

"Loved I Not Honour More!"

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“LOVED I NOT HONOUR MORE!”

CHAPTER I.

MISS KING'S HERESIES.

THE town of Fairport was, some years ago, and for that matter, still is, a place of some pretensions. If certain ill-natured persons, and a few such are, unhappily, to be found in all localities—had been known occasionally to whisper that the pretensions were somewhat higher than were actually warranted by fact, others, on the contrary, had asserted as decidedly that the deraction was but the outcome of either jealousy or disappointment. Certainly, as a port, the name was hardly borne out; the little stream which emptied into the little river, which was itself only a tributary, was navigable for craft only of the lightest burden; nor, except in regard of the clear skies that hung above it, could it in justice be called 'fair.' The water, 'the river' *par excellence*, lay to the south; the little river, which bore the euphonious title of 'Snake Creek,' formed its eastern boundary; while to the north and west there stretched, scantily broken here and there by a rare clump of wood-

land, a waste of common, in no respect more, and in some respects less, attractive than commons generally are.

But the *raison d'être* of Fairport lies in the quarries, of which the desolate rock-strewn common was once the outward garb. Stone, of a colour and texture that made it valuable for building purposes, had been here provided by Nature and utilized by man; and where, not long before, the foot-print of foxes and the cry of the water-hen on the banks of Snake Creek had been the only signs of life, the sound of blast and chisel now made the air resonant, and Fairport grew.

For this development of the resources of Nature money had, of course, been needed. Nature, as a rule, dislikes giving anything for nothing, usually bestowing her treasures only as the reward of toil, and demanding as the price of research into her mysteries, ardent and sincere devotion, and sometimes life itself. On this occasion, however, the baser equivalent had seemed sufficient. Money alone had been required, and had been provided by those who, as some said, now laid claim to the possession of Fairport and all that it contained.

The ill-natured persons aforesaid had been heard to remark that the firm of Beckett & Beckett were monopolists. Without pausing to inquire whether the name *monopolist* be really such a term of reproach as was by them intended, and as is sometimes insisted on, it must be admitted that the accusation, if such it is to be called, was in the main correct. Beckett & Beckett had found the money which had made the town, and they certainly to use a modern expression, 'ran the town' now that it was made. They had built the houses inhabited by the

quarrymen, and paid the wages of those who dwelt therein; they had erected and endowed a church, and founded an especial school; they supplied their dependents with all necessaries of life at much less trouble and at no more cost than could have been compassed elsewhere; in health they furnished work, and in sickness they gave assistance. Of course the matter had two sides; provision and protection, on the one part, demanded gratitude and obedience on the other; and the ill-natured were not slow to observe that Beckett & Beckett expected to buy the souls and bodies of the quarrymen for the price they paid. But however this may be—and it is but fair to say that by many the slander was indignantly cast back in the teeth of those who made it—there was no more doubt about the power of Beckett and Beckett than there was about their wealth, and of that there was no doubt whatever. Those who said they knew best averred that seven figures would be insufficient to set it down.

The firm in full was Beckett, Hall, Davis & Beckett; but the second partner had some time before entered on eternal obligations, leaving an infant heir, whose only share in the business was to draw therefrom a portion of the proceeds at stated seasons; the third still nominally kept his place, but a speculative temperament demanded fuller personal excitement than was to be found in the solidity of a stone quarry, and derived its gratification from the fluctuations of a less substantial stock-in-trade in scenes removed. And as he no more meddled in the affairs of the firm than his particular predilection was allowed to affect its stability, all management was left in the hands of the first and last members—cousins, not brothers—Ralph and

Henry Beckett. Of these, the former was a wholesome-tempered, hearty, if somewhat dictatorial man, of something over forty years of age; he was the husband of a young wife, and the father of two little daughters. Henry Beckett was a bachelor, several years younger; no one had ever called or thought him dictatorial, but neither had any one ever dreamed of laying heartiness to his charge.

Mrs. Beckett was five-and-twenty, very little, very pretty, and very vain. She had a passion for dress, and a strong dislike of anything approaching to useful labour, of which taste and aversion her husband's ample means fortunately afforded her full gratification. Her sister, Celestine King, had not quite reached her twenty-fourth birthday. No one had ever called her a beauty, but no one could ever deny her some claim to remark. She was rather above than under the average height of women, with a lissome figure, a thoughtful face, the whitest teeth that ever were seen, eyes of no particular colour, but of amazing depth and clearness, and a smile as sweet as it was rare.

If Miss King felt any repentance for having accepted her sister's invitation to spend the early months of the summer in the quietude of Fairport, she had shown no sign of it when the first fortnight of her visit had come to an end. She had in that space of time won her way to the affections of her small twin nieces; she had discovered that her sister was in no degree changed by marriage from that which she had been as Sylvia King; she had learned to like and rather to admire and respect her brother-in-law; she had explored, as far as was practicable, most of the town and the windings of Snake

Creek ; she had been through the quarries, with a cheerful, tranquil face and a free step which had gained the admiration of the rough men there at work, and had followed the tramroads to the railway track, a mile and a half behind the town ; she had sung in the church choir, and had been called on by the heads of the four or five families who constituted the limited society of which she was to form a part ; she had made one or two acquaintances whom she was inclined to like, and she had seen more than one person whom she wished to avoid.

There are not many places to which late April does not bring or add some charm, and the unlovely landscape about Fairport, if it did not exactly blossom as the rose, at all events gave evident signs of the influence of the sweet season. Along the borders of Snake Creek the delicate water-weeds were springing, and the willows and alders broke into tender green ; against the dark background of the yet leafless woods the flowers of the hornbeam and of the wild fruit trees showed white ; under the blue skies that bent over the quarries the rainpools in the hollows gleamed like bits dropped from heaven ; in the soft, warm haze of the atmosphere harsh outlines became less harsh, discordant sounds were less discordant ; the youth of the year threw that glamour over all surroundings which only youth, whether of Nature or of human nature, can bestow. Anyone who had seen Fairport at this time would have been content to abide there if only the year could be all spring.

Some of the spring brightness seemed to be reflected in Mrs. Beckett's face as she lingered one morning in the breakfast-room after her 'lord and master,' as she was

fond of calling him, had departed to his daily occupations. Everyone knew that the vassalage was a pleasant fiction, but the harmless delusion hurt no one; but no one was less likely to own a master than the little lady who, while looking so innocent and so fragile, yet essayed the rule of all around her. Of all despotisms that which reigns by force of weakness is the most certain and the most tyrannical, and Mrs. Beckett had long since found it out.

She was sitting in her favourite attitude, in her favourite place—in a streak of sunshine that poured on fine mornings through the south-eastern window. She gently moved her rocking-chair to and fro, with her feet crossed in front of the fire, which, more for appearance sake than from necessity, burned in the grate. Her whitefingers were as usual idle, except that they twisted and tied and untied the ribbons that hung from her waist, as she looked with some earnestness at her sister, who stood in the window, a scarf thrown round her shoulders and her hat in her hand.

It was not probably the fascination of the view that detained Miss King at the window, for the reason that she by this time knew it pretty well by heart. Through the break in the houses at the foot of the slope of lawn she looked as always down to the bend of the river where the little wharf jutted out into the stream, and the mast and rigging of a sloop moored there broke the sky line; she could trace the course of the larger stream beyond—white and shining under the morning sun, and see the line of wood on the farther shore, and—that was all. Nor was the human element much more diversified; an

occasional quarryman changing his place of work, a few children whose pace on their way to school betrayed little dread of discipline, and now and then a woman with her market basket on her arm, was all the variety presented by the street. And yet Celestine waited as if either in expectation or in doubt.

Whatever had been the subject of conversation between herself and her sister there had come a pause. Mrs. Beckett's smile was very bright, but her eyes were somewhat keen, and on Celestine's cheek was a tinge of red not always to be seen there.

Her words when she spoke again seemed *à propos* of nothing.

'And you have lived here five years?'

'Why not?' asked her sister rather quickly. Her tone seemed to imply that she found some imputation in the words.

'No reason. Only I suppose if you had not happened to marry Ralph you would have lived somewhere else.'

'Upon my word, that is a wise speech! That is the worst of clever people—they are always saying something ridiculous.'

'You know I am not clever, Sylvia. I should only like to be, which is a very different thing.'

'And it's not as if I were here all the time,' returned Mrs. Beckett, in an injured tone, and replying in feminine fashion to what had not been said. 'You know I don't like the place, and there has never been a year that I have not been away for a good part of it. There are a great many nice things about money, but one of the best of them is that you can go—and live—where you please.'

Miss King was at any rate clever enough not to retort that in spite of all Mr. Beckett's money, his wife was compelled to pass the greater part of her time in Fairport, a place, which by her own confession she did not like. Instead of this obvious retaliation she merely uttered the platitude: 'Yes, money is a nice thing,' and allowed her eyes, as if in confirmation, to wander over the handsome and harmonious appointments of the room.

'No one would imagine you thought so, my dear,' said Mrs. Beckett, plaintively. 'To go back to what we were saying just now——'

'Please, don't go back to it. I thought we had disposed of the subject.'

'Well, in one sense I suppose it is disposed of, and I am sorry for it. Never having seen him, of course, I can't judge; but from what I have heard, I don't see how you can expect to do better.'

'Perhaps I am the best judge of that myself.'

'You ought to consider, Celestine, that you are nearly four-and-twenty, and that Mrs. King's means will not allow you much chance. Like myself you have only a good marriage to look to——'

Miss King coloured deeply. 'Don't talk about it any more, Sylvia, we shall never agree. I can't look on marriage as a means of maintenance. I hope it will never be absolutely a question of that with me; but, if it were, marriage would be the last I should either choose or think of.'

'Well, I think it is the only proper means for a woman, though I must say you have rather a coarse way of putting it. But I don't want to offend you. Suppose I say

that I think married life is the only happy life, and that it is time you settle down to enjoy it ?'

'That would certainly sound far prettier. Well, Sylvia, find me the desirable *parti*, whom I can love and admire for himself as well as for his advantages, and perhaps I may follow your advice.'

Mrs. Beckett's eye sparkled. 'Is that a bargain? Honest?'

'I think I may say yes, if you fulfil my conditions. But let us talk of someone else now. What did you think of Elsie Frank's marriage?'

'What could I think, except that the poor deluded girl will repent and regret it all her life?'

'Yet they are very much attached to each other, and she will have scope for the exercise of her especial talent.'

'Nonsense! especial talent! I hate a woman with an especial talent; she is almost as bad as one with a mission; perhaps even worse.'

'A talent is sometimes very useful, Sylvia.'

'Do you mean as a bread-winner? Oh, that's a different thing; but a woman in society with one cultivated talent is generally a nuisance to everyone else.'

'Then if your children have talents you will not encourage them?'

'Certainly not to any mischievous extent. I shall bring them up to look nice in a drawing-room, to be able to make a good match when their time comes.'

Miss King was silent, but her sister was evidently aware that the silence was not of the sort that gives consent.

'Of course I don't expect to convert you to my ideas any more than I intend to adopt yours; but there is, as you say, no occasion to dispute about it. We can each keep our own opinion, and see who comes out best. And I have no more time to talk now, for I am going to ride with Henry this morning, and I must go and dress. I wish you would learn to ride, Celestine.'

'That I might ride with Mr. Henry Beckett?' asked Celestine, archly.

'Well, why not?' returned her sister, sharply. 'You like him, don't you?'

'Well—yes, perhaps I do; I don't dislike him.'

'That's rather faint praise. Why, Ralph thinks there's not another such man in the world. Do you not think him very good-looking?'

'Yes, he is handsome. No one could deny that.'

'And you must allow he is good. I often think that no one seems to think more of people's welfare and happiness than he does.'

'To *think*? Yes, perhaps so. Is he not even a little inclined to *pose* as a philanthropist?'

'To *pose*? Celestine, how excessively ill-natured!'

'Was I ill-natured or rude? I beg your pardon—I forgot I was speaking of Ralph's cousin. But I am afraid I only expressed what I thought—gave back the impression his words and manner have given me. Do you know, he a little reminds me of Humpty Dumpty?'

'Humpty Dumpty!' said Mrs. Beckett, with a gasp.

'Is that very irreverent? I don't mean personally, though perhaps his figure is a little provocative of the comparison, but in regard to his moral position. He does

not seem to me to be really at such a great altitude, to look down from a mountain height where the air is clear and pure; but to be just enough over head to make him believe in his own eminence—in fact, perched on the top of the wall.'

'What extraordinary things you do say, Celestine!' Mrs. Beckett's face had lengthened, and her voice had taken on a plaintive minor tone. 'I wouldn't have Ralph hear you for the world.'

Celestine had already learned that her sister was in the habit of shouldering, when it suited her, her own views, opinions, or scruples—when she felt such things—on Ralph.' She therefore smiled, as she replied: 'I don't intend him to hear me, and it is quite possible I may be entirely wrong. Look, Silvia, who is that across the street there? Quick!'

Mrs. Beckett jumped up with alacrity, and ran to the window. 'That man?' she exclaimed, in accents of great disappointment. 'Oh, that's only Philip Crevolin!'

'And who may he be?'

'Why, haven't you heard any of us speak of Ralph's lieutenant? He's a little of everything and a great deal of all. He's responsible for everything and everybody—for those that keep the books, and those that do the work, as well; he manages all the business that Ralph don't attend to, and possibly some that he does, and, besides that, he enters into all Henry's vagaries about the people, though I don't believe they always pull quite together. Ralph is very strict, and Henry's inclined to be lax, and there's a great deal of trouble and discontent among the men sometimes, and then no one seems to be able to get on with them so well as Philip.'

'He is a distinguished-looking figure,' said Celestine.

'Yes, he's distinguished enough, poor fellow!'

'What do you mean?' inquired Miss King.

'You'll know when you see him. He's been away on business, or you'd have met him before; for Ralph thinks there's no one like him, and he's here a great deal. The children are very fond of him, too. He is a nice fellow in his way. It's not my way, but that's not his fault. I did not know he had come back.'

Miss King could have told her sister that the same figure had passed the same spot at the same hour the morning before; but, probably for good reasons of her own, she held her peace. She followed with her eyes the retreating figure of him of whom they had been speaking, until a curve of the road hid him from view; and then, as if her interest in the window were over, turned from it, and put on her hat.

'Where are you going to walk?' asked Mrs. Beckett.

'I thought there must be some flowers in the woods by this time, and I was going to look for them. Why?'

'I meant to ask if Elise and the children might go with you, but the woods are too far; if you are going through the quarries and across the track, that is.'

'I was told that was the best place to look, but I can go somewhere else, if you wish,' said Celestine, with a readiness that seemed to say it was no new thing for her to give up her own will.

'Oh, no; I only wanted to know. But I don't altogether like your going into the quarries alone. The men are, as a rule, civil enough, but still——'

Miss King's rare smile broke over her face. 'If that is

all you are afraid of, Sylvia, I think you may make your mind easy. Why, I have never met with any rudeness or incivility in my life, and it is surely not here among your people that I shall find dread or danger for the first time.' She left the room as she spoke; and Mrs. Beckett looked after her with a puzzled expression, which suddenly cleared away, and gave place to a mischievous smile.

CHAPTER II.

HUMPTY DUMPTY SAT ON THE WALL. 7.

IF any seal had been required to Mrs. Beckett's resolve that her sister should become the wife of her husband's cousin, it had been found in the slight opposition she had detected, or thought she had detected, in Celestine's words and manner. She was perfectly sincere in her expressed opinion that the all-important consideration in a woman's fate was a good establishment, and to do her justice was anxious to do her best for her sister in that regard. But, sad to say, there was now mingled with her generosity a slight feeling of pique which had been excited by the words 'you have lived here five years.' Though they seemed innocent enough, she could imagine that there had been a decided emphasis on the 'here;' and was there not a touch of irony in the expression 'money is a nice thing,' from a girl who had just avoided, if not refused, a more advantageous offer than had ever fallen in her girlhood to pretty Sylvia King?

even an implication that though money was nice there might be something nicer—something of which she—Sylvia—had failed? The little lady felt a little anger mingling with her anxiety for the accomplishment of her little plans. That place of abode which was good enough for her was good enough for Celestine, surely—that way of life and that companionship which had seemed fair and good to Sylvia, she—Celestine—had surely no right to set herself above.

No doubt Mrs. Beckett did not carry out this train of thought consciously, and most likely would have quite repudiated the motives and ideas had they been set before her as her own. And as she was no less an adept at self-deception than the rest of her sex and kind, she perhaps imagined that in thus working for her sister's great and permanent advantage, against her present perverse will and inclination, she was returning good for evil in a very Christian way.

That Mrs. Beckett should have formed the design of bringing about a match between her sister and her cousin-in-law (if there be such a relation), was less remarkable than that she should have found a consenting party in one of those in whose supposed welfare she was interesting herself. Henry Beckett had been for some years an object of marked attention to the not very numerous marriageable ladies of Fairport, and having failed to find a corresponding attraction in any of those whose regard he might, without any great amount of self-conceit, have believed attainable, and being—singular to say—a man who took but little pleasure in the temporary winning and wearing of feminine hearts, was beginning to find th

attention a little wearisome. Miss King possessed the charm of novelty, which is sometimes worth a good deal in the account, besides those more intrinsic, which Mr. Beckett was quite capable of appreciating; and when he perceived, as he very soon came to do, the project entertained by his cousin's wife, he was more than willing to fall in with her views. If he had not fallen in love as into a rapid current, he was at all events wading in deliberately and determinedly as into a safe and shallow stream. That Miss King did not appear to be aware of, or if aware of it was perfectly indifferent to, her sister's plan, was, of course, the one touch needed to give piquancy to—the pursuit, I was going to say, but that would be too ardent a word. It did, however, invest Celestine with an attraction with which willingness to receive and meet his addresses never would have endowed her; and tended to confirm and strengthen a resolution which had in the beginning been formed perhaps with some hesitation.

He felt a momentary surprise when on arriving, prepared for his ride with Mrs. Beckett, that lady informed him that in consequence of a slight headache she had changed her mind; but surprise vanished when she said carelessly, a few moments later, that her sister was gone to look for flowers in the woods across the track, and that 'she really did not like her going so often into the quarries alone, but Celestine was always so venturesome!' A few words of very mild regret at the loss of the company of the one sister was quickly followed by an offer to go—as the ride was abandoned—to the protection of the other; an offer so eagerly accepted that Mr. Beckett could scarcely help smiling as he put on his hat and set forth in

quest of the lady supposed to be so much in need of his care.

Neither perhaps did Miss King feel much astonishment, when on her homeward way she encountered her would-be adorer. To her sister she had disclaimed being clever, but one less entitled than she to plead guilty to the charge would have been competent to penetrate Sylvia's motives and detect the transparent *finesse* in which she indulged. Celestine was not in the least a vain woman, but neither was she very obtuse; and it is as necessary that a woman should be obtuse, in order not to perceive when a man really prefers and seeks her, as it is requisite that she be vain in order to attribute to him a passion he does not feel; which last is the mistake most often made of the two.

She had at this time no actual or personal dislike to Mr. Beckett; that is to say she had as yet seen no one whom she liked better; but she was very far from feeling for him any extraordinary regard, or from believing that such she should ever come to feel. She knew that if arraigned by her sister as to any possible objection to him, she could assign none. Though not in either face or form a model, his appearance was far beyond criticism; his intercourse with wider circles than that of Fairport had been frequent enough and long enough to give him a culture which Fairport alone never could have bestowed; his temper was considered amiable and equable; he could surround the woman on whom his choice fell with all things materially desirable; and his life and character were above reproach. And yet Celestine felt that were the arraignment made, she would be compelled to say,

'were he other than he is, he were unhandsome, and being no other than as he is, I do not like him.'

The woods, where the sap was stirring, and the buds were swelling, where the early blossoms peeped here and there from the brown carpet of sere leaves, and the first birds uttered now and then a note of welcome to the spring, were very sweet and peaceful, and Celestine felt that she would have much preferred to enjoy them without Mr. Beckett's 'soft society,' but politeness required that she should seem pleased to see him; so she put forth her hand and spoke a civil word of greeting as he approached her through the flickering lights and shadows under the leafless boughs.

'I thought you were to ride with my sister to-day,' she said when the first salutations were over.

'Your sister's headache disappointed me,' he replied; and he added gallantly, 'and I cannot regret it now.'

Miss King did not betray her knowledge of the suddenness of the headache, nor her disbelief in its reality. Her left hand was filled with flowers, delicate spring-beauty, pale celandines, and the bright yellow blossoms of the snake-weed, and to these she drew attention.

'You love flowers?' he asked.

'Yes, I am very fond of such as these. But—perhaps it is very bad taste in me—I am no florist, I know nothing of their cultivation, and those rare specimens which usually delight people, give me comparatively little pleasure.

'Surely *you* cannot prefer Nature in the rough,' said Mr. Beckett.

The emphasis on the pronoun was not to be mistaken, and Celestine gave the speaker rather a scornful glance.

'I did not suppose *you* could think that Nature, real Nature, had any rough,' she said.

He looked a little confused. 'Perhaps I expressed myself ill. I did not mean to imply my own opinion as to Nature's handiwork, rough or otherwise, but only my assurance that you would be a disciple of culture in any form.'

'Why should you feel so assured?'

'Ah, there I am not sure, I can answer you. I can only say—I thought so—I hoped so.'

Perhaps she considered it safer not to pursue her inquiries further, and ask why he should have so hoped. At all events she did not answer at once, and after a pause of a moment or two he spoke again.

'But I will confess to a liking, on my own part, for taking raw material and ascertaining what can be made of it by cultivation.'

'And I for my part,' said Miss King, 'confess to a belief that in the course of cultivation the raw material is very often spoiled.'

'Now you must speak for the sake of contradiction!' exclaimed Mr. Becket, with a vexed look; and Celestine thought she liked him better when he appeared inclined to reprove her than when he was too anxious to please. 'Carry out your principle to its limits and what becomes of all improvement, either of mind, body or condition—nay, indeed, that of the soul itself?'

'Oh, you take me too seriously!' said Celestine, laughing. 'You go too deep. I never thought of carrying out principles to their limits; and because I expressed a preference for a bunch of wild flowers, picked by my own

hands in the woods on a spring morning, to a bouquet purchased for me out of season at the florist's, you would make out that I set a bar to all improvement! For shame, Mr. Beckett, to so interpret me! Have some compassion on a superficial mind like mine, which can only entertain one idea at a time.'

Mr. Beckett did not echo her mirth. 'You misunderstand me,' he said, in a displeased tone. You are not superficial; and if I am serious it is not without cause. It is that I see so much to be done, and find so few inclined to do anything—even of those who—' he paused.

'Do you mean the work of the world?'

'Not exactly. There are other things besides work, to my mind. No—the *work* is done, after a fashion; only I wish it were sometimes done in a better way.'

'And yet I am told you have found a very good way to do some of it,' ventured Celestine.

'You mean what my cousin and myself have endeavoured to accomplish for our workmen and the town?' said Mr. Beckett, complacently, and looking pleased again. 'Yes, I trust we have effected something, but it is difficult—' he paused again.

'Human nature has the reputation of being rather a difficult material to work with at all times,' said Celestine. 'I suppose it is no more easily dealt with here than elsewhere.'

'I do not like to say it is *less* easy to deal with here than elsewhere,' said Mr. Beckett, 'but there are times when I am almost compelled to fear it.'

They had reached the edge of the woods and come out on the track, within sight of the quarries and within

sound of the blasts and the picks. It was a wild scene—a scene which even the calm brightness of the April morning could not much redeem or soften. The gaunt frames of the derricks stood out gray and ghastly against the blue of the sky; the tramroads, with here and there a heavy-laden train of trucks thereon, wound in every direction dark and rusty; the thick, black smoke of engines rose noisome into the sweet, pure air; while the sunshine splintered on, yet failed to gild or vivify the riven rock, which, in masses more or less stupendous, lay torn from its native hold. The place looked as if Nature had put forth her utmost power of resistance to the forces which man had brought against her, and as if, though compelled at last to yield, she had submitted with the worst possible grace. Nor, to say truth, was the human element engaged in her disintegration to all outward appearance much more amenable to softening influences than that surrounding stone with which pick and powder were the only arguments available.

Mr. Beckett stopped a moment and looked over the quarry with its busy hive of workers. 'It is a wide field,' he said, 'and a hard one to do rightly by. It is so hard to make people understand what is for their good.'

'Most people think they understand that without making,' said Celestine rather pointedly.

'But if you thought them mistaken you would not therefore cease to strive for what you believed their benefit?'

'I don't know,' she answered doubtfully. 'You can't do people much good against their will.'

She knew she vexed him, but she could not help the words. He looked annoyed, but resumed,

'And here,' he said, 'there are so many conflicting interests to be reconciled, so many differing temperaments to be considered, so many various dispositions to be taken into account. And it is so difficult to deal with them in the mass.'

'Impossible, I should think,' said Celestine, 'as no two atoms of the human mass are alike.'

'But how can one have a separate individuality for every individual case with which one has to deal?'

'Do you ask me? Only I suppose through that sympathy with each which would unconsciously bestow it.'

'Ah, I see you understand it. Could you feel that, do you think? Could you show it? Oh, how much you might help, if you could—and would!'

'What a confusion of the potential mood,' said Celestine, with a laugh a little forced. 'I don't know what I could do. I have never done anything yet.'

'You must begin,' said Mr. Beckett. 'I believe you are formed by Nature——'

He stopped suddenly. Something had evidently happened in the quarry. Many of the men had thrown down their picks and left their drills, and were gathered in groups speaking excitedly and with gesticulation. Presently a figure, which Celestine recognized in an instant, came from the largest of these groups and hastily approached her companion; then catching sight of herself he paused as suddenly and made a motion of his hand towards Mr. Beckett.

'Will you excuse me?' the latter said. 'Will you wait here for me one moment, while I see what has occurred and what Crevolin wants?'

She signed assent and stood still watching the two men while they sustained a short conversation beyond her hearing. Mr. Crevolin's figure and bearing were in repose, if that could be called repose, which was, even in stillness, instinct with life and vigour, quite as remarkable as she had thought them when she had observed him from her sister's window that morning and the preceding day. He was tall, and every movement showed a union of strength and grace rarely found together in such perfection, the poise of his head was proud and dignified, and his gesture was very decided and yet refined. He was at too great a distance to allow his features to be discernible, but Celestine fancied that the profile outlined against the gray-green stone was firmly and delicately cut, and she could see that the hand, with which he emphasized his words, was as supple as it was strong. Why should a man so gifted as he appeared, so trusted as she knew him to be, have been called 'poor fellow' by such a woman as her sister, one who might, she thought, have been supposed likely to rate at their full value such visible advantages as he possessed.

The colloquy was not of long duration, and when it was over Mr. Crevolin went quickly away without nearer approach, Mr. Beckett returning to her side. She looked at him inquiringly.

'There has been an accident,' he said, speaking quietly, though she could see that he was agitated. 'One of the men has been badly hurt in a blast.'

'Oh, how did that happen?'

'Through his own fault or carelessness, I am afraid, from what I hear. They hope it is not fatal, but Crevolin

says the hurts are very serious, and he has a wife and family—young children, I believe.’

‘Poor things! What can be done for them? How can I help them? What do they want?’

‘I have given Crevolin directions that they shall have all they require.’

‘But don’t you want to go to the poor man at once yourself? There is really no occasion that you should come back with me.’ She looked at him as she spoke, and saw that he was very pale.

‘It is not necessary. I seldom visit the people. The man has been taken home, and Crevolin has seen him and sent for the surgeon. Nothing will be neglected. Crevolin is always thoughtful and useful, poor fellow.’

Again, Miss King wondered why the epithet was applied, and again something restrained her from asking the reason. Other food for thought was afforded by the fact that Mr. Beckett was contented to employ a deputy, no matter how efficient, where she would have imagined that, holding his views, he would have thought personal attention indispensable. These two subjects so engrossed her mind that it was in complete silence she resumed her walk.

‘You’ve heerd about Holmes, sir?’ asked a rough-looking man, coming forward when they had nearly passed through the quarries on their way to the town.

‘Mr. Crevolin told me. Are the injuries as severe as he seemed to think?’

‘Well, I was one as helped carry him home, sir, and I should say he’s hurt nigh about as bad as could be. He mayn’t die, some on ’em says; but if he lives he’ll never put a foot under him again.’

‘How did it happen?’

'No one just knows, except he didn't calculate the blast—maybe he warn't altogether fit to be there, you know his fault, sir—for he hain't spoke since they lifted him. The rock lay acrost him, and one of his legs is smashed to pieces besides.'

'Could I do anything for his poor wife? Shall I go to her?' said Miss King, addressing the man.

'Nothing just now, I guess, obleeged to ye, mem, all the same,' he answered, civilly enough, but with apparent surprise. He had been looking at her earnestly, and as if in some doubt, which appeared now suddenly to clear away. 'Mabbe arter a while—but it's no sight for the like o' you—and she's got women folk round her; and Mr. Crevolin—he'll see that it's all right.'

He glanced at Mr. Beckett, but as the latter did not speak again, he made a respectful reverence to Miss King and went back to his work. Celestine had noticed both what had and what had not been said. She had remarked that Mr. Beckett had uttered no word of friendly sympathy, and that to his sympathy and compassion no appeal had been made. Why should Mr. Crevolin be always referred to as the anchor of trust, and not he who professed so deep an interest in those whose welfare depended on him, and of whose lives he had, in a measure, assumed the especial care? Was it possible that natural temperament placed a bar to the execution of good intention? Could it be that, while knowing it needful, he yet lacked that sympathy requisite to give benefits their true value and charm? That, possessing all the will to do good, he yet failed of the power to make others feel and believe it? Did the doubt she was conscious of in her own mind

regarding him exist also in the minds of others, colouring their feelings and abating their trust? Worse still, did it exist in his own? And, above all, why did he also speak of Mr. Crevolin at one moment as 'poor fellow,' and in the next refer to him as the one person to be relied on, and competent to fulfil all needs?

The man who had addressed them rejoined his companions at their work, and looked after the retreating figures as they disappeared.

'Think they'll make it out, Tom?' inquired one of his fellows, a slim, bright young man, with a broad grin on his face.

'That's hard to tell. My Jess, that's nurse-girl up to the boss', says the little 'un wants it a match, but the gal herself don't seem no ways keen.'

I regret to state that by the term 'little 'un,' the quarryman alluded to Mrs. Beckett, for by that irreverent, if endearing, appellation the pretty, tiny woman was known in the vernacular of the quarries.

'Would it be good for us, Tom, think?'

'I know what 'ud be a heap better. Hope she don't have nothing to say to *him*. She ain't *his* style.'

'She's a pretty cool style, Tom, seems to me. The little "un's allers a smilin'," but this one's got a face like a winter day—still and cloudy like.'

'Think so?' said Tom, contemptuously. 'Well, mabbe you know best. Shouldn't wonder if you was a first-class judge of human natur'. But I wanted a good look at her myself, and I've got it. I've got some notions of my fown, too. If that gal's face is a winter day, it's winter with a promise of the spring in it—not the fall sunshine that gives you your first taste of the frost.'


All unconscious of the impression she had made, and of the freedom with which her affairs had been discussed, Miss King had wended her way homewards, and dismissed her escort on reaching her sister's gate. 'I am sure you must have much to attend to; do not let me detain you,' she had said, ignoring the delay which seemed to await an invitation to enter with her. 'And if there is any way in which I can be of use to that poor family, be sure to let me know.'

Mr. Beckett had thanked her, but had only given a qualified assent. 'I will see—I will take care they have all they want; but it would not be a fit place for you to go.'

That evening as 'Auntie Cil,' as her small nieces were fond of calling her, was assisting as usual in the entertainment of the little ones, their mother was annoyed and provoked to hear significant prominence given to the old-time history of how Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall.

CHAPTER III.

CROSS AND CROWN.

N the next evening Miss King stood again in the window where we first saw her, but as changed as the scene she looked on were most of her feelings and ideas. Where she had then watched the glitter of the morning, she now saw only the last shafts of a stormy sunset; and her placid features wore a per-

plexed expression, while over her tranquil mind had poured a current of unaccustomed experiences and emotions, which had left it shaken and disturbed, as a lake is disturbed by autumn winds.

She had that day solved the slight mystery that had attached itself in her fancy to Mr. Crevolin, and if the solution had not been without some element of romance, it had also not been without some pain. Going early in the forenoon, unexpectedly into the drawing-room, she had found him in conference with her sister, and before she had time to retreat she was summoned by Sylvia and forced to return.

'This is my sister, whom you have not yet met, I think, Mr. Crevolin. Celestine, this is our *aide-de-camp*, foremost now in all good works of peace, as I believe he once was in all brave deeds of war. You two should have sympathies in common, and be friends.'

Mr. Crevolin flinched visibly, and, as he bowed in return for Celestine's silent salutation, turned a little away. Then, as if moved by some sudden thought or impulse, he stepped quickly forward into the full light of the window—and she saw.

She saw; and, simultaneously with one involuntary and momentary shock of repulsion, a wave of compassion and sympathy rose in her heart, whose power drove the blood back through her veins, and left her deadly pale.

For Mr. Crevolin was one of those who, from the cradle to the tomb, are marked and stand apart—one of those who, for no fault as for no known cause, bear a brand which should surely, in its terrible distinctness, have been reserved only for the sons of Cain. Over his right cheek

and temple spread and darkened a crimson stain, never while his life lasted to be effaced or removed. Beyond disguise or denial, past hope of being attributable to wound or scar, it proclaimed itself a birth-mark indisputable and undisputed. Those who, at different times, had seemed to think themselves entitled to offer well-meant, if useless, consolation had professed to find in its form, if form it could be said to have, resemblance to certain emblems, either cheering or sacred, such as anchor, key, or cross; but all these comparisons were, of course, fanciful, though perhaps the last came nearest the truth, as it certainly was the most appropriate.

As Celestine looked at him, with the surprise and the infinite pity she would have given worlds to conceal shining in her eyes, the stain appeared to fade and die; only by comparison, however, for it was the flush that rose and deepened over the other cheek and the broad brow that for the moment blotted out the indelible blush which Nature in a cruel mood had seen fit to stamp on one who had never known cause for shame.

It might have been thought that in the course of eight and twenty years Philip Crevolin would have grown careless of observation. Was his present confusion only the evidence of still living sensitiveness under the scrutiny of a new witness, or did he, even in that first moment, recognise that he was in the presence of the one woman for whose sake he would have wished to be as other men? He had borne the intrusive curiosity of many eyes; he had at his country's call faced death on the field; and from neither had he ever blenched as he did when he met the glance of Celestine King, and saw her compassionate

feelings look from the windows of her soul. And it was with a deep sense of self-contempt for so blenching, and a determination to be no more a coward for her than he had ever been before friend or foe, that he faced the light and allowed her to know the worst that could be known.

But his embarrassment had passed almost before it had been well perceived, while hers remained. As he spoke a few more words to Mrs. Beckett—they consisted of an errand relative to the injured man Holmes—in a voice which Miss King was not surprised to find one of soft and full cadence and intonation, she had time to observe him further, and to think that perhaps Nature had marred her handiwork on purpose, lest it might otherwise have been too fine. The lines and features of his face were singularly perfect, and the pale olive skin, save for the brand, so clear as to show the tracery of the veins. The sharp yet delicate curves of his mouth were unhidden by the short moustache he wore, and no beard concealed the firm, strong lines of cheek and chin. But the eyes were the most remarkable feature in a remarkable face. Full and heavy-lidded as those of a woman, they had in their blueness all a woman's softness until they became those of a man of strong will and passion in the sudden, steely flash that all at once revealed what they would be in danger, in anger, or in scorn; a glance so penetrating that when in the course of her scrutiny Celestine met it once, she turned away her own, and yet felt an irresistible attraction to look and meet it once again.

He did not speak to her, but bowed low, and had taken leave with a simple dignity that seemed only a natural part of his free grace of form and manner before she had

recovered herself sufficiently to address to him a word on her own account.

She felt as if she should never recover the self-respect she had lost with her self-possession; and with that desire to lay the blame of her own shortcomings on some one else, from which even the purest natures are not wholly free, she turned on her sister as the door closed.

'Sylvia, why did you not warn me? You had no right to expose me to such a shock.'

'I did mean to, but something always put it off.' It's well as it is. I think you got over the shock very well.

'I did not. He must have seen that I pitied him.'

'Well, why not! He must be used to that, I should think. And you'll get used to him like the rest of us; or if you don't you can shut your eyes while you talk to him,—though it's almost a pity to do that, because his features and figure are so fine.'

'Sylvia, how heartlessly you talk!'

'Because I see something to admire instead of dwelling only on the misfortune and defect. You have the queerest way of reading things backwards, my dear! It is well society sets bounds for us—I should hate to risk the chance of your actions being as different from other peoples' as your thoughts and words.'

Without replying to her sister's speech, which may or may not have borne a deeper meaning than was actually expressed in the words, Celestine made a remark on some indifferent subject; and then, escaping, endeavoured to find in a long and lonely walk diversion for thought that had been considerably disturbed, and was not, to say truth, particularly self-gratulatory. It was not perhaps

an especially well-chosen remedy ; for as she had been careful to keep secret the direction in which she meant to go, and was not on this occasion either met or overtaken by anyone, fancy had full freedom to roam whithersoever she pleased ; and it would not be surprising if, with fancy's usual contrariety, she chose to exercise herself in those very flights which Celestine had intended to avoid.

Later in the day she had been strolling with the nurse and babies on the borders of the little river, where the silken catkins of the willows, and the yellow 'chickens' feet' of the drooping birches were treasures coveted of infantine eyes, when some threatening clouds making their appearance in the west, she sent her party home by the nearest route, while she pursued her own way over a foot bridge that led by a somewhat longer road through a part of the town with which she was not as familiar as the rest, and which she took this opportunity to explore. The street of common wooden houses that sloped up from the bridge level wore a very decidedly unattractive aspect, and she was passing through it with firm and rather hasty steps, when her attention was excited by the noise of children's voices in hot dispute, that came from a sort of lane or alley on her left hand. 'You did !' 'I didn't !' 'I say you did hit him !' 'I say you lie !' were some of the fragmentary amenities of speech that struck her ears. She followed the sound, and soon came on a group of six or seven boys and girls of differing ages, but all quite young, standing round the prostrate figure of the smallest of their number, who lay on the ground. He was a fair-haired, half-dressed little fellow, about three years old. He lay quite still and silent, and there was blood on his face.

'What is the matter here? what have you done?' asked Miss King in a voice of authority.

Apparently much frightened at the result of their quarrel, the children cowered together and did not speak.

'Tell me at once, who is this child, and who hurt him!'

Either the definite question or perhaps the desire of accusing somebody elicited a reply. 'He's Holmes' boy, and Jack Barber knocked him down, 'said two or three voices.

'It's a lie! I didn't do it!' denied the boy designated; but Celestine thought she saw his falsehood in his face.

'Are you not ashamed of yourself, you big boy?' was all she said, but he felt as if her look withered him. He had never encountered just such a glance from just such eyes before.

Celestine stooped over the child; she saw that the blood proceeded only from a cut of the lip produced by his own teeth, but the lips were very white, and he was evidently more than half stunned by the violence of the fall, and the contact of the little head with the ground.

'Where does he live!' she asked. 'Are none of you going to help him up and take him home!'

Several fingers indicated a house she had already passed on her way from the bridge, but no one stirred. Impatient at their stupidity, Celestine lifted the child and carried him off, the small crowd following, open-mouthed, to see the end of the performance, and in some trepidation as to who would be most likely to get the blame.

Miss King knocked at the door, but as it stood ajar and the boy's weight was more than she had calculated on, she pushed it open and went in. Even had she not been

told where she was going, she would have recognized the place, for the bed on which Holmes lay, had, for greater convenience, been moved from the smaller room within, to the outer chamber, and beside the injured man sat Mr. Crevolin. As her eyes fell on him, they took in also at a moment's glance, and with a quickness and certainty that never afterwards failed her memory, the whole scene besides. She saw the sick man's pallor, and the spasm of pain that crossed his face as he moved when her entrance startled him; she saw the nervous, vigorous form beside him, ministering to his wants as, or before, they were expressed; she saw the wife and mother, in whom the traces of great beauty yet lingered among manifest evidences of neglect, bending over the cradle where an infant lay; she saw two or three older children engaged in various occupations or amusements; she noticed the mixture of squalor with the signs of other and better tastes; she remarked that on the little table that bore the medicines and other appliances of illness, lay a book from which Mr. Crevolin had evidently been reading aloud; and beside it, in a common glass, and exhaling a rare beauty and fragrance, which, even in that uncongenial atmosphere was felt—perhaps all the more felt from being uncongenial—were three or four rare and valuable hot-house roses.

As she entered the room with her burden, Mr. Crevolin sprang up to meet her, with an eager look. There was no embarrassment now in face or manner, no turn of the head, or sensitive droop of the wonderful eyes, as he accosted her, quite forgetful of self, and it was to him, rather than to the mother who rushed forward, excited

and vociferant, that she addressed her few words of explanation as to how she came there, and how she had found the child.

'He is not much hurt, Mrs. Holmes,' he said, when the child's head having been bathed, and his mouth moistened with brandy—brandy which Celestine noticed came from a flask in Mr. Crevolin's own pocket—he moved and opened his eyes; 'but you have reason to be thankful it is no worse. Perhaps you do not know this lady to whom we are all so much obliged—she is Mrs. Beckett's sister, Miss King.'

He went through the introduction with a certain staidness that, considering the place and circumstances, would have possessed a strong element of the ludicrous for Celestine had she not instinctively felt that it was, or that he thought it the right thing to do. Mrs. Holmes, who had known perfectly well who her visitor was, but who had seemed inclined to be a little on the defensive, and whose face had worn a slightly hard expression, softened immediately.

'I'm sure I'm more than thankful to Miss King, and I hope she won't think none the worse of me, that in my fright I couldn't say so at once. The young ones is so forever in mischief I never know the minute some on 'em won't be fetched home dead, and after yesterday—'

she broke off with a sob, and tried to swallow her tears.

'Don't fret more than you can help about it,' said Celestine, gently. 'We must hope for the best. Do you suffer very much?' she added, turning to the man, her face lighted by the sympathy that this time she was not afraid to show.

'Well, ma'am, I can't say as I don't, and speak the truth,' he answered with a feeble attempt at a smile. 'But I can't b'lieve even that's better than to think of the time when I shall have to lie here without suffering.'

She mistook his meaning. 'Oh, don't say that!' she exclaimed, eagerly, yet softly. 'Mr. Crevolin has assured us that you are not fatally hurt.'

Holmes appeared equally satisfied with herself as to the authority of the opinion; but though he tried to smile again, he shook his head. 'I know that, ma'am. Sometimes, through the long night that's passed, I've partly wished I was. If 'taint fatal one way, 'tis another. All the best part of me will be dead, they say, if I do get better; and why should the rest, that can be no good to anyone, but only a load, be left?'

Celestine's rare smile broke and beamed like morning on the uplands. 'Is that all? Then I would not worry over it till the time comes. I never borrow trouble. If I want a loan, I always ask for something nice.'

These words, for some unknown reason, seemed to bring her at once more *en rapport* with her hearers. Beyond a few questions relative to actual needs to be supplied no more was said as to Holmes' state, but the conversation became general; and while his wife spoke of the children, of the difficulty of keeping 'Jemmy'—who, in her lap was fast regaining colour and cheerfulness, and earnestly regarding the 'strange lady'—out of the manifold dangers of the street, while she had the house and baby to attend to, and his elder sisters were at work or at school, while she made many and various inquiries into Miss King's affairs, domestic and social, her likes and dislikes, her

home, and her comparative love for that place, and Fairport, with a freedom which though *very* free, somehow just escaped being offensive, and while Celestine replied with less averseness than she would have thought possible beforehand, the latter had time to look about her; and to come to some conclusions from what she saw.

The room was one of those which it is perhaps a pity that they who are fond of expressing their admiration for picturesque 'interiors' have not sometimes the opportunity of studying at closer acquaintance, and in detail. The house, originally comfortably built, bore unmistakable signs of the habitation of a family careless as to cleanliness or order; every article of furniture, though once good, was more or less broken and defaced, some applied to uses for which they had never been intended, and some which should have been there were missing altogether; the floor had had time to forget when it had last been cleaned, and in the windows the vacant places of two or three panes of glass were supplied with substances entirely foreign to the purpose. And yet though the place had that uncared-for look, which to the initiated eye tells of wilful poverty—the poverty that is a sure fruit of a union of unsteady husband and thriftless wife—there were some touches that redeemed it from utter squalor, and hinted at some inconsistencies of tastes in its inhabitants. There were flashes of bright colour in the bed-clothing, and in the flowers of a splendid Japan lily in full bloom, which looked most incongruous with its surroundings; though the walls were smoky there hung on them several highly-tinted prints, which, if not faultless in execution, were very imaginative in concep-

tion and treatment; and though the children were poorly dressed, and their abundant hair bore a strong resemblance to a hay-stack in a storm, they were, with the exception of Jemmy's temporary paleness, fat and rosy, as if they were stinted neither in quantity nor quality of food.

Celestine carried away with her two distinct and very new impressions. The first was this: Mr. Crevolin had retreated to the window, and stood looking out, as if in her converse with Mrs. Holmes he had no desire to take a part, and during a pause she lifted the book which he had let fall down upon the table; it was a volume of Will Carleton's poems, and was open at 'Gone with a Handsomer Man.' Curious to know whether the somewhat singular selection had been the choice of reader or listener, she turned to the title-page, and found the initials 'P. C.,' inscribed in a bold hand thereon. Her action, and perhaps her slight surprise, had not passed unnoticed, for as she glanced at Mr. Crevolin she saw, though the bright, observant eyes were quickly averted, something like a smile on his lips as she laid the book down.

The other incident was of a different nature. While speaking to Jemmy, when he had become capable of speaking, she had remarked that his eyes were fixed on a long spray of the willow blossoms, part of the woodland spoil of herself and her little nieces, which, in spite of the adventure with himself, still depended from her belt. She took it out at once, and offered it to him.

'I don't want it,' said the child. 'Dey's on'y weeds.'

'For shame, Jemmy,' said the mother, in a chiding and yet coaxing tone. 'Take what the lady gives you.'

But the child repeated, with a child's uncompromising frankness, 'I don't care for it. It's a weed.'

Celestine accepted the reproof. The child could not understand that the mind of a master-poet had been able to find, in all created nature, no thing to which to liken the robe of the enchantress who enchanted the enchanter, so lovely as that same weed, the 'satin, shining palm on shallows in the windy gleams' of spring; but Celestine thought she saw the meaning of the costly roses.

She might have remained longer, unmindful of the time, but for a sudden dash of rain against the panes. The clouds had kept their promise.

'Will you wait until the shower is over?' asked Mr. Crevolin. 'I think it will be but a shower.'

'I think I had better not. I would rather risk the rain than my sister's anxiety if I do not appear.'

She did not observe the little curl of Mrs. Holmes' lip, which, however, vanished, as she graciously expressed a desire to be better acquainted with Miss King; and having said a kind farewell to the wounded man, she went out, but the first few moments proved to her that she had under-rated the rain. One of those sudden and heavy squalls so common in the spring was sweeping up from the west, and that the sun was already gleaming behind it was no guarantee that those would not suffer on whom fell the weight of its present anger.

She had gone but a few steps when she heard feet behind her, and glancing round, she saw Mr. Crevolin coming quickly up. He held an overcoat on his arm, which, without waiting to ask permission, he threw, as a heavy splash of rain descended, around her shoulders, and fastened by the sleeves around her neck.

'I beg your pardon for my roughness,' he said; 'but

this will save you from some of the consequences of your imprudence. It's not much of a robe of state, but it will keep off the worst of the wet.'

'But you—' she stammered.

'I!' he answered, carelessly. 'Do not stay to argue, but walk as fast as you can.'

They did walk fast, and Celestine was glad that the storm had so far cleared the streets that there were but few witnesses of her strange attire, to be robed in which she had passively submitted, while wondering at her own submission. Their speed was too great to admit of conversation, and before they reached the end of their walk the weight of the squall was over, and only a few large and scattered drops of the rain remained of its spent force. Mr. Crevolin removed the coat as they reached the gate, and declined Miss King's invitation to come in and get dry, of which, owing to his generosity to her, he stood very much and very evidently in need.

'Do you always try to atone when you harm?' he asked. 'If you had waited, as I wished you to do, I should not have got wet at all.'

He spoke lightly, but she coloured to the roots of her hair. 'Is that generous? Surely you know I meant to act for the best.'

He looked at her with a sudden softening of the eyes. 'Yes—I know—I had no right to say that. Of course, you act for the best; only it's not always when we mean the most good that we do the least harm. Forgive me; I forgot you could not understand. No; I won't come in this time, thank you. Go in and change your shoes. Good-bye.' He went away quickly, and while

she wondered a little at his somewhat abrupt departure she remembered that though on the previous day she had given no invitation to Mr. Beckett, she had felt sure that with him to receive and to accept would have been the same.

Also, when she came to reflect on the matter, as she stood looking out into the stormy sunset, she could not decide why she should be glad to escape question as to what had detained her, and as to why the rain had done her no more harm.

CHAPTER IV.

SUB ROSA.

VARIOUS subjects of speculation amused Celestine's imagination for the next two days, during which a continuance of the wild weather detained her within doors. If among these Mr. Crevolin occupied the first place, it is perhaps little to be wondered at, and for it there was more than one cause. There was about him something sufficiently remarkable to have excited her attention in any case; but when, on her expressing some interest and making some inquiries, she found a sudden and marked disinclination on Mrs. Beckett's part to say anything further on the subject, the repression, of course, set her mind to work to discover the cause and reason, and riveted the thoughts it was intended to disengage. Remorse also played its part in the drama of her thought.

She could not forgive herself the display of her feeling when she had first seen him; and that he appeared to have forgotten it did not lessen her self-reproach, or abate her desire to atone.

Her mind also dwelt at some length on the incidents of her visit to Mr. Holmes. Like too many other people, Celestine's only knowledge hitherto of those of a class in life differing from her own had been derived from servants, deferential or otherwise, as the case might be, but in any event a class apart in life and interests; and her sudden introduction to the *ménage* in Bridge street had been an experience as interesting as it was new. She would have thought beforehand that she would be out of place and awkward, but she had not felt so. Different in tone as she and Mrs. Holmes undoubtedly were, there was yet a harmonizing note in the chord.

On this subject, however, warned by past experience, she said nothing. She possessed her soul in patience for two days; and when the third morning came, bright and breezy, she took counsel with herself only, and went, this time of set purpose and intention, down to Holmes' house.

Mr. Crevolin was not there, but his absence was compensated by the information she gained concerning him. True, she did not learn much as to his parentage or antecedents; that he had been a soldier all knew—that he had been a soldier in command might be guessed from his prompt decision, his instant submission where submission was needful, and his exaction of obedience where obedience was just; he had come from some unknown place some three years ago, and was believed by

some people to be of French extraction, but of this no one was sure, and for this no one cared while he was—what he was; the one man to whom all others looked for advice, assistance, and instruction, the one man who could always be depended on for sympathy and consolation, the one man who could do all things at once and think of all things at the same time. Had all this commendation and reverence been openly spoken in obvious words of praise, Miss King might perhaps have doubted some of its sincerity; but, coming, as it did, in a mass of indirect testimony, and by inference, it left no room for doubt as to what was thought of him by those who seemed to know him best. And as she listened, and felt her esteem bespoken, and her heart warmed with admiration of the character unfolded before her, Celestine found herself instituting comparisons which she hated herself for making, even while she made them.

She flattered herself that this day she also gained ground in the good opinion of the family. She assisted to shift the posture of the wounded man with a touch which he was pleased to say was 'the easiest he'd felt yet 'cept Mr. Crevolin's;' she fortunately remembered the ingredients of a salve which she could recommend to Mrs. Holmes for a burnt finger; and little Jemmy's good graces were completely won by the presentation of sweetmeats with which Celestine had provided herself on the way, and which were, for a reason she probably understood, if she might not have been quite willing to explain, the most expensive to be obtained in Fairport.

She said nothing at home of her visit, but was so well pleased with it that she repeated it the next day, on

which occasion she made the acquaintance of one or two neighbours who dropped in, professedly to see the sick man, though Miss King could not help suspecting that she herself was equally the object of their curiosity. To this she made no objection; on the contrary, she perhaps exerted herself more to please than she had sometimes done in more shining circles, and was vain enough to think that she made a favourable impression.

In order not to be troublesome, and trying to believe that she wondered why she herself took so much trouble, she did not go again for three days. She had hitherto had no self-confessed motive for her visits but that needful and friendly attention which she had thought it right to show; but when this time on leaving the house she met Mr. Crevolin approaching it, she knew it was not alone from neighbourly charity that they had been made.

If there were a moment's hesitation on his part as to whether he should bow and pass on, it was quickly overcome. Her smile and greeting were so unmistakably those of invitation that he turned and walked beside her.

She had imagined that he might perhaps offer a word of explanation as to his abrupt departure when she had last seen him, now more than a week ago; but when none such came she decided that it was more fitting none such should have been spoken.

'I am very grateful to you for coming here as you have done,' said Mr. Crevolin, after a few ordinary civilities had been exchanged between them. 'You are doing good. Though perhaps some might regret that your first experiences among the employés should be of those who, however they interest me, are certainly not among the pattern families of the place.'

'Are they some of the raw material with which Mr. Beckett finds it so hard to deal?' she asked, unguardedly.

'Did he complain of difficulty?' said Mr. Crevolin, quickly. 'But I beg your pardon—I had no right to ask that. Raw material? There is no such thing as human raw material out of the cradle, and scarcely there. The Holmes family, and most like them, are in an advanced state of manufacture.'

'And do you think so differently from him as to believe them incapable of improvement?'

'I did not say that. But it is a not uncommon mistake'—and Celestine wondered whether it was a mistake he believed Mr. Beckett to have made—'to suppose that because a process has not been productive of approved or desirable results it has therefore been less thorough than a more favourable one, or can therefore be more easily counteracted or undone.'

'Can we then never repair what has been wrongly begun? That would be very hard.'

'It is hard. Nevertheless it is in some sense true that, as George Eliot says, "consequences are unpitying." But that is not quite all I mean. I do not want you to misunderstand me *again*.'

In the last word was the recollection and the atonement she had wished for, and it pleased her.

'Ask yourself,' he continued. 'That lace at your throat and a coarse towel came originally from the same flax fibre; the difference between them is solely in the treatment each has received since it left the parent stem. But could any effort now change the texture of either, or make one subserve the purpose of the other?'

She thought she understood the parable. 'I am afraid the lace has no purpose. It is very useless.'

'Forbid it, you should say or think so!' he answered with a quickness that showed how instantly he had followed her thoughts, and a look which it a little confused her to meet.

'But you think,' she said, laughing at his comparison, 'that when human beings have become towels it is no use to try to make lace of them?'

'Not the least use. You might as well try to transform an earthen flower-pot into a china vase. Habits, manners, tastes and opinions are the outward form of the human flax and clay.'

'But humanity has more than outward form,' she ventured. 'What ought your flower-pot to contain?'

'You are right to rebuke me. No—I have not lived so long, and my life has not been—what it has been—not to know that flowers of rarest beauty and perfume are often grown in coarsest vessels, as the finest porcelain may be degraded to base uses. No; I do not question improvement; what else are all our efforts for? Why else are we so made that we can never cease to strive? What I do deprecate is that expectation of radical change which some people entertain and work for—an expectation which can but lead to disappointment. My own opinion is—you can take it for as much or as little as it is worth—that when once humanity has passed through those phases of experience that harden it as the furnace fire hardens the flower-pot you must accept it as it is—do you remember the charming portrait of "My Kate,"

"The weak and the gentle, the ribald and rude.

She took as she found them and did them all good—"

did not made; there it is—do the very best you can for and with it, but expect no more.'

'Your doctrines are very different from those which my brother-in-law holds,' said Celestine.

'Are you sure you ever heard him give expression to any?' And Celestine, on reflection, could not remember that she had. 'Mr. Beckett is very generous and very just; but I think he only concerns himself with material needs. He pays good wages for good work; he provides abundant supplies for a fair price, but he does not trouble himself about abstract questions. He endeavours to make his commands reasonable, and he expects obedience—a duty on both sides. He hears that the children go to school, and he sees on Sunday that they and their parents go to church; if a man is drunk he reads him a lecture the next time he sees him, and if any one is sick he sends the doctor. Beyond that he does not go.'

Celestine could not help smiling.

'I suppose you think that a considerable distance? I admit that it is much further than a great many ever wish or try to go. But there is something more, and it is this which Mr. Henry Beckett is endeavouring to do. It is he who would like, socially and morally, to mould the place on his pattern.'

'And you do not think he is succeeding?'

'I do not like to say so. I have no right to criticise his ideas and mode of action. If I think that a firmer discipline occasionally and a stronger personal sympathy at all times would be more successful in some of the circumstances we have to consider, that is only my opinion, and I may be wrong. He is kind enough often to make

me his deputy, and to provide me the means of giving assistance which would otherwise be beyond my power. And he makes no objection to my doing things at my own time and in my own way.'

'I should think not!' was Celestine's reflection; and she also felt more than a suspicion that if Mr. Henry Beckett were often confiding it was because he doubted his own power of performance at first hand. But she gave her thought no voice.

'With regard to the Holmes family,' resumed Mr. Crevolin, after a moment's pause, 'I fear they will be "improved" now in some respects, though by rather harsh and sudden means. To tell the truth they have always been regarded—perhaps rather unjustly—as *mauvais sujets*. There is no real harm in her, but I have been told that when she had beauty she was very vain, and I know that now she has lost it she is very careless; and he has never been a sober man. He will be one now perforce, unless some one pours drink down his throat, for, unless I am greatly mistaken, the poor fellow will never move alone again.'

'Then what will become of them!' exclaimed Celestine.

'Don't be alarmed about them. If I am not optimist enough to think that whatever is must be absolutely, for the best, I have sufficient faith to believe there is no night so long or so dark as not to end in morning. If he no longer earns, he can no longer waste his earnings, and she will of necessity be roused to be a more careful wife and mother. You will not lose your interest, and others will not neglect or forget.'

If by *others* he meant himself, Celestine felt very sure he would not forget, and still less neglect. He turned now to retrace his steps, but hesitated a moment as he said good-bye.

'There is one thing I should like to say if I dared,' he said, with a smile.

'I have been told that you are not deficient in courage.'

'It is this. You thought—I know you thought—that I should have been reading the Bible instead of Will Carleton to Holmes the other day.'

Celestine could not help the tell-tale colour that crept up into her cheek, but she stood her ground. 'I did not think you should do anything but just what you did,' she disclaimed.

'Your face betrays you,' he said, while a smile of inexpressible sweetness curved his handsome mouth. 'Never try to play the hypocrite, for you will not succeed. But that you may not think that I fail either to teach Scripture or to practice its teachings—according to my ability—any more than yourself, I will ask you a question. Why did you take little Jemmy those French sweetmeats the other day? Would not simpler ones have pleased the child as well?'

Celestine looked astonished for a moment; then, as his meaning broke upon her, she blushed again, a rosy red.

'Perhaps,' she said, 'the *child*, if not—' Then she gathered up her courage, and said, bravely: 'No, you know they would not. And—I took them for the same reason that *you* took the roses.'

His eyes flashed as his thought answered hers. 'Ah.

I see you understand!' in the same words Mr. Beckett had used, but this time they were followed by no question. 'I see you remember David's lesson to Araunah and you know it is not only to the Lord that we must not offer that which costs us nothing. If our gifts be in charity, we may please ourselves—they may be little or much, and of whatsoever we choose; but if we aspire to be their friends and sympathizers, we must give of the best we have to the poor.'

He bowed and left her, and she watched the active, graceful figure out of sight. Then she turned and walked onward with a face of deep thought and a heavy sigh. If any one had been there to ask her, I wonder if she could have confessed to knowing why she sighed?

CHAPTER V.

IN THE TOILS.

THROUGH the lengthening spring days that followed, as April sobbed herself away in fitful gusts and tears, and May came in with cool and fickle smiles, Celestine saw but little of Mr. Crevolin. Though she was no less assiduous than before in all kind and needful attentions to the Holmes family, and though she faithfully continued her visits to them—visits during which she was not likely to be allowed to forget him or to learn to think the less of him from what she heard—she never happened to meet him there again—he had al-

ways either just departed, or was expected, but did not arrive while she remained. She was disappointed, and as yet was not afraid to confess to herself that she was so; the acquaintance had promised her a new interest, and intercourse with a mind which she had at once felt was more in consonance with her own than any she had yet met with in Fairport, and she felt aggrieved at being denied its further development. She remembered that her sister had foretold that she would see much of Mr. Crevolin, as he was often at her house; but though she heard of his being everywhere else he did not come.

She could have but little idea that it was of firm purpose he avoided her, and still less could she have imagined the cause. She could not know that he, like herself, had recognized the sympathetic mind, but, unlike herself, had recognized far more. She could not guess that her pure, tranquil face and deep eyes, her tender blush, and her soft words had roused his sleeping heart to life, and wakened in him all at once those feelings which all the rosy beauty he had seen had so far never touched; feelings which, as time went on, and he had never yet experienced them, he had begun to hope that Nature had denied him, as he believed she had forbidden him their exercise and gratification; feelings so exquisitely sweet and precious that he hugged them to his soul as a new life bestowed on him, and at the same time bitter as death in the face of the knowledge that they must be forever and inexorably stifled and trampled down. She could not know that while every look, every movement, every thread of her chestnut hair, was a delight to him, he forced himself to shun them as an evil or a curse, knowing that in avoid-

ance was his only refuge from worse pain; that if he saw her in the distance alone, a dark shadow crossed his eyes, that when she was not alone, his sensitive mouth contracted painfully, and a frown drew together his straight brows; she could not know that he remembered, and lived on in remembrance, every word she had spoken, every look she had given him; and that there lay upon his heart some of the willow blossoms she had worn. But—that when her image became sweetest to him, and his own thoughts most passionate and tender, he would lift his hand and touch the stain upon his face.

His absence appeared to excite no remark in others, and something restrained Celestine from asking her sister why her prophecy was so far from being fulfilled. Indeed between herself and Sylvia there was now more than one point of disagreement. Mrs. Beckett had become aware of the visits to Bridge street, and had expressed extreme disapproval, and as Celestine did not on that account discontinue them, she considered her authority set at naught and herself aggrieved. Besides this, Sylvia generally spoke now of Mr. Crevolin less with appreciation of his character than with pity for his hopeless personal misfortune and defect—a pity which, as Celestine was conscious of feeling it herself, was all the more repugnant to her when expressed by others.

On one occasion, and by special invitation, he had dined with them; but several other persons had been present, and Mr. Crevolin, in his grave business aspect, was so changed a man from him whom she had known at Holmes' bed-side, and she—Celestine herself—had been so markedly the object of Mr. Beckett's attentions, that the evening had afforded her very little pleasure.

Mr. Beckett's intentions were indeed by this time perfectly apparent to everyone else as well as to her; and she felt herself in a dilemma from which extrication might not be easy. She would not admit that his chance of favour with her was less than it had been a month ago—she stoutly affirmed to herself that he had never had a chance at all; but she felt quite sure that he only waited some slight sign of encouragement that he would receive a favourable reply to prefer his petition, and as, knowing what her answer must be, she dared not give that encouragement, he did not ask the question, and she was debarred the satisfaction of knowing that she had said—and that he knew she had said—*no*.

In the meantime, as nothing at all had been said, matters progressed outwardly much more in accordance with Mr. Beckett's wishes than with her own. She was unable, without showing a consciousness she did not like to betray, to decline or avoid many things which, of her own will, she would have left undone, and the doing of which, she was aware, gave a colour to her motives and intentions, which she was very unwilling they should wear. Among other instances she had yielded, when hard pressed, to Sylvia's persistent solicitations about the riding. Miss King had never been fond of the exercise, and was no horsewoman, but the steeds were warranted steady, and of the efficiency of Mr. Beckett's escort there could be no doubt. Mrs. Beckett was incapable of perceiving that what is granted unwillingly might as well be denied, and was satisfied that dangers were avoided, and that her pet project must receive further advancement every time she succeeded in forcing her sister and cousin into the

unbroken and uninterrupted companionship entailed by a two hours' ride.

Celestine soon became convinced that her name and interests were joined to those of Mr. Beckett in people's minds in a manner highly displeasing to her; eyes followed her, and children's fingers pointed during her walks and rides, and once or twice words not meant for her ears had drifted to her hearing. But she felt that the conclusions drawn were perfectly natural, and that no matter how she rebelled against them, and however much without foundation she knew them to be, while no statement was made, she could not contradict.

She also saw reason to suppose that she was no longer looked on with quite the same favour by her friends in Bridge street, a favour in which she had more than hoped she had taken a firm stand. Though well aware that Jack Barber had been the delinquent with regard to little Jemmy Holmes, she had loyally abstained from any word of accusation, and her generous discretion had won her the devotion of himself and his associates, and at first the approbation of some older heads who were equally well acquainted with the facts of the case. Jack's father, indeed, who was no other than the rough man who had addressed her in the quarry on the morning of the accident, and who was one of the most disturbing elements of the turbulent atmosphere of Bridge street, had at first expressed quite unqualified approval of her; which added to her own helpful hand and heart-felt words had caused her to be received with a readiness and an absence of suspicion never yet accorded to any one connected with 'the boss.' Now, however, a change appeared to

creep over the scene. Symptoms of the discontent which Sylvia had proclaimed, which Mr. Beckett had inferred, and which Mr. Crevolin had not denied, manifested themselves visibly, if not strongly. Frankness and freedom disappeared, and a taint of cool politeness, like a mist, tangible if transparent, spread itself over an intercourse heretofore hearty and free from cloud.

All this time she saw nothing of Mr. Crevolin, except a short chance meeting now and then; and a few words at the church door before or after service was all the speech exchanged between them. That she could know that this was the reason of much that perplexed her; that she could know that Bridge street looked with extreme disfavour on the notion of a union between her and Mr. Beckett, and that having for a few fleeting days hugged the hope of an alliance more in accordance with their own desires and their own supposed advantage, they regarded her now as having gone over to the enemy and were wrathful in consequence, was of course impossible. But it is not always needful to know the cause in order to feel the effect, and Celestine was sensible of some very unpleasant effects from some unknown cause. She was disappointed, worried, and annoyed; and while too just to lay altogether to Mr. Beckett's charge that for which he might not be entirely to blame, she yet felt as if he were entangling her in a web she could not break; or rather as if she breathed an atmosphere of fine dust which, while it seemed to smother her, she was powerless to blow or brush away.

Perhaps it is a little singular that to Mr. Crevolin she never thought of attributing any blame at all.

About this time—in the procession of the months May was now far on her way into the past—Celestine gave her first offence to Mr. Beckett. He had been dining with them, and they were lingering over the dessert; the soft twilight fell through the long open, lace-shaded windows, over the rich appointments of the room and the glowing colours of the fruit and wine upon the table; and one last ray of the departed sun had caught, and still hovered over as if loth to leave, Celestine's shining hair, lighting up the glory of her eyes, and imparting to her smooth cheek a tint rarely, save when she blushed, its own. Her lover had never seen her look so nearly beautiful. He had become a lover at last; his somewhat sluggish pulse had learned to quicken at the touch of her soft hand, his somewhat stubborn will had been roused by opposition to a strong desire to reduce to capitulation the fortress whose cool purity offered so persistent, if so passive, a resistance. That his flame should have required so much fanning will not, perhaps, redound much to the credit of his passion; but the fan had been applied, and the flame now burned, after a fashion, fiercely.

The conversation, which in his hands never strayed far from the affairs of Fairport and his own interest in and efforts therefor, had not been altogether of a cheerful nature. Some complications had arisen of which Celestine now heard for the first time.

'This is a disagreeable business about Barber's son,' said Ralph Beckett, helping himself to strawberries.

'Yes, I was talking to Crevolin about it to-day. He seems to think he can't be taken on again.'

'Certainly not. There's a limit. You must let Philip have his own way.'

'Well, I don't like to rouse the animosity of that family. But Crevolin says it is not wise to temporize any further, or to yield to persuasion again.'

'He's quite right. If he said otherwise I am not at all sure I should not have my own say in the matter, though in those things under Philip's rule I seldom interfere. The lad is a drunken, insolent scoundrel, who sets an example of idleness and insubordination. He must be made an example of in another way.'

'What has Jack been doing?' asked Celestine.

'Jack has nothing to do with it,' said her brother-in-law. 'This older boy—a sharp lad of sixteen or seventeen—was a truck driver, and has been twice discharged for carelessness and disobedience, and twice forgiven and taken on again on promises of amendment never fulfilled. Henry had interceded for him, and I suppose he counts on the same support again; but it can't be done any more. He must go.'

'Will he lose his work? Won't he be worse idle?'

'He needn't be idle—he can take the pick if he wants work. The more responsible places and the better pay must be allotted to those who deserve and can retain them. This boy has been intoxicated two or three times lately in the quarry—it's impossible to run the risk of such damage as he might do.'

Celestine was silent, but Mr. Beckett thought he saw some dissent in her face, and spoke again.

'I know you see these people occasionally, Celestine, and are to some extent interested in them; but in this instance I must request that you do not sympathise too much, or interfere at all.'

'Certainly not, if you so desire,' she replied.

'And you need the less regret your compliance when I assure you that the Barbers are a bad lot altogether.'

'I am sorry,' said Sylvia, 'that I ever took Jessie into the house; but she's so useful, and the children are so fond of her that I don't like to dismiss her without more cause than I've had yet.'

'That looks as if one of the lot, at all events, was not very bad,' said Celestine.

'The whole of Bridge street are a bad lot,' said Henry Beckett, gloomily, and with an energy the occasion scarcely seemed to demand.

'I cannot at all allow that,' said Celestine, glad of a chance to disagree.

At this flat contradiction on his own ground Mr. Beckett looked first amazed, and then amused. Her flashes of spirit, while they chafed him, often caused him to admire her the more.

'Henry's about right, however,' remarked her brother-in-law. 'There's that man Holmes—I firmly believe he was drunk when he was hurt, and though under the circumstances one can but pity him, what excuse can be made for a man who is drinking while blasting is going on?'

On the mention of the Holmes family Mrs. Beckett was not sorry for the opportunity to speak her mind and give some hints concerning them.

'I'm sure, I hope he'll get better,' she said; 'but I suppose if he does he'll only begin to drink again.'

'This may be the saving of him,' said Celestine. 'He has had a severe lesson and will have time to break off.'

'What are the prospects for the man, Henry? You know the people personally better than I do?' asked his cousin.

'Well, I do *not* know much of *these* people, but Dr. Bernard says that, though he'll most likely never walk alone again, he may after a time get about very well on crutches.'

'Then he'll never be able to do any more work?' suggested Mrs. Beckett. 'Shall you have to keep all that family in idleness, do you suppose, Ralph?'

'I don't think you need worry about that, Sylvia,' said her husband, laughing. 'Possibly we may find something he can do.'

'Why, what can a man do on crutches? But it's no matter—whatever you do you will get no thanks.'

'I don't expect thanks,' said Henry Beckett.

'I think we ought to expect thanks, as we ought to give them when they are deserved. It is a poor compliment to those we benefit to suppose them incapable of gratitude. No doubt Holmes would feel more grateful and independent if he thought he earned wages than he would if living on gifts.'

'Who made you so wise all at once in such matters?' demanded her sister, with a sudden suspicious look.

'Miss King has evidently had an able teacher,' said Mr. Henry Beckett, with an emphasis which Celestine well remembered afterwards.

'Independent!' resumed Sylvia. 'I should think they were independent; it would be well if they were a little less so sometimes. And as for gratitude, I don't believe that that Mrs. Holmes is ever one bit grateful when I go to see her.'

This was probably true, Mrs. Beckett generally paid her visits in a dress of silk and lace, and expressed her opinion plainly, by looks if not by words, of the appearance of the chair offered her to sit on, and of all things else besides; and her conversation usually consisted of a mixture of advice and admonition, most of which was so inappropriate and so unpalatable that nothing less sweet than the power of the money she sometimes left behind her on the table would have sufficed to drive it down.

'I have always found her civil,' was all Celestine said. She was occasionally obliged to exercise the talent of silence in Sylvia's behalf.

'I can't think how you can go there so much,' said her sister again. 'The place is horribly dirty. It smells so that I always feel as if I wanted the camphor bottle.'

'I warned Miss King at first that it was not a fit place for her to go,' said Henry Beckett.

'I regret that fate compelled me to slight your warning,' said Celestine, but she did not look grieved. 'Circumstances effected the introduction quite independently of my own will. But I am sorry to say I have grown very fond of Jemmy since I picked him up out of the dirt.'

'You have a nice taste, I must say,' sneered Sylvia. 'To run after a little ragged-robin like that. If you must have acquaintances among the workmen, why don't you choose them from those that are decent and well behaved?'

'My friends are quite decent, and I never see any ill-behaviour,' said Celestine, laughing, though she felt a

little indignant. 'I know they're not patterns, but you can't expect a whole town to be machine-made.'

Henry Beckett looked confounded for a moment, and then deeply hurt. He did not speak, but his cousin asked, in a tone of marked displeasure, 'Is that your own expression, Celestine, or did you hear it from some one else?'

'Oh, I was not clever enough to invent it,' she replied, laughing again.

'Well, whoever said it spoke in extremely bad taste; and you must allow me to say, Celestine, that I think it would be better if you talked less of what you cannot be expected to understand.'

She coloured deeply at the unexpected rebuke. Then all at once it flashed through her like a sword that it was from Mr. Crevolin she would be supposed to have heard it; it would be thought they had together irreverently talked over the management of others; it would be believed they had made light of good intention and earnest effort; she was shocked and alarmed, and added, hurriedly, 'The expression was not applied to this place, I assure you. I did not hear it here.'

Her disclaimer, however, came too late; the impression had been given, the explanation passed unheeded. She saw the mischief she had done, and sensible that she could in no way repair it, she could have bitten her offending tongue for its worse than careless words.

Henry Beckett said nothing, but he was very cold and distant for the remainder of the evening. She saw that he was more than offended, and though in the course of a day or two this passed off, and he regained his usual

manner, she was quite aware that, far from being forgotten, the offence had only been shifted to shoulders still less deserving of it than her own. Whether this readiness to dispense at his own need, in thought and motive, with that benevolence which he so constantly inculcated, tended to raise him further in her estimation, may perhaps be left to conjecture without any great doubt as to the reply.

CHAPTER VI.

NED BARBER'S REVELATION.

IT was on a soft, purple afternoon of June that Miss King strayed down to the little river to see if there were yet any signs or promise of the white or golden pond lilies that later on would star its waters. Enjoying the soft stillness, she had seated herself in the shade of a heavy clump of alder bushes that screened her from view, when she became aware of voices below her. Looking over the bank, which at this point was rather higher than elsewhere, and permitted a sort of little beach on the edge of the stream, she saw little Jack Barber and an ill-looking lad in whom, though she had never seen him, she had no difficulty in recognizing the bad brother she had heard described; they were bending over the water, and throwing in sand and pebbles to watch the ripples break on the somewhat stagnant surface, while they talked in tones by no means lowered. They were evidently unaware of her presence, but not supposing it in any way to concern

them she did not make it known; and having no idea that she could be interested in their conversation she was not even conscious that she listened, though her ears caught the apparently unimportant words they said.

'Tell y' I will!' said the elder lad. 'I tell y' I've sworn to do 't, an' I will. 'Tain't nothin' to do. He's easy scared, he's got a liver like a white hen. I'll feel better when I know I've gin him a good 'un.'

'But s'pose he don't come by himself, Ned?' suggested Jack, in a diffident tone.

'Well, s'pose he don't, what of it? All the better, for he'll be scared for two. If she was Clip's girl you might talk, but since she's gone back on Clip I don't care a —— about her; nor the rest don't, nuther.'

'Be you sure you can do it all right, Ned?'

'Course I kin; it's easy enough. And no one don't know I kin do it, so they'll never think it's me. Look here, you little fool, if you give me away I'll break every bone in your skin. I'd never let you in the fun at all if you hadn't had the luck to seen me gettin' ready.'

'Can I see it go off, Ned?'

'I reckon. Anyone'll see it that's there. Pick, says he! I'll pay him for that, you bet! He'd only a' had to speak up like he did afore, and they dars'n't. Yes, I'll pick when I want to, and when I don't want to I'll let it alone.'

They moved away, and Celestine was glad of their departure. The appearance of the boy fully bore out the character she had heard given him. Sullen, coarse-featured, and degraded, but yet with a look of keen cunning, he seemed one on whom clemency would be wasted, and

offered advantages thrown away. His shuffling gait and downcast eyes, combined with his scowl and savage gesture, appeared indicative of a double nature; one of brutal strength and passion, the other of a capacity for treacherous evil as yet undeveloped, and only waiting time and opportunity.

When Celestine went to ride the next morning with Mr. Beckett, the circumstance had escaped her memory; she had indeed had so little idea of the meaning of the words she had heard that they had passed from her mind as quickly as from her ears. Had she been offered her choice this morning she would have stayed at home. She dreaded to be alone with Mr. Beckett, fearing that declaration which no conscientious woman wishes to receive when she knows that her answer must be rejection, and whose rejection in this instance would be the signal for great annoyance, if not anger, from those she would willingly, if she could, have pleased; and though it is perhaps easier to escape the hearing of unwelcome words on horseback than elsewhere, she knew the time might come when no escape would be allowed her. She dared not, however, refuse the invitation; for besides that she did not wish to subject herself to Sylvia's questions and reproaches, she was aware that the supposed and intended pleasure was offered as atonement for the late unexpressed offence, and she knew that she must accept it if she desired peace,

The consequences which the ride was to entail were certainly among the last she would have supposed within the range of possibilities.

Whether Mr. Beckett, after his usual fashion, was in

no haste, or whether, under the same adroit management as once served the same purpose with Miss Fountain's pony, Miss King's faithful steed had broken the thread of the conversation whenever it threatened to become too tender, will never now be known. Mr. Beckett was destined to learn his fate in another way.

Outward circumstances were agreeable. The day was cool, the air was clover-scented, the sky was blue. The pleasure of the ride had been marred by no untoward accident, when Mr. Beckett proposed that instead of returning as they had come they should pass through the quarries on their way home.

Celestine demurred. 'How will the horses stand it? You know my sister never trusts herself there, and I do not ride near so well as she.'

'There can be no danger. They are used to the engines, and there is no blasting going on to-day. To make sure, I will ask; but I know the road is quiet, and you may, I think, trust me to take care of you.'

He called to a man not far off who told him that there would be no blast until the afternoon; and that moreover it being dinner time and most of the men either gone home or sitting down to eat, most of the trucks and engines were stationary on the tracks.

Thus assured they entered on the road, which was none of the best, being only a rough cart-track often crossed by the tram-rails and seldom used, as horses were of little service in the quarry. Their own animals behaved tolerably well, an occasional start or snort when some escape of steam or sudden whistle occurred in too close proximity being their only sign of disapprobation, until they were

far on their way through, when Mr. Beckett all at once called a halt and beckoned to Mr. Crevolin who at some distance off was speaking to some of the men.

He came, not very quickly, approaching from Celestine's side of the road. Mr. Beckett gave him a cool morning greeting; Celestine, with whom he had never yet shaken hands, bowed and smiled, and he gravely lifted his hat to her in reply.

What was said among them she never remembered—how it happened she never knew. But suddenly a puff of smoke rose in the air close to them; on the silence broke first a loud report and then a dull and muffled roar, a shower of dust and small stones fell upon and around them, and in the confusion the horses were plunging madly; she knew that the bridle of her own was caught by Mr. Crevolin, and that the next moment she was shaken from the saddle and in his arms.

It was all over in an instant; but that instant had done and revealed what all time hereafter could never conceal or undo. The unlooked-for shock had broken the bonds of self-repression, and opened the eyes which hitherto had had no opportunity to see.

Whether any man could under the circumstances have kept rigid self-command, may be open to question, but certainly Philip Crevolin could not. He had never yet even touched the hand of the woman he loved—now, in a moment of danger and of fierce alarm she lay against his heart. Her supple waist yielded to his clasp, he felt the throb and swell of her bosom against his own, as her head fell on his shoulder, her cheek touched his, and her breath warmed and fanned it, and her chestnut hair loosened by

the fall streamed over his arm. Is it any wonder that the ecstasy of the moment brought momentary forgetfulness of all save itself? That for one brief instant he strained her to him in an embrace that means but one thing and tells its own tale? That when she clung to him in her terror, and their eyes met, his blazed with the fire that one torch alone can kindle? That in the words 'Oh, my God! are you hurt?' he said, 'My love! I love you!' as plainly as if for that purpose only, the syllables had been framed? Had he been able to keep his love quite under lock and key, would his love have been quite worth the having?

Celestine at all events found no fault with what she saw, heard, and understood. Her heart gave one quick, answering bound; but, besides that a woman's instinctive power of concealment is greater, she had less to betray. Her self-knowledge was as yet but a flash, her dignity the habit of a lifetime; and before one could count thirty, she had released herself and stood alone and steady, composed if pale, and with a quiet face, if with a beating heart.

It had all happened far more quickly than it can be told, and Celestine trusted that one at least of the party had remained in ignorance of what the accident had revealed. She glanced at Mr. Beckett, but his face told her nothing, and she could only hope that he had really been as unobserved as he appeared.

To Mr. Crevolin had also returned the outward semblance of composure, and with it the full realization of the danger just past—and of some other things besides. He looked very stern and grave now; every drop of blood

had receded from his face, and on his pale cheek the cross stood out distinct and dark; his lips were compressed, and as he looked at Mr. Beckett's averted face and his efforts to control the spirited, and still excited young mare he rode, he frowned heavily. Quite as visibly as the love had burned there a few seconds before, there now gleamed in his eyes, contempt for the man, who in concern for his own safety had forgotten, even for an instant, the woman confided to his charge—the woman for whom he was believed to care. It may be, however, that Mr. Beckett had not been quite so forgetful as he had appeared; but, if he had planned to discover by his own observation, whether the suspicions that had lately for the first time crossed his mind were well founded, it is to be hoped that he was gratified by the results of his investigation.

The alarm over, it became needful to look for the cause. The excited workmen had gathered, and now made eager and vigilant search in the place where the explosion had occurred, but nothing was discovered, save the remains of a fuse and of an ill-laid train which had never been intended for a proper blast, and no one was to be seen far or near. Search and conjecture were alike at last exhausted; Mr. Beckett's anger, Mr. Crevolin's more quiet inquiries, and the authority of both were of no avail; of those by whom nothing was known, nothing could be learned, and the inquisition was for the time abandoned. Celestine refused to remount, and Mr. Beckett giving the horses in charge to one of the men, and coldly requesting Mr. Crevolin's attendance to his cousin's house, with reference to the past occurrence, the three set out to walk the not very lengthy distance home.

On the way, and before they had gone far, Mr. Beckett left them a moment to give some explanations and orders to those men who, alarmed by the unexpected explosion, were hurrying into the quarry from the town side. In his absence, and to break a *tête-à-tête* in which she at least felt very conscious, Celestine moved some few steps off the path to pull some sprays of a creeper that crawled over and draped a large overhanging piece of rock. As she shook the vines something concealed there stirred; and as she parted the leaves further little Jack Barber sprang out into the sunshine.

‘Hallo!’ exclaimed Mr. Crevolin.

The child turned on Celestine a look of wild affright, and uttered an oath terrible to hear from his young lips. ‘By ——,’ he cried out, ‘it’s Clip! Go back, missus, and don’t let him come here! Keep Clip back, I say!’ and as he spoke, and before she could address him, he ran off.

Mr. Crevolin came forward, but the boy was already out of reach. He pulled down some more of the vines and found that the child had not been alone. The elder brother lay on the ground, in the shadow of the rock, apparently fast asleep.

‘Get up,’ said Mr. Crevolin; but the boy did not stir. The command was repeated, emphasized by a push of the foot; still there was no movement, but the boy emitted a heavy, stertorous breath.

‘The lad’s drunk again,’ said Mr. Crevolin.

He looked at Celestine as he spoke, and was astonished to see that she was pale and trembling; her breath came quick, and she said in a hurried undertone, ‘Oh, heavens! it was done on purpose. I remember now!’

'What do you remember? What do you mean?' he asked, quickly.

But with the recollection of the words she had overheard on the preceding day came other recollections still. She remembered the remark Mr. Beckett had made on the animosity of the Barber family, animosity of which she had just seen and felt ample and terrible proof. She felt assured that the boy's drunken sleep was only a feint to cover his complicity in the explosion, and that whosoever discovered or chastised him would again be the object of his wrath and vengeance. She was really glad that Mr. Beckett had escaped harm, but if any evil should menace Philip Crevolin —. As she recognized the difference she knew her own heart at last, and resolved that by no sign or word of hers should he incur risk or danger.

'Are you "Clip?"' she inquired, looking at him steadily, regardless of his surprise.

'I believe I am known by that elegant name sometimes. Why?'

His answer dyed her cheek, but—— 'Nothing,' she replied.

'Tell me what you mean,' he said again.

'Nothing,' she reiterated; but her eyes fell.

His look searched her face. 'You know something and you are keeping it back,' he said, in a colder tone.

She lifted her head proudly. 'Nothing at any rate that you have any right to ask or know.'

He looked surprised and pained, but said no more, for Mr. Beckett rejoined them; and after some continued examination of the boy, which however failed to elicit any sign of consciousness, and many threats of future punish-

ment which Celestine sincerely wished had not been uttered in the hearing of ears that she fully believed understood every word spoken, they left him in his seemingly insensible slumber under the shadow of the rocks and vines and went home. The two men entered together by the side door into the office, and Celestine thankfully reached the seclusion of her own room. Never had she been so glad to be alone.

She had indeed sufficient matter to exercise her mind. With that fond pride and triumph which must always stir a woman's heart when she first knows herself the possessor of a love that does not displease her were mingled other sensations which she might have been less willing to acknowledge, or to allow their true name. But only one thing was quite clear. It was needless that the author of that wonderful book, the 'Golden Butterfly,' should have made his heroine unable to read, and have denied her oral teaching in the matter of love in order to prove her ignorance of it. No amount of outward instruction will avail to give the knowledge until the one preceptor comes, as then no efforts will suffice to withhold it. Phyllis, at nineteen, had never had, or heard of, a lover; she falls a natural captive to the first young man who finds her,—and whom of course she finds—charming. Celestine, at twenty-three, had known and heard as much as most pure women do, and had had her share of admiration and of proffered marriage; yet Phyllis, behind her guardian's walls, was not more ignorant of love than she. Words of wooing had fallen as warm as the alphabet or the multiplication table, tender glances might have been given with equal effect by her

grandmother, until that half minute when Philip Crevo-
lin's eyes met hers, and his passionate tones thrilled her
being as she lay upon his arm. The only difference was
this—that when the magic touch was given, and the new
emotion sprang to life in both, and both alike felt and
confessed its power, Phyllis could not, and Celestine
could, give it its true name.

But in spite of her knowledge of herself, she said to
herself, 'Why?' Involuntarily her hand went up to her
temple until she felt the hot blood rise to shame her, and
drew away her fingers with a gesture of anger. No—
that did not matter while he was—what she knew him
to be; what could matter while his eyes and voice spoke
as they had spoken an hour before; what could matter
while he loved her? The certainty that he loved her satis-
fied her for the present; and all other considerations,
social, prudential, and of probability, were lost sight of.

She had, in respect to other matters, grave reasons for
anxiety and wonder. Could it be possible, she thought,
that a plot like that which had nearly led to such serious
results had been but the outcome of a boy's vengeful
spite? Could he have devised and carried it out alone?
Might it not denote a further disaffection, a spirit of angry
resistance, which would lead possibly to graver conse-
quences still, not only in the case of Henry Beckett, but
might also extend to her brother-in-law, and through him
to those nearer yet to her affections? She had been told
not to interfere, and from motives very different from
those she would be supposed to hold she had resolved to
comply; but she felt that, knowing what she did, and
suspecting more, it might be very difficult—perhaps dan-

gerous—either to keep the resolution, or to obey the command.

There was, however, one comfortable reflection. She remembered, well enough to bring the flush again to her face, the words the young rascal had made use of the day before; she knew on the best authority that she had been talked of in the quarry as 'Clip's girl,' and that to have 'gone back on him' had been there deemed an offence. Well, that offence would exist no more. 'Clip,' at all events, was popular, and as far as depended upon her should not forfeit his popularity; and perhaps for his sake she might regain and retain her favour too.

What passed during the lengthened interview in the office Celestine never, even in the after days, fully learned. There was always one reservation between her and Mr. Crevolin—one trial he had borne for her sake, of which she never knew.

At luncheon, to which Mr. Henry Beckett remained, both gentlemen were reserved and grave. Sylvia was loquacious enough, but her speech was confined to lavish expressions of disgust and anger for the iniquity of boys who would play the fool in the quarry, and reprehension of the carelessness of those who permitted them the chance to do so. Celestine almost began to hope that of her own particular share in the adventure nothing was to be said; but she found afterwards she was not to escape so easily. Visitors occupied Mrs. Beckett's attention during the afternoon, and guests at dinner prevented the discussion of family affairs; but as they were parting for the night Sylvia followed her sister into her own room and closed the door.

'I don't want to say a word more than I can help to vex you, Celestine,' she began, rather nervously, and twisting in her fingers the tassel that depended from her fan; 'but I must ask you what you think of all your protégés now?'

'Ned Barber is no protégé of mine,' said Celestine.

'Never mind; you are mixed up with them all, and you might as well hold a rat in your hand and expect it not to bite, or lift hot coals and expect them not to burn, as look for anything but mischief from any one of them.'

'You are very unjust, Sylvia. Do you suppose I shall condemn twenty people for the fault of one bad boy?'

'Well, if I am unjust, you are very unkind,' said Sylvia, with a little choke. 'I did hope this would be a lesson to you to keep out of such company for the future. I should think to-day ought to have given you sufficient warning.'

'It certainly has,' replied Celestine; but she did not think it necessary to explain in what way.

Mrs. Beckett's face cleared a little.

'Then I hope you'll profit by it, my dear. And—I hope, dear, you won't think I am meddling, because I was asked to say it—but there is another thing that I want to speak about, Celestine—what have you done to annoy Henry so much?'

'I? nothing that I know of;' but she coloured all over neck and brow.

'You know you are not telling the truth,' said her sister, slowly, with her eyes fixed upon her. 'You know that when that accident happened to-day he had a very good right to be displeased.'

'Upon my word, I don't see it!' exclaimed Celestine, flushing this time with anger. 'I think, on the contrary, I am the one aggrieved. For all he did to help me I might have been killed.'

'It is you who are unjust now. You know you had no business to fall into Mr. Crevolin's arms.'

'Would you—and Mr. Beckett—have preferred that I should fall among the stones, and break my neck?'

'Don't talk nonsense. Henry could have caught you just as well.'

'I can't see how, Sylvia, in accordance with the laws of gravitation. He sat his horse and I fell off mine, Mah-ratta had her forefeet in the air, and when people fall they generally fall downwards.'

'You can be as flippant as you choose, but you know very well what I mean if you would confess it.' Celestine certainly did, but she had no intention of confession. 'Dear Celestine, do listen a moment, and be reasonable. You know—you must know—what we all—what—what we should all like. I don't know just what has been said—not exactly, that is—but the truth is I have been commissioned by Ralph—only by Ralph, mind—to ask if you will say *yes* to what Henry is prepared and longing to ask you.'

'Can't he ask for himself?' said Celestine, hotly. Then she added, more quietly, 'No, Sylvia—I should say *No*.'

'Oh, Celestine, you don't mean it!'

'I assure you I mean it as seriously as I ever meant anything in my life.'

'Do think again, Celestine. What can you want, either of means or position, more than he can give you?'

'My dear sister, if Mr. Beckett were President of the United States, or if he were sole owner of the quarries and a whole system of railroads besides, I would not marry him; and as he has made you his ambadress you can tell him so.'

'Celestine, I can only think you must be mad,' said Mrs. Beckett, very gravely. 'Of course there are things one cannot even speak of, but you know what I mean. Oh, do be careful, and be warned in time!'

'I don't think I need any warning,' said Celestine, laughing; 'and so far through my life I have been tolerably careful. Let us say good-night now, for I am tired. Don't be disappointed; you can give Mr. Beckett all the consolation he needs, it will not be much, believe me.'

'Oh, Celestine! I hoped it would be so different.'

'Oh, Sylvia! you married for your own pleasure—why can't you let me remain single for mine?'

'Will you?' asked her sister, eagerly, and brightening up. 'Will you promise me to think of no one else just yet? And I'll take you to Newport with me next month, and see what I can do for you there.'

Miss King smiled rather sadly. 'Dear Sylvia, is there nothing in all this wide world worth thinking of or looking for but a rich husband?'

'Will you come to Newport with me, Celestine? I'll give you all the necessary dress if you will.'

'That is a tempting bait,' said Celestine, thoughtfully 'one that I scarcely feel strength to resist. Well, my dear, I can't promise, just yet; but perhaps I will.'

Mrs. Beckett left the room with a satisfied smile on her pretty face. Her sister looked after her with a sigh.

'Dear little shallow thing!' she said to herself. 'I'm sorry to have to disappoint her, when she means it all for the best. It's dreadful to think they all know it; but perhaps that's all for the best, too.'

She went to the glass, and looked at herself; then while her face burned crimson, she lifted her hand and drew her fingers again and slowly over her cheek and temple, while two large tears gathered and fell. She dashed them away, and as if to counter-balance the recollection that had brought them, she watched the motion of her own lips, as she repeated, very low and softly, the words that had told her so much—'Oh, my God! are you hurt?'—strange words in which to convey a declaration of love!—and then, lower still, 'Philip! Philip! *my* Philip!' Then, suddenly dropping her head, she hid her face from herself in her hands. . . . But why betray any more of her tender foolishness? Sylvia had called her sister clever—she was but like other weak, loving women after all.

'How much I owe Ned Barber!' was her last thought before she fell asleep. 'There's some good in every one, even in Ned Barber. He has delivered me from Mr. Beckett's suit, and he has shown me Philip's love.'

CHAPTER VII.

WILL AGAINST WILL.

SYLVIA was more than pleased by the success of her little scheme. Believing that Mr. Beckett's pretensions were finally disposed of, and thankful for, if contemptuous of, the judicious manner in which he had obtained assurance without any unpleasant questions or harsh replies, Celestine permitted her manner to soften and lose its constraint; and Mr. Beckett, drawing from this a good augury, and as little as Celestine herself imagining the real state of the case, allowed his partially aroused suspicions to be lulled to sleep, and his mind and face to lighten of that gloom which had threatened to settle so darkly down.

So Sylvia was more than pleased. Her woman's wit, or rather cunning, had struck very near the truth, and she had balanced probabilities and calculated chances in a way that did credit to the shrewdness of her little brain. She knew that as long as Mr. Beckett did not ask Celestine could not absolutely refuse; as long as Celestine did not absolutely refuse, Mr. Beckett would not withdraw his suit; as long as he was known to be a suitor, and apparently a favoured one, she believed that Mr. Crevolin, however audacious in thought and desire, would never dare word or sign. Mr. Beckett could follow them to Newport, though Philip Crevolin could not; and absence would, she hoped, soon cool Celestine's terrible infatuation. If Sylvia could only maintain them all in their present beliefs—if she could only keep things in abeyance until

she could get away (and she vowed to get away as soon as possible), all might yet end well.

But in all human calculations there must be an unknown quantity—in all human plans there may be a flaw; a few days after that adventure in the quarry whose dangerous tendencies Mrs. Beckett supposed she had so skilfully overcome, as she and Celestine were sitting together, a servant dropped these words like distilled poison into her ear. 'Mr. Crevolin is in the library, madam, to see Miss King.'

She turned so white that Celestine, whose own conscience told her what passed in her sister's mind, could not help laughing.

'Are you sure it was Miss King he asked for?' inquired Sylvia of the girl.

The servant, who happened to be that Jessie, the under-nurse who lay beneath the ban of Mrs. Beckett's suspicion, answered *yes*, with a very keen glance at Celestine as she did so.

Sylvia's face was the picture of despair; but Celestine, who had reflected, more quickly and reasonably than her sister had been able to do, that a man does not usually come of malice prepense at ten o'clock in the morning and ask deliberately and openly for the lady of his affections when he intends making a declaration of love, went down to the interview without any great perturbation, if in considerable perplexity as to what it might portend. She scarcely noticed, certainly took no heed, that as she crossed the hall Jessie, with some sewing in her hand, entered a small room behind the library which communicated with it by sliding doors.

Celestine had not thought the interview likely to be of importance, and was not prepared for the set stern look she met, nor for the extreme gravity of eyes and voice with which Mr. Crevolin addressed her. She was struck more forcibly than ever before by the sense of suppressed power in his face, and by the impression of self-control conveyed by his whole bearing and demeanour. 'Brave deeds in war,' Sylvia had once said. Celestine could now believe in any boldness, any endurance, which he had learned and shown in that furnace fire of trial, that crucible of soul, in which he had spent four years of early manhood. Where were the fire and the tenderness that she knew lay beneath that calm exterior as volcanic flames lie beneath the granite or the snow? Could it be possible that those steady eyes had so lately flashed love's lightning into her own? that those hands which now would not move to meet hers had held her a few hours before in an embrace strong as death? She had not expected any present evidence of remembrance, but she saw now that what could never be forgotten was to be, perhaps forever, as though it had never been. No, never forgotten. Truly enough had he once said it was 'impossible to undo.' For one moment he had been unable to conceal that he loved her; and though the mask might be resumed, though he was master of himself now, and passion felt the rein and curb, she could say in her heart, 'I know it. He can never take the knowledge from me now.'

His calmness steadied her, and she did not lose her self-possession; but she thought he turned, if that were possible, a shade paler when, in accordance with his evident intention, she gave him only a bow in return for

his own, and remained standing, waiting quietly for what he had to say.

'I am glad to see,' was what he did say, 'that you have suffered no lasting ill effects from the dangerous events of the other day.'

The words might possibly bear a second interpretation, and she answered, 'No, I received no harm in any way.'

He paused an instant, as if considering how best to frame his next words. 'It might have been far different. Have you any idea of the risk you ran? that if the explosion had been better planned, or, even as it was, if the horses had been in motion, you—and Mr. Beckett—might both have lost your lives?'

'I know it,' she replied, simply; 'I know you saved mine.'

'Nothing of the kind,' he said. 'As it happened, the danger was slight. The boy had done his work ill.'

'I do not like to hear you say, "I took no pains for those thanks."' She tried to speak lightly, to turn the current of his thought; but he was not to be led away.

'I will tell you why I have come,' he went on. 'I have reason—you have given me reason—to believe that you know something of this, and I have come to ask you what it is.'

Then she saw that he had a serious meaning, and her heart began to fail her.

'What do you know, or think that I know?'

'I think I know that the explosion was planned with the deliberate intention of injuring either Mr. Beckett or myself, in revenge for the loss of his place, by the boy

whom we found—drunk or not, as the case may be—hidden under the rock.'

'That is a horrible idea,' said Celestine.

'It is; but can you deny that you entertained it at the moment you saw the boy?'

No, she could not deny that the first suspicion had emanated from her.

'If it be so, should not so heinous an offence be tracked out, and punished to the fullest limit allowed?'

'Why do you suppose I know anything about it?'

'You have only to say that you do not, and I will not ask you another word,' he replied, his eyes fixed upon her.

He had so spoken as to force her admission, for again she was compelled to be silent.

'Why should you object to tell me what you know?'

'What does Mr. Beckett say about it?' was her counter-question.

'Mr. Beckett does not agree with me, and, I regret to say, will not move in the matter'—Celestine felt inclined to be grateful to Mr. Beckett for once,—'but he did not see or hear what I did, and I had no right to tell him that without your permission.'

'Then, if he is willing to let it pass, why not do so?'

'Because—I have, perhaps, no right to say it; but I believe Mr. Beckett's motive is less real clemency than expediency. At all events, he declines to interfere, and Mr. Ralph Beckett has left it to me. I believe there is a time when clemency should cease and justice begin, and that it has come with this boy. It must be known that conduct such as his meets its due.'

'The attack, if it were one, was not aimed at you,'

said Celestine, unguardedly. He drew the unavoidable inference from her words, but did not betray it.

'The more reason why I should sift it out and bring it to punishment. What I might be willing to forgive for myself I have no right to pass over when aimed at those to whom my duty is owed. I believe you can help me, and I entreat that you will.'

He looked steadily at her, and saw that at the word *entreat* her eyes fell and her mouth quivered; but she did not yield. While every word he spoke increased her belief in the justice of his motives and her desire to do as he would have her, it yet increased her determination that the dangerous course of action dictated by those motives should in no degree be attributable to her.

'Have you no grounds for suspicion of the boy but those few unfortunate words I made use of?'

'I do not say so. But if you refuse your evidence I shall make use of any other that I can obtain. Why should you desire to shield this boy?'

Of course she could not tell him. She could not say, as she refused the truth, that far from wishing to shield him she would have been glad to hear that he was locked up for life; she could not say aloud, as she said in her heart, 'I do not wish Ned Barber angered lest he may harm *you*.' So she said nothing.

'Can you not see it as I do?' asked Mr. Crevolin. 'Can you not see that for all reasons of law, justice and safety this sort of thing must be put down?'

She did—but she could not tell him that she did not want *him* to be the one to do it.

'If I tell you this,' she said with a sudden thought, 'will you promise me to do no more in the matter—this once.'

'No,' he replied, somewhat sternly. 'I cannot promise that; I have told you what I think right. I ask you that I may have the means of justice in my hands.'

Celestine tried to believe herself angry with him for his refusal of her request, and felt at the same time that she would have respected him less had he complied.

'Then I cannot tell you,' she said.

'Then permit me to say that I think your kindness outweighs your judgment, and that you fail in your duty.'

The words were hard to hear from him. Was this the man who loved her, and for whose sake she was pursuing a course of which she more than doubted the right if she did not yet doubt the wisdom? Involuntarily she stood more erect and lifted her head, though she submitted in silence.

Mr. Crevolin saw the gesture, and his own heart was wrung by the pain he had caused her. 'I cannot understand why you should hesitate,' he said, more gently. 'Your share in the matter will never be known.' As he spoke no warning voice whispered to him that Jessie Barber sat in the next room.

For a moment Celestine's eyes flashed superb scorn. 'Do you think *I* am afraid?' she asked. Perhaps he guessed at whom the emphasis on the word pointed, but he saw that whatever her motives, personal fear was not among them, and he felt a fresh throb of admiration added to the feelings he already found it so hard to keep down.

'I cannot tell you—I will not tell you!' she exclaimed, almost rudely in her distress. 'You have no right to question me so.' And, with a woman's inconsistency, the light in her eyes all at once went out in tears.

He softened instantly. 'Perhaps not—pardon me for having pressed you so far. I am bound to believe that you have good reason for what seems to me incomprehensible, and I will say no more. But remember I once told you that it is not always when we mean most good that we do least harm.'

'I wish to harm no one,' said Celestine with a little sob, her feelings torn between the desire for his safety and the wretchedness of doing what he did not approve.

'I know,' he said softly; 'and I hope you may not regret your kindness in shielding this boy, who if guilty surely deserves no shield. Nor must you expect me to spare him, even though you wish it, if I can bring his guilt home.'

'Remember, at all events, that I have not helped you to bring it home.'

'You certainly have not,' said Mr. Crevolin, smiling for the first time. 'For some unknown reason he has a friend in you, and for whatever justice overtakes him he will have me alone to thank.'

The words smote her, even at the time. Afterwards, when in bitter need she remembered them, she wondered could she have done better? Would anything she could then have said have changed the course of events, and spared her what was to come? But the question forever remained unanswered.

Mrs. Beckett's keen observation found no reason to sup-

pose that any—from her point of view—ill effects had resulted from the interview that had caused her so much alarm, though no hint was given her of what had passed. Indeed, she rather rejoiced over the unmistakable traces of tears which she detected afterwards on her sister's face, and the uneasiness of manner which was only the faint evidence of the terrible anxiety which Celestine endured for the next few days, and could not entirely conceal or control, gave her sincere pleasure.

Celestine's state of mind was certainly not at this time enviable. Though she tried to stifle them, she could not help feeling doubts as to whether she had acted wisely; as to whether she had done quite right she unfortunately had no doubt at all. She was in total ignorance as to what was going on, nor except by results when all was ended could she hope to learn; as to ask a question was impossible without raising those ideas, and exciting those remarks which she was most anxious to let sleep, no one else appeared to think about the matter; and as no one volunteered her any information, she was forced to bear the suspense as best she could, which, to say truth, was very ill indeed.

If she felt any disappointment at the sudden and swift dropping of so dense a veil over the bright revelation of a moment she did not yet admit it to herself. A woman's love, when she first knows herself beloved, is very often self-sufficing, and always patient; and Celestine, though herself unworldly, was yet quite aware that in the eyes of the world Mr. Crevolin's aspirations—if such he held with regard to her—would be so opposed to all its dearest doctrines as to require time for reconciliation with them,

and that the course of love might be none of the smoothest. To what he might himself feel in the matter she did not perhaps give sufficient consideration. She forgot that though she had learned to be unmindful of the outward stain, in admiration of the inward purity, he might not be equally oblivious : and though she believed herself to have measured his character, there were certain items contained in it, without which it would not have been what it was which she had not yet learned, and did not take into account—a true humility and a great pride.

CHAPTER VIII.

QUID FEMINA POSSIT.

THERE came a day when Celestine felt she could bear uncertainty and inaction no longer—when she decided that whatever were to be learned, it was better to learn it than to remain in the torments of ignorance and suspense. Fortune favoured her ; her brother-in-law was absent, not to return till the next day, and Mrs. Beckett had dined earlier than usual in order to drive out with the children when the heat had lessened. On this expedition she had requested her sister's company, but Celestine had declined, having plans of her own. In deference to Sylvia she had abstained, for more than a week, from visiting any of her objectionable acquaintances ; on this evening she had resolved to go and see Mrs. Holmes.

It was intensely hot ; and before setting out Celestine changed her dress for a white one ; as she laid it aside again that night she wondered by what accident of fate, or by what special direction of Providence, she had been led to put it on.

It was unendurably hot. Out of the shaded grounds of her sister's dwelling the sinking sun still shone fiercely, and the walks and walls were baking from the heat of the past day. The atmosphere of Bridge street was stifling, and Celestine was glad that her sister could not know how well-founded had been her accusation of Mrs. Holmes' domestic management. The wounded man, who was still unable to move, was restless and uncomfortable, his wife fretful and inclined to be discontented : on the shady side of the hot street, the children were gathered in listless groups, scarcely caring even to play, and not a man was to be seen.

'It's lonesome here to-night,' said Holmes, after Celestine had been welcomed, and the first and ordinary topics of conversation had been exhausted. 'The men all went over after work to see a clinch come off at Lockman's, 'tother side of the river. I'd 'a liked well enough ——' he broke off with a groan and moved uneasily.

'You will go there again some day,' said Celestine, knowing what he meant. 'It is hard for you now, but you must wait and hope.'

'It's easy to talk,' said the man ungraciously. 'Easy for them as don't feel.'

'So easy,' said Celestine very gently, 'and so hard to practice, that I almost feel ashamed of saying it, even though I know it to be true.'

The man softened, and looked at her with admiring eyes, as she smoothed the sheet about him and extended to him the glass that held some cooling drink. 'You've great patience with me, missus, and the sight o' you does me as much good as I can be done now. I know I'm ungrateful, but 'tis hard to be chained here. If 'twain't for you and Clip—Mr. Crevolin, I mean—you've heerd about Ned Barber, I s'pose, ma'am? None on us hardly thought Mr. Crevolin could ha' been so severe.'

'I have heard nothing; what do you mean?' asked Celestine, her cheeks blenching and her heart beginning to throb.

'Why, it seems Mr. Crevolin thought Ned was to blame for the blast that scared the horses 'tother day; more than that, he believes he did it a'purpose. I wouldn't put it past him; he defied Mr. Crevolin to prove it—but Clip—Mr. Crevolin I mean—says he shall have no more work and no more grace, and gave him three days to clear out, if he don't want to risk jail.'

'Is he gone?' asked Celestine, trembling for the answer.

'Going to-morrow. I don't know as he'll be much loss. There's folks as rough as him with good in 'em, but none on us ever see much in Ned Barber. His own father never could do nothing with him. I guess Clip—Mr. Crevolin, I mean—is about right to ship him; no one can ell what ugly mischief he mightn't do yet.'

Celestine listened with a sick feeling at her heart. Her feeble attempt to baulk a strong man's will had been fruitless, the severity had been shown, and the risk she had so dreaded was fully run. She cared for no more that

was said after that; she sat on unheeding, and answering almost at random, until she became conscious that the sun had set and the dusk was beginning to fall.

She was rising to go home when her first friend, little Jemmy, came in from the street. In her preoccupation she had forgotten the child, and with a feeling of self-reproach, she now called him over to her side and lifted him on her lap.

‘Why, this is my boy!’ she said with a smile she forced for the child’s benefit. ‘How have you been, dear, all this long time.’

‘He ain’t been very well this couple of days,’ said his mother. ‘He’s tired like, and droopy—I guess it’s the heat.’

The child leaned his head against Celestine’s bosom in a listless fashion, and she stooped and kissed the little face, though none of the cleanest. ‘What have you got in your hand, dear?’ she said, for the sake of saying something, as she touched his closed fingers.

The little fellow opened them and put into her white hand a piece of dirty crumpled paper. ‘I ’most fordot,’ he said slowly. ‘Dack Barber telled me dive you dis.’

But for the name Barber Celestine might have paid no attention to the blackened scrawl, but as it was she took the scrap of paper, and by the fading light spelled out the few words it contained, which almost illegible as they were, seemed as she read them to turn to letters of flame, ‘Ned’s goan to shoot Clip as he cums hum the quarie he give me my jack-knife an I hate to hav him killed, you better tell him.’

She dropped the paper with a wild scream, for once totally losing her self-command.

Mrs. Holmes snatched up the paper, and also read it. She also grasped the situation in a moment, but to a perception as quick as Celestine's she joined a far better appreciation of motives and circumstances; a far better acquaintance with lawless ways and manners, and the mode of dealing with them; and with a swift, mental survey, of which Celestine never would have been capable, she knew not only what to dread but what to do.

'I wonder if it's true?' she said, with what appeared to Celestine unnatural and horrible calmness. 'Jemmy, child, where's Jack Barber?'

'In the street out there,' replied the child; and in a few moments the woman had the boy in the room in her firm grasp.

'You young thief!' she said, shaking him. 'Did you write that, and do you mean it?'

'Yes,' returned the boy, sullenly; 'but I didn't send it to *you*. You got nothin' to do with me, as I know. Lemme go.'

'You won't go; and you'll see if I have anything to do with you or not. You'll tell me all about this, or I'll walk you right to the boss, and then if Ned hurts Mr. Crevolin you'll be hung as well as him. Now, speak up. Where's that brother o' yours, Ned Barber?'

'Hid in the quarry. He'll kill me if you let on I told. Jess said *she*'—indicating Celestine—'wouldn't give Ned away, and so I thought she'd keep dark on me. He thrashed me 'cause I seen him cleanin' the pistol, an' then he said he was goin' to shoot plover—there ain't no plover this time o' year. He got no call to kill Clip. I heard him and Jess talkin' last night; he didn't say

nothin' about shootin' to Jess, but he told her he'd thrash him like an ear o' corn. Jess said *she*—the finger again—'was a daisy not to split, and Ned had ought to be ashamed to hurt her beau; and he said *she* had gone back on Clip now, and so it was no odds.'

Celestine could scarcely trust her hearing as she listened to the child's grotesque and rambling, and yet ghastly, talk, and grasped its meaning. She stood white and shaking, only kept from fainting by the tension of suspense.

'Is it—can it be true?' she asked.

'It's all solid, I'm afraid,' said Holmes. 'Mr. Crevolin went over to the station after tea; and he's sure to come back through the quarry. He expected to be home about ten.'

Mrs. Holmes glanced at the clock. 'There's time,' she said. 'What does he mean, ma'am, about the girl?'

She noticed instantly the vivid blush that succeeded the paleness on Celestine's face, and drew her own conclusions. 'Never mind,' said Celestine, 'I know what he means, but it does not matter.'

'I'm not sure of that,' retorted Mrs. Holmes; 'let me think a minute what's best to do.'

'Do; what can we do?' asked her husband. 'Here I lie like a log, and not a man to send.'

'What 'ud be the use of a man?' demanded his wife, scornfully. 'To tell him his risk, and set him looking for the young villain when he's got a we'pon and 'tother none? S'pose *he'd* be scared, or take another road for his *own* safety? No, there's only one thing to be done, as I see. Miss King must go and meet him.'

Celestine looked at her, uncomprehending.

Mrs. Holmes pushed the boy into the inner room and closed the door. Then she looked at Celestine with a piercing gaze from her black eyes.

'You'll excuse me, ma'am, I know, at such a time—it's queer to ask, but—but are you going to—to marry Mr. Beckett?'

'Heavens, what a time for such questions! *Mr. Beckett?* No,' exclaimed Celestine, too much amazed for anger, and with another deep blush.

'No offence, ma'am; if you ain't, I guess it's all right. You see we think a sight here of you as well as him—Mr. Crevolin, I mean—and we had a notion—now, the quarry's a big place, and we'd never find the boy if we searched all night; but if *you* go, and walk through it with Mr. Crevolin—and keep close to him—I reckon he'll be safe.'

'Oh, Mrs. Holmes, how horrible! Won't you go?'

'I? What use would *I* be? It's this way; you go through the quarry, and if you don't meet him till the far side you can tell him all about it, and he'll take you home by another road. If you meet him in the quarry, you can turn and come back with him. Keep close to him; kinder lean on him, and look in his face, like—you heard what the boy said, I guess you know what I mean; talk and smile, and—and whisper. I warrant Ned'll not fire *then*. He'll not want to strike *you*. Understand?'

Celestine did understand. The significance of look and tone which pointed the woman's rapid words was not to be mistaken. She knew the part assigned her well enough—but how could she play it?

‘I can’t do it, Mrs. Holmes,’ she said, helplessly.

The woman mistook her meaning. ‘Well, I didn’t s’pose *you’d* be afraid. It’s not much risk for *you*, but it’s pretty sure for *him* if you ain’t there—if you b’lieve the child.’

Celestine never was conscious afterwards of what passed in her mind during those few horrible moments of indecision. Fear for herself she knew none; but the knowledge of the danger of another curdled her veins, and from what she must do to shield him every feeling of her woman’s nature recoiled.

Mrs. Holmes watched the struggle, without, however, any doubt as to how it would end. ‘There’s time enough, but there’s none to lose,’ she said, looking at the clock again.

Celestine shuddered. ‘Why, it is almost dark already.’ ‘It’ll be too light just now,’ said the man, gloomily. ‘The moon will be up directly. Are you sure you’ve grit to go? God! what it is to lie here and see a woman start for what many a man wouldn’t face!’

‘Let her alone; *she* can do it,’ said his wife, in a meaning voice. Then she turned to Celestine. ‘Don’t you be in a hurry,’ was her last advice. ‘Walk as fast as you like till you get to the quarry, and then saunter like—look around you and hum a tune—be careless like, as if you was out for a stroll—’

Celestine hardly heard or heeded the words until their sense came back to her afterwards. Though she did walk fast through the streets, where the few people she met were seeking coolness in the dusk and the fast freshening air, she had self-control enough already to avoid attract-

ing attention; and by the time she reached the quarry road she had recalled her mind, and realized what she had to do. Indeed, Mrs. Holmes had not failed to make it plain.

Her one hope of escape from the worst part of the ordeal lay in reaching the other side of the quarry before Mr. Crevolin entered it. To meet him there, though difficult and painful, seemed less impossible than the rest. Of her own will she would have flown at her utmost speed over the rough and rugged path; but remembering the warning to be 'careless,' she tried to restrain her desperate eagerness, and as she came among the rocks she subdued her pace to a somewhat loitering and uncertain step.

The place looked ghostly enough in the fallen twilight, and the level rays of the lately risen moon, and under the hazy blue vault where twinkled a few pale summer stars. The rocks rose gray in the dimness, the black trucks and waggons cast impenetrable shadows, the rails here and there caught a moonbeam and lay like a silver sword upon the ground.

Her thoughts were busy as she walked on. For what part of this, for how much of this, was she to blame? What could she have said, or left unsaid, to avert this that had come to pass? Had she told all to Mr. Crevolin would speedier measures on his part have forestalled the danger, or would greater severity have ensured a quicker vengeance still? She tormented herself with doubts as well as fears, and could come to no decision. If she had erred she expiated the error now.

She was conscious that, in her white dress, she was a most conspicuous object, and that she must be seen by the concealed and watchful eyes; and though she had no doubt of her own safety, it brought a strange sensation to think how fair a mark she offered, and meant to offer. Then all at once it occurred to her that perhaps her own passport was no longer available—that her immunity as ‘Clip’s girl’—how her throat contracted and her cheek burned!—was over, and that her own popularity might prove insufficient protection for him. But the child’s words came back to her memory; more had passed than she knew—the boy possessed more information than she could guess at; and something in the remembered significance of Mrs. Holmes’ tone banished the fear.

She went on. Behind which of those stones or loaded wains did the young dastard lie hidden? In which dark corner lurked the watchful eye and vengeful hand? From which mass of shadow might the flash come? How long would the pure white silence remain unbroken? How far would she be allowed to go?

She went on apparently careless, but with an eager, searching glance in front of her; there was no need to look aside for the danger yet—it did not menace her, and her only desire was *not* to see the figure she dreaded to discern approaching. Now and then she stooped for some fragment of rock and feigned to examine it—now and then she turned aside to look at some object that seemed to excite her attention—once she tried to obey Mrs. Holmes and ‘hum a tune.’ But in this she failed. The sound of her own voice broke so ghastly in her own ears upon the silence that she stopped in terror of having betrayed herself, and dared not repeat the attempt.

She passed the place where the overhanging rock stood gray and gaunt in the moonlight, draped still in the torn remnants of the creepers and the tangled vines; she passed the place where the explosion had happened and her plunging horse had thrown her—the remembrance quickened her pulse and her step. She walked a little faster now, beginning to hope that she should gain the farther side of the quarry in time when—a footstep struck her ear, and echoed in her heart. She stopped, and for an instant her breath stopped with her.

Then she set her teeth, clinched her hands till the nails entered the soft flesh, and moved forward. Mr. Crevolin was walking at a swinging pace, and in a minute more he stood before her. His look of utter astonishment was her first stab; but she had not come so far to draw back now. She gave him no time to speak even if surprise had not kept him silent; she glanced round fearfully, but she said, in a voice whose steadiness struck herself with wonder, 'I—I came to meet you,' and held out her hand.

Surprised past speech, he could only ejaculate, 'Miss King!' Then, as he looked at her, he saw that her face was set like marble, and that her very lips were white.

'Are you ill?' he asked, anxiously.

'No, not at all. Won't you take my hand?'

Doubtful of the evidence of his senses, he extended his hand, and for the first time her slender fingers—deadly cold now—lay in his own. The full and instantaneous sense of something he did not understand took from him all desire to press them, soft and passive as they were,

and he released her. He fancied—was it only fancy?—that she was loth to let his hand go.

‘I am glad to meet you,’ she said again, as he did not speak. ‘Let us walk back together. It has been so warm that it tempted me out, but it is lonely here, and I shall like an escort home.’

‘The pleasure is doubly mine,’ he said, stiffly. Recovered from his first shock of surprise at finding her alone in that unlikely place at that untimely hour, his quick ear detected the false cadence in her voice, and his heart told him there was something wrong. He chafed and writhed under the thought, and looked at her earnestly, to discover, if he could, why the strings were out of tune.

He could not tell. She spoke a few more ordinary words, that meant nothing, in the same strained voice, and they moved on together through the white silence. How could he know that under that apparent calm she waged a passionate struggle with herself? That all her nature rose up in rebellion at the part she seemed to play? That she said, in her heart, ‘I will tell him—I *must* tell him,’ and that a voice answered hers, ‘If you do, you court the danger; tell him what you fear, and he that moment, for your sake, leaves your side, and with your side his safety?’

They had gone some little distance now, and the road grew rougher. The moon had risen higher, and the shadows were deeper and had changed their places.

‘The path is difficult,’ said Celestine. ‘Please let me take your arm.’

He assented, more perplexed than ever; but, as she leaned upon him, and he felt her momentary start and the soft contact of her arm, he began to experience something else besides perplexity. He wondered, as her hand lay against him, whether she could not feel the rapid beating of his heart.

He need not have wondered; every pulse was answered by her own. But where his soul knew as much doubt as passion, hers was filled with the courage which dared the shame that, but for fear for him, would soon have quenched all effort. As he glanced at the pale face, made yet more pallid by the moonlight, how could he read the thoughts that throbbed and surged beneath the silent mask? How could he guess that she was saying to herself, 'The boy knows I did not betray him—he will not hurt *me*—and if I can make him believe—' When he marvelled at her restless change of place, he could not tell that her object was to interpose the whiteness of her dress between him and the deepest of the shadow; when she laughed, he could not know that the mirth was for other ears than his. He only heard that the laugh rang false, and watched her the more closely.

The walk, a short one in reality, appeared to her to last a lifetime. She obeyed all the commands she had received, as far as she could remember them; she leaned upon his arm, she lifted her head to look him in the face; at one moment she would laugh aloud, and the next she would murmur soft and low; uncertain at what instant or at what spot the dreaded eyes might be upon her, she dared relax at none; and while he became more and more lost in painful wonder, the strain upon her-

self grew so far beyond endurance that she feared the overtaxed nerves must fail before their work was done.

They reached a cross-track, where some collected trucks cast a deep shade, and made safe shelter for any who might choose to lurk there. As they neared it her strained sight told her falsely that the shadow moved. She instantly crossed to that side, and walked more slowly.

'Would you mind,' she said, speaking very low, as she looked at him, 'have you any—any objection to put your arm round me?'

The idea passed through his own mind that hers had lost its balance; but, as he glanced at her, almost in anguish, he met a steady look as cold as the moonlight—a look which held pain and beseeching, but no token of insanity. As impossible was it to attribute levity of speech to those pale lips—and yet the words had been spoken, too plainly for mistake.

'Did you not hear me? Do you mind it?'

Even yet no smallest suspicion of the truth crossed him, but he complied. He put his arm about her, and she laid her hand upon his breast, and dropped her face on it; then suddenly raising her head, and with her cheek touching his, she whispered something into his ear; but how she must then have looked she could never afterwards imagine; what she had then said she could never afterwards recall.

He had sometimes allowed himself to fancy what it would be to hold her in his arms, to have her all to himself, with her hands in his, and her eyes upon his own; to be free to give and receive caresses, to murmur soft words, and hear her low accents in reply. He had his wish—and

he realized to the full the flavour of the Dead Sea fruit it proved. The draught, in imagination so sweet and luscious, was now as the acrid water of the desert, the food which was to have been as the sustaining bread of life became as bitter ashes when once tasted.

Would the walk never end? They passed the last of the black trucks, they passed the place made memorable by the accident, they threaded their way among the loose stones where the workmen's picks lay scattered, they left the shining rails behind.

At last they came near the overhanging rock, the last real point of danger. The moon, still higher now, threw a shorter and a blacker shadow, and a faint breeze seemed to sway the ragged tendrils of the vines. Celestine glanced at her companion; he was turned from the rock, and looking not at it but at her. Then her eyes went to the shade, and grew there; it was no fancy this time. She saw the vines wave in the breathless air—she saw a shadow move across the gray face of the rock—she saw, distinct and bright in the moonbeams, a momentary and swiftly-hidden gleam of steel.

Something seemed to flash through all her veins and warm them, like wine or fire, and then the courage of mortal fear nerved her to desperation. Before he could draw a breath she had moved in front of him; and, shaking out her white drapery, as she stood fair between him and the rock, she laid her hand upon his arm.

'Would you like,' she whispered, bending towards him, with her hands lifted now, 'would—would you like to kiss me?' And she raised her face to his own.

Now, at last, he believed that his own senses were for-

saking him, but he was also at last shaken beyond control. Nothing could have served her purpose better. His blood took fire and his eyes flashed lightning, and it was with a moment's fierce reality that he caught her hands and said in a hoarse, deep voice :

'Take care—it is not safe to try me too far—do you mean it?—if you say so *I will*.'

But even as he looked into the white appealing face he was struck with shame, and dropped the cold hands that chilled his own. As soon could he disown his love for her as suspect the purity of her motive and thought—as easily as the living light of the diamond could lie, could those clear agonized eyes hold ought but honour. If she were not mad there must be some mystery for whose explanation he must be content to wait, and for the first time it struck him that she was afraid. That she could have cause for fear for him, however, never entered his mind; and attributing all her strange caprice to a past womanish nervous terror of which he had never before supposed her capable, he thought it only lay with him to soothe her to the best of his ability until he could confide her safely to other care.

'Do you *wish* me to kiss you?' he asked, gently, looking in the still beseeching face, the altered tone, the result of his flash of thought. She signed yes, and with a strong effort for self-control he put his arm around her and laid a calm and quiet kiss upon her cheek. For what that effort cost him there is no human measure, and he almost doubted, even in the after time, whether he was ever quite repaid for the renunciation.

Celestine looked to the rock; the shadow was gone,

the vines had ceased to move, and she knew that the danger was over and her part was done. That martyrs have often survived their torments is also true; but neither physical agony nor mental strain can be pushed too far without nature's interposition and remedy of insensibility, and Celestine could not have borne much more.

The short space between the rock and the limit of the quarry was soon passed, and the open ground lying from thence to the town was gained. Celestine quickened her pace, but in the ignorance of just what distance meant security, she hurried faster and farther than was needful, and her over-taxed powers gave way. She stopped suddenly, and as she put her hand to her head she said faintly:

'Wait a moment—I am giddy—and we are safe now.'

He knew then that she had some definite cause for terror, and said quietly:

'Yes, you are quite safe with me; but may I ask what you were afraid of?'

She was aware that he must sooner or later hear it all; perhaps best now, and better from herself than from another. She had time to answer before her reeling senses failed her. 'That boy—he was hidden in the quarry—in wait for you—I knew he would not hurt me, and I thought—' then she added 'I—I feel faint; let me sit down,' and she trembled; but his strength supplied the need of hers, and though she utterly lost consciousness she did not fall.

Then the light broke in on him, and he cursed himself for a fool that he had not seen it long before.

Perhaps it was not surprising that he had not done so. Naturally fearless, trained to fortitude, and long accustomed to a certain amount of lawlessness and to danger in really formidable shapes, it had never occurred to him to anticipate risk from the insignificant reptile he had thought it his duty to crush and throw from his path. Now that it was shown to him he saw his mistake clearly enough. He looked back where the shadows barred the white expanse of moonlight, and though no pulse quickened his face grew graver.

‘As near an escape as I ever had,’ he thought, ‘if she is right.’ Then his eyes came back and rested on the white dress and whiter face before him, and he realized all that she had meant and done.

He had laid her on the ground; he had no other choice in that wild spot. There was neither water nor assistance to be had, all he could do was to wait and watch till sense returned, using for her restoration such means as lay at his command.

It was no doubt a cowardly advantage that he took—it must be owned that he had no right to the indemnity he granted himself for past forbearance and future deprivation, but if his pressure of her lifeless hands were stronger than the occasion called for—if the kisses he pressed on her still temples were more fervent than was needful to restore their circulation, it is perhaps more a matter for reprehension than for wonder. And if he could derive gratification from pouring passionate words into deaf ears, and lavishing caresses on lips and eyes that were sealed and senseless, it would, perhaps, have been hard measure to deny him so poor a recompense for previous self denial.

What his thoughts were during those few silent minutes that he knelt beside her, as he never told them, perhaps we have no right to guess, but it is safe to say they never touched the truth.

He had been aware that she was not ignorant of his love for her, that in spite of his careful self-repression it had been revealed to her in that unguarded moment of her own peril—nor had he wished it otherwise. He had believed he knew her well enough to feel assured that she would not disdain so sincere a homage while no voluntary expression betrayed it or offended her, and his lips were not more firmly sealed by his belief that she was pledged to Mr. Beckett, than by his own estimation of the impassable bar that divided them, and by his own pride. That scorn which had been plainly visible on his face, as he listened to the only half ambiguous assurances of her engagement, and the only half veiled hints as to the impossibility of his own suspected pretensions of which he had lately been the recipient in furtherance of Sylvia's little scheme, had been but the reflex of that which he felt for those who could suppose the warning needed.

But it had never for a moment crossed his mind that she could care for him. He remembered but too keenly her moment of involuntary shrinking when her eyes had first fallen upon him; and he had too long believed himself to be stamped and set apart by fate and forbidden all such love as was blessed and vouchsafed other men, to be able to receive now the contradiction of his creed: and that what lay now within his reach was that for which life itself would have been in his eyes cheap purchase, made it only the more natural that, with common, wilful, human blindness, he should refuse to see it.

These two mistakes led to a third, greater and less excusable still. His experience of women was not wide; but even he should have known that nothing but love would have given Celestine power to do what she had done that night; this he did not guess, and judging her from his own stand-point, he attributed to her a strength and heroism for which she deserved but little credit, while it exalted her in his estimation almost as much as would the love of which her false courage had been the true sign.

How it had all come to pass was, of course, as yet dark to him, but for explanation he could be content to wait. What she had done he knew; the debt he owed her could never be cancelled, but the one return he could now make was to assure her against that misunderstanding she might naturally fear when returning life and recollection should bring back her woman's pride.

The struggle back from insensibility to consciousness, though often described as a romantic episode, involves sensations by no means pleasant; and Celestine, sick and bewildered, at first found in physical suffering some distraction from returning thought. Not for long, however; as she looked round her memory fully performed her office, and a strong shudder shook her from head to foot.

'You are quite safe,' said Mr. Crevolin, quietly. 'But are you sure your fear was well founded? Are you quite sure you might not be mistaken?'

'I saw him!' she answered, trembling still.

'Just now? when—' he stopped abruptly.

'Yes—behind the vines—under the rock.'

She felt the blood run back into her face at the recollection, and turned away her head.

Mr. Crevolin made one or two hasty steps, and returned as quickly. Even had it been possible for him to leave her a moment's thought told him that the culprit was probably by this time a mile away.

'How can I speak to you?' he said, in a voice that his utmost effort could not keep quite steady. 'I owe you my life; and for that supreme gift as for the slightest, *I thank you* is all that I can say.'

She made a movement of deprecation. Did she know that of his own will he would have fallen at her feet and kissed the hem of her garments? Most likely—and she most likely also knew that his abstaining at this moment from doing so was the truest evidence of homage that he could bestow.

'Shall I tell you?'—she began.

'Tell me nothing now,' Mr. Crevolin interrupted. 'I don't understand it, but I can wait to learn. You are not fit to talk of it just yet.'

'Do—do you think I should have made a good actress?' she asked, with an hysterical little laugh and sob together.

He saw that with the need for effort her self-control was gone, and his heart yearned over what he believed her pitiful little protest against the belief he might be supposed to entertain.

'I think you should have been a soldier. Nature made a grand mistake when she put your soul and spirit into a woman's tender frame.'

If it be true that 'greater is he that ruleth himself than

he that taketh a city,' Philip Crevolin had some claims to be considered a hero.

A remembrance suddenly occurred to Celestine ; ' which of your comparisons am I the most like now—the lace or the towel ? ' she asked, with another jarring little laugh.

' Neither ; I should say you were made of granite, with steel wire for nerves. Don't talk any more now, you are shivering. Let me take you home.'

She moved with rather uncertain steps, but he refrained from offering his arm ; during the walk, which was somewhat long, for he took a devious and little travelled way in order to shield her from observation, not a word was spoken. Then he stopped at a small gate leading into an unfrequented part of the grounds.

' I must ask you all about this hereafter,' he said, ' and *this* time you will not refuse me information. At present, until you are rested, and in order not to alarm Mrs. Beckett,' (Celestine guessed the meaning of the somewhat emphasized words), ' the less said the better, perhaps. And—and for myself—' his voice shook—' I have no words, but you will not think because I cannot find them—' he stopped ; even his will could not complete the utterance of the commonplace phrases that belied his heart.

' You are sure you understand—' began Celestine.

' Be assured I shall not misunderstand you,' he answered purposely altering the form of her question in his reply. ' Go in now, and rest.' He was turning away when she suddenly looked up, and for the first time since she had left the rock her eyes met his. He came back at once, and held out his hand with a frank, free gesture.

'Years ago,' he said, 'if one of my comrades had done me such service as you have done to-night, a grasp of the hand and a promise to be quits, if time and fortune ever gave the opportunity, would have been all the guerdon I had to bestow. I can give you now no less—and no more; will you take it—as he would have done then?'

Her quick sympathy with him told her instantly what he meant to imply. Imputing her conduct to courage alone he lost sight of any motive which lessened the claim of that courage to his gratitude; but she also recognized that in that unembarrassed 'comrade grasp' in which he pressed the hand that was now again warm and steady, he intended to sign the death-warrant of his love.

Mrs. Beckett was on the verandah when a few minutes later Celestine emerged from the shadow of the shrubbery. 'Good heaven, Celestine! I thought you were a ghost!' she exclaimed. 'Whatever are you out so late for? and in that thin dress without a shawl! And what have you been doing to yourself? You look as if you'd had a bad dream.'

'I believe I have,' said Celestine, passing her hand over her eyes.


'Well, go in and go to bed, and get a good sleep. You'll be surprised, I dare say, but I have made up my mind to leave here to-morrow, on account of the heat, and — and other things. I have told Elise to pack up—your things as well as mine. It's early for Newport, but we stay over in C——; I want a good many things, and you have absolutely nothing fit to wear. Ralph will be home in the morning, but if not, I know he will have no objection to our going a little sooner than we

proposed. The heat here is enough to kill one—it's telling on you already. For goodness sake don't get sick, and don't look as if you'd lost all your friends. This place does not agree with you, I'm sure; you need a change. Go to bed—and you need not get up early; we sha'n't start till the afternoon.'

Celestine obeyed in silence. She had had no inclination to interrupt her sister's monologue, which, but for her own preoccupation, she would have perceived to be rather excited and confused. In the lassitude consequent on the reaction from the supreme emotions of so short a time before, resistance seemed useless, and all minor matters of small account; and it never struck her to inquire the reason of Sylvia's very sudden and unexpected resolve.

CHAPTER IX.

HUMPTY DUMPTY HAD A GREAT FALL.

ELESTINE so far obeyed her sister's injunction not to get up early that she did not go to bed at all; past excitement and present reaction forbade all idea of sleep. She took off her dew-drenched dress, touching it tenderly, and kissing its soft folds as she laid it aside; then she wrapped herself in a warm shawl, and extinguishing the light sat down by the open window and looked out into the brightness and the silence.

The brightness was scarcely dimmed by shadow, for the moon was now riding high in the heavens; the silence

was unbroken save by the ceaseless hum of insects that made a part of it, and the occasional cry of a night-bird; and the effect of the pure solitude on Celestine's overwrought mind and frame was more soothing than would have been a restless attempt at rest. She sat far into the morning hours, in 'maiden meditation,' if no longer 'fancy free,' and whatever may have been her reflections it would seem that they were not all unhappy; for when she had watched the paling moon sink towards the western horizon, and seen the first flush of dawn given back in rose and pearl from the western sky, she threw herself on her pillow, and if her sleep were none of the soundest, she at least obtained sufficient oblivion to remove all trace of fatigue and agitation from her face, and to restore calmness to her thoughts. There were no signs of her long vigil when she rose, and before descending to their late breakfast looked from her window to see her sister who, early as was the hour for her to be abroad, was already in the garden.

Mrs. Beckett was in high spirits. She had played her cards to the best of her ability, and not unskilfully, and was perhaps not unjustified in the belief that she held the game in her own hands. The chances certainly were largely in her favour, when, partly on account of an unexpected stroke of ill fortune, partly because she lost her own coolness in consequence, she threw them all away.

Unconscious of the malicious trick that fate was about to play her—delighting in the prospect of a speedy departure from Fairport, and a prolonged sojourn among congenial scenes and people with plenty of new clothes—pleased with the anticipation of introducing a new

and attractive *débutante*—and, more than all, gratified at the near success of her own designs, she felt and looked as bright and happy as the summer morning that smiled around her, when her pleasant dreams and shadowings of the future were broken by the sight of her *bête noire*, as she had now come to consider Mr. Crevolin, approaching her on the garden path.

Celestine, from the shelter of her curtains, saw the meeting, and wondered what one so unexpected and so unusual should portend. Sylvia advanced with her accustomed airy grace, but Mr. Crevolin did not take her extended hand; he bowed low but remained at a little distance, indeed, rather retreated before her.

Then followed a short colloquy, apparently calm on his part, but on that of Mrs. Beckett broken by some excited gestures and half audible exclamations. Then came a farewell of smiling graciousness from Sylvia, and accompanied—Celestine was sure—by one anxious glance in the direction of her shaded window from Mr. Crevolin; and then Mrs. Beckett slowly retraced her steps, entered the house and ascended to Celestine's room.

'Isn't it fortunate we arranged to go to-day?' she exclaimed. 'What do you suppose Mr. Crevolin has just been here to tell me?'

Celestine signified her inability to guess.

'Wasn't it thoughtful of him? It seems one of those Holmes children is laid up with an attack of throat, and as there is little doubt it is diphtheria, he thought I ought to know it in order to cut off Jessie's communication with Bridge street in time.'

Celestine turned sick. Very easily she divined that Mr. Crevolin had had more motive for the visit than Sylvia could understand. He was anxious for *her*—it was *her* absence from Bridge street that he wished to ensure by the warning; and conscious both of the risk she had already run and that to which he would surely be exposed in his care of those who needed and would certainly have it, she felt her courage sink as it had never done in the definite danger of the past night.

'Is it my poor little Jemmy?' she said, so soon as she could speak calmly, remembering the drooping aspect of the child the previous evening.

'*Your* Jemmy!' repeated Mrs. Beckett. 'I do wish you would not use such expressions, Celestine. I didn't ask which it was, and it's no matter, for they'll all have it, of course,—this is what I have always been afraid of—that you would catch some horrible disease in those dirty places and bring it home. What a mercy you have not been there lately.'

'Is it a bad case?' asked Celestine, feeling very guilty. 'Will they have all the care they need?'

'Don't worry yourself about it; of course Dr. Bernard will attend to them. I am more than thankful to be going away; your philanthropy might lead you down to Bridge street to act nurse, for all I know. You'll be safer out of temptation.'

Celestine hesitated. She did not know how to make the terrible announcement that the mischief was done.

'I am extremely obliged to Philip, and so I told him,' continued Sylvia, complacently. 'I wish he'd keep out of danger himself, but I suppose there's no hope of his

being so sensible. Well, I shall go and hurry Elise; we shall start about two. Are you ready for breakfast?’

‘Wait a moment,’ in a low voice, as her sister turned away. ‘I am sorry, but I must tell you; I had better not go with you—I am very sorry, but I was at Holmes’ house last night.’

Mrs. Beckett recoiled with a scream. ‘Oh, Celestine, how perfectly dreadful of you! What shall I do? And I suppose you have been kissing my children since?’

‘I have not seen them this morning,’ said Celestine, quickly, and with a deep blush for which the denial scarcely seemed to account, ‘and I will not if you do not wish it.’

‘Wish it! I should think not! Of course, you can’t go with us—you may have caught the complaint. You must go home, and you can join me afterwards, as soon as we can be certain there is no contagion about you.’

‘And suppose there is?’ asked Celestine, quietly, though her voice was not very steady. ‘Would it be quite fair to take the danger you are so much afraid of to Mrs. King, and the children at home?’

‘I never thought of that,’ said Sylvia, *naively* and helplessly. ‘Oh, dear, why would you give all this trouble? What can we do?’

‘Would it be quite impossible,’ asked Celestine, with rather a peculiar smile, ‘for me to remain here until it is proved whether—if I—to perform quarantine in fact,—till it is safe for me to re-enter society?’

Mrs. Beckett reflected. ‘If Ralph does not mind it—I suppose you could,’ she said, doubtfully. ‘Yes, it must be that way; oh, I hope there is no danger—will you

promise me faithfully, Celestine, not to leave the house, and to run no further risks, if I let you stay ?'

'I shall make no promise, except to take the best care of myself that I can,' said Celestine, in a less submissive tone. 'And as for letting me stay, I do not see how you are to help yourself, if I will not go.' The quiver in her voice as she ended showed how much she felt the careless selfishness which had dictated all that Sylvia had said ; selfishness so ingenuous and natural that Sylvia had not even tried to mask it ; but the latter was alike insensible to either indignation or emotion.

'By-the-bye,' she said, carelessly, as she was about to leave the room, 'I almost forgot. I suppose it's not of much consequence, but Mr. Crevolin sent you a message.' It was strange that she did not remark the flash of eager expectation in Celestine's face,

'Did he ? Tell it to me exactly,' she exclaimed.

'It was merely this : "Will you tell Miss King she will be glad to know there is no further cause for anxiety about that boy—he is gone. And I have seen Mrs. Holmes, and there will never be anything said about the other matter." What did he mean ? What boy ?'

Celestine blushed so deeply that it was again a wonder that her sister did not remark it. She understood to the full the import of the message—how much those few words had been intended to convey to her. She would have given her right hand to know what Mrs. Holmes had said, or left unsaid ; her woman's instinct telling her that another woman would as far as possible have been loyal to her, but telling her at the same time that it might have been impossible, under a fire of questions, not to some extent to betray.

'Only something about the Barbers; it would not interest you,' she replied as quietly as she could.

'No, indeed! And I hope this will be the last lesson you will need not to interest *yourself* in such people again. Now I must go and see after Elise and the children. I do hope you'll be careful, and not see anyone—anyone, mind—from whom there will be any fear of infection; and that you will be able to come after me in a week or two.'

In this way Mrs. Beckett threw away her last trump; in this way the 'little speck within the fruit' blighted at last the harvest for which she had toiled with so much care. She wrote and left a letter for her husband—over which that gentleman smiled in considerable amusement when he read it—and with many injunctions to Celestine (delivered now at a safe distance) to be careful and obedient, she departed as soon as maids and children could be hurried into readiness for their sudden flitting.

Celestine, left alone, and having got over the first sense of desertion, felt rather relieved. True, the empty house was somewhat lonely, and it was an uncomfortable sensation to feel that she was to sit down and wait for the symptoms of a dangerous disease, while still worse was it to think of that danger to which he was exposed who had forbidden her to face more than she had already done, for so she had truly read his early visit and his warning; but, on the other hand, she was free to pursue her own thoughts, and released from observation, and, if sympathy had failed her in that quarter where she might have imagined she had a right to expect it, she thought she knew where to look for it without fear of being disappointed.

She appreciated to the full the sense of what she believed to be Mr. Crevolin's delicate feigning; but, at the same time, she was not simple enough not to know that she had the night before—if he so chose to take it—crossed the river and burnt her boats. That no choice had seemed to be left her as to what to do could not alter the significance of what she had done. That he would be less quick than herself to *perceive* was not to be supposed; that he would be less willing than herself to *accept* was not likely to enter her imagination.

Here, perhaps, some tender souls, more sensitive than sensible, may be inclined to cry shame on her for permitting such subjects to her meditations; but, truth to tell, it never occurred to her to be ashamed of herself. Indeed, it is not certain she did not feel some exultation that, once assured her love was not unsought, she could lavish it where no taint of worldly motive or of interest would be supposed to influence the gift, and some pride that she had been able to discern true worth and high deserving through that mist which interest or worldly motive might have raised to obscure them. It must be admitted that her ideas were very old-fashioned; if not exactly 'all for love and the world well lost,' she certainly thought that love came before the world. She did not expect, however, altogether to lose the world; and being in happy ignorance both of her lover's mistaken beliefs and her sister's diplomacy, she did not imagine that her waiting would involve any 'long, long anguish of patience.'

Patience endured for a week without being greatly overstrained. The weather continued warm and delightful, and she spent her time chiefly in the grounds and

garden ; and if she frequented those walks, and caused her hammock to be slung among those trees, which commanded a view of the road to the quarries, and whence she might expect to catch an occasional glimpse of a slender, active figure on the way thither, who shall blame her? A nearer view she did not hope for ; she knew him too well to think he would intrude on her when she was, in a measure, unprotected and alone. Every morning and evening Dr. Bernard paid a visit of inquiry—she thought she could guess at whose instance—for those signs of the malady that never appeared ; she could thus ask her own questions as to the welfare of the invalids, and her solitude was lightened by the good-natured sympathy of her brother-in-law, who scoffed encouragingly at the idea of danger, and ridiculed as much as he dared his wife's fearful and hasty flight therefrom. Once or twice Celestine imagined that he hesitated whether or not to speak on some subject that perplexed him ; but, if so, the question was settled in the negative, for beyond the ordinary courtesies of the day no word was ever uttered ; and nothing broke the uneventful monotony of life until about a week after Sylvia's departure, when Mr. Henry Beckett came to dinner.

Celestine thought it bad taste in him to come ; otherwise she cared but little, and if he were rather more solemn than usual she did not even remark it. He conversed chiefly with his cousin ; and, secure in the remembrance of what she had said to her sister, Celestine was willing to attribute the visit to business, and to excuse it though she might have wished it unpaid.

Quite as unexpected, and far more surprising and embarrassing was another visit received this same evening. Before dinner was concluded Mr. Beckett was called away, only, however, to return in a few minutes with Mr. Crevolin,—the last person whom Celestine would have thought, or perhaps then desired to see.

'Here is an inquirer into the state of your health, Celestine,' said her brother-in-law good humouredly. 'He disclaimed any desire of a personal interview if I could give a good report, but I thought it as well you should answer for yourself at first hand.'

Celestine looked surprised, but no surprise could conceal her confusion; none the less so that as she glanced at Mr. Henry Beckett she saw on his face a dark and ominous frown. Mr. Crevolin appeared perfectly composed, but as the eyes of the two men met the expression of each was unmistakable. Suspicious inquiry looked out, and steady firmness refused to answer; and plainly legible was the fact that friendly relations between them had ceased to exist, and that a known—if unacknowledged—cause of distrust, if of no more, now reigned in their stead.

'I hope you will understand, Miss King,' said Mr. Crevolin very quietly and scarcely looking at her, 'that I had no intention of intruding on you. Dr. Bernard is unavoidably absent to-night, and as he sometimes does me the honour to make use of me, he begged me on this occasion to take his place. Without giving reasons into which I did not wish to enter, I could scarcely decline; but I purposely came at an hour when I knew Mr. Beckett would be at home and accessible, in order that without seeing you I might give Dr. Bernard the report on good authority.'

Celestine understood thoroughly; and her comprehension quickened the beating of her heart.

‘And suppose the report had not been good?’ she said, uttering in her embarrassment about the worst thing she could have said under the circumstances. ‘Suppose I had been less well than, I am very happy to say, I am?’

‘We need not speak of it, as fortunately the necessity does not exist.’

‘You may as well confess, however, as we can all surmise it,’ said Mr. Beckett, laughing. ‘Perhaps you were to act as substitute for Bernard as well as messenger, and have got the caustic in your pocket?’

‘I do not admit it,’ said Mr. Crevolin, more quietly than before, while Celestine felt her cheek blanch at the supposition.

‘But you don’t deny it? That’s much the same thing. How would you have liked a deputy then, Celestine?’

She would have given the world to escape reply. She glanced at Mr. Crevolin, but he seemed unmoved. ‘Perhaps’ she said, ‘as Mr. Crevolin remarked just now, as the case has not arisen, we need not discuss it.’

‘I should say,’ said Mr. Henry Beckett, with languid emphasis, ‘that in such a case such a deputy would have been altogether inadmissible.’

There was an instantaneous flash, like that of a sword in sunshine, from Mr. Crevolin’s blue eyes, then the heavy white lids dropped as suddenly, and he spoke no word. Celestine heard the only half-veiled insolence of the tone, she saw the recognition, and also the self-command which for her sake, she knew—forbade its expres-

sion, and while she strove to imitate the latter, her own spirit rose in arms.

'But for my own part I may say,' she added significantly, 'that *I* should certainly have permitted anything that Mr. Crevolin thought necessary, and that Dr. Bernard had deputed him to do.' She rose from the table as she spoke, rather frightened at her own temerity in uttering the words she could not keep back. 'I will have coffee in the drawing-room, Ralph. Perhaps Mr. Crevolin will join you when you come.' She gave the latter a clear, steady glance, and made him a deep inclination as he opened the door for her to leave the room.

She had made a declaration of war, and she knew it; but sympathy and indignation had been too strong for prudence. Her pride and her affection were both in revolt. She fully appreciated the anxiety for her which had led to Mr. Crevolin's compliance with a request she knew must have been exquisitely painful to him, and her spirit rebelled at the slight assumption of authority and interest conveyed—and she was aware meant to be conveyed—in Henry Beckett's words and tone, and she had been unable to deny herself the expression of both feelings, and the bestowal of such comfort and the infliction of such correction as each man might be inclined to draw. If any mischievous results ensued she might console herself with the assurance that she had after all only added slightly to what some former cause had already and evidently brought about.

She was soon informed that Mr. Crevolin had departed, from the voices of those who remained; she heard Henry Beckett's slow tones somewhat raised as if in expostula-

tion, then a hearty laugh from her brother-in-law, suddenly checked and succeeded by tones of inquiry, and then—ominous sound!—she heard the click of the lock as the door was swiftly and softly closed.

She waited till the coffee was cold, and till the last rays of the sunset had vanished and the shadows were deep in the room; then she gave up the idea of anything but a solitary evening, and lighting a shaded lamp on the mantel which diffused a soft light to fall on the piano, she sat down to play. She was no great musician; but her soul had a trick of finding its way through her fingers when she touched the keys. She had, however, been so soothingly occupied but a few minutes when she was conscious of some one behind her, and turning round in quick alarm found Henry Beckett at her shoulder. He had entered the room so silently as to leave her unaware of his approach.

Nothing could have been more unwelcome, or have irritated her more. Her nerves strung to their utmost tension by the agitation of the scene in the dining-room; her heart filled with indignant love and admiration, she was little fitted or inclined for the society of one at best less than indifferent to her, and at worst totally repugnant. She could scarcely refrain from springing to her feet in the effort to escape; and she could not and did not restrain an impatient movement which was at once misinterpreted.

‘Do not move,’ said Mr. Reckett. ‘I like to hear you. I have been listening some time. What were you playing when I disturbed you?’

‘The minuet in “Don Giovanni.” I thought every one knew that.’

'I could have said it was something of that kind. Your music is expressive, one can almost hear the rustle of the farthingales to the stately measure, and the tinkle of high-heeled feet on the polished floor.'

'I don't believe they wore either farthingales or high heels there,' said Celestine, who was in no mood for compliment and sentimental comparisons, as she half rose from her seat. 'Shall I give you some coffee? though I am afraid I cannot recommend it now—it is late.' She knew how rude the words were, but she sincerely hoped he would take offence, and the hint, and go.

'No, I want no coffee. I want you to listen to me for a moment. I came to say something to you.'

Celestine sank back with an impatient little sigh. She did not yet suspect what was coming, but she felt sure that anything he could have to say must be a nuisance.

'May I hope that you will listen favourably, Miss King?'

Then the inflection of his voice told her that he had not taken his refusal as final, and that the ordeal was to be gone through. In her nervous annoyance a sudden inclination seized her to laugh, and though she managed to suppress anything quite so unseemly, she gave way to a levity quite as foreign to her nature.

'That depends entirely on what you say, Mr. Beckett,' she replied, in a light tone.

'I have your brother-in-law's permission to speak to you, and I am confident that were your sister here she would not withhold hers.'

It suddenly crossed Celestine's mind to wonder whether if—no, *when*—Philip Crevolin told her he loved her he

would employ such a form of words, or whether he would ask any sanction but that of his own will.

‘I should not have supposed any consent to be necessary except my own,’ she said, aloud.

‘And I have that?’ asked Mr. Beckett, eagerly. ‘I have waited—I have given you time to think—you must know that I have no dearer desire in the world than to call you my wife.’

The words were out. She had known it, but she had wished, and hoped, never to hear him say so. However, an honest avowal, no matter how distasteful, always deserves consideration, and, doubtful how best to blend kindness with decision, Celestine for a moment did not speak.

‘You give me hope by your silence,’ said Mr. Beckett, in so soft a tone that it angered her and restored her courage. ‘May I believe that I am not indifferent to you?’

All at once there came to her the remembrance of Mr. Crevolin’s eyes and voice as he had grasped her hands in the quarry and said, ‘Take care!’ The recollection thrilled her like music, and made the present contrast almost ludicrous; and it was with scarcely sufficient thought that she uttered the first words that occurred to her, ‘I thought—I supposed that was all settled, Mr. Beckett.’

‘Settled!’ he repeated, and he looked surprised, as well he might.

‘Yes. After what my sister told you I hoped you would never recur to the subject again.’

‘Your sister told me nothing. I don’t understand.’

‘She never gave you my answer? That was very wrong.’

'Answer to what? I want your answer now.'

'Did you not authorize her ——?' began Celestine, and then stopped short.

'Authorize her? I never authorized any one ——' and he also came to an abrupt close.

Her words had in some degree let the light in on him, and his total unconsciousness told her part of the truth; but in the excessive awkwardness that ensued neither could finish what they had begun to say.

Celestine was the first to recover herself. She was somewhat shocked to find that she had been harder on Mr. Beckett than he had deserved; he, equally with herself, had been duped: but she could say nothing, as to betray Sylvia, more than she had already inadvertently done, was impossible.

'I am very sorry,' she at last said, gently. 'We have both been under a mistake. I am sure you will forgive me—but please never speak of this again.'

'Why forgive? and why not speak? I have spoken—it is for you to give the answer that I wait for.'

'You must forget it. I cannot answer as you wish.'

'Do not say so. I have been led to think——'

'Not by me. Mr. Beckett, if we have both been mistaken, let us be sure of the truth now. I hoped you would have spared me the pain of saying no.'

'And you do say so?' His tone had lost its softness, and his face wore almost a sullen look.

'I must. I can say no other.'

'Why?'

His persistence began to annoy her, and to abate her regret. 'I can only say—because I do not love you,—'

‘and because you do not love me,’ she might have added, had she spoken as she thought!

‘I will wait——’ he began.

‘If we waited till the day of judgment it would make no difference. Please say no more. I am sorry, but it cannot be.’

‘If you tell me there is no one else——’

‘You have no right to ask that,’ said Celestine proudly. ‘I shall not answer further.’

‘I mean that if your heart is free I will not yet abandon the hope of winning it.’ That heart gave a half guilty, half exultant throb, remembering how little its winner had waited and how surely it was won. ‘I have the consent and approbation of those near to you, and surely——surely no unworthy preference——’

It must in charity be supposed either that he had said more than he intended, or that Celestine misunderstood him; but there was, or she fancied it, though she could scarcely credit her hearing some emphasis on the last words. Sorrow took wing and anger filled its place; and rising to her feet, Celestine faced her admirer with flaming cheeks and flashing eyes.

‘Mr. Beckett,’ she said, ‘how can my *preference* possibly signify, provided it does not fall on *you*? There is enough said now, and if we are to continue friends let all this be forgotten before we meet again.’ Her voice and manner were not to be mistaken; they plainly enjoined the parting that must precede meeting, and the long absence that would ensure forgetfulness; and Mr. Beckett accepted his fate—with a very ill grace indeed.

That he had some ground for complaint was true; but

he himself was far from blameless. Of all the mistakes he had made, perhaps the last was the greatest and most fatal. It had always been his boast that he acted not from impulse but from judgment; if that had told him in the present instance to speak with any hope of success when he was actuated by jealous suspicion, and she whom he addressed excited by opposition, it goes to show that judgment is but an unsafe guide in matters of love. But perhaps judgment had less to answer for than a temper for once carried away by angry pique; cautious where it should have been courageous, and unable to perceive that in some contests no boldness will suffice to win the day.

Celestine made what excuse she could for him, but her charity was sorely taxed to discover what allowance to admit for the insult she was *almost* sure she had received; and besides the smart inflicted by this, she felt herself in other respects very badly used. If Sylvia had not scrupled to do so much, was it likely she would have hesitated to do more? and in what other direction the seeds of misconstruction might have been sown, though it was disagreeable to contemplate, it was not hard to guess.

Under the influence of these feelings she sat down at once, and indited the following short letter to her sister, by whom it was read with sensations, the reverse of victorious or satisfactory: 'Dear Sylvia,—I have had a little talk this evening with Mr. Beckett, which has taught us both a good deal that we were rather surprised to learn. Your delicate manœuvre was but egg-shell china and needed care. It has fallen off the shelf in your absence, and all the king's horses, and all the king's men can't set it up again. Poor Humpty Dumpty! I am afraid he feels

the fall more than he might have done, had you not so kindly tried to break it for him. I don't think you need wait for me, as it is no use to go to Newport now. It is a pity you did not take me with you, for I am as well as I ever was in my life. As soon as Dr. Bernard will give me a clean bill of health I shall go home.'

CHAPTER X.

AMOR VINCIT OMNIA.

IT was not conducive to Mr. Crevolin's peace of mind that one of the frequent errands of charity he allowed himself took him that same evening along the north road past Mr. Beckett's house, and brought him back at a moment when, from the darkness without the unclosed windows permitted him a view, through the lace draperies, of the little group and scene at the piano within. The involuntary glance he cast in that direction was sufficiently punished by what he saw. In Mr. Beckett's attitude and gesture, in Celestine's bent head and idle fingers lying listless on the keys, there were visible to him only the signs of reconciliation of what he believed the lovers' quarrel of which he had been unwilling witness a short time before; and the sight sent him to his night's rest with very little capacity or inclination either to obtain or enjoy it.

A wide latitude always has been, and must be, accorded to lovers in the matter of mental blindness; and that

Mr. Crevolin supposed Celestine incapable of seeing below the surface is not the best proof of his own ability in the same respect. That Mr. Beckett was, in all outward guise and circumstances, a more likely object than himself of the choice of nine women out of ten, his humility was ready to admit; of what he was conscious lay below, it needed another and a quickened vision to take cognizance, and why should he dare to hope, against all appearance, that he had found the tenth?

And if his mistaken trust in appearances militated against his happiness, his true appreciation of Celestine certainly gave him no more comfort. 'I will believe thyself against thyself,' he might have said; for having been given distinctly to understand that her hand was pledged to Mr. Beckett, how could he imagine her heart traitor to her faith?

That which a more shallow nature than his would have accepted as evidence, if not proof, of what his soul craved, reason, because he allowed reason to be heard, set aside. Feminine instinct on Mrs. Holmes' part had led to a reticence in her replies to his questions as to what had brought about the events of that ever-memorable night, which had left unshaken his conviction that Celestine's share in them had been indeed only that 'good acting' which she had affirmed it. To him belief in, or comprehension of, a brave deed presented no difficulty; he had not learned that that physical courage which is, or ought to be, so inherent a part of a man's being, that resolution in action is but its unconscious result, is in a woman of far different quality, being only a latent power, an element foreign to her nature, and requiring the pressure of a feeling stronger

than itself to call it into existence at all ; that what in the one sex inspires the deed must in the other be itself inspired by a passion. Therefore, though he could comprehend and admire to the utmost what he had supposed to be the heroism that had led Celestine to risk her life in defence of his, he was not able to understand that the spring of the courage must have been something deeper than itself—that he must look for it in one of the three levers that move humanity to supreme effort, a passionate love, a deadly hate, or a mortal fear.

He was not happy. Fortitude, if a good staff, is not warmth and raiment to the shivering and naked soul just awakened to its own needs ; pride is an excellent tonic, but like other tonics it may sometimes only provoke that hunger of the spirit which itself cannot satisfy ; and though since setting down to the new game of passion Philip Crevolin had found in its sweet excitement ample compensation for any number of candles, and would not for any computation of their cost have foregone his experience of gain and loss, yet there was no denying that the candles had been burned. He had proved to the full his capacity for suffering in the same kind and degree as the rest of humanity : and his life and aims, as far as his present occupation and residence in Fairport were concerned, had come to shipwreck.

For if he were blind with regard to the feelings of a woman's heart, there was no want of clearness in his perception of the workings of a man's mind ; and he knew that it would be no less impossible to himself to inhabit the same place with Celestine when she belonged to another, than to Mr. Beckett to tolerate the presence of ano-

ther man who loved her when she belonged to him. Consistently with Celestine's peace and his own dignity but one course lay before him; and he was not the man, having once so decided, to shrink from any resolution or any sacrifice that the decision might entail.

So that in all respects of the existing state of cross-purposes, Celestine had decidedly the best of it. She was troubled by no sense of responsibility, and with that fortunate faculty of looking to the end, regardless of the intermediate steps of doubt or difficulty sometimes possessed by her sex, she felt assured that if Philip Crevolin loved her he would tell her so at such time as seemed to him good. Nor perhaps was her faith misplaced; for when fate creates two souls for the purpose of uniting them she seldom deviates from her first intentions, though she often displays considerable malevolence in her method of carrying them out.

On the other hand, the means for the final accomplishment of her designs are often so simple as to be scarcely worth recording.

In Celestine's case the means were nothing more than the disobedience to orders of which she chose to be guilty the day before her intended departure from Fairport. Dr. Bernard did not prove inexorable to entreaty, and a few more days saw Miss King at liberty to go where and whensoever she pleased. Her pleasure did not lead her to join her sister, and she completed her arrangements for her return home; but as it was, or as she thought it was, impossible to leave without some personal farewell to those in whom she had professed so deep an interest, she ventured on a last walk, which was to include Bridge street, in the

hope of a chance encounter where she was forbidden a purposed interview. Whether she cherished a surmise—perhaps a hope—that she might thus gain opportunity for another good-bye, without which it would have been hard to go, we have no right to inquire.

The late June morning was warm and sultry, and it may have been only in consequence of this that Celestine attired herself in the white dress she had never looked at since she had kissed it as she laid it by. Also, it may have been solely from love of their own loveliness that she pulled a quantity of syringa flowers, and fastened them at her belt and throat, as she passed the white-starred branches where they hung.

In these early hours of the day Bridge street was as deserted as on that never-to-be-forgotten night when Celestine had last seen it. There were no outward signs of life about Holmes's house ; but through the open window, thrown wide to admit whatever air could be induced to enter, came the sound of voices, one of them that of Mr. Crevolin.

With that swift inclination to fly from the fruition of our own desires and endeavours, of which we have all at times been conscious, Celestine instantly quickened her steps to pass on. Then came the whisper of the silent monitor, always heard if not always regarded, that repentance would surely follow close upon the heels of haste, and Celestine listened to the voice of warning and turned back. She dared not, in defiance of Mr. Crevolin's express and expressed wishes, go in ; but between the door and the low paling that bounded the road was a plantation of sunflowers, beneath whose heavy drooping heads the children had im-

provided a rough bench of pieces of plank and fragments from the quarry, and in this romantic shadow Celestine seated herself to wait till Mr. Crevolin should leave the house, and either give her permission to enter, or become the bearer of her message of interest to those whom he forbade her to see.

She had not calculated on overhearing what passed within, and the first sounds that came to her ears made her regret her position. Holmes was speaking and the voice that answered him came from the open door, so near Celestine that it made her start.

'—French Joe says her name tells that she belongs to Heaven, sir,' said the man, evidently in continuance of some former talk. 'And I guess he's right.'

'You are not right, my friend, to talk about a lady's name with French Joe or any other person.'

'May be not, sir; but if you'll excuse it in a sick and cranky man to say so, 'tain't clear to me but you're of that way of thinking yourself—for I sometimes b'lieve you worship the very stones she sets her foot on.'

'Some people worship the sun, Holmes; but they don't for that reason want to drag it down from the sky, and make little of its greatness and beneficence.'

'No,' said the woman's voice; 'nor they don't for that reason pull down their blinds to keep the light out.' There was a significance in the tone that brought the colour to Celestine's cheek.

'And you're sure what you say has to be, sir?' said the man again. 'No hopes you'll change your mind?'

'You know I seldom change it, Holmes; but few know of my intention yet, so you need not talk about it out of doors.'

‘For that matter I don’t get out o’ doors to talk, sir. It’ll come hard on us to lose all our friends.’

‘You will have one left who can and will do far more and better than I have ever done, Holmes.’

‘Do you mean Miss King, sir?’

‘Yes,’ replied Mr. Crevolin; but the word was not uttered with just the decision that usually marked his speech.

‘Begging your pardon, sir,’ broke in the woman’s voice, ‘you mean nothing of the kind. I don’t want to say nothing to offend, but that’s a rotten reed for us to trust to. You mean Mrs. Henry Beckett, and the sooner you get the mistake out of your mind the better for us all. Miss King will never marry Mr. Beckett any more than I shall.’

There was a sound as of a closing door, as if the speaker had retreated from the consequences of her own impertinence; then a chair was pushed back, and feet moved on the wooden floor; a few half audible words of farewell were exchanged, and then Mr. Crevolin came from the house and confronted Celestine where she sat, or rather where she stood, as she rose to meet him.

I read not long since of a heroine whose face was, ‘incandescent whiteness pulsating like northern lights.’ I can claim no such supernal brilliance for Celestine, but wonder and indignation at her sudden discovery had driven the colour from her cheek, and it wore a paleness that was neither of fear nor of sorrow, while in her eyes, deep and clear as sea water, there shone a light that Mr. Crevolin had certainly never seen there. If the overwhelming revelation of what she must have heard, caused

him for the moment to take her expression for that of anger, it must be forgiven to him. The veil separating them had become thin indeed, but as impenetrable if as intangible as the one that divides death from life is that which hangs between lovers until love lifts it once for all.

One uncontrollable start he gave as he first saw the white figure under the shadow of the sun-flower leaves then, as ever, his agitation was instantly chained under, and only found expression in the anxiety of his tone as he addressed her.

'Why are you here? It is not safe for you. You should not have come.'

She felt no displeasure at the abruptness, whose source she well understood; and in obedience to his desire, expressed by look and gesture only, moved to the gate by his side.

'Do you not wish me to go in?' she asked.

'Certainly not.' His voice was very low and rather hoarse with his suppressed emotion, but its decision was undoubted, and she never thought of opposition. Indeed, she had enough to do to preserve her outward calmness under the rush and pressure of the new knowledge she now possessed. Easy to perceive now why Philip Crevolin had avoided her—easy to understand now why his care for her safety had been so exercised as to seem of no personal interest; and her admiration and esteem were only equalled by the indignation she felt that he had borne such needless pain. 'Brave, noble, loyal, self-denying soul,' she said to herself. But if self-denial were necessary because he believed her attached and pledged to another

man, how did he account to himself for what she had done for *him*? Could masculine miscomprehension go so far as to fail to grasp its real meaning? Of one thing only she felt sure; she would lie under no such imputation as that of having bestowed her heart and troth on Mr. Henry Beckett. To find words to convey the information might be difficult, but there should be no more mistakes.

As she waited for him to speak again, and as he paused a moment with his hand still upon the gate, she detected a rare irresolution in his manner.

'May I walk with you a little way?' he said, at last, 'You know the dying are often accorded privileges that would be denied to those who had before them the fuller enjoyment of life.'

The speech in its extravagance was so unlike him that Celestine looked at him in surprise.

'I was about to ask you to come with me,' she answered simply. 'I have something to say to you.'

They moved on together for a little distance, but Mr. Crevolin did not speak.

'I have a favour to ask of you,' continued Celestine. 'I am going home to-morrow, and I wish to leave those of my charges whom you forbid me to see to your especial care.'

He echoed her words, 'Going home! I thought you were going to join your sister and go to the sea?'

'No, I never meant it. Will you accept my little legacy?' She tried to speak lightly, but she felt her voice shake and fail.

He still walked by her side in silence, and glancing at him in some wonder, she saw that he was very pale, and that his face had a look as of physical pain kept under by a strong effort of will. They had reached a road that branched off from the street and led into that path which conducted to the wicket-entrance of the copse where they had parted with the 'comrade grasp;' into this path Mr. Crevolin struck, as if it were their direct road, and Celestine followed him without remark.

'I need not tell you,' he said, at last, and as if there had been no pause, 'I need not tell you that I would take any charge from you—that you should not even have to ask—' He stopped. The form of his words had already announced refusal, however, and Celestine coloured, abashed and confused.

'But,' he added, with effort, 'I shall not be here.'

'Are you going away, too? Not for long?'

'I—I wish to tell you myself—that—that *I* must leave my work to *you* to carry on in future. I have resigned my position here.'

She looked at him in utter incredulity.

'Resigned! you cannot mean it. To leave your life—your work here!'

'Why not? For those who, like me, are willing to do it, there is work everywhere in the world.'

'But the good you are doing here no one else can do,' she said earnestly.

'Ah!' he replied, with rather a sad smile, 'I have been given to understand—I mean I feel assured—that that can never again be either as useful or as acceptable as it has been in the past.'

Celestine saw it all. Not more certainly would she have discerned the truth, not more clearly would she have understood that the loss of Philip Crevolin's life work was to be the price of his love for her had it been spoken trumpet-tongued than it was revealed to her in those few hesitating words. How far open-insult had gone hand-in-hand with insinuation of course she could not know; but her heart swelled, part with indignation, part with a kind of triumph, to think how completely the petty malice had overreached itself.

But she had no words. Light as the veil might be, it was for his hand to lift it, and not hers.

They left the road, entered the shadow of the copse-wood, and stood under the tender flicker of the trembling lights and leaves before he spoke again.

'You see now,' he said, as he stopped, and she felt that here he meant to say farewell, 'why our positions are reversed, and what you asked of me I must instead petition at your hands.'

'You are in earnest? you are quite sure——'

'I do not wish to talk of it,' he interrupted, very gravely. 'There are some things better unsaid—which friends'—he dwelt on the word—'understand without saying.' He stooped and gathered some blades of grass, as if scarcely conscious of the action, in an embarrassment unusual indeed with him.

'Perhaps I had better not say this—and yet I cannot help it; I will plead my former excuse. It was only half-exaggeration when I spoke just now of the privileges granted to the dying—when people part forever it might as well be death.'

Another pause; she could not tell him how little he need fear the parting.

'For what you know,' he said slowly and softly, 'for what I have not been able to hide from you as I ought, I ask no pardon. We do not ask permission of the saints to pay our worship. But I do ask you to believe that I would have given my right hand rather than that you should have heard your name so profaned as you did just now.'

Celestine turned away her head that he might not see her smile. Profanation? when the woman's rough words had done her service that all soft and delicate speech would have failed to render! The veil was now so thin that it was a marvel the blindest vision did not pierce its folds.

'That is all,' he resumed. 'I could not say good-bye without asking so much, but I have no right to say more, except to wish you all good for all your life to come. I shall not be here when you return.' He spoke the words firmly; she dimly guessed what the firmness cost him, and at last found her own voice, and the courage to use it.

'There is the more chance that we shall meet elsewhere,' she said. 'It is not likely that I shall ever come back to Fairport again.'

What was it? Was it in the words, in the traitorous curve of the scarlet lip that belied their seeming insignificance, in the eyes that strove to lift themselves and failed, in the tell-tale flush and quiver of the half-averted cheek and the white throat, that the knowledge was conveyed to him at last that he had been blind to the light

that should have led him, deaf to the voice that should have spoken hope and courage? Who can tell? What matter which, or if it needed all?

‘ When all’s done, all tried, all counted here,
All great arts and all good philosophies,
This love just puts its hand out in a dream
And straight outstretches all things.’

For all reasons, or for none, for Philip Crevolin the dawn broke, the silver whisper sounded; and the veil dropped—at once and forever.

For one dizzy moment he hesitated; not now in irresolution—that was put away with childish things—but as one dazzled by sudden lightning may put his hand over his eyes to recover certainty of sight, then with one hasty movement forward, he had taken in his own both her unresisting hands.

‘ I said I had no right to ask you more—I was wrong—I did not know—I must know now—I believe I *have* the right to ask you if that woman’s words were true?’

The eager, breathless speech, hot with the haste of passion long checked and now given the rein, was answered but by one quick, sudden upward glance, veiled as quickly before the look that met it. Slight and swift reply, but sufficient. ‘ Could you believe—’ she murmured but she was allowed to say no more. He released her hands, but only to catch her to his heart with a low, rapturous cry, to clasp her in an embrace that crushed the perfume from the syringa flowers on her breast, and to stop her mouth with kisses; kisses none the less sweet that the lips were now warm and living on which he laid them.

If she had wished for a summary and unquestioning wooing she had her desire. She was certainly given as little opportunity as she had inclination for hesitation or denial; and during those first blessed moments when they clung together in that silence which is joy's 'perfectest herald' and in the full and confessed assurance that to each the other was all, she as well as he tasted that one earnest of Heaven that is permitted on earth.

'My queen, my goddess, my life's one idol!' he said when he could let her go enough to look into her face. 'Mine now, to have and to hold forever! Tell me, am I too daring in believing I have won you? Have I very deeply and presumptuously sinned? But not now, any more than in my humility do I beg forgiveness—for if you think I need it it would be no use to ask.'

She laughed, the low, happy ripple in which a woman's fulness of joy runs over. 'You are very masterful—"very vilely proud," I think; but I believe if you were more humble I could not care for you.'

'Ah, I know you care! I can see now, though I have been a blind fool; and you cannot close my eyes again. I know it—but tell me so once more.'

But, for all answer, she hid her face.

'Do you know what you are doing?' he asked presently. 'I can give you an unstained name,—' a sudden little catch in his breath showed that one word had come unawares, and she clung to him the closer—'but most of what once went with it was given freely and gladly in a lost cause, and the little that remains is devoted to those who need it more than I. Can you be content with what my hands and brains can do for you? Not that I mean

to let you go now in any case ; but if you will say "yes, for I love you, Philip," I shall have no excuse for unbelief.'

'I love you—Clip,' she whispered, 'with her face still hidden ; and at the last word, shyly uttered, he folded her in another passionate embrace.

'Won't you look at me ? Do you need moon-light and danger to inspire you ? Ah, beloved ! you were not so coy that night when to save my life you risked your own !'

She shivered a little at the recollection, even in the safe shelter of his arms.

'What did you think of me ? Oh, if you knew how I suffered in the idea of what you might believe ! But what else could I do ?'

'I thought everything but what I ought to have known. I thought you had a man's soul for difficulty and danger. I never dreamed that what few men would have dared came so easy to a woman's heart.'

'Ah, how little you know yet !' she said, softly, looking up with a heavenly smile. Then she added, in one of love's sweet paradoxes, 'Dear, if I had not loved you I could not have done it, but—if I had not loved you it would have been easier far to do.'

* * * * *

Mrs. Beckett has never been grieved by her sister's defective training of daughters. Celestine has 'brought forth men-children only ;' and as Sylvia looks at the three gallant nephews who occasionally pay her a visit from their southern home she feels quite contented that they are not 'Uncle Henry's' sons. The latter is still

unmarried, and likely to remain so ; and as Mrs. Beckett reflects how greatly his celibacy will hereafter benefit the inheritance of the fair fragile beauties, who are already fulfilling what their mother still considers a woman's only proper mission, she is completely reconciled to the frustration of those plans for whose success she once strove so assiduously and whose failure she at first sincerely and deeply deplored.

THE END.

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