh Herwald, Herwald! well might Keith say, 'the lines are fallen unto you in pleasant places.'

A low tap came at my door.

'Are you ready, Nell? because we will go down,' and Dudley stood outside, a white moss-rose in his button-hole, and a pleased excited look on his face. At the foot of the stairs the butler awaited us, and leading the way through a music-room, with an organ and various instruments ranged round, ushered us into a noble drawing-room, with six or seven windows opening on to the terrace. A room so vast and capacious that the numberless couches, tables, and ottomans seemed but to furnish an oasis in the desert, and the three mighty fireplaces could hardly serve to warm it comfortably.

Placing me laughingly in the depths of a yellow damask ottoman, Dudley put his hands in his pockets and looked round.

'It must have taken an upholsterer's shop to have furnished this, and it is not half done yet. Fancy Herwald spending his half-hours here before dinner, a small black figure with a background of yellow satin. One thing, I do not believe it is ever used, it does not feel well aired, does it, Nell? there is not a bit of home feeling in it; no wonder Herwald longs for the old shabby drawing-room at Sunnyside.'

'It is a magnificent room,' I replied; 'look at the view from those windows; this one looks directly on the park.'

'It is too beautiful for me; it wants an army to fill it, beviest of

fair damsels and attendant knights. I won't meet the fellow here ; let us find out the old library he spoke of.'

'Wandering about a strange house the first moment of our arrival.'

'Of course, why not? come along,' and half-leading, half-dragging me through the alleys of chairs and sofas he got me to the door. There was no one in the hall, so Dudley peeped into the dining-room, its long table loaded with silver and glass, and then turned the handle of the door next it.

'Holloa, that's the billiard-room. Oh, if Bruce could only see that table ! I will make acquaintance with it to-morrow. This is the library, Nell, come in.'

We entered, and then both stood spell-bound on the threshold : it was like going into a church, so still, so grand, so peaceful. This was the sanctuary of the house ; all that was homelike and precious, and hallowed by daily use, was here ; and though there was nothing that told of the ministering hand of woman, yet here it was not missed, as in that great unused drawing-room.

Two deep bay windows commanded varied prospects, one looking out on one of the miniature lawns with which the garden abounded, and the other on a pretty dell-like hollow of the park. There was no palisade, so the short velvety turf ran up to the very window, beside which nestled, adding unconsciously to the general effect, a tame doe and her fawn. With the exception of the windows and fireplace, every space and corner of the room was filled by carved oaken book-cases, running from floor to ceiling, and loaded by massively-bound volumes. The writing-tables, escritaires, and cabinets were of the same carved oak ; and so were the two large arm-chairs that stood on either side the fireplace, with a curiously-shaped reading desk, and lamp placed beside each, well littered with papers and periodicals.

'That is his father's chair,' said Dudley.

'How do you know that?'

'Because there are the initials carved with the motto and crest, —Willoughby Delorme. Oh, Nellie, is this not a place to spend one's life in?'

The sound of Dudley's voice had roused a very small dog lying on a velvet cushion on the table ; a black and tan terrier, so tiny, that it was not larger than a full-sized rat. This small atom of the canine breed commenced barking in a strangled whispered bark, like a child's toy dog, till on Dudley's taking it up, it left off with a dreary little whine, its slender legs trembling violently.

'Let's see your name, you little beauty. Why, here is extravagance, a gilt collar ! Sprite,—eh ; why, it is a dog's sprite if ever there were one, so it is a capital name. Come, come, be a good doggie and lie down.' But Sprite was not to be soothed, she showed her little white teeth, and glared with her beads of eyes ; so she was put sulking on her cushion again, when she instantaneously curled

herself up into a round ball and went to sleep. A long heavy scratch at the door and then another, Dudley opened it, and the two deer-hounds rushed in, springing on him gratefully with many joyful whines and slobbering caresses, and after carefully inspecting me, one lay full length on the rug, and the other seated itself erect on Herwald's chair, both listening with grave intelligent faces for their master's footstep.

'These are the dumb companions of his solitude,' said Dudley. 'Hark, what's that?' Only a back door opening and closing quietly; only a light swift step in the outer hall; but Sprite has jumped up barking joyously, and the hounds with a low whining cry are by the door looking up at Dudley with their imploring eyes, and Dudley with a flush on his face has opened it, and after listening for a moment, follows them himself, and I am left alone looking at Sprite.

Five minutes, ten, and then again there are footsteps, voices, the door opens, Sprite barks, and then Dudley comes back, and following him is a slight boyish-looking figure, in a gray tweed shooting-coat; and this is Herwald Delorme! My hands are taken and held in a warm clasp.

'Nellie, welcome, thrice welcome to Hurst-hall; it is a happy day for me that sees you and Dudley here.'

And I look up and smile, and say thank you, and feel strange; and yet it is the old face, the old voice, the same kind eyes of seven years ago.

'Nellie, you say nothing, but your eyes are speaking great things. Do you fully recognize the pale-faced boy you were so kind to in the dear old lang syne?'

'It is just that,' I said, 'that surprises me so, that you are so little changed, so much younger than I thought to find you.'

'So much shorter,' with a merry laugh, 'that is what you meant to say. No, I am not much grown; I'm still half a head less than Dudley, look,' and he made him stand beside him to prove his words; 'you see I shall never make a fine man like my father, he was six feet two.'

No, he was not a fine man, so slight, almost fragile of build, and with the pale boyish face, beardless save for the silken down on the upper lip. It was not a handsome face either; but there was latent power, if I mistook not, in the quiet keen eyes and the somewhat curling lip; but what struck me most was the lofty carriage of the head, and the high-bred nonchalant grace of bearing, that would have distinguished him among a thousand, and which contrasted strangely with the air of extreme youth.

'You see, Dudley can quite look down on me,' he continued; 'but talking of change, you are just yourself, Nellie, not a day older, though your black dress makes you look pale. You have stood still as well as I.'

'And Dudley?'

It was pleasant to see the bright glance exchanged between them, and the arm flung naturally in the old way over Dudley's shoulder.

'He! oh, you had better not ask me, I am so jealous of his extra inches. Well, he has the same grave look that made us sur-name him Seneca in the school-room; how's the Bruce?'

'Flourishing, he's a fine fellow, if you like.'

'I suppose so. Well, I'm a pretty sort of host, forgetting one of my guests: where is the little River?'

'I left her in the nursery, you must not see her yet till she is dressed, or Nellie will be in a sad state.'

'She shall come down to dessert then; and now I must dress, or Morrison will be announcing dinner, and as my tired travellers must be nearly famished, I will make good speed; *au revoir*.'

As he passed I saw his quiet glance scan the simple mourning dress I could not throw off, but I knew no apology was needed, and let it pass without comment.

Dudley sat down and wrote off a business note, and before he had finished Herwald re-entered, dressed in black indeed, but not in the usual evening dress that Dudley had told me he always wore even when alone; his extreme courtesy forbade it.

'Dinner is served,' said the butler, flinging open the library door in approved fashion.

'Morrison.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Turn Leo and Max for a run in the yard, and let Sprite have her cream.'

'You see,' he added, offering me his arm, 'my dumb family must be cared for, and Sprite is so little, she often gets forgotten. What do you think of the wee impish thing?'

'I admire the deerhounds more.'

'You are right, they are noble animals; I call them my body-guard, and seldom go anywhere without them. Max has especially done me good service. Dudley, take this seat opposite me; it is pleasant to think my table will be less dreary to-day.'

Dudley's face, seen through the vista of épergnes and flowers, was radiant as he answered—

'We must see you in the Sunnyside dining-room before we can quite say it is like old times.'

'Ah, if you knew how I have dreamed of the old place and of the happy boyish days, what a long blank there has been in our intercourse, and yet I feel we are the same. One thing I am resolved upon, invited or uninvited I will spend my Christmas with you—may I, Nellie?'

'May you! oh, Herwald.'

'I will then, and though it may not be the merry thoughtless Christmas of old, we will make the yule log burn brightly in spite of all—what do you say, Nellie?'

'That I am doubtful whether Sunnyside will please after Hurst-hall.'

Herwald replied by an unanswerable curl of the lip ; and then by degrees we fell into a long interesting talk of the olden time, and all seemed to vie with each other in recalling ludicrous anecdotes and mirthful exploits, till we forgot the somewhat repressing grandeur of Morrison and his staid, quiet underling Simpson, and were quite at home and at our ease. True, it was pleasanter when, the cloth being removed and the fruit placed on the shining mahogany, Morrison, on a sign from his master, left the room.

'And now for the little "River," may I fetch her?'

'You !' I said dubiously, 'I fear our wee lady will hardly condescend to let you. Dudley had better be your deputy ; I think he has the art of charming her wayward moods.'

Dudley ran off pleased with the commission, and soon we heard the cantering steps of her 'geegee,' and above them the sweet babbling voice, at the sound of which Herwald fairly started.

'A child's voice in the old hall ! can such a thing be possible?'

I glanced proudly at the opening door in anticipation of the new white dress and lilac ribbons that we had decided she should wear ; but to my disappointment nothing was to be seen but a blue flannel petticoat and a well-muffled head. It was one of baby's pretty tricks thus to veil herself when shy, and in absence of pinafores had used the first thing that came to hand. Hence the unsightly result.

Herwald burst out laughing. 'Oh, naughty baby ; Dudley, put put down her dress, please,' but the chubby arms held it tightly ; and it was a confused little bundle that was deposited in the high chair.

'Oh, I am so ashamed, just when I want her to be good—Dudley, what shall we do?' But Dudley and Herwald did nothing but laugh, and I was about to carry her out of the room, when Herwald stopped me.

'This is more amusing than I anticipated, leave the bashful young lady alone, I'll bring her round ;' then in a pleasant voice, and fixing his eyes on the ceiling : 'when I have little girls to stay with me, I always have them down to dessert, and let them have a green and gold plate with a bright crimson peach on it, and a silver knife and fork to cut it up with.' (Great excitement under the white frock.) 'And,' continued Herwald, 'sometimes these little girls have a glass of sweet wine, and some cakes with great almonds in them ;' then very softly, 'Wouldn't Rill like to come and sit on my knee and have these nice things ; won't she come to—whatever shall I call myself ? uncle Herry, yes, to uncle Herry?'

Perhaps it was the cakes, perhaps the winning voice, but the crumpled dress was thrown down, and there came to view the dimpled shoulders and little head rippling over with its tight golden curls.

Five minutes more, and she was quietly seated on Herwald's

knee cutting up her peach, and patiently enduring his kisses, while her rosy lips were continually making demands on uncle Herry.

'There is one question, Herwald, I have been wanting to ask you.'

'What is that?'

'I want to know whether it be to accident or thoughtful design that I may attribute my rose-bud of a room?'

'That is a very needless question for the white moss-rose to ask,' was Herwald's laughing answer, as he jumped up from the table. 'Shall we go into the garden?' and then I knew from his using the old name that Keith and he had called me, that it was no accident at all. 'I have never seen such lovely grounds,' I said some minutes afterwards, as we stood on the terrace and watched the sun setting behind the shrubbery trees.

'These! oh, they are nothing, I am going to show you my "wild garden;" I detest these trimly laid out lawns and paths; I like a "sweet neglect," I will show you what I mean, come this way.' We threaded the mazes of the shrubbery walks, which were so thickly and carefully planted as to resemble a miniature wood; and from this we came out on the 'wild garden.' Wild it certainly was, and negligently beautiful, according to Herwald's motto, that 'beauty least adorned is adorned the most.' Through the grounds, broken up, and diversified by clumps of trees, there flowed a beautiful trout stream, abundantly furnished with trout; across this were stepping-stones, picturesque, but not as dangerous as those by the manse, which led to a tangled thicket, from which we emerged on a smooth green bowling-alley, at the end of which was a Gothic summer-house with painted windows and a passion-flower covering its porch. Beyond, was a pebbly path leading to the fernery, where, amid broken rocks, cool fountains, and shady trees, flourished the rarest specimens that Herwald could procure; this was the prettiest nook of the whole garden; and he pointed out to us a mossy bank where he loved to lie and read.

'It is cool here on the hottest summer day, and when I am restless and perturbed, an hour's retreat with Max and Leo to my fernery sets me right for the rest of the day; I am glad you like it, Nellie.'

And then we went through a copse, and into a dell, from which we came out on the rabbit warren, and so into the park and home. We paused for a moment to admire the new-born moon just trembling on the deep blue of the sky; then Herwald suddenly said to me, for Dudley had run in with Rill, who was sleepy—'What a careless fellow I am, to be all these hours and not ask after my old friend Keith.'

I had not expected the question, and a whole world of foolish colour rushed up into my face, as I stammered out something about his being well. Was it fancy, or did I see a strange look in Herwald's eyes, and a sudden compressed movement of the lips?

No, it must have been fancy ; for those clear bright eyes were looking tenderly at me.

'Is it so? I am glad of it. God bless you, Nellie!' I wanted to undeceive him, but could not, for Dudley came back, and we all paced up and down the terrace talking, till the stars came out and the air grew dark and chill.

'You are shivering, Nellie ; come, let us go in, and you shall make tea for us.' He led the way through an open window to what appeared to be a dark room, but at last I discovered we were in the great drawing-room, and that there was a blaze of light at the far end. In the midst of a nest of couches and ottomans there was set out a pretty little tea-table with silver branches filled with wax candles, hissing silver urn, and costly Sèvres service ; but save for this oasis of light the room was buried in obscurity. 'It is a strange idea of mine, this semi-illumination ; but when the great chandelier is lighted there is such a blaze and glare—no shadow, no dark corners, no "dim religious light ;" do you object to it?'

'Far from it, it is like a bright picture with a dark background ; it is just the place for ghost stories.'

'No, no ghost stories in the summer ; we want the fire and the crackling logs for them. After tea I will show you what sounds better than a spectral tale on such an evening as this.' When tea was finished Herwald disappeared, and a few minutes afterwards we heard a soft wailing melody that grew gradually louder and fuller, and presently the deep sonorous notes of an organ swelled through the whole room. The effect was magical, glorious ; now it seemed to sigh and sob in low tearful symphony, till it wrung the heart to hear it, and then died off in a plaintive moan. I was for the time spell-bound, till I saw Dudley cover his face with his hands ; then carefully and painfully I groped my way through the vistas of tables and couches, till I came to Herwald sitting with upturned face, his hands wandering mechanically over the notes. I touched him. 'Something less sad, less touching, please ; it is the first time he has heard music except at church.' A wordless sigh answered me ; and without breaking off the melody, it suddenly grew louder and louder, and soared triumphant like a conquering march, till in a perfect storm it wavered and broke off in silence. We did not go into the drawing-room, but stood in the bay-window till Dudley joined us of his own accord, which he did after awhile ; then Herwald said, 'I am going to dismiss you, Nellie ; you must repair the effects of a long journey by a restful night. Dudley I know will keep me company a while in the library.' I knew they wanted to talk more fully together, and so bade them good-night, and retired.

CHAPTER X.

'She has neither savour nor salt,
 But a cold and clear-cut face, as I found
 when her carriage past,
 Perfectly beautiful, let it be granted her ;
 where is the fault ?
 All that I saw—for her eyes were down-
 cast, not to be seen,

Faultily faultless ; icily regular, splendidly
 null,
 Dead perfection, no more.
 From which I escaped heart-
 free,
 With the least little touch of spleen.'
Tennyson's Maud.

HIGH noon in the grand old library. All the morning I have been sitting in the bay-window that looks over the park, writing home letters and endeavouring to atone for long lapses of neglect by eloquent descriptions of the beauty by which I am surrounded. Every now and then I lay down my pen and lean back among the cushions, lulled by the slumbrous sense of stillness pervading the whole place ; or gazing idly out, trace the leafy shadows lying athwart the warm patches of light, or listen to the soft swaying and sighing of the trees just ruffled by a passing breeze.

Herwald has come in half-an-hour ago to sit opposite me and write business letters, leaving Dudley to knock the balls about in the adjoining billiard-room by himself, of which occupation he is apparently weary, as he has just entered noiselessly, and is scanning the book-shelves previous to making his selection. Herwald's eyes have a misty far-away look, as he sits resting his head against the carved back of his chair, and toying idly with his pen, and I recognize the drooping curve of the mouth as certain indication of perplexity or care.

Yes, it is the same old face ; there is nothing changed or new about it, save the somewhat grand carriage of the head, and perhaps a little wilful curve of the upper lip ; and looking at it now, old memories surge upon me ; and distinct among them all, that spring morning in the room even now called Herwald's, when we were all making sorrowful preparations for the departure of the boy who was as one of us. I could see him sitting in the old window-seat following my mother with wistful eyes, as she folded up his things with her own dainty hands, and laid them in his trunk : never offering to help her in his strange absent mood ; and how Louie and I at the last could not buckle the straps of his portmanteau for our tears, and how the fingers that came to our aid were cold and trembling too.

I remembered also the impatient look of the proud father, when the good-byes were being said in the hall over and over again ; but I think even he was touched, when Herwald threw his arms round my mother, saying, 'Good-bye, mother, good-bye ; I have never known another ;' and it was Dudley, Dudley quiet and thoughtful even in those days, that led him so gently away, saying, 'Your father waits, dear Herwald ; you know you are to come to us again . don't fret, man ; never fear, we'll see you back soon.'

But he did not, and perhaps it was some dim presentiment of this long seven years' parting that filled the lad's eyes with tears and choked his voice. At this moment I became aware that my dreamy observation of him was being repaid with full interest.

'Well, Nellie, "do my simple features content you?" as Shakespeare has it; or is my face as a sheet of hieroglyphics to be carefully unriddled by bent brows and mysterious eyes?'

'I beg your pardon,' I said laughing, 'I did not mean to stare, but your look recalled old scenes to me; you are marvellously little changed.'

'Just as I was thinking the contrary of you.'

'Of me!' I exclaimed, turning scarlet; 'you surely have not been analyzing me all this time, when I imagined you lost in the mazes of business?'

'My analysis, though thorough, was brief; will that content you? You know physiognomy was always my weakness; and I have an odd trick even now of studying my neighbour's face as index to his character; and don't think me conceited, I have never found myself wrong; if ever a man has a pet weakness or hobby, I am sure to find it out in the first half-hour.'

'You are punishing me sadly for my inconsiderate stare.'

'Nonsense, Nellie, your eyes were looking through, not at, me; besides, these liberties are accorded to old friends.'

'But, Herwald, how am I changed?'

'I thought you were not at the first minute of meeting, but I see you are.'

'Well, go on, don't be mysterious.'

'Well, you've changed your hair, for one thing; you used to have it in a flood of curls just tied in a blue ribbon, and not that mass of glossy plaits.'

'True, I forgot that, but I have long worn it so.'

'Then I miss the old placidity of expression, and in its place I read a certain wistfulness and unrest. I never thought to see it on your face, Nellie; and, lastly, you have that look which mothers have, the anxious loving expression of one who has many cares and many responsibilities: nay, I could have summed up the whole in one brief sentence—I left the girl, I find the woman. Have I spoken too plainly?' for his earnestness had made the tears spring to my eyes.

'No, but I never guessed you had such penetration; how could you see all this?'

'He is a perfect Argus,' muttered a distant voice.

'Halloa, are you there, old Seneca, listening to my rhodomontades? I thought Nellie and myself sole tenants of the library.'

'I was tired of making fine strokes for only myself to admire, Don Quixote.'

'Oh dear, oh dear, the old name! how strangely it sounds.'

Well, as you are here, come and see if this letter will settle my business.'

'You still write with your left hand, old fellow,' was Dudley's remark as he seated himself comfortably on the arm of Herwald's chair.

'It looks like it, I own; oh, how my poor father used to abuse what he called my excessively gentlemanly hand.'

'The whole style of the epistle seems abusive, what's it all about?'

'Oh, didn't I tell you?' laughed Herwald; 'I've spoiled the point. Why, it is a certain bullying tenant of ours, who was especially odious to my father; times out of number he tried to eject him, and never got hold of a proper handle for the purpose. But now the lease is up, and the fellow has been whining and cringing to me to have it renewed! a civil no he won't take, do you think this will do?'

'Well, rather; it is hot and strong enough, in all conscience.'

'All right, give it here, and let me seal it up. There.'

'Halloa, Quixote, what is this scented billet-doux? it looks awfully suspicious; I bet you anything it is from the "unmentionable she."'

'Don't chaff, there's a good fellow, I want to write the direction properly;' but Dudley was in one of his provoking moods.

'It is no good looking so demure and shame-faced, Herwald; it is not likely you have lived so long in the land of the Lancashire witches without having some penchant or other.'

'I assure you,' answered Herwald seriously, and a little sadly, 'there is no "unmentionable she" in the case for me, or ever will be, that I know of. True, the Lancashire witches are handsome and sprightly enough; but I am fastidious—fastidious and I think a little cold. I shall shock you dreadfully, I don't much care for girls.'

'Come, Nellie,' cried Dudley, rising with a serio-comic air, 'let us leave this house, this abode of a monster, a Frankenstein; you hear, he does not care for you.'

'I did not say women, I said girls. Confound your chaff, Dudley.'

'Oh dear, oh dear,' murmured Dudley exhaustedly, 'how these blasé men of the world talk, with their women and their girls.'

'I tell you girls, the ordinary run of them, are slow, vapid, mere frivolous butterflies, pretty enough of course, but not what I want to find in a woman. It is an odd idea,' he continued with a bashful glow on his face, 'but I sometimes wonder if Hurst-hall will ever have a mistress. Of course it will be very lonely living here all by myself, but I don't think I shall ever find exactly what I want.'

'Hear the young autocrat. What are the graces of mind and body your Quixotic lordship requires, then?'

'Oh, something mignonne, petite, spirituelle. Je ne sais quoi—'

oh, I can't tell. Sometimes the fair lady of my fancy is one thing one day, and one thing another, and never two days alike.'

'Is she ever drawn from life, may I ask?' A wicked little smile lurked in the corner of Herwald's mouth.

'You are fishing in too shallow water, Dudley.' Then with a sudden bright change, 'Yes, I can tell you, I can show you the exact portrait of the fair ideal. I lighted on the very thing one day in a volume of anonymous poems, and it seized my fancy wonderfully;' and crossing the library with the springy step so natural to him, he searched for the book, and came back, his finger on the open page.

'Well, go on, is the lad bewitched? what are you looking at? have you not found the "*petite, mignonne*," and what do you call it, in there?'

'Yes, but she is not *petite*, cried Herwald, looking rather foolish; 'she must be tall, listen—

'My lady walks in stately grace.'

'Of course she is, you never saw a little person walk in stately grace; she may be some fair-haired giantess. Go on.'

'My lady walks in stately grace.'

'All right, you said that before, I hate repetitions.'

Herwald replied by a right-hander that sent Dudley out of his place, and forced a strangled bark from the red cushion on the table.

'Be quiet, Sprite, be quiet, my little wee lady,' cried Herwald, laying the animal to his cheek, 'don't excite itself, or it will have the bronchitis; no, no kisses,' as the little red tongue wandered lovingly over his face; 'I love not such evidences of affection—thank you, no,' as I picked up the book he had dropped and pressed it on him; 'we'll leave the fair ideal where she is.'

'I'll be good,' cried Dudley, from the depths of an easy-chair; 'go on, Quixote.'

And Herwald magnanimously completed the stanzas.

'My lady walks in stately grace;
The sun-beams toying with her hair
Have left their golden glories there,
Tinting its brown with colour fair
To frame her winsome face.
Upon her clear and steadfast brow
One little vein its course does show
Like brooklet on a plain of snow,
While dusky lashes darkly fringe
The wonders of her deep blue eyes,
Which lake-like mirror back the skies;
Yet ever in their depth there lies
Still thought with sadness tinged.'

'Don't stop, finish it.'

'Oh, the rest is a mere love idyll; but I will read it.'

'My lady hath a beauteous face!
Last night the sun went burning down,
The heavens were in a crimson frown,
And skirted redly round the town.'

NELLIE'S MEMORIES.

Oh, 'twas an hour of grace !
 I stole beneath the beechen shade,
 Whose overhanging branches made
 A bow'ry depth and still arcade
 For fawns and dryads meet ;
 The mosses held their laps of dew,
 And rang the merry hare-bells blue,
 As she came stealing on to view,
 With wealth of dainty feet.

My lady comes ! she comes, my love !
 Her silken trail of garments sweep
 Across the grasses in their sleep,
 Which shake their silvered heads and weep
 At her light tread above ;
 And wondrous things with curious eyes
 Come stealing forth in slow surprise,
 Luminous things of earth and skies,
 And coil themselves around ;
 A zephyr wand'ring through the air
 Stirs the coy masses of her hair,
 And leaves a tiny rose-leaf there
 That flutters to the ground.

Through the dim aisles she moves, my saint !
 Erect with girlhood's head sublime,
 Praying a prayer against all time,
 With folded hands and face divine,
 That makes my spirit faint ;
 My heart pants like a frightened deer,
 My soul is wrapped about with fear,
 Because my lady draweth near,
 Then, as she breathes my name,
 I fall and kiss her twinkling feet,
 I call her mine, my own, my sweet !
 And dare to whisper Margaret,
 With lips that are aflame !'

'Yes, very pretty, and the idea is debonnaire and winsome enough, but Herwald, my poor lad, such stateliness would eclipse thy puny inches.'

'Peace thou son of Anak !'

'I would advise you, also, to take care before you plunge into the wonders of her deep blue eyes ; she may prove but a golden-haired Lorelie after all.'

'True, O king, live for ever ; but Nellie, may I ask the reason of that smile ?'

I was smiling to myself in a curious mood, but would not have enlightened him for the world ; so he turned baffled to his tormentor.

'We'll have the laugh at you one of these days, Dudley, when we see you enslaved by some angel in blue.'

'Not he,' I cried, preserving strict neutrality no longer ; 'I've no fear of his being led away by a pretty face ; he'll look for something better.'

'Something resembling his little moon-faced sister, I suppose,' said Dudley, pinching my cheek. Herwald looked at us and sighed ; then changing the subject—

'To whom have you been writing all this morning, Nellie ?'

'To my indefatigable correspondent, Louie, to be sure.'

'Louie? that reminds me of a piece of heresy on the part of master Herwald. We were chatting last night in the library about the home-people, and I asked him if he remembered Louie, and he said, "Oh yes, well; she was a buxom red-haired girl." Fancy that description for Queen Loo.'

'I'm sure her hair was red,' persisted Herwald, laughing; 'red, decidedly so, and she was buxom, or stout, well-favoured in fact; I dare say she has grown up a handsome girl.'

'Look at Nellie's vixenish eyes, she is ready to quarrel with you!'

'No, it is true, Louie's hair has red lights in it, but we think it a beautiful colour.'

'If Bruce were here he would spout whole pages in praise of what he calls her Borgia head, and as to buxomness, she is a fine woman.'

'I hate fine women,' was the cynical remark *sotto voce*; and, pulling Sprite's ear viciously, 'and flirts——'

'Herwald!'

'Well, is she not a flirt? don't look so savage, Nellie.'

'What have you been saying, Dudley?' I exclaimed in hot eagerness to defend the absent.

'Oh, nothing, nothing, a mere trifle;' then with a flash of the eye and a set lip, 'Colonel Grey is my friend, that is all.'

I started.

'You know; oh, Herwald!'

'Yes, I know that which I own has greatly lowered my estimate of your sister's character; but I must in candour avow, that I did not learn this from himself, but from Dudley. I happened to mention the name while talking last night, saying what a capital fellow he was, and how much liked, and I saw the young man opposite me glower and frown and change the subject abruptly; and so with my usual sagacity, putting two and two together, sundry hints lately dropped of the siren-like qualities of the second Miss Mortimer, and certain unaccountable lingerings of the Colonel in a particular neighbourhood, I came to one conclusion, and so I told Dudley, and it all came out.'

I was silent, and I must say I blushed for the sister who was not here in her own person to cry '*meâ culpâ, meâ culpâ,*' for I felt that if she knew Herwald as well as I had learnt to, even in these few hours, she also would have cared to stand well before that simple noble nature. That she had forfeited this esteem I doubted not; for both Herwald and Dudley were singularly grave and strict in this matter; among their fellows of the young giddy generation they were as apostles of a new religion.

'I must say,' continued Herwald, 'that I think ill of your sister's taste in refusing such a man; there is not a truer gentleman, a more accomplished officer, in all her Majesty's regiments than Arthur Grey; steel to the back-bone, without an enemy in the world, and a thorough good-hearted fellow in the bargain.'

'She called him conceited,' I stammered.

'You have put it mildly,' replied Herwald, with a little mocking smile. 'Insufferable conceit, I think, was the expression used; again I looked at Dudley reproachfully.

'Now there is not a man more truly humble-minded than Grey; yet just because he has adopted the lounging fashionable manner that men now-a-days think highly bred, your sister has not wit enough to see that it is but skin deep, and that the gold lies at the bottom; did you ever see him?'

'Yes, one Sunday I noticed a singularly handsome man in the Thornton's pew, and Louie told me afterwards it was Colonel Grey.

'Well, how many more of her Majesty's officers has Louie treated in this way, besides poor Grey?'

'Herwald,' I said, summoning dignity to my aid, 'remember you are speaking of my sister.' I felt it was time to break up the discussion, as I was hurt at the tone it was taking, hurt and angry at not being able to defend the indefensible.

Herwald rose, and with an old-fashioned courtesy that sat very prettily on him, put my hand to his lips. 'I will remember it in future, Nellie; and now if you like I will show you the western corridor; you expressed a wish to see it yesterday, that and my bachelor's den besides.'

I assented cheerfully, and as we left the room he said pleasantly, 'Do not close up your letter without sending my kind remembrances to your sister and Bruce.'

I gave him a grateful look, for I felt the kindness that prompted the slight effort, and then followed him with a lighter heart.

In addition to the heavy curtains that draped the entrance to the corridor, was a red baized door; as he opened it, Herwald said laughingly, 'You see we of the western corridor are doubly guarded, nor will you be surprised when I tell you it contains gems worth all the house besides.' As he said this, we found ourselves in a small but exquisite picture gallery; corresponding in size with the eastern corridor, and lighted artfully from the top; at the end, however, a beautiful bay had been thrown out, its recesses occupied by a low well-cushioned couch; this and one or two curiously carved oaken benches were the sole articles of furniture. Four marble statues lent grace to each corner of the room, and a Roman urn of rare beauty occupied the centre; at my involuntary exclamation of surprise and delight, Herwald said—

'It was my poor father's idea, turning this into a picture gallery; and his greatest pleasure during the last years of his life was in adding to his already beautiful collection. There are some pictures not yet unpacked which he bought in Belgium, Vienna, and Turin, and for which I must find fitting place; but,' here he sighed heavily, 'somehow the occupation has lost its zest; poor father, he will not see his beautiful Guido hung in its place of honour.'

'You have some glorious pictures here, Herwald.'

'I believe you; we have a Murillo, a Rembrandt, and a Claude; some of Gainsborough, Reynolds, and Wilson; many from French and Spanish artists of merit, two or three Dutch, and the rest from contemporaries of our own time; among the rest there are some capital landscapes.'

It was very pleasant to hear Herwald's criticisms on the various pictures; he descanted on the merits and demerits of each with the air of a polished connoisseur, and a true lover of art; his eyes lighted up with unusual animation, while pointing out the beauties of a Claude or a Poussin, and his whole manner warmed into unwonted enthusiasm. I had long noticed a large picture veiled with thin gauze; as we drew near it Herwald said—

'My mother's portrait,' and undrew it. It was the picture of a little white lady, with a young tender face and shy eyes, out of which the girlhood had not yet faded.

'Is she not a pretty young mother?' he said, in a low tone, 'she was not one-and-twenty when she died.'

'So young, Herwald.'

'Yes, so young, cut off at the very beginning of her happy married life. They had loved each other since they were children, and those few months had been so full of joy. My father's grief at her loss was so frantic that for years he could not bear the sight of me, the hapless cause of her death; and it was a relief to him in his impatient misery when that appointment was offered him in India. You know the rest, how I came to live at Sunnyside, and how my father, weary at last of his long exile, and yearning for the boy whose childhood he had slighted, returned to home and me; and you know, or at least you can never know, the passionate love that sought to atone for those unhappy years of neglect and desertion.'

We were silent, for we had known that love to be tyrannical, and had suffered from it.

Herwald continued musingly, 'How strange to call her, mother, whose lips never kissed me, whose weak arms never held me in a loving embrace!'

'Oh, Herwald, is this true?'

'Yes, it is true,' he answered sadly. 'When my baby lips were pressed to hers, hers were as cold as ice; they tell me who stood round the bed, that rallying towards the last, she made signs for the baby to be brought; and when it came, her blue eyes, filmy then with death, cast one long loving look at it, and lifting up her hands as if to bless it, then turned and clasped her husband's neck with one long sob and died. Come,' he said, rallying himself, 'this ends or rather begins the catalogue. Now for the bachelor's den; these doors on this side of the gallery, for there are doors underneath the curtains, lead to my father's apartments, but they are so dismantled and covered up that I cannot show them to you, though they are the best in the house; that was his bed-room, the next intended for

a dressing-room, but never used by him as such, then his bath-room, and lastly his bureau as he termed it, where he kept his papers and transacted business with his steward; but it is more suitable for a ladies' boudoir, with its gold and white paper and gilded door.'

'Perhaps it will revert to its original use some day.'

'Perhaps so, *nous verrons*; on the other side, Nellie, are my rooms; we will not open that door, for Allan sleeps there.'

'Allan, who is Allan?'

'Why that fine-looking fellow with the oriental beard, you know, who met you at the station; he fills the office of travelling courier, valet, secretary, confidential agent, personal friend, everything in short that is indispensable and valuable; he is away now on a secret mission, or you would have seen more of him; ever since he nursed me when down in the fever at Cairo, he has been as necessary to me as a mother to her child.'

'Do you mean he enacts that character to you?'

'Almost; he takes care of me, is always giving me good advice gratis, and preventing me from doing anything foolish; he is everything that is good and kind; poor old Allan!'

'What's his other name, Herwald?'

'Duncan, to be sure; what are you making great eyes at, Nellie?'

'Nothing,' I replied; 'where does this lead?'

'To my bath, but it is under repair, so you can't go in. Here is the ante-room, where my dogs sleep; that is Leo's rug, and here Max guards the doorway, and that is Sprite's cradle.'

I looked at the little velvet-lined basket quite shocked. 'Herwald, you house your dogs too delicately; you treat them as if they were Christian flesh and blood; that fair purple bed is more fit for an elfin prince to sleep in than for your impish favourite.'

'Nothing is too good for Sprite; you are very disrespectful to her. Do you know she is the smallest dog in England? Allan pets her as much as I do. This is my bed-room; is it not a pleasant room?'

It was, but it was different to any sleeping apartment I had ever seen; the floor was of polished oak and destitute of carpeting, only two or three costly skins were thrown carelessly here and there. A small brass bedstead of exquisite workmanship stood in the middle of the floor. Herwald pointed it out to me, saying, 'I took a fancy to it in a Parisian shop; and my father, without saying anything about it, had it sent over here at great expense. I believe he would have procured the roc's egg, or tried to do so, if I had expressed a wish for it.'

The rest of the furniture seemed to have been picked up in the same desultory way. There was a large wardrobe of massive black oak magnificently carved, that looked as if it had come out of a mediæval workshop; and two or three chairs that must centuries

ago have belonged to the altar of some old cathedral ; the very dressing-table was dark and cumbrous, and adorned at each corner by carved stags' heads ; and there were various grotesque spindle-legged tables about the room holding heavy brass-clamped boxes. I think I most admired a beautiful prayer desk, over which was a small case of devotional books and a copy of Rubens' Descent from the Cross. This and a full-length portrait of his father were the sole pictures, but there were some statuettes and bronzes of great beauty arranged tastefully about the room.

'Well, what do you think of it, Nellie?'

'I am so surprised ; it is a beautiful room, of course, but I expected something more civilized, and,' I added mischievously, 'more befitting the apartment of a dandy of the nineteenth century.'

'How do you know I am a dandy? you have not peeped like Dudley in those big boxes, and found nothing but unguents, pomades, and essences both European and Oriental ; neither do you know that big wardrobe yonder is groaning with outfits of every description. Allan scolds me dreadfully for my extravagance in dress ; and I am afraid he is right.'

'Trust a woman's quick wit, Herwald ; remember, I have seen you in four coats already since yesterday afternoon ; besides, I saw evidences of fastidious taste at the first glance at you.'

Herwald laughed guiltily. 'Well, if you don't call it comfortable, what do you think of this?' opening an inner door ; 'my father had this fitted up for me as a smoking-room when I came back from college, and though I have since given up the odorous weed, I still use it as a snuggery.'

A snuggery it was, such a tiny warm-looking room, with crimson couch, carpet, and curtains, a tiger-skin serving for hearth-rug, and a case of handsome meershaum pipes over the chimney piece.

'When my college chums come to stay with me, we always adjourn here before bedtime, and many a time have we seen the small hours in with talk and jest and song, when the dear old father thought us asleep ; Allan mixing grog for us out of that tiny brass kettle.'

'Grog, Herwald !'

'Well, I never cared for it, but Vincent and St. Clair did, and I would not stint them, and it did not taste badly ; and when I am alone of an evening, and the library feels large and dull, I come and read myself sleepy in my snuggery. Well, Simpson, what is it?' as we became aware of the pale-faced young footman standing at the door.

'Please, sir, the luncheon is served and Mr. and Miss Rivers are in the drawing-room.'

'In the long drawing-room, did you say, Simpson?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Take the horses round to the stables, and let Thompson rub

them down and give them a feed, and tell Mr. Rivers I will be with him in a minute.'

On Simpson's exit Herwald's calm, deliberate tone changed to one of vexation. 'What an intolerable nuisance having luncheon visitors; I certainly did hope to have you all to myself for one whole day at least, and just as we had planned an afternoon drive to show you Pendle Hill and Whalley Abbey.'

'But must they stop to lunch?' I asked anxiously, for strangers were particularly distasteful to me just now.

'Of course they have come for that purpose; most likely they have been out riding all the morning, and have taken us on their way back; we Lancashire folk are very fond of these morning visits. Come along, Nellie, we must not keep them waiting; Maud Rivers is rather a formidable young lady.'

'One instant, I must just put my hair straight.'

'Nonsense, don't be so affected, you are perfectly neat; I do like hair to look like hair, and not plastered down like Miss Rivers', till it resembles a brown silk skull-cap.'

My last excuse being thus removed, we went downstairs, and I found myself being conducted through those terrible alleys of chairs and tables, as swiftly as I could go.

'Pardon me for so long keeping you waiting, but we were in the picture-gallery. Mr. Rivers—Miss Mortimer, my late guardian's daughter.'

A tall fresh-coloured man, with bushy snow-white whiskers and hair, came forward with a pleasant smile, and shook me heartily by the hand.

'I was not aware your guardian had a daughter, but I am very happy to make her acquaintance, and her brother's also,' as he cordially acknowledged Dudley's greeting; and then Herwald turned and introduced me to Miss Rivers, who responded in a perfectly well-bred though somewhat haughty manner. Without exception, Miss Rivers was the most striking-looking girl I had ever seen; the most striking-looking and the tallest, and her great height was further increased by the singularly long arching throat and slender build of figure, which was aided also by the straight narrow folds of her riding-habit. Dudley wickedly said afterwards that she was only length without breadth, which idea amused Herwald hugely. She had a fine statuesque face, colourless, and when at rest rather inanimate, large blue-gray eyes, and the most peculiar hair possible. Herwald's conceit, of 'brown silk skull-cap,' was certainly very true, for Miss Rivers' hair lay in close thick folds, almost as if glued to the head. Certainly most extraordinary hair, so silky in quality, and so abundant in length, that if those heavy coils of plaits were unloosened, they must reach at least to the knee, and yet dead-brown in colour, shadowless if I may so call it; no ruddy or golden lights for admirers to wrangle over; no ripply waves: better, far better, Louie's Borgia head than this,

Perhaps Herwald did not think so; anyhow he was polite enough to the young lady, disarming her of her gloves and whip, and urging her to lay aside her riding beaver.

'I don't know that I shall,' she said in an abrupt, but not unpleasant voice, though it was scarcely as gently modulated as I love to hear. 'I do not know that I shall, if only to punish you for your unneighbourliness, in not coming to see us before. How long have you been at home, sir?'

'Only three weeks.'

'Only three weeks! hear him, papa! three weeks, and never been near the Cedars to report yourself, after all your fine promises at Paris too!'

'I assure you, Miss Rivers, my long absence from home has accumulated business to such an extent that I have scarcely yet had time to look my affairs properly in the face, and have really crossed no threshold but my own.'

'Oh, you are always ready with an excuse, but we are not going to let you off so easily. I know your misanthropical views, and have determined to combat them, though I must say they seem to agree with you; you look as if you have taken a new lease of life, so wretchedly ill as you appeared before.'

'I wish I could return the compliment; you have lost even the few roses you could boast.'

'Fie, what a pretty compliment for a gentleman to make! but I believe you are right, and I am looking awfully pale; the season this year has been killing, besides which, papa and the doctors say I paint too much.'

'Is this true, Miss Rivers?' asked Herwald demurely.

'Well, I suppose it is; when I am not riding with papa or out with the dogs, I am in the studio; that is to say, when we are at Sabden; for of course in London I can't paint so much.'

'But you will injure your health; indeed, you should moderate your ambition, if only to please your father.' And as he said this I could not detect if Herwald's tone of interest were real or feigned.

'Oh, you know, I never do things by halves,' and she laughed, 'it is better to wear out than rust out.'

'It is better to do neither.'

'Oh, Mr. Delorme, what a serious face! by-the-by, have you hung your Guido yet?'

Herwald changed colour and shook his head.

'Why not, you lazy lover of art?'

'Because, because I have not had the heart to touch the packages, they are in their wrappings still;' and rising and offering his arm abruptly, 'let me take you in to luncheon.'

Perhaps Maud Rivers was more womanly at heart than appeared, for her colour rose as she accepted it, and I heard her say, 'Forgive me, I was thoughtless in mentioning it, but you remember it was the object of my idolatry at Rome.'

Mr. Rivers and I followed, Dudley bringing up the rear. I marvelled to see Herwald head the table with such ease and grace of manner; I marvelled and admired. And yet it was not the same Herwald somehow that talked with me in the library this very morning. There was the same self-confidence, but not the same frankness and open-hearted gaiety; in its place was a certain haughty nonchalance of bearing, something indolent and provoking withal; and underneath the quiet words and gestures I detected a half-veiled raillery, that savoured to my mind of satire.

I felt that if we had met at first in that manner, I should long ago have been annihilated. Yet Miss Rivers seemed to like it; she answered each parry with a dexterous home thrust of her own, and as Herwald never forgot the gallantry due to a lady, their wordy strife flowed on harmoniously, though I myself waxed giddy in the warm encounter of wits. Herwald strove to draw me into the conversation once or twice, but Miss Rivers' hauteur and my excessive shyness forbade his efforts, so I sat and listened to Dudley and Mr. Rivers as they argued on some knotty point in the politics of the day. I had often heard my father talk on these subjects, but not Dudley, owing, I believe, to his usual modest silence in the presence of men older than himself; but now, representing as he did the head of the house, he bore himself and spoke 'as one who had authority,' and I felt very proud of him, for I saw Mr. Rivers was struck with the clear conciseness of his speech, and the breadth and liberality of his views, and was talking as to his equal in mind and age. When I turned my attention from them at last, Miss Rivers was saying—

'I will forgive you your past transgressions, Mr. Delorme, and grant you full absolution, if you will come to us on Monday; ay, I will respect your misanthropy, and no one but Mr. Clive shall be asked to meet you, so you need make no excuse.'

'Thanks, Miss Rivers, but I cannot possibly avail myself of your kind invitation, for a host cannot well leave his guests to amuse themselves in his absence.'

Miss Rivers bit her lip.

'I did not know your friends would be with you then, but that shall not be any hindrance; you must suffer me to extend the invitation to them also;' and turning to me with a gracious smile—

'You will allow us to prove how gladly we shall welcome Mr. Delorme's friends, will you not, Miss Mortimer?'

I did not answer, but looked at Herwald imploringly. He did not seem well pleased at my silence, and said quickly—

'You are very kind, indeed, and Nellie, I know, thinks so; but I am afraid she feels the days are yet early for going among strangers, and so you must please excuse us.'

'I cannot allow you to speak of us as strangers, and to put me off with such scruples; Miss Mortimer must test the hospitality of the north; what I am asking you for is a plain family dinner, no

one but papa and I, and not another creature, just our luncheon party, and no more.'

'Is not Mr. Clive a person, then?'

'Oh, he is no one; he is a necessary appendage, that is all; but we will dispense with him if you like. Come, you must not refuse me.'

Thus strongly urged, Herwald, though with visible reluctance, accepted for us all, and Miss Rivers, without a second look at me, gaily gave the signal for departure.

'Order the horses?' said the courteous host, 'nay, not so soon; may I not challenge you first to a game of billiards, Mr. Rivers?'

'Thanks, not to-day, Maud has afternoon visitors, and cannot delay.'

'Don't be later than six,' was Maud's only remark, as we stood together in the hall, while Herwald ran to fetch her hat and whip, and then went out on the door-step to watch for the horses; as he did so, a piping voice cried—

'Uncle Herry, uncle Herry!' and Rill ran up the lawn, where she had been airing herself with a large parasol.

'Ay, sweetheart, there you are,' and Herwald lifted her up in his arms, where, spanning his face with chubby hands, she played at hide-and-seek kisses.

'Come and speak to the lady,' he said, putting her down. Rill, docile for once, suffered herself to be trotted along to Miss Rivers.

'Nice child,' said she, tapping her on the curls with her whip, and never stooping to caress or speak to her. 'Are the horses up?' and from that moment I felt I disliked Maud Rivers.

Herwald did not seem to, or why was he so long arranging the folds of her habit, as he placed her in the saddle, while she stooped so low to him that the feathers on her hat touched his face; and why, when they were fairly off, did he linger watching them, till she, turning, saw him and waved her hand, and then he hastily entered the house.

'On with your hat, Nellie, the carriage is coming round, and we can have our promised excursion after all; don't be long; may Rill go too?'

'Of course she may, if she will not crowd you.'

'Crowd, this tiny lady crowd us! nonsense, come along, Rill,' and as he caught her up eagerly, 'Nellie, I have an idea. I think I will not marry till Rill grows up; you will be my "wee wife," won't you, Rill?'

'Wee wife' was too much engaged in proudly smoothing the growing moustache to answer, but as he went lightly up the low broad stairs with his burden, I could see the dimpling arms clasped tightly round the neck of uncle Herry.

CHAPTER XI.

'Ye gentle ladies in whose sovereigne
 powre
 Love hath the glory of his kingdom left,
 And th' hearts of men as your eternal
 dowre,
 In yron chains of liberty bereft,

Delivered hath unto your hands by gifts,
 Be well aware how ye the same doe use
 That Pride doe not to Tyranny you lift,
 Least if men you of cruelty excuse,
 He from you that chief doure which ye doe
 abuse.'—*Spenser.*

THE conversation that day at dinner turned on the same politics over which Dudley and Mr. Rivers had argued during luncheon. Herwald took up the subject hotly, and the talk waxed so warm, and to me tedious, that I was glad to leave them to wrangle it out over their wine, and to go and sit on the terrace by myself. At our cosy tea-table, however, Dudley resumed the subject by asking Herwald why he did not enter into public life and stand for the next election.

'The election took place, my dear boy, while you were loitering in the north; and even if it were not, I should hardly dare to do so after the stringent orders of two London physicians not to do anything involving great mental or physical work for the next two or three years.'

'Are you jesting, Herwald?'

'On my honour, no; what makes you think so? you know I did not pick up as readily after that fever at Cairo as I ought to have done; and then I had a relapse or two, and so Allan bothered me to go to Willis and Collins for advice before I started northward, and precious advice they have given me.'

'Oh, I dare say your estate furnishes you with ample employment.'

'My dear fellow, I believe you; there is not another landholder, I am sure, so plagued by his tenants; mine are so confoundedly independent, they get an idea in their heads and stick to it, and "not all the king's horses and all the king's men" can drive the self-will from these Lancashire men.'

'Well improvised; poor old Herwald, these are hard lines.'

'Are they not?' he returned, looking very much as if he liked them, 'I shall have lots to do during the winter; there are thorough repairs wanted in two or three of my tenants' houses, which I shall like to superintend myself; and then there are my plans for the new schools. I am my own architect.'

'That's capital, I did not know you were so clever.'

'Oh, I always had a taste that way, and now I shall turn it to account.'

'Are you building them at your own cost?'

'Yes,' he said quietly, 'it is a memorial; I like it, and I think he would too, better than a painted window or a grand marble monument.'

'Far better,' we both acquiesced.

'I am glad you think so. Clive is so pleased; the old ones are dilapidated to such an extent that the rain comes through on the children's heads, and in addition to that you know we work a large farm of our own; you remember I pointed it out this afternoon.'

'What, the one with the quaint old gabled roof, and the low stone walls lined with holly-bushes?'

'Yes, the same, Holly-bush Farm we call it; there is only a bailiff in it now, but I want to put Allan in possession.'

'What a windfall for him! does he know of your kind intention?'

'He does, but he will not hear of it, which is the more provoking, as he has a decided taste for farming, and is far too fine a fellow to be wasting his years in pampering the whims and fancies of a spoiled aristocrat; I am ashamed of myself for having him.'

'I wonder he can so stand in his own light; why, the possession of a farm like that would be the making of him.'

'Yes, but he says houses and lands are wasted on him, and that nothing can induce him to settle down, for it would drive him mad.'

'Why so?' I asked curiously, but Herwald changed the subject abruptly.

'I hope Clive will be at the Cedars to meet you; he is a particular friend of mine; I know you will be pleased with him.'

'I suppose we shall hear him to-morrow.'

'To be sure; he will conduct the entire service, as his curate is away.'

'Have you many friends about here?' I enquired, 'who do you consider your next-door neighbour?'

'Oh, the Tracys of Millbrook House, halfway down the hill; but as good luck will have it, they are away at Paris, I believe.'

'You don't seem to like them.'

Herwald made a face of disgust.

'What is the matter with them, pray?'

'Matter, why there are six girls and three or four boys, the brothers only a degree more odious than their sisters; I've had to be rather cool to two or three of them, for they used to be eternally riding my horses, haunting the billiard-room, and borrowing my guns; and as they are a fast ungentlemanly lot I did not choose to put up with it. And as for the sisters——'

'Well, what of them?' asked Dudley, much amused.

'Why, you will never believe it,' continued Herwald, growing very red; 'but every one of them made love to me after a different fashion, aided and abetted by a manœuvring mother.'

'This is amusing, go on,' said Dudley, who, stretched full length in the satin couch, was enjoying himself mightily; 'how did they set about it, and were they not handsome enough for you?'

'Oh, they were well enough looking; the eldest draws beautifully, and was always talking to me of high art, and of her never-

to-be-forgotten winter at Rome ; the second, Lucinda, was of sentimental cast, quoted Byron and Moore, wore long ringlets, and kept an album ; the third was decidedly "horsy," and was always riding to hounds on a piebald charger ; and as for the fourth and the prettiest, Flora, her sole thoughts were of balls, picnics, and junketings, a more empty-headed little butterfly never frittered life away ; the two last, the twin harpists and pianists of the establishment, as their mamma called them, alternately played or warbled Italian ditties to our supposed content ; I have a vivid remembrance of their thin arms and scraggy throats, at this moment.'

'What a charming family ! Who are your other friends, Herwald ?'

'Oh, I have hosts ; there is old Dr. Mowbray, who lives in the red brick house opposite the Tracys, with his pretty niece Sophy, she is unfortunately engaged to her uncle's partner, young Greaves ; then come the St. Clairs, one of whose sons, Hubert, went to college with me, and their cousins the Willoughbys, a nice family of girls and boys, who have lately come to the Grange ; and the Rivers, and the Wallaces, and Sir Ralph Percy, and Major Hurlstone, and lastly and best, the Vaughans, once of the Grange and now of Rose Cottage.'

'I never heard you mention them ; who are they ?'

'Arthur Vaughan is the best friend I have in Lancashire ; he and his sister, Miss Milly, to whom I must introduce you one of these days, as she is a great favourite of mine, used to live with their mother at the Grange. There they resided in luxury ; Arthur rode his own horses, went to college with me, and was to have shared my Eastern tour, when it was discovered all at once that his guardian had made ducks and drakes of his money, speculated largely, and the upshot was, that the Grange, which had been in their family for more than a hundred years, had to be sold : the Willoughbys bought it, and the widow and her children retired to a little cottage that belonged to them, and Arthur, with his fine education and gentlemanly taste, was obliged to accept the post of daily tutor to the Willoughby boys, and to teach in the same house where he had once been master. I think this broke the mother's heart—she was a proud woman, and a Spaniard by birth—for she died about six months after their removal to Rose Cottage ; so the brother and sister live quite alone now. Come, have I gossiped sufficiently for your ladyship's benefit ? because if I have, I will go and play.'

And so the innocent woman-killer, by his own account, groped his way to the organ, and soon one of Beethoven's divine symphonies floated through the room ; Dudley and I followed him, and the rest of the evening was spent happily in music.

The next day was Sunday, and after breakfast Herwald asked me if I should mind a long walk to church ; on my replying that I should enjoy it greatly, he said—

'I am very glad of that, for I have a strong objection to have the

horses out on Sunday; not that they are much worked, but I like Williams to go to church with his wife and children, and enjoy his day of rest as much as I do; and then I can listen to the fourth commandment with a clear conscience, and not fancy there are harsh commentators in the servants' pew; and now put on your bonnet, Nellie, for we will take it leisurely this lovely morning.'

The walk was long but exceedingly pleasant, and I was quite sorry when we reached the church, and the minute hand of the belfry clock gave us no excuse for lingering in the shady churchyard. Many a kindly greeting did Herwald exchange on the way with man, woman, and child; and though the rough Lancastrians never doffed or touched their caps, as southern breeding would have taught, yet the 'good-mornings' were as heartily said, and the strong powerful faces lit up pleasantly at the sight of the young master; even the sturdy shepherds' dogs seemed to know him, and wagged their fag-ends of tails affectionately as he passed.

The church was nothing particular in point of architecture, and was chiefly remarkable for its numerous monumental tablets and two superb windows, the gift of Herwald's ancestors. In spite of the glorious sunshine without, all was sombre and shady within, with a dim religious light, and the roomy square pew into which Herwald inducted us, with its purple baize lining, struck me as resembling a good-sized sarcophagus and about as cheerful. High as it was, however, I saw Maud Rivers' tall figure pass into the pew opposite, rustling in silks and with a wreath of jasmine resting on her satin hair, and I was just thinking in my own mind what a pity it was that girls now-a-days wore flower-gardens on their heads instead of the decorous church-going straw bonnets of old times, when Herwald touched my arm, and said—

'That's Hubert Clive!' and raising my head, I saw a tall fair effeminate-looking man with heavy-lidded eyes and a proud weak mouth.

And this was Hubert Clive, Herwald's great friend. I felt bitterly disappointed; I remembered the minister's granite face, and Mr. Egerton's powerful head and benevolent countenance; and I felt I could never care for a clergyman who could look round on his congregation with those sleepy half-veiled eyes. Just then the sun emerged from a passing cloud, and a host of dazzling prismatic colours from the painted window tinged his robes and circled his fair hair with a glory of violet and crimson. Herwald whispered enthusiastically—

'Doesn't he look like the angel Gabriel, Nellie?' and, for all my dislike of talking in church, I could not help answering indignantly—

'Angel Gabriel, indeed, with those long well-trimmed whiskers.'

I thought Herwald would have burst out laughing.

Mr. Clive read the service in a singularly melodious but monotonous voice: his enunciation was perfect, every syllable audible from one end of the church to the other, and that without the slightest

effort ; but the want of variation in the tone, of power, of deep feeling even, were such, that I would have preferred the most faulty style, if it were only combined with earnestness of manner, to his.

Just such was the sermon. I thought of Mr. Egerton's harvest discourses and sighed. Here was a sermon faultless in composition, learned even, arguing great knowledge of the Scriptures, rich with quotations from the fathers, prolific of godly wisdom ; but oh how cold, delivered in that lifeless manner, in that measured tone ! Once only did it amount to eloquence, once while speaking of 'the rest that remaineth,' the eyes opened, looking bright, dark, and vivid, and the voice rose and waxed warm and loud, carrying us along with him into realms of beautiful thought ; till it broke off hastily in a way that was strange and abrupt, and with a low-spoken blessing, almost inaudible, the congregation was dismissed.

'What a charming discourse,' said Maud Rivers with her foot on the carriage-step, as we passed, 'what a superior man and scholar is our dear Mr. Clive !'

'Yes,' said Herwald, 'he is a wonderful fellow,' and we walked on.

'Well, what do you think of him, Nellie?' asked Herwald, as we turned into the road.

The tone was so enthusiastic that I could not bear to damp it ; I thought of the angel Gabriel and held my peace, hoping that Dudley would answer, but he was walking on ahead deeply pondering, perhaps, of 'the rest that remaineth.'

'Well, speak out, why do you hesitate?'

'Because I scarcely know how to answer you ; Mr. Clive's reading and sermon would have been beautiful, if they had not been so cold.'

'Cold,' cried Herwald eagerly, 'do you mean to say that you did not penetrate the warmth, the life, the fervid feeling underneath, so thinly veiled by what perhaps you term a too quiet delivery?'

'Too quiet!' I remonstrated, 'it was monotonous, lifeless.'

'You do not understand him perhaps ; people might judge so after once hearing him, who did not know the man, with his sensitive heart, his passionate love of all that is good and beautiful. It is because he holds himself in as it were by main force, lest he should lose himself ; did you not call the closing part eloquent, gloriously eloquent?'

'Yes, if it had all been like that I should not have complained, but just as we were becoming warmed and carried away, he breaks off short.'

'Of course that verifies my words, he is afraid of himself, of becoming too impassioned.' I thought there was no fear of that.

'But he is so effeminate, so——'

Then Herwald, impetuous always, lost his patience. 'Effeminate ! Hubert Clive effeminate ! why the man's whole life is one

great contradiction of that ; how little you know what you are saying, Nellie ; listen, I will tell you something that will contradict this opinion. Four years ago, a dreadful fever broke out in this place, not a common fever, but one so painful in its details, so deadly in its ravages, that even paid nurses were known to flee it, and the gentry panic stricken quitted their houses one by one. It was then that Hubert Clive showed of what metal he was ; just recovered from a distressing nervous malady, he took up his post as minister of the gospel, performing the rites of the church undauntedly to the sick and dying, and standing bare-headed at one grave after another. We had not fled with the rest, it had seemed to both of us cowardly to do so ; and I shall never forget Hubert's tired, jaded look, as day after day he came to his home for a brief rest or refreshment, and yet he had never seemed so happy before or since in all his unhappy life. Don't ask me why unhappy, Nellie, but believe me when I say, that the man's whole life has been one long martyrdom. Once when all in a house were dead, save one poor youth, Hubert nursed him like a brother, and for forty-eight hours never left his bedside. The lad's name was John Simmonds ; you might have seen him, a bright intelligent-looking fellow sitting in the front free seat ; I believe he is ready to worship Clive's shadow. I remember, Nellie, in that awful time of panic and distress, with the bells tolling all day long, how Hubert reminded me of Aaron, in that " he stood between the dead and the living," till the plague was stayed.'

Herwald's face as he said this looked positively beautiful, in its warm glowing expression, and touched and subdued I hastened to say—

'Perhaps, dear Herwald, I judged too hastily ; I shall think differently now ;' and Dudley said—

'The man's suppressed expression touched me greatly ; and I detected suffering and weariness in every word ; he is young, Herwald ?'

'Yes, only thirty ; he has been in orders six years.'

Dudley had a headache, so we did not go to church again in the evening, but spent it happily in the wild garden instead.

The next morning, as we were sitting at breakfast in the pretty chintz parlour, Herwald said—

'I have a plan for this morning. We will ride over to Holly-bush Farm ; I have several things to mention to Duncan, my bailiff, and I want you to see my latest improvements. Nellie shall ride Larkspur, she is gentle and warranted to carry a lady, and Dudley shall mount our black Marmion.'

'Good gracious, Herwald, I was never on a horse in my life.'

'Then it is time you were ; I'll be your master, and we will have you a first-rate equestrian in half a dozen lessons.'

'But, Herwald, I have no habit.'

For answer he rose and pulled the bell lustily.

'Morrison, tell Mrs. Arundel I want to speak to her.'

Mrs. Arundel appeared trim and complacent as usual.

'Mrs. Arundel, I want you to beg, borrow, or steal a riding-habit for Miss Mortimer's use while she is here ; where can you get one ?'

Mrs. Arundel was perhaps accustomed to these abrupt commissions from her young master, for she only folded her plump hands and pondered placidly.

'Miss Rivers, sir, has three or four all fresh and good, shall I beg the loan of one from her ?'

'By no means, Miss Rivers is the last person to whom I should wish to apply ; think of some one else, my good lady.'

'You would not care to go to the Tracys ?'

Herwald shook his head ;—'and Miss Kate Willoughby is such a slight small figure. Oh, I know, Patty Greenwood, farmer Dean's daughter, has just got a new blue one ; she rides a deal and well too I'm told, and as she happens to be visiting with an aunt at Liverpool, may be they'll give us the loan ; anyhow I'll step up to farmer Dean's and see.'

'Do so, Mrs. Arundel, and let Miss Mortimer have it by to-morrow ; don't go in the gig, have the carriage out, perhaps the little lady might take an airing with you.'

Mrs. Arundel curtsied and withdrew, and Herwald rubbed his hands joyously.

'What a woman that is for ideas ! She is invaluable to me, I can assure you ; but, Nellie, I am sorry we must leave you at home this lovely morning ; how shall you amuse yourself ?'

'Don't be sorry for me, I shall be thoroughly happy. I shall first give the picture gallery the careful inspection it deserves, and then take the snugger corner and the nicest book I can find ; but, Herwald, is the black Marmion you mentioned your own horse ?'

'No, my father's ; he is a noble beast, though a bit fiery, but I know Dudley can manage him ; my own is a real Arab, my beautiful mare, Fatima, the present queen of my affections, a peerless creature : wait, and see us mount, and I will introduce you to her.'

So I walked about the turfy lawn till they came out, and admired the beautiful foreigner, with her soft dumb eyes, and the white star on her glossy forehead ; saw Herwald vault on her without touching the stirrup, and stoop over and play with her chestnut mane lovingly ; and then Dudley mounted Marmion, and they laughingly lifted their hats and were down the avenue in a moment. Then I walked leisurely in, visited the blue nursery, and saw my little maiden equipped for her drive, and then entered the beautiful gallery lying so still in the sunshiny morning, and the next hour passed pleasantly enough.

I was just sitting in the bay window, when I heard quick heavy footsteps, the door was flung open, and Simpson and one of the grooms entered with a huge picture they were carefully carrying,

and following them was the tall man with the bronzed curly beard whom I recognized as Allan Duncan. On seeing me he paused with an embarrassed and somewhat disappointed air.

'I beg your pardon, Miss Mortimer, for intruding on your privacy, but I did not know you were in the gallery at all.'

'I was only resting here a moment, Allan; what are you doing with those pictures?'

'They are the foreign ones the old master bought,' said he, coming near and speaking low, 'and Mr. Herwald cannot summon up the heart to unpack them, and yet he wishes them hung. I know he will be relieved to see them on the walls in their right places, without having to make any effort about it.'

'I am sure he will,' it is a capital idea of yours, and very thoughtful. Which is the Guido?'

'This,' he said, pointing to the one he had carried; 'I would not trust it out of my hand; I know the exact place it is to fill; the difficulty is about the others. If you are not too much engaged, would you mind giving me your advice and taste?'

'Gladly, though I am no true connoisseur, and know little about hanging pictures.'

'As much as I do,' answered Allan, with a pleasant smile; and then we fell to work, inspecting, measuring distances, trying lights, viewing effects, sometimes in our zeal walking the gallery twice or thrice before we could settle the exact position; and so the morning passed happily and busily. Simpson had at last been dismissed to his duties, and the last picture hung and admired; Allan had disappeared to fetch a leather to rub up a frame that looked rusty, and I was kneeling on the floor to examine the figures of a beautiful bas-relief, when two hands suddenly placed me on my feet, and turning round, I saw Herwald's merry face.

'You back?' I exclaimed, 'oh, how swiftly the time has flown!'

'Yes, we are back, and hungry as hunters; luncheon is ready, so come along, fair lady.'

But I would not let him leave the gallery so, but led him to the Guido. He started, flushed, and then turned pale, and when I had shown him the others he said in a touched voice—

'You need not tell me whose work this is, it is just like the dear old fellow's thought.'

At that moment Allan himself re-entered, and then was about to withdraw hastily, when Herwald called him back.

'Allan, who has injured my Guido? look at this crack.'

Allan came forward looking guilty and perfectly speechless; then after examining it—

'That was done when you bought it at Florence, sir.'

'I know it was;' then taking him by the shoulders and shaking him, 'how dare you, you great thoughtful kind-hearted giant, how dare you spoil your young master so, and make him feel so unpleasantly grateful? what do you do it for, Allan?' and the tears

positively stood in his bright eyes. Allan stroked his bronze beard with a trembling hand and only answered—

‘Are they properly hung, sir?’

‘I don’t know, and I don’t care.’

‘Miss Mortimer assisted me, sir, with her taste and advice.’

‘You are a couple of bricks,’ was the answer, as he raced off to his own room quite overcome, I believe, and Allan followed him, while I went down-stairs and found Dudley regarding a cold haunch with hungry eyes.

‘What were you doing? where’s Herwald?’

‘He will be down in a minute,’ and down he presently came, in high spirits and full of fun. After lunch we went out to the trout stream in the wild garden, the young men with their fishing-tackle; but Herwald’s rod was soon thrown aside, and he came and lay on the grass slope at my side and read *Childe Harold* instead. The scene was peaceful and beautiful; a shimmer and sparkle of sunshine lay on the water, but where Dudley angled was cool shadow, for a weeping-willow hung over the stream till it dipped its feathery branches in it, and farther on was a group of larch and silvery birch. Beyond the invisible fence that bounded the garden were meadows lying emerald-green in the sun, dotted over with sheep and oxen, and beyond, like a silver thread, the Calder flowed between its grassy banks. The air was heavy with perfume of honeysuckles and clematis; and as I listened to Herwald’s pleasant sonorous voice, I forgot all about the dreaded dinner-party at the Cedars, till Herwald, after looking at his watch, closed his book and said, ‘Half-past five, we had better go in and dress.’

‘Miss Rivers said we were to be there at six.’

‘Indeed, why so? when they never dine till seven; I confess I do not care for lounging in drawing-rooms for an hour before dinner, even for the pleasure of talking to Miss Rivers.’ So we walked back to the house; and I went up to my cosy room to dress with a heavy heart: why must we go out to that horrid dinner, when we were so happy and comfortable? As I put on the thin crape dress with its modest white ruffles, and a little breast-knot of Cape jessamine and fern leaves that Herwald had sent me up from the conservatory, I wondered what Miss Rivers would think of my simple toilet. Then I took out my mother’s India shawl, smelling so sweetly of *atta* of rose, and hung it on my arm, and then there came a tap at my door, and opening it, there stood Herwald in full evening costume, diamond studs and all, with a tiny morocco case in his hands.

‘How nice you look, my little lady. Ah, I remember that shawl, Nellie, and its faint sweet odour; look here, I want you to accept this little trifle, and wear it for the sake of your adopted brother Herwald;’ and with his daintily-gloved hands he fastened something into my dress.

I ran to the glass ; it was an exquisite pearl brooch, with one single pearl of great size and beauty forming the pendant.

'Herwald,' I remonstrated, 'I cannot accept this, it is costly in the extreme, a perfect gem, far too good for me ; please take it back.'

'If it were not costly I should not have offered it to you, I don't give rubbish,' said the young aristocrat ; 'and as to taking it back, is that the way you accept the only gift I have ever made you?'

'But how shall I thank you ? you are so very, very kind,' and I held out my hand.

'By always thinking of me when you wear it ;' then, as we went downstairs, 'My mother wore it on her wedding-day. Now I am sure you will value it more.'

Herwald and Dudley were in high spirits as they went along, and I could not help being infected with their gaiety, and Herwald was in the middle of an anecdote when the carriage drove through the lodge gate, and in another minute stopped at the hall door.

The powdered-haired footman (I was glad Herwald did not have his servants so disfigured) wanted to hand me over to a jaunty-looking French maid, but Herwald said, 'No need,' and with his own hands relieved me of my shawl, giving me at the same time a sweet reassuring smile ; and offering me his arm, took me in.

There, at the end of a long lofty room, sat Miss Rivers on her couch of state, who welcomed me graciously, and Herwald and Dudley warmly.

She looked really well in her black lace and splendid ruby ornaments, but I should have thought it better taste to have worn a quieter dress, especially as no one was to meet us.

'What makes you so late, or rather punctual to the minute ? I said come at six.'

'Pardon me, but I could not disturb this infatuated angler,' said Herwald, coolly, 'it would have been cruelty, I assure you, Miss Rivers ;' and then Mr. Rivers entered, and after a few words of polite greeting took me in to dinner.

Miss Rivers followed with the two gentlemen, walking between them in a regal manner, and in the same way she monopolized them both throughout the whole meal, dividing her words and smiles between the twain, though I knew where the blue gray eyes looked most often.

For myself, but for Mr. Rivers' kindly attentions I should have been very dull ; but he started some interesting topics of conversation in which I could readily join, and though we did not find as much to amuse us as they seemed to at the other end of the table, I was not ill-amused. Now and then Herwald or Dudley addressed me by name and said some pleasant thing across the table, but Miss Rivers never followed up their remarks, and if some general subject were started, let it drop to the ground ; which was discourteous in so young a hostess. The first time she really

turned to me of her own accord was, when she gave the signal for rising ; Herwald opened the door, and as I passed gave me a pitying smile.

When we reached the drawing-room, though there was no fire, Maud Rivers marched up to the hearth-rug as was her usual custom, and I meekly followed her. Standing there she turned her haughty eyes on me, and quietly looked me over ; and I am certain not a single point, good or bad, escaped her scrutiny—hair, eyes, hands, all passed under review ; then she drew up her tall figure to its utmost height, gave a swift survey of herself in the opposite glass, made a mental comparison disparaging to me, and then said coldly—

‘ Won’t you sit down, Miss Mortimer ? ’ and took the corner seat of the couch opposite to the ottoman to which she had waved me, and paused herself some time in silence.

‘ Do you paint ? ’ she said, at length, somewhat abruptly.

‘ Not the least, Miss Rivers, but I hear you do.’

She put the question aside as not worthy of comment.

‘ Do you play harp or piano ? ’

‘ The latter a little, but I am no musician.’

‘ Do you sing then ? ’

‘ My voice has never been properly trained, I leave all the accomplishments to my sister ; she both draws and plays beautifully.’

‘ Then I suppose you read a great deal ? ’

‘ Alas ! I rarely open a book ; a leisure hour is a rare treat to me.’

‘ Why what on earth can you find to do ? ’ was Miss Rivers’ next question, arching her eyebrows inquisitively.

‘ We are a large family,’ I said, ‘ and I am the oldest and the housekeeper, and I have many children for whom to work.’

Miss Rivers smiled disdainfully, and evidently looked at me in the light of an inferior person.

‘ You seem to be very friendly with Mr. Delorme.’

I felt her cold eyes on me, and answered hotly—

‘ Of course, Herwald is my adopted brother.’

‘ Ah,’ she replied swiftly and with marked emphasis, ‘ ah, I dare say you have an elder-sisterly feeling towards him ? ’

I was silent, attributing this idea to my staid demeanour.

‘ Why don’t you advise him,’ she continued, ‘ to go into parliament ? he has great abilities ? ’

‘ True, but his health will not bear it ; his doctors have recommended rest and a quiet life for some years to come.’

‘ Oh, that is nonsense,’ she said, sharply, ‘ there is nothing ails him but his loneliness and morbid feelings, I saw it abroad ; you who are his friends should recommend him to settle, marry, enter into public life, take his position in the county in fact.’

Oh, I thought to myself, that is what you are aiming at, but I would rather see him in his grave, than you his wife, Maud Rivers. I answered—

'There is plenty of time for that. I don't fancy Herwald is a marrying man,' and then turned the subject; and so with long lapses of silence, and ill-concealed groans on Miss Rivers' part, another half-hour lagged on. It was a relief when the tea equipage was brought in, and Miss Rivers could bustle among the tea-cups, and scold the footman for spilling the water out of the urn.

'Tell papa tea is ready, Stephen,' and as the door closed again, she said, 'I can't think what detains them so long; papa promised me not to sit over his wine and talk politics to-night,' but as the door opened at that moment, the slight frown passed away, and Miss Rivers was again all smiles and welcome. Dudley walked up to me.

'Well, mouse, how are you getting on?'

'I am very tired,' I said, stifling a yawn again with difficulty.

'Tired, oh we've had a jolly long talk; Mr. Rivers is a capital fellow, is he not?' to Herwald, who had joined us, 'a regular old country gentleman, clear-headed and sensible.'

'Yes, he is the right man in the right place. Tired, Nellie?'

'Yes, rather,' I observed again wearily.

'Then you want to go home, you ungrateful girl?'

'Not before you are ready, pray.'

'Well, we must endure an hour's music first, or Miss Maud will never forgive me;' and then he walked off to the tea-table, where he remained, but Dudley brought his cup and stood by my side.

'Why have I never been invited into the studio?' said Herwald, in an injured tone; 'out of revenge because we outbid your father in the Guido?'

Miss Rivers laughed and looked flattered.

'Oh no, my only reason is that I want you to see my picture completed, and to give me a candid criticism.'

'Nearly finished, is it, Maud?'

'Yes, papa, I have only a few days' work.'

'What is the subject, may I ask?'

'Dido's funeral pile.'

'On my honour, Miss Rivers, you are bold to select such a subject; it will want delicate handling.'

'I am delighted it is nearly finished,' observed her father, 'for Maud is putting all her colour into the picture, and I never plan a ride, drive, or visit, but it is "Please, papa, I must finish this figure, or put in this piece of drapery."''

'Miss Rivers was very good then to spare me a few hours on Saturday,' said Herwald quietly; she coloured.

'Papa exaggerates dreadfully; shall we have some music now?'—and sitting down to her harp she made Herwald accompany her on the piano. The effect was very good, Maud Rivers showed herself to be an accomplished harpist, and when they had played two or three pieces, her father begged for a vocal duet, and they sang

some Italian and German songs together. Herwald had an agreeable tenor, and though Miss Rivers' voice was thin and inferior in quality, she made up for it by the excellence of her training.

When they had finished, Herwald of his own accord sat down and sang a Spanish canzonette so sweetly and melodiously, that I could not help whispering as he rose—

'You should sing that serenade to the lady you deign to woo; it would certainly win her.'

He laughed and answered mischievously, but I dared not pursue the joke, for Miss Rivers was watching us closely.

'Don't you sing, Miss Mortimer?' she observed with an attempt at graciousness.

'Like a nightingale,' answered Herwald, gaily; 'I have a vivid remembrance of Bonnie Dundee, and Auld Robin Gray; but you must excuse her to-night—(how kind of him to shield me so), and now, my fair hostess, "the way is long, the night is cold," though, by-the-bye, "the minstrel is not infirm and old," and thanking you for your kind entertainment, you must permit myself and friends to withdraw.'

'Nonsense; it is only eleven.'

'Did I say it was twelve? you have no basis for your argument; I have quick ears, and I know Zephyr and Vixen are stamping their hoofs this moment at your gate.'

'You are so ridiculously careful of your horses; they shall be put up if you like.'

'Thank you;' replied Herwald, quietly taking her hand, 'you are very kind, but we cannot be late to-night.'

I suppose Miss Rivers knew of old that it was useless to dispute Herwald's will, for she said nothing, but bade us good-bye, scarcely acknowledging my parting thanks, and then to my great relief the carriage door was shut upon us, and the horses went off at full speed. Herwald was silent all the way home; but as we drove up the avenue, he said—

'We are sure to find a fire somewhere; I declare it feels quite chilly to-night; is there a fire, Simpson?'

'Yes, sir,' opening the door of the chintz parlour. How cosy it looked with its bright blaze and soft wax-lights! Herwald took off my shawl, planted me into the easy-chair, holding me a moment to look into my face, and say, 'You poor little tired white lady;' and took a low stool at my side.

'How delicious and homelike!' I said, as I leant back and closed my eyes.

'You have been wretched this evening, Nellie; you have not enjoyed yourself a bit; I am so vexed!'

I made answer wearily, that it was my own fault.

'Nay, I saw how it was,'—then abruptly, 'well, what do you think of Maud Rivers?'

'I think her rather handsome,' I replied, briefly.

'Rather handsome. What a term to apply to Maud's grand statuesque face !'

'Very, then, though it is not my style ; I like more colouring, life, expression than her features have : I dare say you may call it beautiful.'

'Certainly, I do ; it is beautiful,' he answered, gravely ; 'with a rare and peculiar beauty ; and as I admire all beauty in whatever shape, style, degree, I must admire her.'

'I tell you what,' said Dudley, 'she would make a splendid model for Helen of Troy, with a diadem and veil ; she would make an artist's fortune. I never saw such a clear chiselled face, and such strange colourless hair, or rather shadowless, as Nellie says ; I say, Herwald, would you mind my going to the library for a quarter of an hour ? I quite forgot to answer a question Bruce asked me relative to business, and I shall not be up for the early morning post.'

'All right, Nellie will keep me company till you come back.'

I made no objection, and Dudley closed the door. Herwald sat looking into the fire some time with his chin on his hand ; at last he said quite quietly and coolly—

'Nellie, don't you think Maud Rivers would make a capital mistress for Hurst-hall ?'

I nearly sprang off my seat.

'Maud Rivers ! Herwald, you are jesting.'

'No, I am not,' he answered, with a peculiar smile, 'why do you look so surprised ? she is very beautiful.'

'So is a marble statue, but I never thought you could love such cold passionless beauty, and for its own sake too.'

'Nay, there you are unfair ; Miss Rivers has many noble qualities besides ; she is an accomplished artist, nay, more, an aspiring one ; a splendid musician, and has four or five languages at her fingers' ends, and has no mean idea of Euclid, and one or two of the "ologies ;" indeed her accomplishments are numberless.'

I laughed disdainfully.

'What a list of virtues for a model wife !'

He did not heed the interruption, but went on.

'She moves with the grace of an empress, and would rule right royally, like one.'

'I believe you,' I groaned.

'She has a high spirit, generous impulses, good moral character ; what more would you have ?'

'Much more, oh much more for your wife, dear Herwald !'

'And then——' he hesitated, 'I know I have but to hold up my finger, and she would have me ;' and Herwald as he uttered these audacious words coloured high.

'More shame to her, that she should let you see that unsought ; and not only you, but every chance observer, and yet you have never wooed her ?'

He evaded the question.

'Many men richer and cleverer than myself would count themselves happy to have won her smiles even unsought; she is a noble-looking woman, and I am very lonely, Nellie; very, very lonely in my great old hall.'

The admission so unhappy in its truth touched me to the heart.

'Poor boy!'

'And she likes me!'

I cried out passionately, 'You shall not have her, Herwald; the idea is monstrous, absurd! what, link your heart, with its chivalrous generosity, its warm young feelings, its scrupulous sense of honour, to that girl of the world with her cold heart? what would become of you, when you had wearied of her imperial beauty and her haughty sway? you do not love her.'

'No, I do not, but still——'

'I would rather see you in your grave than the husband of Maud Rivers,' I said, repeating my thought once again this evening.

'Why, Nellie, my little sister, what is it to you?' he said, stroking my hand.

'Yes, call me that, I like it; you know you are almost as dear to me as Bruce himself; let me help you, and give you sometimes a sister's counsel as well as a sister's sympathy.'

For answer he pressed my hand to his lips.

'Dear Nell, noble Nell, what a treasure you are, what a treasure you will be! alas, how one's hopes fall to the ground mercilessly like withered leaves!'

And as he said this, all at once I felt and understood that Herwald had had some dim idea in asking me to Hurst-hall, that I might remain as its mistress, and that this hope had been frustrated on the first evening, when Keith's name was mentioned; but that as it was scarcely developed, it had been easily destroyed; if it had not been so, he must have surely found out in a few days how little we were suited for each other. Besides, O Herwald, in spite of your noble nature, your generous affections, your princely halls, there is one whose little finger is dearer to me than them all, dear brother Herwald!

When next he spoke I quite started.

'Consider this all unsaid: you are right, I do not care for Maud Rivers; I admire her certainly, but I detest her pride, haughtiness, and egotism, and she treated you shamefully to-night, my poor Nellie! No, I would not marry her if the Indies were her dowry; I was only teasing you and tempting you to tell me your thoughts—heigho! I suppose I must wait a little longer for what I want; perhaps, after all, till Rill has grown up.'

Here Dudley re-entered, and Herwald dismissed me to borrow colour from my rosy room; and as he said this the old merry smile came back to his lips.

CHAPTER XII.

'So innocent, arch, so cunning, simple,
From beneath her gathered wimple
Glancing with black beaded eyes.'—*Tennyson.*

THE next morning Herwald said, 'We must do something to-day to efface the remembrance of that unfortunate visit of yesterday; and I cannot think of anything better than going to take tea at the Vaughans'. I am sure you will like them, and I can answer for their welcome; so we will dine at luncheon-time, and order the carriage at four o'clock, for it is three-quarters of an hour's drive to Rose Cottage, if not more.'

Dudley was so charmed with the idea, that I think he must have heard more of Arthur Vaughan than I had, and as Herwald seemed to look upon the excursion in the light of a treat, I said nothing, though I would rather have enjoyed a long quiet day at home.

Soon after I went up to prepare for my ride. Patty Greenwood's habit was well made and fitted me very tolerably, and suited well the black Spanish hat and feathers that Louie had lent me on my visit to the North. As I came down the staircase the young men were waiting for me in the hall beneath, and on seeing me, both began to clap their hands, and cry—

'Bravo, very well got up,' till I felt quite hot, and feared to get entangled in the long narrow train to which I was so unaccustomed.

'What a formidable Amazon you look, Nellie; I wish Rotten Row were nearer.'

Upon which I told them they were very rude, and asked them how I was to mount.

'This way,' laughed Herwald, lifting me up bodily, and placing me on the saddle; 'now for the first lesson on the curb and snaffle.'

I listened, mystified, as Herwald gathered up the reins and showed me how to hold them, and told me their respective use; and then mounting his spirited Arab, and charging me not to be frightened, I presently found something moving under me, and myself catching at the pommel of my saddle; but Herwald kept his hand on my reins, and laughed at and encouraged me alternately, till, finding I did not fall off as I expected, I presently gathered up courage, and in another quarter of an hour was cantering between the two, with a delicious sense of novelty and freedom. That canter became almost a gallop, when we reached the moor, and the horses snuffed the breezy air. Herwald with difficulty held in his impetuous Arab, and Marmion so snorted and strained at the curb, that Dudley was obliged to give him his head, and put a mile of distance between us.

'Capital,' cried Herwald, as we walked our horses slowly up the

avenue, 'I shall make you a first-rate horsewoman in half-a-dozen lessons. What a colour you have !'

The ride had certainly excited and done me good, though I was woefully stiff and tired and glad to take to a couch after dinner, while they played billiards ; and I was in the middle of a most refreshing nap, when they roused me with the information that I had only twenty minutes to dress in ; for the carriage was already coming round.

We were just leaving the lodge gates, when Maud Rivers cantered by on her gray mare followed by a groom ; she reined in her horse to inquire where we were bound to.

'Rose Cottage.'

A slight frown knitted her broad forehead, and then she waved her hand and galloped off. Herwald laughed saucily.

'She and Miss Milly are old enemies ; look, there is the Grange, Arthur and Milly's old home.'

Through the trees we caught sight of the heavy stacks of chimneys, and the afternoon sun streaming redly on many a mulioned window and gabled end.

'It seems a grand old place,' I said, and then he whispered me to look at Sophy, the doctor's pretty niece, smiling up at him under her broad hat, as she drove past in her lover's gig. Zephyr and Vixen pranced along so proudly and so swiftly, that we reached our destination long before the time Herwald had specified.

'There is Rose Cottage,' he said, eagerly, 'and there I do believe is Arthur.'

It was a little one-storied cottage standing by itself on the edge of the moor, in a sheltered hollow ; its front entirely covered by a beautiful Virginian creeper just donning its autumn livery of brown and crimson ; with a small garden full of bright-coloured flowers, and a trellis-work porch with a passion-flower climbing over it. Nailing up the creeper was a young man without his coat, who was turning his back to us, and so fully occupied with his work and the song he was whistling, that he never heard the carriage stop, till Herwald shouted out, 'Arthur, Arthur,' when he looked round, caught sight of his friend, and ran quickly to the gate.

'Well, old Arthur.'

'That's a good fellow,' were hastily exchanged as they grasped hands, and then without a bit of shame at his shirt-sleeves and soiled hands, he warmly responded to Herwald's introduction to his friends, and then assisted us out. As he led us up the pebble-paved path, I felt terribly disappointed in Arthur Vaughan ; he might be good, he might be clever, he was a gentleman, but he was the plainest man I had ever seen. He had a sickly-looking face, weak eyes, sand-coloured hair, and spectacles ; he might have been any age from twenty to thirty-five, and had a stooping figure, and a slight halt when he walked, which made him seem awkward at first sight. The only thing that struck me in his favour as we

stood talking in the porch were his beautifully shaped hands, a pleasant voice, and singularly sweet smile.

'How is Miss Milly?' asked Herwald at last.

'Oh, I forgot her for the moment; she will be so delighted to see you. Milly, Milly,' he cried, darting into the dark passage, 'Milly, where are you?'

A distant chirping voice replied, and there came tripping out the prettiest little dark lady, such a dainty little creature, with large soft eyes, and glossy black hair knotted behind her small ears; and rustling in the crispest of muslin.

'Petite, mignonne, and spirituelle,' I said to myself, and watched Herwald to see if this were drawn from the life. He was holding out both his hands and clasping hers warmly.

'I need not ask you how you are, Miss Milly, for you look better and brighter even than when I last saw you, not a bit grown in my three years' absence.'

'No,' she said, softly, 'I am but a little creature; are those your friends, Mr. Delorme?' looking at me.

'Yes, guess who they are.'

'Oh I know,' said Milly, cordially taking my hand, 'this is Miss Nellie Mortimer, from Sunnyside, and this is Mr. Dudley,' glancing up with shy bright eyes to meet Dudley's smile.

'Is it possible you recognize them from my description?' asked Herwald eagerly.

'No, I have not looked at them enough for that,' said the little lady; 'I guessed it from your pleased face; I am so glad you have met your dear old friends again, very, very glad.'

'That speech is like you, Milly; but now tell me, have you expected me to come and see you before this? I have been at home a whole month.'

'No; I knew from your letter to Arthur that you were very busy, and we have been away; so if you had called before, you would have found Rose Cottage quite empty.'

'I am glad I did not come then; where have you been?'

'It was holiday time you know, and we went to a cousin's at Oxford; the Willoughby boys were with their grandmother at Chepstow; if they had gone on the Continent, as they planned, Arthur was to have accompanied them.'

'Yes, I was glad to be spared these two months of boredom; it is slow work going over old places one has visited in happier times, and Milly and I have had a pleasant three weeks' trip.'

'Is your cousin going to do anything for you?'

'He is doing all I want him to, looking out for an appointment that will suit me, and canvassing a few big wigs, but nothing has come of it yet.'

'I am sorry for it Arthur;' and then Milly asked me to come in and take off my bonnet.

I followed her through the dark passage and up the narrow

winding staircase, and then into a little bowery room, looking so fresh and clean with green paper and white dimity hangings. It reminded me of the description of Lucy Graham's room at Pear-tree Farm, and I stole to the lattice window, half expecting to see 'the apple orchard, and the pool by the alder trees, where the black cattle came to quench their thirst,' but only saw a narrow lawn with a mulberry tree in the middle, a green door leading to a few out-houses and fields, and beyond and around, the open moor.

It was pleasant to see Milly waiting upon me, standing on tiptoe to reach my bonnet, smoothing my collar, folding my shawl, and then softly lay her hand on my crape sleeves, and look at me with her tender eyes full of pity, till I quite longed to kiss the little dark loveable face.

'It is very sad, but I too have lost my mamma, Miss Nellie; may I call you Miss Nellie?'

'Call me Nellie, pray, I shall like it much better,' I said softly, with a feeling of quick appreciative friendship for the little creature.

'May I? then I will; oh, you cannot think what a grand beautiful mamma she was, and so clever; she knew, oh, ever so many languages, and played the guitar, and sang divinely; she has taught me some of her canzonettes, but my pretty rose-wood piano is sold, so I can't sing them. She came from Spain, did mamma, and brought so many beautiful things with her; real lace mantillas and inlaid fans, but she liked England best, because it was papa's country; and she loved him so that she never married again, though she had many offers.'

'That was for the sake of her children.'

'Oh no, it was out of love for papa; though she was such a young widow, she never wore anything but black afterwards; when she went out black velvet and diamonds.'

'Poor mamma, it broke her heart being turned out of her old home; she could not bear the Cottage, she said she could not breathe in it; the walls and ceilings seemed as if they were falling in on her, and she was always talking of going to her cousin's chateau at Valencia, only she was too ill for the journey. Arthur being tutor to the Willoughby boys vexed her too very much, for she was proud, they say all Spaniards are; but, poor fellow, he never complained, though he had many disappointments and had to work so hard. Mamma used to lie and fan herself all day long on the couch in the little parlour, downstairs, and look so ill and sad—oh, those were miserable days,' finished Milly with a little shrug.

'You are happy now?'

'Oh, so happy,' she said, with a sparkle in her eye; 'happier than I have ever been in my life, at least since we have learnt to bear her loss, but at first it was very bad. I did not care for the Grange as much as Arthur did; it was grand, of course, but so dull. I used to have Italian, and music, and singing masters, and had to work so hard, and then I never rode, except when Arthur was at

home, but always drove out with my *gouvernante* or mamma, and took long dull walks, and in the evening mamma used to have me up in her boudoir, which was so hot and faint with musk and *atta* of rose, and made me read to her stupid Spanish romances, in order to improve my accent. Oh, I am twice as happy now, living in my free busy life, making the bread, churning the butter, feeding my chickens, and stitching Arthur's wristbands ; it is like play keeping house for him, and he is such a dear ugly old darling. What do you think, Nellie, is he not ugly ?'

I politely avoided the question—

'He is not at all like you.'

'No, I am mamma on a miniature scale ; he is like poor papa, who was not at all handsome ; but he looks good, does he not ?'—and tripping to the glass, Milly patted down her hair, rearranged her neck-ribbon, and taking a pair of sparkling ear-rings from an Indian casket on the toilet-table, put them on.

'Do you like these, Nellie ?'

'They are pretty, but I like you better without.'

'Do you ?' she said, shaking her drops till they sparkled again ; 'well, perhaps they don't suit my old dress,' and she took them off.

'These are the only ornaments I have left, except a topaz cross, and a chain, and locket with papa's hair in it ; all mamma's jewels were sold : come, what a time I have been keeping you,' and she ran down, and I followed her.

'Will you walk into my parlour, said the spider to the fly ; it is the prettiest little parlour that ever you did spy,' and with graceful fun she put me into an easy-chair, and then began tying on a large white muslin apron.

'My little maid is out, Nellie, so don't be shocked if you see me come in with the tea-tray.'

'May I help you ?' I exclaimed.

'No, you just sit there and amuse yourself, I insist on it ;' and with a little wilful gesture she ran out of the room.

I looked round at the parlour, which was simply but prettily furnished, and had an air of refinement about it. There were some water-colour sketches on the walls, signed M.V. by Milly's tasteful fingers ; delicate muslin curtains, a canary in a gilt cage, a hanging-basket with some creeping plant, and a maiden-hair fern in the centre-table, and a vase of cut flowers on the mantel-shelf. There were several mementos of past grandeur, a mother-of-pearl work-table, a satin-lined basket, and some handsomely-bound books on the side-cupboards. I was examining one, Arthur Vaughan's school-prize, when Milly reëntered with the tea-tray ; and I could not help admiring the costly China cups and saucers ; Milly looked delighted.

'Yes, they were mamma's, but this great common tea-pot does not suit them ; we want our silver service.'

I took up the delicate little violet and gold cup, to examine it more closely.

'Bridget broke one of them, carrying out the tray one day; I had a good cry over it—for I love these old tea-cups;' and then she went and came tripping backwards and forwards with one thing after another, till she set out the prettiest little tea-table imaginable. A crusty new loaf, butter with the globules of wet still clinging to its firm creamy surface; new-laid eggs in a moss nest, purple mulberries nestling in their leaves, brown Windsor pears, honey in the comb, and honey out of it, and freshly baked biscuits looking temptingly crisp.

'If I had known you were coming, we would have had a syllabub; Herwald is so fond of syllabub; and oh, I have not a piece of the Dundee seed-cake left; I must get him some cranberry jam instead;' and she went jingling out with a great bunch of keys. When she returned, Arthur popped his head in at the window.

'Milly.'

'Yes, Arty dear?'

'Put out another tea-cup, Mr. Clive has stepped in.'

Milly coloured a little as she bustled about again; and then clapped her hands as signal for the gentlemen to come in. Oh, how the four men filled up the tiny room, and what a squeeze and commotion there was till all was settled. Milly received Mr. Clive with the shy grace with which she had welcomed Dudley, and gave him the seat of honour at the tea-tray, Herwald supporting her on the other side, while Arthur took care of Dudley and me.

And what a merry little tea-table it was; though Milly was surrounded by gentlemen paying her attention, and sometimes all at once, she found time to ask me pleasant questions; 'had I enough cream?' 'did I like honey?' and sending down one dainty after another for me to taste; and as for Arthur, his kind voice and easy conversation won my heart before half an hour was passed.

I was surprised to see Mr. Clive's face look so worn when seen close, even his smiles were rare and anxious; but the slight hauteur he had manifested at the first moment of introduction, vanished and gave place to a high-bred ease of manner and agreeable though quiet conversation. He seemed to be on intimate terms with Herwald, his face brightened at a word from him, and his tone to Milly was gentle and chivalrous in the extreme; his haughty head seemed to incline instantly at her slightest word, as she sat there the most winsome and debonnaire little mistress in the world. But what pleased me most was the absence of all false shame, the natural way in which Arthur and Milly entertained their friends in the poor cottage; no reference made to past grandeur after Milly's girlish talk upstairs, no apologies for scant room and small allowance of tea-spoons. When Milly wanted her tea-pot refilled Arthur went laughing to the kitchen to replenish it, and on the second time Herwald insisted on doing the same.

'Nonsense,' he said, on Milly's protesting, with a heightened colour, that there was no need; 'as if I did not know the kitchen and the great black kettle by this time,' and he vanished, gingerly holding the teapot as if it were alive. Presently from the distance sounded a most fearful feline squall; Milly turned pale and wrung her hands, exclaiming—

'Poor pussy, my poor Minnie, he's certainly killed her,' and ran out of the room.

Then followed many endearing epithets on Milly's part, and most coaxing entreaties on Herwald's to pussy to do something or go somewhere, and just as Arthur with a smiling apology was going after them, they re-appeared, Herwald in a state of suppressed laughter, and Milly half crying.

'What on earth has happened?'

Herwald shook his head as he deposited the unlucky tea-pot and kindly said—

'Oh Arthur, poor pussy, he's spilt a lot of scalding water over her tail, and she's gone up the scullery chimney, and we can't get her down.'

There was a perfect shout of laughter, in which the culprit joined; even Mr. Clive, to whom she looked for sympathy, smiled gravely.

'Never mind, Milly,' said her brother, 'she'll be all right directly. I dare say it is as much the sight of a strange man as her burns, that drove her up the chimney; leave her alone and she'll be sure to come down directly.'

So peace was restored, but the little mistress's fun was subdued, till on Arthur's proposal to go into the back garden, which was only to be reached by our passing through the kitchen, she found to her joy poor Minnie sitting on the hearth and licking her injured tail in comparative tranquillity.

Milly and I sat on the low bench under the mulberry-tree, Mr. Clive lying on the grass at our feet; the other three walking to and fro on the narrow lawn in cheerful talk. Mr. Clive began telling us of a sad case he had just been to see, in which he was interested, and Milly asked him after one or two others that had come under his notice lately, and with the details of which he had made her acquainted. He answered her, and then remarked sadly—

'These things are cruel and heartless, as you say, but it is a hard and cruel world, and full of very sorrowful things; one meets with such every day.'

'Nay, Mr. Clive, you shall not say that,' said Milly, 'it is a beautiful world, there is trouble in it of course, but there is happiness enough to counterbalance it. You are affected by what you have seen to-day, or you would not speak so; who can say life is bitter and hard and unlovely on such an evening as this, looking up at that glorious setting sun, and this blue sky, smiling over our heads? Oh, Mr. Clive,' cried earnest Milly, 'and you a clergyman too.'

'Yes,' he sighed, 'and I a clergyman; but we look on different sides of the same picture, you and I; not every one has your rose-coloured spectacles, Miss Milly, more's the pity, and your bright lot has been so sheltered, thank Heaven.'

She stopped him gravely, and with a little dignity.

'I think, Mr. Clive, you must own that trouble is not unknown to me. Do you think it is nothing,' she continued, the tears gathering to her soft black eyes, 'to lose a home such as ours—nothing to exchange wealth for poverty, luxury and ease for work and comparative privation?—Do you think it is not a trouble for me, to see Arthur's bright prospects destroyed, and him bearing daily drudgery so patiently—nothing to lose our mother, and to be alone and orphans in the world—is this nothing?' and her little plump brown hands worked indignantly.

The clergyman's half-veiled eyes rested on her face as she spoke, with a look of pity.

'You have mistaken me; far be it from me to say your life has been free from trouble. This discipline which is to fit you for a higher and better existence has indeed been nobly borne; we know,' and his voice became low and liquid as he spoke,—'that no chastening seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; yours has doubtless appeared so to you, and it is not for me to invite comparison with other lots harder still; but oh, Miss Milly, it was not of trouble such as this which I spoke, when I called life cruel and bitter; things such as these bring no sting with them: no indeed, thank God, this is not the canker-worm that is life-destroying; believe me, there are those who have gone through life, bearing such strange and hidden scars, such thorn-laden crosses, such worn and suffering hearts, that it is a mystery and temptation of doubt to know why Heaven permits such lingering torture and yet suffers them to live. Oh, Miss Milly, there are worse martyrdoms than the visible cross, or the wild beasts of Ephesus, than the faggot and the stake of old times; there is that which destroys, yet will not kill, which saps life of joy, of comfort, of peace even; and when the veil is withdrawn from all human hearts, these will be acknowledged as the true martyrs, who have borne the burden and heat of the day.'

Through the thin blue-veined hand his eyes looked wearily up to the sky as if they would pierce its very depths, and his lips moved slightly as if in prayer.

'Mr. Clive,' said Milly in a pained tone, 'do not talk so; it grieves me to hear you, you cannot have known such suffering as this?'

'Pardon me, Miss Vaughan, I was not speaking of personalities.'

'Oh! forgive me,' she said, looking at him so imploringly that his momentary hauteur vanished, 'something in your voice was so sad that I feared you were speaking of yourself; but of course in your ministerial capacity you must have a large experience of hearts and human life.'

He did not answer her, but lay for awhile with shaded eyes, till suddenly and abruptly, as I thought, he turned to me.

'Miss Mortimer, you think a great deal, your face shows it; do you imagine that there is balm to be found for wounds such as I have been describing?'

The wan weary face evoked my sympathy.

'Can you ask, since the sting was taken away from death? Has not everything its appointed cure?'

'No,' he said, 'there is no real cure for remorse.'

'Because there is no such thing with the Christian, for with him, remorse merges into repentance, and repentance brings its never-failing consolation.'

'But must not man pay the penalty of his short-sighted weakness?'

'I suppose so, to a certain extent, but you know the old saying, "the wind is tempered to the shorn lamb;" and even to these gusts and storms of human passion there shall come a "peace, be still."'

A sweet smile broke over his face, and then he looked at Milly; a look so sad, so yearning, so tender, that she must have read it, for a conscious colour reddened over face and neck, and rising, she said—

'We are becoming sad, talking like this, so I shall show Nellie my pretty white cow to raise her spirits.'

We went together, but as she unlocked the little green door, Mr. Clive was at our side again.

'The sight is no novelty to you,' said Milly, playfully.

'Is that a pretext for ridding yourself of my company? I am very fond of visiting your pretty white Cherry.'

'Mr. Delorme sent her to us,' said Milly, 'and he gave me the beehive too; he has promised me a glass hive next summer for the front garden; and, look, this brood of bantams are from Huist-hall too.'

'Ho, Tiney, and lo, Tiney, and pretty little cow, stand still,' sang Milly, as Cherry, jangling her bell, tossed up her head and scampered round the yard.

'Steady there, lass,' and she patted her sleek satin skin.

'Cherry never behaves like the Tiney of the song; she never kicks me or her pail either, but gives me freely her sweet new milk: now come and see old Molly.'

Old Molly was a sow feeding at a trough with her curly-tailed litter of pigs. I had a wholesome dislike for the unclean tenants of the sty, and I was accordingly surprised, and I think Mr. Clive too, at hearing Milly's coaxing remarks to old Molly, and to see her stroking her hairy back with a long stick, till she rushed off snorting with her whirly tail in the air.

'Now I want you to see my thrush's nest in the field, and my red-eyed rabbits, and dormice. Oh, the gate is locked, and Arthur has the key.'

'Shall I fetch it?' said Mr. Clive, 'but the grass is long and damp, perhaps you had better not go there.'

Milly looked at her neat little slippers, and said 'Very well,' so we turned back to the house; at the door we met the others.

'You have cut us, Miss Milly,' said Herwald, 'now we are going to cut you; the carriage is here.'

'Oh, not so soon. Surely, Nellie, you will ask him to stay; we can't let you go.'

'We must indeed,' said Herwald, who had before told me that he had ordered the carriage early, that we might not overtax their hospitality.

'Now don't you fly off at a tangent; I am going to leave you to unpack the hamper Mrs. Arundel has sent.'

'A hamper! oh, Herwald, how kind; what is in it?'

'A haunch of venison, and some head of grouse for Arthur, and some Paris chocolate and bonbons for your little self, and I believe Mrs. Arundel has put in some home preserves and hothouse fruits; but that is hers and Davidson's business.'

'Mr. Delorme,' said Milly, stamping her foot, 'if you have overloaded it, I shall send it back, I won't have you rob yourself.'

'Dear Miss Milly, do you expect me to eat all my game myself? I should only have sent it to Grey and St. Clair; I am only sorry they are not my own shot, but this fellow is such an angler, he cares for no other sport.'

Milly wrinkled her eyebrows and looked dubious, perhaps she was thinking how her little maid-of-all-work would manage the grouse.

'And, Miss Milly,' continued Herwald in a coaxing tone, 'I have brought you a little souvenir from Rome—a cameo, Psyche's head, I am sure you will like it. You will accept it, will you not? I have sent it to Liverpool to be set as a brooch.'

'Oh, Arthur, listen to him, the setting will cost as much as the cameo.'

'On the contrary,' said Herwald, provokingly, 'it is rather a costly one, it is beautifully cut.'

'Then I won't have it,' said Milly, decidedly.

'Won't you? very well, I vow that if you do not instantly accept it, I'll present it to Miss Rivers, she will be charmed I know; and now I think of it, a little offering will be acceptable.'

'No, no,' cried Milly in a fury, 'she shall not have it, it is mine; do you hear! it is mine; but I will not thank you for it, you are far too generous—'

'Nonsense, wait a minute, I have something for Arthur too, in the carriage;' and he darted away to get it, returning out of breath. 'Now, don't scold me, for wasting my money as your sister did; I would keep this myself if I dared, but I should become a Romanist and make an idol of it, if it were in my possession, but your mind is stronger than mine'—and he unfolded from many

wraps an ivory crucifix so exquisitely carved, that its value must have been priceless.

'Bridget will be shocked at her master's heresy; but never mind, Arthur, hang it up fearlessly in your eyrie'—

'My dear boy, I am not a muff, and I am not going to keep this gem;' and Arthur's blue eyes peered through his spectacles hungrily at the beautiful crucifix.

'Then I'll smash it,' said Herwald, snatching it so roughly that Arthur, thinking he meant it, grasped the treasure in sudden fright, and his face quite flushed as he tried to thank his friend.

'Nonsense,' again said Herwald, 'I won't shake hands for that;' but he did, looking as happy and radiant as a young prince. Herwald showed more to advantage at Rose Cottage than at the Cedars: there he was the listless cynical young aristocrat; here, among his friends who loved him, he was frank, boyish, and full of life. As we passed into the little dark passage, I whispered something to him to which he gleefully responded—

'Miss Milly, Nellie has proposed a capital plan; that you and Arthur should spend a long day with us. I will send the carriage for you at eleven o'clock, the day after to-morrow; so that you, old fellow, may have a couple of hours' fishing before lunch, and afterwards we will have a boat on the river.'

'Oh, what fun,' cried Milly, in her odd childish way; and then as I said good-bye, she raised herself on tiptoe and kissed me. The last glimpse, as Arthur placed me in the carriage and we drove off, was Milly standing by the gate, and behind her, just in shadow, Hubert Clive.

CHAPTER XIII.

'Oh, my cousin, shallow-hearted! oh, my Amy, mine no more!
Oh, the dreary, dreary moorland! oh, the barren, barren shore!

Is it well to wish thee happy? having known me to decline
O'er a range of lower feelings, and a narrower heart than mine.

He will hold thee, when his passion shall have spent its novel force,
Something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse.—*Tennyson.*

THE next day was the first at Hurst-hall that I was allowed to enjoy quietly, and I did enjoy it thoroughly to my heart's content. From morning till night nothing occurred to mar its tranquillity; no stray visitors, no business agents or business letters for Herwald, but one delightful occupation following another. Three hours' work in the fernery, planting, transplanting, and arranging; a breezy ride

over the moors ; an hour's coze in the library with a book ; an evening passed in company with Beethoven and Mendelssohn ; and a moonlight stroll in the park.

Punctually at eleven o'clock the following morning the carriage dashed up the avenue, and Milly tripped out in her fresh white muslin, and broad straw hat, and Arthur followed her, looking gentlemanly in his light gray suit.

While the gentlemen went off to their sport, eager not to lose a minute, Milly and I wandered leisurely through the conservatories, park, and garden ; and then selecting a shady nook, worked and chatted till the gong summoned us in to the mid-day meal. There we found Mr. Clive waiting our return on the terrace, whom Milly seemed more pleased than surprised to see ; though I own his being there looked to me very pointed. Herwald took it naturally however.

'What, come to swell the number of our oars ? that's right.'

Mr. Clive muttered something about a leisure hour, and parochial duties ; but for all that, came with us, as a matter of course, when we crossed the meadows to the river, and embarked in Herwald's pretty pleasure-boat. There we spent the afternoon deliciously, now being swiftly impelled along by our four oarsmen, now drifting lazily with the current ; Dudley and Herwald chaunted now and then some old boating song, while Milly steered and I sat trailing my hand lazily in the cool water. Once we landed, and wandered along the green banks ; while Dudley followed us in the boat. The afternoon was waning into evening when we returned to the house, and I took Milly up to my room to prepare for dinner.

'Oh, the dear room, rose-coloured every bit of it ; how pretty, Nellie !'

'Is it not ?' I said ; 'it is Herwald's taste, and it was all done for me ; was it not kind ?'

Of which self-satisfied little speech I repented, when Milly's eyes took the same quiet searching look that Mrs. Arundel's had on a similar occasion. Whereupon, not without a covert rebuke for her feminine suspicions, I gave her to understand once for all the connection between us and Herwald, though I am not sure I quite convinced her that that was the whole truth. She brushed out her long black hair thoughtfully, and said nothing.

'What beautiful hair, Milly !' I said, to change the subject, 'and how long !'

'Yes ; look, I can kneel on it, or if I hold back my head so, I can make it touch the floor ; sometimes,' continued vain Milly, 'when I brush it, it crackles and crisps like a cat's back, and I call Arthur up to admire it.'

'Well,' I asked, smiling, 'does he ?'

'Of course, though he sometimes calls me a vain puss, or a feminine Absalom ; but once when he was playing with it,' said Milly softly, 'and making believe to strangle himself, I felt him kiss

it, poor dear; for would you believe it, Nellie, Arthur loves me ever so much more than I do him, though I do care very much for my dear ugly boy, who pets me, and works for me, and tries to make me as clever as himself. Nellie,' she continued, as she knotted and braided up her hair so swiftly with her dimpled hands, 'do you ever think yourself pretty?'

'Of course not, Milly; what an idea!'

'I do; is it wrong? but sometimes I talk to myself in the glass, and think what a nice little face I am looking at, and sometimes when I think of all the pretty trinkets and fine new dresses mamma used to buy me, I am ready to cry. Am I very naughty, Nellie?' and she turned her earnest child's eyes on me.

What could I say—I, who had read her secret, and knew why the pretty face was prized and made much of? Was it by a natural sequence of ideas that she should then ask me what I thought of Mr. Clive, and how I liked him?

'You ought Nellie, for he has taken a great fancy to you; he told me you had a true woman's face.'

I was thankful to be able to say without effort that I liked Mr. Clive exceedingly, though I thought him reserved and a little proud.

'He strikes me, I must say, Milly, as the most melancholy man I have ever seen; he must have known great trouble.'

'So Arthur says, but I don't know; I think he gets overworked sometimes; and then it is so dull for him living all alone in that great gloomy parsonage-house, with not a soul to speak to but old Hannah and her husband. It is such a dear old place, with a great lawn, and a sun-dial, and a lime walk, and the rooms are so beautifully furnished—those at least that he uses; he shuts up half. It is a great pity however he does not do as Mr. Hume used to do—give clerical parties, I mean, garden parties and tea-fights for the gentry; he is obliged, of course, to treat the school children sometimes. And then he will not visit enough, and people like to be friendly with their clergyman, and so he is not popular, though the poor worship him. Did you hear how he nursed them at the time of that horrible fever?'

I told her I had.

'Was it not brave and heroic, when every one else was running away? but I wish he would make the gentry love him too; I often tell him it is wrong to make distinctions.'

'He seems to come to you often enough.'

'Yes, to see Arthur, he is very fond of Arthur. I give him a lecture sometimes when he comes, and tell him he ought to go to other houses than Hurst-hall and Rose Cottage, but it is all no good; only Miss Rivers manages to get him now and then, and I don't care for him to go there.'

'That looks as if you want to monopolize him.'

'I—he does not come to see me, but Arthur—I tell you he and Arthur are great friends, and they like each other very much.'

Perhaps so, pretty Milly ; only, why start and flush and plume yourself with such trembling hands ? The little love story I was reading from life inspired me with a tender interest ; and all that evening I watched Milly's pretty ways, half childish, half womanly, as by a thousand little unconscious acts she showed her preference for the young clergyman—watched her, as one human sister should watch another, with deep and loving sympathy.

When I had seen the happy little creature nod her last adieus from the carriage door I went into the deserted drawing-room, and Herwald followed me.

'Dudley has gone down the avenue with Clive for a moonlight stroll, but I am so stiff from rowing that I begged off. What a nice day we have had, thanks to you, Nellie ; I have never enjoyed one more. Don't you like that sweet little Milly ?'

'She is a darling, so childish, so unaffected, so loving ; but, Herwald, it is clear that there will be a match some of these days.'

For answer he stared at me.

'It is easy to see who thinks Milly the dearest little thing in the world too ; and as for her, poor child, her heart has long ago been won, I believe. Mr. Clive is indeed a happy man.'

'Nellie,' said Herwald, with a sudden sternness in his look and voice, 'what nonsense are you talking about Mr. Clive ?'

'Nonsense !' I repeated, rather nettled, 'I am not quite blind, Herwald, if you are. Mr. Clive's lover-like attentions and Milly's happy acceptance of them are sufficiently palpable, I should think, to every one.'

He started up, striking upon the table impatiently.

'I entreat you, Nellie, not to lose your usual good sense ; this is no matter for jesting.'

'Neither do I desire to jest,' I answered, flushing up hotly ; 'you ought to know me better by this time.'

'Then what on earth do you mean by broaching such impossibilities ?' he asked, questioning my face with astonished eyes.

'Dear Herwald, if you will listen to me quietly, and not fly out so, I will explain what I mean. You cannot imagine I wish to mock you or your friends. I say again, it is easy to see Mr. Clive dotes on Milly Vaughan, and she, dear little creature, loves him with all her heart.'

I was not prepared, as I thus decidedly reiterated my belief, to see Herwald turn pale as death, and clutch the arms of his chair in sudden terror ; and in a moment the miserable idea rushed upon me, that I was cruelly wounding him, that perhaps he loved her himself, else why this unconquerable agitation, this unmistakable terror ? In my turn I began to quake.

'Nellie dear,' he said, speaking in a choked, hurried voice, 'unsay all that again, in pity's sake. You cannot mean anything so dreadful, so improbable. Hubert Clive love Milly ?'

It was too late to go back now, so I said, hesitating and looking

down, that I could not but think that Mr. Clive was seeking her for his wife.

Herwald threw up his hands with a horrified gesture.

'But he cannot, the idea is absurd. He is a married man.'

'You mean a widower?'

'I mean no such thing. Poor Hubert has a wife living in a lunatic asylum at Colchester.'

It was my turn now to gasp and turn pale; and for some minutes we said nothing, only looking at each other with horrified eyes. At last I said indignantly—

'Oh, Herwald, it is monstrous; how dare he, how dare he go on like this if he be a married man? She does not know it, poor child, and she loves him, as we all of us love once in our lives, with the strength of her innocent heart.'

'I pray heaven that you may be mistaken, Nellie.'

'He is a bad man, he is wicked to do like this,' I exclaimed passionately.

'No, no, there is an error somewhere; either he is blind or lamentably weak; but bad—I tell you that there is not a truer Christian or a more unselfish man than Hubert Clive in this world. Oh, poor Hubert, what a life has his been! Listen, Nellie, and pity him, ay, pity him from the depths of your woman's heart, for I am going to tell you his story, that you may judge him more leniently, and I shall tell it from the very beginning.

'Hubert Clive is of noble birth; he was the sixth and youngest son of a needy peer, and for him as for his four elder brothers there was little or no provision. As for the heir, he early provided himself with a rich wife, and lived merrily, though not too wisely, on her money; and for the others, two entered the army, and fell fighting for their country, one went to sea, and the fourth picked up, somehow, an attaché to the Russian embassy.

'As for Hubert, a good-natured uncle sent him to the university, intending him for the law; and at the close of a prosperous college career he set up chambers in London and read for his life. This time was the happiest that Hubert ever knew, not only because he was young, happy-natured, and industrious, but because fortune had been kind to him and given him an object for which to labour, and this was the love of his betrothed wife and cousin, Amy Villiers.

'Worldly folks said it was a wild project of old Villiers allowing this engagement between his beautiful heiress and a needy young barrister, but Mr. Villiers had some odd out-of-the-way notions on this subject, and Amy's blue eyes and heart were set on her handsome cousin Hubert; and so the old story was suffered to be told merrily at Grantham House. Mr. Villiers only imposed one condition: Hubert was not to marry Amy till he had an income sufficient to render him independent of his wife's money, and to this he willingly assented, and the work went cheerfully on.

'Fortune favours the brave; one day Lord Clive wrote to his

son to give up the law, and take orders at once, as a rich living was offered to him, and was to be kept till he could hold it for himself. Now, Hubert had a tender conscience, and he did not like entering the Church for mercenary motives, or even with the idea of hastening his union with Amy; but when his father came up in person, and represented to him how hardly he could afford even the small income Hubert was drawing from him, and how necessary it was for him to become independent of his family, he reluctantly yielded, and went up to Oxford to take orders.

His first sermon was preached at Grantham, and Amy came to hear him, and another young lady came too, who had lately arrived at the house for a long visit; and this young lady was Amy's cousin and friend, Harriette Falconer. Hubert did not much admire this new addition to Grantham, though she was a handsome girl with a dark brunette face and great luminous eyes; but though he was never more than commonly civil, and seldom looked at her, Harriette Falconer madly and wickedly dared to love her cousin's betrothed with a love that was hopeless and foolish enough.

Time went on, and Hubert was delicately but earnestly wooing Amy, who had suddenly turned wilful, and refused to fix the time for their marriage, alleging that she was too young, and he too, to settle down.

"I am not good enough for a clergyman's wife," she would say, "and I want a little more fun and gaiety before I go and bury myself in that prim old parsonage. Don't tease me any more about it, till after our great ball on the tenth of next month; you know, papa says we can never attend properly to two things at a time, and I want this to be the most splendid affair the county has seen for years."

"But Amy," Hubert answered sadly, "how can you care for these gaieties from which my cloth excludes me? you must know I can take no part in the coming ball."

"Oh yes, you can, you must; you can't dance, I suppose, but you can stand and look on, and make yourself agreeable, and be ready if I want to talk to you, and not be jealous if I notice other people; for it is my birth-day fête, you know, and papa has ordered me a set of torquoise and diamonds; and it would look so strange if you were not there; do be good, Hue dear, and do just as I ask you."

So Hubert stroked the golden curls and promised; and as he left her, he came upon Harriette Falconer just entering, with her face lit up with a strange triumphant expression.

He passed her with the curt word and smile which was all he ever gave her; but it would have been well if Hubert's sleepy gray eyes had opened themselves to watch her more, to detect her skilful manœuvres, her cruel stealthy game; but only occupied with his idol, he took no notice of the quiet, dark girl who so often crossed his path. But, alas for him! in Harriette's subtle, strong hands,

Amy's weak impressionable nature was plastic as clay in the hands of the potter; hinted innuendoes, covert sneers, cold sarcasms at the model young clergyman, the gray dreary parsonage-house, the dull monotonous life to which his wife would be condemned, all worked like leaven, till the whole girlish heart was leavened.

The night of the ball arrived. Hubert, in his quiet clerical dress, stood and watched Amy in azure clouds of gauze being whirled before him in the dizzy waltz; watched with pangs of jealousy more easily felt than described. Once he caught hold of her as she passed.

"Amy, I want to speak to you."

"Yes, darling," and Amy put on her most coaxing face, and shook out the curls the dance had disarranged, till the jasmine buds of her wreath trembled again. It was very pleasant to be called darling by an angel in a blue cloud, and so Hubert felt, and it was in a gentler tone that he said—

"Amy, I do not think it looks well for you to be dancing so often with Sir Ralph Percy; you have been with him half the evening."

Amy's eyes stole towards the heavily moustached Guardsman, who was again approaching to fetch her, and said quickly—

"This time I must, for I am engaged, but after that I will take care;" and smiling in her cousin's face she suffered Sir Ralph to take her away.

"What muffs clergymen look in a ball-room," said Amy's partner, with a sneer, quite ignoring the fact that it was her *fiancé* of which he spoke. Amy coloured, but did not reply, but all the rest of the evening Hubert felt rather than saw how she avoided him.

The next two or three weeks that followed the ball were not happy ones; Amy became more captious and difficult to please day by day, and the more she frowned on Hubert the more she smiled and coquetted with Sir Ralph Percy.

One morning Hubert called, and went up as usual unannounced to his cousin's boudoir to find it empty; Amy's golden head was not bending over her embroidery-frame, and while he waited, impatiently toying with the little glove that lay on the table, Harriette came down, the tears streaming from her eyes, a letter in her hand.

"Read that, my poor, poor friend," she cried.

Hubert was not a man physically or mentally strong, and when he had snatched the letter from her hand, and seen at the bottom of the page, "Your affectionate cousin, Amy Percy," he sunk down half fainting, like a girl. It was a cruel blow, for if ever man loved a woman, Hubert loved Amy; and the agony of mind he suffered in consequence brought on brain fever.

When he arose from that long weary sickness, and was able to take his place in the pulpit again, the first thing that met his sight was Sir Ralph biting his heavy moustache in the pew beneath, and

Lady Percy beside him, her girlish beauty heightened by bridal finery. It was pride that bore Hubert through that and many succeeding services ; and presently Sir Ralph ceased to come, and after that Amy.

‘All that my poor friend wished at this time was to be left alone to his misery, but there was one whose continual coming wearied him beyond measure. It was Harriette, whose flowers, fruit, books, and proffered sympathy were alike irksome ; yet how could he be ungrateful for such kindness ? How look coldly on one whose sad pale face testified how she felt for him ?

‘Presently, so lonely was his outer life, so dreary the void within, he ceased to dread her visits, nay, liked and encouraged them, believing he had found a true friend. I do not know how it happened, whether Harriette purposely betrayed herself and the love which had taken its root in a curse ; but one day Hubert knew he was beloved, hopelessly, faithfully, it seemed to him. Then, with a generosity unparalleled in men, he swore another human being should never suffer what he had suffered ; and that if Harriette, who had been so true a friend to him in his misery, could be content with mere esteem and friendship, he would make her his wife. It was what she had toiled and worked wickedly for ; it was not she that would say him nay.

‘So Hubert took her home to the gray old parsonage ; and in the parsonage pew, where he had hoped to see the sweet girl face framed in its golden hair, sat Harriette Clive with her dusky face and luminous black eyes.

‘Oh, woe for the day when he took her home as bride ; before two months were over that awful temper displayed itself, which was the precursor of insanity. Almost before the honeymoon was out he had seen the dark handsome face convulsed and livid with passion, and had heard words that “vexed his righteous soul.”

‘What he suffered that year is known only to him and heaven ; Hubert sometimes compares it shudderingly to a hell upon earth ; sensitive as a woman, and with the finest moral feelings, he felt himself defiled, coming in contact with that stormy debased nature. Then and not till then he knew who originated and widened the breach between him and Amy ; who had encouraged Sir Ralph, and assisted them in their work of treachery. Every occasion he gave her for jealousy ; and hers was “cruel as the grave,” and could be evoked by a trifle ; she tore open the festering wounds ; she taunted him with the old dear life ; and had not this time had an end, Hubert must have died, or fled, or gone mad ; the man was growing haggard and miserably ill. At last to Harriette was vouchsafed the divine rights of maternity ; and there was given to her a boy, beautiful as an angel, and with his father’s eyes.

‘When Hubert took his first-born in his arms, his whole inner being was stirred within him, and a flood of tenderness rose up in his heart for his boy. He forgot it was Harriette’s and not Amy’s

child, he forgot the cruel taunts and sneers, the old miserable life, as he wept and prayed over his treasure. Long hours he watched silently by the cot of the wondrous boy; stroking the crumpled fingers, and gazing on the innocent baby face—but alas for him, Heaven had not ordained that this should be the “son of his consolation.” One night when the drowsy nurse slept, Harriette rose up and strangled her child.’

‘Oh, Herwald, Herwald,’ I half screamed, ‘how horrible.’

‘They knew then the girl was mad—would they had discovered it before! and as soon as they could move her, they took her to the Colchester asylum, and there she has been ever since.’

‘When this terrible event was bruited abroad, Hubert fled, a curate did his work, and he never again showed his face in Grant-ham parish.’

‘When he returned from his wanderings, he exchanged his living for one half its value, where he is now; and here he lives and works and preaches, carrying day by day the cross that has eaten so deeply into his flesh. Here he resides in his dull old parsonage-house, half of which is shut up, patiently enduring life; time has wrought some good, but the melancholy is deep-rooted, and never, I fear, to be wholly effaced; at least while Harriette inhabits her dreary prison. You can hardly read this tragedy in the proud weary face, but at least you can understand the lifeless delivery, the crushed broken heart.’

‘And what of Lady Percy?’

‘I saw her once some time ago; they live some eighteen miles from here, in a place Sir Ralph has recently bought; but I assure you, that in the haggard sickly face I scarcely recognized the beautiful Amy, Hubert described. Ah! she sowed the wind to reap the whirlwind. Sir Ralph is a hard, stern husband to her, not cruel in actual ill-usage, but prodigal of coarse sneers and contemptuous language, which most surely crush a woman’s heart.’

‘That she is childless does not mend matters, for Sir Ralph ardently desires an heir; and so she drags on a weary existence, an unloved, unhonoured wife. Hubert knows this, and it forms no slight portion of his daily trial. Tell me, Nellie, do you not pity the man?’

‘I do, I do, Herwald, with all my heart and soul; but oh, not even this can excuse him from appearing to be what he is not.’

‘I have often told him that it might lead to wrong, but I never thought of anything like this; and he could not bear his miserable story to transpire. Oh, Nellie, what shall we do?’

‘Only one thing; I must go to-morrow and warn Milly, somehow.’

‘You?’ said Herwald, with a mixture of surprise and admiration in his tone.

‘Yes, there is no one else, only a woman can break it gently enough; but I would go a hundred miles rather than have to do it, poor unconscious Milly.’

'You have a brave, tender heart, Nellie ; you are a true woman. Go on your sad errand, and Heaven be with you. I see it now, she does like him ; oh, why was I so blind ? What, what will Arthur say ?'

'Oh, what indeed, Herwald ? you must expostulate with Mr. Clive ; he cannot be suffered to go there day after day ; we must spare the dear child.'

'I—I shall not have the courage, Nellie.'

'You must—but hush, here comes Dudley. I will ride over before lunch, remember. Herwald, good-night.'

Herwald's hand was quite trembling and cold as it touched mine, and my own was no better, and short and restless was the sleep of both of us that night.

CHAPTER XIV.

'Ae fond kiss, and then we sever,
Ae farewell, alas, for ever ;
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.

Who can say that fortune grieves him
While the star of hope she leaves him ?
Me na cheerful twinkle lights me,
Dark despair around benights me.'

Robert Burns,

THE great park lay shimmering and sparkling in the morning sun. Only the faintest of breezes stirred the old tree tops, eliciting rustling whispers in return ; millions of dew-drops still rung their noiseless silver bells ; the insect world was astir, and the air jubilant with bird choruses. Slowly from between the beech-trees came the meek-faced does to crop their dainty herbage, and look around them with shy bright eyes ; while their fawns gambolled in the dell-like hollows and round the moss-patched trunks, and up and down the slanting sunny glades. All was light, gladness, and perfume, morning joy and morning breezes ; yet, O Divine Giver of Good, Thou alone canst tell what this day shall bring forth to me and all of us. A gloomy night-vision is clinging round me, a feverish restlessness from last night's talk and resolution, and through it all an old refrain is haunting my lips with its quaint rhythm and sweet expression of hope—

'Be the day weary, be the day long,
Presently ringeth to evensong ;'

and as I slowly repeat it, I have a strange longing for this day to be over and gone, and then I stretch out my face to the cool morning air with the weary gasping of one to whom night has been a long misery and unrest. Suddenly the stillness is invaded, the does timidly retreat to sylvan fastnesses, quick footsteps brush the dew

and crisp the few early fallen leaves, and then I see Atfan's stalwart form and bronzed beard as he strides rapidly down one of the broad glades, the tawny muzzled hounds following him with drooping head.

Presently one stops, listens, and utters an uneasy whine, which ends in Leo's well-known muffled bark; Max chimes in lustily, and as if in obedience to a distant whistle, they race back to the house. Allan stops too, and leans with folded arms against a tree; and I know it is the master long before I see him cross the park with his erect young head and careless springy step, then pause with cheery greeting at Allan's side. I watch them disappear, and then rousing myself from lazy reverie, hasten my toilette, and after half an hour's quiet read, go down to the chintz parlour. I found Herwald sitting at the breakfast-table opening letters and cutting the newspapers while talking to Dudley. The morning stroll had not given him his usual colour, and his whole manner was flurried and uneasy.

'I have ordered the horses at half-past ten; is that right, Nellie!'

'Yes, quite'—and then I lean over my plate with a sudden sickness of heart.

'Where do we ride?' asks Dudley, looking up from his paper wonderingly.

'Oh, to the farm,—I have another hour's business there; but I have promised to drop Nellie at Rose Cottage on our way.'

'I shall not let her ride at all, unless she eat some breakfast,' replied Dudley. 'Where is your appetite? have you not slept well, you little white mouse?'

Herwald looked across at me with an uneasy smile, and I answered nervously; for I had a feeling that Dudley's quiet eyes were scanning our faces, and had found out that all was not right; nothing was said, however, and as soon as I dared I ran out of the room to don my riding-habit.

As Herwald mounted me, he whispered 'Courage, Nell; it may all be a mistake;' but I shook my head mournfully as I stroked Larkspur's glossy mane; some instinct warned me to the contrary.

Such a sweet bright morning for our ride, such fresh breezes rippling our hair, such sun-flecked fields and tender cloud-screened skies. The horses danced and curvetted along the smooth white roads, and now and then we halted under the shade to notice some wondrous blending of tints in the landscape, some picturesque nook, some fragments of natural beauty, but through it all the old refrain haunted me—

'Be the day weary, be the day long,
Presently ringeth to evensong.'

till I grew quite dizzy and confused.

'Here we are; take Miss Mortimer's horse, William,' and Herwald alighting lifts me off and sets open the little gate that closes after me with an uneasy clang. I scarcely hear his whispered 'God

speed you' as I walk up the little pebbly path, so intently am I looking at the green bowery porch and open door. The click of the gate reached Milly's ears, for she came running out, her dimpled arms bare to the elbow, and her trim figure disguised by a huge floury apron.

'Oh, you dear, good Nellie, to come so soon again ; no, I dare not touch you, I should soil your pretty blue habit ; come in here and sit down and make yourself comfortable, I'll be with you as soon as ever I have put the cakes in the oven ;' and clapping her little hands she danced out of the room.

I neither sat down nor made myself comfortable, a dull pain at my heart forbade that ; the dread of what I had to say, and how she would take it ; so I listlessly turned over one or two books on the table, and then stood at the window looking at Arthur's carefully trimmed flower-beds, and listening to the chirping little voice in the back kitchen.

Presently she returned, the hideous bib-apron removed, all fresh and clean in her crisp morning cambric and jaunty blue ribbons.

'You naughty child,' she said, after smothering me with kisses, 'why don't you take off your hat and gloves ? I must do it for you ;' and acting on her word she smoothed my rumpled hair, and made me rest in the easy-chair.

'Now you will stay with me to-day, won't you, dear ? we shall be alone till dinner-time, when Arthur will be back ; we shall have the grouse for dinner and a mulberry-pudding, and Bridget shall make us some cream sauce. Never mind your habit ; what does it matter ! we will have a long cozy day.'

It was hard to refuse her pretty request, but I told her that I had only another week to stay at the Hall, and that Herwald would not like to spare me a whole day, or Dudley either ; so pouting, she reluctantly let me have my way. For a quarter of an hour I sat thus literally on thorns, listening to Milly's joyous prattle, and wonderful scraps of news ; how Sukey, the little black pig, had been crushed by his brothers and sisters ; how there were a dozen little yellow chicks just out of the shell ; and lastly, how Arthur had had that morning a strange piece of luck, in the shape of an anonymous envelope full of bank-notes, directed in a strange hand, from an unknown friend.

And then Milly went on to say, how she hoped Arthur would get a new great-coat for the winter with part of it ; and how she was longing for a pretty scarlet cloak, like Abbie Herne wore on Sunday, and so on, and so on—and all the time I was wondering how I was to start the unhappy subject.

Suddenly she startled me by herself leading unconsciously to the object of my visit.

'Mr. Clive called this morning, on his way to church, to tell me poor Betsy Morris died last night.' Betsy Morris was the woman whose unhappy life he had related to us under the mulberry-tree

that evening. Now was the time—and turning cold all over, and with a violent throbbing at my heart, I rushed into it.

‘Milly, do you know, Herwald has told me something so strange about Mr. Clive, I wonder if you have ever heard it.’

Perhaps my visible paleness and abrupt manner of speaking disconcerted Milly, for she left off tapping on the floor with her pretty foot, and looked up at me startled.

‘Something strange! no indeed, what can it be?’

‘I told you yesterday that I thought him the most melancholy man I had ever seen; and you yourself said that it was Arthur’s, your brother’s, opinion, I mean, that he had known some great trouble.’

‘Well,’ she said, rather impatiently.

‘Well, something I chanced to say last night to Herwald induced him to tell me the history of his life; it was very sad, Milly, very sad, and very strange, and he has indeed bitter reason for his worn, unhappy face.’

She was very pale now, but her soft eyes seemed to ask me to go on.

‘It is a long story, and a terrible one, and somehow I cannot bear to tell it; but surely, Milly you cannot be ignorant that Mr. Clive is a married man.’

‘A widower, Nellie?’ It was the same question I had asked Herwald.

‘Alas, no! oh, Milly, how shall I tell you? Mr. Clive has a wife living, a poor mad wife, shut up somewhere in a lunatic asylum.’

Milly Vaughan did not faint or scream, or become hysterical, when I had thus by one cruel sentence wrecked her life’s joy; but the little dark face grew cold and rigid as stone, and the black eyes suddenly looked wan and hollow, and unnaturally large.

‘Do not tell me you were ignorant of this, Milly; surely, surely you must have known it before?’

It was to say something—for was not the evidence of her ignorance before my eyes?

‘I did not know,’ she said; and then flushed suddenly, painfully, cruelly, till face, neck, and arms became crimson with the shame of having loved unsought. I saw her trying to hide it, trying to speak, crushing the small hands together ruthlessly; but it was all no good, and muttering something about Bridget and burning cakes, she hurried from the room. I dared not follow her. It came upon me all at once, what a stranger I was to this poor girl, who had so interested me; what right had I to intrude into her heart’s secret? and yet how could she, so soft, so childlike, so clinging, bear this great trouble alone? She loved him—ah, there was no denying it, and as I remembered the startled eyes, the small white face, and thought of the shadow that misplaced affection must cast over her young life, my anger was bitter against him whose weak

duplicity had been the cause, and my eyes brimmed over with a sudden tide of sympathy. Presently I heard her slow, gliding step, but I would not turn round, till she came up and silently stood by me. The sight of the little weary face touched me inexpressibly, and with a tender word or two I stroked her hair. The touch, the word, unlocked the flood-gates of her heart; two little soft hands suddenly clasped my waist, and laying her head on my bosom she broke out into passionate weeping. I pray Heaven that I may never hear a woman weep as Milly did that day; my neck was wet with her tears, my heart ached to hear those terrible sobs.

As I pressed the trembling little creature to me, I seemed to feel it all, that awful shrinking from suffering, the first startled look into the cup that she must drink to the dregs, and her shuddering anguish at the taste of it. Heaven help her, the child has a woman's heart, and as a woman must she love and suffer.

I do not know whether she felt my kisses and tears on her face, but presently the torrent of her grief was dried up, and she wept no more.

'Tell me all,' she said, in a low whisper, 'all, all—I cannot believe it.'

I told her the sad history, touching lightly on its worst points. She never moved or spoke till I had finished, then——

'Poor, poor fellow—poor Hubert.'

I made answer sternly, 'I cannot forgive him, Milly; he has cruelly wronged you by his reticence, he has shown pitiable weakness.'

She laid her hand on my lips, trembling in every limb.

'Don't say that, don't say that, whatever you think. Remember I love him, oh, ever so dearly.'

'He has won that love from you, Milly; the fault is his, not yours.'

'There is no fault—none, he never asked me for it, he used to come and like to talk to me; and you know his way; I thought he loved me. Does he not love me, Nellie?'

Oh those piteous, yearning eyes.

'I do not know, dear Milly; but whether he does or not he is very culpable—very; how dare he love any girl with a wife living?'

'But I did not know, Nellie, how could I?'

'My child——'

'Don't call me that,' she cried passionately, 'no one must call me that; oh, would that I were but one again,' and she moaned aloud in her misery.

'My poor Milly, you are blameless, indeed, indeed you are, it is he——'

'If you wish to comfort me,' she interrupted, 'do not speak against him, it gives me such cruel pain. I am not angry with him, and no one else has a right to be; I am only very, very unhappy. I must never see him more; oh, Nellie, I forgot.'

'What, love?' for she had turned white again to her very lips.

'He is coming to-night, I cannot see him, I cannot.'

'Do not fear, darling, he shall not come, we will prevent him, Herwald and I.'

'Herwald knows then?' and she hid her face.

Presently she raised her head, and in a calmer tone than before, and fixing her sweet eyes on me, she said, 'No, I shall never see him again, Arthur will not either, he will be too angry, but you and Herwald must, and I want you to tell him, if he seem pained and miserable about it, that I am not angry with him, that I could not be, that I have not a harsh thought in my heart to him, but that it is only so full, so full of pity. Something tells me that he will suffer greatly when we are parted, and I should like him to know that I shall always love him and think of him as we do of the dead, just as kindly and as purely; but I shall never think of him living lest it break my heart, and I must live for my poor boy's sake.'

'Yes, dear, that is indeed an object that should make you feel strong and brave.'

'I mean to be brave,' she answered, and the soft child's eyes looked steadfast in their anguish; 'ah, never fear for me, I shall be brave enough.' The tiny figure straightened and stiffened itself, and the brown fingers interlaced themselves strongly; oh, Milly Vaughan, it is not I who doubt your spirit!

'What is that, Nellie? hark!' and as she spoke the ringing of horses' hoofs became audible.

'It is Dudley and Herwald come to fetch me.'

'To fetch you! oh, must you go?' and she pressed closer to me and laid her cheek fondly on my hand.

'I fear so, my child; but I scarcely know how to leave you. When will your brother be back?'

'Not before dinner, but indeed, indeed it was not for that I spoke; I shall want a quiet hour sadly, one quiet silent hour in my little room up-stairs. I am so dizzy while I talk to you, my voice sounds as if it belongs to some one else. You will come to me again, Nellie?'

'Yes, to-morrow.'

'Thank you. Hark, there they are,' as the little gate clicked; 'let me go, this way,' and she drew me out quickly into the little dark passage.

'It is only Herwald, love.'

'Yes, I know; don't let him speak to me. Good-bye, good-bye,' and with quick feverish haste she kissed me, and pushed me gently from her.

Turning I saw Herwald's watchful eyes on us, looking eagerly towards the little figure shrinking into the dark corner by the stairs. He seemed as if about to take a step forward, but I laid my hand warningly on his arm and drew him out. He detained me anxiously in the porch.

'Well, Nellie, how fares it with the child?'

'Sorely, Herwald, sorely. Oh, what a heart-wreck is here !

He paled perceptibly. 'Good heavens, can this really be so? Alas ! what cruel thoughtlessness, what irreparable mischief will Hubert have to answer for.'

'Hush, Dudley is looking towards us. Listen to me a moment—Mr. Clive is coming here this evening ; you must ride over and stop him, and say Milly is unwell ; make any excuse.'

'I understand,' and the gravity settled down on his face as he arranged my habit, and told Dudley he had business elsewhere, and luncheon was not to be detained for him, and then rode quickly away. Dudley answered gaily, and then we cantered homewards, along the dusty white roads, and under the arching trees ; and the same blue sky smiled down upon us, and the same birds chirruped lustily forth, a ploughboy whistled a merry tune, and a group of sun-burnt urchins cheered us as we passed ; it was the same happy sunshiny scene of two hours ago, and yet how different. And then out of my full heart I told my brother all—the weakness and the sin, and the love that was founded on the sand, and as I finished it we rode up the old avenue, and slackened rein at the open door. Dudley's sympathy was great, and he quite understood me when I told him I longed for a few hours' quiet, and would meet him and Herwald at dinner-time.

I was indeed painfully harassed, and felt weary and unstrung ; so I spent the delicious afternoon in the most retired spot I could find, the summer-house in the wild garden that stood facing the bowling-alley. There among green shadows, and listening to the cawing of the distant rookery, I sat gazing up into the intense summer blue, and thinking out the problem of life.

At the appointed hour I entered the long drawing-room ; as I did so, some one rose from the couch opposite me, bowed, and came forward with smile and outstretched hand : it was Mr. Clive.

In my sudden surprise and terror at confronting him, I could find nothing to say ; and silently took shelter under Dudley's wing, from whence I looked timidly out on the man who was Milly's fate. As I did so, I could not help commenting on the wonderful brightness that his face just then wore ; it was what Herwald called his 'Angel Gabriel look ;' there was a warmth of expression, a tone, a colouring, that hid the worn lines, and filled up the haggard outline ; a look of mingled repose and benevolence shining in the luminous eyes. He and Herwald had evidently been talking earnestly, but not on that ; the pleased interest, the thoughtful smile hardly belonged to that subject. Dinner was announced, Mr. Clive with his usual stately courtesy taking me in ; but as Herwald motioned me to his right hand, the table divided us, for which I was not sorry.

Somehow I could not smile and talk to this man as if nothing had happened, as Dudley and Herwald were doing ; for I felt all

the more sore and indignant at the sight of his unwonted animation. Nay more, in the irritation of my feelings, I even misjudged Herwald, heading his table with his usual easy grace ; but had I looked deeper, I might have noticed how nervously he spoke and laughed, how anxiously his eyes followed his servants' movements round the table, as if he would hasten them ; and how rarely he met the guest's eyes to whom he was showing such high-bred courtesy.

From a silent musing fit into which I had fallen I suddenly roused up to find Mr. Clive expatiating eloquently on the beauty of abstract truth, and defending it against Dudley, who was evidently casting some slur on its votaries. With a sudden intolerable impulse, I rushed into the discussion.

'I think I side with Dudley, Mr. Clive—that truth is more preached than practised.'

I had been so silent and abstracted all dinner-time, that they all started at my abrupt mode of speech, and Mr. Clive inclined his head courteously as he answered—

'Pardon me, Miss Mortimer, if I presume to disagree with your brother's sweeping assertion concerning poor fallen humanity ; in my opinion the lie direct is rarer than you imagine—save among school-boys and cowards.'

'If you mean by the lie direct a mere verbal falsehood, perhaps you are right, Mr. Clive,' I answered ; 'yet how many men do you suppose, righteous, well-meaning men, act that lie at one time or other of their lives, and are judged not by men but by Heaven ? Is not the one sin as great or greater than the other ; the kiss of Judas more heinous than the lie of Ananias and Sapphira ?'

'There you are right ; but I do not think I entirely follow your meaning !'

Was I going too far ? for Dudley was turning red, and Herwald was pushing the claret-jug towards him, with a quick nervous gesture, to hide his embarrassment.

'My meaning is simple enough. In your argument I think you dwell too much on truthful speech, and less on truthful action ; to evade, to disguise, to keep back, part, or the whole of a matter, must be as hurtful to the moral nature as even the lie direct. No one can so sin with impunity ; that which is told in the ear shall be proclaimed on the housetops ; and to the man who seems to be what he is not, be it in matters great or small, only evil can result from it, evil to himself, or to others more innocent of guile than he.'

I felt I had said too much when I saw Mr. Clive's ashen face, and the twitching movement of his lips, and I was certain of it when Herwald, rising hastily, proposed adjournment to the drawing-room. Bitterly repenting my one great fault, a tendency to impulsive speech, I went out to the terrace and paced disturbedly to and fro. What right had I to meddle with this man's secret life, and to recall to his mind the painful images of the past ? and what good had I done to commence that which I could not follow out ?

The more I cooled down, the more I marvelled at the audacity of my words, and the intolerable but courageous impulse that impelled me to speak them ; and the more I felt how impossible it would be for me to look Mr. Clive comfortably in the face again.

Quick footsteps ringing on the terrace behind me interrupted my remorseful soliloquy, and with a sudden terror I turned to find myself confronting Mr. Clive.

‘Miss Mortimer, can you grant me the favour of a few minutes’ conversation with you? I have something particular to say ; may I suggest a turn or two in the shrubberies, where we shall be able to talk more unrestrainedly than here?’

He offered me his arm, which I declined, though at the same time signifying my readiness to accompany him ; indeed, I could do no less, for though the words were courteous, the tone in which he uttered them was peremptory in the extreme, and admitted of no denial ; but oh, Nellie Mortimer, if this will not be a life-long lesson to you never to interfere again in the business of strangers, but rather, like the Levite, ‘pass by on the other side.’

We had entered the shrubberies and were threading their narrow winding paths, crisping the fallen leaves with our feet, but still my companion walked silently by my side, with his white impassive face and his proud sensitive mouth still perceptibly quivering. He seemed to feel it tremble, and once or twice raised his hand to steady it and bit the nether lip till the blood seemed ready to start ; till suddenly and abruptly he wheeled round, and fixing his gray eyes piercingly on my face, as if to read my every thought, said—

‘Miss Mortimer, you addressed me just now at the dinner-table in words and tone suggestive of hidden meaning. I do not say you intended to convey such to my mind, but I am terribly sensitive, and something in your manner disturbed me with a vague sense of discomfort. I therefore put the question to you, which I beg you to answer frankly, was your speech purely accidental, or was it—’ he paused for a moment, and then went on, ‘was it designedly and ungenerously pointed at me?’

Dead silence, only the rustling of the damp crisp leaves, only the chirping good-nights of the birds, only the quick beating of my own uneasy heart.

‘Mr. Clive,’ I said, then faltered and broke down, the last remnant of courage oozing rapidly away ; till on his repeating his question in a patient weary way, I took heart of grace, and spoke :

‘I did apply those words to you, Mr. Clive, and I own now that they were ungenerous and unkind.’

‘Indeed ! I thought truly, then ; and may I ask what interest Miss Mortimer can possibly take in the affairs of a perfect stranger, and why she should deign to vouchsafe such wholesome and cutting rebukes?’

His manner had changed, there was sternness in his voice,

sternness and concentrated bitterness, his brow blackened, his eyes literally flashed, the whole man, as it were, stood at bay.

'What you can know of me and of my life, I cannot, nor shall I try to guess. Some chance report has perhaps reached and misguided you, for did you know all, or even the greater part, you would scarcely have so insulted the fallen. Tell me, for my honour demands it, what you have heard of me?'

'Mr. Clive,' I replied, 'I know all; the betrayed love, the treacherous wife, the——'

He stopped me with a face of horror, with a low cry of intolerable pain, as he wrung and threw up his thin hands with a passionate gesture to heaven.

'How long, O Lord, how long!' I heard him murmur through his bloodless lips, and then he looked at me with eyes so sad, so stern, so reproachful, that I could hardly restrain my tears. 'You, too, Miss Mortimer; what, is there not one of your sex good and gentle throughout?—and yet I believe there is one; in my heart of hearts I believe there is one too!'

He spoke of Milly; alas! who knew that so well as I? and then in a moment I seemed to see the weary little face, to feel again my neck wet with her tears; and in my remembrance of her I tried to steel myself, though all ineffectually, against the man before me.

'You speak of Milly Vaughan, Mr. Clive?' He started and looked at me strangely.

'You have called me ungenerous just now, and have spoken to me harshly, you have a right to hear my defence; let us walk on, and I will tell you reluctantly and painfully what I know of your unhappy story, and of the existence of that miserable woman who owns your name.'

He shuddered all over; and then, with an effort to keep calm, folded his hands behind him, and walked on beside me.

'I do not ask, I have no right to, why you, a clergyman and a married man, act so as to lead strangers to wrong and injurious suppositions; but I will tell you, that both my brother and I considered you and Milly Vaughan on the eve of an engagement, and it was my confident and well-pleased assertion of the same that incited Herwald to an indignant refutation, and an exposé of the whole sad story; don't blame Herwald, Mr. Clive, he could do no less—; and here I stopped, for the evidence of his blindness and ignorance were before me written legibly on his surprised face.

'You coupled my name with Miss Vaughan's; you could not really have believed that, Miss Mortimer?'

I laid my hand on his arm in my earnestness.

'But I did, Mr. Clive; consider the error you have been led into; consider how you are even now deceiving her and Arthur Vaughan.'

'But she does not think I mean that?' and he turned so suddenly on me that he read my answer in my face, I, who would not

have betrayed her innocent love for the world, read it with the quickness of one just awaking to the truth. I had hit him now; he stopped and breathed hard like an animal in pain.

'Is there a curse on me?' he demanded passionately; 'is it not enough that my life is blasted, and must I be doomed to drag another down? are you going to tell me she loves me, too? I who never knew till this moment that I loved her?'

'Be calm, Mr. Clive, you frighten me.'

'Bid Tantalus be calm, when the water of life flowed to his thirsting lips and he could not drink of it: bid the condemned be calm who have looked into heaven, yet dare not enter. You may do so as well as tell me that Milly loves, and bid me be calm in one breath!'

I had not told him, but his mind had grasped the truth.

'Loves me,' he continued; 'I tell you I love her, but I never knew it: the heavens above be my witness, I never knew it till this minute; oh, my innocent child! oh, my wretched blindness!—what shall I do? I cannot tell her, Miss Mortimer;' and he wrung his hands and groaned.

'I have spared you that duty, Milly knows all.'

'No, no, all—Harriette's miserable existence; the horrible deed—the secret—the shame? all?'

'Yes, hush, for pity's sake,' for his wildness terrified me; 'I want to tell you what she said, how lovingly and sweetly she spoke.'

'She loves me,' he repeated again, 'she loves me, I feel it,' and the worn, desperate face softened and grew radiant, transformed even, reminding me of how Hubert Clive must have looked when he first became assured of Amy's heart; but this mood speedily changed.

'Heaven do so to me, and more also, if I would harm one hair of her innocent head. If I have sinned, it has been in ignorance; I knew I worshipped the ground she walked on, I knew her pretty ways could charm me in my darkest hours; but dwelling among the misty horrible images of the past, I never once thought of this; and now I have wronged her past forgiveness!'

I spoke to him soothingly and gently, I gave him Milly's sweet message of peace, I prayed him to have pity on himself; but though he heard me, and smiled once or twice in a strange uncertain way, he never moved or turned his eyes from the distance where they were fixed on Milly's home just dimly shadowed forth between the trees.

At last I stopped quite exhausted, and then the silence seemed to rouse him.

'If in her dear love she forgives me, I can never forgive myself.' Then stretching out his arms with his eyes full of tears. 'Oh, Milly, darling, why have I ever looked into your child's dear eyes; oh, Milly, Milly!' and then he broke down.

Looking up, I saw Herwald's grave, kind face, and an instant sense of comfort came over me. Passing me without a word, he went up to his friend and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

'Hubert, Hubert !' but the young clergyman gave no heed or answer.

'Hubert, come away with me, come !' and guiding him gently as one would guide a sick child, he led him away.

Sick at heart, I retraced my steps to the house ; Dudley, leaning over the parapet, was watching for me, and we paced the terrace together, till the twilight deepened into darkness, and the moon shone out cold and bright ; then Dudley bade me come in to tea, as Herwald had evidently gone down to the parsonage and would not be back till late. The little tea-table looked bright and pretty as ever, but we were both saddened by the events of the day, and talked little, and I was glad when Dudley proposed our adjourning to the library and each taking a book. Dudley read his steadily, but I only by fits and starts ; every quarter of an hour I raised my eyes to the clock and strained my ear for a distant footstep. It was half-past eleven when the door-bell pealed through the house, and Herwald came in with a tired face, and threw himself down in his easy-chair.

'What will I take?' he said in answer to Morrison, who still held the library door ; 'a cup of Mrs. Arundel's best tea, such, Morrison, as will cure a head-ache.'

'Well, Herwald !' for he was examining the diamond on his finger, absently, and with knitted brow ; but looking up and meeting my anxious glance, he smiled and roused himself.

'You want my news? Well, I have left him better, in a calmer, healthier state of mind, though he is terribly cut up, poor fellow. I took him home and talked and argued with him, and as soon as he came to himself he wrote a letter to her, and made me promise to deliver it.'

'A letter, Herwald?'

'Yes, and he wished me to read it ; such a brief, beautiful farewell, so touching in its reverential tenderness, and its meek prayer for forgiveness. I stopped at the cottage as I passed and left it.'

'At Rose Cottage? whom did you see?' I asked eagerly.

'Only Arthur ; he was standing in the porch, and I beckoned him down to the gate. I have been talking for nearly an hour.'

'How does he take it, Herwald?'

'As I knew he would ; all the blood of the Vaughans is up, and a little of his mother's pride besides. He is hot, indignant, won't hear of any excuse, and blames me in the bargain.'

'You, my poor Quixote,' said Dudley.

'Yes, it has given me such a confounded headache ; and he is such an obstinate beggar, dives down into the root of the matter, and swears by yea and nay. Of course we made it up, old Arthur

never bears a grudge ; besides, the intimacy is not owing to me, the mischief was done when I was abroad.'

'And what about Milly ? you have not told me that.'

'He says she behaves beautifully and is quite calm and resigned. Oh, poor fellow, if you had seen his eyes brimful of tears when he told me how he had come home and found her lying on her little white bed—' and here Herwald broke off and sighed heavily.

'I may go to-morrow and see her ?'

'Oh yes, you must if you want to see her again ; Arthur is going to take her away to North Wales, for a change for a week or two.'

'That is very nice, then the money will come in capitally.'

'What money ?' he said, and looked at me rather oddly, I thought, but I did not explain, for the tea equipage was just brought in, and the clock at that moment striking twelve, Herwald insisted on my retiring.

'All this worry,' he said, holding my hands, and looking anxiously at me ; 'all this worry is undoing the week's good, as if you have not trouble enough at home without my friends' affairs bothering you out here.'

I tried, laughingly, to get my hand away, but he held me fast.

'You have done two deeds of mercy for me to-day, and I have not thanked you for them ; Heaven bless you, Nell !'

When I got into my little room, I shaded my lamp and threw open the window. The park was lying in a flood of moonlight ; the trees met dark and still against the dark blue of the sky ; peace, tranquillity, and sacred stillness reigned around ; and as I stood I whispered, half aloud,

'Be the day weary, be the day long,
Presently ringeth to evensong.'

The following day, at the same hour, we rode over to Rose Cottage, and, as before, Herwald and Dudley went on to Hollybush Farm, promising to call for me in an hour's time. I entered the silent house ; no tripping step, no mirthful laugh greeted me ; the little parlour was vacant, and so was the doll's house kitchen ; and so I passed out on to the tiny lawn. Milly was sitting on the grass under the mulberry-tree, picking lavender ; she sprang up when she saw me, and ran towards me with a low cry.

'How kind of you to come and wish me good-bye ; how very, very kind, Nellie !'

She looked as if she had not slept much, and the brightness of her eyes was dimmed with weeping ; but it was not this alteration in her appearance which struck me so painfully, as she stood holding my hands and speaking in that sad subdued voice ; and when she drew me to the low green bench, where we had sat that evening, and placed herself at my side, and played mechanically with my whip and gloves, I looked down on her and marvelled at the change. All that was childlike had faded away—all that was womanly, and gentle—and long-suffering had taken its place.

And so you are going away, Milly ?'

'Yes, to-morrow ; Arthur thinks it better, and I am willing to do as he wishes : we are going for a month.'

'And what then, Milly ?'

She drooped her head a moment, as she answered—

'And then home, and quiet days, and long evenings when Arthur's work is done. I dare say it will be lonely at first, but I shall soon get used to it ;' and the brave little face lifted itself up in the sunlight.

'Dear Milly, will you come to me, to Sunnyside ? If you will, we will love you dearly, and take care of you, and in our happy home you will soon regain your old spirits.'

She smiled faintly as she shook her head.

'Dear, kind Nellie ; but it cannot be yet.'

'Why not ?' I urged, 'will not Arthur spare you ?'

'Oh yes, too gladly, I am sure, but I cannot bear that after his long hard day's work he should come home and find empty rooms, no one to speak to him and make him comfortable ; and even if that could be arranged, I feel that I could not be happy at Sunnyside, not just yet, but in a little while I may.'

'Well, then, come to me at Christmas. Herwald will be with us, and Katie, and Lucy Graham ; come then, and help us to forget our vacant places.'

She clasped me gratefully.

'I should like it, but we have promised to go to Liverpool, to Arthur's god-mother, and as she is very rich, she may do something for him, and so we dare not despise such an opportunity, but may I write to you when I can come ? perhaps I might in the Easter holidays, you know, when Arthur goes again to Oxford.'

'Any time, dear, it matters little to me, only the sooner the better ; but now I have only half an hour to spare, and I have much to talk about.'

I told her what had passed between me and Mr. Clive ; and when I had finished, she drew the letter half out of her bosom, and showed it me.

'I shall keep it till I die, and then it shall be buried with me ;' and she carefully replaced it.

'Nellie, do you know he is going away ?'

'No, indeed, but I am glad of it ; where ?'

'To Italy, I think, and Fergusson is to take the duty for six months ; Arthur is going to give up our seats at church. Ah, you cannot think how angry he was yesterday.'

'Herwald told me.'

'He will not be angry any more, it makes me too unhappy ; how can any one be hurt with Hubert ?' and she folded her hands lovingly over the place where the letter lay, and smiled a little smile to herself.

'Will you write to me, Milly ?'

'To be sure I will, and you will send me long answers, all about yourself and Sunnyside.'

'I will try what I can do, but I am not a good correspondent, I leave most of that to Louie, she is the clever woman of the family.'

Just then a long shadow fell on the grass; it was Arthur's, and at the same moment I heard the hoofs of the returning horses. Arthur's blue eyes sparkled through his spectacles, as he warmly grasped my hand.

'Miss Mortimer, I owe you a debt of gratitude for the kindness you have shown my little girl,' and he clasped her fondly as he spoke. 'She tells me she has already learnt to look upon you as her best friend.'

Milly smiled up at me.

'Nellie knows what I think of her; oh, there they come, and you must go,' and she clung to me with long lingering kisses. My eyes were dewy enough as I followed Arthur, and when I had wished him good-bye, she came out and stood in the porch, and waved to me with fluttering hands till I was out of sight.

CHAPTER XV.

'Little things on little wings,
Bear little souls to heaven.'—*Anon.*

IT was the last day of our stay at Hurst-hall. I had formed a resolution the preceding night to rise early and revisit all my favourite haunts, and as soon as the sun shone brightly and warmly in at my window, and the birds began their waking twittering, I rose, and after a hasty toilette, crept noiselessly down the eastern corridor, so as not to disturb the sleepers. But I was not to escape unperceived, the sound of my unhallowed footsteps aroused the wary hounds; first Leo came and peeped at me suspiciously through the curtain, and then Max, and after satisfying themselves that I was no unmannerly intruder, followed me with many demonstrations of joy. Early as I was, they were flooding the tessellated pavement of the great hall below; and one sleepy-eyed domestic, stifling a yawn, opened the garden door, through which I and my self-imposed guardians passed into the pure morning air beyond. The dew lay heavy on grass and bush, and a delicious freshness and coolness pervaded the air, sweet with the fragrance of opening flowers. As I entered the park, the sense of absolute stillness was marvellous; nothing crossed our path but a startled hare, or a fawn answering to its mother's call, and nothing stirred the slum-

brôus silence save the lark's voice carolling in the morning blue, or the bleat of some distant sheep. One after another I bade farewell to each pleasantly-associated spot : the wild garden, the trout stream, the fernery where we had worked, the arbour in the bowling-green where I had sat and mused—bade them farewell with the fondness one attaches to spots where many happy hours have been passed, regarding them with

‘The feeling of sadness and longing,
Which is not akin to pain,
And resembles sorrow only
As the mist resembles rain.’

It was certainly rather hard to brace myself up to the home-work after the delicious ‘far niente’ and ease of the last two months ; to go back to the old niche, and become one of the plodders again in the work-a-day world ; but if hard for me, doubly so to Dudley, to whom was the burden and heat of the day. Returning to the house, some two hours later, I came upon Herwald in the chintz parlour, playing with Sprite on the hearth-rug. He listened with a faint smile as I recounted, well-pleased, my morning ramble.

‘So you are sorry to leave Hurst-hall, Nellie ; well, I can only say you are not half so much as I am to lose you. I wish our lazy lie-a-bed had joined your stroll, if he could have gathered such roses as those.’

‘Dudley not down yet?’

Herwald gave me one of his comical looks.

‘We prolonged our last library talk to too late an hour, and the boy has the grace to be sleepy this morning ; oh, there he is,’ as Dudley entered with eyes only half-awake.

‘Yet a little more sleep and a little more slumber,’ cried Herwald, putting Sprite in his pocket, in which position she usually took her breakfast. ‘Halloa ! what is all this rubbish, Nellie?’

Rubbish, indeed ! I put them carefully aside, the relics of my morning rambles ; only a leaf from the fernery, a smooth white pebble from the stream, a forget-me-not from the bank where Milly and I had sat, a pheasant's feather picked up on a mossy knoll ; but they were precious to me, and to be treasured as such.

A softened gravity stole over our young host's face, as he watched me put them up.

‘I can hardly believe you are going to leave me to-day, really going away.’

‘Oh, that is not the worst,’ replied Dudley ; ‘the thing is, I am going home a spoiled man. Nellie, this fortnight has ruined me for the factory.’

‘You are jesting surely?’

‘On my honour no ; I always disliked the treadmill, and now I shall hate it ten times more.’

‘Are you really in earnest, Dudley?’

'Why, what big eyes, little Wolf! don't eat me up. Look here, Quixote, this girl has grown up with the notion that I love the factory, love the grinding, oily, musty old place; just because I have never grumbled or complained, or talked grandly, like "the Bruce."' "

'And you disliked it all this time?'

'Dislike is a strong word, *ma petite*; one must not speak ill of the bridge that carries you over the water; but I own I have never liked it; and if truth be told, never shall. Why, as to Bruce, for all his lordly palaver, it's shallow humbug, every bit of it; the fellow adores the place, likes, nay really enjoys its bustle, and scurry, and din, ay, and the downright hard work too, and there is not a better man of business breathing, though I say it,—but for me—'

'Well Dudley?'

'Well, I would fain be working on my own broad acres, sowing and reaping harvests, and eating the fruit thereof; be a farmer, country gentleman, what you will so that it bring plenty of healthy out-of-door exercise; mind, I don't aspire to Hurst-hall, something humbler would content me, even Abbey Farm; anything to work on the green earth and under the open sky.'

I had never heard him speak so strongly before, and I was very sorry.

'The fault is your own,' said Herwald, carelessly, 'you have refused the remedy.'

'Quixote,' and Dudley waxed red as fire. Herwald folded his hands demurely.

'Pax, Pax.'

'Not if you breathe another word. Come now, let a fellow enjoy a grumble quietly for once.'

'Alas, alas! it is for me to grumble, not you rich busy creatures going home to pleasant faces and loving greetings; look at me!'

We did so, he was no bad object to regard, sitting there with the morning sun streaming full on his fair boyish face, as he thoughtfully tilted his spoon on his cup.

'Just as you are crossing the threshold of Sunnyside—dear, bright, happy Sunnyside—I shall be sitting down to my solitary dinner, staring blankly at silver *épergnes* and curious orchids instead of human faces; by Jove, I don't think I can stand it to-night; Morrison's bland attentions will drive me wild; I'll go over to the Willoughbys', and get up a lark with the boys.'

Dudley leaned his elbows on the table and looked long and earnestly at his friend.

'My dear fellow, why not come home with us? you are your own master, and have no one to dictate your movements. Bid Simpson pack your portmanteau, there's ample time, and I'll telegraph to Louie to prepare your room.'

Herwald smiled dubiously and shook his head.

'Don't tempt me, Dudley, for I don't know how to refuse, but I

cannot come ; I must not ; our tenants have been sadly neglected, and I have work enough to last me to Christmas ; only the workman is worthy of his reward, and I could not enjoy my promised holiday if I had not buckled on my harness and made a little fight before the waning year draws quite to a close. I have been but a sad idler hitherto—an idler, and a dreamer of dreams, but I have determined to make an end of all that.'

As he threw up his young head with the quick impatient movement peculiar to him, he reminded me of a picture I had seen in my childhood of Christian arming himself in the Palace Beautiful.

'Promise me one thing, Nellie,' he said, laying his hand with his old familiar way on my arm, 'make me one solemn promise.'

'Nay, I will not pledge myself to anything blindly ; name your behest, Sir Knight.'

'Promise me that nothing that may happen—and who can tell what these months can bring forth?—nothing shall prevent my coming to you at Christmas ; remember I am your adopted brother, and am to be treated as such, and the new year must find me at Sunnyside.'

I promised gladly.

'And, Nellie, may I bring Allan ? I can't do without him, and he is a great admirer of yours.'

I hesitated confusedly.

'Don't think me unkind, dear Herwald, but Sunnyside is so different to Hurst-hall, and I don't know where to put him.'

'Not know where to put him ! why, you had two or three unoccupied rooms on the third floor ; what's become of the yellow garret, or Dusty Den as we called it ?'

'Oh, I don't mean his sleeping quarters, we have ample accommodation for that ; but what am I to do with his meals ? he can't dine in the kitchen, nor yet with us in the dining-room, and hardly with Lucy in the nursery.'

'Oh, I see,' and Herwald set himself to consider gravely. 'Why, what's become of the Oak parlour, where we learnt our lessons, made our feast-suppers, and talked round the fire ?'

I clapped my hands. 'What a capital idea ! I never thought of it. He shall have the Oak parlour.'

'And comfortable quarters too ; and, Nellie, one more thing—I may bring my dogs ?'

'Dogs ! how many ?'

'Only Leo, Max, and Sprite ; may I ?'

How could I refuse him, looking up in my face with that coaxing smile ? so I cheerfully acquiesced, and asked what more I could do for his pleasure.

'You must let me have my own room. Don't shake your head, Nellie. I won't sleep in any other.'

'Please, Dudley, make him hear reason ; I want him to have

Bruce's ; it is larger, more comfortable, better furnished, and everything.'

'Oh, as to that, Mrs. Housekeeper, we can manage either way ; you know we have agreed to have a little renovating process at Sunnyside, new drawing-room carpet, &c., and of course we will do away with all that spare room rubbish.'

'If you are going to put yourself to any expense I won't come ; and as to turning Bruce out of his room, I should have the nightmare every night I spent in it. No, I'll have my own dear old room looking over the orchard, with its faded moreen hangings, and all—do you know, I have every article of furniture in it by heart !'

'I can hardly believe that.'

'Can't you, old fellow ? here, I will give you a summary, gratis, for nothing. First, it had green panelled walls, very worn, I won't say dirty, and the corners and edges partially peeled, and pared by mischievous boys' hands, yearning for its crisp brittleness ; next, it had a window-seat of some dull grained colour, and two corner cupboards painted mahogany, and piled up with dusty books and parchment. The bed and window curtains were moreen, of a yellow green with knotted fringe ; and there was a heavy cumbrous sofa at the foot of the bed, covered with the same, which creaked when any one sat on it, and had a folding flap, and three deep drawers, always full of string and paper.'

'Oh, Herwald, how can you remember such trifles ?'

'Trifles ! can't I see at this minute the unsightly patch at the right-hand side made by Dudley's muddy boots, when he lay on it and talked to me after our twelve miles' walk to Farnham Hollow ; and let me see, what comes next ? oh, there was a spindle-legged table, and a high-backed chair covered with seedy velvet, and a great black wardrobe, almost touching the ceiling. Just over the mantel-shelf, George the Third simpered in his coronation robes ; I remember that, because Bruce and I used to shy blotting paper pellets at him, and try which should hit him on the nose ; and a heartrending picture of Nelson's death over the wash-stand with a pleasing vis-à-vis in Gainsborough's "Blue Boy." I think that's all, if I mention the two tall china pots of rose pourri, and the shell-patterned quilt, and the beautiful linen sheets, smelling so sweetly of lavender.'

'I think he deserves his room after this, Nell.'

Our discussion was ended by Allan abruptly entering.

'I find, sir,' he said, addressing Dudley, 'that the trains for this month are altered, and I have been obliged to order the carriage an hour earlier.'

'An hour earlier ! then, my good child, you have only time to tie on your bonnet and Rill's.'

'All right,' answered Herwald, 'don't flurry her ; go quietly up-stairs, I'll attend to everything, Rill in the bargain.'

In three-quarters of an hour from that time we were standing in

the shabby little station at Whalley, exchanging the last greetings and inevitable good-byes.

'Kiss Uncle Herry for the last time; a good one—that's right; and now God bless you, Nellie; you hardly know what good you have done me, perhaps some day you will. Good-bye, old fellow; no, I won't be thanked. Confound your soft speeches—no, I did not mean that; God bless you all;' and he wrung Dudley's hand and walked away to where Allan was standing with the patient dogs.

The train moved slowly along the platform, the hounds panted and strained in the leash, Allan put up a military salute, and Herwald waved his straw hat, and in another minute we were steaming away for the south, and our happy visit already became a thing of the past.

'Dudley, Dudley,' lisped Rill, from her seat on my knee. Dudley, whose face was settling into gravity, turned towards his baby sister with a smile.

'Uncle Herry sends you this,' at the same time dropping from her fat fingers something that lay sparkling and blazing on the carriage very like a ray of light. Dudley picked it up eagerly and placed it on his finger; it was the magnificent diamond ring that Herwald always wore, and that we had once innocently admired.

'There,' he said, stretching it out for me to see; 'it hardly becomes my hard-working brown hand, after his slender white one. What do you say, Nell?'

'That yours is well-shaped, and gentlemanly, and that I like it ten times better than his, which is characterized in my mind by a certain languor, I will not say effeminacy; I don't care for white-handed men. But surely, Dudley, you do not mean to accept anything so costly? it is a princely gift.'

'It is, and worthy of a princely heart; Nell'—and a rare happy smile played round his mouth as he spoke—'I dare not refuse this; I would not so wrong his generous nature; Heaven knows, I have refused enough already.'

My eyes questioned him; he hesitated a moment, then continued—

'Well, I did not mean to betray him, but I suppose my sister-friend is to be trusted. My dear, you cannot imagine what Herwald has been urging on me day by day; truly, if I had chosen, "the good of all the land of Egypt" might have been mine; I had but to admire to have it instantly offered me. One day it was a picture from the gallery, any I might choose, with the exception of the Guido and his mother's portrait; then a brace of silver-mounted pistols worth their weight in gold, a hunter valued at two hundred guineas, and lastly—' here Dudley coloured up, so that I was afraid he was not going to tell me; 'lastly, Nellie, he earnestly besought me to accept a large sum of money; I won't tell you the amount, but enough to settle me handsomely in any profession or business I might choose. and sell out my share of the factory to Bruce—which

he will have is injuring my health. We had our first quarrel about it. I flatly refused to take a penny at his hands, and he stormed up and down the library, carrying his head like a young king, and confounding my independence, pride, and want of friendship. It was a long time before I could calm him down at all, he was so excited. Don't you call that worthy of a Quixote?'

'Give him a better name than that, Dudley!'

'Well, when I had made him understand that I would be beholden to no man, not even to my own brother, for what my two hands could bring me, he shifted his ground, changed his tactics, and then and there, in perfect good faith, propounded the strangest proposition that could ever come from a young man of three-and-twenty. He told me with sad, serious eyes, that he should never marry, and prayed me if I loved him to let him have one of our boys to adopt and educate and make his heir, and he fixed on Charlie.'

I cried out in sudden pain, 'Oh, my dear, don't think of it.'

'We could not spare one of our children, could we, Nell? least of all our pretty loving Charlie; it was not to be considered for a moment. So I just walked up to him, chafing on his own rug like a young lion, and put my hands on his shoulders, and said, "Quixote, you are the most generous fellow breathing, but I were worse than a fool or knave if I were to accept this at your hand. Ten years hence, when you have lived a little longer in the world, and learnt more of its wisdom, you may enter again on this subject if you choose, but till then I will not entertain such a preposterous notion for a moment. And, mark my words, Herwald, for all your morbid visionary ideas, I predict that long before the time I name, your own son and rightful heir shall bear witness to the justice of my motives, and shall strengthen your hands and heart in the hall of your fathers."'

'What did he say to that, Dudley?'

'He answered with an idle jest, and mocked again at his Lancashire witches; but, for all that, he knew and I knew that I was right. So you see, Nell, that I can hardly refuse this graceful gift he has sent by our little Rill's hand;' and his eyes dwelt so long and tenderly on the brilliants on his finger that they were quite dim when he raised them.

The afternoon was waning into evening when we sighted our little town of D—; and in a few minutes we had run into its dingy station. It was arranged that no one was to meet us there to renew the memory of the last terrible waiting, and swiftly as we could, we passed out into the open air, and hailed the first empty fly whose driver touched his hat to us.

As we passed along the old familiar streets, something impelled me to draw back and cling to Dudley with a trembling hand, till the mournful impulse passed, and I could raise my eyes from Rill's golden curls, and answer Dudley's bright sweet smile as he whispered—

'Courage, Nell, we are nearing home.'

The aspect of the country had changed since we left ; the corn-fields, then proudly waving with ripening ears ready to harvest, and gay with poppies and blue cornflowers, were now nothing but stubbly fields, with the fallen leaves lying damply heaped up in the ditches ; with here and there an ungleaned stalk rotting in the mould.

The churchyard trees were bare, save for the firs and cypresses that guarded the still white tombs, and the horse's hoofs trod crisply on the yellow and crimson leaves that strewed the path and road ; now and then one fluttered redly in at the window and pelted our faces softly, as we leaned out to catch the first glimpse of home. As we turned the corner by the parsonage and came in sight of the grass lane, there was a waving of straw hats, and a joyous pealing of boyish huzzas from the stile ; and then the carriage stops ; some one wrestles furiously with the fastening, till the door is jerked open, and Halcot plunges in head foremost, to treat me to his roughest and most loving hug, and Charlie follows with his shy girl's kisses.

'What, is the grand new rule in vogue ?' says Dudley, laughing, as Halcot half-bashfully extends his hand ; 'I think I must transgress for once ;' and his lips touch the boy's brow lightly. Then three pairs of hands help me over the stile ; and while Charlie and Seymour linger behind with Dudley, Halcot, with his arm tight round my waist, impels me furiously along the sunny lane, talking so fast all the while, that his words trip one over the other, and I have not the slightest notion of what he is saying. I am trying vaguely to find a clue to what he is telling me about running, and scores, and long-stop, and somebody bowled out, when he turns—and at the same moment somebody takes hold of me and brushes my cheek with a soft moustache, and I look up half laughing into Bruce's handsome face, while he holds me out at arm's-length more fully to survey me.

'Welcome home, old Nell ; how we have missed you, to be sure ! why, what a sunburnt little gipsy, and looking quite pretty too,' and he smiles down at me with kind pleasant eyes, that remind me somehow of Charlie's. I have never in my life seen Bruce half so demonstrative, but I release myself at last, for I see Loo's dear beautiful face in the doorway, and in another moment she has clasped me in her arms.

When at last I sit down in my low chair by the garden window, I can hardly believe it is only two months' absence ; only two months, yet how changed the dear old drawing-room looks to me ; how narrow, how low, how shabby even, with its faded chintz and heavy panelling, and then, as if ashamed of the unconscious thought, I praise the bouquet that Louie has so tastefully arranged in my own particular vase and kiss the bright face that bends over me. Five minutes later and I would not exchange it for Hurst-hall and all its grandeur ; for Loo is kneeling by me holding

my gloves and chattering saucily, and Seymour has my cloak, Halcot is pulling at my bonnet strings, while Charlie, red in the face and breathing hard, is tugging ruthlessly at my boots, under a mistaken impression that they are goloshes. I can scarcely see them all now for the tears that dim my eyes, and make but poor answers to Bruce's gay bantering remarks, seeing which Loo proposes my adjourning up-stairs to my own room and making a quiet toilette, which is not to be done apparently, for they all swarm up after me, and peep out of odd doors and passages, while I turn the handle rather listlessly, if truth be told, for I have a lingering remembrance of my rosebud room.

'Loo, Loo, what does this mean?'

What does it mean indeed! this pretty new room with its delicately stencilled green paper, and moss carpet, fresh dimity hangings, and new chintz coverings. I look up at the ceiling, but its snowy surface gives me no clue, or the pretty dressing-table with its vase of light chrysanthemums, or the mantel-piece cleared of its antique rubbish, with a beautiful bust of Purità in the centre; and then I look at Loo, but she shakes her ruddy head unconcernedly and contemplates herself in the glass with an air of great serenity.

'Loo, Loo,' I cry, flying to her and squeezing the fair fresh face between my hands, 'this is your doing; let me thank you, though it is but poorly enough, my dear, for this pretty, glad surprise. How you all spoil me, and you, my precious sister, as much as any.'

She patted me affectionately on the shoulder. 'There, there, I am pleased you like it, but it is Bruce's doing as well as mine, he is equally indebted to your thanks;' and following her eyes I became aware of a shadow on the threshold, and a face peeping slyly round the corner, and in a moment had my arms round his neck.

'I say, don't strangle me, my good child, don't; what are you up to? oh my collar!'

Then as I released him, 'If she has not taken all the starch out, and it is my favourite one too;' but for all that, the corners of his mouth were going delightedly. 'Now, what's all this excitement about?'

'Oh, Bruce, you dear good fellow!'

'Well, I'm sure I don't object, but why these affectionate terms? oh, keep off, do,' and he waved his hands helplessly.

'He pretends ignorance, Nellie, but he has done as much as I.'

'Fie, what a story-teller you are, Loo; you know you bought the carpet and the chintz.'

'Yes, but all the rest is yours. He helped me choose everything, and used to sit and read while nurse and I worked; you can't imagine what a kind the thoughtful boy he has been.'

Bruce seemed to think these additional praises so fraught with danger to his personal appearance, that he retreated backwards,

sparring all the while, till he fenced himself in with the towel horse, where he felt his collar and remained passive.

'We have long thought that it was a shame your having the shabbiest room in the house ; why, Dudley's and Bruce's are much better ; and as to mine, I always thought I ought to make it over to you, especially since aunt's legacy enabled me to furnish it so handsomely. So,' continued Loo, 'we could not bear your coming back to such a poky little place after visiting at such a grand house as Hurst-hall must be ; so Bruce was generous, and we just set to work with a will and got it all done last night. I've not been able to attend to those nursery arrangements, Nellie.'

'Never mind, there is plenty of time, Mrs. Graham does not come till Thursday.'

'Who is this Mrs. Graham, Nellie, that you are always writing about?' asked Bruce ; but Louie would not let him enter on that subject, and by dint of much coaxing, got him out of the room, while I rested and refreshed myself, so that I was better fitted to meet the merry party down-stairs ; for it was a merry party as far as the boys were concerned, whatever the others felt. It seemed to be tacitly agreed among ourselves that each should bear his and her burden as cheerfully as might be ; and though Louie saw me shiver slightly as I passed the closed-up room, she only drew me on quicker, and no one noticed Dudley's brief gravity when he took the place that had not yet become familiar to him. I was not allowed to sit at the tea-tray, but had the guest-chair between Dudley and Bruce, with the three happy boys' faces opposite, and Loo's smiling eyes peeping round the urn. Scarcely had we seated ourselves, and the decorous grace been chanted by Charlie in a sing-song voice, with a loud Amen from Rill, followed by a clamorous demand for jam, than Halcot burst violently into the subject he had commenced in the lane.

'My dear boy,' I cried, interrupting the incessant 'I says' and 'he says,' 'I can't understand what you are talking about. Who was bowled out, and when?'

'Why, Damon, to be sure,' replied Bruce mischievously ; 'don't you know his Pythias is head of the school, Double-first, Dux, Monitor, whatever you call it.'

Seymour's face lighted up with an ingenuous blush.

'Yes indeed ; Louie told me the grand news, but I forgot for the moment to congratulate you ; I am very glad, Seymour dear, very, very glad, though you have left our poor Halcot so far behind.'

'No, indeed,' exclaimed Halcot, with a look of joy eagerly ; 'he's top of his class, and has got a histor

'History, indeed,' cried Halcot ; 'a precious lot to compare with your Greek and Latin prizes, to be sure ; not that I grudge you them, Seymour ; of course you got them, every one knows you are heaps cleverer than I.'

'I'm a year older,' said Seymour, who looked quite uncomfortable at his friend's humble avowal of inferiority. 'I'm sure you would work twice as well if you were only more ambitious.'

'Never mind, Seymour,' laughed Bruce; 'you've bowled him out in prizes, and he's scored you up at innings. Nellie again looks mystified; I refer to the grand cricket match between Dr. Merton's boys and the Grammar-School; Halcot made the greatest number of runs, and Seymour only five—so you see our Hal beats him hollow at cricket—'

'And at every other game too. I'm no match for him there,' and it was evident from Seymour's bright looks that this sense of inferiority was very palatable to him.

At this point of the argument, Halcot suddenly became violently red and exchanged meaning glances with his friend.

'Now's your time,' whispered Seymour, and Halcot, clearing his throat and gulping down something, broke out with—

'I say, Dudley, I have been thinking a good deal about it, and I've made up my mind that I want to go to sea.'

'Want what?' asked Dudley, aghast, rousing himself from a reverie.

'I want to be a sailor,' said Halcot, decidedly. 'I'm sure it is the life I'm suited for, and I hope, Dudley, that you will please to let me.'

Louie uttered an incredulous exclamation, and Bruce elevated his eyebrows ironically, while both the boys grew hot as fire.

'Come here to me, my boy.'

Halcot obeyed readily, and Dudley put his two hands kindly on his shoulders, and thoughtfully scrutinized the bonnie sunburnt face before him, the old tired look coming back as he did so.

'This is a grave proposition, Hal, and so suddenly started as almost to take my breath away. Come, now, tell me as quietly and clearly as you can, what are your reasons for supposing yourself fitted for a sailor's life?—quietly, mind, so that I can understand you.'

Thus adjured, Halcot commenced, but the flurry of his mind communicated itself to his words, which tripped up each other in long unfinished sentences, so breathlessly delivered, that Bruce put his hands up to his ears, and Dudley signed a piteous protest for silence.

'My dear boy, I can't make out a word of what you're saying; we shall never get to understand each other at this rate. Steady, Hal; tell me honestly, whom have you been consorting with, or what books of wonderful adventures have you been reading lately, so as to make you enamoured of the hardships and dangers of a seafaring life?'

Poor Halcot blushed. 'It is not the books so much, Dudley, but I feel I'm just cut out for a sailor.'

'Nevertheless,' returned his brother, smiling, 'I will trouble you

for their titles. Come, Hal, you are always frank with me ; tell me what you have been reading since I went away, in the holiday time, you know.'

Halcot reluctantly complied, naming as he did so several of Captain Marriott's, Cooper's, and Mayne Reid's, and as the memories of his favourite authors rose before him, he cried enthusiastically, 'Oh, Dudley, I can't bear the idea of being shut up in a little place like this all my life ; I should like to see the foreign lands and wonderful sights these men talk about ; fancy being among the icebergs, or seeing the Aurora Borealis, or the Southern Cross, and all the great creatures that live in the sea, and the water-spout, and the——'

'I see—I see, Halcot ; love of adventure the first potent reason ; now for the second.'

'Don't you think that a good one, then, Dudley?'

'A thoroughly boyish one, peculiar to most lads of your age ; now for the next motive.'

Halcot however commenced fumbling with the buttons of his waistcoat, and appeared confused.

'Up with your head, man, and speak out ; don't be afraid,' said Bruce, encouragingly.

'He's not afraid,' replied Dudley, putting his arm round him and drawing him closer ; 'tell us what is in your heart, my boy.'

Halcot flushed up to the roots of his hair, and stammered out with difficulty—

'It will be so awfully dull when Seymour goes to college and leaves me here ; I cou'dn't bear being left—I'm sure I should hate myself and everything else too.'

Bruce burst out laughing.

'Oh, Damon, Damon, we've got to the bottom of the argument at last.'

Even Dudley could hardly preserve his gravity as he motioned him to silence.

'Are these all your reasons, Hal?'

'No,' said the boy, plucking up heart as he felt himself losing ground, 'I've got a better one still. You see I must have some business or profession, and I would not be a clergyman for the world ; besides, I'm not clever enough, I should be plucked at the little-go, and I know you could never afford the expense of college ; and as for the factory, Bruce says there must not be a third brother in the concern.'

'How do you know that, young Jackanapes?' inquired Bruce, colouring with surprise.

'Why, I heard you say so to Dick Thornton one day when he asked you what you were going to make of me, and you called me a muscular beggar ; you know you did, Bruce.'

'I was not aware you were listening, little Pitcher. What a deal of trouble these boys are, to be sure.'

'Leave him to me, Bruce;—as for the factory, my lad, I suppose there are other places of business in D— besides that. Why one of these days Dick Thornton may be wanting a junior, eh, Halcot?'

His round face lengthened perceptibly. 'That is worse than anything. I could not sit on a high stool in a dark counting-house all day; it would drive me crazy in time, I know. I should cut it all and run away.'

'I trust not, for the honour of the Mortimers; and now a truce to all jesting. I've heard all your reasons, Halcot, and I want you to answer me one question;—do you think you would have proposed this if my father and mother were alive?'

Halcot hung his head in silence, and Dudley cleared his voice, that was becoming rather husky, and went on—

'To tell you honestly, Hal, I don't think you would. I am sure you could never have had the heart to distress them by proposing the first break in the home circle; and I am equally sure that nothing would have induced them to let you go.'

Halcot drooped his head still more painfully. Dudley put his hand under his chin, and turned the brown eyes full on his.

'I don't want to depress you, my boy. I have heard what you have had to say on the subject—you must hear my views now. I think you are old enough to know and to understand the heavy responsibility that rests on my shoulders, which, though you may not think it, is felt by me to be a great and awful charge; it is as though I were personally responsible for each one of you; how then can I answer for those who are not immediately under my wing? What do you think would be my feelings, Halcot, when I should see you prepare to set the ocean between us and you; exposed in your boyhood to the world's temptations, to jeering shipmates, and to dangerous work; and every wild and gusty night, when the wind howls round Sunnyside, to lie on wakeful bed and think of our absent boy? What, Halcot, have we not vacant chairs enough, and would you add another?'

'I never thought of that, faltered the boy.'

'Look at Keith,' continued Dudley; 'whom duty calls from home and country. Think how many an hour of longing and fruitless regret he will have to endure, before he learns to battle out his fate in the strange loneliness of that far-off land; and would you, of your own free will, sever these home ties, and go away from us?'

The boy's lip quivered, but he did not answer.

'You look on the happy adventurous side of a sailor's life, but now would you like the midnight watches, with the thoughts of Sunnyside so far away, and the dreary pangs of home-sickness—how in those long silent hours would you think of us, and wish to be among us again?'

Still no answer, the bright face still so sad and cast down.

‘I speak to you like this, because I would have you pause, and reflect on both sides of the question, before you make up your mind, for if you are set on it, you must go; I mean to have no grumblers in my camp, and shall impose no irksome chains of government. Once make up your mind that this is your true vocation and rightful sphere, and I will let you go, however I may regret the decision; and then, as now, you must abide your choice.’

He paused, quite exhausted by his inward emotion, and shading his face with his hand, seemed pondering deeply. Poor Halcot, left to himself, shuffled his feet, fumbled his buttons, and appeared generally uncomfortable; his brother's speech had appealed strongly to his affectionate heart; and we who knew him did not doubt the issue of his mental conflict. It came at length:—

‘Well, I have made up my mind, I won't go, Dudley; I see it won't do to break up the party at home—but what on earth am I to do with myself?’ he finished disconsolately.

Dudley smiled with an air of relief.

‘We will not vex ourselves about that just yet, Hal, you are only fourteen, and another year's schooling will do no harm; and after that we will hold a grand family council, and see what manner of man you are likely to turn out. Who knows? we may think a season at Antwerp desirable to improve that Anglo-French accent.’

Halcot's eyes sparkled.

‘I don't care where, Dudley, but I do so want to see the world.’

‘Well, well, it is a natural desire, and bred of a lively nature; but now I think our long discussion is ended, and happily too, thanks to your yielding the point; there—God bless you, boy,’ and for the second time that day Dudley transgressed, and kissed his young brother's brow.

Poor Hal looked rather sheepish as he came back to his old place, but Seymour, whose eyes had been filled with tears half the time, imparted consolation in whispers.

Soon after, Dudley challenged Bruce to an evening stroll, and the rest of us sat in the dark drawing-room looking out on the moonlighted lawn. Charley climbed up into my lap, and Halcot nestled close beside me with his head on my shoulder. He was very quiet at first, and talked in monosyllables, but we soon drew him out, and by the time the young men returned from their walk, his merry peals of laughter were ringing out at his own expense.

CHAPTER XVI.

'O weary hearts ! O slumbering eyes !
 O drooping souls, whose destinies
 Are fraught with fear and pain,
 Ye shall be loved again !
 No one is so accursed by fate,
 No one so utterly desolate,

But some heart, though unknown,
 Responds unto his own.

Responds—as if with unseen wings,
 An angel touch'd its quivering strings,
 And whispers in its song,
 "Where hast thou stayed so long?"

Longfellow

IN a very short time I had fitted into my old niche again, as though I had never moved from it. At first it felt strange to be sitting sewing quietly in that silent house, hearing nothing but the rustling of the leaves in the court, and the sighing of the wind in the cedar tree ; to look out upon unswept garden paths with their heaps of dead rotting leaves, or drearier still on the stubby fields in front, but by-and-bye I got used to it, and looked back on Hurst-hall and its splendours as the 'baseless fabric of a dream.'

At Bruce's request our old musical evenings were resumed, and Louie, once more in her element, presided at the grand piano, while Dudley suffered his cornet to see the light, and his brother brought out his beloved violin. On those occasions, Halcot had been accustomed to perform prodigies with a fife and triangle, while I, constituting the auditory, withdrew to the farthest corner of the room, so as not to be deafened, and thought it the finest orchestra in the world. These concerts gave the boys great satisfaction ; now and then, it is true, Bruce's violin got the spasms, and howled and wailed as if demoniacally possessed, or Dudley's breath whistled through his cornet in unmelodious shrieks, that left him red in the face, while Halcot had a knack of chiming in at the soft pathetic parts, which drew down anathemas on his devoted head ; but in spite of these little accidents, some of the finest operas were executed with triumphant success, and sometimes Seymour would coax his father across to listen to a favourite piece.

Working quietly by my shaded lamp, I would think sometimes pityingly of Herwald in his lonely hall ; or musing abstractedly, would ponder of the past, the present, and the future. And here a word or two to those who peruse these simple records of a quiet home life.

It may be that some may think—I do not say they do, but the idea has struck me—that I have shadowed forth myself too faintly and in colourless tints, while I have suffered others to stand more boldly out upon the canvas. Let no one think I would not have it so, it is what I have intended from the first. If I have sketched myself more dimly than the others ; if I have withdrawn a foot or two into the shade ; if I have suffered brief sentences to touch on feelings where others would have written whole pages ; it is because

I wish this to be no egotistical autobiography, but rather the remembrances of home characters and tender home scenes.

And there is another point where my reticence may be mistaken—let no one think I did not love Keith. From the hour when he wooed me a second time, comparing himself to Jacob and me to Rachel, in that the years he waited for her were nothing to the love he bore her; and looking on me with that brave sweet smile went cheerfully away to his exile; so in that moment, to quote a Scriptural expression 'my heart clave to him,' and the love so long dormant, and so timidly confessed, grew day by day stronger and stronger. I loved him, there was no mistaking that; deep in the recesses of my heart I held that secret hid; no one knew the intensity of my feelings, no one was witness of those long musing fits in my little room at night, or saw how often my pillow was wet with my tears.

If any one guessed at these things, it was Dudley; I only knew this by his giving me all Keith's letters and never asking for them again. He never wrote to me, and rarely sent me messages, but I felt that every line was meant to reach my eyes, and hoarded them with the jealousy of a miser. With the new-born love awoke a restless thirst and craving, a feverish desire for work, for companionship, for excitement, and in those days, Lucy Graham was my great resource.

It was late in the week when she arrived, and between three and four in the afternoon, when the house was silent, and cleared of its boyish occupants, which was a great relief, as I wished the sick child to be carried quietly up-stairs, and laid in the nursery cot, without the intervention of curious eyes and tongues. Louie, painting in the window-seat, was the first to give note of their advent, and the stopping of the carriage-wheels at the stile, and we both ran out into the hall to set open the door, and welcome the weary wayfarers.

It was a gusty October day; the wind swirled the dead leaves to our feet, and swept them in eddying masses about the court; and only a flickering sun-light played upon the stubbly land in front, and in the west were a few pallid clouds gradually warming to sunset; but for the crimson berries in the hedges and the ivy on the stable-walls, it would have been a very desolate scene indeed.

'What a lovely face,' cried Loo, as Lucy appeared in sight, looking wistfully about her, and asking questions of the man who carried Hennie; then as she quickened her steps at seeing us, and came up the court, a sudden impulse made me stoop down and kiss her cheek.

'Welcome to Sunnyside, Lucy!'

Blue eyes swimming in tears answered me, and then the forlorn stranger, taking heart of grace, responded gratefully to Louie's warm greeting. Hennie opened his arms when he saw me, and called me in his shrill whisper to come near; the little face felt hot

and feverish, and I signed to the bearer to carry him quickly upstairs. Hennie, however, interposed.

'I want to speak to that handsome lady first.'

The handsome lady bent smilingly over him, and pressed the little hand to her lips; no shadow of repulsion or shocked feeling passed over her face as she did so, inured as she was to the sight of want and misery.

It was one thing to establish Hennie comfortably in his day cot by the nursery window, it was quite another thing to get him to take refreshment quietly and consent to go to sleep. For the first half-hour he refused to do anything but look about him and ask questions.

'Where are the boys?' was the first; 'I want to see the boys.'

'They are at school, my child!' I answered, looking painfully at the large dilated eyes; 'but by the time you have had a little nap, they will be home and ready to see you.'

'I can't sleep,' he answered, rather peevisly, pausing with a spoonful of jelly to his lips. 'Don't talk so silly, Niss Nell.'

'Miss Nell' was the name he always gave me.

'Lucy! where are you, Lucy?'

She had been laying aside her cloak and bonnet, and came forward now, looking wonderfully pretty in her grey merino dress and neat falling collar.

'What is it, my darling?'

'What's that place?' said Hennie, trying to raise himself still higher in bed, 'all green, with a lot of trees?'

'That is the orchard, Hennie, full of apple and pear and cherry trees.'

'I like it!' exclaimed the child; 'look, Lucy, there is a cow, a real live cow walking about in it. What a funny garden, though, Miss Nell.'

'It looks very dreary now, Hennie, but it is beautiful in summer-time—'

'But it is like a field, all grass, and nothing but a great black tree in it, and a lot of bushes going all round it—haven't you any flowers?'

'Very few now; but you can't see the flower-garden from this window because of the shrubberies; it is such a pretty, quiet little place, shut in by a green gate, and leading to the kitchen garden; it has an arbour, and a fountain, and a rose-tree walk, and beds full of lilies and carnations; you shall go and sit there when the warm weather comes again.'

'But, Miss Nell—'

'Now, Hennie, I am not going to answer any more questions just now, so lie still like a good boy, while I talk to Lucy.'

My decided tone seemed to have some influence, for he offered no opposition only continued his questions in a low tone to himself.

'Well, Luc,' I said, drawing her smilingly into a distant window-

seat, and placing myself at her side, 'how do you like Sunnyside? do you think you can be happy here?'

She lifted up her face with a mute wistful expression.

'Well, dear, I do not mean exactly happy, that would be expecting too much in your unsettled state; but peaceful, Lucy, and tranquil in your new home.'

She laid her clasped hands on my lap, such delicate little hands, and looked up at me with the troubled earnestness of a child.

'Miss Mortimer, do you believe in presentiments?'

'Presentiments!' I replied, astonished, and somewhat awed.

'Yes, presentiments; something stirring vaguely in the heart, and whispering of hope and untold blessings,—blessings even for me and my boy. Do you believe in these, Miss Mortimer?'

'Yes, surely, Lucy. Have you really felt such a presentiment as you describe?'

'I have—I have. Oh, Miss Mortimer, I have!—standing on your threshold, I felt the unseen lifting of my burden; felt hope stirring into life again, and knew my husband was not dead. No, he is not dead—something that never lies has told it to my heart; I will despair no more. One day I shall have glad tidings from a distant land that bids me go to him, or he will come to seek his poor widowed girl; whichever it be, I know—I am sure—I shall see his lost face again;—and Lucy bowed her face upon her hands and wept.

I drew the gentle head down till it rested on my shoulder.

'If I weep, Miss Mortimer, it is with joy. I cannot tell you how I felt an hour ago, when you greeted the sorrowful stranger like a sister, and made her sharer in your happy home. It was as if after a long disastrous voyage we had drifted into some fair haven, never to battle again with the rough hard world; never to be hungry, or weary, or friendless, or to see my darling wasting and pining with neglect, but to rest for ever and be hopeful and thankful in this dear place.'

Here Hennie, peeping over the side of his cot with hot wistful eyes, broke off our conversation, and as I rose to speak to him, we heard feet scudding along the passage, and a whispered pause at the nursery door.

'The boys! the boys!' cried Hennie, sitting bolt upright and clapping his wasted hands; 'the boys; oh, let them in, Miss Nell, please.'

His excitement was so great, it would have been cruel to deny him, so I set open the door, and with a whispered caution, let them in.

All three advanced, treading on tiptoe, and holding their breath. I had prepared them as well as I could for the stunted, afflicted little creature they were to see; but an instant's glance at the disturbed and agitated group showed me the uselessness of my efforts. Struggle as they might, their self-possession was quite overthrown

by the sight of the weird, ghastly little face, propped up on its bony hands, and peering at them with bright specks of eyes. Poor boys, how I pitied them !

Seymour, generally so calm and quiet, was shifting his place uneasily, and looking everywhere and anywhere except at the strange object before him. Halcot having picked out a likely place in the ceiling, gazed at it in serene abstraction, while Charlie, with an ominous puckering of the mouth, took refuge behind my skirts. Poor Hennie looked from one to another more puzzled than pleased.

'Well, my child,' I said, coming cheerfully to the rescue, and giving Seymour a furtive little push, 'these two are the young brothers I talked to you about, Halcot and Charlie, and this is their schoolfellow, Seymour Egerton ; come, you must all be good friends together.'

'Hum !' says Hennie.

Here Seymour, recalled to a sense of duty by my premonitory nudge, gathered up his courage, and, with manifest effort, said—

'How do you do ? Are you better ?'

'Pretty well,' replied Hennie, coldly, but politely. 'What's that boy looking at ?'

Halcot, bringing down his eye from the ceiling, and becoming as red as a young turkey-cock, was heard to mutter 'flies,'—a fiction invented for the occasion.

'Flies,' exclaimed Hennie, throwing himself back upon his pillow with his weak gasping laugh. 'Oh, those silly flies, how I always laugh at them.'

'Why ?' asked Halcot, still looking over Hennie's head more in dismay than ever.

'They are so funny,' remarked Hennie, speaking so shrilly that his words came out in little squeaks, 'they look so very funny, walking on the ceiling with their heads down ; they don't like it, you know ; it makes them giddy, and then they fall backwards in your tea, and stick up their legs in the air,'—and here Hennie, again overcome, renewed his displeasing laugh.

None of the boys saw the joke in the least, but it seemed to refresh Hennie, for he sat up, chuckling still, and demanding to shake hands.

'I have a little hand,' remarked the sick child, 'and I like to feel big strong ones like yours. Won't that pretty boy with the curly hair come and speak to me too ?'

I led Charlie, still reluctant, and looking as if he were going to cry.

'He is very pretty,' said Hennie. 'He is like the little Samuel in Lucy's book ;—oh, what nice soft hair,'—and here he broke off with a little sob that brought Lucy from the other end of the room.

'What ails my pet ? what is it, dear ?'

'Why haven't I got pretty curling hair like that,' cried the child,

'and warm strong hands? I should like to be like that little boy, Lucy, to have great laughing eyes, and rosy fat cheeks like his.'

'My boy, my baby, my precious one, don't talk like that; it breaks Lucy's heart, and you would not make her more sorry and sad than she is now, dear; do I not think you pretty, my own—'

'Yes, you do; but look at those boys with their firm straight legs, and look at mine.' And here, to my great dismay, and the boys' horror, Hennie threw back the bed-clothes and displayed his shrunken, crippled limbs.

Poor Lucy burst into tears.

'Come Hennie, don't be so naughty—cover them up.'

'Ain't they funny legs?—they all go the wrong way, and won't walk a bit; they might be sticks for the good they are. What are you crying for, Miss Nell?'

I was not crying, but the tears stood in my eyes.

'There, I have made you all sorry; how these boys stare, to be sure;—come and kiss me, Lucy; we can't help my legs, can we? and we shall have the white wings some day; and perhaps Peter and John may come down this way presently.'

'Do you mean the Apostles?' demanded Seymour, speaking up boldly as befitted the future clergyman.

'The which, sir?' asked Hennie.

'The Apostles—the St. Peter and St. John in the Bible?'

'I mean the men who walked about with no stockings, and long frocks, and a great rainbow round their heads, and told the man at the Gate Beautiful, which was all gold, every bit of it, to get up and walk, and in a minute he walked and ran about. Well, they are angels now,' finished Hennie, 'and I thought they might perhaps come and tell me to do the same, and one day I should get up "leaping, and walking, and praising God."'

To see the little creature fold his hands upon his face as he said this; to see him turn and clasp his mother's neck, and tell her not to cry; to see the quaint bright expression coming back with the utterance of the childish faith;—to see all this would be to draw the tears from anybody's eyes, however hard and stern they might be. The boys forgot their repulsion, and drew near him in unfeigned sympathy, and before many minutes had passed Hennie was asking Dr. Merton's young monitor whether he liked dolls, and Halcot was in fits of laughter.

'Or if not dolls,' remarked Hennie sweetly, 'soldiers; I have a box of grenadiers, and we will play at them together.'

Seymour good-humouredly complying, the box was brought, and at the same moment came a low tap at the nursery door.

'It is only I,' said Bruce, putting in his head.

'Oh, come in, sir,' cried Hennie, 'we are only going to play soldiers.'

Oh, that's the little chap, is it?' said Bruce, putting his hands

in his pocket and trying not to whistle; 'how do you do, little what's-your-name?'

'Hennie, sir; how do you do?' extending a limp hand carelessly, 'I'm playing—don't interrupt.'

'Are you!' returned Bruce, staring; then in a low voice, 'well, of all the precocious little beggars.'

'Hush dear, hush; this is Mrs. Graham, Hennie's mother.'

Bruce did not whistle now, but only drew a long breath indicative of great surprise, and stared again with all his eyes at the pretty face before him, looking first at her and then at Hennie, in unmitigated astonishment. I tried to say a word and make him speak, but he only looked the harder at the unconscious Lucy, and twirled his moustache; and I was just beginning to feel uncomfortable, only hoping that Lucy did not notice it, when the chiming of the church clock called me to the tea-table, and I summoned Bruce to attend me.

'Oh, what do you say? tea-time, all right. I'll come; good-bye for the present, Hennie, and—ahem—Mrs. Graham.'

I hurried off to the dining-room; Bruce followed me.

'You sly old Nell, where did you pick up that confoundedly pretty little widow? by Jove, what hair, and what complexion.'

'She is not a widow, Bruce; and how could you be so rude and unkind as to stare at the poor thing so? I was quite ashamed of you, and afraid lest she should notice it.'

Bruce laughed that saucy laugh of his.

'You unreasonable woman. What! bring a pretty face into the house, and expect me not to look at it; what do you take me for? Don't you know your brother's weakness better by this time? stare at her, indeed! where's her husband if she is not a widow, Nell?'

'I told you before; I gave you her whole history. It is unkind to go on like this, when you know it teases me; it is not right, Bruce.'

He turned off my reproachful speech, in his lazy good-humoured way.

'Not a widow! well, she's next to one; that poor wretch will never turn up again. And what a comical little chap that boy of hers is, a miniature death on a mopstick; jolly little fellow, though, I expect; but what a contrast to her. Why, I have not seen such a face for years.'

'Oh, Bruce, Bruce, what is her face to you? Remember her position and yours; don't make me repent of bringing her here, for you will if you go on like this.' But Bruce did not abate one inch of his provoking behaviour.

'That's your own look out; if you bring a pretty girl into the house—for she is a pretty girl, widow or no widow, though I should prefer the former—you must abide by the results, for I shall look at her often enough, you may depend on it.'

Here, foolishly enough I began to cry, but I felt so vexed and

disappointed, and not a little frightened in the bargain. Now Bruce had the usual masculine abhorrence of woman's tears, and his soft heart was always more or less touched by the sight of them.

'Crying, Nellie! well, you are a muff, not to take a bit of chaff better than that; what an opinion you must have of me. You did not believe I was serious all this time. Nellie, I say, Nellie,' shaking me, 'look up, can't you, and don't be so silly.'

'Are you sure you were only joking, Bruce dear?'

'Am I sure? Listen to me, child,' holding me gently by the shoulders; 'you should let a mischievous fellow like me have his fling, and not immediately think there is mischief brewing.'

'And you were not in earnest, Bruce, truly?'

'Yes I was, I was very much in earnest when I praised Mrs. Graham's pretty face; and quite in earnest when I took a good long look at her; but I think you should have known me better than to suppose I must directly go and fall in love with her. Why, even if she were a widow, which I dare say she is, there is no fear, thank Heaven, of a mésalliance with Bruce Mortimer. Why, the prettiest farmer's daughter in England would not tempt me; the story of King Cophetua and the beggar is very well in poetry, but the Mortimers know themselves; there has never been one that has done a foolish or mean thing, and I shall not be the first.'

Now the blood of the Mortimers was Bruce's especial hobby. When twitted with his numerous flirtations, his first retort was always to pick a flaw in the family pedigree of the lady, and say magnanimously and sadly, 'She is a nice little thing enough, but you see the affair can't go on, she is not my equal; why, her father was such and such.' But as, from of old, the greatest talkers have not proved to be the greatest doers, somehow or other I was always dreading some irreparable piece of mischief on the part of Bruce; and felt that in my position now, of mother as well as sister, I could not guard my handsome brother enough, hence my fear at his unlucky expression of admiration.

'Oh, dear Bruce, of course I never thought of such things' (which was a little fib), 'I only meant it was hardly respectful to poor Lucy to look at and speak of her so. I am delighted you admire her; why, Dudley can't say enough in her praise; but we cannot be too careful, dear, now we are our own guardians, and hers too, poor child; and you won't mind your cross sister being a little particular now and then, especially when she has the trouble of looking after such a good-looking boy.'

Bruce laughed and kissed me.

'You are a dear little soul, though a crotchety one. Come, give us some tea, old girl.'

My heart felt lighter after this talk, nor did I repent its having taken place; for without this explanation I should have been uneasy. Bruce could not be kept out of the nursery, and Hennie and he became fast friends, but though he still looked at Lucy, I was

pleased to note the quiet respect of his manners and the suitable reserve with which she bore herself; and the more I perceived how entirely he was to be trusted, the more I felt convinced that my deed of charity was neither rash nor unwise.

Before three days had passed Hennie had singled out a favourite in the person of Seymour Egerton, to whom he became devoted. Seymour's grave beautiful character had seized on the child's fancy; in his presence he dropped the whimsical drolleries which he showed to others, and became a simple happy boy. A word, a look from his young monitor would check the fretfulness of his whine, and it was his greatest delight and consolation in hours of pain to be carried to and fro in his strong arms, till he grew weary and fell asleep. For Charlie he also manifested the greatest affection; but as for Halcot, whether he had experienced his love of teasing or felt no sympathy with his rough boy nature, I do not know; but he was more indifferent to him than to any one of the family, speaking of him contemptuously as 'the boy,' and very jealous of his single-hearted alliance with Seymour.

The nursery was a very pleasant place in those days, and both it and Hennie received a vast amount of attention, for which Lucy did not fail to come in for her share.

CHAPTER XVII.

'Eyes not down dropt, or over-bright, but
fed
With the pure pointed flame of chastity;
Clear, without heat, undying, tended by
Pure vestal thoughts, in the translucent
fane

Of her still spirit; locks not wide dispread,
Madonna-wise, on either side her head;
Sweet lips whereon perpetually did reign
The human calm of golden charity,
Were fixed shadows of thy fixed mind.'

Tennyson.

THIS was how I first saw her.

It was some three weeks after our return from Hurst-hall, when Mrs. Egerton held her quarterly tea-party, to which we were all bidden as a matter of course. It was November then, and the weather was drearier than is usual even at that time of year. Heavy mists hung over the lowlands, obscuring everything save a bare tree-top or two; raw gusty air, replete with dampness, surged in at the hall door whenever it was opened, or crept through the numberless cracks and crevices, chilling and searching to the bones. You might flatten your face for hours in the day against any of the windows at Sunnyside, and see nothing but a crazy church-tower apparently looming in the distance, or the fantastic shapes engendered by the damp on the panes of glass. Everything seemed reeking with moisture, and the hall, with its piles of shaggy coats

and hats, was continually steaming afresh. A miniature twilight pervaded the place for days ; lamps were lighted for the early breakfast, and remained unextinguished till noon, and dining-room, drawing-room, and nursery were alike prodigal of gloom, and, as in winter, the only cheerful place was by the fireside.

It was in this exhilarating state of things that Mrs. Egerton's birthday came round, and with it the quarterly tea-party. These evenings were very much noted in our family annals for many reasons : first, they were more or less tinged with an air of painful excitement, being generally preceded on Mrs. Egerton's part by a sleepless night or two, and followed by days of feverish exhaustion, frequently ending with Dr. Waldegrave and a soothing prescription ; secondly, they were, with this one exception, the pleasantest and the most enjoyable evenings in the world. You were sure to meet at the parsonage every one worth knowing, and all your own friends beside, not to mention a desirable stranger or two, to give zest to the entertainment, and that without the slightest stiffness or formality ; and lastly, they assumed an importance in my eyes, on account of my sharing the responsibilities ; of late years I had always acted as Mrs. Egerton's deputy-assistant and manager in general, being expected to receive the guests, and amuse those who could not find a place near her reception couch. Now of this position I was not a little proud, and I certainly did my best to make these tea-parties pass pleasantly.

It was my usual habit to go over early in the morning and help arrange the rooms and fill the flower vases, as well as drill the prim personage Jane in her duties for the evening. This year it had been gravely mooted in the family whether our recent trouble would not furnish a sufficient excuse, but Dudley, to whom it was finally referred, said, in his mild authoritative way, that those who wished might stay at home, but that it would be both selfish and unkind to deprive the poor little hostess of her assistant, and that in his opinion a serious clerical meeting like that was very different to a party of pleasure.

So, to Mrs. Egerton's relief, we consented to go, with the exception of Louie, who announced her intention of drinking tea with a couple of crabbed old maids living at the far end of the town. It was useless questioning Loo's vagaries, so no one offered the least opposition, and when the evening arrived, Halcot and I ran down the lane in a dense mist, Dudley and Bruce promising to look in some two hours later.

It was very early when we arrived. Old Charlotte, our family factotum, was setting out the tea-tray in the library, and Jane just lighting up the drawing-room candles ; but early as it was, Mr. Egerton was already standing on the rug in the stiffest of clerical cravats, and beaming complacence on his little hazel-eyed wife, who was cosily propped up on her couch in her well-preserved lavender satin and China crape shawl.

As we entered the room, he came forward with smile and outstretched hands.

'Here's our busy bee, Grace, that's been humming and working all day long, yet looks as fresh and bright as if November mists were never heard of; here she is with her young squire of dames too, and now we're as right as possible;' and so saying, and scarcely waiting for me to whisper my birthday congratulations to his wife, he deposited me in a formidable arm-chair beside her.

'Oh, Mr. Egerton,' I cried, jumping up, 'this is the seat reserved for the Hon. Mrs. Bluffington.'

'Never mind,' he replied, rubbing his hands joyously; 'we'll give it up to the old lady directly she arrives; but we have an hour's respite still. Is not Grace looking nicely, Nellie? I always tell her she looks ten years younger in that dress.' And sitting down on the extreme edge of the sofa, he smoothed it with his great hands, as if its very texture were precious to him.

'I must have a new one, Tiny,' says Grace, smiling faintly, 'if we are to continue our grand tea-parties.'

'Why, love, it is quite new.'

'No, not quite,' said his wife, gently shaking her head; 'fifteen years have worn off the gloss and freshness: it has been a serviceable friend to me; but such old friends must part at last. When I wore it first I was but a young wife, Tiny.'

'Ah, well, time slips by somehow; it seems but the other day since I first admired you in it, and now you tell me it is worn out; but you know, dearest, you have only to ask to have. To-morrow is a leisure day with me; I'll take Seymour down to Howel's and choose you a new one.'

Mrs. Egerton held up her delicate ruffled hands in affright.

'There is no such hurry as that, my friend; we will talk this grand matter over again, and then Nellie shall go with you. I can't trust you alone, Tiny, I can't indeed; where she would choose me silver grey, or golden brown, you would send me some emerald green, or violet, or heaven knows what particular shade of the rainbow, and a nice little white-faced creature I should look in them.'

Here Halcot interposed.

'I say, Nell, will you button my glove for me?'

'Come to me, my lad,' said Mr. Egerton, 'my hands are stronger than Nell's.' And when the boy obeyed, 'so it is all up with the sailing, I hear.'

Poor Halcot looked up from his hand sheepishly enough, but said nothing till the glove being fastened he tried to walk off.

'Nay, nay, not so fast, Hal; I want to have a little talk about this. Are you very disappointed, my boy?'

'Well, sir, Dudley thought it better to give it up, and of course he knows best. I don't so much mind now,—but—' The sigh belied the words.

Mr. Egerton put his hands on his shoulders, and looked down with his large calm eyes as if he would read the whole boyish heart.

'So much the better, Hal, so much the better; it is only a coward can't bear a disappointment, and not a brave fellow like you. I knew you would give it up at once if your brother wished it. And now for an old friend's advice, my lad, who means nothing but kindness to you and yours,—be guided by that dear brother in all things, and you will grow up the wise and happy man that both he and I wish to see you.'

'Thank you, sir,' faltered Halcot.

'He is setting you boys a bright example,' continued the good man, musingly; 'look to yourselves that you follow it. None of you know how anxiously he watches over your present and guards your future—none of you know him as I do, to be one in a thousand, clear-headed, silent of tongue, and faithful beyond all things; for the goodness of Dudley Mortimer is innate and only to be discovered by his nearest and dearest friends.'

Halcot's 'thank you' this time was bright enough; for myself, I was tongue-tied—but the words, oh my brother! were very pleasant to me.

Here Seymour, who had been vainly endeavouring to catch his father's eye, broke in with—

'Father, father—the wine.'

Mr. Egerton rose, helplessly feeling in his pockets one by one.

'Jane has just told me, father, and please be quick and I will help you.'

'True, my son, I forgot. Andrews detained me on parochial business, and put it out of my head.'

'And all the people will be here,' cried Mrs. Egerton, nervously. 'Oh, Tiny, Tiny, how could you be so careless? and now you are going into the cellar with your nice new coat on.'

Mr. Egerton shook his head laughingly at her, and left the room, and Seymour was following him, when his mother called him back.

'Seymour, darling, be sure you brush your father down when he comes out, and don't let him out of your sight a minute—remember our last party.'

'Yes, dear mother,' and Seymour ran off.

'What of last party, Mrs. Egerton? I don't remember.'

'Not remember, Nellie love, when you laughed till the tears ran down your face?—don't you recollect the innocent, simple fellow rubbing his hands and talking so pleasantly with Archdeacon Clyde, and all the time with a great patch of whitewash on his shoulder as big as my two hands, not to mention the sawdust on his elbows and knees. Oh, how the Archdeacon laughed, and that naughty Bruce brought the clothes'-brush into the drawing-room.'

'True, I forgot. Hark! There's the first arrival, Mrs. Egerton; Mrs. Bluffington, I suppose.'

It was only Dudley and Bruce, who, finding the home parlour dull, followed us speedily.

'Well, Mrs. Egerton, how are you?' said Dudley, coming up to her sofa and giving her the kiss he always vouchsafed her on birth-days and high-days. She was his and Bruce's godmother. 'You see we have come early, after all; where's the parson, ma'am?'

'Down among the dead men,' replied Halcot, whose fingers were jingling noisily among the lustres on the mantlepiece; 'he's bottling wine, don't you hear?' and he drew divers corks with an alarming approach to reality, standing on the bright fender all the time in his excitement.

Bruce walked quietly up to him and dislodged him by the ear from his perilous resting-place and marched him off to a distant window-seat.

'Don't be such a bully, Bruce,' muttered the boy.

'Don't you be such an unmannerly young jackanapes,' replied his Mentor. 'Hark! there are the Waldegraves—come, behave yourself, Hal; you spoil him dreadfully, Mrs. Egerton; he forgets he is not at home.'

'No, he does not,' growled Halcot, 'only they are not such prigs here as you!' but further remarks were silenced by the entrance of Dr. Waldegrave and party, and the Grosvenors—and for the next hour I had plenty of occupation in securing seats for the dowagers, and devising small talk and pleasant companions for a few shy young curates who huddled together in a corner of the room, and looked sheepishly out on the rest of the party over their high clerical collars.

These curates always gave me more trouble than all the other people put together; they would not come out and be introduced to some High Church young lady dying to know them, and giving me broad hints of her wishes on the subject, and they would persist in looking unspeakably wretched. One young curate in particular, scarcely more than a boy, who always had holes in his great lavender gloves, and blushed up to the roots of his hair when even looked at, was a most distressing example of the clerical biped. Nothing could be extracted from him but a few harmless platitudes delivered in a feeble stammering voice, and the least approach to a joke would throw him into a fever of nervousness. I never saw him wiping his brow, which he did about thirty times in an evening, and clearing his voice behind his hand, without pitying him sincerely, and wishing he had a mother or sister to take him quietly away. And yet I knew him to be a zealous Jehu in his profession, driving furiously, and driving well, leonine in his courage in the pulpit, and showing his ugly boyish face to his congregation from thence with a steady composure and earnestness that well became it.

So I not only pitied the Reverend Herbert Blane, but liked him, and did him a good turn on the evening in question; for, finding him uncomfortably sitting on the edge of his chair by Emma

Sunderland, a pretty, spectacled, and most objectionable young lady, and being talked to on the subject of the 'Oolite Formation' and the structure of the Plesiosaurus—at least I heard those words frequently—I rescued him, not without difficulty, and placed him instead under Mrs. Travers' motherly wing, who talked to him about his Manchester home, and his father's mill, and his rough school-boy brother, and the pleasant old house in Whalley Range.

It was eight o'clock, and the room was rapidly filling. I had been in the library some time, and on my return became aware of a fresh arrival and a perfect stranger to me. It was a lady about seven-and-twenty, sitting somewhat apart from the general group, turning over some engravings on a side-table.

Something in the sweep of the silver-grey dress and a graceful contour of the bent head attracted my attention, and I at once caught hold of Seymour and asked who she was.

'All right, go and talk to her,' said he, not in the least understanding my question, and rushing off to show a clever trick to two curates in the corner; so remembering my character as assistant hostess, I crossed the room and introduced myself. At my first word she raised her head and returned my greeting with a gesture full of grace, at the same time replying with a high-bred ease that met me more than half way. As she did so, I thought then, as I think now, and shall till I die, that it was the most beautiful face I had ever seen. It was not so much her features, though they were singularly attractive, as the grave and noble air that distinguished them, and the mingled repose and sweetness in lip and eye. She was dressed richly, yet with a certain stern simplicity; and she wore her bright brown hair folded back in loose full braids, as I loved to see it; and her smile was sweet and lingered long as she spoke.

'You are very good to introduce yourself to me, Miss Mortimer you English are so slow generally to welcome strangers. It is not from want of goodness of heart, I believe, so much as from the *mauvaise honte* that impedes your society and makes it so cold.'

Though she said 'you English,' and spoke in the liquid accented tones of one who had dwelt long among foreigners, I felt satisfied she was not one herself, nor was I mistaken.

'I must return your courtesy,' she continued, 'and commend my name to your notice: I am Marion Vivian.'

'Not Vivian of the Priory, surely?'

'Why not of the Priory?' she replied, smiling archly at my surprise; 'not that I expect a Mortimer of Sunnyside to recognize me; we have been so long exiles in a foreign land, that our name must almost have died out among our neighbours and friends, and we ourselves be supposed to have died out with it.'

I sat down beside her quite bewildered.

'I certainly have some vague remembrance of a Marion Vivian

some fifteen years ago, of a bright-eyed little girl we used to meet in the early mornings, walking with her governess.'

Miss Vaughan laughed.

'Then I ought to have more than a vague recollection, being the elder by many years, of the happy little creatures—girls and boys, and white-headed infants—always playing in that shady lane, or laughing out at me from the windows of the large white house; but my memory is as indistinct as yours, for the strange wandering life I have led these many years has somewhat blotted out the past; but still, wherever I went I carried with me the fond remembrance of my dear old home.'

She paused and sighed slightly, and then went on in a brighter tone.

'You must have been our nearest neighbour, Miss Mortimer, then as now; how was it then that the heads of our families were not more friendly with each other? We children, though we met day by day and exchanged words and smiles, never played together!'

It seemed strange to her, but we had always understood from our parents that Mr. Vivian was a proud, reserved man, little given to making friends of his neighbours, and only mixing with the highest county families; and that his wife was even laughtier and more distant than he; but I could not explain this to Miss Vivian, so only said how pleased I was to hear they were home again.

'Yes, but not to stay,' she replied, smiling; 'you do not suppose we are bats, to live in such ruins. I have only come to see the dilapidations, and decide on repairs and alterations; and a few minutes' conversation with our bailiff convinced me that six months' work will hardly effect all I have planned.'

'And you came over alone?'

'Yes, with Dominique, our major-domo, and my maid Babette; we have been here four days bivouacking on the first floor, which is the only habitable portion. We shall leave again for Paris on Thursday.'

'A fleeting visit, truly—'

'But sufficient for my purpose, which was to put the work in train. Oh, the dear old place, wretched, dilapidated, ruined as it looked on the first night of our arrival, with its broken terraces and wilderness of gardens; I felt so happy to see it again, that if it had not been for Dominique and Babette, I could have knelt down and kissed the threshold. It has not been my wish, these fifteen years' exile of ours, in our bright southern home; not Italy's sunny skies and our beautiful Neapolitan villa could compensate me for the loss of home.'

'It was your father's wish, then?'

She inclined her head with a slight gesture of assent.

'Your wanderings are over now, Miss Vivian, or will be; you will be back with the summer, all of you, I hope.'

'All,' she repeated with a sigh, 'all,—there are but Eleanor and I to come; we leave our father and Harold behind; do you comprehend me?'

Too well, in her lowered tone and reverent utterance.

'We were four when we first left the Priory, but we leave our eldest and youngest behind us. It was very sad to lose our father, who was old and suffering, and longing to go, but it was worse to lose our boy, our eagle-eyed Harold, the hope and pride of us all. Well, it was many years ago. I can bear to tell you.

'One day he set out in his little boat, on the great calm treacherous bay, and before noon a storm arose, and when the boat rode in at evening time, there was no Harold there; and the next morning some Neapolitan fishermen found him lying on the beach with his bright hair all tangled with seaweed, and the life buffeted and beaten out of his dear brave heart, and they carried him home and laid him at his father's feet. He was an old man,' finished Miss Vivian in her tender melodious voice, 'and he never got over it; but I should not have saddened you by such miserable details,' and her eyes dwelt pityingly on my crape dress; 'there is no need to ask if you, too, have known trouble.'

At my low-toned explanation she held out her hand with an expression of frank sympathy in her dark eyes.

'How sad, how very sad, and you so young too; but, Miss Mortimer, when we settle down in the early autumn, as I trust we shall, we must be good friends with our Sunnyside neighbours; we are no recluses, Eleanor and I.'

'Shall you not be home before the autumn?'

'Not if Eleanor carries out her plan of spending the summer among the Pyrenees, and I shall think myself happy if she permits us to be settled then. You look surprised, but my sister has no such love for her English home as I. At least not till lately, when she herself proposed we should give up our wandering life and live again among our own people. You see she is an artist, and loves Italy's blue skies and sunny plains; she delights in change, variety of objects, and uncertain excitement. I fear it will be long before she settles down happily in this quiet tranquil home.'

'She is your younger sister?'

'Yes, there are six years' difference between us; it is right that she should be gay and I grave.'

'You love her dearly?' I asked, for there was a rapt enthusiasm in the tone in which she uttered her name.

'Love Eleanor! there—I forgot, I must not rhapsodize; when you see her for yourself, you shall judge whether my idolatry is thrown away; for it is idolatry,' she continued, blushing, 'and such creature-worship as every unmarried woman bestows on one of her household gods. It is as vain to say to a woman, do not love, as it is to say to the ocean with the great Master, "Peace, be still."'

'So that the object be worthy,' I acquiesced.

'And who so worthy as Eleanor? What if she be capricious,' she continued musingly, 'or a trifle wayward? has not the adulation and praise she has received everywhere been more than enough to turn her head? We who belong to the happy mediocrity, and have never been caressed and fêted out of our senses, can form no idea of the temptations that assail these few favoured darlings of fortune, but it has never changed my child's heart, never; nothing on earth could spoil my high-soul'd Eleanor. But how egotistical I am becoming, and how patiently you are forbearing with me! let us talk of something else; if you will be so good, you shall tell me a little about these people here, whom I must look upon in the light of future neighbours, and possible friends; but I have made one to-night, have I not, Miss Mortimer?'

I smiled assent, for my heart felt drawn to this graceful frank woman, with her serious eyes and sunshiny smile.

'But, Miss Vivian, how is it that Mrs. Egerton did not inform me of your intended visit this evening? she surely did not know of it?'

'No, she did not. I told Mr. Egerton that I should not come, but on second thoughts I altered my mind, which I do not regret; but now, will you satisfy my curiosity, and tell me who every one is? First, I want to know who are those two good-looking young men talking to that pretty little widow; the fair one is singularly handsome, but I prefer the countenance of the other, it is so earnest and good.'

Then, and not without a certain proud beating at my heart, I told my new friend they were my brothers. She was too highly bred to betray the slightest embarrassment at my answer, but only said—

'You have reason to be both happy and proud.'

'I shall be doubly so if you will allow me to introduce them,' and I beckoned to Dudley, whom I had already noticed casting curious glances into our corner from time to time, as if he were only waiting a signal from me to join us gladly.

Miss Vivian rose at his quick approach, with smile and outstretched hand.

'I cannot allow you to greet me as a stranger, Mr. Mortimer—I am Marion Vivian.'

'Of the Priory?' he answered, holding her hand, in bright surprise. 'I am, indeed, happy to be one of the first to welcome you home again.'

She coloured slightly as she reseated herself.

'Yes, we have been long away, but, as I have explained to your sister, I have only come for a few days, to investigate repairs; the Priory is in a sadly ruined state.'

'You are right, it must have been very hard for you to have seen the old house looking so wretched. We are your next neighbours, Miss Vivian; remember you can command us in any way.'

'You are very good,' she answered gratefully. 'Yours is the first offer of help that I shall accept in case of necessity.'

'Whom have you left to look after the work?'

'My bailiff, Mr. Burrowes, of Abbey Farm, and in June I shall send Dominique to take possession. Eleanor,' she continued, turning to me, 'has decided that all our furniture is to be sent from Paris; I think she is right in buying new, ours is too antique for use.'

'Not for the library and wainscoted dining-room, Miss Vivian.'

'I am glad you say so,' she replied, well pleased; 'because your opinion just coincides with mine. I propose to fit up the antique rooms with our oak furniture; but our drawing-room, and Eleanor's studio and boudoir, shall be modernised to her heart's content.'

It was pleasant to see how unreservedly she conversed with us, and to notice with what quiet respect and admiration Dudley stood looking down into her beautiful face, which lifted itself up to his, as if reliant on his appreciative sympathy.

It was always a pleasure to me to watch Dudley with girls; he neither criticised nor flattered, but would insist on meeting them on equal terms, and talking to them as if they were sensible creatures. I should think the vainest and most empty-headed among them must have felt the tone of her mind raised after a conversation with him; he was so tolerant and gentle, so patient with their feminine weaknesses, so ready to aid with his masculine strength, that they could not help respecting and liking him with an honest, wholesome liking. But the vainest of them never catered for a compliment, nor the boldest dared to coquette, for they were sure to be repelled by a stiff, cold rebuff, either in look or word. And this was perhaps the reason why he was hardly such a general favourite as Bruce.

I think Miss Vivian understood at once by instinct what manner of man he was. I am sure that while Dudley was admiring her as a highly-bred, graceful woman, that she on her side comprehended that the 'good earnest countenance' was but the index to the heart within. Something in her manner told me this more than in words, for she was not one to accost a stranger freely, or to unbend a certain lofty reserve that served her in the place of pride; yet she had received us both with a familiar graciousness, that was as flattering as it was unexpected.

Bruce summoning me at this minute, I was obliged to resume my general duties as hostess; but on my return to the corner in half-an-hour, I found Dudley still talking, and Miss Vivian retaining my place for me.

'There,' she said, as I seated myself again at her side, and Dudley came and leant over my chair, 'we are comfortable again; but I really must apologize, I had no idea I was detaining my hostess so long.'

'Nell makes a good one,' said Dudley, smoothing my hair,—he

never would behave stiffly and like other young men in company ; 'are the good folks amusing themselves well ?'

'Yes, but poor Herbert Blane has been in hot water again.'

'You don't say so?' laughed Dudley. Miss Vivian called for an explanation, and when I had given it, remarked—

'A friend of ours, Mr. Delorme, always said he pitied young curates of all men.'

'Mr. Delorme ! not Herwald Delorme of Hurst Hall ?'

'The same,' she replied, turning her eyes full on him ; 'why, how surprised you look ; is it very astonishing that we should both know the same person ?'

'It is to me, I confess. I should have thought our paths, and the people who crossed them, were as diverse as the poles ; but now I will not ask you what you think of him, for to know Herwald Delorme and to like him are but one and synonymous terms.'

'Is he not good ?' she answered, with sparkling face ; 'is he not different to any one you ever met, or heard of, or read of in books ? Do you know my name for him ? he is my ideal Sir Galahad, the purest and best knight of the Round Table ; or a Bayard, peerless chevalier, "sans peur et sans reproche."'

'These are finer names than our old one of Quixote, Nell.'

'Oh, did you call him that ?' she laughed, 'I like Sir Galahad best—

"Whose strength is as the strength of ten,
Because his heart is pure ;"

but I must own to you that I did not form such a fair opinion of him at first, rather the contrary.'

'Where did you meet ?'

'At Rome ; his father was alive then. We met first in the salons of the Duc de F——. Ginevra de Festa was to sing that night, and there was a great reunion in her honour ; she was a star just rising above the horizon, and none of the learned savants who crowded round her and praised the trembling artiste, imagined it was so soon to set.

'The evening was drawing to a close, when I noticed a young Englishman, with a fair boyish face and a peculiarly high carriage of the head, cross the salon and address Ginevra in tolerably pure Italian.'

'Well, Miss Vivian, what are you smiling at ?' and Dudley smiled too, as she paused.

'Because I have hardly the courage to tell you, who are so truly his friend, what was my first impression of him.'

'Nay, I will grant you full absolution for whatever you may have thought, for the knightly name you have conferred on him.'

'Well, then, I own I turned to my companion, a red-bearded giant of a Scotchman, and asked who that supercilious, cor.ceited-looking youth was, and upon Mr. Douglas laughingly proposing to introduce him, I replied haughtily enough, that I was perfectly

indifferent to the existence of such English puppies as those. "You will alter your opinion," replied my friend, "after your first *tête-à-tête*, and as I could not bear such a noble nature to be misconstrued, I shall bring him to you in defiance of your command."

'Well, Miss Vivian?'

'Well, Mr. Mortimer, he brought him, and before half-an-hour had passed, I was obliged to own that I had never before met any one who interested me half as much; nor did I change my opinion in the frequent occasions that I saw him during our stay at Rome.'

'And you re-christened him Sir Galahad?'

'No, not then, not till long afterwards, when we met again under far different circumstances; but I am wearying you.'

'Far from it, you are deeply interesting me; remember, the man of whom you speak is to me as my own brother; pray tell us how and when you saw him next.'

'It was in a lonely Swiss inn, where our merry party were fain to rest and refresh ourselves after a long and fatiguing excursion among the mountains. He was in deep mourning then for his father, which corresponded but too well with his harassed and worn face; and the veriest stranger among us could not fail to be touched and subdued by the spectacle of that lonely sorrow. For myself, I own my heart bled with pity. I remembered him the gayest of our clique at Rome; I remembered his merry sayings and boyish spirits, and it was hard to see him so changed, and yet have no power to comfort. I am happy to recollect now that my poor words appeared in some measure to have influence with him; and partly, I believe, because he felt grateful for them, he consented to bear us company for a day or two, before he started for his tour through Egypt.'

'As we were sitting at table that evening, a talkative waiter informed us that a compatriot of ours, and, he believed, an Englishman, had come to the inn a week previously for a night's lodging, had suddenly sickened, and was lying now at the point of death in a stifling little garret at the top of the house, where the landlord was keeping him out of charity, he being evidently without money and friends; at least, they could find none, neither name nor address. The rest of the party looked horrified at the dismal story, all but one—and that was my Sir Galahad, who only whispered to me to know if I would go with him to visit the sick Englishman. I consented willingly, and we at once begged our waiter to precede us to the place where he was lying.'

'It was in the roof of the house, a small low-ceiled garret, stifling from the absence of anything like ventilation. The little trundle-bed appeared too short and narrow for the strong giant frame that was stretched upon it, moving its head from side to side of his hard uneasy pillow. It was a fine face, and evidently a handsome one, though wasted with sickness, with a bronzed beard all unkempt and unshorn, reaching to his waist, and——'

'Allan!' I exclaimed suddenly, in answer to Dudley's wakening smile.

'Yes, that was the name, but we did not learn it from himself, he was too far gone for that, as he lay hammering feebly on the bed-clothes with his brown helpless hands, and muttering broken fragments of French, German and English. It was in vain that we spoke to him or touched him soothingly, he only moaned louder, and moved his restless head faster on the pillow. After a few minutes we arranged what to do; we had him moved to a larger apartment, with a cool quiet aspect, and sent for the best medical advice.

'The next morning we were to rise early, and after a hurried déjeuner, to resume our mountainous route; and at the appointed hour we were all assembled, with the exception of Herwald Delorme.

"Milor had been up all night with the sick Englishman," our talkative friend informed us, "and Milor was trying to repose himself a little at present;" and so we were obliged to await his arrival with what patience we might. At the end of the meal he entered.

"You will lose your breakfast, my good fellow, if you don't make haste," said one excitable young tourist.

"My plans are altered," he replied coolly; "you must make up your party without me, and start at once."

"Without you?" we exclaimed.

"Yes," he answered, smiling, "you must leave me to enact the old story of the Good Samaritan; I am bound to stay with this poor fellow till he is better."

'Ah, Quixote, how like you!'

'We endeavoured, at least my friends did, to shake his resolution, but he was firm, and gaily waved us an adieu from the window. I say gaily, for he looked more like himself that morning.'

'And that was the last time you saw him?'

'The last time I spoke to him, but I had the pleasure, a long time after, of seeing both him and Allan at a distance; we found out his name was Allan, and that he had been a soldier, from a letter Mr. Delorme discovered hidden under his pillow. And the way I saw them was this:—

'I was walking early one morning in the Boulevards at Paris, when I noticed a tall soldierly man before me with two superb deerhounds; the animals as well as their master seemed to attract great observation, and many beside myself paused to admire them. All at once one of the hounds stopped and uttered an uneasy whine, his master stopped also, and turned round, as if expecting some one; as he did so, I caught sight of the bronzed beard and noble features of the sick soldier. I hastened my step to accost him, but before I could reach him, a young man galloped past on an Arab, and then suddenly reined him up, and in a moment Allan had turned into the road in obedience to his quick signal, and I lost

him, but not before I had recognized the rider for Herwald Delorme.'

'Oh, what a pity!' I exclaimed.

'Nay,' returned Miss Vivian, quietly; 'it was enough for me to see them well and happy, and in each other's company; we shall meet again some day.'

Here a message was brought from Mrs. Egerton, begging Miss Vivian to sing. She rose directly, and put her hand in Dudley's arm with a cheerful acquiescence that was truly amiable, especially as she had before observed to me that she disliked singing in public.

As she crossed the room, I noticed all eyes followed her graceful figure, and when she commenced her song, a breathless silence succeeded to the buzzing of the many voices.

She sang, as I knew she would, with pathos and deep feeling, regulated by a highly cultivated taste, and with a voice at once powerful and sweet. Cheerfully as she had commenced, she complied once and again, and then without waiting for her justly-merited applause, put her hand again in Dudley's arm.

'Will you take me to my hostess, Mr. Mortimer? I am certain Dominique is waiting for me by this time.'

'You are not going so early, surely?' said Dudley, earnestly, and in a tone of real regret.

'I must, indeed. I have a heavy day's work before me to-morrow, and we start for Calais the next day; but I have had a very happy evening, thanks to you and your sister.'

'You are not the only one who has had that,' he replied pleasantly. 'Here is Nellie behind you, Miss Vivian.'

She turned to me with a sweet smile, and pressing my hand warmly, bade me adieu. Dudley took her out to the carriage, and then came back for me.

'I had no idea it was so late; what a nice evening we have had; look, the people are going, so we had better do likewise;—wrap up warmly, for there's an awful mist.'

I was glad to go, for I was anxious to hear what Dudley really thought of our new friend, but at my first word he bade me shut up my mouth, and run as fast as I could, so it was not till we were all sitting cosily round the fire in the oak parlour that my curiosity was appeased.

'Admire her!' said Bruce, sententiously, 'why, he can't help doing that; she is a very elegant woman, but not as handsome as our Loo.'

'Far handsomer, Bruce, you mean.'

'No, he does not,' returned Dudley, quietly, as he stood looking down into the fire. 'Miss Vivian is not Bruce's style.'

'Yes, she is,' retorted his brother; 'I think her a very superior girl, and a clever one in the bargain, and what's more, I tell you she will be a great acquisition to our society; she is just the sort of

woman fitted to preside over it. I never saw such well-bred manners, and then what a voice she has !'

'And, Dudley, what do you think ?'

'That she is very beautiful, and what is better, very good. Bruce would tell you the same, only his head is full of that little baby-faced widow.'

Bruce laughed and reddened.

'Mrs. Sullivan, do you mean? Poor little Laura Sullivan? Nonsense, Dudley; she has only lost her husband eight months; besides, I have made up my mind if either of you marry a widow I won't be at your wedding;' and with these terrific words, I bade them good-night.

That night, and the next, I looked curiously across at the Priory, and on the following morning after that, as I was going along High Street, a carriage passed me at full speed, and a lady throwing back her long white veil, looked out, and waved to me with her hand—it was Marion Vivian!

CHAPTER XVIII.

'There are some natures in this world of
ours
That walk the earth with spirits wing'd
for heaven,
So meek, so wholly strange to selfish
thoughts,
That injuries in them wake no sense of
wrong.
You might as well to fierceness stir the
lamb,
Or from the soaked fleece strike the
granite's fire,

As draw a spark from gentleness like
theirs;
Heap on them ills on ills so numberless,
That patience hardly could the load en-
dure,
And, like the overladen camel, they shall
sink,
But never murmur. Gentle souls like
these
Do move among us, and of such was *she*.'

Bennet.

It occurs to me, that among the many characters and persons I have touched upon, briefly or otherwise, I have never mentioned either Mrs. Hazeldean or Rose Meredith. Now this will appear at first sight all the more strange when I say that Rose Meredith was my friend, a silent, reserved sort of one, to be sure, but still a friend, and ever to be held by me as such, and her name would certainly have found its way into these pages over and over again, but that her life and very being were of necessity incorporated with that of a woman who had been my aversion from my youth up, and that was my godmother, Mrs. Hazeldean of Hazlitt Park.

The cause of this aversion was deep rooted, and best known to myself, though I believe I shared it with many other members of my family, particularly with Louie, who was the second god-daughter, for Mrs. Hazeldean was not a woman to be beloved and

respected, and was, in spite of her grand house and vast wealth, decidedly and deservedly unpopular.

I cannot myself trace the origin of our close connection with one so uncongenial with our tastes and feelings. Dudley indeed had told me that at some time or other of our parents' early married life, Mrs. Hazeldean had done my father a kindness, and that he had in gratitude selected the childless lady as sponsor for his two eldest girls, but whether this was true or not we had now no means of judging. Suffice it to say that Mrs. Hazeldean had always exercised a distant and lofty kind of influence over our lives; showing us kindness by fits and starts, and exacting in return an amount of respect and deference that was at times rather difficult to yield. For my godmother was not a loveable woman; hers was one of those natures which, governed through life by one strong masterful passion, isolates itself on a pinnacle of its own creation, which, while it demands worship, does not deign to crave for love.

Hers was indeed a solitary nature, perpetually enveloped in a mantle of reserve; above the puerile weaknesses of humanity, needing no support, perfectly self-contained, entirely self-absorbed. And yet I have often thought that had my godmother been bred up amid less narrowing influences, and been taught in her early days to bear and forbear, like the less favoured of God's creatures, she might have become a more loveable and estimable woman; but one hereditary fault, engendered in childhood and fostered through youth, growing with her growth till it became, not part, but an entirety of herself, proved the baneful influence of her own and other lives, and this was pride. Pride of birth, and of her stainless pedigree, of her ancient acres of wealth, of her own stern self, and even of her pride itself—what marvel that with these imperial notions, and exaggerated sense of her own dignity, the Lady of Hazlitt Park should remain within her own fastnesses, avoided by her neighbours and friends whom her scant courtesy offended, and leading the life of a solitary recluse!

Such was Mrs. Hazeldean in her prime and when I first remembered her, but of late years the infirmities of age and the slow agonies of an insidious disease had worn deep ravages in her constitution, under which her haughty temper succumbed, and was replaced in time by a restless and nervous irritability.

It had been a custom in our family from time immemorial for Louie and me to pay an annual visit at Hazlitt. Regularly every year a solemn invitation, couched in my godmother's stiff handwriting, came to us in the mists of November, and was always as solemnly accepted; and now it had come again, following close upon our pleasant Northern visit.

I had hoped to have refused it this year, but Dudley proved inexorable; and, turning a deaf ear to my remonstrances, informed me that it was my duty to go, and all the more a duty that it was unpleasant to fulfil!

'For heaven's sake, Nellie,' he exclaimed, when I had urged him out of all patience, 'why should we break through the old rules that our parents laid down for us? What if it be an unpleasant duty, it is not worse than former invitations, and it has but to be borne once a year. Pshaw, child! a fortnight is nothing, and the sea-air will do you good.'

'But we have the children, Dudley. Think of the children.'

'I do think of them. Is not your invaluable Mrs. Graham able to take charge of baby and Hennie? and can I not answer for the boys?'

'Yes, but you are away all day at the factory, and supposing anything were to happen?'

'Well, are they not away too? I am not omniscient, but I think I dare answer for the consequences. If Bruce and I and Mrs. Graham cannot manage to look after three children for a fortnight it is a pity. Come, I will have you take Louie with you for companionship or you will be moped.'

'But you and Bruce will be so dull without us.'

'Do not be too sure of that. It is possible to find a worse fellow than Bruce, and when we are hard up for female society, we can go over to the parsonage, or sit with old Charlotte in the kitchen.'

He seemed much set on it, unnaturally so, I thought, till I remembered how anxious he was ever to follow his father's example to the letter, and to honour the friends he honoured; so, though not more than half convinced, I wrote a reluctant acceptance of the invitation, and with a heavy heart prepared for the fitting, for I disliked Hazlitt Park as much as its mistress, and perhaps when I have stated my reasons more fully, the reader will sympathize with me.

Mrs. Hazeldean of Hazlitt Park was, as I have said before, a woman of great wealth, residing within twenty miles of us, at a place called the Point, which was the central and highest part of a chain of cliffs, enclosing a long broad arm of the sea.

Here she lived in solitary state, a childless widow. Solitary, because, being unloved and unloveable, her neighbours and friends avoided her rather than otherwise, a state of things which did not fret the mistress of Hazlitt Park, but rather accorded with her grim and taciturn humour.

My godmother, at the time I write, was about seventy, a fair personable woman, with handsome, well-preserved features, and soft white plentiful curls, of which she was very proud, as she was of her still rounded figure and small shapely hands.

A woman with many vestiges of past beauty, but with stern steel-gray eyes, and a haughty droop of the mouth, which marred the whole expression, and gave it a lowering look of pride. A face that rarely smiled, even upon those it loved, but ever wore the same cold expression; and with a tongue cunning as Machiavelli, studying only how to conceal her thoughts.

I have said before that she was widowed, and very early too in life, I believe; but what manner of man her husband was I never knew, save that he had been a Colonel in the Guards, and had died on his first campaign.

That she was childless mattered little to this strange unloving woman, but that she lacked an heir was a thing hard and not to be borne. With wonderful inconsistency she therefore resolved to adopt one, and made choice of the very last person that one would have expected her to fix upon.

Passing by the claims of wealthier and happier relations, she selected the child of her half-brother, an embarrassed and needy artist, whom she had coldly neglected and never voluntarily looked upon during his life-time, till broken-spirited and wrecked in body and mind he had laid himself down to die by the side of his dead wife.

It was in that visit, which Heaven knows why she paid, that she first saw Philip Hazeldean, then a lovely boy of some eight years old, weeping in the corner of that miserable garret; for whom she instantly conceived an infatuation, which made her resolve to adopt, educate, and make him her heir.

Nor was her choice unwise, for Philip was a bright bold boy, who gave ample promise of more than average talents and a fair allowance of good qualities; in those days at least he was truthful, generous, and sincere; with a laughing, ringing voice, which sounded merrily in the ears of his adopted mother and aunt.

But with his manhood there came a change, whether from the blighting influence of the old house, or from the weary verifying of the proverb that 'It is ill waiting for dead men's shoes,' but certain it was, if truth must be told, that the heir of Hazlitt Hall was a moody discontented man.

Leading a desultory lounging life in town, where he habitually resided, Captain Hazeldean (still called so, though he had long sold out of his regiment) followed an unprofitable, aimless existence, seeking refuge from *ennui* by plunging still deeper into the vortex of fashionable folly, and abhorring the very name of his old home, which he visited rarely and with the strongest reluctance.

Perhaps his aunt's haughty temper and many infirmities combined to work this change in him; perhaps he had grown bitter with long waiting for his inheritance; but better had grown to worse with Philip Hazeldean in those days, and the powers of evil were triumphing over their prey. He would not marry, that had been his aunt's grievance for years. Many an heiress had she chosen for him, and when these had failed, many a well-born, beautiful girl, but he had scouted them all with a sneer; he could not, would not, and should not marry, he affirmed, at the bidding of any woman in England, and that no advantages of person or fortune could compensate him for the loss of his freedom; and so, putting away from him with fretful impatient hand the only blessing which would

have availed to win him from his weary self, and fill up the void in his life, Philip Hazeldean triumphed in the exercise of his own free will, and was at seven-and-thirty still an unfettered man.

Unfettered, but not happy; it did not take a second look at his face to read that; in his bitter words, and looks, and cold hard sneers, were outward, visible signs of a discontent always gnawing at his heart-strings.

I have always thought, and sometimes not without reason, that the man was wasting under the influence of some early disappointment—perhaps some hopeless love for a girl whom he dare not wed and bring as wife to Hazlitt Park, for fear of forfeiture of his inheritance. But if this were so, I was morally certain that the love had perished, leaving only the ashes of his discontent behind.

In person, he was a goodly man enough, with a proud, easy bearing, and a fair, well-featured face. His hair, moustache, and beard were singularly blonde—white almost, soft and silky, and profuse in quantity, and his dark prominent hazel eyes were the only features which redeemed him from utter colourlessness.

Almost at the same time that Philip first came to reside at Hazlitt Hall, my godmother had, for some inexplicable reason best known to herself, adopted another child, a girl, and this was Rose Meredith. None knew of the parentage or birth-place of the beautiful little stranger who shared Philip's lessons and play; none knew for what purpose she was so carefully reared and educated, and taught the accomplishments and graces that might have fitted her for any station. But surmises were many, though facts were few. Some said she was intended for the heir; others for some county match; a few, that she was to be enabled to work out her way in life as governess; and lastly, that she was to be a life-long companion to her patroness; and apparently only these last seemed to have a slight glimmering of the truth.

Almost before people had finished talking, and when their patience was waxing low for waiting for the truth, while yet in the meridian of her womanly beauty and grace, Rose Meredith's fiat had gone forth, and the victim of caprice had sunk into the life-long domestic drudge.

How it had come about no one knew; but while people looked and marvelled, the high-spirited girl had become all at once the weary, broken-down woman, who, day by day and hour by hour, endured the fitful caprices and haughty insolence of the stern mistress of Hazlitt, whom, out of gratitude more divine than human, she tended.

Out of gratitude; for surely no other reason could have kept her imprisoned so long in that great lonely house; shut out from living companionship, from kindred spirits, and from sympathizing friends. Who, save Captain Hazeldean, Louie, and myself, and perhaps the physician and clergyman, ever voluntarily crossed that threshold—ever passed through the creaking gate, whose stony dragons

guarded one poor English maid, shut up there of her own free will, more rigidly than the enchanted ones of old? Not even allowed to tend the poor whom she loved; pitied and contemptuously looked down upon by the very servants whom she would have been the first to nurse in sickness or to comfort in sorrow; all her girlish sweetness wasted, all her fine talents and abilities unused—did ever man look on a sadder sight than Rose Meredith, moving in her shadowless gray dress about the house? She never complained; no one ever heard a murmuring word from those quiet, patient lips; no one ever saw her weep, or heard her laugh, and her smile was sadder than most people's tears.

There was such a mystery about her too: no one knew her age, and guesses on that subject were utterly futile; for the last fifteen years, since I had known her, she had never seemed different to me, and others said the same, nor could we find a clue in her general appearance, for every feature contradicted another, and spoke alternately of youth and age.

The girlish rounded figure, so beautifully moulded, might belong to nineteen; the face, still so fresh and fair, might belong to seven-and-twenty; but what of the plentiful tresses of soft gray hair folded back from the ears and knotted simply behind? Hair so strangely contrasting with the still youthful face, that at first sight it lent the effect of powder to it, till one learnt to connect it with the furrowed brow and with the fluttering hands; for last, but not least, among Rose Meredith's mysteries were these, her hands.

Now, whenever I have taken particular notice of any person, I have always connected a special individuality with their hands, and classed them in my memory with their features; and Rose Meredith's were different from any I had ever seen. I remember Mrs. Egerton's, so singularly transparent, and Milly's brown dimpled ones, and Maud Rivers', with long tapering fingers and almond-shaped nails, and Louie's, large, white, and plump, with cool pinky palms; and lastly, Marion Vivian's, thin, white, and blue-veined, with a warm sensitive feel in them that one remembered long afterwards;—but Rose Meredith's were not like these; they were suffering hands, such weak, wasted fingers, with knotted knuckles, and veins not running in clear blue lines, but swelling deep purple, as if they would burst through the thin trembling skin, and entangling themselves in raised contorted twists, as if they were too tightly strained; and then the palms, not pinky or moist or cool, but burning in a crimson blaze of colour, of morbid beauty, of something I had never seen before.

These hands of Rose Meredith's had strange ways with them too; they were restless hands, they would not support her book quietly, or lay in her lap as others; they had odd tricks and curious ways of their own, fluttering nervous ways, of twisting themselves in odd ungraceful motions, of pressing palm to palm, and knitting fingers into the puckered cloth, of passionate graspings and work-

ings. Tired hands, sick and weary of themselves, and according strangely with the changeless face and low, sweet, monotonous voice.

And this was why I hated Hazlitt Park, because to my undisciplined girl's heart no martyrdom could be more exquisitely painful to witness than the slow torture that was wasting that woman's life, and not the less surely, that she tried to hide it under an impenetrable mantle of reserve and silence. Yet we were friends. Strange as I was to her thoughts and feelings, I felt that we two understood each other, and that she loved me even better than I did her, though when I first prayed to be her friend, prayed from the depths of an intolerable yearning to impart some comfort, she put me from her with a sudden frightened movement, bidding me choose among the bright and young, and not a grave sad woman like her.

'Besides, Helen,' she said (she always called me Helen), 'friendship is nothing without confidence, and mine is only given to myself and Heaven.'

And as she spoke, the tears stood thickly in her soft blue eyes; and suddenly pressing me to her bosom she bade God bless me, and went away; but ever since then I have taken the name she would not give me, and held it as my right.

I have said why I hated Hazlitt Park, but there was yet another reason, and one that I know will sound but foolishly in my reader's ears—and that was, I believed it to be haunted.

Not credulous of ghost stories, and scouting all such ideas generally, I no sooner found myself within the walls of Hazlitt than argument and self-reasoning fled to the winds, and I abandoned myself to an almost childlike terror. In vain Louie laughed, Mrs. Hazelden mocked, and Rose Meredith gently combated what she called my sick fancies; nothing would induce me to sleep alone in the warm comfortable room allotted to me, and Louie, grumbling, though not unwilling at heart, was fain to bear me company.

It was such a hideously contrived house: with large gloomy rooms opening into one another, rambling corridors, long narrow passages, with break-neck steps where you least expected them, and dull sullen corners with baized doors leading to a back staircase or empty disused chambers.

And then the noises at night! first, the low interminable moaning of the sea chafing on the pebbly shore to fret one into wakefulness; and then the mysterious sounds that always preceded midnight, such creaking of rotten planks, such whistling through keyholes, such stealthy rushings, and distant, uncertain knockings, now and then varied by the growling of a dog in the yard.

Many a time have I woken Louie, sleeping quietly by my side, to listen to a gliding footstep in the gallery outside, or a buzzing sound which seemed to proceed from somewhere by the dressing-room window. And then the wind! not the merry boisterous wind I loved to hear at Sunnyside, but a dreadful sullen wind that was

eternally howling and moaning round the house like a lost spirit ; a wicked passionate wind that lashed the poor waves in its fury, till they beat their white heads against the rocks, or surged back with a low dying moan into the bosom of their mother ocean.

A deceitful wind, lurking in secret corners and waiting for a spring, for a mad rush and a cruel whistle, and a tearing and roaring round the house like a pack of hungry wolves.

A horrible musical wind, playing dreary symphonies with the monotonous sea, or wandering wistfully among the garden trees, waking baby lisps in the ivy on the walls ; and then a lull, and whispering again, ominous rustlings and a warning whistle, and then the crescendo shriek—the Pandemonium of sound ; and the band of demon minstrels have tuned up their instruments and are off again ; and they carry me off with them, for the wind is wicked at Hazlitt Hall, and it makes me wicked too. It fills me with mad strange thoughts, till I scarcely know myself, and, chill with horror, nestle down to the side of slumbering Louie—of Louie, who stretches out her warm sleepy arms and takes me into them, while I lie surrounded by her veil of hair, and tremble and shiver myself to sleep.

She loves the wind, does Loo ; in her bright waking moments she is charmed to sit and listen to it, and often, in spite of my entreaties, she will set open the window that she may hear more distinctly the fight of the blinding surge and feel the cold salt spray in her face, or leaning out, track the moon's silvery path on the dark sullen sea.

In her strong healthy nature she thinks no such thoughts as mine ; she would turn them into mockery and trample them under foot, regarding them as morbid ; in her warm vitality suffering no shock, but rejoicing in what she termed 'the musical strife of sound.'

To my comfort, however, she hated these annual visits as much as I, alleging as her reason the insufferable dulness of the old house and its mistress, and was little more cheerful than myself when we said good-bye to Bruce at the station, and started off in a dense mist for our agreeable destination.

But Louie could adapt herself to circumstances, and while I sat sulking and blinking at the dull lamp in the carriage, she wrapped herself in her furs, bade me a laughing 'good-night,' and was actually asleep in a moment, in which blissful condition she remained till the train drew up at the platform.

'Are we here?' she exclaimed, rubbing her eyes brightly, and shaking herself into order. 'Jump out, Nell, and secure a fly, the carriage won't be sent for us this evening ; Mrs. Hazeldean's horses never go out when it is damp, you know.'

Which was a fact I well remembered, so we got into a fusty close fly which smelt like a harse, and were presently dragging slowly up the steep hill that led to the Point.

'Pray put the window up, Louie,' I cried, pettishly, shivering with the cold and dampness.

'I want to smell the sea,' she urged, leaning out till her face was wet with the salt spray, and utterly regardless of the mist she was swallowing by mouthfuls. 'Hark, do you hear it rippling over the stones? what a delicious free sensation it gives one. I think I shall get out and walk. Here, take my rug.'

And quite oblivious of the darkness, she descended and walked briskly by the side of the carriage, encouraging the jaded horse, till she and it stopped together before the dragon-guarded gates.

It was some minutes before the old lodge-keeper, who was gardener as well, a red-headed Hibernian more addicted to drinking than horticulture, set open the ponderous gates, which always had a reluctant rusty way of turning on their hinges; and after grating awhile along the winding path, our humble vehicle drew up with a sudden lurch before the door.

Maunders, the supercilious butler, received us with the patronizing air which he always accorded to the Sunnyside ladies, and throwing open the door announced—

'Miss Mortimer and Miss Louisa Mortimer,' in his usual stentorian key.

The room looked warm and cheery after our long drive, the more so that my godmother's chair was vacant; Rose Meredith sat knitting by the fire in her gray dress, and, stretched at full length on the couch, with his back towards her, Captain Hazeldean, with *Bell's Life* in his hand.

At our entrance, however, the paper was flung aside, and he came forward to receive us courteously, nay warmly even, placing chairs near the cheerful blaze and busying himself with Louie's wraps.

I thought he was looking older and more jaded than when I saw him last, and he had an excessively bored manner about him when he told us he had been here a week.

'A week to-day, is it not, Rose?'

'Yes, I believe so,' she answered, in her calm impassive way.

'That is a tolerably long visit for you, Captain Hazeldean?' queried Louie, mischievously.

'You are right,' he said, with a shrug. 'Nor would I be here now, only aunt has been making no end of a row lately about my short visits and long absences, and so I thought it best to do the civil for once—at least Rose thought so, and I am acting on her advice; and the consequence is, that aunt has done nothing but quarrel with me from morning till night. If it were not that I hope your visit will make the place a little more endurable, I should be off to-morrow.'

'And how is Mrs. Hazeldean?' I asked, turning to Rose.

'She has been ailing of late,' was the quiet reply. 'I think she has been fretting about Captain Hazeldean—about his coming so

seldom, I mean ; for at heart, you know, she is very fond of him, however she may scold him when he is here.'

Rose always called her adopted brother 'Captain Hazeldean,' though when they had been young together it was 'Philip.' As she spoke she turned to him with mild sorrowful eyes, as if to reproach him for his unseemly words—a look which he turned off with a laugh and a shrug.

'Rose thinks it very wrong of me to be talking to you young ladies like this, but when a fellow has been mewed up in a precious old house like this for seven whole days, he's glad to have a grumble ; not that I intended any disrespect to my aunt, but if you are a woman of the world, Miss Mortimer, you will understand how it is that two such spoiled people never can get on long together.'

Here Rose's quiet voice again interfered.

'I think you had better not detain your friends any longer, Captain Hazeldean, for your aunt is waiting in her dressing-room to receive them ; so, if you are quite warm and comfortable, Helen, I will take you to her at once.'

Captain Hazeldean drew himself up and set open the door, with a hard cynical smile as he did so, that conveyed how he understood the interruption, and Rose whispered anxiously as we crossed the hall—

'Do not heed his talk, please ; his aunt and he are excellent friends, though, I must own, he has tried her more than usually to-day.'

'I do not think the Captain has altered for the better, Rose?'

'No, no,' she interposed hurriedly, 'pray do not say that ; you do not understand him, indeed you do not ; he is much—very much improved. Illness has made his aunt rather fretful and capricious, but I doubt not he will soon bear with her as I have learned to do.'

Poor Rose ! it must have been a hard lesson then, for we knew too well of old the harsh looks and words and haughty insolence that were heaped on the poor companion, as we knew too how sweetly they were received, how gently warded off.

I was afraid to answer, however, at this moment, as we were already before my godmother's door.

It is strange how certain perfumes linger in the memory in association with certain spots. Just as the smell of dried lavender always recalls my chintz room in the minister's manse, so the close perfume of musk brings back to me even at this distance of time, with singular vividness, the remembrance of my godmother's dressing-room, as I saw it on this very evening in question.

It is clearly before me now. A quaint heavily-panelled room, with dark oaken presses, and stands of curious dragon china, with a carved screen fencing in the high-backed chair which served to frame so fitly the tall stately figure that filled it.

I have said before that Mrs. Hazeldean was a handsome woman, but she never appeared more pre-eminently so than when she sat

thus in the ruddy firelight in her black velvet dress and white Spanish shawl, with the delicate lace ruffles falling over her fair wrinkled hands, which were always knuckle-deep in brilliants.

There was a full-length portrait that always hung opposite her chair, taken in the days when she was the beautiful Miss Bennetthorpe; in the days when the young beaux thronged round her carriage in the parks, and toasted and laid wagers on her beauty in the club-rooms; before Colonel Hazeldean, the smartest and most dashing of them all, fought that duel in her honour, which created such a furore in the beau monde, and which afterwards secured for him her hand.

It was the picture of a girl in the costume of the period, with a string of pearls loosely confining her white swelling throat, and with a coronal of dark curls falling low over her forehead. A girl wanting none of the adjuncts of girlhood, with a lap full of bright-coloured flowers, and a spaniel tied to a blue girdle; a straw hat and a scarf lying beside her; yet with a face that lacked many of its best attributes—simplicity, softness, and love.

Often and often have I sat in the firelight pondering on the face of Clara Bennetthorpe, stamped even at that early time with the impress of a lowering pride and obstinacy which were never to be eradicated through life, and then turned to the living original with a vague impression of its progressive truth as delineated in the stern eyes and drooping mouth, and marvelled at the little change.

I may as well say here what it is little use denying, that not only was there no love lost between my godmother and me, but that I was in my secret heart afraid of her, holding her very much in awe, and seldom venturing on asserting my own individuality in her stately presence.

Sometimes, it was true, she could be very kind to me, but ordinarily there was that about her speech and manner that always seemed to say, 'You are a poor little insignificant thing, Nellie, and it is impossible that I can have much to say to you;' and I never felt it more than on this evening, when, after a hasty kiss and 'Sit down, Nelly,' I withdrew to make way for Louie—for Loo, blundering and stumbling in the dim light, overturning the carved footstool, and then entangling herself in a coil of netting—for brave heartsome Loo, putting things to rights again with deft fingers, and setting her bonnie laughing face against all outraged dignity.

'There, godmother, it is all right now;—be quiet, Fido,—how dare you, Fluff?' as the two little King Charles spaniels leapt on her with maddening barks. 'Do light a candle, please, Rose. There, they have pulled the knitting out of my hand again.'

Down on the floor sat Loo, still muffled up in her furs, to remedy her momentary carelessness, while Mrs. Hazeldean, wholly oblivious of my presence, looked down with keen, bright eyes at the ruddy head beneath her.

But Rose's voice soon interrupted her quiet scrutiny.

'Had I not better set the work to rights instead of Louisa, Mrs. Hazeldean? the first bell has long sounded, and there will only just be time for them to change their dresses.'

'True, true; put it down, child; I forgot, it is of no manner of consequence; I was thinking of you rather than of it. Yes, take them to their rooms, Rose, and make them comfortable; poor Nelly looks starved with cold; as for you, Miss Louie, let me see you make yourself as beautiful as you can—it is a pity you are in mourning, not but what you are fair enough to set off even that.'

Loo laughed at the unexpected compliment, she seldom blushed, and sailed out of the room; and I followed her, somewhat mystified at the unwonted consideration expressed in Mrs. Hazeldean's voice and manner.

The apartment allotted to us was at the farther end of the gallery, and was warmly and snugly furnished, and if I could have divested myself of the thousand unpleasant images which always crowded on my mind when I was at Hazlitt, I might have made myself as comfortable as Louie appeared to be. But one glance at Rose's worn face, and one whistle of my old enemy the wind, lying in wait for the night, and making unpleasant signs of his intentions at the dressing-room window, soon drove my good resolutions away, and the old uneasy feeling came back again.

'You are very tired, Helen?'

'Yes—no, I do not think I am; Rose, you do not seem pleased to see me to-night.'

Rose flushed all over her pale face, but held her peace; it was not in her nature to make demonstrations.

Louie, crowning herself imperial-wise with her plaits at the glass, turned round in surprise.

'You have been so good to me this year, Rose, and have written to me such dear wise letters of comfort, that I looked for a warmer welcome from you this time. Sorrow has made me a spoiled child, and I want visible comfort from my friends, but you are very cold to me.'

'Am I, Helen?'

Just that; no kiss, no pressure of the hand I held, no outward token of regard, but the earnest loving look she turned upon me made me more than content, and I let her go.

'Rose looks older and graver than ever,' said Louie, as the door closed after her; 'there is some great mystery about that woman's life, and I cannot make it out.'

'I should smile at such an idea in open daylight, but now, in this house, I could believe anything; after all, it does not need much discernment to read that hers has been an unhappy life.'

'As it does not to see Mrs. Hazeldean hates her.'

'Louie!'

'Yes, hates her; why not, when it is in human nature to hate those whom we have injured? and dare you affirm, Nellie, that

Mrs. Hazeldean does not daily injure her in the life to which she condemns her?’

‘I affirm nothing—a truce to such talk, Louie. Hark! there goes Mrs. Hazeldean down the gallery with her maid.’

‘I am ready, Nellie; let us overtake them.’

We did so, and five minutes afterwards were seated at the chilly solemn dinner-table, where the sense of grandeur was oppressive, and the topics of conversation few; where diamonds sparkled more brilliantly than wit, and the shining silver seldom mirrored back a pleased and smiling face; for who could talk or laugh with that gloomy handsome woman sitting at the head of the table, casting keen scrutinizing glances from one to another, and scarcely opening her mouth, save in responsive monosyllables to the butler or page? while Captain Hazeldean divided his attention between his glass and his moustache, and seldom spoke, save in cynical comment or derisive repartee; and Rose sat puckering odd devices in her damask napkin and seldom raised her eyes.

Under such circumstances who could talk? not I, but, to my amazement, Loo could, and did, and her merry laugh rang out as blithely as in the old parlour at home; till the dear fresh face, so bright and sparkling, and the tongue so rife with girlish questioning, awoke answering smiles on every side; and Mrs. Hazeldean, rousing from grave reverie, looked at her from time to time with undisguised admiration.

But the pleasure with which I watched the softening countenance of my godmother was speedily alloyed when I perceived that the charm had extended to Captain Hazeldean; and especially when after dinner he came up flushed and excited to lean over her chair and whisper compliments into her ear; then indeed a vague disquiet mingled with my thoughts, and it was a relief when our hostess made the signal for our retiring, and our first evening at Hazlitt had drawn to a close.

CHAPTER XIX.

Nor deem who to that cross aspire,
Must win their way through blood or fire.
The writhings of a wounded heart
Are fiercer than a foeman's dart.
Oft in life's stillest shade reclining,
In desolation unrepining;

Without a hope on earth to find
A mirror in an answering mind,
Meek souls there are, who little dream
Their daily strife an angel's theme,
Or that the rod they take so calm
Shall prove in heaven a martyr's palm.

Keble.

‘NELL,’ said Louie that night as I lay down in bed, ‘you are not going to keep awake, I hope, as you used last time you were here; because if you begin your silly fancies, I shall certainly send you home.’

To which threat I returned in a sleepy voice, that I believed nothing on earth could really rouse me—a reply which she received with entire satisfaction; and after lingering a moment to tell me that the night was dark and the rain-clouds abroad, placed herself at my side and was asleep in a minute.

It is one thing to form a good resolution and another to keep it, and so I found, to my cost; for lying a while afterwards in the semi-dozing state which sometimes follows a first brief slumber, a large cinder falling heavily on the hearth aroused me with a start, and in a moment I was wide awake. I tried to compose myself again, but in vain; and found myself wondering instead how Keith was faring in his distant home; from which reverie I was again startled by the pattering of hail against the windows, and the sudden tremendous rising of wind and sea together.

In a moment, without warning save from the aspect of the darkening sky, the storm had burst upon us, and such a storm as even I had never heard before at Hazlitt.

The tide was rising, and every minute seemed to roll nearer and nearer, as if in hot haste to scale the cliffs and engulf us in its greedy arms; and the wind was abroad too in tremendous force, driving the icy sheets of hail against the panes of glass, as if it would stave them in, rattling the window-frames by turns and then together, while showers of the frozen particles found their way down the chimney, and were extinguished sputtering and thawing on the reddened coals beneath.

An awful night! so prodigal of gloom and sound, that I was glad to crowd the bed-clothes round my shrinking ears, and so shut out, as far as might be, the evidences of the tremendous strife.

No signs of lulling yet; more fitful horrors in the surging sea and shrieking wind, more hail; and then I catch Louie by the arm and pray her to wake, for there is a fearful crash as if a stack of chimneys had fallen, and I am certain I can feel the house shaken to its foundations.

'Checkmate, without losing a pawn,' mutters Loo drowsily; but she wakes up more fully when I shake her again, and sitting up in bed demands why I have roused her.

'Oh, Louie, how can you sleep through such a storm? Hark! what's that?' for there is another terrible crash, this time apparently of broken glass, and my teeth fairly chatter with fear and cold.

'Now, Nell,' said Loo, still speaking sleepily, but very decidedly, 'if you are going to have a fit, I shall alarm the house. Why, child, what terrors are you conjuring up? it is only some broken glass in the conservatory—whatever it is, I shall get up and light a candle, one can hardly breathe in such inky darkness.'

And true to her word, she commenced raking together the few dying embers that the hail had not wholly extinguished, and in a few moments the dull red brands ignited and warmed up steadily together.

'Oh, Loo, Loo!' I cried again with a shriek, 'what is that?' and even Louie recoiled, as we watched the door open, and something came softly gliding in through the darkness.

'Hush, it is only I; it is Rose. I thought the storm might frighten you. Have I startled you, Helen?'

I was past replying, but Louie answered—

'Startled her! why, you have done that for both of us. I am not particularly nervous, but for the moment I believed you to be the wraith Nellie is always expecting to see, or some weird lady of the storm; what a night, Rose!'

'Yes, is it not? I don't think we have had such an one for eight or nine years. I remember the last well, for a vessel was driven into the Point by sheer stress of weather; and but for the day breaking all hands on board would have been lost.'

'And they were saved?'

'Some twenty were, but the rest went down. I never wish to see such a terrible scene again. We had most of the men up here; some of them we nursed for days—they were so grateful, poor fellows!'

'But, Rose,' interrupted Louie, who had by this time lighted the candle and turned round to look at her, 'how is it that you are up and dressed? it must be nearly one o'clock.'

'I am seldom in bed till past that hour,' replied Rose, with that strange smile of hers; 'I never lie down till I am likely to sleep; sometimes on wild nights like these I watch till morning. Captain Hazeldean is up too.'

'Is he?' I exclaimed, with an intense feeling of relief and safety; 'where is he now?'

'He is gone down with Maunders to ascertain the extent of the damage; several of the conservatory windows are broken; and they think a chimney has fallen.'

'And oh, Rose, I am certain the house rocked—ah, there it is again.'

'It always does on windy nights,' she returned, with perfect composure, as if she and fear were strangers to each other; 'how cold and shivering you are, Helen! let me wrap this shawl round you; stay—who calls me?'

'I—where are you, Rose?' demanded Philip, impatiently, outside; 'what with this confounded wind, I can't make any one hear.'

'What is it?' she demanded, still holding the door in her hand. 'Softly, or you will wake your aunt.'

'Who cares if I do? What nonsense! do you imagine she can sleep in such riot as this? There is a wreck, Rose,' he continued, excitedly, 'or a ship in distress; Maunders heard the gun; and I'll be bound the signal-light is not trimmed. I'm off to see; keep the house till I come back.'

'No, no,' she cried, 'what are you thinking of? You'll lose your

way in the darkness, or be blown over the cliff. Philip, Philip, hear me—you shall not go—you shall not ;' but with a muttered oath he threw off her detaining grasp and vanished into the darkness.

'Don't be afraid, Helen,' she said, coming back and speaking in her usual voice, 'there can no harm happen to you ; rest quietly till I return. I am going to try to persuade Captain Hazeldean to forego his mad project, for his own and his aunt's sake.'

As she left the room, Louie, who was now fully dressed, and kneeling at the window, trying to strain her eyes into the darkness, turned round excitedly.

'Why should she dissuade him from doing his duty and helping his fellow-creatures in distress? If I were a man, instead of an useless impotent girl, do you think I would be staying quietly here, for all the dangers of cliff and darkness? don't you think I would be out and breasting the storm, were it ten times more furious! Hark, I hear something! was that the gun he mentioned?'

'I hear nothing, Louie ; for heaven's sake, don't open that window.'

'I must, I can't stop here pressing my face against this senseless glass. Stay, he spoke of signals ; I wonder if they have lighted up the turret.'

'What do you mean?—Rose's room?'

'Yes, don't you recollect last November, we decided a light placed in the window would be as good a beacon as the signal at the Point, for it stands almost as high ; and to think,' cried Loo, rising and lighting a lamp with hands that shook in their haste, 'that no one has thought of such a thing before ;' and beckoning me to follow, she led the way up the long winding staircase that led to the turret where Rose's sanctum was.

She might have spared herself her trouble, for the little room was brilliant with light from a large oil-lamp placed on the broad sill of the centre window ; on seeing which, Loo uttered an exclamation of relief and pleasure ; and seating herself by the table, covered her face awhile, perhaps with a prayer for the safety of those poor mariners who braved the perils of the deep.

Meanwhile I looked curiously about me, for, friends as we were, I had never entered Rose's room before.

It was a large well-proportioned chamber, but so simply, nay, barely furnished, as to suggest to my mind the convent cell of a recluse vowed to holy poverty, rather than the apartment of an English lady.

The little white-curtained bed hidden up in the farthest corner seemed placed only for needful rest, and not for luxurious ease ; and nothing that necessity did not warrant, or ordinary comfort demand, found its way among the sparse articles of furniture ; no cushions softened the woody straightness of the high-backed chair, and only a well-worn straw hassock defended her knees from the bare uncarpeted floor.

It was so, even in trifles ; just as if she put from her everything that might resemble the warmth and comfort of home ; that might soothe and minister to the mind by pampering the body ; as if she dreaded to lull or deaden by one slight luxury the sufferings of a too sensitive and spiritual nature, for the very reason that such things were highly prized by her, and were accordingly renounced in her strange lifelong penance.

It is a sad and certain truth, that some are born into the world predestined martyrs ; martyrs, not only by the will of Heaven, but by the will of their own natures ; who add to the weight of the cross divinely appointed, by divers ingenious methods of their own, whereby they do torment themselves unwisely, probing still deeper the wounds they should have bound up, and leaving them to fester and grow corrupt. These are the weary ones of earth, for whom there is no balm in Gilead ; because, dearly as they love the Healer, they will not take His cordials, or taking them, infuse some strange bitterness of their own into the mixture, whereby the saving properties are lost or rendered harmful.

It is not well to twine for ourselves the crown of thorns, nor is it well to refuse to lay down the burden of our sorrows side by side with the measure of the yielded sins ; lest the forgiveness that attends the latter bring us no new joy, but is rather veiled from our sight in the shadows of the old sadness.

There is a time and a season for everything. It was never decreed that sorrow should be life-long, and therefore the web of an irreversible grief is woven by other than Divine hands, and the knots in it that patience cannot unloose are human in their intricate fastenings.

It behoves us, therefore, to look to ourselves how we gather up the ends of a ravelled life, lest we work out not the beautiful tracery of a heaven-wrought pattern, but rather a device of our own, crooked and altogether unmeet for the Master's use.

It was thus I thought of Rose Meredith, as I glanced round her room, which bore in its simplest details the evidences of a stern uncompromising submission to fate, that declined to lighten for itself one iota of the heavy load, or to do anything indeed but suffer and be still.

Suffer ! who could doubt it, who read the mute evidences of that crushed life in the truth-telling walls ; every picture that adorned them—and here, at least, her natural taste was allowed to be gratified—bore some affinity with a strange and mysterious sorrow, that fed itself by the contemplation of others, higher, purer, and deeper than its own.

Such painful pictures.

Here the bloody sweat of Gethsemane and the sad details of the Mount of Sorrows, or the lone figure in the monkish legends falling beneath the cross upon the thorny way, while the daughters of Jerusalem rent the air with their lamentations and cries of pity.

Here, too, hung the Magdalene, with those red-lidded sore eyes, as if they had wept out all their tears, draining them over the sacred feet ; and here, too, was the Mother Maid reposing in that awful shadow, with the sword of God piercing her stricken breast.

Heart-rending pictures ; it was a relief to look away from them, they darkened all the room with their mysterious faces. Far better was it to turn to the large square table that occupied the centre of the chamber, and note why the midnight lamp was so carefully trimmed, and to see the piles of coarse stuffs and flannels that Dorcas hands were shaping.

Absorbed in these thoughts, I did not hear the slight rustle of a dress passing over the floor, till the shadow of a moving hand arrested my attention, when I looked up and saw Rose Meredith standing beside me, and praying me with earnest gesture not to betray her presence to the still unconscious Louie.

The straight folds of her gray cloak clung tightly to her figure, but her hood had fallen back, and with it the uncoiled masses of her silvery hair, which streamed dripping with wet over her shoulders, while the strange blue eyes were burning with feverish light and haste as she swiftly wrung it out and knotted it up. Not till she had done this, and cast away her steaming cloak and warmed her wet chill hands, did she suffer the silence to be broken and Louie's attention to be attracted.

'What are you watching for, Louie?' she said, at last.

Louie turned her head with a start.

You here again, Rose? bless me, are you shod with silence, that one never hears your footfall on the floor ; where have you been?'

'Watching too,' she answered briefly.

'Has that made you look so cold and pale, my poor Rose? see, your dress is wet, soaking : you will catch your death.'

She released herself from Louie's touch not unkindly but abruptly.

'The rain blew in where I stood ; it is nothing.'

'But what of the wreck, Rose, and Captain Hazeldean?'

'He has come back, and the wreck is invisible ; let us pray it is a false alarm, for the gun has not been heard again, and the storm shows signs of lulling.'

'Ah, that is well—come, Nellie, I feel I can sleep now.'

'So cannot I ; leave me here, Louie, I shall not rest if I come.'

'Yes, leave her here,' said Rose, turning her wistful eyes on us, 'it is a fearful night for one to be alone in, who will not close her eyes before the dawning day ; please leave her here.'

What a concession from the silent woman, and yet I need not to have so greatly marvelled, for there are times when even the strongest and most self-contained natures shrink from their own loneliness, and cling, though it be but to a child, for company.

Louie was surprised, but offered no objection as she lit her lamp

and wished us a cheerful good-night; but when the door was closed, Rose came up and took my hands.

'Now, Helen, you are to lie down on my little bed in the corner, while I sit here; why do you hesitate? you surely never thought I meant in my selfishness to keep you up; it will comfort me just as much to see you sleeping there, as if you were to be close beside and talking to me; come, my child, come.'

It was useless to argue with Rose, she had such a quiet firm will of her own, and it ended in my submitting to lay my tired head upon the pillow, but not to sleep.

'You will sit by me, Rose?'

'As you will, dear,' and then as she did so she stooped to stroke my hair.

'You will smile at me, Helen, when I tell you that if I had been married and had a daughter I should have wished her to have been like you.'

'Like me!' I repeated in astonishment.

'Yes, I should have liked her to have had the same golden brown hair and cloud-gray eyes, with the same appealing tender look that always goes to my heart.'

'Do you love me, Rose?'

'Dearly; did you never guess that before, Helen?'

'Perhaps a little; but why did you refuse to make me your friend?'

'Because I told you then, as I tell you now, that there can be no friendship without confidence, and I cannot open my heart to you.'

'Why not?' I answered, raising myself quickly, 'why not? do I not know that you have some sad mystery in your life, apart from your daily trials? do I not read it in your every action, your gray hair, your silent tongue?—what is your sorrow, Rose?'

'I have none,' she replied, as she gently unloosed my grasping hands.

'None?'

'No, I have outlived it.'

'Rose!'

'Yes, I have outlived it; it has perished with my youth; it is nothing but the ashes of a dead hope you are raking up to-night. They say,' she continued musingly, for I remained silent, 'that patience worketh experience, and experience hope, but with me the hope came first, and then the fear, experience and patience followed hand in hand. Well, I have learnt my lesson, and "he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."'

'But endurance signifies the bearing of a trial, and yours, you say, is past.'

'Yes, the trial itself, for the gray-headed do not suffer like the young; but the consequences remain, and herein is the sting of my bitterness. Listen to me, Helen; for after this night I shall hold my peace; listen to me, I will explain what I mean. In early

youth I sinned a sin ; for it was a sin, though it did not seem so to me—it offered such joy and such protection ; it was a Zoar from Sodom, and “was it not a little one?” Child,’ said Rose, speaking sternly, and with set eyes—

“‘Twas but a little sin, that morning enter’d in,
And lo ! at eventide the world is drown’d.”

Judge of mine, therefore, when I tell you I am now reaping the harvest of that one small seed, reaping it in my joyless, loveless life, hour by hour and day by day.’

‘But, Rose, if you have done wrong, you have repented?’

‘And so did Eve, and yet what think you were her feelings when she looked upon the body of her dead son, and claimed the murderer for her own? how did her small transgression look to her then? Yes, I have repented, and do repent, else should I not be here? bending my back willingly to the burden, and never repining at its weight ; and with the need grace has been given me to bear it. I am happier now than I ever thought I should be, and day by day dim glimpses reach me of a far-off rest.’

‘What are you saying, Rose?’ for she was murmuring indistinctly to herself some broken fragment of a verse.

‘An old habit,’ she answered, with a smile ; ‘I have a trick of repeating snatches of verse aloud ; I must break myself of it.’

‘It seemed familiar to me ; what was it, Rose?’

‘Something that has been running in my head, you can make nothing of it, child ; it is this—

“Tell him the shipwreck’d joys of other years
Are landed on that coast ;
The deathless love that she has dimm’d with tears
Has there its sadness lost—”

‘You have said it wrong, Rose,—“the deathless love that he hath dimmed with tears” is the true phrase.’

‘Is it?’ she answered calmly, ‘it has grown dissevered in my memory.’

We were silent awhile, but putting my hand up in the dim light I found her face was wet.

‘You are weeping, dear?’

‘If I am it is because to-night has painfully excited me. Some things seem dead within us, Helen, but perhaps it is only because we think them so ; and all the while they are lying dormant, ready to be roused by a look or word ; but it must not wake again,’ she continued, crushing her hands fiercely in the old familiar way, ‘it must not, it shall not wake again.’

‘Has the storm lulled, Rose, or is my old enemy the wind only couching silently for a last spring?’

‘Yes, it is lulled ; and now you must sleep, my child ; it is an odd fancy, but I should like to sing you to sleep to-night.’

Rose sing! a strange fancy indeed ; but everything was strange and unfamiliar about her to-night : and before I could answer she

had commenced an old Latin hymn, singing in a tender human voice that had in its tones the cooing note of the dove.

A low monotonous chant—half hymn, half lullaby, soothing me with its changeless symphony, till I sunk into a sound slumber, from which I awoke no more that night.

CHAPTER XX.

‘She knew,
For quickly comes such knowledge, that his heart
Was darken’d with her shadow.’—*Byron.*

AND a bird sang in my dreams !

And all night long I walked with Dudley in cool green caves by the side of a murmuring sea, with our feet sinking deeply in the silvery shifting sand, till we came to a place, rocky and barren, and sunless, and surrounded by a waste of waters, and this was the end of the world.

And here we found Rose in a white wrapper, sitting under an umbrella, and combing out her long grey hair. And Dudley began whistling to the stars till they fell down one by one, spluttering and blazing into the sea, and went off like rockets. And when I asked him not to do it, Rose laughed a mad, wolfish laugh, and commenced spinning violently round and round like a crazy teetotum, and the light went out, and the sea rose and climbed wetly to my knees, and the wind made a horrible roaring, and in a frenzy I caught hold of Dudley’s hand, and it felt like a claw, and burnt me, and in my fright I awoke.

Awoke to find the sunlight streaming in upon my face, stirring my drowsy eyelids by the very force of its warmth and brightness, my nightmare folded away with the darkness, and nothing remaining but dewy freshness, morning breezes, and the song of birds—to hear the cool bubbling sound of the sea upon the sandy beach, humming to itself like a giant bee, while it flowed emerald green under a sky as blue and cloudless as any June could boast. Frothing, it is true, from its midnight rage, but with its crested waves carrying their snow-white heads proudly as they sparkled in the sunlight.

Such a brilliant morning, such warmth of light, and life, and colouring ; white cliffs, yellow sands, a sea glassy and flecked with foam ; up in the west one large white cloud folding itself in sleep, and just in the dip of a wave a sea-gull trailing its wings. Salt breezes wandering over my face, and cool fresh smells from the seaweed lying heaped up in the shallow pools between the boulders,

fragrant moist memories of the dripping herbage and rotten leaf-mould blending with it all.

And the mystery of the nightmare seemed stranger than ever when I went down-stairs, and saw Rose sitting so quietly behind her urn in her gray dress, and Louie's ruddy head drooping laughingly over her plate, as Captain Hazeldean read aloud some racy critique from a *Fraser* or a *Blackwood*.

The sunny breakfast parlour, with its fire, its sleepy dogs, screeching cockatoo, and its merry babble of talk, seemed indeed a contrast to the passionate scene of last night ; I could hardly realize the change.

'Only just down, Miss Mortimer? then you have not heard the news.'

'What news, Captain Hazeldean?'

'Why, that there was a wreck last night, after all.'

'A wreck ! oh, Judas sea, what devil entered into thee to betray the innocent?'

'Yes, a wreck ; but only a small one—a little fishing smack ran ashore, and was beaten to pieces, and two men and a boy drowned ; but we can't understand what vessel was making signals of distress westward ; I must find out.'

'But the men and the boy, Captain Hazeldean?'

'Ay, poor fellows, they are strangers to this part. I say, Rose, upon my word, do your people call this coffee? it is nothing but a decoction of brown sugar and black beetles ; you may laugh, Miss Louisa, but there are hundreds of them in the lower regions, and it is my theory that cook uses them for colouring matter. If I were you, Rose, I would make the coffee myself, and not leave it to the tender mercies of domestics to brew with lukewarm water ;—halloa, —why, where is she?'

But Rose had left the room, so the Captain returned to his critique, and was forgetting his grievance in a hearty laugh, when she returned, and, as if by magic, placed at his elbow a large cup of fragrant steaming coffee foaming with yellow cream, at the sight of which Philip, to do him justice, first turned rather red, and then commenced sipping it, well pleased.

'That is something like, Rose, you might take out a patent for that ; why, coffee is as necessary to me as brandy and soda-water to other men ; tea is a feeble washy drink for old ladies, but coffee au lait or coffee noir for me ; what do you want, Fanchette?'

This to the buxom French woman who had thrust her fat face and flaxen curls into the room.

'Will Monsieur le Capitaine speak with Madame? Madame is in her boudoir with the *mal de tête*.'

'What does she want with me, old Fanchette? come, give a guess ; can't you say I'm out shooting, or gone to look after the wreck?'

Fanchette and Captain Hazeldean were on excellent terms, and fully understood each other, as Fanchette's answer proved.

'Monsieur le Capitaine can please himself, it is true, but Madame is, in spite of the *mal de tête*, in a *humeur très excellent*; it is a pity to lose good news, and she has smiled thrice to herself, as I dressed her hair, and so——'

'And so I may venture—well, say I'm coming, Fanchette.'

But he did not hurry for all that, finished his critique and read his letters, gave some to Rose to answer, and dawdled on the rugs with the dogs, then played with the cockatoo till it screeched and bit his finger, and finally going to the window proposed a stroll on the beach.

'But your aunt is waiting all this time,' remonstrated Louie.

'She is used to it,' he replied, negligently; 'if you want to be independent, always keep people waiting. Well, I'm off now, get on your bonnets and I'll join you in a quarter of an hour.'

But we did not hurry ourselves, partly owing to Louie, who was provokingly determined, as she said, to prove herself independent, and it was quite three-quarters of an hour before our little company were fully equipped and ready to start, but still no Captain Hazeldean.

Another ten minutes, and then he came slowly down the staircase, whistling the 'Ghost's Melody,' with such a big fierce frown on his brow. On seeing us, it cleared a little, and he began a laughing apology; but as he opened the door and we all went out into the windy park, I, being the last, heard him say hurriedly to Rose in a low tone—

'Confound her, there are sharks ahead again, but I don't care this,' and he snapped his fingers and ran off to join Louie.

Rose looked up at the bare tree-tops, and the blue sky above, and the line of white surf in the distance, and at a sea-gull skimming along the margin of the waves, and then she folded her gray cloak resolutely about her and went on in silence.

On through the bare hummocky park with its young plantations, and then through a stubbly field or two, till we came to the cutting in the cliffs, where the soft yielding sands and narrow rocky walls reminded me of last night's dream.

And then we came out on the open yellow sands with a fresh salty breeze blowing in the distance, and the sun shining—shining steadily down on the snow-white line of cliffs.

And Louie lost her hat; and the Captain, grasping his with both hands, and his stick flying to windward, was fain to start in chase, and Louie and the dogs started too; and Fido had it in a trice, and was dragging it, feathers and all, through all the shallow pools he could find, till he entangled it in a bed of slimy seaweed, when he left it and commenced barking loudly in his joy, till Captain Hazeldean shook him and lost his balance and went plump into the deepest part of the pool, he and the dog together.

Whereupon we, walking sedately on, met poor dragged Fido limping painfully along, and heard Loo's ringing laughter as she gave her wet hat to the Captain to carry, and tied a laced handkerchief over her hair instead. And this gipsy head-dress suited her fresh fair face so well, that when we came up, Captain Hazeldean was looking at her with undisguised admiration, while she fished up a sea anemone half buried in sand.

'Here he is, I've got him at last,' cried Loo, enthusiastically; 'isn't he a beauty? what shall we do with him, Captain Hazeldean?'

'Do with him?' pon my honour, I don't know; better leave him here, he's such a rum beast to carry home, you know,' and the Captain poked him reflectively on the back.

'Oh, I don't mean that; I would not take him away for the world, but he looks as if he were dead, poor fellow; let us put him in a pool, and see if he will come to life—this one with the shells and crabs and seaweed, he will think he is in the sea.'

'But perhaps he would rather stay here; 'pon my honour, Miss Mortimer, you know he may prefer lying on his back and being frizzled by the sun; you see, we don't know his tastes.'

'No, we don't,' laughed Louie, merrily, 'all the more shame for us; but let us try the pool—that is, if you don't mind.'

Captain Hazeldean said he didn't, and looked as if he did, as he raised it gingerly and flung it in, while Louie seated herself on a large stone to watch the vivifying process, and we walked slowly on.

No, Rose was not in a talking mood, she only looked seaward with her weary eyes and held her peace.

As for myself, I had ample food for reflection in a letter I found enclosed to me, with a note from Dudley. So I took out Milly's letter and read it over again as we walked, and again and again, till I had weighed each curt sentence and made out the sense of the whole.

It was such an innocent little production, such brief childish sentences, not running into each other, but loosely strung together; tender words of gratitude, and faint expressions of hope, with here and there a misty shadowing forth of her quiet daily life.

But what struck me most painfully was the complete absence of individuality; everything was what Arthur said or did, as if she had already merged her existence into his, and had no cares or feelings of her own.

And if this were so indeed, what a pitiable contrast to the vivacious little lady, who praised her own pretty face, and let down her innocent nets for a draught, who had so much to say about her lost ornaments, and her neat housewifely ways—who was, in fact, the most prattling little piece of egotism in the world.

And so I was very sad for her, for I felt, as I refolded the letter, that the Milly I had known with the thousand winsome ways and loving graces, my Milly as she was, was no more; but a sadder, graver Milly was there, who was buckling on her armour with her

staunch little hands to do her woman's work in the world that had lost its sun.

And then in the midst of my wandering speculations on the fate of those two whom Heaven had ordained should live separate the one from the other, Rose, shivering in the folds of her heavy cloak, motioned me to turn our faces homeward; and homeward we went.

And, looking out for Louie and her escort, I descried them as two dark specks in the distance, and then came upon them half-an-hour afterwards resting on a wooden bench under an ash tree in the park. And Captain Hazeldean had his cigarette in his hand, and looked merry and handsome, and Louie's eyes were sparkling like jewels under her lace kerchief.

And so we went in, and I wrote back an answer to Milly, and then betook myself to the drawing-room, where I found my godmother alone and knitting by the fire; the others having gone to the billiard-room for an hour.

'Not that they care for it, my dear,' she observed, 'but anything is better than sitting with a dull old woman like me.'

Now, though I heartily agreed with Mrs. Hazeldean, of course I did not tell her so, but on the contrary, plucked up courage, and prepared to make myself agreeable. So I praised, though timidly, the plum-coloured brocade that was her nephew's last gift; and having in this manner broken the ice, volunteered a recital of our morning's walk with so much earnestness and animation, that I surprised myself.

Nor were my exertions wasted: Mrs. Hazeldean first looked mollified and pleased; and then, before I had half exhausted myself, interrupted me, with the view of taking up the conversation herself, but first she had dropped a stitch.

'Where is Rose, my dear? my eyes are so dim, I cannot see to pick it up.'

'Let me do it, Mrs. Hazeldean; you need not fear to trust me, I always took up my mother's dropped stitches;' and kneeling on her stool, I successfully accomplished my task.

'Ah, young eyes, young eyes,' sighed Mrs. Hazeldean, as she complacently regarded the fair wrinkled hand; 'time was, when I did not need any one to help me, and now, if Rose is ever out of the way, I am sure to want her half-a-dozen times an hour.'

'She looks very thin——,' I was beginning, but my godmother did not hear me, she was regarding me absently, and evidently making up her mind to enter on some particular subject. What could it be? I thought she was excessively gracious to me to day, and I felt more afraid of her than ever.

'Nellie, my dear,' she began at last.

I knew the endearing diminutive was meant to propitiate—

'Nellie, my dear.'

'Yes, Mrs. Hazeldean, what can I do for you?'

'Nothing, my love. I was just thinking what an extremely striking-looking person Louisa has become ; really,' she continued, reflectively, 'an exceedingly lovely woman.'

I thanked Mrs. Hazeldean for her good opinion, but she did not heed me.

'You see she has good blood in her veins ; as I told her poor father, the Mortimers of Sunnyside could hold up their heads as high as anybody, for there was not a county family, the Vivians and Stacys to boot, that could compare with them in point of antiquity ; but for that factory,' she went on, angrily, 'but for that factory, you girls might marry any one.'

'But, Mrs. Hazeldean,' I exclaimed, startled at this new view of things, 'how could we live without the factory? we have no property.'

'But your grandfather had, my dear, a very nice snug little property, every bit of which belongs now to the Priory ; and why? because that fool of a Marmaduke Mortimer made ducks and drakes of it ; and then that impatient boy of his—Heaven forgive me, I meant your father—must needs enter into partnership with Sykes ; with Sykes, a Mortimer becoming a tradesman, and all for fear of an honest poverty, till the estate could right itself. And I say again, my dear,' she finished, smoothing her dress querulously, 'that but for that headstrong young rake of a Marmaduke, you and Louisa might hold up your heads with the best, and marry anybody.'

'But as it is—' I returned proudly, 'we are plain people and only pretend to be such, and are liked for what we are, and not for what we have got. Dudley and Bruce never complained, and why should we?'

'Well, well, young people will be young people, and perhaps by-gones had better lie by ; but it was not that I was going to speak about, it was about Philip ; I am very much troubled about Philip, my dear.'

I said I was sorry to hear it, and waited for her to go on.

'You see I have set my heart for years upon his marrying, and marrying well ; and with his handsome face and fortune, what's to hinder him from making the richest match in England? but he won't hear of such a thing ; he is as far from making up his mind now at seven-and-thirty as he was twelve years ago.'

'The trouble I have taken with that boy is incredible, and all for nothing. Why, I had Ada Bennethorpe down here a whole month, and gave parties and picnics and I don't know what in her honour, in the hopes Philip would take a fancy to her. He was five-and-twenty then, and she a pretty delicate little blonde beauty with three thousand a year. And would you believe it, Helen ! my lord refused to have anything to say to her ; and when I demanded his reasons, turned on his heel and said he would not marry any such little idiot, with a complexion like paste, for all her China blue eyes—no, not if she were weighted with gold.'

'Well, I was very much vexed, my dear, but I did not quite lose heart, and the next summer I had down Madeleine Laurence, Viscount Laurence's sister, a dark splendid brunette, who had turned half the men's heads in town the season before.

'Well, she came, and Phil certainly seemed struck with her, and rode out with her, and taught her billiards, and I thought it was all right; but at the end of three weeks he cooled perceptibly, and in reply to all my reproaches said nothing on earth would induce him to take a flirt for his wife, and it was no use my looking out any more, for I evidently did not know his taste, and never should. And so it was with Minnie Davenport, and Katherine O'Brien, the pretty Irish heiress, till at last I lost patience, and gave it up.'

'Why do you want to see him married so much, Mrs. Hazeldean?'

'Why! because it is high time he should settle down in his old home, and give up his lounging London life, which does him no good. Look at this great house, not half inhabited, nor ever will be, till he brings his wife and settles down and has children's faces in the old rooms. And if not now, when will he? and he getting so bald too, as I told him this morning, only he did not like it. I declare I am getting quite in despair about it.

'This very morning I have offered to settle upon him five thousand a year without waiting for my death, if he will make up his mind to bring a wife to Hazlitt in the course of the following year—a wife, mind you, of suitable birth, education, and appearance, I will overlook the money.'

'So, so, my lady,' I thought to myself, 'that is what you are aiming at, but you shall never have our dear Queen Loo.' But I dissembled in my anger, and said—

'And what if he marry contrary to your wishes? I mean if he were to choose one whom, however attractive, you might consider beneath him; what would you do in that case, Mrs. Hazeldean?'

'Philip knows, my dear,' she answered, and there came a dark evil look into her face. 'He is a troublesome mad fellow, and bad enough to manage in some of his humours, but I have never feared his going contrary to me in that. Do you know what I said to him this morning, Nellie, my dear?'

I had my suspicions, but feigned ignorance.

'Why, I told him,' she answered, looking steadily at me to see how I took it, 'that Louie Mortimer was a good and beautiful woman, and that he could not do better than choose her.'

'And what did he say, Mrs. Hazeldean?' I cried, flushing up in my eagerness, for Philip would be no desirable brother-in-law, in my opinion, had he fifty thousand a year.

'Fie,' she replied, shaking her forefinger at me good-humouredly, 'would you have me betray him? of course he admires her, who would not? and he has promised me to think about it; but it is my opinion that he is caught already; he has never been so attentive

to any one since Madeleine. I watched them in the park this morning.'

Just as my godmother said this, I became aware of some one sitting silently in the shadow of the curtains, knitting; of course it was Rose, but when and how she entered so noiselessly I did not know, nor did Mrs. Hazeldean perceive her, for she called to me again to rectify her work, and remarked it was very strange the others were so long away.

The lunch-bell relieved me at this minute, and no prisoner was more thankful for an escape than I.

How I watched Louie and Captain Hazeldean all that day and the next;—for, reason as I might, the conversation had given me great uneasiness, and this was not lulled by the renewed spirits and increasing attentions on the part of Philip. Nor was this gaiety assumed; the pleasure he took in Louie's society was evidently unfeigned, and also his admiration of her beauty; and if so, another moth was fluttering round the dangerous flame, unless indeed—but here I got so perplexed and frightened, that it was as much as I could do to keep my fears to myself.

For could it be possible, that she who had refused that brave and Christian gentleman, Arthur Grey, a sin so heinous in Herwald's eyes that he could scarcely bring himself to forgive her, that she could ever care for this cynical weary man, who had spent the best of his life, who had no freshness, no youth, no wisdom of prime to offer her, only the dregs of a discontent that would pall upon her with the growing years?

Could she ever like him? ever accept him and his worthless five thousand a year? ever come and live in this dreary old house? Pshaw! what made me fear such things? she did not flirt with Philip, though she shared his society and accepted his attentions; she showed none of her usual pretty coquetry—but, nevertheless, I feared.

She was so very quiet and gentle with him when he came up flushed and excited with wine to lean over her piano and challenge her to chess—too gentle by half at those times, ah, far too genuinely sorry!

Did Rose fear it too? why was she so absent, so forgetful, so anxious-looking?—did she see it? and did it trouble her, and make her act so strangely, so unlike herself? But before many days were over I heard that question partially answered, when I was unconsiously made party to a *tête-à-tête* between her and Philip.

This was how it fell out.

It was about a week after we arrived at Hazlitt, when we returned one afternoon from a long and windy walk over the Downs.

The others went into the stables to look at Philip's bay mare that had fallen lame, and was said to be in bad condition, but I, being fairly tired, made my escape into the house, and betook myself with a book into the small drawing-room—a warm cozy room

hidden within the other by heavy crimson curtains, and had no outlet into the outer hall, for the sake of greater warmth and comfort.

The room was so close after the chill air, and the dusk came on so rapidly, that my book fell to my knee, and I was soon enjoying a deliciously surreptitious nap on the little couch, hidden up in the darkest corner.

How long I had been asleep I do not know, when I was awakened by the sound of voices beyond the half drawn curtains, to which I listened, half drowsily at first, believing the room to be full, and half inclined to fall into a doze again.

A sentence, however, made me start, and think how I could best make my escape, and that being impossible, how I could contrive not to listen; but ears are dangerous traitors, and mine played me false that afternoon. For Rose was speaking to Philip Hazeldean, and every tone of that earnest animated voice was new to me, and Rose was saying—

‘Do not despise my warning, Philip; go, in Heaven’s name, before it be too late.’

‘Go! and why go? if you are not enough to drive a man mad, Rose!’

‘You must go,’ she repeated, speaking rapidly, ‘because it is no longer safe for you to be here; because you are sowing the wind to reap the whirlwind; because every moment you linger on this enchanted ground is fraught with danger to you; because I have read your heart, Philip, and its pulses are not beating true—not true, not true.’

She had laid her hand on his arm in her earnestness I think, for with a muttered oath he shook it off.

‘They have laid a snare for you,’ she continued, ‘and this time you will not escape it; you will stumble and fall; day by day the temptation is growing stronger, and day by day you are less powerful to resist it. Up, Philip, you shall not linger here; I will save you.’

‘You!’ he exclaimed, angrily, ‘you, who have brought me to this; you, who have worked to get me here, have insisted on shutting me up in this dreary old prison-house, and then in an instant turn round and upbraid me with the mischief you yourself have wrought; it is well to talk of saving me; very well, indeed.’

‘And you will not go, Philip—you will not?’

‘No, I will not! I scorn to be turned from my purpose by a woman’s whim. You have always had influence with me, Rose, but in this you are unreasonable, nay unaccountably absurd; I could believe, were it possible, that you are jealous.’

‘If I were,’ she answered, in her calm sad voice, ‘I could not be more earnest in my prayer to you to go—to leave this place, that Louie Mortimer’s goodness and beauty may not tempt you from your sense of right, or darken more completely your unhappy

life. Remember Madeleine—oh, Philip, Philip, remember Madeleine!

'Confound her, and you, and everything. Am I ever likely to forget her, do you think, with you perpetually throwing her into my teeth at every turn? Stay, Rose, I will have no more of this; you've lived alone in this accursed house till you are half crazed. Once for all, I tell you, I will not be talked to on this subject again!'

'And you will not go, Philip?' she reiterated in her patient tones.

'No, I won't; I won't be turned out of the house of which I am rightful master, because I have a harmless penchant for a girl who pleases me; it is harmless, Rose; I have sworn it to you, whether you believe it or not; but she pleases me, and what is more, she tries to, which is what you do not care to do, or you would not sit interminably knitting in that odious gray dress, till I declare I almost—'

The sudden stoppage was evidently made by a hand placed lightly over the speaker's lips.

'Don't say that, Philip; don't say anything particularly hard to your poor friend, if you can help it; it is lonely enough to sit day and night and hear the wind and the sea in their eternal moaning, without having the memory of cruel words to add to it. I don't think I could bear it now.'

'Well, well, Rose,' he replied, half sulkily, 'I meant no harm; I have done you enough already; but you should not provoke a man, especially a man of my hasty temper; you know I would not willingly offend or hurt you.'

'No, you have a good heart, Philip; but we must both learn to bear and forbear. It is too late now to think of pleasing you, is it not? a gray-haired woman like me, and you so young and strong and handsome. I only try to save you needless sorrow, and I shall do that till I die.'

'I believe you will, my poor woman; only put these silly fancies out of your head; here, I want you in the study a moment—I have a business letter to answer, and shall be glad of your advice.'

They moved together, and their voices ceased with the closing door, and trembling and scarcely able to breathe, I rushed out of my hiding-place, and up to my room.

What could all this mystery mean? I sat down by the hearth quite sick and chill.

Louie, humming a tune before the glass, broke off to bid me make haste, for the dressing-bell had sounded, and Mrs. Hazeldean would be offended if we were late for dinner.

So I put away thought, and hastened so that I was ready as soon as Louie, for I was anxious not to betray my ill-gotten confidence before her scrutinising eyes.

When we went downstairs, Rose was not in the drawing-room nor did she appear at the dinner-table, but sent down the excuse of

a bad sick head-ache ; of which no one seemed to take any notice. As for Philip, he had relapsed into his old gloomy mood, and did not appear to hear it ; even to Louie he was taciturn, and only answered her merry sallies by a bare smile or two.

After dinner he stopped down longer than usual, and when he came up to us at last, his face was much flushed and his voice thick and very excited ; even Louie shrank slightly from him as he took his accustomed place beside her. But not for long ; in a few minutes her words were as gentle as ever, her look as calmly sorrowful and kind, and when she rose to sing his favourite songs, the tears came into her eyes and quite dimmed their brightness, and faltered in her voice.

CHAPTER XXI.

'Why are we weigh'd upon with heaviness,
And utterly consumed with sharp distress,
While all things else have rest from weariness ?
All things have rest : why should we toil
alone ?

We only toil, who are the first of things,
And make perpetual moan,
Still from one sorrow to another thrown
Nor ever fold our wings
And cease from wanderings.'

Tennyson.

AND the cloud that was at one time no 'bigger than a man's hand,' swelled in its blackness and darkness till the visible horizon was obscured and the light in heaven went out.

The time was now drawing near for our return home, and day by day and hour by hour I counted the laggard minutes, till the moment for our release should come ; all the more that Mrs. Hazeldean had turned restive, and insisted that our visit should be prolonged at least another fortnight.

To this I would not consent ; whereupon arose the startling proposition that Louie should remain alone, a proposition that rendered me positively unhappy, as Louie seemed not only to think it possible but desirable ; and, when I reasoned with her on her duty of returning with me, remarked somewhat surprisedly that she knew her duty to the full as well as I did, and that she believed it lay in the path she had marked out for herself.

But the question was held in abeyance for a day or two, and it was not yet settled on the last evening but one, when we were all sitting round the fire waiting for Captain Hazeldean.

For the bay mare had fallen into very bad ways indeed, and it had become necessary to get rid of her, and to replace her by a younger animal, and to this end Captain Hazeldean had been away all day effecting the exchange, and had not yet made his appearance.

It was tedious waiting, but Mrs. Hazeldean, who was in a most gracious humour, had discovered a specific amusement for her favourite, by displaying to her admiring eyes the celebrated Hazlitt diamonds, which was an honour never yet vouchsafed to us.

And truly it was a regal collection, and one that a duchess might have feasted her eyes on, but Mrs. Hazeldean went further in her condescension ; for she took out the costly ornaments one by one, and clasped them round Louie's white throat and arms, linking some across her ruddy hair, saying carelessly to me as she did so, that these would form the marriage gift of young Mrs. Hazeldean.

And Louie heard her, and turned round with such a flush on her face, and the precious stones as they flashed and sparkled lent such a glittering effect to her imperial beauty, that even Rose looked up with more than wonted animation in her eyes, and regarded her long and earnestly.

And Captain Hazeldean entering at that moment, first stood transfixed on the threshold, and then came up with a strange smile on his face.

'Fair as Queen Cophetua,' said he.

Louie unclasped the ornaments and began laying them aside.

'I cannot fancy myself in that character, or indeed in any other than my own ; this is your aunt's vanity to-night, not mine, so find a better name for me, Sir Philip ;' and so saying, she swept the glittering toys from her in a moment, and turned hastily away.

At dinner, Captain Hazeldean showed himself in excellent spirits, and rattled away more than his wont, vaunting the merits of his new purchase, Wildfire, to the skies, and finally begging Louie to pay a visit to her stall after dinner and pronounce on her beauties by gaslight.

'I will,' she answered, readily, 'if you in your turn will consent to forego your dessert.'

Captain Hazeldean bit his lip. 'Why that stipulation, Miss Mortimer ?'

'A whim, Sir Knight, a whim—nevertheless, I ask it ; and if you are wishful for my company you will just ring for Fanchette to bring down my furs at once, and not,' she added in a low tone, 'fill for yourself more than this solitary bumper of claret to pledge me in.'

Daring words ; but though Captain Hazeldean frowned and reddened, he did not dispute her will, only helped her silently with her cloak and followed her out of the room.

Rose was going too, but Mrs. Hazeldean angrily called her back.

'Why do you intrude yourself, Rose, where you are not wanted ? have I not told you a hundred times to let those young people be alone as much as possible ?' So saying, she swept haughtily from the room, and Rose went and sat by the window and looked over the park and the cliffs to the sullen water beyond, across which lay one long white path of light, and a little boat rocking in its midst ;

and standing near her a moment and looking seaward too, I heard her whisper to herself, 'He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved;' and knowing that one of her sad moods was on her, I left her to herself and took up my book.

I read for about an hour, forced myself to read, and then, unable to disguise my uneasiness any longer, laid it down and went out.

I was going to seek them, to explore, if need be, park and garden and moon-lighted cliff; to do anything, in fact, if only I might find them and bring them back; but passing through the hall, I was made aware of voices proceeding from the library, and standing in the shadow, I ventured to look through the half-closed door; and then what I saw made me clasp my hands in uncontrollable sorrow and steal silently away. For Loo, our Loo, our own dear, bright, beautiful Loo, was sitting there, and Philip Hazeldean was kneeling beside her with his face hidden from sight, and the lamp-light was falling on their bent heads and closely-locked hands.

And I went away into the darkness, and looked across the cliffs to the sullen sea beyond, and the boat still rocked in the silver path, and a great star came out and trembled near the moon, and the wind hustled and whispered in the ivy, and the bare trees cracked and strained with their withered arms; and Nellie looked up to heaven with Jonah's impious cry upon her lips: 'It is better for me to die than to live—for I do well to be angry even unto death.'

For at this sight, so long expected and so dreaded, I had reached the culminating point of my misery, not knowing, poor fool, that there should be trials appointed to me hereafter, that should shrink this one into insignificance, and rebuke me for that hasty wish that night.

And the fair moon smiling down on the sullen water so recalled Louie's face smiling down on Philip Hazeldean, that I could look no longer, but went back to the drawing-room; to the firelight and the lamplight, and my godmother's drowsy chat.

And presently they came in with flushed, quiet faces, speaking to no one, and rather shrinking from observation; and when tea was over Loo went and played soft music at the far end of the room, and Philip went too, and sat near her, and soon light whisperings mingled with the melody; and raising my eyes at the sound, I met Rose's looking wild, fixed, and a little fierce, and I knew not why, but their expression terrified me.

I was thankful indeed that night, when the time came for our retiring to rest, that I might have my sister to myself, for, wilful as she was, I could make her listen to me—I felt sure that she would listen to me for once.

But, to my surprise, at my first word she stopped me.

'Not to-night, Nellie, I want to-night for quiet, silent consideration—to-morrow—yes, to-morrow, we will talk about this;' and,

looking at her more closely, I saw that her face was pale and her eyes heavy with unfallen tears.

What could I say?

I knew her too well of old to venture to question her more at present, so when I had silently completed my preparations for bed, I lay and watched, as she drew the low chair to the hearth, and sitting down in it, laid her face on her folded hands; watched her till I grew drowsy, and dozed and watched again, then sank into an uneasy slumber, and awakened with a start, and still she sat with her falling hair, and her face laid on her clasped hands.

And when I next woke it was morning, and nothing but the ashes in the grate and the empty chair beside it remained of last night's vigil, and Louie, flushed and slumbrous, was leaning on her pillow commenting on the dreary prospect outside.

'A bleak, cold morning,' said Louie, yawning; 'sky gray and opaque, and not a glimmer of sunshine, and a nice searching dry east wind just scattering the heavy mist. No riding for me, Mr. Philip; you must try Wildfire alone.'

This speech she reiterated at breakfast-time once and again, as Captain Hazeldean strove to gainsay her resolution; but at last, finding his arguments in vain, he rose to equip himself for a solitary ride.

'We will come into the hall and see you mount your new favourite,' she said; 'and do be cautious, Philip, as I warned you last night, for I don't half like the look of her, thoroughbred as she is; it strikes me she has more vice than spirit. If I were you, I would take Maples, for fear of accident.'

'Maples, indeed!' repeated Philip, scornfully; 'you don't suppose a man who has ridden Demon and Vampire needs such a muff to take care of him. Come, now, Louie, what will you bet me that I do not bring you a bit of gorse from the top of Auckland's Hollow, and do it in an hour and a half too—come?'

'I shall take no bet, Philip,' she replied, 'and pray that you will not attempt anything so hazardous and foolhardy. Auckland's Hollow is an awkward place at all times, but to try it with a fresh horse would be sheer madness.'

'Nevertheless, you shall have your gorse,' he answered, laughing, 'and shall wear it as a mark of the prowess of your own true knight. Look, there she comes down the gravel walk; is she not a beauty?'

A beauty, indeed, with her small head and smooth shapely limbs, black as jet, with just a white mark or star upon her forehead; and yet when I looked at her I felt I would not have trusted any one I loved to mount her.

To see her strain and grapple at the curb, and wince at the lightest touch, laying back her delicate ears, expanding her nostrils, and showing in an instant the red of her wicked eye, till she looked like a Demon, a Wildfire, or anything unsafe or uncanny.

Philip did not seem to think so, as he came out and eyed her proudly, then vaulting into his saddle, held her in with his sinewy strong hands, while she pranced and reared under his weight.

'Don't touch her with the whip, Philip,' cried Loo, anxiously, as she stood in the wind and watched him. 'You are very reckless; I wish you would not go to-day.'

Still holding in the vixen with one hand, Captain Hazeldean lifted his hat with the other, with a smile for answer. As he did so, some one, gray-cloaked and gray-hooded, glided from among the wind-blown trees, and laid her hand on the bridle.

'Good heavens, Rose,' he exclaimed, impatiently, 'are you mad? Drop the rein, or you will be the death of us both.'

'Steady her, then, Philip, for I must speak to you. Philip, Philip, do you hear me?'

She might as well have spoken to the air, for half in defiance, half in sheer recklessness, he touched the fretted mare smartly with his whip, and in a moment she was plunging and rearing and curvetting madly about the gravel walks, till she broke into a wild gallop, and disappeared from our sight.

'Heaven help the boy!' cried Mrs. Hazeldean, while Louie uttered a half-suppressed exclamation. Rose said nothing; but I shall never forget the look of her haggard face as she passed me and re-entered the house.

'Well, girls,' said Mrs. Hazeldean, as she beckoned us shiveringly to come in, 'it is no use straining your eyes and watching, for he won't come back yet. He has given us a turn, certainly, but I am pretty sure in my own mind that he is equal to the management of the animal, spitfire as she is. Bless you, you have no idea of Phil's pluck; he is never to be beaten by anything. But come in now, you look frozen; and if you have nothing particular to do, Nellie, I should like to hear you read the paper—there is an excellent leader to-day, and really a very clever article on universal suffrage.'

Mrs. Hazeldean's behest was peremptory, so I took up the paper and read continuously from leader to article, and then on to the foreign intelligence, without the slightest notion of what it was all about, being distracted every moment by Louie's restless movements from window to window, and having a visible consciousness of Rose's white face behind me.

It was a relief therefore when Mrs. Hazeldean gave me permission to leave off, and I was just rising to speak to Louie, when the trampling of a horse's hoofs sounded up the gravel walk, and with a joyful exclamation we all ran to the bay window.

'He waved his hat to me ten minutes ago from the cliff,' cried Loo. 'I knew he was coming, but would not interrupt you,—what's that!—oh, good heavens, Mrs. Hazeldean, he has fallen—he is—' Her voice stopped, stifled with a sudden terror, for Wildfire was tearing past the window trailing something behind her, something

that dragged after her with foot in stirrup, with fair hair dabbled in blood, with a dead face all torn and bruised and disfigured with gravel; alas, alas! it was Philip Hazeldean.

The horse stopped, we could see that even before we got to the door.

Then, what was that terrible shriek that rang through the house, that passionate cry of 'My husband, my husband!' from the stricken creature who had caught him up, and was sitting down upon the ground with the bleeding head pressed to her bosom?

Who was it, that sheltering him with her own dress, cried out that he was not dead, that kissed open the fainting eyes and wiped the blood from his face, and called out to the servants, hurrying round, that they should bear him in gently, oh, very gently, from the piercing cold, and lay him on his bed?—it was Rose!

It was Rose; but it was not that strange sudden discovery that chilled the current of my life, nor yet the sight of the ghastly burden she held in her lap; it was the look on my godmother's face, the wicked evil look that lurked within her eyes as she moved her dry lips as if to speak, and raised her wrinkled hand.

'Take him up, Maunders,' cried Rose; 'why are you waiting? do you not see how the wind whistles round him! There, take his feet, and I will guard his head carefully—carefully.'

'The first one who carries that man across the threshold of my door,' said Mrs. Hazeldean, in a strange terrible voice, 'shall leave my service and for ever. Take him up if you will, and bear him elsewhere, but he—my nephew—and my would-be heir—traitor—liar and deceiver as he is—and the impious woman who has betrayed him to his ruin—shall never sleep beneath my roof again—so help me Heaven.'

And throwing her hands from her, as if she were scattering dust, she turned away her white haughty face, as though she would never look on him again.

And Philip heard her, and tried to move his broken arm, but it fell useless to his side; and with a groan of despair he hid his face on his neglected wife's bosom, and bade her take him away.

'Mrs. Hazeldean,' cried Loo, 'this is not the time for revenge. Bring Mr. Philip into the house,' she continued, addressing the servants, 'or his blood will be on your mistress' head, if you leave him out longer in this deadly cold. Do you hear me?' she repeated, stamping her foot and with her fair face flushed with anger; 'if you are men and not cowards, obey me instantly.'

'I defy them,' returned the haughty lady of Hazlitt, 'they dare not—who are you, Louie Mortimer, that you presume to set up your will against mine? I tell you again, and all the world may be my witness, that that lying traitor, Philip Hazeldean, shall never cross my threshold again, living or dead. Maunders, close the hall door.'

'Your curse be on your head then, you wicked woman,' exclaimed Louie with flashing eyes; 'but if there be a human being here, bring

blankets and help me bear him down to the inn, or I will carry him myself.'

Mrs. Hazeldean swept back with a mocking laugh, and the servants, no longer under the influence of her basilisk eyes, brought restoratives and warm plaids and wraps, and carefully and gently bore their unhappy master from the ill-fated grounds.

'The inn, Rose,' said Louie, as she watched the cortège out; 'it is only a quarter of a mile, and the vicarage is farther on; I will be with you before you reach the door. Now, Nell,' she continued, laying her large white hands on my shoulders—and I remember they felt to me as strong and trustworthy as a man's—'go up to our room, and pack up our boxes, Fanchette will help you, and I'll bring a fly for them in an hour or so.'

'What do you mean, Louie?'

'What I say,' she repeated, impatiently; 'nothing on earth shall induce me to sleep another night under this wicked roof, neither shall you—do you understand? We will stay at the inn.'

I acquiesced mournfully, and went in; Fanchette came weeping to my assistance.

'Madame,' cried the faithful creature hysterically, as she brought me some food and wine and pressed me to eat 'Madame has locked herself in her apartments, and is walking to and fro like a wild thing; it will break her heart,' finished the soft-hearted Fanchette, 'she is very wicked and cruel and hard as death, but it will break her heart.'

I thought so too, and even while I felt revolted by her barbarous act, some grain of pity lingered in me for the wretched woman, who could be capable of such terrible passions as to make the adopted son of her love an outcast, while he lay seemingly dying at her feet.

Yes, I pitied her, for I believed when the deadly rage was lulled, that it would be exceeded in her remorse, a remorse that would prey upon her and waste her life, but with her would never, never, merge into a healing repentance.

Absorbed in these painful reflections, I did not hear Louie's footsteps till she stood beside me.

'How is he, Loo? oh, poor fellow, will he die?'

'Die! not a bit of it; he is bruised and shaken, and terribly cut, and one of his arms fractured, but Dr. Blackstone trusts there is no internal injury, and if we can keep him from fever it may yet be well; and oh, Nellie, pray that he may be restored to his dear wife's love, who has so generously forgiven him, and taken him back into her faithful heart.'

'But, Louie, I cannot understand—do you?'

'Yes, I knew all last night; and but for poor Philip's weakness and vacillation all might have been explained, and this terrible accident avoided; but I cannot talk or breathe in this house. Is everything ready, Nellie?'

'Everything.'

'Very well ; I will ring for the men, and give me your card, please. I am going to write a few lines to our hostess. We have met with hospitality and kindness here, and we will not slink out of her doors like a thief—but, I will tell the truth, if I die for it, and I will expose her for what she is, a wicked, barbarous woman. Come, let us go.'

We went ; the servants, crest-fallen and respectful, watched us out, and one or two of them ventured a word of excuse to Louie for the part they had been taking, but she turned her face away.

'You are all hirelings !' she answered, 'every one of you serving for wage and not for love, or you would never have carried your young master out like a dead dog, for the orders of all the women in England. There, drive on, coachman.'

The man obeyed, and as we turned the corner I saw a hand raise a blind cautiously from an upper window, a fair wrinkled hand sparkling with brilliants, which I knew for Mrs. Hazeldean's.

Louie saw it too, for she bowed gravely towards it, and thus we passed for the last time through the dragon-guarded gates of Hazlitt, and five minutes later stopped before the clean pleasant inn of the 'Bald-faced Stag.'

'I have got them such nice apartments,' said Louie, as she presented me to the comely landlady, 'roomy, clean and comfortable, and with a warm quiet aspect. Is lunch ready, Mrs. Morgan?'

'Dear heart, yes,' answered the buxom Mrs. Morgan, as she ushered us into a quaint homely parlour, looking on the steep village street, just over the creaking sign, with a roaring fire, and a cosy meal laid out for two.

'Our bed-room, Nellie, is just within here, Philip's is across the passage ; take off your bonnet, while I run over and see if Rose has got him to sleep.'

I was far too much in a dream to think of disputing Louie's practical suggestion, so I wandered into the little three-cornered room she had pointed out, with a big brown bed in it with its foot in the fire-place, and two small diamond-paned windows commanding a view of the stable-yard ; and while loosening my bonnet-strings, amused myself with looking down for a long time on a red-headed ostler rubbing down a steaming horse like Wildfire, and accompanying his evolutions with a whizzing, buzzing noise that was perfectly inexplicable to me.

After watching him for a good while with a dazed sort of curiosity, I went back into the low-ceiled parlour, and, curling myself up in the broad window-seat, resumed my look out and my reverie together.

And what I thought about I have not the least idea ; but I know that I saw a basket of apples roll down the street, and an old woman and two boys ran after them and picked them up, and a fussy little terrier ran too, who barked at the boys and licked their

faces when they stooped, and entangled himself in the old woman's dress, and made himself generally useful.

And I know I saw one of the boys take a good bite out of one of the muddy apples, and was cuffed heartily for it ; and a waggoner in a smock frock, drinking at the inn door, took his ruddy sunburnt face out of the pewter and said it was a shame, and then Louie came in.

'It is as I hoped, Nellie : he is sleeping just as placidly and gently, Rose tells me, as a child. I did not go in, but she came out, and whispered to me a long time in the passage. I have promised her that you shall not go near the room till we hear her open the door, for Dr. Blackstone says this sleep will do wonders ; at all events, poor fellow, it is temporary oblivion of pain.'

'And Rose, how does she look?'

'Tired, but so thankful.'

'But is she happy, Loo? does she really love him so dearly?'

'Of the love, I think we can have little doubt who saw her this morning ; as to happiness, I should fancy her feelings too excited and vague for that yet. Besides, there is so much that is unsatisfactory still ; the blow has been struck certainly, but the shadow still lingers that has darkened their life ; Heaven grant it may be speedily removed. Of course,' continued Louie, 'it must be a great consolation to her, even in her trouble, to have him all to herself to nurse and tend ; it will be the first time she has ever performed a wifely duty to him, and they have been married fifteen years—what do you think of that, Nell?'

'It is incredible. Fifteen years ! oh, my poor Rose, I never dreamed of trouble such as this.'

'Nor I ; I always thought she liked him, and that it was a case of hopeless love ; but this time, somehow or other, I got a glimmering of the truth, and at my earnest request Philip told me all.'

I caught her by the arm.

'Was that what he was telling you last night in the library, when he was kneeling down beside you?'

'Yes, he told me that, and a great many things besides. He lay bare before me the history and sorrows of his life ; the weakness that was his stumbling-block and error from the beginning ; but I am tired and cannot repeat it all, Nellie ; I have Philip's version, you shall learn it from Rose's lips yourself.'

'Oh, Louie,' I cried, vainly trying to restrain my tears, 'if you had spoken to me last evening, what misery you might have spared me, for I thought—oh, Louie dear, how could you try me so?—that you and Philip Hazeldean were engaged.'

'Engaged ! I engaged, and to a man like Philip Hazeldean !' she exclaimed, in genuine amazement ; 'my poor silly little Nellie, whatever put that into your head?'

'Everything—everything ; your kind looks and words, your pity, your constant companionship ; besides,' I continued, struck by a sudden thought, 'why were you sitting with your hand in his?'

Louie laughed and blushed.

'I did not know that curious eyes were watching us, or I would have been more mindful of propriety; but if I did hold Philip's hand, it was because I felt as if he were my brother, and because I forgot all, save the earnestness of the cause I was pleading. I was praying him, Nellie, with all my poor powers of persuasion, to throw aside the chain of fear and deceit that he had made for himself, and dare to act like a man, and claim Rose before the world as his lawful wife; and I spoke so strongly, I urged her pitiable case, her patience, her trust, and unassuming goodness, that I conquered his cowardice; I got his sacred promise—and but for this horrible accident, all might yet have been well.'

'But, Louie, all this seems so incredible of belief. Do you mean to tell me seriously that Philip Hazeldean does not like you, even if you are indifferent to him?'

'I am not indifferent to him, Nellie; I never met any man who so interested me, or who inspired me with more genuine liking and pity. As I said before, if he had been my brother, I could not have been more anxious about him; but that you should have imagined that I could have married a man who not only drinks, but bets and gambles, that I could have devoted my life to such as he is!'

'It was foolish enough, I own, but appearances were against you. But forgive me, Louie, are you quite sure that Philip does not care for you?'

'He had an idle fancy once, I think; he is so weak, you know, but I soon laughed him out of it, and we became excellent friends. I was aware Mrs. Hazeldean misconstrued our actions, but for that I was not answerable. I had a fixed purpose before me, and that was never to leave Philip and Hazlitt till wrong should be made right. And so,' finished Louie solemnly, 'man proposes and God disposes; and the knot that was too hard for my untying was severed, and in an instant, by the will of Heaven.'

CHAPTER XXII.

A woman's heart, who, when the cold
wind blows,
Deems it will change: no—storms may
rise,
And grief may dim, and sorrow cloud her
skies,

And hopeless hours and sunless days come
on,
And years—when all that spoke of bliss is
gone,
And dark despair, the gloomy future fill—
But, loving once, she loves through good
and ill.' *Sandford Earle.*

SEVERAL hours passed before I received permission to enter the sick room.

The drowsy afternoon had waned into evening, and twilight had

wavered from dusk to dark, and still Louie lay and dozed the remembrance of last night's vigil away, whilst I sat at her feet on the rug and reviewed many a gleaming picture and fancied scene in the caverns of red-hot coal before me, or traced the fantastic shadows that played on the low oaken rafters and panellings of the quaint old room, linking them in my mind with the tragic events of the day.

The heat and stillness at last made me drowsy, and I was sleepily trying to combat the idea that Philip Hazeldean was standing behind me playing the flute, when Louie's hands were pressed on my shoulders, and her warm flushed face laid against mine.

'Asleep, Nell, I declare ! well, I believe I've had a nap too, for certainly it was light when I closed my eyes ; and now let us ring for candles, it must be six o'clock.'

'More than half-past, Louie,' I replied, 'and Philip still asleep, thank Heaven.'

But I was prevented from further speech by the entrance of the gray-headed waiter, bearing two old-fashioned silver candlesticks, and shortly afterwards the urn and tea-tray, and at the same moment we heard the signal of the opening door.

'There it is ; go in, Nellie, and I'll follow directly I've got their tea ready.'

I waited for no second invitation, but groped my way across the passage, guided by the chink of light proceeding from the sick man's room.

It was a large commodious apartment, as Louie had said, with a clean wholesome-looking bed, furnished with white hangings, in one corner, and an old-fashioned fireplace lined with china tiles which reflected back the light and heat of the ruddy flames as they leaped and crackled up the wide chimney.

Rose, standing by the bed, beckoned to me to advance, without speaking, so I crept up to her side, and a silent hand-pressure was all the greeting that passed between us.

The curtains had been drawn back so that the cheerful blaze might fall on Philip's face, and by its light I was enabled to see clearly the pale features of the injured man, with his bandaged arm and head, and his long yellow beard floating on the pillow.

The rustle of my dress had roused him, for he opened his eyes and looked at me with a faint smile, only for a moment however, for he closed them again immediately, with a slight contraction of pain.

Rose stooped over and watched him anxiously, feeling his forehead with her moist cool hands, and loosening the clothes about the wounded arm.

'Does that feel easier, dear Philip ?'

A motion of his lips answered her.

'The sedative they have given him has not quite worked off,' whispered Rose, with a thoughtful glance ; 'I think if we leave him

a little while he will sleep again. Put the screen before the fire, Helen, and I will join you at the other end of the room when he has dozed off.'

I obeyed, and sat down on a large settle by the hearth with my face to the bed, but the sleep did not come so quickly as she supposed. First he groaned and wanted his position shifted, and, when she had laid him down on the freshly-shaken pillows, became restless and uneasy.

'What is it, Philip?' she asked, for his heavy eyes were fixed upon her with a wistful expression. 'Is it this?' and she held the drink to his lips.

The sick man turned away his head with another groan, so she smoothed the linen about him again with her tender tremulous hands and resumed her patient watching.

'Rose,' he said at last, and his voice was very weak and suffering, 'Rose.'

She bent her head down to catch his whispered words; bent it so low that her gray hair touched and mingled with his yellow beard.

'Rose, I have wronged you deeply, my poor wife.'

She raised her face with a beautiful flush upon it, and laid her hand upon his lips.

'There is no wrong, Philip, or if there be I have forgotten it; I have no thought but love for you to-night, and thankfulness that you are spared to me. Nay, you must not speak; remember that you are ill, and all excitement will be dangerous. Oh, if you have one feeling of pity for me, Philip, do not retard your recovery by such agitating thoughts as these.'

'But I cannot forgive myself. Oh, Rose! I see it all now,' he answered in an agonised tone; 'I saw it all when I lay battered to death on those cruel stones, when you held me in your arms, and that unhappy woman cursed us. I cannot forget too what that girl said to me last night about your white face and gray hair. Why did you not curse me too, Rose? you had as great a right as she.'

'Because I have forgiven you, Philip—because—'

And then she bent over him with a divine smile, and kneeling, pressed her lips to the hand which lay on the coverlet, conveying by this wordless action the love and homage and full forgiveness that her overwrought heart had failed to speak.

Philip raised his weak hand until it fell upon her neck, and tried to turn his face towards her; but in his bruised and helpless condition even that slight effort extorted a groan of suffering. Rose heard it and sprang to her feet.

'Do you see what a wreck I am? I cannot move; kiss me, my wife.'

She stooped and kissed him; and then, without relinquishing the hand she held, sat down in the shadow of the curtain to hide her falling tears.

It was long before she joined me, long before Philip regained his calmness and composed himself to sleep, but when the drawn features had relaxed and the breathing became soft and regular, she ventured to lay down his hand and creep noiselessly away.

Louie had been in once or twice, and had held a whispered consultation with me, in which it was agreed that for this one night I was to share Rose's watch, and if possible induce her to lie down in the next room for an hour or two while I took her place; but Rose, coming up with a bright wakeful look, would not hear of it, so it ended in our both sitting down on the long settle by the fire to wear away the night as best we might. And Philip slept; hour after hour his soft tranquil breathing filled Rose's heart with thankfulness, and caused us to relax the rigour of our watch, first by a whispered word or two, and then by a low-toned conversation, and in this conversation I heard from her own lips the secret of her life.

It was long past midnight. We had been talking by fits and starts of the strange events of the day, and I had just expressed my great surprise at the relationship between her and Philip, when she turned to me with a soft dreamy smile and commenced as follows:—

'You ask me, Helen, when I first loved Philip Hazeldean. I tell you frankly that I do not know; I believe I always loved him from the first moment when he came to the Park, and his bright boyish face reflected life and light on mine.

'In birth I was Philip's inferior, for while he came of a well-connected though impoverished family, I was only the child of Mrs. Hazeldean's governess, who had married beneath her station, and who scarcely eked out a scanty pittance for herself and child in a miserable lodging in Paris.

'But the wasting ravages of consumption soon put an end to her labours, and deprived me of my mother; and it was on her dying bed that she sent for Mrs. Hazeldean and earnestly committed me to her care.

'What were the motives that induced my patroness to undertake the sacred charge I cannot even now define, but she was an impulsive woman, and was evidently struck by the little stranger's beauty—you will smile, Helen, perhaps, but I was considered beautiful in those days, and long after.'

'I can well believe it, Rose, for there are vestiges of it remaining still.'

'Nay, my child, it has been long ago wept away; but there have been times, thank Heaven, long past, when I would have given worlds to recall it, and to be again that Rose Meredith whom Philip used to call his "Flower of the Vale."

'I was a year or two older than Philip when we first met at the Park, but very young for my age; a timid nestling little creature, who loved to shelter herself under his rough boyish wing, and whom he in turn delighted to protect; and daring, headstrong boy as he was, how gentle he could be. Even at this distant period of

time I can recall a thousand instances of his care and tenderness, and of the way in which he used to shield me from the hundred little annoyances even then besetting my daily life.

‘So generous and unselfish too ; giving up planned excursions with boys of his own age to go nutting and cowslip-gathering with me in our old woods, walking for hours beside my pony, with his hand upon the reins ; going miles to seek moss for my fernery, or food for my birds, or carrying me in his arms over limpid brooks or rough stepping-stones, when I was tired.

‘Oh, Helen ! when I forget that pure boyish love, I shall be in my grave ; for, in all the dreary years that have passed since then, with the remembrance of what he has made me suffer in them, and what he has himself become, I have never forgotten those days ; I have only had to think of the bright, frank-faced boy of long age, to forgive him all and everything.

‘Of course we loved each other. How could we help it ? thrown together so many months and years with no resource but in ourselves and in each other ; and if Mrs. Hazeldean had not been wilfully blind, she must have perceived the natural, the inevitable end.

‘My first grief in those days was when Philip went to Rugby, and I was sent to the Pensionaire in Paris, where, with the exception of the ordinary summer and winter vacations, I remained till I was more than nineteen.

‘From Rugby Philip went to Oxford for a term, and then started on the grand tour ; so that when I returned home, my education finished, full of the delights of leaving school, and of being no longer separated from my brother, I found Mrs. Hazeldean alone and Philip far away.

‘Many years have passed since then, but the remembrance of that great disappointment still lingers freshly in my memory ; of the despair that possessed me when news met me on the threshold that Philip was gone, and for years ; and that the letter awaiting me in my room, with its tender farewell and bright prospects for the future, was all I had to live upon for months to come.

‘It was bitter, oh ! it was a very bitter trial, and the corridors echoed with my sobs as I fled from Mrs. Hazeldean’s presence to shut myself up with my misery. Nor was this the only trouble ; before many weeks were past, I perceived clearly the fate that was now intended for me, and for which I had been educated. I found that my hand had been promised to our next neighbour, an elderly man of great wealth and eccentricity, who had loved me from my childhood.

‘I have nothing now to say against Sir Henry Varny, I believe he was an upright and an honourable man, but I hated him then ; the sound of his harsh dry voice speaking my name would throw me into a state of nervous apprehension, while I regarded his plain Scotch face and tall ungainly figure with distaste bordering on disgust.

‘It is cruel to attempt to force a timid girl’s affections—alike cruel and useless. Even the worm will turn, and the gentlest woman can, when outraged, stand at bay with the firmest, and so it proved with me.

‘For two years I endured this unseemly persecution, and then I rose and quelled it. I told Sir Henry no power on earth could induce me to become his wife, and when Mrs. Hazeldean stormed and raged I threatened to leave the house, and doubtless should have kept my word, but that in the heat of the turmoil she fell ill, and I remained to nurse her. And then Philip came home, and the current of my life was changed.

‘We met, but not the same. He had left me in the freshness of his youth, and now after more than three years’ absence he stood before me, tall, bronzed, and bearded, hardly recognizable, and I—well, we met like strangers; and like strangers looked, and fell in love. It is an old story, Helen, and it is told every day. He loved me first. I am glad to remember that now. I am glad to think how innocently I believed that this was the old sisterly love I felt for him, till he spoke and showed me the truth.

‘Ah! how happy we were, how we peopled our fool’s Paradise with a thousand blissful fancies, how we lived but in each other’s society, how blinded and deceived we were! but it was not to last for ever, we were destined to be parted. Philip bought a commission in the army, and was to join his regiment in the Highlands, and leave Hazlitt and me in three months’ time; and then the fatal error was committed—then, with the headstrong rashness of his character, Philip entreated me to be his wife, alleging that this course only would insure my safety from a second persecution. He urged it with passionate protestations and generous haste, and, fool that I was, I yielded. We were married very secretly, very quietly, and Rose Meredith became Rose Hazeldean.

‘It was a wrong step, nay, it was a wicked one, all the more that Philip’s aunt was lingering under the effects of some mysterious disease which for years threatened to end her life. It was cowardly also, because, as I knew long afterwards, Philip, always weak and with little moral courage, was building on this chance, for which we were both to wait.

‘It sounds badly told like this, but perhaps it was natural. He loved me, he wished to call me his own, and to put it beyond the power of man to separate us; but he knew also that to avow this marriage would be to forfeit his inheritance and blast his hopes in life.

‘“We must wait, Rose,” he said, sadly, on the morning of his departure; “we must wait, even if it be for a year or two;” and knowing the urgency of the case I assented without a murmur.

‘But troubles fell thickly on me after he was gone. First Mrs. Hazeldean began to turn against me, to taunt and weary me, to find fault with my nursing and to chafe at my every word; patient

endurance but fanned the flame, and day by day the barrier grew wider. I knew what it was, that she had learnt to distrust me, to fear the influence of my looks, and to tremble for Philip; and when the mischief was done and past remedy she began to see how she could best rid herself of me.

'Then it was that I unconsciously met her views half way. I solicited leave to visit an old school-fellow who had been for some years married to a French Protestant minister and was living in one of the quietest suburbs of Paris; gaining her consent I set out, and it was well I did, for sick in body and weary in mind I was sorely in need of the advice and sympathy of some good woman. I wanted comfort, and I wanted rest, and Rosalie gave me both.

'In that prim little white-washed house in the Rue de L——, I met with friends who watched with me in my trouble, and consoled and counselled me; who, like the good Samaritan, pouring in oil and wine, bound up my wounds and led me gently on.

'And so, before many months had passed my boy was born. Ah! you start, Nellie; but there is a little grave in the corner of the cemetery at Paris, marked by a tiny cross; and there they have laid my boy, who for only six weeks—six delicious blissful weeks—was to look at me with his father's eyes, and nestle with his baby fingers upon my bosom.

'Ah, my baby! he was too beautiful to live, and when they showed me him in his coffin, with the white roses and lilies lying on his breast and in his crumpled hands, and gave me the little curl of silken hair, I thought my heart would break. I felt I could not give him up, but "Rachel weeps, and they are not"—and day by day mothers lay their first-born in the Master's arms, in the sure hope—joyful thought!—of one day receiving them back again on their childless bosoms.

'Suddenly in the first dark hours of my grief I received a summons home. Mrs. Hazeldean was worse and not expected to live, and Philip wrote to me in great anxiety that I would set out as soon as possible, that I might be with him at the end.

'I had not seen my husband then for nearly a year, and the thought of our speedy reunion was the first thing that roused me from my stupor, and in an incredibly short space of time I arrived at Hazlitt.

'I had informed Philip of our boy's death, and nothing could exceed the mournful tenderness of his greeting, and the earnestness with which he strove to comfort me during those two months of suspense and anxiety during which we watched by his aunt's sick bed. I had nothing to complain of; he was all and more than I could have wished him to be.

'But there came a change. Mrs. Hazeldean awoke to life, and Philip rejoined his regiment, and for two whole years I never saw his face again. I marvel now how I could have borne that separation—I who loved him so; but I believe my very love gave

me strength to endure, and there was something of latent pride too in my nature, for I would rather have died than have urged him to avow our marriage contrary to his wishes and interest.

'I began to feel that if he could tolerate this life I would not be the first to complain. It behoved me, however, to be careful in those days. With Mrs. Hazeldean's return to health, her old distrust and jealousy of me came back fourfold. My life began to be a burden to me; unnatural restraints were imposed upon my freedom, and, worse than all, when it was possible to find a pretext for my absence, I was debarred from sharing Philip's visits. Often and often I was sent to town on some frivolous errand which detained me a week or two, and on my return found that he had been there and had left, grievously distressed at my unaccountable disappearance.

'It was on one of these occasions that he met Madeleine Laurence. Yes, just when his love for his wife was beginning to weaken from protracted absence, he was exposed to the wiles of the most beautiful and seductive woman of her time; he was weighed in the balance and found wanting.

'It was an awful trial for Philip, and he came out of it with wavering faith, with a heart well-nigh broken. The passion of his manhood had swallowed up the passion of his youth, and when I returned to Hazlitt I found nothing but the ashes of his love, and a moody, discontented man. Ah, he had ceased to love me; day by day the bitter evidences of the truth were before me in his altered tone and looks, in his fitful humours, his brief and distant letters, while every visit widened still more the awful gulf between us.

'That awful gulf—alas, poor wife! how I sought to bridge it, how I wept and prayed, and wrestled in the agony of my soul, till my beauty was dimmed with tears, and he began to murmur at my altered looks—nay, even to regard them with aversion.

'At last the time came when I strove no more, when I was dumb with anguish, for I knew then that all was lost, that he had not only ceased to care for me or to wish to claim me for his wife, but that the chain galled him to madness, that he would never risk his inheritance; nay, more, that he would have given it all to have been rid of me, once and for ever.

'You weep, Helen; so did I once, before I went down into the burning fiery furnace; but there my tears were all dried up. What I suffered you may guess when I tell you that in one brief summer and winter my hair turned gray, as it is now.

'There were times when I thought I was going mad, when wild thoughts of ridding Philip of his life-long burden by unjustifiable means rushed through my brain and made me chill with horror. Thrice have I gone down to the great sea, that by night seemed to woo me to its bosom, and nothing but baby hands have held me back from the deadly deed. And then came a calm, when my prayers were answered—not as I wished them to be, but better and

diviner far, when the blackness of darkness was lifted off my soul, when I accepted my fate with patience, when I took courage, and thanked God for the light.

'Then it was that I regained something of my lost influence, when Philip no longer turned from me with aversion, but suffered me to be his friend ; when in his milder moods he blessed me for my love ; when he turned to me in his troubles and I could shelter and save him. I had outlived hope then, as I deemed I had outlived love, till the sight of his bruised and bleeding form this morning showed me my mistake. Many waters quench not love, Helen, and though I have been an unloved, neglected wife for more than eleven years, my affection for Philip Hazelden is as true and deep as it ever was when he wooed and won me in the dear old times of yore.'

Here a feeble voice calling to Rose induced her to break off, and coming back in a little while she urged me affectionately to go to bed ; saying that Philip had asked her to sit beside him, and that she had now no longer any pretext for detaining me.

Being nothing loath, I was soon persuaded, and after stealing a last look at Philip, who stretched out his hand to me with a grateful smile, I groped my way across the passage in the chill gray dawn, and was soon happily asleep in the great brown bed.

I was awakened next morning by a hand drawing aside my curtain, and blinking my eyes open drowsily I became aware of Louie standing beside me in her travelling dress.

'What o'clock is it, Louie, and where are you going ?'

'It only wants an hour to noon. How soundly you have slept, child ! If I had not succeeded in rousing you, I should either have lost my train or been obliged to go without bidding you good-bye, which I was very unwilling to do—come, wake yourself up, I want to speak to you.'

'Do you mean to say you are going home now ?'

'Yes, this is the time we arranged, you remember, and Bruce promised to be at the station to meet us.'

'But you are leaving me behind, Louie !'

'Of course I am ; I have been thinking a great deal about it, and this is what I have finally decided : first, that you, and not I, shall remain behind ; I think, considering what has just passed, that it will be in better taste, and on the whole more pleasing to Rose ; secondly, that if Philip continues to progress steadily, that you need not stay more than three or four days ; of course, if he be worse, or other circumstances occur, you must judge for yourself, but you had better let me say, Nellie, that I expect you home on the third day from this.'

'Don't you think Rose can spare me before that ?'

'I have no doubt she would to-day if you asked her, but I think it would be kinder of you to remain. Lastly, on no account prolong your stay, for if the old love is ever to be rekindled in poor Philip's heart he must be left alone to the tender ministrations of

his wife, and must learn to depend on her and her alone for the future.'

There was so much delicacy as well as tact in Louie's arrangements, that I made no opposition.

It was, I knew, as much self-denial for her to leave the poor invalid in whom she took so deep an interest as it was for me to banish selfish thoughts and let her go alone; so I only charged her with a few household messages, and promising to follow her advice, and let future circumstances guide me, suffered her to say good-bye.

Rose's 'thank you,' when I informed her a few hours later of my prolonged stay, was quiet and heartfelt; and though she still insisted on bearing the whole burden of the nursing herself, and never let me relieve her, even for an hour, yet I soon found my presence was a comfort to her, and her silent but rare caresses spoke more volumes to me than any other woman's words; but I could not help her having a hard time of it.

Poor Philip's irritable temper could ill brook the confinement and suffering, and though he struggled against it, his impatient words and restless murmurs at his weakness must have tried his gentle nurse to the uttermost.

But she never complained; though her nights were nearly sleepless, and her strength day by day more sorely taxed, she never varied her low soothing tone, she never spoke to him without that smile upon her face, and then sometimes her patience would be rewarded.

Sometimes when we sat together in the failing light, talking in whispers, so as not to break in upon his doze, he would suddenly call her by name, and ask her to come and sit by him and tell him of the dear old time when they were young together, when he loved her and knew her for his own, before he and the world grew mad and wicked together, and Madeleine came to destroy his heart and life with her wild beauty.

And Rose would fall cheerfully into his humour, and narrate many a merry scene of long ago, boyish exploits long forgotten by him, but hoarded in her simple faith—daring headstrong feats and escapes marvellous to them then, till the pale lips contracted into a smile, and a weak laugh followed the fancies she had conjured up.

And sometimes she would speak to him in other wise; would tell him of the little grave with the tiny cross gleaming in the moonlight, of the dead boy with his father's eyes, whom she had named with his father's name, and who had quivered out his baby life upon her bosom, with his cheek pressed close to hers.

Then Philip would put up his trembling hand and pray her to stop, and kiss her hurriedly, and bid God bless her, in a broken voice, for that he was not worthy of her, and never had been, and she a saint of heaven.

Sometimes from a hidden seat I could see him lie and watch her

with shaded eyes as she sat in the firelight, while the leaping flames made a halo round her calm white face and silvery hair, and shone upon her folded hands.

Then he would speak to her in an awe-struck, frightened tone, and tell her not to let him die, for he meant, if he lived, to be a good husband to her, and to make her happy, and that they would go away somewhere, where his aunt's cruel words could never wound her more.

Ah! as the days went on it was easy to see that remorse was working in poor Philip's heart—but whether for lasting good was yet to be proved.

Rose breathed no hope, at any rate, but went on from day to day rejoicing in her work of love, and trusting only in the present.

Philip, to do him justice, took little notice of me, sometimes calling me 'Louie,' and scarcely remarking my brief absences from the sick room, or hailing my return with more than a smile, so that I felt quite at liberty to go home at the time specified, and answered Rose's objections by a clear statement of the case.

On the last morning of my stay I had been out to purchase Philip some grapes, and it being a clear, bright sunny day, had lingered somewhat to enjoy the air.

On my return I was passing along the narrow inn passage to gain the winding staircase that led to our apartments, when going by an open door, a sudden curious impulse induced me to look in.

A young lady in a dark blue travelling dress was sitting there, with her back towards me, and her hat and gloves on the table beside her.

In the deep shadow I could not discern even the slight profile.

I was passing on when I caught sight of a dimpled brown hand moving listlessly among the feathers of the hat, and with a breathless start I advanced a step into the room and said 'Milly,'

In a moment the dark little face was reflecting back my astonishment, and with a great sob of joy Milly darted into my arms.

I pressed the dear little creature to me without speaking, and indeed for a time both she and I were silent.

It was such an unexpected meeting, and my heart was so full for her, and great surprises sometimes make one dumb.

Milly was the first to recover herself.

'You here, dear? Ah, Nell, Nell, if you knew how often I have wanted you!'

'Nay, that is too good, Milly,' I answered, trying to laugh; 'if you wanted me so badly surely you knew where to find me? How comes it, little one, that after declining my pressing invitation, I find you within an hour's journey of Sunnyside?'

'Of Sunnyside? you don't mean that I am so near as that?'

'Ay, but I do—only an hour's journey, and yet, but for this chance meeting in this out-of-the-way inn, I should never have known that your steps had been directed southward. Come, I am

going to have it all explained ; but first let me see how you look. Turn nearer to the window, please, for this dusky parlour envelopes all your features in shadow.'

She followed me with something of her old merry laugh, but not even that or her smiles could hide from me the pallid hollow look upon her face, which in its lack of brightness had lost something of its old beauty. Indeed, but for the great innocent eyes, I think I should scarcely have remembered how very pretty I thought her when I saw her first.

'Well?' she said inquiringly, when I relinquished my hold of her with a sigh, 'what are you thinking about?'

'Thinking about!' I answered, with a little shake in my voice, 'nay, I do not know. What does it matter? Come and sit down beside me in this comfortable window-seat, and let me hear everything that has happened to you since we parted, and especially how it is that my brave-hearted girl looks nothing better to me than a sad-eyed Sprite?'

The poor little face flushed up under my earnest gaze ; and she played with my hands in her old way for some minutes without speaking.

'Has Time dealt gently with you, Milly?'

'A strange question,' she answered, with a tremble of her lips, 'when Time is in his infancy and life is yet to be traversed. I never could understand,' she continued, 'that old saying of Jacob's, that "few and evil were his days;" mine, I fear, will be very many and very long.'

'So all feel who are under the cloud, but once let the sunshine stream through it again, and you will be the first to regret the fleetness of the passing hours. But now, my child, tell me how it fared with you after I left.'

'I don't know,' she answered wearily. 'I wrote to you that Arthur had taken me to Aberystwith, and that we were there three weeks, and I told you too how kind and gentle he was to me, and how wicked I felt at not being happier for his care.'

'You could not forget your trouble, then, Milly?'

'How could I?' she answered quickly ; 'oh, if any one you love, Nellie, have bitter sorrow at heart, and you think to change their life and scene for them a little, never take them to the sea, never take them near it.'

'My dear, why not?'

'Because it is not good, because they will return home ten times more sick and sore than when you took them first ; I assure you I have proved it. When we first got down I liked the sea, and I thought, as I heard its great monotonous moaning breaking on my ear at night, that I could never be weary of seeing and listening to it ; I thought it seemed to agree and sympathize with me in its pitiful earnest tones, but I confess to you I soon found my mistake. Oh, Nellie, it chafed me terribly. In a little while I was satiated

with melancholy ; I was fatigued with the endless repetition of the same sad song ; there was no hope in its voice, neither earthly nor heavenly, only a vague unrest, till I realized, as I had never done in my life before, "the time when there shall be no more sea."

'Poor little one, go on.'

'So I begged Arthur at last to take me home, for that I was only growing ill instead of better ; and when he saw I was in earnest he consented at once, and we returned to Rose Cottage.'

'Where you were left alone nearly all day ; ah, Milly, that must have been the worst thing possible for you. Did you not find your trouble harder to endure when you got back ?'

'No,' she answered firmly, 'I think not. I was at my post, and one suffers less in doing one's duty than in being petted and pitied like a child ; I never could bear that. Of course I had hard work at first, and I learnt how necessary it is to take up the cross daily ; the effort must be freshly made every morning, or one has no strength for the cares of the day ; but I have been led gradually to one conviction, Nellie.'

'What is that, dear ?'

'That I must have more work—work to brace my energies and make me strong ; work to fill up my days, that no time be left for idle repinings ; and this sort of work it is impossible to get at Rose Cottage.'

'You are right ; but what is it you plan, Milly ?'

'What is it rather that I have planned ? for it is all arranged. Arthur is pleased and so am I ; he was dubious at first, till I told him all that was in my heart, and then he saw it would be right. Can you guess my scheme, Nellie ?'

'Nay, that I cannot, nor will I waste our precious time in idle conjectures ; what is it ?'

'I am not to be left alone at Rose Cottage any more, but I am going every morning to teach Bessie and Laura Willoughby, to be actually a daily governess in the very same house where Arthur is tutor, and to teach in the old school-room of our own dear old home.'

'You don't mean it, Milly ? But what is to become of Arthur's little housekeeper ?'

'Oh, I am going to combine both duties as much as I can, and Bridget can manage the rest. I shall have the early morning, you know, and the long winter evenings to sew in ; but what pleases Arthur most is that he will have me to walk with him every morning to the Grange, and most probably my company back.'

'Well, Milly, all I can say is, that it is an admirable plan, if only you have strength and courage to carry it out. What ages are the little girls ?'

'Only ten and eleven ; but they are such bright, teachable children ; they are wild with joy at the thought of my coming to them, and Colonel and Mrs. Willoughby are so kind ! I am to

have fifty pounds at first, till my capabilities have been tested, so I shall not only be helping myself but Arthur in the bargain. 'Just fancy helping my dear old brother.' And the little sister's eyes glistened with tears as she spoke.

'All this is very satisfactory; but tell me, now, how it happens that you have wandered so far south; are you staying here?'

'No, I am staying at Brooklands, about eight miles from here, with the Tracys, who are cousins to the Willoughbys, you know. They were up at the Grange a long time, and Mrs. Tracy, thinking I looked pale, begged Arthur to spare me to them for a few weeks, as I was not to commence my new duties till after Christmas. To tell you the truth, I was dreadfully loath to come, but Emma and Mrs. Tracy and Arthur over-persuaded me; in fact, I was pretty nearly carried off by force. You can't think, Nellie, how kind they all are to me; and I feel it is very ungrateful in me not to enjoy myself more.'

'But how is it you are sitting alone in an inn parlour, Mill,?'

'Oh, we came up to the Point for a sea breeze, and Emma remembered she had an afternoon's business in the village; so we put up the carriage and lunched here, and as I was very tired Mrs. Tracy proposed my resting here till they returned. But I never thought, as I waited so listlessly by the window, that my good angel would presently look in upon me.'

'When do you think they will be back?'

'In another half-hour. Oh, how dark it is getting; I can no longer see your face.'

'Then stir the fire up to a cheerful blaze by the time I come back; for I have forgotten all this time that there are other people in the world beside you and me.'

So after briefly sketching to her the strange concurrence of circumstances that had brought me also to the inn, I ran upstairs, and returning in a few minutes found Milly kneeling on the rug warming her chill hands at the pleasant blaze.

'Come and sit down, Nellie; quick! we have not a moment to lose, and there is yet plenty to tell. What a pity you are going away to-morrow, or I should certainly coax Mrs. Tracy to let me carry you away with me to-night; don't you think Mrs. Hazeldean will spare you?'

I quite started at the name, for she was still Rose Meredith to me, but smilingly shook my head.

'Well, well, I will not urge you, you always know best; and now let us talk.'

'Have you heard any news of Mr. Clive, Milly?'

'Yes, Herwald told me about him when he came to see me on our return from Wales. Oh! you can't think how kind he was to me, no woman could have shown more gentleness and delicacy, no, not you yourself, Nellie.'

'And what did he say?'

'He said that when Hubert reached Geneva, he was taken with a return of his old nervous disorder, but that he was well attended and nursed by a Catholic sister of charity—Sister Agatha, who had written the letter at his request ; but he told Herwald not to be uneasy, as he was not able to write himself. Hark ! there are the carriage-wheels, and there's Emma's voice.'

Milly was right. In another minute, brisk cheerful Emma Tracy entered, and after many adieus and many lingering caresses, Milly was fain to tear herself away and follow her friends.

I went upstairs, and found Rose presiding at a cosy little tea-table spread in honour of my last evening in the sick room ; while Philip, propped up with pillows and looking cheerful though weak, insisted on forming one of the party.

And a nice little evening it was, one pleasant to remember, but it closed early, of course ; and the next morning I set off for Sunnyside, after many a kind and grateful good-bye being spoken, not only by Rose, but by Philip Hazeldean.

CHAPTER XXIII.

'Childhood is the bough, where slumber'd
Birds and blossoms many-number'd ;—
Age, that bough with snows encumber'd.

Gather, then, each flower that grows,
When the young heart overflows,
To embalm that tent of snows.'

Longfellow.

'So the Snow-fairies toiled all night, and emptied their laps of the sparkling crystal crumbs, and hour by hour the noiseless work went on till the whole fair garment was woven. And when King Sun awoke and prepared to step into his golden chariot—behold, the Earth was clad in dazzling white and looked glorious as a new-made Bride, and all those spots and stains she had contracted in her weary way were folded over and hidden from sight.

'And the Sea came up and looked upon her with his calm blue eyes, and stretched out his arms as though to take her in, and the Snow-fairies melted away in the great radiance of that happy day.—I can't remember any more, but I know the end was awfully pretty, and the moral—I've forgotten—but you can find it out for yourselves.'

'Halloa, Charlie ! are you asleep ?'

A drowsy head raised itself from Seymour's shoulder as he spoke, and shook itself indignantly.

'Asleep ! not a bit of it. I heard every word you said, Seymour ; but, tell me, are there really any Snow-fairies ? and do they always work by night when we can't see them ? How I should like to have a peep at them.'

'Well, look out for them when you hear the north wind blow,

for the next gale is sure to bring a shoal of them along with it ; but I advise you not to get out of bed and look at them ; for the little people don't like to be interrupted by mortals, eh, Halcot ?

Halcot, simmering in the full blaze of the nursery fire, with his round eyes fixed admiringly on his chum, looks forth sagaciously into the gathering darkness and observes they will be at work to-night ; for Bruce had said the wind was in the north half an hour ago ; and, hurrah ! they would have a merry Christmas after all.

'Of which to-morrow is the eve,' acquiesced Seymour thoughtfully.

'But is this really true, all this you have been telling us, or only play ?' persisted Charlie, now large-eyed and wide awake. 'Because—'

'True,' repeated Seymour, with much gravity, 'true ! why of course it is—surely, Charlie, you don't mean to disbelieve in fairies at your age ?'

'Don't tell 'tories,' broke from the little golden-haired bundle on the floor, that lay huddled up closely in company with the nursery cat ; and Rill, sitting up, presented her flushed face reprovingly to the circle, 'don't tell 'tories, Lucy says bad boys who tell 'tories never go to heaven.'

'Where do they go, baby ?' demands Seymour, stretching out his arms to his favourite, a proceeding pettishly ignored by the little maid.

'Come, baby, tell us ; where do they go ?'

'Oh, I know ; they go down into the burning fiery furnace, and the great golden image goes and eats them up, every bit of them.'

At this startling proposition, compounded of last Sunday's lesson, the nursery synod burst into roars of laughter, while Rill, crimson and confused, first butted angrily at Halcot, and then hid her head in Hennie's bed-clothes, from which a confused sobbing presently arose, mingled with stifled exclamations of 'naughty boy, tell 'tories, naughty, wicked boy !'

Mother Nell, seated in the dark window-seat apart, smiling to herself at the lads' vagaries, now comes herself to appease outraged infancy ; and Rill and the cat being made joint sharers of one warm nest, to wit, her lap, quiet is restored and the conversation proceeds, Charlie sleepily.

'If they work to-night, we will make a snow-man in the orchard under the great apple-tree, as big as Dudley ; and Bruce shall help us do it.'

Hal chiming in : 'And we'll break up the snow in the front court, and dig out a regular path down Grass-lane, as we did last year, or the fellows won't be able to get to the factory ; and perhaps Mr. Egerton will let us help clear the churchyard with the men ; that will be the greatest treat of all, because they are sure to have us in to drink hot-spiced beer in the kitchen, and perhaps taste old Marjory's Christmas cake.'

'Hold there ; you are reckoning without your host, my masters,' replied Seymour the prudent, withdrawing a well-toasted boot from the high fender as he spoke. 'Move your head a moment, Charlie ; you are going to sleep again, I verily believe, for you are precious heavy. As to snow men and snow-digging, have you forgotten our promise to Louie to help her with the church decorations?—she has given us her assistance these three days past, and we must not be shabby and cut her, now it is our turn.'

'Bother the decorations,' muttered Halcot, biting his nails savagely ; 'I am sick to death of 'em ; why, we grubbed all the stuff we could get from the Priory woods and Holly-Top bend, and you don't mean to say she wants us to put them up? I thought the Thorntons and Waldegraves were to settle that?'

'They will be there, of course ; I believe Belle and Ada have done most of the wreaths already, but we are wanted for the nailing up, and Bruce is going to help. Come, Hal, don't be sulky ; we have done the house so famously, it will never do to neglect the dear old church—I hate shirking a thing ; besides, after all, there may be no snow to-morrow.'

'If there is we must stick to our word,' returned Halcot ruefully, 'and take the chance of having time for both ; but I must say I am awfully tired of this fagging at holly and evergreens ; I thought certainly we had done for good and all to-night.'

I echoed poor Halcot's sigh of weariness as I remembered the trials of the previous week. For three whole days—days of unparalleled distress and confusion, had the mistress been set at defiance, and Sunnyside delivered into the hands of the spoilers. A crew of young carpenters, aided and abetted by their brothers, had taken possession of the whole house, and waged war fiercely with their tools against any who ventured to oppose or even to assist them. Only Louie, with her trailing skirts well looped up, was suffered to approach within speaking distance of those dreadful ladders, and meekly proffer gimlets and papers of nails.

From garret to kitchen these boy tyrants ruled supreme, nothing was safe from them, and only one spot of ground declared to be inviolate, and that, my own pretty drawing-room with its bright carpet and curtains and new chintz coverings.

Furthermore, I had stipulated that the guest-chamber should be let off with two or three garlands apiece, but beyond this I was powerless to interfere, for deafening whistles and detached morsels of soaking shrubs were sure to follow the faintest protest.

What I suffered in those days is incredible ; from morning to night cart-loads of evergreens blocked up the hall, so that it was impossible to cross it without having the hem of your garment entangled and imbedded in holly, stray prickly leaves of which would stick to your stockings, and not unfrequently work into your shoe itself. Every now and then a wild shout from one or other of the boy labourers would arrest the incessant din of hammering,

when it would be discovered that Nettle had retreated to a distant mat and was in the act of gorging the luscious white berries amid sneezes and rolls of joy ; or that Rill, so good and silent for hours, had been found with her pinafore full of the bright crimson beads she had been despoiling so cleverly for the purpose of threading necklaces with Hennie up-stairs.

But Rill's tears and Nettle's choking was nothing compared to what I suffered on Charley's account, from the moment when I first saw him on the top of the highest ladder clinging on to a rusty nail and balanced on one foot, to the last hour when he came crying to me with his little hands all red and torn from having fallen down-stairs with a paper full of tin-tacks, which he had heroically grasped to the last.

All that time, I say, I never knew a-moment's peace.

But trouble has its limits, and mine had come to an end in the afternoon in question, when all was declared finished, and Dudley and myself conducted through the house for an admiring inspection.

And really it was very pretty and very nicely done. Heavy festoons of dark shining foliage with the crimson berries peeping out like tiny clusters of blood-red grapes, ran round the walls both of the hall and dining-room ; but the great triumph of art was a mighty 'Welcome,' written up in ivy-framed characters opposite the street-door, while the entrance to the rooms appropriated to Katie and Herwald were literally embowered in green.

Nor had Hennie been forgotten ; the little day cot was canopied with holly and mistletoe, while he, with his bright eyes dancing with joy, threaded marvellous chaplets of coral beads for his doll's Christmas ornaments.

The little party therefore collected round the nursery fire could well assume the air of wearied artists, and, like poor Halcot, sigh for change of employment.

'Have Dudley and Louie gone down to the station yet?' Seymour asked, stifling a yawn.

'Yes; I heard the door close ten minutes ago; if I were you I would rouse up and make ready for tea, for Katie will be here in another quarter of an hour. Come, baby, I shall put you and Pussy down—run and find Lucy, and ask her to brush out those tangled curls.'

'Don't you wish this were Christmas eve, Nellie, and that Herwald were coming too?' asked Hal, as I turned to leave the room.

'Nay, we want Katie to ourselves for one evening at least, we should not be able to make so much of her if he were expected too; you know he will be here by the first evening train to-morrow.'

The time had passed quicker than I had thought, for I had hardly set my foot on the stairs before I heard the click of the iron gate, and the hasty brushing of footsteps along the flags, and almost

before I could fling the door open, a scarlet-plaided figure sprang into my arms, and laid a cold fresh face against mine.

'And is it you, my bonnie Katie ; you, verily and indeed ? oh, welcome, Katie, back to Sunnyside.'

And then for the moment I could say no more, for the grip of the small strong hands and the look of the dark eyes brought some one so clearly to my mind, that it clouded even this happy meeting with the shadow of involuntary pain. It soon passed, however, for who could choose but smile to see our 'freckled lassie,' as Keith called her, so beside herself with joy ! For myself I could do nothing but watch her.

To see her hugging the boys, Seymour not excepted, then spring upstairs three steps at a time to meet baby peeping slyly through the banisters, and return wrapping her closely in the old red plaid—to hear her laugh and chatter with Louie, as she fairly danced through the rooms, trying all the familiar seats and peeping into every corner, and then come slowly back and kneel beside my chair with the tears gathering fast to her smiling eyes, and whisper that she could hardly realize it, that she was so very, very happy.

'But, Katie,' I remonstrated, as I folded back the soft brown hair, 'how is it that you have not yet inquired after Bruce ? Did you not expect your old playmate would be the first to greet you on the threshold, or did Dudley tell you how he was engaged ?'

As I spoke, the clear sonsie face grew suddenly overcast, and then came the quick fall of the lip, that always showed in Keith and Katie a touch of the proud Cameron blood, as she replied in the ringing Scottish tones, every one of which thrilled me through and through—

'No indeed, Dudley never mentioned his name ; and for myself, the full-grown portrait that you drew for me at the manse was so undesirable, that I am dreading rather than otherwise to see the wraith of him whom you call by the old name.'

'And what fearful things has my mischief-loving sister been telling of me, may I ask ?' said a voice in her ear ; and Katie, springing to her feet, became aware that her old playmate was standing behind her, his handsome face aglow, half with pleasure, and half with vexed surprise at her words.

'Why, if it were my wraith indeed, you could hardly look more startled and scared ; will you not shake hands with me, or rather suffer me to claim the cousinly salute you have just accorded Dudley, eh, Katie ?'

But Katie would not, and only standing aloof with a heightened colour extended her hand ungraciously.

'As you will,' replied Bruce carelessly, as he held it a moment loosely, and then suffered it to drop ; 'after all, I wonder which of us two is the most changed, Kitty ?'

'Not I,' returned Katie, defiantly ; 'but it's ill keeping up the old customs, when the old faces and fashions have died out ;' and so

saying, she moved aside with compressed lips, and presently addressed some trifling remark to Louie standing beside her.

Whereupon ensued a most awkward pause, but though neither of them spoke to the other again for the next ten minutes, none the less were they employed in measuring their vantage ground, and each taking stock, as it were, of each other; and while Katie's scrutinising eyes observed the elegant exterior and languid manners of her *ci-devant* playfellow, Bruce on his side was noticing with fastidious accuracy the sunburnt face with its marked irregular features and firm compact figure, nay, even the neat ankle the looped-up linsey dress displayed, hideously disguised as it was by the clumsy village-made boot.

To me this meeting, to which each had so long looked forward, was especially disappointing, for I knew how difficult it would be to break through the barrier of reserve raised at the first moment by Katie's wilfulness; of the two, indeed, it would be difficult to say which was at heart the proudest—the one haughty from vanity, the other from sensitiveness and shy reserve.

Standing there, they were the most strangely contrasted couple—Bruce fair to effeminacy by the side of the 'nut-brown mayde,' and she with a glint in her eye and a glower on her brow that gave to her the dignity and severity of a Minna Troil.

Dudley was the first to break the silence by questioning Katie about her journey and the incidents thereof, of which she discoursed at first with visible reluctance, and then with her old vivacity; but it was more or less a relief to us all when she proposed adjourning to her room to prepare for the evening meal; and Louie and Dudley followed her to see after her luggage.

As soon as the door closed on them, Bruce drew a chair to the fire and sat down, looking sulky enough, till, seeing my eyes fixed on him anxiously, his mouth worked with a sort of provoked smile, and he commenced raking out the grate with unnecessary violence.

'Well, Sis, why are you looking at me?' he remarked at last, when he had desisted from sheer weariness.

'Why, to tell you the truth, Bruce, I am longing to know what you think of our Katie.'

'Think of her!' he returned, hesitatingly, menacing a second attack on the poker, which I stopped by taking it out of his hand.

'Yes, think of her? how slow you are to-night, dear.'

'Well, then,' he returned, quietly, after making one or two abortive attempts at whistling, and tilting his chair back till it hazarded dislocation of the neck, 'well, if I must tell you, I think her the most perfect specimen I have ever seen of a Scotch milkmaid, and about as tastefully dressed.'

'Bruce!' I exclaimed, all my Cameronian predilections firing my eye and cheek, 'how can you talk so rudely of any one, and especially of Katie?'

'Why did you ask me?' he replied, rather irritably, as he

got up and walked the room somewhat after the fashion of a polar bear in its cage, only without its polar serenity. 'Did anyone ever conceive,' he continued, 'how a civilized girl in her senses could put on that odious green linsey dress over a blue stuff petticoat? and then her boots!'

'Now, Bruce,' I interrupted, 'you are too absurd. I ask you your opinion of a girl, and you inveigh against her clothes after the true feminine fashion that you men abhor; and were it not that I believe that there is some little pique at the bottom of it, you would make me quite angry with you.'

'Pique!' he retorted, hotly; 'pique! nonsense, child;' but as he turned to leave the room, I caught a lurking smile at the corner of his mouth, that made me think I was not so far wrong, after all.

I was sure of it ten minutes after, when Katie re-entered, her fresh face rippling with smiles and her figure looking trim and rounded in her well-made black silk, and with her hair knotted up with its bonny ribbons of blue; for though he cast at her from time to time looks full of amity, he never touched by word or deed upon the courteous reserve she seemed to have established between them, but waited scrupulously for her first addressing him, before he made the least advance.

Strange as this sudden coolness was between the two compared to the warm cordiality shown by Katie to the rest of the family, yet so well was it glossed over by outward civility that it was more felt than seen, and, with the exception of the slight rupture at the first moment of meeting, nothing disturbed, in appearance at least, the general harmony of the evening.

We had consented, out of pity for our wearied traveller, to break up the circle that night earlier than was our wont, that she as well as the rest of us might be fresh on the morrow for Herwald and Christmas Eve; but this prudent resolution was frustrated as far as Katie and I were concerned, for happening to kneel down a minute on the rug to exchange a few good-night observations in front of the crackling logs, did Katie then and there, as was her custom at the manse, draw me into such a long and tangled skein of talk by artful questioning and bright alluring answer, that long after Loo had ceased her few sleepy interjections, did we sit huddled up in our long hair, growing warmer and more electric every second, talking of Keith and Lucy, till the midnight chimes hushed us with a start and sent me back to my chilly room shivering from very shame.

When I awoke the next morning, which was not till long past my usual hour, and then I was heavy and drowsy, I grew conscious by degrees that something very unusual was taking place above and around me.

Boys' voices sounded shrilly in the keen morning air, scudding feet over-head, and then heavy boots scuttling along the passages; followed by the picking sound of some instrument grating harshly

on the stones outside ; with the last sound came doubt, and then conviction, and I ran to the window to see for myself that the boys' hopes were realized, and snow and Christmas had really come together.

And so they had : all night long had the busy workers in Seymour's pretty tale ceaselessly and noiselessly striven, and the result was like magic.

Far and wide over the country glimmered the fairy pall, while every brake and hedgerow bloomed thick with frozen blossoms.

The stubby fields in front, yesterday so black and bare, now lay smooth as an Alpine glacier underneath the blue-gray sky, while the Priory walls and Parsonage and the gray old church itself were daintily draped with the same soft mantle of down.

Beneath, in the snowy garden, the cedar-tree trailed sparkling garlands, and the same graceful pendants suspended themselves like broken crystals from every bush and shrub ; all looking fair and still, like the enchanted garden of a dream.

But even as I looked and admired, chaos was being wrought by profaning hands in front, where the lusty labourers, clamorous for work, were already digging out for themselves deep dark trenches through the white sea ; all but Charlie, who was retiring behind his comforter, with blue and frozen fingers, the wrecks of divers snow-balls scattered at his feet, and the marks of recent tears upon his face.

But the tumult reached its height at the breakfast table, and was finished by three times three, when Dudley, after much argument and waste of breath on the part of the small fry, gave out his orders for the day ; which were to this effect, that no decoration work was to proceed till a clear, decent, and orderly path should be cut through court and lane, for the good of traffic in general and the special behoof of him and Bruce.

'So to your spades, young idlers,' pronounced the practical autocrat, 'and warm your frozen toes and fingers by going *infra dig* ; and as we are actually snowed up, I suppose partner and self must assist.'

'I'll help too, cousin Dudley,' said Katie briskly, as we rose from table ; and, true to her word, she reappeared in a trice with her dress well pinned up and head and arms comfortably swathed in her favourite plaid, and armed, to wit, with a formidable kitchen shovel.

Bruce made way for her to pass with a meaning shrug and elevation of his eyebrows, as he donned, whistling the while, his dapper gray overcoat and drew on his fur-lined gloves ; signs not lost upon the too watchful Katie, for she flushed scarlet as she followed Dudley out.

'Come along, Loo,' cried Bruce, when he had finished all his arrangements, lit his cigar, and bravely grasped his spade ; 'does not this spectacle of northern activity fire your sluggish pulses and

move you to an emulative zeal? come, put on your brown-paper boots and set a pattern to your sex; never mind chilblains and red hands.'

But lazy Loo, trailing her heavy skirts further from the draught of the open door, shook her head laughingly and sat down to a scroll she was illuminating, while Katie worked bravely in the midst of the men and boys, till Mr. Egerton, coming up to help, took her place and her shovel together.

As many hands make light work, so in good time this part of the day's business was over, and the little party were at liberty to concentrate their energies on the church decorations; so, after a hasty luncheon they all sallied forth, escorted by Bruce, intending to dine at the parsonage with the rest of their fellow-workers and be back punctually at half-past five, which was half an hour before we expected Herwald.

Left by myself in the deserted house I soon bustled through the thousand little things I had to do, and in the early afternoon was free to look round and admire my handiwork.

I had encountered Lucy often during the day in my frequent journeys to and from the nursery, and it had struck me more than once that she was looking sadder and more delicate than usual. In our last encounter I stopped her.

'You are looking pale to-day, Lucy; have you a headache?'

'No,' she answered, dejectedly, as she made a movement to pass on.

'Nay, you cannot be well,' I urged, detaining her gently, 'for your eyes are heavy, and your hand hot and dry; the boy is better, but what ails you, Lucy? Have you not slept well lately?'

'Yes; at least, I do not know—waking or sleeping it is all the same to me.'

'You mean that your trouble finds you out in dreams?' but she made no answer.

'Now, Lucy,' I pleaded, kindly, 'you are not dealing well with me, your friend, for you are suffering, and yet leaving me ignorant of the cause. Has anything occurred to grieve you freshly, or is it only that this festive season now approaching adds a darker shade to your sorrow? alas, if it be that, I cannot see how any spoken word of sympathy can avail you, and yet I would fain try and cheer you if I could.'

For a moment the pallid face lifted itself to the cold wintry sky, with the sick look of one whose heart is slowly breaking, and then she turned to me with a lip that smiled amid its pain—

'I do not know what ails me—but hope seems slowly dying out; all the blessed thoughts that greeted me when I crossed your threshold, all that I so fondly trusted were presentiments of future good; the dreams, the visions rather, that were given me—all, all are gone. I no longer believe that Heaven has spared him to me.'

'But I do, Lucy; nay, look up, you have so infected me with

your bright imaginings, that you have made me credulous too. What! shall we despair without proof, when you have hoped and prayed so long? It is but the natural sickness of a too long protracted hope that makes you droop. Remember, Lucy, and take it as your Christmas motto: "It is always the darkest, the hour before day;" and so saying, I drew her to me, and kissed her for the second time.

It was yet early in the afternoon when I left her and went downstairs, but already within-doors the wintry twilight was stealing swiftly on, the hall was wrapped in shadows, but the drawing-room was light with the reflected whiteness of the snow and the radiance of the leaping ruddy flames.

It was my favourite time, this hour of twilight, and I had just drawn up my chair for a spell of drowsy enjoyment, when the sudden opening of the hall door and a draught of raw gusty air startled me to my feet, and filled me with vague alarm.

'How careless of those boys,' I muttered, 'to leave the door on the latch; it must have blown open of itself;' and I was making my way out, groping and feeling about, when my hands were suddenly grasped in the darkness, and a voice, not Dudley's or Bruce's, cried—

'Is that you, Nellie?'

It was Herwald.

'Yes, it is I,' I answered. 'Oh, my dear Herwald, how you frightened me!'

And then, in my glad surprise, I half led, half dragged him into the room I had just left; and after kindling a mighty blaze that made it as light as day, I went up to where he stood, leaning against the mantelpiece watching me with his grave, sweet smile; and, taking his hands, bade him welcome again and again.

'And now,' I said, as I made him sit down and took my place at his side, 'tell me how it happens that you steal upon us wraith-like, in the darkness, two hours before your time; and what in the world have you done with Allan and your luggage and dogs?'

For answer, Herwald dived into his pocket, from whence he produced Sprite, who, on being liberated, ran at me with a short bark, and with many snarls, worried at the hem of my garment, under a mistake that my morocco slipper was a full-sized rat.

Meanwhile, her master, leaning luxuriously back, talked at me with half-closed eyes.

'Why I was deposited at your eccentric little station two hours before my time is more than I can imagine, though I have a shrewd suspicion that the mistake was owing to my blundering knowledge of Bradshaw; as to the luggage and dogs, I dropped them with Allan some twenty miles from here, to come up to-morrow afternoon, the delay being warranted by private business of his own; but why your hall-door opened when I touched it, and why your lamp was not kindled in such darkness, is for you and not for me to answer—

then, with a low sigh of content, 'Oh, Nell, Nell, how good it is to be here!'

'And how does the old place look, Herwald? just the same, or has anticipation, as usual, cheated reality?'

'Not in this room,' he replied, rousing himself from the quiet reverie he was pursuing, with his eyes fixed on the crackling logs, and glancing thoughtfully round him; 'not in this room, for it looks to me brighter, fresher, and more homelike than even I had fancied it would do. Oh, when I first caught sight of the dear old walls of Sunnyside standing out in the snow and twilight, I could not realize it, I half fancied I was in a dream.'

'Did you see the church lighted up as you passed? they are all working down there at the decorations for to-morrow; they will be so sorry when they return, to find you here first.'

'Will they?' he answered, smiling; 'nay, it is better as it is. So many voices greeting me on the threshold would have overpowered and confused me—it would have been too dazzling after my solitary life, and now I shall have fitted into my niche and be more ready to meet them all. Yes, I knew they were church-decorating, for the obvious reason that I saw them at it.'

'My dear Herwald, you don't mean it; then how is it no one is with you? surely Dudley could have been spared?'

'Oh no, no—it is not as you think, I did not speak to any of them, though I was sorely tempted to do so. I will tell you all about it.'

'It was nearly dusk when I left the station, but yet so early that I had plenty of leisure to saunter down the village street and note the several changes that seven long years had made in it; but these were not so many as one might expect, and except that the whole looked dwarfed and shrunken to half its size, and that the smithy was down and the Blue Lion had got a new sign, no alteration of importance attracted my notice.'

'Looking at it with a critical eye, perhaps the footpaths might have been wider, and the beershops less numerous; but these minor defects were forgotten when I had left the factory quarter, and turning the corner by the Hermitage, came full upon the church with its illuminated windows casting ruddy gleams upon the snow, and the parsonage, and the fields beyond, and the lane and the stile and the garden gate, all the hallowed precincts, in short, of Sunnyside and home.'

'From the rising ground where I stood, I could see dark shadows moving across one of the transept windows, and, impelled by a feeling of curiosity to see what was going on, I went in at the churchyard gate, and clambering up on the ledge had a full view of the decorators, and it really was a pretty sight.'

'Whom did you recognize among them, Herwald?'

'Well, many were strangers to me, I believe, but I saw Dudley standing in the middle of a group of boys and looking very much

in his element ; and a tall young man near him mounted on a ladder, who, according to all descriptions, must have been Bruce ; but who the square-shouldered fellow with the florid face and black curly hair was who was helping him, I have not the faintest idea ?'

'Why, that was Dick Thornton, your old adversary and tormentor ; but where were all the girls, Herwald ?'

'There were two or three fair-haired ones sitting in a pew just underneath me, working and chattering, but I did not recognize any of them ; for I was looking especially at a brisk tight-looking lass that I made up my mind in an instant was no other than Katie Cameron, though I never saw her in my life. She had a bonnie sensible face which to my taste was rather attractive, and was tied up for warmth in a black and red plaid shawl.'

'The very same—to whom was she talking ?'

'To a lady in a fur-trimmed cloak, and a hat with a long black feather, but I did not see her face.'

'Why, you provoking boy, that was Louie ; who else would have been extravagant enough to wear her best fur cloak at such work as that ? and if you had not been looking so long at Katie you would have found her out for yourself.'

'So I should,' he observed, ponderingly ; 'how could I have been so slow ? But how comes it, Nellie, that you are not with the rest of the busy ones, but sitting here by yourself in the gloaming ? Do you know I saw you before you did me, standing in your black dress in the doorway with a firelight halo round your head ; did I not startle you by touching you so quietly without a word ?'

'No, your hand had the touch of a friend, it was too warm and human for a snow-wraith. But now you shall not tire yourself out with talking to me ; let me show you to your old quarters, that you may rest and refresh yourself before the noisy party come in ?'

'You will take me to the nursery, surely, Nell ?'

To which I assented ; and we presently adjourned there, Herwald pausing, however, on the landing-place to look down on the moonlit garden and cedar tree, and halting a second time before the holly-framed doorway leading to his own apartment.

'That is not my room,' he cried, after glancing in and giving me a withering glance ; 'where is the old brown bed, and the sofa with the lid and drawers, and the roughly notched window-seat, and the spindle-legged table ? Oh you traitress, Nellie, you have forsworn faith and refurnished it handsomely ;' but for all that, his eyes glanced well-pleased enough at the crimson hangings, and pretty tasteful new furniture that had replaced the old, though his voice had a tone of real regret, as he added,—'but you have broken up the old associations, and left me no relics of the past.'

'Yes, yes, indeed I have,' I exclaimed eagerly ; 'look here, Herwald, I have left you Gainsborough's Blue Boy, and that odious George III., and the little watch-stand that you used to use, and mother's jars of rose pourri ; but you really did not think,' I con-

tinued, leading the way to the nursery, 'that I could have put you to sleep in that old curiosity shop—why, what would Allan have said?'

'Just what Allan had liked; but you are quite right, Nellie; it is ten times better as it is. But now for baby; I wonder whether she will be shy to me or not?'

Shy! not a bit of it; for as the door opened and Uncle Harry appeared, down went the pinafore full of beads, that rolled, and jingled, and crisped under the little feet, as the 'wee wifie' bundled to meet him, and clasped her dimpled arms about his knees.

And the happy smile broke out on Herwald's face, as he lifted up the 'bit birdie' and felt it nestle to his neck, and heard the cooing voice in his ears, and his heart seemed full as he took his seat by Hennie's bed, and talked earnestly and lovingly to them both.

And so merry grew they and he at last, that it was difficult to part them, and nothing but a promise of speedy return and a hint of Christmas treasures for the morrow could silence their affectionate entreaties to him to stay and partake of their nursery tea and cake, and dry up the tears that began to fall from the wilful wifie's eyes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

'Oh, woman, in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
And variable as the shade

By the light-quivering aspen made,
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou.'

Sir Walter Scott.

LINGERING a moment under Herwald's green-framed doorway, I heard a key blundering in the lock, and then came a rush of cold wintry air, and the hall was filled with snowy footmarks, and joyous whistlings, and flingings hither and thither of coats and overwraps, and all the hasty movements of a tired and excited party, over whose heads I serenely looked down mindful of much warmth and inward comfort.

'Why are you hiding up there, Nellie? come down and see what a troop of frozen-out gardeners we resemble, with never a whole hand among us, that is not defiled and torn by every species of prickly shrub that Dame Nature ever invented in a fit of spleen. Look here, and here;—do you call this fit for a gentleman?'

And Dudley stretched out a rusty chill paw, well seamed with scratches, and thrust it mischievously into my face.

'Nothing to mine,' growled Bruce. 'I shall be obliged to keep them in my pockets or wear gloves for the next month. I am sure

we deserve a vote of thanks from the pulpit to-morrow in return for all our sufferings and labour.'

'Don't be profane, Bruce ; it was quite sufficient for Mr. Egerton to make that pretty little speech in the porch. Don't you grumble, I am certain we ladies did our share of the work too. Good gracious, child, what's that?'

Nothing, nothing—a mere trifle ; it was only Charlie, who, from being self-balanced on a playful toe, had miscalculated distance and toppled over into the umbrella-stand, thereby bringing on his devoted head a shower of buffets from manifold hats and caps. It was only one of the daily chapters of accident continually occurring, but it provoked a burst of laughter from the boys, and even a smile from the elder ones, but only for a minute, for in spite of the little lad's endless escapades, he was the pet of the house, and as much spoiled and cherished as Rill herself.

So, while Seymour supported him on his knee in true prize-fighter's fashion, and Halcot skilfully felt for invisible bumps, Dudley kissed the tears away, and Bruce fired off volleys of not unkindly chaff.

'Now, young Murad the Unlucky, how many bones have you broken? You're a nice sort of chap to keep in a house ; not at all like a bull in a china shop—oh no ;—come, don't howl, there's nothing fractured—not even a little finger joint ; but we'll have a plaster of brown paper and vinegar, and pickle him well. Now that's right,' as Charlie essayed a feeble smile ; 'try another.' And Bruce, sitting down on the matting, contorted his face into every possible risible twist of which the human face is capable.

In the midst of the domestic hubbub came the calming words, 'Herwald is here.'

'Herwald here ! nonsense—Herwald ! why did you not tell me before?' And Dudley, putting me hurriedly aside, sprang up three steps at a time, while Bruce, setting his face in order, and whistling carelessly an air from Meyerbeer's Huguenots, followed him after a minute's hesitation.

'Herwald here !' repeated Louie, as Halcot and Seymour dragged off Charlie in hot haste. 'Herwald ! and we are not dressed ! Come along, Katie, do.'

'No such hurry,' replied Kate, as she tucked herself, red shawl and all, under my arm. 'You won't get me to dress for Herwald, or any other aristocrat of the north, till I've had a warm and a wee bit coze with Nellie over the drawing-room fire, after my hard day's work ; so if you're minded to get yourself up very gaily, it's ill waiting for me, I can tell you.'

Louie answered nothing to the implied home-thrust, but sailed peacefully away.

'There goes the empress,' whispered Katie, as she coaxed me to my low chair and pushed her favourite stool to my feet ; 'she'll amble before the glass a full hour, I'll warrant you, before she

comes down armed at all points and prepared to conquer. What a pity such a grand loveable creature as she is should be so full of faults and vanities.'

'Nay, but Kitty,' I remonstrated, 'both she and we all desire to look our best to-night in honour of our long-lost Herwald. Come, you are too negligent of your outward appearance; do you know, I want my Scotch lassie to look her bravest to-night; so away with you, my bonnie bird.'

"Tie up your sleeves with ribbon rare
And lace your bodice blue."

But Katie made no movement to go, but only rested her brown head lovingly against my arm.

'Have you had a happy day as well as a busy one?' I asked, as I stroked the smooth fresh face.

'Happy! yes—well, I can scarcely tell; I know I worked steadily and pricked my fingers, and those girls with the fair hair and blue hats—what do you call them?—'

'Belle and Ada Thornton,' I suggested.

'Yes, Thornton, that was the name—well, they laughed at me and called me awkward, till they almost sent me daft with their unmannerly conduct, and in church too! And then Bruce came up and asked me why I looked so glum, or something like it; and when I said it was not seemly making such clack and riot in a sacred place, they went off tittering and laughing and staring at me, as if I were a barbarian at least, and I was just going to get up and ask them if that were their southern breeding, when Bruce whispered to the youngest and prettiest of them to come and help him with some fal-lal or other, and so broke up the talk, and we saw neither of them again till we came home.'

'Ada, I think you said?'

'Yes, Ada, the one with the long curls—Bruce was going to see her home, only Dudley begged him not to break up the party,'—and as she said this, the smooth face broke into hard stern lines under my caressing hand.

'And so you felt angry with Bruce, dearie, because he preferred the society of a harmless girl who gives him plenty of winning smiles and words—too many perhaps—to that of an old playmate, who snubs him—it is an ugly word, lassie, but it is a true one—at their first meeting, and has done nothing but glower and look distant ever since; indeed, I begin to take the poor lad's part, for he greeted you in all true faith and amity, and has met with no response. Really, cousin, I shall turn the tables now, and ask, is this your northern breeding?'

Katie reddened and bit her lip, and muttered something about the subject not being agreeable to her, and then, as if fearing she had hurt me, put up her face to be kissed.

'And so we are all to fall in love with Herwald, are we?'

I smiled at the changed topic and the question, but let it pass till she repeated it.

'And so we are all to fall in love with Herwald, are we, Nellie?'

'Only one at a time, I hope, or he'll scarcely know what to do!' responded Herwald himself from the back of my chair, behind which he had stolen unperceived in the twilight; 'only one at a time, please, Miss Cameron, or I shall have my hands full indeed;' and Herwald's face in its mock gravity and distress was so innocently provocative of laughter that Katie's rang through the room clear as a bell, as she jumped up without the shadow of a blush to give him her hand.

'Come, that's well, waiting for no introduction or fuss, and just as cousins should meet.'

'Cousins, Mr. Delorme?'

'Herwald, Katie, Herwald! let us have no nonsense; have we not known each other by report at least half our lives? Why, Nellie will tell you I recognized you at first sight an hour ago through the church window, and drew a touching portrait of you on my return; and as for cousins, why, I am adopted brother to all the Mortimers, girls, boys, and babies—am I not, Dudley?'

'Certainly, by all means; but I have not the least idea what the question was.'

'Of course not, every one knows you are chronically deaf. Never mind, we understand each other, and shall be capital friends in no time. You'll promise to like me no end, won't you, cousin Katie?'

'Indeed I will, Herwald,' replied Katie, frankly, and with a world of honest truth in her eyes; 'I always know when I like a person directly, and I am sure I shall like you.' And so saying, she gave him her hand again in an unaffected way that was quite delicious to see.

'Now, Kitty,' said Dudley, laying hands on her with gentle force, as she was about to re-seat herself on her stool, 'I am not going to allow you to desecrate Nellie's pretty drawing-room any longer with that rough shawl and those snow-boots; if you don't go up and ask Louie to furbish you up a little with some of her finery, I will show you how fierce I can look.'

Katie seemed inclined to rebel, but on Herwald rising and setting the door open for her, she made a virtue of necessity, and tripped laughingly away.

'What do you think of our fashionable cousin, Delorme?' asked Bruce, who had passed her on the threshold.

'Who? Kate Cameron? for heaven's sake, don't call me Delorme, Bruce, there's a dear old boy,' and Herwald looked in his face with his most winning smile.

'I think she is the brightest girl I have seen for many a long year, and rich with a beauty that does not belong to feature or form. I congratulate you on your friend, Nellie.'

'Don't you think her very like Keith?' asked Dudley.

'Yes, especially about the eyes and forehead—by-the-bye, when did you hear from him last?'

'Not since the 27th of last month; but I suppose we shall have letters regularly by every mail; he's an awfully good correspondent is Keith, and can always find matter out of nothing, which to my mind is a true proof of cleverness, and a letter from him is sure to be hailed as a fund of amusement through the house from Charlie upward.'

'Could you not borrow a few hints from him then? your letters are wonderfully terse, their staple contents being generally a kind inquiry after my health, a few curt sentences on every-day affairs, and a flourishing Dudley Ellis Mortimer at the end, the last being larger than all the rest put together. A few less flourishes, my dear fellow, and a little more sentiment, would greatly improve the tone of the whole. Could you not try an anecdote or two—or even a short spell of poetry for a change?'

'Nay, nay, that sort of thing is not in my line, the factory has beaten everything but hard facts out of me; besides, you do quite enough for both.'

'Barrin the poetry, I suppose?'

'Barrin nothing.'

'Then I indignantly beg to repudiate the charge. I never quoted poetry in my life except to a few brainless Byronic young ladies, who only hid their blue hose by a decent length of raiment, and invariably parted their hair on one side *à la* Eliza Cook; poetry, rubbish.'

'Now, Nellie, I call you to witness if this be not an infamous libel on my memory. Do you not know as well as possible that he spent the whole of an evening in the Hurst drawing-room spouting whole passages out of that blessed "In Memoriam" till he reduced me nearly to a state of imbecility, and you were silly enough to compliment him on his retentive memory, and begged him to go on, and now you hear what he says?'

'Oh, that is a different sort of thing altogether; we were regularly descanting on the beauties of Tennyson, doing him thoroughly, in fact. By-the-bye, we never finished that discussion, Nellie; you know it was to be concluded in our next.'

'Which is not to be on Christmas eve, I can tell you; I will have none of that morbid melancholy stuff—'

'What!' cried Herwald, tossing up his head with the impetuosity of a young war-horse rushing to the charge, 'say that over again, Dudley.'

'No, pax, pax—here comes Loo.'

Pax! there was not only pax, but a dead calm, as Herwald rose and stood beside his chair with strange half-veiled eyes, till the amplitude of skirt floated through the room, and Louie's beautiful face shone down upon him.

'And this is Herwald Delorme,' said Louie, as she calmly took his proffered hand.

They were very few words, and very quietly spoken, but the tone of mingled meaning and resignation in which they were uttered was almost sublime in its despair.

Such a tone might have become an Alexander, gazing down upon some humble Parthian village and sighing for more worlds to conquer. It was as if she said, condescending from the altitude of her womanly beauty and grace,—'What! this is the new suitor for the bounty of my smiles, this the long-looked-for Herwald Delorme; he is nothing but a bright-eyed insignificant boy!

The words were involuntary and not unkindly spoken, but I could see in a moment that Herwald's rare and subtle instinct had divined the utter disparagement of the tone; for as he resigned the hand he still held without a pressure or a smile, the small patrician head lifted itself up proudly, as if determined to assert its nobility, and the sensitive nostrils quivered and dilated irrepressibly.

'So this is Herwald Delorme,' again asserted Louie, in slow placidity, as she placed herself upon her favourite ottoman, and suffered her dress to fall in full and plenteous folds around her; while Herwald, not deigning to disguise his puny inches in her sight, stood before her straightening his erect form, and poising the chair back carelessly in his hand; 'and you have really come back at last to us and Sunnyside?'

'Yes, I am come back to Sunnyside, Miss Mortimer,' replied Herwald, quite ignoring the 'us';—and Sunnyside and I—'but pardon me, you were about to speak.'

'No, Herwald, no, pray complete your sentence,' and Louie smilingly shaded her face with the screen Bruce had handed her.

The full under-lip was bitten slightly at the easily pronounced 'Herwald,' but he answered quickly, 'My sentence must take care of itself, for it is already consigned to oblivion; and as I dare say you have forgotten yours, we will both cry quits, and start on a fresh topic.'

'Nay, Herwald, I quite remember mine,' persisted Louie sweetly but provokingly; 'I was only going to express my surprise at seeing you so little changed and so little grown; why, I should have known you anywhere, in a crowd even.'

'I daresay,' responded Herwald, dryly.

'Yes, indeed I should; but I am afraid it will hardly be complimentary to add, it is scarcely so much my memory that is trustworthy, as that you are so slightly altered from the portrait we have of you in the Oak parlour; why, the features, everything, are the same, just as if you had walked out of the canvas into this room.'

'I must indeed look animated,' muttered Herwald, *sotto voce*; but Louie did not heed.

'Now, I dare say you would hardly have known me anywhere

but in the Sunnyside drawing-room, and would have passed me by in the street?’

‘Most probably, Miss Mortimer.’

‘Well, I thought so. How strange that some of us should be but bare outlines of our old selves, filled up in other colours, so as hardly to be recognisable; while others, like you, seem to have stood still altogether. Look at Nellie, too—is she not just the same as when she haunted our school-room corners, a quiet little white mouse?’

Herwald turned and looked with gentle kindly eyes at the same ‘white mouse’ before he replied, ‘They tell us somewhere, I think in the old copy-book sentences, that comparisons in all cases are invidious; well, I rather fancy the copy-books are right, and especially in this room, where the thews and sinews of the Anakims are heavily weighted against me. To match me with Dudley and Bruce, or any other Saul among men, would be impolitic in the extreme, and yet, perhaps, were I suffered to stand upon my will alone, I might—who knows?—outweigh them all;’ and as he said this, in sarcastic polished tones, his brow was creased with a frown that darkened all his face with pride.

‘Ma belle Reine,’ said Dudley, as he came and leant pleasantly over his sister, ‘it strikes me your little craft is sailing upon troubled waters, and is in danger of coming to grief among the breakers, or of grappling too closely with a certain tight little schooner; so as I am the admiral of the Home Fleet, I shall just up with my speaking-trumpet and give orders that the “Louisa” shall at once unfurl and lay to; dost thou understand me?’

‘Not in the least,’ replied Louie, promptly; and, to tell the truth, she did not, for though clever enough in most things, she was remarkably slow in following the thread of another person’s ideas.

‘Well, never mind, for I see “the tight little schooner” aforesaid does; but now, joking apart, cannot you say something pretty and agreeable to our long-looked-for guest, instead of drawing odious comparisons? Cannot you tell him, for example, how happy we all are to see him here, though we would be heartily more pleased if he would take that seat beside Nellie, and not spoil our new carpet by designing patterns upon it with the chair leg?’

Herwald, thus reproved, did as he was desired, and placed himself beside me, though still with folded brow and wintry smile, while Louie went on,—

‘I expect all the pretty speeches must be exhausted by this time, for mine is the latest of all the welcomes.’

‘And the coldest too, Sis.’

‘Nay; there you are wrong. No one is more pleased than I to see Herwald forming one of our family circle again; though I am astonished,’ she continued, addressing him, ‘to find that Sunnyside still possesses such charms in your eyes after the splendours of Hurst-hall.’

'Are you surprised that fidelity is an attribute of my nature?'

'No, but I know you have many friends; Dudley and Nellie were loud in their praises of them, and of your lovely place. Their descriptions were, to say the least of them, eminently tantalizing.'

'As for my friends,' replied Herwald, 'my best and dearest are here, and kinsmen have I none. Nor need I, I think, explain to you, how soon a lonely man is satiated with mere natural beauties, either animate or inanimate, and sickens for the luxury of a home.'

'Do you not call Hurst-hall a home?'

'Never,' answered Herwald, vehemently—'never. Home is not four bare walls and a roof; and until Hurst-hall holds something more precious to me than pictures and furniture—some one to look at me with human eyes, and answer me from a human equal heart, I will never call it home or think it so, or indeed anything else but a great gaudy prison, where I am prisoner and jailor too.'

'You are right, Herwald—perfectly right,' and Katie, who had just entered, turned her face on him with a friendly benison that Bruce could never win. 'It is association, of course, that hallows home; why,' she continued, addressing me, and speaking fast, as she always did when excited, 'do you think that if father got a rich living, and were to take mother and me to live in ever so grand a place, like the Laird of Gowan's, that Keith would think of us with half the pleasure and half the homely feeling that he has at picturing us in the dear old manse? Do you think he would not grieve, and I too, at leaving it, even for an earthly paradise, when every corner has some cherished memory of its own? The little empty fish-ponds that Duncan made, the trees that Dorothy and Emma planted, and the pigeons that Catherine loved, while everywhere is scored, on walls and tree trunks and rough garden seats, the names of the dear dead sisters. No, no; the manse for Keith and me.'

'You must miss your brother sorely!' said Bruce, with a softer look than his face had worn yet. 'It was, indeed, a cruel parting.'

'No, not cruel,' answered Katie, with tears in her voice. 'It was sad, of course, but it lacked the thorns of bitterness to make it cruel. If we had had angry words, or even a harsh look to remember, it would have been different; but it was all trust—trust and hope and a little patience—you understand me, do you not, Nellie?'

Nellie did, but being dubious as to her own faith and patience, betook herself to a convenient absent fit, and so the question passed.

'I say, what a dismal lot you are,' cried Hal, boisterously. 'Why, it is Christmas eve, and I thought we were going to have a "roaring tea," and heaps of fun, and here we are, all as dull as ditch-water.'

'Patience, my son,' replied Dudley. 'Look, here is Hester at the door, anticipating your wishes with orders that the cubs may feed—so, Damon, shoulder your Pythias and Charlie, and be off with you—Herwald, bring in Nellie—Katie will fall to my share. As for Loo and the Bruce, they always like to walk together,

because folks say, "Bless me, what a fine-looking couple they make, to be sure."

Dudley had to make good his retreat after this, with a sofa cushion whizzing in his ear, and the orderly procession he had arranged became an unmannerly rabble, as the three cubs dashed in among them, armed with mystic white berries, and hung about Katie's neck, all except Charlie, who gave Herwald one shy salute, and then vanished in confusion.

Under the cover of moving seats and chattering voices, I whispered to Herwald as he leant over the tea-tray, examining delightedly a pair of curious sugar-tongs he had seen my mother use—

'Oh, Herwald, Herwald, you have greatly disappointed me to-night.'

'Put not your faith in princes, or in any other sons of men, Nellie; but what have I done particularly this evening to deserve such a sweeping assertion?'

'You have set your face as hard as a flint, and nourished a hateful memory, and our dear Queen Loo has found no favour in your eyes—that is what I mean.'

Herwald dropped the sugar-tongs as if they burnt him, but made no answer.

'Believe me,' I continued, earnestly, 'I am very serious in what I say. I had so set my heart on you two being friends, and this is the second meeting since yesterday that has disappointed me.'

'Which was the first?'

'Why, Bruce and Katie, who encountered the first moment like young bantam cocks in full feather, and have done nothing but spar ever since; but I expected better things of you, Herwald.'

'What better things did you expect of me, Nellie, my friend?'

'Why, I thought that you, with your wise keen eyes, would soon penetrate the slow placidity which envelopes Louie like armour of proof; and would see for yourself how debonnaire and true-hearted she really is; and now——'

'And now, "all's well that ends well,"' whispered Dudley, who has quick ears enough sometimes, and now came and leant over us both—'Don't trouble your anxious little head about such trifles as these; let our Scotch bantam trim her spurs if she will, and make for the battle; and as for the "tight little schooner," mark my words, when they have hoisted up their true colours and exchanged signals, the Louisa and he will soon sail in fairer waters.'

'A hint in your ear, Quixote. Don't you mind what this tender-hearted chick of ours says, but just launch as many shafts as you like against a certain person; she has been awfully spoiled hitherto, both at home and abroad, and a little harmless satire won't hurt her, on the contrary, do her a world of good.'

So saying, he returned to his post at the head of the table, and Herwald, shut in safely by Nellie, Katie, and the urn, became his old self again, and the meal went gaily off.

When we went back into the drawing-room, the boys dragged off their brothers to join in a round game; Herwald, being proof against 'nods and becks and wreaths and smiles,' preferred a cosy chat about the Whalley and Sabden friends with me in the chimney-corner, to Louie's distinct invitation to share the ottoman with her and Katie; but none the less did I notice that while we discussed Milly's new life and Hubert Clive's last letter, or gossiped deliciously on Maud Rivers and her artist friends, that many a searching glance was directed to the two girls before us.

So passed a pleasant hour. Then Louie walked to the piano and began to play, and I began to smile. It was naughty and uncharitable of me to smile, but I knew that this movement betokened more than any one imagined—that it argued, in fact, a complete sense of failure, and Loo, like a queen as she was, did not love failure, even though her artillery was directed only against a poor little Parthian village, or a bright-eyed insignificant boy.

Who was this boy, this Herwald Delorme, that he should disdain her smiles? the game was a little one, she knew, a very little one, but she did not love to be beaten for all that; and if beauty had failed the Siren knew she had other weapons in reserve; so the Lorelie left off combing her golden hair and tuned up for her death song!

Now, though I smiled at this display of coquetry, I was none the less aware that in this the wisdom of the serpent was blended with the innocence of the dove, for I had before seen men, strong powerful men of intellect, who had proved callous to her other attractions, who had yet succumbed and fallen prone before the beauty of her voice.

There was such a plaintive sweetness in it, that though it was not half such a rare contralto as Katie's, and lacked Milly's bird-like buoyancy, it yet charmed more than either, for it seemed to reach the heart's core.

So Louie went to the piano, and Herwald and I composed ourselves to listen. At the end of the few first bars, however, he started up.

'Shall I play your accompaniment, Miss Mortimer?'

'No, thanks,' she returned, smilingly, 'I am accustomed to do it for myself.'

'Oh, very well,' and Herwald sat down again, but the dissatisfied tone of his voice was so evident, that Louie, who had recommenced, turned half round, and asked why he offered.

'Because, pardon me if I speak the truth, you will mar the harmony of that sweet composition if you play it in that way.'

'In what way?' she inquired, surprised, 'really no one ever said such blunt things to me before.'

'Because people in general find it easier to flatter than to tell the truth, but I am such a lover of music that I can rarely keep silence in her cause.'

‘Indeed, I had no idea I was in the presence of such an able connoisseur; after that, you shall certainly play my accompaniment, and Nellie shall tell us how it sounds.’

So saying, she rose pleasantly from her seat, and Herwald, without another word, took it, and commenced.

The song was Tennyson’s sweet love Idyll, ‘Swallow, swallow, flying, flying south,’ and was Louie’s especial favourite, but she had never sung it as she did to-night, and her voice sounded gloriously, aided by Herwald’s masterly accompaniment.

There was quite a Babel of clapping hands, and a tear on Katie’s cheek when she had finished, but Herwald only said coldly—

‘A very pretty thing, and very well sung, but you have not practised lately, I can see.’

‘How do you know that?’ she asked, somewhat piqued.

‘Because I have a troublesomely fine ear, and two notes rang rather flatly on it; but it was very nice for all that. Come, shall we try the Volkslied, from Mendelssohn, or if you are tired shall I take your place for awhile?’

Louie tired! who had been accustomed to star it for hours before an admiring circle; alas, poor Siren—it was very hard, and from an insignificant boy too! No, she would have nothing to say to the Volkslied—he might oblige them with a song if he would.

Herwald bowed assent, and after straying his hand over a few low chords, broke—oh, Herwald, Herwald, it was very naughty of you!—into that deliciously capricious little refrain, ‘Beware, beware.’

‘I know a maiden fair to see,
Take care, take care!
She can both false and friendly be,
Beware, beware!
Trust her not,
She is fooling thee.’

‘Bravo!’ cried Dudley, leaving the boys, ‘bravo! you are a plucky fellow, Quixote.’

‘But,’ Loo said languidly, ‘I know that song, but never cared for it; can you not try something more new?—do you not sing Italian?’

‘Yes, with Maud Rivers,’ answered Herwald, with a grim smile at me, ‘but I fancy I am in the mood for English ballads to-night, unless you will try the Volkslied?’

‘No, no,’ I interposed, ‘let us have something suitable to Christmas eve. Shall we call the boys from their game and have a carol before they go to bed? Do, Herwald, it will remind us of the dear lang syne, when you and Dudley and the Bruce used to haunt the passages in Christmas week and sing so sweetly at our doors.’

‘Nellie,’ he said, with an abruptness that startled me, ‘it is not the “Auld Lang Syne”—that can never return, or the dreams that have not come true; why, then, should we strive to recall it? Have the boys up if you will, and let them give their carol, but my song has been sung for to-night.’

'Dear Herwald,' I whispered, reproachfully, 'have you been less happy this evening than you thought to be, or have we too disappointed you?'

'Never,' he answered, vehemently, 'never; what a strange question! Of course I have been happy—very, very happy—too much so, I think; but I will not sing your carol, Nellie, though you ask me so sweetly with your eyes. Let the dear boys have it by themselves; it will sound purer and fresher from their lips.'

And so he had his way, and the boys sang their carol, and Louie and Katie joined, but Herwald went and leant against the large bay window and looked out on the snowy garden sleeping in the starlight, and up at the blue winter sky, till they had finished, and the good-nights were said, then he came forward with a tranquil smile and joined the fireside circle.

CHAPTER XXV.

'Hark! it is pealing—
The music of bells;
Solemnly stealing,
Upward it swells;
Now it is drawing
Nearer, more near,
Now it is soaring
Far from the ear.
Bells, ye are telling
The story of old!

Bells, ye are telling
What angels have told!
Heralds of glory!
Wide o'er the earth
Peal forth the story—
Our Saviour's glad birth.
Stay not your ringing,
The tidings it tells
Angels are singing,
Sweet Christmas bells.'

Helen Burnside.

I HAD left the room a moment with the boys, to give Seymour some parting message to his mother, and on my return found that Bruce had extinguished the candles and thrown a mighty log on the fire, while the rest were gathering round it in regular hearth circle.

'Come here, Nell, and sit between me and Herwald,' and Dudley pointed invitingly to my favourite chair. 'Why, what makes you hesitate?' as I leant on his shoulder with a sudden touch of pain.

'Nothing,' I replied; but I sighed as I took the seat, for I remembered, though he did not, poor boy! who had sat there last Christmas eve, with one curly head between his knees and another nestled to his breast.

'Christmas time, a holy and a happy time,' murmured Katie, half to herself, as she placed herself on the rug at my feet, while the flame made a halo round her upturned face; 'yes, truly a holy and a happy time.'

Ay, Katie, holy; you are right there, for nothing can detract

from its sanctity since first the wondrous star guided the shepherds to Bethlehem, but happy only to those who can look upon an unbroken circle, and know not the heart-wrung longing for an absent face.

So I was sorry and sad that Bruce had made twilight and gathered us round the old yule log; for from time immemorial it had been our custom; but then the hearth-stone had been rife with merriment, with jest, and laugh, and song; while the wassail bowl brewed by children's hands, with a mother's voice to aid, had gone its pleasant rounds; but now—oh it was very wrong of Bruce to form our Christmas circle to-night.

Others beside myself seemed to think so too, for scarcely had we placed ourselves, before Sadness, an unbidden guest, stole into our midst, and made havoc of our pleasant thoughts.

Gradually each smiling face grew grave, while long fits of musing interspersed each broken word and sentence; even the flame burnt dimly and flickered shadows in the place of ruddy gleams, and the room beyond seemed hidden in sable darkness.

And a sense of heaviness was on us all, for death had been with us during the past year, robbing us with a double loss, and with it a parting that was like a lesser death, so greatly did it embrace indefinite time and distance, stretching out over a long vista of years.

Alas for Katie's faith and hope and patience, there were others whose heart was sick with longing and with the fear that 'they should see his face no more.'

From thoughts like these I roused myself with a shudder to stray into other homes, and marvel how others were feeling.

I thought of Hubert Clive spending desolate days in his Tuscan villa; and Milly making one of a merry Christmas circle, showing a brave bold front of cheerfulness with a spirit that was quelled and broken; and then of Rose Hazeldean and that strange new life of hers, tending her sick husband in their pretty cottage at Ventnor; and lastly of Lucy's sorrowful face and her plaintive voice, that seemed to ring in my ears with the cry, 'Surely the bitterness of death is passed;' and then I woke with a start, for suddenly the log blazed and crackled and roared under Bruce's impatient touch, and a thousand sparkling atoms fell in showers of light.

There was a deep-drawn sigh of relief, and as if some darkened weight had been removed from us all, and before it could close upon us again, Herwald drew breath and said,

'Again at Christmas did we weave
The holly round the Christmas hearth;
The silent snow possess'd the earth,
And calmly fell our Christmas eve.
The yule log sparkled keen with frost,
No wing of wind the region swept,
But over all things brooding slept
The quiet sense of something lost.'

His voice sounded melodiously in the silence, and when he had

finished, Dudley said softly, pausing with his hand on my neck, for he had been engaged in what he termed 'stroking his cat,'—

'In Memoriam again, Herwald?'

'Yes; but you shall not speak against it to-night, you can hardly find the heart to do so, I should think.'

'Nay, nay, I was only jesting before; indeed, you wrong me if you suppose that I can fail to be touched by the noblest human dirge ever written.'

'Except one, Dudley.'

'And that?'

'And that the finest masterpiece we possess of the kind, the inimitable lament of David over Jonathan; I never can read that, or indeed the whole history, without feeling that Jonathan's affection was truly beautiful.

'The entire story in all its noble brevity is so unique and exquisitely worded, from the moment when Jonathan, standing beside his dark-browed father, first looks upon the "ruddy and beautiful countenance" of the shepherd-boy coming in with his maiden spoils; and when, with the mysterious instinct of a kindred mind, we are told "that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." And then passing through all the dark phases of that most unhappy friendship, noting as we go on the protective tenderness of the princely friend, mingled as it was with filial piety, we come at last to the blood-stained heights of Gilboa, to the dead face of him "whose love was wonderful, passing the love of women," and to the tears and lamentations of David weeping over the slain. "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been to me," and yet, and yet—'

'And yet,' interrupted Dudley, with his gray eyes kindling brightly, 'you feel as I do, that the strongest love lay buried in the dead man's bosom; that deep as was the pathos of the shepherd-king's lament, the sorrow it expressed was calm, compared to the anguish that wrung from him afterwards the heart-breaking cry of, "Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"'

'And what do you deduct from that, Dudley?'

'That the parental instinct was stronger in David than any other, and that his nature was less capable than Jonathan's of claiming affinity with one who was not of his blood; his love for him was great, but it was not wonderful, neither did he love him as his own soul.'

'Then you consider David the less noble nature of the two?'

'Let me pass that question, Herwald, it involves higher things. Had I lived then, doubtless my human judgment would have approved of Jonathan's rare generosity, and yet my pity would have been moved by the desolate condition of the fugitive shepherd-boy hiding in the caves and fastnesses of the rocks. Do you not

fancy that many and many a time he must have thought with regret of "those few sheep he had left in the wilderness?"

'Perhaps so; every life has space enough for such regrets, but the boy who could wrestle with the lion and the bear was fitted to become the crowned warrior of his nation, and to share the stirring life of camps and palaces. But we are wandering from our subject, which was on elective affinity, and the relationship of kindred minds. Does it not seem strange to you, Dudley, that the world at large—the great practical world, I mean—should deride and scorn this relationship, terming it null and void, and of no account in the eyes of men, and should rank even the lowest tie of blood as immeasurably its superior; can you solve the enigma?'

'Ay, and readily too. Have you lived so long, Quixote, and do not know that the world never approves of what it does not understand; and what man in ten, or in twenty, thirty, if you like, does fully comprehend the meaning of the word friend, or acts up to your notion of what is required of the same?'

'My notion; ah, I fear if that were defined it might justly be termed Quixotic,' answered Herwald, sadly; 'but perhaps you are right; it must be that all natures are not capable of receiving the rare and subtle instinct which is the very essence of friendship. But at least, if they cannot understand, they might approve when the seal of sanctity has been put to it, and our great Exemplar himself was not free from its influence. Is it not old Herbert, the quaintest of divines, who says,

"But love is lost; the way of friendship's gone;
Though David had his Jonathan, Christ his John?"

All the disciples were beloved, Dudley, but one only leaned upon His breast at supper.'

There was silence a moment, for all felt the delicate beauty of Herwald's argument, and waited for Dudley's answer, but none came for awhile, as he sat with shaded face looking at the fire.

Presently he roused himself.

'The question is a broad one, Herwald, and needs tender handling. For myself, I am not sure that my brain is fine and subtle enough to detect and weigh the niceties of so grave an argument. I feel rather than know the justice of your sentiment, and, from my own experience, can safely add that you yourself have always acted up nobly to your own ideal of what friendship should be.'

'Nay; now you are trenching on personalities—a most unfair thing in a critical argument, and Nellie, as our umpire, should interfere. But it strikes me, Dudley, as it must all the rest, that we have flown off at a mighty tangent, and just as you were redeeming yourself, in my eyes, by a most unexpected tribute to my favourite poem. Come, finish your broken sentence.'

'I was speaking of it as the noblest human dirge ever written, and you interrupted me by a long and Biblical digression.'

'A thousand pardons—yes ; but as it provoked you to a most uncommon flow of eloquence, I cannot repent of my slight rudeness. Did you ever see him warm up so?' he continued, addressing Bruce. But Bruce, not choosing to be drawn into the discussion, contented himself with a negative shake of the head, and resumed his contemplation of Katie and the fire together ; she, meanwhile, with half-closed eyes and a bright smile flickering round her mouth, rested her head child-like against my knee.

'Yes,' said Dudley, musingly, and only half conscious of Herwald's mischievous praise, 'yes, it is a noble dirge, and well worthy of a noble object. But as to whether it be healthy or wise for any true mourner (and he was a true mourner) to ring the changes continuously on sorrow till every chord of the human heart vibrate to a note of pain ; whether this be well, is quite another question, and one that I do not care to answer.'

'Say, rather, my friend, to ring the changes on every earthly and heavenly consolation of which the human mind at its highest and noblest is capable.'

'Yes, the consolation is there too, gradually brightening towards the close. But, Herwald, does it not strike you that there is too much womanish passion mixed up with his regret—something effeminate and fierce, poetically fanciful, in short ? Dare you affirm that there is nothing morbid or unnatural in all this ?'

'I affirm nothing. Did we not agree some minutes ago that few natures—and those only of a rare and delicate order—are capable of true friendship ; and may it not be possible that some youthful poetic temperament, like our favourite laureate, may infuse into such a bond all the strength and passion of a fervid imagination, and an enthusiastic genius, till he really believes it, when he says—

"First love, first friendship, equal powers."

But we——'

'Well, Herwald—but we—pray conclude your sentence.'

'But we,' continued Herwald, steadily, but with a lip that trembled withal, 'even if we have not experienced either in its strength, can yet distinguish the difference in both. Nothing can be nobler than friendship ; nothing more passionate than first love. In this we differ from Tennyson's view of the subject.'

'You own, then, that he appropriates what should fairly belong to another passion ?'

'I suppose I must, or you will crush me with a weight of evidence ; but I will not grant, mind you, the effeminacy of which you speak, but will rather maintain that there is not a word in it, from beginning to end, of which manhood need be ashamed. From the first moment when the poet awakes from the blank lethargy of despair to lament "his friend, the brother of his love"—his David, not his Jonathan, Dudley ; and step by step, with strong weary hands grapples fiercely with his woe, now combating ghostly doubts and

spectres of the mind, now yielding to a burst of tenderness, and anon triumphing in the thought that—

“It is better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all,”

till at last he arrives at a resignation almost sublime when, with faith that is perfected and made strong, he speaks with calm hope and comfort of “that friend of mine, who lives in God.”

‘Which were the lines you repeated to me at Hurst-hall, Herwald?’ I whispered softly, when he had subsided into silence; ‘you said they were your special favourites,’—and Herwald, with a half-drawn sigh, recited them.

‘Dear friend, far off, my lost desire,
So far, so near in woe and weal;
O, loved the most, when most I feel;
There is a lower and a higher!

‘Known and unknown; human, divine;
Sweet human hand and lips and eye;
Dear heavenly friend that can’st not die,
Mine, mine, for ever, ever mine;
Strange friend, past, present, and to be;
Loved deeper, darklier understood;
Behold, I dream a dream of good,
And mingle all the world with thee.’

Herwald’s voice had faltered a little at the last, but notwithstanding he said, with an effort of gaiety—

‘What! weeping, Nellie; I saw something very ominous hang on the corner of an eyelash just now.’

‘It was the pathos of your voice, Herwald,’ said Louie, with her face full of feeling. ‘I am not easily moved myself, but something seemed to touch me in that piece.’

‘Would you believe it,’ she continued, ‘that Bruce read the whole of “In Memoriam” to me last winter, and we neither understood it in the least; indeed, Bruce said he had never read a book that had bored him so much.’

‘I am sure I never said anything of the kind, Loo,’ returned her brother with an annoyed air.

‘Oh, but you did, dear; and you called Tennyson a conceited old humbug, who did not know in the least what he was talking about. Why are you frowning at me? you know I am only telling the truth.’

‘Which is not always palatable,’ muttered Bruce.

‘I don’t see that at all. But what I was going to say is this, that I think if Herwald were to read it to me in the same way that he recited those few stanzas just now, I am sure that I should understand it and like it too.’

‘Very well, then,’ returned Herwald, in a tone in which interest was blended with a certain amount of pity; ‘since you own yourself so faultily deficient in this portion of your Tennysonian education, I can only assure you, that it is never too late to mend; and,

that we may the sooner remedy the evil, I would advise that Nellie should suffer her drawing-room to be appropriated for future morning lessons, in which I offer myself as master.'

'And a very good idea too,' responded Nellie, brightly, while Louie, now really pleased at this mark of condescension on Herwald's part, rewarded him with her sweetest smile.

'Will you read to me while I paint?' she inquired innocently.

'By no means,' returned Herwald in his most authoritative manner; 'I shall resign the lessons *in toto* unless my pupil consent to sit beside me and follow the page while I read.'

Loo looked appalled, while Dudley asked why, in some surprise.

'Because I have had my share of experience in reading to ladies. They are always so pleased if you offer—so charmed with anything, romance, poetry, essay, or critique; will be so quiet and so good; but raise your eyes from a passage you consider telling, in search of an answering glance, and what do you find? that the feminine mind is lying fallow, while the dear creatures follow the tracing of their embroidery, or regard pensively the shading of a leaf; and if you ask—as I often do, out of a sheer spirit of mischief—for an abstract of the whole, oh! what a hashed conglomeration of ideas follow the unlucky question. No, Miss Louie, paint to your heart's content if you will, but leave me and my "In Memoriam" to a time when you can give us undivided attention.'

'I am afraid you will find Nellie a more promising pupil,' said Louie, half inclined to repent her rash words.

'No, she will never be that,' he returned, pleasantly, 'for the very name pupil pre-supposes ignorance and a desire to learn. Now, in this Nellie is my fellow-student, or pilgrim rather, for we have both strayed down the same flowery paths and drunk of the same brook by the way;

"When each by turns was guide to each,
And Fancy light from fancy caught,
And Thought leapt out to wed with thought
Ere Thought could wed itself with speech."

Were not our Hurst talks something of this kind, Nella mia?' and he touched my wrist caressingly.

Louie's eyes dilated with surprise, which Dudley noticing, said—
'Never mind, Queen Loo, when he,

"A lord of large experience, train
To riper growth the mind and will,"

he will no longer consider you beneath his notice in these literary matters; and after all, every one knows that Nell is inclined to be a little "blue" on the sly; but look, our Christmas log is burning blackly, and, by all that's good, if Kitty is not asleep.'

At the sound of her name Katie woke up with a start to find every one looking at her, and the church clock striking twelve.

'It is Christmas morning,' said Dudley, with a brief sigh. 'A

happier Christmas to all of us, my friends ; a happier Christmas and a more glad New Year.'

'Amen,' responded Herwald and Bruce, and then Dudley came up and kissed us all. 'Now, little flock, it is time that you disperse, that you may not look out upon to-morrow with too weary eyes. Will you retire with the rest, Herwald, or shall we stir up the old log once more?'

'By all means—I am not tired ; will you join us, Bruce?'

'No, thanks, I have had a fagging day of it,' he answered with a yawn, 'I'm half asleep now ; come, make the move, Nellie.'

This broke up the circle, and Herwald and Dudley drawing their chairs closer together, were left to the enjoyment of their talk.

'Christmas, a holy and a happy time,' I said to myself, as I sprang out of bed the following morning, and by a resolute act of will banished the painful images that had been crowding round my pillow ; and again Katie's words rose to my lips as I stole to the window, and, resting my forehead against the frosted panes, looked out on the fair wintry scene that lay around.

'It was yesterday's landscape still covered with its fairy pall ; but the snow of to-day was crisp and dazzling under the mild beams of the December sun, while the crystal pendants that still hung motionless on every brake and hedge-row were gemmed with dancing light, and the very air itself was buoyant and full of life.

Through the leafless trees my glance wandered instinctively to the Priory roof, now one sheet of pure white brightness ; and almost at the same moment my thoughts recurred to Marion Vivian and her sister, the unknown Eleanor, and many a time during the brief process of dressing, I found myself wondering what this peerless Eleanor could be like, while, more than once, the fancy seized me that there might be some who would not deem her so fair as her sister's fancy painted her.

I was roused from my reverie by the prayer-bell.

They were all assembled down-stairs, with the exception of Herwald, who did not make his appearance till we had seated ourselves round the breakfast-table, and the boys had inspected the gifts and Christmas remembrances that had, in accordance with an old custom, been placed upon their plates.

Hennie had just sent down a message of thanks for his wonderful clock-work mouse and the rose-coloured cornucopia of sweets ; and Charlie, wild with excitement, was examining his box of tools, when Herwald entered, fresh as the day, and not a trace of last night's cloud remaining.

Warm and cordial were his Christmas greetings, warm even to Louie ; and though I noticed he still made use of the formal prefix to her name, not a spark of hauteur marred the courtesy of his speech ; while she, on her side, laid aside the bland indifference

that had so irritated him, and seemed disposed to treat him well, and as his manhood demanded.

Katie and Bruce, too, seemed infected with the spirit of the day, and exchanged words and glances of amity; nay, they did more, for, to my surprise, Katie suffered herself to be guided by Bruce through the snowy defiles that the boys had cleared to the stile, and to be placed in the corner seat in the pew where she might share his hymn-book. Of this latter arrangement, however, I am afraid she rather repented, as it brought her face to face with the Thornton party, where she could see, almost without looking, Ada's simpering smiles and mock affectations.

The curls might shake under the little blue bonnet; but Bruce had no eyes for them, as he stood up in his place erect and handsome, with unwonted gravity and reverence on his face.

Gaily the bells chimed out and gloriously pealed the organ within, while the sweet boy voices rang through chancel and nave, 'Peace on earth, good-will towards men.'

'Peace and good-will.' Ah, Lucy, weeping in that lonely gallery pew, look up and see, the amaranths are already springing up, and an angel's face is shining through the cross.

CHAPTER XXVI.

He look'd on the face, and beheld its hue,
So deeply changed from what he knew;
Fair, but faint,—without the ray
Of mind, that made each feature play,
Like sparkling waves on a sunny day.
And her motionless lips lay still as death,
And her words came forth without her
breath;
And there rose not a heave o'er her bosom's
swell,
And there seem'd not a pulse in her veins
to dwell.

Though her eye shone out, yet the lids
were fix'd,
And the glance that it gave was wild and
unmix'd
With aught of change, as the eyes may
seem
Of the restless who walk in a troubled
dream;

Lifeless, but life-like, and awful to sight.'
Byron.

It was early in the afternoon.

We had dined at our usual hour with the children, in accordance with Dudley's advice, and as the same prudent forethought had forbidden all attempt at Christmas festivity, save in the matter of the children's pudding, the meal was despatched without fuss and ceremony, and the roast beef and Herwald's game excited no special comment.

At this point of the proceedings, however, there was a slight stir and agitation at the bottom of the table; Rill ceased to roll her pinafore into a ball, and Charlie's eyes grew round, while Halcot, noticing my look of inquiry, came to me with an air of mystery

and great importance, while his napkin trailed crumbs all the way—to whisper that it was a great secret, and no one must know, but the rectory dinner was over an hour ago, and Seymour had got his mother's leave to come up to dessert, and he was going to bring Hennie down to see the 'wonderful pudding alight,' that he had been talking about for a whole week.

'And he is sure to be punctual,' continued Halcot, excitedly ; 'hark ! there is the door bell. I'll run back to my place, or Charlie will be blabbing it all out, he is such a little muff at keeping anything quiet, and I want them to be surprised ; don't look as if you expected anything, Nellie.'

'No, I won't if I can help it,' I replied honestly, but none the less did I strain my ears at every distant sound that might intimate that Seymour had caught his foot in the landing mat, and had fallen down-stairs with his burden, and it really was a relief to my mind when Hester appeared bearing the 'mighty plum bonfire,' the great triumph of the day to the childish faction, and Seymour followed warily in her wake with an old shepherd's plaid bundle in his arms, and a white spectral face nestled against his shoulder.

Oh the shout of welcome that hailed the little sufferer, as Seymour placed him in my lap, to feel the touch of the little hot hand, and hear the shrill quavering laugh as Hennie's eyes beheld the burning pudding and the Christmas jugglers round it.

Oh those wonderful jugglers, of whom Bruce was prince and chief—lapping up spoonfuls of liquid fire and swallowing them down with grave unwinking eyes, making little trenches of fire round their plates, till the hot flame fell on Hennie's face, and Rill began to cry over her scorched fingers naughtily meddling in the dish ; till Nellie cries out that the pudding is burning, and has a cindery smell, and that the joke has been carried out long enough, and then all begin to blow it at once with inflated cheeks like cherubs, and still it blazes on, and Dudley interferes, and cook comes up and speaks crossly, and Lucy looks on with frightened eyes, and still Bruce and Herwald and the boys blow on and on, till the final spark goes out, and they retire with faces scarlet from the fumes of brandy and the heat together.

'Oh, what a lovely fire !' says Hennie, with his eyes brilliant with excitement ; but for all that, his pudding lies untasted before him, and he prefers sailing little bread boats in the finger-glasses, with Seymour to act the part of wind, to partaking of any of the dainties at the table ; so Bruce cuts him out an orange-peel pig at dessert with an almond in its mouth, and Dudley constructs a wonderful old woman with nut-cracker jaws with the aid of his hand and a napkin and burnt cork ; a hungry old woman who talks toothlessly and demands nuts with a ravening eagerness.

'Where do the nuts go ?' wonders Hennie, as the coat sleeve swallows one after another ; 'fie ! what a greedy old woman ; don't bring her near me, Mr. Dudley, please, she is so ugly.'

'Nor near me, nor me,' cry the rest, and there is a general panic as old mother nut-crackers performs her rounds, and clears the plates before her.

Ah, well may Hennie look tired as he lays his little shock head to rest, and thinks as he looks at his holly-wreathed cot, that to have Christmas every day must be heaven upon earth.

'And why can't it be, Miss Nell?' he asks, as he makes dimples in his pillow with his baby fists, 'why can't it be every day?' and he gazes lovingly at his little pig.

So I tell him a little about Christmas, about its true meaning and its joy, but he is too tired to listen, and presently goes to sleep with a veritable child's smile upon his face, and Lucy comes up with languid slow step to take my place at his side.

I have much to say to her, but remember that I had been bidden to haste down-stairs, so leave it to another time, that I may join the merry fireside circle.

I was just crossing the hall, now growing dusk with quick wintry shadows, when the door bell again sounded, and there was a patter of many feet and a rush across the drawing-room floor.

'That's Allan,' cries Halcot, breathlessly. 'Now for the dogs ;' and all the boys make for the door together.

What a scene of confusion it was, while Herwald caresses the dogs that leap half-maddened to his shoulders ; and Allan and Dudley count the hampers and luggage, and Halcot and Seymour and Charlie look on with wondering eyes.

'All right, give the porter a Christmas box,' cries Herwald, joyously ; 'and, Allan, old fellow, let me relieve you of your snowy coat. Now then, give yourself a good warm by the hall fire—no, never mind,' as Dudley opens the door of the Oak parlour, 'it is awfully jolly here ;' and Herwald draws a wooden bench round to face the fender.

'Come along, boys,' says Dudley, who sees at a glance that Allan and his master have much to say to each other, 'we can't have you lumbering up the hall like this ; off with you all.'

And at his brisk behest Hal and Seymour drag off the reluctant hounds, and Charlie follows with his new whip and whistle, while Herwald leans against the wall and looks down at Allan, warming his hands at the pleasant ruddy blaze.

'If you be minded to do me a service, Nell,' says Kitty to me naïvely, 'you'll just go and tuck up your hair ;' and then, as I put up my hand in surprise, I remember that Hennie's lissom fingers had been working in my braids, trying to let down the bell-ropes, as he called them, so I laughingly hurry up-stairs again.

But the laugh died out, and my spirit felt faint within me, when I came suddenly upon Lucy, half leaning, half crouching against the passage wall, with her face all white and drawn, and her blue eyes burning feverishly.

'Lucy ! Lucy !—my dear girl,' I exclaimed, in terror ; but before

I could get out the words her small hands were gripping my arm with a force like death.

'Whose voice is that?' she cried. 'Miss Nellie, Miss Nellie, whose voice is that?' and her grasp became so painful, I could have screamed with agony.

'Whose voice, dear child! Why, it is only Mr. Delorme talking to his steward.'

'Talking to whom—his steward?' she repeated, in anguish; 'oh, my God—am I to be deceived by a voice? Hark! there it is again! I am going mad, I am going mad; but it is Allan's voice—it is—and not all the demons that are leagued against us shall keep me from him. Allan—Allan, I say!'

She had torn herself from my arms with a violent wrench, and, with her eyes still glittering fiercely, had dashed to the head of the staircase; but there I caught her again, trembling lest she should throw herself down in her brief summer madness.

I could see them, where they sat below; and she could see them too.

Herwald was talking earnestly, and Allan listening with bent head, and the firelight playing indistinctly over his bronzed face and beard. Neither had heard her cry, inarticulate as it was with anguish; but at the sound of her hands striking violently against the balustrade in her attempt to escape my grasp on her dress, Herwald stopped in his talk, and Allan turned his face round; but before his eyes, dazzled with the firelight, could penetrate the dusk, she had cried out again, 'Allan! Allan! Allan!'

And this time it reached his ear.

There was a sound of opening doors, and frightened faces peering out behind them, as there rang through the house an awful cry, like the cry of a strong man in pain. And Allan had dashed up the stairs and had snatched the slight form that now lay heavy in my arms, and was clasping it hungrily, half hiding it in his breast.

Ay, press it to your bosom, Allan; nestle the golden head more lovingly there; poor bird with the broken wing—poor child with the broken heart; cover the cold face with tears and passionate kisses, and call her your own—your bride—your lost darling, for it is she verily and indeed, and soon will she wake up to find the amaranths are indeed springing up, and an angel's face is shining through the cross.

But the joy turned to terror, as the sweet pallid face still rested motionless on Allan's shoulder, with its falling hair, and the little hands still tightly locked in their last terrible agony.

'Oh, Herwald,' I cried, 'what shall we do?'

But Herwald did not heed me, and it was Katie who came at last to our help, with heartsome words on her lips and the tears streaming down her face.

'Why, it is only a dead faint; whisht, how the child sobs—she

will never come to like that. Come, Allan, pluck up heart. Carry her up-stairs to Nellie's room, and lay her down ; she'll never be better, poor bit lassie, while you squeeze the breath out of her like that—come.'

And guiding him gently with one hand, while he clutched his treasure with the other, she made him follow her, and by dint of much coaxing got him to lay her down on the bed, though he still insisted on supporting the precious head in his arms.

'Ah,' said Katie, her own tears dropping fast, as she bustled hither and thither, 'we must be very careful now—very, very careful, Allan ; for if she sees your face too quickly when she comes back to consciousness, all the dear life will go suddenly out again, and only the good Lord will know then what might happen.'

So Allan sat motionless in his place, while Katie and I applied the usual remedies. But it was heart-breaking to see the dumb look of anguish with which he followed our every movement, while the stalwart arms trembled under the light burden they held, and the lips that were every now and then pressed on the soft floating hair were blue and livid as hers.

Presently Katie whispered that there was a faint stirring of the pulse, and that the hands were relaxing their iron grip. She was right, and in another minute the eyelids quivered ; faint dawning colour stole over her face, and then, as if with the painful birth-throes of a new and mysterious existence, Lucy struggled back to life.

'Thank Heaven !' murmured Allan, and at the sound, eyes blue and wondering as a child's opened themselves full upon us.

'What is this?' she said, 'what are you doing to me—have I been ill?' and she tasted the cordial that Katie offered her. 'What day is this?—have I been dreaming? have I——'

'No,' returned Katie, softly, 'you have not been dreaming, unless it be a bright and happy dream that has come true. This is Christmas-day, Lucy, and such a Christmas-day as even you have never known before.'

'I have known many,' said Lucy, languidly, 'far—far too many, I think. We used to hang up the mistletoe-bough at Pear-tree farm, and I remember once Frank Thornicroft came and stole a kiss under it ; Dorothy was so angry, but Allan said—no, not Allan, he was not alive then, at least, I——'

And here she stopped, confused ; and then her wandering hands straying restlessly over her breast, came into contact with something that suddenly seized and held them.

She had touched her husband's hand.

'Why, what is this?' she asked again ; and then, as the warm drops fell upon her face, she leant her head back, and those blue eyes, brilliant now in their rapture, and shining with a joy too wondrous almost for wonder, were looking into Allan's face as if they would never look their last.

'Peace,' said Katie, now crying freely, 'peace, let us come away, we may safely leave them now !'

Ay, we may safely leave them. Heaven has been very gracious to thee, poor lost birdie ; with thee 'weeping has indeed endured for a night, but joy hath come in the morning.'

Katie became so hysterical when we got out of the room, that she sat down on the stairs and announced her intention of having it out, till Bruce, overhearing her, came up and began a series of pungent jokes that made her dry up her tears in no time, in a heat of indignation ; seeing which, he brought her a glass of wine, and then very much astonished her, and me too, by giving her a kiss. After which he retired, and performed a large portion of the Barber of Seville at the hall window.

Going down, I found the drawing-room in commotion, the boys playing leap-frog over the settee, and Herwald on the rug in the midst of dogs, sparring at any one who invaded his solitude ; while Rill sat on a stool and sucked her thumb, with Sprite's black nose peeping out of her pinafore ; Dudley was nowhere, and Loo had vanished.

On seeing me Herwald jumped up excitedly and bade the boys cease their tomfoolery, and call off the dogs.

'Well, Nellie, how is she now ? tell me all about it. I am half mad with impatience ; quick, every word !'

So, sitting down in my low chair while he knelt before me, I told him as well as I could. And when I had finished, he put up his hand and stroked back my hair softly.

'Poor little Nell, we do nothing but harass you with these sort of scenes ; first it was Milly and Hubert, and now it is Allan !'

'But is it not glorious, Herwald—oh, Herwald, is it not merciful beyond belief, for that poor lonely girl to find her husband again, just when all hope was leaving her, when she was beginning in reality to think him dead ?'

'Indeed, indeed it is ; but while your heart is full of Lucy, I can do nothing but think of my noble Allan, of the man who has been like a brother to me in all my troubles ! Where is he, Nellie, that I may go to him and wish him joy ?'

'Nay, that you shall not,' I replied. 'I have hidden them away in my private sanctum, where no one shall intrude upon them. Indeed, Herwald, your congratulations would be sadly wasted, for Allan is too much agitated to speak a word to you.'

'I forgot, I am so dreadfully impulsive ; but now, how comes it that we have been so blind about this matter ?—here has Lucy been an inhabitant of Sunnyside for months, while Allan——'

'Herwald,' I cried, starting up suddenly, 'do you know it is all your fault that this meeting was not brought about sooner ?'

'Mine !' he repeated, astonished.

'Yes, yours ; Dudley, come here, please,' for he had just entered the room. 'Do you remember my asking Herwald, in the picture-

gallery at Hurst-hall, the first morning we were there, what was Allan's other name?'

'To be sure I do! for something in the tone of your inquiry especially struck me. I think the same thought occurred to us both; but I am certain that he never said it was Graham.'

'Of course not; he told us it was Duncan—yes, you certainly did,' as Herwald made a gesture of dissent; 'you replied very carelessly, "Oh, Duncan, to be sure."'

'Impossible,' cried Herwald, wrinkling his brow, 'I never recollect your putting such a question to me; that is the name of my father's bailiff.'

'Then you must have confused the two; and that is how you put me off the scent, just as I was going to remark on the uncommonness of the name. Had you said Allan Graham, I should have told Lucy's history on the spot; afterwards it never occurred to me to interest you in her especial case, and Milly's affair soon put it out of my head.'

'Dear, dear,' repeated Herwald, in a vexed tone, 'what could I have been thinking about? Well, well, man with all his efforts only mars, it is Providence who makes. Here we have been searching England, north, south, east, and west, following many a false trail, and meeting with many a disappointment and rebuff—to find the lost bird after all safely caged at Sunnyside.'

'It is very strange,' exclaimed Dudley; and then we all drew closer together and talked of the wonderful Christmas reunion, till both reminded me at last that it was time I should go and see how Lucy was bearing the excitement.

Louie met me on the staircase, looking warm and tranquil; she had been crying for once in her life, and had fallen asleep afterwards.

I paused at the door an instant, but hearing nothing, went in. Lucy was lying still as I had left her, with her head on her husband's shoulder, and one hand toying languidly with the long curly beard; but when she caught sight of me she sprang up with a radiant smile.

'Here she is, Allan; here is our dear Miss Nellie, who has been like an angel to me; and but for whom you would never have seen your poor lost Lucy again;' and as she spoke the grateful creature hid my hands in her bosom, and covered them with kisses.

'Heaven only knows,' said Allan, 'why your face and voice seemed to light up my heart with sunshine when first I saw you at my master's house. But, I tell you this, Miss Mortimer, that if human blessing can avail—'

'Oh cease, pray cease,' I exclaimed, now sorely distressed. 'reserve your thanks for Heaven that has restored your wife to you; I have done nothing. Lucy has been to me a dear friend, and has been cherished by me as such; and both Hennie and she have richly repaid any little sacrifice in their behalf.'

'Hennie,' said Lucy, now suddenly moved, and turning very pale—'oh, my boy! but I have not forgotten you. Will you fetch him, Miss Nellie? you are so good, I know that you will not mind, and his father has never seen him.'

'No, but I can wait, love,' said Allan softly, and he bent over and whispered something into her ear.

'Will not another time be better, Lucy?' I urged, for her eyes were filling with tears.

'No, I would rather you should bring him now, please. I have told Allan what a poor distorted little creature he is, but he will soon learn to love him as you do, Miss Nellie.'

But for all that, her face looked dubious and full of terror at what Allan might think of his son.

I left him soothing her with grave words of tenderness, and went my way. I found the nursery looking dark and cheerless and Hennie sitting up in his cot sleepy and rather cross.

'He had been asleep a long time,' he said, 'and the nursery cat had awoke him by coming up, with her kitten in her mouth, and mewing round the bed; he had sat up to stroke her tail and had scratched his hand badly with the nasty holly that was over his crib; yes, it was a very bad scratch, and he was sure it had bled, though he could not see it in the dark; but he was tired of calling for Lucy, so he had tied it up himself in his Robinson Crusoe pocket-handkerchief. No, I was not to look at it, but it was a very bad place indeed, and not all the cold water in the world would make it better, he was sure; and it was all Lucy's fault, for if she had lighted the great big tin candlestick, it would not have happened,' and here he left off and felt for his little pig.

There was no doubt at all that Hennie was very cross, and that, if not properly humoured, he would have one of his bad sulky headaches; a thing to be especially dreaded, as in that case he would lie with his face to the wall for hours and refuse to speak or answer, so there was nothing for it but the most careful diplomacy.

So I spoke cheerfully to the cat, as I groped my way to the fireplace, and stirred the fire into a blaze; then lighting the candle, I quickly set on some water to boil, and furnished him with his favourite beverage of warm milk and water.

Then as he drank it, I took up the fat tabby kitten and remarked on her pretty white boots and the length of her whiskers, till the large eyes ceased to glare over the top of the mug, and that and the Robinson Crusoe handkerchief were laid aside together with a smile.

But the smile was watery and in danger of eclipse, so I put the kitten on the pillow, and sponged the hot face and hands and did marvels with the hair, and then I said—

'Now, Hennie dear, if you are quite refreshed and ready, I have something very wonderful to tell you, something so very, very

wonderful, that it is only fit to be a happy Christmas story. Who do you think is with Lucy now ?'

'I am sure I don't know,' replied Hennie, as he lay and cuddled the kitten softly, while Mamma Puss made lamentation round the bed. 'I am sure I don't know.'

'Can't you guess, dear ?' I continued, bending over him, for I knew how often his mother had talked to him of his father and her grief, 'can't you guess whose coming would make poor Lucy happier than you have ever seen her in your life ?'

There was no answer, but the little creature suddenly turned pale, and trembled in my arms.

'Your father has come, Hennie.'

Still no response.

'Yes, your father has come, and Lucy has asked me to fetch you, because he is so longing to see his little boy ; will you let me take you to him ?'

He made no remonstrance when I stooped to lift him, though he did not hold out his arms as usual ; but as I drew the old shawl carefully round him, he shivered and nestled down closer, as if to hide himself.

So I sang a scrap of a merry tune as I hurried through the cold passages, and said brightly as I opened the door—

'We have kept you a long time waiting, Lucy, but Hennie was tired and sleepy, so we stayed a little till he got more refreshed, and now he will sit up and look at his dear new father.'

But Lucy's quick maternal instinct had detected the quivering of the little frame, and she stretched out her arms in an instant.

'Come to me, my boy, my baby ; give him to me, Miss Nellie ;' then, as the child clung to her and hid his face in her neck, 'tell Lucy what has frightened my darling—come, my pet, whisper it all to Lucy.'

'Take me away,' moaned Hennie, who had caught sight in a moment of the handsome bearded face of his new father, 'take me away !'

'Why, my precious, why ?'

'Take me away,' repeated Hennie restlessly, 'don't let him see me—don't, he'll hate me, you know, because I'm so awful ugly.'

'Oh, Hennie,' cried Lucy, in a heart-broken voice, while Allan put his hand before his eyes—'Oh, Hennie, how can you talk and grieve poor Lucy so ?' but Hennie only repeated over and over again, 'I'm so awful ugly, take me away, I'm so awful ugly.'

Poor Lucy could do nothing now but clasp him helplessly and look at Allan with her pitiful eyes—while he, poor fellow, held the child's hand in both his, though it struggled to escape.

'Hennie,' I said, as I knelt down and brought my voice to his ear, 'do you remember what we were talking about last night ?'

Hennie paused as the 'awful ugly' trembled on his lip for the twelfth time, and said, peevishly, 'Go away, Miss Nell.'

'No,' I replied, 'I shall not go away, though I am so shocked and sorrowful, that I only wish I could. I don't think, Hennie, that I ever felt more shocked in my life.'

Hennie ceased hunching himself in his shawl and appeared to listen.

'I wonder,' I continued softly, 'if the Child-Christ who came to your bed last night, and who, you told us, had smiled at you so sweetly, and had given you a little cross all roses and thorns, which pricked your hand when you tried to grasp it, till the blood dyed the white roses red—I wonder if He were to stand amongst us now, what He would think of the little boy who refuses to love his father. Dear Hennie,' I went on more earnestly, 'do not let that beautiful dream go for nothing; for as sure as your father is watching you with tender yearning eyes, so certain is the divine Child-Christ looking at you now and sorrowing at your wicked words, and at your mother's tears.'

I ceased, and then the shawl was pulled down timidly and slowly, and Hennie with quivering lip and brimming eyes was gathered to his father's bosom.

Ah, there was no need for Lucy to gaze up at Allan's face so anxiously, for no shadow of repulsion clouded the look he cast upon their sickly child, and Hennie felt the kisses that were showered upon him were full as warm and loving as hers.

'Well, if the house won't be washed away with the showers,' cried Katie, as she came in, and caught me at it again; 'dear, dear, this will never do; pray brisk up a bit, Nellie, for they're wanting you at the tea-table, and we've made the Oak parlour as cheerful as might be for Allan and Lucy, with a regular cozy spread; for never a morsel has the poor fellow tasted this bitter day, since first he broke his fast this morning, Herwald told us so.'

Five minutes later, and Lucy was presiding at the pretty tea-table in the Oak parlour with the fire-light and lamp-light casting ruddy gleams upon her happy dimpled face and freshly braided hair; while Allan sat beside her, with one hand fast locked in hers; and Hennie in a huge arm-chair, opposite, fenced in with pillows, was feeding himself and the orange-peel pig by turns.

The picture was such a pretty one that Herwald was called in to admire it, and when he had shaken Allan's hand, till his arm was dislocated and the facets of his emerald ring had cut into his own finger; and when he had loaded Lucy with compliments and Hennie with kisses, we all thought it best to leave them to their own enjoyment, and retire from the room.

So Herwald fairly danced through the hall with Katie on his arm, much to Bruce's astonishment, as he rose politely to open the door for us.

'Well, this does look comfortable,' exclaimed Herwald, as he stood up in his place and rubbed his hands joyously. Now for

"the cup that cheers but not inebriates." Kitty, where are you going to? come and sit by me.'

'Nay, Katie, your place is down at the bottom of the table,' cried Bruce, pleasantly, as he pointed to the vacant chair between him and Dudley.

'I'll trouble you, Mr. Herwald,' returned Katie, as she wilfully eschewed Bruce's mild hint and passed on to the seat by Herwald, —'I'll trouble you, sir, not to call me out of my proper name, which is surely good enough for the likes of you, as old Marjory would say. I want none of your "Kittys," and that I tell you plainly.'

'Beshrew me, Kate, but I love you heartily,' said Herwald, quite unabashed; 'for all that you have a sharp tongue and a tolerable will of your own. It is not old friends of a day and a half that will quarrel, Kitty, so make it up right well over this piled-up dish of girdle-cakes that Nellie has provided for your especial delectation.'

'You are wrong there,' I interrupted; 'it is not only Katie who likes girdle-cakes, for since our stay at the manse there has been a perfect furore for Scotch cookery. You should see Dudley's face if the scones are not done to his bidding, or the oatmeal porridge the least bit burnt; I would not be in old Charlotte's place at that moment for anything.'

'I'll tell you what, Cousin Dudley,' cried Katie, 'you let Nellie return with me in the spring, and I'll promise you I'll give her such lessons in dairy and kitchen, that if ever the bannocks be poorly baked or the porridge be smoky, it shall not be my fault or hers either.'

'No, no,' returned Dudley, cheerily, 'we can't spare Mother Nell just yet, so none of your tempting hints, Miss Katie.'

'But I'll come—yes, that I will,' exclaimed Herwald, as he rose to tilt the urn; 'What! more water? What thirsty souls we are!'

'Will you, Herwald—will you, really? then the mother shall send you an invitation the moment I return. We'll make room for you, and the dogs, and Allan—oh, I forgot.'

'To be sure you did,' said Herwald, ruefully. 'Ay, I have no Allan now to follow my wandering star; he'll just settle down with his wife and child, and will leave me—'

'To follow his example, eh, Quixote?—no, don't frown. I'll never leave you a minute in peace till you've shown up one of your Lancashire witches.'

'Very well; I will write to Maud Rivers to-morrow. It is too cold to travel this weather, but a letter will do just as well. Her father says she is getting thin and pale, so it is a pity to leave it any longer. Well, as we've finished tea, you may as well fetch me the writing-case, Charlie. After all, procrastination is a bad thing.'

Bruce had been very sullen and silent all through the meal, but when the room was deserted, and I was putting something away in

the sideboard cupboard, he came and leant against it, swinging the door on its hinge.

'Delorme is a capital fellow, Nellie—yes, certainly, a capital fellow, and clever and amusing in the bargain; but does it not strike you that he is a little uppish and uncommonly conceited?'

'No, I can't say it has,' I remarked, dryly. 'What makes you think him so, Bruce?'

'Oh, I don't know, hundreds of things. But, Nellie, you must own he treats Katie most cavalierly, and in a manner that their slight acquaintance does not warrant in the least; to me it is perfectly absurd.'

'Katie does not think so, dear, and she is the best judge of that. If you had only heard her frank acceptance of his overture of friendship, you would have seen for yourself in what excellent part she takes it all.'

'That is the worst; these sort of fellows always do get spoiled by the women, and that makes them so conceited; but I suppose that if he stands on his acres and gold he is a big enough man in his own and every one else's estimation. It won't do for Dudley and me to mount the high horse, when we have nothing but that detestable factory to depend on.'

'Fie, Bruce—what a speech!' but the little black dog was on his shoulders, and he could not shake it off, so I turned to another subject.

'Katie and you seem to have hit it famously to-day; I was so surprised to see her looking over your book in church; really she is almost pretty, don't you think so, when her eyes are sparkling, and she has a nice colour?'

'Pshaw,' said Bruce, impatiently, 'what do I care?' and he kicked over a footstool and walked away.

Yes, he walked away, and it was naughty of you, Miss Nellie, to run after him and hold him round the neck so tightly, while you said, as I did from my heart—

'But you do care, Bruce—you do care very much, and I like you for it, and I have never so loved and admired you, brother mine, as I have to-day.'

And then we went in and had a very happy evening, and when the boys sang their Christmas carols, Allan and Lucy came in and joined our circle, and the words sounded more sweetly than they had ever done before—

'Peace on earth, good-will towards men.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

'Never did one tender vision
 Fade away before my sight,
 Never once through all my slavery,
 Burning day or dreary night ;
 In my soul it lived and kept me,
 Now I feel, from black despair ;
 And my heart was not quite broken
 While they lived and blessed me there.

'Then I saw, as night grew darker,
 How she taught my child to pray,
 Holding its small hands together,
 For its father far away ;
 And I felt her sorrow weighing
 Heavier on me than my own ;
 Pitying her blighted spring-time,
 And her joy so early flown.'

Adelaide Anne Proctor.

IN the course of the next few days we learnt much from Herwald of Allan's sad life during those years of separation and sorrow ; but from Lucy herself I could glean nothing, for even the few words that she spoke on the subject were so broken with her tears, that I was the first to advise her to let the past lie by with all its sufferings and perplexity, and to repose thankfully in the full sunshine of the present.

And certainly it was better for both that those years should be consigned to oblivion ; for though Allan, reticent and long-suffering as he was by nature, had given Herwald, and that reluctantly, only the barest outline of his life, yet enough had been said to wring our hearts with pity, and to fill us with esteem and admiration for the man who was noble alike in his prosperity and adversity. What Herwald told us was much as follows :—

'When the sailing orders had gone out that the troops should embark, and hour after hour the work had gone on, till the living cargo was complete, and nothing remained but for the final signal for leaving the harbour, through all that time of agonized suspense Allan had watched with straining eyes and ears for the tardy approach of his child-wife.

'The state of his mind was indescribable ; now he cursed himself for his blindness in suffering her to go on such a fool's errand as that, and now he cursed Dorothy, when he thought that she and Josiah must be in some manner the cause of the delay ; and anon he started, as some slender form essayed to cross the perilous plank, and hurrying to the gangway, would cry out hoarsely to "Lucy, to take care," and to the sailors, "for Heaven's sake not to let her slip," but as some ruddy gipsy face would laugh back at him with a mocking foolish answer, he would retire again more sick and sore of heart, to search among the groups of chattering soldiers' wives, if haply he might light upon some corner and find Lucy watching and weeping for him there.

'But, alas ! hour after hour passed, and still she did not come, and when the bustle and confusion increased, and boats were drawn up and others put off from the vessel, so did his search become yet more frantic ; and when at last the signal was given, and with

cheers and huzzas and fluttering pennons the gallant ship steamed for the open sea, Allan fell down upon the deck like a dead man in the midst of his affrighted comrades.

'They brought him to at last, but his agony was terrible to witness ; for days and days he was like a madman, tossing on his hammock through nights of sleepless misery, or crawling up on deck where he could see the last of the beloved land now receding rapidly from view.

'Often would he sit motionless for hours, looking down upon the moving mass of waters, with a face as dark and sullen as its depths ; and through all those days they never left him or relaxed their silent watch, never since the night when he had had that awful dream, and had seen Lucy floating in the moonlight, with the seaweed tangled in her golden hair ; he had seen her clearly, and had tried to climb the gangway to clutch her, as she drifted past with her dead blue eyes smiling up at the stars ; but before he could reach her some one had come behind and lifted him in his arms like a child and carried him back to his hammock ; and Allan recollected the chaplain and the doctor had come and looked at him with grave kind eyes, till the night and the dream had passed away together.

'After that he fancied he had had brain fever, but he never quite knew, but when he was better and could sit up and look about him, his Colonel and one or two of the officers had come to him at various times and cheered him up and bade him be a man, and not give way to despair, for when they touched land he could write, and his wife could join him in the next out-bound vessel.

'And this and the tender kindness of a few old comrades and their wives so heartened him up, that he was strengthened to bear the rest of the voyage, and it was with a sense of renewed hope that he at last landed at Calcutta.

'The troops were to occupy the barracks there, until they should be drafted off to their various stations, and there Allan despatched his first letter, and then his second, and his third ; all of which arrived when Lucy was lying on her bed of pain with her poor dazed head, and only that hard grim sister to nurse her and the wretched babe to whom she had given birth.

'The suspense attendant on these unanswered letters and the heat of the climate combined, threw Allan into another fever, and before he had fully recovered, a sudden and terrible accident incapacitated him and three other men from further service ; he was sent on sick leave to recruit his shattered health in the hill country, and then pensioned off with full permission, if he pleased, to return to his own country.

'Of this permission he gladly availed himself, and just as Lucy's distracted letters were pouring in by every mail, Allan was commencing his second chapter of accidents by embarking on board the "Golden Rose."

'Ah, well might Lucy think that he was dead ; or at least wring her hands in an agony of doubt ; for the "Golden Rose" went down one awful night, with all her crew, and only Allan and the coxswain and four or five of the sailors escaped with life.

'With life, but with barely that ; drifting rudderless through the dark ocean in a frail small boat, drenched to the skin ; naked, starved, and thirsting—for seventeen days and nights they plodded through the deep, till one after another succumbed to their terrible fate, and the rest, more dead than alive, were literally cast upon an island more desolate than Melita, and with natives almost as rude and barbarous.

'On this wretched island Allan and the two sole survivors of the little crew abode for eleven months, living with the natives, sharing their squalid huts, and winning their hearts by many mechanical inventions that stimulated their curiosity and excited their reverence ; and through all that weary time the man bore his unhappy destiny with an uncomplaining fortitude and patience that won the admiration of his companions in misfortune.

'At last a Portuguese frigate, distressed for water, put in to shore ; and the three barbaric creatures, with their unkempt beards reaching to their waists, and their semi-civilized dress—yet calling themselves Englishmen, clambered joyfully on board, and, relating their tale to the captain, were permitted to work their way home.

'In course of time—very slowly as it seemed to our poor Allan—they arrived at Lisbon, and finding a Bristol merchantman just starting for England, he again worked his way across ; and early one fine summer morning he stood once more upon his native shore.

'In his impoverished condition it was necessary for him to go to London first, to assure himself of his promised pension, and furnish himself with a few necessaries, before he could make his appearance before Dorothy Beazley ; but after a delay that seemed incredibly tedious, he was at last enabled to set his face northwards ; and one evening, just as the sun was setting redly behind the old beech-trees, he entered the little town of D—, and with faltering steps made for the dingy house in the High-street, where Josiah Beazley lived.

'But, alas ! the man's fate was cruelly adverse ; hardly had his hand touched the knocker, before he read the words "Cramp, late Beazley," on the brass plate ; and this fresh blow was so dreadful, that he could hardly command his voice enough to answer the trim serving-maid, and to beg to see her master on urgent business at once.

'Cramp, late Beazley, was a plump rosy little man, very good-natured in the main ; he was sorry for Allan—very, very sorry—offered him wine, and tried to cheer him ; but he could do nothing for him. No one had ever heard of the name of Lucy Graham,

and as for Beazley, he had left the place under very disgraceful circumstances some nine months back, and no one knew where he had gone; but some—and here Mr. Cramp winked knowingly—some were of opinion that his native land was rather too hot for him, and that he and his wife had started for America, and for himself he rather fancied this was the truth.

‘No; there was nothing to be done—nothing, nothing; so Allan staggered, half-blindly, to the door and across the street and through some green fields, where some sleepy kine were browsing, till he came to the copse and the pool by the pollard trees; and there he lay down and prayed that he might die.

‘Ah, the water ran stilly and clear that evening; it was a lonely desolate spot, and when the sun set and the shadows deepened, and the moon rippled on the glassy surface, and not a breath ruffled the dark branches that beat over it—it all looked so peaceful and quiet; so fit for a sleep that would have no waking.

‘Should he stretch himself upon the cool white surface, and, crossing his hands upon his breast, sink slowly to the bottom? “Oh, Heaven, have mercy upon me,” groaned the miserable man, “for never Cain was branded with a more cruel fate: and I—I dare not die—oh, Lucy, Lucy! my girl, my saint, I dare not—must not die.”

‘But the prayer for mercy was heard. Some one riding through the copse in the moonlight with slackened rein, paused and listened to the despairing cry, and, like the good Samaritan, tarried by the way-side to comfort and to aid.

‘Kneeling down beside the stranger, he gently unlocked his hands and bathed his brow with the cool limpid water, while all the time he murmured words of holy consolation, till the horror and the darkness passed away, and Allan, weeping like a child, could recount his sorrowful tale.

‘The moon was high and bright now, when he had finished. But the kind friend who had consoled him did not suffer his benevolence to rest here, but when he had poured in the oil and wine of sympathy, and had prayed and wept with him, he took him to his own house and cared for him.

‘It was the Vicar of Bringham who had befriended him—a man celebrated for miles round for his eccentricity and devoted piety. Allan, indeed, had reason to bless his name, during the many days that he watched and tended him, till the overwrought mind and body were restored, and he could look round again, and think what was now to be done.

‘Then again his new friend came to his aid, and together they set on foot all possible inquiries after the lost Lucy and her child (for Allan now knew that he had one), but though they soon learnt the sad particulars of her long and terrible illness, nothing further was known than that she had left the town one evening on foot, carrying her child, and looking wan and ill, and that Dorothy had

said to her neighbours that she had gone to live with an aunt, and that it was a good riddance of them both.

‘Now of this aunt Allan knew nothing, and though Mr. Priestly did everything in his power to further the search, it was all in vain, and Allan said, weariedly, at last, that it was time that he should go into the world again and work for himself.

‘But the vicar would not give him up so readily. He had discovered that he was a man of excellent education and intelligent parts, and he secured his services as courier to a wealthy family in the neighbourhood, just starting for Rome; the change of employment and scene, he thought, would be good for his shattered nerves, and in his absence he would still prosecute all possible inquiries.

‘Allan was very loath to accept this offer, but his pension was small, and bread hard to win, and hope was dying out, so he let himself be persuaded into undertaking the office, and late in the autumn he left England.

‘The rapid travelling, the varied scenes and excitement of the journey, worked some good to Allan, and all went on smoothly, both employers and employed being mutually well pleased, till, in an unlucky moment, at an inn at Lucerne, as Allan was settling some score with the host, a voice from a travelling chariot, just starting from the door, called out impatiently for Lucy to be quick; and Allan, straining his eyes in the sunlight, caught sight of a blue veil and some golden curls floating under it, and in a moment he had seized the idea that it was Lucy herself.

‘Nothing would do now, but he must follow that carriage, and despite the remonstrances and anger of his master, thus suddenly bereft of a most valuable courier, Allan, mad with impatience, had taken his leave, and was posting rapidly among the Swiss lakes, till his money was exhausted, and he arrived one sultry night at the little inn where Herwald and Marion Vivian had found him, raging with disappointment at discovering that it was not his Lucy at all, but a pretty English girl, travelling with her father, and with a return of the old fever upon him.

‘The rest,’ finished Herwald, ‘you know; he has never left me since. Together we have done what human wisdom could devise in our search after Lucy, but all in vain, for while we explored England, she, poor lassie, had escaped over the border.’

It was such a pitiful tale in all its bearings, that it really was a relief when Herwald had finished it, and the first moment that I could, I left the room to breathe freely by myself.

The door of the Oak parlour stood open as I passed. I could see Lucy on the window-seat in her soft French gray and new blue ribbons, while Allan sat beside her, watching the nimble little fingers as they flew over her work, while Hennie lay on a pillow on the rug, playing with his clockwork mouse, the kitten purring sleepily near him; and pleasanter than music was it to hear the

laugh with which Allan hailed every now and then some quaint speech of his crippled boy.

'Come and play, father—come and play,' was Hennie's constant entreaty, and Allan was rising at last, more in compliance with Lucy's soft pleading eyes, when Herwald's peremptory voice was heard calling impatiently, 'Allan ! Allan !'

'I am coming, sir,' answered Allan, and then as he passed me lingering on the stair, he turned and smiled.

What a bright, happy smile it was ! it seemed to light up the whole face, while all the grave stern lines of suffering were suddenly smoothed away. Already he was becoming a changed man under the influence of his new-found treasures.

Lucy sat and sang to herself as I went in and played with Hennie. And presently Allan came back with a pleased excited look on his face, and took his seat by his wife again.

'Ah, Lucy, our good things are never to end. What fresh happiness do you think is in store for us ?'

'Nay,' answered Lucy, 'how can I tell ? Have I not more than I know how to bear already ?' and the hand that always now seemed fluttering towards him like a little dove, rested lovingly on his shoulder.

'Not more than we know how to be grateful for, I hope,' he answered, reverently. 'But listen to me, my precious wife, for this is certainly good news ; what do you think my generous master and friend has offered me ?'

'Not Holly-bush farm, Allan ?' said I, as I drew near the little group.

'Yes,' cried Allan, with sparkling eyes, and he pressed Lucy closer to him. 'Yes, Holly-bush farm ; and so the poor soldier will be able to offer his darling a better home even than the one from which he took her.'

'Better than Pear-tree farm, Allan ?—oh, surely not better than that.'

'Ay, even than that—for Holly-bush is a grand place, with a handsome white dwelling-house and with a dairy that will hold a score of pans ; and then the garden, Lucy, with its arbours and rose-bushes and bee-hives, and a real fountain for Hennie to splash in, and with a long green orchard running half round it—why are you crying, love ?' as she clasped his neck in an ecstasy of joy.

'Because we are too happy—too happy, Alan. Think of you and me and Hennie living in a place like that all our lives. Oh, how good, how kind Mr. Delorme is !'

'Indeed he is ; and not the least of my pleasure is, that I shall still be near him, and shall be the life-long tenant of the man whom I most love and respect in the world ; it is a great boon to accept from any one, but somehow I do not mind being beholden to him ; for he has been as much my benefactor as Miss Mortimer has been to you.'

After that I went away and heard all that Herwald had to say on the subject.

He and Dudley were full of it—and it was arranged between them that after a week or two Allan was to go down with Herwald, and see that everything was put in order for the little mistress. Duncan the bailiff and Mrs. Arundel were to get everything in readiness, and Herwald and Allan were only to see for themselves that all was fitly done.

They would both be back in a couple of days or so ; and then Allan and his wife and child were to bid good-bye to Sunnyside and take possession of their new home.

So when the snow was gone and the days grew clear and long, we gathered in the hall one mild February morning to say good-bye to Lucy and Hennie.

The sweet face looked sad enough for the moment, and the blue eyes trembled with tears as Lucy clung to me with blessings and adieus ; and the tears became general when Allan came downstairs with his boy safely couched in his plaid—Hennie, his eyes red with crying, and the kitten held firmly in his small thin hands.

'Good-bye, Miss Nell,' said the little creature ; 'don't cry when I'm gone, and write and tell me if poor Titty's mother mews after her when she finds her bed empty.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

'The world goes up
And the world goes down,
And the sunshine follows the rain ;
And yesterday's smiles

And yesterday's tears
Can never come back again,
Sweet friend,
Can never come back again.'—*Anon.*

AND in those days Sunnyside was divided by faction. There was the open feud of the Cameron and Mortimer, and the greater but no less deadly one of the Mortimer and Delorme ; the apple of discord had been flung into our little southern nest, and a whole world of discomfort was the result.

A large infusion of northern pride and the leaven of a tyrannical irony warmed up the Mortimer blood ; till Louie's slow placidity took fire, and Bruce, ever a man of mettle, was ready to do battle to the death ; and in those days, Sunnyside was hardly the abode of peace that it might have been.

And this was how it came to pass.

When the excitement at Lucy's and Allan's happy reunion had a little subsided, and the novelty of Herwald's arrival worn off, and the usual every-day life resumed, then it was found that some alien

influence was at work, and provocative aggression, followed by open hostility, became the order of the day ; and of this alien influence Katie Cameron was prime leader and chief.

During Christmas-day the truce had been fairly observed between her and Bruce ; but the very next morning Bruce had sinned with an error of judgment, had been reproved, and turned restive in consequence, and Katie had then and there flared up a crimson flag of assault, and becoming all of a sudden morally deaf and dumb, drove her aggrieved adversary straight into the Thornton fastnesses.

It was the very matter and manner of his revenge that was so grievous to our high-spirited Katie ; for with the unerring instincts of an honest heart, she had taken a strong personal dislike to the two giddy heads of Belle and Ada ; the mere sight of the blue bonnets and the long fair curls was sufficient to drive her into one of her tantrums, and woe then to the Bruce if he crossed her path.

Dudley said it was as good as a play to watch them both, but with this I could hardly agree. I could not bear to see the bright sonsie face so often downcast ; and provoking as were her wilful moods and still more wilful tongue, I could not help taking her part, for I knew that feminine weakness and unconscious suffering lay at the root of all the waywardness ; and in my opinion Bruce was very hard on her.

Of course it was her own fault. If she had treated him well from the first, he would have been the old frank Bruce of his boyhood, but she had never done so ; she had mocked at his dandyism, indolence, and assumption of dignity, and goaded him by her pungent satire ; her whole manner was so indifferent to him compared with the warm cordiality that she extended to Dudley and Herwald, that it was hardly a wonder that he did turn restive at last, and go where sweeter smiles and more flattering attentions were lavished upon him ; and then it was—when Katie suffered.

Then, when she saw him going off, and knew that she had really wounded him, and yet was too proud to call him back, though a word or smile had been sufficient ; when she watched him saunter down the lane, with Ada's dainty little flower-knot in his coat and a careless whistle on his lips, then it was that her face took those sorrowful curves, and the brightness of her eye was dimmed, but only for a moment, and then pride came to her rescue, and the smothered sigh was lost in a jest or bandied repartee with Herwald.

On such occasions her resentment was strong, and no reconciling word or smile greeted the culprit on his return ; but as these little feuds were not suffered to mar the harmony of the evening circle, and were only betrayed by the uneasy glint in the eye and the tell-tale suffusion of blood to cheek and brow, by silence and a strict avoidance of the other, we thought it best not to interfere, but to let our Scotch bantam have her way.

But there were times when Bruce went too far, or Katie's proud spirit was too deeply stung ; and when this was the case, we always knew what would happen—that, be the day what it might, hail, snow, rain, or piercing sleet, she would presently appear wrapped in the folds of her scarlet plaid, or a long gray water-proof cloak, Louie's charity basket slung on her arm, and bound for some wretched out-lying district some three or four miles off, to reach which she must wade ankle-deep in snowy slush or miry clay, where stiles of fabulous height must be encountered and not unfrequently a five-barred gate beside.

But these obstacles were nothing to Katie in these wilful moods of hers ; and it was soon found that all argument and opposition were worse than useless. In vain would Herwald jest from his cosy nook in the chimney-corner, and protest that she was no Romanist or High-church Ritualist to believe that such meritorious works should secure her saving reward ; or Dudley remonstrate with her gravely as with a sister, or Nellie herself put a daring foot against the door—she would listen to none of us, and it was soon felt by all that it was better to leave her alone to her own wayward will.

Sometimes as the afternoon closed in dim and gray, Bruce would come in looking subdued and penitent, and cast a swift sly glance at Katie's empty chair, but he never asked after her, unless I were alone, and then only in the way of protest and with an angry denunciation against us for suffering her to go such fool's gait. But if the weather were more inclement than usual, the twilight stealing on dark and chill, or the snow-flakes falling fast upon the frozen ground, and still she did not return, he would pace up and down the room with a glower on his face and his step full of uneasiness, go to the hall door and look out and watch down the lane, and presently start off to stride patiently over ploughed fields and through clayey lanes, till he came upon her, footsore and weary, plodding through the snow.

And then, just as we sat down to the lighted tea-table—Dudley often with an annoyed speech at what he termed these tiresome escapades, and Herwald with mock gravity relating how some clown in fustian would stumble upon them in the early morning, lost in the snowdrift, lying dead as the children in the wood, with the basket between them—they would suddenly appear powdered with snow-flakes and bespattered with mud, Katie with a bloom that shamed our fire-warmed faces, and Bruce looking radiantly bright.

And all the evening Katie's eyes would look tender and true, and her sweet bird voice trill joyously out, while Bruce's face would wear its bashful happy glow, and all would be harmony and peace.

On those occasions the dainty little flower-knot that Bruce had worn with such open pride all day invariably found its way under the grate, where it perished ignominiously, singed to the death ;

and it was curious to see how Katie instantly detected its absence, and how the bent face sparkled blithely over her work.

So much for the Cameron feud, which was harmless on the whole, if not amusing, and carried its *Finis* legibly written on the standard of each hostile force, but the Delorme gave me greater uneasiness.

'Herwald,' I said, one afternoon, as we were alone together, 'Herwald, I want to speak to you.'

He was sitting opposite me, with his arms folded over an open book, whose edges he was crumpling sorely, and his face, in its thoughtful abstraction, looked three parts sad and wholly grave.

Louie had just left us; she had been taking her first lesson on Tennyson, and had received her dismissal from her young tutor some ten minutes before, a dismissal more graciously received than awarded.

The lesson had commenced auspiciously; the day was dull, and no visitors likely to call, and Louie had therefore obeyed her summons to the drawing-room with right good humour and alacrity, had settled herself with less regard than usual to the ample flowing of her skirts, and had consented to turn a serene eye on the open page before her.

In five minutes Herwald had forgotten himself and her and the world beside, as he wandered through the mazes of melodious rhythm, and the faithful reasonings of love; and his whole voice trembled on his lips, when he was suddenly and unpleasingly recalled to the outer life, for Louie yawned.

Yes, Louie yawned, and Herwald frowned, and Nellie, that most artful of peace-makers, said blandly—

'How beautiful, Herwald, I never heard you read so well before; pray go on.'

Herwald muttered something impatiently, but went on notwithstanding, but his voice lost its rich cadence and became measured and monotonous; and Louie yawned again.

I shook my head at her, and looked entreatingly; but her eyes were becoming sleepily round and opaquely blue—a third time, and Herwald closed the book.

'You are dismissed, Miss Louisa; a thousand pardons for the prolonged weariness that I have caused you; please consider the first and last lesson at an end.'

Louie turned her dreamy eyes on him with a slow pleasant smile.

'Thank you so much—I am sure you read very nicely—but I agree with you, that half an hour of that monotonous verse is sufficient at a time. Pray tell me what hour will be most convenient to you to-morrow; if I am not too much engaged, I will be at your command. Only do read a little louder next time, for your low voice and the dusk together has made me quite sleepy; I think I must have a nap on my own sofa. Good-bye, Mr. Tutor. Oh,

your chair is on my dress,' and two delicate little folds crossed Louie's forehead. The only time she ever came near a frown was when any one thus ruthlessly trampled her train. 'Oh, you careless boy, you have torn the crape.'

'Have I?' he replied, laying a forefinger on the fragment he had ravelled out; 'I am very sorry for it, Miss Louie; but such tears as these can be fitly repaired by your nimble fingers; it is only the rents of hurt pride and wounded esteem that you will find very hard to patch up one of these days,' and he smiled coldly, and let her go.

'What a character you are, Herwald,' laughed Louie, as she sailed away; 'quite a well-bound edition of proverbial philosophy; but you are too clever for me, or rather, I am too stupid for you—go and talk to Nellie.'

But Herwald did nothing of the kind, only settled himself to his musing with averted eyes, and when I addressed him by name, merely looked up vacantly and did not answer.

'Herwald, I want to talk to you.'

'Oh, did you speak, Nellie? I was in a brown study, and did not hear you before, I am afraid. What a raw gusty afternoon it is; if the snow would but hold off a little, I would go down and meet Dudley. By-the-bye, where's Katie?'

'Down at Stony Cleft; she has gone to visit old Cobbler Chubbins for Louie; little Bill, the youngest, is sick, and the mother is down with the rheumatism; she started off well laden with bottles and bags an hour ago. Hal pleaded hard to go with her, but Dudley said, it was not fit.'

'Fit!—what a crazy lass it is; she will come by a snowy death one of these days, and then Bruce will marry Ada.'

'Heaven forbid!' I ejaculated.

'Why, I see no harm in the girl, she has a pretty face, and is very good natured; and that is all a man like Bruce ever asks for. Kitty is too much of a termagant for him to manage; though, if I were he—'

'Well, Herwald, what would happen then?'

'Why, the curls might go to Jericho, and I would marry Katie to-morrow; ay, in spite of her sauciness and vixen's tongue, I would; for a better and bonnier lass never lived on this side Jordan. One does not meet with angels now-a-days; and, mark my word, Nellie, it is my belief, you could not find a sweeter or more wholesome nature than hers if you were to search from here to Tweed. It is ill judging her now, when the girl is sore and suffering, and would fain be a help-meet for an Adonis; what a queerly-assorted couple they will make one of these days.'

'You think, then, that it will come to that?'

'Think—are you blind or bewitched, Nella mia, that you cannot read aright all this pretty plaguery and riot; or, are you so much above your sex, that you do not understand these tempestuous

devices and alternate seasons of storm and calm? If you were a philosopher, you would know that such a wild colt from the Highlands could never be broken in without plenty of trouble, and by a practised hand, and Bruce is not good at such things; he has too much vanity and personality; and so she frets at the weak curb he imposes, and rears and grows rampant at his lightest lash. I crave your pardon, but one of these days I shall tell Bruce he is an idiot, and does not understand a woman in the least; what is the use of perpetually arousing her jealousy, and then making foolish amends? He must be firm, and take her by storm, as it were.

'You think, then, the fault lies with him?'

'The fault of mismanagement and want of decision, but I think she is a little vixen to him, Nell; one of those girls who drive a man crazy before marriage, and are like lambs afterwards, model wives, in fact. But don't trouble your head about them; one of these days, when she has irritated his vanity, spurred up his indolence, and driven his dignity to the winds, he will turn round upon her, and like the Bruce of old, conquer and take captive in a breath.'

'Will the course of true love never run smooth?' I sighed. 'Alas, poor Kitty; but Herwald, it was not of her that I wanted to speak, but of yourself. Oh, you cannot think how bitterly you have disappointed me.'

'I!' he exclaimed, in surprise, 'I hope you are joking, Nellie;' and he sat down on the rug at my feet in company with Max, and fixed his eyes reproachfully on my face. 'Ah, I see you are not serious, you have a little smile just dimpling one corner of your mouth; I half believed I was coming in for a regular lecture.'

'Don't flatter yourself that you will wholly escape one,' I replied; 'I have been wanting an hour's quiet talk with you these three days, and you see the Fates and the snowy day are in my favour, and now you cannot escape.'

'All right,' he returned, caressing Max's head, as it rested itself on his knee, 'all right, fire away, only don't be surprised if I go to sleep in the middle, like Louie.'

I caught at the name.

'There, you have introduced the topic yourself. It was of her that I wished to speak to you. Oh, Herwald, it is very sad for me to see that you do not like my sister.'

He started and pushed the dog from him rather impatiently, but did not answer.

'It was bad enough,' I continued, 'to feel that there was strong prejudice against her before you met; but I thought that after a day or two, when you saw how we loved and trusted her, that such an unfavourable impression might wear off. I know that her first words to you were indifferent, and not flattering, but I hoped you would make excuse for that too; and since then she has treated you well in her own way, and striven hard to yield you the reverence you exact from those who know you.'

'I exact,' he returned, hotly; 'I exact, Nellie?'

'Yes, exact—not by manner and word of mouth, but by the dignity of your manhood, by the very strength and power of your intellect, a power that has made itself felt in her somewhat dense nature, and in spite of——'

I hesitated for a fit word.

'In spite of my want of stature and air of extreme youth,' he went on calmly; 'why do I look so absurdly young, I wonder? you heard her call me a boy just now; I don't fancy Dudley would mind such a trifle one jot—rather like it, in fact;—but it grates on me somehow, perhaps in the tone more than in the words. I dare say I do look very much the boy to her, but no one ever called me so before; and,' he continued, with an uneasy laugh, 'it hurts my touchy dignity.'

'I know it does, she has the unhappy knack of doing that very often; but when you know it is not meant, can you not forgive her those little speeches, hard as they are to bear?'

'Do you think, then, that I treat her so badly?' he inquired in a low voice.

'My dear Herwald, no; how can you imagine such a thing? I don't believe you could treat any one badly, man, woman, or child; what I mean is this, that were Louie other than herself, she must have felt herself sorely hurt at the contrast in your manner to us two; such warmth of cordiality to the one, such frigid politeness to the other.'

'I can't help that,' he answered hurriedly; 'would you have me behave coldly to my friend?'

'No, indeed; but, Herwald, she would be your good friend too, if you would suffer her.'

He shook his head.

'I tell you she would, if you did not repulse her by the sternness and austerity of your manner. In her heart I am convinced she has a great esteem for you.'

'I do not think it, Nell; because you are partial yourself, you imagine every one else must be so too; there is not a greater mistake in the world. But of one thing I am assured, that if I have erred by reticence, at least I have shown no want of courtesy or kindness.'

'No, if by courtesy you mean the decorous punctilio of etiquette, on which you pride yourself, like a high-bred gentleman as you are. I know that you treat us like queens, rising when we rise, and setting open the door for us to sweep through, placing footstools and listening with inclined head; why, Louie herself said that you spoiled us for the society of other young men.'

'Did she say that?'

'Yes, indeed she did, that, and much more too, only I won't make you vain; and now, Herwald, promise me that you will be more cordial to her in future.'

'I cannot,' he answered, flushing up; 'she treats me like a boy, she insults my pride with her placid insolence, she reduces me to a cipher by the very grandeur and majesty of her womanhood; I—a Delorme, who never feared woman's smiles or frowns before—not that I do fear hers, only she tortures my vanity, she robs me of my peace. I am accustomed to the world's approbation, Nellie, and to a certain sense of power and dignity, and it does not please me to be annihilated——'

'You annihilated!' I exclaimed, 'you, who have borne her most provoking speeches so patiently; you, who have reduced her to a grieved silence by the very sternness of your eye and voice; you, whom she ceases to allure, because you have taught her to distrust her own powers; you are sinning now, if you like, by the error of a mock modesty, or else you are strangely blind to your own merits.'

'I never was before,' he answered bitterly; 'perhaps such humiliation is good for me; it has shown me, at least, that the basis of my character is false pride and an overweening self-esteem.'

'It has shown you nothing of the kind. Do be sensible, Herwald, and not look at things from such a morbid point of view. You are angry with Louie, grand loveable creature as she is, because she has thwarted you this afternoon.'

'No indeed,' he answered eagerly, 'it is not that; I am speaking of the way she treats me always; you must have noticed her manner yourself.'

'She does not treat you worse than others; she always does victimise her adorers.'

'Perhaps so,' he replied coldly; and as he spoke, the delicate nostrils quivered in their pride; 'but you know I never aspired to the honour of being elected into those favoured ranks.'

'Exactly, and that is why Queen Loo pronounces you such an unsolved enigma; she can't understand your bad taste in not adoring her. You must forgive our capricious beauty, Herwald, and remember she is the spoiled darling of the house. Why, I myself often think it hard that you so constantly refuse her innocent requests.'

'Her requests! her commands you mean—commands which if obeyed would lead to other and more dangerous ones still. Don't look at me so reproachfully, Nellie; your rebukes fall on sterile ground, for I have already learnt to distrust her too much. Her patronising tone I can and must bear, but I will never be a slave to her caprices. If she wants any one to minister to her pretty whims and fancies, she must go to others more servile and more willing to obey.'

'If I were to give you a new name,' I remarked, jestingly, 'I should call you Herwald the Flint Heart.'

'No, you would not,' he answered, all at once melting into a

smile so sweet and true, that all the hard proud curves in his face lessened and disappeared, 'you would not, for I have never been flinty to you. Exacting as I am, there's not a whim or fancy of yours, Nella mia, to which I would not gladly submit, no homage too great for me to yield, no token of friendship too strong for me to bestow. If you were to demand my neck this minute as resting-place for that pretty foot, you should have it gladly, and everything else too that might prove how dearly I love my adopted sister.'

'Even if she called you her own poor boy,' I replied, laughing away the tears that were ready to start.

'Yes, even then; I don't mind it from you a bit, it seems natural and right—nay, I will go further, Nellie; for notwithstanding all that I have said, I will try to behave more cordially to your sister, and will do it for your sake, though it should cost me ever so great an effort.'

'And you will lay aside that absurd prefix, and call her Louie; do, Herwald, it does vex me so to hear it.'

'Vex you!' he answered sadly; 'why, it is a trifle at which to take umbrage at, but it shall be as you wish.'

As he uttered the last word, the door opened and Louie walked in. I think Herwald recognised the step, and the slow rustle of the silken skirt across the floor, but he kept his eyes fixed on the fire, and never moved till she came up and stood behind him.

A softened mood was on her, for her eyes were full of a slumbrous beauty, and she held her white hands passively folded before her, and when she spoke the rare gentleness of her tone made Herwald start.

'I am afraid I vexed you this afternoon, Herwald, by seeming so little interested in what you read; it struck me suddenly as I lay dreaming in the twilight, that you must have thought me very ungracious.'

He had risen to his feet as she began to speak, and stood leaning against the mantelpiece with his hand half shading his eyes, but he did not answer her immediately, till she had repeated her question.

'Did I vex you? please, tell me frankly.'

'A little, Louie; but it is of no consequence.'

'It is of great consequence to me,' she returned, 'if I have been unfortunate enough to offend my brother's friend; but I will not believe that I have, since you can call me, of your own accord, by my rightful name. I have never yet heard Louie from your lips before. How is it, Herwald, that we so completely fail to understand each other?'

'I understand you well enough,' he replied; 'there is no need to increase my knowledge. I know you to the full, as well as if I had lived with you all my life.'

'Then if it be so,' she returned, rather bewildered, 'why can we not be better friends? Nellie tells me that it is my fault, and that I

am perpetually hurting you by my careless speeches. Is it that that makes you so abrupt and stern in your manner to me? It is very strange, for no one was ever stern to me before, and the fair face flushed distressedly.

Poor Queen Loo, her sceptre was roughly handled just now; a daring subject was wresting it from her grasp. Ah! for all his boyish looks, Louie had found her match at last.

Herwald remained silent.

'I hate these feuds,' said indolent loving Loo. 'If I have erred I will willingly sue for your pardon; but I cannot see in what I have done amiss;—perhaps my faulty humours trouble you; but at least we can have peace.'

'Assuredly,' he answered, coldly.

'Not while you look and speak like that. How proud you are, Herwald—prouder than all my pride and vanity put together; but I like you in spite of it, and I would willingly be your friend, if you would let me. Speak, Herwald—may we not be friends?'

So sweetly sued by smile and outstretched hand, all Herwald's haughty vapours fell from him like a cloak, and for the first time since he had entered Sunnyside he pressed her hand warmly, while his eyes beamed full on her with perfect benignity and good-will.

'You have well said,' he answered brightly; 'I, too, am a lover of peace. Yes, we will be friends.'

'And you will not laugh at me, because I am not so clever as Nellie, and cannot appreciate things as she does?'

'Laugh at you!' exclaimed our poor Quixote, drooping his head, 'surely I have never so forgotten your dignity, or mine, as that would lead me to imply.'

'And you will not satirise trifles?' she continued, without heeding his speech, 'trifles which may appear folly to you, but which go far to make me happy. You must be lenient, Herwald, in your judgment of me—not because I am more faulty than others, but because I am more independent, and cannot brook reproof, and hitherto even your silence has reprovèd me.'

'I will be more careful in future,' he responded, humbly; 'I am sorry to have grieved you.'

'All hard biting comments do grieve me, though people think I am as slow to feel as to take notice of them; but now you will know better. Do you really think I have so many faults, Herwald?'

'Do you wish me to reply truthfully?'

'Of course—as one friend should answer another.'

'Then I think you have; but they are all such as can easily be cured, especially by such a will as lies dormant within you; if you would but exercise that patiently and perseveringly, they might soon be conquered.'

Louie opened her eyes wide, and laughed merrily.

'I know where to come for compliments. Never mind, it is a change to hear the truth for once in my life. I get plenty of flattery,

even at home, and when I want a wholesome bitter to counteract its bad influence, I can come to you ; but, like the rest of my mentors, I shall soon tire you out, as I have Dudley and Nellie.—Nell, you naughty child, why do you not speak, after I have been keeping my promise so faithfully too? Every night this week, Herwald, she has been begging and praying me to say all this to you, but I have never felt inclined, till I woke up from my nap this afternoon, and remembered how rude I had been ; and now I am tired again ; it is dreadfully slow trying to be good. One thing more : you will resume " In Memoriam " to-morrow.'

Herwald answered with alacrity that he would.

'And if I get sleepy again you won't be cross? Come, that is being a friend in earnest. How warm and cozy the rug looks in the firelight. Reach me that screen, Nell, and I will sit and bask in it a little, till it is time to dress for tea. Fancy Katie being out in the snow at this hour. I hope Bruce has the heart to go out in search of her. What a strange uncanny thing it is!' And then as she sat with her head against my knee, she sang softly to herself that sweetest of all Scotch ballads—

'Oh, wert thou in the cauld blast
On yonder lea, on yonder lea ;
My plaidie to the angry airt,
I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee.
Or did misfortune's bitter storms
Around thee blaw, around thee blaw,
Thy bield should be my bosom,
To share it a', to share it a'.'

'Go on,' exclaimed Herwald eagerly, as her voice sank at the end of the first stanza ; 'oh, do go on. Nothing is so bewitching to me as singing in the twilight ;' and Louie went on.

'Or were I in the wildest waste.
Sae black and bare, sae black and bare,
The desert were a paradise
If thou wert there, if thou wert there.
Or were I monarch of the globe,
Wi' thee to reign, wi' thee to reign,
The brightest jewel in my crown
Wad be my Queen, wad be my Queen.'

'I wonder if these are Bruce's thoughts to-night, Nell?'

'If they be, he will never translate them into such poetical language,' returned Herwald ; and then, at his request, Louie sang him one or two more songs, of the same character, to which he listened with a delight that for the first time he did not strive to conceal.

And then they fell into a discussion on the comparative merits of English and Scotch ballads, and were alike regretful when the entrance of Dudley and the boys broke up the fireside trio.

Herwald's face looked radiant enough, when he made his entrance into the lamp-lighted room, and Dudley was not slow to comment on the change.

Tranquilly the evening wore to its close ; but before we had retired for the night, Louie had laid one of her lazy whimsical commands on Herwald, and Herwald had then and there quietly declined to obey.

'Oh, Herwald,' she began, in her old peremptory way, 'you tire-some—' but Herwald flashed such a look upon her, that she thought better of it, and gave him her hand with a little deprecatory laugh, as she bade him good-night.

CHAPTER XXIX.

'Women can less easily surmount their coquetry than their passions.'—*La Rochefoucault*.

FOR a long time things went on very well with Herwald and Louie. Both had eaten plentifully of the forbidden fruit—to wit, the apple of discord ; and neither had found its flavour pleasant to the palate. By mutual consent, therefore, they promised to bear and forbear, and by the exercise of a mutual patience harmonious relations were preserved.

The slight effort that it had cost Louie to effect this understanding was amply repaid to her ; for she reaped golden harvests from Herwald's sweet disposition and readiness to make amends. He was always seeking now how to give her pleasure, and the strength of this new friendship was such, that it excited universal comment and not-always-to-be-concealed surprise.

Sternly as he had rebigated all attempts on Louie's part to subjugate and make him her slave, he now by a voluntary act of will placed himself at her disposal ; and though he still refused to submit to any weak fancies or caprices, and would argue with her on the absurdity of her fancies till all marvelled at his boldness, yet in his heart he was her faithful subject, and was assuredly paying homage to the woman, even while he was quietly uncrowning the queen.

This mixture of haughty independence and chivalrous courtesy was a great attraction to our Loo ; it at once repelled and allured her ; its novelty gave zest to her daily life ; and, above all, it invested Herwald with a certain halo of reverence and reserve, which his own merits could never have gained for him.

He was generous too : unasked, he drew forth from the storehouse of his talents things new and old for her use ; and, constituting himself her master, set vigorously to work to develop the unfinished mind, and lend grace to her varied efforts.

Louie had great abilities, but was too idle and pleasure-loving

to cultivate them ; and while she attempted many things, accomplished none ; music, painting, Italian, were all taken up and abandoned just as the fancy seized her, and her portfolio of unfinished drawings spoke volumes of the graceful but indolent hand that had sketched them.

This fault of incompleteness was a great eye-sore to Herwald, and he laboured patiently to eradicate it ; day by day he strove to rouse her efforts, partly by flattering her vanity and partly by appealing to her sense.

They were always together ; Louie could do nothing without him, and this sense of his necessity to her was very soothing to Herwald. In the morning they painted or illuminated, an occupation of which they were both very fond ; and in the afternoon he read Tennyson to her, taking care, however, that this reading should be very brief, and should on no account be carried on in the dusk ; and though Louie still lounged at times, and put her screen ominously to her lips, yet no restless movement betrayed incipient drowsiness, or called up the frown to Herwald's brow.

Sometimes they diversified it with Dante or Tasso ; at such times Louie looked beautifully virtuous, as, armed with a large dictionary, which however she never used, she placidly listened while Herwald descended into the 'Inferno' for her, and brought up from thence grand and terrible things to confront her.

The evenings, as usual, were devoted to music, and here too Herwald reigned paramount, as his great taste and unerring ear fitted him well as conductor of our amateur concerts.

Under his care Louie's voice increased in power and beauty, till she herself naïvely confessed to him that he must have provided her with a new one, since she scarcely recognised her own voice,

'I have done better,' he replied, smiling, 'for I have shown you the power of your resources, and how to apply them to the best purpose ; by these means I have doubled your wealth. The wise man, the miser, and the spendthrift, may be alike rich ; but the one hoards and the other is prodigal ; it is only the wise man who knows when to spend and when to withhold his hand.'

'And which of these do I resemble, oh, my master?' cried Louie, laughingly.

'The spendthrift, for you have wasted your substance and impoverished the richness of your voice by borrowed tones and strivings after great effects. You cannot sing like Grisi, Louie—what folly then to try ; and yet among amateur ballad singers many would own you their queen.'

Rare praise from Herwald, but Louie had worked well that week, and he would not stint her of her due.

Life is made up of alternate seasons of storm and calm, and no long level of peace is granted to us here. Sunnyside in this did not differ from other earthly homes, happy as we esteemed it ; and one morning we woke up to the fact that the last rift of snow had

melted from the lowlands, and that the feud had broken out again in a fresh place, and was raging fiercely. It happened in this wise.

A few days previously, a large irruption of Goths and Vandals, as Dudley irreverently termed the Thornton party, had made a descent upon Sunnyside, and had with much persuasion bidden us to a festive gathering at the Hermitage, an invitation that commenced with Dudley and went down to Halcot, whose wonderful performances on the flute and triangle had already gained him some renown in the little musical world around us.

'It is only a family party, and you must not disappoint us,' said Ada, in that touchingly plaintive voice that she used upon occasions; 'there is no one coming, is there, Belle? except old Captain Wyatt, and Mr. Fitzgerald of Fawly.'

Mr. Fitzgerald of Fawly was a new name in the village, and Louie pricked up her ears curiously, and asked who he was, a simple question, but one that made Ada simper and look foolish, while her sister replied, tossing her head, that he was a gentleman they had met during the London season; and mamma had taken a great fancy to him, and Dick had asked him down. He was of very good family, she believed, and awfully rich, and had a beautiful place down at Fawly.

This and much more did Belle obligingly inform us, while Ada played with her gloves, and glanced shyly under her eyelashes at Bruce; and it was at once understood by us all, that Bruce was supposed at the Hermitage to be too long making up his mind and coming to the point; and that Mr. Fitzgerald of Fawly was to be played against him on the evening in question.

The girls were so pressing in their invitation, that excuse was impossible, and at last it was arranged that all who cared should go; but when it came to the point, it was found that Nellie, that inveterate stay-at-home, intended to devote the evening in writing a long letter to Milly, and that Dudley would fain stop and help her do it; but not being rich in feminine wiles, or graceless enough to escape without fitting protest, he had suddenly bethought himself of some parish matters that he wished to talk over with Mr. Eger-ton, and had gone down to the parsonage an hour before the others started.

So Louie and Katie, escorted by Herwald, Bruce, and Halcot, were the only ones ready to join the party.

The little company, however, were in the finest humour; Herwald and Louie had been practising by themselves all day getting up solos and duets, and Bruce had been mimicking Belle to Katie, and sending her into fits of laughter; and if good looks and merry speeches could guarantee happiness, they were sure of a pleasant evening.

But the Fates (horrid old women!) had decreed otherwise, and put a stumbling-block and stone of offence in the person of Mr. Fitzgerald of Fawly; who, born under an unlucky star, was destined

to create nothing but confusion from the moment of his entrance to his exit from the Hermitage drawing-room.

This unfortunate scion of the aristocracy, being blessed with a critical eye, no sooner perceived Louie entering the room, leaning on Herwald's arm, than he bore down on his hostess, glass in eye, and demanded in lisping tones who that lovely woman could be.

Of course there was nothing for it but to introduce him, which accordingly Mrs. Thornton did, with the best possible grace, and had the pleasure of seeing the longed-for son-in-law attach himself with graceful pertinacity to her guest for the rest of the evening.

It was very hard, of course, but such accidents will happen in the best-regulated families, even with a manœuvring mother at the head; and especially was it hard for Ada to see the conquest of many a London ball snatched from her side in a moment, even though she preferred in her heart that most dilatory of wooers, Bruce. There was nothing for it, however, but to submit—'grin and bear it,' as Dudley would have said, and make good her chances in the other quarter.

In this fortune favoured her, for Bruce, being nettled by a chance word Katie had let slip at the beginning of the evening, fell into the trap which Ada had laid for him, and in five minutes more the curls were shaking over the rosy face, as foolish words and still more foolish flatteries were whispered into her willing ear.

Ah, well might Katie shiver and turn white and look imploringly into Herwald's eyes, as he came up to her corner, as if to ask him to take her away; but for once she met with no response, for Herwald's face looked dark and stern, as he drew himself up behind her chair with a lip that curled scornfully.

Once only did Katie feel that she was understood, and that a silent sympathy was in his heart for her. Once, as she saw Bruce bend over some flowers that Ada was gathering for him in the conservatory, and make believe to press them to his lips, an action that made Katie start and crimson with anger—did she feel a white-gloved hand laid gently on her arm, and a low voice whisper in her ear—

'He is at his mad pranks to-night, but they all mean nothing, dear Kitty.'

Half an hour later, as I was sitting dreaming over the fire, waiting for Dudley's ring, I was surprised to see Herwald make his appearance with a gloomy face, and throw himself down in the chair opposite me.

He had a headache, he said, and the lights and the music had increased it; so he had begged Mrs. Thornton to give him his congé and let him go; he had not been able to make himself agreeable, and so his room was better than his company.

It was impossible to discredit the headache, for there were palpable signs of it in the contracted forehead and heavy black-ringed eyes; but none the less did I know that outraged sensibility

or some mental suffering were at the bottom of it, and I determined that he should not make his escape from the room till he had told me all.

So I stirred the fire and threw on another log, and wheeled up an easy-chair close to it, and gave him a cushion for his head, and then I ordered up tea ; and while it brewed talked cheerfully to him, till the gloomy fit had passed and he could smile and answer me, and then it all came out.

He had had a miserable evening, he began, and everything had disgusted him ; he thought Mrs. Thornton a very under-bred person, and that she ought to be ashamed of herself to have brought up her girls in the way she had ; that dark-eyed one, Belle, had been flirting dreadfully with young Hazelwood.

'My dear Herwald,' I remonstrated, 'she is engaged to him ; they are to be married in the spring.'

'Is she? well, it did not seem like it ; he looked far more at Louie than he did at her ; I never saw a man stare so.'

'Poor fellow!' I ejaculated.

'Why so?' asked Herwald, rather savagely ; 'you are always pitying somebody ;' and then when I told him the truth, that poor Harry had loved Louie for years, and had at last made an offer to Belle in sheer desperation, he changed colour, and remained silent, till a fresh question was put to him : 'How did Bruce behave?'

'Bruce? Oh, he was disgusted with him, he never saw any one behave so badly in his life, and for his part, if he were Katie, he would never speak to him again ; he was playing with her and Ada shamefully ; it quite gave him the heart-ache to see the poor girl sitting alone in the corner pulling to pieces the pretty little breast-knot of camellias and fern-leaves that Bruce had brought her home that evening, with pitiful eyes that looked as if they would have brimmed over if they dared.

'Really he is more heartless than I thought him,' finished Herwald, 'and, if I were Dudley, I would remonstrate seriously with him on his conduct.'

'Dudley cannot,' I returned, 'Bruce is too hot-tempered to take a word from him, he would only become far more reckless than he is now. But come, Herwald, be frank with me, we are only beating about the bush ; this is not what has given you a headache :—has Louie been up to her old tricks, flirting with Mr. Fitzgerald and giving you the cold shoulder? You see you cannot deceive me, and you will be all the better for talking it quietly over.'

Thus pressed, Herwald at last consented to come to the point, and show where the secret sting lay.

It was true, Louie had flirted all the evening with Mr. Fitzgerald ; but as he had known from the first that she was a flirt, and always would amuse herself in this manner, he had thought little about it. So when Mr. Fitzgerald made his way up to the couch, and hung over it for an hour, laughing and whispering with her, he had taken

it as a matter of course ; the only thing that surprised him was, that she could be pleased with the attentions of such a man with his lisping voice and insufferable conceit ; and yet she had smiled and seemed to like him.

'In my opinion,' added the young cynic, 'women seem to take more naturally to a fool than to a wise man ; there is no cure for these things. You may shut up a flirt between four blank walls and she will coquet with her own shadow,' and then he took great pains to inform me, with many satirical comments, what it was that had so annoyed him.

When music was called for, and Louie, as prima donna, rose to perform her part, instead of beckoning Herwald to her side to arrange with him what song she should sing, she had submitted to be led up to the piano by Algernon Fitzgerald, and to turn over the portfolio, while he had stood patiently by her side, drawing off his gloves that he might be ready for the accompaniment as usual.

The choice fell on one of which the instrumental part was singularly difficult, and it had required both time and care on Herwald's part to master it perfectly. What was his disgust, then, when Louie blandly turned to Mr. Fitzgerald, and, telling him that she had heard he was an excellent musician, bade him sit down and play for her !

With the utmost alacrity he obeyed, while Herwald walked scornfully away, but not before he had heard with secret triumph that Louie had broken down twice under her pianist's innumerable blunders, and he had seen the provoking easiness and good-humour with which she had borne the infliction, making him try another and a simpler one when she had finished that song.

Stung by what he termed her ingratitude and fickleness, and wounded to the heart by the fact that she could forget his very existence when it suited her, he had made apologies to his hostess, and with one brief word to poor weary Katie, made his way from the room.

Of course there was nothing for it but to strive to comfort him, and own that I felt bitterly angry with Louie ; but though this concession to his opinion pleased him, he would not be mollified, and as soon as Dudley's ring gave him a pretext for retiring, he gladly made his escape, and only just in time, as it happened, for they all came home in another quarter of an hour, the party having broken up earlier than they expected.

And a tired dispirited little band they looked. Halcot had found it slow, and was dreadfully sleepy ; Katie looked tired and wan, Bruce sulky, and Loo decidedly cross—that is to say, cross for her. I could see it in the way she sat shivering in her wraps, yawning, and looking at herself by turns.

When I had said good-night to the others, and had tried to rouse Katie to a fireside chat, which however she avoided by taking flight and locking herself up in her room—I followed Louie as she walked

sleepily along, trailing her furs on the ground, and, under pretext of helping her to undress, treated her to a sound lecture.

I talked, and I talked, and I talked, till I grew breathless and perfectly angry. Louie had been unclasping the necklace from her round white throat when I began, and held it loosely for a moment to examine the pendants, but before I had done she had worked wonders with it. She had formed bracelets on her arms, each more varied than the last, and constructed it into a stomacher; she had woven it into her ruddy hair, till it looked like the tiara of our empress; and then she turned round, just as I was growing mad with the silent serenity of her trickeries, and asked if it did not become her.

'It would do for a fancy ball, Nell, with my black lace shawl for a mantilla, and I could take the character of—what's her name of Spain?—Ferdinand's wife—the one who loved Don Carlos—no, that was a Philip—Dear me, how tiresome, I always do forget my history, and no wonder, when I am so sleepy. Come, say good-night, there's a good girl, and don't talk any more nonsense. I told you he was a boy; and no one but a boy would have behaved in that foolishly impulsive way this evening. I was quite ashamed of him. I can't think what the Thorntons will say to his running away like that. The fact is, we have all spoiled him, till he does not know how to behave.'

'It is you who do not,' I began, in the most fiery manner; but Louie would have no more of it, so she laid her strong white hands on me, and kissing me twice, fairly put me out of the room.

But I did not sleep much that night, for Herwald paced his chamber till the small hours of the morning, and till I was worn out with listening to him.

And so the feud broke out afresh, and for three days raged fiercely.

The first morning Louie met him with her usual easy smile, but Herwald merely gave her a silent touch of the hand, and passed on, and all breakfast-time he sat sorting his letters and speaking little, and directly the meal was over, carried them off to his own room.

The snow had entirely disappeared, but a small drizzling rain had set in, so that it was impossible for any lover of comfort to stir abroad; and as it was the hour for her painting lesson, Loo enveloped herself in her bib-apron, and preparing her palette and easel, sat down and waited for Herwald, but no Herwald appeared.

'Have you seen Mr. Delorme?' she inquired of Charlotte, as she brought in a note at that moment.

'He is up in his room, Miss Louie, writing letters; he told Hester to fetch them at twelve o'clock.'

Louie coloured a little, and then commenced painting, but soon wearying of it, took to reading some new periodical that Belle had lent her, over which she fell asleep, till the dinner-bell roused her, and she came in to find Herwald in his usual place.

He did not address her, and the gravity and sternness of his manner was not inviting for her to begin ; but she lingered long in the dining-room afterwards, while he played with his dogs and Rill, in the hope that he would speak some reconciliatory word, and provide some amusement for the afternoon ; but Herwald was inexorable, and offered himself instead as Katie's companion to Stony Cliff.

Poor Loo, it was very uncomfortable to be treated so, and on a wet day too, when she was dependent on him for entertainment ; and I was not at all surprised to see her betake herself to her rocking-chair and a long musing fit that lasted till the twilight came on.

Neither Katie nor Herwald appeared till tea was over, and then they had a cosy little meal by themselves. The walk and each other's company had cheered them up, and they presently entered the drawing-room, looking better and brighter, and Herwald challenged me to a game of chess.

Now Loo loved chess passionately. Herwald had ever been her favourite opponent, and she would play with no one else while he was near, and it was especially trying for her, when she had lacked amusement so sorely all day, to see us sit down for an hour's battle. Even Dudley pitied her, and invited her to backgammon or draughts ; but Loo's spirit was up, and she would have none of them, so played and sung to herself till the evening was over.

The next day commenced just the same : Herwald treated her with cold politeness, only speaking to her some chance word, as necessity compelled ; shut himself up in his room again all the morning, and in the afternoon went down to the works with Dudley and Bruce ; and as Katie had promised to spend the evening at the parsonage, where she was a great favourite, he coolly invited himself and went too.

The next morning at breakfast-time, Bruce, suspecting how matters lay, was foolish enough to attempt to chaff them both, but Herwald's brow grew black, and he answered the jest by such pungent satire, that poor Bruce turned red as fire and became silent.

I had expected to see Herwald retire to his own room as usual after this, but, to my surprise, he followed us into the drawing-room, and taking his school plans to a side table, began drawing silently.

Louie stood and watched him for a minute, as if doubtful whether to speak or not ; but the frown still lay heavy on Herwald's forehead, and his lip curled cynically, and so her heart failed her, and she sat down quietly to her illumination, while Katie and I worked and chatted in a corner by ourselves.

Once only Herwald raised his head, and cast a swift keen glance at her, as she bent with drooping hair over the pencilled scroll ; he had traced the design for her with much elaborate care, one afternoon, and she had leant over his chair and watched him as he did it, and had praised the skill of his artistic fingers, telling him

that she should frame and hang it in her room, for she had never seen one she liked so much ; and now she was listlessly laying on the colours with her mind far away, and the beautiful scroll would be spoiled.

Presently she pushed it from her, and uncovered her embroidery frame and began the shading of a rose in the same listless way, till, in her absent fit, the needleful of floss silk trailed from her hand, and Max reminded her of it by trying to swallow it, needle and all, and after that she did no more work.

It was again a wet afternoon, but Katie, being healthily indifferent to the changes of weather, announced her intention of starting to the town to match some silk ; but this time Herwald did not offer to escort her, he was going on with his plans, he said, and should carry them into the Oak parlour, as the light from the bay window was strongest.

So Halcot took the board, and Herwald was following him with the rule and compasses, when Louie, who was standing by the window looking idly out at the rain, called out suddenly, 'Come back, Herwald, I want to speak to you.'

Her tone was peremptory and almost abrupt, and the proud flush mounted to Herwald's brow, as he hesitated, still holding the door in his hand, till she repeated her command and swept towards him as if to compel him to obey.

'What do you want, Louie ?' he asked, coldly, as he closed the door and came forward.

'That I want you is quite a sufficient reason for your obliging me, at least it should be with a gentleman, though by what code of politeness you frame your present behaviour, I am at a loss to imagine ; for stranger conduct than yours, Mr. Delorme, during these last three days, I have never seen before. May I ask the reason of this sudden alteration of manner ?'

And Louie looked as she spoke, as Louie had never looked before, with those great mild eyes full of a grieved displeasure, and her red lip quivering perceptibly.

Herwald's face grew dark as he replied—

'You may ask, Louie, but I see no necessity for my answering that question.'

'Why not, pray ?'

'Because the mode and expression of it are alike distasteful to me,' he answered, laying down his compasses and folding his arms. 'I thought you knew me better by this time than to suppose that I would reply to anything so derogatory to my dignity.'

'Your dignity ! ah, Herwald, you think of little beyond that, I imagine, or you would hardly so wound the feelings of one for whom you so lately professed friendship.'

'A friendship which you have made me regret,' he returned, bitterly ; 'no, no, Louie, do not delude yourself or me by applying such titles of esteem to the slight bonds that unite us. Friendship

belongs only to the equal mind and soul, but between you and me—pshaw—it is like a chain constructed of rose leaves, that a breath dissolves, a wandering wind will blow its fragments to nothing, and then what remains?’ and Herwald laughed scornfully.

‘I read your pretty allegory aright,’ said Louie, sadly, ‘and I know what wandering wind has blown us two asunder. Go, you are not my friend, or you would not suffer such a trifle to estrange us, or let a momentary fault create such cruel jealousy and distrust. I thought better of you—yes, indeed I did, and I was just growing to esteem and like you, and to feel grateful for your constant kindness; but now, now you have shown me that Louie’s errors are more to you than her virtues, and that you can neither forgive nor forget them. You may be disappointed and hurt, Herwald, and so am I, and not only that, but grieved and wounded to the heart;’ and flushing to her broad white forehead, Louie turned and walked quietly out of the room, leaving Herwald still standing there motionless and pale as death.

The sound of the closing door roused him, for he started forward and cried, ‘Louie, Louie,’ in a voice that was full of pain; then remembering himself he came towards the fireplace and laid his head down on the mantelpiece on his folded hands.

‘Herwald,’ I exclaimed in terror, ‘my dear boy,’ and the work fell from my lap as I sprang to his side, and prayed him to tell me what had happened.

‘Oh, Nell,’ he cried, ‘it is all over with me! I love her—I love her, and I have never loved before.’

And then in a tone of anguish ‘Oh, Nell, what shall I do?’

‘Do, Herwald, do!—why, be a man and bear your fate bravely, whatever it may be. Come, it is no time for despondency—up and tell her all that is in your heart, and see how she will answer you.’

‘I tell her—I! Do you want her to mock me?’ he cried.

‘Never; she cannot do it; she is a true woman—ay, in spite of all her faults and follies, she is. Besides, you owe it to her; no honourable man should withhold the love he feels for a girl, or leave her in ignorance of his intentions; a candid avowal of your sentiments will gain her esteem, even if it will not win her love. Believe me, Herwald, I am only speaking for your good. Ah! if you only knew how proudly I should greet you as my brother.’

‘Would you, Nellie?’ he said, lifting up his face with a strange sad smile on it.

‘My dear, I would; for there is none that I love better upon earth, after Dudley and Bruce, and—’ I hesitated—‘Keith; and I should think better of Louie, and be more fond and proud of her, it she would love you too.’

‘Vain hope,’ he answered, sighing. ‘Who am I that I should win and wear her for my own?’

‘You are yourself, Herwald, a knightly gentleman “sans peur et

sans reproche ;” and then in his pleasure at my speech, he reddened over his fair beardless face like a girl.

‘Are you surprised, Nellie, that I love her?—ah, I have kept my secret well. None of you knew, and she herself less than all, what I thought of her that first evening, and how when she came out from the darkness that night, I could have fallen at her feet and owned her for my queen ; how I loved her even then ! It has been a troubled time to me ; joy and sorrow mingled ; sorrow at the hopelessness of my love ; joy at seeing and being near her. She has called me a boy—but what boy could so regulate his pulses and control his heart, while such passion as mine was wasting it ? It wanted a man’s will and a man’s strength, and even then to fail miserably.’

And then what passed between us I need not tell ; but presently there came new strength and courage to support him, and he gave me his sacred promise that he would tell Louie all, and patiently abide by her decision.

‘But even then I will not give up hope, until I learn from her lips that she loves another.’

At this minute Louie re-entered, and came up to us with her gliding step.

‘Here is a letter for you, Nellie, with the Lancashire post-mark ; I suppose from your little friend, Milly ; I found it lying in the hall, as I came down ;’ and she was passing away, when Herwald suddenly arising, asked her in a low tone to stop and listen to him ; and Louie wonderingly obliged.

And then he told her all : calmly and reverentially he stood beside her, and without faltering or hesitation made his manly declaration of love ; and when he had finished, he waited silently till she should lift her bent head and answer him.

He had told her all ; his loneliness ; his longing for some object on which to fix his affections ; his fastidiousness and difficulty of choice. He told her that some mystic influence, strong as destiny itself, seemed ever to beckon him to Sunnyside, and that he had discovered the first evening what that influence had been. He owned that he had struggled fiercely against the new fascination, because he deemed her cold and unworthy of his love ; but how all his efforts had been in vain, and day by day and hour by hour he had only learnt to prize and cherish her more ; and then raising his head like a young king, he laid himself, his name, and his possessions, at her feet, and bade her take or leave them as her heart and conscience should alike dictate.

And Louie sat and listened with folded hands and mute downcast face, till he had done, but when she answered him her voice was low and sweet, and her eyes dim with tears.

‘It is a proud moment to me, Herwald, when you, whom I so deeply respect and love, deem me worthy to share your life ; your wife I cannot be, but your friend—ah, you must never refuse to call

me that again !' and she stretched out her hands to him, which he caught and pressed to his lips.

'And you will not come to me?' Oh, the passionate yearning of his tone!

'No, I cannot, for I do not love you as a woman should love her husband, and it would be a sin and a shame to marry you without. Forget, then, though I never can, the words you have spoken to me to-day, and let all things be as they were before, with this one difference, that I shall ever hold you in my heart as the noblest man I know.'

Thus spoke Louie with her beautiful face paling with emotion, and a moment afterwards she rose and softly left the room.

CHAPTER XXX.

'Talk not of wasted affection; affection never is wasted;
If it enrich not the heart of another, its waters, returning
Back to their springs like the rain, shall fill them full of refreshment;
That which the fountain sends forth returns again to the fountain.'

Longfellow.

'THE world goes up, and the world goes down,' says the quaint old rhyme, and we were soon to experience the wisdom of the adage, for three days after the memorable evening on which Herwald confessed his love, came adverse news from the north, and sundered our happy little party by depriving us of our Katie.

We had just seated ourselves round the breakfast table that morning, when Dudley entered with his hands full of letters, one of which he flung across to Katie, saying—

'There is your Edinburgh letter, lassie, that you have been expecting so long; I see it is in Aunt Margaret's pretty flimsy hand, so tell us quickly what the dear old lady has to say for herself.'

'So I will, when I've read it,' answered Katie, with a smile, but the smile died away abruptly as her eye glanced over the first few lines, and she passed it to me without a word, and Dudley read it over my shoulder.

It was from Aunt Margaret, and was very brief and sad; the minister had met with a severe accident during their stay at Edinburgh; Deacon Clyde's vixenish mare had shied while he was riding her, and had thrown him with his head against the curbstone. He was brought home insensible, and they feared concussion of the brain, as he had lain ever since in a state of lethargy, bordering midway between life and death.

As the danger, though imminent, was not immediate, Aunt Margaret had not cared to startle Katie with a telegram, and had

Written instead ; but none the less was she sure that her darling would come to her at once, in this her hour of trouble ; and thus with many a loving message, the letter ended.

It was very sad, and I could see it all so plainly ; the dark tall house in the dim close of Old Town, Edinburgh, the little three-cornered room with the great blue bed, beside which Aunt Margaret would sit all day, smoothing her muslin apron with failing tremulous hands, while Deacon Clyde's fussy little wife, with her skirts pulled through her pocket-holes, and her front of flaxen curls bobbing over her black bead-like eyes, would trot fifty times in an hour between the creaking door and the ebony cabinet, as she did when I fell ill one day, and Katie and she cosseted me together. And the minister would lie—but here Herwald's clear concise voice broke upon my musing—

'What is the earliest train by which you can start, Katie?'

'9.15 to-morrow,' she returned, 'unless Dudley will let me take the mail train for to-night.'

'On no account, dear Kitty,' replied her cousin ; 'I could not consent to anything so improper ; rest content with us these few hours longer, you see Aunt Margaret says decidedly that there is no immediate danger.'

'In that case,' said Herwald, 'I shall be your escort for the first hour or two, at least so far as our paths lie together.'

Then, as Louie looked up quickly as she followed Katie out of the room, and the rest of us uttered an exclamation of surprise—

'I am aware that my mode of announcing my departure is singularly abrupt, but your astonishment will be lessened when I inform you that I mean to return in three weeks, or a month, at the latest.'

'Three weeks, man ! perhaps you will have the goodness to explain why you are going away at all?'

'With pleasure.' And Herwald handed to Dudley the letter he had just been perusing ; 'read that, and you will see for yourself what impudent fellows those tenants of mine are, and how they require their landlord's constant presence among them.'

'But can't your steward settle all these matters without your bothering your head with them?'

'He could, I dare say, but I am rather a rigid disciplinarian, and do not care to delegate much of my authority to a subordinate ; besides which, he is too much of an easy-goer, and lets them infringe by inches on our feudal rights. No, I must manage all this myself, call the rascals to account, and make them eat humble-pie on pain of forfeiture of the lease ; and then, while I am there, I must go over my school plans with Allan and Wright, and see that they begin at once getting the workmen and materials together. I am going to make Allan my clerk of the works ; he has twice as much brains in him as Duncan and Wright put together.'

'But, my dear fellow, this won't take three weeks or a month.'

'Won't it? then I beg to differ from you, and as great haste is bad speed, I mean to go on my own deliberate way; but I see no reason why I should not charter a companion to enliven my solitary home, so I am going to ask Bruce to give me the pleasure of his company.'

'Me?' cried Bruce, evidently much surprised. 'Nonsense, you don't want me, Herwald.'

'But I do,' he returned eagerly, 'I want you awfully, only I was afraid to ask, lest you should find it dull. You see I shall be out riding half the day, but if you do not mind being left a good deal to yourself, and can find entertainment in my billiard-room, horses, and dogs, and will be content with Allan for your squire, and me as your evening companion, you will not lack resources—but stop—I have a thought, why don't you bring Halcot? I have promised he shall come some day, and no time is like the present; you will find him both useful and amusing.'

'I should like it of all things,' said Bruce, and to tell the truth, he looked extremely flattered, while Halcot clapped his hands in an ecstasy of joy. 'But how about the factory, Dudley? I don't want to shirk work.'

'You can be well spared, at least for a fortnight. And look here, Bruce, if things turn out badly with poor Uncle Cameron, you cannot do less than go on to Edinburgh; as Keith is away, no one but you can so well perform a son's part.'

'What do you mean by that?' asked Bruce, reddening and biting his lip.

'What I say; I see that you understand me, so there is no need for my making any further remark; but that I am sure that it is your rightful prerogative, I would offer myself in your stead.'

'But don't you think, in that case, they would like you best?' asked Bruce, huskily.

'By no means. Aunt Margaret, it is true, knows you but little, and that only by report, but I am sure that she will value highly your business powers and shrewd good sense. 'Come, don't be foolish,' as Bruce again attempted to speak, 'and for Heaven's sake don't stand so blindly in your own light; let Katie see you at the manse, and in your own true character, and she—' but here Dudley, becoming aware of the boys' round eyes and widely-open ears, broke off abruptly with a smile.

'And you really think,' continued Bruce, pretending to dust the crumbs from his waistcoat, 'that you can spare me for three weeks?'

'My dear boy, for a month, if it comes to that; business is not very brisk, and you had no holiday last year. Give Herwald his fortnight, and then go on to Edinburgh or the manse, as future circumstances guide you.'

'Thanks,' replied Bruce, briefly, and he left the room; but though this monosyllable was all he said then or afterwards to his brother, yet the warm look of gratitude that lighted up his face was

more than a reward for all the extra work that his absence would entail on Dudley.

Shortly after that I went up to poor Katie.

It was a busy day for us all, for not only had Katie's and Herwald's trunks to be packed but Bruce's and Halcot's ; and the latter was in such a fever of excitement that there was no doing anything with him. Even while I was sorting his shirts and entreating him to tell me what had become of his missing collars, he had rushed down the lane without his hat, to tell his old chum Seymour that he was going away, perhaps for a whole month, a piece of intelligence that silenced Seymour and made him very dull.

It was a miserable, trying day. Though little was said we were all greatly shocked by the intelligence of the minister's illness, and the silent sympathy manifested on all sides for Katie seemed to touch her to the heart.

All through the day she bore herself well and bravely, making her preparations for her departure with her usual forethought and alacrity, and showing by no outward emotion what she felt at thus leaving us all ; the only thing I noticed was that she avoided with tacit instinct all attempts at condolence, and never even looked at me if she could help it, but when she did so her eyes invariably filled with tears.

But nothing could exceed the kindness of Bruce to her, and the gentle gravity of his manner. Quiet as he was, and he was very quiet, he manifested in a thousand little ways the innate goodness of his heart ; and at once constituting himself her protector, shielded her from all unnecessary trouble ; and though she spoke less to him than to the others, and acknowledged his kindness by no special word, yet the softened look in her dark eyes spoke volumes to us all.

Wearily the evening wore to its close, and it was with a sense of relief that we all retired to our several rooms, where we need no longer hide with an embarrassed show of ease and cheerfulness the fear that lay dormant at our hearts.

I was just preparing to extinguish my candle when a low tap came to my door, and opening it, there stood Katie, with her bright hair all unbound and a scared wistful look on her face, as she begged to be allowed to sleep with me.

And then as the darkness covered us, and chill haunting shadows emerged from hidden corners and seemed to people the room with impalpable shapes of undeveloped terror, Katie crept silently to my bosom and cried herself to sleep.

When we awoke next morning, the pattering of sleet against the window-panes augured ill for the comfort of the travellers, and it was a chilly disconsolate party that gathered round the lighted breakfast table.

There was no pretence made at cheerfulness except on Halcot's part, and it was rather difficult for him to keep it up, while Seymour

pulled such a long face, and looked as though it were a parting of years rather than weeks—and it was at once comical and sad to watch them both.

Katie did not eat or speak, and Herwald was very silent, and every one despatched the meal as quickly as possible, and then gathered in the hall to help or impede the process of getting the luggage carried down the lane, where the carriage was waiting for it at the stile.

Thither at last we all repaired, despite the sleet, to wave our last farewells from the old trysting place; and there for a moment Herwald stood with Louie's hand clasped in his, as if he could never let it go.

'You will wish me God speed, Louie?'

'Certainly,' she answered brightly, 'and not only that, but a quick return to us; we shall miss you sorely, Herwald, and shall be only too glad to welcome you back;' and then I heard no more, for Katie was calling to me from the carriage window and I hurried to her.

The little brown head nestled down to me for the last time, as I bade God bless her, and wrapping her more warmly in the folds of her plaid confided her to Bruce's care.

'Good-bye, dear Nell, oh, good-bye, good-bye,' I heard her cry, as they drove off, and then Dudley drew me away, my dress and hair being heavy with snow.

What a strange lonely place Sunnyside seemed, half depopulated and with great gaps in the family circle; and how odd it was, when Rill and Charlie had gone to bed and we three settled ourselves down for the evening. Dudley took up the paper, but soon grew restless and threw it aside, and commenced promenading the room in Bruce's polar-bear fashion; Louie lounged drowsily in her rocking-chair with her novel lying in her lap, and I stitched at my little work-table, and sighed till I could sigh no more from sheer dulness.

The next day it was rather better, and after that Dudley and I fell into our Darby-and-Joan ways, and had long twilight talks, in which we discussed all possible and impossible things, and built our air-bubble castles, each one brighter than the last.

But Louie was disconsolate. Hide it as she might, it was easy to see that she missed Herwald every hour of the day—missed him in her occupations and amusements, from which all zest and interest seemed taken away, and missed him for himself and the delicate attentions with which he had enveloped her, anticipating her wishes before they were uttered, and giving her that silent homage that was quietly but surely winning her heart.

A strange sweet change was passing over our Loo in those days. Herwald's subtle influence under the title and pledge of friendship was stirring up her sluggish impulses, and inciting her to become what he so longed for her to be—a whole-hearted, noble woman.

Hour by hour and day by day, I saw her struggle with her indolence of will, and apply herself to her several pursuits, that she might surprise him with her progress when he should return.

But she never talked of him, and rarely mentioned his name ; and when I strove to smooth the way to some conversation on the subject, that I might further his cause with a little judicious praise, she would listen to me in perfect silence, till a chance question disturbed her, and then she would break it off.

One day there came a letter to her with the Delorme crest and seal ; it was lying on her plate when she came down-stairs, and she took it up with a little conscious flush, and then laid it aside. Nothing was said about it all day, but the following morning she posted an answer with her own hand.

The next week there came another, and the following week one more, and then I understood that the friends were beginning a pleasant correspondence, and meant to keep it all to themselves ; but as time went on the dreamy look deepened in Louie's eyes, and a shade almost of sadness came over her face, till I had almost ceased to notice it under the pressure of new and strange events.

One morning, when the letter bag was handed to Dudley, he drew from its contents two black-edged letters—one from Bruce, the other in an unknown hand ; and hastily perusing the first with a grieved face, he passed it over to me. It was very brief ; the minister was dead, and he, Bruce, was about to start for Edinburgh on the instant receipt of Katie's letter, in which she had prayed him to come to them at once, as her mother was ill, and she herself too much distressed to enter into the complicated business matters that were waiting her.

Bruce just wrote this and enclosed poor Katie's pencilled scrawl, and added in a postscript that he had left Halcot at Hurst-hall, till Herwald should bring him home ; he was very well, he said, and enjoying himself mightily.

'And now, Nellie,' said Dudley, looking up from his second letter, 'I have another painful surprise for you. Your godmother, Mrs. Hazeldean, of Hazlitt, is dead.'

'My dear Dudley !'

'She died suddenly one night last week in a sort of fit, and when her maid went to her bedside in the morning, at her usual hour for rising, life was quite extinct.'

'Oh, my poor godmother, what a terrible end ! Who has written to give you these particulars ?'

'Her solicitor, Mr. Delany ; but that is not all, for he requires your presence up in London by twelve o'clock to-morrow, that you may be present at the opening of the will.'

'Only I ?—surely Louie is to be there too ?'

'No, only the eldest daughter, Helen Marion Mortimer. So I suppose, Miss Nellie, you are coming in for some nice little legacy,

—though, now I come to think of it, poor Mrs. Hazeldean always called Loo her favourite.'

'Yes,' cried Loo, 'till I thwarted her, and called her a wicked woman to her face; after that, I suppose I forfeited my chance. Never mind, Philip will be righted now, and come into his own again; Nellie tells me he and Rose have been very anxious about their future.'

'Indeed they have. Philip's long illness deprived her of all her little savings, and when the last letter came from Ventnor, it said that he was still invalided, and would be utterly incapacitated for work; and she did not know what they were to do when all their money was gone.

'She would have had to become the bread-winner, I suppose, and maintain herself and him. What a wretched life for them! Poverty would be unendurable to a man like Philip, with his luxurious and extravagant habits, and before long he would have worn out himself and her too with his querulous railings against fate.'

'No; Rose says he is much improved, and tries to curb his impetuous temper, though at times, of course, it is beyond his control in his weak nervous state. But he is very gentle and grateful to her, and Rose thinks that something of the old love is returning to him, for he is far less restless and miserable, and talks cheerfully of the time when he shall be well, and can take her to some of his favourite places. "Vain hope," she writes, "for long before that happy time arrives I shall have to tell him we are penniless."'

'One could almost say, humanly speaking,' pondered Dudley, 'that this sad event happening just now is not so lamentable as it seems. But now we have little time to spare, Nellie, if we are to be in town to-night.'

'To-night!'

'Yes, unless you want to rise at 5 a.m. to-morrow—rather a chilly proceeding on a winter's morning, and in that case you will lack your escort, who will never get up at that unearthly hour to please anybody. No, let us be reasonable; you put your house in order, and prepare me an early luncheon, and we will get up by six or seven, in time for a cozy tea with Mr. and Mrs. Philip.'

'Shall we meet them, then?' I exclaimed eagerly; 'you never told me that.'

'How silly you must be, then, not to know the heir-at-law must be forthcoming as well as Helen Marion Mortimer; they are in London already, as it happens, and we are going to put up at the very same hotel. There, don't ask me any more questions, you chatterbox, for I'm off to the works.'

So he went, and at the appointed hour we were on our way, and after a short but bitterly cold journey, found ourselves at the London Bridge terminus.

There, amid a seething shouting mass of passengers, porters, and cabmen, I was huddled and hustled to the refreshment-room,

where a cup of hot coffee revived my exhausted faculties, and then we got into a cab and drove rapidly off.

Often as I had been to London, it was still a deliciously novel sight to me; and I found ample amusement in watching the crowds that ebbed to and fro on the slippery darkened pavement; and I was quite sorry when we stopped so soon at the door of a handsome private-looking hotel.

Several waiters received us, one of whom, on hearing our name, bade Dudley follow him directly, as Captain and Mrs. Hazeldean had given orders that we were to be conducted to their apartment as soon as we arrived.

Rose Meredith—Mrs. Hazeldean, well, it still sounded strange; but I had no time for wondering, as we were already entering a long well-lighted drawing-room, with a blazing fire half heaped to the chimney at one end; and a lady in deep mourning, with soft shining bands of gray hair, who was rising to greet us.

'Is it you, Helen? how glad I am to see you again, my dear;' and still holding me by the hand, she welcomed Dudley warmly, and then, placing me on the couch beside her, busied herself with my wraps.

'My husband will be here directly; he has only gone down to the coffee-room to speak to a friend of his. We hardly expected you by this train; but I'm so pleased you have come;' and as she said this, she stroked back my hair with the fond kind smile of Rose Meredith of old.

But it was not Rose Meredith, it was Mrs. Hazeldean, a mild soft-eyed woman with a low plaintive voice and pleasant motherly ways; all the sternness and depression gone, all the hungry fluttering of the hands, and replaced by a benignant repose that was very restful to see.

And then Philip came in, and at the sound of his step Rose's gray eyes became bright and dark, and the flush deepened on her pale face as she rose hastily to assist him with her arm across the room.

And this wreck of a man who crept so slowly towards us, with wasted limbs and stooping shoulders, was the proud, cynical Captain Hazeldean whom I had once regarded with a mixture of fear and aversion.

It seemed as if years of suffering had passed over him; his face was drawn and bloodless, and his forehead deeply lined; he was becoming bald too, and a short yellow beard altered the expression of the lower part of his face, so that the man looked prematurely old; his chest was hollow, and a dry hard cough impeded his feeble utterance, and only the undimmed lustre of the eyes remained to tell what Philip Hazeldean had been in the days when health and strength and youth had been his.

Deeply shocked, I put my hand in his without speaking, while Rose looked imploringly, as if to entreat me not to notice the change, and Philip said—

'You find me an altered man, Helen Mortimer; I have seen the best of my life. Is this your eldest brother? it is long since we met, Dudley, but you at least are unchanged, and the years have passed lightly over your head;' and then, guided tenderly by his wife, he sank down on the couch, breathing painfully, while she stooped over him and wiped the drops from his brow.

'Don't talk any more just now, Philip, you are exhausted with climbing the stairs. Did not Major Haughton or Captain Dale offer to see you to your room?'

'No, they were all too busy talking. What a merry crew those fellows are, to be sure—too merry for me, I can tell you; they have worn me out. Just give me a glass of wine, Rose, and let me rest quietly a minute, and then I shall be more ready to enjoy our friends for the rest of the evening.'

That night, when, after a long pleasant evening I retired to my room, and Rose followed me to see after my comforts and speak a few last words, I could not help expressing my pleasure at witnessing the peaceful change that had passed over her life.

'What a faithful nature yours must be,' I continued, 'that the bitter sufferings and wrongs of years should not be able to deaden the old love. It is almost a matter of surprise to me that Philip should still be so dear to you; and yet you told me once that the passionate love was gone?'

'And so it was; the fire that wastes, if neglected, must die out in time, and my love and my suffering under the misery of Heaven grew less as the years went on; but I always cared for him, always, and would have laid down my life for him gladly, even while he spurned me most. Those were bitter days,' said Rose, sighing, 'and they have left their evidences here,' passing her hand over her gray hair, 'but I never mean to think of them more, they are forgiven as though they had never been.'

'And the old love has come back?'

'Ah, can you wonder at it?' and her tender eyes filled with tears. 'How could I help it, when his mutilated helplessness appealed to all my womanly compassion; when he lay there wasting away and feeble as a child, with no one in the world to care for him but I; and he, my husband—my husband, and the father of my boy! Helen,' she continued, folding her pale hands, 'I love him, I love Philip better now than in the days when we whispered our first young vows in Fern Hollow Down by the cliffs; when my hair was brown as the chestnuts in my lap, and he said that there was no one in the world so beautiful as Rose Meredith to him.'

'And you are happy?'

'Yes, I am happy; peace and sober content are mine, for I know now that I am necessary to him, and that he would not part with his gray-haired wife for all that life could offer him; and I am happy, though I know that at no very distant day it will please Heaven to ordain that we shall part.'

'Part! oh, Rose, do you mean he is as ill as that?'

'He will never be better, my child; he is a broken man; but for such love as mine there is no bitterness in this thought of parting between us; "no earthly separation can leave us desolate." Once, when my beauty was fading and my heart nigh to break, I offered to Heaven the impious prayer, that his love might be given back to me at any cost, even at the sacrifice of his life or mine. It was a brief summer madness that breathed that prayer, and it was soon repented; but look, Helen, my friend—so surely as the restored love is poured into my bosom, so surely is his dear life ebbing slowly away. But, hush, we must talk no more, for he is waiting for me, and he will not sleep until I read to him. Good-night, dear, good-night;' and with a kiss and something that sounded like a blessing she left me.

My thoughts were sad that night, but they could not keep me awake, and long before midnight I was dreaming pleasantly that Keith was coming over to me in a boat that sailed placidly on a golden sea, and that Rose waded towards him, knee-deep in water, with her hair floating round her like a mermaid's, and guided him to land.

We had a quiet breakfast next morning, we three, and just before Mr. Delany arrived Philip came down, and dragged himself wearily to the sofa.

I had met Mr. Delany before at Hazlitt, and remembered him as an elderly white-headed man, who used to sit chatting with poor Mrs. Hazeldean, and taking snuff plentifully. He recollected me too, and had a pleasant greeting smile and word before we drew our chairs decorously to the table, and waited for him to begin.

It is many a long year since that day, and I cannot now recall to memory the exact wording of that strange Will.

I know there was a long list of lesser legacies to old servants and dependents, before he came, reading slowly and ponderously, to the part where the testator, being then of sound body and mind, bequeathed the bulk of her entire personal property, amounting in all to eighty-five thousand pounds, together with the manor, hall, and lands of Hazlitt, to her god-daughter, Helen Marion Mortimer, with the one stipulation that she should allow, during the period of his life, the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds per annum to her nephew, Philip Hazeldean.

When this startling announcement was read there was a great hum of astonishment. Dudley sprang to his feet, and then sat down again, while a sudden mist seemed to rise before my eyes and blot out the room and the people in it.

What were my thoughts that moment? ah, I am ashamed to say; a sudden whirlwind of ideas seemed to surge through my heart and brain, and to pass and repass with a velocity that deprived me of all power of reasoning.

Eighty-five thousand pounds!—there suddenly spread before me

a dazzling sea—a sea of gold, and its waves were bringing one who was dear to me ‘through life to death,’—one who was serving in a weary exile for the Rachel of his love.

Let no one say proudly that he can surmount temptation, for we know not how weak we are till we are tempted—till some brilliant vision of hope blot out the wrong and confuse the right, as for one giddy uncertain moment it bewildered me.

For while Mr. Delany’s babbling far-away voice wandered meaninglessly on, my thoughts, winged with an intolerable impulse, were skimming the ocean, and had arrived to where my lonely Keith was working out his heart’s blood beneath the burning sun, that he might the sooner come back to me and Sunnyside; and look! how the golden waves are lapping at his feet with their message of Nellie’s love; the little boat, the rippling sunlit sea, last night’s dream. Ah me, the yearning of a passionate heart just learning the strength of its love!

And then I thought of the manse, its good minister gone, Aunt Margaret in her widowed loneliness, and Katie in her pure unselfish grief; and I thought how the golden sea would bring back the son and brother to their hearthstone and make their sad hearts sing for joy. And then my bent head was suddenly raised, and Rose’s sweet kiss of peace fell like dew on my hot brow.

‘Look up, Helen—we are all waiting to congratulate you. Why, your eyes are full of tears, love—you cannot think we are sorry, Philip and I, that this rich gift has passed to you—nay, cheer up—much blessing and much good attend you and it.’

But answer made I none, for the strange beating at my heart, as I rose and crossed the room to where the lawyer sat clearing his throat over his papers.

‘Which part of the Will relates to me, Mr. Delany? show me the exact place.’

‘This, my dear young lady—look, here is your name, clear as print, Helen Marion Mortimer, and a nice pretty name it is, too. The rest is only servants’ legacies, and so forth.’

‘Good,’ I answered, ‘I understand;’ and then I took it in my hand, and knelt down by the sofa, where Philip lay with shaded face and weak irrepressible tears starting through his wasted fingers.

On seeing me near him, he brushed them hurriedly away, and began a half-joking speech of congratulation, but I stopped him.

‘By this will, Captain Hazeldean, your aunt has disinherited you, and bequeathed the whole of her landed and personal property to myself, being no relation, but only her god-daughter and the child of her friend; and she further deposes me, as her sole legatee, so it was worded, I think, to make over to you the sum of one hundred and fifty per annum—is not that correct?’

‘Quite correct, Miss Mortimer,’ he replied, coldly; ‘but it is for

Captain Hazeldean to decide whether he deign to accept that paltry sum.'

'It is for Captain Hazeldean to do nothing of the kind,' I replied, turning red and throwing the will into the fire. 'It is a wicked, monstrous, unjust will, and Helen Marion Mortimer will have nothing to say to it, and will never touch one farthing of the money, which belongs to you, and I only hope that dear Rose and you may long live to spend and enjoy it ;' and sitting down on the floor, I began sobbing like a child.

'Helen—my dear Miss Mortimer,' cried poor Philip, quite overcome, and stammering painfully, 'this generosity—this kindness I cannot, must not accept. Come to me, Rose ; what are we to say to it—what are we to do?'

'Do, my dear Captain !' said Mr. Delany, bustling about, and blowing his nose loudly ; 'nay, if this noble young lady does the right thing, and puts you in possession of what, as the rightful heir, you had reason to expect, you can do no better than what she herself says, enjoy it with the good lady your wife.'

'But we can divide it,' persisted Philip. 'Miss Mortimer can take half.'

'No, no, I cannot touch it ; pray do not pain me so ; I have no right at all to it—it is your's and Rose's.' And then Dudley came and lifted me up, and standing with his arm round me, and a proud pleased look on his face, quietly reiterated my words.

'My sister has acted according to her own good impulse ; but if I could have advised her, my counsel would have been just the same—' and then, with such a smile, 'I only hope, Nellie, that those quick little fingers of yours have not too much complicated Mr. Delany's work with regard to the lesser legacies,' at which Mr. Delany laughed and took snuff again.

And then Philip rose from his sofa and came towards me ; his words were few, but full of gratitude, but nothing touched me so much as the way in which Rose pressed my hands to her lips, and held them there for a moment without speaking.

So Hazlitt Hall would see its rightful master again, and the curse, causeless, break harmlessly upon his head.

It was a cheerful little dinner-party that day ; Philip was restored for the time being to something of his old self again, and talked of the sea-breezes and their restorative effects, till the faint colour stole into his face and warned his languid pulses ; and Dudley talked with him, and was as merry as a boy.

Mr. Delany dined with us, and told us old court stories of George the Third and Mrs. Fanny Burney, and the prim, snuff-loving old Queen Charlotte ; and became at last so wildly hilarious over his claret, that he invited Dudley to bring me down to Oatlands, where Susy and Anna, his daughters, would be happy to make the acquaintance of the young lady who could afford to give away eighty-five thousand pounds.

And after that we bade them good-bye, and started for town, intending to reach Sunnyside by half-past ten.

It was quite dark when we arrived at the station, and were cosily shut up in the snug railway carriage.

Dudley had not spoken to me as yet, but when the train commenced moving into the darkness, he put his hand under my chin and said, playfully—

‘Well, pet, how about your pretty little legacy now?’ And for all that it was so babyish, I put my head on his shoulder and cried bitterly.

‘Why, Nellie,’ he cried, once or twice, ‘why, Nellie—’ and then he seemed to understand it, for he drew me closer to him, and kissing me fondly, told me, that when Keith had heard what I had done he would love me twice as well.

We reached home punctually, and found Louie all smiles, and very glad to see us again.

There was quite a budget of letters and news to be unfolded ; for when Louie had heard all that we could tell, and had exhausted us with questions, she gave us a long letter from Bruce, full of business and painful details—a round-about epistle from Halcot, and another from Herwald, fixing his return for that day week.

It was written in very cheerful spirits, and contained many messages for me. He had seen Arthur three times, and Milly twice ; she was looking rather better, he thought, but very thin ; all the Willoughbys seemed to take to her immensely, and to pet and make much of her, almost as if she were a daughter of the house.

He said Halcot was considered a fine fellow in the north, and was already a first-rate horseman, and rode over to Holly-bush farm every day to see Lucy and Hennie, and spent his evenings in the library looking at pictures and drinking strong coffee, except when he entrapped him into the hall for a turn with the foils and boxing-gloves.

Altogether it was a very merry letter, and quite raised our spirits. And when I had tucked up Charlie with a motherly kiss, and seen Rill’s curly head rolling on the pillow, I went up to my room with a lightened thankful heart, and fell asleep while trying to recall the occurrences of the day.

CHAPTER XXXI.

'O tell her, Swallow, thou, that knowest each,
That bright, and fierce, and fickle is the south,
And dark, and true, and tender is the north.

Why lingereth she to clothe her heart with love,
Delaying as the tender ash delays
To clothe herself, when all the woods are green?

Oh, Swallow, flying from the golden woods,
Fly to her, and pipe and woo her, and make her mine,
And tell her, tell her, that I follow thee!

Tennyson's 'Princess'

ONE day another carrier pigeon, or northern swallow, as Dudley termed them, came down from Lancashire for Louie, and this time the fluttering of its wings seemed to disturb her serenity more than their wont, but as usual she strove to hide it, and nothing was said.

Dudley had a letter too, in which Herwald announced his intention of arriving at Sunnyside the following evening.

'Which, by-the-bye,' he growled, 'is very provoking, as I have to start to Monkton to-morrow morning to see the Stuarts of Ullaston about the commission they promised us, and, as it is a wretchedly out-of-the-way place, shall probably be obliged to take up my abode there at an inn for the night. Why could not the fellow have named an earlier or a later day?'

'Never mind,' I replied, 'it does not much matter, for you see he cannot be with us till eight or nine, and so the evening will be broken up, as it is, and he will need no other entertainment than Louie and I can give him.'

But Dudley had made up his mind to be disappointed, and on the day in question went off to keep his appointment with a rueful face, which I laughingly told him was more worthy of a Quixote than a Seneca.

Dudley's disappointment, however, serious as it appeared, was nothing to Louie's restlessness. Early in the morning she got out her painting apparatus, and placing herself near the light, began working away industriously, while I trotted about the house, 'on hospitable thoughts intent.'

Happening to revisit the drawing-room some half-hour later, I found her standing at the window in her hat and mantle, and leisurely drawing on her gloves.

'Going out, Louie?' I exclaimed in surprise.

'Yes,' she replied, looking up with rather tired eyes, 'I have got a fit of the vapours this morning, and I am going to walk it off. Any commissions in town?'

'Oh yes,' I returned, delighted, and sitting down I pencilled off a long list for the grocer and haberdasher, with many minute verbal directions, to which Louie listened dreamily, and then departed.

At the early dinner hour she reappeared, looking dragged, wan, and weary, with her dress two inches deep in yellow clay.

'Why, my dear Louie,' I exclaimed, 'what a state you are in; surely you have never been so foolish as to go to town by the way of the brickfields?'

'Ay,' she said, wonderingly; 'in a state, am I? dear, dear, what a business Hester will have with it, to be sure. I must have trailed my dress in forgetfulness;' and hurrying away she presently came back in fresh clean raiment, and took her place at the table.

'And what did Cluppins say about the flaw in the long-cloth, Louie?'

'Cluppins, oh! I forgot; I have not been to town at all, I went down to Stony Clift instead.'

'You need not have troubled me then to write out all those commissions,' I returned, rather vexed, 'and now I shall have to get Charlotte to go this afternoon instead, which is very inconvenient; but never mind,' as Louie put on a penitent look, 'we shall manage, I daresay without her. Well, and how is little Bill?'

'Little Bill,' said Loo, now turning crimson, 'oh! I did not go in, I only went for the walk, and sat to rest on the turnstile at the end of the field; I was not inclined for old Dame Dorothy's talk.'

'And you actually went six miles for nothing? no wonder you look tired and worn out; you must have a long rest after dinner.'

But Louie demurred; she must finish her antimacassar for Mrs. Egerton, she said, as she had only two roses to do, and would I read to her while she worked? she felt so dull and listless.

Quite flattered by the proposition, I took up the Blackwood to which she carelessly pointed and read till I was very tired and the dusk came on; but I was rather disappointed, I must confess, when I found that her crochet had lain idle in her lap all the time, and that she had not listened to a word, so I shut up the book rather abruptly, and remarked that a nap would suit her better, as I went out of the room.

But the hastiness of my words smote me when I returned and found her with the traces of freshly-dried tears on her cheek, and noticed the involuntary trembling of the hands which had now resumed their work.

Louie with tears in her eyes was an unheard-of sight in our Sunnyside records, but that Louie should lay down her head on my shoulder and cry like a child, suggested to my mind that life must be very strange with her just now, and filled me with surprise and terror.

But though she suffered me to soothe and caress her, and seemed to feel pleasure in my doing so, she would not let me coax her to speak, but disregarded all my pleadings for confidence, merely said she was low and tired, and would I send her up a cup of tea if she went and laid down?

At the usual time, then, I took up the tea, but the door was fastened, and when I knocked softly, a sleepy voice (and apparently a faithfully sleepy one) bade me put it down and go away, which I did, and had a nursery meal with Charlie and Rill, after which I told them fairy tales till bed-time, and then came down again to the drawing-room, hoping to find Louie there, but it was empty, so I sat and worked and longed for Dudley; and then went up to see if Herwald's fire were burning brightly and his slippers put to warm, but careful hands had been there before me, and the room looked cosy and home-like enough.

There was a pretty little pincushion on the table, that Louie had once pleased him by working for him, with his name tastefully embroidered in pins; and there was a little flower-glass inside, which she and I always kept filled from the Thornton conservatory. Louie had chosen the bouquet to-day, a large crimson camellia, with a spray or two of myrtle, and it looked so effective in the midst of the lace and satin drapery that surrounded it, that I went up for the second time to admire it, when, to my surprise, I found Herwald's magnificent emerald ring lying right on the heart of the flower.

'Oh, the careless boy,' I said to myself, 'he has left it about, I suppose; what a comfort Louie has found it, though, and not one of the servants! it would be exposing them to unnecessary temptation. Even now I scarcely like leaving it here, but they won't be coming into the room again—it is nearly eight o'clock; I hope it is all safe, though.'

But the emerald blazed so brilliantly from its crimson setting, and looked so beautiful, that I silenced my misgivings, and went away.

Five minutes afterwards Louie came down looking very fair and pale, and sat down to her embroidery.

She had dressed herself with great care, and wore a large crystal cross on her crape dress, and she had drawn away her hair so as to show more of her broad white forehead. Altogether her appearance was so pensive and unusual, and her eyes so soft and sad, that I felt quite alarmed. Is she going to be ill, I thought?—she is certainly a good deal thinner than she was. But no, the pure healthy colouring gave the lie to that supposition, and set my wits wool-gathering in another direction.

My thoughts were free to wander where they list, for Louie never broke the silence till the church clock chimed nine, then she took out her watch to compare it with the drawing-room time-piece.

'Half an hour late,' I remarked, answering her unspoken thought; 'I suppose the snow and the darkness have delayed the train a little.'

'Do you mean to say it is snowing?' she asked, anxiously, 'I had no idea of that.'

'When Charlotte came in at seven, she said it was lying half an

inch thick, and that she could not see a yard before her; perhaps it is abating now a little,' and I went to the window. 'Oh, dear no, what a night it is! there is a perfect snowy whirlwind raging down the lane,' and then Louie joined me, and we stood and looked out together.

'I wish Dudley were here, Nellie, he would go down to the station to meet them.'

'I wish he were,' I echoed, sighing; 'oh, how I hate those trains!' and at that moment the bitter memory crossed me of how I had sat in this very room before, on one sad night in June, waiting for a step I was never to hear again—and, as if she had followed my involuntary thought, Louie shivered and turned away.

'If you like,' I continued, following her, 'I will send Hester into the town to see if she can learn the cause of this delay, though it is not much over the half-hour yet, and these Lancashire trains are never due at the minute.'

'What is the exact time that they fixed for being here—at this house, I mean?'

'Twenty past eight at the latest, Herwald said,' I replied, with a sudden misgiving, 'and it is ten minutes past nine. It is certainly very strange; we will wait another quarter of an hour, however, and then Hester had better go.'

So we waited the quarter of an hour, Louie with her watch in her hand, and then Hester was roused from her warm dozing by the nursery fire, to go out into the bleak inclement night; but Hester was a good faithful-hearted girl, and never demurred or grumbled at rendering any service to her young mistresses, so she sallied forth cheerfully with her old battered umbrella, and promised to hasten back again with what speed she could.

And I sat and stitched away and broke my thread a score of times, snapping it impatiently at every chance sound about the house, while Louie, now not attempting to conceal her discomfort, wandered restlessly from window to window, or made for the hall door every five minutes, where she stood peering out into the darkness, with her hair and dress blowing in the draught.

'Why, Louie, dear,' I exclaimed, when she returned for the fifth time and stood leaning her arm disconsolately on the mantelpiece, 'just look, the snow you have brought in is melting and running in little rivulets all down your best dress. Do let me dry it for you, or you will spoil my bright fender.'

But Louie, shaking the folds carelessly out, put me away from her with hot impatient hands, and went back again to the window.

Presently the clock struck ten. Louie looked at me, and I at her, and then we both made a simultaneous movement to the door.

'I can't bear it any more,' she said, pausing on the hall mat, and pressing her hand suddenly to her heart, 'I am sure there is something wrong; what shall we do? let us go down to the stile—anything is better than waiting here.'

'No ; what good would it be? do not let us be so disheartened, it is only ten now, and yet, my poor little Halcot——'

'Halcot!' said Louie in a low tone ; 'I forgot the boy. Hark ! there is Hester come back : I am sure I heard a step,' and, trembling so that I could hardly breathe, we threw open the door.

What a night it was ! The snow had ceased, but it was pitchy dark, and a rising wind moaned among the leafless trees, and whistled coldly round my neck and face.

'Surely it was your fancy, dear,' I said, but as I spoke a sudden mighty gust dislodged me from the step where I was standing on tip-toe, and drove me right into a pair of wet rough arms, which lifted me up like a child, and carried me in.

'There you are, Nellie,' cried Herwald's merry voice ; 'why, what are you shaking and shivering for like an aspen? I have brought your two boys safe home to you, you frightened little mother.'

And then Halcot rushed in, rosy and breathless, and having hugged me to his heart's content, began sparring at us all with Hester's large umbrella, while Max and Leo bounded in, barking and nearly suffocated with joy.

'Oh, Herwald !' I cried, half laughing and half crying, 'what a terrible two hours you have caused us, we have been in such fright and suspense ; whatever made you so late?'

'I could not help it,' he answered, looking grave all at once, and his eye glancing rapidly round ; 'our engine broke down about twelve miles from here, and we had to wait till another was sent us from the station. I don't think it was a lively time for any of us, for, besides knowing you would be in a state here, it was horribly cold, was it not, Hal?' But Hal was executing a frantic war-dance round the dogs, and blowing on his fingers, and did not answer. 'Where is Louie, Nell? I saw her standing beside you as we came up the court.'

'So she was,' I replied. 'I suppose she went back to the drawing-room fire as soon as she heard you were safe.' And then—as Herwald's countenance fell—'she was far more nervous and alarmed than I was. I have never seen her so restless before ; I can't think what has come to her.' And as I thus redeemed my sentence, a sudden bright surprise crossed his face, and he followed me silently into the room where Louie was standing with downcast eyes looking dreamily into the fire.

She did not move or speak as we came in, but waited till Herwald went up to her, and took her hand with a greeting word and smile, but, to my astonishment, and his too, her reply was nearly inaudible, while a quick crimson flush dyed her face and neck in a moment, as she turned from him, and seated herself, and without looking at him again took up her embroidery.

No word of surprise at his tardiness, no expression of thankfulness at his escape, scarcely a movement stirring the white lids as Halcot ran in with an impetuous embrace, and sitting down at her

feet, gave her marvellous accounts of his fright, and of Herwald's courage and coolness.

No, she only sat with bent head and quickly-flying fingers, while Herwald stood and watched her, growing paler from minute to minute, till he turned to me with a heart-grieved smile; and, after a question or two as to where Dudley had gone, and if I had heard from Bruce, said, weariedly, that he would go up now to his room and refresh himself before supper, and summoned Halcot to attend him.

As the door closed on them, Louie's hands and work fell to her lap, the colour that was burning on her face faded away, and as she leant back in her chair, with her hair floating over the cushions, and a meek, pathetic look in her eyes, she looked like some beautiful image of purity and love. I wished Herwald could have seen her; but, almost before I could frame the wish, the door had reopened and he appeared.

Yes, Herwald appeared, and then I thought I was in a dream, for, without seeming to notice me at all, indeed I believe not conscious of my presence, he went straight up to Louie, and, stooping over her, bent down and kissed her lips.

'Oh, my love,' I heard him whisper, 'oh, my love.' And Louie, looking up at him with sweet, serene eyes, put her hand in his without speaking.

And on Herwald's finger shone the brilliant emerald ring, and in a moment I understood it all—the yielded pledge, the token restored, the sparkling gem hid in the crimson flower to meet his eyes, the silent acceptance of a passionately-urged love, and Herwald's incredulous joy at the sight of it.

Through my tears I looked upon him now—the man who was dear to me as a brother, as he stood, his noble face transformed with happiness, with Louie's hand folded in both his, while thanks, tender and true, were breathed in her ear.

Then Louie, looking up at me with shy bright eyes, saw me watching them, and held out her arms to me.

'Come hither, Nellie, my dear little sister, and tell me if I have done right. Do you think in your heart, my pet, that I shall make Herwald happy?'

But I could not answer her—no, not even when Herwald knelt down beside me and claimed his brotherly right, for my heart was too full of joy; but I took their hands and bade God bless them, for they were dear to me as life itself, and then I could say no more.

'Oh! how the foolish child cries,' said Louie, patting my cheek. 'Why, Nell, are you so sorry to part with your tiresome, provoking Loo?' And I answered—

'It is for happiness, dearest, that you have fulfilled my cherished hope, and given me such a brother. Oh, Louie, Louie! love him, and honour him from your heart, for he deserves all that you can give him.'

'She has given me all, Nella mia,' he returned, proudly, 'in giving me herself.' And, as he spoke, he drew off the emerald ring from his finger, and, kissing it, placed it on hers.

And Loo flushed over her beautiful face, while her eyes filled with tremulous light, for this was the sign of their betrothal; and then I left them together, and, going into the dining-room, found Halcot in the great arm-chair before the fire, with the three dogs in his lap, all licking him at once. On seeing me he thrust out a red, restless face.

'What's up, Nellie? and why are you all shut up in the drawing-room? Do you know that I'm nearly famished, and that it is eleven o'clock?'

'Then have your supper, dear Hal, and go to bed,' was the unexpected rejoinder. 'No; it is no use waiting for Herwald and Louie, they are much better engaged, and will come in when they have finished talking.'

So Halcot sat down grumbling, while Max and Leo followed him uninvited, and when he had done I sent him up to bed, not caring to have the news spread through the house just yet, and presently they came in, Herwald holding his head high, and looking unutterably happy, and Louie, calm, placid, and benignant, with a restful contented expression upon her face.

It was so new and strange to watch them, that I could have sat there comfortably all night; but Herwald was more mindful of our well-being, and, as soon as the meal was over, insisted on our retiring to rest.

And then we had a long, long talk, Louie and I, over her bedroom fire, Loo brushing out her masses of hair thoughtfully, and I, kneeling down on the rug, with my hands clasped in her lap.

She had always liked him, she owned, more than any man she had ever seen, only the boyishness of his look had a little distressed her, and she fancied at first that he was cold and proud. But she had always said to herself that it was not for her, so wilful and capricious, to love and marry. So, when Herwald asked her, she deadened the first impulse of her heart, and bethinking herself that it might be, after all, but a wavering fancy such as she had had many a time before, had deemed it her duty to refuse him.

But the patience and sweetness with which he had borne his disappointment, and his calm undeviating kindness towards herself, touched her more than she cared to allow; and when, on the morning of his departure, he had placed the ring in her hand, telling her that its restoration should be the token of her favour; and that then, but not till then, he should renew his suit, the gem had trembled loosely in her fingers, and it had been half in her mind to give it back to him at once; but she was too proud for it, and so let him go.

After that she tried to forget him; but only found she remembered him more, till, from missing him so sorely and feeling herself

sad and lost without him, she came to see that it was useless to struggle against it, and that she might as well confess to herself that she loved him.

'For I do love him,' said Loo, sighing, as she dismissed me for the night, 'though it is a miracle to me how I can; and yet, if I had lost him, as I thought I had in that terrible storm, he would have left me widowed in every thought.'

And this from Loo?—ah! well might I kneel beside my little white bed that night and pour out my heart in thanksgiving, that the sister for whose future we had so much feared, had anchored the hopes of her life on such a rock as our Herwald.

And this night I dreamt again of Keith, but this time no little boat rocked pleasantly on a golden sea, for I thought he was sitting alone, stern and pale; and when I went up to him, turned away without speaking to me: and when I awoke my face was bathed in tears.

Alas, how unequal is fate! Here were two sisters, each loving and each beloved, one soon to become a happy bride, and follow the man of her choice to a rich and pleasant home, and the other to waste out her heart and years with a longing that perhaps might never be fulfilled.

We had a late breakfast next morning, and in the middle of it Dudley walked in. How blithe was his greeting to Herwald, how unconscious his welcoming words!

For a little while we all sat there deferring the startling announcement from minute to minute, till a favourable opportunity should occur.

But Dudley was too quick for us. Even in the middle of an animated description of Ullaston, its noble architecture and grounds, his roving eye had detected the emerald on Louie's finger, and in a moment he waxed dumb and awfully red.

Herwald cleared his throat, albeit his voice was as clear as a bell, and commenced, looking rather bashful—

'I have something to ask you for this morning, Dudley,' and he took Louie's hand as he spoke. 'Do you think you can give me your sister?'

Dudley did not answer, and Herwald went on—

'I know that I am not worthy of Louie, and that I can never hope to be, but if you will intrust her to me, no woman shall be so loved and so fondly cherished.'

He drew her towards him as he spoke with a grave protective tenderness very strange to see, and Dudley said—

'To whom can I intrust her so gladly as to you, Herwald? And when I tell you that I can wish her no prouder lot in life than that of being your wife, you will understand how unnecessary are your last words. Take her then, and may she be to you all that she has been to us.' So saying, he folded her in his arms and stretched out his hand to Herwald, who took it eagerly.

'Ah, Loo, Queen Loo!' cried her brother, proudly and fondly, 'must Sunnyside lose your rule?'

'Only that she may resume her sceptre again at Hurst-hall,' replied Herwald.

'Oh, no,' responded Louie, with a faint smile, 'you must offer me no sceptre there, for a divided sovereignty will hardly suit you, Herwald, if I know you aright, and I have ever loved my own will too dearly. I only hope,' she continued, with a sort of subdued sadness in her voice, 'that I may not find the lesson of obedience too difficult to learn, or you to teach; but one thing I am assured of, that you have ever been my patient master.'

And this from our proud wilful Loo! Ah, well might Dudley laugh, and protest that the world was turning upside down when such a one as Queen Loo talked of love and of obedience!

After that Dudley and Herwald held a long conversation in the Oak parlour; and then Herwald came in and fetched Louie for a walk, whilst I sat down and wrote a letter to Bruce, in which I told him the wonderful news, that a real live pair of lovers were inhabiting Sunnyside at the present minute.

CHAPTER XXXII.

'My heart is sair, I darena tell,
My heart is sair for somebody,
I could wake a winter night
For the sake of somebody.

Oh hon! for somebody! Oh hey! for somebody!
I could range the world around, for the sake o' somebody!—*BURNS.*

IT was soon noised abroad in our little town that the beautiful Louie Mortimer was engaged to be married, and fast and thick poured in the visits of congratulation, that feminine curiosity might be appeased, and a fruitful dish of gossip provided for many a maidenly tea-table. And for ten long wondering days the feminine tongues were busy, in and around Sunnyside; many and conflicting were the several opinions, but the feeling that seemed apparent in most minds was that of unmitigated astonishment.

'But, my dear,' said Mrs. Thornton to me one day, and I felt that she was acting as the mouth-piece of the British matronhood about us; 'but, my dear, he is so young, and, if I may candidly express an opinion, so insignificant-looking. Of course he is a gentleman, and has very fine manners and all that, and possesses, I am told, the fortune of a prince. Every one knows that our dear Louie ought to marry into a wealthy family; but still, how she could refuse that elegant Colonel Grey and accept Mr. Delorme passes compre-

hension; he is so exceedingly—' here Mrs. Thornton paused with the obnoxious word insignificant again on her lips, and substituted, 'so boyish-looking; why, in a few years she will look old enough to be his mother.'

'Nonsense, Mrs. Thornton, he is two years her senior.'

'And what is that in a man, my dear? in happy marriages there ought always to be a disparity of years on the right side, or the balance of power is disturbed. Take my word for it, Nellie, as a woman of some experience in these things, before the first few months are over Louie will have learnt to rule her young husband regally.'

'She will do nothing of the kind,' I returned, hotly; 'you little know our Herwald when you say that; he has more strength of will and force of character, with all his appearance of extreme youth, than any man I ever met; and great as is his love for Louie, if her will were ever to be opposed to his in any matter of importance, I know well who would have to give way, and it would not be Herwald.'

'I am very glad to hear it,' replied worthy Mrs. Thornton, with a constrained smile; 'and I suppose, after all, there is no accounting for tastes, only such a fine woman as she will make ought to have a personable man for a husband, and not one who will appear like a younger brother to her all his life.'

'My dear mother,' interrupted Dick, who was standing near, listening to us, 'you are making Nellie quite cross with your animadversions on her favourite, and, after all, the truest sentence you have said is that there is no accounting for tastes. Belle, *par exemple*, loves a man of mettle, and is infatuated with Harry's broad shoulders and Herculean proportions, but there are many who, like Louie Mortimer, can see more beauty in Herwald Delorme's pale face and clever dark eyes, than in Harry, who, albeit his inches, is nothing but a clown, or in Algernon Fitzgerald, who is a mere "rasher of wind cut in halves," empty sound, and without a fragment of humanity about him.'

So spoke honest Dick, who in the days gone by had nourished certain warm feelings of his own towards the Sunnyside Beauty, but Mrs. Thornton only shook her head till the ribbons of her cap went to work like flimsy windmills; and seeing how the land lay, and that certain envious instincts had been aroused by the mention of Hurst-hall, I took my leave, repeating to myself as I wandered down the lime-tree walk from the Hermitage porch, a clause in the Liturgy, which bids us abstain from 'envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness.'

'Fie, Sprite! down, silly doggie; fie! what a world it is, Sprite, when you are even jealous of poor old Nettle walking with the fringe of my shawl in her mouth.'

Louie, who was profoundly indifferent to public opinion in general, only laughed long and merrily at Mrs. Thornton's tirade;

content with her own choice, it mattered little to her who else approved or disapproved, and as Herwald minded it even less than she did, the feminine babble did no mischief to us, and only provoked our mirth.

Meanwhile things went on merrily at Sunnyside. Herwald made a most devoted lover, though a very quiet one; and Louie, though rarely demonstrative, yet soon made it evident to all, that she loved now for the first time in her life, and with an earnest, true, womanly affection, that would bring its own reward. Day by day her simple reverence increased for Herwald, and she ceased to regret the sacrifice of her pride and will, and could bear to think of the time when she must leave us all, to follow him to a new and unknown home.

And that time was fast approaching.

Almost before a week was over Herwald, ardent and impulsive in this as in all things, had pleaded so earnestly and so successfully, that Louie had yielded to his and to Dudley's wishes, and had consented to name an early day in the following April, that they might have the summer before them for a long foreign tour.

Herwald knew that it was Louie's great desire to see Paris, Switzerland, and Rome, and had planned this tour for her express pleasure and benefit. As far as his own wishes were concerned, he would have preferred not leaving England at all, and would rather have taken his wife home to Hurst-hall at once; and as Louie knew all this and was touched by his unselfish generosity, she could make no opposition to his plea for an early marriage, even though it left her only six weeks more for the exercise of her maidenly will and liberty.

Yes, in six weeks we were to lose our Loo; and as the distance of time lessened, our hearts failed us as we thought how sorely we should miss her, our gay light-hearted sister.

It was true that she was, as far as work was concerned, only a drone in the home-hive, but none the less did she store us with the honey of her words and the sweetness of her presence, but all the honey and the sweetness belonged now to Herwald, and we in the old home would be left to regret Queen Loo's mild benignant sway.

Were Keith's words really coming true? How well I remembered them:—'Your brothers are with you now, Nellie, but one day they will take to themselves wives and leave the home-nest, and Louie will not be long with you, and the boys will go out into the world; and then when you are alone in the old house, then—then it will be pleasant to remember that there is one to whom you can turn, and on whom you have a certain right.'

'Ah, Keith, Keith, if only you could come to me now, my dear!'

And then Bruce came home; he had been away seven weeks, and returned brown and blithe and bonnie, and heartily glad to be amongst us again; but even while he told us so, there was a latent

gravity in his words and manner that told us his thoughts were not all here, and that he was remembering his Highland lassie.

But he was full of affection for Louie and of hearty rejoicing in the prospect of happiness that lay before her, and there was earnestness in the jesting tone in which he told her that now for the first time she had redeemed her character in his eyes and blotted out that one great error, her treatment of Colonel Grey.

'Oh, Colonel Grey!' sighed Louie, 'am I never to hear the last of that unfortunate man?'

'Never,' replied Herwald coolly, 'because of course you know he is one of my groomsmen, and Arthur Vaughan the other;' which unexpected rejoinder reduced Louie to a state of utter speechlessness.

And after that Bruce told us all he had done.

They had had a very dreary time of it in Edinburgh, Bruce hunting over papers with the deacon and talking business with the lawyer, whilst Katie nursed her mother up-stairs; but in the dusk she would come down and stroll with him up the Castle Hill. And though Bruce spoke little of these walks, it was easy to see that these were the brightest moments of the day.

And then he took them back to the manse; 'and there,' he continued, 'they will remain till the early days of May, for so Uncle Cameron's successor, Mr. Buchanan, has arranged, and then they are coming to live here.'

'Here, Bruce? do you mean at Sunnyside?'

'No, no,' he replied quickly; 'how could you think of such a thing? as if I should ask them here without consulting you and Dudley! but I have told Aunt Margaret that it will be far better for her to settle down by us, and then she will be near Keith when he returns to England.'

'How do you make that out?' asked Dudley; 'Keith's place of residence—when he gets one, poor fellow, will be London.'

'Well! don't you call that nearer than the manse by two or three hundred miles? I should have thought that fact patent enough to any one.'

'Of course, of course,' rejoined his brother, hastening to mollify the momentary heat; 'you have but verified my words, that dear Aunt Margaret would soon learn to value your shrewd good sense. It is certainly a fine stroke of yours persuading her and Katie to come here.'

'Katie did most of the persuading,' returned Bruce smiling, 'I talked her over at Edinburgh, and as Aunt Margaret does everything she wishes, it was soon arranged. I thought, Dudley, if one of those pretty Priory cottages were to let, it would be just the size for them, and it would amuse us all after Louie's flitting to get it ready and in order.'

'An excellent idea; they will be Miss Vivian's tenants then. I am certain one of the factory men told me the other day that Forbes

—Lieutenant Forbes—was leaving, and he lived in the little corner one, the Fernery I think they call it; we had better go down to-morrow and see.'

Bruce agreed with the utmost alacrity, and after some further discussion the party broke up.

Certainly, it was a most bustling and bewildering time. It was the first wedding in the Mortimer family, and Louie had determined it should be the grandest the neighbours had seen for years; and though Herwald told her with much mock gravity that all her labour would be lost upon him, for he was sure he should see nothing on that day but her, and only her very obscurely, Louie was inexorable, and for five whole weeks Sunnyside was delivered over into the hands of mantua-makers and milliners; and presently Herwald set to work, and worked with a will too.

He had his mother's jewels sent down that Louie might give him her opinion on their re-setting and arrangement; and as she played daintily with the shining toys, now trying them on hair and neck and round white arm, Herwald watching her with his eyes of love, it recalled to my mind vividly the evening when Mrs. Hazeldean had once proudly decked her with her own jewels, and Philip coming in and seeing her had called her Queen Cophetua.

'Philip,' cried Louie, unloosing a glittering serpent from her hair. 'Ah, poor fellow! I would never have worn those jewels of his.'

Which speech she was compelled to take back and swallow gracefully, when there shortly arrived a small, exquisitely-inlaid casket, containing a noble parure of turquoise and diamonds—'with Philip and Rose Hazeldean's best wishes,' and a sad, sweet little note, written in Rose's neat cramped hand, in which she begged dear Louie to accept and wear for her the ornaments which she could never wear for herself; but what pleased Louie most, and Herwald too, was a dainty little pearl necklet, with a small diamond cross—'for Helen, with Rose's fond love.'

Dear little sparkling cross, how I prized and cherished it, and placed it side by side with the brooch that Herwald had given me on my visit to Hurst-hall.

It was now the end of March, a bitter cold blustering month, offering little inducement to the lovers to extend their daily ramble, and leading them to prefer the warm cosy drawing-room, which Nellie, with marvellously feminine tact, contrived to vacate for their use.

They had had a long talk there one afternoon, a talk that had made Herwald grave and Louie quiet, in which Herwald announced his intention of leaving for Hurst-hall on the morrow for a ten days' absence; and in the absurd logic of lovers these ten days augured a bitter parting.

Louie had at first endeavoured to combat the notion, alleging that such and such things might be done without the master's eye,

and adding that in her opinion Herwald's notions of duty were painfully Quixotic ; but realising the utter powerlessness of her will, and weary of throwing arguments against a rock, she had succumbed at last with womanly yielding, and bade her knight go where his honour called him.

'But,' said Louie, with a spice of the old coquetry, 'I suppose you will manage not to lose your train and be too late for the fourteenth.'

Herwald's answer was inaudible, but that it was satisfactory was evident from her sudden blush and smile.

'And I shall bring back Milly, Nellie ; be sure you write her a pretty little note of invitation so as to serve for my passport, and don't forget to put in, that Louie's number of bridesmaids will be incomplete without her.'

'Oh yes, I will tell her all that ; and as it will be the Easter holidays she can't refuse me.'

'But, Herwald,' interrupted Louie.

'What, love?'

'If anything should happen to delay you long into the second week—and those Lancashire people are capable of doing anything to keep you among them—you must send off Milly alone, or her bridesmaid's dress won't be ready—do you understand?'

'Oh yes, quite ; but I mean to be back at least three days before, so get all that'—here Loo put her hand across his mouth, but the 'flummery' came out in spite of it—'finished and out of the way, for I shall want you every minute of the time to myself.'

So on the morrow Herwald went, and during the next two or three days Louie wandered about, turning over satins and laces with listless hands and far-away eyes, which seemed to elude substance and be fixed on vacancy.

But presently we all found a new source of interest. It was about a week after Herwald's departure, and a mild, pleasant April evening : I had tempted Louie out into the lane that she might admire the budding hedgerows, and listen to the cuckoo's note, which we now began to hear for the first time, and we were strolling to and fro, arm-in-arm, when Seymour's face suddenly appeared above the stile, and in another moment he had leapt down and was assisting a tiny neat-looking lady to surmount its difficulties.

'Whoever can that be?' inquired Louie.

But the problem was soon solved as Seymour, leaving his companion to trip after him alone, came towards us, saying—

'Here is Miss Vaughan, Nellie, and she is asking for you.'

'Why, it is Milly !' I exclaimed, and at the sound of her name she ran up to me with her little dark face all aglow with excitement and pleasure, and threw herself into my arms.

'Why, my pet, what brings you here to surprise us without letting us know whether you could come at all?'

'It is all Herwald's fault ; he ran down to Rose Cottage himself

last night, and he and Arthur persuaded me not to wait for them, but to come alone, and Herwald brought me to the station himself this morning and saw me safely off. Was I wrong, Nellie ?

'Wrong,' I returned reproachfully, 'wrong to come to Sunnyside after all my invitations? nay, you can hardly tell how glad I am to see you here, Milly.'

And then Louie came up, and stooped down and kissed her cheek, at which Milly coloured up gratefully.

'I have heard so much of you,' said Loo, with her warm sweet smile, which always took all hearts by storm, 'Nellie has talked about you for hours, so I feel as if I knew you already.'

'I do not think it will be long before I know you quite well,' Milly answered softly and shyly; 'but I am afraid, Miss Mortimer, I shall be your smallest bridesmaid,' at which Loo laughed good-naturedly, and replied—

'No, no, you will be nothing of the kind; Ada Thornton, who has to stand with you, is just such another little thing. What an excellent foil they will make to each other, Nellie, the one so dark and the other so fair. By-the-bye, did Herwald—did Mr. Delorme send any message to me ?'

'Only a very disappointing one,' returned Milly; 'he said very unusual business would detain him in Lancashire longer than he thought, and he really fears that he will not be able to leave till the thirteenth.'

'On the thirteenth!' I exclaimed; 'that is very close quarters, considering the wedding is to be on the fourteenth.'

But Louie said nothing, only turned away with a little sad sigh, and then Milly and I went in.

'Am I really at Sunnyside?' she said, pausing on the door-step and looking round her with grave wistful eyes; 'oh, what a dear, comfortable old place, and how green and full of trees the garden looks—almost like a dell in Herwald's park, seen through that half-opened door; and oh, it feels like home!'

'I am glad of that,' I returned, kissing her; and then we went up the broad low staircase together, the evening sunbeams falling slant and rosily on the old recessed window-seats.

'Shall you mind sharing my room, Milly?' I asked dubiously, my hand on the door.

'Mind! what an idea! it will be delightful, for then I shall get you all to myself for some long, long talks.'

'I thought afterwards perhaps you would like it, but the actual truth is, I have nowhere else to put you except with Louie, for Herwald has one spare room, and your brother, Mr. Vaughan, is to have the other; the Thorntons have offered to accommodate Colonel Grey at the Hermitage.'

'Oh, for the wedding,' sighed Milly. 'Of course the house will be very full,' and then I took her hands and drew her closer to me, and she looked up in my face and smiled.

'Shall we sit down in this comfortable window-seat?' I said; 'it wants an hour to tea-time, and I have so many things to ask you about. But first, how are you? you are very thin, very, but still you do not look ill.'

'I am very well,' she maintained, stoutly; 'don't shake your head, for indeed I am, much better than when I met you at Hazlitt; only, you will laugh at me, Nellie, I do feel so old sometimes.'

'Old! I repeated, incredulously.

'Yes, so staid, and middle-aged and thoughtful. I can fancy now how the old feel when they look back on their life behind them; I fancy I have seen the best part of mine.'

'My dear Milly,' I exclaimed, unable to restrain a smile, but she went on gravely—

'Everything seems so gray and misty and common-place, all the colouring and gloss gone off; and when the children press round and court me to join in their little amusements and pleasures, just as if I were one of themselves, I often wonder if they would do so if they could know how stern and sad I really feel.'

'But these ideas are absurd,' I remonstrated, 'you are little more than a child yourself.'

'If you knew what a mockery that word sounds to me,' she returned, with a baby frown knitting her brow, 'you would not use it. What have I in common with childhood, which is unconscious of evil, and knows no suffering? when to exist is to be happy.'

'At least you are innocent, Milly.'

'I don't know,' she returned sadly; 'one so vain as I can never be quite innocent. How much I have thought of myself, and now—now—'

She broke off abruptly with a sigh.

'And how do you like your new occupations, Milly? are the Willoughbys kind to you?'

'Oh so kind,' she answered, brightening up, 'they treat me just like one of themselves, and pet, and make quite a fuss over me. I like all the family, my pupils especially—the teaching seems play work, they are so good and quiet; and it is very nice when I walk across the moor of an evening with Arthur, and find Bridget and tea awaiting me, and feel that the day's work is over and that I have done my part in earning our bread.'

'How does Arthur—your brother, I mean, get on? Has he no better prospect yet than this daily drudgery?'

'Oh, don't you know?' she answered, with her eyes sparkling—'but no, I forgot, I have not written to you since. Arthur is going up to Oxford next term to take orders.'

'To take orders, Milly!'

'Yes, Herwald has offered him a living, and is to put a curate into it until he can hold it for himself. It is about eight miles from Hurst-hall, and is worth five hundred a year, and there is such a pretty church and vicarage. Arthur did not like accepting it at

first, but Herwald has such influence with him, he can talk him into accepting anything.'

'He is the best friend your brother has in Lancashire.'

'Yes, or in the world beside. You and he are our best friends, Arthur said so himself yesterday, for I assure you he thinks quite as highly of you as he does of Herwald.'

'Nonsense, Milly,' I returned, blushing.

'But it is not nonsense at all; he admires you more than any woman he has ever seen, and if it had not been that I have told him about Keith Cameron, it would be dangerous, I am sure.'

'My dear Milly,' I replied, getting quite hot, 'I wish you would not talk like that, it is too absurd.'

'It is not absurd a bit,' she answered flatly, 'but you should never have had him, darling, for you are far too pretty for him with his sandy hair and blue spectacles—I told him so myself one day, and he said, poor fellow, that he did not know the woman who would care to marry such a plain sickly-looking man as he—he really said so, Nellie.'

'I am sorry to hear it; and when next he breathes such heresy, you may tell him that there is many and many a one who would think themselves honoured by the love of such a man as Arthur Vaughan, and he is not to judge himself by the comments of such a sister as you.'

'But that Nellie Mortimer prefers her own handsome Keith,' said Milly; 'am I to tell him that too?' and she squeezed my face between her two soft little hands, till I disengaged myself with a laugh, but after that she waxed grave again, and the smiles and the dimples died out together.

'Have you heard anything about Hubert, Nellie?' she said suddenly.

'I, my dear child! what have I to do with him?'

'Personally, nothing, but I thought perhaps Herwald might have talked to you about him, it is so long since he and I have had any conversation together, and he is the only one who ever tells me about him at all.'

'I do not remember that he has said anything, except that Mr. Clive had gone on to Rome with a friend of his, but I do not think he knows more himself; the letter from which he learnt it was a very brief, unsatisfactory one. But why did you not ask him when he took you to the station?'

'I! I never mention the subject unless he begins; you do not think I could, Nellie?'

'And he did not speak of it?'

'No, only as he bade me good-bye he looked at me with a very kind smile, and said, "Keep up a brave heart, Milly, for there is not a worse fate in life than yours;" very strange of him, was it not, Nellie?'

'Very, and rather vague,' and I sat musing over the words,

while Milly rested her face against my shoulder and sighed heavily.

'And how is Maud Rivers?' I asked gaily at last, trying to rouse myself and her into something like cheerfulness; 'what does she think of Herwald's approaching marriage?'

'Nobody can tell quite what she thinks, but she is engaged.'

'Engaged!—you don't say so?'

'Yes, within a week after the news reached Lancashire; but you will never guess whom she has chosen, Nellie.' And, to my surprise, Milly suddenly faltered and turned pale.

'My pet, how can I tell the names of all your fine Lancashire squires?'

'Ah! but you know this name;—listen—Maud Rivers is going to marry Sir Ralph Percy.'

I could not believe my ears.

'Will you be kind enough to tell me, Milly, what he has done with his wife?'

'Ah! poor Amy, Hubert's first love, is dead, did you not know it? She died last spring; they had wintered at Rome, but she had been ailing, more or less, all the time, and the physicians recommended Sir Ralph to take her to Southern Italy, but she died on the way, in a little lone posting-house, and a strange peasant woman held her in her arms at the last. Was it not a sad end?—poor, poor Amy!'

'Terrible indeed, but Mr. Clive did not know of this when we were at Whalley last summer.'

'No, but he knows it now, and Herwald told me he was much shocked and distressed; but at the time it happened the report was confused, and every one up in the North thought it was old Lady Annabel, Sir Ralph's mother, who was dead.'

'And you mean to tell me that Maud Rivers is engaged to that cold, heartless man? and he not a widower a year?'

'Yes, really, and they are to be married in July. Poor Amy! what a life he led her, till her spirit was crushed and utterly broken. He will find it a hard matter to break Maud Rivers', though: it must be a daring man who will try.'

'What can induce her to marry such a man?' I asked.

'Pique,' returned Milly, readily, 'pique, and slighted affection.'

'You think, then, that she really liked Herwald?'

'Nay, she did more, she loved him; she gave to him all of that that her cold nature was capable, and if he could have brought himself to have married her, she would have made him a true and faithful wife.'

'How long, little Milly, have you become such a shrewd observer of character?'

And Milly hid her face in my neck, and whispered—

'Only since I have suffered myself, and have learnt to feel for others' sufferings. Hark! what is that?'

'It is the tea-gong,' I answered, 'Halcot is sounding it; come, we must go down. Here, we have talked all this long time and you have never yet told me what you think of our Loo.'

'Think of her!' returned Milly, enthusiastically, as she shook out her crushed skirts, 'why, what can I think of her, except that she is the loveliest creature I have ever seen, and ought to be a queen at the least; such eyes, such hair, such a complexion; oh, no wonder that Herwald loves her so dearly, he could not help himself.'

After which candid opinion, we went down-stairs, and Milly made acquaintance with Bruce and the boys, producing a most astonishing impression on the last trio, who all buzzed round her at once, as if they considered her their lawful prey, and the 'funny little dark lady with the black eyes,' as Charlie called her, seemed especially in her element among them; a most charming, piquante little Milly she was, now talking sagely with Dudley and Bruce, now laughing and jesting with the boys, and, anon, nestling cosily under Louie's and my wing, and looking all the while so blithe and bonnie that a stranger would have thought her the happiest creature in the world.

But one who knew her well, and who watched her tenderly, saw how the uneasy colour blazed and faded suddenly on the small thin face—saw how often the lip trembled as it smiled, and the voice died away in a quiver; and as we stood together that night watching a large white moon rising behind the cedar-tree, she leant heavily against me with straining breath, and whispered—

'Oh, if I could have died like Amy, Nellie, how much better it would have been for him and me.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

'And shall I see his face again?
And shall I hear him speak?
I'm downright dizzy with the thought,
In truth, I'm like to greet.'—*Burns.*

'But where is she, the bridal flower
That must be made a wife ere noon?

She enters, glowing like the moon
Of Eden on its bridal bower:
'On me she bends her blissful eyes,
And then on thee; they meet thy look,
And brighten like the star that shook
Betwixt the palms of Paradise.'

Tennyson.

IT was the evening before the wedding. All day long there had been bustle and confusion and much hasting to and fro; but now the last finishing touches had been put, and nothing remained to us but to watch for the expected bridegroom.

An avant courier had arrived early that morning in the person of Allan, and towards afternoon Arthur Vaughan, the second

groomsman, made his appearance, turning up unexpectedly *en route* from London some hours before he was wanted.

In the midst of our household cares it was rather perplexing to have a strange gentleman on our hands ; but the boys came to our rescue by carrying him off to see the Priory and factory, and all the sights of the neighbourhood, while Seymour, as a *chef-d'œuvre*, enticed him on their way back into the parsonage, where he remained turning over certain rare and dusty folios with that ancient scholar, Mr. Egerton, until Dudley fetched him out in triumph.

All day long Louie had moved among us with a grave, wistful face ; now talking over manifold arrangements with her head bridesmaid, Nellie—now laying dainty finger-touches on flowers and curtains, and certain readjustments of furniture ; anon lingering under the cedar-tree with Bruce, or turning aside to kiss Rill's sunny curls, and murmur loving words to Charlie.

But now it was evening, and it only remained to welcome Herwald, who was expected every minute ; so while some of the party went down to the station, and others sauntered to and fro before the gate, Louie took up her station by the drawing-room window, and looked out into the sunlight, while Milly and I, at the other end of the room, made up the white satin ribbon into favours.

Busily Milly's nimble little fingers constructed the bridal ornaments, with their sprays of orange flowers and silver acorns, laying each aside in the garlanded basket ready for the morrow's distribution ; but my hands rested often idly on my lap, and my eyes felt full of unshed tears, for Louie was humming to herself softly the tune of some well-remembered words.

'Tis the night before the bridal,
And to-morrow she must wear
The emblems of affection
Amid her sunny hair,'

I listened.

'Hark, what is that?' said Milly, pausing in her work ; and then Louie rose and left the room, and we knew that Herwald was come, even before we heard the click of the iron gate.

'That is well,' said little Milly to herself, and half unconsciously I went on with Louie's strain :

'But not the orange blossom,
Or the diamond's costly blaze,
Can give her back the brightness
Of her gir'hood's happy days.'

'That is a sad song you are singing, Nellie.'

'Is it?' I returned, absently ; and then Dudley put in his head and beckoned me to come out to him.

'Well, what is it?' I inquired, gathering up my apron full of the 'flummery,' as Herwald would have called it ; but Dudley, still keeping his place on the hall mat, only made signs to me to move quicker, with a mysterious face.

'Herwald wants you in the dining-room, Nellie; he and Louie are together there.'

'Then they don't want me,' I returned, deliberately; and I felt the truth of my remark when I opened the door and saw what a pretty little group I was disturbing, while Herwald came forward to meet me with quite a boyish flush on his face.

'Dudley says that you wish to speak to me,' I stammered out rather confusedly.

'So I do. Don't look so bashful, Nellie. Come and sit down.' And Herwald resumed his former place and Louie's hand together.

'Well, what is it about?' I inquired, rather mistified. 'I suppose you don't want the wedding to be put off?'

'I suppose I don't,' replied Herwald, with an arch look at Louie; 'but I am going to surprise you, nevertheless, little sister, when I tell you Hubert Clive is here.'

'Here, in this very house!'

'In this very house; and, what is more, in the Oak parlour this minute, with Dudley to keep him company.'

'Then he must go away,' I returned decidedly. 'I am very sorry, Herwald, but if you will be so thoughtless, you must abide by the consequences; and I am certain of this one thing, that Dudley will never allow such a meeting to take place under his roof,' and I got up breathless with excitement.

'Now, do sit down and calm yourself,' remarked Herwald, quite coolly. 'Of course, I should never do what Dudley dislikes; but he is quite of my opinion, that a man may ask his intimate friend to marry him if he chooses.'

'But Mr. Egerton is to do that, Herwald.'

'Mr. Egerton will assist, of course; but none the less have I set my heart on having dear old Hubert to perform the ceremony. Now, don't get into a state about it, for marry us he shall and will.'

'I don't understand you,' I replied, very much displeased.

'Don't understand me?' returned Herwald, with a smile—'poor little Nellie.'

'No, I don't,' I replied; 'all your life long you have been unselfish and generous, but now you are gratifying your own whim at the expense of a girl's future happiness. Though it is your wedding-day, Herwald, you must give way in this, for with my consent Milly shall never see Hubert Clive again.'

'Nonsense, she shall see him in half-an-hour's time, and, what is more, with your consent, and Dudley's into the bargain—come now.'

I looked at him in silence, too much offended to speak.

'Do be quick and explain yourself,' said Louie, laughing, 'or we shall have Nellie arguing for an hour—what a tease you are to-night, Herwald.'

'Because I'm too happy to be serious, *Bella mia*. Well, Nellie,

I have asked Hubert here because he wishes to see Milly, and because Harriette is dead.'

'No, Herwald !'

'It is the truth, and this is what has kept me so long at Whalley. About a week ago I was sitting in the library, just commencing a letter to Louie, in which I meant to fix my return for the following day, when Hubert suddenly burst in, looking wild and haggard ; he had heard the news at Rome, and had travelled day and night back to England as fast as steam could carry him, but he had not courage to go down to Colchester by himself to learn if it were really true, and so came on first to Hurst-hall.'

'Well, and what then ?'

'Well, I made him take wine and food, and lie down, and when I had seen him safely into my own room, I went down to Rose Cottage and told Arthur, and never rested till he and I together persuaded Milly to come to you at once ; we had hard work at first, but in the end I got my way.'

'That was wise and right of you,' I returned, gratefully.

'Of course it was the only thing to be done, but I never felt comfortable all that evening or the next morning, till I saw her safely off, for fear of some chance meeting occurring before we had ascertained the truth of the report ; and then, when I had put her under your wing, Hubert and I went down to Colchester.'

'And was it true, Herwald ?'

'Oh, yes ! quite ; poor Harriette had been dead a month ; but oh, you should have seen Hubert, Nellie. When what he believed to be the burden of a life-time was suddenly lifted off his heart, and he walked and talked a free man, his agony of joy was almost painful to witness.

'Painful indeed ! there is something terrible in the idea of having to rejoice at any human creature's death, but especially in that of a wife.'

'You must not judge of it in that light, she was never a wife to him, but simply a burden of misery from the first. Think of what his sufferings were, poor fellow, and you will understand his thankfulness at being released.'

'I do quite understand it, but I am not sure he is doing right to come here.'

'You mean that it is hardly decorous to come now ?'

'Yes, I mean that.'

'Well, I hinted something of the kind, but he would not listen to me. He said it was never too soon to make wrong right, that he had worked Milly a deadly wrong during his wife's life-time, but that her death now gave him an opportunity for redress ; and whether she would have him or not, he should consider it his duty to go to her at once.'

'Did he really say that ?'

'He did indeed, and there was no reasoning him out of it ; and

there he sits, poor fellow, in the Oak parlour yonder, white as a ghost, and telling Dudley over and over again that he knows that he has sinned past forgiveness, and that she will never speak to him again.'

'And do you want me to go him?'

'No, that would be of little use, I want you to break it gently to Milly that he is here, and see how she takes it; go, Nellie, you know you are our ministering angel, and this is only another little mission of love for you to undertake.'

'Very well, I am going; but first you must tell me you forgive the hastiness of my speech; and on your wedding eve, too, Herwald.'

'And is that any reason why those pretty eyes should be full of tears?' he replied, with another brotherly embrace; 'come, we must have no rainbow faces to-night—as if you did not know me better than to suppose I could be vexed by such a trifle as that.'

And so I left them, and passing into the drawing-room, still warm and ruddy with light, sweet April sunshine and evening shadows mingling, I knelt down by Milly's side, and taking the busy little hands fondly into my grasp, asked—

'What was that Herwald said to you at the station, my pet, when he took leave of you?—try to remember his very words, and repeat them to me.'

And Milly answered simply and readily, her eyes full of a soft surprise—

'I do not think he said anything but "keep a good heart, Milly, for there is many a worse lot in life than yours," and he grasped my hand as he spoke till I was ready to cry out with pain.'

'And you are sure that there was nothing else?'

'Not a word; why do you ask?' And then she trembled all over, struck, I suppose, by the visible agitation of my manner; 'and why—why are your hands so cold, and your face so pale and strange? Have you anything to tell me?'

'I! what have I to tell you?' I faltered, not knowing what to say for the moment, and fearful of too suddenly breaking the news.

Milly's eyes grew sick with a look of intolerable longing, but she answered never a word. And with my heart beating so that I could hardly speak, I went on—

'Those were right and true words that Herwald said to you, Milly, and I would have you ponder them well. You have thought your trouble bitter and hard to be borne, and Heaven forbid that I should say it was not; but we must remember, my precious, that every cloud has its silver lining, and what, if in infinite mercy its sable edge should be turned away from you and light suffered to appear?'

Suddenly her features took the ashen hue of death, and she put up her hand to her head as if bewildered and in pain.

'I don't understand,' she murmured, brokenly. 'I don't think I

hear. What is it you are saying about clouds and darkness? you have come to tell me, I see, that he—Hubert—my Hubert is dead, and why do you keep me in suspense?’

‘No, no, my darling, what are you thinking about? nobody is dead that you care about, and it is glad news, not sorrowful, that I bring you, dear; Harriette, poor mad Harriette Clive, is no more, and Hubert is here in this very house, longing and waiting and praying to see you.’

Over her sweet face there spread a crimson tide of joy, and she sprang to her feet with a low irrepressible cry of ‘Hubert, Hubert,’ like the soft low cooing of a dove calling on its mate; but even as she essayed to move she tottered and turned dizzy, and her little hands groped helplessly before her like a blind man’s feeling in the dark.

‘Where is he?’ she murmured piteously, ‘let me go to him, I cannot find him; there is a flood of light before my eyes that seems to drown me, a glitter and blaze of colour that is hiding my Hubert from me.’

As if she were the child she seemed, I lifted her in my arms and placed her in the low chair by the window.

‘Sit there, Milly, sit there quietly and patiently, and I will bring him to you; do not move or stir till I come back to you again.’ And kissing her I left the room.

It seemed to me in my excitement and bewilderment as if the Oak parlour were full of people, but I found out afterwards that it was only Dudley and Arthur Vaughan, but not heeding them I went up to where some one was sitting alone, with bent head and shaded face, and touched the thin white hand that I remembered so well.

‘Mr. Clive,’ I whispered, ‘Milly wants you, come to her at once,’ and then the face was lifted up, and Hubert’s mournful gray eyes were fixed upon mine.

‘Come to her! is she not angry, then? do you think that she can really forgive me?’

‘It is not I who can answer you these questions,’ I replied, smiling, ‘come and ask her for yourself,’ and taking his arm I drew him gently from the room.

At the threshold he paused, however, with an agitation that was pitiable to witness.

‘But do you really think, Miss Mortimer, that there is hope for me?’

‘Hush,’ I returned, opening the door, ‘look and judge for yourself.’

Hubert looked in and saw a little figure in white lifting itself up in the sunlight with fluttering hands, and a sweet child’s voice calling on his name, and with a stifled cry he passed into the room and had her in his arms in a moment.

And as I turned away with a murmured word of thankfulness at my heart, I came upon Arthur Vaughan standing behind me.

'Can I speak to you a moment, Miss Mortimer?' said the poor fellow, gulping down something in his voice: 'I want a word with you so much.'

'Certainly, but I don't know where we can go,' I returned with a little laugh, 'the dining-room is engaged, and so is the parlour; shall we take a turn in the lane?' he nodded assent, and we went out.

There was a red sun setting behind the Priory, a distant chorus of rooks, and a few faint warblings from the elm-trees in front. Everywhere breathed the perfume and freshness of spring, when Nature grows in stillness and beauty from day to day and hour to hour, and for a few minutes we paced the grassy path in silence, content with our own thoughts.

Arthur was the first to speak, as pausing at the stile he took off his straw hat and let the cool breeze stir the thick masses of his hair as he tossed it off from his heated brow.

'This is strange news we have heard to-night, Miss Mortimer, and I want you to tell me what you think of it, honestly and truly in all its bearings.'

'You mean about Milly and Mr. Clive?'

'Yes, about them both, but I never thought latterly to hear those two names coupled together—my poor little girl.'

'She will be a very happy one now, Mr. Vaughan.'

'Do you think—do you really think it, that it is safe to trust her in his hands, I mean? you see I can speak openly to you, because you have been such a true friend to her and have loved her so dearly.'

'Not half so dearly or so well as she has ever been loved by her brother,' I returned, looking at his kind ugly face as I spoke with true, heartfelt liking.

Poor Arthur turned away with a sudden dimness in his eyes.

'Heaven knows you are right, Miss Mortimer; and that she has never cared for me one tithe of what I do for her. I can never remember the time,' he continued, with a very tender smile, 'when she was not the darling of my heart, and dearer to me than all the world beside; and when our mother with her last breath confided her to my care, no one knew how proudly and reverently I accepted the charge, and how I prized and cherished her, and worked for her day and night. And then came the blow, then when I found her innocent affection was misplaced, and her heart wounded to the death, and when she shrank from my righteous anger against the man who had acted so cruelly and cowered away from me, poor little creature, lest I should speak against him whom she loved; then it was that I read the bitter truth, how little was the brother who had sheltered her all her life, compared to the stranger with his smooth soft words and speeches. Oh, it was hard Miss Mortimer! oh, it was very hard! and no one but I, who had the one ewe lamb and lost it, can tell what I felt.'

Softly I put my hand in his and felt how truly noble was this

man, who could love so passionately and forbear so gently ; who had never chided Milly by word or look, though often and often I knew she had vexed him by her thoughtless folly and pretty childish caprices, but ever bore patiently and tenderly with her.

'And now it is over,' he continued, pressing my hand gratefully for the unspoken sympathy, 'and a Divine will has broken down the only barrier between my child and Hubert ; but oh, Miss Mortimer, do you think it will be well with her ? for if it be not, it were better that she had never been born.'

'I think it will be well with her,' I answered steadily. I think that you can trust your treasure safely to his care, and I am sure that he will guard it well ; sorrow and trouble have made him a changed man ; and I am certain he is a penitent one.'

'If that be so, then let him have her, the child's heart has long been his ; and perhaps, after all, I was harsh and partial in my estimate of him. The time was when I liked him well and trusted him as I trusted few men.'

'And you will trust him again ; nay, do not shake your head so sorrowfully, you know that Herwald loves him. Believe me, Mr. Vaughan, that however bitter this change is to you, the time will come when you will learn to rejoice in it ; and when Milly will learn the worth of her brother, and will reward him with the love he deserves.'

He leant on the stile a moment without answering me, but his lips moved and his eyes were fixed on the little gray church just looming through the trees.

'Dear mother church,' he whispered, half to himself, 'there is refuge in thee for many a weary son, and the time has come when I, the weariest and loneliest among them, shall find rest and comfort under thy sacred shade.—But come, Miss Mortimer, the dews are falling and the air is heavy with moisture, and you are thinly clad, let us return to the house.'

'And you will come and speak to them ?'

He bowed assent, and followed me : Dudley lingering under the laburnum-tree with Bruce, gave us a swift look of inquiry as we passed them without a word.

Again I opened the drawing-room door, but now shadow predominated, and through the dark, light whisperings as of happy lovers reached our ears ; but at the sound of Arthur's stumbling footsteps both rose, and Milly, disengaging herself from Hubert's detaining touch, ran forward to meet us.

Hester, coming in at that moment with the lamp, delayed her intended movement ; and during the few awkward minutes of closing windows and lowering blinds, she stood shyly clinging to Arthur's hand with downcast rosy face, until he lifted it up and looked down into the depths of the smiling eyes.

'Is it so, little Milly ? come, whisper to me, is my darling really happy ?'

The small hands clasped his neck as she raised herself on tip-toe to touch his lips.

'That is no answer, my bonnie bird, Milly must tell her brother all she feels ;' and as she buried her face childlike on his breast—'Come, you have nothing to fear ; is not your happiness more to me than anything else in the world ?

'I am happy,' she whispered, with trembling lip, 'so happy that I can scarcely believe it true ; for I love him, Arthur, and he loves me, and I am going to be his wife—and you will let me ?' she added, as she caught sight of the shadow on his face ; 'you will let me, will you not, dear, that I may make him forget his troubles, and all the bitter, bitter past ?'

And Arthur, kissing the little shining head, stretched out his hand to Hubert, standing beside him.

'Take her, Hubert, she is yours ; I give her to you, my hearth-flower, my lamb, my darling ; and may the heavens above be my witness against you if you wrong one hair of that innocent head. Great is the trust I repose in you, look to yourself how you fulfil it.'

'God bless you, Arthur,' replied Mr. Clive, solemnly.

'And now, dear Milly,' said her brother, with a sad smile as she looked up gratefully into his face, 'we must not forget what night this is, and how much we are already beholden to our kind hosts, and the brightness of the bridal eve ought not to be dimmed by any more such scenes as these.'

'It is enhanced, Arthur,' said Herwald, who had stolen in unnoticed through the half-opened door, and stood apart with blinded, dazzled eyes, coming in from the darkness, 'and I am happier to-night even than I thought I should be, now Hubert shares it too ; where is dear Milly ?' And as she tripped up blushing, he actually lifted her in his arms and kissed her before us all.

'It is quite allowable,' he remarked, as she retreated under Hubert's wing, 'there is a kind of distant relationship or friendship, I don't know which ; besides, she is to be my bridesmaid to-morrow,' which absurd logic made us all laugh, and brought Louie in to hear and join in it.

What a strange, strange evening it was, half happy and half sad ; happy with lovers and sad with impending separation, and in the midst of it all I wandered as if in the magic of a dream, repeating to myself the old refrain—

'But not the orange blossom,
Nor the diamond's costly blaze,
Can give her back the brightness
Of her girlhood's happy days.'

A blither, bonnier day never shone down on Sunnyside than on our Loo's wedding morning ; and waking early with that marvellous feeling of something impending not wholly pleasurable and not wholly sad, it was refreshing to linger a moment by the open

window, and look over smiling gardens and dewy meads with the kine browsing knee-deep in the soft rich grass.

And, oh, such a fair spring sky, not as in summer with deep purple clefts hewn in the snowy masses of cloud—alps piled on alps, and airy flotilla and white sails gliding through the central blue, but a mild soft blue-gray sky, with one placid cloud-bank to westward, and a tiny white fragment over the cedar-tree, just like a baby's hand; all so peaceful, so pure, so calm, I could have stood there and dreamed for ever; but the joyous scurrying over the nursery-floor, and the merry ring of the boys' voices, already awakened to bustle and excitement, soon brought me back to life again, even if I had not peeped between the white curtains to watch Herwald as he paced up and down the garden-walks leaning on Dudley's arm.

And then came breakfast, and with it packets of gloves, piles of bouquets in little coral and gold holders, one white, perfumy, bride-like, lying on the top, clasped by a silver hand with a band of pearls; then more presents, diamond-starred locket, with Herwald's and Louie's portraits inside; and then Nellie begins to dream again, and dreams on to the end of the day.

It is so confusing, so marvellous, so unreal, such wild pealing of bells, and stamping of hoofs in the distance, such resplendent maids, all muslin and ribbon, such wonderful boys' toilettes, such a tiny fairy Rill, all sash and curls.

And then Milly comes down a bewitching little bridesmaid, and takes me up and dresses me, and scolds because I will not put my bonnet straight, and will look out of the window instead; and then in the glass I catch sight of something airy, white, bewildering, with a pale tired face, peeping out under the clematis wreath, and then I won't look again, for I must go to Louie—I say—'My dear Louie,' and then I begin a-crying, and Milly goes down on her knees and scolds me more than ever, and Dudley brings me champagne and makes me drink it, too, and Bruce does wonders with a vinaigrette that has lost all its scent, and Arthur Vaughan stands outside in the passage and asks through the chink of the door in a mysterious manner if I am better.

And presently I laugh and make them leave me, but nearly cry again when Dudley kisses me so kindly and begs me to be calm.

And I turn the handle of my darling's door and go in, and then I could not have cried for the world, it was so beautiful; for through a veil that encircled her like a cloud, I saw a woman imperially fair, with shining eyes and ruddy golden hair, diamonds flashing on neck and arms; something that looked like Louie, but grander nobler far, who, turning to me with a bright calm smile, stretched out her hands to me, and I said—

'The diamonds are dimmed, love, for no one will look at them to-day,' and Louie touching them softly murmured—

'But they are Herwald's presents, and therefore precious to me

beyond their worth ; he said that he would deck me like a queen. Look at this cross, Nellie, how it glitters like a star, and these beautiful ear drops, too.'

Something that glittered too fell on the little cross as I took it in my hand and kissed it.

'Fie, Nell, what is that? a tear—we must have none of that to-day, dearest, we are all too calm and happy.'

'It will not harm the cross, Louie, I do not know the tear that would ; but I have half forgotten my mission—Herwald wants to see you, my beauty, before he meets you in the church, for fear he should be too much dazzled, he said, and could not attend to the service.'

'I am willing,' she murmured, but blushed nevertheless as she prepared to follow me.

Herwald was leaning against the wall as we came out with folded arms ; he looked very pale, but the erect head and earnest noble face reminded me of Marion Vivian's name for him, of Sir Galahad ; and he looked so pure, so good, so true, that I felt he deserved it from that moment.

Very few were the spoken words of greeting, but the proud fond look that accompanied them said volumes, and then Dudley came up and fetched him away ; and Louie went back into her room.

Merrily the bells rang out and the organ pealed ; while a great golden sun flooded the chancel in light, touching Herwald's hair with a circling halo ; and casting rosy gleams down Hubert Clive's white robe, as he stood with his Angel Gabriel's look, and in low earnest tones read over the solemn words, 'For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part.' Oh, solemn words indeed !

And then it was over ; and Louie Delorme, leaning on her young husband's arm, passed through the crowd, treading on a flowery pathway strewn by children's hands, and re-entered her old home, to be hers no more.

'Nellie,' cried Herwald's old merry voice from the curtained recess where he had placed Louie to receive her homage as a bride, 'Do you know what was Lulu's first wifely speech?' (his pet name for her).

'Herwald!' remonstrated Louie, blushing brilliantly.

'She asked if I thought all brides felt as happy as she did, and if it were not wrong not to care more about leaving her old home and you all ; what do you say, Nellie?' and he looked proudly down on her, as she toyed with the little golden circlet that seemed so strange to her.

'I say it is natural and right, and that Louie ought to be happy if she were not ; and as to leaving us all, we shall have her back again often ; we shall trust that to you, Herwald.'

'Shall I bring you back, dear Louie,' he whispered, 'before I take you home? should you like to see Sunnyside in its autumn livery of

brown and crimson before we travel northwards?' and Louie smiled assent at him gratefully as I left them to greet the thronging guests.

What a strange long day it seemed, as if it would never be over.

The interminable breakfast, with speeches and bride-cake, with a distant vision of Louie and Herwald at the end of it; then a rising and bustle, trunks in the hall, wedding favours unpinned, Louie reappearing in travelling dress with Rill in her arms, while Bruce lingers near, looking sad and dispirited; and then the good-byes, the pressure of warm clinging arms, the last long kiss for Nellie, and then Dudley has closed the door, and he and Herwald grasp hands, the four horses dash down the road, while the boys run after it bare-headed and a crowd of factory men cry hurrah, till the street echoes with their shout—and then a great blank falls over our circle, and we feel that we have lost her.

'Nellie,' said Dudley that evening, as I leant my aching head on his shoulder for a moment, as I said good-night, 'have you looked over at the Priory to-day?'

'No, dear, why?'

'Then come and look,' and he drew back the curtains, that I might see through the trees its many windows blazing with light.

'What does that mean?' I asked, astonished.

'That they are come back; Halcot saw them pass through the village this afternoon with a courier and maid in the rumble. He saw Marion Vivian plainly, and there was another lady with her in a black hat and feathers; yes, actually Marion Vivian has come.'

'Is she?' I said, rather weariedly, and then I went to bed, and all through the waking period of the night I found myself repeating, 'yes, actually Marion Vivian is come.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

'But thou wert nursed in some delicious
land
Of lavish lights and floating shades;
And flattering thy childish thought,
The Oriental fairy brought,
At the moment of thy birth,

From old well-heads of haunted rills,
And the hearts of purple hills
And shadow'd coves on a sunny shore,
The choicest wealth of all the earth,
Jewel or shell, or starry ore,
To deck thy cradle, Eleānore.'

Tennyson.

'AND so, if you are ready, Nellie, and I am willing, what is to hinder us from going down to the Priory this lovely afternoon?'

'Nothing at all, if you do not think that we shall not be intruding on them too soon,' I replied.

'I am sure we shall do nothing of the kind, so be quick and put on your best bonnet, and remember that the lords of creation do not like to be kept waiting.'

So knowing well that my especial lord exacted a prompt and loving obedience in such matters, I folded up my work, arrayed myself with what speed I could, and in a few minutes was threading the low meadows with Dudley at my side, and a lark singing merrily in the blue sky above.

'How long is it, Nellie,' he asked, as we at length reached the lodge-gates, and paced slowly through the shady avenue,' since you and I used to stroll to the rosary with work and book, and spend many a pleasant evening, while the wild roses loaded the air with perfume, and trailed on the long grass at our feet, as if inviting you to gather lapfuls, as you so often used to do?'

'It is nearly a year ago,' I answered with a sigh, 'and the old times will come back—never—I suppose!'

'Not the ruined beauty of the rosary, I imagine. Just peep through this hedge: there are no broken dryads or headless fauns now, not even the lion with his lopped tail, and the greyhound minus a leg. What a transformation! See—shaven lawns, clipped yews, a marble fountain banked in with ferns, a nymph or two, and Diana from the bath just gleaming snow-white through the trees—the effect is magical, with such a stillness and silence that one would imagine the new Prioress Marion were herself turned to stone.'

'And what of the unknown Eleanor?'

'From whom defend me! Hush! was that an arm of flesh shining through the rose thicket, or do Galatea and her companions descend sometimes from their pedestals to snatch the garden sweets? By all that's marvellous, I believe it was human and moved. We have peeped enough, and now I am going to startle the gray old Priory by such a peal as it has not heard since the monkish days of Edward the Third!'

'Edward the Third!' I replied, derisively; 'there is not a stone of the old building remaining, Mr. Egerton says, because——' and then I paused, for the massive oaken door was swinging slowly back, and then a tall bearded Italian ushered us, with many gesticulations and reverences, into a dark Gothic-looking hall, lit by high, narrow, painted windows in mediæval style.

'Si, they were at home—at least, the Signora Marion; but he, Dominique, believed the Signora Eleanor was out in the grounds; would the Signor follow him at once?'

Which we did, catching sight as we passed of a low oak-ceiled dining-room, and a sombre library, looking, in its dusky shade, like the aisle of some old cathedral; and then we found ourselves in a large sunny drawing-room, with modern French windows, opening on to the lawn, and a conservatory at the end, full of rare exotics and singing birds, and a cool plashing fountain in the midst—and there, sitting in the shadow of a ruby velvet curtain, I saw, for the second time, Marion Vivian.

She rose and greeted us with the earnest cordiality of manner that had attracted me at first.

'Would Dominique find her sister, or at least send Babette for her; she was gathering flowers, she believed; and would we not sit down, she was so glad, so truly glad, to see us again; for,' added Marion, pressing my hand with foreign warmth, 'I have not yet forgotten our pleasant evening at the parsonage.'

'Neither have we, I assure you,' returned Dudley, 'your name has been on Nellie's lips often since then, and we have both looked forward to the hour when we could renew the acquaintance, and greet you as neighbours and friends; but have you not a little anticipated that time, Miss Vivian? I thought you were not returning to the Priory till late in the summer, or early autumn. Did your sister, then, consent to forego her promised excursion to the Pyrenees?'

'Not very willingly, I own; but the friends with whom we had planned the tour were compelled to return to England under the pressure of sudden family bereavement, and so the excursion lost its charm for Eleanor, and she was the first to propose that we should at once come home to the old deserted roof-tree.'

'A proposal that pleased you well.'

'Ah! that it did,' she returned, with a frank sigh; 'I was so weary of our Zingara life, pitching our tent according to an artist's fancy, in sunny spots and nooks of natural beauty—now in a Florentine palace or a Neapolitan villa, a Swiss *châlet*, a cottage by the Rhenish vineyards, or a Burgomaster's dwelling in a grass-grown street in Ghent. Such things please for a little while; but for me'—stretching out her fair white hands—'I longed for my English home.'

'Is your sister, then, such a lover of art and nature?'

'She adores nature, and ever seeks to reproduce her on her canvas, though with a crude and girlish hand. Perhaps it may be my partial fancy, but I think that Eleanor has genius.'

'What is her style?' asked Dudley, much interested. 'I trust she does not aspire, like a young lady we know of, Miss Rivers, to a "Dido's funeral pyre."'

'Miss Rivers! Oh! I met her in Italy with my Sir Galahad—who, by-the-bye, I hear has carried off your sister, the beauty of Sunnyside, as she is called. The whole village was teeming with the news as we arrived, and very much surprised and pleased I was to hear it. Well, and how did Maud Rivers handle such a masterly subject, Mr. Mortimer? I have never seen her paintings, but I should say there was nothing crude and girlish about her.'

Dudley shrugged his shoulders and arched his eyebrows with a laugh.

'What, was it bad then?'

'I! how can I tell? I am no connoisseur. There was a blurred outline of crazy colour: yellow opaque-looking flames, mingled with blue-white faggots; a sea that, like Elijah's flame, seemed ready to lick up the sacrifice; a burly-shouldered Æneas standing

at the prow, like a good-liking navy, dressed in his Sunday best, with certainly an un-English length of hair, and a turban that savoured of the East; and a Dido, long-limbed and ungraceful, struggling in an agony of muscle.'

A peal of silvery laughter rang through the room, as Dudley finished his absurd art-criticism; and, turning, we saw a girl standing within a foot of us, half concealed by the heavy drapery of the window-curtain.

A girl, tall and supple, and slight of figure, swaying to and fro with the restless grace of a half-tamed animal, with the head and eyes of a deer, and with masses of sun-coloured hair, half hidden away in a net, and half falling in loose curls about her long white throat.

A girl, rich with exceeding beauty; beside which, for a moment, Marion's paled and grew dim, as a stray moonbeam would be eclipsed by the shifting colours of a kaleidoscope, but which, while it pleased and dazzled the eye, conveyed no sense of rest and comfort.

She was strangely dressed, too—in a white cashmere, quaintly cut in the old Italian fashion, with loose hanging sleeves reaching to the knee, and a cross resting on her bare neck, with a ruby star in the centre. A sweeter, softer expression would have marked her for a Beatrice or a Leonora; as it was, she was unique, and herself, Eleanor Vivian—half child, half woman, half artist.

'Come hither, Lenore,' said her sister, 'and give your hand in the English fashion to our good friends and neighbours, the Mortimers of Sunnyside. You remember that I told you of them on my return to Vienna?'

'Si, Sorella;' and Eleanor, advancing, gave her hand to me, while she saluted Dudley with a half shy, half proud inclination of the head, and then, sitting down on the rug at her sister's feet, commenced sorting and arranging the flowers she had hoarded in her lap.

Marion leaned over her, and played caressingly with her hair.

'No one but you, Carissima, would find the carpet a fit resting-place in the presence of strangers; but you are such a child, and the proprieties and conveniences of life are as nothing to you.'

'The proprieties, I detest them—go—they are too absurd,' said Eleanor, speaking in a quick, bright voice, in which was the musical ring of the foreigner; 'who regards the inconvenient decorum of these cold English people, with their wind that whistles so chilly in the fairest summer's day, and their sarcasms, so polished, and so nipping? here there is nothing warm, strong, brilliant, as in our sunny south.'

'Are you pining already to return to Italy?' asked Dudley, with grave kindness; 'your sister wearies of your wandering passage life, and is rejoicing in her quiet home. True, our skies are not so blue, but we have sunny nooks of landscape beauty, to attract an artist's eye.'

Eleanor dropped her flowers, and looked up into his face with eager interest.

'You are right there ; you have spoken the truth. Every morning have I waded through the dew, up and down the meadows, and through the leafy lanes, to find a subject for my pencil, and have had to choose among a hundred ; but to-day I have fixed my mind, and have found one, quaint, homely, English, what you call—*ravisante*—seen through a break in the hedge, at the bottom of the home-fields.'

'And what was that, Lenore? describe it to us, if you will ; though, if I may hazard a guess, it is only that old brown cottage standing by the road-side.'

'Old—brown—yes, you have it there ; but then, what surroundings ! A background of wood, still, green, velvety ; a patch of sunny road ; a Roman horse-trough, such as those of Etruria might have used ; an oak tree, casting dusky shadows ; a cool, deep pond, with a broken fence, and a willow trailing at its edge—what would you more ?' And Eleanor, subsiding into silence, pulled the crimson petals of a brilliant exotic to pieces.

'Your whole soul seems in your art,' observed Dudley, while Miss Vivian and I exchanged smiles.

'My soul?' said Eleanor, with a strange bright smile that seemed to light up her face with a sunbeam, and then flicker and die rapidly out. 'You an Englishman, and talk of my soul ! Do the men here think that they have any? do they think of more than their money-getting, and their great hungry selves? But you are different, you do not seem to be a stranger to the sympathies—tell me, do you care for these things?'

'Very much,' he answered, heartily, 'so much so, that one day when you know me better, and consider me entitled to such honour, you must permit me to see your studio.'

'Permit you! you shall see it at once—come ;' and springing from the ground, which was strewn in a moment with her flowers, she beckoned to him as frankly as if she had known him for a life-time.

'One moment, Eleanor,' remonstrated her sister ; 'you must invite my friend, Miss Mortimer, too !'

'Consider it done,' she returned, tapping a little scarlet slipper impatiently upon the floor ; 'why so ceremonious, Marion? and for you—' looking at Dudley, 'you shall tell me which picture you like, and the one you choose shall be your own—your very own—to remind you of your first visit to the Priory.'

'Indeed,' replied Dudley, turning red, 'I cannot permit you to suffer by such impulsive generosity ; at any future time I shall be proud indeed to accept the slightest sketch from your hands, but—'

'*But* is a word I approve of in no language ; and unless you accept my favours, you shall not cross the threshold of my studio—hold, I am serious, there—' and Eleanor wrinkled her low white

brow till her hair rippled over her eyes. 'I paint only for caprice, and I love to part with my pictures to my friends.'

'Then let it be so, out of gratitude for the implied compliment of being ranked among the number of your friends,' returned Dudley, half-fascinated and half-repelled by the new aspect of warm southern nature presented to his view; 'and if my choice light on the best and favourite, the fault must lie with yourself.'

'I!—I have no favourites; but come, you are wasting time and my patience!' and so saying, she turned, and leading the way across the hall, flitted up the broad oaken staircase before us.

I say 'flitted,' for no word in our language could describe Eleanor's movements—so sudden, erratic, abrupt, and yet so graceful. One could not say of her as of others that she walked, glided, sailed, or even swam; but in a way, she combined all. She moved with the springy step of a fawn, and the erect head of a queen: impulse and dignity blended together in her gait.

At the landing-place she paused, and beckoning again with her hand, ushered us into a noble-looking room—a room that reflected its owner in every corner of it.

The walls, as well as the coverings of the various lounges, ottomans, and sofas, were of a delicate sea-green, that faint, fair colour that reminds one of cool summer seas, or the tender tints of the spring; but the hangings that shaded the windows were of rose-coloured silk, and the floor was covered with velvet-pile, into which one sank as into the moss at the foot of some gnarled oak.

A balcony had been thrown out, which was furnished in the Italian style, with tubs of aloes, and stone vases full of flowering shrubs; part of it was protected by an awning, and spread with a curiously-patterned Indian matting. Here there were seats placed, with guitar and book, and mantilla thrown carelessly down, as if the morning had been spent there; and everywhere, piled on tables, stands, easel, and even chairs, were Eleanor's pictures—some mere sketches, some half-finished, as if she had wearied of them, and flung them aside—very few of them really completed and ready for the frame.

That they were painted by the hand of an artist was undoubted, though it was a crude and girlish one, as her sister had said. They were all fresh, fervid in colour, bold and masterly in style, and bearing the stamp of genius: but none the less did they all have the same fault—want of finish, the marks of a restless, capricious fancy, soon wearying of its subject, and turning to another; and yet, even in their incompleteness, charming more than another's perfected production, even as originality and genius always will attract more than laborious perseverance without it.

They were so varied, too. Here a Roman drinking-fountain, with a water-carrier asleep; an archway, with Florentine girls selling grapes; a stone cross, broken and moss-grown, with a brown baby at the foot, with bare dimpled limbs, watched over by a sheep dog; a bird's nest full of speckled eggs.

Then a sea-view—white cliffs, tiny wavelets lapping on the yellow sands, dark ridges of sea-weed, a distant sparkle of foam, a silver sail gleaming in the sunlight. Now, the same sea repeated under the horror of a tempest—white-flecked breakers, sullen as death; an inky sky lowering its crest; a broken mast, with a dead hand clinging to it.

Then a forest dell; patches of yellow moss, trailing shadows, rank luxuriance of foliage, full-leaved parasites, a blue sky, the stillness of approaching evening; and over each we lingered till we were wearied of reiterating the same praise. But at last came a silence, a pause, and then Dudley said—

‘Here is one, Miss Vivian, that I admire more than all.’

It was small, simple in subject, but with more lavish work expended on it than on any of the others; it was as if the artist had loved it herself, and had not cared to hurry it. An English pastoral.

‘A few poor sheep,’ as Eleanor laughingly said, ‘and nothing more.’

And she was right. Stray sheep that had wandered into a field through a break in the hedge, by which lay a sleeping shepherd, with the rest of the flock looking wistfully after their companions, but not daring, like them, to pass their ‘Cerberus,’ who, curled up on his master’s coat, was fast asleep too.

The beauty, however, lay not in subject, but in the colouring; the full, deep tints of evening; the sun flushing the clover; the bank of rosy clouds to westward; the church-spire peeping through the trees; the harmony of the whole: and we both agreed with Dudley in thinking it the most beautiful of all.

‘Well, it is yours,’ said Eleanor carelessly. ‘Guido shall bring it you this evening, and I will come over to-morrow and show you in what light to hang it, and see your great ugly Sunnyside at the same time.’

‘Lenore!’ said her sister gravely, while Dudley, checked in his intended thanks, stood and stared as if he had not heard aright.

‘Why! what have I done? What are you looking at?’ returned Eleanor, with a little wilful laugh. ‘I thought you were a nation of truth-tellers! Is not your house ugly; and why must I give the polite lie?’

‘If you cannot praise, at least be silent; courtesy forbids blame,’ replied Marion: ‘and what fault can you possibly find in Mr. Mortimer’s home? It looks to me the very ideal of domestic comfort.’

‘Because you have no perception of the beautiful; you have great, silly, English ideas. Look here,’ pointing to where, across the low meadow, stood Sunnyside, gleaming white through the garden-trees, ‘who that has eyes can call that huge barn pretty, with its unsightly stacks of chimneys and great staring windows? Why do not you, who have sense,’ turning to Dudley, ‘cover and hide it with ivy, with luxuriant creepers—Virginian, that turns red

in autumn, and wistaria, with clusters of flowering grapes? Where is your taste and discernment? Do you love barns?’

‘I love Sunnyside,’ replied Dudley, stoutly, ‘and I hate ivy, and tore it all down last Spring because it was ruining the wall, and filled our bed-rooms with earwigs and such-like noxious insects; but I agree with you, Miss Vivian, that the Priory is more to my taste, indeed it is my notion of an earthly Paradise; and if I see much more of it I shall be fearful of breaking the tenth commandment.’

‘Then come every day, if you like; we have no friends here, Marion and I, and you please me, and your sister too—only she is so quiet, keeps in a corner, and nibbles her own thoughts like a little white mouse; and I cannot come to you; I do not love barns.’

‘Oh, Eleanor, how can you be so rude? Mr. Mortimer, pray excuse her; you see what a child she is—so careless of her words.’

‘I see,’ returned Dudley, with a grave kind smile at Marion’s perturbed face, ‘but your sister’s outspoken frankness needs no apology. Both Nellie and I understood it in a moment—still, Miss Eleanor, we have English notions of pride, and never visit those who will not return it; and so, if you disdain the barn, this will be the last, as well as first, visit to the Priory.’

‘Nonsense,’ replied Eleanor, impatiently, and colouring high. ‘We are going to be friends, I tell you; and now come and see our garden—it is prettier than yours, though I have never seen it; Marion and I planned it at Vienna, and Dominique carried it out.’ And before we could answer she was springing down the staircase again, and was out on the lawn in a minute, while we followed her more leisurely.

Dudley lingered behind with Marion, while I walked on ostensibly with Eleanor, though she was never still for a second, or uttered two consecutive words;—now she was skimming over the grass in search of gay-coloured moths; now flitting from flower to flower, like a humming-bird; now entangled in a rose-thicket, in search of a thorn-garnished bud, that scratched her white hand in the gathering; now calling to Dudley and interrupting his quiet talk with her sister, to look at some view, or some picturesque embankment of clouds, and doing everything in a perfectly perplexing and wholly fascinating way.

Presently, we heard the cooing of doves, and came in sight of their lattice-work prison, and in a moment Eleanor was in the midst of them, fondling them in her bosom, stroking their sleek bird-heads, as they perched on her shoulder cooing in her ear, and fluttering delightedly around her, till she at last came out with one resting on her bare white arm.

‘You seem fond of them?’ I said, smiling, as she nestled the pretty creature against her cheek.

‘Very. I have many pets—wait, you shall see,’ and taking up a little whistle that was suspended to her girdle, she sounded it three times, loudly.

Presently came a joyous barking, and a beautiful Italian boy, dressed in a rich but strange costume, came running up the lawn, with two white Persian kittens under his arm, and followed by three small Italian greyhounds, and a King Charles spaniel, that swept the grass with its long ears.

'That's right, Guido; come here, my cats. Miss Mortimer, these are my lovely Persians—Prince Comfie and my Lady Mufftie. See, they wear gold bells on their blue ribbons, and have coats as white as snow; and they live like a prince and princess of the "Arabian Nights," on cream and other good things; are they not beauties? And there are my Italian greyhounds, Carlo, Pietro, and Belle, and my pet spaniel Fanchette—look at her ears of floss silk, and her great dumb, loving eyes. I like dogs' eyes, Mr. Mortimer; they can only look love at you, and never frown, and be angry. Look, Guido, Carlo is trampling the flower-beds; take them in to Babette. Good-bye, my lady Mufftie; depart, away with you all;' and waving imperiously with her hand, Guido vanished in an instant, with slender feet scudding after him, and much ringing of tiny bells.

'And now,' said Dudley, advancing, with a smile, 'you have beguiled our time so pleasantly, that we have already trespassed late into the afternoon, and must bid you adieu, with many apologies for our lengthy visitation.'

'Nay,' answered Marion, softly, 'we owe you many thanks for your friendliness—' But Eleanor interrupted her as usual. 'The shadows are falling in the avenue, and it is cool and delightful, let us walk down to the lodge gates with them, and I can show Mr. Mortimer the brown cottage by the roadside that I mean to sketch.'

'So we went. Dudley seemed at first as if inclined to linger by Marion's side, but Eleanor recalled him by one of her peremptory gestures, and then monopolized him the whole way; Marion and I walking behind, talking of many things.

At last we reached the gates, and then parted, Eleanor kissing me on each cheek, with foreign vivacity and freedom; Marion stealing a slow cool hand in mine, and pressing it kindly.

'Adieu,' were Eleanor's last words; 'I shall come to Sunnyside to-morrow.'

'Well, Nellie?'

'Well, Dudley?'

And then we broke into a laugh, as I took his arm and walked down the narrow field-path.

'Come, I have done all the talking for you this afternoon; it is your turn now.'

'Assuredly you have done your part; how well you can talk when you like, Dudley, and how handsome my plain boy looked to-day, by way of a change.'

'Not much of an Adonis, Nell, but well enough as to thews and sinews, and the strength that makes up a man; but how about our fair Prioresses? are they not an acquisition to our little circle?'

'Undoubtedly. Did you ever see such a bewildering, fascinating creature as this wonderful Eleanor? But I admire Marion's grave beauty more.'

'She is the more admirable of the two, for she is the more worthy—she is a good woman, Nellie.'

'I am sure of it; it was the sweet seriousness of her face, and voice that attracted me so that first evening, and which I have never forgotten. In her presence one feels better, and less selfish, with broader views of men and things; it is a rest even to look at her.'

'So I felt,' he answered, quietly. 'Eleanor's vivacity bewildered and surprised me, she was such a beautiful, capricious child; but when one turned to Marion, one addressed a woman, who, while she commanded liking, exacted reverence.' (And won love, I could have answered, but wisely held my peace.) 'And then, what a mother she is to her sister; with what tender care she seems to watch over her. Such affection as hers, Nellie, is delightful to witness.'

'It is little short of idolatry,' I returned. 'Did you notice the tone in which she always uttered her name? Eleanor is to Marion sister, child, everything in life, and Heaven grant that she may always reward her love.'

'Amen,' he returned, musingly, and then we saw Bruce in the distance coming to meet us, and then we had it all over again.

The following afternoon I was not surprised when Bruce went to the factory, that Dudley lingered behind under a pretext of finishing a little carpentering job that I had asked him to do some days ago; and shouldering his hammer, went up whistling with Rill at his heels. Neither was it a great astonishment to me when he came down ten minutes afterwards, looking fresh and well-brushed, with his diamond ring on, and announcing casually that 'the Miss Vivians were crossing the meadows and bearing down upon the house,' went out into the garden to pick a narcissus for his button-hole; but somehow as I stood and watched him do it, my heart felt suddenly as heavy as lead.

Five minutes more, and then there was a rustling of silks, an odour of otto of rose, and Eleanor entered in her drooping hat and feathers, and Marion followed her.

'See, we have kept our promise, and crossed the Rubicon,' she said; then, seating herself on the couch, and looking round her—

'The barn is not so unsightly within, it is home-like, and this room is pretty and sweet with flowers; yes,' nodding her head—'I shall come again, you are good people, and kind. Oh, there is Mr. Mortimer! Come, Mr. Mortimer, I have been praising Sunny-side, and now you must show me the garden.'

So they went, and Marion and I sat by the open window, and watched them disappear through the shrubbery; and just as we were in the midst of an interesting conversation, Eleanor again burst in, her hands full of flowers, her curls streaming loosely under her hat, and her eyes shining brightly.

'Oh, such an orchard, Marion, with a little gipsy beauty in it gathering buttercups; and Mr. Mortimer has promised that I am to come to-morrow and sketch it, and Rill is to be put in, in a scarlet cloak and hood, and that ugly rough dog with the nice head is to be in it too.'

'It will make a very pretty picture,' said Dudley; 'and the promise is, that it is to be Nellie's, and to be called "Little Red Riding Hood." Don't you think your sister is too lavish in her generosity, Miss Vivian?'

He had taken the seat beside her as he spoke, but Eleanor had tossed her flowers down, and was drawing on her little scented gloves.

'Now, Mr. Mortimer, I am ready. We are going to see the church, Marion; it is in the old Norman style of architecture, and has some curious carving, and some rare old books—a chained Bible, and a chalice set with pearls—you come, and Miss Nellie too; don't keep me waiting, or we shall miss the best light.'

I thought both Dudley and Miss Vivian obeyed Eleanor's imperious command rather reluctantly, so I enticed her across to the parsonage first, to ask for the keys, and was glad that Mr. Egerton detained us for a few minutes in the study, to show her some old prints; and when we came out we found the others lingering in the porch, apparently well-pleased with each other's company.

When Eleanor had finished her survey, and exhausted her vocabulary of admiring epithets, and quaint, out-of-the-way remarks, both sisters took their leave, Dudley politely escorting them to their own gates.

I loitered long about the lane, hoping he would return, and tell me what he thought of our new acquaintances on the second visit; but as he did not appear, I at last came to the conclusion that he had taken the other path to the factory.

What was my astonishment, then, when Bruce came in alone to tea, and asked me what on earth had become of Dudley, for he had not seen him the whole afternoon.

'You don't mean it!' I exclaimed; 'then he has been at the Priory all this time.'

'There he comes to answer for himself,' cried Bruce; 'how now, partner? what means this escapade? shirking work for the whole afternoon!'

But Dudley leant silently over my chair, with an inconceivably mischievous expression.

'Where have you been, Dudley?'

'In the Priory garden, Nellie.'

'What have you been doing there, sir?'

'Talking gravity with the elder, and mirth with the younger sister. Come, cease your catechism, Sis, for your boy is famished with hunger, and dying for a cup of tea. Have you managed without me, Bruce?'

'No, I have worked everything into a tangled skein for you to

unravel to-morrow. Both the shop, tell us something new. Which is the favourite sultana, old fellow?"

'Ask Nellie—she knows; she peers into all my secrets, and reads my thoughts better than I do myself. Go and see them for yourself, Bruce, and tell me which you admire most, and I will take the other; never mind your Highland lassie—

"Out of sight is out of mind
With mony folk we find!"

'Fie, Dudley, what heresy; don't listen to him, Bruce. My opinion is,

"It is well to be off with the auld love
Before you are on with the new!"

And if I were you, I would not go near the Priory beauties, for they are certain to be "Scylla and Charybdis" to you, and Katie, Katie, bonnie and true, is worth all of them.'

Both the young men laughed, but Bruce coloured and looked conscious, and adjourned the conversation as speedily as he could.

Later in the evening I observed Dudley smiling over his open page, and stealing to his side, I found it was Herwald's favourite translation of Torquato Tasso that he was reading.

'What! is it you, Nellie? Look here, is not this an apt illustration of certain friends of ours?—it struck me as so quaint in its coincidences; and kneeling beside him, I read the passage he pointed out.

'I saw two ladies once—illustrious, rare,
One a sad care; her beauties at midday
In clouds conceal'd;—the other, bright and gay,
Gladden'd, Aurora-like, earth, sea, and air.
One hid her light, lest men should call her fair,
And of her praises no reflected ray
Suffer'd to cross her own celestial way:
To charm and to be charm'd the other's care.
Yet this her loveliness veil'd not so well,
But forth it broke; nor could the other show
All hers, which wearied mirrors did not tell.
Nor of this one could I be silent, though
Bidden in ire, nor that one's triumphs swell;
Since my tired verse, o'ertask'd, refused to flow.'

'Coincident indeed,' I murmured, and was about to continue my comments, when Dudley rising, suddenly closed the book.

CHAPTER XXXV.

'The circle is broken, the garland untwined,
The flow'rets are scatter'd, upborne by the wind;
They have quitted our roof, have wander'd away
From the home that they loved in childhood's bright day.'—*Simon.*

AND so the summer passed rapidly away, laden with fresh interests and diversified by new and startling events.

First, there were the continental letters so eagerly looked for, and read with such pleasurable excitement, rousing the quiet spirits of Sunnyside by amusing incidents of travel, and descriptions of the world of nature and art ;—Louie's, tender, wifely, loving, breathing the fruition of a perfected happiness ; Herwald's, ardent, devoted, blissful, and full of the praise that his beautiful bride excited in the cities of Europe. And ever as I mused over his glowing sentences, that passage from the 'Day-dream' seemed to haunt my lips—

'And o'er the hills, and far away,
Beyond their utmost purple rim
Beyond the night, across the day,
Through all the world she followed him.'

Ah, Loo ! Queen Loo ! so loving and beloved, what can Fate do more for you than she has done ?

And then from time to time came Milly's letters, telling me of days of brisk happy toil, of moorland walks with Hubert, and quiet evenings with Arthur ; how they had both agreed to wait till Arthur had taken orders, and could marry them himself ; and how the parsonage was already being fitted up for its little mistress.

And then there was intercourse with the Priory, which seemed to infuse new life into us, an intercourse which was ripening day by day into friendship, warm, even if it were sudden and impulsive.

Every day we met, at first by chance, afterwards with full understanding ; while a variety of pleasant excursions gave zest to our somewhat monotonous life.

Now it was a strawberry feast, or, as the season grew later, a woodland nutting ; now, a fern-gathering in dells and dingles, and a gipsy tea at 'Abbey Farm ;' a moonlight row on the river, to the music of Eleanor's guitar ; or a garden fête at the Priory ; while the sisters ever made Sunnyside their constant resort, Eleanor sketching in the orchard, or filling my flower-vases, while Marion and I sat and worked, happy in each other's company.

And ever as the days went on a dim consciousness, that at last became almost certainty, filled me at once with pleasure and a sadness 'that was akin to pain ;' a consciousness that some one beside myself was becoming infected with the constant sweetness of Marion's presence, and was already paying homage to the nobility of her womanhood, and the purity of her Madonna-like beauty ; ah, Dudley, my dear ! how will it fare with me when I surrender my present right to another ?

I loved Marion, who could help it ? I considered her fair, without spot, and among women the most honourable ; I was proud of her friendship, I gloried in a character that contained nothing selfish or base, that erred only through excess of loving, through a constant persistence in the perfection of others, and blindness to their faults and weaknesses, which extended to all alike that charity that thinketh no evil. I loved her, yet I was sad, though it would be the proudest moment of my life to call her sister—to see her Dudley's wife.

Alas! for us poor earth-worms, how we cling to our idols of clay; how jealously we guard them, how loath we are to see them attach themselves to others, and leave us behind; how our faulty humanity would fain be everything to them, and the knowledge that it cannot be so, pains us to the heart!

'And a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife;' and his home, and his brothers and sisters, shall dwindle and wax less, waning towards the outer circle, while within are the sacred ties of wife and child; and woe to that sister, loving almost as purely and entirely as a wife, who shall be left desolate in the old house, knitting to herself no new ties, dwelling on the memory of the old! To her the great world yields no pity, but her name is *Marah* (Bitterness).

And yet for Marion, for the beautiful stranger who had stolen into my heart—for Dudley, who was more to me than myself, would I not do many things? would I not lay down my 'love-crown,' and suffer her to wear it?

Ah, in the fair summer afternoons, and in the glimmering twilights, new thoughts, like strange unknown birds, came and abode with me, and would not be shaken off; till I learnt to consider Keith's words as prophetic in their truth, and already looked forward to the time when I should sit alone in the old home, waiting for him.

And then came Bruce's marriage, startling us all like a thunder-clap, and leaving Dudley and me alone in the home-nest. And this is how it came about.

In the early days of May, when the hedges were gay with hawthorn, and the boys were gathering cowslips in the meadows down by the farm, poor Aunt Margaret and Katie came to take possession of the pretty Priors cottage, known in the neighbourhood as 'The Fernery,' from the variety and rarity of the beautiful ferns Lieutenant Forbes had collected.

For a whole month we had been employed in fitting up and preparing the house for habitation, and great was the labour and care we expended on it; I busy by day, and Bruce working evening after evening, with a zeal that love only could have taught; training the creepers, mowing the little lawn, filling the beds and flower-baskets, and doing all the carpentering required about the house.

The 'manse' furniture, which was old and clumsy, was to become the property of the in-coming tenant and new minister, Mr. Buchanan; so that everything in the Fernery was new; simple and inexpensive it was true, but still well chosen, and in good taste; and it looked so pretty when it was finished, with its fresh papers, green, mossy carpets, and white muslin curtains, that Dudley said regretfully that it was only fit for a bridal couple, and that it was a great pity it was not for the purpose. At which speech Bruce first grew very red, and then very silent, but for the moment I agreed with Dudley, and thought with how much interest

I should have worked if it were to be Bruce's home as well as Katie's.

And indeed it was a pretty little place, a cottage orné, with French windows opening all around on the verandah, and a lawn running down to the bank of the Priory stream, with a willow-tree and a rustic bench looking on the Fernery, that gave it its name.

The rooms too were large and pleasant, though somewhat low-ceiled, and the chamber that was to be Aunt Margaret's, and Katie's dressing-room adjoining, commanded the best view in the neighbourhood; looking right over the Priory gardens and woods to the blue hills beyond.

Both Dudley and Bruce had contributed many little embellishments to the house, and other useful things beside; an ornamental work-table for Aunt Margaret, and a flower-stand, a cabinet, and some book-shelves for Katie's dressing-room, a brood of the Sunny-side chickens for the poultry-yard, and a cow for the paddock; while I stored preserves and other good things in the little cool room which I knew would be Aunt Margaret's delight.

And so one evening, in the late spring twilight, Aunt Margaret and Katie entered their new home, both looking sad and pale in their deep mourning garments, but striving painfully to express the gratitude and thankfulness they felt to us for all our loving care; and Katie's eyes grew dark and dim with tears, as her womanly instincts noted in a moment the little tokens of remembrance that were strewn around, and saw how every expressed taste had been gratified.

In a short time, an incredibly short time it seemed to me, the strangeness wore off, and they were settled at home; and I soon got used to Katie bringing her work of a morning, that she might sit and talk to me, and we all grew to regard it as a natural right that Bruce should spend his evenings working in the little garden with Katie at his side, or strolling down the lane on moonlight nights with Aunt Margaret leaning on his arm.

A great change had passed over our Bruce in those days. His former gay companions, the Thorntons and Hazelwoods, knew him no more. Ada's flippancy failed to rouse him from his quiet, sedate bearing; and instead of loitering at the Hermitage on the summer afternoons, as he so often used to do, he worked with his brother at the factory as steadily as ever Dudley did, and required no other change than Aunt Margaret and Katie's company in the evening.

Often on our way from the Priory, where we had already begun to resort, we would come upon Bruce leaning to rest on the little garden-gate, with Katie, in her black dress and broad-brimmed hat, standing beside him; but though we never could catch a word of their low-toned talk, Katie's tell-tale blush and quiet happy look would speak volumes.

One evening—I think it was the last night of June, when Dudley was as usual at the Priory, where the sisters had begged him to

make one of a grand dinner-party that they were giving to some of the county families, and from which I had excused myself with some trouble—I had gone down to the cottage to sit in the porch with Aunt Margaret.

Bruce and Katie were working down by the fernery, but as the last sunset cloud disappeared from the horizon, and the soft still twilight came on, they laid aside their garden tools, and rested themselves on the bench under the willow-tree, where they remained till long after we had gone inside, and had lighted the candles in the dusky parlour.

Aunt Margaret had been talking to me about Keith—it was her favourite subject now. She would read me his letters, and hold forth for the hour together on his goodness, his virtues, and his future prospects, for she knew now that I loved him, and was never weary of listening to her; and often she would break off to tell me that I was as dear to her as if I were already her daughter, and that Katie loved me best in the world, except herself.

‘And one other,’ I would say, laughingly, at which Aunt Margaret would smile, and shake her head, and say that ‘Bruce was a dear good boy, and very kind to her, and she an old woman; but she did not know—her Katie was so quiet and reserved.’

There had been a fresh letter that evening from Keith, and I was just reading it a second time over when Katie came in with such a colour on her face, and her eyes full of tears, and kneeling down by her mother’s side, laid her head in her lap. Bruce followed her in a minute or two, looking handsome and nervous, and, sitting down, took Aunt Margaret’s hand in his, while she looked from one to the other with a sad, tender expression.

‘You will not rob me of my bairn, Bruce—my one wee lamb; eh, but you will spare her to her widowed mother, and Keith beyond the seas?’ and Aunt Margaret’s voice faltered, and her hands worked tremulously.

‘Dear mother,’ said Bruce, speaking in his honest, manly tones, ‘and you will suffer me to call you by that name, who have no mother of my own; I am not taking Katie from you; I am giving you a son. Listen to me, dear,’—as Aunt Margaret shook her white cap—‘a son who will work for you, and cherish you, and guard you sacredly till Keith comes back; who will love you, and never be weary of serving you, or of trying to make you happy.’

‘Eh, my child, and what will I do if you take from me my Katie, the blithest and bonniest of them all?’ And Aunt Margaret rocked herself to and fro, the tears streaming down her withered cheeks.

‘I will never leave you, mother mine,’ said Katie, kissing the fair wrinkled hand; ‘oh, never fear it, mother; Bruce does not ask it from me. Listen to him, dear, for he is so good, and will do what is best for us all.’

‘Three daughters have I buried in the kirk-yard, and two baby

boys beside them, and the minister is lying down to take his long rest, and my first-born is away, and now you are asking for Katie! Oh well is me, for few and evil are the days that remain.'

'Auntie,' said Bruce, reproachfully, 'and do you think that I am so selfish as to take away your only prop and stay?'

'Eh, bide a wee, mother, for he will explain it all.'

Aunt Margaret wiped the tears from her muslin kerchief, and sighed, and held her peace.

'It has seemed to me,' said Bruce, speaking low, 'as if I had loved Katie all my life, but I suppose it cannot be so. We met as strangers last winter, and it was long before we became friends. I always knew she liked me, and was sure of it even when she was cold and provoked me most; but I never knew how much till I asked her first on Castle Hill, when we strolled together in the dusk, and when I told her I hoped she would become my wife.

'It was a bad time for wooing, Aunt Margaret, and you lying sick in bed; so, though Katie loved me, and told me so, we agreed it was better, perhaps, to let things stand as they were, and that this mutual understanding should remain until you should be settled here, and your sadness a little abated. But it seems to me as if it were useless waiting longer, and, dear aunt, these things were in my mind when we took this house. Katie and I love each other, and I love you—why should she leave you? What should hinder me from coming here and taking care of you both? Why should we not marry at once, and spend the rest of the summer happily together?'

So said frank, outspoken Bruce; and though his proposal at first startled us all—Katie as much as any one—yet we soon learnt to consider it as not unreasonable; and as Dudley came stoutly to his brother's assistance, and showed Aunt Margaret that it would not only be a comfort, but a God-send to her, she gave consent, only stipulating that the wedding should be as quiet as possible, as befitted their late bereavement.

So, early one morning in August, when the fields were whitening to harvest, Dudley and Bruce and I walked silently down the lane to the little church, and found the boys waiting for us in the porch, and presently Katie entered in her white dress and simple bonnet, leaning on her mother's arm.

A quiet wedding, truly—an empty church, no wedding guests, no bridesmaids. How different to the day, not long before, when Louie and Herwald were married, and yet I liked it well.

And the sun that streamed upon the chancel shone down upon a sweet-faced bride, trembling and pale indeed, but with a steadfast look in her dark eyes; and on our Bruce, with his grave, happy face. And though Aunt Margaret wept when she pressed them to her bosom, and heard Bruce call her 'mother,' yet her tears were of joy rather than sorrow, and we knew that in her heart she was thankful and glad.

when the brief ceremony was over, we went into the parsonage, and there Katie changed her dress for her ordinary mourning garb, and after they had taken the refreshment prepared for them, the young couple went off for their bridal tour, among the English lakes, while we took Aunt Margaret back with us to Sunnyside.

Only for a fortnight, though. Bruce had had his summer holiday, and would not hear of leaving his brother longer; so almost before the news of the wedding was bruited abroad, they were among us again, looking as happy and matter-of-fact as if they had been married a year.

Of course we missed Bruce sorely. We missed his merry laugh, his light-hearted gaiety, his whistle in the hall, and the scent of his cigarette; and at first it seemed strange and dull to see him pass his old home so often, and to remember that he had now no part in it: but after a time we got used to see him sitting in the Fernery parlour, or reading to Katie and Aunt Margaret in the porch, and we were more than content when we knew how dearly he loved his bonnie Katie.

And Katie grew bonnier and brighter each day; and the cottage echoed with the sound of her light step and song, while her brisk, housewifely ways almost filled me with envy, and Katie Mortimer at the Fernery bid fair to outshine Dame Nell of Sunnyside; but she had only this one fault, that she thought nothing good enough for Bruce: and as Aunt Margaret soon grew to be of the same opinion, there was great chance that he would ere long be completely spoiled.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

‘What was her life?
A blank, my lord!’—*Shakespeare.*

ONE afternoon I was sitting alone in my usual place by the open window, looking over the front court and the corn-fields beyond.

It was a still, lovely day in September, when the ripened earth seemed to yield up all her sweetness, when the pine-woods were heavy with fragrance, and roses and heliotrope loaded the air with honeyed odours that entered every window; when white, slumbrous clouds were piled heavily on a deep blue sky, and wonderful shadows flitted hither and thither over the grassy lawn,—a day that seemed to fulfil the promise of the summer, yet gave no hint of winter's decay, save in the warm reddening of leaves and a bare bough or two.

From where I sat I could see the loaded corn-wains passing to and fro, scattering golden grain as they rumbled over the stubbly

furrows, and catch the hum of the busy reapers, chattering over their work; while from the orchard came the children's laughter, as they swung on the boughs of the King-Pippin tree, or raced up and down the knotted hillocks with Nettle at their heels.

But Sunnyside itself lay buried in silence; not an opening door or a footfall on the stairs told of stirring life. It seemed as if its only occupant were this same dreamy Nellie Morimer, leaning back in her chair, and thinking over the days that were gone.

There are times in one's life when one seems suddenly to come to a pause, and ask, What is to be next?—when we feel conscious that we have gained, as it were, a landing-place on the staircase of life, when sundry moving events have carried us several steps onward, hurrying us beyond our wont; and as we rest to take our breath and look around us, we marvel at the change.

And so it was with me. I was thinking over the happy Christmas circle when Louie, and Bruce, and Herwald had been with us; and as I remembered the broken links, the strange severing of the home party, I found myself wondering what would happen next—and as I thought, I shuddered with a new dread.

The opening of the front gate arrested my musing, and looking up I saw Dudley coming rapidly up the garden walk—an unusual sight in the early afternoon, and I was just laying aside my work to run and meet him, when he entered the room, and sat down on the seat opposite me.

The hasty question that was on my lips was suppressed, however, when I saw his face.

He looked as Dudley had never looked before—flushed and agitated, his gray eyes dark and brilliant with excitement, and a strange, sweet smile upon his lips—but even in that first glance I saw, with a sudden sinking of heart, that the loving eye and smile were not for me, and I said—

‘What has happened, my dear?’ And he replied, speaking in his low, grave voice—

‘I am so happy that I am incredulous of my happiness; for, Nellie, you will have a new sister!’

Alas, for the idols of clay! mine lay, Dagon-like, fallen on his face.

I rose and knelt down by his side. Did he read the reply in the agonized grip of his hands? for speech I had none—no voice for gladness, for joy, and congratulation. Ah, Marion, my friend, it is my heart's blood I am giving to you, but you are worthy, worthy of it all!

‘No word, Nellie dear? What! will you not congratulate your brother, or did you want him to remain an old bachelor all his life for your sake? That is hardly like you, who are so unselfish and so thoughtful for us all!’

And I answered, ‘I want nothing but your happiness. God bless you, and her, too, my dear;’ but my voice seemed to choke me, and I laid my face on his knees and wept. Did I ever think it

would be as hard as this? Did I ever imagine what life would be without him?

'Poor child,' he said, stroking my hair; 'poor child.' Then, raising my wet face and kissing it, 'there is no need for tears; you surely do not think that this will make any difference between us? we shall always be the same to each other, Nell darling—heart-friends and true friends; nothing will change that, I hope.'

I shook my head mournfully.

'Your confidence must now belong to your wife only; but we have had a very happy time, dear; I will be patient, and remember that.'

'And we shall have happy times yet; it will come strangely to you at first, I dare say, but soon you will get used to it, and learn to love my precious Eleanor as much as you do me.'

I laid my hands heavily on his breast, for I felt my lips whitening in that terrible surprise.

'Did you say Eleanor—Dudiey?'

'Yes, Eleanor, of course. Ah! I know what you mean; you thought it was Madonna Marion; but for once you were wrong; I never should have dared to aspire to her; besides, I loved Eleanor from the first.'

Ah me! but I would hide my despair from him though I should die for it.

'And she has promised to be your wife?'

'Yes, with tears of joy in her bright eyes, she has promised it. If you had only seen her when she confessed that my love had already reconciled her to England and home. Oh, Nellie, Nellie, what have I done that such happiness should be mine! Do you not think me a man fortunate beyond compare?'

'I think she is the proudest woman upon earth.'

He pressed my hands gratefully, and went on—

'It is not only her beauty that has won me; but her noble impulses, her generous instincts, her sweet child-like character, have alike attracted and enthralled me, till I only marvel how I could have lived so long without her.'

Lover's transports; but I am not dreaming, and it is really you who are talking, Dudley, my dear. 'Have you spoken to Marion yet?'

'Yes, I have had a long talk with her. Nellie! that woman is like an angel!'

I wrung my hands in the bitterness of my spirit. Oh, why did he mock me so!

'And she, what did she say to you?'

'She covered her face with her hands for a long time, and could not speak; but when she looked at me her countenance seemed almost divine in the sweetness and serenity of its expression; and though her words were few, they said so much to me.'

'Yes, yes, let me know all,' I exclaimed impatiently.

'Do you wish me to repeat them? I can scarcely remember them now. She said that there was no one whom she trusted and respected as she did me, and to whom she could so safely confide her child; and she prayed me, with tears in her eyes, to bear patiently with her frailties, for she had never known any mother but her. And then she told me what I knew before: how Eleanor's greatest faults were capriciousness and impatience of control; and how she hoped that the influences of my love might have a salutary effect, and make her the noble-hearted woman she promised to become; and then she began telling me about her father's fortune, and how it was equally divided between them both on Harold's death; but there I stopped her, saying that I had no room in my mind for such things as those, for they were as nothing to me compared with Eleanor's love; and then my darling came in, and Marion left the room.'

'Do you wish me to go to her, Dudley?'

'No, I have promised to bring her to you. I have just excused myself to Bruce for the rest of the afternoon, and if you have nothing further to say to me, I will go over to the Priory at once.'

'Go by all means and do not hurry back. I shall be more fit to receive Eleanor in an hour's time than I am now. You know I want to think over it a little, you have taken me so by surprise.'

'And I may tell her you are glad?' And his wistful eyes questioned me closely.

'Yes, yes, tell her that, and everything kind; and—and—my dear love to Marion. Good-bye, good-bye!'

He held me in his arms a moment tightly, and kissed me once or twice, and then turned and went; but when he was out of sight I went up to my room and locked the door, and sat down on the window-seat and looked over the low fields to the Priory.

My eyes were dry; I could not have cried now for the world; but a sudden weight seemed pressing down my heart, like lead, while it ached with a palpable, terrible pain, that throbbed in every nerve.

But yesterday, a little cloud no bigger than a man's hand; to-day, a heaven thick with clouds and blackness. Alas for the poor mammon-worshipper; how will it fare with thee now, and the idol thou hast carven? Oh, Dudley, is it for this that I have loved and cherished you, that you should disappoint me in the end; you whom I have counted as more than mortal, and held as half divine! Oh, Dudley, do you not know that 'beauty is deceitful, and favour vain,' that its gloss and glitter should so deceive you, my poor unhappy boy?

I had been so proud of him; proud, not alone of his goodness and affection, but of his discretion and his high-souled integrity. I had placed him immeasurably beyond Bruce and Louie, as though he were a being of another order, and now, how was I punished. Louie, whom I had called *coquette*, and who had fretted and chafed me

by turns, had chosen the man of all others worthy to be loved ; and Bruce, our fickle, light-headed Bruce, had turned from the allurements of beauty, and contented himself with Katie's plain sensible face ; and Dudley alone had erred, fascinated from the right way.

I had no faith in Eleanor, I gave no credence to her honeyed words, and fond clinging ways ; her restless fancies wearied me, her great loveliness ceased to charm, and she at once provoked and repulsed me by her imperious, half-childish sway ; compared to Marion, she seemed but a glittering will-o'-the-wisp, or like the fleeting sunbeam on the wave.

And this beautiful half-tamed creature, sweet and dangerous by turns, with her Zingara life, her wild, artistic education, was to be my sister, and Dudley's wife—Dudley, with his grave domestic tastes, his great gentle heart ! Oh, mother, if I could only lie down beside you in your green mossy grave ! for my pain is too heavy for me to bear.

And Marion—but no—I would not think of it—perhaps it was only my blindness after all—and she had known it from the first ; my own wishes had probably misled me.

If only Eleanor might make him happy, that was my prayer : if only she would make him the wife he deserved, I would grovel in the dust at her feet, I would love her as no sister was ever loved before.

Hark ! the church clock was chiming the hour, the boys' voices sounding in the hall below, I dragged myself across the room, and began hurriedly to refresh myself. I felt sick and dizzy, and shaken all over, as if a year of suffering had passed over my head ; but when I had bathed my white face, to bring back the colour, and brushed out my rumpled hair, I dared not delay any longer going down, lest Dudley should come in, and marvel at my absence.

Nor was I an instant too soon ; scarcely had I touched the last stair, before the old iron gate creaked back again on its hinges, opened by a vigorous hand, and Dudley came slowly up the court, with Eleanor leaning on his arm.

I just caught the glimmer of the sunlight on her blue dress, and with something like a prayer for strength on my lips, went forward a few steps, trembling in every limb.

'There is Nellie, darling,' I heard him whisper ; and Eleanor raised her blushing face, and running hastily forward, sprang into my arms, and looked up at me with her great deer eyes. I kissed her without speaking—what was I to say ?

'You will be fond of me, will you not, Nellie, and try and love me for his sake?' she said, in a low, sweet voice that I scarcely recognized as Eleanor's. 'I know I am not worthy of him ; Marion says so ; but you will all try and make me so, will you not?'

How could I steel myself against such soft humility, especially as Dudley was standing by, looking at her with those lover's eyes ? so I kissed her again, and answered—

‘Only make him happy, dear Eleanor, and even you cannot ask from us more gratitude and love than we shall willingly bestow.’ And then I led her in; but all the time I was thinking to myself, how different it would have been if it had been Marion I was welcoming home.

It seemed to me as if tea-time, and the hour after it, would never pass; and even in the midst of Dudley’s asking me a question, I found myself wondering if this were not some miserable dream, from which I should presently awake; nothing seemed real to me, not even Eleanor, sitting on the cushion at my feet, with her warm hand holding fast to mine.

And yet to Dudley’s eyes she must have appeared a miracle of loveliness, sitting there with changing colour and downcast eyes, her loose golden curls streaming over her round white arm, as she half-leant against me, and talked in her low musical voice, with its soft foreign intonation.

Ah, no wonder he should admire her! and even to me she seemed changed, subdued, transformed even by the halo of his love, shining with a borrowed glory, till I found myself addressing her with reverence, and a dim hope rose within my heart, that perhaps, after all, she might prove not unworthy, and these haunting terrors of mine might vanish in the sunlight, thawed by an irresistible influence. If I had only not seen Marion—if I could but trust her!

It was Dudley who at last freed me from this purgatory of doubt and pain, by proposing a stroll.

‘It is such a fair, sweet evening, Eleanor,’ he whispered, ‘and there will be a harvest-moon to-night to silver the corn-fields, and light us among the lanes; come, Lenore, come.’

‘If it be not unkind to leave Nellie,’ she returned, looking shyly up in his face; ‘it seems so lonely to desert her—she is but triste and quiet to-night, poor little white rose!’

I touched her hair caressingly.

‘Do not think of me, Eleanor, for I shall go across and see Marion; she also is sitting alone, and will be glad to talk with me, I dare say; so make haste and put on your hat before this glorious sunset is over.’

Thus urged, Eleanor did not linger, and in a few minutes I was standing at my window watching them as they wandered slowly down the lane; he, with his bent head, and she looking up at him with her two hands clasped on his arm.

Ah, the old, old story, first told in Eden, where the angels listened to the first pure tale of love—wonderful old story—ever new, and never wearying, to be repeated and multiplied a thousand-fold, till the earth be destroyed, and time shall be no more, until, with the new heavens and the new earth, shall begin an eternity of happiness, whose very essence and embodiment is love.

Through the corn-fields, with their few scant sheaves of grain, and

towards the brightening sunset, they wandered, those two happy lovers; while I crept wearily down the sloping fields, and through the hazel copse, till the green verandahs of the Fernery came in sight.

Katie was sewing in the porch as I passed and did not see me, but Bruce, working at the flower-border down by the gate, called to me to stop, and stood up in the garden-path with his hands full of flower-pots, and his face ruddy with exercise.

'Whither away so quick, Nellie, that you can't stay to give a neighbourly greeting? I suppose you are bound to the Priory; this comes of these strong young lady friendships, which puts brothers in the background. Look, I have taken slips of all my geraniums, and a capital lot I have made of them; likely young plants, ain't they? we'll have the garden next June full of them, with a border of white and coloured pinks;—hullo, what are you up to? you've knocked over two of the pots by swinging back the gate, and the mould is all over the fresh-rolled gravel.'

'I am very sorry,' I returned, in a subdued voice. Bruce looked at me.

'Why, what's the matter, little woman? you don't look well; is there anything up at the house?'

'Oh, Bruce,' I cried, moved to a sudden confidence by the kindness of its tone; 'I feel ill, and broken-hearted—oh, Bruce, Dudley is going to marry Eleanor Vivian.'

'Eleanor!—you mean Marion!—we'll, that's no surprise to me, or to you either, I should think, who have been manœuvring all this time to bring it about; why did you have her so much, if you did not want it? of course you know how these things end!'

'Oh, don't mistake me,' I returned; 'don't you see how miserable I am—if it were but Marion, but it is not; it is Eleanor he has brought to me to-day, and given me as a sister. Bruce, what chance of happiness is there for Dudley, if he have Eleanor Vivian for his wife?'

Bruce turned quite pale, and dashed down his hand on the little gate with such violence that Katie came running out quite frightened at the noise.

'What is it, dear,—oh, there's Nellie; why, whatever is the matter with you two?'

'Matter!' said Bruce, turning round savagely upon her, 'there's matter enough, I think, when Dudley, whom every one has been lauding to the skies all his life, has turned out nothing but a poor fool after all, to pass by a woman like Marion Vivian, who has beauty, character, and everything else, and take up with that brilliant piece of quicksilver, Eleanor, who would only make a wife for a gipsy, or a travelling artist—why, the man's mad?'

'Do you mean Dudley has done that?' asked Katie, looking sorrowfully at me.

'Yes, it is all over, Eleanor and he are engaged.'

'Oh, Bruce!' and she laid her hand against her husband's

shoulder, the tears starting to her eyes ; ' then it is indeed all over with him, for trouble and he will never be apart.'

' Don't say that, Katie !' cried poor Bruce, who seemed at this moment as dejected as I was. ' Dudley is not like any one else, and perhaps he will know how to manage her, and mould her to his ways ; if only she really love him, Nellie, can we be sure of that?'

' As far as I can judge, I believe she does, and has loved him from the first.'

' Well, well,' he groaned, ' we must hope for the best ; every man must make his own life or mar it, and he has entered into this with his eyes open, and a better choice before him ; but who would have thought it of our sage prudent brother, that he should go and entangle himself with this wild girl, while I, the scapegrace of the family, contented myself with my Kitty's plain face !'

My Kitty looked anything but plain this moment, with that frank sweet blush, as she laughingly answered—

' Yet there was a time, husband mine, when you objected to the freckles, and thought a dairymaid would have looked more trim in a home-spun petticoat and village-cobbled boots.'

And Katie tapped the gate with her pretty foot, now looking comely enough with its smart kid boot ; for Katie had turned coquette for her husband's sake, and wore silken attire of glossy sheen, made by her own skilful hands into the newest fashion.

' Thou art fair enough now, in my eyes, lassie,' he answered tenderly, ' though I grumbled once in my coxcomb days ; but here is Nell looking ready to drop with fatigue, and we have never so much as asked her to come in and rest ; our mother is down by the willow-tree, let us join her, while Kitty gets you some wine.'

But I excused myself, for I was longing to go on to the Priory, and get over my talk with Marion ; so Katie bade me a wistful good-night, while Bruce put on his straw hat, and walked up the avenue with me, and all the way the poor fellow kept wondering and sorrowing, out of his great soft heart, what marvellous blindness had beset his brother, that he should miss the ' Pearl of the Priory.'

' But don't you fret about it, Nellie,' he reiterated, as we parted at the open hall-door ; you have no reason to reproach yourself, for you have been a good little sister to him all his life ; but not even a guardian angel can preserve a man when he is in love with the wrong person, and perhaps, after all, she may turn out better than we expect.'

So saying he turned on his heel, and I went in, looking into the different rooms as I passed, to see if Marion was there.

Babette, meeting me on the stairs a minute later, told me that her mistress was indisposed, and had one of her bad sick-headaches, and was lying on her couch, trying to sleep, and would have no one disturb her. I hesitated on hearing this, and let Babette pass me.

' I would wait,' I said, ' and listen at her door, and if I heard her moving, would go in.'

She never minded me at any time, and loved to have me tend upon her in pain ; but even as I spoke a misgiving seized me, though I strove to banish it by telling myself that these headaches were nothing new, as they frequently recurred at intervals, prostrating her for the time being by their violence and intensity : but still—no, I would not conjecture so idly.

I went up boldly, and turned the handle of the door. It was locked ; I paused and listened—there was no sound except the twittering of the birds through the open window, so I crept to the dressing-room door, which stood half-way ajar, and through the bath-room, which communicated with her sleeping-chamber, and entered. Softly as I moved over the thick carpet, I was heard, and Marion rose from the foot of the bed, where she had been half-sitting, half-lying, and confronted me.

Ah me for my foreboding heart ! Her eyes were swollen with weeping, and her forehead dark and contracted with pain, while her hair was half pushed back by feverish hands, which seemed to burn me as I touched them.

‘Marion !’

The febrile spot glowed on her white cheeks, and she smiled at me, such a smile of anguish.

‘Don’t look so fearful, Nellie, I have only one of my old attacks. Babette has been ministering to me, but for once her leech’s skill has failed.’

I made answer, with sorrowful sternness—

‘This will do for the world, Marion, but hardly for me, your friend ; do you think you can deceive me ?’

She stretched out her hands to me for answer, in a pitiful helpless sort of way, and then fell on my breast in an agony of weeping. Ah me ! for her broken heart ! for the sacrifice of the noblest woman my eyes had ever seen.

Many a long day has passed since then, but the memory of that bitter hour is yet fresh in my mind, of the hour when we two wept together in that half-darkened room, and she laid her poor head upon my bosom, Marion, my friend.

‘Heaven in its mercy help you, dearest, for vain is the help of man,’ and she answered in a voice broken by sobs—

‘Oh, Nellie, I would have died to win one look of love from him, for the sake of the sweetest soul and the gentlest spirit that ever breathed on earth !’

Oh Dudley, Dudley, wandering in the sunset, with your golden haired idol, look upon this heart-wreck, and pause.

‘I know you well, Marion, that you are brave, and proud, and tender alike ; you are not of those who love unsought ; tell me how this has happened ?’

She rested her burning forehead against my hand.

‘Where the wrong and the mistake is, I cannot tell, and Heaven forbid that I should reproach him who cannot but be noble and

true ; but as surely as that sky bends over us yonder, so surely did I believe it was I he loved.'

I thought so too ; oh, poor misguided women, what could we do now ?

'Never, never,' she continued, vehemently, 'did I mistrust in my inmost heart the evidence of his choice ; and calmly as one looks on a sunny vineyard, I abandoned myself to the sweetness of the thought, that I—and I alone—was beloved ; alas, my friend, have pity upon me if you will, for when he told me this afternoon that Eleanor was to be his wife, I could have fallen down and died at his feet.'

'I know, I know, but do not say such things, for my sake !'

'You know !' she repeated, 'do you know how I can love ? I, who have no one on earth for whom to care but my child. Do you know how I learnt to worship his shadow ; how his presence seemed sunlight, and his absence darkened the place ! do you know how I have prayed in the cold still moonlight, scarcely daring to breathe his name—his name, which never yet has passed my lips, lest it should betray me ; how I have trembled and thrilled at his faintest word, and his smile which seemed to be almost divine ! did you know all this, Helen, his sister, whom I loved as much for his sake as for your own ?'

I did not answer, save by the soft kisses I pressed on her forehead and eyes ; those troubled, beautiful eyes, shining Madonna-like through her long dark hair, with their searching look of agony.

'All, all gone !' she continued. 'Ah, how I loved my mother, and she was taken from me when I needed her most ; and Harold, who was the idol of my heart, from the moment when I held him as a baby in my arms, to the last day, when I sat on the shore by that cruel lake, rocking his dear dead face against my breast ; and my father, whom I watched and tended, all taken from me, all leaving me alone.'

'Dear Marion,' I pleaded, 'no earthly consolations can avail you now ; but surely strength will be given you to bear it !'

'I hope so, I humbly trust so, but I am afraid, my spirit is so brave, and my body is so feeble ; and the weakness of the one will detract from the strength of the other. They talk about the glory of self-sacrifice, of the crucifixion of self, of voluntary renunciation of the affections ; they preach it from the pulpit, they inculcate it in the monasteries, but do they ever think how hard it is to practise ? how the flesh revolts, how the spirit faints, and the creature holds up helpless hands to the Creator !'

'My friend, my friend, be comforted ; there shall come a time when your faith shall triumph, when you shall neither suffer nor despair.'

'In the "many mansions of the Father" it may be so, but never here. Why do you shake your head ? do you think, who know him so well, that one who loves Dudley Mortimer can ever learn to forget him ? is that your notion of love, my child, is that your woman's

reasoning? Ah, I have spoken his name; Dudley and Eleanor Mortimer, how well they sound together. Good; I must practise it, that it may come natural to me, for I must soon learn to call him so; he is to be my brother, you know.' She smiled, ah, such a heart-breaking smile. 'Hush, surely I hear their voices; look out between the curtains, Nellie, for I am certain they are coming up the avenue!'

'Yes, truly, it is they, Marion, and they are looking up; what am I to do?'

'Go down and meet them. Say that my head is worse (heaven knows it is the truth), and that I must have sleep, and total quiet, to recruit my exhausted energies. Tell Eleanor not to come to me—my love—my love to her, and to—my new brother.'

'And I may come back to you again?'

'You, poor dear; why, what can you do for me now?'

'Little enough, I own,' I echoed sorrowfully.

'No, I will not let you say so, forgive my impatience—but I suffer so; when the wound is stanch'd a little, it will be a comfort to me to feel that there is one who knows my trouble, and is witness of my struggles. There, go; it is better for us both that we talk no more at present.'

And then I left her, and came upon Dudley and Eleanor whispering in the moonlighted bay; and after a lingering leave-taking, during which I walked slowly down the avenue, he overtook me, and we went on silently side by side.

It was very strange, but for the first time in my life I omitted to take his arm, nor did I remember it till he drew it through his, with a smile; a trifle, merely a trifle, but it brought the tears to my eyes.

Very little was said on either side, for his happiness was of the silent, brooding kind, and needed no words; so when I complained of headache, and suggested that with his permission I would retire, early as it was, he made no objection, only kissed me with more than his usual warmth, and let me go.

But what a night it was—the slow revolving hours, how prodigal of suffering, how surcharged with pain, as, with a heart aching and heavy with unshed tears, I lay, watching the moon wane, and the cool glimmering light dawning in the east.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

'The little rift within the lover's lute,
Or little pitted speck in garner'd fruit,
That rotting inward slowly moulders all.'—*Tennyson*.

THAT was a strange time for us, when the grave master of the house went daily down to the Priory, and left Sunnyside to take care of itself; but there were stranger days in store for us.

At first it all promised fair, Dudley was in the seventh heaven of happiness, while Eleanor—well, there was no denying it, she was just irresistible, every one said so, even those who were the most prejudiced; nobody could hold out long against her, and, what is more, nobody tried.

Nellie, with the silly soft heart of hers, was the first to give in, sorrowfully enough, it is true; but with a patient succumbing to Fate. Then Bruce, hot and furious in the beginning, but melting by inches with a visible thaw, and stout, heartsome Katie bringing up the rear.

Yes, even I, loving Marion, sorrowing for her, bearing the bitter knowledge in my heart, that clouds and troubles must come anon, and that Dudley's fate hung in a perilous balance, even I ceased to wonder at his choice, and was only astonished that I should have been so long blind to the dangerous power of her attractions, and the splendour of her strange beauty.

As Bruce said one day, after watching her for some time, 'She was enough to drive a fool mad, and a wise man crazy,' and in my heart I agreed with him.

There was something so mysterious in her subtle influence. Compared with Eleanor, Queen Loo was but a blunderer in the art of winning love, her best triumphs clogged by effort, and heavily weighted. But Eleanor conquered by no visible means; her words, looks, and smiles were all actuated by impulse, and her chief charm lay in the entire absence of vanity.

A profound egotist, yet without conceit; loving to please, yet perfectly careless of effort; and heedless as a child of the great world's censure; brilliant and beautiful because heaven had made her so, but blooming as naturally as the flowers of the field, which unconsciously satiate you with their sweetness.

Such was Eleanor—from beginning to end a mystery, an enigma—so full of heart, so passionately loving, yet so ignorant of all womanly self-denial; at once capricious, changeful, splenetic, hasty of tongue, impetuous in deed, one minute ruling like a queen so fair, so imperial in will—and the next moment humble and submissive; surely a girl for whose sake a man might die for love, but with whom it were misery to live, and especial misery for Dudley, whose word had never yet been thwarted, and whose home-life had never been dimmed by a passing cloud.

But Marion, to whom I so bitterly complained, bade me have patience.

'If you had the knowledge of character that I have, Nellie, you would see your mistake,' she said to me one day.

'How so?' I returned, impatiently. 'Do you mean to tell me that she will ever make Dudley happy?'

'Not at present, I own,' she continued calmly: 'for it is not in the power of a spoilt, capricious child to make him so. He wants something better; and I fear that the days of their engagement

will be but stormy ones at the best. But Eleanor has certain latent qualities, at present lying dormant, which only need to be developed to make her the finest type of woman living—the type that suffer themselves to be remoulded by the hands they love, and are so transformed and purified by the power of their affection that they no more resemble their old selves than the dusky chrysalis resembles the bright-coloured moth.'

I smiled incredulously.

'You give no credence to my words ; well, time will prove ! You judge Eleanor by what she appears to be to you now. I go upon wider ground ; on a life-long knowledge of her character, and much thoughtful pondering over it. It may be that my human experience may fail, and that it may need a crueller process than the gentle influence of love to effect this change—some fire of affliction, some sudden blow, perhaps, inflicted by her own hand in a momentary caprice ; but in whichever way it comes to pass, I know that it will be for the best : and, Nellie, you must trust to it too.'

But I only looked up at her and sighed, for it seemed to me I had nothing further to say.

People said that Marion Vivian looked old and worn in those days, and that the time of her beauty was passing. My anger was great when I heard such things ; but nevertheless, by the evidence of my own eyes, I knew it to be true.

She did look older. How could she help it ? worn by sleepless nights and the harass of continual pain ; by a struggle superhuman in its strength and exhaustive in its results ; by the patient endurance of a sorrow than which there is none greater on earth—the sorrow of having loved unsought. Oh, how she suffered ! How the fire that consumed her, and was slowly wasting her life, looked out from her dark, soft eyes, which seemed to me like two dumb spirits mourning over a lost Paradise !

In those few days she had greatly changed. The old mobility and play of feature, that had been her great charm, had gone for ever ; and in their place was a changeless serenity, a pale, impassive face, grave lips that rarely smiled, sedateness and dignity of womanhood, that had passed by the things of youth.

No one marvelled over the close of the brief summer of her life ; no one guessed her secret. How could they ? for she guarded it well and proudly, pressing her cross close to her, and hiding it in her bosom.

She had never spoken to me on the subject since the night when I had broken in upon her hour of weakness, and discovered it for myself ; and once when I ventured to approach it, she silenced me by a wordless gesture, commanding in its reserve and proud in its despair ; and then I knew there was to be silence between us—the silence as of the grave !

The only object of her life seemed now to make Eleanor worthy

of Dudley's love ; and none, he least of all, knew how much he was indebted to her mild charity for many an hour of peace ; for before many days were over, clouds began to cross the lovers' path.

At first they were but trifling—a stray word from Dudley, implying less homage than usual, or arguing a matter of will—a wish, perhaps, only couched like a command ; then a baby-frown from low, white brows, knitting over sunny eyes, a petulant answer blotted out by tears ; then soothing caresses, penitent rejoinders, and followed by hours of uninterrupted bliss.

They were always together, every minute snatched from business was spent by Dudley at the Priory, for Eleanor had taken up her wilful fancy again of disliking the barn ; so the Priory gardens, or the studio-balcony, or Marion's drawing-room, were generally their favourite places of resort, and it was a question whether Sunnyside or Nellie were left most desolate.

Nor was Eleanor contented with the evenings that were her fair allotment. Often of a morning she would linger at the stile in the half-way meadow, that Dudley might take that path to the factory, and be induced to waste an early morning hour in rambling through the sunny lanes to choose a spot for her pencil ; and even when he persuaded her to spend her evenings with me—for, occupied as he was, he never forgot me—she would frustrate his purpose by proposing the garden or the orchard, or a country stroll, where a troublesome third party might not interfere with them.

And yet, though she selfishly robbed me of him for weeks together, she was fond of me in her heart, and would come sometimes of an afternoon and sit at my feet for hours, never complaining of dulness, but, in her better moods, talking to me as she would to Marion, and loading me with loving caresses ; but at the click of the iron gate she would be up and away, and be lost to me for the rest of the evening.

She loved him ; there was no doubt of it ; but, alas, alas, she loved her own will better.

At first, only

'The little rift within the lovers' lute,'

but the harmony was soon deadened, the music stopped, and long before the dark days of November had set in, Marion had work enough to keep things straight.

She was so very wilful, and yet so ignorant in the ways of the world ; so despotic, and yet so rebellious—so prone to error, so careless of reproof ; chafing even at the bright fetters of love, wearing them haughtily, and ever tiring of their weight.

'If these are your English notions of tyranny,' she said to him one day, when he had gently chidden her for some act of petulance, *'you may choose some one else. Your wife I may be ; but your slave, never—no, never, never !'* and she tore her hand from his angrily.

'Lenore !' said Marion, reproachfully, *'you are not kind to hurt*

Dudley so ; he was perfectly right in saying what he did, and you will think so yourself to-morrow.'

'Of course, you always take his part, Madonna Marion,' cried Eleanor, mockingly. 'Truly your gravity and prudence are matchless, my sister, and Dudley must think so, for you always agree wonderfully ; you would make him an excellent wife, Marion—quite an English one, you know—but for me—' arching her full white throat—'I do not love obedience—I will not give it. Go, sir,' looking at Dudley haughtily, 'I have done with you ; you are dismissed for the evening.'

Marion rose and left the room, her eyes filled with tears.

'If I am to be dismissed,' said Dudley, calmly, 'I will go, Eleanor, for I can bear to leave you, my love ; only be very careful lest you do it once too often, for you may find me difficult to recall.'

And he stood up straightening his erect figure ; but whether Eleanor saw the flash in his eye, or felt she had gone too far, I know not, but she went up to him without a word, and laid her head on his breast, in a quiet subdued kind of way, like a child who was sorry for its fault, and had come to be forgiven.

'How could you try me so?' I heard him whisper, as he bent over and kissed her. 'Lenore, Lenore, how can you try me so?'

'Many waters cannot quench love,' she answered, with her strange brilliant eyes fixed on his ; 'those words keep haunting me when I see you looking so pale and vexed, Dudley. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods overflow it. You must be very patient with me, dear, and hold me fast, or one of these days you will lose me.'

And as she spoke, I saw her supple white hands suddenly close over his tightly, and her voice trembled with emotion.

Ten minutes afterwards, she had thrown his diamond ring to Carlo, and was laughing with elfin mischievousness at his troubled face, as he hunted the sparkling fragment the dog kept depositing in dusky corners, and under couches and chairs, till he placed it again triumphantly on his finger.

'How absurdly childish, Eleanor,' he said, quite vexed as he came back to her ; 'it is a most valuable ring, and the dog might have swallowed it.'

'Oh, so he might !' she exclaimed in horror, 'poor little animal. Oh, Carlo Dolci, I might have choked you,' and she caught him up, and kissed his silky head in an agony of contrition.

'I was not thinking of the poor little beast,' said Dudley, provoked to a smile, 'but of my ring, you traitoress.'

'Oh, your ring ! that was nothing, mon cher, for I would have bought you another, double its value, if it had cost me a thousand pounds, and you would have liked it ten times better than if that silly boy, Herwald Delorme, had given it you ; I don't like you wearing other people's gifts,' and she made up such a fascinating, pouting face, that it charmed Dudley into good humour immediately.

I hoped that this would have been the last time that Eleanor would test her power ; but the days that followed were prodigal of such scenes ; and then, as reconciliation became more difficult each time, Dudley began to grow moody and discontented.

It was very cruel to see how she tried his sweet temper and wasted his spirits, how his thwarted will was compelled to assert itself on behalf of his outraged dignity ; and my old pride in him returned to me, when I saw how calmly and determinedly he opposed himself to her waywardness—not weakly succumbing to her caprices, but patiently and firmly combating them, even though his faithful heart was wrung and wounded the while.

She tortured him so ; she would punish his outspoken frankness by a silence of days, during which she would remain shut up in the Priory, denying herself to him when she dare, or, if compelled to meet him, receiving him with courtesy, and cold, polished sentences, as though they two were strangers to each other ; until Marion's persuasions, or the remonstrances of her own conscience, had a salutary effect, and she would send him a letter with sweet and touching prayers for forgiveness, no sooner craved than granted.

During the brief hostilities, however much he suffered, he never complained, or attempted to smooth the way for reconciliation, but bore himself calmly, and with dignity ; but when his forgiveness came it was full and free, and knew no bounds.

Bitterly as she had angered him, cruelly as he had been wounded, he would take her back to his heart without one reproachful word, or lingering feeling of distrust or coldness—nay more, with added love ; heaping coals of fire on her head.

And then for some days all would be rest and sunshine, Eleanor striving to atone for her fault in a thousand winning ways, till the next clashing of wills came, and then it had to be gone over again.

Oh, no wonder it wore him out—no wonder he was growing thin and anxious-looking, and that Marion and I watched wearily from hour to hour.

They were not to be married till the following spring, so Eleanor had decided, and Dudley was obliged to submit ; and though Marion, Katie, and I all attempted to gainsay her decision, she was inexorable, having set her mind on a wedding-tour among the Pyrenees.

‘If I am not worth waiting for, I am not worth having at all!’ she repeated again and again ; ‘what is it you wiseacres are saying, that there is no necessity for waiting?—perhaps not, if you are thinking of the paltry money ; thank Heaven, neither Dudley nor I care anything about that ; besides, I have enough for both ; but marry in the cold snowy Christmas?—no, if I were never to have a husband—there now. I will marry Dudley in the spring, when the hedges are green, and the skies all blue and sunny, unless I change my mind, and go to Italy with Marion instead ; and I will if you sit shaking your head at me, Nellie. You called me a “child”

this morning, and now you are teasing me to be a wife before I am twenty. Keep to that handsome Scotchman—the Cameron—what do you call him—of whom a little bird told me; and leave me to manage my grave-faced lover myself,' and after that there was nothing said.

Towards the end of November Herwald and Louie came to stay with us before going northwards, and their visit made a pleasant break in the monotony of my home-life.

Herwald looked as young as ever, and our dear Louie more blooming and beautiful, and full of the new home to which she was going.

Both of them were struck with the change in Dudley, and commented on the strangeness of his choice, even while they praised Eleanor's loveliness and great fascination of manner; but it was Herwald who first called my attention to Marion's visible languor and depression, averring it as his belief that she was sinking rapidly in health.

'I have never seen any one so altered in my life, Nellie—she never was a strong woman, but I don't like the look of her at all; and if I were you I would persuade her to see Dr. Waldegrave; perhaps the English climate does not suit her.'

Conjectures at which Marion laughed, calling them idle fancies, and chiding me gently for entertaining them; but even while she spoke her colour went and came like one in weakness, and she finished by a burst of tears which seemed to exhaust her—but not for that would she see Dr. Waldegrave; and when I pressed it, told me quietly that it was all no use, for the malady was not of the body.

When Louie and Herwald at length left us, an added gloom hung over Sunnyside, and for many days I went about the house with a feeling of something painful impending.

Are such feelings prophetic of evil, or mere chimeras of an excited brain, I wonder? In my case, I was soon able to answer the question.

Things had been growing worse and worse at the Priory; the lovers' quarrels, if not more frequent, were at least more dangerous, and there was a look in Dudley's eyes that I did not care to see, when he came in evening after evening, and threw himself down moodily in his chair, instead of going out fresh and trim to meet his *fiancée*.

If he could have talked to me in his old frank way—if he could have broken down the slight constraint that had grown up between us, it would have been better for him, but he could not; and as he sat there in his silent wretchedness I could not go to him, though my heart ached, and I would have given worlds to comfort him.

In the outer circle, Nellie! ay, bide and keep your place; he has no room for you in the inner one, poor faithful little sister. Ah, but I wronged you there, Dudley, my dear.

One night I was sitting thinking alone over the dining-room fire—he had not come in that evening, so I supposed him safe at the Priory; and was dreaming idly of other things when he came suddenly in and shut the door.

‘It is all over, Nellie—look here,’ and he held out to me a shining hoop of diamonds—Eleanor’s betrothed ring. ‘We two are parted now, and this time it is for ever—for ever.’ And he stood up and looked me full in the face.

He was very pale, and his lips were compressed as if in pain; but his eyes—those dear earnest eyes—looked steadfast in their woe.

I went up and laid my hand on his arm—I was too frightened and awe-struck to speak.

He did not repulse me, but let me stand there in my old way for a long time, till I took his hand and kissed it, and then he laid it on my head.

‘There is no one to care for me but you, Nell, now—nobody but you; and then he gave one deep sigh and went out of the room, and when I crept up afterwards to find him his door was locked. I waited down for him one hour—two—and then, chilly and heart-broken, went up to bed; but just as I was laying my head upon the pillow, I heard him at the door asking admittance, and he came and sat down by me and told me all.

‘I owe it to you, Nellie,’ he continued, when he had finished the recital of his wrongs, ‘for you have been faithful to me all your life long; and I leave it to your generosity not to breathe one word of reproach against her who was to have been my wife.’

‘Dear Dudley, she would never have made you happy.’

‘I know it, but I love her, yes, though I would not lift my hand to bring her back; I love her still, oh, never so dearly as I have done to-night, when she gave me back my troth; Marion, dear soul, wept and prayed, and seemed in agony for me, but I never said one word, till I touched her hand for the last time, and then—’

‘Ah, tell me, Dudley; do not stint your confidence in me to-night, dear.’

‘I told her that I should love her to the hour of my death, and should never cease loving her, but that nothing on earth should make me try and change her decision, neither should anyone else try for me; but that if ever she should come back to me of her own will and accord, and lay her head in its old place, even though she should do it without a word, I would take her back again, ay, even to seventy times seven.’

Oh Dudley, my brother; so tender, so loving, so true.

‘Are you going to leave me now?’

‘Nay, what can you do for me, my child? I must bear my trouble alone, and bear it like a man too; but Nellie, one thing, Marion wishes you to go up to the Priory to-morrow and bid them good-bye.’

'Good-bye !' I exclaimed, quite bewildered.

'Yes, good-bye, these cold winds are too much for Eleanor, and they will leave for the South in a day or two ;' and then he said good-night, and bade God bless me, and kissed me again.

'Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods overflow it.' Ah, for his broken heart, Dudley, my dear.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

'Life is thorny, and youth is vain,
And to be wroth with one that we love
Does work like madness on the brain.'—*Coleridge.*

THE next morning the following note was brought to my bedside ; it was from Marion, and was brief, and blotted with tears, while the tremulous characters scarcely resembled the beautiful Italian hand I knew so well. It ran as follows :—

'DEAREST NELLIE,

'Dudley will have told you that all is over, and that my poor wilful child has sealed his wretchedness, and her own too.

'I have been up half the night reasoning with her, but she is inexorable, and will not listen to me ; yet in my heart of hearts I believe she loves him, but her pride will never allow her to own it.

'She only repeats over and over again, that she will be no man's slave, that he must choose some one else to bend to his iron will ; and that it was madness in her ever to promise to marry him, as such an union could only end in the misery of both ; and all the time her poor face looks white as death, and I know she suffers terribly.

'I can do nothing further, my strength is exhausted, and I can no longer withstand her passionate entreaties to take her away from this cold cruel land, where no one is good to her ; and to-morrow, yes, to-morrow, we are to turn away from our father's home, and become wanderers again on the earth ; and this time who knows whether I shall see England and Sunnyside again.

'I have much to say to you, but it cannot be spoken now. One day perhaps in a happier life we may renew the friendship so rudely broken, and all the sweet words of love and gratitude with which my heart is swelling may get themselves said ; but not now—not now !

'I shall expect to see you this afternoon at the hour we usually meet, and Dudley with you, for I have that which I have promised to deliver into his own hands. Do not deny me this sad pleasure, Helen, my friend, for it may be the last time I shall ever look on your dear faces again. Farewell, and think only tenderly of your unhappy

'MARION VIVIAN.'

There is no trouble to compare with the agony of seeing those whom you love suffer ; all personal pain is preferable, for it brings its own action with it ; but to stand afar off, and watch our friend or our brother writhing in the throes of some deadly sorrow, ah ! that is trouble indeed.

It has always seemed to me, speaking in all reverence, as if there were something awful and mysterious in the anguish of the 'Mater Dolorosa,' as she stood beside the cross of her Divine Son, washing the nailed feet with her tears—tears such as no mother has ever yet shed, or will shed again.

Well may the old Catholics, with some dim shadowing of the truth, paint her with the sword piercing through her heart—her wounded maternal heart—fainting in the terror and anguish of that mysterious woe.

Thrice blessed among women, to whom it was granted to descend into the abyss of mental pain, even before the last dread hour came, and 'that disciple' took her away to his own home.

To see our beloved suffer, and yet to be unable to comfort !—what a lesson for poor helpless fallen humanity to learn ! and how loath we are to take to it ourselves. If we could but be the scapegoat, and descend for them into the wilderness ! but a merciful dispensation decrees that each must bear his own burden, and the heart's bitterness be known only unto ourselves.

It was late before Dudley made his appearance, but I knew that he had needed a morning's hour to recruit him after a sleepless night ; I knew it even before I looked at his heavy eyes, and touched his limp hot hand. He shrank evidently from my notice of him, and seating himself, began to talk as usual to the boys ; and when one of them remarked on his loss of appetite, and seemed to wonder at it, laughed it off so naturally that he would have deceived any one but me.

But even he found it impossible to conceal his agitation when we were left alone, and I took out Marion's letter and laid it before him.

He read it over twice with a trembling lip, and then turned aside as he answered me—

'Why must I go, Nellie? I do not think Marion is right to ask it.'

With my heart bleeding for him, and yet remembering my friend, I answered—

'She has some good reason for asking it, dear ; do not deny her. You see she says it may be for the last time.'

'What does she mean by the last time? is she ill, then?'

'Very ill,' I said, breaking into tears. 'Oh, Dudley, this has all been too much for her, and I believe she is going to die.'

He looked at me with a visible terror in his face

'To die !—Marion going to die ! Good Heavens ! why have you never told me she was ill before?'

'Because she will not own it, and hides it from us all. She never thinks of herself, you know. But now you cannot refuse to bid her good-bye, as it may be for the last time.'

'I will not believe it; nonsense! you are frightening yourself and me too, and we have trouble enough without that, I should think. Well, I will go with you. I at least have nothing to dread from any chance meeting, and Heaven forbid that I should shrink from what appears to be my manifest duty. I suppose'—hesitating—'you do not intend to bid Eleanor good-bye?'

'I, Dudley! oh, what are you asking me? How could I trust myself to speak to her, who has so cruelly used you?'

He silenced me by a grave gesture.

'Hush, you are touching on forbidden ground—but I was wrong to suppose you could. If it had been possible I should have liked you to have bidden her a kindly farewell—but, perhaps, better not;' and sighing heavily, he left the room.

All the morning I went about my household duties with a lost, helpless sort of feeling; a dull, weary aching, compared to which physical pain would have been a luxury. Now, I thought of Marion—and now, of Dudley—till I grew bewildered in the tumult of my misery.

Dudley did not come in till the dinner was nearly over, and then, without a pretence of eating, went up to his own room, where he remained till the hour Marion had appointed; but when he came down, and joined me at the gate, he looked perfectly himself, and quite collected and calm.

Through the low meadows we went; past the half-dried pools and rows of leafless pollards; past the stile, by the elm-trees, where Eleanor, sketch-book in hand, had kept her morning watch; past the long lane, and the Fernery, looking so green, retired, and silent; and then we were crushing the red leaves of the avenue beneath our feet, while the keen November air brought others pattering down on us with little crisp moanings over their own decay, till the grass lay buried beneath its autumn carpet of yellow, crimson, and brown.

Dominique opened the door to us, with the most melancholy expression the face of man could wear. Poor fellow! he really loved his young mistresses, and was not a little attached to Dudley, and this miserable *dénouement* was a severe blow to him.

Babette, also, coming down with her mistress's message, could hardly speak, and it was with the greatest difficulty I could gather that we were to wait in the drawing-room until the Signora Marion could join us.

To wait—oh, Dudley!—to wait in that perfumy, sunny drawing-room, where every nook and corner breathed of Eleanor's presence; where her pets came fawning round him, whining for their wanted caresses, and the white Persian cats rubbed themselves lovingly against his knee; where, even now, lay the silken mantle and

plumed hat, tossed, in the old way, on the couch—was it a wonder that he should stand listening there with bated breath, and the dim vain hope in his eyes, that she would come, even now, repentant and remorseful, to his heart.

Ah, no, Dudley—no, no, my dear—can it be that you are so ignorant yet? And then he looked up at me and read my thought in my face; and the old paleness and gloom settled down on him again, and his mouth took the set, stern expression that was never to leave it more for many and many a long day to come.

But one thing I noticed—once, when he thought that I was not watching him, he lifted up the corner of the mantle, underneath which lay a little gray glove, and took it hurriedly up, and hid it in his bosom; and as he did so, his eyes filled with tears.

A slow rustling of silks, and opening door, a shimmering of soft hazy blue, and Marion had entered the room, and was advancing towards us.

She greeted us without a word, just touching our hands and motioning us to sit down. But I noticed that she placed herself under the shadow of the ruby curtain, that it might screen her from the truth-telling sun; and that as she spoke she seemed to shrink back into its folds, with a painfully suggestive action that betrayed volumes to me.

Her face was white and colourless as marble, and her large dark eyes had a strange unnatural brilliancy of expression that I had never seen before; and her hands, as she sat, had a nerveless twitter in them, like the wings of a caged bird. And I saw then for the first time, with a suffocating feeling that I cannot describe, that this was indeed death in life, that the hereditary malady, the enemy of the family, had fixed its deep fangs in her who had nothing but wasted strength and a broken heart to oppose to it; and that Marion Vivian would soon be 'where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest.'

Did Dudley see it too? did he read the truth for himself, that he should take her poor thin hand in his with that mute reverential tenderness, while she flushed beneath his mild brotherly gaze, till her face was dyed crimson?

'Marion, this is not well; why have you not told me before that you were ill? I should never have known it but for Nellie, who opened my eyes this morning. What ails you, Marion; and why do you hide it from those who love you?'

She tried to disengage her hand from his, but he held it fast; for the moment he had forgotten Eleanor, in the unselfish warmth of his interest. His clear gray eyes dwelt searchingly on hers.

'Your hand feels like a little child's, Marion, so loose and weak; your eyes have the lustre of fever, your face the colourlessness of death. But you will not trust us with your sorrow, you will endure the dolour of disease alone; and all the while, with your faithful lips, you give us the name of friends.'

She covered her face with her hands and wept. Had he been other than himself he must have read her secret in those exhausting and pitiable sobs, labouring from her broken heart ; he must have known her sorrow, so soon to look her last on the face she best loved on earth, and to travel painfully and alone, with groping, feeble hands, into the 'Valley of the Shadow of Death.'

Oh, life so brief, so full of sadness ; oh, dreariness and terror of approaching decay !

'Dear Dudley, I cannot bear this !' I exclaimed ; 'you must not pain her even by the least shadow of reproach.'

'Heaven knows I feel none,' he replied ; 'and that my heart is burdened with a weight of gratitude that I would fain express before we part. Look up, Marion, whom I had so proudly hoped to call my sister ! for time is short, and this scene is almost too painful to endure. If you do not wish to entirely unnerve me, do not try me by such tears as these ; is not my sorrow as great or greater than yours ?'

She took his hand and pressed it, with a mute entreaty for pardon, and then continued calmly.

'Time is short, as you say ; and the hour of parting approaches, and I have that to do that must not be delayed ;' and she detached from the folds of her dress a small sealed packet, and placed it in his hands.

'See, I restore you these tokens of your love—your letters, and other trifles, that were once as priceless jewels to my poor Lenore ; and I am to give them into your hands with no other word than she has spoken, that nothing on earth can change her determination never to become your wife.'

'No other word than that, Marion ?' he inquired, sternly.

Marion hesitated.

'If there be anything you can say to comfort him at all, do not keep it back !' I whispered.

'She did say that she hoped he would always love, and think tenderly of his poor friend, who could never make him happy ; but almost before the words left her lips she recalled them angrily, and blotted them out with others that were cruel enough. But Dudley, when I am gone, remember what I say, that Eleanor loves you, though she loves her own will better, and will love you, and no other man, till the day of her death !'

His grave, mournful eyes seemed to negative her words ; and he laid his hand on the place where I knew the little gray glove rose and fell to the beating of his heart.

'You do not believe me, for your heart is sore, and she has tortured you so ; but one day you will know it for the truth, and will remember Marion's words, and bless them as prophetic ; and when she comes to you, Dudley, in after days, to pray for your forgiveness, do not refuse it her, promise me to take her back !'

'I have told her so, Marion, until seventy times seven, but not

for that have I faith or credence in your words ; Eleanor will never come back to me !'

At the ring of pain in his voice Marion trembled, and stretched out her hands to him.

'I have done what I could for you, Dudley ; oh, Dudley, I have done what I could !'

He turned to her with his sweet kind smile.

'I know it. The traces of your tears and prayers are legible enough on your face. Heaven bless you for them, my faithful Marion, my true-hearted sister ; ay, and you will be blessed ! But now I can endure the pain of this conversation no more. I am very weak, but I am new to such trouble, and it unnerves me. Suffer me to go ; perhaps we may meet again under some happier circumstances.'

'Not here, Dudley, not here !' and she pointed upwards. Did the reflected glory from the 'many mansions' tinge her countenance with that strange, beautiful expression, as she spoke ? 'Nay, do not look so grieved and pained for me ; it is better so—oh, far, far better so !' and turning to me—'It is not for you to weep, my friend, who know that the burden of my care is too heavy for me to bear ? Life is so sorrowful, Nellie, and rest so sweet.'

She pondered a moment, with her head leaning on her hand ; until Dudley, too much touched by words, laid his gently on her shoulder, and whispered 'Good-bye.' Then she started up in a moment, with a sudden terror in her eyes.

'Good-bye !—what good-bye ? Oh, not for ever ! Dudley—Dudley, I cannot say good-bye !'

Whether it was the lingering tenderness of her tone as she uttered his name, or that one long look of agony she cast on him, that betrayed her, I cannot tell ; but in that moment he read her secret, he knew it all ; though never one word crossed his lips, then or afterwards, I saw he knew it, for his face was suddenly transfused with crimson, and he looked at her with such eyes of loving pity as an angel's might have worn.

'Marion,' he said ; 'poor sister ! poor Marion !'

And then, as with womanly instinct she shrank from him, divining all, he drew her gently towards him, and touched her forehead with his lips—so gravely, so tenderly, so reverently, it must have calmed her fears.

I scarcely know what followed, or whether they were Marion's tears on my face or my own, as I bade her farewell ; but I know it was Dudley's hand that quietly unloosened my grasp and led me away to the door.

As it opened there was a rustling of garments, a flutter of soft draperies, the movement of a shining arm, and Eleanor stood before us white as death, but carrying her fair head haughtily—proud even in her surprise.

For a moment the arm on which I leant trembled slightly as

their eyes met, and then, with a grave inclination of the head, Dudley passed her and went out.

As I followed him, was it fancy, or did I hear her utter his name? Nay, it was only the sighing of the wind among the trees, or the rustling of the crisp fallen leaves.

'For Life is thorny, and youth is vain—
And to be wroth with one that we love,
Does work like madness on the brain.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

'In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of life,
Be not like dumb driven cattle,
Be a hero in the strife!'—*Longfellow.*

So the sunshine and brightness faded out of the dear home-life, and over Sunnyside hung the gloom of despondency, the darkness of the gathered clouds.

Oh, the dreariness of that November month, and the sad, sad days that were to follow!

It was such a new thing to see Dudley suffer; to miss his frank, sweet smile, and light-hearted jest; to see him, as the days went on, ever grow paler and thinner, as the 'sickness of yearning' made his true heart grow faint, and the misery of his wounded love pressed more heavily upon him. And though he never complained, it was easy to see the struggle for patience and forbearance was growing too much even for his endurance.

Slight things betrayed this to me; irritable words and fretful tones, never known before in Dudley; listlessness, and languor, and weariness of the shaken nerves, and, stranger than all, sternness and imperiousness of manner in one never known to rebuke before.

He, the mild, patient master, who had ruled the household and the factory with a serenity and equableness of control that had always excited my envy, now took umbrage at trifling faults, and was impatient of the slightest contradiction.

It was wonderful to see how Bruce bore with him; how he restrained his own hot temper, lest it should add to his brother's sufferings; while the same spirit of tolerance was manifested by the men at the factory and the children at home.

'The young master was not himself,' was the opinion of the blunt operatives, to whom the father's son was the light of their eyes; and even Rill carried out the same feeling when she laid a plump finger on her lip, and said—

'Dudley not well ; he has great holes in his cheeks, and funny black rings round his eyes ;' while the boys held aloof from him, not daring to invite him to their games ; Halcot's eyes growing round with awe, and Charlie looking shy and conscience-stricken—for Charlie led us a life in those days—but of that anon.

I don't think Dudley knew that he excited so much uneasiness ; wrapped up in his own deep sorrow, he neither invited nor wished for sympathy ; even mine, so timidly and silently proffered, he often put from him, though not unkindly ; for however much he suffered, he was never otherwise than good to me, reserving for me his rare smiles, and still rarer conversation.

But his pain was so great, it could not fail to wear him out.

Loving Eleanor as his own soul, he took the burden of her caprices upon himself, and reproached himself with severity and sternness to her. If he could only have borne more patiently with her, poor wilful, motherless girl, she would never have left him ; but he had only cared for his own will. He had rebuked her harshly for her faults, he had never been gentle with her, he had driven her away—yes, he knew now he had driven her away.

All reasoning and remonstrances on this subject were utterly futile, and only irritated him.

'No one but he had loved her,' he said, 'and he only too imperfectly, and of course nobody understood her. It was very kind to absolve him from his faults, but he was too conscious of them himself. Only yesterday, one of his own men had told him he was out of temper, and he had been ready to knock him down for his impudence, gently as it was said, but of course he was right—every one was right, he knew—and he only was wrong, and she had found him so !'

And then he would give that bitter sigh that always went to my heart, and go out and pace up and down the leafless avenue, sometimes for hours together, till all in the house were asleep except myself, and I watching drowsily at an upper window.

But, hard as it was to see his sweet temper racked by harassed nerves, and his self-esteem lowered by such false humiliation and morbid feelings, there was one thing harder still, when, after days of listless brooding, he would suddenly return to himself again, and strive to become the Dudley of old ;—ah, that was the hardest of all.

He would try so manfully for a time, taking his old place beside my little work-table of an evening with his book or paper, endeavouring to interest himself and me in the politics of the day, sharing Charlie's Latin lessons, or helping Halcot in the grand new ship that he was building ; seeming to atone, by his exceeding gentleness, for all he had made us suffer, till some stray hint or word—perhaps some chance allusion—recalling his lost idol too vividly before him, threw him back again into his old state, from which there was no arousing him.

The only thing that seemed to soothe and please him were Herwald's letters, and these came constantly, and many sweet womanly ones from Louie also. But though his face lighted up when he read them, and he looked for them as eagerly as in the old times, yet he resisted all their united persuasions that his Christmas should be spent with them at Hurst-hall, though he knew that Bruce and Katie were going, and were taking Halcot with them.

So, to all Herwald's affectionate entreaties, and Bruce's remonstrances, he opposed the same decided negative.

'Nellie might go,' he said, 'and make the family reunion in the north more complete; indeed, he wished her to do so, that she might see Queen Loo in her new home. But for himself, he would intrude his melancholy face at no man's table, and, least of all, at Christmas time, and in the house where he had enjoyed the pleasantest days in his life.'

And when we saw how our persuasions vexed him, we all desisted; only Nellie retained her old right of staying at his side; and indeed, in those days, she could not have left him.

So Bruce and Katie started off on Christmas eve for a fortnight's holiday, and Katie wrote me warm glowing letters, saying what a gracious hostess Louie made, and how she looked fair and grand as a queen, as she moved about in her velvet and jewels, her beautiful face beaming with happiness; while Herwald—but here Katie found no language sufficiently eloquent for his praise, so simply said that he was himself, 'and I should know what that meant from her.'

So, when Christmas-day came, we made but poor pretence at cheerfulness, and none at all at festivity—we left that for Hurst-hall; for Arthur Vaughan, and Milly, and Hubert Clive were to be there, and there were to be great doings. A yule-log burnt in the grand hall; a Christmas-eve supper and dance, for the tenantry; a great stately dinner, with the Willoughbys and St. Clairs, with a table so long that Herwald would hardly see Louie's face smiling through a vista of candelabras and épergnes.

How differently did the day pass at Sunnyside, when Dudley went, after church, to fetch Aunt Margaret, and we sat down with the children to an early dinner, and afterwards he went out for a long country walk through the drizzling mist and rain, to come back wan and exhausted, and sleep on the sofa all the evening.

It was hardly a wonder, then, that I should feel dull and dispirited after such a miserable day, even if I had not had fresh cause for uneasiness; but, as it was, there was a new trouble on my mind.

I had seen Dr. Waldegrave observing Dudley narrowly in church, and after service he had taken him by the arm, and had a long private talk with him, walking up and down the churchyard path.

I had struggled with my anxiety all day, lest Aunt Margaret should notice it; but when night came, I could bear it no longer,

so, when Hester had taken her home, and Dudley, rousing himself drowsily, had gone from his sofa to his bed, I took heart of grace, and creeping after him, knocked at his door.

He was asleep, or feigning to be, but as I looked at him by the glimmer of the dying embers, he opened his eyes and saw me standing at his bed.

'What are you doing there, you little white mouse? I was rather sleepy, for a change, and now you have woke me up; is anything the matter?'

'No, and I am very sorry if I disturbed you; but, Dudley, I could not sleep till I had asked you a question,' and I sat down beside him.

'A question? a dozen, if you like, now you have fairly awakened me, for I have not much chance of rest now for the next hour or two. Don't look so sorry, Nellie; fire away—what do you want to know?'

'What Dr. Waldegrave said to you in the churchyard this morning, after service?' I replied, baldly.

He looked at me in surprise, and laughed uneasily, but did not answer.

'Dear Dudley, I am so anxious to know.' Again he laughed, but his voice did not ring true to my ear.

'Come, come, Nellie, this is carrying your curiosity too far; can't two staid churchwardens have a talk over parish matters, without your wanting to know all about it, you Puss Pry?'

'Yes, dear, if you can truthfully assure me that your conversation was only on parish business; but even then, I should find it rather difficult, for once, to believe you.'

'Why so, little Mystery?'

'Because Dr. Waldegrave was not thinking of such things when he stood leaning his elbow on the pew door, and looking at you through his spectacles so gravely all the time of the anthem; he was observing you narrowly for some reason of his own, for I saw him distinctly, twice or three times during the sermon, looking at you again; and, Dudley, I am very uneasy.'

Again he did not answer me; but by the dim firelight I saw his face take the same worn, anxious expression that had so worried me of late.

I touched his hand to arouse his attention.

'Dear Dudley, do you remember the night our mother died? I was hushing the frightened children to sleep, when you came and sat down by the nursery fire, and, speaking in a whisper, told me you had left our father kneeling over his Bible in the little room downstairs; we did not call it the Oak parlour in those days, you know'—I paused.

'Well, Nellie?'

'I had Rill in my arms—she was such a little creature then—and she had gone to sleep with the folds of my dress crumpled in

her baby-fingers, so I could not lay her down ; but I came and knelt by your side, and we had a long, long talk together ; we don't have such talks now, dear.

'You told me many things that night that I have forgotten now ; but one thing I shall always remember—you said that we must have faith and confidence in each other, and then we should never lack comfort. Those were your very words, dear, and I have always cherished them, they were so earnestly spoken, and you looked at me so kindly as you said them.'

'Have I ever withdrawn my faith, Nellie ; have I ever hidden anything from you ?'

'You are hiding something from me now, dearest—something that our old friend Dr. Waldegrave said to you this morning.'

He was silent for a minute before he answered.

'If I have, it is because I have caused you so much trouble already that I am unwilling to give you more.'

'No trouble is too great for me to bear. If you tell me that you are going to be ill, I can be your cheerful and faithful nurse as well as sister, dear.'

He took up my hand and kissed it—it was an old way of his when he was touched—but he had never done it since his engagement ; and somehow it reminded me of other days so forcibly, that I could have laid my head down on the pillow and cried ; but he was speaking—

'I am not going to be ill, dear Nell—at least not in the way you mean, nor does Dr. Waldegrave think so ; but I will tell you exactly what he says, and then you can judge for yourself.

'I did see him looking at me during service-time in the way you describe, though I did not attach much importance to it ; and I was certainly surprised when he took my arm in the porch, and, requesting the favour of a little talk with me, walked me up and down the yew-tree path behind the church for about a quarter of an hour.

'He began by telling me that he had not liked my looks of late, and that as he was my father's oldest friend, as well as our family physician, he meant to put certain questions to me respecting my health, which he begged me faithfully to answer.'

'Well !' I exclaimed, breathlessly.

'Well, thereupon followed a long list of questions, half of which I have forgotten ; but I know he asked me if I suffered from loss of appetite, if I slept badly, if my rest were harassed by feverish dreams and terrors, if I felt listless, languid, and unfit for business, and whether my old headaches had returned ?'

'Oh, Dudley, Dr. Waldegrave is a clever man, or he would never have guessed your symptoms so exactly. You know how Bruce complains of your nervousness and want of appetite. What did you tell him when he asked all this ?'

'I told him probably what was the truth—that for two months I

had never known the comfort of an unbroken night ; and that the terrors that tormented my sleeping hours were such, that I often got up and sat reading till dawn, rather than undergo them again ; that I was often prostrated by unaccountable languor and oppression ; and that I was seldom or ever free from my old headaches.'

'Oh, my dear ! and what did he answer to this?'

'Why, you know his way ; he only gave those short grunts of his, and muttered, "I thought so ;" and when I had quite finished, he put his hand on my shoulder, and told me all his mind.'

'He said I had inherited from my poor mother a peculiarly sensitive and finely-wrought temperament, that was likely to be easily disorganized by any severe mental pressure ; that the shock of those two terrible bereavements had worked the first mischief, and had caused him the greatest uneasiness on my account.'

'He reminded me how these same distressing symptoms of which I now complained had first made their appearance then, and how he had sent me away for some months' total rest and change, that my over-wrought nerves might recover themselves ; and he warned me solemnly that unless I took greater care of myself than I was now doing, he should have to repeat his prescription, only on a larger scale.'

'Oh, Dudley !' I cried, in despair, 'he must think you very ill, then?'

'No, not at present, only very much out of order—perfectly unstrung and unnerved, as he said ; and he ordered me—I am hiding nothing from you, Nelly—to go away at once for a few weeks' change.'

'And you will go, will you not ? Herwald and Louie will be so rejoiced to have you, and we can keep our new year with them after all.'

'Not so,' he returned, decidedly ; 'I do not mean to be absent from my post even for a week, unless I give way altogether.'

Oh, Dudley ! is that only the voice of duty, or is there no lingering feeling in your heart that Eleanor might come back, and must not find you gone ?

'I was very obstinate on this point, and at last the old doctor had to give way, and in the end we made a bargain, and I promised to take his tonics and follow his directions at home as long as he ceased to persecute me, and withdrew his ban of exile ; but he had the honesty to tell me that all his medicines would work no good until I waded somehow out of this "slough of despond," and buckled to my work like a man.'

I sighed. Dr. Waldegrave's words sounded ominous to me, and Dudley was so wilful and determined.

'How grave and silent you are, Nellie ; have I frightened you too much?'

'No, but it is so very sad to see you suffering, yet refusing to be cured.'

'I refuse nothing,' but, clenching his hand, 'I will cure myself, Nellie, I am ashamed of my weakness, I literally loathe myself. Am I the first whom love has made sorrowful? why then this moral cowardice? why cannot I bear my fate resolutely, and like a man? and it is not like a man to faint and grow weak under it; it is like a girl in her teens, who has the vapours, and mopes, and dwindles into skin and bone.'

'Strength is made perfect in weakness,' I whispered.

His eyes had a dull look of anguish in them, as they met mine.

'I have lost my sheet-anchor, I have gone astray from the true path; I have worshipped an earthly idol, and it is but clay; I have forgotten my faith as a Christian, my dignity as a man. Oh, Lenore, Lenore, if you knew my sufferings, you would pity me!'

What followed after this I cannot write here, it was at once so sacred and so human; this hour of his weakness was terrible, and it lasted long; but I stayed with him till it was over, and he had fallen asleep with his head on my shoulder like a little child.

CHAPTER XL.

'Oh, thou child of many prayers!
Life hath quicksands,—life has snares!
Care and age come unawares.'—*Longfellow.*

'FOR in these days Charlie led us a life!'

Such were the words that I inadvertently dropped in the midst of far different matter, and as I write them down again, others come to my memory, tender, sorrowful words, stealing in through the silence.

'Be faithful to your brothers and sisters, Nellie, my child, and take care of little Charlie!'

Yes, 'take care of little Charlie,'—only that—and again—'take care of little Charlie!'

How well I can recall the night when this was spoken; a harvest night in the mild fruitful September; I had propped up my mother with pillows, that she might see the low white moon suspended like a silver globe in the summer sky; and when, wearied with the unwonted effort, I had laid her down again, her mind had turned on her approaching end, and on the sacred duties devolving to my care; and just before she fell into that sleep, that in her case was the merciful precursor of Death, she had whispered into my ear, 'Take care of little Charlie.'

Often have I marvelled since then that no other of the children were mentioned by name, not even the youngest, our baby Rill,

whose warm, curly head even then lay nestled to her bosom ; but only 'little Charlie.' But I have ceased to wonder now, for it has seemed to me as if the same instincts of maternity had divined some dim foreshadowing of the truth ; and as the mother went forth alone to that strange, distant bourne, she stretched out appealing hands to me to watch over and protect her boy, her sensitive fragile 'little Charlie.'

It had seemed a light charge at first to Dudley and me, warm and eager for our work, and full of love for the children confided to our care ; but as time went on, a great anxiety and fear came upon us, when we grew to understand more perfectly the delicate piece of mechanism with which we had to deal, in the person of our 'little Charlie.'

He was such a perplexing and difficult little creature to manage, the most heedless, and the most vexatious, the most disobedient, and the most loving ; a chaotic mixture of childish faults and virtues governed by an ungovernable impulse that evaded all rule, and was yet amenable to gentleness.

He would do the most provoking things in the world, with the most innocent face imaginable, sinning through sheer carelessness, and an inherent love of mischief ; full of sorrow for his fault, but repeating it again and again in a vague heedless sort of way, that could not remember, or that would not learn.

And then it was so hard to punish him ; the least harsh word, even a well-merited rebuke, made his tears brim over, and he would sob as if his heart would break ; but an attempt at severity or sternness was more than we dared to try, nay, it would have been dangerous, for though he looked thriving and healthy to all outward appearance, there was no real stamina ; and there had been a time when none had thought our 'little Charlie' would live to be a man ; and though we had somewhat outgrown this fear, yet the morbidly susceptible nature remained, and herein lay our difficulty.

'A little hot-house plant,' as Dudley once observed, 'that would not be breathed upon, and yet full of prickles and thorns, that must be weeded out by a skilful and kindly hand, or it would go to waste and ruin ; a boy whom home-education would spoil, and make a milksop, and whom a year at a public school would inevitably kill. Why, he would be the butt of every bully, Nell,' he remarked, when a friend recommended this mode of treatment ; 'he would fall a prey to their coarse jeers and practical jokes, till he would be made an idiot or coward for life, even if his health did not break down under it, which it certainly would. No, I shall send him to Doctor Lane's school, under Halcot's care, and we will see what he can make of him.'

A very wise resolution of Dudley's, for the boy thrived under the Doctor's mild regimen, while the strict censorship of his brother and Seymour, who mounted a joint guardianship over him, and protected him from the few black sheep to be found in every private

school, while, by over-looking his lessons and exercises, they secured him an immunity from punishment and disgrace.

But the spirit of waywardness, thus restrained abroad, only showed itself more plainly at home, and in spite of judicious management, and the most unbounded patience, poor Charlie lived under a perfect cloud of reproof from morning to night.

He had the capacity of a Puck for mischief, and when he had broken a window or two, and had frightened me to death by falling down-stairs with a rocking-horse proudly clasped in his arms, while the rockers playfully performed their work at the perilous edge of the nursery passage, he would bethink himself on some novel amusement, less painful in its consequences, Charlie having a chronic horror of cut fingers and bruises.

So one day I found the nursery squad, to wit, Hennie, and Rill, and himself, all despoiled of their eyebrows; while Rill's curly little mop was being shaped after the fashion of Master Benjamin Slater, the pastrycook's son, all the little yellow rings cut off, and neatly plastered down in ends.

I am ashamed to say that both Lucy and I had a hearty cry over this latter piece of mischief, while Dudley moaned over his little Puritan girl in the most ludicrous manner, when she came down to tea with her pinafore full of the golden shreds to show him.

Charlie fretted himself nearly ill when he saw the genuine sorrow he had caused; but a week afterwards, he had forgotten all about it, when he ransacked my medicine-shelf, and administered pills to the self-same little victims, who, deluded by the gilt, swallowed them whole, and asked for more.

After that, Charlie was banished the nursery, and after having damaged himself severely in Halcot's and Seymour's laboratory, and filled the house with noxious perfumes, that haunted it for hours, got up a blaze with a box of lucifers, that he handled carelessly, and as nearly as possible burnt Sunnyside to the ground; but this time his own terror gave him a memorable lesson, and his remorse was so pungent that even Bruce, the hardest of his task-masters, frankly condoned his offence.

Who, indeed, could resist those sweet violet eyes, swimming in tears, or the piteous plaintiveness of his voice, praying to be forgiven; for in that loving little heart anger and resentment had no place, and after the sternest reprimand, he would nestle with clinging arms, and soft, close kisses, till he saw the frown disappear, and the old smile come back.

'Take care of little Charlie,' ay, mother, your poor little Charlie, your poor unhappy little Charlie?

If school-time were a harass to me, what must the holidays have been? when his youthful monitors betook them to distant fishings and rambles, and left my boy-torment for me to interest and amuse; but never had even I found it so hard as during the Christmas vacation that had just arrived.

For it was the most unseasonable Christmas that we had seen for years ; with hot murky vapours, and dank unwholesome exhalations rising from the meadows and stubble lands, and a brooding mist, that dissolved into rain, for days together.

A miserable time for our poor boys, with the memory of last Christmas fresh in their minds ; no snow-man in the orchard, no snow trenches, no skating, and it was fortunate for Halcot that his fortnight's visit to Hurst-hall, with its unwonted festivity and pleasure, made the remaining holidays more bearable ; but it was very dull for Seymour in his quiet parsonage, and Charlie, a prisoner at Sunnyside ; especially as Rill had transformed herself into a little sulky needle-woman, who planted herself at Nell's feet, and, pricking herself, haughtily, told ' that bad boy Charlie to be quiet, and go and play by himself.'

Thus abandoned to his own resources, Charlie involved himself in such a cloud of peccadilloes and practical annoyances that he fairly wore out my patience, and Dudley's too ; and both hailed Halcot's return from the north with unwonted delight, trusting to his rough boy guardianship to extricate poor Puck from further disgrace.

The damp unhealthy weather still continued, and it began to be bruited abroad in the village, that it was likely to be a sickly season, and that Dr. Waldegrave had been heard to say that the mortality was dreadful in the low-lying lands, especially among the old people and children.

Halcot, when he went down the town with Seymour, was sure to bring home some dismal report. One day it was that a low fever had broken out in the brickmakers' cottages, and that he had met young Frederic Sparkes, Dr. Waldegrave's assistant, riding back with a very doleful face ;—and folks had said, three of the Cluppins' children lay dead together.

But this was nothing to the terrible news that 'diphtheria,' that new, mysterious malady, had shown itself in the healthier parts of the town, and that scarlet fever had broken out in the Hammels' house, and that Walter and Freddy Hammel, Halcot's schoolfellows, with their little sister Gertrude, were down with it.

By-and-by the bell began to toll, and the boys came in one day, with red eyes and sorrowful faces, to say that they had been standing bareheaded in the parsonage garden, while little Gerty had been laid to rest in the great Hammel vault, that had not been opened for many long years ; and the tears rolled down Seymour's cheeks as he whispered that it was but too likely that poor Walter would soon be laid there too.

But my terror reached its climax when I heard that Felix Brookes, Charlie's especial 'chum' and playmate, had sickened too, and, in accordance with my advice, the boys were seriously interdicted by Dudley from visiting at any of their schoolfellows' houses during the remainder of the holidays, till the amount of the

mischief could be estimated; and both of them were warned to keep within bounds, and on no account to enter the churchyard, where the number of freshly-made little graves augmented every day.

Presently, prayers began to be read in the church for the sick and dying, but still the pestilence continued, and day by day the reports grew worse in the village.

One morning, towards the close of the holidays, I noticed that Charlie had been reading intently for hours, curled up in the drawing-room window-seat, elbows on knees; and as it was a rare thing to see a book in his hand for more than ten minutes at a time, I looked over his shoulder with some curiosity, to see what could so interest him.

'Grimm's Fairy Tales,' I remarked, half aloud; and to my surprise, he instantly shut the book, with a very red face, and muttering something about washing his hands for dinner, ran out of the room, forgetting, however, to take the book with him.

Just then Halcot came in, and, attracted by the gaudy binding, took it up.

"Grimm's Fairy Tales!" why, the very thing Seymour and I have been wanting to get hold of for months, only no one had it to lend; wherever has Charlie got it from? Hallo!—opening the fly-leaf—'Willie Benson;—why—'

Then, stopping abruptly, he became almost as red as Charlie did; and saying something about 'that boy being always up to mischief,' he went off in search of him.

Rather perplexed by this mysterious conduct I was about to follow him, and sift it out for myself, when the bell summoned me to my post at the head of the table, and other matters put it out of my mind.

For Dudley had a headache, and could eat nothing, and looked so ill besides, that it quite disturbed my own appetite; while the weary irritable way in which he spoke to Hester and the children, showed me that something had occurred to try his temper that morning.

And so it turned out; for Bruce, calling in on his way to the factory, to bring me the last Indian letter from Keith, with Aunt Margaret's love, confessed that there had been some slight words between them, relative to a new piece of machinery, about which Dudley had been both unreasonable and obstinate; even their trusty foreman, Drewitt Wells, had proved him to be in the wrong, and told him so.

'It was nothing much,' Bruce continued; 'and Dudley had made it all right afterwards, but one of his "confounded headaches" had come on, and he had been fit for nothing all the morning; and it had not improved him, when, on their way through the village, that "ass of a Leslie Underwood," like a blunder-headed puppy as he was—had the impudence—' here Bruce used a very strong word,

'to condole with him on the shameful way Miss Vivian had treated him. It is bad enough for a fellow to be jilted, without being pitied by a consummate idiot like Leslie. I shook my fist at him when he had turned the corner, I can tell you.'

'Much harm that did him ; but how did poor Dudley take it ?'

'Very badly ; he turned quite white at first, and then just lifted his hat, and walked away, leaving Leslie gaping and staring in the middle of the road like a lost calf, and serve him right too !' and here, with another forcible expletive, Bruce nodded good-bye, and ran off.

Dudley was not in the dining-room when I returned to it, and Hester, who was clearing the table, told me she thought he had gone to lie down somewhere, so I went into the drawing-room, and sat down to my letter.

The privilege of reading Keith's letters to his mother was very precious to me ; very often they were the unrestrained outpouring of his heart to her, the history of his inner life, with all its loneliness, troubles, and privations, its failure of hope, its weary patience, its hours of home sickness, and often my cheek burnt with its sweet, dim allusions to one constant idea, as it did at the following passage :—

'It is useless to hide from you, mother, that as yet nothing but disappointment has awaited me, and that I am as far off as ever from having my efforts crowned with success.

'As regards business matters, things look very black with me ; instead of realizing my Utopian dreams of wealth, I can barely secure an honest competency ; and but for the dread of greater poverty in England, I would take the next ship back, and battle out my fate in the old country, after all.

'For as time goes on, so do my yearnings increase for the sight of the one dear face—which is England, home, everything to me ; and so far from growing dim, my love waxes greater from month to month, and from year to year, till I sometimes wonder whether any one on earth has loved as I do.

'Mother, will she ever be mine?—but yet your words give me hope, and your last letter filled me with a flood of new happiness, for I know now that she loves me, and that while I work and struggle these hundreds of miles away, my Nellie sits in her quiet home, watching, and waiting, and looking for me.'

Thrice had I perused the foregoing sentences with flushed face and beating heart, and thrice I paused over the words—'Your last letter filled me with a flood of new happiness.'

Oh, Keith ! oh, soft-hearted and treacherous Aunt Margaret ! thus to betray my girlish confidences to the only ear not meant to receive them ! And as I remembered that last twilight conversation, and the incautious words I uttered, well might the blush grow deeper and deeper from conscious shame, till my cheeks seemed to tingle again, and I cried out half aloud, 'Oh, perfidious Aunt Maggie, how can I ever talk to you again !'

I was sitting thus absorbed in thought, with my fingers half-touching, half-caressing the letters traced on the page before me, when the sudden report of a pistol rang through the house, followed by a piercing scream, and in a moment I was at the foot of the stairs; but there my limbs, numbed with horror, refused to move, and for some seconds I underwent the oppression of a nightmare, neither able to go backward nor forward, and perfectly speechless, as if paralyzed.

The distinct tones of Dudley's voice, however, recalled me to myself, and, clinging to the banisters, I dragged myself up-stairs, and opened the nursery door, scarcely knowing what horrible sight might await me there.

An instant's glance made all clear.

Charlie was standing in the middle of the floor, white as death, and trembling violently; while Halcot, scarcely less pale, was turning over with his foot a large horse-pistol that I recognized as Bruce's property, that had been suspended for years over his bedroom mantelpiece; and Dudley, looking almost as ghastly as the boys, was holding his baby-sister in his arms, and striving to soothe her loud and distressing cries, while he endeavoured to ascertain whether the deadly weapon had harmed her or not.

Without looking at the unhappy culprit, I knelt down by his side and assisted him in his examination.

'Look here, Nellie!' he exclaimed in horror—'look here! Oh hush, baby dear, your cries cut to my heart.'

And then, with shaking hand, he showed me where the bullet had whizzed past the ear, carrying with it a little scrap of hair.

'One half-inch more—just one small half-inch more—and nothing would have saved her. Do you hear, you wicked boy! nothing but a merciful Providence has preserved you from killing your little sister, and making you a murderer!'

'Oh, Dudley!' cried Halcot, appalled by this view of the subject, 'he did not know it was loaded.'

'How was he to know it was not, sir? How dare you try to exculpate his disobedience?' demanded his brother sternly.

'Charlie knows that he has been forbidden to touch anything in mine or Bruce's room, or indeed to enter them on any pretext whatever. But to take down that pistol, and aim it at that poor dear baby for the mere cowardly pleasure of a bully, in order to frighten her, is a glaring act of disobedience, and a case of dastardly practical jesting.'

'Was it not enough for you, you wicked, heedless boy, that you have nearly burnt down our house from wanton carelessness and disobedience, and now you have but just escaped destroying your own sister! Go to your room, sir, and don't let me see your face again till I have determined how best to punish you. Gentle methods have but failed, and now we will try the other means. Let him be by himself,' he continued, turning from the trembling

child, 'I forbid any communication with him, until such time as I think proper to give leave.'

He paused, positively to take breath. Never had I seen Dudley so moved—so utterly unlike himself. His gray eyes flashed with anger, and his voice quivered with the intensity of his emotion. Overmastered by his terror, and bewildered with the irritation of pain, he forgot the mere child he was addressing, who shrunk away from him as if he were some stranger thus sternly reprimanding him.

'Did you not hear what I said just now, Nellie? where are you going?' for I was slipping out of the room after poor Charlie.

'Only to shut his window, Dudley,' I replied, meekly, 'it is so damp and foggy.'

'Let him do it himself. Charlie, shut your own window, and close your door;' then, as his footsteps died away along the passage, 'I suppose, Nellie, I can be obeyed in my own house; when it comes to a clashing of wills, I would have you know that I am master.'

Strange words to me, strange, harsh, unloving words, but I could bear them, ay, and much more than that, Dudley, my dear.

So I only laid my hand on his shoulder, and answered nothing, while he still applied himself to hush Rill's tumultuous sobs; and when he had a little succeeded, he placed her with many kisses into my arms, and turned to leave the room.

'Dudley,' I said, timidly, 'Dudley, I must speak to you a minute.'

'What do you want?' he asked, more gently, 'I can't talk to you yet.'

'Don't be too harsh to poor Charlie; remember our mother's last words. Dudley, you will repent it if you are.'

'Leave that to me,' he returned, haughtily; 'I have never been found harsh or unjust yet—at least, I think not,' and pressing his hand on his aching forehead, he went away, but I heard him sigh heavily as he passed Charlie's door.

It was the most miserable afternoon that I had ever spent. Rill would not leave my arms, till, exhausted by her fright and dreadful crying fit, she put her head down on my neck, and fell asleep, and all that time I had to listen to Charlie's long wailing sobs, passionate with the agony of a child's despair.

Oh, if I could but go in and comfort him! Twice I paused on the threshold, and twice went back; I had never disobeyed Dudley in my life, and I did not know how to begin now.

It was quite a relief when Katie came in, and I could unfold my tale of horror to a sympathizing auditor, but though she fairly cried over it, her grief was nothing to that of Bruce, when he arrived at tea-time, and his brother quietly put him in possession of the facts.

'My pistol,' said the poor fellow, turning pale, 'my pistol! and

loaded. Oh, Dudley, if things had come to the worst, I should have been the murderer, not Charlie.'

'You, Bruce!' cried Katie, wiping her eyes; 'oh, Nellie, don't let him talk so, and before his wife too!'

'Would you have come to have seen me in prison, Kitty?' he asked, smiling grimly, 'for I am sure they would have put me there—leaving a loaded pistol about! oh, what accursed carelessness! No, Halcot, take the plate away, I can't eat anything to-night, you have effectually spoiled my appetite.'

'Don't take it so to heart, Bruce,' replied his brother languidly from the sofa; 'of course it was a mistake; you forgot, and left it about. Do you recollect, though, when you first loaded it, and why?'

Bruce thought a minute.

'Oh, it was that night of the alarm, when there were men in the garden, and the mounted patrol rode down to warn us. I must have done it then, and forgotten all about it; but who would have thought of that disobedient little monkey climbing up to get it.'

'He is incorrigible,' groaned Dudley, 'I shall have to send him away.'

'Well, well, we will see about that afterwards, he must have a good scolding first. By-the-bye, where is he? are you not going to give him some tea?'

'Halcot has just put some milk and bread on the mat outside; he is in solitary confinement at present. On second thought, I don't mean to use severe measures, but the boy well deserves a caning, and would get it too, if he were not so delicate. Did you knock, as I told you, Halcot?'

'Yes, Dudley.'

'Did he answer you?'

'No, he was crying too much; I could hear him sobbing from the stairs.'

'Poor little beggar,' muttered soft-hearted Bruce; and then Rill came down, very red-eyed and pallid, and absorbed in her apron, having woke up sulky and altogether unapproachable.

While her big brothers nearly hugged her to death, and Katie lavished strawberry jam on her, and Halcot made depredations on the sugar-basin, for which he got his fingers caught, and severely punished, and Seymour played 'peep-bo,' till he was red in the face—the little maiden only ran her hand absently through those lamentable sticks of curls, or sitting bolt upright, gave vixenish pinches to Nettle's tail, or rubbed her smarting eyes to keep them awake.

'Baby does not love her brothers at all to-night,' said Bruce, pretending to cry, and ending with a dismal howl.

'Stoopid,' cried Rill, and gave her boot to Seymour, with a regal air, to be laced up more tightly.

When Bruce and Katie had taken themselves off, with strict

injunctions not to tell Aunt Margaret to-night, lest she should not sleep, I quietly begged Dudley to let me go and see how Charlie was getting on.

He hesitated for a moment, as if inclined to relent, but then said—

‘No, Nellie, I think not; and I am acting now not on the hasty impulse of the moment, but from calm consideration. I have decided not to give him any further punishment, but a few hours’ loneliness will do him no harm; and I certainly do not wish you to have any conversation with him to-night, I mean to speak to him myself before breakfast to-morrow.’

‘But you won’t leave him alone in the dark?’ I pleaded; ‘consider what a timid nervous child he is.’

‘Hester may take him a light, if you like; but no one else need go near him till Halcot goes to bed.’

I turned away, only half satisfied; he meant to be merciful; but did he think what those hours of suspense must be to Charlie, shut up in his lonely room? If he would but have left him to me; and I wished it more than ever when I passed soon after, and found Hester taking down the untasted meal.

‘How is he?’ I asked, eagerly, ‘did you speak to him?’

‘No, miss; Master Halcot told me not. Mr. Dudley’s awful put out, to be sure.’

‘But you saw him?’

‘Well, miss, I can’t say as how I did, for I just put the candle down, and drew the curtains, but he was huddled up on the foot of his bed, wrapped in Master Halcot’s coat, and did not raise his head.’

‘Was he crying, Hester?’

‘Just whinneying like, as if he were tired. Law, don’t fret, miss; I’m sure it was an audacious act of Master Charlie’s and ought to be punished. Poor darling Miss Baby, too,’ and settling her neat white apron, Hester bustled away with the tray.

But I sighed as I sat down in the silent drawing-room, and took Keith’s letter from my pocket, for my heart was heavy to-night—strangely heavy, ‘little Charlie.’

CHAPTER XLI.

‘The air is full of farewells for the dying,
And mournings for the dead;
The heart of Rachel for her children
crying,
Will not be comforted.

Let us be patient! These severe afflictions
Not from the ground arise;
But oftentimes celestial benedictions
Assume this dark disguise.’

Longfellow.

I WAS still sitting alone in the drawing-room two hours later, utterly weary of myself and my own thoughts, when Halcot’s curly head was suddenly thrust in at the door.

'Nellie! I wish you would come up to our room directly; I am sure there is something the matter with Charlie—he looks so funny.'
I dropped my work in amazement.

'So funny, Halcot?'

'Yes; he keeps sitting bolt upright in bed, and his eyes are so bright and queer, and he does nothing but talk about such droll things—cricket-matches, and lucifers; I can't make him out a bit. Do come; I'm sure he is ill, or something.'

Full of forebodings, I hurried up after Halcot, and bidding him follow me with a light, went to the little white bed in the corner of the boys' room.

Halcot had not exaggerated; the first glance was sufficient to show me that.

Charlie was kneeling up among his pillows, doubling his fist at some imaginary object before him, his face flushed and scarlet, his eyes brilliant with unnatural lustre, his respiration oppressed and difficult, while he poured out a flood of incoherent matter in an excited strained voice, that I had never heard before.

One touch of the little burning hand, and then I said—

'Oh, Charlie, Charlie!' in such a tone of agony, that Halcot looked quite frightened.

'Shall I fetch Dudley, Nellie?'

'No, no; wait a moment; I must speak to him myself. Keep farther off, Halcot—I don't want the light any more.' But the boy still held it with shaking hands, and looked on.

'Charlie, darling, there is no one there; it is only a shadow on the wall you see. Come, lie down; look how cool and fresh those pillows are. Does your head ache, dearie?'

'Who are you?' he demanded, nervously, and shrinking from me as I tried to enforce my words.

'Why, it is only sister sitting by you because you seem poorly. Come, it is so cold, Charlie, let me lay you down.'

'I can't lie down'—tossing his head restlessly—'do you know why, Nellie?—it is Nellie, is it not? You are sure Dudley is not behind you?'

'Quite sure, darling; there, is your pillow comfortable?'

'No, no; that dreadful pistol keeps going off in my ear. I am sure it is under these somewhere,' and he plucked at the coverlet and blankets with feeble, uncertain fingers, that made me turn cold all over. 'I can't sleep for the noise. Nellie, do—do take it away.'

'There, I have thrown it out of the window; you can't hear it any more, dear. Now lie quiet.'

'But are you sure Dudley is not in the room?'

'Quite sure—he is downstairs.'

'I don't think it was Dudley I meant. Dudley never spoke to me like that before, or looked at me with such flashing eyes. He could not be cruel, could he? and it was cruel to call me a wicked

boy, and say I had killed baby ! Oh, that pistol, Nellie—you have not thrown it into the garden, I know ; you have only pretended.'

'Come away, Halcot—come, I want you. You must sleep in Dudley's room to-night.'

'Is he so very ill, then ? Oh, poor little fellow ; I may just kiss and bid him good-night first?'

'No, no, Halcot ; come away, do you hear me?—come ;' but he only stood motionless, with fast-filling eyes, till I put my hand on his shoulder and led him out.

Why did he linger so? did some sad presentiment come into his boy's heart that he should never, oh, never, look on his young brother again?

'Dudley, open your door—I have something to say to you.'

A thin haggard face looked out at me with shaded eyes.

'Let me rest, this one night, Nellie—oh, how you trouble me !'

'Dear brother, it is not I, but the hardness of our fate. "Little Charlie" is very ill, and you must go for Dr. Waldegrave directly !'

'Ill !'

'Yes, Halcot must sleep in your room to-night, and to-morrow he and Rill must be sent down to the Fernery—Katie will mind them for me—for, oh, Dudley, Charlie has scarlet fever !'

He cast on me a look of anguish I shall never forget, and hurried away.

Halcot standing behind me in the passage, now came up, and touched me on the arm ; the boy's face looked quite livid with horror.

'Oh, Nellie, don't leave me till I have told you all. I have tried to hide it from you for fear of making you uneasy, but you remember about "Grimm's Fairy Tales?"'

'Yes, yes—quick, let me go, Halcot.'

'Well, he got it from Willie Benson's, when he went down the town on Tuesday !'

'Willie Benson ! well, what of that ?'

'He was not well, Charlie told me, when I found out about it ; and this evening, I hear from Seymour, who saw Mr. Sparkes at the door, that both he and Bobbie have got it ; and, Nellie, Charlie did complain of sore throat this afternoon.'

I wrung my hands and sobbed bitterly, and bidding him pray for dear Charlie and us all, went back into what was now the sick-room.

Charlie was quieter, and hailed me with a smile when I entered, but in a few moments he began to ramble again.

'Do you think I shall see mamma again soon, Nellie?'

'My darling boy, we shall all see her some day.'

'I don't know, but I fancy I shall see her sooner than any of you. I dreamt of her last night, and oh, she looked like a queen, so happy and smiling, with something that looked like stars round her head, I think it was a crown. Mamma is in heaven, Nellie, is she not?'

'Yes, yes, Charlie.'

'Oh, I shall soon see her, it is a long way there, but clouds look easy to walk upon, don't they? something like treading on snow, only nicer.'

Then growing bewildered, and putting his hands to his head—

'There—it has gone off again—one, two, three! Oh, tell baby not to cry so—I would not hurt her for the world, poor baby, poor baby. Oh, Nellie, why does not mamma come to me?—I want her so—I want her so dreadfully; she used to kiss me, and say all sorts of sweet things when we were alone together, and she never called me a wicked boy as Dudley did; don't let him come near me, hide me from him, Nellie. Oh, dear, kind Nell, take care of me, and never leave me again!'

'Never, never, Charlie!'

The little creature shivered, moaned, and then lay quiet. Oh, my motherless boy, my poor motherless and fatherless boy! is this what we shall have to bear?

'Well bowled, well bowled—Duncan's out—it is Walter Hammond's turn. What are you saying, that he was buried yesterday, and can't come? no, he was not, it was Gerty—Gerty, whom I used to carry in my arms round the garden, and drop in the middle of the strawberry bed—only for fun, you know, Dudley—no one was hurt, not even baby; though she cried so that I thought she was killed, it made such a bang and she went down so. Dudley is hiding somewhere in the corner of the room, with a long stick, but I shall only say it was for fun.'

And so on, and so on, till I was fairly sickened with the babble of delirium, and then Dr. Waldegrave and Dudley came in.

As the latter crossed the threshold, the little fellow, believing he was addressing some one else, called out to him earnestly not to let Dudley come in, for he knew that he hated him, and would never speak to him again. And as he said this, the look of pain and remorse in Dudley's eyes was so pitiable, I could not look at him for my tears.

All through that dreadful night—and it was a dreadful night to us both—he sat silent and motionless at the head of the little bed, only rising to render me any assistance as I required it, and always with that heart-broken look on his face.

Once only he spoke to me, when I implored him to have pity on himself, and lie down, and take the rest of which he had such sore need.

'Don't ask me to leave my post, Nellie,' he returned, in a hoarse whisper, drawing back the hand I was chafing in mine.

'At least let me keep it while I can. Heaven only knows,' he continued, 'how I have striven to do my duty by that unhappy child; and Heaven knows also how miserably I have failed. I only trust God will be merciful, and not try me beyond my strength.'

And then he went back to his place, to lay his head on Charlie's

pillow, and listen to the incoherent raving, with that terrible under-current always running through it, that Dudley was angered beyond forgiveness, and that his anger had broken his heart.

With the first dawn of early morning, Dr. Waldegrave came again, and still he watched with a grave and steady face, and would give no opinion; not even Dudley, who followed him out, could obtain any certain information; he could not judge as yet, he said, he would come again at noon.

Dudley would not go to the factory, though Bruce and I prayed him to do so, but wandered in and out the sick-room all day, attempting to be of service to me; but first he sent Rill and Halcot down to the Fernery, where Katie promised to take faithful care of them.

Katie begged very hard at first to share my nursing, but Bruce would not hear of it, the risk was too great; but he promised, if Dudley would consent to give up his watch for the following night, he would most willingly take it himself.

Dudley was reluctant to do so for a long time, and would not be persuaded, but towards the evening he alarmed Dr. Waldegrave and myself by having a prolonged fainting-fit, and after that we had no trouble with him; only first he made us promise that we would call him if there were any perceptible change.

Never had I seen Bruce such a dear, kind fellow as he was that night; he was so cheerful and good, so handy, and full of little inventions, so careful for my comfort, so thoughtless of his own.

In the quiet intervals, when no special watching was required, he would make me lie down, and cover me up on Halcot's bed, and shade the light, and replenish the fire noiselessly, speaking and moving as if he had been used to such work all his life.

It was a more comfortable night on the whole, and towards morning the fever began to abate, and we looked more hopefully to Dr. Waldegrave's visit; and as Dudley was still asleep, worn out by his anxiety, Bruce followed him down to ask his opinion.

He was a long time absent, and when he came back his face was very pale.

'You don't mean to say he thinks him worse?'

Bruce took my hand without speaking.

'Is he so very ill, then?'

'We must make up our minds to lose him, dear Nellie!'

'But why, why? the fever is gone. Look, he is asleep, the darling, and looks just like his old self. He is never dying; I won't believe it, Bruce!'

'My dear,' he said, laying his hand on my shoulder, 'we must not fight against it, it only makes it worse. Think of Dudley, Nellie, and keep up for his sake!'

'It is for his sake I am so sorrowing; he will never get over it—it will break his heart,' and then I could not speak for my bitter crying.

'My dear,' said Bruce, in a broken voice, 'we shall do nothing if you give way so : indeed it is not right ! While there is life there is hope, Dr. Waldegrave says, though he dared not hold out any of his own ; he looked so grieved for us, Nellie !'

'But what did he say? I don't understand it. If the fever is better, why cannot he get well?'

'The fever has never been great, the doctor says, not half as bad as Freddy Hammel's, and he is doing well ; but there is no power—that is the mischief—the dear fellow has no constitution, no stamina, no reserve strength, and, as he told our poor mother, no ability to wrestle with disease ; he is slowly sinking.'

'Slowly sinking ! God help thee, little Charlie !'

'That which you call sleep is only a stupor ; when he recovers from that he will be conscious till—till—' here Bruce paused. 'No, I can't talk any more about it ; besides, I have to tell poor Dudley, and run down to the works, and see if Drewitt Wells can manage without me. I shall be back in an hour or two ; I must just report news to Katie through the window. Poor girl, she is so anxious !'

I never knew how Dudley received those heavy tidings, but he came in shortly afterwards, and took his old place, which he was never to leave till all was over.

The lethargy, or stupor, as Bruce called it, lasted all day ; but towards evening there were signs of rousing, and as Dudley moved to draw the curtain closer, he opened his eyes and looked at him, this time without shuddering.

'Is that you, Dudley?'

Dudley dropped the curtain he held, and bent over him.

'My darling boy, do you know me?'

'Know you? of course I do ! Ah, I see what you mean ; but you are not angry with me now, are you? I am so very ill ; you will not be angry with me any more, Dudley ; for I have always loved you so !' and he tried to raise himself to kiss him, but fell back on his pillows.

'Oh, Charlie, Charlie, do not break my heart. My precious boy, can you ever forgive me?'

'Forgive you? what have I to forgive? I was a bad, wicked boy, and disobeyed you, and nearly killed dear baby ! Oh, Nellie,' he sighed wearily, 'tell him not to cry so, it makes me sore all over !'

But Dudley, worn out by sorrow, and unable to control himself, hid his face in the pillows, and sobbed aloud.

'I am so very tired,' said the dying boy ; 'and it makes me so sorry to see him so unhappy, when I love him so dearly, and have given him so much pain. I want to kiss you, dear, if you could only let me, and do take me in your arms as you used to do in the old times, before I made you angry. I want to sleep, somehow, and I cannot rest here !'

Dudley, trembling in every limb, took the little creature to his bosom, and let him nestle there ; but Charlie seemed restless still.

'You don't kiss me, Dudley; are you sure you have forgiven me?'

His quivering lips touched the boy's eyes, and hair, and brow, and something like a blessing escaped his lips.

'My pretty boy—my precious little Charlie!'

'Oh, then, you do love me! How nice all that sounds, if you would not cry. See, your tears are on my face, Dudley, and on your own too; I must kiss them away.' And, throwing his weak arms round his neck, he gave his last sweet caresses.

'Don't give them all to me, Charlie; look, there is poor Nellie longing for some, and Bruce too.'

'Let them come to me,' murmured the child exhaustedly. 'Ah! that is your hand, Bruce, it is so strong and brown, and Dudley's is so thin. Mind you take care of Dudley when I am gone; and tell him not to grieve, for I always loved him—always. And there is dear kind Nell, too. Don't leave me, Nellie, I like to see you there. The room's getting dark, I think, and I am cold.'

'There is light in heaven, Charlie.'

The fast-glazing eyes brightened.

'Yes, yes—and mother is there, is she not? and father too? Is that a great white angel standing at the foot of the bed? Look how he smiles and beckons; he has surely come for me.'

'Ay, surely. Farewell, little Charlie.'

'Ah, now, Nellie is crying; I am so sorry. Mind and kiss dear baby for me; and tell Halcot'—here his voice dropped.

'Look, he is trying to clasp your neck, Dudley; raise his dear hands for him, they cannot find their way alone'—and Bruce laid them on his brother's shoulders.

'Yes, I meant that. God bless you all! One more kiss, Dudley. Don't fret—don't fret. Now lay me down, please.'

Ay, lay him down, for the light is gone out of the sweet violet eyes, and it is only the lifeless clay we are so passionately caressing.

Good-bye—good-bye till we meet in heaven, 'little Charlie!'

* * * * *

That night, as I left Dudley's room, I saw a foreign paper, sealed and stamped, lying on the hall table; and scarcely knowing what I expected, I broke the seal, and as I did so the following paragraph met my eye:—

'At Ravenna, in the twenty-ninth year of her age, Marion Beatrix, the eldest surviving child of the late Harold and Eleanor Vivian.'

CHAPTER XLII.

'Come rest in this bosom, my own stricken deer ;
 Though the herd have fled from thee, thy home is still here ;
 Here still is the smile, that no cloud can o'ercast,
 And a heart and a hand all thine own to the last.'—*Moore.*

JUNE scents are in the air, the fragrance of the garden sweets, the breath of the new-mown hay, pleasant sights and sounds around us, the lark's song as he soars into the central blue, the sun flushing the clover, the bleating of the snow-white lambs in the meadows down by the pool, the lowing of the dappled kine browsing in the short crisp grass, the freshness of the spring mingled with the glory of the summer.

Come, we have had enough of sadness, let us turn to brighter scenes, and the dawning of a better hope.

Bereavement has but one mournful repetition ; sorrow, an empty and useless flow of words ; let us shroud ourselves in the mantle of oblivion, let us avoid this retrospect, so harassing to my readers, so exquisitely painful to myself.

Vain indeed would it be for me to tell how sorely we missed our precious boy ; let each afflicted one put him or her self into our place, his own heart will inform him—but for me, who was doubly bereaved, who had lost my child and my friend ; ah, no wonder my smiles were slow to return, as I trod the weary path through the valley of desolation, to the border-land of despair.

But not for long ; oh, not for long. Heaven is merciful, and human love is great ; though one link snap after another, the ties that bind us to life are strong ; we are smitten, let us have patience, no suffering save one is eternal.

One evening, it was the eighteenth of June, I remember, for it was Dudley's birthday, we sat together by the open window, looking out on the lawn and the cedar-tree.

In accordance with Dudley's wish, the day had been suffered to pass without any of its customary formalities, and as evening came on, he and I were left alone together in the quiet house, Halcot having taken his little sister down to the parsonage to meet some juvenile parishioners at a grand strawberry fête in the garden.

Dudley had been very silent and abstracted for some time, and as I sat opposite, at my work, I could not help stealing a glance now and then, not often, lest he should think himself watched—and as I did so, I wondered what current of thought he was pursuing, as his eyes rested with that dim far-away look on the wide stretch of sunset-clouds just warming from gold to crimson.

Was he thinking of his brief life, with its seven-and-twenty summers, its short feverish dream of happiness ? did he see himself in the zenith of his youth, a broken man ? broken in health, in

heart, in hopes, in all that makes up the glory of life ; with nothing to sustain him to the end, but the strength of his faith, the endurance of his manhood ?

He was very changed ; even in repose the over-wrought tension of the nerves never relaxed ; sweet sorrowful curves round the mouth, heavy mournful gray eyes, deep lines traced on the clear broad forehead, slight indications of gray in the dark hair over the temples ; thin white hands, once strong and brown ;—ah, my dear, my dear ! what are these but signs that life, and not time, hath dealt very hardly with you ?

A movement of the opening door, a slow rustle over the cool summer matting, a shadow, and the sweep of black draperies, then we rose confused and startled to our feet, as a lady in deep mourning entered, who threw back her long crape veil, and looked at us ;—it was Eleanor.

‘ Lenore, Lenore !’

‘ I have come back to you, Dudley.’

But almost before the low broken murmur had escaped her lips, he had her in his arms, and had laid her beautiful head on his breast.

What was it she was saying ?

‘ Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it,’ and made as though she would have knelt to him ; but he held her up with his brave right hand, and closed her quivering lips with his passionate kisses.

‘ Here, on my heart, love, here, in your rightful place, where no other head but yours has ever rested—my darling, my lost Lenore !’

She folded her arms about his neck, as the dying boy had done, and threw back her head till her eyes rested on his ; and as she did so, her face wore a look like a little child in pain.

‘ I knew it, I feared it ; how changed, how wan, how sad ! ah, it is all my doing. Can you ever forgive me ? oh, my love, my love, can you ever forgive me again ?’

‘ Unto seventy times seven, Eleanor, unto seventy times seven.’

She took his patient hand, and kissed it, and hiding her face in his breast, wept as if her heart would break ; and as he bent over her, I went out of the room, and left them to themselves.

Yes, I left them, and stealing down the garden walks to the orchard, seated myself on the low green hillock under the King Pippin tree, and clasping my hands before me, let the evening breeze stir the hair from my brow and cool my flushed face.

Above me slow piles of ruddy clouds faded away to westward, and over my head the ripple and rustling of leaves kept up monotonous swaying with my thoughts, and only the waking twitter of some happy nestling broke in upon the silence of the hour.

And the rush of tumultuous feeling at my heart, was it pleasure or pain ? or a strange mingling of both ?

Alas, how can I tell, save that I was utterly bewildered, and

that my pulses were beating like a fluttering bird, just fallen to the ground.

Could this indeed be Eleanor? proud, wilful, capricious Eleanor? this beautiful sorrowful woman, who spoke in such broken tones, and looked at us with such mild loving eyes.

She was very altered; there was not a tinge of colour in her thin white face, and the flood of golden curls, that used to stream from under her hat, was folded back in loosely dropping braids; and in her eyes, and in her voice, and in her mute clinging caress, there was some great, unspeakable change, like the dawning of a new life.

Could it be that Marion's words had come true? Ah, how well I remember them—

'It may be that my human experience may err, and that it may need some crueller process than the gentle influences of love to work this change—but it will come yet.'

Had it come? Had suffering and affliction purified and strengthened her, till, from the vague restless dreams of her girlhood, she had awakened to the reality of perfected womanhood?

Heaven grant that it might be so, and that her sister's prayer could be realized.

And the crimson clouds turned pale and ashen gray; and slow luminous stars trembled on their verge; and a fair young moon trailed silvery paths over the damp, long grass; and the liquid manna of the night fell thick on the hungry shrubs—and still I sat with clasped hands, trying to think.

Presently, lights began to gleam in the upper windows—the children had returned—and, becoming suddenly oppressed with the gloom and stillness, I hastened down the garden and regained the drawing-room window.

Hester had been in during my absence, and kindled the evening lamp; Dudley had moved it aside, but its light fell full on Eleanor's shining hair and pure white face, as she sat on the couch by Dudley's side, her head still resting on his shoulder, and her hands clasped in his.

But Dudley's face, so calm, so unspeakably happy, with its old fond smile, as leaning over him I put back the hair from his forehead with caressing fingers—

'Is that you, dear Nellie? where have you been so long? Child, your hand is cold, and your dress heavy with dew!'

'I have been keeping the moon company, that is all—you have not wanted me to-night!'

'Little jealousy! do we want our sister, Lenore?'

She did not answer, but beckoned me towards her with a smile; and, making me sit beside her, kept her hand in mine.

'Do you know Marion has sent me to you, her last precious legacy to Helen, her friend?'

The soft lips touched my face.

'Will you have me as your sister, Nellie, now that he has forgiven me?'

'Dear Eleanor, can you doubt it?'

'Tell us about her, my darling,' said Dudley; but I noticed his voice faltered as he spoke—'Nell loved her dearly, and so, indeed, did we all.'

'She never chid me,' murmured Eleanor, softly, 'for she knew that I was broken-hearted—oh, Dudley, Dudley, how could you leave me as you did, that day?'

'It was you who left me, my bird, but you have flown back to your nest—see here!'

And he drew the little gray glove from his breast.

'Night and day this has lain next to my heart, but I always knew that you would come back to claim it as your own. I have you fast, Eleanor, I will never lose you again!'

'Never, never,' she repeated.

'Nay, do not weep, beloved, perhaps this parting, with all its pain, has been for our good. I know it has been for mine; for the Eleanor that has come back to me to-day is sweeter and better far than the Eleanor I have lost.'

'I humbly trust so, in my heart of hearts I pray that I may be worthy of your love.'

'Child, do not fear—I have you fast—you are not alone, I will be your friend, as well as your lover, to aid and comfort you, Lenore!'

'When you left me to my despair, Dudley, do you know how I suffered? how wicked and restless I was? how I lay at her feet, and prayed that I might die!'

'My dearest, hush!'

'You passed me on the threshold without a word, when my heart was breaking, and though I called your name thrice in my remorse, you never heard; you were deaf, even to my voice, Dudley, my love.'

'His mild, gray eyes dwelt sorrowfully upon her, but he did not reply.'

'And then the devil, whose name is Legion, entered into me, and my pride sustained me. I hardened my heart, and set my face as a flint, and exulted in my own torture. Those were dreadful days with me.'

'Darling, they are past; why recall them?'

'Let me speak for this once, and then, if you bid, I will be silent. I am very humble, dear—my spirit is broken—broken in the weary watches of the night when I sat by her side, sweet saint, as her "feet stumbled on the dark mountains," and she went down the gloomy valley, writhing with untold agonies, yet patient as a little child.'

Faithful unto death, Marion, faithful unto death.

'Did she know you to the last, Eleanor?'

'Yes, yes; and with her failing strength she drew my head to

her bosom, and prayed Heaven to have mercy on her unhappy child—her poor motherless, unhappy Lenore.'

There was silence for a few minutes, then—

'Do you love me, Eleanor?'

She raised her wondering eyes to his, as if she had not heard him aught.

'Should I have humbled myself so, if I did not?' she replied.

'Then come home to me at once. I am lonely, Lenore, and so are you. Come home to me, my love, and I will comfort you.'

These were the last words I heard him speak to her that evening, for soon after, I had occasion to leave the room, and when I came back, she was only waiting to bid me good-bye, before Dudley took her over the low meadows to the Priory.

It was late enough before he returned, and then his first words drove sleep that night from my eyes.

'Nellie, it is all arranged, and she is to be my wife before next month is out; she owned Marion would have wished it so; and, dear, I am a happy man.'

'God bless you, Dudley.'

'You will miss me at first, dear Nellie, but I shall be very close to you, and the Priory and Sunnyside shall be like one house.'

The Priory! Dudley master of the Priory! I could scarcely believe my ears.

'Shall you live there? why, I thought—Sunnyside is your own house, you know.'

Dudley smiled mysteriously.

'At present—well, I am too happy to talk about houses and lands to-night; we shall have plenty of time to discuss that, but now, I can only think that Eleanor, my Eleanor, has come back to me to-night—my darling, my wife that is to be.'

And kissing me fondly he left the room, and the light springy step I had not heard for months went up the old oak stairs.

'Oh, happy Dudley!—happy, happy Eleanor; oh, why was my pillow that night so wet with my tears?'

CHAPTER XLIII.

<p>'And I must give you up, who love you so, Your face and voice have made my home so long; My heart can find no words to bid you go, My brother—older ties are all too strong.</p>	<p>Your kindly smile has been our household sun, Your strong right hand has been so true and kind; God bless you still, my best beloved one, In life, and home, and in your chosen bride.'</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Helen Burnside.</i></p>
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ALL too swiftly passed the time, till the last day arrived that was to see Dudley master of Sunnyside; but, even in that brief space, thick and fast came the changes around and about us.

For two days after Dudley's re-engagement arrived news from the north, that our dear Loo had become a mother, and great was Herwald's pride and joy over his first-born son.

Dudley Willoughby Delorme, so the young heir was called, and Dudley, though reluctant, was compelled to go down some ten days before his marriage, to give and receive congratulations, and to make acquaintance with his godson.

Aunt Nellie—well, it was very strange, but I liked it, even though it made me feel lonely—lonely and a little sad.

During his brief stay in the north, Dudley assisted at another festivity, for, two days after the christening, Milly Vaughan was married from Hurst-hall, and Dudley was Hubert's best man.

He came up the next day, and Herwald with him, and both had much to say in praise of the little dark-faced bride, who sent her dear love to Nellie, and only hoped she might be as happy as she was that day.

Eleanor had been with me during Dudley's absence, and the more I was with her, the more I marvelled at the wonderful change that had passed over her.

Who, indeed, could recognize the capricious, fitful child, in the mild, gracious woman, whose voice was so low and sad, and on whose meek beautiful countenance there was the impress of a crushing sorrow.

Great indeed was Dudley's power over her; in his absence she drooped and pined, spoke little, and sat apart, but at the sound of his step and voice, her face would brighten, her great eyes grew brilliant and happy, and she would go out to meet him—her dearest friend—and nestle her golden head against him, as if there were no other resting-place for her on earth.

And when, as sometimes it happened, a spark of the old Eleanor spirit would burst out, kindle in her voice, and crimson her face, one grave, low word from Dudley, nay, even a glance of his eye, allayed the passing fever, and subdued her pride.

A fair, sweet woman; but as Dudley sometimes said, as he fondly looked at her, 'not his old Lenore.' She had never come back, but a better and a lovelier than the one he had lost.

But what was most striking was her entire passiveness in the preparations for her marriage; she left everything in mine and Dudley's hands, as if we were her two guardians, and she some lonely orphaned child, who had no concern at all in her own fate.

Even in the matter of her trousseau she resigned all to Babette and me; merely stipulating that she was to leave off her mourning on her wedding-day, for Marion had made her promise to do so.

'She never liked me in black,' she said, with a sad smile, 'and she knew that I should mourn for her as truly as if I were shrouded from head to foot in crape.'

'But surely you have some choice in colours, Eleanor?' I remonstrated, 'How are we to satisfy your taste unless you aid us?'

'Babette knows them by this time,' she returned, and passed on.

And shortly after I saw her wandering through the garden paths, plucking the rosebuds with listless hands, only to throw them away.

Herwald, when he saw her, on his arrival at Sunnyside, told Dudley that he had done wisely in fixing the marriage at once. She was pining for her sister, he said, and would never be settled or well till he had taken her away ; but though I argued with him, I did not feel quite satisfied.

'Eleanor,' I said one day, as she glided past me like a wraith in the twilight, 'I am not content about you ; are you sure that you do not regret anything ? that you are really happy ?'

She fixed her wistful eyes on me ; there was truth, but there was sadness in their blue depths.

'I am happy, Nellie, but I miss Marion !'

'My dear, I know it ; but you love Dudley, do you not ?'

'More than all the world beside ; I would lay down my life for his dear sake.'

'Then why not rouse yourself from this melancholy that oppresses you. Remember that in three days more you will become the wife of the man you love ; can any woman desire a prouder fate, Eleanor ? Why then this sadness ?'

She clasped her hands over the cross she wore at her bosom ; it was a trick of hers now. Sometimes she would press it till the glittering facets cut into her white flesh, and left its mark graven on her palm.

'I am in a dream ; don't ask me to analyze it, I cannot. I am happy, and I tremble ; content, but fearful as a child ! What if I foil in my wifely duty ? I who love him, yet have streaked his hair with gray ? When he warmed and cherished me, I stung him, I plunged barbed arrows into his faithful heart. Nellie, I have no trust in myself, only in him.'

'And is not that enough, Lenore ?' said a voice in her ear, and Dudley's hand was on her shoulder. 'Come, what have we to do with fears and anticipatory troubles ; remember, my dearest, that your future belongs to your husband and heaven.'

His least word always calmed her ; and the agitated look now died off her face as he spoke, and for the rest of the evening Eleanor looked and moved more like her old self than I had seen her yet.

It was a great disappointment to us all, that Louie could not come up to the wedding ; but Herwald was with us some days before and afterwards, entering into all the necessary arrangements, and making himself generally useful.

There was no end to business ; every now and then Mr. Howard Tracy, the Vivians' solicitor, and Mr. Stephenson our own, met in the Sunnyside dining-room, and Bruce, and Dudley, and Herwald would go in and have long conferences with closed doors and much mystery.

'I tell you it is all stuff and nonsense,' said downright Kitty to me one day, as we sat working together, while Eleanor stood dreamily apart by the window; 'these lawyers want to pocket a long fee, that's all, and make as much out of it as they can. I hate such mystery. Why, the business is as straightforward as possible, Bruce told me so. Everything belongs to Eleanor solely and without reserve, and will come into her husband's possession as a matter of course; and a capital property it is, Bruce says; it will make him the richest landowner in the county, Earl de Lacy excepted.'

I was silent. Truly 'his lines had fallen to him in pleasant places.' How nobly and well he would take his place among the county families; he, with the gentle blood of the Mortimers flowing through his veins. Dudley Mortimer of the Priory—yes, it sounded very well.

An opening door, a distant babble of voices, advancing footsteps, and then Bruce, flushed and eager, put his face into the room.

'Ladies, your presence is requested in the dining-room, and Helen Marion Mortimer's especial signature is required.'

'More mystery,' quoth Kitty; but she followed gladly enough; and Halcot, who was in a state of great excitement in the hall, was beckoned in also.

Herwald and Dudley were conversing in the bay window as we entered, and the two lawyers bending over certain deedy-looking parchments before them.

'Helen Marion, my dear,' said old Mr. Stephenson, who was a familiar friend of the family, 'Bruce has told you that we want your signature for the transfer of certain properties passing into your hands, and appertaining to yourself, heirs, and assigns for'—

'My dear sir,' said Dudley advancing, 'you are bewildering my sister, who has as much head for business as most women, I suppose; if you will suffer me, I will explain our family arrangements to her myself, and without the formal technicalities, which will only puzzle her. Nellie, my dear, sit down; and, Mr. Stephenson, you must put me right if I make any error in speech.'

The lawyer bowed, and smiled, and Mr. Howard Tracy having furnished the other ladies with chairs, Dudley began to speak.

'You will understand, my dear sister, that Bruce has as much voice in these arrangements as I; but as, by virtue of necessity, two cannot speak at once with any hope of being understood, he has constituted me his spokesman.'

'Hear, hear,' said Bruce, patting him on the back; 'you must go into Parliament, and be a great gun in the Commons, Dudley.'

An interruption which made us all laugh, and Mr. Howard Tracy frown.

'Business, my dear sir, business; consider this gentleman's time'—here Mr. Stephenson bowed;—'in order to gain this young lady's signature we must make her understand these matters a little. Pray continue, Mr. Mortimer.'

'You see, Nellie,' began Dudley again, very good-humouredly, 'that such a great change in the family position necessitates much careful thought, and Bruce and I wish you to know how everything stands with us.'

'Hear, hear,' muttered Bruce rather less audibly, with a sly wink at his Kitty.

'My dear Eleanor will endow me with such wealth, that I must of necessity withdraw myself from the factory, which was our father's business, and the elder son's share devolves of right to Bruce, and he—he'—here Dudley stammered, hesitated, and lost himself. 'I mean of course, the business is solely his.'

'Nearly put your foot in it, old fellow,' groaned Bruce.

'Hush!' said his brother.

'Louie also has all she needs—'

'And a long way over,' ejaculated Bruce *sotto voce*.

'—and requires nothing from us; and with Eleanor's consent I mean to take Halcot's future upon myself. He will make but a bad man of business; so I propose that he go to Oxford with Seymour, and then choose a profession for himself—barrister, or clergyman; only—looking at the boy's radiant face, we advise him to choose the wig.

'There only remains you, Nellie; for we constitute you Rilp's, or rather as it stands here, Maud Edith's guardian, until such time as she comes of age; and for this purpose your two brothers, of their own free gift, resign Sunnyside to you, and to your children for ever, only hoping that a happier life may dawn for you in the dear old place.'

'Amen,' cried Bruce, this time seriously.

'But, Dudley—'

'Nay, no objection, it is a free gift from Bruce and me.'

'But why should not Bruce have it? It is so much better than the Fernery!'

'But not than the new Fernery that is to be Herwald's and my present to him. Look how he reddens, and pretends not to understand, though we have been dinning it into him for an hour past.

'Sunnyside is little to old Bruce's taste, though it is dear to you as to me, Nellie; and that you may be able to keep up the old place, we make over to you our mother's dowry that was sunk into the business ten years ago, and which will yield you some three hundred a-year; and if that should not be enough'—here Dudley again hesitated—'Bruce wishes to make up whatever is required; that is all, I think, Mr. Stephenson?'

'All, my dear sir, all at least that'—

Here Bruce gave the old man a perceptive nudge.

'Ah, yes, I understand. Now for the signature—now, my dear. Sunnyside is yours for ever.'

Utterly bewildered and touched to the heart with their thought and goodness, I affixed my name in a trembling hand; and then

Dudley and Bruce came up and kissed me, and Katie and Eleanor did the same.

Mistress of Sunnyside !—never, never to know another home ! well, it was more than I dared to expect.

This was the morning before the wedding, and in the evening there was a grand show of presents, and more excitement.

Dudley's gift to his bride was a locket set with diamonds, with Marion's portrait and hair ; and at the same time he hung round my neck a similar one of less value, set with pearls, with his own miniature inside it.

Eleanor, too, gave me a costly bracelet, sparkling with brilliants, and the beautiful coral and pearl parure that Marion used to wear.

'Do take them,' she pleaded, as I remonstrated with her on her lavish generosity ; 'indeed I have more jewels than I know how to use ; and I know—I know how you loved her, and will prize them for her sake.'

'And not for yours, Eleanor ?'

She laid her cheek to mine in a fondling way quite new to her.

'I think you love me too, a little ; but, dear, I have learnt to be so glad that I am going to be your sister too'—smilingly—'not only for Dudley's sake, but for your own.'

It was late that night ; Dudley had just returned from taking Eleanor for the last time over the low fields to the Priory, and was busily engaged in his own room packing up his travelling valise for the morrow and talking over his intended route with Herwald.

Leaning against the wall of my adjoining chamber, I could catch, though very faintly, the pleasant sound of their voices—Dudley's low happy laugh, and Herwald's joyous repartee ; but somehow to-night both seemed to jar painfully on my ear, when I remembered how I should miss one of those voices on the morrow.

If only I could creep in after him and bid him good night for the last time in the dear old room ! Would Herwald never go !—no, there was more laughter, scraps of French, some lively anecdote or other, another mirthful volley, and a little whistling, twelve chiming from the church tower, his wedding day. I could bear it no longer ; hark—yes, the door was opened, held ajar, then closed with a bang ; and Herwald went off down the passage humming the Wedding March to himself.

'Who is there ? come in. Why, is it you, child ? I thought you were in bed and asleep, an hour ago.'

'I don't expect there will be much sleep for me to-night ; can I help you ?'

There seemed to be need of my help ; the room was strewn over with coats, waistcoats, gloves, collars, and the heterogeneous matter of a gentleman's trousseau ; the new Scotch maud flung carelessly over one chair, and the splendid dressing-case with silver settings that Herwald and Louie had given him, heaped over with a confused medley of rubbish.

'Help me!' said Dudley, cheerfully cramming in the pile of new shirts; 'no, thank you, I have just done. Look what a first-rate packer I am, everything fits into corners, as if they were made for them; it is funny to think I shall never have this sort of thing to do for myself again. Just fancy me with a valet, to bring me my shaving water in the morning, and lay out my dress clothes for dinner.'

'It is rather strange to imagine it, Dudley.'

'Is it not? don't touch those coats, please, no one has a knack of folding them but myself; you may buckle up the maud, if you like; yes, just think of me doing the South of France en grande Seigneur, with Babette and Dominique in the rumble. They will call me milord at the hotels, see if they don't,' and Dudley laughed merrily.

'Take care of yourself when I am gone, Nellie, and write often, mind.'

'If you wish it,' I replied, quietly.

The evident despondency of my tone struck Dudley, for he raised his eyes from his work and looked at me.

'Why, what a white weary girl! We have let you do too much to-day, with one thing and another. Go to bed, darling; you must not show that sad little face to-morrow.'

'Oh, Dudley,' I began, 'I shall miss you so,' and then I fairly burst out crying.

In a moment he was beside me, and holding me by the shoulders with firm kind hands.

'Nellie, my dear child, hush, this will never do.'

'I am so sorry,' I answered, sobbing exhaustedly, 'but I am so tired and excited, and so very, very sad, Dudley!'

He was silent a moment, and then relaxing his hold, made me sit down, and placed himself on the arm of the chair, where I could rest my head against him and be content.

'Nellie, do you remember what I said to you on the day of my engagement?'

'Yes, every word.'

'My dear,' he returned very gravely, 'what I said then, I say now—nothing, not even my Eleanor's dear love, can make you less to me—it is impossible, it could not be; you are what you must always be, my precious little sister.'

I ceased my tears to listen; his words were so strong and gentle, they consoled me.

'Wherever I am, and whatever I am doing, I shall never cease thinking of you and caring for your welfare. Tell me, Nellie, can you trust me with your future?'

I looked at him wonderingly.

'My future, Dudley?'

'Yes, yours—it will be a very happy one, dear, be assured, for I will guard it well. And now I want you to promise to obey me as

faithfully as you have ever done ; come, will you give me your word ?'

'Of course I will obey you, Dudley.'

'Well then, this is what I wish you to do. You know what we have arranged about the Whalley visit ?'

'That I am to go home with Herwald.'

'Yes ; Loo is longing to have you, and you must make acquaintance with her boy. Bruce and Katie have promised to stay with you till you go—and you are to remain at Hurst-hall till our return.'

'Till the beginning of October ?'

'Yes, why not ? no one wants you here ; at least,' as I drooped my head at his words, 'I mean you have no especial duty, Hal will be at school, and little Maud—we must drop that absurd Rill—will of course go with you.'

'But two months,' I continued, dubiously, 'such a long time, Dudley !'

'Not a bit of it ; the society of Loo and her wonderful boy will make it pass quickly enough ; and then there will be riding with Herwald ; and Hubert and Milly, and Arthur, and Lucy, and a host of friends to amuse you ; and when October comes, you will be all fresh and bright to welcome us home to the Priory.'

'And then ?'

'And then there will be daily walks, talks, and drives ; and all the gossips of the neighbourhood will be unable to determine whether Sunnyside or the Priory be Nellie's home.'

I smiled, his attempt to cheer me was so kind and evident.

'Come, we must have no more tears ; you don't know half the good things that are in store for you. Remember, you have intrusted me with your future. But now it is late, and I must let you go. Good-night, and God bless you, my darling sister.'

And holding me fast to him for a moment, he kissed me fondly, and then I went.

CHAPTER XLIV.

'The sun shall look down from his throne on high,
The white clouds, like angels' wings, hang in the sky ;
The pealing of bells shall resound o'er the lea,
When we, on that morning, bid farewell to thee.'—*A non.*

SUCH a glorious morning ; such a shimmer and sparkle of light ; such dewy freshness ; such blue hazy skies ; such twitterings and carollings of birds !

Over the wind-blown grass lay dancing shadows, purple in the sunlight, while the chirp of the grasshoppers, and the sweet gossiping of the foliage, made tiny music in the garden below. Every-

where were brightness, beauty, and the melody of song ; while above all came the chiming of bells—crashing bells from the town steeple ; melodious bells from the village church ; tinkling bells, echoing all day long from the factory close at hand.

Excitement commenced early. Even in the midst of quietly dressing myself and Rill after our simple breakfast, Halcot burst in to say that the townfolk were already crowding the church, and all the factory men, clad in their best, were lining the road and path, 'and that it was a great secret, and only Bruce knew—but the gray horses were to be taken out, and twenty of the men were to be harnessed in their place, and draw the bride and bridegroom to the Priory.'

'But, Halcot, there is nothing to see. What are all the people crowding the church for?'

'Oh, I don't know ; a wedding is a wedding, I suppose, though it is ever so quiet. Make haste, do. I expect they will be off directly ; I will tell you when the carriage comes round.'

And then came Herwald forward to have a button fastened on his glove, and to carry off his 'wee wife,' who showed her sash to him on the first step, and her little rosetted boots on the second.

'Very pretty, indeed, Miss Rill—very pretty indeed ; now give me a kiss.'

'I'm Maud Edit,' lisped the little lady, smelling gingerly at her handkerchief, where a small modicum of scent had been placed. 'Dudley says Rill is like a baby ; I'm Maud Edit, Uncle Herry.'

'You are an angel,' remarked her brother-in-law, and he snatched her up in his arms. 'Now come and see the pretty bouquets I have got for you and sister.'

And then came Dudley, looking quite like himself, only handsomer, and a little pale, with some delicate white flowers in his button-hole, and his lavender gloves in his hands.

'Now I'm off, Nellie ; Herwald is waiting for me. How nice you look, dear. Adieu, till we meet in the church.'

And then, with a long lingering glance at me, the little room, the garden, and the fields beyond, he went off with a sweet unsteady smile, and left me to finish.

'Now then,' exclaimed Halcot, throwing open the door, 'are you not ready? the carriage has gone round to the Priory. Take my arm, come. Oh, you are all right ; don't fuss—you look as jolly as—as—' here he failed for a simile—'as the "Undine" Seymour and I are reading about. Come along—hold tight. Why are you shaking?' and seizing me with his rough paw, he hurried me downstairs.

'There, now, did I not tell you so? There are the men—look—what a jolly lot ; there's Drewitt Wells and Timothy—halloa, they're going to cheer. I say, shut up, you fellows ; it is not the bride, and my young lady is going to faint.'

'Be quiet, my lad,' responded Bruce, with his hand on the

carriage door, and then he assisted me to alight, and led me in, where Katie was standing in the porch in her soft French gray and pretty pink bonnet, waiting for us, that we might walk up the aisle together.

The wedding guests, such as there were, were already assembled in the chancel; there were very few, only such as we felt obliged to ask—Mrs. Egerton and Seymour, Dr. and Mrs. Waldegrave, and old Mr. Stephenson.

Leaning on Bruce's arm, and listening to their soft-spoken congratulations, seeing in the distance the mass of faces filling up the nave, the Thorntons of course among them, a dim sense of unreality fell upon me, and I almost began to think it was a dream, when Dudley came out of the vestry, followed by Herwald, and at the same moment Eleanor entered the church with her appointed guardian for the day, Mr. Howard Tracy.

There was a rising hum and murmur of admiration as she walked up the aisle; but as if from afar he noticed how she trembled and wavered, Dudley came down the chancel steps to meet her, and took her up himself to the altar.

She was very simply dressed, not a jewel, not a flower, nothing to betray the heiress, in her plain silk dress and falling veil; but I thought I had never seen such a noble-looking bride.

She looked very beautiful; not her paleness, her agitation, or the dimmed lustre of her eyes could detract in the faintest degree from her exceeding loveliness; and Dudley—but I could not look at him—I only heard his words, and every tone of that deep, earnest voice sank into my heart.

It was soon over, incredibly soon it seemed to me, trying so hard to realize what we were all about, and thinking half the time of a foreign grave with a withered wreath of immortels hung on its marble cross; and of another little grave under the willow-tree yonder, with fresh roses clustering about it, and lilies, and sweet lemon thyme; with garden bees humming about it, and the birds twittering in the grass above, and all the pleasant sights and sounds that he loved when he was alive.

And then it was over; and raising her long white veil, Dudley gave Eleanor his first husband's kiss, and then led her to me.

'Nellie, your sister.'

And Eleanor's sweet luminous eyes were moist with tears as I folded her in my arms.

And then he took her away, and presently we heard the sound of cheering, and the tramp of many feet; and we knew that those lusty, loving men were carrying their young master and his bride to their home.

The crowd was so great that it seemed as if we should never clear the churchyard; and it was a relief when Mr. Egerton placed me in the carriage by Katie's side, and we drove rapidly off.

In a few minutes we had passed in at the lodge gates, and the

dark old trees of the avenue closed in over us ; and then there was the open door of the Priory, and Dudley standing there with Dominique behind him.

'A kiss on the threshold, Sis. There, you are made free of my house ; now come to Eleanor.'

And still keeping my hand, with a cheerful nod at Katie, he took me into the bright, sunny drawing-room, where we had seen Marion Vivian sitting under the shade of the ruby velvet curtains on our first visit there.

Eleanor was sitting there now, looking quite simple and at home, in her pure white dress, her veil and gloves lying beside her, and her pets clustered round her feet.

The deadly paleness had left her, and was replaced by a tender little rose-flush, that deepened when any of her guests addressed her by her new name, or when she looked down upon the tiny circlet on her hand.

Eleanor Mortimer, Dudley's wife—oh, it was passing strange !

'Does not Dudley seem the right man in the right place?' said Herwald, coming behind us. 'He looks as if he had been master of the house for years, standing on his own rug, with the doctor and parson.'

I smiled, and Eleanor glanced up at her husband proudly, and just then he came towards her.

'Lenore darling, I am going to take you in to breakfast. Dominique tells me there is no time to lose. Nellie, Mr. Egerton falls to your share ; mind you sit near us.'

The breakfast was laid in the oak-panelled dining-room, that I had once compared to the aisle of a church, but it looked less sombre to-day, with the sun streaming in on sparkling silver and glass.

It was the ordinary wedding breakfast, with no fuss or ceremony, no cutting of cake, no speeches or health drinking, so Dudley had arranged ; with just a cheerful flow of conversation, which Herwald and Bruce took care should not flag ; and at the end of half an hour Eleanor rose, and at a sign from Dudley I followed.

'May I help you, dear?' I asked, as we crossed the hall.

'If you will,' she answered, and then turned away, her eyes filling with tears.

I knew what was in her heart ; she had hoped that other hands would have decked her on her wedding-day.

Passively she suffered Babette and me to put on her rich travelling dress, and then, without glancing once at herself, she hurriedly crossed the room, and passing through an opposite door closed it after her. It was Marion's dressing-room.

A low whistle in the corridor summoned me, and I went out to Dudley.

'Is Eleanor ready? they are putting the luggage on the carriage.'

'She has gone in there,' I answered, pointing to the door ; 'I do not like to disturb her.'

'I am afraid you must, or we shall lose our train. Please knock, it is far better that she should not be left to herself.'

I obeyed, and as I did so I fancied I heard a low sob from within, and then she came to the door, drawing down her veil, but I could see through it that her eyes were red and swollen, as if she had been weeping.

'Now, my dearest, come, say good-bye to Nellie,' and Dudley, taking her reluctant hand, led her down to the hall.

There were few to whom to say farewell; in a minute he had placed her in the carriage, and was shaking hands with Bruce and Herwald, and then he came to me.

I don't think he said anything, and I know I did not; but as he stooped to kiss me, I held him round the neck, as if I could never let him go.

And then there was the crack of the whip, gray horses tearing down the avenue, a hand waving from the window, and they were gone.

'Now, then,' cried Bruce, bustling in, joyously, 'we have ordered the other carriage up, and we are going to drive to Stony Clift and Pharo's Folly—you will go with us, Nell?'

'No, no,' I returned, drawing back nervously, 'make up the party without me—I must go home.'

'Go home!' responded Bruce. 'Nonsense, child, I won't have you sit and mope alone.'

'Indeed, indeed, I have a headache, and can't talk. Please let me be alone, Bruce.'

'She will be far better left to herself,' interrupted Herwald, for which I thanked him with a grateful smile. 'Katie shall take your place if you like, and we shall all be home in an hour or two.'

'Very well,' agreed Bruce, 'only mind and get us a first-rate tea—these cold collations are dead failures. I shall be famished by six o'clock.'

And then they took me down the avenue to the elm-tree stile and let me go.

And so I entered Sunnyside. Sunnyside—what was it now? four blank walls, and nothing else.

Slowly I dragged up the stairs with that sense of bitter loss at my heart, and went into Dudley's room.

It was just as he had left it in the morning—things strewn about; a coat here and a waistcoat there; his dear little Scotch cap lying on the pillows; I took it up and fingered it tenderly, and then began to straighten the room.

There was a tweed shooting-coat hanging behind the door; it felt warm, and soft and pleasant, and I laid my cheek against it before I put it away; and then I took up the Scotch cap again, and sat down by the bed, and laid my head upon the pillow where his was never to rest again, and cried as if my heart would break, and till I could cry no more.

Blundering footsteps in the dusky passage outside, and then Bruce came in, knocking over half-a-dozen things as he did so.

'Confound it all, I shall break my neck directly. Are you here, Nellie?—yes, there you are, and Kitty's right, as she always is; and sitting down on the bed, Bruce regarded me for some time with a rueful countenance.

'I say, Nellie, old girl, don't fret so, it makes us all so sorry to see you take it to heart like this. Why, Dudley is as right as a trivet, if you would only think so and cheer up.'

'I am so lonely,' I sobbed—'I am so lonely in this old house by myself. Louie is gone, and you, Bruce, and Charlie, and Halcot; and now Dudley has left me, what am I to live for?'

'Live for?' cried Bruce, fondling my hair with an uncertain hand; 'why, life is the jolliest thing in the world, Nell, if you would only see it properly.'

'I can't see it at all,' I repeated; 'it is all trouble, and pain, and loss—loss, and pain, and trouble. I don't know what I am to do, Bruce, I am so very, very lonely.'

'My bonnie dearie,' cried Katie, rustling up in her soft crisp silks, and her honest face brimful of sympathy, 'my bonnie dearie, have you forgotten Keith?'

'Ay, I declare I had for the minute,' returned Bruce; 'that's the right chord, Lassie, we shall make it all straight now. Why, Nellie, I don't believe you care a bit for the man who has loved you all his life.'

'I do,' I answered, startled into a sudden avowal, 'I do care for him very much, but what is the use of that?'

'Then if you do care,' returned Bruce, earnestly, his handsome face flushing as he spoke, 'think of him as much as you can—think of him, and find comfort in the thought; your life is not objectless, Nellie, it is full of hope, a hope that will eventually be realized, and all the brighter for this weary waiting, that has tried you so.'

'He is worth it,' murmured Katie; 'tender and true is Keith, and it is not you that will deny it, dearie.'

And then they talked to me, and cheered me so heartily and yet so lovingly, that the bitter hour passed, and I could smile and be myself again.

And then we went downstairs, and Katie made tea, and I sat beside her, and Herwald and Bruce both petted and made much of me, and the evening was not so bad after all.

And the next day but one Herwald took me to Hurst-hall, and my dear Louie's loving care, and the pleasure that her sweet babe yielded me, soon set me right; and in hers and Milly's companionship the two months passed as Dudley had prophesied.

And every now and then came Dudley's happy letters, and little shy loving ones from Eleanor, and I could see they were happy and at rest, and I was satisfied.

CHAPTER XLV.

'The book is completed,
And closed like the day ;
And the hand that has written it
Lays it away.'—*Longfellow.*

IT was Christmas-eve, and I was standing alone in the Sunnyside drawing-room, waiting for the carriage to take me round to the parsonage ; for there were to be great doings there to-night, to celebrate Seymour's sixteenth birthday and first coming home.

It was not one of the usual clerical tea-parties, that had taken place during my stay in the north, but a gathering on a much larger scale, for all the notabilities of the neighbourhood were to be there, and not only Katie and Bruce were coming, but Dudley had promised to bring his wife and some guests who had lately arrived at the Priory in the persons of Herwald and Louie.

Katie, who was now as much at home at the parsonage as I, was deputy mistress of the ceremonies in my place ; and it was she who arranged the programme of the evening, and ordered the various amusements, for there was to be dancing in the library for such young people as liked—tableaux in the dining-room, and tea and talk in the drawing-room, to which latter apartment the Mortimer folks were sure to restrict themselves.

So there I stood in the dim firelight in my white evening dress, clasping the coral and pearl ornaments on my neck and arms, and feeling rather strange.

It was early of course when we arrived, for Halcot, who rode rampant on such occasions by virtue of the friendship of his Pythias, was in a fever of excitement till we were there ; but early as it was, Katie came running out to meet us, looking wonderfully pretty in er silk train and a crimson rose in her hair.

'You dear lassie, to come so soon,' she cried, unwinding me from my wraps, and shaking out my dress ; 'now stand still, and let me have a good look at you.'

'Well, Kitty ! what now ?' for she eyed me over curiously with a little smile to herself ; 'you are never going to find fault with me, I hope ?'

'Find fault with you, my white rosebud ! nay, that would not be possible ; for a more gracious bewitching little lady I have never set eyes upon. You must forgive my looking at you, dearie, for I have never seen Nellie Mortimer in jewels before.'

'I shall call her a white lily of the valley,' said Seymour, coming behind and giving me a hug.

'Or the Queen of Sheba,' echoed Halcot, 'for she cuts Mrs. Kitty out no end.'

For which compliment Kitty first made him a face, and then

boxed his ears ; after which they dressed up Rill as Red Riding Hood, and put her behind the curtains to try the effect, while Halcot lay down at her feet in a leopard-skin rug as a dim personification of the wolf.

Rill looked so lovely in her little scarlet hood, with her pouting mouth and small dimpled hands crossed over her basket of butter, that Mr. Egerton brought his wife in to see her, who spoiled all immediately by taking her up in her arms and smothering her with kisses ; upon which wolf growled and then showed his teeth.

'Mrs. Egerton,' cried Katie, pouncing briskly upon her, 'we can't have you injure our tableaux like this ; please take her away, Nellie, and both of you stop in the drawing-room, you are only wasting our time, and send Bruce to us when he comes.'

So we went back to the drawing-room, now warm and ruddy with light, with one small curate turning over the photographic album on the centre table, whom Mr. Egerton immediately pinned and bore off to the rug, while his wife and I sipped coffee and talked in whispers.

Presently appeared Mistress Katie, looking trim and important, with Bruce and the boys following her.

But scarcely had they taken their places before the knocker began to work, and arrivals to commence, after which the room filled rapidly.

Such a medley of happy faces, girls with shy eyes and long sashes, and boys grouped confusedly about the door ; the Thorntons armed for conquest at all points, and a sprinkling of curates, the Waldegraves, Stephensons, and a host more ; till Mr. Egerton began to gasp for breath, and look longingly at the curtained windows, upon which Katie and Seymour exchanged glances, and at the tinkling of a very small bell the tableaux commenced and the crowd drifted into the other room.

'I say, Nellie,' whispered Bruce, when the first was over and the second preparing, 'how late the Priory people are ; they will lose Red Riding Hood after all.'

Which they did ; and not only that, but the rest of the tableaux ; and then the young people began to dance in the library to Ada Thornton's music, while I sat still in my quiet corner, a silent but amused spectator of the whole.

Presently came a loud peal that rang through the house, and a stir and commotion about the door ; and then Louie and Eleanor came in together, exciting no small admiration as they passed up the crowded room.

Two such lovely women they looked—the one in velvet and diamonds, the other in her bride's dress of silk and pearls ; Louie with her grand open lovable face, and Eleanor with weird lustrous eyes and wonderful yellow hair. No marvel, then, the busy knots of talkers ceased their hum of tongues, and glances and whispers were exchanged on the comparative merits of the rival beauties.

But where were Herwald and—

'Nellie, dear,' said Dudley's voice behind me, so close that I was fairly startled, not having seen him come in ; 'you must suffer me to introduce an old friend to you.'

And then I became aware of some one stooping over me, so low as almost to brush my face with a long soft beard, and looking up I met the glance of two dark eyes, whose loving recognition thrilled me to the heart ; and I knew that I was looking up into the face of Keith Cameron, and that his gloved hand was holding mine firmly, closely, tightly, as if he would never let it go. And then I don't know what happened, save that the room seemed swimming in circles of light, and that the humming of innumerable bees were keeping pace with the pulses of my heart, and that Dudley's arm was round me, while his voice was speaking afar off.

'We have managed it too suddenly, Keith : but what could we do ? Keep here a few minutes, and I will take her away. Come, Nellie, darling, lean on me ; no one will notice you ; the room is so hot, you know. Make a path for us, Herwald, please. There, that is a brave child. I was afraid you were going to faint.'

And so he took me away, but not to the refreshment-room, that was full of people, but to the deserted dimly-lighted cloak-room, where we found Katie sitting by herself and crying heartily.

'Oh, Nellie—my bonnie boy that I have just seen !' she began.

But Dudley stopped her ; so she fell to kissing my hands instead, and laughing hysterically. till Bruce came in and scolded her and took her away.

'Well, little one, how do you feel now—better ?'

'Oh, I am quite well,' I returned, unsteadily ; 'but—but—Dudley, are you sure it is not a dream ?'

'A true one at any rate,' he remarked, laughing ; 'you see the reason of our delay now ?'

'What delay ? Oh don't talk to me,' I answered, beginning to crimson violently ; 'I wish you would take me away somewhere, where nobody can see me. I don't know what to do.'

'My dear child,' he returned seriously, 'I can't take you away ; think how it would look.'

'Then leave me alone a little while. I can't collect my thoughts, they seem going everywhere. Dear Dudley, please leave me to myself.'

He looked at me anxiously a moment, and then went away, and I hid my face in my hands, but I could not think. I could see nothing but a little boat rocking on a golden sea, and Keith in it—Keith, who had come home to England and me.

Presently I became aware that the chair beside me was taken, and then some one was drawing the hands away from my face with gentle force that would not be denied.

'Nellie, I want to see you. I have not looked at you yet !'

Oh, the ring of those brave Scottish tones, that I thought I

was never to hear again! Oh, the touch of that strong faithful hand!

I looked up at Keith; and then, I don't know how it happened, but Keith was holding me to his heart, and I felt like a tired bird that had found its nest, and was at rest and content—that was never to wander again—never, oh, never!

'I have found you, my Rachel; I have you here! and Jacob's long term is over—my own, my very own!'

'Do you want me, Keith?'

'I have served for you for more than ten years now, and, like Jacob's, "they were as nothing to the love I bore." Look up in my face, my darling bird, and tell me what you see there!'

'It looks tender and true, Keith. Oh, Keith, what have I done, that you should love me so?'

And as the involuntary exclamation escaped my lips, low words of blessing seemed to hover over me, and fold me with ineffable peace.

'Have I come back to my wife, Nellie? Dear love, I have wooed you so long and patiently. I have suffered and laboured in your behalf.'

'I know it, Keith; I know it—'

'What are you saying, dear? I cannot hear you.'

'I will be what you wish.'

And then he kissed me again. And after that we grew calmer; and he talked to me, and I listened, till Katie came in, and then Dudley, and then we all went back to the drawing-room.

What a long delicious dream that evening seems, looking back on it now; with such a sense of being tenderly shielded and watched over, with such a feeling of indescribable repose; and then, when it was over, the moonlight walk to Sunnyside, wrapped up in Keith's plaid, with his strong arm to lean upon; and to know, oh, happy Nellie, to know that it was mine to lean upon for ever!

And then, the circle round the blazing fire; Herwald's merry jests, and Louie's fond caresses, and Katie's bright sparkling face looking up from the rug at her husband's feet; and last, but not least, Dudley's proud glance of triumph as he sat with Eleanor beside him, looking at Keith and me.

'Nellie, do you think now you did well to trust me with your future?'

Keith watched me, smiling.

'I don't understand you, dear;' but getting hot, as I replied, nevertheless.

Dudley left his place and bent over me.

'What should you say, my pet, if you knew that your brothers, feeling how lonely you were, and how well somebody loved you, wrote a long letter to that somebody, bidding him cross the sea that had too long divided you and him, and take Sunnyside and his wife together?'

'And what should you say, my pet,' as I hid my face so gratefully, oh, so gratefully, on his shoulder, 'if Bruce added a postscript, bidding him leave the business that had so ill kept him from poverty, and take the younger brother's share at the factory, which my marriage would leave vacant?'

'And what would you say if that somebody started the very next week, and arrived just as we were setting out for the parsonage?—no, you shall not thank us, child; are you not our very own?'

'Hush!' cried Keith, drawing me to him; 'what is that?'

And then, as we were all silent, the pealing of the Christmas chimes broke on our ear.

"Peace on earth, goodwill towards men"—a happy Christmas to you all, my friends!

'Amen,' said Dudley, solemnly, 'and a brighter and a better life to you both at Sunnyside.'

THE END.

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