



THE
BATTLE-FIELD
OF
LIFE



REALM of REDONDA



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"How strange to feel that upon my weak woman's hand rested the support of all who were dearest to me."—Page 191.

THE
BATTLE-FIELD OF LIFE.

BY
AGNES GIBERNE,

AUTHOR OF "THE CURATE'S HOME," "COULYNG CASTLE,"
"THE MISTS OF THE VALLEY," ETC.

"What is Life, father?"
 "A Battle, my child;
Where the strongest lance may fail,
Where the wariest eyes may be beguiled,
And the stoutest heart may quail."
"Let me die, father: I tremble, and fear
 To yield in that terrible strife."
"The crown must be won for heaven, dear,
 In the battle-field of life."
 A. A. PROCTER.

SEELEY, JACKSON, & HALLIDAY, FLEET STREET,
LONDON. MDCCCLXXVII.

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UNWIN BROTHERS, PRINTERS BY WATER POWER.

75
1712
E-28254

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THE BATTLE-FIELD OF LIFE.



CHAPTER I.

A FIRESIDE CONSULTATION.

WE were sitting round the fire, not talking much. At least, for half an hour past, there had been more of silence than of words. It was Ellie's sixteenth birthday, and we had had a little merry-making. Lennox had consented for once to lay aside his evening work and mother her mending. But the merry-making did not last long uninterrupted. The postman's rap came sounding along the street, and uncle Amory Pleydell's letter effectually banished cheerfulness.

We did not say much, until our two schoolboys, Gordon and Edwy, had betaken themselves off to bed. And I do not think we told them anything beyond the fact of uncle John Pleydell's death. The letter was quietly passed to and fro among us elder ones, but Esmeralda's name was hardly even mentioned. Mother shed a few tears, and

the boys lowered their voices in consideration for her feelings. Still it was twenty years since she and uncle John had met, and I do not believe he was ever a very kind or affectionate brother.

However, when Gordon and Edwy had vanished, we three girls and Mother and Lennox drew our chairs round the fire for a consultation. Somehow it was a consultation which soon fell into silence. The reason must have been because Lennox took no part in it.

What a damp dismal evening it was! Rain pattered incessantly against the window-panes, and the wind wailed past now and then in a dreary sort of way, as if it lacked energy to blow with heartiness. All this was in unison with my own feelings, despite our would-be fête; for it was only a month since our Maggie had gone to Africa, and the sorrow of her loss was still upon me.

If upon me, how much more upon Lennox! Only, one element of pain, present in my case, was absent in his. What a trouble and a cross I had often been to Maggie in the past, with my excitable temperament and "sensitive" temper and wilful ways. Looking back I knew it well, and knew it with keen heart-ache. But I did not realise in the least that such as I had been to Maggie so was I still to all the others.

We had been cheerful and merry that evening, notwithstanding our cares, until the postman came. And now here was a fresh burden. Not so much

in the death of uncle John, for he was an absolute stranger to us, but in that which his death might entail. I remember thinking bitterly to myself, Should we never have any peace? Was life to be nothing but one long succession of shadows, pressing thickly one upon another? We seemed to have had so many.

The room was all in confusion with the boys' romps. Poor little homely drawing-room,—how ill suited for our large party. And yet we loved it. But somehow things looked forlorn just then. Mother's work-box had been tilted over, and its contents lay about on the carpet; and the window-curtains were pulled awry; and the table-cloth hung too much on one side; and not a chair stood in its right place. I felt fretted and teased, and wished somebody would put them straight, though it did not occur to me to do so myself.

My own seat was opposite the fire, and on the left-hand side Francey and Ellie sat on the little ottoman, with their arms twined lovingly together after their usual fashion. Those two had been inseparable from babyhood. We looked upon them as children still; but though small and slight, and peculiarly simple-hearted and child-like, they were rapidly developing into womanhood. Already Ellie's fair rosebud beauty and sweet manners were threatening to win no small share of admiration, though Ellie herself seemed so prettily unconscious of her own attractions.

Francey was a little deformed, from an injury to her spine in early infancy; but there was something very interesting, to those who knew her well, in her delicate attenuated face, with its fine brow and great dark sensitive eyes.

Lennox was by Mother, on the old couch, just opposite the two girls. He had not uttered a word yet, but only kept the letter in his hand, and seemed to be studying it attentively. I can recall him distinctly, as he sat leaning forward in a thoughtful attitude, with the firelight setting out the clear firm outline of his face and its stedfast quietness of expression. There was a slightly sunken look below the cheek-bones and the temples. I don't suppose one among us realised a tithe of the wear and tear he underwent to keep us in anything like comfort. The weight rested upon us also in a measure; but he bore the brunt of it.

I was marvelling that he did not at once repudiate the possibility of this proposed additional burden; and when we girls had given our opinion pretty freely, and still he and Mother spoke not, I grew impatient.

"Lennox, why don't you say something? You know very well that it is absurd to think of our undertaking anything of the sort."

Lennox half-smiled.

"If you know my opinion so well, Jeannie, what need that I should tell it to you?"

"Because Mamma is worried, and so am I," was my answer. "I do think it is a shame of people to expect so much of others."

"My dear Jeannie, your uncle does not ask us to do anything," Mother said.

"No; I know he doesn't. It would be more honest if he did. Mamma, can't you *see*? It is as plain as daylight. He wants the proposal to come from us rather than from him; but he has set his heart on bringing it about somehow. That letter is just to pave the way."

Mother gave one of her appealing looks at Lennox. She had always leant upon him and Maggie with more implicit trust, in the matter of advice, than upon any of her own children.

"What do you think? Is Jeannie right?" she asked.

"I think she is," said Francey. "It would be just like uncle Amory."

"Mamma, we can't do it," I said decisively. "Uncle Amory must make some other arrangement for Esmeralda. Just see how hard we find it now to get along at all. And if we had another in the house——"

"It isn't as if we were rich, mamma, you see," put in Ellie.

"Not that uncle Amory will believe that we can't afford it," I said. "He has made up his mind beforehand, I suspect. And, oh Lennox, did you notice that expression of his about our

‘diminished circle.’ You see what he means. Our own Maggie!—as if any one ever could step into her place! Uncle Amory will say that if we could get along with her at home, we could just as well support Esmeralda now. I know exactly how he will put it all. And how I should hate to have Esmeralda come, with any such idea afloat. Mamma, would not you? Can’t you tell uncle that he must—positively must—provide for her himself?”

“My dear, I want to hear what Lennox thinks,” Mother answered, looking a little tired of the excited way in which I ran on.

“Lennox, do say something,” I urged. “Why don’t you?”

“You seem to know more about the matter than I do.”

“Nonsense! What do you mean?”

“My dear Jeannie, I could not have told you half so much of your uncle Amory’s intentions and motives as you have told me.”

“His motives are easy enough to read,” I said. “Anything to save his purse and put off an unwelcome burden on somebody else.”

“But now that I have so much information, on your authority, it may help me to a decision,” he went on gravely.

“I wish you would not be sarcastic,” was my hasty answer.

Lennox allowed the remonstrance to pass as if

unuttered. Down in my heart I knew full well that if he had given me the little rebuke otherwise than lightly I should have minded it yet more. But then I did not consider that a rebuke in any sort was needed.

“You don’t mean to say that we are never to believe anything of anybody except what we see plainly on the open surface?” I said warmly.

He moved his head negatively.

“Then what do you mean?”

“Only that I have found my own motives so often misjudged as to make me cautious about judging those of others. It may be as you think; but I would not be too sure beforehand.”

“I haven’t a grain of doubt. *You* don’t suppose that uncle Amory doesn’t want to thrust Esmeralda upon us?”

“I am afraid he may have some such thought.”

“And you know it can’t be.”

“That is the question.”

“It can’t be,” said I, with all a girl’s impetuous leaping at conclusions. “It can’t, and must not, and you know it can’t.”

“Jeannie, I want to know what Lennox really does think,” said Mother.

“There are two sides to the question,” observed Lennox deliberately, fitting the corners of the letter together with great care. “One is that Mr. Pleydell may give her a home. According to our view of the case he *ought* to do so. He

is in better circumstances for it than we are ourselves."

"Better! I should think so! If you knew what those girls spend upon their dresses!" I exclaimed.

"Which, no doubt, leaves less ready money in hand. Nevertheless he is certainly better able than we are. Granted that, if you like, also that the claims of relationship are the same in either case."

"No, Lennox," Mother interposed softly; "that is not fair. Amory and I are related to her alike; but the burden of her support would rest upon you, and you have no call whatever to undertake it."

"I think we may pass over that consideration," said Lennox in a matter-of-fact tone. "Your interests are and must be mine, and your duties are mine also. But now for the other side of the question."

"It has no other side," I said. "Uncle Amory, and he alone, ought to provide for her."

"Granted, if you will. There is yet another side. What if Mr. Pleydell absolutely refuses to provide for her?"

"He can't," I said. "It is incumbent on him."

"I am glad to hear it," said Lennox, with a suddenly relaxed gesture and amused look. "Then we may as well go to bed."

This brought me to my bearings.

“I don't mean that. He can't rightly; but I suppose he will. It is easy to see in his letter that he will not spend a penny on her more than he is absolutely obliged.”

“Rash assertions again, Jeannie. But, supposing you prove to be in the right——”

“We can't do it.”

“Then what becomes of your cousin?”

There was a pause.

“Just think of her condition, Jeannie. Only twenty-one years old; absent all her life from England; fatherless, motherless, friendless, penniless, half-educated! What is to become of her?”

“She must support herself as other girls do in her position,” I said, trying to steel myself against her.

“How? Mr. Pleydell describes her as utterly unfit for the life of a governess, or even of companion to a lady. She knows nothing of English ways. What can she do?”

“Suppose we had a dozen penniless cousins,” I said suddenly; “would your knight-errantry go so far as to make you take them all in?”

“Wait till the dozen make their appearance. Possibly some among them might have learnt to spell, which it seems Esmeralda has not done yet. Happily we have only one to deal with, and all I want is to be clear as to the ‘can’ and ‘ought’ of the whole affair.”

“That is very simple,” I said. “Uncle Amory can, and uncle Amory ought to, support her.”

“And if he will not, upon whom does the duty devolve?”

“I think we have enough to do to keep ourselves afloat,” I answered.

“And yet,” he said after a slight break, “if you were swimming with difficulty, and saw one sinking near you, would you refuse to stretch a helping hand, — ay, though it might be your death?”

A certain consciousness was in my mind that self-preservation might in such a case prove a stronger instinct than pity. But if so with me, it would not be so with Lennox, I knew right well. And I did not care to confess that unpleasant little glimpse into my real self.

“Mother, *you* don’t agree with Lennox?” I said abruptly.

Mother was generally a good deal troubled by indecision. It was one phase of her character to have great difficulty in making up her mind what course to pursue. But Lennox’s words seemed to have carried conviction with them, for she said,—

“Yes, I do, Jeannie.”

Francey sighed, and so did I. To think of having our dear little home broken in upon! That was the worst part of the whole concern, I do believe, in our opinion.

“However, we must still hope the best,” remarked Lennox, standing up. “After all, Mr.

Pleydell may be willing to take her in. If not, then we must make up our minds as to our own duty. I should be sorry to wrong any of you out of pity for her. Mother, we must pray for guidance in this."

The lowered deepened voice let me know that Lennox was a good deal more disturbed than appeared on the surface. It was no light question to decide.

"Yes, we must pray," Mother echoed.

They were speaking in softer tones together. Francey and Ellie made a move to go to bed, and when they had disappeared, I slipped away likewise. Somehow I did not feel inclined to stay. But a few words from Lennox reached me as I went through the door,—

"To know what HIS will in the matter is—"

That was what they wanted,—Mother in a gentle simple fashion, often distressed and uneasy, yet meekly yielding through all; Lennox, with the full strength of a manly determined nature, bending submissively before his God. They wanted to know what God willed, that they might do His will. And they were content to do it, whichever way it might point.

But I was not. I lit my candle and hurried upstairs into my little bedroom. Maggie had slept there with me, until the last month. Now it was mine alone. Should Esmeralda be my companion henceforward? My whole soul rose

in stormy opposition to the idea. I sat down moodily on the bed, and sighed.

No; I was not willing. I could not have joined in the prayer, which I felt quite sure was being prayed downstairs, to be shown the will of God in this matter. I wanted to have *my* will. I wanted Esmeralda not to live with us. I pitied her, of course, for her story was a sad one; but I did not want to have her in our home. It was uncle Amory's duty to see to her. If he did not——

Well; why must the duty devolve upon us? Why had not uncle John provided for his only child? Why had he so run into debt? Why had he not given her a better education?

Practical questions all of them. But the still more practical view of the whole matter was just this: Was it or was it not our duty to take this burden on ourselves? Had God called us to it, or had He not? And my heart answered that the affirmative seemed probable. And my will rose passionately up, and said,—It shall not be!

It was strange how little of opposition to my will I had yet known in life. Mother was always so ready to yield that I was quite unaware how much I really domineered over her. Maggie was one of those people who never came into collision with anybody, her whole life being devoted to making others happy. I had never dreamt of actually resisting any decision of Lennox's, but he did not often exert his authority over me;

while Francey and Ellie and the boys had long learnt the only peaceable plan of doing just what I told them.

So there had been nothing hitherto to try my temper or test my will, except in the matter of our losses, and sorrows, and cares. Three years before, the will of God had been to take our Liliias and Minna and dear Papa home. And I had murmured deeply in my heart, even while calling myself submissive.

I doubt if I had ever truly said under these trials, "Thy will be done." But the grief had been inevitable. I had been compelled to accept it, and to endure as best I might. It was not till, as in the present case, the question of submission or non-submission seemed in a measure to rest with ourselves, that I realised in some faint degree the flood-tide force of this unchecked earthly will of mine.

And yet even in those days I was not without the desire to follow after better things. Through other longings and other strivings, many and tumultuous, I never absolutely lost my hold upon the aim to live as a child of God. And I did seek to serve the Lord, but it was with no whole-hearted service. Not that I was new to these things. In the days of our sore troubles I had known repentance,—had known the sense of loving pardon,—had known, with somewhat of certainty, that Christ the Saviour of the world

was *my* Saviour, and that His blood was sufficient for the cleansing of my sins. But a thick growth of thorns had since sprung up, and the young plant of life had waxed feeble and sickly. I had become careless in seeking the daily supply of heavenly oil for my lamp, and its flame was flickering low and faint. I wanted to serve God, but I wanted to have my own way as well. My will was not in unison with His will, and as yet I scarcely cared to have it so. Rather did it rise up as a barrier and a hindrance, clogging my steps and keeping me back when I might have been pressing forward.

For a while I sat and thought, nursing and encouraging my intense dislike to the thought of Esmeralda Pleydell being an inmate of our home. Then I rose and went to a little side-table. It was my own especial province, where I was wont to sit for hours, and write or draw. Maggie had never used it. Her deft fingers and light feet had always been blithely busy about the house, helping Mother. How Mother must have missed her! It seemed so cruel of Digby Drummond to take her away,—and yet, no wonder he wanted her. When Maggie was leaving us she said tearfully, “My only comfort is that there will be one mouth less in the house to feed.” And I answered, “Oh, Maggie! how *can* you?” But neither of us dreamt how soon another mouth would be coming to supply her place.

There was a small block on the table, bearing a half-finished sketch of a little child in its mother's arms. A small oil painting was there too. Also part of a manuscript written in a clear large hand, and some proof sheets partly corrected, lying side by side.

One very simple little story for young children had been accepted by a publisher, and was just coming out. It was my first gleam of success in that quarter. My drawings had been spoken about very encouragingly by more than one whose opinion was worth having, but as yet they had brought me nothing beyond barren praise.

It was a doubtful point with me, in which line my talents lay most distinctly. But I believed I had talents, and I had long since made up my mind that success in one line or the other, if not in both, lay before me. My whole heart was set upon it. The name of Jane Phillimore was to be a known and honoured name.

If God willed, I used to say in my prayers. If He did not so will—then I could not answer, Thy will be done! I rather dared to pray, Give me my will at any cost, and *let* it, O God, be Thine.

Some such prayer I remember offering up that evening. And I know I asked very earnestly that Esmeralda might not live with us.

But there are petitions which in loving wisdom God wills to deny, even to His own children.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT TO DO WITH ESMERALDA.

UNCLE Amory Pleydell's house was at a considerable distance from ours—indeed, in quite another part of London. Sometimes when I could manage to spare the time, and felt inclined for a chat with my cousins, I walked there and back; but it was a long way, and we could not afford unnecessary omnibus fares, so they and we did not often meet. I do not think this troubled me much. There was very little congeniality between them and us. No doubt, if my heart had been in the matter, I should have managed to go oftener, as I did manage with Katherine de Salvernai, who lived quite as far in another direction. But then Katherine, though only Lennox and Maggie's cousin, and not mine, was my dearest friend, whereas I cared very little for the five Pleydell girls.

However, distance or no distance, uncle Amory found his way to us on the following day. It was a dismally wet afternoon again, and sounds of hammering came up from the unused back-kitchen,

which the boys had transformed into their workshop. Francey fled, after her fashion, at the first sound of the front-door knocker, but Ellie was so busily engaged with Lennox, who had just returned from his office, that she did not even hear it.

“Mr. Pleydell, please, ma’am.”

And with the announcement he walked in, nodding familiarly to one and another, as he put his hat upon one chair, his gloves on another, and his stick on the table. He always had a sort of easy good-natured way of letting us know that he felt thoroughly at home in our house, and doubtless we should have appreciated the same, only somehow he never allowed us so to act or feel in his house. Without taking the trouble to shake hands with anybody except mother, though we had not seen him for at least a fortnight, he sat down opposite the fire, and heaved a sigh. Mother echoed it gently.

“All quite well, eh?” asked uncle Amory, glancing round again and spying each in turn. “Jeannie at her writing, as usual, I see. Ha! ha!—we shall have you quite an authoress some day—quite an authoress.”

“No, I was drawing,” I said shortly; and I rose and put my block into a drawer, lest he should ask to see it.

“An artist, then—ha! ha!” and uncle Amory seemed for a moment to enjoy the joke amazingly.

Of course certain reports as to my little attempts and aspirations had travelled to his ears, though never with my consent.

“You have had a wet walk,” interposed Lennox, with kind consideration for my ruffled feelings.

“Raining cats and dogs, but I took a ’bus to the corner; didn’t get more than a sprinkling. Well, Jane, sad news this about poor John, eh?”

He looked decorously sorrowful, blew his nose, gazed into the fire, and brought down one hand upon each knee with a sort of commiserating slap.

“Melancholy, dying out there all alone,—not a soul near him.”

“Except Esmeralda,” I suggested.

“Except Esmeralda. Just so. Poor girl! Dear me, it *is* sad.”

“Poor John,” said Mother, with tears gathering in her eyes.

“Poor John—yes,” repeated uncle Amory, abstractedly. I could see that he was considering how to bring about his wish respecting the daughter. “Poor fellow! who would have thought it twenty years ago?”

“It seems so long to have been separated,” sighed Mother.

“So long—yes. And you and I are the only ones left now, Jane, my dear,” said uncle Amory, quite affectionately.

Mother’s eyes overflowed. She had had so

little kindness in her lifetime from her two brothers, that any show of tenderness overcame her at once. I think she would have done anything for him at that moment.

Was it only a show—and a show with a purpose? I dare not judge now, but I did not doubt it then. And I saw a sudden slight contraction of Lennox' brow.

“How soon will Esmeralda arrive in England?” asked Mother.

“Early next week. She was to start by the first steamer after the funeral. Short notice—but she had nowhere else to go. Poor John! Well, it is what we must all come to, sooner or later. My wife and daughters will cost me a pretty penny with their mourning, I suspect. *Your* ladies are more economical—happily for you.”

“Of necessity they are,” answered Lennox, to whom this remark was addressed.

“It seems strange that Esmeralda's American friends should not offer to take her in for at least a few days,” I said.

“Canadian, not American,” corrected uncle Amory, who never allowed verbal errors to slip; “Canadian friends, my dear. But the truth is, poor John never *did* make friends. Otherwise it would be very inconsiderate of Esmeralda to come upon us so quickly.”

And this time it was Lennox who involuntarily breathed, “Poor girl!”

Uncle Amory caught at the words.

“Poor, yés. I felt sure you would feel for her. In fact, I said so only last night—talking with my wife, you know; Ellinor was remarking on her friendless condition. So unfortunate that my hands are not more free just now; in fact, I am burdened to that extent that it is simply an impossibility—that I—ahem—that we—you understand?”

“I beg your pardon,” said Lennox, with a very evident determination to spare uncle Amory no explanations.

“Impossibility—ahem—that we should receive Esmeralda into our circle. A business man—a—you see—has so many calls upon him. Five daughters, too. Really, it is a serious difficulty how to get on at all in these days. I could not feel myself warranted to undertake extra expenses—I couldn’t, really—in conscience. My duty to my wife and daughters——”

Uncle Amory paused. I wondered he could proceed at all under that steady half-satirical gaze.

“So you see—you understand—with the best will in the world, I—a—absolute impossibility.”

Lennox simply waited. Mother would have spoken, but I squeezed her hand, and she took the hint. Not a word was uttered.

“Fact—as I was saying last night—fact is—desolate condition of the poor girl,” went on uncle

Amory, stumbling about vaguely over his own words. "I couldn't in honour and conscience undertake to support a sixth daughter just at the present moment. So much depending on the next few months. Critical crisis just at hand. You are a happy man—regular income—don't know anything about this sort of thing. Why, I might be a bankrupt in a twelvemonth. Last straw breaks the camel's back, you know. Ellinor or I were remarking—I don't know which—really it seems as if your sister's marriage was quite a providential circumstance."

"May I ask what you understand by a providential circumstance, Mr. Pleydell?"

"I—really, you put very searching questions," said uncle Amory, trying to laugh, though I could see he felt too anxious to do so heartily. "Isn't there something, somewhere, about marriages made in heaven?"

"There are many foolish things said. This is no subject for a jest," returned Lennox coldly. "I trust God's blessing has truly been upon our Maggie's marriage. But will you kindly explain its connection with Esmeralda?"

Ellie rose and left the room. I think it was at a sign from Mother. Uncle Amory fidgeted.

"You keep one very closely to the point; capital head of a committee you would make. Well, really, it did occur to us that here was—ahem—a gap which might be filled up, with something of

advantage to all parties. By 'providential circumstance' I only meant—to one believing in an over-ruling Providence, you know—seems quite as if one young lady had been removed elsewhere, to make way for the arrival of a second!"

And, though he did not laugh, he did smile in a benignant self-satisfied way, perfectly unaware that he had said anything to wound us.

I don't know what Mother felt. It did not perhaps touch her quite so closely as it did me; for though her feelings were deep, they were not quick or passionate. I know what I felt. It was all I could do to keep my seat, and almost more than I could do to keep silence. Waves of angry indignation rose and swelled in my heart, and all but broke outwardly. I knew too something of what Lennox felt. There came a rush of burning crimson into my face, but I saw his turn pale as marble. Was it the white-heat of passion, exceeding mine?

The words carried a special sting. For beneath the man's careless ignorant utterances there lurked the possibility of a terrible truth. It struck coldly to my heart. Was Lennox thinking the same? God had taken from us our Maggie. *Was* it therefore His will that we should receive Esmeralda? If Maggie had been living still at home we could not have so done.

But if there were indeed aught of truth in this, what business had uncle Amory to lay his hard

hand upon our sorrow, and press it recklessly? He put us to such pain. I could hardly bear it, or Lennox either.

“Hey?” said uncle Amory, quite unconscious of the effect of his words.

There was a pause still, and then Lennox spoke in a low constrained voice,—

“You wish us to understand that you altogether wash your hands of your niece, and devolve your duty upon us?”

“I shall be most happy, I assure you, to do—to do all in my power. If a ten-pound note——”

He drew it out of his purse and laid it on the table with a magnanimous air.

“Am I to understand that you are willing to give Esmeralda a regular allowance?”

“Not *regular*,” said uncle Amory hastily and very decisively. “When I can—conveniently. In fact, we may look upon this as just a first instalment.”

The first and the last. Lennox knew that as well as I did. He took up an envelope.

“Will you kindly enclose it in this, and address to your niece? I have nothing to do with it myself.”

“I should have preferred leaving it in your charge—less ostentatious, you know,” said uncle Amory blandly.

A gesture answered him,—sufficiently expressive without words. He did as he was told, playing

with his pen by the way, and making flourishing tails to his capitals. Lennox did not once raise his eyes during this operation, and his bent brows never relaxed. He had the look of one carrying on a battle. There was no battle at all on my part, for my whole soul was surging with angry indignation, which I did not attempt to quell. I only kept silence because I trusted Lennox to manage better than I could do. That it would come to our taking charge of Esmeralda in the end I feared there was little doubt, but I wanted uncle Amory's suspense to be prolonged. Lennox would keep him for awhile on tenter-hooks—would refuse immediate decision. That was what I hoped.

“There!” said uncle Amory complacently, with the air of one who has done a generous action. “And now——”

He wanted Lennox to settle the matter there and then. And I was rejoicing in the thought that Lennox would not do so,—that, with the quiet satirical power which he possessed, he would keep the other at bay; put him off; play with his anxiety. He could do all this to perfection. He had not used the power of late, but I knew that it was his, and I felt sure he would not let slip this opportunity.

How the next words startled me!

“And now, Mr. Pleydell——”

“Yes,” said uncle Amory nervously.

“I accept the responsibility which you repudiate. For the present,—mark me, I do not say more,—for the present Esmeralda shall find a home with us.”

The thing was done. No drawing back was possible. Absolute astonishment kept me dumb, and strong annoyance with Lennox took its place beside my other sensations.

“Most generous—most kind—indeed, just what I had expected, knowing you so well,” murmured uncle Amory.

“But I leave it in your hands to meet her and bring her here.”

“I was hoping—my time so much occupied—if you could have managed——”

“No,” said Lennox decidedly; “I cannot spare a day. That I leave to you.”

Uncle Amory did not look particularly pleased.

“Well; I’m sure I don’t know—but I suppose it will have to be.”

And then we were silent.

“Will you stay to tea, Amory?” asked Mother.

“Dear me, I’m forgetting the time,” exclaimed uncle Amory, starting up, glad of an excuse to move. “Sorry I can’t stop—got an engagement to dine at the West End. Good-bye, all of you. Good-bye, Jeannie; don’t wear out your brains before their time. I’ll take care Esmeralda reaches you safely somehow. Very grateful to you for your obliging readiness in this matter, Lennox.

You see my difficulties, I know—should have been so glad to do more, could I have seen my way. Good-bye.”

Lennox accompanied him out to the front door, and was detained there for two or three minutes of confidential talk about nothing. Mother went away to make tea, and I had time to indulge in a little private stew of indignation which was anything but profitable. My dear little upstairs chamber,—that was what haunted me most,—Maggie’s and mine! To think of my having to share it with Esmeralda! What right had Lennox to saddle her upon me in that fashion, without giving me the power to say yea or nay? I don’t think I had ever so rebelled against a decision of his before. It was all very well, he and Mother being so generously ready to receive her. But neither of them seemed to remember that *I* should be the chief sufferer!

Oh, that empire of self over self! oh, that worship of self before self, in my being! Self reigned upon self’s throne. Self bowed down at self’s footstool.

Lennox came back again with a somewhat heavy step and burdened look. I fancy he thought the room empty, for I was back in the shade. He walked up to the fireplace, rested his arm on the mantelpiece, and gave one short deep sigh. There was more in it than mere weariness, though how much more I did not then care to fathom. I was thinking more about myself than about him.

“Lennox, how could you?” I asked abruptly; and he started a little to find that he was not alone.

“How could I what?”

“Let uncle Amory have his own way so easily. He will think he can do anything with you now.”

“He will find his mistake, then.”

“Why didn’t you at least keep him in suspense for a time?”

“Why should I?”

“He deserved it.”

“Possibly. I can’t judge what his deserts may be.”

“Didn’t you feel inclined?” I asked shortly.

“Too much. I found the temptation so strong, that it was impossible not to recognise it *as* temptation.”

Something of rebuke to me lay beneath the words, and I did not relish it. “Where do you mean Esmeralda to sleep?” I asked.

Man-like he had not thought of that. I could hardly see his face in the shadow of the mantel-piece, but perplexity was plainly written there. He could not make up his mind to answer, “Where Maggie slept.”

“You and Mother must settle that. Is there any difficulty?”

“If you mean her to step into Maggie’s place, and sleep with me, I think I might have been allowed a voice in the matter.”

I could hear my own watch ticking in the silence that followed.

“I am sorry if I have been too precipitate,” he said at length. “It seemed to me the right thing. After all, I don’t know——”

A sudden movement brought his face out of the shade, and I caught a glimpse of purple pain-shadows under his eyes. I relented a little, though too proud to show it.

“Has uncle Amory given you a headache, or have you had one all day?”

“No; only the last half-hour. What are we to do about this sleeping business?”

“I don’t know.” My tone was hard.

“Will you talk it over with Mother?”

“Really, Lennox, when you have settled the matter so far without reference to me, you may as well settle the rest.”

He looked excessively harassed, and rested his forehead on his hand. I hated myself for the temper I was showing, and yet it seemed as if I had no power of self-control.

“Of course, Jeannie, I cannot *force* Esmeralda upon you as a companion in your room, if you are resolved against it. We must think of another plan.”

“No other plan is possible. We haven’t a spare corner.”

“Then what is to be done? I cannot and will not draw back.”

“ I don't know. That is your business.”

There was a sound of longing for Maggie in his sigh. She would have put things straight immediately. It seems to me that the world is divided into two classes : those belonging to the one being always engaged in raking up difficulties, and those belonging to the other in smoothing them down. I belonged to the former class, and Maggie to the latter.

“ What makes you dislike Esmeralda's coming so much ?” asked Lennox.

“ Everything. I can't bear strangers. And I detest the whole concern, just because it is all uncle Amory's doing.”

“ I don't look upon it in that light.”

“ Don't you ? What do you mean ?”

And then it flashed across me what he did mean ; and I started up, saying, “ But it is tea-time.”

And I went to the door ; and then, under a sudden impulse, I turned back.

“ Lennox,——”

“ Yes.”

“ Do you think it is that ?”

“ What ? I don't understand.”

“ What uncle Amory said. That Maggie—that Esmeralda——”

Somehow I never could easily express myself in anything bearing upon religion. Lennox looked confused, as he was sometimes apt to do, when

those sudden and acute headaches came on. He had only been subject to them for about a year.

“That Maggie—our Maggie—was taken from us to make room for Esmeralda. If you want to make me hate her outright, you will say, Yes.”

“I can neither say ‘yes’ nor ‘no,’ ” was the serious answer. “It is enough for me to know that my Master has given Maggie a happy home, and that He *seems* to be calling us to this little piece of self-denial for Him. His purposes are beyond my grasp. It is enough for me to trust and to obey.”

“But you don’t mind—you are willing——”

“I *have* my own will in the matter; but I dare not ask or wish for it to be granted, if it is contrary to His will.”

And then he moved in his turn towards the door. I did not want them to know in the dining-room how I had worried him.

“Esmeralda will have to sleep with me, of course, if she comes at all,” I said ungraciously. “There is no other way.”

“Then I may consider it settled?” he asked, evidently thankful to avoid further discussion.

“If it must be, it must,” I answered.

But if I felt it to be inevitable, why could I not give way pleasantly, instead of bringing a cloud upon the household by my gloomy annoyance all that evening?

CHAPTER III.

OUR NEW INMATE.

EARLY next week Esmeralda Pleydell made her appearance.

Uncle Amory sent her on to us, in a fly, from his house, with her solitary huge box. He paid the fare generously, and doubtless considered thenceforward that he had done his duty by her. Mother and Ellie were out walking when she arrived, and Francey was lying down, so I had to welcome her alone. I knew I ought to be kind and cordial, but somehow I felt frigid as ice.

My first impression was of a slight-made girl, under medium height, with a great quantity of untidily-dressed and strongly-golden hair; a rough short jacket, and a black skirt hanging in awkward folds, which teased my rather artistic eyes. My cold manner acted upon her instantaneously. One glance ran me over from head to foot, and a limp hand-shake and chilly kiss passed between us. She just offered one cheek, and moved away almost before I could touch it.

There was some difficulty about the box. The

cabman grumbled at having to lift it, and utterly refused to carry it upstairs. Indeed, I did not know where it could be put, even had he been willing. So it stood against the wall in our narrow passage, barely allowing space for one person to squeeze by. Esmeralda took the matter very coolly. I suppose she was well used to such things in her rough Canadian life, but it vexed me to see how little she seemed to consider the inconvenience to which she was putting us.

“Would you like to come and warm yourself in the drawing-room?” I asked, when the cabman was gone.

“Thank you.” And we walked in together and sat down on the sofa. Esmeralda pulled off her gloves, and bent forward, holding her chilled blue fingers to the blaze. I examined her face furtively, while she was taking an open unabashed survey of our poor little homely room. “Plain and uninteresting,” was my silent verdict. “She has a pretty complexion, to be sure; but her features are quite irregular, and her eyes are too light a blue. They don’t seem to have any expression in them, except calm curiosity. Her eyelashes are very long and thick, and if they were dark instead of light I should admire them; but I never do admire light eyelashes and eyebrows. And her forehead is too low, or she makes it look so, by the way she brings her hair forward. Her mouth is really the best part of her face, but there is

something singular about it too. Obstinacy—I don't know whether it is that, or temper. I am sure there are possibilities of temper in those eyes. Her figure isn't bad, but——” and a softer voice, farther back in my mind, took up the sentence, and concluded in a whisper, “Not so good as *mine*.”

“Which of my cousins are you?” asked Esmeralda suddenly, having apparently satisfied her mind with respect to the room, and being free to bestow her attention upon myself.

“Jane,” I replied.

“The eldest?”

“Except two.”

“How many younger are there?”

“Four.”

“What are your ages?”

“I am twenty. Francey and Ellie are seventeen and sixteen, the boys fourteen and twelve.”

“Do you belong to the first family or the second?”

I felt as if I were being catechised, and particularly disliked it. “The second; but we don't count that it makes any difference. Lennox and Maggie are just the same to us that we are to one another.”

“They are only your half-brother and half-sister.”

“We don't count them so. We all love one another alike.”

Esmeralda's eyes looked amused, I thought, in a cool dry sort of a way—whether at me or my words I knew not.

“Isn't one married?”

“Yes; Maggie was married to Digby Drummond a few weeks ago, and went to Africa.”

“Are any of the others like you?”

The tone implied that she hoped not, or at least I fancied so. I brought her a photograph album from the table. “You can judge for yourself,” I said. “These were taken last year.”

“Is that aunt Jane? How sweet-looking! You have not told me anything yet about Lennox, or Mr. Phillimore, whichever I am to call him.”

“Lennox has an appointment as secretary.”

“To a nobleman?”

“O no,—a society.”

“Isn't he in any profession?”

“He went through college, and had been travelling for a year, and was just going to be ordained, when Papa died. That altered everything.” I knew Esmeralda must hear these things, and I was steeling myself to tell her as shortly and drily as I could.

“How?”

“There was nothing for us to live upon. Lennox could not have supported us on a curate's income. And this secretaryship offered itself.”

“Then did he give up the thoughts of being a clergyman? I don't like that.”

“It was not by choice. He had all of us depending on him. It was only said to be put off, but there does not seem any prospect of its becoming possible.”

“I don’t like him for doing it. He ought not to have turned aside.”

“I do not see that you have any right to condemn him,” I said, restraining stronger words which were fast rising to my lips. “For any lighter reason it would have been wrong. He could not leave us to starve. You know nothing of the particulars.”

“How long ago was this?”

“Over three years.”

“What did your father die of?”

“Scarlet fever.”

“Nobody else?”

“Yes, Lilius and Minna.”

“Where did they come in age?”

“After me.”

“Were they twins?”

“Yes. Esmeralda, I can’t talk about them to you yet,” I said, half choked.

“Don’t call me that. Esma is my name. What a lovely face! Whose is it?”

“Maggie’s.”

“Maggie Drummond? She *is* sweet.”

“Ellie is thought like her.”

“I am glad of that. I like a pretty face to look at. Who is this? Mr. Drummond, I suppose.

What a fine face he has,—quite noble, only there is something sad about the outline here. Look.”

“That is Lennox.”

“Mr. Phillimore?” She studied the carte attentively in different lights. “There is something quite unusual about the contour—I don’t know what it is precisely.”

“He is very like a picture of one of his ancestors,” I said. “His mother came from an old French family. There is a picture of a French Count de Salvernai, who was driven over to England by persecution in the reign of James the Second. The old family history and some portraits have been handed down.”

“Who has them?”

“Lennox’ uncle, Mr. Claire de Salvernai.”

“Where does he live?”

“In London. He is quite an invalid, and very poor; and he has one daughter, Katherine.”

“What is she like?”

“She is my greatest friend.”

“What makes Mr. Phillimore look so sad in his photo?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think he does. It isn’t his way.”

“Is he lively? Are you a lively family?”

“I am sure I don’t know. You had better wait and see for yourself,” I said, getting out of patience. “Would you like to come upstairs, and take off your hat?”

“If you wish. I can take it off here just as well.”

She pulled off the little round thing of black straw, and hung it on the back of her chair as she spoke.

“You had better come,” I said, getting perplexed what to do with her.

“Don’t you like telling me about yourselves? I shall have to know it all now, if I live with you. However, you have given me some general notions.”

“You can fill up the gaps from personal observation,” I said. “Would you like to come upstairs?”

Esmeralda laughed. “You seem determined on a move. One would think you had no end of family secrets to guard. Very well, I am ready.”

I wished then that I had not pressed it; but she rose and led the way herself into the passage, and just at that instant Mother entered the front door.

“You don’t say she has come! My dear child!”

Mother’s welcome was just all that it ought to have been. She received Esmeralda straight into her arms, and kissed her right lovingly. And then she took a good look at her,—only not such a look as mine had been, and not with the same result. Esmeralda’s delicate complexion, which had been pale hitherto, flushed up now with a

brilliant pink in the cheeks, making the white look whiter by contrast, and tears shone visibly on her long fair eyelashes, and her light-coloured eyes seemed suddenly to darken and deepen. I could not deny even to myself that she certainly did look "rather pretty."

"My dear child!" Mother repeated more than once. And she put up a hand, and smoothed back a wavy lock from the girl's forehead. "Dear child, I am so glad to have you. I wish I had been at home to give you the first welcome; but we did not know exactly when you would arrive. How like you are to your father when he was young—in features I mean, for you are not a Pleydell in colouring. You have made Jeannie's acquaintance, of course, and here is Ellie. I want you not to look upon any of us as strangers. Have you come straight from the ship? Did Uncle Amory give you lunch? No! What could he have been thinking about! Then Jeannie has seen to your wants?"

"I thought she had dined, of course," I said. "At least, I did not think about it."

"I am in no hurry. Don't disarrange anything," said Esmeralda. "Backwoodsmen are used to irregular meals," and she laughed.

"My dear, I could not think of letting you wait." And Mother hurried away, pursued by Ellie with offers of assistance. So I was left a second time with Esmeralda on my hands. She

turned to me again, cool and quiet as before, saying,—

“ Now I can go upstairs.”

I led the way without a word. It was a small slip of a room in which I slept, long and narrow, with a double bed at one end, and the door close beside it, and the fireplace at the other end. In the middle of one side stood my private writing-table, close under the window. The chest of drawers, cupboard, dressing-table, washhand-stand, and two chairs, fairly filled up all remaining space, except a little necessary room for moving about. Maggie and I had done very well there together. Esmeralda and I might not do quite so well. She looked round with one quick glance.

“ Am I to sleep with you ? ”

“ Yes. There isn't another spare corner in the house.”

She turned from me, and went to the window. I have often thought since that it might have been to hide something of distress. She had always been accustomed to a room alone, and doubtless her future companion appeared to her that day in anything but fascinating colours. I was thinking a great deal of the trial as it concerned myself, but perhaps it was greater to her than to me.

CHAPTER IV.

EARLY IMPRESSIONS.

“THERE will be hardly room for my box up here,” said Esmeralda, suddenly facing me again.

“No,” I said; “it must go down into the back kitchen. I have cleared out some of these drawers for you.” In fact, I had removed all my own things into the receptacles which had once appertained to Maggie, leaving my own free for Esmeralda. I could not bear her to step into Maggie’s place.

“Then my best plan will be to unpack the box in the hall, and carry the things up here. What a nice little side-table! Is this your drawing?”

My blood boiled to see her calmly fingering my possessions. Even Maggie had never meddled with that table. “Esmeralda! those things are all mine.”

“So I supposed. That is a pretty little sketch, only there is something rather odd about the perspective.”

I just walked up to her, took the picture out of

her hand, and laid it face downwards upon the table. If I had spoken at that moment I verily believe I should have flown into a passion. Esmeralda looked straight at me with genuine surprise.

“Can’t you stand criticism? That is a pity. I have always heard that real genius and great minds never shrink from it. Not that I know,” she added, with her composed little laugh. “I am not clever at all in any way.”

“I do not mind criticism from those who are competent to give it,” I said coolly.

“If I am *not* competent, then my remark matters so little that it is not worth your annoyance,” said Esmeralda, with quickness.

Clever or no, the girl had the upper hand of me. I wished I could have said, “I am not annoyed;” but it would have been untrue, so I remained silent.

“Do you write as well as draw?” asked Esmeralda, moving a small pile of papers. “That looks like manuscript.”

“Yes,” was my short answer.

“Have you printed anything yet?”

“One book is coming out this spring.”

“A novel?”

“No.”

Esmeralda caught sight of a proof sheet, and took a look at it, never seeming to doubt that she was at liberty to do so.

“Oh, I see: only a story for children.”

She put it down, and turned away, as if it were not worth her attention. I was just as much nettled by her indifference as I had been by her over-interest. What perverse creatures we are! What a specially perverse creature was Jane Phillimore! Self-worship was at the bottom of it all, however.

A nice little luncheon awaited Esmeralda in the dining-room. Mother was called away to a visitor; so she left Ellie and me in charge. The two boys just rushed in to shake hands and then rushed out again. They were deep in the delightful mystery of rigging out a dainty little three-decker, to be presented as a birthday gift to Katherine de Salvernai, and Esmeralda's very existence was a secondary matter with them. I sat grave and silent at the head of the table, seeing Esmeralda's wants attended to but making no effort to entertain her. Ellie was shy, but the continued silence distressed her notions of propriety, and she brought out an occasional remark with a pretty rose-colour mantling her cheek. Esmeralda seemed equally ready to converse or to abstain from conversation, and responded at once to Ellie's efforts. And then Francey appeared, and I saw Esmeralda's scrutinising glance run all over her from head to foot. Francey could not stand it, and beat a hasty retreat almost immediately.

“What an interesting-looking girl!” was Esmeralda’s comment. “Is that Frances? I thought she was a child, from the way uncle Amory spoke.”

“Francey and I are both children,—are we not?” said Ellie, with a glance at me. “We want to be children as long as we can.”

“Most people are in a hurry to grow old, till they are old enough to wish to be young again,” said Esmeralda.

“But not Francey and I,” said Ellie, in her soft way, with the dreamy look in her blue eyes which was almost habitual. “We’re mammy’s fledgelings still.”

“What is the matter with Frances?” asked Esmeralda, after an admiring but, as I considered, non-appreciative glance at Ellie.

“Hush! Oh, the door is open,” exclaimed Ellie, starting up in alarm, and she went to close it, while I remarked,—

“You must make no allusions in her hearing, Esmeralda. Frances is very sensitive.”

“But what is wrong?”

“She had an accident when she was a child, and the spine has never been right since.”

“What a pity. She would not have a bad figure if her shoulders were not so high; and she looks so clever; I am sure she must be the genius of the family.”

“Oh, no! Jeannie is our genius,” said Ellie

merrily. "She is going to do all sorts of wonderful things."

"Frances *looks* like the genius," persisted Esmeralda.

"Do you want any more?" I asked abruptly.

"No, thank you."

"Then I had better ring for the things to be cleared away."

"And I had better go and unpack my box. Somebody will be tumbling over it out in the passage."

Mother reappeared, and could not honestly deny that it would be a great comfort to have the huge thing put away. Ellie eagerly offered to be of use in the transport of the contents upstairs, and her services were accepted, with slight thanks, as a matter of course. I could not resolve to offer mine also. It did not seem to be my business to wait upon Esmeralda. At least, pride maintained that it was not.

The box was curiously packed, with heavy things at the top and light things at the bottom—delicate breakable articles flung carelessly in among piles of clothing, and some apparently valuable bracelets and brooches tossing loosely about in the mass of confusion. Yet somehow nothing seemed to be broken or lost, and not a dress looked tumbled. Esmeralda pulled out each in turn, gave it a slight shake, and laid it on the floor till Ellie could carry it away for her.

I thought this going rather far. "Ellie, you will be quite tired," I said. "Cannot Kitty help?"

"Oh, no; she is busy, and I love to be useful," said Ellie brightly.

"Oh, here is my diamond ring! I could not think where it was."

"How pretty," said Ellie. "But cousin Esmeralda, were you not afraid of losing it?"

"My things never get lost. I knew I had put it in, and it could not walk out by itself. I was sure I should come to it in time."

"Who gave it to you?" I asked.

Esmeralda was fitting the ring on her finger, and did not speak. I guessed the truth, that it had been her mother's, and I said no more.

By this time the hall was completely strewn with odds and ends, for the box was emptied much more quickly than its contents could be conveyed upstairs. And in the midst of this scene of confusion the front door opened, and Lennox walked in.

Mother had just vanished to hunt up the invisible Francey, and in her absence I ought no doubt to have performed some sort of introduction, seeing that I was Esmeralda's cousin and he was not. However, I forgot my duty, and they managed without. She rose from her cramped position, not in the least embarrassed, and gave him a quiet half-inquiring glance, as if doubtful how he would meet her. But his exceedingly

kind and courteous bow brought a sudden change into her manner. Her eyes fell, and a faint colour rose in her cheeks. And before either of them could speak, Ellie came running downstairs, and sprang past Esmeralda to his side.

“O, Lennox!” she exclaimed, with the little joyous note and eager kiss which she always accorded him on his return. “It doesn’t rain to-night; does it? Your coat feels dry. Lennox, Esmeralda has come! Cousin Esmeralda, this is our Lennox.”

She spoke the little word “our” so proudly, yet so simply, as she stood by his side, doing in her childish way the thing which I ought not to have forgotten. Ellie never seemed to think there was any one in the world like Lennox. Francey was her darling companion, but Lennox was almost her idol. And her love was returned in full measure. I saw his hand steal tenderly over the back of her glossy brown hair for a moment, before he stepped across a pile of clothing and held it out to Esmeralda.

“Am I to reckon you as my cousin, Mr. Phillimore?”

He bent his head again. I could not make out whether or no he liked her. There was nothing of particular admiration in his expression, but a great deal of cordial kindly welcome—the welcome of the master of the house. She evidently appreciated it.

"Certainly. As your cousin, Lennox Phillimore. There are no differences reckoned among us."

"Then I am Esma to you, as to the rest."

"Too soon for that," I thought; but Lennox simply answered, "If you wish."

"Has it been a very hard day's work?" asked Ellie, with her fingers on his arm.

"Pretty well."

"And you are tired?"

"Not too tired to act as additional carrier for some of these things."

"Oh, no, if you please; I could not think of it," said Esma, drawing back.

"No; it isn't gentleman's work," said Ellie. "Make haste and get ready, Lennox, and have a little rest before tea."

Esma stepped aside to let him pass through the narrow passage between the box and the wall. She stood thoughtfully for a minute after he was gone.

"Don't you mean to finish your unpacking?" I asked; and she lifted her eyes to mine.

"Yes; I was thinking. You are right. He has the look of *noblesse* about him,—blue blood, isn't it? such as we hear of, but don't see in America. He is a born count. But the sad look is there, and I like him the better for it."

She spoke with a sort of composed quiet interest, just as she would have done in criticising a portrait. But I did not like her the better for her words.

“Lennox is no count, even by descent,” I said. “The title in a French family does not go in the female line. Katherine de Salvernai is a countess, if you like—and we often call her so.”

“I don’t know anything about her. I have not seen her. *He* looks like it, whatever she does.”

And then Esma set to work expeditiously, and soon reached the bottom of the box. The two boys were called into requisition to remove the now useless piece of lumber down to the back kitchen, which task they accomplished with some difficulty and much merriment. Ellie carried upstairs the last pile of clothes from the hall floor; and I followed, to find my once peaceful domain looking as if a tornado had whirled through it, leaving everything upside down.

“Esmeralda, how will you ever get the room straight to-night?” I asked in despair.

“Nohow at all, I suspect,” responded Esmeralda, lifting her long eyelashes to look at me calmly.

“If you can sleep in this sort of confusion, I am sure I can’t.”

“I can sleep anywhere, happily; but I am sure I shall be very much obliged to you if you feel disposed to do away with the mess.”

She pulled out from the mass of confusion a black evening dress, thin in texture, and, though heavily trimmed with crape, hardly suitable I thought to be worn so soon after the loss of a father. However, she did not ask my opinion,

but quietly pinned fresh ruffles in the neck and sleeves; and then proceeded to let down before the looking-glass a magnificent profusion of hair. I really was startled at the length and thickness of those deep gold waves, and I saw her steal a glance at me as if for admiration; but I allowed none of my surprise to appear. So she began in a leisurely style to twist it up again; while I sat upon my bed, between opposing piles of dresses and jackets, debating with myself which of us two would be the most punished by my declining to assist in necessary arrangements. Pride absolutely won the day against my own proper inclinations. I could not resolve to wait upon Esmeralda.

The summons to tea came before I had thought of changing my dress. We did not invariably follow the custom when by ourselves, so I paid little heed to the matter, and went down as I was in my heavy black serge—for of course we were all in mourning for uncle John. I felt myself immediately an incongruous element there. Everybody else wore something of festive trim in honour of Esmeralda's arrival. Even Mother, though her soft plain black merino never varied, had donned a fresh cap for the occasion. I fancied I caught a passing glance of disapproval from Lennox as I took my seat behind the urn. It had been Maggie's seat awhile back, and how differently she would have filled it that evening! She

would have been a bright spot where I was a dark one.

I caught myself watching Lennox jealously, lest he should admire Esmeralda, for I did not want her to be admired. Yet I could not but be aware of her attractions. Somehow, that half-transparent black dress seemed just made to set off her snow-white skin and bright colour. I preferred darker hair as a matter of personal taste, but there was no denying the beauty of this rare rich mass of gold; and though it had been fastened up in any sort of fashion during the day, its present arrangement was elaborately simple and simply elaborate, in massive coils and becoming twists. The eyes, which had seemed to me so cold and pale a blue, now shone with bright warm lustre, and the pink tinting of her cheeks might have rivalled painting on the purest porcelain.

But I could make out nothing of what Lennox thought concerning her. He was all gentlemanly courtesy and cousinly kindness, and nothing more and nothing less. Ellie, our fair opening rosebud, on his other hand, was a curious contrast to Esmeralda. Her brown hair was only smooth and glossy as silk, with no gold or waviness about it, just coiled neatly round the beautifully-shaped little head; and though she was fair, she had not Esmeralda's dazzling whiteness, and the gentle flush which came and went in her cheek was not brilliant. I thought the soft purity of outline

and the sweet careless dreamy repose of expression were worth tenfold any amount of more meteor-like brilliancy. So at least I told myself; but all might not be found to agree with me—and I knew this well.

After tea Lennox retired as usual to his davenport in the corner of the drawing-room, where he almost invariably spent the evenings in writing. I was glad to see that he made no difference for Esma's presence—but in truth the said presence made his work more needful than ever. Esma looked rather flat, I thought, for a minute; and then Mother drew her into a long talk about her Canadian home and uncle John. Ellie stole out of the room, and did not reappear for an hour. Nobody knew what she had been after, till late at night, when Esma and I found our room as neat as wax, with everything folded up and put carefully away, as at the touch of a fairy's wand. Peace-making Ellie had saved us from something of a household stir that evening, assuredly; for displeasure had been brewing in my mind hour after hour, as I sat over my drawing, and exchanged few words with Esma. Happily it found nothing to feed upon.

CHAPTER V.

DISCORDANCE.

THOSE were not happy weeks following upon Esmeralda's arrival in our midst.

Most of the unhappiness was my own fault—I do not say *all*. I had determined to dislike her, and everything she did or said was harshly prejudged in my mind. But, apart from that, and even with the kindest disposition on my part towards her, she could hardly have been anything but a trial to me, or I to her—at least until there had been time for a measure of assimilation. There was something in our two natures which caused them of necessity to jar upon and fret one another.

Loving forbearance might have kept the peace between us—only we did not love; and I showed no forbearance towards her, and she made no effort to avoid annoying me. I think she rather knew her power, and exercised it purposely. Still I blame myself far more than her; for Esmeralda made no profession whatever of leading a Christ-

like life, while I—I counted myself to be one of the followers of the lowly Jesus. How sorely do such followers dishonour His name among men!

They were very little matters about which we disagreed, or from which unpleasantness sprang. Esmeralda had a sort of cool manner of taking things as her right, which vexed me beyond expression. She was six months my senior; but, then, I was the eldest daughter of the house, and she was only a poor penniless cousin, taken in out of kindness. Nevertheless she unhesitatingly presumed upon those six months, and took upon her the standing of an elder sister in a quiet easy fashion. She gave her opinion readily, and criticised my performances without mercy, and with a certain sting in her words, though she did not possess aught of real critical power. But a gnat-bite, though it be not a scorpion-sting, has yet its power to worry.

There was an odd mixture of acuteness and dulness about her. An utterly neglected education made it impossible to say what her natural gifts might be, but she certainly showed no leaning towards intellectual pursuits. Nevertheless she had managed to pick up enough of stray information to enable her to pass current in society; and, after the fashion of people not much burdened with knowledge, her views, if not deeply rooted, were always strongly stated. Sometimes she would make assertions which I believed to be

utterly opposed to the truth; and if I entered on the task of convincing her, which I was apt to do, being somewhat dogmatic in my own opinions, she always stuck to her point with unreasoning pertinacity, unable or utterly refusing to see the logic of the question. The discussion generally ended in loss of temper on both sides—first, alas! on mine.

Hardest of all to bear, she set herself to step into Maggie's empty place. Something of pain was here allowable on my part, but anger too often mingled with the pain. Mother never saw the matter as I did. She had taken a fancy to the girl, and Esmeralda with Mother was a different person altogether from Esmeralda with me. But may not this have been my own fault? What a different welcome had we two accorded her!

Esma was very clever with her fingers. She had quite a natural gift for cutting-out, and making old things look like new, and trimming hats and bonnets. That was the sort of work which had always fallen to Maggie's share, and now Esmeralda undertook it. Perhaps it was partly her way of doing the thing which irritated me, for the thing itself should rather have roused my gratitude. She saved Mother a great deal of trouble, and left me more leisure for my own concerns; and I do think she meant it kindly, and wanted to do her best to help us all. Only she had a certain want of tact which made her some-

times wound us unconsciously. Us!—for I know she put Lennox to pain as well. I have seen him flush up many a time at her calm assumption that she might do whatever Maggie had done. But I would not and could not ascribe to her kind motives and right intentions, as he always persisted in doing.

Mother took me to task one day—gently, yet firmly. I think she must have been a long time making up her mind to it; and I remember her dear face looking very pale when she began. She would not flinch from her duty, however.

So she told me quite plainly how grieved she was to see so much of this jarring and disagreement between Esma and me. The example was so bad for the younger ones, and it brought quite a shadow on the house. She could not understand it, for Esma seemed to get on very pleasantly with all the other members of the family. Why was it that I alone disliked her? Whatever I felt, I was old enough to exercise more self-control. Mother had never seen so much temper in me before, and it made her very unhappy. Would I not think the matter over earnestly, and pray about it? She was sure I had not been always quite kind or fair to Esma. Perhaps Esma might try me a little; but could I not make allowances, and win her by love? Anything would be better than to go on as we were then doing.

I listened without interrupting—but I listened proudly, sitting there by Mother's side. It was a new thing to me to be found fault with in this direct way. Mother must have seen very especial cause for such a step before she took it. Once I drew my hand out of hers, but she took it back. Tears were in her eyes when she stopped speaking.

“I am sorry for it, Mamma; but I can't help it. You don't know what Esma is,” was my answer.

“In what way, Jeannie dear?”

“She does all she can to try me. She is sweet and submissive enough to you, I know; but to me she is very different.”

I suspect Mother found Esma anything but “sweet and submissive” at times; but she did not say so. She only inquired again, “How?”

“She interferes so. Nothing that I have is my own. Maggie never used to meddle with my drawing-table, and I should not have minded if she had. But Esma seems to think all my things are hers as well. Her eyes and fingers are everywhere.”

“I am sorry for it. But she will learn better in time. And if meanwhile you would be a little more forbearing——”

“It just amounts to positive persecution,” I said. “Yesterday she took possession of my table for two hours, and refused to let me have it till she had done cutting out scraps for the boys.”

“It is trying for you ; but I suppose she can’t understand that she has not an equal right over the table. I will explain it to her.”

“She behaves so all the more if I show that I mind it.”

Mother was silent for a minute.

“But it is not that which brings on the discussions downstairs,” she said. “If you only would avoid them, Jeannie! Every evening lately we have had vexatious arguments about nothing.”

“Esma has such foolish ideas, and is so ignorant,” I said petulantly. “And she has such an immense idea of her own opinion. It is of no use trying to convince her.”

“Then don’t try.”

“I can’t help it. When people say such weak things, I can’t pass them over.”

“Don’t give me reason to think *you* weak, Jeannie,” said Mother gravely. “I want you very much to get over this habit. It is childish, and it will grow upon you. And you don’t know how it tries Lennox, and hinders him in his evening work. He does not mind talking or music, as you know, but that sort of thing does trouble him extremely.”

“Why, Mamma, he took part himself last night in one discussion, when Esma would persist in saying——”

“Yes ; because you were hard upon her, and really gave her pain. But after you had all gone

to bed, he said he did so wish we could have a little quiet in the evenings. He ought to have it. The day before yesterday I was really quite ashamed of all the wrangling that went on, and it was nothing but that which made his head ache so."

"Now, Mamma!" I protested incredulously.

"It almost made mine too," said Mother, in her quiet fashion; "and I had not been working all day in an office."

"Mamma, Lennox is always having headaches now, without any special reason. Only that Esma being here of course gives him more to do."

"And you do not lighten his work," said Mother. "The least we can do is to give him peaceful evenings. What do you think Maggie would say to all this sort of thing?"

Tears seized upon the excuse, and rushed to my eyes. "I wish Maggie had never married, and then we could not have taken in Esma," I said.

"I can't wish anything of the kind, for I love Maggie far too much not to think with joy of her happiness. She had toiled long enough for us. It grieves me to see Lennox throwing away the best years of his life for our sake, as he is doing now."

"And yet you wanted Esma to live here!"

"How could we leave her homeless?"

"She ought to have worked for her living."

Mother sighed. I think she was disappointed to find me of so impracticable a spirit.

“I don’t want to get into an argument with you, Jeannie; only do think over what I have been saying. It is not right to give way to this sort of irritation. It is not Christian.”

Somehow I did not want to get upon the subject of religion. I knew I had no defence to offer there, and yet my pride would not stoop to the acknowledgment that I had been wrong.

“Mamma, I meant to go and see Katherine this afternoon. If I don’t start soon, I shall be late back.”

“I will not hinder you. Only, Jeannie, you will think this matter over?”

My “yes” was reluctant and cold. Mother said no more, and I left the room.

It struck me that Esma would want a companion for a stroll that afternoon. Ought I not to ask her to accompany me? But I did so dislike her presence in a long *tête-à-tête* walk. So I made up my mind not to ask her, and thereby threw away the opportunity of doing a kindness, gaining nothing by it, for when I went downstairs I found her waiting in the passage.

“Aunt Jane says you are going out, and I thought I would go with you. What a time you have been getting ready!”

“I could not guess that you were here,” I said. “Mother said nothing about you, and I meant to go alone.”

“To see Lennox’ cousin?”

“Yes,—no; I don’t think I will do that to-day.”

“You mean that you don’t want *me* to go,” said Esma. “Then I will ask Ellie to walk there with me, for I want to make Miss de Salvernai’s acquaintance.”

“Ellie can’t walk so far to-day; she isn’t very well.”

“She will not refuse if I ask her.”

“It would be bad for her. No; I will go myself,” I said ungraciously. And hardly another word passed between us throughout the long cold walk until uncle Claire de Salvernai’s residence was reached.

The said residence was an exceedingly unpretending one. Mr. de Salvernai and Katherine occupied a tiny house in a by no means select neighbourhood. That is to say, it was neither rich nor fashionable. I suppose the inhabitants of the row were chiefly clerks with their families, varied by a sprinkling of daily governesses and music mistresses. A dressmaker’s brass plate shone in the doorway just across the road. What did it matter? There was an innate superiority about Kathie which made one oblivious of her surroundings.

On one noted occasion uncle Amory Pleydell found his way to the house. I do not remember the cause of his visit. I only know that he never went again. Some people’s dignity requires such painfully careful guarding lest it should be lowered

from its pedestal. I think ours was of a tougher texture. And as for Katherine, if she had dressed in rags and lived in a hovel, she would have been an unmistakable lady still.

There was a single tiny parlour, which had to serve as drawing-room, dining-room, and library—all in one. The back room was uncle Claire's, for he was only able to walk a few paces, and could not manage to ascend steps in any wise. Upstairs were Katherine's bedroom, the maid-servant's room, and the lumber-room. I often told her she ought to put the servant into the lumber-room, and turn the other into a sort of studio, or work and writing room, for herself. But, as she always said, "What would be the use?" Uncle Claire could never bear her out of his sight.

He had once been a rising and prosperous man, with every hope of future wealth and fame. And then, in one day, came the blow which cut him off from his profession, and left him a widowed, helpless, half-crippled life-invalid, with but a pittance for his support and one little daughter for his comfort. How bravely and cheerily through twelve years past had Kathie fulfilled her mission!

She became simply everything in life to him. One hour's walk in the day she wisely secured for the sake of her own health, and also a certain time of absence in the kitchen to superintend the preparation of his meals. Nobody's hands save hers could do this to his satisfaction. But working,

painting, copying, or aught else in the way of occupation, had all to be carried on in the parlour.

I wondered how she could endure it sometimes. Before a stranger, indeed, though but a wreck of his former self, uncle Claire showed always as a splendid wreck—handsome, dignified, cordial, well read, sometimes even playful and witty. Kathie used to look right proud of him at such times. But he was a victim to strong nervous excitement and intense irritability, and often talked complainingly for hours together without stopping. Kathie always maintained that the injury to his spine must in some measure have affected the head, so as to weaken his self-control. It was difficult otherwise to account for or in any wise to excuse this conduct in one who at other times would speak almost with tears in his eyes of his Saviour's love. Oh, poor weak human nature, not knowing its own weakness! That was it. Uncle Claire did not know himself. I never saw a man so free from introspection or self-examination—except no doubt so far as he urged himself to it from a sense of duty—or so calmly confident in the belief that he was always in the right.

Therein lay one main point of difference between him and Kathie. Each had by nature an intense will and a hasty temper. But uncle Claire had never yet attained to Kathie's measure of self-knowledge, and therefore never battled, as Kathie did, for victory. The force of his will went to self-

gratification, not of course wholly, for that could not be with a Christian man if his religion had any life at all, but still in a large degree. The force of hers was bent to self-conquest.

I dare not say that in those days she had more of victory than failure. She failed often—constantly. Her patience as a whole was much to be commended, in consideration of how she was tried; but I doubt if a single day ever passed without at least *some* hot words of stormy self-defence on her part. I have seen her positively stamp her little foot with the moment's irrepressible indignation. She used to say that she envied me my calmer nature—but the said calmness, resulting I am afraid from the lack of a disturbing element, had been sorely ruffled of late.

CHAPTER VI.

BELOW THE SURFACE.

UNCLE CLAIRE was reading to himself when Esma and I entered the little room, and Kathie was copying at the table. It was one of her plans for eking out their scanty income. She had taken the idea from Lennox, and I believe it was he who procured the work for her in the first instance. Her little firm brown fingers wrote a capital hand, clear and regular as letter-press.

Papers were lying all over the table and down upon the carpet, for neatness was not Kathie's forte, except in her own person. She looked tired that afternoon, and out of spirits, though her face lighted up at the sight of visitors. I saw Esmeralda's eyes soon straying up to the dark old family portraits on the walls, and she took advantage of the first pause to ask,—

“Is that the Count de Salvernai?”

“What do you know about him?” asked uncle Claire, looking gratified; for he always liked to meet with interest on the subject of his forefathers.

Esma rose and went nearer. It is a half-length life-size portrait, worth more perhaps from its age than its execution. Still it must have borne a good resemblance to the original. The face is dark, thin, and worn, with shadowed dark eyes, and the long flowing hair of the period falling over the shoulders. Esma studied it earnestly awhile, and the other two studied *her*. I thought she was aware of this, and did not object to be an object of interest. Did I judge thus because I should so have felt in her place?

“Yes, it is very like,” she said at length.

“No doubt,” said uncle Claire; “although—pardon me—I do not see on what grounds you have come to your conclusion, Miss Pleydell.”

“Father thinks you mean that it is like the Count,” said Kathie.

“O no; I mean that it is like Lennox. I don’t know about your ancestor, of course.”

And I saw that she immediately sank many degrees in uncle Claire’s estimation. He did not underrate Lennox; but Lennox was in the present, and Henri de Salvernai was in the past; and uncle Claire preferred the past.

“Almost every one thinks with you,” remarked Kathie.

“Even to the very expression,” said Esma, gazing thoughtfully still. “Quiet and self-controlled,—half-worn, half-sad,—a little weary of life altogether, I think.”

Uncle Claire was too much of a gentleman to say to a stranger, "Don't talk nonsense," as he undoubtedly would have said to Kathie or me.

"There are the marks of the rack and fiery persecution in that face, Miss Pleydell. You will hardly discover such marks in my nephew, good fellow though he is. Look there—another of my family at the same date: collateral ancestor of my own—Henri de Salvernai's brother-in law."

"The same painter, evidently," said Esma; but she made a false shot for once.

"I beg your pardon,—quite a different man. The style far more stiff. Sir Vaughan must have been a fine-looking man, but it wants some discrimination to discover the fact."

"More than I possess," said Esma, laughing. "I don't admire him at all. Who is this lady?"

"Ah! she was a hundred years later—a De Salvernai still."

Kathie twitched my dress slightly.

"Father, I want to speak to Jeannie upstairs. Would you tell Esma all about the pictures while we are gone?"

"With pleasure, if Miss Pleydell really feels an interest in the matter," said uncle Claire politely; and happily Esma gave by look and word a satisfactory answer. The next moment Kathie's eager fingers were pulling me up the narrow staircase.

"What is it, Kathie?" I asked, when we reached the little bedroom with its scanty furnishing.

By way of answer Kathie put her face down on my shoulder, and burst into tears. I knew what that meant, and I called her, "Dear pet," and "darling," and did my best to comfort her.

"There. I'm better now," she said, sitting up and trying to smile, though she caught her breath rather hysterically. "I haven't had one cry for a whole month, and I could not stand it any longer. I never can cry when I am alone. I only fume."

"What is the matter to-day?"

"Nothing—especially; only things have been going wrong. Father wanted a basin of gruel at a particular moment; and just before it was ready, down came the soot in the kitchen chimney, and spoilt it all. I could not possibly help that; could I, Jeannie? But he told me that I was no manner of use to anybody, and that he would sooner have a charwoman to wait upon him any day. Of course I knew he did not really mean it; but—but—O Jeannie, sharp words are cruelly hard to bear!" said Kathie, with her lips quivering.

My conscience gave me a prick. Esma had had many a sharp word from me lately. Had she found them so hard to bear? She had not indeed Kathie's warm sensitive nature; nevertheless, she had doubtless in some measure felt the pain.

"It seems such a time since I have seen any of

you," said Kathie. "Father can't bear my leaving him, or I should have been to see you before now; but I can't get there and back in an hour's walk. Sometimes I treat myself to a make-believe that I am going, so as to get up a little spirit for my ramble; but the coming back is dismal. Oh, Jeannie, how do you like Esmeralda?"

And she soon drew my troubles from me. What a fund of sympathy there always was in that girl. The deep trial of her own cheerless toilsome life was put aside, that she might comfort me in my lesser trial. I had so many to love me in the inner home-circle, and only one jarring spirit among them. She had only one to love her within that dividing line, and that one was himself her greatest trouble. But she kissed me and pitied me far more than was for my good, and said it was "too bad" when I enlarged on Esma's delinquencies.

"She is a pretty pleasant-looking girl too, Jeannie—don't you think so? I should not have expected from her such teasing ways."

"She is pretty, I suppose; I don't admire her. I like people to be dark."

"Why Jeannie!—look at Ellie."

"Ellie has dark eye-lashes and brown hair, if her eyes *are* blue."

"I like fair beauty. But it isn't that at all. It is only that you don't love Esma. Be honest,

dear old Jeannie." Kathie could say things to me which no one else would have ventured upon. "Esma is very pretty, there is no doubt whatever, —and pleasant-mannered——"

"She can be if she chooses."

"And of course she chooses in company?"

"I wish she would choose when she is alone with me."

"But, then, if you don't like her, is it to be expected that she should care for you?"

"I don't want her to care for me. I only want her to leave off meddling."

"Yes; you want her to be an individual of perfect tact and good taste. She isn't that evidently. But I dare say she does not mean to be disagreeable."

"Perhaps not," I said dejectedly. "O Kathie, I could bear almost anything, if it were not for her way of slipping into Maggie's place."

I think I was pleased that Kathie should see me in that light, not so much annoyed as suffering. But Kathie had a great knack of seeing through people, and she was too sharp for me.

"You wouldn't," she said. "It is Esma herself, and Esma as a whole, that jars upon you, not Esma in one or two particulars. Jeannie, you and I sorely need to learn a little patience."

"I don't really see that I am more impatient with Esma than she deserves," I said.

Kathie put her two little slight strong hands on mine, and looked me straight in the face.

“Jeannie, I can’t mince matters,” she said. “I don’t with myself; and I won’t with you. There isn’t the faintest atom of excuse in that, for you and me to give way to temper as we do. It isn’t because of their *deserving*,” — she was alluding I knew to her father as well as to Esma, — “but just because we can’t help it, that we get put out so easily.”

“I hope you don’t think I am as bad as Esma,” I said.

“I dare say you try her as much as she tries you.”

“O Kathie !”

“You don’t know,” said Kathie. “Your side of the question seems quite right and fair to you, and you see her all in the wrong. But no doubt Esma’s side of the question seems quite right and fair to her, and she sees *you* all in the wrong.”

“How can she ?” I asked.

“You would not like me to answer that truly. Let us talk about something else.”

“No ; I don’t mind it from you, Kathie. Tell me. How am I in the wrong ?”

She hesitated a moment, and then spoke with straightforward frankness, —

“You can be brusque and curt, Jeannie, where you don’t like a person, though you are so tender where you really love. And you are positive, and do like to hold your own in an argument. And there is nothing you hate like having to allow

yourself to be mistaken or in the wrong. And if you want a thing, you only see the force of your own need, and not the force of the difficulties affecting other people's comfort."

Sentence by sentence my own conscience bore witness to the truth of these assertions. I had never seen it so before. A veil seemed lifted from my eyes. But I was silent, for the very pride, in that moment revealed to me, held me dumb.

"If you knew what it was to have a temper like mine!" said Kathie. "I'm not setting up myself as a model, so don't think that. The hot words come slipping out before I know what I am about, and then I feel miserable for hours. O Jeannie, it does so dishonour Christ."

The last words were whispered. But I think that gentle whisper made an impression on my heart as deep as words falling with sledgehammer force could have done. Only I said nothing.

"Can you forgive me?" she asked suddenly.

"What for?" I know my tone was hard, though I did not feel hard.

"For speaking out so plainly."

"Of course. I asked you to do it."

"But you don't like it quite."

And then uncle Claire's voice called, "Kathie, Kathie."

She sprang up to answer the summons, but

lingered for one moment, looking down on me as I sat, with her tears glistening. I just gave her a kiss, and said, "Thank you, Kathie." I could not do more at that moment, but I have been always glad since that I did not do less. And Kathie looked satisfied. We went downstairs, and soon after Esma and I started for home.

Why is truth so seldom out-spoken between friend and friend? The poet would have been thankful to see himself as others saw him. That is a power none of us possess; but cannot a true and tender friend act the part of a second self, and open the eyes so often stupidly blind and dull to our own defects? I think so. The only real barrier in the way is our own self-satisfied pride. But I know I have owed much to those few honest words of Katherine de Salvernai's. They laid hold upon me with a grip as of steel.

Not that they immediately took effect in any wise upon my outward conduct. Esma must have found me a very brusque and disagreeable companion throughout the homeward walk. And I saw Mother look at me once or twice afterwards with a sigh, as if feeling sure that her remonstrances had been all thrown away.

It seems to me that spiritual lessons, whether of guidance or of reproof, are often sent in a twofold or threefold form, and not from one quarter only. I, at least, have remarked it thus. So it

was this time : first, Mother's words, then Kathie's plain speaking, and lastly, a stamp or seal set upon it all from the Word of God itself.

I think I sat down to read in my room that night with a sort of vague intention to find out what a Christian life really ought to be. What it too often *is* I knew well. I wanted to see clearly, not the common measure, but the Bible standard.

That which I sought was not hard to find. As I turned over page after page of the Epistles, verse after verse helped to fill up the picture. I was to "be holy as God is holy." I was to walk as Christ had walked. I was to adorn the doctrine of God my Saviour in all things. I was to be gentle, humble, lowly, longsuffering, kind, compassionate, unselfish.

Yes; all these, and more. But I stumbled suddenly upon one brief passage, which stood out luminously as if stamped in letters of gold. I knew then that I had received my marching-orders.

"DO ALL THINGS WITHOUT MURMURINGS AND DISPUTINGS; THAT YE MAY BE BLAMELESS AND HARMLESS, THE SONS OF GOD, WITHOUT REBUKE, IN THE MIDST OF A CROOKED AND PERVERSE NATION, AMONG WHOM YE SHINE AS LIGHTS IN THE WORLD."

No murmurings! No disputings! Absolutely none. The "all things" left no margin whatever.

No matter how much cause I might have to murmur, how much reason to dispute in self-defence—still the calm stern gentle rule remained inexorably the same: No murmurings! No disputings!

“Blameless,” and “without rebuke.” None to be able to stand up and say, looking me in the face, “Jane Phillimore, what sort of a religion do *you* show in your life?” None to be able to whisper behind my back, “I suppose she is a Christian, as she professes to be; *but*——”

A life absolutely blameless! A life absolutely free from murmurings, disputings, arguments, disagreements, self-defendings! These things might be natural, but they were not Christ-like.

My head went down upon the open page in deep humiliation. Kathie’s words swept strongly through my heart: “O Jeannie, it does *so* dishonour Christ.” Yes; I knew it then. Every murmur dishonoured Him. Every dispute dishonoured Him. Every rebuke to which I laid myself open, as a Christian of inconsistent profession and practice, was a rebuke against Christ.

What sort of a shining had mine been? Verily few, looking at Jane Phillimore, would have turned instinctively with upward glance to see whence came the reflected light. The lamp had not, perhaps, absolutely flickered out, but the supply of oil was feeble and the flame was dim. And I had not sought to have it otherwise.

Strange new glimpses of myself below the surface did I obtain that day and evening—seeing darkness where I had dreamt that all was bright, and blackness where I had deemed myself fair. I made deep heart-resolutions that the future should be utterly different from the past, and utterly failed in the carrying of them out. Better so. I needed to learn my own absolute weakness.

And the stirred-up mud and agitated waters of my heart were not suffered to settle down again. Days, weeks, months of battling and restless striving followed; often painful, weary, almost hopeless, yet with occasional gleams of light, and in any case far better than the self-satisfied stagnation preceding.

CHAPTER VII.

A COLLEGE FRIEND.

IT was somewhere near the end of June that summer that Lennox' college tutor and particular friend, the Reverend Austin Auriol, was appointed to the incumbency of the district church which we were in the habit of attending.

His arrival caused a good deal of sensation among us. The last time we had seen him was during a bright little visit which he had paid in our midst, just at the close of Lennox' university career, and a year before the coming of all our troubles. He was closely associated with dear faces never to be met again in this life. Also we liked him for his own sake. Ellie had been quite his little pet; while over my dawning girlish mind he had exercised a singular fascination, winning from me an amount of confidence which I bestowed upon few. At fifteen years old, the thoughtful well-read man of twenty-five—as old for his years as I was young for mine—seemed placed at a most fatherly distance. I had looked up to him with silent respectful hero-worship, and

now and then had responded to his kindly interest, by letting him have glimpses into my inner life and longings, which perhaps I had accorded to none other.

But those days seemed far away, and Jane Phillimore at twenty was another individual. I was curious to see him again—curious to find out whether my girlish estimate of the man would prove unchanged, and rather bashfully curious to discover whether he had forgotten those little outpourings of confidence. On the whole, I hoped he had.

The first evening of his appearance among us is strongly graven on my memory, for the dawning of another trial broke upon us that day. Lennox received a scrawled line, telling us to expect him to look in for an hour or two on his way from the station to the lodgings. He wanted a friendly welcome, he said, to make him at home. So we determined that it should be a festive occasion, and we went to the extravagance of a bunch of flowers from the market; and tea was spread in the drawing-room instead of the dining-room, that we might dally over the meal, and sit about as we liked and enjoy ourselves. It was an intensely hot day, and our little drawing-room, facing north, could boast tolerable coolness, whereas the back of the house was like an oven.

And then came two knocks at the door in quick succession before one could be answered, and

Kitty ushered into our presence—Mr. Auriol and uncle Amory Pleydell!

A more thorough wet blanket could hardly have been provided. I was so vexed that I quite missed the sight of the two friends' greeting, and only looked up in time to see Austin Auriol scan Lennox' face with a swift questioning glance of strong dissatisfaction. I did not know what it meant. The next minute he was shaking hands with me, and apologising for not having done so earlier.

The same face and the same manner that I remembered—a little singular, yet pleasant withal. He was of medium height, and inclined to stoop his head in a thoughtful fashion; and his forehead was remarkably well developed, wide, and full. The grey eyes were avowedly short-sighted; nevertheless they contrived to see a good deal; and the well-cut nervously-sensitive lips were rarely at rest.

Uncle Amory did not seem for a moment to doubt our gladness at seeing him. I have often felt disposed to envy the comfortable conviction of some people that their friends can never have too much of them. One of my minor life-torments has been the dread of putting myself in the way; but I do not suppose uncle Amory would have known the meaning of such a fear.

He was just in time for our tea—so fortunate, he said. Such a fine day, he had felt tempted to walk over and see how we were getting on. Esme-

ralda was quite at home by this time, no doubt—charming addition to our domestic circle. He was *so* glad to find us all looking so well. I saw Mr. Auriol give a quick glance round at Lennox and Francey, as if he were marvelling at some folks' obtuseness. And a few minutes later, as I sat somewhat apart in my office of tea-maker, I found him by my side.

"Let me hand that cup for you, Miss Phillimore."

"Thank you. O no; I don't think it is wanted just now."

"Your brother never wrote me word that he had been ill."

"Lennox! No. Why? He has not been," I said, in surprise.

"Oh!" It was a curious low long-drawn sound.

"The hot weather makes him look pale," I added. "I hope you will like London life, Mr. Auriol."

"Not much fear. What a pretty creature the little Ellie is growing."

He looked across at her with genuine admiration, and then suddenly brought back his attention to me.

"How about the name and the fame?"

"Oh, girlish dreams are not often realised," I said, blushing. "I hoped you had forgotten all that."

“Not at all. It used to am—interest me, I mean, excessively.”

Amuse him, indeed! For a moment I felt the least little bit savage. The next he disarmed me.

“You see, I never had a sister of my own, and that month of fresh home-like intercourse with you all—you especially—was like a glimpse into a new life.”

“They were bright days,” I said sadly.

“Ah!” and his quick sigh told me how much he had felt for us. I knew by his glance round the room that he was comparing it with our former home.

“But now I want to know what your pen and pencil are about,” he said suddenly, seeming to consider that he had a sort of right to be let into our secrets.

“Jeannie is hard at work upon something that is to astonish the world,” said a soft slow voice on my other side.

“Francey!” I said rather sharply.

She flushed up and moved away, and I saw him give a quick glance from one to the other.

“And to enlighten posterity, I hope,” he added drily.

“Francey had no right to tell,” I said, unable quite to subdue my annoyance. “I am only writing a tale, Mr. Auriol.”

“A three-volume novel?”

“O no; only one volume.”

“Are you near the conclusion?”

“It is done—virtually,” I said. “I hope to send it off to a publisher in two or three days.”

“Virtually, but not actually?”

“There are only a few more corrections needed. Lennox proposed a few.”

“And did you agree to them?”

“Some. I don’t know why I should tell you all this,” I said.

“When will the book be out?” he asked, smiling.

“Never, perhaps.”

“Never!”

“I mean that it is quite uncertain. The publishers may not like it.”

“I thought it was not your first.”

“No, not quite. But that was accepted a year ago. I have had one complete failure since then. Nobody knows, out of our own circle, Mr. Auriol.”

“Just so,” he said composedly. “But we must be hopeful about this.”

“I don’t think I am—very. What if I should have mistaken my vocation?”

I hoped that he would treat that as an absurdly impossible idea. Instead of which he looked up at the ceiling thoughtfully, and remarked,—

“Well, people do sometimes. In that case you must take up something else.”

So lightly said on his part. But to me it almost

seemed that I could more easily lay aside life itself, if called upon so to do, than yield without a murmur my longings for earthly success and earthly distinction.

“Your brother has seen your book, then?”

“Yes; they have all read it,” I said.

“What is the family verdict?”

“I shall be glad if the publishers’ verdict is half so good.”

“Phillimore’s opinion ought to be worth something in such a case. You would be very much disappointed in case of failure. Don’t put your heart into the matter too deeply, Miss Phillimore.”

And then he carried off a cup of tea to Mother, and I saw him playfully renewing his old acquaintance with Ellie. His last words carried a sound of warning to my ears; but I had no leisure to think them over just then. Uncle Amory came behind the round table, and seemed disposed, in his turn, to honour me with a little confidential conversation.

“Been very busy lately, eh? I tell my girls they ought to take a leaf out of your book. Well, and how does Esmeralda get on? Fine looking girl.”

“Will you take some more tea, uncle Amory?”

“Thank you, yes. A *little* more sugar than last time. You are a first-rate tea-maker. So Esmeralda has quite fitted into her nook in your

household—seems like your own sister by this time, I should imagine.”

“No,” I said, rather shortly; “sisters are not of such easy growth.”

“A little jealous for Maggie, I am afraid, my dear Jeannie—ha, ha—quite natural feeling, but after all—by the bye, have you heard from her lately?”

“Last mail.” It was as much as I could do to speak civilly.

“Quite well and happy, of course?”

I did not see why it should be a matter of certainty, but I answered in the affirmative.

“Marvellous how the young generation advances. One marrying; another growing up. To say nothing of my five girls at home, look at your sisters, now.”

“I wish we could keep them children a little longer,” I answered; “Ellie is almost a young lady.”

“Quite a pretty girl, too—really quite pretty. What has become of Frances?”

“She generally helps the boys with their lessons in the evening.”

“Latin and Greek, eh? I am afraid she is a little *blue*.”

I could not deny the fact, and would not confirm it, for I knew Francey was very shy on the subject. Happily uncle Amory seemed at length to have done the agreeable to his own satisfaction, and rose to depart. Like a lady keeping the gist

of her letter till the postscript, he had reserved the point of his visit to the close. It came out now in the shape of an invitation to dinner from aunt Ellinor.

Mother declined for herself at once, but seemed anxious that some of us girls should go. Uncle Amory pressed for all—every one. Only just a family dinner, he said—nothing grand; we were to take them just as they were. He seemed to think this would be a particular inducement, though I could not imagine why. We had plenty of quiet dinners in our own home, and a grand one would at least have made a variety. However, we settled to think the matter over, and send an answer by post, the more so as Lennox seemed exceedingly indisposed for the exertion.

I believe I was struck by something a little unusual in his manner. He had been very silent the last half-hour; and no sooner was uncle Amory fairly gone than he frightened us all dreadfully.

Francey had just returned from her work with the boys, and we told her of the invitation we had received.

“What for?” she asked, knitting her brows. “Uncle Amory doesn’t really want us, and I’m sure we don’t care to go.”

A glance from Mother reminded her of Austin Auriol’s presence, but he was talking to Esma, and made believe not to hear.

“It can't be helped now and then,” Lennox remarked. “Dinners are necessary evils once in a——”

He just stopped speaking in the middle of his sentence. I heard no more; but before I could even glance round to see why he did not continue, there was a terrified scream from Esma, and the next instant I found that he had suddenly sunk into a state of death-like insensibility.

For a moment our consternation was extreme. I believe there was hardly one among us who did not fear the very worst. It did not look like an ordinary fainting fit. The room went round with me, but somehow I was the first to lift his head. Its strange leaden heaviness alarmed me inexpressibly. Gordon, who had appeared opportunely in the room, rushed off for the doctor at Mr. Auriol's suggestion. Nobody else seemed to know what to do. Mother just sat down, feebly chafing Lennox' hand, and looking at him with dim tearless eyes, as if she expected never to see him move again. I tried to think of what Maggie could have done in my place, and the word “water” came into my head. I said it aloud instinctively, and Francey hurried away to get some, though the poor child was trembling so that she could hardly stand.

But before she came back, and not two minutes from the beginning of the attack, so far as we could judge, Lennox regained consciousness as

suddenly as he had lost it. He did not seem in the least faint, but sat up and looked surprised at our state of excitement, asking, "What is the matter?"

Mother burst into tears and cried bitterly. It was about the worst thing she could do, but the shock had been too much for her; and her weeping set off Ellie at once. Lennox put his hand to his temples with a look of pain and confusion, as if hardly knowing where he was; and I said despairingly to Esma, "Oh, do take Mother out of the room." But she was leaning on the back of a chair, as white as a sheet herself, and evidently on the verge of hysterics. I was intensely grateful to Mr. Auriol for offering his arm to Mother, and gently but firmly leading her away. He came back immediately, sent Francey to attend to her, and was going to dispose of Ellie in a like fashion. At this point, however, Lennox unexpectedly started up, crossed the room, and brought back the sobbing girl to where he had been sitting. It was too late to protest.

"What are you crying about, Ellie?" he asked in his gentlest tone.

Ellie only flung herself down on her knees, with her face pressed against his arm, and wept more than before.

"I wish you would rest," I said nervously to him. "Did you feel faint, Lennox?"

"Just now? I believe I did for a moment—something of the sort."

“Did you not know you fainted away?”

A light evidently broke in upon his mind.

“I see! Then that is what startled you all.”

“Have you ever done such a thing before?” asked Mr. Auriol, who was standing beside the sofa.

“Only once, about three weeks ago. It was an overpowering hot day, like this, and I had all at once a queer dizzy far-away sensation, and then suddenly discovered Mr. Whymple gazing at me as if I were an Egyptian mummy. He told me I had fainted—but I don’t know; it all passed off very quickly.”

“And you never told us!” I said reproachfully.

“There was no need. I only mention the thing now, that you may see how little it signifies.”

But I did not expect that the doctor would be precisely of the same opinion. Lennox exclaimed quite indignantly, when he found that one had been summoned. It was three years and a half since our last visit from a physician; for though Mother and Francey were not strong, they had never been really ill, and we could not afford needless visits. I had a nervous shrinking from the advent of one again within our doors. We had never even spoken to Mr. Ramisay, though he lived only in the next street, and we had long ago decided to call him in, should medical advice be at any time required.

He was a little gentle-looking frail man, with a big forehead and soft movements. I believe he inspired most people with implicit trust from the first; certainly it was so in our case. Lennox was smiling and talking quite brightly when he came in; but I do not fancy he was in the least deceived. He stayed some time, examining and questioning in close and business-like style. And when he left, Austin Auriol went out of the room with him, and Esma slipped after them. I did think it too bad of her, for I could not go also, and I was longing to know what Mr. Ramsay thought. Mother presently re-appeared, and then I found an opportunity of making my escape, unobserved by Lennox.

CHAPTER VIII.

PENMANSHIP.

MR. RAMSAY had only just taken his departure, and Mr. Auriol, Esma, and Francey were still in the dining-room. I had it on the tip of my tongue to reproach Esmeralda for running away as she had done; but she looked so shaken and miserable, that I checked the words, and only asked,—

“What does Mr. Ramsay think?”

“He thinks——will you sit down, Miss Phillimore, and let us speak of it quietly?” asked Mr. Auriol, pulling forward a chair.

“What does he say?” I repeated.

“He does not fancy it was quite a common fainting fit,” said Mr. Auriol, in a hesitating way. “He is a little afraid it was a—a—some kind of attack resulting from pressure on the brain.”

“But you don’t mean—O Mr. Auriol!—O Francey!”—for Francey’s dark anxious dilated eyes were shining like two lamps out of her colourless face,—“you don’t mean that it is anything serious?”

“O no,—not if taken in time,” said Mr. Auriol cheerfully. “Mr. Ramsay prescribes absolute rest from head-work.”

We three girls exchanged glances.

“Would you like me to go back to the drawing-room?” asked Mr. Auriol suddenly. “I seem rather intruding into family matters; only perhaps—if you knew—Phillimore and I have had few secrets apart. I am a poor man, but I can give advice; and your pastor has a right to be consulted in your troubles.”

The curious half-gentle half-blunt simplicity of the man almost made me smile.

“Thank you! I do not think there is anything which you may not hear,” I said. “You know as well as I do that we are dependent on Lennox for our support.”

He bent his head in acquiescence, but only observed,—

“It is strange—I did not like the look in his eyes at the first moment of seeing him to-day. I was surprised that you did not seem more anxious; but Miss Pleydell told me she was sure all was not right with him.”

“Why—what do you mean? How could *you* know?” I asked, turning to her; and I must have spoken brusquely, for she shrank back, and Francey whispered, “Jeannie, do be gentle with her.”

“I could not help seeing,” she said in a broken

voice, very unlike her usual cool confidence of tone and manner. "You never notice such things; but I do. That dark shade under his eyes—I learnt to know it at first, when he only had head-ache now and then. But the last few weeks it has been always there."

"Yes, since you came——" I broke off there, seeing how much the words implied, and Esma's face quivered; but she went on with what she was saying.

"I did not like to make aunt Jane anxious, or you either, so I spoke to Katherine the other day. She had noticed the same thing."

"I know Lennox has had a good deal of pain lately," I said; "but I always thought the hot weather was enough to account for it."

"He hardly ever has a day without pain. You don't ask him, and he never complains, and you all get used to seeing him look ill; but I tell you, he is just killing himself."

She spoke collectedly so far, and then—rather to my annoyance, for I thought she might have shown more reticence in Mr. Auriol's presence—she put her hands over her face and burst into tears. We all looked a little uncomfortable for a minute, and at length I said,—

"Come, Esma, I really don't think there is anything so bad that you need cry about it." Whereupon she turned suddenly round, and clung to my hand, which I had put out with a soothing intention.

“O Jeannie! Jeannie!—what shall I do? If he dies, I shall have killed him. I ought never to have come here. O Jeannie, it is dreadful. I know you don’t love me; but can’t you pity me? I’m all alone in the world—and I haven’t any home—and aunt Jane has been so good to me—and now—now—oh, what shall I do if I have killed him?”

“Esma, this is nonsense,” I said, really hardly knowing what line to take, between embarrassment at some of her words and agitation at others. “You are talking nonsense,” I repeated. “Lennox has been wearing himself out for a long while—ever since our troubles began. *You* have nothing to do with it.”

“Oh, but he wasn’t like this when I came. But it shan’t go on. I’ll go away. I’ll get a situation as companion to somebody—anybody—I don’t care who. Only tell me you forgive me for coming here at all. If I had known better I would not.”

Suddenly Lennox’ own voice said, close to my side,—“What is the matter? You all seem very much excited.”

Nobody had seen him enter, but the words took electric effect. Mr. Auriol, who had been gravely awaiting the right moment to speak, instantly assumed a look of cheerful indifference. Esma checked her tears, and Francey and I did our best to get up each a lively smile.

“What is it all about?” repeated Lennox.

“What made you leave the drawing-room?” I asked. “You ought to be resting.”

“Very well,” and he took possession of the easy-chair; “I can rest here. I did not stay in the drawing-room, for the simple reason that I felt tempted to have a share in your discussion.”

“What discussion?” I asked.

“That is the question. Something highly important, to judge from the tones of your voices. What was Mr. Ramsay’s opinion?”

Glances were exchanged, and I saw that he marked the fact.

“You are to stop work,” I said.

Lennox’ “Indeed!” had a sarcastic sound.

“You are overdoing yourself, Phillimore,” added Mr. Auriol.

“The hot weather is overdoing me, if you like.”

“But it isn’t prudent to go on without any rest,” I said. “You might make yourself ill.”

“A good many evils *might* happen. I suppose it was in connection with all this that Esma was making such startling resolutions when I came in. Did the ‘anybody’ include a possible costermonger’s wife, or a retired groceress?”

She gave him rather a pitiful glance, unable to smile.

“I am not quite laid on the shelf yet, so your

arrangements are premature," he said kindly, though a little drily. "Besides, you know my Mother quite looks upon you as one of her own children now. I wonder if you would mind going to sit with her while we are all absent."

Esma rose at once, but lingered to say,—

"If I might but do one thing—just help in your copying ——"

"Yes, the evening writing—the extra work," I added, catching at the idea with eagerness. "The very thing, Lennox! We could so easily manage that between us."

"You would find it troublesome. But if you like, you may try." And she went off, with her face lightened of half its trouble; while I thought that quiet acquiescence the very worst sign I had yet seen in him. I knew he would never pass on the labour to another, unless he felt the absolute necessity for so doing.

"Has the extra writing tried you much lately?" I asked.

"Rather. I have once or twice thought of asking you to help, only you always seemed busy."

He spoke cheerfully, yet I was struck by a certain habitual look of weariness, and a pang of self-reproach assailed me, for having never thought of offering the needed assistance. We talked a little longer, and he seemed so sure that quiet evenings would afford all the repose he

needed, that we fell in with the plan. Austin Auriol looked grave, and averred that the doctor had intended something more; but what could we do? Lennox was the household support—the household bread-winner. Everything rested upon him.

So we girls undertook a sufficient amount of copying to release him from work in over hours. I do not know what I should have done without Esma, for she toiled most perseveringly, though the occupation was ill suited to her tastes. Francey was never able to continue long without back-ache or fatigue, and Ellie did not manage to accomplish much. The brunt of it fell upon Esma and me. But we took care to leave none for the evenings, since Lennox could not see us at work without lending a helping hand.

Just at that time we were all more or less in anxiety about the tale which I had recently written, and concerning which I had spoken to Mr. Auriol. The family opinion having been as a whole highly satisfactory, the manuscript had been despatched to a publisher, and his decision we were awaiting with the best patience we could muster.

It was a book of many hopes and many prayers. For long months I had busily woven into its pages my longings and aspirations, and had pressed into its service my best strength and vigour. Whatever else of mine might fail, this, I thought, would surely win its way. My prayers

must receive an answer. I had asked so often and so earnestly for guidance in the writing, and success at the close. If it should be God's will, of course. But, then, it seemed so likely that this would be God's will.

Success on my part was an important thing to us all. Lennox's failing health—for it was failing, and we knew it, though we tried to shut our eyes to the fact—made it doubly needful that others among us should be earning something. What if I could gain enough to give him the required rest and change, and supply deficiencies in our income? I had visions of gold and silver falling in showers. It seemed such a wonderful thing that God should have given me this talent, just fitted to our need.

If He had!

But I felt sure that He had. I made up my mind that thus it was to be. Looking back, I can see now, more than I knew at the time, what passionate intensity of desire went out for success; partly for my own fame; partly for the benefit of others; partly—yes, that had a share—because I hoped the book might do some small portion of work for God. But I am afraid that the order in which I have here placed the motives, was the true order of precedence which they occupied in my heart.

I wanted to do some work for God, and this was the work He had doubtless given me to do. It was very pleasant to think so, and how happy I

was in the thought! At one and the self-same time it would be work for God—work for those dearest to me — and, alas! work for self. It seems to me that there is great danger in that which God gives to do for Him, being just the thing we would ourselves have chosen. The task of gauging our motives, hard enough at all times, becomes then doubly hard. Self-gratification creeps in where self-denial ought to reign, and the simple love of the work for its own sake may so easily be mistaken for the higher aim of pleasing Christ.

I do not by any means say that it must of necessity be so. There is no danger so great but that sufficient grace may be obtained to overcome it. Nevertheless I know the reality of the danger.

CHAPTER IX.

WITHIN AND WITHOUT.

THE two pathways of my inner and outer life, during those summer months, how commingled and how distinct they were ! Looking back now, I can see it so with strange clearness. No shade could fall upon one without casting a gloom athwart the other. But of those around who watched me pacing the latter pathway, not even the clearest in vision caught ever more than a passing glimpse of that shadowy, yet more real, self which walked the former.

They were days of battling ; I think I have said this before. So long as the soldier remains upon the field he has not done with fighting, but he has his intervals of comparative rest and of simple watchfulness. The seasons of quiet watching were not for me that summer, however. Rather did the enemy seem near about me on every side, strong, relentless, and unwearying. *I* was weary often with a bitter weariness, for the battle was too strong for me and my strength was faint ; yet though oppressed and driven back, and some-

times almost in despair, I was never entirely crushed.

Strivings against temper, strivings against self, strivings after holiness, strivings against unbelief, wrestlings with my own will, fightings with suggestions of evil, strugglings upward—these were some phases of the battle. But each and all gradually resolved themselves into one intense and absorbing desire—a longing, “as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks”—for more of union, more of communion, more of holy intimacy with Christ my Lord; nay, including all briefly, for JESUS HIMSELF, in fulness of love and presence and blessing.

Not that I did not know Him yet; but the dim view did not satisfy. Not that I had not tasted the water of life; but I longed for a rich unbounded draught, in place of the few drops which awhile back had seemed sufficient.

On the outer pathway of life, the self that showed must have showed too often as a jarring harp-note in a well-tuned harp. I knew myself at last as the family cross, and bitter was the knowledge. Yet I think that if those around could have caught one clear glimpse of that other self, walking upon the inner pathway, they would have pitied more than they would have blamed. They did not see. How could they? The foes, so personal and real to me, were absolutely hidden from them. They thought me absent, restless,

unhappy, gloomy, irritable ; and chided or coaxed me as the case might be. And I was all these things—one and all, without excuse. No shadow of excuse for the *sin*. Yet I doubt not that ONE, looking on near at hand, though to me He seemed so far away, had tenderer pity for my weakness than fellow-men would bestow ; even while seeing, with clearer eyes than they, the blackness of the defiling stains, day by day contracted. Each pettish word, a stain ; each selfish desire, a stain ; each complaining thought, a stain. If we could see these things as they stand in the light of Christ's contrasting holiness, what mind would bear the knowledge ?

But to come back to the outer pathway of my life.

The "family dinner" at aunt Ellinor's house did not come off the next week. It was deferred until the last day in July, just before the annual family migration of the Pleydells to the sea-side. We found then that we could hardly get out of it any longer, without the possibility of giving offence. I do not know that they cared to have us, any more than we cared to visit them ; but aunt Ellinor liked to do the correct thing, and we had not been for a year.

Mother would not go, neither would Francey. The boys' lessons were more important, she averred, and they never worked hard unless she were at hand ; and besides, she hated society.

Mother seemed sorry to see the growth of this latter feeling in Francey. The child was shooting up into womanhood—growing fast, not in body, but in mind. Where Ellie was all yielding softness, Francey had certain angular tendencies, and just a leaning towards a cynical turn. We did not think solitude good for her; but nothing short of a positive command would take her from home, and Mother found it hard to cross her indulged darling.

So we left those two together, and Esma, Ellie, Lennox, and I started on our unwelcome pleasure trip—unwelcome, at least, to him and to me. I believe the other two rather enjoyed it. We performed the greater part of the distance in an omnibus; a plan which saved our feet, but did not suit Lennox' head. I was sorry to see him put back the hair from his forehead with a gesture of suffering as we neared the end of our rattling drive. I did not want to destroy Ellie's pleasure by drawing her attention, but she was at a safe distance, and I said something to him in a low voice.

"One must have one's little burdens," he said quietly. "You as well as I."

"What is mine?" I asked.

"Having to appear in an alpaca dress—isn't that what you call it?—when the cousins will wear silks."

"You don't think I really mind that?"

"You are a woman, Jeannie," he said, smiling.
"You only don't allow yourself to mind."

“And *your* burden is——”

“The gas-lamps down on a level with my eyes all the evening;” and he laughed, but suddenly added, in a different tone, “There are heavier burdens than these. *You* know them.”

“What do you mean?”

“Spiritual restlessness—longing—pain.”

“If it is longing after things unattainable, it must be pain.”

“But the things which seem unattainable to you, may all the while be lying within your grasp.”

“I did not mean—— what made you think I was speaking of myself?” I asked quickly.

“I did not know. I guessed. *I* was thinking of you.”

“Lennox, how do you know anything about it?”

“Perhaps because I have gone through the same. I don’t know how I came to speak just now on the subject, but I have sometimes felt inclined.”

“You see deeper than most people,” I said, longing for a word of help, and yet trying to shirk it by an uninterested manner.

“That is as may be. Jeannie, there is one offered gift which you have not yet accepted.”

“What gift?”

“‘My peace I give unto you.’ ‘Let the peace of God rule in your heart.’”

And I would have said, “How can I?” but the omnibus stopped, and there was no opportunity

for more. We walked down half a street and reached uncle Amory's house.

I could not put aside his words all that evening. They clung to me tenaciously. "Peace;" "My peace;" "The peace of God ruling!" How little I knew of all that! How could I know more? What peace could there be for me while my sins and failures were so many?

The two paths of my life were very distinct that evening. On the inner I was searching and groping and struggling. On the outer I was seated quietly beside aunt Ellinor Pleydell or others, making polite conversation to the best of my ability.

Dinner proved but a heavy affair. Three or four people had been asked to meet us; acquaintances who were not so high in the social scale, that aunt Ellinor had any qualms about introducing to them her poor relations. I could not help thinking how she need not have hesitated to introduce Ellie or Lennox to the first nobleman in the land. Ellie's soft ladylike refinement was certainly not to be matched among any of her own five daughters. Ellinor and Janet were fine-looking girls, but they dressed in colours a trifle too bright, and talked in voices a trifle too loud. Sybil, the third, was the plain and dull one of the family, consequently also the shy one. Her mother and sisters were always trying to rouse her up, but to no purpose. I could have had

more sympathy with her than the others but for the utter impossibility of drawing her out. Frances and Minnie were just out of the schoolroom, clever bright girls, eager after lectures, learning, and examinations, such as were once considered not to appertain to womankind, and by no means loath to display the accumulation of knowledge whereby they were wont to astonish friends and relations.

“Fan has just begun to take up Greek. Isn’t that a joke!” Ellinor said, rustling up to me in her blue silk, a while after dinner. “And Minnie says she won’t be beaten, and she means to do the same.”

I thought of Francey’s quiet studies and the old-fashioned horror with which she would have heard them proclaimed. And a little brown-eyed single lady, with grey silk dress and mittened hands, sitting beside me, remarked,—

“Classics for young ladies are very well in their way, if they don’t put aside the darning needle.”

“Darning! Oh,” cried Ellinor, “Fan wouldn’t thank you to set her down to a hole in a stocking.”

And then she rustled away, and Janet came up instead. It was a curious thing about the Pleydell girls that they had no idea of sustained conversation. They could ask questions or give detached pieces of information, and they could joke or argue, but they did not know how to converse in the strict and simple sense of the word.

It was a difficult evening to get through, and would have been more difficult but for the presence at home of Harry Pleydell, the only individual in the family for whom we had real genuine affection.

He did not resemble either of his parents or one among his sisters. It was quite impossible to help liking Harry : there was such a free frank *bonhommie* about him. I do not think he ever could have been out of temper in his life for any wrong done to himself. Though he had just finished his last term at the University, it was difficult to give him credit for his twenty-two years, so boyish was his appearance, with his curly head of brown hair and innocent blue eyes.

I did not come much in Harry's way that night, however, for he attached himself to Ellie, and followed her about the room like a faithful dog. He had always been her devoted knight in childhood ; but there was danger now of the thing becoming more serious, despite Ellie's unconsciousness. I thought aunt Ellinor did not approve of his exclusive interest in her, for once or twice she tried to call him off. It was of no use, however, for he was back again almost immediately. There had been some debate whether Harry's law-studies should be carried on in London or in Edinburgh, and the point was undecided till that evening. But I think uncle Amory and aunt

Ellinor came then and there to the conclusion that Harry would be better at a distance.

We said good-bye at a comparatively early hour, to allow for the long homeward walk. A second omnibus was not to be put into requisition. Lennox and I were the two silent ones, so we naturally fell into the position of listeners, Esma attaching herself to me, and Ellie walking in front, clinging to Lennox' arm. I could hear her sweet merry tones pouring out the history of the evening, and dwelling much upon Harry's general improvement.

"He isn't the least bit like any of the others, is he, Lennox? I think he has grown so handsome; at least, nice-looking. And, do you know, he means to study as hard as possible and to get on, and, perhaps, to be a great man some day. Don't you think he will? I am sure he will be something quite different from uncle Amory. Harry won't be like most lawyers, you know; for I don't like lawyers, do you? Uncle Claire always says that he, and you too, would have been much better off if it had not been for the lawyers. But, of course, there are some nice specimens among them, and Harry will be one of the nicest." And so on, in a childish light-hearted way which almost made me smile, though I was sorry too.

Esma's remarks were of a different class. She had a good deal to say about the dresses and appearance of all whom she had seen, and I

allowed her to run on, only putting in an occasional vague reply to keep her going. But I am not quite sure that she paid much more heed than I did to what she uttered.

Reaching home we found that all but Mother had retired, and she carried off Esma and Ellie immediately. Lennox went into the drawing-room and threw himself into the arm-chair; and I followed him in with a sort of undefined longing for something of help—I hardly knew what. He seemed in no state for conversation, however, so I said nothing; and I do not think he was even aware of my presence till I laid a wet sponge on his brow, when he said in surprise, "Jeannie!"

"Don't you like it? Has your head been aching like this all the evening?"

"Not so acutely."

He let me bathe him steadily for a while, and then I suddenly found him with his eyes open watching me. His next move was to take the sponge and apparatus out of my hands and put them on the table.

"That will do," he said. "Sit down, Jeannie, and tell me what you were going to say when the omnibus stopped."

"I don't know," was my involuntary reply. And then I remembered.

"One soldier can help another in action sometimes," he said. "Are you quite sure I cannot now?"

Tears were threatening to come, and I did not know what to answer.

“Don’t think me interfering,” he said gently; “but I am sorry to see you unhappy. What is it all about, Jeannie? Not outside troubles, I think.”

I do not know what I said or how much I told him. Certainly I only spoke a few words. But I found the next minute that he had become possessed of my secret grief—the long long hiding of my Saviour’s face; that he was acquainted with my secret heart-desire for the abiding presence of Jesus.

“What keeps you back? What comes between?” he said, briefly and searchingly.

“I suppose it may be—sin,” I said hesitatingly.

“There is no sin so great that the cleansing Blood cannot wash away. The ‘all sin’ leaves no margin.”

“No,” I said. “But don’t you think—don’t you think He *does* hide His face sometimes—for our sins.”

“No doubt of it. Unconfessed sin—habitual sin—allowed indulged sin—these soon rise in a black cloud and shut off His countenance. It cannot be otherwise.”

And I asked him suddenly, “Has it been so with me?”

“Put that question to your own heart, Jeannie,” he said, with seriousness.

There was no need to reply in words. I knew the true answer, and so did he.

“I can’t help it,” I said bitterly. “What am I to do? I don’t allow them in one sense, but in another—I don’t know.”

“Allow what? Habits of sin! You don’t allow them as desirable, but you allow them as irresistible.”

“I find them so.”

“Take each one separately—whether it be temper or pride or aught else. *You* have found it too strong to be stamped down. But—‘Is anything too hard for the Lord?’”

“No, but——”

“Have you ever practically, and with unquestioning faith, claimed the fulfilment of that grand promise, ‘Sin shall NOT have dominion over you’?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then I am safe to conclude that you have not. You have failed hitherto in doing for yourself. See now what Christ can do for you. There was one ‘could not’ in His life, but that was ‘because of their unbelief.’ Only trust Him, Jeannie. There is no promise whatever, that in this life you will ever get beyond the tempting, enticing, clinging power of sin; but there *is* the promise that you shall be free from its dominion, free from its mastery, free from its enslaving command.”

He flushed up suddenly, and put his hand to

his head with a return of the sharp pain, and I wanted him to stop.

“In a minute. One word more. Jeannie, if you wish to walk close to the Saviour, your aim must be to ‘walk as He walked.’”

“How can I? How could I?”

“Give yourself into His hands—let Him work His will in you—no resistance or holding back on your part. Never make your own weakness an excuse for yielding to sin. Other temptations will rise as these are overcome, but see that you *do* overcome—in Him. Allowed sin is fearfully dishonouring to His name, and fearfully dangerous for ourselves. It isn’t His will to take us out of the battle-field in this life, but it *is* His will to keep us from being overcome by the enemy. I can’t talk any more now, I think. Good-night, Jeannie.”

He would not let me do anything for him, but went at once to his own room, and I went to mine. Esma was happily asleep, and I had leisure to think over the past conversation.

It seemed to me the dawning of a new hope in my life. I had cast already upon Christ Jesus the burden of unpardoned sin. But now I knew that I might also cast upon Him the burden of unconquered sin. And I felt at last that, in so doing, HE would not fail me.

CHAPTER X.

KATHIE DE SALVERNAI.

ONE hot day in the beginning of September, when the half-empty city lay lazily sweltering beneath the sun's rays, Katherine de Salvernai spent an afternoon and evening with us.

Directly after our early dinner I went with Esma on a little shopping excursion, for which I knew we should have time before Katherine's arrival. As we approached the house on our return, the front door suddenly opened, and Austin Auriol rushed out. I say "rushed" advisedly, for though at all times an impetuous walker, his ordinary pace was on this occasion nearly trebled. He almost ran over me, and then pulled himself up and apologised confusedly with a flurried look.

"Is there anything the matter?" I asked.

"The—matter? I—I beg your pardon——"

"I thought you might have been sent for suddenly," I explained, for he seemed bewildered.

"Oh—oh, I see! Yes, thank you;—no,—I—I believe there is a committee——"

And then he took off his hat, bowed, and walked on at an express-train speed, leaving us in a state of amaze.

“What has come over him?” exclaimed Esma.

“We had a narrow escape of a collision. Perhaps that embarrassed him. Or he may have forgotten his committee, and suddenly remembered that he would be late.”

Esma shook her head doubtfully, but we had now reached the house, and my latch-key admitted us without delay. No sooner were we within than I caught a glimpse of Ellie coming out of the drawing-room, with her face perfectly crimson, tears brimming her eyes, and her little hands clasped distressfully together. The moment she saw me, she turned and fled upstairs. I had time for one passing wonder, as to whether Mr. Auriol could by any possibility have seen it his duty to speak any words of pastoral rebuke or admonition to Ellie—a thing exceedingly improbable with one so sweet and gentle. And then Katherine arrived.

Poor Kathie! Half a day’s holiday was a rare pleasure in her life! How she revelled in a few hours’ escape from her round of petty troubles.

She came dancing into the house in a state of exuberant spirits, like a child set loose from school, perfectly indifferent to the heat of her long walk. I took her straight upstairs to my own room, and Esma for once had discretion or kindness enough

to keep aloof. Kathie was universally acknowledged to be my special friend, and my right to her was undisputed.

She sat down on one chair and I on the other, and then she took my hands, and looked straight into my face with a pair of devouring eyes.

“Well, Jeannie?”

“Well, Kathie?”

“Tell me all—everything. I am sickening for details of something beyond my own little cramped circle of interests. Pies, puddings and pies; puddings, pies and puddings; with shirt buttons and darning by way of variety.”

“It doesn’t narrow you, that is one comfort.”

“It does. My mind has grown painfully contracted of late. Oh, what an age it is since you and I have had a chat. Tell me all about your drawing and writing.”

So I poured out a history of my hopes and efforts into those most sympathising ears, and Kathie looked by turns as delighted and as anxious as I could desire. She was very sanguine of success for me.

“You clever creature, I wish I were you,” she said. “I’m such a humdrum animal—only capable of copying other folks’ ideas.”

“Oh, Kathie! you paint beautifully!”

“Copying—only copying. I can’t originate. If I could I would invent some new puddings to satisfy father, for he is tired of all the old ones.

But go on—tell me something more. What about Esma? Do you and she get on better?"

"Yes," I said thoughtfully, for I had wanted to speak with Kathie on this very subject. "I am always so glad you told me what you did that day."

"It was very cool of me."

"It was real kindness. I am sure I needed something of the sort."

"You were very good not to be offended. Are you more fond of her now?"

"Not exactly that," I said. "But I am more sorry for her. And—yes, it is easier than it used to be to live smoothly with her."

"She isn't so vexatious in her ways, you mean."

"I don't know. I don't think she can help being a little—a little——"

"Teasing," suggested Kathie.

"Yes. But, Kathie——"

"Well?"

"I don't think we *ought* to give way to temper when we are teased."

"Of course not. It is dreadful. But I can't help it. Oh, how I have fought and tried—and almost to no purpose."

Her eyes filled with tears all in a moment.

"I know—I know what it is," I said. "But, Kathie, though you and I can't conquer, there is One who can."

"Yes—but——"

“You don’t quite believe it?”

“Of course I know it must be so. But—He doesn’t.”

“May I speak plainly?” I asked.

“As plainly as I did to you.”

“Kathie, have you asked Him?”

“To do what? Conquer my pride and temper? Yes—of course.”

“But how? In a general or in a special way? Because, you know, general prayers bring only general answers; and vague prayers bring vague answers; and special prayers bring special answers.”

“I suppose it has been in what you would call a general way,” said Kathie slowly.

“And not looking out afterwards for any marked answer?”

She fixed her eyes on me and shook her head. And then I said,—

“But I have proved His power.”

“How? What power?”

“To be my strength where I am weak. To conquer where I fail.”

“Tell me how?” she repeated.

“I told Him my weakness. I put the sin altogether into His hands—whichever I was most troubled about just then. I asked Him to set me right—to keep me right—to give me patience and calmness. And then I waited for the answer—expecting it.”

“ And it came ? ”

“ Oh, Kathie, you can't think what a difference it has made.”

“ *How ?* ”

“ The hopelessness in battling is gone. It is just the difference of fighting alone, and of fighting with Him beside me,—with His hand holding mine.”

“ Since when ? ”

“ Only lately. It was something Lennox said which helped me first. I am just learning step by step, and I can't always see so clearly.”

“ But the feeling Him beside you,” and tears flooded her eyes again. “ You don't know, Jeannie,—I never spoke of this to you before,—but you don't know how I long just for that. I wish I were you. Oh, I wish I were you ! ” And she sighed heavily.

I hardly distinguished at the moment that which I remembered so distinctly afterwards, a little voice in my heart saying softly,—“ Ah ! Kathie set *you* right a while since, but *now* see how far you have advanced beyond her ! ” But for that voice I should surely have answered in other wise than I did,—should have tried to help Kathie onwards, rather than have dilated further on my own experience.

“ It makes such a difference,” I said again. “ To feel Him with me, to know that He is watching all I do, and that I am doing it all to Him ; I don't think that any earthly joy can equal

that. And sometimes the sense of His nearness is so strong,—like that verse, ‘His left hand is under my head, and His right hand doth embrace me.’ I could not say this to anybody but you, I think, Kathie, but to *you* I may.”

“And you have felt like that!” she said in a longing sort of a way. “But you don’t always, do you?”

“No,—and then everything is dark—nothing apart from it is worth having. And then I pray,—and it always comes again sooner or later.”

She sighed again quietly, as if feeling it quite hopeless to attempt to reach up to where I stood. Was her feeling the reflection of something in my own heart? And then she began telling me how fractious uncle Claire had been of late, and how nothing she ever did could satisfy him; and how her brave little heart grew at times almost weary of her life, with its fretting round of dull duties and puny cares. She found some relief doubtless in talking to me; but I do not think I said anything which gave her particular comfort, long as our talk lasted.

All at once the tea-bell rang, and we went downstairs. I was surprised not to see Ellie present, and Mother said, in answer to my inquiries, that she did not feel quite well, and a cup of tea was to be sent up to her. I felt sure something unusual had happened; but it was no time to inquire in public. Mother’s cheeks wore their little worried

flush, and though Lennox' face told no tales, I felt sure he knew all about the matter.

Other people were light-hearted and careless enough. The only one who seemed really out of tune was Esma. I fancied that she felt herself rather cast into the shade by our little dark-eyed brown-skinned countess, as we used laughingly to call Kathie. How heartily Kathie enjoyed the fun and freedom of our family party! She kept the whole table alive with her little flashes of wit at one and another, and had one or two regular passages at arms with Lennox. Esma grew curt in tone, and I wondered whether she were jealous.

Among other subjects that of uncle Claire's family pictures came up, and the supposed likeness of Lennox to the count was touched upon.

"Highly flattering to myself, only I never could perceive it," he remarked; while Kathie merrily maintained that the two faces were as like as two peas. "If Lennox only had a long curly wig, there would be no knowing them apart," she declared. "I always used to say he was not thin enough, but I can't say even that now." And then such an anxious look came into Mother's eyes, that Kathie was quite sorry for her words, and tried to cover them over by adding brightly, "Just as Maggie grew more like the baronet, you know, with advancing years."

"What! Sir Vaughan Menteith!" I asked.

“ Ah! I always said she had a strong look of him ; but nobody sees it except you and I.”

“ A mere collateral ancestor ; she has no right to it, and father says it is all fancy on my part. Never mind, Jeannie. You and I may indulge ourselves in the happy belief that we can see farther than most folks.”

“ I thought Maggie was supposed to be a beauty,” said Esma, looking at me, and speaking in her most “ contradictory ” tone.

“ She is,” I said warmly.

“ And yet you think her like that plain rigid-looking Sir Vaughan ! ”

I was insulted for my hero and my pet picture, as well as for Maggie.

“ Sir Vaughan plain ! The idea of such a thing ! Lennox, don't you agree with me ? The execution of the picture is inferior, of course ; but surely any one who knows anything of physiognomy must see his face to belong to a far higher type than Henri de Salvernai's.”

“ I don't know about the physiognomical part of the question, but I am bound to give my sanction to your verdict, after the remarks on my likeness to the count.”

“ It isn't that I want to depreciate the count ; only the other face has a peculiar attraction for me,” I said.

“ It hasn't for me,” said Esma. “ If *I* am anything of a physiognomist, which Jeannie would

deny, he must have been one of the most dogged, dogmatic, self-opinionated, ill-tempered men that ever existed."

She was just stringing words together to tease me ; and I knew it. Something had irritated her, and she was venting her irritation on me. Why could I not pass quietly over the question ? What did it matter, whether she or I agreed or disagreed in our estimate of a couple of old portraits ?

But, no ; I must needs endeavour to convince her that she was wrong and I was right. Mother tried to keep the peace, by remarking that Maggie was too completely an Orme to bear much resemblance to a De Salvernai ancestor, much less one who was not even a De Salvernai in descent. But it was of no use. We were in the thick of one of our wrangling discussions before I knew what I was about ; whereupon Mother made a hasty move to go into the drawing-room, though Edwy had not done tea ; and our argument was broken off.

Just at that instant I met Kathie's eyes fixed steadily on mine. It rushed across me what she must think ; but I could not undo the last few minutes.

There was no opportunity yet to see Kathie alone, as I longed to do. She was petitioning for a game of chess with Lennox, and an interested group soon gathered round the board. I busied myself with sketching the scene lightly on a piece of paper. Mother had disappeared, and Esma

was sitting rather apart; but Francey stood behind Lennox' chair; and Kathie was flanked on either side by a devoted knight-errant of a boy, sympathising largely in her suppressed excitement, and endeavouring to help her with advice, which she received gratefully but did not follow. It was a pleasure to commit those three exuberant faces to paper. Esma, soberly working in a sort of "middle distance" behind them, made a curious contrast; Francey's brow had lines of trouble on it, which came out strongly in the drawing, with no intention on my part; and Lennox' attenuated look had never struck me so forcibly. I put down my pencil twice to scan him. His cheeks were almost sunken, and there was a strange shadowy line across his forehead which I had not noticed before. It told me how he had wasted of late.

"Now, Kathie, do, *do* check him," whispered her right-hand adviser. "Why, if I was you, I'd checkmate him in two moves."

"How?" asked Kathie kindly, willing to be instructed.

"Why, I'd move the castle *so*; and then next time, the queen *so*; and then—oh, dear! but I didn't see he could take your queen."

"No; so I'll do this instead," said Kathie, in a peculiarly quiet tone which ought to have warned Lennox of danger. A shout made me look up and ask,—

“What now?”

“She’s taken his castle. Hurrah!”

“Game’s yours now, Kathie, sure enough. Hurrah!”

“Mine! I wish it were. Don’t sing my victory before it is gained. Lennox, your head is aching.”

“Check!” said Lennox coolly. “There is one thing you have not learnt yet, Kathie, in the course of your wide experience.”

“What?” she asked wonderingly.

“Stale news is wasted breath.”

“But doesn’t this make it worse?”

“I can’t possibly give up the pleasure of beating you.”

More than that was not needed to make her forget all other considerations in the excitement of the fight. Mother glided into the room, and I said to her softly, “Is Ellie better? What is the matter?”

Mother shook her head and glanced at the others.

“Don’t you know what it is?” I asked, rather bewildered.

“I can guess; but the poor child only cries, and will not talk. She does not want any one with her, she says; but when Kathie has gone you might try.”

Mother moved away into the chess-group, and I felt perfectly mystified. Just then, however, my thoughts were directed into another channel.

The postman's knock sounded, and I slipped unnoticed out of the room. I remember, how with lightning speed certain thoughts flashed through my mind. What if an answer had come about my book! O for success! If I could but make a few pounds, what a relief it would be! Change of air for Lennox must be our first consideration. He was worn-out with the long hot summer of ceaseless work, and I had an intense dread of his breaking completely down, if things were allowed to continue thus. Six weeks of sea breezes and absolute rest might set him up for the winter; but otherwise——

I opened the front door, and took from the postman's hand a letter and a parcel. I knew in a moment what it meant.

How glad I was to be alone. I went into the dining-room, shut the door, and lighted a candle before opening the letter. Yes; my tale of many hopes and many prayers was refused, was seemingly altogether a failure. It was kindly and courteously refused—but still it *was* refused. There was no disguising this bitter fact. It was refused, and that in a way which convinced me that the home estimate of my story, and doubtless also my own estimate of my powers, had been pitched far too high.

What if, after all, I had no such talent? What if this were *not* to be the way in which our difficulties should be hedged over, and Lennox enabled

to slacken work? Sadder thought still — what if he were *not* to slacken work in time? What if there should come at length a complete break down, and all means of livelihood should fail us?

No need to fear this only because my plan had not succeeded. God could help us in a thousand other ways, if it were His will. Nothing was impossible to Him. The whole world, with its silver and gold, and the hearts of all mankind, lay at His disposal.

Ah! but this way of mine was the way *I* wanted. How could I give it up? For ten minutes I remained apart, and wrestled passionately with the fierce striving of this will of mine. How powerless I found myself to conquer! O the bitterness of those few minutes!

And then I thought I would use the present opportunity of absence from the drawing-room, to see how Ellie was. I had taken care not to shed any tears, lest their traces should be seen, but I wanted no sign whatever of agitation to be visible on my face, and I was glad of a little longer delay.

The door of Ellie's bedroom was shut, and I thought at first that it was locked. Tapping failed to bring any answer, and I could hear, with attentive listening, the sound of low sobbing within. I spoke her name, but in vain; and then to my joy

I found that the door yielded on the turning of the handle.

I shut it behind me, and went softly to the bed. Poor little Ellie! she had thrown herself down, with her face buried in the pillow and only the outline of a flushed distressed brow was visible. But when I touched her, she started to a sitting posture, with an exclamation of surprise,—

“Jeannie! oh, I don’t want—please leave me alone.”

“What is the matter, Ellie?” I asked gently.

“I’ll tell Mamma by-and-by. Do leave me quiet, please.”

She looked pitifully entreating, and her sweet face quivered with the effort for self-control. I longed to have her turn to me for comfort, but somehow Ellie had never been accustomed to do so, and she was not likely to begin it now. I felt painfully that I had not sought her confidence, as I might have done, by more outpouring of sympathy in everyday life.

“Don’t you feel any better?” I asked.

“There isn’t much wrong with me. I’m only so—so miserable.”

The word forced its way out, and she sobbed again.

“Would you not like to see Francey or Lennox?”

“O no. They have both been in, and I’ve

promised to talk to Mamma presently. Please, Jeannie, I *do* want to be quiet.”

What more could I do? I put the shawl straight over her feet, and gave her a kiss, which she returned, but I could not force confidence from her. Feeling altogether very useless and heavy-hearted, I retraced my steps to the drawing-room, taking care to assume a tolerably cheerful expression as I entered.

CHAPTER XI.

THE END OF THE EVENING.

“DID the postman bring anything, Jeannie?” asked Mother. “We have been wondering what could have become of you.”

“I went to see Ellie for a minute; but she did not want anything, and I came away,” was my answer. “Yes, the postman brought back my manuscript. They decline to publish the tale: so it is evidently a failure.”

Thus bluntly and composedly did I announce my news. Exclamations of sorrow and disappointment answered me, and Mother’s tender half-tearful kiss of sympathy put my self-command to a pretty hard test. I could stand anything except that.

“What reason do they give?” asked Kathie, kindly taking it for granted that I did not care, and speaking in a matter-of-fact tone.

“Oh, you can see, any of you,” I answered, holding out the letter as invitingly as if it had been a sugar-plum. “It wants plot and interest; and they don’t think it would sell. They ought

to know at all events. I suppose I must try somewhere else; but I don't expect now to succeed. What has become of the game of chess?"

"Done," said Edwy; "and Kathie won."

"Yes; but I don't feel proud of my victory. Lennox isn't up to doing his best."

"The beaten party has no right to comfort himself with excuses," said Lennox. "There never was a battle lost yet in which something or somebody might not be blamed. The stern fact of defeat remains untouched."

He laughed slightly as he spoke; but I thought I could detect an unusual air of oppression about him and a weight of pain rested upon his eyes. It rushed across my mind more strongly than ever, how there could be no change or rest for him now. I do not know whether my face showed anything of that moment's distress. I had hardly realised till then how much, how very much, I had been building on the success of my book.

"I am afraid I ought to be going home now," said Kathie, slipping her arm affectionately into mine. "Father made me promise not to be late. Is this yours, Jeannie?"

She picked up the little rough sketch which I had made before the postman arrived, and it was passed to and fro, winning praise largely. Dear creatures—they all thought my wounded vanity wanted soothing; and though I saw through the motive, I loved them the better for it.

“Well, who is going with me?” asked Kathie.
“Father will grow impatient.”

Both boys volunteered eagerly to act as her escort, and she went upstairs with me to dress. She chatted upon indifferent subjects until ready equipped for the start; and then, taking hold of both my hands in a tight squeeze, she said softly—

“I’m so sorry!”

“What about—the story? Oh, you need not think of that any more,” I said cheerily. “All would-be writers have to go through these little disappointments. Perhaps I have been trying too high a flight. I may succeed, after all, some day; and if not, I must just settle down contentedly to a life without writing.”

“I thought you would have minded more,” she said; and how pleased I was to have so successfully blinded her. Minded! O dear!

“It is a good thing to be philosophical,” I remarked. “But I want now to speak about something quite different. Kathie, did you notice at tea-time——”

“Yes,” she said simply.

“I was afraid you must. I am so sorry and ashamed,” I whispered. “But you must not let *that* make you think what I was saying any the less true. The thing is, I am afraid I was pleased with myself—almost proud of myself—when I was talking to you, and that always brings about a fall.”

She gave me a kiss and went away. I followed her to the head of the stairs, and then returned to my own room, thinking sadly how my conduct had belied my teaching. Would it be better that I should never speak at all on such subjects, but only strive to witness for my Master by a holy life? No; I could not feel this right. Rather should I pray more earnestly against this sin of mine, seeking to be set free from the snare of self-consciousness and self-satisfaction, even as I had advised Kathie to seek, according to her need. A "meek and quiet spirit," "a heart at leisure from itself," were what I wanted.

I had sinned in listening to the whisper of self-complacency. But was the after-failure in temper an absolutely necessary consequence? Because my motives in speaking for my Master had been thus tarnished, was an outward fall the needful result? Hardly so. If I had been more upon my guard, more instantly aware of the temptation, more prompt in seeking fresh pardon and fresh strength, the after-trial of my temper might not have taken me unawares.

I thought over these questions for a minute or two, and then my mind wandered off to my poor little book. This unlooked-for failure seemed to bring such a blank with it. The excitement of expectation had suddenly collapsed, and I felt almost as if no interest in life remained to me. I had seemed to myself beforehand to be praying

so submissively that God's will might be done in the matter. And now—well, doubtless this *was* the doing of His will. But it was not that for which I had hoped, and instead of finding submission in my heart, I found rebellion. It is easy to say, "Thy will be done" when all things are shaped according to our own inclinations; but I failed to stand the test of the direct crossing of my will.

Afraid of my absence being remarked, I was descending the stairs, when I met Mother.

"I am going to Ellie," she said. "Will you come too?"

"Ellie would rather have you alone."

"No, Francey says she is asking for us both."

I was perplexed; and it was not till the day following that I learnt how Francey had told her of my disappointment, and how Ellie's tender heart had immediately reproached her with having treated me ungraciously. However, I followed Mother, and we found Ellie seated on the side of her bed, with her hair tangled, one cheek flushed, and a pair of tear-swollen eyes looking out for us anxiously.

"Do you mind my staying, Ellie?" I asked, "or shall I go?"

She put her hand on mine by way of answer, and held it fast. Mother took a seat beside her, and Ellie's head went down on her shoulder like a little bird creeping close up to the parent wing for protection.

Bit by bit the story came out, interrupted by occasional sobs from Ellie and slight explanations from Mother, who knew already a good deal more than I did.

It seemed that Mr. Auriol had walked into the drawing-room unannounced, as he often did, for he had grown to be very much at home in our midst. There he found Ellie seated alone at her work, and immediately entered into conversation. Ellie's intention was to summon Mother, but she did not care at that moment to disarrange her work by putting it down, and he seemed well content to have a chat. "Of course, he always is kind, and talks to me like an old friend," said Ellie, in a sort of resentful way. "And I like to hear him speak about Lennox; and I always thought he treated me as a child, and I didn't want anything else."

A fact came out here which gave me a start, for somehow I had never imagined such a thing possible. I too had deemed that he looked upon Ellie as a pretty playful child. But it appeared that a month or so earlier he had spoken to Mother and Lennox, asking their permission to seek her hand, and they, though much surprised, were evidently in no wise unwilling. They only considered her very young, and advised delay. No absolute restrictions were laid upon him, however; and though he seemed content to follow their counsel, I suppose he could not resist the

sudden temptation of finding Ellie alone. One way or another, he spoke out his mind in unmistakable terms.

"I am sure I don't know what I said to him," sobbed poor Ellie, when the tale reached this point. "It isn't that I don't like him, for I do. I never knew anybody kinder. And he is so clever that he almost frightens me. But I can't *think* how he got such a stupid idea into his head. I'm only a child, and I don't know or care about any such thing. I don't want to know, either. I only want to be a child as long as I can. Mamma, what *shall* I do? I can't—I couldn't—"

"You shall do just what you wish, dearest," said Mother. "As you say, you are very young, and can hardly know your own mind yet."

"But I do know it," said Ellie. "It isn't *that*. I shan't change. I like Mr. Auriol; but I couldn't leave you for anybody in all the world. Mamma, how could I? How could he ask me to do it? And I never shall love anybody so much as Lennox and Francey and you. And then—after everybody in this house, you know—I like Harry better than anybody, because he is my own cousin and he is so nice. I can't make myself like Mr. Auriol so much as my own relations, can I, Mamma?"

"No, dear, of course not," said Mother.

"But Mr. Auriol seemed to mind it so dreadfully," said Ellie, her voice shaking. "O Mamma,

I can't bear to make anybody unhappy. Why didn't he have the sense to fix on Jeannie or Esma? Jeannie would just suit him exactly."

"Thank you, Ellie," I said as drily as I could.

"I wish he had. Mamma, isn't it dreadful? He is such a good man, and Lennox' own particular friend, and you are all so fond of him;" and poor Ellie broke down completely, and cried as if her heart would break.

Just at this instant the door creaked slightly, and I caught a glimpse of Francey's face peeping in. She said in a low voice, "Jeannie, do you know where the sideboard keys are?"

"Downstairs, I believe," I said.

"Jeannie—come, please, and show me."

There was a ring of impatience and a sharp tremor in the subdued tones. Mother was soothing Ellie, and noticed nothing. I went to the door, where Francey caught my hand, pulled me out by main force, and whispered breathlessly,—

"Don't speak! Don't frighten them! Lennox has fainted again. Oh, come!"

"Lennox!"

"He went off in a moment, like last time. Esma is so frightened. Do make haste."

I rushed downstairs at a pace which she could not equal. Nobody was in the drawing-room, except Esma, who stood leaning against the table, looking just as helpless and terrified as she had done once before. Lennox was half-sitting, half-

lying, on the sofa, where he had suddenly sunk back, with his head resting against the cushions. I hurriedly loosened his collar and made him lie flat, as in an ordinary fainting fit; but the dead weight and deathly whiteness sent a shudder through me. "Some water—the doctor!"—I exclaimed, almost alarmed at the strange sound of my own voice. "Francey, send for him at once: this is worse than last time."

"He is dying," said Esma, with a gasp. "Don't you see, Jeannie? I tell you he is dying."

"No, no, no!" I said vehemently; and I snatched a glass of water—unseen till that moment—from the side-table, dashed some in his face, twice, thrice, without avail, and tried to force a few drops between his lips. Then Francey came back, and we began to chafe the cold white lifeless hands which hung so heavily in our grasp. Was it, could it be, death? I believe a sickening fear was gaining entrance into our hearts, and I had just said,—“It is of no use; Mamma must be called,” when he opened his eyes and looked around.

The relief of that moment! but I did not dare to show it. I only said, "Lie quiet, Lennox. You are better now; but please keep still."

"What is the matter?" he asked involuntarily, and then he caught sight of Esma's face and sat up. "I see! I have startled you all again. Where is Mother?"

“Not here. She does not know,” I said.

“I am glad of that. You have not sent for the doctor, of course?”

“I wish you would be still,” I said uneasily; for, though himself again, he was white still to the lips, and there was a slight confusion of manner perceptible.

“Have you sent?” he asked with unusual peremptoriness.

“Yes; but indeed, Lennox——”

“Send somebody else and countermand the message.”

I heard the front door open, and ran out, hoping it might be Mr. Ramsay. No; Kitty said he was from home. There was no concealing the fact.

“Tell her to go at once and say that I do not require him this evening,” said Lennox, more quietly, but not less decisively. “I will call and ask him some day about myself, but I will *not* have my mother alarmed. Jeannie, if you do not go I must do it myself.” I held out for a while, and then found there was no choice but to obey. I found Kitty coming away from Ellie’s room, and though she had had discretion enough to give no particulars, she had let slip a word about “master’s head being very bad to-night.” Mother and Ellie were down in the drawing-room before two minutes were over. I don’t know how they escaped knowing from his face what had occurred, but he welcomed Ellie so merrily from her

“retirement” that I suppose they were deceived into thinking him all right. I fancy the slight singular excitement of manner struck Ellie at last, for she looked earnestly at him once or twice, and then made him lie down, and stood for a long while by him, laying her little cool hands alternately on his brow. When next he moved he was quiet as usual, only so weary that he had hardly voice to say “good-night.” Ellie whispered to me half-pitifully, half-indignantly,—“As if I ever could leave him and Mother! The idea of such a thing.” But I do not think I viewed the matter in quite the same light. I was older than Ellie, and Lennox had never been quite so much the object of my devotion as of hers, though he was a very dear brother to me. How dear I did not then know.

And then Esma and I were alone in our room, and she came up in front of me with a pink spot on each cheek and a glitter in her eyes, and said steadily,—

“Jeannie, do you know that Lennox will die?”

“Esma, how *can* you?” was all I could say.

“I mean, if things are not changed. He is killing himself.”

It was sadly, terribly true—so far! But what were we to do?

“He is wearing out,” she said huskily, “and *I* have been just the added weight which is breaking him down.”

“Nonsense, Esma. We all have to reproach ourselves.”

“You! you belong to him,” she said, coming a step nearer, and looking hard at me. “You have a claim upon him. I have none. I am only a stray waif; nobody to love me in the world; nobody belonging to me. O Jeannie, it is so bitter.”

She put her hands over her face with a harsh tearless sob.

“But we do love you,” I said.

“Not you. Aunt Jane pities me. Ellie loves me a little as she would love even a cat or a dog that came in her way. I am nothing to anybody. Jeannie, can’t you be a little sorry for me?”

“I am very sorry,” I said, wishing I could be a better comforter. “But, indeed, Esma, you are not so alone as you think. You seem quite to belong to us now.”

“Only seeming—not reality. I am not one of you. It is very good of you all to put up with me, but you won’t have to do it much longer. I shall find a situation, and I want your help.”

I was going to protest, but she took hold of my two wrists and held them like a vice.

“Jeannie, I won’t hear a word; you shall not act the part of tempter to me. Do you think I don’t want to stay? But I tell you it would be wrong—quite, quite wrong. Lennox will die if his burden is not lightened. Do you want me to feel as if I had been murdering him? You are to

make aunt Jane consent, and then help to find me a situation as quickly as possible. Jeannie, you must promise me."

"If I can see it to be right," I said slowly, for I believed it might be so.

She put her arms round me, and gave me a kiss.

"You don't dislike me so much as you once did; but you know it will be very nice for you to have your room to yourself. Jeannie, I *would* have loved you more, if you would have let me at the first; and lately I really have begun. I know you don't care for me, but you will—will—will pray for me."

The word would hardly come, and I longed to say something to her about the Friend she needed, only I always felt so reserved with Esma. I just whispered, "Indeed, I will!" And then we undressed in silence. But I heard sounds of subdued weeping long after we were in bed—so subdued that I could hardly feel sure I was not mistaken, until I saw her heavy reddened eyelids next morning.

I had a long conversation with Mother, in the course of which we both very reluctantly came to the conviction that Esma was right. It would not do to sacrifice Lennox to cousinly feeling, and Esma was certainly more capable of filling such a situation than uncle Amory had imagined her, or perhaps than she had actually been on her first arrival in England.

But the thing we wanted was not easily found.

CHAPTER XII.

YIELDING UP.

THE desired situation for Esma did not present itself readily, though she seemed prepared to grasp at the first which might be offered. Lennox had given way in the matter of consent, though he would take no active steps in the matter. Our friends were few, and possessed little interest. Austin Auriol had kept clear of our house for many weeks, which was hardly to be wondered at, though Mother and Lennox had expressed to him earnest hopes that we should not lose him as a friend. It was not the time, however, to ask any favour of him; and though uncle Amory had promised to help us, he seemed greatly disinclined to bestir himself. We fancied that he considered the plan injurious to his own dignity, and that he would have preferred to see Esma living on in our house.

One dismal November day, I remember undertaking all alone the long walk to uncle Amory's, for the purpose of trying to impress him with a sense of our true position. I started immediately

after our early dinner, but a faint pall of blue fog hung already over the streets, and a weight of gloom lay at my heart.

There seemed no hope, no outlet, for us in our troubles. Lennox' co-secretary, Mr. Whymple, had called that very morning to express his serious fears for Lennox, and to offer advice, in terms going beyond a hint, that he should either give up the secretaryship altogether in time, or take a six months rest, finding some competent person to fill his place. Of course Mr. Whymple knew nothing of our circumstances, or how the said competent person would almost deprive us of our means of subsistence.

We did not need the warning. It was enough to see Lennox failing week by week. He bore up still in a measure, but to the constant pain in his head had of late been added intense mental depression, and the struggle to appear cheerful was sadly evident. He had taken a fortnight's holiday in October, but it was too late now for so short a respite to have any permanent effect.

This could not go on! How often, oh how often those words passed our lips that autumn. But what was to be done? Our daily bread literally depended on that failing hand.

What could *I* do? The one opening from which I had hoped so much was steadily closing. My book had been refused by a second publisher. It was now in the hands of a third, and I told myself

that if this also failed I should give up hope. I had not given it up yet. And how I prayed—with what passion and fervour and intensity of desire none around could know. Would success come? I seemed to think it must at last.

I reached uncle Amory Pleydell's house with weary feet and muddy skirts. The servant showed me into the breakfast-room, and said she would tell her master that I had come; for I had asked for him, not for my aunt. *She* would do nothing for us. There was an afternoon party going on, the girl said, but no doubt master would spare a few minutes to speak with me.

She closed the door behind her, and I sat alone, and waited, and listened to the stir of voices. Now and then a silk dress swept up or down the staircase outside. I could see that my cousins had been working busily in this room. Bits of white cotton were scattered over the floor, and a pink tarleton skirt lay spread on the sofa. I believe the girls spent three-fourths of their time in making up their own clothes. I used to think that in their place I would rather have dressed a little less stylishly, and paid a little more to the dressmaker, and secured a little extra leisure for matters of weightier import.

Time passed on, and no uncle Amory appeared. Once I rang the bell, but it was not answered. The house was evidently in confusion, and the servant had no doubt forgotten all about me.

I determined to wait quietly for half an hour, and then, if he did not show himself, to start for home. It seemed an unfortunate day on which to have come; but I would not give up at once. And having resolved thus, I moved to a low easy chair near the decaying fire, and put my face down upon a small table beside it, half to rest, half to think.

Thought won the day over repose. All our difficulties and anxieties and perplexities seemed to gather themselves into one sharp focus, pressing heavily upon me. What could be done? What could I do? Suppose Lennox grew worse and worse! Suppose he had to leave off work altogether for six months or a year. Suppose he had to give up the secretaryship entirely. Suppose Mother's anxiety should end by making her ill. Suppose my book were again refused. Suppose we should find ourselves at length literally without the means of livelihood. Suppose I had to take to the work of a daily governess—a thing which had been discussed already, but strongly vetoed by Lennox.

Well, suppose it all were so,—

“Thy will, not mine, be done.”

I lifted my head and looked sadly towards the window. How could I say the words? My heart was not submissive. My will was opposed to the will of God. I had no power whatever to bring the two into unison. I had striven, and striven oft, but without avail.

No wonder at the dimness of my soul. My adverse will lay across the doorway, blocking up the entrance and keeping out the brightness of my Master's smile. He seemed so far away—so utterly apart from me. Was it so? Would He never show me the light of His countenance again?

Ah, the barrier was of my own raising, not of His. But how could I expect peace whilst wilfully struggling for my own way? There is no absolute peace except in absolute rest upon Jesus; and resting and struggling cannot co-exist.

A great longing came over me that hour for a spirit of submission,—a great sense of utter helplessness. Other troubles faded almost into nothingness beside that one—the burden of my own unconquered will.

I think I almost forgot where I was. It did not occur to me that uncle Amory might come in at any moment. The darkening afternoon and the long home-walk went out of my mind altogether. I just knelt down where I was sitting, and poured out my very soul to my loving Master. He did not seem far off then. It was all that I could do. I told Him I had no power to submit, no power to say, "Thy will be done;" and yet I gave my will to Him. I told Him I knew I should forget often, act often as if it still were mine. But I brought it there, and laid it down at His feet, and prayed Him to take it and keep it, and

to bend and shape and subdue it, according to His will, at any cost, or by any needful means.

I think I knew that my Master did take my will that day and make it His own in *fact*. The moulding of it into accordance with His will was no mere work of an hour. It is still going on. Nevertheless, I laid my gift at His feet, and I felt that He accepted it, and if doubts have since at times assailed me, I come back ever and anon to the old sweet belief. I have given over my will into His hands, and it is mine no longer.

I cannot go into the matter fully. These things are rather to be felt than told. The sense of rest in knowing that my will was His, and no longer mine apart from Him, was more than I can describe.

Somehow my wish to see uncle Amory had fled. It would have been hardly possible just then to have talked to him about our troubles. I wanted to be alone still, that I might realise this new sweet peace. O the measureless love of Jesus! He had done all things well—yes, all! If these trials of ours were according to His will, it was better not to have them otherwise. He would bring us through and out of them somehow; but it must be in His time and way, not mine.

The walk home was all brightness. It mattered not that the streets were dark, and the ground muddy, and the air heavy with thickening fog. Through and over this outer dulness there

seemed to come a strong soft shining to my heart, as of a light in altogether another atmosphere. This poor lower atmosphere mattered little in comparison, and weariness of mind and body had alike fled away.

I reached the house, and let myself in with a latch-key. The passage was half-dark and empty, but there lay upon the slab a letter and a parcel, both addressed to me.

Yes, my manuscript was returned again. It hardly troubled me, however. My Master's will, not mine, had to be done. I had given up my will to Him, and taken His to be my own. I remember looking up with a little smile, in the first fervour of that afternoon's joy, and whispering softly, "As Thou wilt,—only as Thou wilt. I commit it all to Thee." And I think I could have borne anything for His sake.

Then the drawing-room door opened, and I had to come back to the outer walk of life.

"Jeannie, what did uncle Amory say?" asked Esma.

"I could not see him, dear. They had an afternoon party."

"Not see him in all this time?"

"I waited, but I think the servant forgot that I was there. He would hardly have given his mind to the subject even if he had come to me."

"Well, it doesn't matter much. I have done better than you."

“How?”

“I met Mr. Auriol, and we got into a talk. He looked very restless and careworn—but what a nice good man he is! I told him how unwell Lennox had been lately, and he said he must come and see him; and then I spoke of my want, and he thinks he knows of a situation.”

I hardly knew whether to say I was pleased or sorry; so I gave her a kiss. She squeezed my hand for a moment.

“You won’t be very glad to lose me? Please don’t.”

“I really don’t know how we shall get on without you,” I said. “But perhaps this will not come to anything.”

“Yes, it will. He was sure he could get it for me. An old cousin of his, living in Bath, has suddenly lost her companion, and wants another in a great hurry, so I can be off without delay. She is very odd, and keeps no end of cats and dogs; and I hate pets, but that is no matter. I dare say I shall have to feed and wash the little dears all round.” She laughed half-hysterically as she spoke. “It will be interesting, won’t it? And she knits counterpanes a great deal, and drops a stitch every five minutes, which I shall have to pick up for her. But I shall be out of your way, and you’ll soon forget all about me.”

“No danger of that,” I said quietly. “Esma, you know there is not.” And she gave a short

sob, and went hastily away. Yet when I next saw her she seemed very eager to have the matter in train.

It did not take long to come to a point. Mr. Auriol was prompt in writing, and the old lady, Miss Penzance, was prompt in deciding. All she stipulated for was that there should be no delay, since both cats and counterpanes were suffering for want of attention. So, only one week later, Esmeralda left us.

I never could have thought that her absence would make so great a blank. The house felt dull indeed, and her vacant place seemed to bring back more keenly than ever the absence of our Maggie. Lennox, who had been the hardest of all to persuade to consent to her going, was the one who seemed least personally troubled by the loss. As a matter of principle and kindness he would have worked himself to death, sooner than have breathed a word relative to her finding another home—yet I doubt if he ever positively had liked her. I certainly detected signs of relief in him at the quieter household and undisturbed family circle.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

CHRISTMAS came, and with Christmas came Harry Pleydell to his home. That was one event which marked the date. Looking back now to that week, it stands out with a peculiar calm sweetness in my memory, as if a gleam of sunlight had broken through a rift in the clouds, ere they closed more darkly in upon us. It was well we had no eagle's vision wherewith to see ahead.

There was no talk of a holiday for Esma, since she had entered so recently on her new duties. We had received two or three long rambling ill-expressed letters from her, full of palpably forced cheerfulness, but describing a life as free from trial as could be expected under the circumstances. The cats and dogs worried her, and the incessantly dropped stitches were a perpetual tax upon her patience; but the old lady herself was not unlovable, and Esma was evidently becoming an important element in the household.

Great excitement arose on the afternoon of Christmas Eve when a parcel-laden cart drove

to our door, and left a tolerably large hamper, directed to Mother in a strange handwriting. No word or note within gave the faintest clue respecting the quarter whence it came. There was some eager talk as to the possibility of uncle Amory having been seized with an unwonted fit of generosity; but uncle Amory's gifts always went with a flourish of trumpets before and after. I had my own suspicions, and quietly kept them to myself.

If the kind giver could but have seen the shining young faces around, as the fat turkey and the big ham and the three boxes of preserved fruits, packed over two layers of splendid apples and pears, were successively pulled out, he would have felt amply repaid. Ellie was in wild glee, frolicsome as a young kitten, and we all felt brightened up by the unexpected windfall. There was something Christmas-like, cheery and encouraging, in the kind thought shown for us; and it just took away the slight cloud of dulness, which would otherwise have been present on our first Christmas without Maggie.

Lennox too was well enough to enter into the fun, which was an added element of pleasure. He had not suffered nearly so much since the frosty weather set in, and, except for his increasing fragility of appearance, we should have felt less anxious about him. The slight improvement had been used by him as an excuse for postponing the

consultation of Mr. Ramsay; but I do not think I was so well satisfied as the others appeared to be. That evening, however, we seemed to lay aside our anxieties, and give ourselves up to the spirit of enjoyment. And as if nothing were to be wanting, in an ordinary way, to its completion, the front-door bell suddenly sounded, and Harry Pleydell appeared in our midst.

What a welcome we all gave him. The straw-and-cord-strewn hall was left to the boys, and we made our way to the drawing-room fire. I thought Harry looked older by three or four years than when we had last seen him—decidedly graver, and yet brighter.

“I couldn’t resist coming over here the first thing,” he said. “Will you let me stay to tea, aunt Jane?”

“My dear boy—*let* you!” she said affectionately. “But what about your home party?”

His face clouded a little.

“They have friends coming in to take dinner,—some gay folks whom I don’t care for. I told my father I really could not spend Christmas Eve in that fashion, and said it was a choice between my own bedroom or here. That is—I have promised to be back for a time, but it shall be a short time.”

“You did not send us a hamper, did you, Harry?” asked Ellie, with her merry half-saucy sisterly freedom towards him. “I have been half suspicious.”

“No, indeed. I wish I had; but it never occurred to me.”

Somehow conversation did not flow quite so readily as it was wont to do with him. There was just sufficient effort at attention on his part, to show that his mind was occupied with other matters. Not with Ellie. He was as unconscious in his manner to her as she was to him; as affectionate as ever, but in the old simple brotherly style, which had been a little changed during his last stay at home. I wondered whether the boyish fancy were dying a natural death with developing manhood. And yet Ellie looked so sweet and fair that evening, that I almost marvelled at the possibility of any man failing to fall in love with her.

Tea was over, and they were all sitting still round the table, chatting about various matters, when I went to make up a fine Christmas fire in the drawing-room. Gordon had procured us the rare luxury of a large log, which I arranged with care upon a fine bed of coals. And then I looked up to see Francey standing beside me.

“Jeannie, do you know who sent that hamper?” she said.

“I don’t *know*,” I answered.

“I do. It is Mr. Auriol.”

“Francey, you can’t be sure.”

“I am quite positive.”

“Well, it doesn’t make any difference,” I said

slowly. "The same thought did occur to me; but, after all, it is pure guess-work."

"The hamper came from nowhere beyond London; and who else can it be? Uncle Clare could not—uncle Amory would not. We don't abound in generous friends."

She spoke a little bitterly.

"Come, Francey," I said, standing up, "we are not going to look on the dark side of things to-night; are we?"

"I don't know. I suppose not. I think life is dark altogether," she said in an undertone. "Doesn't it seem so to you?"

"Sometimes," I said. "What makes you feel so to-night, Francey dear? Are you not well?"

"I'm well enough—only tired. And they are all so bright—and it can't—can't last."

"No brightness lasts for ever in this world," I said. "But neither do the shadows."

"O Jeannie, I wish you would talk to me sometimes," she said suddenly. "I feel as if I were growing ten years older to every one year of Ellie's, and nobody understands me."

"Then you must try and help me to do it," I said, giving her a kiss. "Yes, you are much older, Francey—so old that you and I ought to be more of companions."

That was all that passed, for the others came in; but I often looked back afterwards, and thought what a curious little unsought glimpse

I had obtained of Françey's walk upon the hidden pathway of life. She too had her battlings and strivings, all unseen by others; while I, in my self-absorption, had almost deemed myself a peculiar and isolated sufferer. Yet how like was that little spot on her pathway to many a spot on my own!

A cheery hour of talk, half-grave, half-merry, followed. We all sat in a semicircle round the fire; and the boys roasted chestnuts, and Ellie, with her soft fun and laughter, kept us in gay spirits. I think she was afraid of our beginning to talk about Maggie; but perhaps the remembrance was more strongly present with us than we acknowledged; for, after a while, Lennox began to look weary, and we all grew sober, and the boys ran away to finish holly decorations about the house. We older ones were not sorry to be left quiet, and we speedily fell into earnest conversation: first about Maggie, next about Christmas-tide, and thence upwards to those things which alone form the true joy of the season.

And then it was that I began fully to realise the change in Harry—a change involving much of advance, much of deepening, in the spiritual life, and yet not only or altogether these. We had considered him for many years well disposed, seriously disposed, religiously disposed,—only somewhat kept back by family influences. But there was now no possibility of doubt about the

matter. Harry Pleydell had become in heart and soul a follower of Christ.

He was full of fervour and earnestness, and of longing to work for his Master. There was nothing whatever to be seen of his old easy-going *insouciance*. He told us how much he had lately learnt to know of the love of Jesus; how he desired and had resolved to give himself up, wholly and for ever, body, soul, and spirit, unto Him; how he was ready to go anywhere or to do anything, no matter where or what, in the cause of Christ. He had had some sort of belief and love before for a good while, he said, but this was more—better—higher. He could not be a half-hearted Christian any longer.

And everything was so bright, and Christ his Lord had such power. All was to be victory with him henceforward. Why should it not be, since the power of Christ is unbounded, and He hath promised to succour His own to the uttermost?

Only faith was needed, and Harry seemed to think he could never doubt again. He told us that it was marvellous what power in daily life and in work for God this grasp of faith on the strength of Jesus brought him. Sin had not its old power over him. He did not want anything, except what God willed to send him. He was ready to take joyfully any trial. Life, with the abiding presence of Christ, was full of nothing but

joy and victory. There was no such thing now as secular work in his life. Everything was done for God, and done in prayer. He wished we all knew what it was that he felt.

And we sat and listened, and let him talk. It was all, as a whole, good, excellent, beautiful. I was greatly struck with the similarity of his experience, in many leading points, to what my own had been. Only—only—I did have more than one passing wish, as I listened, that somebody else could have been telling some of these things about Harry, instead of Harry telling them all about himself. I did wish that subtle dangerous “I” might not have been quite so often introduced.

Yet, when he suddenly remembered the hour, and hurried away to fulfil his promise of being back in time for the guests at home, I did not feel inclined to agree with Lennox’ softly uttered,—

“Poor fellow.”

“Lennox, you would not wish to see him less warm-hearted?”

“No; but after the hill-top will come the valley.”

“He does not think so.”

“Wait and see.”

“But you are not blaming him, are you?” I said. For Harry’s recent experience seemed, as I have said, just so far to coincide with my own, that I felt inclined to defend him. Only *I* had

come to more valleys than one. He half smiled, and said,—

“The eyes which adjudge the praise and the blame,
See further than thine or mine.”

“You are not satisfied, though.”

“I would rather see less of self and more of his Lord.”

“I thought *that* was his one theme,” I answered hastily, though the same thought had been in my own mind.

“Aye; Christ in reference to self—self’s joys and self’s victories, through Christ. He does not know it yet. He thinks with you that the honour of Christ is his sole aim. But I am a little afraid for him. Better be looking only at the Master, and altogether away from self.”

And Mother very gently said on my other side,—

“‘Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.’”

“Mother, are we never to feel confidence in that strength which is not ours?”

She gave only a little smile of assent, and Lennox answered for her,—

“The fullest confidence. But never to feel confidence in our own standing on that strength.”

“But if, as he says, he has committed the *keeping* of that standing to Jesus——”

“He will be kept unto the end. Nevertheless, if at any moment he trusts alone to that act of

past committal, and neglects *present* looking up to Christ Jesus, he will slip or fall. I never find in the Bible that stores of strength are given beforehand for future exigences. If he fall, he shall arise, I doubt not. But you may work yourself into a labyrinth of perplexity on these matters, if you take each truth by itself and strain it to the breaking point. We must just look up and trust and expect. Isn't that enough?"

"You don't doubt Harry's earnestness and sincerity, do you?"

"Not one iota. But he has many lessons to learn, one of which is, that self-contemplation, even though it be the contemplation of self through Christ, is never safe the moment it passes the boundary of self-abasement."

We were silent for a few minutes, each I suppose occupied with the same subject. Ellie's face was the brightest present, and suddenly she said,—

"I should like Harry to be a missionary. Do you think he will?"

"There is a very evident leaning in that direction," I remarked. "The doubt is, whether uncle Amory would ever consent. But Harry seems so willing to give up all hope of worldly advancement——"

"And so exultingly conscious of that willingness," muttered Francey.

"O Francey!" exclaimed Ellie, "he did not boast."

“I never said he did, but—Mamma understands.”

“Mamma!” said Ellie appealingly; and Mother smiled.

“I think, dear, that he feels himself altogether on rather a height above the rest of us, and can’t help telling us so. That is all.”

“But if he *is* on a height, how can he help knowing it?” I asked. “If faith and joy are brighter than ever before, he can’t be unconscious of the change.”

“It is a difficult question to settle in a few words,” said Mother,—“how not to fall short of and yet not to exceed ‘By the grace of God I am what I am.’ No doubt one may be conscious of advance, and rejoice in it, and yet be humble. And being conscious of a thing is not quite the same as talking a great deal about it. But I never can forget hearing it once said in a sermon that every step nearer Christ is a step down in humility. Somehow it isn’t always those who feel themselves the highest, who *look* the highest to those around.”

“Rather the reverse,” said Lennox briefly.

“I think you are both hard upon poor Harry,” I said. “It is Christ’s power, not his own, which he exalts.”

“Perhaps we are. Better not say any more about him,” said Lennox. “Only it *may* be that the witnessing in words to Christ’s power, as

evidenced in self, has too often a tendency to glide into witnessing for self, and not for Christ. Jeannie, that self, self, is a terribly insidious foe. It creeps in at every corner."

Did I not know the truth of this already?

And then I do not think we talked any more about Harry Pleydell. Maggie's name came in, and once upon that subject we could not quit it again.

CHAPTER XIV.

A THREATENING FOE.

WE saw a good deal of Harry during the next ten days. What might have been the immediate consequences to him and Ellie, if he had continued much longer thus to come in and out, I know not, but we had our conjectures at the time. Suddenly, however, there was a break in our pleasant intercourse, and the brief Christmas brightness died out.

It was an unhealthy season. A short spell of cold weather abruptly ended on Christmas Eve, and was succeeded by oppressive mildness. I remember hearing it remarked that several cases of fever, both scarlet and typhoid, were appearing in our neighbourhood, but I do not think I took alarm. Somehow it scarcely seemed within the bounds of possibility that our once desolated household should be stricken again. My chief anxiety was regarding Lennox, for the heavy warmth of the atmosphere brought back all the intense pain and languor from which he had suffered in the autumn, and the burden of

each day's work seemed almost more than he could endure.

Harry's last visit stands out clearly in my memory. He had dropped in unexpectedly to tea, and as usual remained chatting for an hour or two afterwards. Ellie was not so bright as usual. She had complained very much all day of feeling tired-out with the heat, and while we were talking she sat silently with her head on Mother's lap. I almost thought Harry must have said something to vex her, she appeared to care so little for his presence. The twins seemed to have changed places, for Francey was just as excited as Ellie was dull. She made odd cynical remarks which set us off laughing, and contradicted Harry flatly several times in a fractious way which perplexed me. He took it very patiently, and presently dropped the subject of which his mind was full—his growing desire to become a missionary. But whatever came up it was just the same. Francey agreed with nothing that was said. And all at once she startled us considerably by bursting into a violent flood of tears, without the slightest apparent cause.

We gathered round her and tried to discover what was the matter, but in vain. She clung to me, sobbing passionately, and declaring she did not know—she only felt miserable; she wished Jeannie would take her up to bed. Ellie was looking agitated and almost ready to follow her

example ; so I grasped at the suggestion and hurried her away. It was a good while, however, before I could soothe her sufficiently to make undressing a possibility. As a little child she had been rather addicted to fits of crying about nothing, and I could only suppose that she was nervous and overwrought from having attempted too much copying of late. I said something of the kind, and she shook her head vehemently.

“ But, Francey, if it is not that, what is it ? ”

“ Everything,” she said, with a gasp. “ Jeannie, don’t things ever look so to you ? ”

“ How, darling ? ”

“ *Black*,” she said, with a great effort and a fresh burst of sobs.

“ I know what it is, but I fancy the reason is that you are not quite well.”

“ It isn’t *that*,” she said petulantly.

“ Well, then, it’s a little bit of the muggy atmosphere worked into your brain,” I said, thinking it best to smile.

Francey sighed.

“ Suppose you get into bed quickly, and go to sleep, and let it work out again.”

“ I know I can’t sleep. I’m tired, and I ache all over.”

“ That explains the gloomy view of things, Francey.”

“ No, it doesn’t. Things *are* miserable. We’re

just getting from bad to worse—and Lennox is going to be ill—and Harry will marry Ellie, and take her off to Africa—and I shall die of a broken heart, for I couldn't bear to lose her; and—O Jeannie—O Jeannie, I dare not die——”

She was past reasoning altogether. I had never seen her in such an agony of distress. I kissed her and told her she was a “silly child” with reference to the first part of what she said; and then I spoke a word about the trust which could lighten even the last dark valley. She stopped crying then, and said her head ached, and she wanted to go to sleep. I helped her quickly into bed, and read two or three verses aloud; but before I had done, and contrary to my expectations, she was in a heavy slumber. Poor Francey! I kissed her hot cheek, put out the light, and went downstairs, feeling not quite easy about her. Harry was just taking leave. I went into the passage to see him off, for the boys were absent, and nobody else seemed inclined to move. He said to me in rather a perplexed tone,—

“What has come over you all to-night?”

“I don't know. I don't think anything has come over me,” I said. “Lennox and Francey are feeling this close weather very much.”

“I haven't heard Lennox make two remarks the whole evening, and I never saw him look so depressed. And Ellie—surely she is not well.”

“She has seemed tired all day. Come again

soon, Harry, and we will try to give you a brighter welcome.”

“Thank you. I was almost afraid Ellie was teased to hear me talk so much about my future. But you know, it *is* an anxious time,” he said earnestly. “And if I feel myself called upon to go out as a missionary, and my father holds me back——”

“Then you can only wait until God removes the barrier,” I said.

“Ah! that would be——”

I think he was going to say “hard,” but he stopped.

“Yes; you are right, Jeannie. There could be no blessing on my work, if it were undertaken against my father’s will. I must be content to wait till my way is made plain. I *am* content. I only want to be sure which is the right course.”

And then we shook hands, and he went away, I little thinking how long it would be before we should see him enter that door again.

When I went back into the drawing-room Lennox said wearily, “I thought he was never going.”

This seemed to me rather hard upon poor Harry, but I said nothing. He left the easy-chair where he had been sitting for some time, and crossing the rug he bent down to lay his hand against Ellie’s cheek. I had seen him do the same thing twice before in the course of the evening. In a

quiet careless way he managed also to let his fingers lie upon her wrist.

“Little woman, it is time for you to go to bed,” he said.

“She is quite tired, poor child,” added Mother tenderly. “Don’t sit up any longer, Ellie. Francey will be glad to have you. Come—shall I go with you?”

Mother’s tone was solicitous but not worried. I could not understand the expression of Lennox’ face. He waited a moment; and then, as Ellie seemed disinclined to move, he said, “Get up, darling.”

She obeyed at once, but leant against the table, looking white and dizzy, as if she hardly knew what she was about. Mother put her arm round her waist, and they went out of the room together, but I thought I noticed a slight stagger in Ellie’s gait. Lennox watched her intently.

That was the moment when fear first entered my heart. What did it all portend?

I was afraid to speak. Lennox sat down and rested his bowed face upon his hands. I could see that his breathing was hard and short, with physical or mental pain, and the veins in his forehead stood out, purple and visibly throbbing.

Five minutes may have passed away. It seemed longer, but perhaps it was less. I *could* not break that silence. Lennox at length said suddenly,—

“What do you advise?”

“How?” I asked.

“Shall I call in Mr. Ramsay at once, or wait till the morning?”

“I don’t know. Why, Lennox, you don’t really think——”

“I think it would be wisest. But Mother has no fear yet—not a suspicion. I don’t know how to tell her,” he said, in a low heart-wrung tone.

“Tell her what? I don’t understand. I think you must be ill yourself to-night,” I said desperately. “Ellie has often been a little poorly before, and Francey fretful.”

“Not like this.”

“Yes; I am almost sure——”

“No; I have been watching them closely. I did not want to tell you before it was needful, but typhoid fever of a very severe type has broken out next door.”

I believe I breathed freely at the first moment. Scarlet fever, not typhoid, was my dread. And then I remembered the constitutional susceptibility to fever of all kinds displayed from infancy by our darlings. It had gone hardly with them last time. Lillas and Minna had died. Francey and Ellie had barely pulled through.

“But typhoid is not catching,” I said.

“Some say not. I suppose it is not considered infectious in the same sense as scarlet fever. But, after all, the question is a doubtful one. The infection may be conveyed in a different way.”

He spoke in a low oppressed voice, without removing his hands from his brow.

"But, Lennox," I said, "after all, what reason have we for being afraid? Both would not begin together."

"Lilias and Minna began on the same day—and—it was they who died."

I felt that it would never do to view the matter in this light. Neither he nor I could bear it.

"I never knew you to be superstitious before," I said steadily. "The only excuse for you is the state your head is in to-night."

"It is not aching much. I am simply stupefied," he said, sitting up, with a forced smile. "I think I had better summon Mr. Ramsay. After all, it is useless to attempt concealment. My Mother must know."

"I wonder I never heard of it before," I remarked.

"Stranger things happen in London. I trusted to our city ignorance of our neighbours, and told Kitty to keep her own counsel. Besides, it has not been there long."

Mother came down in a few minutes and made things easy for us. Ellie was in bed, but could not sleep, she said, and both seemed poorly, Francey especially being very hot and restless. Did Lennox think it might be best to ask Mr. Ramsay to step in and see them? She knew there were low feverish attacks about, and such things were best taken in time.

“I will go and speak to him at once,” Lennox said, rising. Mother stood gazing into the fire after he was gone, a little pale, but calm. I wondered whether she were more anxious than appeared on the surface.

“It is a good thing Esma is not here,” she said at length. “One of them may have to be moved into your room.”

“Mamma,” I said, and paused.

Mother laid her hand on mine, and it was just like ice.

“We must not look forward beyond to-morrow,” she said steadily. “Just to-morrow—no more. You and I will have to rest by turns in my room, as we can be spared. It is a good thing you have not the Phillimore constitution.”

“Mamma, it may be nothing,” I said.

She shook her head quietly.

“I know the signs too well.”

“Not scarlet fever,” I said. “It is not that.”

“I think so. Your father had it three times in his life, always badly. Some symptoms are wanting, but——”

“Not scarlet fever,” I repeated. “There is typhoid next door, and it may be a touch——”

“*Is there?*”

“Lennox did not tell me till this evening. It may be that, Mamma—not the other. You said just now there were cases of low fever about.”

“Yes; but I did not think of typhoid. It may be. I must go back to them now.”

And she went, steadily and without any hurry. She was bracing herself up for what might be coming. I waited alone in the drawing-room, listening to the ticking of the clock, and watching the movement of the flames as they crept over the coals and rose upwards. Eye and ear needed occupation, for I could not think—I could only feel.

And Mr. Ramsay came at last. He did not say much, but the little was enough. Ellie was wrapped up warmly, and carried across the passage into my room. She seemed more comfortable there than when troubled by Francey’s unceasing restlessness.

The enemy had overtaken our household, not advancing by slow steps, but breaking upon us in full strength. On the morrow we knew it well.

CHAPTER XV.

THE VALLEY OF SHADOW.

THE days went by somehow, one after another ; how, I knew not then, and know not now. Harry was strictly forbidden to approach our house, in consideration for his mother and sisters. Kathie was no less strongly prohibited by uncle Claire. We thought the caution natural and right, aware that we ourselves should have acted thus in their place ; but I began to realise the meaning of solitude in London. Only Mr. Auriol came in and out.

The fever took a different course with the two girls. Francey was incessantly delirious ; and the wild outpourings of excited fancies, to which I listened hour after hour, let me more into the secrets of her nature than perhaps any amount of confidence on her part could have done. Ellie was heavier, weaker, more drowsy, and talked far less. She was always asking for Lennox, but rarely recognised him ; and neither Mr. Auriol's name nor Harry's was ever on her lips. Old-nursery rhymes and baby hymns were what

seemed to haunt her most; while Francey, on the contrary, talked eagerly about every individual of our acquaintance, and laid bare many a fevered imagining of her heart as to what others thought of herself. Poor sensitive fanciful Francey!

The boys sickened next—Edwy first, and then Gordon. They had the fever more slightly, but were ill enough to require considerable attention, though happily not too ill to remain together. Our hands by that time were full. I do not know how we managed to get through all that had to be done. Neither Francey nor Ellie could ever be left for more than a few minutes. Mr. Whymple very kindly made an arrangement whereby Lennox could return home at midday to help in the nursing. The night-work was the worst of all; yet we kept up cheerily, both Mother and I. About Lennox there was a growing calm submission day by day, which sometimes looked to me like hope and sometimes like hopelessness. He used to bend over Ellie at first with a perfectly heart-wrung look, but after the first few days I saw it no more. Francey was a deeper care to me. Day and night, I never could for one moment shake off the remembrance of those words she had spoken the evening she was taken ill; and the longing to have met them more wisely and fully weighed upon me like lead. But I could not bear to tell any one else of my trouble.

Our good-tempered kind-hearted Kitty proved invaluable in that sad time, showing an amount of thoughtful efficiency which we could not have expected in one so young. Mr. Ramsay, too, was indefatigable, making his appearance twice or three times each day. We grew to mark the flight of time by these recurring visits rather than by the succession of evening and morning. What had he said last, and what would he say next, formed the staple subject of the few brief and broken scraps of conversation ever to be snatched by us busy nurses.

So things continued for a little while. The fever had not yet turned with any of the invalids, when suddenly a heavier thunder-cloud, which had long uncertainly threatened us, broke over our heads.

One day, when Mr. Ramsay paid his second visit, not far from tea-time, he did not come alone. A gentle little grey-clad lady, with mittened—not gloved—hands, stood by his side. Where had I ever seen her before?

“I have brought some one to help in the work,” he said briefly. “Miss Talbot is an old friend of mine, Miss Phillimore, and loves to make herself useful.”

And then it flashed across me that she had been at dinner when we went to uncle Amory's. A few words of explanation let me into the fact that she had felt interested in us, and hearing by

accident of our trouble through the doctor, had instantly proffered her aid.

I do not know what I said. The timely help seemed so heaven-sent. I felt like kneeling down there and then to return thanks; yet perhaps they thought my quiet reception cold.

"Miss Phillimore is getting done up," said the doctor. "I don't know how Mrs. Phillimore bears the fatigue as she does."

"And Lennox too," I added.

Mr. Ramsay looked strangely at me, I thought.

"Was your brother up all last night?"

"Yes. I could not persuade him to rest."

"I have just sent him to lie down in his room. I'll—I'll come and look at him before I go. He wants a word with you, I believe."

"Lennox does?" I said, in surprise.

"Yes. Don't hurry yourself. Miss Talbot and I will manage without you for half an hour."

There was a measure of authority in the tone. I wondered, but went as directed to Lennox' room.

The door was ajar, and my tap producing no answer, I looked in, fancying he could not be there; and then I supposed he had fallen asleep, and I went softly nearer, and stood looking at him.

He was lying on the narrow iron bed, with folded arms and closed eyes, and the same singular expression of deep repose over every feature

which I had already noticed during the last two or three days. He reminded me of the calm carved figures of Crusaders on the tombstones in old churches; and then I thought of a warrior at rest after the battle, or on the eve of another fight. Which was it? A sudden fear took possession of me, and my heart beat so violently that I had hardly breath to say,—

“Lennox—Lennox!”

He opened his eyes then, and looked at me, but with such a strange unconscious expression that my alarm was redoubled.

“Don’t you know me?” I asked huskily.

“Is Ellie gone?” he muttered. “I thought—no—what am I saying? Did you want anything?”

“Mr. Ramsay said you wished to speak with me.”

“I recollect——” and his eyes grew steady. “How are they both now?”

“The same; I wish we could see a change,” I said, beginning to recover from my fright.

“Mr. Ramsay expects it in two or three days.”

“Does he? And I thought he seemed more hopeful this morning. Lennox, is your head so bad?”

He lay without speaking for a minute, and his half-wandering gaze again gave me a vague uneasiness.

“I want to say something to you, Jeannie

dear," were his next words very tenderly uttered. "Can you bear it bravely?"

I think my heart foretold what threatened. He signed to me to come nearer, and laid his hand on mine. I felt it burn with a dry consuming heat.

"Lennox—oh, no—not *you*?" was the cry which escaped my lips.

"'Thy will, not mine, be done,'" he said softly.

"Oh, no, no, no—oh, no!" I passionately answered; for this—if it came to the worst—would indeed be the wreck of all.

"It must be, Jeannie."

"No, no—you are only tired——"

My voice failed, though no tears came. He took my hand, and carried it to his forehead for a moment. That was answer enough; yet still I struggled against my own conviction.

"O Lennox—if you were to ask Mr. Ramsay——"

"No need, dear Jeannie. I have seen him already; but I knew it hours ago. Let me say a few words to you while I can."

I turned my face towards him, crushing down the rebellious risings in my heart, that I might listen. Where was submission now? Alas! I had not looked for *this*.

"Don't think I am nervous or an alarmist," he said slowly, as if command of language were becoming already somewhat difficult. "All may go

well, and the attack be slight. Still I have very little strength with which to pull through, and I don't think my head will bear much. No use to veil our eyes to the truth. Jeannie, if it should be—as may happen——”

He paused to allow me time for self-control.

“You know what I mean. If so, the support of them all, under God, will rest upon you. I have committed you all into His hands. I cannot—do not—fear for you. But you will have to work——”

I made a gesture of assent, being past speech.

“It will not do to trust to authorship—neither can you leave Mother. Maggie and John will help—would, I mean, if needful—and I think Mr. Pleydell also. It is Ellie I fear for most. If she could but have cared for Austin—but there, poor child——”

The wandering look was coming back into his eyes, and I begged him not to continue.

“I must—something I had to say,” he muttered confusedly. “What is it? I can't think.”

“You must not say any more,” I answered, speaking in a steady clear tone, and laying my hand across his forehead. “There is no need for you to be anxious. God will take care of us. And in any case—whatever happens—I have quite made up my mind, that when all in the house are well, I will become a daily governess. I could command a good salary, and I ought to have

begun long ago, but you and Mother would not consent."

"Not while I live and can work for you. Well, it will be all right," he said calmly.

"You want rest, and less to do," I said.

"Rest!" and he looked up dreamily towards the ceiling. "Yes—in sleep. The burden and heat of the day are past; they don't come back at eventide."

I thought he did not know what he was saying. "Then go to sleep now," I answered soothingly.

"Not sleep *here*, Jeannie—in such pain as this! No rest till the battle is over."

And then Mr. Ramsay came in, and prohibited any further conversation. When next Lennox spoke he was delirious.

The foe came on with giant strides. I think hope died in Mother's heart from the first. It did not in mine, for I would not let myself believe that so dire an evil could lie before us. Yet Mr. Ramsay gave no encouragement whatever. He had spoken all along of hope for Francey and Ellie, but with Lennox he plainly said that it was a case beyond medical skill. The fever seemed to lay hold upon that weakened frame with an iron grasp. Hour by hour and minute by minute Lennox changed for the worse, going down and down with a swift descent which knew no break nor variation.

Three days of ceaseless restless agony were

appointed him, as if he were to be borne away in a very chariot of fire. I used to stand beside him in the passionate pain of helpless sympathy, wondering whether this were sent in mercy to us, that we might learn to rejoice in his release. He wandered much and knew none of us, though never seemingly unconscious of suffering. But the very wanderings were gentle, and full only of such a longing for his Saviour's face, of such calm and joyous realisation of the life to come, that I felt as if it were selfish indeed to wish to keep him. And yet how fervently I prayed that he might not be taken !

CHAPTER XVI.

AT LAST.

THE third evening had come. I was left alone with Lennox, sitting beside his bed, while Miss Talbot kept watch over Francey, who had shown signs of slight amendment, and was at length asleep. Ellie hung still between life and death, and the crisis of her illness had arrived. Mother dared not quit her for one minute.

No sound save low unconscious moans broke the stillness of the room where I sat. Delirium seemed now passing into stupor, and no remedy which the utmost skill of our kind physician could devise took any effect upon the sufferer. But after sixty hours of unbroken agony, it was rest to see him lying thus quietly, even though it might be the first faint shadow of death which was creeping already over his face.

I remember my own stunned calmness of heart and brain, which I thought was resignation. Perhaps it was so in truth, for a while.

Waiting there silently, with nothing to do save to keep a stedfast look-out for the slightest change,

my chief and only distinct sensation was a feeling of relief that I *could* say, "Thy will be done." It seemed to me that I could say it in reality. I had no power to look forward, or to understand that which might be coming upon us, yet I knew what threatened. And the prayer of Gethsemane passed to and fro, clause by clause, in my head. It was such a prayer for me just then.

"Father, if it be possible—

"Let this cup pass from me—

"All things are possible to Thee—

"Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done."

And then in a kind of effortless way the thoughts shaped themselves into verses in my mind. Poetic merit was scarcely to be looked for at such a time, but the languid occupation was soothing. I had a pencil at hand, and I found myself softly inscribing them on the fly-leaf of my pocket-book. I wrote them down, and wondered a little after doing so whether I really felt thus.

"THY WILL, NOT MINE."

Father, my Father, take this cup from me,
 This bitter cup of sorrow and heart pain ;
 Thy hand is lifting it toward my lips,—
 Oh, take it back again.

If Thou be willing, let it pass aside—
 Remove Thy hand, dear Lord, that I may see
 Thy face with no such cloud between,—
 All things are possible to Thee.

All things are possible ! It need not be
 That I should drink this draught ;
 It needeth not—Thy power is absolute—
 Oh, stay—launch not the shaft.

All things are possible ! And yet—
 My God, hast Thou the victory won
 For me ? And shall I shrink for Thee ?
 Thy will, not mine, be done.

Not mine ! not mine ! although it striveth sore ;
 I come to lay my longings at Thy feet.
 If Thou be willing, take this cup from me,—
 If not—Thy will is sweet.

All things are possible to Thee,—
 And yet—Thy will, not mine !
 I cannot, dare not, choose ! I only plead,
 Bind Thou my will to Thine.

Let them be one henceforth ! so bitter pain
 Shall cease, and I shall lean on Thee,
 And rest upon Thine arm—*perchance* to drink
 This cup Thou givest me.

Suddenly Mr. Ramsay stood by my side. I
 slipped pencil and book into my pocket, and rose.

“ How is Ellie ? ” I breathed.

“ Better, thank God ! ”

He was much moved—this kind friend of ours.
 I had never seen him more so. Drops stood upon
 his brow, and his lips trembled visibly. I suppose
 it was hardly possible that he should have come in
 and out perpetually, as he had done of late, with-
 out gaining a strong personal feeling for us all.
 I did not feel sure, however, whether his momentary

agitation was at the thought of sorrow escaped or sorrow still threatening.

“Better?” I repeated.

“Asleep, with her hand in your Mother’s. Poor Mrs. Phillimore!”

He turned away his head for a moment. I marvelled at my own apathy and want of thankfulness at the joyous tidings.

“Mother ought to rest,” I said.

“Impossible. She dare not risk disturbing Ellie by a movement; and she says she had two hours’ sleep this morning. When did you sleep last, Miss Phillimore?”

“Yesterday.”

“From two till four! Not since then? I shall have you down too, if I don’t look out. Go and get some sleep at once.”

I shook my head.

“You must. I will stay here for two hours.”

“What do you think of *him*?” I whispered.

Mr. Ramsay made no answer. He bent a little over the bed, and then stood up again. I heard a sigh.

“Is this a good or bad sign—this strange stupor?”

“Not good.”

“When will it pass?”

Silence again.

“Mr. Ramsay”—I spoke calmly and low, though I heard a hollow sound in my own voice—“Mr. Ramsay, is this death?”

“ It may not be.”

“ I cannot go,” I said ; “ I must be here.”

“ You shall be called on the slightest appearance of a change. Miss Phillimore, I entreat you—your strength may be sorely needed.”

And I went submissively, but not to rest. The very thought of sleep was revolting to me ; yet it was a relief to find myself alone. Those four short words had torn roughly down my fence of apathy. Now at last I realised the truth, and like a flood the enemy rushed in upon my soul.

Lennox must not die ! He should not die ! It was a sorrow too great to be endured. If prayer had any power, why should not my prayers save him even yet ? I thought of the words, “ According to your faith be it unto you.” Had I sufficient faith to save Lennox by prayer ? I thought I had. I *must* do it. I *would* not doubt. I *did* not doubt. So I told myself. I made myself believe that he would certainly recover, and crushed down every heart-suggestion to the contrary. These hours of rest should be given up to prayer—prayer so intense, so strong in faith, that it could not possibly fail of its object.

For two long hours I knelt there, and never once arose, despite my weariness. All thought of submission to God’s will had flown. Passionately wrestling, wildly entreating, it seemed to me that the answer I desired could not but arrive. I was worked up to a pitch of fevered excitement,

and shivered from head to foot as I knelt. But I was determined to have my desire. "My will, not Thine, be done," was the language of that prayer.

Well was it for Lennox, and well for me, that my God did not take me at my word, and send me the thing I wilfully sought, stripped of His blessing. The fulness of love in the denial I cannot gauge in this life. Now I trust—by-and-by I shall behold.

The door opened, and I rose. Mother stood, pale and calm, before me.

"Come, Jeannie darling," she said; "we must go to Lennox at once."

And we went. Mr. Ramsay was there, with his hand upon Lennox' wrist counting the failing beats. He looked up as we entered, and signed to us to come nearer; but Lennox recognised no one.

God took away from us the head of our house that day. In one brief half-hour all was over. We watched and waited silently, as the breaths grew fainter and fainter. Words were not spoken; but what did it matter? We needed not dying testimony from one whose life had been a testimony. The deep peace of that unconscious face was the peace of a victor in the war; and hardly was the last sigh given, before a look of sublime beauty settled down upon the wasted features.

Yes; the burden and heat of the day were over

for him, and they came not back at his early eventide. He had entered into rest. But I—I felt that the burden and heat of my day were only beginning.

How that evening and the next day passed I hardly know. Mother appeared stunned and faint at first, and soon we found that she too was sickening, though with slight symptoms. I hardly seemed to care, however, for I felt both ill in body and stony in mind. There were hard and bitter thoughts in my heart, and for a while I think I strayed away from my Captain in the fight, and fell into the enemy's hands. My prayers had been useless, I said. My faith had failed to bring a response. My heart's desire had been denied me. I turned resentfully aside from the Hand which in tender love had laid this sorrow upon us.

It did not last. He did not leave me thus to perish, as I deserved. Sitting beside Ellie, I dropped asleep, and dreamt that I was dying—dying without hope; and then I woke in fear, with the consciousness of my sin upon me. I knew it all in one flash—the stubbornness, the wilful determination to have my own way, the utter lack of resignation, the distrust of my Father's love, the black ingratitude for all His mercies past—I knew it all. It brought me to my Master's feet, in deep humiliation.

There, beside the sleeping Ellie, I knelt to pray. It seemed to me that pardon would not come yet

awhile. Something of delay must surely be my chastening. But even as I poured out the broken confession peace crept back into my heart, and I knew that I was forgiven.

And then a hand was laid upon my shoulder. I lifted my head, and found some one kneeling beside me.

“Jeannie, Jeannie dearest.”

“Esma!” I said.

“O Jeannie, this is terrible,” her white lips murmured. “Are you praying for us all?”

I do not know what I answered. I remember a feeling of dull surprise coming over me, to find that I could not rise from my knees; and next that I could not speak. Black specks fell round in showers, and long vacancy followed.

After that I had but a dim consciousness, from time to time, of shaded lights and flitting forms, murmuring voices and weary pain. The outer world did not seem to have much in common with me, or I with it.

For Mother and I too were down with the fever; only a touch of it, our kind nurses hoped at first, and Mother was speedily up again. But I, though never in danger, had a longer bout, and six weeks passed before I could again leave the room where I had been taken.

They were almost a blank to me, those six long weeks, so far as thought and feeling were concerned. I neither looked back nor looked forward. It never

occurred to me to wonder how we managed to get on at all, with no bread-winner, no means of support whatever. Everything needful was supplied to me, and the whole household seemed to hinge upon Esma. A year before I little dreamed how I should one day lean upon that girl, and how, with the strange fickleness of illness, I should cling to her more than to any of those who were about me.

CHAPTER XVII.

BACK IN THE DAILY BATTLE.

By the opening days of March I was pronounced well enough to travel, and we all went for a three weeks' change to the seaside. It was a necessary absence, not alone on the score of health, for our house needed to be thoroughly painted, papered, and purified. Mother seemed to me to submit, almost as passively and unquestionably as I did myself, to whatever Esma decreed. Sometimes a languid wonder crept over me as to how these things were possible, and how our heavy expenses were to be met. But Esma dexterously shirked or openly forbade all discussions on that score. "Time enough by-and-bye," she said. "Get strong first, Jeannie, and then we will discuss ways and means." And in my weakness I found hers the stronger spirit of the two, and was fain to submit.

The three weeks of sea-side breezes were pleasant to us all. It may sound strange to talk of pleasure so soon after our great trouble, but there is a wonderful buoyancy in human

nature, inclining it to rise even after the heaviest storm : and to me, if not to all of us, it seemed as if December and January lay in a dim and far-off distance. So, though the shadow was ever upon us, yet we did enjoy the bright sands and waves and the rare mildness of that early spring. It was good to see some return of vigour to Francey's spiritless movements and of bloom to Ellie's white cheeks. The boys were in exuberant spirits, and even Mother's gentle smile grew less sad, while I began to feel the burden of returning life no longer too heavy to be borne. And Esma went about among us all, pale and quiet herself, yet making things smooth, and pleasantly suiting her own mood to the mood of each in turn, with marvellous unselfishness. Was *this* the girl whom I had once so disliked and despised?

But she would still allow no talk about business affairs. Those three weeks must be kept clear, she said. We were to have our minds at rest, and gather all the strength we could. Work should come after, but was not even to be thought about then. I think Mother and I were glad to put off the evil day ; and somehow we had by this time gained sufficient trust in Esma to obey her implicitly. She was seemingly carrying on a good deal of correspondence herself with different parties, and I had suspicion that some of the letters bore reference to our future ; but if so, she kept her own counsel, and we were none the wiser.

How strange was the return, with restored health, to a new and untried life in the old familiar home! How strange to feel that upon my weak woman's hand rested the support of all who were dearest to me! I think I realised the fact fully, and for the first time, immediately after our arrival. I was standing alone in my room, and the boys' voices sounded cheerily downstairs, as they helped to haul in the luggage. But the sense of a missing presence weighed upon me like lead; and heavier than lead, heavier than a millstone, came that crushing consciousness—all resting upon me!

What could I do? I stood there in a maze of utter helplessness, squeezing the handle of my carriage-bag between my fingers. How had I ever borne to wait all these weeks without planning something for the future? I must rise now with energy, and buckle to—must work, strive, struggle, do my utmost! But what would that utmost be?

For I had tried before and failed. What if other openings should fail likewise? Mother, Francey, Ellie, and the boys—those five could do nothing. What could I do? I, only I! All rested upon me.

Heavier and heavier weighed the load. I felt almost inclined to sit down on the floor, like a little child, to cry in hopeless misery. And suddenly I bethought me,—

“Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.”

“Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you.”

“Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.”

“Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

I stood for a moment silently, as the sweet and holy words breathed calmly through my heart. And then I cast off my burden and my care upon my Master, and prayed Him to “undertake for me.” Little mattered my helplessness beside His glorious power. He could do for me, and for those whom I loved, all that my weak hand could never accomplish.

He was with me. He would sustain me. He cared for me. No need had I to fear. The pathway ahead might be cloudy; but He could roll away the clouds, or bear us safely through the storm. No need to tremble. The load was too heavy for my strength, but I had cast it off upon Him now, and my walk might be light and free. No need to doubt. The responsibility was no longer mine, but His, and He in His faithfulness would not fail me.

As I had stood in a maze of helpless fear, so now I stood in a maze of joyous confidence. What true and wondrous sympathy is that of our God, who “comforteth those that are cast down!”

Needlessly cast down, distrustfully cast down, it may be; but none the less does He lovingly comfort those who look to Him for help. For He knoweth our frame; He knoweth our ignorance and the dimness of our sight. Even so, I think, would an earthly father tenderly soothe and closely caress the little one, who tremblingly doubted and shrank in danger, if only—there is that if—*if* only in her fear she clung to him still, and did not leave his side.

Esma came suddenly in, and laid her hand on my arm.

“We are going to have tea the first thing,” she said. “Will you come? Mr. Auriol is downstairs, and that will be a help. Jeannie?”

The last word was in a changed tone, uttered questioningly. I kissed her without speaking.

“What has happened?” she asked soberly.

“Nothing,” I said at first, and then I added,—

“Only I know now that God will take care of us.”

“Yes,” she said wistfully; “I suppose He will.”

“I thought *I* had to do it all,” I said. “But God my Father will do it now. I have just put the whole matter into His hands, and told Him my difficulty. He will do it.”

She gazed at me steadfastly, with a tearless glitter in her eyes.

“I can’t bear to disturb your confidence,” she said. “But—Jeannie, He *does* send sorrow.”

“Yes, He does,” I said. “But He brings us through—in His own way—the best way. He sent us great sorrow lately; but our sorrow was joy to Lennox. There are many kinds of happiness which cannot possibly come to one without bringing pain to others. And this care now about how we are to get on I have cast off upon Him, and He will undertake it for me. He has promised, and I am going to trust to His promises.”

“He may bring you through in *His* way,” said Esma, in a low voice. “But that may be just the way you would most dread.”

“It may be,” I said. “If so, He will come through it *with* me, and then I shall be able to bear anything. But I do think, Esma, that very often the hard and sorrowful way has to be, only because we won’t give up our own strivings and put the whole thing unreservedly into His hands. I think it must be so. I am going to trust Him now to care for us.”

She said no more, but only slipped her arm into mine, and we went downstairs together.

I think all our party without exception was glad of Mr. Auriol’s presence. It was a comfort to have one to fill the vacant chair, who seemed to have some shadow of a right to sit there. He did not press himself upon Ellie’s notice, but was unobtrusively watchful and attentive, and I certainly marked a change in her manner to him. She dropped her childish air, and was alike more

dignified and more cordial. I could excuse him the brightness of renewed hope which showed in his face as the meal went on; but that same meal—our first in the old room without Lennox—was a hard trial to our fortitude. Ellie fled away upstairs at its conclusion, followed by Francey, and the boys disappeared elsewhere. Austin Auriol by no means shared in my satisfaction at finding ourselves alone in the drawing room—Mother, Esma, he and I. But I was anxious to obtain information on the subject of our prospects.

Just as I introduced it, uncle Amory Pleydell was ushered in. I was sorry, and yet glad. He would necessarily have a voice in the matter; but I should have preferred the first talk without him.

“All well again, eh?” he asked, in his comfortable robust tone. “Invalids quite recovered? Just what I expected to hear. Jeannie looks thin still, but fairly strong; quite up to work, no doubt.”

“Any amount of it,” I said, though Austin Auriol shook his head slightly.

“Ready to enter on your new duties next week, eh? Really, Esma has been quite indefatigable.”

“When I know what my new duties are,” I said.

“Jeannie has been told nothing yet,” observed Esma. “I thought it best to keep business out of sight, till we came back.”

“Very wise, very prudent on your part,” said

uncle Amory. "Shouldn't have expected to find such a grey head on such green shoulders."

The said head—not grey, but golden—made an impatient movement.

"But will some one tell me now, please?" I asked. "Has anything been settled for me?"

"I don't know whether you will mind," said Esma; "but you spoke of it one day in passing, so I thought I might act. We have found a situation for you as daily governess, at a hundred guineas a year."

I believe an exclamation escaped me.

"It is not much, as you will sleep out of the house, and your only meal there will be your dinner."

"It seems a good deal to me," I answered. "How many children are there?"

"Two girls," said Esma. "That is all you will have charge of. Two girls, aged about fourteen and sixteen, and you are to finish them off, with the help of a music-master. That was the only point where I could not answer for your 'finishing' capabilities."

"Have you seen them?" I asked.

"No, Mr. Auriol kindly arranged all for me. They are friends—acquaintances, I mean—of his."

"I think Miss Phillimore will find them kind and pleasant people," said Mr. Auriol. "Not that I know them well. They are out of my cure—rather a long walk for you, I am afraid; but

altogether we thought the advantages counter-balanced the disadvantages."

"Jeannie is a good walker," said Esma.

"But there is another thing I want to ask," I remarked suddenly. "How about the last few weeks' expenses?—months, I might say. Where has the money come from? Mother, do you know? Esma assured me she was running up no long bills."

"Everything has been paid down," said Esma composedly. "It signifies very little how."

"I think it signifies very much," I said.

"All has been honest and straightforward, I assure you. Aunt Jane trusts me—why not you too?"

"Yes, I trust you, my dear; but Jeannie and I must beg for a little explanation," said Mother gently.

Esma flushed up a bright pink, and was evidently embarrassed. Uncle Amory thought this a good opportunity to make his voice heard.

"I don't wonder you are a little perplexed, my dear Jane, and Jeannie also. Positively I almost concluded for a time that Esmeralda must have discovered the philosopher's stone. And now that I am better informed—not as to the philosopher's stone, but as to the young lady's stones—ha! ha! ha!—I am anxious to express my approbation of her praiseworthy conduct. I should not have expected it of her. No, I positively should not."

I was utterly mystified, and looked from one to the other.

“Stones!” I repeated.

“Ha! ha!” laughed uncle Amory, delighted with his very tame little witticism and rubbing his hands together. “Ha! ha! Not the philosopher’s stone, but the young lady’s stones! Very good, isn’t it? Esmeralda knows how to transmute stones into gold.”

I saw Mother’s eyes fill with tears, and her hand steal into Esma’s. Did she understand? *I* felt perfectly stupid.

“Esma, do please tell me what it really means,” I said.

And she answered, “It isn’t worth such a fuss. I had a diamond ring and a few trinkets, worth something altogether; but I didn’t love them as I love you—all.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE OLD MANUSCRIPT.

“SOLD!” I exclaimed.

“Yes,” said Esma, with composure.

“Sold! not your diamond ring, and your ruby bracelet!” I reiterated, knowing something of their intrinsic value, and yet more of their association-worth in Esma’s eyes. She gazed at me hardily, with a smile, though her under-lip quivered.

“I liked very much to do it, Jeannie.”

“O no! O how could you let her?” I said eagerly to Mr. Auriol. “You don’t know how much she thought of those things.”

“I assure you I had no voice in the matter,” he responded. “If I *had*, I am not sure how far I could have used it dissuasively. But the whole thing was done long before any one suspected it.”

“Nobody *should* have suspected it, if I could have helped telling,” said Esma, with some defiance. “But uncle Amory took it into his head that I was spending aunt Jane’s money recklessly; and he confabulated with Mr. Auriol, and Mr. Auriol came down upon me with a lecture upon rectitude

and prudence, and I let the cat out of the bag in a burst of self-defence. That was all. Can't we talk of something more interesting?"

Mr. Auriol looked deprecating at part of her speech, and Mother said,—“ But, my dear child, I don't know what to say to our owing you this heavy debt.”

“ Debt ! ” Esma broke out almost angrily. “ It is no debt at all. It is your right. Aunt Jane, fifty thousand pounds wouldn't repay all I owe to you. It would not. You gave me a home, and a mother's love, when I was perfectly alone in the world. What are a row of rubies or of diamonds to that? *Please* don't say any more about them. I would much rather you should not.”

“ Highly commendable,” said uncle Amory, with an air of approval.

This checked at once all expression of feeling, and silence followed. Uncle Amory was the first to break it.

“ And now—since that matter has been satisfactorily settled—now, my dear Jane, a word with you. No doubt a hundred guineas sounds to these young people a very large amount. Nevertheless, the idea of your family being supported—clothed, fed, and housed—upon that sum is simply chimerical.”

Mother made a little movement of her head, and I saw moisture glittering on her eyelashes. “ But we shall be very economical,” I interposed.

“No doubt, no doubt. Still the difficulty remains unsolved. When you are a little older, my dear niece—well, well, the desire for independence is very praiseworthy on your part. But——” and here uncle Amory made a long pause. No one spoke, however, so he had to continue,—

“Now, I am a prudent man—a very prudent man. Too prudent by half some would say. I feel, however, that I owe a duty to myself—to my wife and daughters, I should say—hem! Nevertheless, all things considered, I think I shall not be over reckless in offering you some assistance in your difficulty, my dear Jane. A widowed sister—pressing claims—touching to my feelings—words of poor Lennox on his death-bed—showed a trust in me—most gladly respond——”

These and other confused sentences gradually opened out uncle Amory's meaning. I felt sure there had been some previous influence used on the part of Esma and Mr. Auriol to bring him to this pitch of generosity. He offered to take Gordon, now close upon fourteen years old, into his counting-house, and to pay for Edwy's expenses at a boarding-school in preparation for his entering the merchant navy. The former, indeed, would not be any loss to him, for he had long had his eye upon our eldest boy with some such intention; but the latter would involve no inconsiderable pull upon his pocket. Gordon was to have no salary at first, but if he worked well, and proved himself

of value, he would begin to receive a small sum after the first year, to be gradually increased. I believe I was a little disappointed to find that the merchant and not the royal navy was to be Edwy's destination, for at the first moment I misunderstood uncle Amory to refer to the latter. However, we could not reasonably look for more.

This double assistance would be a great relief to ourselves. The education and settling of the two boys in life had loomed before me as an almost insurmountable difficulty. It was not, indeed, what we should have chosen for them. Edwy would, I knew, be wild with delight at the prospect of going to sea, but the merchant navy and its associations were anything but desirable for his excitable and easily-led temperament. Also, I somewhat dreaded the constant influence of uncle Amory for Gordon at such an early age, and we had wished for two more years of schooling for him. We were, however, in no condition to choose for ourselves or for them, and could only gratefully accept the proffered aid.

Even so, how should we ever get on? When uncle Amory and Mr. Auriol had vanished, we three sat talking over the fire, and looking our difficulties in the face, till the light of confidence in my heart grew dim for a while. The hundred guineas seemed to shrink as I gazed upon them. Our rent and taxes mounted, I knew, to over forty pounds; yet the expenses of a move to a smaller

house would utterly swallow up any advantages to be gained thereby. Gordon and I should indeed dine away from home, but the very idea of our food, clothing, and household expenses being covered by sixty pounds a year seemed absurd.

"That need not be all," said Esma soberly, when I spoke of this.

"You think Maggie and John will help. If they can—yes."

"I do not mean the Drummonds. Aunt Jane, you know Lennox once said—no, you did not hear him; but he said you counted me as your child. Do you?—may I be?"

Mother held her hand for a few seconds thoughtfully, and then said,—

"Yes, so far as my loving you is concerned."

"Thank you. I am going back to my good old lady next week, you know; and I could not possibly spend all I have from her on myself. So, as I am your child——"

"No, no, Esma," I said; and Mother interposed, half-smiling——

"My dear! Twenty-five pounds!"

"A quarter of your income. Besides, it is going to be thirty from the beginning of next half. Twenty is all I should ever use—or fifteen."

"You must lay by," I said.

"At my age! Nonsense. That is all settled. I have been thinking that Francey and Ellie might carry on the copying," and her suppressed sigh

received a double echo. "They would make something that way. And now for one little matter more. I thought I would keep a sugar-plum till the close. Jeannie, do you know I took a great liberty with your belongings while you were ill?"

"Did you?" I said; and a shamed recollection flashed across me of how I had once deemed Esma a very liberty-taking young lady.

"Yes; I rummaged out that story of yours from your manuscript-box. It was very cool, but Mr. Auriol and I had a talk one day, and he seemed to think something might be done. He carried it off, and read it through, and said he liked it very much; and this evening he asked me to make his apologies to you. It's odd how much afraid of you he seems."

"No need," I said. "He was very welcome to look at the poor old thing if he cared."

"Well, he has looked and acted to some purpose. Here is a letter which he told me to hand over to you, and I was to ask whether you would accept the offer."

I read the letter through, and sat amazed. It was a brief business epistle from a certain well-known publishing firm, making proffer of twenty-five guineas for the copyright of my tale, on condition of certain alterations being made therein.

"Well!" said Esma softly. "It isn't so very

much for all your trouble ; but still it is hardly to be despised."

"Despised! Mamma!" I cried breathlessly. "Mamma, look here!"

"What is it, dear?" she asked, quite unsuspecting.

"Mamma—my poor old story," I said eagerly. "Only think—my poor old story—it is coming out at last, and I am to have twenty-five guineas for the copyright. O if only——"

If only Lennox could have been at hand to rejoice with us! It was a selfish wish, but for a moment my heart felt almost like breaking with the rush of pain. Too late to save him! Might it—would it—have saved him? Nay, what had I to do with that? God could have willed to send just this and more a year sooner. But His will had been to call Lennox "home."

Mother's hand stole tenderly into mine, for a sudden silence had fallen upon us. "Dear child, I know—I know," she said. "But he is better off."

"Mamma, I am ungrateful," I said, hardly able to speak. "Esma, it is a real comfort ; only——"

She just looked up at me with a white quivering face, and then went out of the room. Mother said pityingly,—

"Poor child! Poor dear child!"

"Mamma—Esma, do you mean?"

"Yes; only don't ever say anything about it."

“About what?”

“Her sorrow. Poor child, she has borne up well. Maybe it has saved her from a more bitter sorrow of another kind. I do not think *he* would ever have cared for her.”

“Who? Do you mean——?”

“Our Lennox.”

“Cared for *her*?”

“Yes. Did you never think she cared for him?”

“I don’t know. I did not think.”

“I never doubted it; and one night, just when you were getting better, she broke down, and I found something of what she was suffering. Poor Esma! She has not acute perceptions; and I think she had been building on his kindness of manner. I should have thought his indifference was sufficiently manifested; but no need *now* to undeceive her. Don’t ever speak of it to her, Jeannie.”

“No,” I said, sighing. “Mamma, isn’t it strange to see how the cup is dealt out to all around, each one having something of sorrow or pain?”

“No cross, no crown!” she said with a gentle smile. “Only a moment’s shadow before the exceeding ‘weight of glory,’ my Jeannie. We have ‘need of patience’ now; but when we have received the promises, how all this will shrink into nothing.”

“If one could but realise it,” I said.

“ I do, sometimes. Between whiles it is not so hard to trust, as it once was.”

“ Mamma, does Esma care more for such things than she did ? ”

“ Do you see no change ? ”

“ Yes ; but she does not speak, so I could not be sure.”

“ I *think* there is, and no mere outside change,” Mother said quietly. “ But she is not a girl from whom one can force confidence.”

“ No, indeed,” I remarked ; and then I took up the publishers’ letter again. How strange it seemed thus to obtain the fulfilment of my long-standing wish, and the answer to my prayers. Yes, the answer had come at last, and the very answer I had wanted ; only neither as nor when I had wanted it.

Why—oh, why not sooner ? What might not that twenty-five pounds have done six months earlier ? A few weeks of change or repose might have fitted Lennox to battle through the illness ? Why not—oh, why ?

So questioned one restless rebellious voice in my heart. But another voice—whether my own or no I cannot tell—made calm and sweet reply,—

“ It is the Lord ; let Him do what seemeth Him good.”

Ay, *let* Him do it. Disturb not the calm progress of His loving will and action by passionate wilful strivings. “ Let Him do what seemeth

Him good." O rebel heart—O restless spirit—be still, and rest upon thy God.

And I think my heart and spirit did grow calm that night; and I was content to wait—just to wait through this little moment of pain, till the coming of the eternal weight of glory.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MONTAGUES.

THE first day of entering upon my new duties—how I had dreaded it, yet longed to have it over.

Mrs. Montague and I met once beforehand, and I also began a slight acquaintance with my new pupils. It was quite another thing, however, to find myself seated in the schoolroom, just opposite those two great feckless-looking girls, with their mother hovering in my rear. Mrs. Montague was a sallow restless little woman, and something of habitual peevishness showed in her curved eyebrows and high-pitched though not harsh tones. I wished she would go away, but she said she “wanted to see how we got on.” She had a singular but sincere belief that nothing ever went on well unless she had a hand in it; and it was very evident that she meant to have a hand in schoolroom affairs.

I sighed mentally at this introduction to my work. The two girls were aged respectively sixteen and fourteen: and I did not quite know yet what to make of them. Edgitha was a brown-

eyed unformed maiden, not lacking in thoughtful intelligence of expression, but intensely bashful. Ella, clumsily made, large featured, fair-haired, with a heavy forehead, and a spice of lurking mischief in the corners of her light-grey eyes, was oddly unlike her gentle namesake in my home.

“Will you let me see what books you have been studying lately?” I asked.

“Which?” said Ella.

“Any you like. History—French—German, if you have begun it.”

“Edgitha *was* to, but she never did.”

“My dear, what an inelegant way of talking,” exclaimed Mrs. Montague. “Miss Phillimore will be quite shocked.”

Ella produced a few volumes slowly, one at a time. Edgitha sat still, never offering to help, and Mrs. Montague fidgeted up towards the table.

“I believe you have not had much experience in teaching, Miss Phillimore?”

“Not beyond my own sisters.”

“Sisters—ah, yes. How many? Only two! I thought you had five. But I do not mean to hinder you. Pray don’t let my presence interfere with the lessons; I only want to learn what is your method. Oh, by the bye, I particularly wish to direct your attention to Edgitha’s figure. It slipped my memory the other day. She has a most inveterate habit of stooping. Indeed her manners altogether require close attention. She

wants ease, and is far too nervous and self-conscious. She takes after me, for I was fearfully nervous at her age—I assure you I was, though you might not think it now. It was perfect agony to me to enter a room full of company. But that excessive shyness is very awkward, and must be overcome. I just wished to draw your attention to it.”

I promised to remember, and hoped she had finished; for the poor girl looked extremely uncomfortable.

“Then as to lessons——?” and Mrs. Montague paused questioningly.

“I was waiting until you had done with me,” I answered, with as much polite *sang-froid* as I could assume.

“Oh, I see. Yes; but pray don’t let me be any hindrance. I am very anxious that the girls should work hard. I do not think they got on at all with Miss Pearce; but I am sure it will be different now. Somehow she had not the knack of interesting her pupils. She never seemed to throw herself into her subject; and I always do believe that unless the teacher herself is interested, the pupils cannot possibly be interested either.”

I assented, but began to fear Mrs. Montague was not overmuch gifted with wisdom. Ella’s eyes were fixed on my face, with a certain twinkle in the corners which made me feel how undesirable was this style of conversation in her hearing.

“Mr. Montague’s great wish is that his girls should grow up thoroughly practical and useful women. Please discourage Edgitha’s dreaminess as much as possible. She wants rousing and pushing on. Ella is far the cleverest of the two, but Edgitha can do pretty well if she chooses. Ella learns her lessons and says them off without a grain of trouble. I doubt whether she ever looks at them till five minutes before they have to be repeated. Do you, my dear?”

“Not often, mamma.”

“That is hardly a good test of memory,” I observed. “How if I were to ask to hear those same lessons a few hours later, Ella?”

She laughed and coloured.

“I shall do that sometimes. And every lesson that you say to me must be prepared perfectly the day before, and the book be never opened for a glance on the morning when I hear it said.”

“Ah! I see Miss Phillimore means to work a reformation,” said Mrs. Montague. “Quite time too. Well, I think I had better leave you all for a little while now. You will be sure to attend to Edgitha’s carriage?”

“Quite sure.” And she went to the door, but lingered there.

“I assure you attention is needed. You see what an awkward way she has of carrying her head. Ella is awkward too; but almost all girls are so at her age. Besides, Ella is clever, and

people will put up with a little *gaucherie* where there is talent to make up for it. In fact, it no doubt often passes for originality. But Edgitha has a good figure, really, if she would make the best of it. At her age she positively *ought* to show more ease."

Three times did Mrs. Montague turn the handle of the door, and three times did she pause to deliver herself of some fresh injunctions. At length she vanished, and I breathed freely. At the same instant Ella's tongue was untied.

"Miss Phillimore, what are your sisters' names?"

I told her; and she exclaimed at the second,—

"My own! How queer. I must see her some day. How old is she? Seventeen! What a bother! I should have liked her for my friend. Is she like me?"

I shook my head in some amusement.

"Why? You needn't laugh. Is she pretty?"

"It is hardly fair to ask me, Ella. I think her lovely; but perhaps a sister is no fair judge. Now we must leave off talking, and attend to our books."

More easily said than enforced. Ella's tongue ran incessantly, though I had no reason to complain of the work she accomplished at the same time. Edgitha talked less, but wasted half her time in fits of dreaming. I soon found that it would be no easy task to keep them both up to

the mark. After luncheon we had a walk, and then lessons again till half-past five. By that time mind and body had been on the stretch to such a degree that I felt like a person strained and bruised all over. I suppose I had hardly yet shaken off the weakness resulting from my illness. The two girls gave me an affectionate farewell, and Mrs. Montague delayed her new governess for half-an-hour's talk in the passage. She seemed highly gratified with me and my doings; and certainly she had a right to an opinion in the matter, since her visits to the schoolroom had numbered nearly a dozen.

Then came the long walk home, wearying in itself, though there was a certain relief in the freedom from any necessity to speak or act. I plodded on mechanically, feeling myself a very wayworn wanderer through life; and by the time I reached our front door I thought I had done as much as I could do that day.

“Tired, Jeannie?”

Francey stood looking at me pitifully, as I stumbled heavily in, and sat down on the old hall chair.

“You'll never be able to go on with it. I knew you wouldn't.”

“Yes, I shall. Nonsense, Francey.”

“You're just done up altogether.”

“The first day is the most trying.”

“Come straight into the dining-room. I'll

make tea this evening. No, not there," as I half-turned towards the drawing-room.

"Why?"

She lowered her voice to a whisper—"Mr. Auriol and Ellie—hush-sh!"

"Francey!"

"Sh-sh!" and she pulled me into the dining-room, made me sit down, and took off my bonnet. "An exclamation may spoil all. Mr. Auriol begged me to befriend him; and when she came in I slipped out for something and didn't go back. Mamma and I have been on tenter-hooks, for they have been closeted in there an indefinite length of time."

"I wish Ellic *could* have him," I said slowly. "For his sake."

"So do I now, though I hated it once. But she would be happier; and I am trying not to be selfish. Besides, I have you."

"As you always had, my dear Francey."

"Ah! but having you now is a different thing."

"You used to be such a child," I said. "And we have passed through trouble enough to draw us very closely together."

"Is it only that?" she asked, looking disappointed.

"Is what?" I was getting refreshed already, seated in our cosy dining-room, with Francey's fingers clasping mine.

"The difference in you," she said quickly.

“ I can't see myself from outside, Francey. I *feel* different.”

“ Only the difference of having had trouble ? ”

“ No, indeed. The difference of knowing Christ my Lord as I never knew Him before,” I said softly. “ O Francey, how I wish——”

She made a quick movement. “ *Didn't* you know Him before ? ”

“ I thought I did. Yes—the knowledge was dawning. But I am not sure if I did not deceive myself in some measure. Francey, I wish——”

“ Yes, I know,” she said, kneeling down by my side, and looking up at me with her large shining eyes, while her cheeks grew white. “ I wish it too, Jeannie. And sometimes I think I do love Him just a little ; but how do I know it isn't all self-deceiving ? ”

“ Tell Him your doubts, and pray David's prayer that He may search and try you, and lead you in the way everlasting. Even if you have been deceiving yourself in the past, you need not in the future. Francey, darling, if you long to be saved, He longs still more to save you.”

“ *Does* He ? ”

She stood up suddenly, gave me a kiss, and went away. Tea was evidently forgotten. I put aside my shawl, rang for the urn, and did all that was needful. Then I heard the drawing-room door open, and I went into the passage. Mother and Austin Auriol were talking earnestly in low tones,

with such bright faces. I slipped past them into the drawing-room.

Ellie was standing on the hearth-rug, her little slender figure erect, her hands clasped nervously, and her cheeks burning. She did not see me till I was close to her side, and then, with a slight exclamation, she turned and flung herself into my arms. I felt her whole frame heaving and quivering with excitement, but she was silent.

“What is it, Ellie dear?” I said at length.

“Mr. Auriol——” she whispered.

“Yes,—tell me, Ellie.”

“I am going to—to—do what Lennox wished.”

Was that her only reason? I tried to lift up her face, but could obtain no more than a glimpse.

“Am I to say I am sorry or glad?” I asked softly. “What shall we do without our pet?”

She gave a violent start. “O no! O no! It won’t be that yet—for a great while. I couldn’t leave you all. Only—only—I’ve just—said—said—Yes.”

“He was Lennox’ greatest friend,” I said soothingly.

“Yes. Oh, I know! and he’s such a good man—and so kind——”

I did not feel exactly satisfied. But before I could say more Mother came up, and took Ellie out of my arms into her own.

“Sweet one, is this true? Why, it is the wish of my heart; only there is bitter with the sweet.”

“Mamma!—don’t.”

"Little woman, I want to see your face. Do you know I have been hoping this lately?"

"O no; I couldn't leave you."

Mother looked at me, rather perplexed.

"Not yet," I said; "Ellie does not care to think about that part of the matter yet. Better to enjoy the present quietly."

"It was *his* wish," Mother murmured involuntarily.

"Mamma, don't! O Mamma, I *wish* he were here! O Lennox!"

She broke into agitated sobs, crying passionately for Lennox, and refusing comfort. Mother took her off at last to bed, and I went to the tea-table with Francey and Gordon. His boyish appetite had been taxed almost beyond endurance, and I set him to work at once. Francey looked dreamily calm, with a repose I had rarely seen upon her face. Gordon wanted to know what Ellie was so miserable about.

"Not miserable at all, only over-excited," I said; and I explained the state of affairs.

"Whew! you girls are queer creatures," said the boy contemptuously. "I don't know how Mr. Auriol feels, but I know *I* shouldn't like the girl I was going to marry to set to and cry like that, just after saying she'd have me."

"Ellie always cries easily," said Francey. Nevertheless, I think we all felt a little doubtful concerning the whole affair, and were relieved to see her look like herself in the morning.

CHAPTER XX.

KATHIE'S BATTINGS.

"I ALWAYS thought it would come to that in the end," said Katherine de Salvernai, in a thoughtful tone.

She had dropped in unexpectedly upon my first half-holiday. Mother and the two girls were out, so Kathie and I retired to my bedroom for a chat. I had not seen her before since Christmas. After some sadder talk, the subject of Ellie's engagement came up.

"Did you? Ellie seemed so indifferent to him till just lately."

"Well, it is a very happy arrangement. When does the wedding take place?"

"Ellie won't hear it mentioned."

"No? But you say she is in good spirits?"

"As good as she has ever been, since our troubles—only variable."

"Poor little Ellie! Jeannie, how natural it seems for us, to be sitting here together! Can you believe that it is months since we saw one another?"

“ I could better believe it to be years.”

“ Ah, poor darling! you have gone through so much. No wonder it has changed you. Have I changed too?”

I took a good look at her. She was rather thin, but brighter than of old in her expression, and less excited in manner.

“ I have had no easy time in the battle-field,” she said. “ Jeannie, do you remember that talk of ours?”

“ Which?”

“ When you spoke of the difference of fighting alone and of fighting with your Captain by your side; and when you said you had proved His power to conquer for you when you were helpless.”

“ I remember.”

“ Well, you taught me something that day, though not the lesson you had been learning. You made me miserable and self-dissatisfied—sure that I wanted something more, and yet hardly knowing what I did really want.”

“ How did it come to you?” I asked, for I felt certain “ something more ” *had* come.

“ Do you like hearing ‘ experiences ’?” she asked, with a little smile.

“ Yours—yes.”

“ But haven’t you a great horror of talking about self?”

“ Yes, especially for myself. You have not my

tendency to self-consciousness, and there are exceptions to every rule. David said he would declare what the Lord had done for his soul."

"I'm sure those words would do for me," she said softly. "And then I have no possible cause for self-satisfaction—and we are not in public—and you and I are just like one."

"Tell me what you have been doing and feeling, Kathie."

"Well," she said, with a long breath, "it began just so. You made me long for something more—something which I couldn't get at. But I think I soon began to feel my way towards it. I am sure I was being led. Just about that time I happened to be thrown with two or three different people, who gave me more or less of help.

"Did you tell them your want?"

"Not all of them—oh no. Only we talked about how to live a more Christ-like life. And one spoke a great deal about faith. He said every failure came from a want of faith on our part. He told me that every time I failed to conquer in temptation, it was because I had not faith sufficient to grasp Christ's strength to overcome for me; and that if only I had enough faith, I might remove mountains of difficulty—everything would go down before me.

"It was all perfectly true, Jeannie, but perhaps it wasn't quite all I wanted. He kept to that one point and talked it threadbare, till I could think

of nothing else. But I do think that to fill a person's mind like that with one truth, leaving altogether aside its companion truths, is rather like filling one side of a ship with ballast, and leaving the other side empty.

“At all events it had much the same sort of effect upon me. I think there was real danger of my little boat going right over and sinking, with the weight of that unbalanced truth. Only, Jeannie, ONE was on board; I can't doubt it, even though He did seem for a while to be sleeping.”

She paused for a few seconds, and I pressed her hand.

“I began to see that the power of Christ Jesus in daily life to save one from sin, is just the same as His power to save the soul from death. But instead of looking straight up to Him, and away from self, that He might do all for me, I looked to my own faith, and was perpetually testing and trying it, to see if it were strong enough to bring the blessings I wanted. I really think I was in danger at last of looking upon it almost as a sort of transaction—so much faith put forth, so much blessing to be expected in return! Jeannie, do you see what I mean? It was very dreadful of me. I am sure *you* never felt so.”

Yes, I had. But not even to Kathie could I detail aught of that sad evening when Lennox had died.

“There is a spurious faith in prayer, as well as a true faith,” I said. “I think the truest and highest must always say the most fully, ‘THY will, not mine.’”

“Ah, you understand!” she said in a low voice.

Then, after a minute, she went on,—

“The next thing was, that your cousin, Mr. Harry Pleydell, came to see us.”

“Did he?”

“Yes, and he seemed very much distressed about all your troubles. No wonder. I used to cry my eyes almost out. But we had a long talk about these things, and he soon saw that I was in a doubting inquiring state. He told me that the thing I wanted was consecration of myself—whole-hearted consecration. I don’t say he actually made too much of it, but I do think he put it a little into the wrong place, though it was true enough what he said. I can’t remember a word that wasn’t true. I was to withhold nothing, he told me. I was to give up everything. The least thing reserved would be like the Babylonish garment in the Israelitish camp, and would hide my Saviour’s face. Yes, it was all true, but—

“I’m afraid to say whether he was worst as teacher, or I as learner. But he certainly left me with the idea that I had as much to do as any poor creature openly trying to work her way to heaven. I felt that I must never look for peace

until my consecration was absolutely perfect. So I was always searching into this, and looking into that, and testing my motives, and weighing my actions, and sitting in judgment on myself, and hunting out possibilities of disturbing elements in my spiritual life, till there was very little time left for looking at my Saviour. Do you see the danger, Jeannie? I used to sit and imagine all sorts of dreadful troubles that might come, and wonder whether the consecration of my will was so entire that I could take them willingly from His hand. And if my heart said 'No,' then I thought I must not look yet for His smile. I wasn't looking to my faith this time, but to my consecration, to bring all I needed. Jeannie, what blundering childish creatures we are. I was just turning deliberately away from the beauty of Christ, to look at myself and my poor little doings."

"And how were you helped? for I am sure you were, Kathie."

"Ah! I *did* pray all through to be guided aright. The first thing was a little bit of conversation with Mr. Auriol. He was so kind and wise. I spoke about my wish to have my Saviour's presence always near me. And he said I mustn't doubt it—that when clouds came, I must trust through all. He reminded me of those verses, 'My presence shall go with thee,' and 'Lo, I am with you alway,' and told me to cling to them. He said my doubts might bring about the very

thing I feared, and he warned me earnestly against too much spiritual pulse-feeling and watching of self. It was just the healthy bracing sort of advice I needed."

"After which——"

"After which I came one happy Sunday morning to hear him preach. Such a beautiful sermon on the burnt-offering—the only perfect one ever seen, in Jesus offering up of Himself for us—and then our poor little imperfect offering up of ourselves to Him. I began to see how it was only by steadfast looking up to Him that I could ever offer myself.

"That wasn't all, Jeannie. Father went to sleep in the afternoon, and I had an hour alone. I don't often get one, and it was delightful. I went upstairs with my Bible, and began to think how I still wanted and longed for something, I hardly knew what. And then I knelt down and prayed for it, whatever it might be—this blessing—and waited.

"Jeannie, I do think the answer came. It seemed to flash across me all at once with such wonderful sweetness. What *did* I want? Why, I wanted Jesus! I wanted Him in fulness. But I had Him. He was mine already, mine for ever! I could think I heard a voice saying, down in my heart, 'What *more* do you want? ALL THINGS are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.'"

She could hardly speak for a while, and her eyes were full.

“One thing after another seemed to open out. I saw that it was no new thing I wanted, but only a greater fulness of what I had already. And I felt sure that would come, more and more of it. But the greater things I had longed for were mine, only I had realised and grasped them so faintly. I was *His* already, consecrated to Him already; but I had to realise this consecration more fully, and to act upon it in daily life. And His power in the battle was mine, but I had to grasp it more fully by faith. I kept on thinking, ‘What more? —what more do I want? Jesus is all, and He is mine, so all things are mine.’ And I saw that it wasn’t perpetual examination into self, but perpetual looking up to Him, that would bring confidence and victory.”

“I am very glad, Kathie ——”

“I have had clouds since, but they don’t last as they did. It is peace now. And I think I have the ‘more’ I wanted, only it isn’t anything new, but just a deepening of the old. I do feel now that the Lord Jesus is everything to me. And every bit of my life-work is for Him, and that makes it sweet. I don’t mind *now* spending my time over puddings for father, and having to darn and mend, and waste hours in talk, because you know it is just exactly the work which He has given me to do; and those two words ‘FOR HIM’ make everything beautiful.

“Jeannie,” and she looked earnestly at me—“do you think there can be anything of self-deceiving in all this? Can there be? He is so dear to me now.”

“I have always thought Mother was very dear to me,” I remarked musingly. “Do you think that I can be deceiving myself, and that I really don’t care for her?”

Kathie’s face lighted up brilliantly.

“I see! Then I needn’t be afraid, for I am as sure of that love as I am of my love for my father. And then He loves me. O Jeannie, only to think of His love! One can’t doubt *that* for a moment.”

I had doubted it for awhile—when Lennox was taken; but I did not tell her so. I only let her talk on. She did not say any more about herself, having simply told me facts so far; but she had a great deal to say about her Saviour and His words. The Bible seemed so full of fresh beauty to her, that I think she could have gone on pouring out her happy realisations for hours.

Dear, loving, enthusiastic Kathie. How many have eager warmth and bright enthusiasm to spare for earthly interests, who grow calm and reserved and languid when they touch upon heavenly things! Not so was it with Kathie. She gave her very best of love and joy and praise in the service she had chosen.

But I could not help thinking, after our con-

versation, how even the best intentioned and most earnest-hearted teachers may sometimes mislead their hearers, just from a little lack of heavenly wisdom, in the putting forth of heavenly truths *without* the wondrous divine balancing with which they are given in God's Word.

CHAPTER XXI.

ABOUT ELLA.

THE summer months came softly rolling over our heads, and brought many matters of care or interest in their train. No unjoyous household was ours, notwithstanding all the grief through which we had passed. Our anxieties were greater than of old, but Mother had never looked less anxious. Her placid face was a perpetual unspoken song of thanksgiving. Just *because* she and I felt ourselves so absolutely helpless, we had the more completely rolled off our burden upon One who was strong to bear.

And we made our way—ay, and paid it too, though the wherewithal at times seemed hard to find. I soon discovered that it was needful, not only to teach all the day, but to write all the evening. Simple children's stories were the utmost I could accomplish after hours of toil preceding; but I loved the little task, and the little opportunities of teaching little lessons about my Saviour. It was all work "for Him" from first to last. That was the "sweetener."

My other tale was passing slowly through the

press, and the proof sheets took up valuable time, without bringing in any more of the "needs be" for our household. I found it necessary to rise an hour earlier sometimes, to get through all that had to be done.

Francey's clear voice was ever carolling over the house that summer, as it had not been wont to do in other days. After long seeking, doubting, and thirsting, the peace she failed to find was suddenly borne to her through the medium of those few words of mine: "If you long to be saved, HE longs still more to save you." In the wondering joyful reply, "Does He?" she accepted the great truth of her Saviour's pitying love, and believed that His atoning blood had been shed for her; and the barriers of unbelief were swept away. Strong was the tie thenceforth between Francey and me; and very sweet it was to feel that I had been used, in my weakness, to carry the message of comfort to her.

Edgitha and Ella Montague were a great and growing source of interest to me. To Edgitha I soon became really attached, and she returned my love with intense devotion. I was almost afraid for awhile that Mrs. Montague might grow jealous of my unbounded influence over the elder girl. But I soon found that she did not in the least appreciate the depth of Edgitha's love, and merely looked upon it as "just a fancy,—she hoped not a passing one."

Something of an acquaintance gradually sprang up between our two families. Mrs. Montague called very kindly upon Mother one day, and nearly overwhelmed her with a prolonged gush of small-talk. Ella Montague was extremely anxious to see my sisters, but I did not care to take the initiative in the matter, even though Mrs. Montague showed no unwillingness for the gratification of Ella's desire. However, I was one day walking with the girls in the direction of my home, when there came on suddenly a heavy hailstorm, and we were thankful to take refuge there as speedily as might be. Mother's occupation happened to be mending, and Francey's copying, when we entered. Ella used to spend a good deal of her time in dreamy idling, which was perhaps in a measure excusable—if only I could have felt sure that her musings were all happy ones. She stood at the window just then, in an unconsciously graceful attitude, gazing pensively out upon the rain; and we had time to make observations, for she remained perfectly unconscious of our presence till we had all advanced across the room. I saw the other Ella give her own peculiar little nod of sagacious admiration before Ellie woke up and came to meet us, with a start and a pretty blush of embarrassment. *

We went into the kitchen and dried ourselves, and then sat and talked till the storm was over.

I could not be sorry that Mother should have an opportunity of seeing my two great overgrown pupils. She liked the gentle Edgitha, and won her out of her shyness into easy conversation, while Ella's clumsy movements and odd remarks amused her not a little. But when we three ventured to quit the house and return homewards, I had to endure a perfect volley of questions.

"You needn't have been afraid to praise your sister's beauty, Miss Phillimore. She's a dear!" said Ella.

"I liked the other best," put in Edgitha softly. "Do you mind, Miss Phillimore?"

"What, do you think you are bound to prefer Ellie?"

"No; but——"

"I love them alike," I said. "But so far as attractions go, Francey has the most mind, and Ellie the prettiest face."

"Mind is worth more than looks, of course," said Ella sententiously. "Still—I should like that Miss Ella Phillimore for my friend."

"She is too old," said Edgitha. "It would be enough, I think, to sit and look at—the other."

That was Edgitha all over, and I could not help smiling. "My dear, I wish you a better occupation," I said, "and friends nearer your own standing."

"Now, Miss Phillimore—you'll make yourself out decrepit next," said Ella. "Edgitha, I've

a splendid scheme in my head—only don't tell mamma."

"Then don't tell me," I said decidedly.

"No, now, indeed—it isn't any mischief—only just an idea. I was only thinking—suppose, when Trevor comes home, he were to see your sister and fall in love with her. The pretty one, I mean. I *should* like her for a sister-in-law."

"A quite impossible and ridiculous fancy on your part, Ellie," I said gravely. "You are too much of a child yet, to think about such things; and this could *never* come to pass, so no more about it, dear."

But checking speech was not necessarily checking thought; and I felt sure Ella indulged herself therein to an unlimited extent.

The two girls had only one brother, named Trevor, then finishing his last term at college. He was shortly to return home for several months, and as the day drew near, Ella became a victim to wild excitement.

On the very last day of lessons he arrived. I was just arranging about certain tasks to be accomplished for me in the holidays, when there was a sounding rap at the front door, and Ella rushed away into the passage, crying,—

"Trevor; oh, it's Trevor's knock."

Edgitha did not move. I thought she was sorrowfully feeling for me, knowing of the brother I had lost. Then it occurred to me that she

might be only dutifully awaiting my leave to move; and I was about to bestow it, when all at once the door was flung open, and Ella galloped in like a young elephant. I heard Mrs. Montague whisper outside,—

“Yes, do come; they won’t be satisfied till you have seen their paragon governess.” And the lower but equally clear answer reached me likewise,—“Nonsense! What on earth shall I say to her?”

I do not know why I had expected Trevor Montague to resemble his father. Certainly the picture in my hand had been of a stout, light-coloured, ordinary individual; and I had counted the sister’s raptures to be nothing more than sisterly.

My preconceived notions proved false. A dark-skinned gentlemanly person, of particularly cool demeanour, stood before me. He looked as if he had self-confidence sufficient to face all the world. Ella hung upon one of his arms in ponderous devotion; but he drew it from her and bowed to me across the table.

“Ella, that will do!” he muttered, as she seized upon him again.

“Ella!” I said, under my breath, seeing him look annoyed; and with her newly acquired instinct of obedience she released him at once, and stood meekly apart. He gave one quick glance of surprise from governess to pupil and back again.

“ I am afraid you find this sister of mine a wild colt to manage, Miss Phillimore.”

“ I am getting her into harness,” I said.

“ What are you all studying together? Geography? Come, I’ll examine you both.”

The atlas fell open in his hands at the map of Asia, and he began a rapid string of dodging questions, without casting a glance at it himself. I was a little afraid for Edgitha, but she seemed to have no nervousness with him; and Ella’s memory rarely failed her on an emergency. Both answered quickly and creditably, and he speedily fell to giving them information, in place of calling out what they possessed. Getting into Indian history somewhat beyond their depth, he appealed to me, and we had a most lively discussion upon the days of Clive, passing thence to Warren Hastings. I liked his fair and dispassionate view of both men, and was amused at the girls’ interested faces.

However, the dinner-bell interrupted us, and I awoke to the consciousness of having very much outstayed my time. Good-byes were speedily said, the girls openly lamenting the coming long break in our daily intercourse. I gave them a general invitation to pay me a visit whenever they would, and took my departure, expecting to find considerable wonder at home concerning my prolonged absence.

It had to be prolonged yet further. A drizzling rain was beginning to fall by the time I reached

our street, and I was about to hasten on, when Austin Auriol suddenly confronted me.

"Let me shelter you," he said, putting up his umbrella. "You are late back this evening."

"Yes, I was hindered."

"I have been waiting about for half an hour, wanting a word with you."

"What word?" I said, as he offered his arm.

"Must you hurry in this moment?"

"No," I said, "not till you have done with me."

And then we went a good many paces in silence. I thought he looked pale and somewhat troubled.

"How to say it, Jeannie, I hardly know. But you will act the part of a true friend to me and to—her. It is only for her sake that I can force myself to speak."

I looked at him wonderingly. What did he mean?

"I want you to answer me one plain question," he said. "Do you, or do you not, think Ella happy?"

My past misgivings rushed in a tide of tenfold force over me. What could I say?

"You will answer me frankly. I know I can depend upon you as upon no one else. Tell me the plain truth, please. Better I should know it now than by-and-by."

"You seem to think you know it already," I found myself saying involuntarily.

His face grew suddenly ashen.

“And you confirm my fear! You cannot undeceive me!”

“Stay. Let me think. No, you must not misunderstand me,” I said hastily. “Ellie has not been very bright lately, but then she never has been so since Lennox’ death.”

“Do you think it is that alone which keeps her down? Is it likely—is it natural—with her temperament—at her age?”

Again strong secret misgivings stilled aught of response. We took another turn upon the wet pavement.

“I want you to understand me,” he said at length, in a voice which would not entirely submit to control. “For my own sake I would never utter a word—would have it go on at any risks. But I cannot for hers. I love her too well. If she has been drawn into it hastily—if she did not really know her own mind—I will not have her life blighted. Let her rather be free at once. I—I—could bear——”

“Don’t, Austin!” I said anxiously.

“I did not know I could be so easily unmanned,” he said, in a low tone. “There, we won’t talk any more about it. Will you seek out for me the true state of the case?”

“What am I to do?” I asked, in some fear.

“Anything. Your womanly tact will dictate better than my wisdom. Watch her—speak to

her—whichever you think best. If I am mistaken, better no such idea should be suggested. But I leave it to you—only don't lengthen my suspense needlessly."

And he hurried away, and I went in with a heavy burden on my shoulders. O Ellie, if you had but known your own mind sooner! I felt indignant at her weakness, dearly as I loved her. And yet, when she came hurrying to meet me—with her sweet rosebud childlike face and loving kiss—how could I have a harsh thought concerning her? She was Lennox' pet and darling.

CHAPTER XXII.

WE THREE GIRLS.

KATHIE, Francey, and I made a busy sewing trio one afternoon in the following week. Kathie appeared again unexpectedly, and finding us two at work, she insisted on lending her aid. Mother was out walking with Gordon, and Austin and Ella were closeted in the drawing-room, ostensibly for "just half an hour." As yet I had found no opportunity for seeking into the true state of Ella's mind, and indeed a more perplexing task had never in my life been set before me.

"So your cousin Harry Pleydell is coming home," said Kathie, her deft brown fingers occupied over an old stocking. We had been listening reposefully to Francey's low-toned happy singing, which suddenly ceased under the attentions required by a certain patch.

"No, not yet," I said. "The plan is for him to join all the home-party by-and-by at the sea."

"The plan is given up then. I met aunt Jane and Gordon just now, walking with your cousin, Miss Pleydell—the eldest, I think. Your aunt is

not very well, and your uncle has failed in some speculation or other——”

Francey and I exclaimed.

“Nothing of any great importance; so don't be anxious,” said Kathie. “But the seaside business is put off, and your cousin is coming home immediately.”

I thought of Ellie, and almost wished Harry Pleydell could have kept out of our way just then. It was a sort of nervous feeling, hardly to be reasoned for or against.

“Aunt Eleanor not well, did you say, Kathie?”

“Not very—worried, Miss Pleydell said. Look here; will this do? I'm putting my very best darning into it.”

“I wish I could equal you,” I said rather absently.

And we worked on awhile without saying any more.

“Francey—sing.”

Francey glanced up with a smile. “Why don't you, Kathie?”

“I want cheering up to-day. I'm down.”

“What about?” she asked, her face full of sympathy.

We three were growing to be very open with one another. Kathie did not mind the question.

“I'm disheartened,” she said. “There are some enemies whom I took to be slain, and they have suddenly risen up again in full armour, stronger than ever.”

Francey looked at me. "Well," I said slowly; "I have found the same, Kathie, before now."

"What did you do?"

"First, what you are doing. I went through a hopeless stage—almost looked upon myself as beaten. And then, the ring of victory came to me in the very midst of the conflict. There are always weapons to be had from the armoury of God's Word."

"Not always ready to one's hand, are they?"

"I think so, only we don't always put out our hands to grasp them."

"Pass on yours to me," said Kathie softly.

"'The Lord mighty in battle,'—that is one," I said, making little pauses. "'Mighty to save'—that is another. 'Strengthened with all might according to his glorious power'—that is another. 'The Lord himself is thy keeper'—that is another."

She drew a deep breath, and said, "They ought to be enough. 'The Lord Himself—mighty in battle—mighty to save—JEHOVAH HIMSELF.'"

"Yes; I always love that last word in the Prayer-Book version," I said. "It seems to give such force and personality; like the words spoken on the lake: 'Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.'"

"I find myself sometimes at my old mistake, watching and gauging my own faith, instead of looking straight to Him," said Kathie. "Isn't it

wonderful how we see a thing to be all wrong, and think we are quite safe never to do it again, and then suddenly find that we are in the very midst of the same old failure."

"Like children, learning and forgetting," said Francey. "Jeannie — Kathie — I want you to answer me a question. Is it right or wrong to be always wishing for more work than God gives me to do?"

"Well, Kathie?" I said.

"That's one of the enemies I fancied slain," said Kathie. "He has risen up again like a giant."

"What name, and under what guise?" I asked.

"Discontent—under the guise of seeking God's glory. But, Francey, don't mistake me. There is a longing which is the longing of pure love to Jesus, and which I don't think can be wrong."

Francey looked wistful.

"Only I'd make sure that I was doing all that God *had* given me to do," said Kathie.

"My time is so taken up," said Francey. "There does not seem any possibility of my going more among the poor. It would not be right to leave mending on Mother's hands. Don't you both long for more direct work?"

"Sometimes I do," said Kathie. "But I am cut off from it distinctly. So I look on this as my preparation time. Maybe I'm in training for a hospital-nurse."

“Jeannie is best off,” said Francey. “Teaching, and writing, and influencing others.”

“Very secular teaching, the greater part,” I answered. “As for being best or worst off. I don’t think you or I can judge. Did you ever look at Newton’s writings? and do you remember what he says in his description of what a supposed angel’s life would be upon this earth, if one came to live here for a while?”

No; they had not seen it. I put down my work, and fetched the “Cardiphonia.”

“Just these few words, and then I must go on working.

“‘In the first place, I take it for granted this angel would think himself a stranger and pilgrim upon earth. . . . Surely he would look upon all the bustle of human life (further than the design of his mission might connect him with it) with more indifference than we look upon the sports of children or the amusements of idiots and lunatics, which give us an uneasiness rather than excite a desire of joining in them. He would judge of everything around him by the reference and tendency it had to promote the will of Him that sent him; and the most specious or splendid appearances, considered in any other view, would make no impression upon him. Consequently, as to his own concernment, all his aim and desire would be to fulfil the will of God. All situations would be alike to him; whether he was com-

manded, as in the case of Sennacherib, to destroy a mighty army with a stroke; or, as in the case of Hagar, to attend upon a woman, a servant, a slave; both services would be to him equally honourable and important, because he was in both equally pleasing his Lord, which would be his element and his joy,—whether he was appointed to guide the reins of empire or to sweep the streets.”

“That’s grand,” said Kathie, as I paused. “I’ll tell you what, Jeannie, it brings down the highest service to two very simple words: Loving obedience.”

“But still,—still,” broke in Francey earnestly, “we can’t be meant to think all kinds of service alike. It must be higher work to win lost souls than to—to do what we are doing now. And surely the longing for more direct service isn’t wrong.”

“I see that Newton supposes his angel to have, certainly in the chief place, the success and spread of the glorious Gospel at heart,” I said.

“Yes; but look here,” interposed Kathie eagerly, with clasped hands and neglected work. “That may be in a sense the highest work of all—*must* be, it seems to us. But God doesn’t give the highest work to all His servants alike; and wishing for it against His will seems to me like rebellion. I don’t think Francey is right to talk of ‘more direct service.’ There can’t be more

direct service than doing God's will. And if it is God's will that one should preach the Gospel, and another should look after the home-comforts of that same preacher, who dares to say the first is more *direct* service—though *higher*, no doubt—than the second, if only both are done alike for Christ's sake?"

"'I came down from heaven *not* to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.'" I quoted slowly. "There's our example. 'Even Christ pleased not himself.'"

"And I have always one great comfort," went on Kathie. "There's no knowing how much one *may* be doing to win souls, without that which Francey calls 'direct service.' Just the mere letting of our lamp shine brightly may light some lost one on his way, all unknown to ourselves. Jeannie, what an illumination the world would have, if only every Christian shone steadily and clearly, instead of flickering and hiding away his light."

I gave her an assenting smile, but only said, "Well, Ellie?" as the door opened.

She came in and stood by my chair, looking troubled and dreamy.

"Has Austin gone?"

"Yes; he went just now."

"Here, Ellie; did ever you see such a darn as this in your life?" exclaimed Kathie exultingly, with easy transition from soft gravity to soft gaiety. "I'm proud of my workmanship."

Ellie gazed at it abstractedly.

"Ellie, do you know Harry Pleydell is coming home?" I said, smoothing down my long seam.

What made me say the words, I don't know. I was just thinking it would be best not to mention him at that moment, when suddenly they slipped out.

"Harry——"

She gave a visible start, but I do not think either of the others remarked it.

"Yes; uncle Amory has had something of a loss, and aunt Eleanor is not very well," I said, trying to speak in my most matter-of-fact tone. But I think my secret anxiety was too great to be absolutely controlled. I glanced up and met her eyes, and in one moment I knew she had read something of my feelings.

I would have given anything to have recalled that moment's indiscretion, or to have seen any sign of resentment on her part. But she only stood perfectly still, watching me as if fascinated, with a livid look coming round her lips.

"Ellie, are you faint?" exclaimed Francey.

"N-o; what makes you think so?" asked Ellie nervously.

"My dear child, you look as if you were," I said, glad of the excuse to rise and pat her cheek carelessly. "You white-faced little woman. I shall tell Austin he ought to scold you for not taking longer walks. Has Mother come in yet?"

“No, I don't think so,” said Ellie, looking relieved at my natural tone, as if she had expected something different. “Can't I help you with your work?”

I hoped that the affair had blown over, and that my momentary want of self-control would work no ill consequences. We sat together a while longer, and then Mother came home, and Kathie went away. Mother mentioned what we had already heard, and said she was sure Harry would be a comfort to aunt Eleanor. Beyond that no remarks were made, and Ellie seemed to pay no attention to the matter.

But late at night, as I sat reading in my room by candlelight, there came a little tap at the door, and Ellie glided in. She was in her dressing-gown, with her long brown hair falling all unbound over her shoulders, and her blue eyes looked distressful.

“Ellie!” I exclaimed.

“May I come in? I want a talk with you, and Francey is asleep.”

“Come, darling.”

She knelt down by my side, and I felt her quivering like a little aspen-leaf.

“What is it, Ellie?” I asked.

“Jeannie, what—what—did you mean to-day?”

She could hardly get out the words, and grew whiter still with the effort, though her eyes were lifted to meet mine resolutely.

“Fanciful as ever, Ellie?” I said, smiling.

“Am I fanciful? I thought Francey was more inclined to that. Jeannie, I don’t know what to do. I’m not happy. O do help me!”

It was coming now. I shrank a little for poor Austin Auriol’s sake.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BREAKING OFF.

“ I CAN’T help you, unless you tell me exactly what is wrong, Ellie.”

“ I can’t. I don’t know it myself. Jeannie, don’t speak in that cold way—don’t hate me. I can’t help it. Do put your arms round me.”

“ Ellie, dearest, I am not cold,” I said, drawing her nearer to me. “ But you must speak plainly. I dare not guess for fear of guessing wrong.”

“ Austin—” she whispered.

“ Well? ”

“ I—I’m afraid—I—don’t feel as I ought——”

“ You should have known this before,” I could not help saying.

“ I thought it would come—indeed I did. He is so good and kind. And he was Lennox’ friend—and Lennox wanted it to be ; and—and I thought it would help Mamma by-and-by ; but——”

“ What has opened your eyes, Ellie? ”

“ I’ve been miserable for weeks. I can’t make myself feel differently. And to-day he—wanted me—to fix—to fix a time. O but I couldn’t ; I

told him I couldn't. And he said he was afraid I didn't know anything of his feeling of impatience; and I could not say I did, so I said nothing. And then he got up and went away. And when I heard from you——”

She broke off, and lifted her face to look at mine again.

“Please don't mistake me, Jeannie. You were mistaken this afternoon. I know you were; only don't talk about it. I want you to understand the real truth. I don't feel what I ought for Austin; and I don't feel in that way for anybody in the world. I don't think I ever shall, or I *must* have learned to do it for Lennox' friend. I love Mother and Francey and you better than everybody. And Lennox—I shall never know any one like him. I couldn't love any one so much,” she said with a deep sigh. “And Harry is as much my brother as ever—next after you three to me. He always will be. Jeannie, do you understand?”

“You are a very child still,” I said thoughtfully. “I wish Austin had had the sense not to speak to you till you were a woman.”

“I wish he hadn't. I wish I *could* be a child again. Tell me what to do,” she said helplessly. “I can't speak to him. I can't bear to see him troubled.”

“Why not?” I said involuntarily, thinking she had not shown much regard for his feelings.

“O I can’t bear it. He is so good. And it is all my fault; and I have been so silly. What shall I do, Jeannie? Ought I to let it go on?”

“No,” I answered. “If you are sure you do not and cannot love Austin Auriol, it would be cruel to bind yourself to him; and unprincipled to promise that which it is not in your power to perform.”

She looked half-frightened at my grave tone.

“Was I so wrong? But I thought it would all come right. Lennox wished it—and Austin is so good——”

“Ellie, are you perfectly certain that you know your own mind now?” I asked earnestly.

Ellie gazed at me with some wonder, and inquired, “What do you mean?”

“Are you perfectly certain that you do not care for Austin more than you imagine?”

“I like him,” she said dubiously. “I like him very much. But I do get tired of seeing him so often; and I think I am glad when he says good-bye. I would rather have a good talk with Mother, or Francey, or you, or Harry.”

I believe I sighed. It certainly did seem hopeless.

“So what shall I do?” she asked again, evidently much relieved to have handed over her perplexity to me, and showing a curious childlike faith in my power to make things straight. She did not seem yet in the least to realise the extent of the wrong she had done to Austin.

“ I think you had better let me speak to Austin to-morrow,” I said slowly.

“ Will you? O thank you, Jeannie. I would so much rather you should than I.”

“ I think you will have to do so too; but I will open the way. Austin has been fearing something of this sort, I think——”

Doubting whether or no to tell her of what he had said, I began thus hesitatingly.

“ Then he will not be so taken by surprise,” she said. “ I am glad of that. And, oh, I am *so* glad I have spoken to you. It has been horrid lately—like a sort of nightmare feeling.”

She clung to me gratefully, but I found it difficult to be quite so tender as she expected. Had we indeed spoilt our winning pet with over-consideration of her feelings? Tears came into her eyes, and she said, “ There! I know you are angry with me, Jeannie.”

“ No; not angry, only grieved that you did not know your own mind sooner, and very sorry for poor Austin,” I answered gravely. “ Good-night, Ellie, darling; I must not let you stay up longer.”

She cried a little, and then went away; more evidently distressed at my slight restraint of manner than at anything to do with Austin Auriol directly. I wondered how much she slept that night. I lay and counted every stroke of the clock till morning light; while Ellie wore no signs whatever of restlessness past, when we met at breakfast-time.

The dread of the coming interview rested heavily upon me for hours. Mother and I talked the matter over, and she left it entirely in my hands. Austin had shown confidence towards me, she said, and I was the right person to speak.

He came at last—and not Ellie but I went to him in the drawing-room. He shook hands, looked me steadily in the face, and then did what I had never known Austin Auriol do before—deliberately turned his back upon me, and walked to the window.

How long he remained there I could not tell. I simply sat and waited. After a while he came back, and stood with one hand on the mantel-piece, looking down at me.

“I understand, Jeannie.”

“Then there is no need for me to say more,” I answered sorrowfully.

“Yes, there is. Tell me how it came about.”

“You and I did the business between us,” I said. “Austin, she is the veriest child still, despite her eighteen years. She is my own sister; but don’t think I excuse her—only she does not know, does not understand.”

I wanted to tell no needless particulars; but he would spare neither himself nor me, and he wrung from me bit by bit, every detail of the last night’s conversation.

“Thank you. Now *I* understand, if she does

not," he said with bitter calmness. "Yes, it is childishness; but are you sure it is not heartlessness as well? I do not want to be hard upon her, however, though she has treated me hardly. Tell her she is absolutely free — and tell her I forgive her. The thing is at an end."

"You do not want to see her once more?" I faltered.

"What for?"

I believe I had some faint hopes that an interview might bring about a different conclusion; but I had no reason for saying so to him.

"It would be useless pain for myself and a needless trouble to her. It is pain to me to say good-bye to you, Jeannie; but good-bye it must be. If any here are ill and need my ministrations, send for me; otherwise our connection is for the present broken off. I dare not trust myself among you all."

His cold fingers clasped mine for a moment, and then he passed into the passage. Mother stood there, having just left the dining-room. Tears streamed down her face as she met him; for he was Lennox' friend, and all connected with Lennox was dear to her.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Phillimore," he said huskily.

"O Austin; to think that a child of mine——"

"She is a child—only a child," he said in a low voice. "Good-bye, Mrs. Phillimore. *You* will remember me kindly, I know."

And then he was gone. Mother just said, "Go to Ellie," and motioned me upstairs. I passed straight on to her room, and found her gazing out of the window, with a half terror-struck face.

"Ellie," I said.

She turned and fixed her dilated eyes on mine. "Has he gone? Didn't he want to see me?"

"No. Why should he, Ellie?"

"I don't know. Jeannie——"

Her hand grasped my arm, and she still looked at me half-fearfully.

"Jeannie! is it all over? I thought I should be so glad."

"You could hardly be glad to put a good man to pain and sorrow," I said.

"No; that is it. But I didn't mean—I thought—I thought it would all come right. Jeannie, don't look so grave. Will every one look grave at me?"

"Ellie, don't be such a child," I said, almost out of patience. "You have your wish now, and you are perfectly free. And Austin told me to say that he forgives you."

"Forgives! Then he was angry."

"He had good reason to be displeased, but I thought he took the matter beautifully."

"Ah! you admire him so. If he had but fallen in love with *you!*" she said. "But do you think he will seem displeased with me when I see him next time?"

“You are not likely to see him again,” I said coldly, feeling more of the risings of my old temper at her first words than I had done for a long while past.

“Not see him!”

“Of course not. What should he come to the house for? Ellie, do have a little common-sense.”

“But he did before—when I refused him.”

“He had Lennox then to come and see,” I answered sorrowfully.

“O Jeannie, don’t. And Mother loves him so for Lennox’ sake. And I have driven him away.”

Regret of a certain kind had found entrance, if not actual remorse for the wrong she had done. Ellie put her head down on her bed, and cried till she was exhausted.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OTHERS IN THE BATTLE.

Two days later Harry Pleydell made his appearance. I was out walking with Ellie at the time, and a very trying walk it was, for I had never known our sweet-tempered pet so fractious and difficult to please. She was perpetually arguing out the subject of her broken engagement, going over and over the same ground with me, thoroughly self-dissatisfied, yet meekly and persistently self-defensive. If I blamed her, she tried to prove that she had been in the right; and if I did not blame her, she sorrowfully talked of how she had been in the wrong; yet the moment I agreed therewith, she turned round again upon the defensive. I found reasoning of little avail, and had to take refuge in half-chiding, half-soothing, as with a fretful child.

“Mr. Harry Pleydell is here, Miss,” was Kitty’s information as we entered the front door; and Ellie, instead of being pleased, made an impatient movement as if almost annoyed. I took no notice, but went into the drawing-room, where I found

him deep in conversation with Francey—the two faces both looking very serious and very happy.

“Jeannie! O how do you do?”

He sprang up, and gave me his warm-hearted greeting. Ellie yielded only the tips of some limp fingers to his grasp, and I saw him scan her quickly with evident perplexity, ere turning again to me.

“Congratulate me, Jeannie! I have just been telling my good news to Francey.”

“And I have been saying how I could envy him,” said Francey eagerly. “Jeannie, you will be so glad.”

“What news?” I inquired. “Is aunt Eleanor better?”

“I don’t think there is much the matter with her. She has been rather worried at this loss of my father’s; but after all, what are a few thousands! Their loss is a very windfall of joy to me.”

“How? What do you mean?”

“My father has consented to my going out as a missionary.”

I *did* congratulate him then. It was the very wish of his heart, and his blue eyes fairly shone with delight.

“I can’t believe it yet; but it is true. We had a long talk yesterday evening. The change in his determination is a mystery to me, humanly considered. Only we know that nothing is too hard

to be brought about—and I have so hoped and prayed.”

“It is just what we have wished for you,” said Francey, clasping her hands. “Isn’t it, Ellie? To think of the joy of *such* a life before you, Harry—*such* a service.”

“Harry might have found plenty of work to do in England after all,” said Ellie, playing with her hat, which she had pulled off. “And those blacks are dreadfully uninteresting.”

I saw that the perverse mood had not yet passed off. Harry had never heard her speak so before, and glanced from her to me without a word.

“I don’t think *any* human beings are uninteresting,” said Francey. “And the farther they are from us, and the lower they have sunk, the more they need raising and teaching. It seems to me that missionary work is the very highest and noblest of all.”

“Why, Ellie, I felt sure of *your* sympathy,” said Harry gently.

“Francey’s will do as well, I suppose,” said Ellie with some shortness. And then a sort of flush passed over her eyes, showing me that tears were not far distant; and she suddenly quitted the room.

“What is the matter?” asked Harry. “Did I say anything to annoy her? I never knew before that Ellie could be annoyed.”

“Nothing—never mind,” I said. “Ellie is not

very bright just at present. The truth is, her engagement has come to an end——”

“*Has it?*”

“Yes; and we are all very sorry, but it was by her own wish. She is rather unsettled and irritable now, and I suppose it will take her a short time to recover her balance. But about your plans——”

Harry looked a little as if he had received a dash of cold water, and it took him some minutes to recover his spirits. A good deal more soberly than he had first begun, he explained how the change had come about—not exactly as the direct result of his father’s losses, yet seeming to have some connection therewith. He had found his father more thoughtful and more disposed to depression than he had ever known him; and seizing on a happy moment, had earnestly brought forward and pressed his desire for missionary work. Whether uncle Amory had been previously wavering, or whether in his somewhat subdued mood Harry’s eloquence fairly took him by storm, I know not, but certain it is that then and there he gave full consent to the project.

Full consent—I do not say *gracious* consent. I rather fancy he bestowed some sharp hits, implying strongly that Harry’s “Methodism” had rendered him worthless in any other walk of life, and that he looked upon him thenceforward as a good lawyer thrown away. Harry was not one

to flinch at a few hard words, and he said very little about them; though he did tell us with real joy that his father had shown symptoms of softening towards the close of their conversation, and had even gone so far as to say, "Well, well, I don't know much about these things, but I'm not sure that I shouldn't be better off if I did. You have been a good fellow, Harry, after all, and I wish your sisters were more like you."

"Isn't it conceited of me to tell you this?" said Harry half-bashfully. "But it did make me glad, Jeannie, to know that at least I had not brought dishonour on religion in my home. Looking forward is a different matter. How shall I ever honour that profession as I ought?"

"The missionary's? As you would have honoured that of a Christian lawyer, if needful," I said. "By remembering that it is your Master Himself that you have to honour—not a mere dry *profession*, however high—and all in and through and by Himself."

"Ah! I know that well," he said low and happily. But he did not speak with quite the old self-confidence—which he had deemed to be other than *self*-confidence, though to us it had worn so doubtful an aspect. I found later, in conversation with him, that his battlings during many months past had not been crowned with quite the unbroken song of victory for which he had joyously looked. He had known somewhat of the valleys, foretold

for him by Lennox; and the enemy had been subtle and strong, and Harry's faith had sometimes waxed and waned like the faith of other Christian men; and Harry had learnt some dark and bitter and salutary lessons concerning his inner self, which he once knew not; and had obtained some new and strange glimpses into unknown unsuspected regions of his own nature, alike humbling and startling—side by side with new and strange glimpses into the wondrous love and beauty and boundless power of his Lord.

It seemed to me that the sharp angles of the young Christian life were rounding, and the unripe though most promising fruit was growing more mellow. There was not quite the same readiness to pour out to anybody and everybody his spiritual experiences that there had been, though he had not sprung back to the other and common error of over-reserve. I noted more of willingness to learn as well as to teach. He no longer talked down to us all as from a superior pedestal of knowledge and attainments; yet were there plain marks of spiritual advance, whether the same advance had been chiefly up over sunny hill-tops, or down through shady valleys. Harry Pleydell had had a taste of each, I trow, and was none the worse for either. I think it is one thing to be led down into a valley by the guiding hand of the Master Himself, and quite another to descend by ourselves, of our own wilfulness and unbelief.

I had been rather anxious about one little matter since hearing of uncle Amory's sudden loss, and that was concerning Edwy's future plans. However, my mind was soon set at rest; for before I had even communicated my ideas to Mother, uncle Amory himself came in, and made known his intention of carrying on what he had begun. It was announced pompously, as usual, and he took good care that we should look upon his action as no small piece of self-denial; yet the kindness was so real and unexpected, that I felt self-reproachful for the many hard thoughts in which I had once indulged respecting uncle Amory.

We saw a great deal of Harry during the next three weeks. Ellie preserved persistently the cold and indifferent manner with which she had received him. He seemed slightly pained at first, but was very willing to ascribe it to over-excitement and general irritability on her part. I could not quite make her out, for there seemed to me no necessity for any such manner in return for his frank brotherly ease.

I do not know how events might have come to pass if Ellie had taken up any other line of conduct, or had chosen in any wise to resume the old influence which she had undoubtedly once possessed over him. As it was, she deliberately put it aside, and sent Harry, who was a most sympathetic being, to find the interest he craved in another quarter.

Some people might have guessed what was coming, on the day of his arrival. I did not. The truth flashed suddenly across me one evening, when Harry remarked with rather a dreamy and abstracted air,—“ It’s curious, Jeannie ; isn’t it ? I used to think Ellie so *much* the prettiest of the two. But I fancy she must have gone off lately. Her face will not do to compare with Francey’s.”

“ Ah, you know how to draw our shy Francey out,” I said soberly, though in that very moment I saw ahead with daylight clearness. “ What is it that you talk about so much to her ? ”

“ O missionary work in Africa,” he said with quick enthusiasm ; no mistake about *that*. “ You don’t know how interested she is.”

Yes ; so she was, and so was he. I doubt if anything lay nearer the hearts of either. But that very companionship in interest caused a closeness of mutual sympathy, out of which something else might most naturally spring.

As it did. I was not mistaken, and others also saw it coming. Mother was not taken by surprise when, at the end of three weeks, Harry humbly yet passionately pleaded for the gift of our darling,—if only Francey were willing. And Mother did not refuse.

There was no hesitation on Francey’s part. I had hardly known before that her reserved sensitive nature was capable of such free and radiant happiness. Mother and I grew fairly

joyous in our Francey's abounding joy. The two seemed just made for one another—so happy in their loving trust, and in their perfect unity of devotion to the great cause they had at heart, that it seemed difficult to believe any shadow could ever again come athwart their sunny sky. And yet I knew that partings lay in the future which must bring such clouds to our tender-spirited Francey.

But upon poor little Ellie the news came with a shock indeed. She was utterly unprepared—had dreamed of no such thing—had never deemed it even possible. The face of distress with which she first listened to me, made me plead for self-control for Francey's sake. She promised, and kept her promise with a degree of resolution which I had not ventured to expect. But I shall not soon forget the low cry of woe with which she flung herself upon me late that night, when we found ourselves alone together.

“Ellie, cannot you rejoice for *her*?” I whispered. “Darling, we must be willing to give her up; for this does indeed look like the Master's call to work which He wills her to do.”

“O Jeannie, Jeannie! it seems as if everything were going,” she cried with a wild sort of bitterness. “O Jeannie, there will soon be nothing left. If I had Lennox I would not mind. Jeannie, it is so hard to bear.”

And no words of mine had any power to comfort her.

CHAPTER XXV.

A WEDDING.

BETWEEN two and three years passed quietly by. They do not seem long to look back upon now, though many a day and week lagged heavily in its actual passage. Sometimes I wonder whether the whole of life will thus shrink into comparative nothingness, when I stand and look back from its outermost verge. So many a hill which assumed a mountain form in advance, and lowered upon me with direful aspect, has sunk to a very hillock in the landscape behind; and I marvel how it could ever thus have taxed my faith and courage.

Francey was the sunbeam of our home those years. Harry's preparatory studies at the missionary college kept him much absent, but she never fretted as some girls would have done. Her one aim seemed to be to lighten others' burdens, and, I might almost add, to make us miss her as sorely as possible when she should leave us. At least, if such were not her aim, she attained it unconsciously.

Of Austin Auriol we saw almost nothing. The link between him and our family seemed to be absolutely broken. He did not exchange into another living, as I had at one time fancied he might do; but he never came near us. We rarely met even in the streets. I suspect that his short-sighted eyes contrived to see and avoid us from a considerable distance. Once or twice, when I happened to be alone, he came up and shook hands, and we talked pleasantly of the weather, but that was all; and, indeed, what more could there be? We attended his church still, and heard him preach Sunday after Sunday—heart-stirring and beautiful sermons often. But our pew was in a dark far-off corner, close to a side-door, and Ellie invariably sat where a glimpse of his face was an impossibility. He looked to me older and more serious, and perhaps a little more abrupt in manner than he had been; also a few silver hairs had stolen into his brown locks, and some rather careworn lines showed about his mouth. Otherwise he was unchanged.

Ellie never mentioned his name. Sometimes I questioned to myself whether she were really so perfectly indifferent to him as she had believed herself to be; but I had no means whatever of judging, neither could I tell in the least how far his affection for her might have survived the shock it had received.

The irritability and unreasonableness which she

displayed immediately after the rupture of the engagement did not last any great length of time. Still there was a marked alteration in Ellie, and Mother and I became only the more aware of this as months passed on. The sweet brightness and unselfishness of her childhood had given place to a pensive and dreamy self-absorption, too often amounting to positive gloom. She grew thin, and a slightly sallow tint crept into her complexion, detracting greatly from her beauty. A large portion of her day was generally wasted in the most desultory pretence at reading or working; but remonstrances were useless. Though always gentle and affectionate, she opposed a most invincible front of resolute *inertia*, and we could do nothing with her. It was alike singular and sad to compare her languid aimless life with the bright vigour of our once semi-invalid Francey. Yet Francey was delicate still, and Ellie decidedly the stronger of the two.

My work in the Montague family went steadily on during those two years and a half, and the acquaintance between them and my home circle deepened into something very like friendship. Then there came a sudden break in the frequent intercourse. Mrs. Montague dropped her cordial tone, and grew stiff, and my younger pupil let slip confidential and mysterious whispers about "Trevor" having shown a decided liking for my sister Ellie, and "Papa" being much displeased.

Happily I knew that Ellie's sensations towards the said Trevor were of such absolute indifference as almost to amount to dislike. I made light of the whole concern to Ella Montague, but managed quietly to let her know the truth; and of course my words were at once passed on, for Mrs. Montague grew thenceforth more pleasant in manner, only the girls were no longer encouraged to visit at our home.

Still there was evidently no idea of parting with me. My salary had now risen to a hundred and twenty guineas, and any change of the kind would have been a serious matter to us; but I believe Mrs. Montague was too well satisfied to think of such a thing. Edgitha gave promise of expanding into a more attractive womanhood than her anxious mother had ventured to hope, and Ella's uncouth ways were greatly softened. Certainly no governess could ever desire more devoted outpouring of affection than I received from both my pupils, but especially from the eldest. Very strong and very sweet was the tie between Edgitha and me. I doubt if there can be any stronger and sweeter tie in this life than that between teacher and learner—no matter what the position and capacity of each—when the one has been the leader, and the other has been the led, unto the feet of Jesus. I had found many an opportunity of sowing the good seed in the young minds placed in my charge for earthly training; and with Edgitha it had taken deep and steady root.

I think Mrs. Montague was pleased on the whole. She was one of those people who have a good deal of religion up to a certain point, and she was possessed of a certain desire that her girls should have the same. She liked "moderate views," she averred, and had a great objection to anybody saying that anybody else's opinion was wrong. Had she been called upon herself for anything of theological definition, I am afraid her ideas would have been found to partake of the general confusion of her mind. Still she made no objections to the use I made of my influence over Edgitha, and for this I was thankful.

The use *I* made! Nay, rather should I say, the use made of me, as of a most weak instrument, in the Master's skilful hand!

Our daily dependence was not upon my teaching alone. Edwy had gone to sea, and Gordon was earning a small salary long before the close of the time of which I write. Esma regularly sent us a portion of her earnings, and now and then a generous gift found its way home to us from the dear sister in Africa. Also there was my pen. I knew my standing at length, and while able to smile over the brilliant and unrealised dreams of early youth, I valued greatly the small scribbling-power which I did actually possess.

My first book fell somewhat flat, and the publishers were consequently shy about taking another.

My first, I ought to say, not counting the tiny child's tale published earlier. But gradually I found other openings, and from time to time a simple little story would steal into print, most unpretentious in style, and making no noise at all in the world, but bringing in a few welcome golden coins for the payment of dressmakers' bills. I had learnt at length to aspire no higher.

One day towards the end of the two years, Francey blushing showed me a spirited little article which she had written, and asked if there would be "any harm" in offering it to a magazine. I advised her by all means to try. It was immediately accepted and inserted, with liberal remuneration and a request for more.

"Esma was right," I said, smiling. "You are the genius, Francey."

"I always thought I might write a little some day, perhaps," she said humbly. "It isn't genius, though. And Harry and I have another sort of life before us now. I wouldn't exchange, Jeannie."

I knew well that she would not. Even independently of Harry, she was not one to put her hand to the plough and give a single backward look.

"But, Jeannie, *you* used to wish for fame."

"Yes," I said, "almost more than I cared for life. I do not now."

"Not at all?"

"I think not," I said. "If it came, I would lay

it at my Saviour's feet. If not, it is best so for me. Francey, I never forgot one text upon which I stumbled one day, unwittingly."

"Which?" she asked. "It will do for me too, perhaps."

And I told her,—

"'Seekest thou great things for thyself? SEEK THEM NOT!'"

She stood thoughtfully, with a bright illumination of her face.

"No, I won't, Jeannie. If I ever do write—and I may be able, you know, a little, sometimes—it shall be all for my Master, not for myself."

"If—" I said.

"Yes, if He will make me able. But He will, if I pray Him to keep the matter in His charge. It isn't presumption to feel sure, because of all the promises. He *is* my Keeper—He Himself. Jeannie, you and I know that *all* things are possible to Him."

"And He will transform the 'great things,' for self into 'great things' for HIM, that He may pour back upon you gifts ten thousand times greater," I said reverently.

"As it has been transformed with you?" she asked lovingly.

"I cannot say, darling. I dare not be confident, and the old temptation may come back. But I do not think I *want* these things now, unless they are truly His will."

And then I remember she gave me a kiss, and said,—

“Well, anyhow, Jeannie, don’t go and overdo yourself, for I do not like to see you looking ill, as you have done lately. You are thinner than Mother herself.”

I did not tell her or anybody that I felt ill, but it was true. Some new and unaccustomed sensations had of late been creeping over me; and my long daily walks and hard toil were getting to be too much for my strength. I used to wonder quietly sometimes whether I should fail and die as Lennox had done. It did not seem to me a bitter prospect, so bright was the shining from the other side of the river; only I could not think what Mother and Ellie would do without me.

But in the absorbing interest of preparing for Francey’s wedding and departure I had little time to think about myself, and others had small leisure to notice me. I was always laughingly said to be “muscular and wiry,” though thin, and nobody looked for much colour in my face, so the difference was not so observable in me as it would have been in some. Kathie alone watched me now and then solicitously, and remarked that she really thought it would be a good thing when the bustle was over and Francey gone.

We could not feel it a good thing, however. The day came at last, and a bright day it was, for our darling herself was all sunshine and happiness,

almost up to the moment of her departure. The old painful self-consciousness seemed entirely to have forsaken her. But it was hard to yield her without a murmur—to yield her thus for life.

She was gone at last, and we four remained alone in the house—Gordon and Ellie, Mother and I. It was not the final good-bye. We should have another glimpse of our darling; and the dismissal of our missionary-brother, Harry, with his bride, before starting for their new sphere of life-work, was yet to come. But our home-bird had taken flight. Francey was ours, specially ours, no longer.

Ellie was the only one who sat and cried that evening. Mother gave herself up to comforting us all—the dear unselfish pale-faced Mother who felt our loss more deeply than any one. But she always thought of others before herself. She had come out like fine gold from the refining fires of the past few years.

That day's parting was the worst. The dismissal service and the final leave-takings, a month later, had something very sweet and solemn about them. Ellie was inconsolable; but Mother and I felt that it was indeed well to give up *willingly* so precious a gift unto our Master's service. And it was with hearts full of joyous hope and fervent zeal that Harry and Francey set sail for far-off Africa.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LOOKING AHEAD.

How heavily the days came and went during the few weeks following Francey's departure. It was a dull cloudy sort of winter, and I felt as if I had sunk down into an atmosphere of mist out of all reach of sunshine. Mother thought I was grieving for Francey, but I do not remember any active sorrow, only a tired-out longing to have done with this life. The other life looked bright enough—the radiant life to come. I am not sure that the impatience of "desire to depart" did not at times amount to actual sin. I think there must have been some spirit of repining mingled with it. But at the time I only recognised the feeling as strong realisation of that glory upon which so many dear ones had already entered.

One day I happened to meet our good friend Mr. Ramsay out-of-doors, and he asked a question or two as to Mother's health and mine. "I shall look in soon and see you—only a friendly call," he said carelessly, on parting. I did not think any more about it; but contrary to my expectations

he came speedily — on the following Saturday afternoon.

It was my holiday, so I was at home, and being too tired to accompany the others on a necessary shopping expedition, I was also alone. The absolute quiet was pleasant, and I had been dreamily tracing some lines on a piece of paper—only unpolished verses, not poetry. I knew by that time that I was no poet, and if I wrote lines for my own pleasure, I never showed them to anybody. But now and then I found the occupation soothing. They were somewhat sorrowful verses that afternoon.

“ Only a little valley to-day,
And a little hill ahead,
But I wonder how many more there be,
Ere the journey Home be sped.
For the light is dim—the air is close—
And I weary for that land,
And I could not go another step,
But for my Father’s Hand.

“ Only a little valley to-day,
But it seems so deep to me,
And I wonder how I’ll ever climb
The next hill that I see :
Though maybe on the summit,
’Midst many an earthly beam,
From far-off sweet Jerusalem
I’ll catch a glory-gleam.

“ My feet are aching wearily,
Sharp stones obstruct my way,
And breath is short, and strength is faint,
And light is dim to-day.

I'm tired of climbing up and down,
 For the hills are sorely steep ;
 And in my lonely valley here,
 I'd fain sit down and weep.

“ Oh, sweet sweet fair Jerusalem,
 I long to reach thy shore,
 To have done with lonely valleys
 And steep hills evermore.
 For now, as still I mount each height,
 Fresh valleys lie in view—
 My pathway leadeth down through each,
 And up to hill-tops new.

“ O to have reached the golden gates,
 The land of endless joy ;—
 O to have passed the clouds and rain,
 Earth's sorrowful alloy ;—
 O to have gained the sunshine
 Of the Master's presence sweet ;—
 O to have found the sapphire throne,
 Round which His children meet !

“ But I know the Master will not fail,
 And the time will surely come :
 Lord, quell this impatient longing,
 Give me grace to wait for home.
 I want the 'patience of Jesus,'
 O grant me grace to rise,
 Full of fervour in Thy service,
 Till Thou callest from the skies.”

And I had not long finished, and was sitting meditating thereupon, when Mr. Ramsay was announced.

He stayed a considerable time talking, and seeming much interested in all I had to tell him

about Francey. Somehow a long while had passed since we had met Mr. Ramsay, and many things had happened of which he knew not. But he soon brought round the conversation to myself, and I found I was in for a regular medical visit, under guise of a friendly call.

I let him do and ask what he liked, taking note of the changes in his very expressive face. I think I had a suspicion of what was in his mind long before I had an opportunity to say quietly,—

“Then this is more serious than I had imagined?”

He bent his head slightly in assent. I knew by the movement of his lips how much his feelings were stirred.

“I must know the full truth,” I said. “Have you the slightest hope that I can recover?”

Unwilling as he was to answer, I drew the truth from him. There was just a gleam of hope and no more. He had known recovery from such a case. He made the best of that gleam, in words; but I saw deeper, and knew it to be faint. How long might my time be, I inquired; and he spoke vaguely of a few months. I had neglected myself far too long, though it might have made no difference. Work must stop at once. I showed no dismay, but said, “I cannot tell Mother, Mr. Ramsay. It must go on for a while.”

“No,” he answered. “I will see Mrs. Montague, and arrange with her. If I prescribe a

holiday, she will grant it. You are too valuable to her not to be taken care of."

"But if I can never teach there again, I will have no pretence at a short holiday," I said.

"You are difficult to manage, Miss Phillimore," he answered a little sadly. "And we must not talk of *never*. But I will explain matters to Mrs. Montague, and take care that she writes such a letter to your mother as shall create no suspicion. No need, as you say, to alarm her yet."

A little later he went away, speaking cheering words as he said good-bye, and promising to call again soon. Nothing much could be done for me immediately, however.

He went away, and I was left alone with my own thoughts.

It is one thing to dream calmly of heaven, and to write verses of vague longing for its repose. It is another thing to stand face to face with the king of terrors, and to believe surely that in a little space of time will come the last fierce grappling with that deadly foe.

Face to face! It seemed to me that verily so I stood that hour. There was a sense of solemn awe upon me, and a deep consciousness of the weight of things unseen; yet my heart did not quail. The awe was unmingled with trembling fear, and the silent consciousness grew slowly into strange and calm rejoicing. For I knew that the king of terrors had been trampled down beneath

the feet of the King of glory ; that the foe in all his might was but a vanquished foe ; and that I in Christ should likewise find myself " more than conqueror." " O death, where is thy sting ?" Though in sight of the valley of the shadow of death—ay, though, as it seemed to me, with the dim shade creeping already over my sky—I did not fear, for I knew that my Lord was with me.

The joy was no light and careless gladness, however. I could not see the dark river, but I knew it might be flowing near ; and Eternity loomed beyond with a dim mysterious awfulness and power which made this life shrink to a mere point in comparison. Earthly sorrows and pleasures, earthly desires and disappointments, earthly hopes and fears—what mattered one or all of them to me, in comparison with that grand and boundless " FOR EVER" upon which I might so soon be entering, and of which I knew so little ?

So little, and yet so much ! For Christ my Lord was there. " With Him " in death meant safety. " With Him " in eternity meant a weight of glory past human understanding. With Him, and made like unto Him ; seeing Him as He is ; dwelling in the mansion He hath lovingly prepared for me ; wearing the crown laid up in His keeping ; abiding in His presence for evermore ; loving, serving, praising Him, in sinless, spotless purity. So much I knew.

So much, and yet so little ! Gazing on the dim

future with poor veiled human eyes, I felt how slight was my knowledge, how large the need for trust. No language on earth could suffice to tell the things of the life to come. What matter? If I knew not, there was ONE who knew. The love divine and unchanging of my Lord would overshadow me still. Though all the host of heaven in glorious beauty should be strangers unto me, yet ONE would know me, ay, and one Face I should recognise, by the look of love, learned down in the shadows of this earth, while seeing Him who is yet unseen.

Beyond this confidence, what did I need? The when, the how, and the where of a future existence, the mysteries of the spirit-world, the manner of heavenly life and service, the sublime realities of things to come, all these I might calmly leave in my Master's hands, till He should Himself reveal them unto me. If Christ were verily mine, I could afford to wait in quiet faith. I thought of Kathie's text: "*All things are yours: and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*"

All things on earth! All things in heaven! All things in time! All things in eternity! Nothing withheld, save that which would work us ill. For the King of kings, in giving, gives with a royal bounty and a kingly fulness; and when Jesus gave Himself, He gave all things to His redeemed.

The "all things" may be briefly expressed.

They narrow down to one bright streak of light, now falling softly on many a heart, and by-and-by to expand into a glory which shall fill eternity—the love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

O death! O grave! O valley of shadow! — what need to fear in the light of the Master's loving smile?

CHAPTER XXVII.

UNEXPECTED.

“WELL, Jeannie, dear, have you had a nice quiet afternoon? Did you think we were never coming back?”

I roused myself as from a dream at the sound of Mother’s voice.

“Quite quiet, except that Mr. Ramsay has been,” I said. “How have you enjoyed your walk; and where is Gordon?”

“Gone somewhere with a friend. What made Mr. Ramsay come?”

“He said he had not seen us for a long time. I met him, you know, a few days ago.”

“And I suspect he thought Jeannie wanted looking after,” said Ellie, pulling off her hat.

“He gave me a prescription for some strengthening medicine,” I said quietly. “And he said he should look in again some day before long—just for a friendly call.”

“Just like Mr. Ramsay!” said Mother. “He does not forget the state of our finances. I never shall forget all his kindness last year,” and she

sighed. "But I think you wanted something of the kind, so I am glad he came."

"I suppose the parcel has not arrived yet from the shop," remarked Ellie, who was looking brighter than her wont. "I hope you'll like our choice, Jeannie. The dress we have chosen for you is a nice soft grey, very dark and pretty, and not in the least expensive. I wanted to get the same for myself, but Mother had a fancy that it was a little too old-looking. What do you think?"

What did I think? What did it matter? Could I ever have felt interested in such a puny trifle as the colour of a dress? And yet—life is largely made up of trifles. If death to-morrow were an absolute certainty, I still must eat and dress and be busy to-day. Only I did marvel that afternoon that I could ever have bestowed upon them aught but the barest needful attention,—could have made them any matter of heart instead of simple duty and necessity.

"I am sure I shall like whatever you have chosen, dear," I said. "I hope you have not spent too much on me."

"My purse would not admit of much," said Mother, with a little smiling shake of her head. "But come—suppose we have tea in this room to-night, rather earlier than usual. Gordon seems disposed to play truant."

She rang the bell, and after giving necessary orders, went to remove her bonnet.

Ellie drew nearer to me, and stood a little behind, where I could not see her well.

“ Jeannie, I saw Mr. Auriol to-day.”

“ Did you, dear ? ”

“ Yes.”

And we were silent.

“ Why don't you ask more about it ? ” she asked, in rather a petulant tone. “ Don't you care to hear ? ”

“ Indeed I do, Ellie—anything that touches your happiness.”

I hardly know what made me say the words. I think I was answering the thought in my own heart—the “ What matter ? What matter ? ” These things of time, how soon must they pass away ? And yet they did matter. For the things of time have their bearing one and all upon the things of eternity, and nothing which concerns the happiness of any human being is a matter of indifference. How much more did the welfare—even earthly—of my dear little sister closely concern me.

That was how the words escaped my lips. Otherwise I should have been more cautious. Her brilliant colour made me in a moment aware of my inadvertence.

“ Or anything that touches your interest, I ought to say,” I went on calmly after the slight break needed for me to observe what I had done.

“ Of course—I always like to see him,” said Ellie shortly ; looking, I fancied—strange to say—

rather flat and disappointed at my after-speech. Was it only fancy on my part?

"I like it for the sake of—old days, you know. You know what I mean. But he needn't have bowed so stiffly."

"My dear Ellie, I do not think you can expect anything else."

"A man should not bear malice so long," said Ellie, flushing again. "And I was such a child then; why, it is not much less than three years ago."

"It is not bearing malice," I said. "But after the way you acted he could not possibly put himself in your way. How could you expect it of him?"

"I don't see why he shouldn't be our friend still. He might by this time. Mother and you would like to talk to him; and if he hates me so, I could go and sit upstairs in my own room. I don't want to see him, if he doesn't want to see me."

"Ellie, I begin to think you never will leave off being a child," I said gravely. "And yet you have had enough in your life to make you a woman ten times over."

She gave a little sudden sob.

"That's just it. Things are all changed—and I don't know when they'll stop changing; and I haven't anything to look forward to. Jeannie——"

She came and suddenly knelt down beside me. I thought it was for the purpose of having a good cry, with which she was wont to relieve her feelings when disturbed. But the inclination to tears seemed suddenly to have left her.

“Jeannie, I saw somebody else.”

“Who, Ellie?”

“Mr. Trevor Montague.”

“Do you mean that you spoke to him?”

“Yes. Mother was choosing at one counter, and I went to look at something on another. And he came up.”

“What did you do?”

“Why, what *could* I do? We talked for a minute or two. He seemed to wish so much that he—they, I mean—could see more of me.”

“Did you tell Mother?”

“No. O I couldn't. I'd rather not. It isn't anything.”

“Then it is not worth hiding from her,” I said gently.

“Well, it wasn't my fault, at any rate; and besides, there was no harm. You know very well I don't care one bit for Mr. Montague. Only he is very handsome and gentlemanly, and so clever too. He does amuse me so when he talks. It was just after I had been speaking to him that I saw Mr. Auriol,—directly we left the shop. But I don't think he could have seen me talking to Mr. Montague.”

“It is a matter of little importance whether he did or not,” I said quietly, feeling it strange to be pulled back so suddenly and forcibly to these petty matters; and somehow poor Ellie gave them a double pettiness by her way of talking. “Mr. Auriol has nothing whatever to do with any of us now.”

“O Jeannie!”

There was a sound of hidden pain, it seemed to me, in the slight involuntary exclamation. I would not notice it.

“Nothing whatever, Ellie. But putting him aside, we know Mrs. Montague’s feeling very well.”

“If Mrs. Montague thinks me so far beneath her that her son must not say a civil word to me, she had better keep him out of London,” said Ellie rather pettishly again. And rising hastily she left the room, so that our discussion was broken off; for which I could not be sorry.

It must have seemed to Ellie a curious commentary on her own words when a letter reached me by post next morning from Mrs. Montague, stating that her two daughters, with their brother, were unexpectedly going into the country to visit some relations, so that my attendance would not be required for some weeks. I knew that the plan had been under discussion; and that the principal doubt had been on the score of interrupted studies. No doubt Mr. Ramsay, by explaining the abso-

lute necessity for such a break, had decided Mrs. Montague not to delay the projected visit.

It was most kindly done, however; the note being couched in very pleasant terms. Nevertheless, Ellie flushed crimson over it, and, as I could plainly see, suspected it to have some connection with her interview of the day before. I did not like her to attach so much importance to so small a matter; but it was not possible—or I could not resolve—to attempt to undeceive her.

For two or three weeks things went on quietly. Mother was pleased that I should have the rest, and we read together and talked a great deal,—often, when Ellie was not present, wandering in word as well as in thought to that fair country, where so many of our circle were already safely landed. Mother's habitual attitude of calm waiting was a help to me, but I was not so calm myself. I was filled often with an eager desire to know all that might be learned of the other land; and the desire grew into deeper realisation, and the realisation into deeper longing. The golden gates of Jerusalem seemed very near at times,—so near that I almost forgot to think of what lay between.

Yet there were other days and hours, not few in number, when the brightness of anticipation seemed quenched in the pain of the threatened parting. How could I leave Mother—Ellie—the boys—and kind friends all? How give up the

hope of meeting Maggie and Francey again in this world? This earthly life which I had thought I prized at so low a rate, I found suddenly to be dearer to me than I had dreamed. The laying aside of one thing after another with the belief that it would be for ever, was full of keen pain. And yet one clear glimpse of the shining ahead was alone needed, and sorrow was lost afresh in longing joy.

Again there were seasons of solemn self-searching and questioning, lest by any means or in any wise I should have fallen into self-deceiving or vain confidence. But I always came back to the old sweet consciousness of trust in Him who said, "In me is thine help!" Not self, but Christ. Not self's attainments, but the blood of Jesus. These were my dependence, and these could never fail me.

So the days went by. Once Mr. Ramsay came in. He did not see me alone, and he said little, but I think a new fear found entrance into Mother's heart from that hour.

And all at once, on a certain bright evening in my recollection, an unexpected joy broke upon us.

We were sitting together round the fire; Mother working, Ellie gazing idly into the flames, Gordon fashioning a piece of wood into a boat with his pocket-knife. The post had just brought me a long letter from Esma, which I was reading aloud.

Mother remarked on the quiet contented spirit which characterised it throughout.

“It is not like the Esma we first knew,” I said. “How thoroughly she seems to have settled down there.”

“Fancy spending one’s life in tending cats and puppies,” said Ellie.

“No; not quite so bad as that, Ellie. In tending the old lady herself, if you like. Some of the cats and puppies have been given away, you see, and books fill a more important place than they used to do in the house.”

“Esma herself was never very fond of reading when she lived here.”

“She evidently prefers it now to any part of her daily duties,” I observed.

“People change so oddly,” said Ellie in a dissatisfied tone. “I wish they would stay as they are.”

“The ‘as they are’ ought to be a most satisfactory condition, if you won’t admit of any improvement,” said Gordon. “I didn’t like books when I was six.”

“Oh,—then, of course,—you were a child. But I do hate changes in anybody and of any kind.”

It was curious that she should have made the remark just when so material a change awaited us. All at once we heard a ring and a startling visitor’s knock at our front door. We exchanged glances in surprise.

“ Rousing the echoes at that rate ! ” said Gordon. “ Who *can* it be ? An invitation to dine with the Lord Mayor, at the very least ! ”

He went to the window and peeped through the shutter.

“ Whew ! there’s a carriage ! Travellers, seemingly ! It’s all a mistake, Mother. Some folks come to the wrong door. ”

“ Yes, ” said Mother. But I think she felt a vague kind of expectation, for she left off working, and sat with folded hands.

And then the door opened, and we all four looked round. Kitty had come to tell us of the mistake, of course.

But it was not Kitty. A lady in mourning entered first—slight and young and fair, with brimming blue eyes and eagerly extended hands ; and close in her rear followed a substantial black-bearded individual, carrying a small boy in his arms ; while yet farther behind I caught a dim suggestion of a baby in long clothes, borne by a middle-aged woman, and flanked on either side by a man loaded with articles of luggage.

Nothing was clear to my vision, however, except the foremost figure. Almost dizzy with bewilderment, I stood up. Mother did the same, and just said in her gentlest tone, “ *Maggie !* ”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ARRANGEMENTS.

I DO not know how long Mother and Maggie remained locked together, but I think they were ashamed to show their faces for a while. Maggie's was all wet and quivering when she lifted it up. She crossed over the rug and gave me my turn,—Ellie's following—and then came a burst of questions on our part.

“We'll tell you all presently,” she said brightly, though not very steadily. “Here we are, and that is the best part of my tale. O how home-like it feels! Jeannie, I should not have known you, nor Ellie either. Mamma, I do so want to show you my children. Isn't this a bonny boy?”

John came forward with his sleeping four-years-old burden—our Lennox' namesake. The child had Maggie's hair and complexion, however, while baby took after her father.

“You will all be devoted to my little Lennie before a week is over, I expect. Where shall we put him? O no, Mamma, not on your knees—he is far too heavy. Just curl him up in the arm-

chair, John, and he will sleep soundly ; and, Nurse, you can give me baby."

She pulled off her bonnet, and sat down with the wee dark infant in her arms. They made a pretty contrast, for Maggie's own soft outline of feature was unchanged ; and though her bright colouring had nearly vanished, she really looked almost younger, and decidedly fairer, than Ellie. I had not known till then the extent to which our youngest was altered.

" Maggie, it is about time to explain to Mother how we come to be taking her by storm in this fashion," remarked John, in his good-tempered ponderous style. Yes, he certainly was always a little ponderous, though at the same time a thorough gentleman.

" So it is," she said, looking up. " Are you wondering very much, all of you ?"

" Why did you not write, dear ?" asked Mother.

" It all came in such a hurry. I really had no time for anything, and I did not quite know how to resist the temptation to take you by surprise. We talked the matter over, and I did mean to write—only somehow it wasn't done."

" Convenient forgetfulness, Maggie ?" I asked.

" Just so, Jeannie dear."

" And is it illness that has brought you home ?" I asked doubtfully, for they looked very healthy invalids.

" O no. Adolphus is dead."

She spoke gravely rather than sadly. Adolphus Drummond, her husband's elder brother, had been personally little known to her; but the event must have come with something of a shock upon John. The brothers had been much attached, and Adolphus was just such another healthy hearty fellow as himself.

"How was it?" Mother asked after a brief pause.

"He caught a severe chill walking out in the snow, and neglected to change his wet clothes. The illness only lasted a week, and his death was very sudden. Directly we heard of it John threw up everything, and we started for home."

I looked up in surprise. "And your brother's child?"

"Poor little Dolph!" said Maggie pityingly. "He was actually dying at the very time when his father was taken ill. Did I never mention in my letters that we had heard of his illness? It was a rapid consumption. Surely I told you."

"And the poor widow?" asked Mother.

"She has gone back to live with her parents. O it is very sad for her!"

I hardly heard the next few sentences, for I knew what all this meant. John Drummond was no longer the poor younger brother, working for his livelihood, but owner of the family property in Devonshire. Maggie was now in a position to do all that she had often longed to be able to do for

us; and whatever Maggie wished, her husband was sure to wish likewise. I had been waiting in trust, feeling sure that something must sooner or later come to unravel the dark tangle which seemed to lie ahead. And all at once the "something" for which I looked had verily come,—a change so great and so unexpected that I felt half giddy and unable to look it in the face. Little had I dreamed of aught like this. I thought pityingly of the poor young widow's blighted life. But what selfish creatures we are! I soon came back to full rejoicing in our Maggie's return. It seemed almost too good to be true.

"So I felt sure you would take us in for a few days, Mamma," were the next words which reached me. "I know you have more room now, with Francey and Edwy away. Dear little Francey! How I wished she and Harry had come to our part of Africa; but missionary-work and money-making work are such different things."

"If you made money, you used it for others' happiness," said Mother quietly. "And there was a great deal of real missionary-labour, I suspect, mixed up with the money-making."

"John and I were always longing to do what we could, but it was little enough. O I had just begun to say something. John wants to run down to The Beeches to see that everything is made ready; and meantime we can all pack up here and prepare to start as soon as he sends us word. *All*

of us, Mamma. You won't mind giving up this little old house, will you? I dare say it will feel a little strange just at first, but I will do my best to make The Beeches like home to you. And we shall be so happy all of us together."

Ellie's delighted "O Maggie!" was the first sound. Mother slightly shook her head.

"Do you care so particularly about this house? Because, if needful, we *could* keep it on, just for you to spend a month in occasionally."

"My dear Maggie! It is not that, I assure you. But I could never consent to your taking such a burden on yourselves,—a young married couple——"

"An old married couple, if you please," protested Maggie. "And it will be no burden, but simply a delight."

"Maggie and I have quite settled all that, my dear Mother," said John. "We used to talk it over on board."

"But I have not," she said.

"Mamma, if you refuse to come, John and I won't go either," cried Maggie. "What do we care for riches, while you are all pining away here in poverty, and Jeannie working herself to skin and bone, for no purpose whatever. You shall, and must, and will come. Gordon is to board in some nice comfortable house, and to spend his holidays with us. What do you think John and I and these two mites would do in that great house all alone?"

"It won't do," said Mother steadily.

"No, it won't Mamma; so you have to come and look after us."

"My dear child, I mean that *your* plan will not do."

"Only, you see, it is all settled," put in good kind John determinately.

"Nay, John, — I have surely a voice in the matter."

"A voice of assent—nothing more," said Maggie. "I will not listen to anything else. And Jeannie's face convinces me that she is on our side."

"Does it?" I said. "We must think the matter over. It is just like you and John to make such a proposal."

"And just like Mother to refuse," said Maggie. "She hasn't a notion how we want her. But *you* know, Jeannie. Now that is all settled, and here comes Nurse. Have you found a corner Nurse, for the children to sleep in?"

Mother looked a little troubled, but Maggie dexterously turned the conversation into the channel of household arrangements. Supper had to be provided and beds prepared for our unexpectedly increased numbers. Maggie would let no one treat her as a visitor, but stepped back without hesitation into her old position of eldest daughter, looking after everything herself, and carrying about with her a general atmosphere of soft brightness. And yet she keenly felt the

changes in our home. Once I caught her standing sorrowfully and alone in the room that had belonged to Lennox, lost in a muse of the past. But the moment she heard my footstep, she assumed a careless air and went singing down the stairs. *I* had been thinking sadly of the joy with which Lennox would have welcomed her home. But what foolishness to grieve for him! How dim and poor would such joy look in the light of the glory to which he had attained. I thought wonderingly how soon I too might have learnt to gauge these earthly matters at their rightful value.

It was long since our little household had worn so sunshiny an aspect. Maggie's light step and sweet face seemed to carry music and cheer wherever they went; and the sound of children's voices ringing through the quiet rooms was a positive delight. Ellie's passive inert manner became exchanged for almost her old brightness; though even this did not prevent Maggie from saying to me,—

“I am disappointed in Ellie. I always fancied she would grow up so much more attractive.”

“That unfortunate affair has had much to do with it,” I said.

“Austin Auriol! I'm curious to see him. But the man's blunders put me out of all patience. The idea of speaking to such an infant as she was then!”

“ Ah, we wanted you to look after us all.”

“ As you do still. Jeannie, you *must* lend your influence on the right side,” said Maggie earnestly. “ I see you have far more power over Mother now than you used to have.”

“ About living with you ?” I asked. “ Dear Maggie, I only want to be sure it is right.”

“ Of course it is. John and I have set our hearts on it.”

“ People sometimes set their hearts upon things undesirable.”

“ Not in this instance,” she said.

“ I only want to be sure it is right,” I repeated. “ I think—perhaps—it may be.”

“ It is the most delightful plan that ever was,” she said brightly. “ Mother shall sit in her arm-chair and smile at us all ; and Ellie shall help with the little ones ; and you shall be my right hand in the village, for I have all manner of schemes for work amongst the poor. You will like it now, will you not?—though once upon a time you would not have done so, Jeannie. I see a change in you. But, dearest, we must nurse and build you up first. What have you been doing to bring yourself to this state ?”

She took both my hands and looked anxiously at me. I hardly knew how to face her, and something of a change in those deep blue eyes of hers told me that she was reading more than I intended her to read.

“Jeannie, you frighten me. What do you mean?”

“I did not intend to say anything in particular,” I answered quietly.

“But you were thinking something. What was it? Something is wrong with you I am sure, for I see it plainly, and I only wonder at the others’ blindness. Tell me all, dear?”

She drew the truth from me, I scarcely knew how. It was harder for her to hear than for me to make it known. I felt her fingers tighten round mine, and saw a rush of tears into her eyes, though she struggled to keep them back.

“Mother need not know yet,” I said. “And the thing is not certain. There may come a favourable change, or there may be the possibility of something being done——”

“Something?” she faltered.

“In the way of an operation. Mr. Ramsay did not deny that it might be so. I do not trouble myself about that yet.”

“You don’t!”

“Why should I? It is all in my Father’s hands.”

“Dear Jeannie! O Jeannie!”

She put her face down on the sofa-cushion, and cried excessively for a minute, thoroughly overcome. And then she resolutely fought her way back to self-command.

“Mr. Ramsay may be mistaken. You must have other advice.”

“I believe he is very clever. There is no need,” I said. “I don’t think I should have mentioned this yet, Maggie, only it does just alter my feeling about the living with you. If I could work on, I would not consent—but in any case, I suppose a time of rest will be needful for me.”

“Yes, yes, that is all settled,” she said hurriedly. “We must put an end to your engagement with the Montagues. And I don’t know whether it will do for us to go to The Beeches quite so quickly as we had intended. We are here, with the best advice within our reach, and it may be needful to delay a little.”

“I can’t have you upset all your plans on my account,” I said.

“Plans! Nonsense. You must be put first in our considerations. What sort of love do you think I have for you?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “If you loved me as I used to treat you—in proportion I mean—it would not be over much.”

“It would. But I love you for what you are, not only for what you were,” she said. “And now, Jeannie, you are to be cheery, darling, and not depressed. The very best that can be is going to be done for you, and I do think, please God, that you will be quite well again soon. Mr. Ramsay never ought to have told you his fears. But you will not give way to nervousness.”

“I do not think I am nervous,” I said. And

then we were interrupted, and Maggie disappeared to avoid questions about her tear-stained face, while I went up to my room.

Did I wish he had not told me? Was it nervousness and depression to feel so sure that recovery did not lie before me?

Nay, it was rather strong desire and eager joy. Not for worlds would I now have missed this past rich and wonderful realisation of things unseen and yet to come—this standing, as it were, for weeks upon the borderland of life, gazing across to the brightening light which shone from beyond the hills of glory. Standing there only in thought and imagination may be, but in thought and imagination so intense, so vivid, so long-continued, that even yet I can look back upon it all as upon reality. Why not reality? True, I may have dwelt upon the doctor's words till, by the very force of my own desire, likelihood grew into certainty. But none the less truly, though through such a means, might I have been called apart, as it were, for a while, thus to stand, and thus to gaze, and thus to learn somewhat of the spirit-world's deep mysteries, never afterwards to be forgotten amid the entangling cares and toils of this lower life.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TURNUED BACKWARDS.

THINGS did not take with me the precise course which Mr. Ramsay had foretold; and even if Maggie had not already given up the thoughts of a very speedy move to Devonshire, it would have proved impracticable. The end of the second week after their arrival found me a prisoner to the sofa; and there was a consultation between our own doctor and a leading physician.

I have a keener remembrance of Mother's anxiety than of my own. We had not told Ellie the cause for fear; but it was impossible to keep it from Mother. I remember her dear white patient face all that day, going about the same as usual, smiling on the children, and keeping watch over me. And it seemed to me that she had wondrously learnt the lesson of heart-submission. I thought I too was at last somewhat of a victor in that department of the battle.

The report of the doctors was such as to encourage Mother and Maggie, yet not such as to disturb my own quiet anticipations. Mr. Ramsay held to his first impression, slightly modified

while the other doctor considered the case less hopeless, but believed the danger, such as it was, to be more imminent. A day was coming speedily wherein the question of life and death might be there and then decided.

It broke upon me with something of a shock—the latter fact. I had believed myself ready for anything, yet for a while I shrank from this. But I do not think those around saw anything of the struggle. I soon found that this burden too was light when borne for me by my loving Master. So I laid it off upon Him, and ceased to be troubled, and found it not hard to wait in trust.

I do not know how the news of my illness reached Austin Auriol, but one day he suddenly made his appearance. "You know I promised to come," he said gravely; and if he showed some shyness during the first five minutes, it soon passed off. The visit was a great enjoyment. He read and talked a little, and spoke with so much feeling, yet so calmly, that it did us all good. Ellie was out at the time; and when he retired, promising to call again soon, Maggie remarked, "Well, I am surprised at that silly child. I never thought Austin Auriol would turn out like this. She isn't worthy of him, I am afraid."

But it seemed to me that Austin had softened, and that his spiritual life had deepened. May-be the discipline he had had to bear was just according to his need.

Two or three days later he came again, and this time Ellie was present. She turned scarlet when he was announced, shook hands with him, and walked straight out of the room. I was pained for him; but he only gave one steady glance after her, and then bestowed all his attention upon me. Next time she heard his knock and fled before he entered. The fourth time she was caught again, and again beat an abrupt retreat. We found that an invariable consequence of a visit from Austin was to have Ellie come to tea with red eyes. Maggie and I wondered a little now and then, but she was extremely reserved, and would say nothing to either of us.

"The clue doesn't seem to me far out of reach," Kathie remarked one day when paying me a call, for I liked seeing my friends though unable to go to them. "Depend upon it, the child made a mistake, as many a girl has done before her, in thinking she did not care for him."

"If so, why avoid him?" I asked.

"Dear Jeannie, you are innocent. She is heartily ashamed of herself, no doubt. And besides, it is quite an open question how far *his* feelings towards *her* are the same. Not many men can stand being treated like that, with unshaken constancy."

I certainly could recall no indication on Austin Auriol's part of any desire to renew the engagement, and I said so.

“Just what I mean. He *may* be exercising great self control, and he is likely to go on exercising it, I am afraid. He will hardly risk another rebuff; and her line of proceeding will make him think she dislikes him more than ever. But I don't see how else she could behave, nor do I believe he is quite unchanged towards her. She has to reap the consequences of her own hasty act.”

“It did not seem hasty at the time, Kathie; she was very miserable.”

“Well, regrets are useless now,” said Kathie, with something of a sigh. “But I can tell you one thing, Jeannie, and that is that your illness is a boon to Ellie. She is growing much less inert and self-absorbed, poor little thing.”

I had noticed the same myself; and as the knowledge of my danger slowly broke upon her, the change was yet more marked. She became my most attentive nurse, giving up her whole time and thoughts to me, and showing herself far more like the sweet-tempered attractive Ellie of old than we had seen her for years past.

John Drummond was obliged to pay rather a long visit to The Beeches, making necessary arrangements. Then he came back to wait until we, or *they*, as I said in my heart, could journey thither. And on the very day of his return Esmeralda travelled up to London for a brief holiday. She could not often be spared, but somehow I had

been longing for her presence in the house. A very short time now would decide for me the question of recovery or non-recovery. A sort of remembrance of my last illness and of her patient nursing had come across me, and the wish only had to find expression. Maggie wrote at once, and Esma came.

Even then I believed that the intervening space of uncertainty would be longer than it actually proved. Mother and Maggie were hopeful, but unable to control their fears. Esma was the only calm and perfectly self-possessed individual in the house. She attended to any little matters which I wished arranged, in case—just *in case*—things should go ill with me. I remember smiling as I said the words. I felt so sure it would be thus, and that the so-called “ill” would be only “well,” right well for me. But Esma quietly acquiesced, and did all I wished; whereas Maggie never could have borne to do so. It was no want of feeling in Esma, however; she was very loving and tender.

And the day came. Thanks to the merciful discovery of chloroform I had no consciousness of bodily pain to dread beforehand, and the excitement buoyed me up, so that I felt less ill than I had often done of late. But, oh, how strange the knowledge that ere long—perchance before that very evening—I might be welcomed Home! What untold glory in the thought! But I think my feelings were rather of calm trust than of exultant

joy. The intense though suppressed anxiety of all around made me wonder if I had not been selfish in my gladness. Poor Mother! After all she had gone through, how could I wish her to have more sorrow?

Then came the time of darkness, and utter weakness following. Days of dim languor and semi-unconsciousness lie faintly in my memory, till one morning our kind friend Mr. Ramsay stood by my side, and said feelingly, yet with a tone of hearty cheer,—

“Well, Miss Phillimore, this is indeed all we could wish. Thank God for it!”

“I am stronger to-day,” I said. “Do you think it will last?”

“Last! O yes; I trust so indeed! Nothing is wanted now but rest and care, and a little patience. You are on the high road to recovery. It has been a wonderful success.”

More words were said, and how my dear ones were all rejoicing! Did I rejoice with them? Was I thankful?

I think I understood then what the poor Israelites felt, when they were turned back and away from the Promised Land into the wilderness, and “their soul was much discouraged because of the way.” It seemed hard to me thus to turn back, after so near a view of my Jerusalem-Home,—harder than if I had been in the depths of the wilderness all the while. The battle had seemed so nearly over, yet now all the fighting had to

begin over again. Rest had appeared so near at hand, yet now must I plunge once again into the toils and tangles of life.

“Thy will, not mine.”

I could not say it at first. I had grown into such a certainty of just the other ending to my illness. I had looked forward with such confidence to the glory—not distant, but almost within my grasp. Had I been wrong?

Ay, verily! conscience answered with stern truthfulness—wrong *if* my own will had grown to be dearer to me than the will of my God. Was it for me to dare to fix the term of life or the time of death? Had my Lord and Master borne so much for me, and could I not wait patiently a little longer for Him? The wilfulness and selfishness which had mingled with purer and higher longings rose strongly before my eyes. I could but take them to my Saviour’s feet, and pray for His healing touch. “Thy will, not mine. Let my life be one year more or fifty years, it matters not; only do all for me according to Thy will.”

And with the yielding up of my desires came a return of peace. I was willing once again to fight on in the battle just so long as my Master willed that I should so do for His sake.

I thought of Newton’s angel a good deal; for he, though he must have been ever longing for heaven, would yet surely have never indulged in a wish to return thither one hour before the time when God should summon him from earthly work.

CHAPTER XXX.

ELLIE AND I.

WHAT strange creatures we are. Why was it that in turning suddenly back from the great change which had seemed so near, there was an accompanying rebound from spiritual joy? The other world, which I had thought so close, I now felt to be incalculably far away. I found myself all at once down on a grey cold level, with no power to realise things unseen, but with a keen and vivid return to earthly interests.

Was it sin, worldliness, and unbelief on my own part? Was it the necessary reaction—the valley following the hill-top? Was it discipline required and sent—the testing of my faith and love?

Hard questions these to answer at such a time. But I think it may in truth have partaken in some measure of the nature of all three. There are certain laws of action and reaction in human nature, not altogether set aside by the actings of higher energies; and while “all things” in the guiding hand of our Jehovah God are working together for the good of His redeemed, we yet

bring upon ourselves or needlessly deepen many a shadow through our own faithlessness.

"Jeannie wants change of air," said Kathie meditatively, as she sat alone with Esma and me on the afternoon of the day preceding Esmeralda's return to her work.

"Mr. Ramsay was saying to-day that he hopes she will very soon be fit for the journey to Devonshire," said Esma; "I am longing to have them all so near to me."

"And so far from me. Well, I must not be selfish," said Kathie cheerily. "Maggie declares that father and I are to pay a long visit at The Beeches some day; and though I don't *quite* see how he is ever to be moved, I have great faith in Maggie's power of managing almost impossibilities."

Why was it that Esma's words had conveyed to me a certain little unpleasant shock? I could not think how it was that I so regretted leaving London, and cared so little to enter upon life in our beautiful Devonshire home. But I decided that the parting with Kathie had a good deal to do with my reluctance, as well as the breaking off from dear though sorrowful associations connected with our little city dwelling.

"Kathie, I don't know what I shall do without you to come in and out," I said.

"I shall feel quite lost without you. Don't talk about it yet. I have to be brave, and not

to murmur. Do you know I sometimes indulge in a certain little dream of the future for us three? It comforts me when I feel a wee bit down-hearted."

"What dream?" we both asked, curious to know how she meant to dispose of us.

"Why, that some day, by-and-by, ever so long a time ahead, when you and Esma and I are middle-aged single ladies, we'll take a small house, and live together in the middle of London, and work among the poor."

"It doesn't sound exactly romantic," said Esma soberly. "Couldn't you manage to make one of us a widow, Kathie? And *must* the house be in that very undesirable locality?"

"Why, Esma—no other place wants workers so sorely."

Kathie looked rather damped, for she had spoken with the most single-hearted and transparent enthusiasm, and met with no response from either of us. Esma seemed half-inclined to be sarcastic. I was wondering again why the idea should have conveyed to me a second unpleasant little shock, and why my own will rose up very decidedly against any such plan.

"Jeannie, *you* would like it," said Kathie, wanting some sympathy.

"I foresee certain difficulties," I said. "Depend upon it, Esma, Kathie herself will give the first example of defection from the 'single ranks.'"

“No, indeed! Jeannie, I thought you would have been delighted with the idea.”

“I do not see very much use in planning beforehand,” I said. “Such schemes seldom come to pass. My present and most practical dream is that I don’t wish to be a burden on Maggie when I am strong.”

“And you shall not,” said Maggie’s own voice by my side. “My dear Jeannie, nobody is going to be a burden upon anybody; so don’t talk nonsense. Did you see Mr. Auriol pass the window just now? I suppose he will come in presently.”

For Austin Auriol still kept up his regular visits, though I was advancing beyond that stage of invalidism which would have seemed to require them.

“Why, he only came two days ago,” observed Esma.

“He is very persevering,” said Maggie. “Poor man! not that he gains much by it. Ellie treats him by turns with the hauteur of a countess and the pettishness of a spoilt child.”

“And if I am not mistaken, Austin Auriol cares very little for either,” said Esmeralda.

“Wrong, Esma; depend upon it he cares a good deal more than you know, or perhaps than he himself knows,” said Kathie. “Otherwise, why beset the house in this fashion?”

“Well, I don’t often advocate interfering in

such matters," said Maggie lightly. "But I must confess I *do* sometimes wonder, Jeannie, whether it is not in your power, by the merest finger-touch, to set that stone rolling again."

"How?" I asked gravely.

"My dear, your own sense will dictate the 'how' far better than I can do. But I feel sure that if I were in your place I would attempt something."

Maggie's words set me off thinking. I soon found myself considering deeply Ellie's possible and probable future. Also I wondered greatly what Austin Auriol really did feel in the matter. Were his present sensations towards her precisely the same that they had once been? Was his indifferent manner merely the result of wounded pride, and only kept up by her continued coldness?

I turned the subject over and over, regarding it from every attainable point of view, and was just as perplexed at the end as at the beginning. Then I suddenly found myself leaving Ellie alone to dive into some of the underground passages of my own mind. And I came therein to a certain heavy door which I had long kept locked and closely barred, forbidding myself to enter. It was there, and I knew it; but I had not turned the lock for so long—consciously at least. It surprised me to find the door standing open, or at least ajar. Had I been wandering in and out unknowingly of late?

Maggie's words had startled me a little. What! was *I* to move in the matter—to shut-to that heavy door, and to lock and double-lock it for evermore? Was it needful? Might I not at least leave events to take their own course?

In the very midst of my cogitations Austin Auriol was announced. I found myself a little shy and reserved somehow, and I knew that he instantly noted the change. He thought me depressed, and set himself to wile me back again to cheerfulness. It was not a regular pastoral visit, but Austin never went anywhere without carrying with him a certain grave gentle pastoral atmosphere. We had some earnest and interesting conversation, in which the others joined.

"He *is* a good man," Maggie said warmly when he was gone. "Jeannie, you really must do what you can for poor little Ellie. She has been looking miserable of late."

Must I? Yes; I had noted Ellie's depression. The temporary excitement of nursing me had subsided, and she was sinking back into her old inertia, only with more appearance of positive mental pain about her than had once been the case. She bestowed confidence on none, and hardly ever mentioned Austin's name; but I think we all felt pretty sure at last as to her real feelings.

I did not sleep much that night. I had too much to occupy my thoughts. That "Must I?" was a question hard to answer.

Why must I? Why need I? Let things at least take their course. I would but remain quiescent. If matters came about thus, so let them come. I would bend my head and submit. But surely I might wait passively for their development?

What if any share in the said development seemed to lie within my grasp?—if by a motion of my hand I might set rolling the stone once stopped by Ellie herself? I knew not, but it might be so. I believed Austin Auriol to be in a somewhat halting and uncertain condition of mind and resolution. Without reasoning very closely upon it, I had an impression that he stood rather in the position of a man looking down two paths, hesitating which to enter, and perhaps to be helped in his decision by word or look or touch from another. That was my fancy; and I wronged him by it.

I wronged him, for there was no such uncertainty whatever in his mind. But if not in his, there was in mine. Maggie's words haunted me the live-long night, and I tossed sleeplessly to and fro, longing for yet dreading the morrow. What should be my course of action? Must I? Ought I?—to do as Maggie advised.

If there was an "ought," there was also a "must." Conscience whispered softly, but I tried to reason away its voice. Why need I put Ellie's happiness before my own—if I *had* any power in the matter? The answer was clear: "In honour

preferring one another." "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

But in this instance it seemed almost too much to be expected of any one. I resisted the "ought" and put aside the "must" for many hours, all through that night and all through the following day, till I was aware of a shadow creeping over my soul. True, my spiritual life had appeared to me sluggish of late, and wanting in joy. But was I prepared to find the cloud deepen? Could I bear to have my Master's Face altogether withdrawn? Not thus might the plain voice of conscience be disregarded, with impunity.

I saw the matter in another light. For His sake who had died for me, could I not do this thing? It seemed right to me. Was I going to hold back?

All for His sake! That broke me down. I flung myself in utter weakness at my Master's feet, praying Him to turn me in the direction whither my strength sufficed not to carry me. And then I rose, having received power to advance.

"Thy will be done"—once more. Hardest lesson of all to learn—needing to be taught again and yet again, in each fresh phase of the great life-battle.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SOMETHING SETTLED.

AUSTIN AURIOL came in again, after two days. I do not know whether I had most wished or feared that he should speedily re-appear. No one was in the room with me except Ellie, and as I happened to have her hand in mine, I quietly retained possession of it. She gave one hasty snatch, with the intention of taking to flight as usual, and then, after a surprised glance, sat quietly down by my side.

“How do you do, Mr. Auriol?” I said. “Most of them are out—except this little prisoner of mine;” and I took care to let him see by whose will she was detained.

Austin looked provokingly uninterested, instead of showing the suppressed gratification on which I had counted; while Ellie fairly hung her head, and would say nothing. Somehow the cheery conversation usual during his visits fell extremely flat. Not one of us had any remarks to make worth hearing.

“And you really are all going to Devonshire in

a fortnight?" said Austin Auriol, after a few fitful observations from one side or the other.

"Really, I believe. Packing up has begun."

"Don't ask me to congratulate you all."

"No; for I am quite in two minds about going," I said. "London cannot but be a home to me. But I don't think Ellie feels quite as I do."

I thought she would contradict me, as she had done occasionally, and say how sorry she was to leave the dear old house. Instead of which her head went up, with a red spot on either cheek, and her voice said decisively,—

"I never want to see London again."

"Don't you?" asked Mr. Auriol.

"No; nor anybody in it."

"Well, you will be at a good distance in Devonshire, if that is a consolation," he said, in the soothing tone which one would use to a fractious child, yet half-sarcastically too. It either pained or irritated her past bearing; and, truth to tell, it roused my own indignation somewhat. She pulled her hand from mine, and walked straight out of the room. He drew a quick breath, and said,—

"I am glad."

"I am not," I said. "How *could* you speak to her like that? I don't wonder she is vexed."

"Forgive me, Jeannie. It was wrong; but—I never have a word alone with you, and almost any manner of speech from me seems distasteful to Ellie."

“O no,” I said.

“You don’t know. You always put the kindest construction on everything. I know well enough that she barely tolerates me.”

I opened my lips to contradict him, and shut them again. If I had, as I imagined, guessed Ellie’s secret, I certainly had no right to betray it to him.

“But never mind Ellie just now. I have a word to say to *you*—if I may.”

“About Ellie?” I asked rather stupidly, since he had just put her aside.

“Ellie! No.”

“I did not know—only—I have been wondering a little,” I said hurriedly. “I thought—perhaps—things might be different now between you and her.”

“They *are* different,” he said emphatically, but with a shadow on his face. “Not in the sense though in which—I am afraid—you mean. Is it possible that you do? Jeannie—have you been thinking *that*?”

His meaning was not very clearly expressed, but of course I understood.

“I don’t know,” was all I could force myself to say.

“Different!” he repeated. “Why, that fancy of mine died long ago. How could it be otherwise? I am as constant a man as any, I do think; but that was only a fancy. I was infatuated by her pretty

face, and dressed her up in imagination with those qualities which I admired ; and it took some time to break the spell. She did the work herself effectually. Why, she was but a child, and a weak child too, though so lovable. Don't think I have a shadow of resentment against her. She could not help it, poor little thing ! Nay, now — forgive me for speaking so, for she is your sister. But I want you to understand how absolutely free I have long been from *that*. Even if it were not so, I could not seek her now. With all her sweetness and attractiveness, there is a certain want in your gentle Ellie. *You* know it, Jeannie. She is not fitted to be a clergyman's wife. She would never go heart and soul into parish work. And I must think of my parish as well as myself. But there is no self-denial in this case—none whatever. I am afraid you despise me for changeableness. Do you ? Tell me plainly."

"I have no right to do so," I answered. "Ellie has disappointed all of us, not you alone. But I think we shall see her some day rise to more of life and vigour."

"I trust so, assuredly. Nevertheless, as she so plainly keeps up her old dislike for me, it is well that I can look upon her with the most simple brotherly and pastoral interest. It never can be anything else."

Glancing up for a moment into his earnest face, almost pale with excitement, I knew that it verily

was so, and that I might say no more concerning Ellie. I think too I knew that somewhat in addition was still to come.

At all events, it came. Three minutes later I was aware that the certain strong door in my heart, which had long been locked and barred upon a little grave of buried girlish dreams, might now be flung open to the light of day.

Might be! But I thought of Ellie. Had I done for her all I could—all I ought?

“I must think for one night, Austin,” I answered; though in the first moment of surprise he had drawn from me the acknowledgment that I could return his love.

“Think! But, dear Jeannie, will you keep me in suspense, when you have already done away with the only possible objection?”

I felt that it was so; yet I repeated steadily, “I will give you my answer to-morrow.”

After what I had said he could hardly feel much fear. I found that Mother knew of his wish, but had promised to mention it to no one; and he had only told *her* twenty-four hours earlier.

The thought of poor little Ellie haunted me in my joy. But Austin had a great deal more to say. He began to speak about those old days when he and I first met, and when he had exercised so strong an influence over me. “Ay, and you over me,” he said. And, strange to say, he told me of a resolution on his part, then formed, that if he

ever married, the fifteen-years-old maiden, Jane Phillimore, should be his chosen wife.

He came to London with this resolution still in his mind. But somehow when he first saw me—Austin hesitated here, but I waited for more, and he brought it out—somehow he had been a little disappointed, and Ellie, in her dawning girlish beauty, had cast a glamour of fascination over him.

“There was no depth in it,” he said. “But you see how it was. I came to your house prepared to fall in love, and—I hardly know how——”

“I know how disagreeable I was in those days,” I said.

Of course he protested, but at the same time admitted that—well, that, for instance, he had heard me speak sharply to Francey the first evening. He had also, of course, a great deal to say regarding my present self as compared with my past self. Everything he said naturally gave me pleasure that afternoon, and I was not critical. Nor was there need so to be. He had passed through just such a phase of experience as many good men, and many great men also, do pass through. And I cannot but feel sure that Ellie would have failed to make him happy, so I am very thankful things turned out as they did.

But when at length he was gone, I went upstairs to my own room. My first care was to kneel down, with such joyous thankfulness for the brightness which had broken out on my cloudy battle-field,

as I had not known for years. I did not seem to have anything to ask, except that my God would still watch over me, as in the past, and do everything for me, just according to His holy will. But how much of praise I had to offer up!

That was about all the exertion to which my bodily strength was as yet equal. I lay down on the bed and waited, thinking Mother or Maggie would come soon to me. Instead of that Ellie was the first to appear.

Just as well so. I had no time for considering how to break my news, therefore I uttered no confusing speeches.

"Ellie, darling, I want a word with you. Please shut the door."

She came and leant over my bed.

"Austin Auriol has just gone."

"Has he? I'm glad I escaped."

Nevertheless she flushed slightly.

"Darling, I want to be the first to tell you something. I hope it will not give you pain, for it is a long time now since you refused him; but——"

"Is he going to marry somebody else?" she cried, with unmistakable eagerness.

That cleared off all difficulties. "Ellie, he has proposed to me," I said softly.

She kissed me in a perfect rapture. *I* could only wait in bewilderment.

"I'm so glad—oh, so delighted. I always did say he ought to like you. And he has done it at

last. You are just made for one another. Jeannie, this *is* good news !”

“ I am glad you are pleased,” I said slowly.

“ Of course I am. Jeannie, don't look so puzzled. I did so wish for something of this kind. I never *could* care for him myself, and yet I never could forgive myself for the way I treated him. If you did but know the weight it has been on me to think I made Lennox' friend, and such a good man, so unhappy. It was horrid of me. I knew he must despise me—and—and——”

She put her head down on the pillow by mine.

“ And do you know, Jeannie, I have sometimes felt as if I ought not to hope to be forgiven for the wrong I did—for I know it was wrong—oh, very ; and yet I could never ask him to forgive me, so how could I pray about it ? Was I wrong to feel so ? It has made me very miserable lately. But now all will be right. I shall like him for a brother, and you'll tell him how sorry I am for the way I behaved to him. O you dear old Jeannie ! you have made me so happy. And now I shall love to be Maggie's right hand with the children, and never to bother myself again with anything of *that* sort. I do think I shall be a child all my life long.”

I almost thought so too, as I heard her talk. But there was no mistake whatever about her joyous satisfaction.

Mother's happiness was of a different and more

subdued kind. She did rejoice in my joy, with unselfish rejoicing, however; and with greater heartiness than she could have shown, perhaps, but for our Maggie's return.

So I had no hesitation whatever regarding the answer which I might return to Austin Auriol on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ONE OF THE BRIDESMAIDS.

“TALK of the first defection from single ranks! The idea! And you looking so innocent all the while!”

“No; but Kathie——”

“I’m not going to spare you one single blush. No wonder my beautiful scheme didn’t exactly fascinate you. My dear Jeannie, how did the notion first enter his head?”

“You had better ask Austin for particulars, if you are curious.”

“I’m not curious. I am perfectly delighted. You’ll be half-way nearer to me than ever before. I shall be able to run into the Vicarage in the course of my hour’s walk. What a pest you will soon find me!”

“Of course,” I answered; for Kathie’s wild spirits that day admitted of no more staid answer.

“Well, I can take a hint; so if I give you too much of myself, you’ll only have to tell me so. Do you know, Jeannie, I never was so delighted in my life—positively never. And now I must ask a question. When is it to be?”

I did not answer directly. The question had been under discussion only that morning.

"When will it? Do tell me."

"Austin is rather impatient," I replied. "He says all this is a hindrance to his sermons—and—that I ought not——"

"Of course you ought not. Next week, Jeanie?"

"Kathie, don't be mad!"

"My dear, how can I be anything else? I feel all bubbling over—like father's favourite tea-kettle. You haven't answered me yet."

"I think—in the end of next month," I said. "We are going to The Beeches on Tuesday, and I want to know if you will be my bridesmaid."

"Well, I don't think I'll have any particular objection," said Kathie, with dancing eyes. "Who else?"

"Ellie and Esma and Edgitha. I don't mean to have more than four. Austin has no sisters or cousins, you know."

"Shall we wear pink or blue?"

"I don't know. Kathie, don't pretend to care so much about that part of it."

"My dear child, I never wore a bridesmaid's dress in my life. I really shall enjoy the excitement. Is it wrong? Do you think I am growing worldly?"

"I hope that isn't to be the character of my wedding, at all events," I said, smiling. "Kathie!

—as if I had any wish or right to judge you! I only wish my life came as near to self-abnegation as yours does.”

She shook her head rather soberly.

“And how is the little Ellie?”

“Very happy, and full of arrangements. We are packing up vigorously—only they won’t let me do much. How Mother will enjoy the country!”

“Ah! shouldn’t I like a whiff of a country breeze.”

“You will have your wish next month.”

“How?”

“Why, Kathie—what we have just been talking about.”

“Do you mean to say the wedding will be in Devonshire? How stupid of me not to understand. Of course it must. But, Jeannie, I can never leave father.”

“Just for once! O you must!”

“I don’t think he will consent.”

Her face flushed, and her eyes filled with the keenness of the disappointment, though her lips smiled bravely.

“It won’t do. I should make him ill by only proposing such a thing. I must be content to welcome you back to London, dear old Jeannie. Father would never do without me for a whole day and night. I was thinking it would only be absence for a few hours.”

“ But this is almost slavery,” I objected.

She looked up at me with a light in her dark eyes.

“ No : only loving service,” she said. “ Don’t try to make me discontented, Jeannie. It is *so* sweet to accept the whole from my Master’s hands, as just what He wills me to do, that I don’t want to feel inclined to murmur at the very least little portion. I would love to be at your wedding, but I can’t make a fight for my own way, and I should never get father’s leave without something of a struggle. And suppose, after all, he were taken ill in my absence ! No, it won’t do at all.”

There was nobody whose presence I had so set my heart upon as Kathie de Salvernai’s. But I saw it was not to be, and her bright patience made me ashamed of my own secret inclination to rebel. I would have had her at least try for what we both so thoroughly desired ; but she held firmly to her first resolution, and would lift neither hand nor voice in the matter.

After all, it was done for her. Maggie quietly went one day and had a long talk with uncle Claire, winning from him an unqualified assent. She let him know something of the sweet spirit of self-denial his child had shown ; and uncle Claire’s eyes filled with tears as he said emphatically, “ She *shall* go : it is the first pleasure she has had for many a day. There are not many in the

world like my Kathie; the most loving-hearted daughter that ever was to her old father. Yes, she shall go, if it were China, instead of Devonshire."

I can hardly suppose uncle Claire's resolution would have held good if China really had been our destination next week, which, happily for me, it was not; but he gave Kathie no choice whatever, told her decisively that the whole thing was settled, and desired her to be absent for three whole nights.

Maggie removed the two leading difficulties, by promising to provide a temporary attendant for him, and by making Kathie a present of the bridesmaid's dress. After that our dear little countess went about as if she were on air. I never saw more hearty childlike enjoyment of a pleasure, or of its anticipation, than was hers.

Then came our removal. It was a little hard to leave the old home. I felt as if I had tendrils twined in and about every nook and corner of the house; and somehow during those last few days, in all my happiness, the thought of Lennox was constantly present to my mind.

He had run the race. I was running it still. He had entered early on his rest. I was entering upon a new phase of life in this world. His sun had gone down while it was yet day. I might have yet to linger on till long years of work and battling were over.

Was his the sadder history of the two, so far ?

I put the question earnestly to myself one night, with another following. Had this world grown so bright to me in the light of my new happiness, that all longing after the life to come had faded into nothingness ?

I could not answer the latter question as I would fain from my heart have answered it. This world *was* dearer to me than it had been. The longings *were* fainter after heavenly joys. But the change had come before—not after—the change in my prospects. I was thankful at least for this. And if I could not feel sure that there was no falling back, I could at least pray from my very heart one earnest prayer that, at any cost, my God would keep me in the path of life.

Was Lennox' life-history sadder than my own ? I could answer that question unhesitatingly—No. *Not*, seen in the light of his early death ; for dying to this world was but entering upon life eternal. *Not*, seen in the light of his crucified will and frustrated life-purpose ; for if the work he did was the work his Master gave him, it mattered little whether or no it were that which he would himself have chosen. He had hoped to serve his Lord in the ministry, and this desire of his heart was denied him ; yet, though cut off from such a post in the battle, and set to contend with other foes, the “ Well done, good and faithful servant,” would surely be his meed.

Might it but be so with me also. How earnestly I prayed that I might be roused from my deadness of heart. And I doubted not that the answer would be sent, even though for awhile delayed. One sweet promise came richly home to me,—

“Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He SHALL strengthen thine heart.”

So I waited still, and knew that the Word could not fail.

Next Tuesday we went to Devonshire. I felt more like one paying a visit than like one going to a new home; but my greatest happiness in the matter was to think of dear Mother being settled in such a haven of rest. How she leant upon Maggie, and how dearly she loved her little grandchildren! I could almost have been jealous of her absorbing devotion to them, only that I resisted any such temptation. And Ellie was full of schemes for work in the village and in the home. She meant to be Maggie's governess, she said, and to take the children under her special charge as they grew older. Maggie smiled and acquiesced in everything, but without, I think, any very confident expectations as to Ellie's capabilities. The child was bright and sweet and happy once again, and much like her old self. But the self-indulgence of long years had left their traces in a character which might have reached a higher type; and though I do think there was an earnest and conscientious desire in Ellie's heart to be something

more than a merely professing Christian, still she had not lost her childishness, and it was hard to say how much of depth lay beneath that changeful exterior.

“Never mind,” said Mother gently, when I let slip a little of my regret to her; “Ellie will grow old quite fast enough. Her real childhood was cut short too soon, and now she is having a taste of it again. I *do* think there are signs of growing faith and love down below, Jeannie dear; and we must not kill a feeble plant by pulling it up to examine the roots.”

Mother was right. But I often thought how different was Francey’s nature, and how quickly its sanctified beauties had flashed into light, under the constraining power of Heavenly love. The growth of a higher life in Ellie was altogether another affair; not unreal, I trusted, but sluggish and intermittent.

Well, many a flax smokes long before it breaks into a flame; and if the Master has patience in waiting and tending, what are we, to dare to look on with feelings of impatience or restless unbelief?

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CLOSE—BUT NOT OF THE BATTLE.

AFTER all, Kathie was not at my wedding.

Was this the beginning of an answer to my fervent prayer, at *any* cost to be kept from falling back? May be so. I think I needed somewhat of the "discipline of disappointment."

Till then all had been going so smoothly, and arrangements altogether had seemed so satisfactory, that we were almost expecting a time of absolutely unalloyed brightness. The alloy came, however, just before my wedding-day, in the shape of a hurried scrawl from Kathie, saying that uncle Claire had been taken dangerously ill, and she could not leave him on any account.

There was no help for it. I would sooner have lacked the presence of any one of the guests than that of my one and only chosen friend. But she was bound hand and foot to her post. The letter was brave and cheery, like herself, and she would not sadden me by saying how she feared that another week might find her fatherless. So I only knew of our mutual disappointment, and did

not realise her deeper sorrow. Uncle Claire had often been dangerously ill before, in a sense, and I could not tell how much worse was this attack than usual.

I remember being startled that day to find how certain little unexpected blunders and "contre-temps" irritated me and tried my patience. Was the old "sensitive" temper, which had so long lain dormant, suddenly to spring up in my happiness with its former dominant power? There was nothing for me but to flee to the never-failing source of strength, and I went apart from the many calls on my attention, and cast myself in helplessness at my Master's feet. And though I had often known more loving warmth and joy in my own heart, yet never came the answer more quickly than to that earnest cry. The rest of the afternoon and evening was calm, and I felt my tendency to vexation under control as if held down by a strong and gentle hand—not my own.

My remembrance of the next day is of some confusion, much quiet happiness, and certain sorrowful farewells. But I knew I was leaving Mother and Ellie in a home of peaceful brightness, such as they had not known for years; and how could I be sad with Austin by my side?

The month following proved bright, as a honeymoon should be, and the neatly mapped-out plan which lay in a corner of my husband's pocket-book was fulfilled almost to the letter. It was a

delightful carrying out of my old girlish dreams of foreign travel—my first tour, and likely to be my last for a good while to come ; for the busy London clergyman, with his very moderate stipend, was not likely to cross the Channel soon again.

The weeks sped quickly away, yet not too quickly. Pleasant as I found it to travel with Austin, I found it pleasanter still to be in my own home with him. My sensations at first were of a very luxury of happiness.

Nevertheless, there *was* a shadow. I did not always acknowledge it even to myself ; yet there it was—a dim faint shadow over my soul, obscuring the brightness of the spiritual joys and the strength of the spiritual longings which once I had known. I scarcely knew what was wrong ;—I was only conscious of a vague dissatisfaction and sense of something lacking, which prevented perfect repose.

Not only was Kathie absent from our wedding, but she could not even welcome me home, as she had hoped to do. I found my way to uncle Claire's next day, unable to rest without a sight of her face ; and she came to meet me in the passage, with clinging hands and eager smile.

“ You dear good Jeannie ! I did not think I *could* expect you so soon. Father isn't well enough to bear me out of the house yet for more than ten minutes. But you are a bit of refreshment in yourself, you dear creature.”

“Kathie, how thin you are!” I said anxiously.

“Ah, it has been a hard bout of nursing. I didn’t think he would ever have pulled through.”

Her eyes filled and her cheeks flushed.

“But you never told me he was so bad.”

“Why should I? It would have been a thousand pities to have spoilt your time abroad. Haven’t you found it charming? He *was* bad, Jeannie. The doctor and I sat by him hour after hour, watching for the last breath. I never knew till then what it would be to lose him and be left all alone in the world.”

“Kathie, could you *then* say, ‘Thy will be done’?” I asked softly, as we stood alone together in the passage.

She looked up at me steadily, half-wonderingly, for a minute.

“The trouble did not come,” she said slowly. “If it had, my Lord Christ would have given me strength to say those words, Jeannie. I know He would, for I asked Him, and I put the whole thing into His hands, and prayed Him to do His will. If it had not been His will, how could I wish for it?—father’s getting well, I mean. But I don’t think I was looking into what I felt. I had too much to do with nursing father, and I was obliged to keep on looking up and up for strength all the time, or I could not have got along at all.”

“I am sure that was the best way,” I answered; wishing I had myself more of Kathie’s childlike

simplicity. Yet she too had known somewhat of the danger of morbid self-introspection.

Then we went together into the parlour, where uncle Claire lay feebly on the couch. He seemed to me more like a man dying than a man recovering. And grieved though I was to find him thus, and grieved to think of what Kathie's loss would be, yet I did feel that this very blow which threatened might prove in the end a happy release for Kathie from her narrow fretting round of duties. She seemed to me so formed for working widely and successfully in the great Harvest-field, as to be almost thrown away in the cramped sphere to which she was confined.

But if such a path is ever to be Kathie's, it lies yet future. I thought I knew what would be well for her, but Kathie's Master knows better. Uncle Claire still lives on—shattered, feeble, and helpless; somewhat exacting still, but far more gentle than of old. And Kathie shines on still in her little appointed nook with a light so bright and stedfast that I cannot wish for any change. It might be that elsewhere the shining would not be so clear.

Sweet, brave, patient Kathie! I know one sentence of Holy Writ which seems just to describe her inner and outer life:

“Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.”

No lower power could thus have transformed her. But Kathie herself cannot see the transformation. If she could she would not be so humble, and then the transformation would be less marked. It sometimes appears to me as if "self" in its ugliness were altogether vanishing out of her life. Would that it might in mine likewise!

Three months had not elapsed from my wedding-day before I was in a busy round of parish work and ceaseless toil. Work, not for myself; toil, all for my Master. So I thought—only, may-be, some was for love of my husband, and some because it had to be done, and some because it was expected of me. There was still a something lacking on the inner pathway of life. I found there an atmosphere calm and grey, and wanting the old gleams of light which had been wont to shoot across in golden radiance from beyond the far-off hill-tops.

I sought and prayed to learn the truth; and like a flash it came to me at last. Reading my Bible one night I was arrested by certain words in the Book of Revelation: "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: . . . and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. *Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because THOU HAST LEFT THY FIRST LOVE.*"

Deeper and deeper sank the solemn voice of

warning into my soul. Looking back with earnest searching, I knew that my Master *had* been dearer to me once, that my heart's devotion *had* been more unreservedly poured out upon Him, that the things of earth *had* been as nothing in the light of His countenance, that I *had* once cared for no joys in life without the sense of His presence.

My "first love!" A love of warmth and fervour, of whole-heartedness and devotion. A love which would do anything, bear anything, give up anything, for the Lord Jesus. That is the love here meant. Too often there creeps in later a spirit of expediency and worldly prudence. But if such a love was ever mine, it came to me, I think, not as to many, with the first call to my Saviour, but rather with a later rousing and awakening from a level of Christian life so low and dim and feeble, that I scarcely dare to say, on looking back, how far it was genuine life in Christ at all.

I knew now, however, what was wanting. But I remembered with joy that this "first love," in its glowing fervour, had been a gift from the hand of my God, and I knew that I might plead at His footstool for a renewal of His gift. I went back to the old sweet promise, "Ask, and ye shall receive." And I asked, and I think I did receive; for the greyness and the blank passed soon away, and the light from the other land grew clear to my heart once more.

What more shall I add? Still in the battle-

field of life ; still fighting day by day with foes old and new, as each in turn arises to confront me ; yet no longer am I, as of old, a stranger to the song of victory.

We are all on the battle-field together : Mother and Ellie away in quiet Devonshire ; Kathie beside her father's sick bed ; Harry and Francey at their noble post of distant duty ; Esma just entering upon a new and busy sphere as the wife of our kind friend Mr. Ramsay ; Austin and I in our ceaseless round of city work ;—ay, and even my wee Kathie in her nursery. All are on the same great battle-field, fighting, I trust, under the same Captain, against the same enemies.

Day and night cease never the clang and clash of the conflict, of well-tempered steel from the armoury of God, as opposed to the dark weapons of evil. But for the dulness of our senses, what sights and sounds might we not see and hear ! There is ONE, however, who knoweth all ; and the weakest child-soldier, in the least important corner of the field, has his Captain's eyes as steadily upon him as the mightiest champion in the cause.

Day and night, year by year, the battle still continues. But the end may even now be near. One by one each soldier lays aside his sword to receive the crown of victory ; and a time will come when, from one end to another of the field, the song of triumph shall break forth and the sounds of warfare cease for ever.

“More than conquerors through him who loved us.” But most of us have to “endure” a while first of “hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.” How else might we show our love to Him who bore the bitterness of anguish and the utmost heat of the battle for our sake? And heaven will be the sweeter at the close.

THE END.



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