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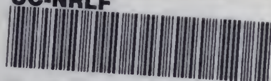
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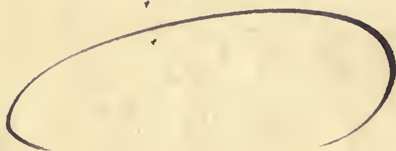

BELFOREST.

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BELFOREST.

A

TALE OF ENGLISH COUNTRY LIFE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"MARY POWELL," AND "THE LADIES OF BEVER HOLLOW."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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BELFOREST.

CHAPTER I.

THE VILLAGE POST-OFFICE.

Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop. Michael Saffery is stamping the letters for the night post. He has already closed the shutters of his little drapery-shop; the bright brass kettle is singing on the hob in the little back-parlour, a buttered muffin is basking before the fire, and he is cosily shut in for the night. I wish every one had as snug a berth!

That buttered muffin is not for Mr. Saffery; it has been toasted by a little girl of remarkably prim demeanour, who is now spreading the tea-table of the lodger. Mr. Saffery's parlour is behind the shop; but the lodger's parlour, which is larger, is parallel with the

shop, and looks into the village street. This street, a very devious one, of considerable width, meanders up a hill and then meanders down the opposite side of it, dodging the declivity a little. It is the only street in the village, though there are one or two populous lanes and a green encircled with homesteads. Opposite Mr. Saffery's shop the street has a wide reach or bay, with a little knoll or islet off the opposite coast, wooded by a hoary oak with a seat round it. Under the lee of this oak is the village inn—the "Swan"—where, at this moment, a farmer's cart bound for the beast-market is baiting; it is full of calves calling piteously on their mothers; the air is filled with the incessant, melancholy plaint. Also, the tinkling bell of a muffin-boy from a neighbouring town, a man calling "Live shrimps," and several barking dogs and squeaking pigs prevent any approach to silence. Yet how different from London noises!

The lodger's parlour is scantily furnished, but filled to repletion with his own belongings. The little girl has once already had the privilege of dusting them, and she has eyed them with intense curiosity and interest. There are

books, a strange medley; portfolios, sketch-books, paints, easel, palette, and all the apparatus of an artist.

The young man is straining his eyes to read the "Life of Nollekens," by the waning light. As the queer little sprite flickers about the table, he eyes her furtively, with some curiosity, and at length says abruptly—

"I say, little one, how old are you?"

In a very staid manner, she answers,

"Thirteen, sir."

"Thirteen? Why you don't look eleven!"

"No, sir; I'm aware I'm very small of my age" (with a deep sigh). "Some people think I shall never grow again."

This was said as if all the faculty had been consulted about it.

"Why should they think that?"

"I've had a serious illness, sir. A fever. And it settled on my nerves. That's why I'm away from boarding-school."

"Ha! Well, I dare say you'll be better some day. What's your name?"

"Nessy."

"Jessy? Bessy?"

"No, sir, Nessy."

"What a queer name! Why could not your parents call you Jessy or Bessy?"

"My parents had nothing to do with it," said Nessy, looking deeply wounded. "My godfather and godmothers gave me that name —at least *one* of my godmothers did, who left me a fortune!"

"Oh, my goodness! So you're an heiress! To the tune of what?"

"Sir," said Nessy, with severity, "I have *thirty pounds a year*—shall have, at least, when I'm of age; if I live as long—which perhaps I shall not. And that's why I'm being brought up like a lady; for it is all laid out on me."

"And why does a lady wait on my table?"

"Oh," said Nessy, looking pleasantly at him for the first time with her dark-blue eyes, which were very pretty, "it's no trouble, it's a pleasure. I—"

At this moment a sound in the other parlour made her start, as if she were shot, and then dart out of the room. The artist thought he heard the kettle boiling over, and a hasty ejaculation of "O my!" from the pseudo-young lady. An instant after, something

whisked past the window, in what appeared to him the aforesaid young lady's shabby black silk frock.

As it was now quite too dark to read, he began to be impatient for tea and candles, which seemed unnecessarily delayed, and rang the bell.

In sailed Mrs. Saffery, a fresh-coloured, comely woman, with the lighted candles in highly-polished candlesticks, not of the precious metals, but borne on a waiter with equal distinction. She drew down the blind and withdrew. Then Nessy brought in the hot tea-pot, and then the—or, at least, *a* hot muffin. The lodger observed she had been crying.

"What was the matter just now?" said he.

"The matter," said Nessy, reluctantly, "was that the kettle boiled over the muffin, and completely spoiled it; but I knew the muffin-boy was only at the other end of the village, so I ran after him and got another; only my mamma says—"

And, suppressing a little sob, she withdrew, and appeared no more that night. The artist pitied the poor child, who had probably been chidden for gossiping with lodgers instead of

minding her own business; but he did not give it a second thought, diverting himself with his book during tea and while the table was being cleared, and employing himself with pencil and pen during the remainder of the evening. His name was Leonard Antony—Leonardo his comrades laughingly called him. He was now in country quarters while his town lodgings were being painted. Of course, an artist never goes into country quarters of any description without finding something or other to enrich himself with in the way of new materials. This very morning, Mr. Antony had noted a couple of curiously-carved oaken stools in a cottage, and, while sketching them, had been told they were used at funerals to rest the coffin upon while the service was being read. He came upon some quaint memorials, too, of Cardinal Wolsey, and he spent the evening in writing down what he had heard of him, and in finishing his sketch of Wolsey's well.

At dead of night Mr. Antony was roused from sound sleep by a voice loudly bawling under his window—

"Michael Saffery! Michael Saffery!" and,

concluding it could be for nothing short of murder, fire, or thieves, he sprang out of bed and began by hitting his head violently against the bedpost. At the same time, a creaking window was thrown up in the adjoining room and speedily shut down again, and, after some gruff mutterings, silence ensued. Mr. Antony rubbed his head, supposed all was right, and went to bed again.

Next morning, when he entered his parlour, he saw Nessy, with her back to him, immersed in one of his books. Without ceremony, he took it out of her hand, saying—

"Do you know that you should not meddle with what is not yours?"

She started violently, and said, "I should not have hurt it, sir."

"That's as may be; at any rate, it might hurt you."

"I don't think it would," she said, regretfully. "It was a very pretty story."

"Ay; but, my good girl, it is anything but a pretty trick to touch what does not belong to you. I'm a very particular gentleman, and if I find I can't leave my things about without their being meddled with, I shall go away."

Nessy looked sorry and ashamed. She said, "I promise you, sir, I won't do so any more. It did not occur to me it was wrong, and I'm so fond of reading."

"Yes, but you must confine yourself to books that are given you."

"*Given?*" Nessy's tone implied that in that case she should have none.

"Or lent," said Mr. Antony, sitting down to his breakfast.

Nessy went for the kettle; and, when she had brought it, she said, very humbly—

"I'm sure, if you lent me that book just to finish, I would take the greatest care of it—"

"To finish? Why, how much have you read already?"

"Nearly to the end, sir."

"Oh well, then," said Mr. Antony, almost gruffly, "you may take it away, and make an end of it while I am at breakfast; but mind you bring it back, and don't meddle with any other books of mine, nor even ask for them."

"Very well, sir. Thank you." And away she went with "Paul and Virginia."

When she brought it back, he said, "Well, have you finished it?"

" Yes, sir," with a little sigh.

" It did not end very happily, you see."

" No, sir."

And then, after a minute's silence, as she swept away the crumbs, she added, reflectively—

" Virginia was very rich."

" Rich! yes, but it did not make her happier, you see, but quite the contrary," said Mr. Antony, delighted at the unexpected opening for a moral.

" We can't tell what she might have done if she had not been drowned," said Nessy.

" No, Nessy; but take my word for it, that riches do not, of themselves, make people happy."

" Should not you like to be rich, sir?"

" Well, that's a poser," said he, laughing a little. " We can't get on very well without some money, but too much of it is bad for us; it's a great responsibility, for which we shall be called to account, whether we think so or not."

" But if we use it well," suggested Nessy.

" Ay, *then* indeed," said he, with a shrug and a smile; and the little maiden, seeing

he did not mean to say any more, went away.

"Ten to one," thought he, as he got his painting apparatus together, "that child intends to do great things with her thirty pounds a year. To her it probably seems as considerable an income as I should think a thousand. Should not I like to be rich, indeed! I believe I should!" And he set to work with all his might.

At supper-time the alarm of the previous night occurred to him, and he said to Mrs. Saffery, as she waited on him—

"By-the-bye, what was the meaning of that tremendous uproar last night? I thought the house must be on fire."

"Oh, did you hear it, sir?" said Mrs. Saffery, looking rather conscious.

"Hear it? I must have been deaf if I did not."

"Well, sir, you see it was the guard, come for the letters. It's an awkward time of night, and Saffery can't be always sitting up for him, so he makes up the bag before bedtime and takes it up to his room, and lets it down through the window with a string."

"When he happens to wake."

"Oh sir, he always wakes first or last."

"Well, I hope to-night it will be first. It's *my* turn to sleep, this time."

Mrs. Saffery said she knew she ought to apologize. She wished Saffery did not sleep so heavy.

"Could not you wake him?"

"Well, sir, you see, I sleep heavy too. I've got used to it, so it makes no impression—at first, that is. But we always hear it, soon or late."

"If you did not, I suppose you'd lose your situation?"

"Oh, sir, it could never come to that. We *always* hear it, soon or late."

"I wonder the guard has patience."

"He hasn't, sir! He curses and swears."

"Humph! no wonder."

"It's trying, I know," said Mrs. Saffery, "but when people work hard, they sleep heavy."

"That little girl of yours does not seem to work hard. Why don't you let *her* let down the letters?"

"Nessy, sir? Oh, she's such a tender plant!

You've no idea! The night air through the open window would kill her out of hand."

"Well, I suppose it might—she doesn't look very strong."

"No, sir, Nessy is far from strong. She's a great anxiety. She took on so at school that it gave her a nervous fever."

"Were they cruel to her?"

"No, sir, no; they were kind enough. But she worritted herself to learn more than she *could* learn — she has such ambition, has Nessy."

"Oh, indeed. She told me she was a young lady of property."

"Ah, that's child's talk, sir. Thirty pounds a year *does* seem a fortune to a girl of thirteen, that has but twopence a week pocket-money; but, dear me, thirty pounds is little enough to dress and educate her upon, let alone extras. And the extras, sir, I do assure you, at these genteel schools, just double the account!"

"No doubt of it."

"When I found that," said Mrs. Saffery, "I knew we could not afford extras to Nessy, and I proved it to her in black and white, for she's a reasonable child; and she saw it could not

be. But as her aunt had laid it down strict that she was to be a lady, she couldn't abear to be ignorant of anything a lady should know. And so she got doing one thing and another for her schoolfellows, over and above her own tasks, helping them with their sums, mending their gloves and stockings for them, and such like, all in an obliging way, to get them to teach her something in return that they learnt of the masters. And so she got a little drawing of one, and a little music of another, all in play-hours, you know, sir, and hindered herself of her natural recreation and rest, which every child, to be healthy, wants ; and her mind always on the full stretch, anxious-like. But the end of it was, that poor Nessy broke down, and instead of getting ahead, had to give up learning entirely, which was a sore grief and disappointment to her. And so, as she was getting no good at school, we thought it a needless expense ; and had her home to take the run of the house and get well."

"Much the best thing you could do," said Mr. Antony. "And you know, Mrs. Saffery, that it is not playing and drawing that makes the lady. A lady may be a lady and do

neither. A woman may be no lady, yet do both."

But Mrs. Saffery shook her head, and withheld her assent to this proposition.

CHAPTER II.

NESSY'S TROUBLE.

"I NEEDN'T have been cross to the queer little thing," thought Antony. "She shall have the run of my books, barring Nollekens, if she likes —though I question if she will find anything she can understand. At any rate, the prohibition shall be removed."

So, at breakfast-time, he said, "I will lend you my books, one at a time, since you are fond of reading, except the one I am reading myself; but only on condition of your doing them no injury."

Nessy's face shone with pleasure. She thanked him, and, to his surprise and amusement, laid her hand at once and without hesitation on a volume which doubtless had already attracted her.

"What is it?" said Mr. Antony. "Oh! Mrs. Graham's 'Journal of Three Months'

Residence in the Mountains East of Rome.' Yes, read that and welcome."

So, for the rest of the morning, Nessy was supremely happy; for, having performed her customary tasks of dusting, washing up, &c. she, with her mother's concurrence, took the book, carefully covered in newspaper, to a certain lath construction, garlanded with scarlet-runners, dignified by the name of "the arbour," which to her on the present occasion was a veritable bower of bliss. Soon she was, in imagination, exploring Poli and Palestrina, enjoying pleasure parties among old Roman remains, and witnessing country sports and rustic feasts. Soon she was devouring the stories of the brigands, thirteen of whom kept in terror a town of twelve hundred inhabitants—I have not read the book since I was about Nessy's age, but I remember it all as vividly as yesterday—how banditti carried off a poor surgeon named Cherubini, and threatened his life unless his family sent an enormous ransom—how the shepherds were in league with the brigands—how the robber chief quarrelled with one of his prisoners and slew him—how a handful of soldiers and the bravest of the townspeople went in pursuit of the

brigands and came upon their lair while it was yet warm—all this and much more did Nessy read with avidity, and realize the better inasmuch as there were illustrations of the narrative by Eastlake's graphic pencil. Having finished it all too soon, she sat in a maze, her head resting on her hands, living it over again. Then she thought what a pity it was she could not keep the book to read over and over whenever she liked, and it occurred to her that the next best thing to possessing it would be to copy it.

No sooner said than attempted. Nessy flew into the house for an old ledger her father had given her, in which she had already inserted many ill-written exercises. Providing herself with this *tome,* and with pen and ink, she returned to the arbour; her facile mother being satisfied that she must be doing herself good as long as she was in the open air.

And thus, returning to the house only for her dinner, Nessy spent the whole afternoon, industriously and happily, but gradually getting feverish over her work, and writing worse and worse. It was her grand ambition (Mrs. Saffery had said Nessy was ambitious) to finish

Cherubini's letter before the early tea-hour; but this she almost despaired of doing; especially as, in the over-haste, which is worst speed, she had made sundry omissions, which necessitated interlineations, sadly marring the neatness of her manuscript.

"One page more only," thought she, rapidly dipping her pen.

At that moment, her mother, at the garden-door, sharply called, "Nessy!" making the poor, nervous girl start from head to foot; and oh, woe! a round, black drop of ink fell on the page of Mr. Antony's book.

The complicated terrors of the event presented themselves at one glance to Nessy. There was the book spoilt! There was her promise that it should not be injured broken! How could she tell him? What would he think of her? Could she sop the ink up? No, it was already dry. There stood the ineffaceable spot, like the drop of blood on Lady Macbeth's hand.

An evil suggestion darted through her mind. Should she shut up the book and return it without saying anything about it, trusting to its never being discovered? That suggestion

only presented itself to be rejected. It was a great point in Nessy's life. To you, to me, the dilemma may appear trivial; it did not seem so, it was not so, to her. Oh, no! it was a very serious crisis; but, happily, she at once decided virtuously; and as she did so, the hot tear it cost her fell on the blot, but without effacing it. She carefully wiped away the tear, and, deeply sighing, closed the book and carried it indoors. As she entered the house, Mrs. Saffery said, more crossly than was her wont,—

"Nessy, there are but few things you have to do, and I expect you to do them. Mr. Antony has rung twice, and I have had to leave my clear-starching to carry in his tea, because you were out of the way. Take in his muffin."

"Yes, mother." She carried it in sadly; then, after a moment's pause, said, in an unsteady voice, "I'm sorry, sir, I must return you your book."

"Why so?" said Mr. Antony, in surprise.

"Because I've blotted it."

"The deuce you have!" said he, hastily. Her pale face became very red.

"How came you to do so?" continued Mr.

Antony, taking the book from her roughly, and running the leaves through his fingers.

Nessy could hardly command her voice, but, seeing that he could not find the place, she said, "I'll show you, sir," and found it.

"Ho!—humph! Yes, it's a bad job, certainly! Serves me right for lending books to little girls that don't know how to use them."

Nessy's heart swelled.

"You've made it worse, too, by trying to wash it out."

"No, sir, no!"

"What makes it so wet, then?"

"Sir, it was only a—"—and other tears rolled down.

"Only a tear, do you mean?" said he, softened.

Nessy nodded: she could not speak.

"Well, it's no good crying. The mischief's done."

"Yes! I'm so very, *very* sorry!"

"Come, you needn't cry any more about it. Only you can't expect me to lend you any more books."

"Oh, no, sir! No, indeed!"

"How came you to be meddling with ink? What were you doing with it?"

"Copying it."

"*Copying* it? Copying what?"

"The book, sir."

Mr. Antony looked much inclined to laugh.

"Do you really mean you liked this book so much that you were going to copy it out, right through?"

"Yes, sir, great part of it."

"Why, it never would have repaid your time and trouble."

"Oh!" said Nessy, "the trouble was a pleasure, and my time is of no value."

"Go and fetch this precious performance of yours. I think it must be a curiosity."

Nessy, much relieved at the turn the dialogue had taken, hastened to obey his directions, and soon returned, carrying the ledger.

"I know it's very badly done," said she, apologetically.

"Yes," said he, after a pause, during which he had looked through what she had been writing, "it *is*, as you say, badly done—*very* badly. Of course, your chief object was to secure the contents of the book (why it should

interest you so much I know not), and for that purpose any readable writing would do, though I can hardly call this readable. However, I suppose you can read it yourself."

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Well, Nessy, considering how you aspire to be a lady, I think you might aspire to write a better hand. Your mother can hardly believe —what is quite true, however—that music and drawing will not, of themselves, make a lady, and that a lady may be a lady who knows neither; but a lady can hardly be a lady who does not write a good hand. *No* lady would write such a hand as this. It is what used to be called, when I was a little boy, a chandler's-shop hand; but in these days of education, chandler's-shop people write very good hands, and would be quite ashamed of writing like this. Take my advice, therefore, and try to write better, whether you aim at being a lady or not."

"Yes, sir," said Nessy, softly, and looking much humiliated.

"And as for this book—ahem—you may finish reading it, since you have begun it, if you will not make any more blots."

"I *have* finished it, sir, thank you."

"What! all through? I see you have attempted to preserve it, too, by covering it with newspaper. Well, we won't say any more of this blot, especially as you came and told of it at once (not but what I should have been safe to find it out). But, as for lending you any more, I really don't think I have any here that you would care to read."

"Oh, sir, I don't expect such an indulgence."

"But would it *be* an indulgence?"

"Yes, certainly, sir."

"What would you like to have, supposing I suffered myself to be prevailed upon to be so very weak and soft as to make trial of you again?"

Nessy saw he was not at all cross now, so she at once put her finger, smiling and silently, on the corner of the "Life of Nicholas Poussin."

"Well," said Mr. Antony, "I think you'll find yourself disappointed in it; but, however, you may try. But no ink, Nessy, this time, if you please. If you copy, it must be in pencil."

"Oh, yes, sir; I wish I had done so before. It is very good of you to trust me."

And away she went, happy as a queen, yet with a nervous catch in her breath, like the ground-swell after a storm: and when she remembered what a shock and temptation and struggle were safely overpast, she could not help her eyes from filling with tears.

But she felt very thankful that she had been carried safely through it; and very grateful to Mr. Antony for being so placable and benignant. I repeat it; this was a point in Nessy's life—a crisis that helped to form her character. Seeming trifles, such as these, are sometimes very important to little people; and to great people too.

"Poor little wretch!" thought Mr. Antony, as he ate his muffin, "she was properly frightened, if ever child was. An honest little creature, too, to come and tell of it as she did, instead of waiting to be found out. What a funny fancy of hers, to copy all that! What was there in it that she was taken with, I wonder? To me the narrative seemed trite enough. But I suppose her own imagination dressed it up for her, somehow—just as mine

did Sir Robert Ker Porter's campaign in Russia, which now I can't for the life of me see any charm or spirit in. Sometimes the sunshine illumines a landscape, and gives it, for the moment, a beauty not its own."

CHAPTER III.

"WHY DON'T HE WRITE?"

It is curious how hunger will find palatable and wholesome nutriment in food that in ordinary circumstances we should consider uninviting. Not to speak of the Esquimaux relish for tallow candles and soap, we know that necessity compelled the Huguenots to the preparation of tripe, the French soldiers in the Crimea cooked dainty dishes of nettles, and the German peasants rejoice in daisy and dandelion salads. Appetite is a good sauce. Just so with books. Hunger for new and vivid impressions makes us hunt them out where most unlikely to be found. As a child, I used to delight in forty-eight numbers of the *Edinburgh Review*, from which I culled many a graphic extract and false impression; and it is curious to remember now, how, while adopting unquestioningly its canons of criti-

cism, and considering it beyond doubt that "the Lake poets" must be very silly men, I devoured every scrap that was vouchsafed of the Lake poetry.

In like manner, Nessy fed, not so much on what she would as what she could; and, failing any more such dreamy romances as "Paul and Virginia," was fain to content herself with "Nicholas Poussin." Nor was it difficult: Nessy was in the habit of forming pictures to herself; and here were pictures by the dozen; not portrayed, indeed, but described.

What had attracted her to the book were two of Fenelon's "Dialogues of the Dead," in the appendix; for children love easy dialogue. These dialogues were between Poussin and Parrhasius. She did not know who Parrhasius was, nor who Poussin, but she had before her the means of resolving the latter question. As for the banks of the Styx, she had learnt a mythological catechism at boarding-school, and read Butler's Astronomy in class, so she was at least as well up in that department as most real young ladies. Far more vivid was the pleasure she took in it; for Nessy, unconsciously, had something of the temperament

of a poet; and even our best, most Christian poets, find themselves glad, somehow, to trick allusion and metaphor in the old Greek fable.

These dialogues, then, were nuts to Nessy; and many a true and false canon of art did she derive from them. A new world was opening to her; she had scarcely seen a picture, and yet now her mind was full of pictures. After the dialogues came a descriptive catalogue of Poussin's paintings. She formed images of them all. Such passages as the following, for instance, were vividly suggestive.

"No man, perhaps, ever equalled him in the choice of subjects, or in the happiest moment in which to seize his history—as in the saving of Pyrrhus. The rebels have just reached the party, and are seen fighting with the guards of the young prince: the Megarians, on the other side of the river, beckoning, show that there is a probability of safety; but there is still enough of uncertainty to give interest and action to the piece. None better than Poussin knew how to excite the passions and affections."

"'Moses exposed.' Jochebed is placing the cradle of bulrushes carefully on the river's

brink, near a recumbent statue of Nile leaning on a sphinx. Her husband has turned away, and little Aaron follows him. Miriam stands by her mother, and makes signs that some one is approaching. Nothing can be more expressive than all these figures; behind them are some fine trees, at the foot of one of which there is an altar covered with offerings, and on the branches are hung a bow and quiver, and some musical instruments; through the trees, a majestic city, partly composed of local views of Rome." (I regret to say that this incongruity did not strike Nessy.)

" 'The Finding of Moses.' The princess here has seven attendants, besides a man in a boat, who appears to have been employed in saving the child. The Nile and sphinx occupy a portion of the foreground. . . . In the background are persons in a boat, engaged in hunting the hippopotamus, an incident taken from the Prænestine pavement."

" 'Moses trampling on the Crown of Pharaoh.' Pharaoh, seated on a couch, has his crown lying by him, on which Moses, apparently two years old, treads. The priests, considering this an evil omen, one of them is about to stab the

child, who is saved by a female attendant; the princess and her women taking part. The background is very simple; it is a wall, over which appears a single palm-tree, and the upper part of a temple of the Ionic order."

The following were, with equal industry, copied in pencil.

"'Achilles discovered by Ulysses.' While Ulysses appears only intent on selling the contents of his box of pedlar's ware, and is offering a diadem to Deidamia, Achilles has seized a sword, and is eagerly drawing it from the scabbard."

"'Young Pyrrhus saved.' This is one of the most celebrated of Poussin's works. The story is admirably told. Æacidas, king of Molossis, having been driven from his kingdom by rebels, his two friends, Angelus and Androclides, fled with his infant son Pyrrhus and his nurses. The enemy pursued them so closely that the same night they came up with them on the banks of a river, swollen by recent floods. Finding it impossible to ford the stream, one of them wrote a few lines on the bark of a tree, and tying them to his spear, threw it to the opposite bank, to ask the assistance of the

Megarians. They tied trees together to make a raft, and saved the prince. The moment Poussin has chosen is that in which the Megarians are prepared to receive Pyrrhus and his friends : the enemy is at hand ; the terror of the women is lively, the friendly strangers beyond the river are making signs to them to cross it. One of them uses the common modern manner of beckoning in use among the Romans at this day, and as it is probable that they have retained more antique customs than other nations, he has shown his judgment in adopting that action."

This was an epic—the next was an idyl. I know some one who has quite as much pleasure in copying it as Nessy had.

" 'Arcadian Shepherds.' The thought in this picture has been greatly and justly praised. Two Arcadian shepherds and a shepherdess are looking on the inscription on a tomb in the midst of an agreeable landscape. The inscription carries the moral—it is simply, *I, too, dwelt in Arcadia.*"

"I, too, dwelt in Arcadia." Nessy, if her feelings had been thoughts, could have echoed those words. The book took her quite out of

and away from herself—made her now and then give great sighs.

She began the painter's life with reverence, and found it interested her less than she had expected and wished. She pitied him for being recalled from his beloved Rome to the French court, to be employed in trifles, and sympathized with him in his joy when he got back. One or two sage axioms fixed themselves in her retentive memory. "'As I grow older,' wrote Poussin to a friend, 'I feel myself more than ever inspired with the desire of surpassing myself, and of attaining the highest degree of perfection.' It has been observed that where a sound mind and body have remained, painters have improved, even to extreme old age. Titian improved to the last, and he died of the plague at ninety-seven."

There was something pleasant in the idea that one might go on improving to the age of ninety-seven.

After reading so much about painting it was natural that she should aspire to bring theory into practice. One day, when Mr. Antony returned to dinner, he saw Michael Saffery standing at his shop door, with a very compla-

cent expression of countenance, which was reflected on the faces of his wife and daughter who stood on either side of him. Their heads bobbed up and down as they alternately looked across the road and then at a small white paper Michael Saffery held in his hand; but as soon as Nessy saw Mr. Antony, she vanished out of sight.

"This isn't exactly bad, sir, is it?" said Michael Saffery to the artist as he approached, at the same time handing him the paper. The first sight of it nearly threw Mr. Antony into fits; it was so difficult to avoid an explosion of laughter, which, had he yielded to, would have deeply wounded the parental feelings. Nessy had drawn the view from the attic window on the horizontorium principle; so that, if you could not see round four sides of a square cube, you certainly could see three, and the effect was most grotesque. Again, the groups of figures, not sparsely introduced, were truly Chinese, almost more alive than life. Mr. Antony, controlling his muscles by a violent effort, pronounced the single word "capital," and passed on into his room, leaving his host impressed with a conviction that he was very laconic.

Nessy was too conscious to wait at table that day; though she might have done so with impunity, for, after the first minute, Mr. Antony never bestowed a thought on her performance.

There was a poor woman, dressed in shabby black, who used to come almost daily to the post-office with the same inquiry—

"Please, sir, is there a letter for me from my son George?"

And when Mr. Saffery replied in the invariable negative, she as invariably rejoined—

"Dear me, why don't he write?"

To this, Mr. Saffery would gravely reply that perhaps he had no pen, ink, and paper, or no stamp, or was a long way from a post-office, or on a journey, or too busy, or had nothing to say, or had no mind to write. To these varied conjectures she would sometimes reply querulously—

"But he's gone to the gold-diggings—he might send me a money-order."

Mr. Saffery would answer by a little shrug and shake of the head, or sometimes put her off with—

"Perhaps he will write by the next mail."

On which she would look wistfully in his

face for a little while, then give a deep sigh and withdraw.

Mr. Antony had heard her make the inquiry one day, and, being struck by the humour rather than the pathos of it, had echoed her words when Mrs. Saffery brought in his supper, saying—

"Well, Mrs. Saffery, have you brought me a letter from my sister?"

And when she said "No, sir,"

"Why don't she write?"

It was one of the privileges of lodging at the post-office, that instead of getting his second-delivery letters at breakfast-time, he had them overnight; that is, when there were any to have. But, like all forestalled pleasures, this sometimes only forestalled disappointment; for he knew all the sooner that he had no letters to receive.

After one or two trials of this sort, he was rewarded by Mrs. Saffery's coming in to him with her pleasantest smile, saying, "A letter, sir," and handing it to him on a waiter with very little japanning left on it. He smiled too. It was a nice, fat little packet, directed in a pretty, ladylike hand; so he settled himself in

the most comfortable posture for enjoying it, snuffed the candles and began.

"My dear Leonard, Jones Street, *May* 16.

"I had nothing particular to write about yesterday, and did not feel very well, so I thought I would wait till to-day. The paint made me feel rather sick, in spite of what I said to you, so I took your advice at last and came here, where Miss Hill is very glad to receive me. The men were off work yesterday, so the second coat was not put on as promised, and this, of course, will occasion a little more delay. I am sorry to say my little story is 'declined with thanks.' I suppose the editor's hands are full. So it did not much signify that there was a difference of five pounds in our estimates of its value. Mr. Penguin does *not* take your 'Sunshine—Storm coming on.' He says there are so many. Not with the same effect, though, *I* think. It will be sure to sell, soon or late; good pictures always do. Hit off some bright little thing for the next exhibition, such as will be sure to please—a young mother with her child, or something of that sort,—without fretting over unsuccessful efforts already made, and trying to force them down.

"It came into my head last night, as I was lying awake, that it is nonsense for people to say such and such a thing is hackneyed. Nothing is hackneyed to real genius. Of course, if Shakspeare were to come to life again, and sit down to write on any or all of the subjects now called hackneyed, he would turn out something perfectly fresh. Set one of our great essayists to write on some trite theme—on Truth—on Honour—on Fame—he would produce something perfectly new, something we wondered we had never thought of saying ourselves. And so with everything else. Therefore do not fancy, my dear Leonard, as you do sometimes when you are dispirited, that all the good subjects are taken up. They may all be used over again in a new way; and there are hundreds of others besides. I am sorry for this little disappointment of yours, because I know you were rather in want of the money; but I have carefully gone over last month's expenses, and they were just sixteen-pence halfpenny less than the month before, and even then, you know, we were living within our means.

Your affectionate sister,

EDITH ANTONY."

CHAPTER IV.

A MISUNDERSTANDING.

This letter did not enliven Mr. Antony. It was a short one: what made the envelop so fat was that it also enclosed a boot-maker's bill; on seeing which, he muttered, "Bother!"

He sighed. Old Penguin had seemed so likely to buy that "Sunshine—Storm coming on;" and now he said "there were so many." So many what? Storms coming on? Very likely. Stupid old fellow. *Stingy* old fellow. *He*, fancy he knew a good picture!

"'Hit off some bright little thing for the next exhibition.' That's cool of you, Miss Edith. Suppose I were to advise you to hit off some bright little thing for the *Cornhill*, *Macmillan*, or *Fraser*. 'Declined with thanks.' *Don't* they thank one? Well, it's best to be civil. Poor little Edith! that's a disappointment to her, I know. It's a shame they won't have it: that

story of hers is worth a dozen of the washy, flashy things they print—for washy, flashy readers. Humpty-dumpty sat upon a wall. Ay, and got a great fall; there's a moral in that, my masters. Aim highly, fall nobly. But I'd rather not fall.

> " 'Fain would I climb, but that I fear to fall.'
> 'If thy heart fail thee, do not climb at all.'

" Ha, ha—capital! Almost as good as—"

> " 'My grief is great, because it is so small.
> Then were it greater, if 'twere none at all!'

" Query, is that a sequitur? Heigho, I'm as flat as a fish. Why could not the girl say a word about Rosabel? Probably because she had not a word to say."

In this disjointed fashion did Mr. Antony pursue his cogitations till Mrs. Saffery came in to clear the table. She was a good sort of homely woman, not disinclined, now and then, to a little chat; and on the present occasion she seemed disposed to take the initiative.

Instead of removing the tray, she fidgetted a little with the tray-cloth, and, after clearing her throat, said, rather hesitatingly—

" Pray, sir, if I may be so bold as to ask, do you ever give lessons?"

"Well, no," said Mr. Antony, in surprise. "That is, I certainly did give a few lessons to a young lady once; but it is not in my line."

"I humbly beg your pardon, sir. I hope no offence?"

"None at all, Mrs. Saffery."

"Then, as you did give lessons to a young lady once, sir, maybe you might not quite object to do so again?"

"Well, I hardly know," said Mr. Antony, rousing up at the thought of pounds, shillings, and pence, and yet not much relishing the way by which they were to be acquired. "Do you know any one in this neighbourhood in want of lessons?"

"Nessy, sir."

"Nessy!" repeated he with surprise and aversion. "Oh, Mrs. Saffery! that would not suit me at all. I mean, it would not suit *you*. My terms would be too high."

"We concluded, sir," resumed Mrs. Saffery after a pause, "that your terms would be high. Whether they would be *too* high is another question."

"What should you say to half-a-guinea an

hour, for instance?" said Mr. Antony, thinking to startle her.

"Half-a-guinea an hour," said Mrs. Saffery, after another pause, "is a considerable sum, sir. There are many that couldn't pay it. Being so high, it would compel Nessy to have the fewer lessons. But then, sir, we should always have the privilege of saying that Nessy had had the best of teaching at half-a-guinea a lesson. It might be an advantage to her, sir, all her life."

This was such an unexpected argument, that Mr. Antony had not, for the moment, one word to say in reply. But his repugnance to teaching Nessy was undiminished.

"Mrs. Saffery," said he, rather haughtily, "you don't quite understand our relative positions. I am *not* a professed teacher; I feel as if I should be letting myself down somewhat by it—at least, by teaching such a very little girl as Nessy."

"Nessy's older than she looks," put in Mrs. Saffery.

"Yes, yes, I know; but still, she's *very* young, and has had no previous instruction."

"I thought, sir, that might be an advantage."

"Well, perhaps it is so," he reluctantly admitted; "but why should you think it?"

"All the easier, sir—"

"Oh no, you're quite on the wrong tack," interrupted he. "It is merely that I should not have the faults of a bad teacher to correct, as well as her own."

"The mind of youth has been compared to a sheet of white paper," observed Mrs. Saffery; adding, with a view to improve the illustration, "on which you may draw either landscapes or figures."

"Ay; or carts and horses; or pigs and poultry."

"Then, sir," said Mrs. Saffery, after another and longer pause, "I'm afraid I am to understand you decline the proposal."

"Well—no," said poor Antony, as the question of ways and means rose up against him. "I don't like to disappoint you, Mrs. Saffery, but I really think you might employ your money better."

"Sir," said Mrs. Saffery, "*we* must be the best judges of that."

"But it really will seem to me like picking your pocket."

"Why should it, sir? We have a certain sum per annum to lay out on Nessy's teaching; and it may as well go into your pocket as any one else's."

"But an inferior and cheaper master would suit your purpose as well or better."

"Are the cheapest things, sir, always the best?"

"No; but you really are taking me too much on trust. You don't know that my teaching will be worth the money."

"Oh, sir! those lovely things of yours!" said Mrs. Saffery, extending her hand towards his pictures, and gazing towards them in fond admiration.

Mr. Antony could not help smiling, and feeling mollified.

"You take a deal of persuading, sir," she added.

"Well, I do," said he, "because, you see, it's against my judgment, and against my inclination, too. For I don't hesitate to say, Mrs. Saffery, that I am not, in a general way, fond of teaching."

"Perhaps, sir, the young lady you mentioned as having taught was particularly troublesome."

"No, she was not," he said, hastily. "Well, Mrs. Saffery, since you will have it so, so let it be. But the lesson must be one hour long, and no longer."

"Suppose, sir, since you are so afraid of its being too long, we divide it, and say half an hour at a time for five and threepence. That would come easy."

"I don't think we could do much good in half an hour," said Mr. Antony. "However, we'll see. So, let Nessy come to me to-morrow morning at ten o'clock."

On this, Mrs. Saffery was voluble in thanks, and at length she carried out the supper-tray, leaving him hardly conscious whether he were annoyed or pleased. It is certain he was not in a very good humour that night; and after spending half an hour very discontentedly, he carried himself and his discontent to bed.

Next morning, true to the hour, Nessy appeared in her shabby-genteel black silk frock, staid and prim as usual, but immensely happy, though rather embarrassed.

"Well, Nessy, here you are," began Mr. Antony, looking up. Now, then, for it. Let us see what we shall see. Can you use a piece of chalk?"

"I dare say I can, sir."

"Humph! Can you cut it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now, here's a piece of cartridge-paper, and here's a piece of chalk. Draw some lines like these."

"Oh!" said Nessy, in blank dismay, "*that's* not what I was to learn!"

"Not what you were to learn? Why, what were you to learn?"

"To paint in oils."

"My good girl, if you were going to build a house, should you begin with the chimney-pot?"

"No," said Nessy, resentfully, and losing all her fear of him under the burning sense of indignity at being called a good girl.

"Well, that would be just like beginning to paint before you can draw."

"But I *can* draw, and I don't want to draw," she answered, impetuously. "I want to paint, and it is for painting only that my mamma is willing to give so much money."

"Whew! Good morning, Nessy."

Her throat swelled. "I don't call *you* Leonard, sir!"

"I stand corrected, Miss Saffery. Good morning, miss. Our engagement, if you please, is ended." And he sat down, and began to write a letter.

Nessy stood still, and silently cried. Presently he looked up.

"Well, Miss Saffery, I must say this is not very polite."

"I hope you'll forgive me, sir."

"No, I don't think I shall."

Tears flowed afresh. The letter was continued.

"Well, Miss Saffery, I really am surprised. I thought this room was my own for the time being."

"Sir, I am going," said Nessy, in smothered accents; yet still she stayed. A long pause.

"Well, Miss Saffery?"

She walked a step or two towards him.

"Oh, what an opportunity to lose! Sir, *will* you teach me?"

He burst into a roar of laughter. She looked amazed and scandalized.

"Were you laughing at me all the while?" said she.

"No, certainly not," said Mr. Antony; "but I never knew such a tragi-comedy. O Nessy! —Miss Saffery, I mean—"

"You may call me Nessy, sir, if you like."

"A thousand thanks for so inestimable a privilege. Well, Nessy, *are* you going to be a baby or a sensible girl?"

"A sensible girl—if I can, sir."

"Very well; then now for it. You know, if *you* are going to teach *me*, our positions are reversed. If I am going to teach you, you must mind what I say."

"Yes, sir."

Here Mrs. Saffery looked in, anxiously.

"I hope Nessy is getting on pretty well, sir?"

"Oh, swimmingly!"

"Be a good girl, Nessy."

(Exit Mrs. Saffery.)

"My mamma would be so disappointed," said Nessy, timidly, "if she thought I did not give satisfaction."

"Ah! it's a difficult thing to satisfy *me*," said Mr. Antony, with a sort of groan or

grunt, accompanied by a terrific shake of the head. "Here, suppose you and I look over this portfolio of pictures together."

Nessy was silently transported.

"There! what do you call that?"

"That's a man."

"Clever girl! Yes; and that's a woman."

"Not a very pretty one," said Nessy.

"*Not* pretty?" and he looked daggers. "Pray, Miss Saffery, what is the matter with her?"

"Her nose is too straight."

"Why, that's a Grecian nose. A Grecian nose is beautiful!"

Nessy was silenced; but she did not think her a pretty lady.

"She has a pretty name," observed she, finding Mr. Antony continued to look at the head, and wishing to conciliate. "Is her name Rosabel?"

"It is, and yet it is not," said he oracularly; and he turned another drawing over it.

"There. What's that?"

"An angel."

"Is the angel's dress in straight lines?"

"No, wavy."

"That wavy line is the line of beauty. It is elegant, graceful. Straight, angular forms are ungraceful. Wavy lines are beautiful."

"I thought you said just now that straight noses were beautiful," said Nessy.

"Do you prefer crooked ones?" said he. "There; go and draw me some wavy figures on that cartridge paper."

"What sort of figures, sir?"

"Any sort you like, so that they abound in the line of beauty (waving his hand in the air)—fairies, angels, zephyrs."

She sat down to obey this vague direction as well as she could, and drew very quietly and patiently for nearly a quarter of an hour. Mr. Antony stood at his easel the while, and began filling in a background.

"Well," said he at length, "let me see how you are getting on. Come, this is famous. Here is the line of beauty and no mistake. Double s's running into one another as they do in the Lord Mayor's gold collar."

She drew a deep breath.

"Are you tired?"

"A little."

"Well, your half-hour is almost up."

She looked at him with timid entreaty.

"Might not I paint, just for five minutes, sir?"

"Well, yes, if you like. I suppose nothing else will make you happy."

He put the brush and palette into her hands. She held them awkwardly, afraid of dropping them.

"What am I to do?"

"Here's a millboard that will be none the worse for a coat of paint. You may fill in a plain background all over it."

"What! all over that beautiful picture?"

"The picture is not beautiful, and if you don't cover it over, I shall."

"Oh, then I will!" cried Nessy. "Which colour, sir?"

"Mix them all together into a sort of sky-blue scarlet."

She knew he was laughing at her, but she did not mind. It was so delightful to handle the palette-knife! When she had mixed all the colours together, she found they made a dirty drab.

"Is that sky-blue scarlet, sir?"

"Well, it will do for it. Now take the

largest brush. *Laissez-aller.* Don't crumple up your fingers as if they were tied together with a piece of string. Don't niggle-naggle. Firmer, firmer. That's better. That's well."

After working away for some time with evident enjoyment, she looked up at him with a smile, and said—

"At any rate, it teaches me the use of the brush."

Mr. Antony's conscience smote him for letting her waste her time so; but, in fact, she was not wasting it.

"Now hatch it," said he, taking the brush from her and showing her what he meant. "That's right. Come, you'll beat Apelles some day."

"Or Nicholas Poussin," observed Nessy, smiling.

"Ay, you know more about him."

"There's something about Apelles though, sir, in Butler's 'Globes.'"

"Ah, that's a book of universal information. Have you been through all the problems?"

"No, sir."

Here Mrs. Saffery looked in with a smile and said—

"Nessy, the time's up."

"Oh!" said Nessy, with a start, "how sorry I am!"

"Stay, you may as well just cover the mill-board," said Mr. Antony, "or I shall have to do so myself. Another five minutes will finish it."

"There's no more paint, sir."

"No? Then we must have a little more. Squeeze it out of these little tubes. Not too hard, or you'll burst them, and spoil your frock. I advise you not to paint in a silk frock in future."

"It is such an honour to paint at all, that I think I ought to wear my best," said Nessy.

"Things that are inappropriate are not the best. Some day you'll upset the palette on your frock, and then who will you have to thank? Wilful waste brings woful want. That's why I didn't bring my best hat into the country."

"Did not you, sir?" said Nessy, in surprise, which made him laugh.

"There, now you've done it! What a splendid achievement!"

"Good morning, sir. Thank you."

"You had better take that chalk and cartridge paper with you, and draw some more angels."

"Do you believe in angels, sir?"

"Believe in them? Yes, to be sure! and in zephyrs and fairies, and all such things. Do you think I'm a Sadducee? Here, Nessy, just stop while I show you one thing."

She hesitated, looked wistful, but went towards the door.

"No, sir, my lesson's over. I must not use any more of your time."

And the door closed after her.

"A conscientious little monkey," muttered Mr. Antony.

CHAPTER V.

PYRRHUS.

On the first Sunday of Mr. Antony's stay at the post-office, Mrs. Saffery had said to her husband at dinner-time—

"Where did Mr. Antony sit in church this morning?"

"I don't think he sat anywhere," said Mr. Saffery. "I don't believe he was in church."

"No, I don't think he was," said Nessy.

"That's abominable," said Mrs. Saffery. "I've no notion of young men being infidels and heretics; let them be the finest young gentlemen ever born. I shall tell him a bit of my mind, if I find it's the case."

"Oh, mother, don't," said Nessy, hastily.

"But indeed I shall, though," said Mrs. Saffery. "Many a man's soul has been lost through the false shame of his neighbours."

"False nonsense, my dear," said Mr. Saffery.

"You shouldn't judge folks so hastily. Mr. Antony may have been in church after all, or have had some good reason for staying away. He may not have had a hymn-book."

"That's true," said Mrs. Saffery, "though he might have asked for one, and that was a poor reason for keeping from church. However, he shall not have that objection to make this afternoon."

So when the church bell began to go, she tapped at her lodger's door, and on his saying, "Come in," she entered with a bland smile, and found him lounging in the American chair, reading the Artist's World.

"Oh, sir, our afternoon service begins at three," said she, in carefully modulated tones; "and though the church is rather full of a morning, there's always plenty of room in the afternoons. I thought you might be glad of one of the hymn-books we use—it's the collection authorized by the Bishop of London, and published by Routledge, price fourpence." Saying which, she laid the little book on the table.

"Thank you," drily said Mr. Antony, resuming his reading in a posture of more complete ease.

Mrs. Saffery was a good deal excited. "I don't believe," said she, returning to her husband, "that he has any more idea of stirring than that table."

"Well, my dear, it's no business of ours," said the placid Mr. Saffery.

"Strictly speaking, it may not be; but I can't see a fine young man going to wrack and ruin without feeling pained. It's not in my nature. Catch me remembering to let him have the next Artist's World till Monday morning!"

"Why, if you don't give it him, he'll only ask for it; and if he don't get it, he'll only read something else," said Mr. Saffery.

"Then I hope it will be something awakening," said Mrs. Saffery.

Nessy had been alarmed and pained by this little dialogue, and she felt uncomfortable whenever the subject of Mr. Antony's faith and practice occurred to her. *Now* she seemed to have found the solution of the enigma, so at dinner she cheerfully said, "Mamma, I know why Mr. Antony does not go to church; it's because he has not brought his best hat."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Saffery, in disgust;

"he didn't expect you to believe that, did he? His hat is good enough, and besides, he would not wear it in church."

This had not occurred to Nessy. "At any rate," said she, in a lower voice, "he believes in angels, and he says he is not a Sadducee."

"What a very odd remark," said her mother. "No, nor a Pharisee, neither, of course. Why, the Pharisees and Sadducees were Jews; and he isn't a Jew, even if he is not a Christian. I tell you what, Nessy. Mr. Antony is a good deal cleverer than you or I, whatever his principles may be, and I don't pay him to teach you religion, but painting; so you must let alone these kind of subjects, or I shall stop short your lessons. Your business is to paint, not to talk."

This was a check to poor Nessy, who feared losing her lessons more than anything.

"Now, here's a stupid thing for somebody to go and do," said Michael Saffery, beginning to stamp the letters. "Here's somebody been and posted a letter without ever a direction on it. Where is it to go to, I wonder?"

"To the dead-letter office, of course," said his wife; "but, dear me, Michael, let us try to

make out who can have put it in. Is there a seal upon it?"

"Yes, with Q. P."

"Why, that's Quintillia Prosser! Of course you know Mrs. Prosser's name is Quintillia, because she signs it to her money-orders."

"Well, but of course I don't know who Mrs. Prosser meant to direct this letter to."

"No, but Nessy can take it to her and get her to direct it. One would not wish to disoblige Mrs. Prosser. Put on your bonnet, Nessy, this minute, and run off with it."

Nessy was just then about some little affair or other that she particularly disliked being interrupted in. However, she put it aside and dressed herself for the walk. It was a pleasant afternoon, and the air was very fresh and sweet as she crossed the common on the skirts of which was Mrs. Prosser's cottage. It stood a little below the turfy, undulating waste, so that you only saw the brown tiled roof till you came close upon the white palings; and then a steep little pebbled path took you down to the porch, which, in heavy rains, was apt to be under water. Nessy was always fond of this place, though she could not tell why. It was

like two or three small cottages converted into one; and hardly two rooms in it were on the same level.

Mrs. Prosser was one of those very clever people who sometimes do very stupid things. She had been in great haste, she said, which must have occasioned the oversight, and she was very much obliged to Mr. Saffery for sending back the letter, and to Nessy for bringing it. She hoped she had not minded the walk. Oh, no, Nessy said, she liked it very much. Altogether, it was a bright, pleasant little interview, and Nessy was glad Mrs. Prosser had forgotten to direct the letter.

She walked home more at her leisure—*daunering,* as the Scotch say, and pausing here and there to look about her and enjoy the pleasant air. A river, winding through the lower ground, lost itself in a tangled thicket; some anglers were crossing it in a punt; on the other bank were one or two of their party hallooing and beckoning. All at once Nessy was reminded of the description of Poussin's picture, "The Saving of Pyrrhus." She had a great desire—"ambition," her mother would have called it—to produce a sketch, and here

was a subject! She hastily pulled out a crumpled piece of paper and the stump of a pencil, and rudely scrawled the scene, writing "trees" and "grass" at certain points of it.

That evening, when her day's work was done, Nessy busied herself by making what artists would call a finished study of this piece. First, she drew it out on a slate; after several corrections of the original sketch, she copied it on the cartridge paper; taking care to introduce the withies, the ashes, the poplars, the sedges, the water, the boat, and the steep, broken foreground. All this, of course, was very rudely portrayed. Then she put in the figures, which were still worse executed, but in lively action. Costume, of course, of no particular period.

As Mr. Antony's stay was expected to be short, it had been arranged that Nessy should take four half-lessons a week, viz., on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. Saturday and Monday were busy days, when Nessy was expected to attend to certain light tasks in the way of dusting and cleaning, getting up fine linen, gathering fruit and vegetables, shelling peas, stringing and slitting French beans, top-

ping and tailing gooseberries, &c.; employments that her mother averred no lady need think scorn of. At all events, Nessy liked them very well, and never thought of despising them ; so that, on the whole, her time passed as happily as a little girl's time could.

When she tapped at Mr. Antony's door, in readiness for her second lesson, he called out, "Come in," in his usual cheerful manner.

"Stop a bit," said he, without looking up, as she entered, "I want just to finish what I'm about before I attend to you."

"Yes, sir ;" and she stood a few paces behind him, watching him with deep interest. He was painting a little landscape with figures.

"Now then," said he, at last, laying down palette and brushes, and turning round upon her. "I suppose you've a basketful of angels? Hallo! what's this?"

"The saving of Pyrrhus, sir."

"The *what?*"

In a much lower voice, she repeated, "The saving of Pyrrhus."

"Who's Pyrrhus?"

Nessy did not know. She believed he was a prince or king, or something of that sort.

"King of what?"

She could not tell.

"Well, this is the funniest thing I *ever* heard of. To draw a picture of you don't know what and cannot tell! Why, Nessy," after a long pause, during which she felt penetrated with shame, "you don't know how well, in some respects, you've done this!"

She gave a great start.

"Here's *genius!* But you don't know what that is, neither. Where did you get this background?"

"Oh, sir," said Nessy, colouring crimson, "you must not think it invention. I copied it."

"Oh! From what?"

"From Fairlee Common, as I crossed it yesterday."

"And the boat?"

"The boat was there too, and some of the people."

"Men in Greek tunics?"

"No, I took them from the picture-Bible, because I did not know how people dressed in Pyrrhus's time."

"Hum—combination. What on earth put Pyrrhus into your head?"

"One of Poussin's pictures, sir. The description of it, I mean."

"Turn it up. I don't remember it."

Nessy speedily found the description, and showed it him. He read it very attentively, with a little frown on his brow, which made her doubtful whether he were pleased or the reverse.

"Humph," said he at last; "it is a queer thing to take hold of you. You've got it all in, one way or another, nurses, soldiers, and all. The figures, preposterous, of course. Still—" and a long pause ensued.

"Nessy," said he abruptly, at length, "you are but a little girl, whatever you may think, but I'm going to talk to you, for once, as if you were a woman." And he looked grave, almost stern. "I said, just now, you had genius. Have you the least idea what that means?"

Nessy blushed painfully, and said, "Yes, sir."

"Oh, you have, have you? What is it?"

After a pause, she said, "A person may know what a thing is, without knowing how to explain it."

"I won't admit that. Come, try at it."

"Genius makes you do at a thought—almost without thought—what others can't do with ever so much thinking."

"Not bad that. But you hardly improved it by adding 'almost without thought.' '*At a thought,*' was the thing. It don't come without thinking. And that one particular thought that hits the mark comes of many foregone and wistful thoughts, that seemed to have no particular end. They wrap themselves up, at last, into this bright thought that suddenly knocks the nail on the head!" And he rapped the table with his knuckles. "D'ye see?"

"Yes, sir."

Another pause.

"There are many people, Nessy, who never attain to that one bright thought—they go on hammering and hammering, this side and that side the nail, very close to it sometimes, *but never on the head.*"

"No, sir."

"Those people," pursued Mr. Antony, frowning darkly, "when they see *you* hit the nail, cry, 'bless my soul, how was it *I* could not do that? That's just what I meant to do, and

was going to do, only you've done it first.' Don't believe it! They would *never* have done it!" And he shook his finger at her.

"No, sir."

"Just as if you knew anything about it," muttered he, after another pause. Nessy felt aggrieved.

"Now," resumed he, "after what I've said of genius, very likely you think those who have it have won the battle. Quite a mistake. Because genius is a gift, that doesn't make it self-sufficient. Because you've a nose, that does not enable you to do without eyes and mouth, does it?"

"No, sir."

"And what's the good of a mouth without something to eat? No more good than genius without workmanship! Genius is a capital thing, Nessy, to start with; but it's no good at all, you'd far better be without it, unless you know how to use it. Now, at present you don't know how to use yours. You know absolutely nothing. And I don't see how you are ever to learn much. And I don't see what good it would be to you to learn much."

"Oh, sir!" And Nessy looked miserably

disappointed. "I thought," faltered she, "it was always good for us to improve our minds."

"If we *do* improve them," said Mr. Antony. "But we are not improved by what takes us out of our own sphere."

"I thought all that was settled, sir, between you and my mamma. Surely we need not go all over it again?"

"Well, no. It has been decided that I am to give you a little smattering of drawing, and it will be but a little smattering, Nessy. You must not plume yourself on having had a few lessons, and fancy they have taught you everything; for, at best, they can but teach you very little. A man cannot learn to make a pianoforte at the first trial; no more can you learn to paint. It requires a long apprenticeship. And if it was needful for you to undergo that apprenticeship, you have a very fair capital of genius to start with. But happily for you, it's not needful. I say happily, because you would find it very hard and very ill-rewarded work. So many others are in the field, that even when you deserve it, you can't always get on."

She sighed.

"As for this sketch, I advise you to put it in the fire."

"Oh, sir!"

"Yes, put it in the fire, I say; there's no real value in it; though, considering the circumstances, it is a curiosity. Artists would only laugh at it."

Oh, surprise! Mrs. Saffery, opening the door, said, "Nessy! your time's up." And Nessy had done nothing.

CHAPTER VI.

A VISITOR.

"I MUST say, sir," said Mrs. Saffery, presently returning to the parlour, where Mr. Antony was sitting in a thoughtful posture—"I must say, sir," said she in an accusatory tone, "that I didn't expect Nessy to be a wasting of her time as I find she's been a doing this morning. You must have the kindness, sir, to keep her to it a little more strictly, if you please."

"It was my fault, Mrs. Saffery; I was talking to her."

"Well then, sir, if I may say so without offence, we are not rich enough people for you to be talking to her at five-and-threepence the half-hour."

"Of course not. I did not consider the lesson begun. Send her back; she shall have it now."

"No, sir, she has one of her bad headaches.

Nessy's a curious child, she doesn't bear too much thinking; and it was partly because her father and I did not like to see her so much at her books, that we wished her to paint, as we noticed, sir, that you always stood at your easel, and that your sketching took you so much into the open air."

"That's true; but you are mistaken, Mrs. Saffery, if you suppose that painting does not require thinking. It requires constant thought of the closest kind; a really good painter has his art always in his head—always is taking notice of happy effects in light and shade, bits of drapery, &c. For instance, there's a capital fold at this instant in your apron, Mrs. Saffery; don't move, for your life! I'll jot it down in a moment. I beg your pardon."

Poor Mrs. Saffery stood transfixed, like the Lady in Comus, for full five minutes, wishing the artist at Jericho.

"There!" said he, presently, "that bell-shaped fold was too good to lose. Well, Mrs. Saffery, you see I had a great deal to explain to your little girl this morning. She fancies, and so do you, that one may be an artist at a jump; at any rate, in five or six lessons. My

good lady, do you think you could teach me to make a gooseberry-pie in five or six lessons ?"

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Saffery, beginning to smile, "I'm afraid your crust might be heavy. You see, that's woman's work."

"Oh, pardon me ! we have plenty of French pastrycooks, and Scotchmen, and Italians too."

"Well, sir, you see they're taught."

"That's the very thing," said he, quickly. "They have a seven years' apprenticeship. And do you think it easier to paint a picture than to make a pie ?"

"Well, sir, many ladies paint very prettily."

Mr. Antony shrugged his shoulders. "They had better stick to their bead-work and button-holes," said he. "At least, that's my mind."

"It will never be theirs, sir."

"No, I am afraid not."

"Then, since that's the case, sir, why should not Nessy paint like the rest ? Just in a lady's way, you know, sir."

"Well," said he, "the fact is, Nessy might do better than nine ladies out of ten, if she were regularly put to it."

"Would not it be worth while, then, sir,"

said Mrs. Saffery, brightening, "to put her regularly to it?"

"To what end? In the first place, you would not like the means. They would be expensive, and take her quite away from her usual work—set her above it."

"That would be bad, certainly," said Mrs. Saffery.

"Yes, and even supposing her health could bear the training, which I very much doubt, if half an hour's quiet talking, such as you and I are having now, gives her a nervous headache."

"Oh, sir, I doubt it too!"

"Very well; but even supposing her health to bear it, and supposing her to become as good an artist as I am, for instance—which indeed, Mrs. Saffery, vanity apart, is a very wide supposition—what has she attained *then?* —what have I? Have *I* made my fortune, or secured a lasting fame? is my name even familiar to my countrymen?"

He shook his head. "They hang my pictures—not in the silver teapot row or the silver milk-jug row; no, nor yet even in the dead-game row!—but at the very top or else at the very bottom."

"Is it possible, sir!" said Mrs. Saffery, "that there can exist such bribery and corruption?"

He could not help laughing a little. "Not in reality, perhaps," said he, "but people will consider their own friends first, and we, the overlooked, are apt to attribute all our slights to envy and malice."

"Ah, that's human nature, sir; but *you*—that *you* should be overlooked!"

"Wonderful, isn't it? But, you see, I am but young yet, and have time to make my way. Perhaps at sixty I may have made my fame."

"I hope so, sir."

"Meanwhile, you see, I paint to live, instead of living to paint. And the upshot of it is, Mrs. Saffery, that you may be very glad your little girl is not a little boy, with his way to make in the world."

"Yes, sir, I am very thankful Nessy is provided for."

"Send her out to pick gooseberries, since her head aches with thinking too much; and let her come to me to-morrow."

When Nessy came to him the following day, he said, very calmly—

"Well, now we will propose to ourselves

some easy task that shall not be too much for our nerves. I think it will be best for you not to aim at the highflying school, severe history, and so forth: leave Pyrrhus, Pericles, and all the rest of them, to take care of themselves, and stick to little rustic pieces."

"Yes, sir."

"By-the-way, let me have another look at that grand performance of yours."

"Oh, sir! I burned it."

"Burned it?"

"You told me to do so," said Nessy, her lip quivering.

"But I did not think you would."

"I wish I had known that, I'm sure, for I should have liked very much to keep it."

"Well, I am sorry I told you so, since it gave you so much pain. However, I give you credit for it; and it really is a good thing to have cleared it away, for you could have made nothing of it."

"It would have been pleasant to look at sometimes."

From this time, Mr. Antony gave Nessy his best attention, both in drawing and painting; so that in a fortnight, it was surprising how

much progress she had made. In fact, her mind was at work all day long, and even in her dreams; so that Mrs. Saffery, fearing she would be ill, invented errands that continually sent her into the open air.

One day, when Nessy returned from one of these excursions, her mother was dismissing a tall, pale, thin old man, who seemed to have been seeking relief without getting any. Deeply sighing as he turned away, he said—

"I think I'll go into the House. There I shall, at any rate, have plenty of victuals, and a roof over my head; but somehow I don't think I can stand being shut up, for I've been in the open air all my life, and I did hope that nothing but death would part my old mistress and me."

Mr. Antony, as he passed through the shop, was struck by the unaffected expression of pity on Nessy's face. She was feeling in her empty pocket.

"Hallo, old man," said he, "what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing, sir," said the old man, "but want."

"Do you want to have your likeness taken?"

"You're a merry young gentleman, sir. I wish I wanted nothing more than I want that."

"Well, but *I* want to take it, if you don't, which comes to the same thing. Your withered cheek, and tresses grey, seem to have known a better day. Step in here, my old friend; I'll hit you off in ten minutes, and then give you a shilling."

The old man, in surprise and joy, followed him into the parlour, saying, "You may hit me as much as you like, sir, if you don't hit too hard."

"Is not that nice, mother?" said Nessy, gladly.

"Yes, very nice," said Mrs. Saffery. "And, now I think of it, there's a bit of cold hashed mutton, not enough for a dinner, but quite enough for a relish, which you may put into the oven for him if you like, and give him when he comes out."

"Oh, thank you!"

When the old man, who had enjoyed a good chat with Mr. Antony during the sitting, came out with the shilling in his pocket and a smile on his face, Nessy met him with the plate of warm food and a piece of bread.

"Do you mean this is for me?" said he, in a glow of pleasure, as she presented it to him. "Well, this *is* a bright day for me, that I thought was going to be so dark. For what I am going to receive, may the Lord make me truly thankful!"

"You may come again to-morrow," said Mr. Antony.

"Thank'e, sir! thank'e!"

Nessy had set him a little table, with a knife and fork, and he despatched his little meal so like a famished man that she thought it a painful pleasure to watch him. The thought suddenly was borne in upon her—

"Surely, there can be no happiness equal to that of giving food to the hungry!"

Day followed day. Mr. Antony had been nearly a month at the post-office, when he told Mrs. Saffery, to her great regret, that he was going to return home at the end of the week. This was a sad blow to Nessy, but she had known it must fall. Notwithstanding his having been mischievous enough to dismay Mrs. Saffery by saying to her one Sunday, "Cannot Nessy and I have a little painting this morning?" he really had gone punctually to church, though

occasionally in some distant village; spending the interim between the services in the open air.

On the morning of his last day, as Nessy was reluctantly leaving the room at the end of her last lesson, the parlour door suddenly opened, and, instead of Mrs. Saffery, there appeared a vision of delight in the person of a very bright, blooming young lady, who looked brimful of mirth and sure of a welcome.

"Hallo, Edith! how are you, old girl?"

She burst out laughing, and they kissed one another. Nessy vanished.

"Why, how glad I am to see you? Why did not you come before?"

"Why did you never ask me, Mr. Leo?"

"I did!"

"No, not once! You said you were sorry I could not come."

"Because I thought you would not. And, besides, I knew that there is not a corner in this house in which to put you."

"That's a valid argument; however, you might have asked me to come for the day, as I've come now."

"And you might have come for the day without asking, as you have come now!"

On which they joined again in a merry laugh.

"I'm very glad you *are* come," said he, taking her hand. "How well you are looking!"

"Oh, no; the paint has half poisoned me."

"Why did not you stay with Miss Hill?"

"She was so tedious. I preferred the paint."

"Was not that tedious too?"

"Well, they have been very slow about it, but it looks so nice now! And we have clean blinds and clean curtains and—"

"And I hope Martha has a clean face."

Edith laughed and said, "It is always clean in the afternoon. You must not expect too much of her in the morning."

"What! not to wash her face when she gets up?"

"Oh dear, no, Leonard! Only think, Mrs. Gregory rings her up at five, and she dresses by candlelight."

"Not at this time of year. She puts on her clothes with a pitchfork, does not she?"

"If you knew what it is to be a lodging-house servant, you would not be so hard on poor Martha."

"I hope I should always begin by washing my face."

"Well, but what have you been doing? Falling in love with another pupil?"

"How can you talk such rubbish; my pupil went out as you came in."

"That plain little girl?" said Edith, raising her eyebrows.

"Hush! walls have ears: and these walls are thin. She's a clever little body. Besides, what nonsense you were talking just now of 'another' pupil! Just as if a man could care for two at once. By-the-bye, have you seen Rosabel lately?"

"Yes, I have."

"Tell me all about it," said he, eagerly.

"There's not much to tell. I met her and her father coming along the square. They both saw me, but he pretended not to do so. She would have stopped, but he pulled her on: so she gave me this kind of look—as much as to say 'you see how it is!'"

"Brute!"

"Well, I don't think it's any good for you to mind it, or to think much about her, for I fear nothing can come of it."

"Just as if I could help it!"

"Every man ought to be able to govern his own mind."

Mr. Antony sighed like a furnace.

"You don't know what my feelings are," said he.

"Oh yes, I do, pretty well. But, Leo, we can talk about this at home. What shall we do here? Show me your sketches. I see you have a pretty little thing on the easel—just such as I told you to paint."

"Painted to order, then."

"This will be sure to sell. And here is a nice study of an old beggar; 'Pity the sorrows of a poor old man,' will be just the motto for it."

"By-the-bye, Edith, you must be hungry. What will you have? Marmalade, anchovy paste, eggs and bacon, bread and butter, or what?"

"Nothing before dinner, thank you. I had a bun as I came along."

"Ah, I must think about dinner. If you had given me notice, we might have had salmon and lobster-sauce, ham and chicken, rhubarb tart and custard."

"Only, as I did not, we must have two

mutton-chops and two potatoes! Well, it will not be the first time. But I don't care about dinner, I want to take a long walk first."

"With all my heart. Where shall we go?"

"Oh, I must put myself under your guidance."

"Suppose we go to the Dulwich gallery. Do you mind stretching out three or four miles?"

"Not in the least. I am as fresh as a lark, and shall enjoy it of all things."

"Suppose we take little Miss Saffery with us."

"Oh, no! that would spoil sport. Suppose we take some bread and butter with us, and have our mutton-chops at tea. Then we shall be independent."

"Yes, that's well thought of. Perhaps Mrs. Saffery will contrive us some sandwiches out of something or nothing, and let us have some biscuits."

He rang the bell. Nessy answered it.

"Nessy, my sister and I are going to walk over to the Dulwich gallery, and we shall not want our dinner till tea-time; then we will have them both together. But it is a long walk, and ladies are apt to get hungry, so that if Mrs.

Saffery could by any possibility invent a few sandwiches for us, we should be infinitely obliged. And do you think, Nessy, we could have a few biscuits?"

"Oh, yes!" said Nessy, with alacrity, "I'll go for them myself, and lend you a pretty little basket. It will hold the sandwiches besides, and I'm sure mamma can cut some slices off the Bath chop."

Her blue eyes seemed to smile as she spoke; and, after bestowing an admiring look on Edith, she retired, on hospitable thoughts intent.

"She seems a nice little thing," said Edith. "Suppose we revise our sentence, and take her, if you think she would care to go."

"Let her get the biscuits first," said Mr. Antony. "One thing at a time will last the longer."

When Nessy came in with her basket, she was almost out of her mind with joy at the invitation that awaited her. She had been thinking how Mr. Antony and his sister were going to enjoy themselves, and how delightful it would be to be either of them; and now, to be asked to make a third!

> "O, che gioia! che contento!
> Di picer mi balza il cor!"

CHAPTER VII.

NESSY ENCHANTED.

"It was so kind of you to let me come," said Nessy, shyly, to Edith as they started.

"Kindness is its own reward then," said Edith laughing, "since you have undertaken to carry the basket."

It will suffice to say of the walk in general terms, that it was delightful. It led them across the country, through out-of-the-way places, and now and then Mr. Antony caused a halt, that he might sketch. On the confines of an old deserted house, that looked gloomy, windy, and full of ghosts, they came to a gap in some mossy park-palings, within which was a sylvan brake that Edith pronounced the very spot for their sandwiches. A felled tree afforded them an excellent seat; and Nessy, with some self-importance, first unfolded a tray napkin at the top of her basket, and spread it for a table-

cloth; then placed on it a very respectable packet of sandwiches, three hard-boiled eggs, and a little paper of biscuits. Mr. Antony declared that one of the eggs was much larger than the others, and insisted they should draw lots for it with dandelion-stalks. And his sense of equity was so exact that he made Nessy count the sandwiches into three allotments, and distribute them equally. He said they wanted nothing but strawberries and cream.

"There must always be a want," said Edith. "The best way is to be content with what we have.

> "What though from fortune's lavish bounty,
> No mighty treasures we possess,
> We'll find within our pittance plenty,
> And be content without excess."

"If we are all going to say a hymn, I'll repeat 'The Little Busy Bee,'" said Mr. Antony.

"I'll give you my last sandwich if you can say two verses without missing a word."

He did so, and had the sandwich.

"Now then, Miss Saffery, I call upon you."

"Oh, no!" said Nessy, hastily; "I can't say anything."

"Not even the multiplication table?"

She smiled and said she did not think he would care to hear that.

"Let us start some improving subject, however. Who is the greatest living painter?"

"Mr. Antony."

"There, Leonard! You are satisfied, I hope. What a pretty spot this is; it is like one of Ruysdael's pictures."

"No, it is not. You'll see some of his pictures presently."

"Well, but they are not all alike. Miss Hill told me a curious fact, Leo, about Wordsworth."

"What was it?"

"His eyes used to get very much inflamed, particularly when he was composing; but the inflammation was very much subdued by his looking at pictures. They amused his mind, which, no longer fretting at his ailment, allowed his eyes to get well."

"Nothing like leather," said Mr. Antony, which seemed to Nessy an irrelevant remark.

"I should think the fairies danced here on moonlight nights," continued Edith.

"To what music?"

"'The pipe of Pan, to shepherds crouched in the shadow of Menalian pines.'"

"If I had a fiddle, I would play while you and Miss Saffery danced."

"Or you might dance to your own playing," said Edith, laughing as if the idea tickled her fancy.

"Edith, you are weak, or you could not laugh at such nonsense. Come, we had better go forward."

Laughing and talking, they soon found themselves within the precincts of the secluded college.

"What shall we do with the basket and sketchbook?" said Edith. "Shall we leave them under the hedge?"

"No, put them in that empty cart."

"Suppose the cart should go away."

"There is no horse in it."

"Suppose somebody should steal them."

"Not a creature is near."

So they put the basket, the book, and an umbrella into the cart, and then entered the college. The gallery-keeper, looking at Nessy, said,

"We don't admit children under twelve."

"I'm thirteen," cried Nessy.

"This lady is thirteen," said Mr. Antony; "her birthday was on the 25th of March—"

("No, the first of August!")

"Oh, yes! the first of August. What a memory I have! She is above the age; you have done her gross injustice."

The keeper smiled and let her pass. So they entered the suite of three rooms, in which there was not another living creature.

"Come, this is nice!" said Edith. "We have the gallery all to ourselves. You soon put down the keeper."

"I saw it was necessary to take a firm tone," said Mr. Antony, with one of his awful looks.

"Taking a firm tone means bullying, does not it?"

"Bullying is not a lady's word."

"Is it a gentleman's deed?"

"Only in politics now and then."

"Bringing a barbarous nation to reason, for instance?"

"Just so. Look at this Wouvermanns."

"How charming. The man on the bank seems spying at that ship in the offing. How unaffectedly earnest all the figures are, in whatever they are engaged!"

"Good distance."

"Very."

"What is Miss Saffery looking at? A lady playing on a keyed instrument. You don't call that a good picture, Nessy?"

"I think it a pretty picture," said Nessy, continuing to look at it.

"Yes, so do I," said Edith. "I can almost hear the jingling wires. She is playing something of Sebastian Bach's."

"Come here, and I will show you something better."

"Oh, please let me go on regularly," implored Nessy.

"I obey commands. Now you are at the lady buying dead game of an old man. You like that, I suppose."

"Yes, I do. How nicely her satin dress is done!"

"Ah!—" drawing in his breath with a hissing sound.

"Is it not?"

"Yes, but it is not high art."

"Who said it was?" interposed Edith. "There is one glory of the sun, and one glory of the moon. Leo, what a capital Teniers that is! Teniers himself, and his wife, with

foot-boy at their heels, sauntering out on a showery afternoon. How well the rain-clouds are done!"

"'There are so many of them.'"

"Oh! quoting my letter! That pricked you, did it?"

"Of course."

"But I don't think any one could have said so of *these* rain-clouds."

"No one but a gaby."

"You see, Leonard, this picture is so obviously original."

"Do you mean to say mine is not, Miss Edith?"

"Not like this."

"Granted."

Nessy was now looking at a hunting party. A man was taking a stone or thorn out of a mule's foot. The animal's pain was so naturally expressed, that it gave some pain to witness it.

"'Rubens' Mother!'" exclaimed Mr. Antony, with a burst of admiration. "Glorious!"

"That's a very nice old lady," said Nessy.

"Nice! what an unworthy expression!"

"What *should* I have said?"

"'Glorious,' of course," said Edith.

The brother and sister went into the details of the painting in a manner that Nessy liked to hear, though she could not entirely understand. Mr. Antony retreated a few paces, and looked up.

"Guercino's St. Cecilia," said he. "She plays other guess music than the lady on the keyed instrument."

"That charming Moorish girl with her lapful of flowers!" said Edith. "One of Murillo's prettiest domestic studies."

"Yes; but she has no ideal beauty. None of his women have."

Nessy was living quite in a world of her own, while she looked at the Meeting of Jacob and Rachel.

"Look here, Nessy!" said Mr. Antony, suddenly. "Here is David with the head of Goliath. Do you like it?"

"No," she said with aversion.

"No! Why, this is by your famous Poussin."

"Oh, *is* it?" cried she, surprised and disappointed.

"Yes. Does it not equal what you expected of him?"

"Oh, no! David has red hair."

"Nay, that's no great matter. Perhaps David's hair was red."

"No, he was a Jew. Jews are dark, with black hair."

"He consulted the general tone of his picture, which is red."

"Too red," said Edith. "He neglected Ephraim Holding's advice—'Don't put too much red in your brush.'"

"The manner is dry," said Mr. Antony, after a close survey; "but the picture has all his peculiar excellences—learning, propriety, dignity. The drawing is good; so is the expression."

"I think I might learn to like it better in time," said Nessy, who was reluctant to give up Poussin at first sight. "But there are many prettier pictures here."

"If you were told you might have four, which should they be?"

She looked full of thought, pressing her hands tightly together; and then said, "The Boy Eating the Cheese-cake, Jacob and Rachel, the Mule with the Hurt Foot, and the Lady Playing on the Harpsichord."

"Not bad, Nessy, though you might have chosen better than the last."

"Looking at that lady took away my headache."

"Indeed? Well, if she had such sedative power, you have wisdom in your choice."

"I," said Edith, "would have St. Cecilia, Murillo's Assumption of the Virgin, the Scene on the Sea-shore, and the Conflagration of a Town by Night."

"Oh, what bathos!"

"No; there is poetry in it."

"Which, of course, an authoress thinks more of than painting."

"Are you an authoress?" said Nessy, in surprise.

Edith smiled, but did not say whether or no. She stood much higher, however, in Nessy's estimation, from that moment.

"Mr. Antony has not told us," she presently observed, "which his four pictures would be."

"I think I would have Guido's St. John, Rubens' Mother, Rembrandt's Jacob's Dream, and one of the Cuyps."

"I don't much care for the Rembrandt," said Edith. "Jacob is so badly drawn."

"But the ladder is so wonderful. Come, let us sit down. Miss Saffery, do you see that door ?"

"Yes."

"Suppose you go and open it, and look in."

"Oh dear," cried Nessy, "I could not take such a liberty !"

"I will give you sixpence if you will."

"Indeed I don't want sixpence ! It would be so odd ! The keeper might be there."

"I am sure he is not."

"Perhaps," cried Nessy, "there is some trick. I have heard my mamma say, that when she was a little girl, she was taken to the Painted Hall at Greenwich, and an old pensioner gave her a key, and said, 'If you will go and unlock that door, it will let you into Queen Anne's garden.' When she went close up to it, she found it was only painted—keyhole and all! There was no real door. My mamma said she could never help thinking that if there *had* been a door, it would have opened into a beautiful garden, full of terraces and fountains."

Mr. Antony laughed, and then said, "I give you my word for it, that is a real door."

"Have you ever opened it ?"

"Yes."

"Is any one inside?"

"Not a living soul."

"Will there be any harm in it?"

"None whatever."

"Then I'll go." She walked briskly to the door, though with secret trepidation. The moment she opened it, she started to find herself in a flood of saffron light; at the same instant, the door was suddenly closed behind her.

"Oh, let me out," cried she in a paroxysm of fear; but the next moment she was ashamed of herself, for she knew it could only be Mr. Antony who had shut her in. So she looked around her with admiration and awe. It was a small mausoleum to the memory of Lady Bourgeois, and only lighted by orange and purple glass. In a minute or two she tried the door again, and found it open; she re-entered the gallery, it was empty. At the farthest end of the most distant room, Mr. and Miss Antony, with their heads close together, were apparently absorbed in contemplation of a picture; but Nessy saw a little smile at the corner of Edith's mouth.

"You shut me in!" said she to Mr. Antony. "What a shame!"

"Dear me," said he, with a pretended start, "have you come out of the tomb? I thought you never would come back!"

"*Is* it a tomb?"

"Something of the sort."

"I was not in it two minutes."

"My dear Miss Saffery, what are you thinking of? Half an hour, you mean. (He looked at his watch, and appeared to think himself confirmed in his statement.) You took no note of time. I suppose it passed as agreeably as it did to Father Felix in the 'Golden Legend,' who had a momentary peep, as he thought, into Paradise, which, in fact, lasted forty years."

"This was not Paradise."

"No; but the mausoleum of a very beautiful and beloved lady, full, I should think, of suggestive fancies."

"*Was* she beautiful and beloved?"

"No question of it."

"I don't believe," said Edith, "that you know any more about her than we do."

"If she had been otherwise, would she have had such a mausoleum, think you?"

"Perhaps not."

And so their visit to the gallery ended. When they reached the place where the cart had been, the cart was there no longer. They all looked rather foolish. Presently, a turn of the road brought them to a gravel pit, and there was the cart with a horse in it: and there was a man shovelling gravel into the cart, and there were their things on the bank. The man laughed a little, and said—

"I thought you'd find 'em."

"That was a very unwarrantable thought of yours," said Mr. Antony; "and, to pay you off, I shall put you and your horse and cart and the gravel pit into my book."

He very composedly set to work, till the man, who did not seem half to like it, filled his cart and drove it away; and then they all walked on again.

"I am sure there must be some story belonging to that deserted house," said Mr. Antony. "Some miser, perhaps, like old Elwes, lived in it. How I should have liked to tumble out all his hoards!"

"I thought you were not fond of money," said Nessy.

"Leonard not fond of money!" cried Edith. "Why, he's always thinking of it!"

"That I'm not!" said Leonard. "Only one can't entirely get on without it."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DAILY ROUND.

WHAT a happy day it was! and though Nessy was very sorry to see the brother and sister go away, she had so much to think about that she was almost glad to be by herself, that she might live those happy, happy hours over again. She was not sorry to be sent to bed, where she could do so at her leisure; but she was so tired by her long walk, that she fell asleep directly she laid her head on her pillow, and did not even dream.

In the morning, Mrs. Saffery affixed a small white paper to the parlour window, bearing the single word "Lodgings." She and Nessy found plenty of work for themselves in taking up the carpet and giving the room a thorough cleaning. Mr. Antony had made Nessy a parting gift of sundry properties, not very valuable to himself, but of immense importance to her—

an old palette, a few brushes, some half-empty bottles of oil and varnish, sundry paints, and a piece or two of millboard. With these she intended to do wonders; and she very wisely resolved always to get her regular household tasks accomplished before she addressed herself to the fine arts. By this means she secured uninterrupted leisure, and escaped sundry scoldings that otherwise would certainly have fallen to her lot.

Nessy's life at this time was very happy; for Mr. Antony had so far given her a start, that she could pursue her course without immediately coming to a check. Of course her painting was what he or any other artist would have pronounced worthless; but neither she nor her parents were aware of this; so that she jogged on with a very comfortable belief that she was treading the very same path that Poussin and all the great ones had taken before her.

Her first check was the want of more paints, and though it was decided that she must and should have a fresh supply, they were not to be obtained till Mr. Saffery's next visit to London, which was not immediate. In the

interim, Nessy had nothing to fall back upon but her sewing, over which she became very dreamy.

From this rather unhealthy state of mind she was roused unwillingly by the advent of a new lodger. Mrs. Puckeridge, the new comer, was by no means an agreeable lady. She was very self-indulgent, and her favourite indulgences were eating, drinking, lying in bed, and reading novels. It was a good thing for Nessy that she received a severe scolding for meddling with one of her books; for it was a wrong habit, which she required to be broken of, and the books were not good ones for her to read. The poor girl was starving, however, for want of mental aliment.

She grew so downhearted and absent, that Mrs. Saffery got into the way of scolding her, and saying, "Why, Nessy, you are not like the same girl! Those painting-lessons spoilt you, I think."

"Oh, no," she would say, "they did me a great deal of good; only I am losing all I learnt now, as fast as I can."

Then Mrs. Saffery told her husband that the paints must really be procured; so Michael

Saffery brought his business affairs to a focus, and went up to London for the various things he wanted, not forgetting the paints.

When Nessy set to work again, it was as good as a play to hear Mrs. Puckeridge inveigh on the utter absurdity of a tradesman's allowing his daughter to paint in oils. Nessy would have fared badly, had she had to stand the brunt of her indignation by herself; but Mrs. Saffery came to the rescue with great effect, saying the lady must really pardon her, but she must beg leave to think herself the best judge of what was suitable for her own daughter. Nessy had property—a very pretty little property—and the tastes and inclinations of a lady; and, as long as they did not interfere with her domestic duties, which they had never done yet, it was her parents' desire that those tastes and inclinations should be cultivated.

Nessy had escaped into the kitchen, but she could not help hearing the above, and some more, through the open door; and when Mrs. Puckeridge said abruptly to her, the next time she went into the parlour, "What property have you?" she coldly replied—

"Did not my mamma tell you, ma'am?"

"No; or I shouldn't have asked you."

"Then, since my mamma did not think proper to do so, I had better not," said Nessy.

"Oh, pray keep your own counsel, if you like. It's not of the least consequence," said Mrs. Puckeridge, in dudgeon. "I regret to have troubled myself to ask such an insignificant question. I suppose the 'property' is so small that you are ashamed of mentioning it."

Nessy did not answer this taunt; and as she afterwards waited upon the indignant lady at dinner, in perfect and almost melancholy silence, she thought to herself that it might be possible she and her mother really did plume themselves too much on the thirty pounds a-year. It was the first time such a possibility had ever suggested itself to her.

The silence was broken in rather a ridiculous manner, for Nessy had to help Mrs. Puckeridge to some Scotch ale. The ale was "up," and sent the cork flying to the ceiling, and sprinkled Nessy's face, and made her involuntarily laugh a little, though she begged pardon the next instant. Mrs. Puckeridge drily remarked—

"People of property can't be expected to know how to draw a cork. I have property myself, and I never did anything so menial in my life, so of course *you* cannot be expected to. I rather prefer being waited on by servants who *are* servants, and not above their work, nor yet below it. I believe I shall quit these lodgings as soon as it suits my convenience; but not *before* it suits my convenience," she added quickly, as Nessy left the room.

"Mother," said Nessy, in a low voice, to Mrs. Saffery, "I cannot think how a lady can be as cross as Mrs. Puckeridge. She says she has property, but I don't think any amount of property can make up for such a temper."

"You are right, Nessy," said her mother; "money gives nobody a right to airs and ill-nature. Let it be a lesson to yourself. Your father and I are a little apt to spoil you sometimes—you are never snubbed—"

"Oh, yes, mamma!—by Mrs. Puckeridge."

"By *us*, I was going to say, if you had not interrupted. It's a bad habit of yours, Nessy, and proceeds from conceit. Mrs. Puckeridge, I was going to say, might, at your time of life,

have been as good a girl as yourself—there, I did not mean that!"

"Thank you for it, though, mamma, all the same."

"Well, you *are* a good girl, and that's the long and short of it; only see, Nessy, what even a good girl may come to, if she gets spoilt, and has property, and never is snubbed."

"Only I don't know that Mrs. Puckeridge ever *was* a good girl," said Nessy, "and can't fancy it. There goes the bell. Is the pudding ready?"

The pudding-sauce was not to Mrs. Puckeridge's mind, and her remarks on the person who made it were unflattering. One way and another, she contrived to make the Safferys' gains by her very dearly earned; and Nessy ardently hoped she would fulfil her threat of going away. She did not do so for some months, but when autumn came, and Hastings became tempting, she gave notice to quit at the week's end.

The family had never been so glad to be by themselves. So quiet, and so cheerful! No bell-ringing, no fault-finding, no meals but their own to prepare. Mr. Saffery bought a

lobster for tea, because he said he thought they all deserved a treat after what they had put up with. As for Nessy, she now had leisure for the paints, which had long been in the house without her being able to use them; for directly she began to lay her palette, Mrs. Puckeridge's little handbell was sure to ring. It had a peculiarly querulous tone, and she carried it from place to place with her wherever she lodged.

But now Nessy, with her mother's concurrence, placed her easel in the window of the unoccupied first-floor room, with a little three-legged table beside it on which she arranged her colours and brushes. Then, having completed her morning's work, and the dinner being cleared away, and her mother dressed and seated behind the counter with her plain work, and her father reading the *Times* in his arm-chair, still at the little dining-table in the parlour behind the shop,—and the shadows beginning to fall from west to east, and the whole village seeming steeped in quiet, so that you might hear the mewing of a stray kitten from one end of it to another—under these propitious circumstances did Nessy complacently take her stand before her easel, and,

having long ago settled what she meant to do, begin to sketch with a piece of chalk on the sheet of primed millboard upon the trough the general features of the village-green ; the "Swan," with its yards, stables, coachhouses, and out-buildings—the old oak on its islet of verdure—the now leafless lane, winding out of sight—the baker's shop, the cottages, the gardens, pigsties, pigeon-houses, beehives—and the old man Mr. Antony had painted, sunning himself on a mossy bank.

It was a pretty, homely subject, prettily sketched. She started when her mother called her to get tea. Could it be four o'clock already? More than an hour fled before she could return to her darling task. Meantime, the shadows had surprisingly lengthened. The scene was prettier now than before.

With continual interruptions, yet with daily intervals of leisure, Nessy lovingly and perseveringly continued her task, till she had painted in a really attractive little oil-sketch. Of course, it was rude and full of faults and imperfections, and would have been utterly valueless in the estimation of a picture-dealer ; but still it pleased the eye—the unprofessional eye, at any rate.

Mr. and Mrs. Saffery viewed the performance with undisguised delight. It was put in the shop-window, and seen by every one in the village. Many were the encomiums which drew modest blushes into Nessy's cheeks, and made her heart overflow with pleasure. You may talk of your Raffaelles, Correggios, and stuff—she was as happy as any, or all of them. She could say, "I, too, am a painter."

The artist thrives on praise as the infant on milk and kisses; but "solid pudding is better than empty praise," say you. Well! suppose I tell you Nessy earned that too. A traveller, strolling round the green while the horses were changing, spied the picture, and, struck with the exact reproduction of details, went in and bought it of Mr. Saffery for seven-and-sixpence. Nessy was out at the time, and when she returned, was divided between disappointment at the loss of her picture and elation at its having been bought.

"Why, Mr. Antony sells his pictures, don't he?" said Mr. Saffery. "Leastways, when he can. Don't be circumcilious, Nessy. Be thankful you can earn money, for it's not what all

of 'em can do. As for your picture, you can paint another like it."

"I'm not quite sure I can," said Nessy, "but I'll try."

Her father held towards her the three half-crowns.

"Is it mine?" said she, glowing with pleasure. "May I have it all to myself?"

"All to yourself? Yes, to be sure," said Michael Saffery. "You earned it yourself, and you may spend it yourself."

"Oh, thank you, father!—papa, I mean."

And our young lady of property took her three half-crowns more joyfully than poor Correggio his sackful of coppers.

CHAPTER IX.

THE UNCOMMON TASK.

JUST as Mr. Saffery and his daughter were thus standing with smiling faces at the counter, Mrs. Early, the poor widow-woman, whose son had gone to Australia, came in, looking more shabby and woebegone than ever, and anxiously said—

"Any letter for me, Mr. Saffery?"

"No, Mrs. Early," said he, still gaily.

She looked, almost with reproach, from one cheerful face to the other, and exclaimed, with passionate querulousness—

"Why don't he write?"

Then, bursting into tears, and covering her face with her hands, she hurried out of the shop.

"Oh, papa, it's very shocking!" said Nessy, piteously.

"Well, yes, so it is, poor creature!" said he;

"but what can we do? *We* can't make the thriftless scapegrace write."

"He must be a very bad son, I think," said Nessy.

"He may be dead," said Mr. Saffery.

One afternoon the letter-bag contained a dirty, foreign-looking letter, directed to "Mrs. Early, Providence Cottages, Belforest, Surrey, England," with a rather indifferent portraiture of Her Majesty on the stamp, which bore the superscription "Victoria, Sixpence."

"Why, here's a letter from George Early, I do suppose!" cried Mr. Saffery.

"Let me run down with it to her then, papa, please," said Nessy. "It will give Mrs. Early so much pleasure!"

"Off with you in a jiffy, then," said he, good-humouredly tossing it to her; and, putting on her garden-bonnet without even waiting to tie the strings, Nessy ran off to Providence Cottages. She tapped twice at the door before a stifled voice said, "Come in," and, when she entered, she saw Widow Early sitting on a low nursing-chair with her apron at her eyes.

"Mrs. Early, here's a letter for you," cried Nessy, cheerfully. "A letter from Australia."

"Oh, you blessed, blessed girl!" exclaimed she, starting up, but instantly dropping again into her seat. "Give it me! give it me! He's alive, then?—thank God! I knew he'd write."

Her outstretched hand dropped feebly at her side. She faintly said, "My head is full of strange noises; everything dances before my eyes. Open the window, my dear, will you?"

Nessy did so, rather awe-stricken, and the fresh air revived the poor widow, who began to shed tears. She said, "Never mind, my dear, it relieves my head, and clears my sight—it is doing me good."

Then she imprinted two or three eager kisses on the letter, and began to open it with trembling hands, but she tore the thin paper with her nervous fingers, and Nessy said, "Let me cut round the seal for you," and produced her bright little scissors, which were tied to her side with a ribbon.

"Thank'e, my dear, thank'e kindly. I might have torn the writing. Why, how small he do write! and so little of it! and in such pale ink! Maybe there's a money-order in it. No, there isn't. Oh, dear me!—oh, dear!"

Her sigh was almost a sob; and Nessy's quick thought was, "She is thinking more of money than of her son. That is not right."

But, pitying the old woman, she said, "Have not you spectacles? shall I find them for you?"

"They're broken," said Mrs. Early, dolefully, "and I've no money to pay for their being mended. Oh, my dear, read me the letter, there's a good girl! I don't suppose there are any secrets, and if there are, you must keep them faithfully."

"Oh, yes, I will," said Nessy.

So she took the letter, and read in a distinct, deliberate voice, while Mrs. Early, leaning towards her till their faces almost touched, devoured every word, as a famishing person devours food.

"My dear Mother,

"You will have fretted at my silence, and I would have written to you long ago, if I had had anything to tell which would give you pleasure. When I first came out, I had a bad fever, and while I was down with it, all my fellow-passengers went up the country, and the people I was with were thieves, and when I

got about again I had hardly a thing left. I looked about for work, but could get none, and there was nobody to speak for my character. When half-starved, I consented to keep sheep in the bush. It was quite a lonely life, away from everybody and everything; and sometimes I seemed going out of my mind. After this I gave up shepherding, and took some bullocks across the country to another run. This was more cheerful, as I had change of scene and companions; but the scenery was, to me, very melancholy, and my companions were low, brutal fellows, and because I did not like their talk, they made fun of me, and called me the 'Young Lady.' I thought once or twice I would make away with myself, but did not. Then, at a public-house, we fell in with a lot of fellows from the gold-diggings, and one of them had found a nugget, he said, as big as a beefsteak-pudding, and they told me I should make a fortune in no time, so I determined to go as soon as my engagement was ended. But I had to do job-work first, to earn a little money for the things I wanted; and once or twice I was minded to write to you, only I knew you would not like the diggings. So I thought I'd

put in for a nugget as big as a pudding, and when I'd got it I'd come home.

"However, I've been all this while at it, and have not found the nugget yet; and I have been ashamed to tell you of so many failures at one thing after another. One thing is certain—I don't like gold-digging at all. They are a horrid set of low fellows that do best at it, and I'm not even second-best. I've been ill, and been robbed, and been ill again. Some people were very kind to me last time, but they're gone away now.

"You must not think of coming out here; there is no chance of my building the pretty little cottage I promised you; I can't even send you a few pounds. My shirts and socks are dreadful, and prices are awful at the diggings. England is the best place for old people, and perhaps for young ones; but the human mind desires change. I kept my promise of saying that hymn every night, and reading my Bible on Sundays. Sometimes, though, in the bush, I did not know when Sunday came round. No churches nor church-bells. Oh! how gladly would I hear once more the ding-ding-dong of those three cracked

Belforest bells that I used to pretend said 'Come along, George!' I should think it the sweetest music."

Here he seemed to break off abruptly: the few lines in addition were dated some weeks later, from a place called Rummidumdumm, and merely contained these words—

"Off to the interior with an exploring-party, in search of rivers. We may come to grief: we may come to glory. Pray for me, mother dear! May God bless you in this world and in the next.

"Your ever-affectionate son,

"GEORGE EARLY."

Mrs. Early, having held her breath to the end of the letter, now began to cry bitterly, and rock herself to and fro in the nursing-chair, saying—

"Oh, my son, my only boy! He'll never come back, I know! He'll perish in that howling wilderness!"

"Oh, no, I hope not," said Nessy. "Perhaps they'll make some grand discovery."

But Mrs. Early shook her head and refused

to be comforted, saying, "His bones will whiten in the desert."

"It's a good thing he reads the Bible, at any rate," said Nessy, at which Mrs. Early stopped short. "What is the hymn he speaks of?"

"Ah, it's a good hymn that has strengthened many a sorrowful soul," said Mrs. Early. "I wouldn't let him rest till he got it by heart, and promised to say it on his pillow every night. It begins—let me see. Oh, this is it—

"Commit thou all thy ways
To His unerring hands,
To His sure truth and tender care,
Who earth and sea commands.
No profit canst thou gain
By self-consuming care,
To Him commend thy cause, His ear
Attends the softest prayer."

"I call that a very pretty hymn indeed," said Nessy. "I don't wonder at your son's repeating it. It's full of comfort, and I think if you would repeat it to me once or twice, I should know it too."

Mrs. Early repeated it once more, but would

not do so a third time; so, after Nessy had said, "Now, would not you rather have had this letter than that it should have gone to the bottom of the sea?" and extorted a reluctant, "Well, yes," she left her folding her hands and murmuring, "Praise the Lord that my boy wrote before he started! Pray God he may live to come back!" Her face looked peaceful as Nessy left her, yet it was so worn, withered, and shrivelled by age, watching, waiting, fasting, enduring all the unseen sorrows of penury and suspense, that the impression on Nessy was painful.

"Why, how long you have been!" said her mother, when she returned.

"I had to read the letter to Mrs. Early, as well as carry it to her," said Nessy. "Oh, mamma, she is so very, very poor! That clean little blind to the window makes people think there must be comfort within, but there was no fire. Instead of dinner, she was going to have tea; but only make-believe tea—toast-and-water poured out of a teapot. She had got the hot water of a neighbour."

"Dear me, that's very sad," said Mrs. Saffery. "I always fancied she was above want. Our

used tea-leaves would be better for her than toast-and-water."

"Only she might be above having them," said Nessy. "But if you give me leave to offer them to her, I will."

"Her worthless son has a good deal to answer for," said Mrs. Saffery.

"Mamma, I don't know that he is worthless," said Nessy. "He says a hymn every night and reads his Bible on Sundays."

"Come, that's better than Mr. Antony, at any rate," said Mrs. Saffery.

Nessy did not like this remark, so she returned to George Early, and said—

"The only reason he did not write was, because he had no good news for his mother."

"He'd better have written, though, for all that," said Mrs. Saffery, "instead of wearing her heart out with suspense."

Mr. Saffery here came in from serving a customer, and said—

"Well, what has young Early been doing?"

"He has been gold-digging," said Nessy, "and now he has joined an exploring party, in search of inland rivers."

Mr. Saffery gave a sort of inward whistle, and said—

"Exploring parties are ticklish things."

After this, Nessy set about another picture, intending it for a facsimile of the first. For some reason or other it was not quite as good, and it was far from being a facsimile. The third attempt was better, and much smaller, because she had only small pieces of millboard left. These studies, and a succession of others, all of the same subject, were exhibited in due course, in the shop window, and, in due course, sold, at various prices; sometimes to a chance visitor at the inn, sometimes to a farmer or farmer's wife, and one or two were actually painted to order. Let no one think scorn of our young lady of property for exhibiting her works in the shop window, and receiving payment never reaching the dignity of gold. Except in idea, she was not in any way above her station, nor accustomed to think her parents demeaned themselves by selling tapes and stamping letters. She was naturally, or rather had become, fond of money, through having her "property" and "expectations" foolishly talked of; but she was beginning to have an

idea that it was not the best thing in the world, nor even the most powerful. However, Nessy did not deal in abstract ideas, except after a fashion of her own. Mr. Antony had left behind him a crumpled envelop, much scribbled, which he had doubtless intended for the kitchen fire, but Nessy hoarded it as a treasure. It contained these scraps.

"Grey shades about the eyes give an air of modesty.

"Sir Joshua told his pupils, when painting flesh tints, to think of a pearl and a peach.

"Lord Palmerston said the other day, that some men think the human mind is like a bottle, and that when you have filled it with anything, you can pour it out and leave it as empty as before. That, however, quoth his lordship, is not the nature of the human mind. No, indeed, I wish it were, in some things.

"The Bishop of Troyes, in his funeral eulogium on Prince Jerome Buonaparte, called him 'assez religieux.' Ha, ha! Good, that.

"'Il y a des paroles qui valent les meilleures actions, parceque, en germe, elles les contiennent toutes.' Regulus's 'no,' for example?"

Nessy, though she did not understand half

of any one of these aphorisms, nor know what was original, what only quoted, had a glimmering notion that they were clever, and that it was a good plan to secure one's fugitive thoughts, if they had any good or beauty, before they were lost. But when she tried to write down some of her own, she could not, for a time, find any.

I do not wish to tell tales of Michael Saffery, but certainly he was fond of news fresh from the press, and certainly he made no scruple of daily reading the *Times* as it passed through his hands to some subscriber. One day, when thus engaged, he called to Nessy—

"Here's something that will interest Mrs. Early, maybe. Come and read it, and then you can tell her about it."

It was a short paragraph extracted from an Australian paper, mentioning the exploring expedition, and the interest and sympathy it had excited, and the dangers it would probably have to face. The names of the explorers were given, including that of George Early, though as a subordinate.

It was better for Mrs. Early to hear Nessy's version of the paragraph, than to read the

original, for Nessy would be too kind and discreet to dwell on the probable dangers. She undertook the mission with pleasure, and, on tapping at the door, heard "come in" uttered with more alacrity than the first time; for Mrs. Early now knew her tap. "Another letter?" cried she eagerly, as Nessy entered.

"No," said Nessy, "but—" The widow dejectedly sat down in the nursing-chair.

"But," pursued Nessy, "there is mention of your son in the *Times* newspaper."

"Has he found the river? has he got glory?" cried Mrs. Early.

"Not yet, but very likely he will. You can't think how interested the gentry and townspeople were in the expedition. They gave the explorers all manner of useful and portable things to take with them—more, at last, than they could carry; preserved meats, and fruits, and all sorts—and started them off, and gave them three cheers at parting. Was not that nice?"

"What does it amount to," said Widow Early, "if they leave their bones to bleach in the desert?"

Having got this idea into her head, there

was no getting it out, except by reverting to a subject nearer home.

"And here's Mr. Broad, Miss Saffery," said she disconsolately (Mr. Broad was her landlord), "says he won't let me be here after Saturday, for he's going to raise the rent. I must go into the House."

"Oh, I hope not," cried Nessy.

"But I *must*," she reiterated, crying bitterly, "for I can't hold up my head any longer, and there's no other place to go to. Living on dry bread and toast-and-water lowers one's strength, so that one can't struggle on and on for ever. I must go into the house, though I never thought I should, for I've known better days."

Now, it so happened, that Mrs. Prosser had lately given up the White Cottage, which, with some of its least valuable furniture, had been put up to auction; and, as nobody else happened to want it, it had been knocked down a dead bargain to Mr. Saffery, who thought it would be a very good investment for Nessy, and sure to let in the summer. They had been looking about for some one to put in it and keep it open.

Nessy was delighted at being, in any sense,

the proprietress of the White Cottage (the rent of which was fifteen pounds), and she now hastened home to beg her parents to let Mrs. Early be the person put in to take care of it. They had previously decided on the allowance that was to be given, which, though slender, would be something to Mrs. Early.

Mr. and Mrs. Saffery did not at first take kindly to the proposal, but Nessy dwelt with glowing cheeks and dilated eyes on the sore strait of the poor widow, and the great advantage it would be to her, till they saw it with her eyes, and at length consented.

Joyfully did Nessy return to Mrs. Early to tell her of her preferment, and very sweet was it to her to see how glad and thankful it made her. The removal from Providence Cottages was now looked forward to, not with dismay, but with pleasure; true, her position there might not be permanent, but while it lasted it was a pure, unqualified good; and, for once in her life, Mrs. Early would not look forward to evil.

"If George could see me here," said she, complacently, at her neat little tea-table, when Nessy looked in on her on Saturday afternoon,

"he'd think me in no need of a squatter's hut. I fancy there are not many cottages in Australia as pretty as this."

She spoke quite at random; for she knew nothing of Australia but the name.

CHAPTER X.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

NESSY at length produced a *chef d'œuvre,* in the opinion of the family; and Mrs. Saffery exclaimed, "Mr. Antony ought to see this!"

"Oh, mamma!" said Nessy, in affright.

"Yes, I don't see why he shouldn't," said Mr. Saffery. "Yet, on the other hand, why should he? He sees plenty of good pictures every day."

"That don't signify," rejoined Mrs. Saffery. "He started Nessy off at it, and he'll be glad to see the progress she has made."

"Yes, I should think he would be," said Mr. Saffery, doubtfully. "But how shall you get it to him?"

"In a deal packing-case, to be sure," said his practical wife, "such as he used to pack his own pictures in. I've an old one upstairs, that will

only want some wedges to make the painting fit it. Go you, and fetch it down, Nessy."

Now that the first shock at the scheme was over, Nessy's heart beat high with elation. She felt quite sure, at that moment, that hers was a wonderful performance, and that Mr. Antony would be very much surprised and delighted.

"You must write a line with it, Nessy," said her mother, as she proceeded to fit the wedges.

"Oh, mother !—what shall I say ?"

"Only that we thought he would like to see how well you paint now."

Nessy could not say so thus broadly, though it was the very thing she meant to express. With a great deal of preparation and forethought, and copying from the slate, she completed the following note :—

"SIR,

"My mamma thinks you may like to see what progress I have made since you left. I am afraid it is done rather badly.

"With our best respects to Miss Antony,
I am, Sir,
"Your obedient servant,
"NESSY SAFFERY."

She was not quite sure this was as a lady would have expressed it, and she wistfully read it again and again, to see whether she could improve it, but found she could not; and really she had said all that was wanting, and no more. Her father carried the case, duly directed, to the station; and Nessy followed him with her eyes till he turned the corner, full of silent exultation. This lasted till he came back—till the train was off; all that time she seemed walking on air.

Then the bubble broke; the balloon collapsed; she was no longer buoyed up by her imaginings; she felt perfectly vapid and flat. She was quite certain Mr. Antony would think the picture the greatest daub that ever was painted, and the note presumptuous and absurd. Nessy was ready to cry all the rest of the evening, and she lay awake half the night.

Mr. and Mrs. Saffery little knew what the poor girl endured during the next two days. Of course she was a gratuitous self-tormentor; but the torment was none the less real.

When the post came in on the evening of the second day, Mr. Saffery, who was sorting

the letters by candlelight, called out to Nessy in a lively tone, "A letter for you, Nessy!"

She darted from the parlour into the shop. "Oh, where, papa?" and joyously seized it. She tore it open with nervous fingers. It only contained two words—

"Capital! capital!"

Nessy's heart gave a great bound. Her first feelings were of relief and thankfulness. He had seen, had approved, had encouraged. Then came a great recoil. How short! how unsatisfying! how disappointing a letter! Perhaps he was only laughing at her! This thought was intolerable; she chased it from her, and yet it would recur.

When Mrs. Saffery came in, it was with very subdued complacence that Nessy said, "Mr. Antony has written, mamma."

"Well, what has he said?" rejoined Mrs. Saffery.

"He says, 'Capital, capital.'"

"Well, that *is* capital," said her mother. "But only those two words? He need not have been so sparing, I think."

"Only those two words," said Nessy, sighing.

Next morning the picture reached her. Just

as she was taking it from its case, a lady came in to buy something: the rector's wife, Mrs. Fownes.

"Dear me, that's a pretty little thing," said she. "Did you do it, Miss Saffery?"

Nessy owned the soft impeachment.

"Why, you must be a self-taught genius. I should think you might get a medal from the Society of Arts. Would not you like to do so?"

"Yes, I dare say I should, ma'am," said Nessy, contemplating public honours for the first time.

"Well, you've nothing to do but to write to the secretary, and send up your picture. I don't exactly know the steps, but you could easily learn them of any friend in London. It's about the time, I think, for sending the pictures in."

Mr. Saffery was caught by this: a good deal of talk ensued; and Nessy felt the dawning of a new ambition. Whether it were for her good or not, I don't pretend to say. I rather think the simple girl only dreamed of shining in the eyes of her father, her mother, and Mr. Antony. It was decided, in family conclave, that she must write to him again. Nessy had

a great repugnance to doing so. She was not sure how he had taken her first note, nor whether irony lurked in his "capital, capital." She remembered the severe things he had said of her writing, and she feared it was not much better now. It was, however.

After almost as much thought as if it were an Act of Parliament, she wrote as follows :—

"Belforest, *March* 7.

"SIR,

"I am afraid this second note may be intrusive; but our rector's lady, Mrs. Fownes, has recommended me to send my picture to the Society of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, Adelphi, Strand; and my papa and mamma wish me to be guided by your advice. Perhaps you do not think it good enough. There are gold and silver prizes, of various sizes, given. Of course I could only hope for the smallest silver one. Apologizing for this liberty, I am, sir, with our united respects,

"Your obedient servant,

"NESSY SAFFERY."

In two days Nessy received the following answer :—

"Newman Street, *March* 10.

"DEAR MISS SAFFERY,

"Considering the circumstances of the case, I think your picture quite as worthy of the Isis medal as many that have obtained it; at any rate, you can but try. 'Aim highly, fall nobly,' is the best motto. Your painting is a very creditable little performance. As you are a long way from town, and my time is rather fully occupied, my sister will, if you wish it, take the necessary steps, on your sending up the picture. Honorary rewards, though not very valuable in themselves, are spurs to us, along what Sir E. Bulwer Lytton calls 'the upward course of an opposed career;' and there is no reason why you should not put in for them if you like it. Kind regards to Mr. and Mrs. Saffery.

"Yours, &c.

"LEONARD ANTONY."

This letter made Nessy very happy. She did not mind its qualified and rather supercilious tone; that was characteristic of Mr. Antony. He had once, and only once, been surprised into saying she had genius; but it had sent a thrill through her as the same thing

said by Sir Egerton Brydges' father sent a thrill through the sensitive son. Then, again, Mr. Antony had put her in connexion with his sister, with whom Nessy felt much more at ease, though she had only been in her company a few hours: she was altogether a more eligible correspondent for her. This affair caused a good deal of pleasant family conversation; all were hopeful, though none of them immoderately so.

After Nessy had sent her picture a second time on its travels, she received a very kind note from Edith, inclosing a list of printed rules, and telling her that she should have affixed a card to her painting, with the sex, age, name, and class of the artist written on it. "I mean," she continued, "whether you belong to the honorary or artist class. Of course, the former, as you are not professional, and have never sold your paintings."

Here was a sudden check. Nessy *had* sold paintings: she *was* professional. "Oh, what a pity!" she exclaimed, half aloud. But then she thought, "what difference does it make? I don't mind their thinking me not quite a lady, and that is all the difference."

No, it was not; but Nessy did not know it. She wrote Edith a plain statement of the fact, that she had sold many little pictures as soon as they were painted.

"*Here's* even-handed justice for you!" said Mr. Antony, grimly, when his sister told him of it. "Nessy Saffery can sell her pictures, and I can't sell mine."

Nessy now tasted a little of the cup of suspense—not its dregs, but its edge. Other people's conjectures and anticipations had made of moment to her what would otherwise never have occurred to her to wish for. She would not like to fail, now that Mr. and Miss Antony and Mrs. Fownes knew all about it, and her father and mother spoke of it across the counter to this and that country neighbour. "Our Nessy has sent a picture to the exhibition, at least to an exhibition. Our Nessy has a picture in a picture-gallery. Our Nessy is trying for a prize."

All this made harder the disappointment in store for her, when her feverish little day-dream was dispelled. Edith wrote a kinder note than ever, saying she was very sorry to tell Miss Saffery that her picture was (Edith would not write the grating word rejected, but)

not accepted. She could quite feel for her disappointment, for she had had disappointments herself; but she had always found the best way to get over them was not to rate the thing missed above its real worth, and to turn the attention to something else as soon as possible. "Happily you are not, as many artists are, dependent on your talents for support," she wrote; "and, even supposing you to be so, why, your being able to sell your pictures as you do, shows you can suit the popular taste; and the real test of a book or a picture is its being *bought*, whatever the critics may say of it. When people are willing to pay for a thing, you may be pretty sure they really want to have it, and value it. So you have more reason to be glad your pictures sell, than you would have had if one particular picture had procured you a medal. At least, that is one view of the subject. A member of the society told me you would have had a fair chance if you had been able to class yourself as an honorary candidate, because an artist is supposed to have had professional training (which you have not), and is therefore more severely judged."

"How kind she is!" Nessy thought; but

her lip quivered and she twinkled away a tear. She was in the little back parlour by herself when she opened the letter, and she felt very much inclined to run up to her attic and have a snug cry before she faced her father and mother. However, like little Abner Brown, she "took a 'poonful of resolution," and bravely went to her mother, and said,

"Mamma, I've had a disappointment. My picture is not considered good enough for a prize."

"Dear heart, what a pity!" said Mrs. Saffery, who was clear-starching. "What could be the matter with it, I wonder?"

"I don't know that anything was the matter with it," said Nessy; "but it was put along with others that were a great deal better, being done by real artists."

"Then yours should not have been put along with theirs, that's clear," said Mrs. Saffery. "It was not fair."

"Ah, but every society has its rules," said Nessy, checking a sigh; "and I dare say it was all fair enough. Miss Antony seems to think so: she writes very kindly."

"Let me hear what she says," said her mother.

Nessy read the letter, and Mrs. Saffery remarked,

"That's a very good letter, and one that you may take pride in her having written to you. I must say, Nessy, you take the disappointment very well; and I am pleased with you."

This quite paid the simple girl, who went cheerfully to tell her father. She said less, and he said less than had passed between her and Mrs. Saffery; his sole remark being,

"Oh, it's rejected, is it? Well, what can't be cured, must be endured. There is generally a good deal of favouritism in those matters. I told you, I thought you would not get it" (which was quite a mistake of his), "and you'll soon forget all about it. As soon as the picture is put in the shop window, it will be sure to sell."

Mrs. Saffery had been the best consoler, and Nessy asked her leave to answer Miss Antony's kind letter, which she felt would be a soothing employment. Leave obtained, she wrote to this effect—

"Belforest.

"Dear Miss Antony,

"I think it very kind of you to send me such a nice letter. I have quite got over my

disappointment now, though it was one, of course, and shall turn my attention to other things, only remembering your kindness. Pray forgive my having caused you so much trouble. My papa and mamma desire their best respects to be sent to you and Mr. Antony, and I remain

"Yours respectfully and truly obliged,

"NESSY SAFFERY."

"Poor little wretch! it must have been a disappointment to her," remarked Mr. Antony; "but she takes it very sensibly. Do you think she would like to see the prizes given away? I could get her a ticket."

"How can you think of anything so tantalizing?" said Edith. "Much better let her forget all about it. She does not need honorary rewards, and I am not at all sure that emulation is, in any case, a good thing."

"Oh, indeed!" (Ironically.)

Whether the attempt to compete with others had done Nessy harm or no, I am persuaded her failure, in so far as it humbled her, did her real good; for it did not amount to a crushing mortification, but only made her take a more moderate and just estimate of herself. She

found she was a nobody among artists, though, among those who were not, she was held to paint pictures rather prettily.

About this time it happened that Mrs. Saffery discovered Nessy's old bed-furniture would hold together no longer, and she told her she would give her new dimity if she would make the furniture herself. Nessy was delighted, and obtained the additional grant of a daisy-fringe, and, after that, a remnant of pink glazed calico to cover a light table, with a clear muslin toilette-cover over it, so that she made her attic quite smart. All this pleasant employment set painting quite aside, and a variety of other wholesome domestic engagements enabled Nessy's head to clear itself of too dominant a subject, and her mind to recover its healthy tone. Sometimes she looked in on Mrs. Early, who did not now come incessantly to inquire for letters, as she knew that her son could not write to her during his exploring journey; but she was very greedy of a little chat about him with Nessy, who, to gratify her, had borrowed one or two books on Australia, and picked up a few facts about it to retail to her; but she never succeeded in

convincing Mrs. Early that it was not a howling wilderness peopled with howling savages, with grass as brown as hay, and salt-marshes instead of rivers.

All connexion with the Antonys now seemed at an end, and Nessy was therefore surprised as well as pleased when, about the beginning of June, she received a note from Edith, saying that, as the weather was now so pleasant, she and her brother were thinking of spending a day in the country, and would be glad, if convenient, to bring a friend with them to see the Dulwich Gallery, and afterwards dine at Mr. Saffery's.

As the lodgings were unlet, they were quite at the Antonys' service, and Mrs. Saffery was glad to requite Edith's kindness to Nessy by her alacrity in engaging to have everything comfortable, in a plain way, for the party. It was delightful to Nessy to put up the clean blinds, gather flowers for the chimneypiece, and assist in the preparations.

"I wonder whether the friend is a lady or gentleman," said Mrs. Saffery. "Ducks and green peas and gooseberry-pie will do for either; but one would like to know. Perhaps

it is some gentleman that is going to marry Miss Antony; or it may be some young lady who is going to marry Mr. Antony."

"It ought to be a very nice gentleman for Miss Antony," said Nessy, "or a very nice lady for Mr. Antony. I wonder what sort of lady he would like."

"A lady with a good bit of money, most likely," said her practical mother.

"I did not mean that," said Nessy. "I meant whether tall or short, dark or fair, and so on."

"Ah! looks are but skin deep," said Mrs. Saffery. "If you had ten thousand pounds, Nessy, people wouldn't mind how plain you were."

This remark made Nessy thoughtful. She habitually plumed herself on her thirty pounds per annum; but yet, to be run after merely because she had ten thousand pounds, would be running after what she held, not what she was, any more than you run after the dog who has run away with your dinner; you run after your leg of mutton.

CHAPTER XI.

ROSABEL.

THE first glimpse of the expected visitors showed that the stranger was a lady—a young lady—a pretty young lady—a tall, pretty young lady, prettily dressed. Nessy saw all this at one eager glance, and next she saw that Mr. Antony, much better dressed than usual, though she could not say in what respect, looked almost—nay, more than handsome. His cheek, his eye, his mouth, his whole air, the tone of his voice, told that he was under some spell or excitement. Edith, who hung a little back, and was prettily, though inexpensively dressed, looked languid and tired. Nessy's face lighted up when their eyes met, and Edith's face cleared directly she saw the grateful girl: each instantly felt there was sympathy between them.

"Ah, Nessy—Miss Saffery!" said Mr. Antony, hastily correcting himself, "how do you do?

Here we are, you see, a little after the time appointed. The ladies would like to leave some of their wraps here before we go to the Gallery—they fancied it might rain."

Nessy's answer was a bright, silent smile. She had shaken hands with Edith, who was friendly, and treated her more like an equal than her brother did. Nessy had thought he would name the young lady to her, but he did not. She had settled in an instant, that here was Mr. Antony's future wife; but she had not settled that she liked her.

She showed them into the neat little parlour.

"Here are my old quarters, you see, Miss Bell," said Mr. Antony, with an attempt at unconcern that was not quite successful. "Capital ones, too, for a bachelor. Don't you think small rooms are snug?"

Miss Bell didn't know: she preferred large ones. She said this in a thin, rather high voice, that had no melody in it. Edith untied her bonnet and took it off, and began to smooth her hair, which the wind had a little ruffled.

"Would you like to step upstairs, Miss Antony, and have a comb?" said Nessy, lingering.

"Yes, I think I should," said Edith. "Will you come, Miss Bell?"

"No; I do very well, thank you," said Miss Bell. "Nobody to see one, you know."

"Oh, then, I won't go," said Edith, resuming her bonnet.

"Pray do, Edith, if you want to," said her brother.

"Oh, no; it does not signify."

Meanwhile Nessy had disappeared; and presently Mrs. Saffery entered, bearing a tray with cake and some home-made wine, while Nessy brought a china jug of water.

"Oh, we didn't mean to lunch, thank you," said Edith. "Will you take anything, Miss Bell?"

"I should like a biscuit."

"You will spoil those pretty gloves, if you don't take them off," observed Mr. Antony. However, she did not offer to remove them. "Won't you have something, Edith?"

"Only a glass of water. How deliciously cold it is! and so sparkling! so different from London water."

"Some wine, Miss Bell?"

"No, thank you."

"Just a little—"

"No, thank you; I never drink home-made wines. We never have them."

Mr. Antony looked a little annoyed. "We are going to the Dulwich gallery, Miss Saffery," said he to Nessy, as she was leaving the room. "Would you like to go with us?"

Edith gave him a quick look, and so did Miss Bell. Nessy blushed with pleasure and embarrassment, and said, "I fear I should intrude, sir."

"No, no, not at all," said he. "We shall be glad to have you. *Shall* we not?" appealing to his companions.

"Of course," said Edith. Miss Bell looked as if she had no concern in the question.

"Do go, then," said he, cheerfully. "At least, if you like it."

"Oh, yes, sir! I should like it very much."

And away she hastened to obtain her mother's consent, and put on her Sunday things. Edith said, with a smile, when she was gone, "You left me no choice but to say 'of course,' in her hearing."

"Why, there was nothing else to say, was there? Do *you* mind her going, Miss Bell?"

"It makes no difference to me, either way."

"No, I supposed it would not; and we shall give the poor child a little pleasure. Her life is dull enough."

"She does not look as much a child as she did," said Edith. "She is grown, and grown prettier."

"No—has she? I did not notice. She may have grown, but can hardly have grown pretty. Miss Bell, that plain little girl is a genius. Do you admire geniuses?"

"Oh, yes! very much," said Miss Bell; "they are so entertaining."

"Not always, I'm afraid. Some are very grave and profound."

"They are very disagreeable."

"Oh, no!" said Edith; and she took up the defence of profound geniuses with animation, to which Miss Bell answered in monosyllables of assent or dissent; while Mr. Antony, lapsing into silence, attentively observed her profile. It was Grecian, but the expression was very insipid; and nothing less than the misleading imagination of a young artist-lover could have tricked this inane young lady with the attributes of a semi-goddess, though her teeth were

like pearls, and her eyes limpid blue. Nessy, fresh as a flower, entered before he was tired of his long, unreproved gaze, which Miss Bell was quite conscious of, though she appeared not to be.

"Oh, now we had better be off, then," said he, starting up, and giving a quick look at Nessy. The result was an inward concession of "Yes, she's prettyish. Mind begins to give expression."

As soon as they were all in the open air, a spell seemed suddenly removed. At first, they all walked in a line, four abreast, in the middle of the country-road, in the following order:— Nessy, Edith, Miss Bell, Mr. Antony. Edith, whose glimpses of the country were not many, but who was extremely fond of it, immediately began to say droll and cheerful things, which her brother answered with spirit, glancing at Miss Bell every time for a smile, or laugh, or assenting look. Nor were they denied, for though she said little, she looked pleased, and seemed to enjoy the harmless puns and witticisms that are pretty sure to occur when a party of lively young people take a country walk together. If one or two of them happen

to have what passes current for wit among those who are not too captious, there is no need for all to be droll, so that they are but *en rapport* with each other. Nessy had never heard such a flow of repartee before; she thought it delightful; and though Miss Bell only smiled when she might have laughed, and often let a point escape her altogether, she seemed waking up so fast from her torpid fit, that Nessy, catching a glimpse of her across Edith now and then, began to think her pretty.

Presently, they turned off the high-road, and were treading the elastic turf of the undulating upland which commanded the scene of Nessy's sketch.

"Nessy!—Miss Saffery!—why, here is 'The Escape of Pyrrhus!'" cried Mr. Antony, laughing; and he began to tell Miss Bell, in a lively, pleasant way, about Nessy's historical flight, and her heroic sacrifice.

Miss Bell smiled, and looked at Nessy rather curiously, remarking, "It was a pity to burn it."

Nessy walked onwards in a happy reverie, overpaid for the immolation by Mr. Antony's

glowing words. He had said, "She did not know how well she had done it."

"A great shame of you not to have told her, then," said Edith. "What a pretty cottage that is in the dell!"

"That's mine," said Nessy.

"*Yours?*" said they all.

"Yes; my papa thought it a good investment."

They gave a quick look at one another, and Miss Bell was ready to laugh.

"Is she rich, then?" said she aside to Mr. Antony.

"She has property," returned he in the same tone, delighted to have this shadow of a confidence.

If Nessy could have read Miss Bell's thoughts, she would have known that in her estimation she had risen from a nobody to a somebody.

They went on, up and down the little inequalities of the ground, for a short time in silence, and then Edith inquired—

"Are you going to live there?"

"Oh, no! we hope to let it."

"Don't you hope to live in it some of these days?"

"Oh, no! we could not afford it. The post-office does well enough for us."

Nessy sank from her temporary elevation in Miss Bell's opinion.

"Is it empty now?" inquired Edith.

"Mrs. Early is in it, to keep it open."

"Mrs. Early! I seem to remember that name," said Mr. Antony.

"Yes, sir, the person who used to come so frequently to ask for a letter from her son, and who always said, 'Why don't he write?'"

"Oh, ay—and does she go on saying so still?"

"No, sir; he *has* written."

"Indeed!"

"She was so glad," said Nessy, with feeling. "I took her the letter, and she trembled so, she could not open it, nor yet read it; so I read it to her, and it explained how he came not to have written to her sooner; and he said he was going into the interior with an exploring party, in search of rivers."

"Dear me! that is very interesting," said Edith. "He may make some great discovery."

"Or perish in the wilderness," said Mr. Antony.

"That's what Mrs. Early said," observed Nessy. "She said his bones would bleach in the desert."

"I like that cottage, with its tall white lilies, very much," said Edith; "I should like to live in it."

"I wish you did, Miss Antony," said Nessy.

"Should *you* like to live in a cottage?" said Mr. Antony in a low voice to Miss Bell. "Could you be happy in one?"

"Oh dear, yes, if it were covered all over with honeysuckle and passion-flower! I should delight in it."

He looked earnestly at her, and began to hum *sotto voce*, at first without the words—

"O Nanny, wilt thou gang with me,
Nor sigh to leave the flaunting town?
Can silent vales have charms for thee,
The lowly cot, the russet gown?"

"That's a sweet thing," said Miss Bell. "The sentiment is so pretty. It goes so well to the harp."

"The harp is a divine instrument."

"I don't like it nearly as much as the piano, though," said Edith.

Her brother uttered an impatient groan of dissent.

"No, no more do I," said Miss Bell. "And I should not like a russet gown. Brown is so very ugly."

"The russet gown of the ballad only typifies simple tastes," said Mr. Antony. "Even poor people don't wear russet now."

"Russet-coloured alpacas are worn sometimes," said Edith; but this prosaic observation elicited no remark. Mr. Antony was expatiating on simple tastes to Miss Bell; and, as their route now lay through a rutty lane, with a very narrow footpath, they fell into couples; Mr. Antony and Miss Bell in advance, and Edith and Nessy behind them, stopping from time to time to gather wild flowers. Edith was very desirous to know the name of every herb and flower that grew in hedge and field, and was soon learning of Nessy the names of wood-sorrel, stitch-wort, golden-rod, shepherd's-purse, and shepherd's-needle. They came to a pause over their nosegays, but Edith, looking up and seeing the others a good way in advance, ran after them, and Nessy after her, without stopping for some of the dropped

flowers. Mr. Antony and his companion seemed to have made progress in the interim; they were talking together with ease and apparent interest, and the narrowness of the lane still kept Edith and Nessy behind, till they took their position as a matter of course, and did not think of altering it as the path widened. To Nessy this was delightful: she had never had such a congenial, yet superior companion, before; one to whom she could admiringly look up, yet who did not put her down. Edith's disposition was excellent; she was frank, kind, and unselfish, with a keen appreciation of what was good and beautiful in nature and art. Even about wild flowers she seemed to put Nessy's vague thoughts into words—better words than would ever have occurred to her. When they came to an end of the subject, Nessy said, after a little pause—

"Are you not very fond of reading, Miss Antony? *I* am; so very fond!"

"I am not fond of reading for reading's sake," said Edith; "there are other things which I often like better; but when I get a book that suits me, I certainly enjoy it thoroughly."

"Would you tell me some of the books you like?" said Nessy timidly.

"There are so many," said Edith, laughing. "I am very fond of travels, and lives of painters, and essays and poems, and magazines, and good, healthy, spirited novels."

"None of those books come in my way," said Nessy, "so I am obliged to content myself with what I can get."

"What have you?"

"'Sacred Dramas,' and 'The Death of Abel.' Those were prize-books. And Butler's 'Astronomy,' and the 'Grecian History,' and the 'History of England.' Those were lesson-books. And Bingley's 'Animal Biography,' and 'Prince Lee Boo,' and the 'Gentleman's Magazine.' Those are my father's."

"Poor child—and can you really be fond of such books as those?"

"There are some nice things in them," said Nessy, "but I own I'm too fond of picking out the plums."

"*Are* there any plums in the old Gentleman's Magazine? I thought it was only what school-boys call stodge."

"Oh, no!" said Nessy, laughing, "there are

some very good pickings here and there; especially in the obituary."

"Well, you have the oddest taste! Let us run; they are getting on so fast."

Arrived at the gallery, they once more united in a group, but soon scattered, as people do when they are looking at pictures. Mr. Antony, however, was continually going off to something else, and then saying, "Come and look at this, Miss Bell," and then she would affect to be more reluctant, Nessy thought, than she really was, but yet went; and when Edith and Nessy joined them, they found they were not talking of the pictures at all, nor even looking at them, which Edith was the less surprised at, because they were often the poorest in the gallery. She grew tired of this, at last, and a little cross, and gave up following them about; straying from one to another of her favourite pictures, and looking at them absently. Nessy, who at first enjoyed following the bent of her own taste, was insensibly drawn to her admired companion, whom she preferred even to the pictures. Seeing Edith looking fixedly at David with Goliath's head, she said—

"Is this a good picture, Miss Antony?"

"Yes—no;" said Edith. "You know it is by your favourite Poussin."

"Perhaps these pictures don't improve on acquaintance?"

"They ought to do so. What makes you suppose so?"

"I don't think Mr. Antony seems to find they do."

A look that crossed Edith's face made Nessy feel she had better have spared the remark, though she could not think what harm there was in it. To make the matter better or worse, she added—

"Nor do you."

"Oh, I like them very well," said Edith, "only I'm tired, and thinking of other things. Ah! they are looking at Rubens' Mother. Let us admire it too."

Mr. Antony, however, was not looking at Rubens' Mother, but at Miss Bell, and as they approached him from behind, Nessy heard him softly call her "Rosabel."

Miss Bell, who saw them coming, let a look of extreme coldness take place of a downcast softness, as she said rather drily—

"My name is not Rosabel, but Rosa, and I

don't like being called by my Christian name." Saying which, she placed herself beside Edith, and continued to attach herself to her all the rest of their stay in the gallery, which was not very long. Mr. Antony looked taken a little aback, and the rest of the dialogue was disjointed and pointless.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COTTAGE.

It was now full time they should make the best of their way homewards, unless they meant the ducks and green peas to be spoilt; but Mr. Antony, with the wilfulness of his tribe, saw fit to discover an excellent point for a sketch, and nothing would prevent him from taking it.

There are, or were, many pretty little rural bits about Dulwich and Norwood, such as Ruysdael would have loved. The present one would hardly figure much in description. The turn of a rutty road, a broken, gravelly bank, tufted with weeds, a broken paling, a little ragged copse, with deep shadows between the slender trunks, a gleam of water, that was in fact only a pool, a cow standing under a tree, and lowing for her calf, another cow audibly cropping the grass, fleecy clouds overhead— there was not much more.

Mr. Antony, however, plopped down on the grass, and out with his book, in spite of Edith's "Dinner will certainly be spoilt."

"Do you take one of the cows, then, and Miss Saffery the other," said he; "they may move away, which the landscape will not. At present, the pose is excellent."

"I've no pencil," observed Nessy.

"Help yourself," said he, holding out a handful to her, and then to Edith. Edith wanted paper and a penknife; he supplied both; there was no getting off, so there were they, three in a row, all sketching very earnestly, while Miss Bell twined her hat with eglantine.

"Miss Bell, you come in very well," said Mr. Antony. "I will put you in."

Miss Bell was quite agreeable, and put herself a little in attitude, which he accused her of, and she denied; so that made a little laughing. One way and another, they were all very happy.

"Which cow will you have, Miss Antony?" said Nessy.

"The lowing one, please," said Edith. "I hope she won't leave off yet."

"Am I to put in the brown spots?" said Nessy.

"Every one of them," said Mr. Antony, "and plenty of tail."

"Oh, I do believe my cow is going to lie down!"

At the same moment, the other, ceasing to low, wildly dashed along the hedge to another gate, making all the ladies start to their feet in fear of a collision. Mr. Antony did no good after this; finding which, he put up his tools, and away they went merrily. It was one of those little episodes that one takes no note of, and yet it marked with a white stone that day in his life.

Arrived at the post-office, they found dinner done to a turn, and Mrs. Saffery rather anxiously awaiting them. Miss Bell thought it odd that a young person of property should change their plates, &c., but to every one else it appeared quite simple. After dinner it became a question what to do next. They were too tired to go far, and Mr. Antony voted for going on with his sketch while they talked to him, which they pronounced very stupid.

"Miss Saffery, might not we go over your cottage?" said Edith.

"Oh, yes; do, please!"

"Nobody is in it, I think you said?"

"No one but Mrs. Early."

So off they went, and Mrs. Early, in her neat, close cap and faded black gown, received them with smiles; but her cheeks were very thin, poor woman! for the fact was she had too little to eat. The trifle she received for keeping the cottage open was nearly all she had to live upon; but she was allowed plenty of garden-stuff, and was not above being thankful to Mrs. Saffery for dripping, broken meat, and even used tea-leaves. Sometimes people who came to look at the cottage gave her sixpence or a shilling for showing it, but such windfalls did not occur very often.

"What a pretty parlour!" cried Edith. "A piano, too!"

"The ceiling is very low," observed Miss Bell, "and the piano has not the additional keys."

"How nice it would be if you would take this cottage, Miss Antony!" said Nessy.

Edith laughed, and said, "I believe it would. Where's the money to come from?"

"I would let it to you very cheap. I wish we could let you have it for nothing."

"Thank you very much; but we cannot leave London, nor afford two sets of lodgings."

Mrs. Early, who had been waiting to speak, now said, wistfully, "No more news of the exploring party, I suppose, miss?"

"None that I have heard of," said Nessy. "I don't think another mail has come in yet."

"You have a son in Australia, have not you?" said Edith. "I have a cousin there. It is such a nice place! He has a pretty farm-house, with a verandah round it, and eleven cows, and twenty pigs."

"Ah! he's a settler," said Mrs. Early, sorrowfully; "but my George has gone into the heart of the undiscovered country to find water, and maybe his bones will bleach in the desert."

"Oh, no! let us hope not," said Edith. "People are very hospitable out there, and directly they hear the crack of a stockman's whip (which may be heard a mile off), they put the kettle on, with a handful or two of tea in it, and cut off two or three dozen mutton-chops and begin to dress them for the travellers that are coming."

Two or three dozen mutton-chops and a

handful of tea did certainly seem very comfortable to Mrs. Early; but she said, after a little pause, "My George mayn't have the luck to come across people like those. My notion of a desert is, that it's all sand and stones."

Miss Antony combatted this notion with the laudable intention of soothing the poor mother's anxieties, which she actually succeeded in doing by sketching and vividly colouring a fancy picture of Australian life, in which, it must be owned, she brought together particulars belonging to widely separate colonies.

At this moment an old man with a milk-can appeared at the gate, and Edith exclaimed—

"Might we not have tea here? How nice it would be!"

"Oh, yes!" said Nessy; "and Mrs. Early's kettle is almost boiling, only she has not tea and sugar or bread and butter enough for such a party. Take in some more milk, please, Mrs. Early, and I'll run home for what we want and return directly."

She darted off as she spoke, and Mrs. Early, catching something of the cheerful spirit of the moment, which afforded a variety to her usual sad and still life, bestirred herself to

make the kettle actually boil, which it did not do yet; and Edith, with the desire of being useful, took out cups and saucers, and glanced into the little pantry, where it grieved her to see little more than Mother Hubbard found in her cupboard. What were Miss Bell and Mr. Antony about all this time? Why, Miss Bell had insisted on Mr. Antony's bringing her a blue convolvulus without a little black insect in it, and he was trying to find one, and bringing her one after another that did not answer the requirement, and there was a good deal of banter going on between them that came under the denomination of harmless flirting. At least, it was harmless enough in its character, however far from harmless it might be in them, under any circumstances, to flirt.

"This is how people lived in Arcadia," said Mr. Antony, at tea-time. "Oh! why is there now no Arcadia?"

"There *is*," said Nessy; "an inland country of Peloponnesus." At which the brother and sister laughed, seemingly at her expense, though she could not tell why.

"Perhaps I pronounced it wrong," said she, softly.

"Quite right, Miss Saffery. You are so uncommonly strong in Pinnock's Catechism and Butler's Globes."

"My brother was thinking of an ideal Arcadia," said Edith, "where people had nothing to do but amuse themselves."

"Oh, then he meant the golden age," said Nessy.

It was Nessy's golden age while the brief hour lasted, and then there was a concluding hurry for shawls and parasols, lest they should lose the train. The sun was brightly setting, but it seemed suddenly to cloud to Nessy as she watched the three retreating figures, and then turned indoors very gravely.

"That young lady was very generous to me," said Mrs. Early, showing Nessy two half-crowns. "I dare say she is well off."

"No, I don't know that she is," said Nessy; "but she is very good."

There had been some kind of settlement between Edith and Mrs. Saffery which Nessy had no concern in. But Mrs. Saffery's good word was likewise hers; and Nessy could not but think how much more she liked her than Miss Bell.

Were Mr. Antony and Miss Bell engaged lovers? That was a puzzler to Nessy; but Mrs. Saffery decided, without hesitation, that it was so, and "hoped the young lady had a good bit of money."

Nessy thought her pluming herself on conscious wealth might help to make her unagreeable. Disagreeable might be too strong a word.

"A stuck-up young person," Mrs. Saffery added. "She looked as if she couldn't say bo to a goose."

And there the matter dropped.

"I say, mother," began Mr. Saffery, at supper, suspending, for the moment, his consumption of bread and cheese, "I'm afraid we're going to have a bad season. Here's June nearly gone and July coming on, and our lodgings are unlet, and so is the cottage. I call it a very bad season."

"Perhaps we had better lock up the cottage, and pay off Mrs. Early," suggested Mrs. Saffery.

"Oh, I hope not," said Nessy, hastily.

"Why, she doesn't seem to do a bit of good. She has snug quarters, and perhaps sets people against the cottage."

"But people don't go."

"Then where's the use of her being there?"

This difficult and disagreeable question was solved the next day, or at any rate rendered unnecessary to answer, by a visit from the new curate, Mr. Weir, who, having gone over the cottage, offered to take it for six months, with liberty to continue in possession of it if he wished. "And I know he can't do better for himself," afterwards observed Mr. Saffery.

"Well, there's one load off our minds," said Mrs. Saffery.

"I don't think you have any other, have you, mamma?" said Nessy.

"Our lodgings, child."

"Oh, to be sure. Only, it's very comfortable to be without people."

"Not if they're like Mr. Antony."

This was too true to be contested.

"It never rains but it pours." At least, such is the saying, though, of course, it is not a true one. It expresses the general feeling we have of disappointment, when two eligible things are offered us, and we cannot accept both. About an hour after the arrangement was concluded with Mr. Weir, a widow lady, of prepossessing

appearance, entered the post-office, and inquired the terms of Miss Saffery's cottage, saying that Miss Antony had mentioned it to her, and she had come down by the train expressly to see it. It was almost too tantalizing, for the Safferys took a liking to this lady at first sight; and, of course, her being sent by Miss Antony was a voucher for her respectability. How kind of her to think of them!

The lady seemed much disappointed when she found the cottage was let, for she was persuaded it would have suited her, in which case she might have taken it for a permanence. Did they think there was any chance of the other party giving it up, if not very much set upon it? Why, no; because, you see, he was the curate—the new curate, Mr. Weir, who couldn't do better for himself, there being no choice, for there was not another furnished cottage to let in the neighbourhood.

"Ah, yes—yes, indeed," the young widow lady said plaintively, as if it were a very afflicting dispensation, but she must endeavour to submit to it. It was always the way, she said, with anything she set her mind upon: no doubt, it would prove to be for the best.

Would there be any objection, did they think, to her just looking at the cottage? She had a picture of it in her mind's eye, and should like to verify it.

They assured her there could be no objection: Mr. Saffery, chief spokesman, being echoed in everything by his wife, who stood beside him behind the counter; while Nessy stood at the glass-door of the back-parlour, casting wistful glances at the pretty lady with the soft voice and small feet and large dark eyes, so beautifully dressed in the deepest mourning.

"Which is the way? Please give me a very exact direction, for I am so dreadfully stupid—"

"Nessy will show you the way, ma'am, with the greatest of pleasure;" and Nessy started forward with alacrity, repaid by a speaking smile from those lovely black eyes, without a word spoken.

So Nessy, very much captivated, took her to the cottage; the interesting stranger conversing with her by the way with much affability, and obtaining, by well-selected inquiries, much local information, both important and unimportant,

which she received with many a gentle sigh.

"This is just the place," she observed, after a pause, "to live,—

"'The world forgetting, by the world forgot.'"

"Dear, do you think so?" said Nessy.

"You don't enter into such feelings, of course," rejoined the lady, with one of her sweet smiles. "Ah, my dear, at *my* time of life, and with *my* bereavements—may you never know what they are!"

Nessy thought this very amiable and touching. "There's the cottage," said she presently.

"Is *that* it?" said her companion, with a little disappointment in her tone. "Well, it *is* pretty, certainly. Yes, very retired and very charming. In fact, just what I wanted. Let me see whether its interior is equally nice."

The front door was a little ajar, so they entered without knock or ring, and crossing the little hall to the dining-room, found Mrs. Early just within it, and—Mr. Weir, on his knees, measuring the carpet with her yard-measure.

His employment naturally made him rather

red in the face, and perhaps he became rather redder when he looked up and saw two female forms in the doorway. He instantly got up.

Nessy thought she had never seen anything prettier or more becoming than her companion's little surprise and the grave dignity with which she bowed, recovered herself, and retreated.

"Pray come in," said Mr. Weir, embarrassed, "if you want to."

It was not a very elegant form of words, and he still held the shabby yellow ribbon in his hand, so that his *abord* altogether was not so prepossessing as the widow lady's, though he undeniably looked like a gentleman. She kept her advantage; would by no means intrude; had had no idea any one was in the house but the housekeeper; had merely intended a visit of curiosity and interest; and saying this, she re-crossed the threshold.

He followed her with genuine civility, and said, "Pray go over the cottage, if you like it. I have but just taken it, and am measuring the carpet, to see whether a better one of my own will cover it."

But no, she would not—she could not for

the world. She had only heard of it that morning, and being in want of just such a pretty, peaceful retirement, had come down directly to secure it, and found she was just too late. She smiled a little, gave another little inclination, and retraced another step or two.

Mr. Weir's face seemed to say "Well, I'm very sorry for you, but I really cannot give it up." However, what he actually said was, "It was very disappointing."

"Oh," said she, with an expressive look, "I'm *used* to disappointment. 'Tis nothing. Pray think no more of it. *Good* morning."

And this time she really did go; leaving the young curate looking after her in a ruminating manner. When they had quitted the garden, she said absently to Nessy—

"An interesting-looking man. Who is he?"

"Our new curate, Mr. Weir," said Nessy.

Now, before they had started from the post-office, Mrs. Saffery, as a last effort to retain so eligible a party, had said to her, "You wouldn't like these rooms, ma'am, I suppose?" half opening her front-parlour door as she spoke. And the lady had answered by one of her wonderfully expressive looks—"Quite out of

the question!"—whereby Mrs. Saffery had felt it *was* quite out of the question, and could only be sorry for it. But now, the fair stranger, after pausing to note one or two points of view on the upland, and pronouncing it, with a regretful sigh, "a pretty, *pretty* place," declared to Nessy she should like to see the lodgings, and judge whether she could by any possibility stuff herself and her belongings into them.

Nessy was agreeably surprised at this, and so was Mrs. Saffery when she learnt it. She did the honours in her most obliging, respectful manner.

"*Very* clean; and very, very small," said the lady. "As for the sofa, oh!" throwing herself for a moment on the hard little couch. "No repose!" Then she looked, considering, around her. "No room for my harp."

"Excuse me, ma'am, I could move this little round table, easy," said Mrs. Saffery, "and an 'arp would stand beautiful in the corner."

"The reverberation would be too powerful," replied the other; and as Mrs. Saffery was not quite sure what this meant, a pause ensued.

"But, however," cried the lady, suddenly, "I'll try it. "And," with a sweet smile, "the

expense won't be ruinous. You're good creatures, I can see; don't put yourselves in the least out of the way about me. I have no whims, I take just what comes: I've known too much sorrow to be exacting. You'll cook for me, and—do for me, in short. My tastes are quite simple; I eat very little—a little bread and fruit, now and then a chicken; I suppose the butcher has a sweetbread sometimes? I shall bring my own linen and plate, *not* a servant, nothing but my wardrobe, a few books, and perhaps my harp."

"Is the wardrobe a very heavy one?" said Mrs. Saffery, doubtfully; "there's an awkward turn on the stairs."

The lady smiled sweetly, and explained that the wardrobe simply meant, a box of clothes.

So preliminaries were finally settled.

"And your name, ma'am?"

"Homer. Mrs. Homer."

As Nessy had only heard of Homer the blind—Pope's Homer—the name struck her as rather amusing.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. HOMER.

HOMER. If you pronounce it slowly, in your most mellifluous voice, you will perceive something soft in it. Ho-mer. It was not a common name. Nessy thought nothing about Mrs. Homer was common. And when Mrs. Saffery had ventured to inquire what part of the world she came from, she had said "Cromer,"—Mrs. Homer, of Cromer, recommended by Miss Antony;—they were all prepossessed in her favour.

She was not to come down till the following week, having affairs to settle in London, where she was staying at present; in Cromer Street, Nessy thought, but this was a wild surmise, for Mrs. Homer had not said so. And when Mr. Saffery, who happened to know Cromer Street, remarked that "it was nothing particular of a street," Nessy felt sure she was mistaken.

Though Mrs. Homer was not coming immediately, she was going to send down some of "her things," including the 'arp. And as Mrs. Saffery was not in the general habit of leaving her h's unhasp . . . pshaw! unaspirated, it is to be supposed that owing to some defect in her early education, she happened not to know how harp was spelt, or, at any rate, had forgotten, else why should she say 'arp?—reminding one of the very refined lady who said she liked veal cut with an 'ammy knife!

Meanwhile, Mr. Weir seemed making the most of his time, for he was seen passing from house to house, and cottage to cottage, stooping his tall figure under low doors, and blocking up narrow passages in earnest converse with reluctant housewives. This state of things was particularly observable from the village post-office, which commanded such a wide area; and the Safferys remarked to one another, with some interest, that he seemed a very stirring young gentleman.

In a little while he let them know what the stir was about. He came briskly into the shop, and said—

"Oh, Mrs. Saffery, good morning; I hope

we shall be better friends. Can I speak a word to Miss Saffery?"

"Certainly, sir. Nessy! come down stairs. Mr. Weir wants to speak to you."

Nessy was touching up her cow—the cow she had sketched, which Mr. Antony had pronounced "quite a Potter;" but she obeyed the summons immediately, with a slight expression of pleasing wonder on her face, which Mr. Weir thought intelligent. He began at once with—

"Oh, good morning, Miss Saffery; you and I shall, I hope, become better acquainted. I want to enlist you on my side."

Nessy looked much pleased, and said, "How, sir?"

"I am quite distressed," replied he, "to find there is no Sunday-school in the place. During Mr. Fownes's long illness it has absolutely dwindled away to nothing. Since the former mistress's death no fresh one has been appointed. I have induced several mothers to promise their children shall attend, if teachers can be found. Will you be one of them?"

"Very gladly, sir, if my mamma will let me!"

Mrs. Saffery could not, at the instant, decide to say yes or no.

"Mind, I don't say it will be pleasant work to you," said he, quickly. "At first it will be quite the reverse. The children have got out of training; some of them have never had any; at present they are like sheep without a shepherd—sheep going astray, every one his own way. Sheep? I'm afraid you'll find them a good deal more like pigs."

"Your head, Nessy," said Mrs. Saffery, succinctly.

"Her head? what's the matter with her head?" said Mr. Weir. "It's a good, clever-shaped head."

This made them both smile; and Mr. Weir smiled too, thereby disclosing his good white teeth, which gave his face a very pleasant expression.

"Yes, sir, Nessy *is* clever," said Mrs. Saffery, taking up the word. "She's rather what you may call a genius, sir; and was obliged to be took from school, because her faculties were too much for her."

"In what way have these faculties deve-

loped themselves ?" inquired he, looking rather amused. "How have they burst out ?"

"In the shape of headaches, sir," rejoined Mrs. Saffery; while Nessy felt embarrassed, and fidgetted from one position to another.

"Oh, headaches don't always proceed from overpowering faculties," said the curate. "I have them myself very badly sometimes, but my genius won't set the world on fire. Headaches proceed from various causes—bile, cold, and—"

"Nerves, sir. Nessy's headaches came from nerves."

"Very likely, Mrs. Saffery. Young persons' headaches very often do. Do they unfit you for your daily employments ?"

"Oh no, sir! I hardly ever have them now. You know, mamma, I have grown out of them."

"Well, I rather hope you have; only—"

"Of course," said Mr. Weir, "I shall not want to bring on your nervous headaches again. But, if you would not mind trying, I would propose your leaving off directly you found your headache return."

"Thank you, sir. I shall not at all mind trying. I shall like it very much."

"If Mrs. Saffery will be kind enough to let you try—"

"Certainly, sir, certainly," said Mrs. Saffery; "you have made everything so easy by saying she shall leave off if it brings on her headache, that I would not, on any account, make an objection. We have always been steady people, sir, regular church-goers, and Nessy has been well trained, sir."

"Yes, yes, I have no doubt of it; and now I hope she will find pleasure in training others to the same solid advantages she has herself been privileged to obtain. Mrs. Fownes said she was sure she would do so."

"That was very kind of Mrs. Fownes," said mother and daughter, simultaneously.

"Do you know anything of the routine? it is very simple."

"Oh, yes, sir! I've been in the old Sunday-school, but it wasn't quite as nice as it should have been. Mrs. Groat used to hit the children too much."

"There should be no hitting in Sunday-schools," said Mr. Weir. "Pupils should be ruled by the law of kindness."

"Yes, sir; I'm sure that would answer best."

"I never once," joined in Mrs. Saffery, emulous of the clergyman's approbation, "I never once raised my hand against Nessy, sir—no, never, except in the way of washing and brushing."

"And you have been repaid in the affection of a good daughter," said he, looking kindly from one to the other, and making their hearts swell as they exchanged glances. "Well, Miss Saffery, I shall start you off on Sunday morning, and you will have the reins completely in your own hands at first, at all events, for I have not yet enlisted another teacher—every one seems afraid, or idle, or uninterested."

"Please, sir, I should like it all the better in my own hands. I could work out my own plans."

"Have you any? Come, that's capital. I see, you and I shall be great friends." And he cordially shook hands with her, she and her mother equally proud and pleased.

"I shall look in again on you before Sunday," said he; "but I must go now, for time fails me. Halloa! what is coming in here? Not a coffin, surely?"

"Oh, it's the 'arp!" cried Mrs. Saffery, as

a railway-porter appeared at the door with a cumbrous package on his back.

"The what?" said Mr. Weir, in surprise.

"Mrs. Homer's harp, sir," explained Nessy.

"Mrs. Homer?" he repeated. "I have not that name down. Is she of this parish?"

"No, sir; she has just taken our lodgings. She comes from Cromer Street, or Cromer."

"Mrs. Homer, of Cromer," repeated he, smiling. "I must look her up when I've time. Perhaps I shall make her useful, or get her to subscribe. Is she old or young?"

"The lady, sir, whom I brought to your cottage."

"O—h!" and his tone quite changed as he made this very long Oh. "So *that* was Mrs. Homer, of Cromer. Ah! Well, I hope she will do some good among us. She was disappointed at not getting the cottage. So she plays the harp—King David played the harp. Good morning!" and he briskly walked off.

In truth, they were rather glad to get rid of him, for he blocked up the doorway, while the railway-porter stood, the picture of patience, with "the harp, his sole remaining joy," on his back. Its exterior covering was a very

dirty old sacking, under which was a dirty old blanket; but under these peeped out a very smart stamped leather case, which impressed Mrs. Saffery and Nessy with profound respect for the stringed instrument it contained. Moreover, that it did actually contain aforesaid instrument was evidenced by a certain twangle or groan of suffering emitted from its innermost depths when the porter, with more concern for himself than the 'arp, bumped it down in the corner. He objected to depart without being paid, so Mrs. Saffery produced the money while Nessy signed the book. Then mother and daughter contemplated the dirty sacking a little, longing, but not presuming, to remove it; and Mrs. Saffery curiously examined the direction-card, superscribed in a very pretty, lady-like hand, and having, on the off side, "Mrs. Homer" engraved in old English characters, with no address annexed. Then they began to say to one another what a very nice gentleman Mr. Weir was, how bent he seemed on doing good, how conciliating his manners were, how pleasant his voice was, and how gratifying it would be to assist him in any way. Nessy did not return to her cow, but

began to mend her father's stockings with great zeal. It was an employment she was particularly fond of whenever she had anything interesting to think about; and that was the case now. She had often had a vague wish to do good, but saw no opening for it, and here was one expressly presented to her. Ragged children immediately acquired a value in her eyes which they had never had before. She resolved to make them clean and make them good. Her primary notion was to teach them as she would have liked to be taught herself.

With her head full of philanthropic schemes, Nessy's dreamings were much more profitable than usual; and though they now and then diverged to the Antonys and the new lodger, they soon returned to the Sunday-school.

"I will teach them till they are tired," thought she, "and then tell them a story."

What should she teach them? What should the story be? Here were new ranges of thought.

Mr. Weir brought a handful of letters for the second post, and came in to buy some stamps. It was a pleasure to Nessy to serve him.

"I must go away on Monday," said he, "but I hope to give you a fair start on Sunday. There will probably be two dozen or more children. You must begin from the first, with marks. One mark for early attendance in the morning, one for the same in the afternoon, one for lessons well said, and one for good conduct during the day. I must try to find time to supply you with little tickets, with the number and date written on them, just as vouchers to encourage the parents."

"That will trouble you, sir. I will gladly make them."

"Will you? Do, then. You and I shall work well together, I see. You must enter the marks in a class-book, which I will supply you with; and at the end of the year they will be counted up, and the children will have a penny a dozen for them. This they will add to their shoe-club, or have the value in little books—hymn-books, and so forth. You look dissentient; what is your objection?"

"I think they would like the money itself so very much better, sir. It would be so much more of an object to them to work for money of their very own."

"Do you think so? Why, they would spend it in lollipops! It would do them no good."

"The earning it would do them good, sir; and perhaps they would not spend it in lollipops; not all of them, at least."

It was he who looked dissentient this time.

"What makes you think they would like the money best?"

"I know the feeling, sir."

He laughed. "Oh, come, that's a cogent reason."

"We all like laying out money of our own accord, sir, or having the privilege of saving it."

"Of being free agents, in fact. Well, I believe we do. But some of these little tots are hardly fit to be free agents. I scarcely know what to say to it. It will all go in gingerbread, you'll see."

"I might influence them, sir."

"Well, we'll think about it, Miss Saffery. Influence them as much as you can, by all means. There will be little prizes, you know, besides, and a Christmas tea-party to the children whose names have not once been in the black book. Powerful allurements!"

"Yes, sir."

"It has been said that the *teacher* is the school. As is the teacher, such is the school. An intelligent teacher will have intelligent scholars. A pious teacher will make pious scholars. You see this? you feel this?"

"Yes, sir."

"But a teacher who is *not* pious, is *not* intelligent, mind you, is no good. I am not speaking of extensive book-learning, but of plain, practical wisdom; the heart-knowledge of the best of books. As far as you have this, you will do good; if you have it not, you can do *no* real good. Do you see this? do you feel it?"

"Yes, sir" (very seriously).

"I am sure you do. To teach others, even little children, you must constantly be teaching yourself; renewing your knowlege, increasing your knowledge. To teach yourself (lowering his voice and speaking very earnestly), you must be taught of God. You must be taught by His Spirit. You know how to seek it, how to obtain it—by prayer. You must be teachable as a little child. And then you will be able to teach little children."

He shook hands with her across the counter, and was gone. A third person was present, whom he had not noticed. Mrs. Saffery, coming in while they were talking, had fidgeted a little at first, to attract his attention; but, on second thoughts, she preferred being without it, and stood listening. When he turned to go, she remained in the background. Then she said—

"Nessy, that is a good young man:" and her mouth twitched.

As for Nessy, she ran up to her little bedroom, and shut herself in.

"By-the-bye," said Mr. Saffery, the next time they assembled at meal-time, "what's going to become of Mrs. Early?"

"Ah, I thought of that," said Nessy, "and would have asked Mr. Weir, only he was talking of things so much more interesting, that I did not like to interrupt him."

"Take my word for it, Nessy," said her mother, "that Mr. Weir is one of those people who, the seldomer you interrupt, the better. He puts me somewhat in mind of the girl in the fairy fable who never opened her mouth but there fell out a pearl, a diamond, and a flower."

"That's a pretty idea of yours, Betsy," said Mr. Saffery. "I never saw any good in the story before."

"Oh, as for pretty ideas," said she, pleased at his praise and his calling her Betsy, "I leave them to Nessy and Mr. Weir."

"But, about Mrs. Early," said Nessy. "Shall I look in on her?"

"Yes, do; and if Mr. Weir's servants are coming in, she can step down here as soon as she's discharged, and I'll settle with her."

So Nessy took the earliest opportunity of paying her visit of inquiry. She found the tall old man, whom Mr. Antony had painted, at work in the front garden. He looked very happy, and said he had told Mr. Weir he wasn't good for much, but was good for a little, and Mr. Weir had told him to come and go, and do a little when he was able, and leave off when he wasn't, and he would pay him what was reason.

"He's a kind gentleman to be under," said he, "and this is a pretty bit of ground, as has always hit my fancy; and now the weather's not remarkable hot, I shall get it all into condition by degrees, as you'll see. There's

a lot of rubbish in yonder corner as didn't ought never to have been left there all this time, and will burn finely and make first-rate manure, that I shall dig well in. I can dig with my left foot, though the other's past service."

"Take care you don't burn down the laurel hedge," said Nessy.

He gave her a knowing smile, and said—

"Trust me for that; I wasn't born yesterday."

Mrs. Early, usually so pitiful, received her with smiles.

"I'm not going away, Miss Saffery," said she. "Mr. Weir wants a second servant—his London cook doesn't like the country, though one would have supposed it an agreeable change after Shoreditch, but there's no accounting for tastes—and so he has requested me to be his housekeeper; at any rate, till Mrs. Weir comes down and sees need to make any alteration."

"Is Mr. Weir married, then?" said Nessy, in surprise.

"Oh, no, it's his mother; an elderly lady. He's the only son of his mother, and she is a widow. Those were his very own words; at

least, Scripture words that he saw fit to make use of. I told him it was exactly my own case; that George was my only son, and I was a widow; not an importunate widow, I hoped, but an indigent one, as everybody knew: and though I had never expected to go out to service in my old age, yet I had been getting downwards by little and little, never getting the remittances my poor boy had talked of sending me; so that it was an object to me, a great object, to be provided for, and if he'd only try me, he'd find I could save him many a penny. The cleaning isn't heavy, and I can cook a cutlet pretty well when I've a cutlet to cook. So I hope I shall suit him, for I'm sure he'll suit me. But he goes to London o' Monday."

Nessy's spare time after supper was spent in making the tickets.

CHAPTER XIV.

SUNDAY WELL SPENT.

SUNDAY witnessed a decided success. Nessy was at her post at half-past nine, and was soon followed by a rabble of youngsters, who clattered boisterously in, as if the prime object was to see how much noise they could make. She knew every one of them by name, and, with a sudden inspiration of genius, began shaking hands with them all round, in this way:—

"Mary, how do you do?—why, how nice you have made yourself look! Stand here, please. Joseph, how do *you* do? I'm glad you're come. Stand on *this* side, please. How do you do, Patty?—stand next Mary, please. I shall soon have you all sorted. Philip, how do you do?—you shall stand next to Joseph. Mr. Weir will be in presently. I want to get you all in order before he comes. Janet, how

do you do?—stand here, please," &c. &c. &c. The cheerful, kind, but rather subdued tones of her voice produced a general lull, till broken by a giggle from the youngest; on which Nessy gave an exculpatory look at the rest, as much as to say, "She's very little—we must forgive her." The boys, meanwhile, stood kicking their heels, awkwardly enough, and seemed meditating a scrimmage.

"Mr. Weir is going to open the school presently," resumed Nessy; "and meanwhile I will tell you something you will perhaps like to know. Come a little nearer—no, not quite so near. Yes, that will just do. You will begin, from the first, with marks. Every one who comes in good time on Sunday mornings will get a good mark. You were all in good time—You will all have a good mark."

"Tom Brown hasn't come," one of the little little boys burst out. "He won't get a good mark."

"All the worse for Tom Brown. Perhaps he is not well. If you come in good time in the afternoon, you will get another good mark. If you say all your lessons well, you will get another good mark. That's three! For general

good conduct, you'll get another good mark. That's four!"

"What's general good conduct?" said Joseph.

Nessy paused, and then said, "Being orderly and obedient. Not speaking too loud. Being polite to one another" ("Oh, my!" in a whisper) "and kind to the little ones. Going to church, and behaving well there; and—being good in general."

This was received in silence. "All the marks will be set down in a book, and you will have little tickets besides, to carry home. *That* will please father and mother. And at Christmas all the good marks will be counted up, and you will get a penny a dozen; and prizes and a tea-party besides."

"Hurray!" said Philip.

"And now let us kneel down, and say the Lord's Prayer."

Down knelt the girls; and, with a little shuffling, scuffling, and pushing, down knelt the boys; and their voices followed Nessy's with one accord. At this propitious moment, Mr. Weir entered, and stood for an instant in pleased surprise; then knelt down too, and

added a strong "Amen!" and the benediction. The children rose, completely sobered, and then he arranged a few preliminaries, gave Nessy the class-book, took the boys under his own teaching, while she took the girls; and soon, as orderly, well-organized a little school was in full occupation as a benevolent teacher would wish to see.

When the church bells began to ring, Nessy rose and said, "Now I must go home, to go to church with my father; and I hope you will go too, and behave very nicely, and get good-conduct marks in the afternoon. I am so glad we have made such a nice beginning. Mind you come again in good time. Good-bye."

"Cannot you accompany them to church, Miss Saffery?" said Mr. Weir, coming up to her.

"No, sir. My father would miss me. I think they will be very good. They look as if they would. You will, won't you?"

"Yes," cried some of them.

"Suppose we finish with a hymn; with one verse of a hymn," said Mr. Weir; and he led the doxology.

Nessy entertained and interested her father on their way to church with an account of

their proceedings; and he was pleased at her taking so prominent a part, especially as it had not hindered her being his companion. He and Mrs. Saffery took it in turns to keep house, and he would not have liked to go to church alone.

Mr. Weir preached on "The poor ye have always with you;" and he observed that there were degrees of comparison between the poor, so that even the very poor could find those yet poorer, towards whom they could always exercise compassion—if not with money, with sympathy, assistance, and loving words. He spoke of the London poor, and their want of many things that even the poorest in country places scarcely knew the want of—want of light, of air, of drinkable water, of a drop of milk. He spoke of those "whose pity gave ere charity began"—whose instinctive compassion, that is, made them hasten to relieve, before charity, strictly speaking, had had time to operate; and he enforced compassion by reminding his hearers of what we all owed to a compassionate God.

It was preaching that none could sleep under; that the very poor listened to with as deep attention as their richer neighbours.

"And how did you like Mr. Weir to-day,

Saffery?" said Mrs. Saffery, as they sat at dinner.

"I wish more could have heard him," said Mr. Saffery. "It was what I may call an anecdotical sermon."

"Hum!—that sounds odd," said his wife.

"Odd or even, so it was. He gave us instances and cases . . . you might have heard a pin drop."

"Cases like what?"

"Well, he told us of a poor woman in Shoreditch, talking to him about her soul, and while they were talking, two little starving children kept plucking her apron and clamouring for food. She took part of a carrot out of her pocket, cut them each a slice off it, and put it in her pocket again. She had picked the carrot out of the gutter. It was all the food she had in the house."

"Tell mother about the old gentleman, father," said Nessy.

"He spoke of an old gentleman, from personal knowledge, who had given away twenty thousand pounds in acts of benevolence, and lived himself on a hundred and seventy pounds a year."

"Well, if Mr. Weir can tell things like that in his sermons," said Mrs. Saffery, "I expect he'll have plenty of listeners."

"I'll be bound to say," added Mr. Saffery, "that there was more substance in the sermon we heard this morning, than in all the sermons Dr. Fownes has preached in the whole course of his life."

"That's a good deal to say, too, Saffery."

"I say it, though, and I mean it."

The afternoon school was almost as satisfactory as the morning, though a few boys absented themselves. All had good-conduct marks. They began and ended with singing hymns; and they had Scripture questions, and a little reading, and Nessy read them a short story.

She felt at night that it had not been a day of rest to her, but a very happy day. Mr. Weir had lent her a very interesting book; it was "Mendip Annals;" and as she read it by snatches during the week, the doings of the brave-hearted Patty More fired her with generous emulation.

Mr. Weir was gone, and Mrs. Homer was coming; so no more reading, at present, for

Nessy. Mrs. Homer came down on Saturday afternoon, looking as pensive and sweetly pretty as before, and the railway porter brought her luggage on his barrow. Mrs. Saffery was rather put out at her not having written to tell her what to provide for her Sunday dinner, or whether she would want to dine on her arrival. Mrs. Homer smiled sweetly, and said it was not of the least consequence, she was never very hungry, and had had some bread and butter; she could wait very well for tea.

Would she like something with her tea?

"A little fruit."

Mrs. Saffery did not know of any fruit but apples.

Apples were smiled at, silently. "Prawns?"

Mrs. Saffery, dismayed, assured her there were no prawns. Would she have a chop?

Head shaken. "Oh, it did not at all signify. She never minded."

Would she like an egg?

Well, yes, she thought eggs would do—they were very simple. Or a little preserve. Either. She never cared.

What would she like for to-morrow?

Oh, anything there was. A chicken, a rabbit,

a little bit of fish, a slice of their own hot joint. She left it entirely to Mrs. Saffery.

"Fish on a Sunday!" muttered Mrs. Saffery, as she returned to her own quarters: "where can this lady have lived? Oh, at Cromer, to be sure, where you might catch fish, perhaps, from your parlour window. And we've nothing but a beefsteak pie. I don't suppose she'll touch that. Do ask her, Nessy, when you go up, whether she will have pie or a chicken. Get yes or no from her, if you can. I hate yea-and-nay persons that don't care, and leave it to you, and end by fixing on the most unaccountable things. In an inland place like this, one never gets fish, unless from London; though a man comes round, indeed, once in a way, with herrings and mackerel."

Here the bell rang violently, and Nessy flew up stairs to answer it. Mrs. Homer was in her bedroom on her knees before a trunk.

"Did I make that abominable noise?" said she, sweetly. "I had no idea the bell would ring so easily. Do forgive me."

Nessy assured her there was nothing to forgive.

"I cannot untie this cord. The knot is so

tight, it will break my nails. Is there a man in the house?"

"My papa is out," said Nessy; "but I dare-say I can do it."

"Oh, I don't like to ask you. The porter should have done it. So stupid not to ask him." (All this while Nessy was at work, tooth and nail.) "There! you've broken *your* nail now. Does it bleed? will you have my nail-scissors? Please, don't strain yourself. The box may just as well remain where it is till the morning."

"But to-morrow is Sunday," suggested Nessy, "and you may stumble over it if it is left here."

"Ah, then, to-morrow being Sunday, I must unpack it for my books. One depends so on a book on Sunday."

Nessy, learning the contents of the box, tugged at the cord with the more zeal, and at length got it off. Then there was a hunt for the key. It could not be found; but Mrs. Homer said she did not mind.

"My mamma desired me to ask," said Nessy, "whether you would like beefsteak pie for dinner to-morrow, or—"

"Oh, I should like beefsteak pie, of all things!"

This was quite a relief; but when Mrs. Homer added that she should prefer dining after the second service, Nessy was in trouble, for this would involve the whole family's dining late too, which she knew her father would not consent to. So she had to make an embarrassed explanation; but Mrs. Homer set all to rights by assuring her that it did not in the least signify, she did not mind.

"When one visits Arcadia," said she, "one must do as the Arcadians do."

Nessy thought this a lovely metaphor, and went down stairs quite pleased.

"She is certainly very sweet-tempered, mamma," said she, "for she accommodated herself to our hours directly."

"All the better for both parties," said Mrs. Saffery. "Take out a pot of black currant jam, Nessy. I have boiled her two eggs, so she can have her choice."

Mrs. Homer's choice was something like Nelson's coxswain's, for she disposed of it all, in such a sentimental, meditative way, that she seemed eating in a fit of absence. "You

need not wait," said she sweetly to Nessy; "I can't bear to trouble you."

So, though Nessy could truly have said the trouble was a pleasure, she did as she was bid, shut the door after her, and never was chid. And when she cleared the table, there remained on it two empty egg-shells, an empty bread-and-butter plate, and empty jelly-pot.

"Well, that young lady *was* hungry," Mrs. Saffery observed, smiling.

Mrs. Homer found the key of her book-box, and spent some hours in unpacking it and arranging her clothes.

"Do go and ask her, Nessy, for the sheets and spoons," said Mrs. Saffery. "It's no good keeping up this nice airing-fire till midnight. Your father wants to be in bed."

Then want must be his master, or he must go to bed some hours before the rest of his family, for Mrs. Homer remained reading a book she had opened, as she sat on the floor, till it was too dark to see, and then she rang for lights, and reclined on the couch that had "no repose" till between eleven and twelve o'clock.

"That young lady must have got an exciting book, seemingly," said Mrs. Saffery.

"I don't think she has a book," said Nessy. "She did not bring one down."

"Whatever is she doing, then?"

"Thinking, I believe," said Nessy.

"Thinking!" exclaimed Mr. Saffery. "Really, that's too bad. I shall go to Bedfordshire." And he proceeded to shut the shutters with much clangour.

"Do go and ask her, Nessy, if she'll take anything," said Mrs. Saffery, losing patience.

"Bid her take my advice, and take herself to bed," said Mr. Saffery, softly.

The answer, in a drowsy voice, to Nessy's inquiry, was—

"Nothing, thank you, Thomas."

"Ma'am?" said Nessy.

"Dear me, I believe I have been dozing," said Mrs. Homer. "What a thief there is in the candle! Is it bed-time?"

"It is rather past *our* usual bedtime, ma'am. Nearly twelve o'clock."

"Ah, well," said she, rising and twinkling her eyelids. "I must learn Arcadian hours. All 'beauty sleep,' you know, is before twelve o'clock."

And smiling good-night at Nessy, she took

up a bedroom candle and went towards the door.

"What o'clock shall I call you, ma'am?"

"Oh, to-morrow is Sunday. Say, nine o'clock."

Nine o'clock? and the Sunday school was to open at half-past! Arcadian hours, indeed!

When Nessy, with very lengthened face, told her mother what orders she had received, Mrs. Saffery said, with great resolution,—

"It don't signify, Nessy. I'm not going to have my household rules and regulations upset for any stranger, however die-away and pretty she may be. Duties is duties; and you having pledged yourself, as one may say, to stick by the school till Mr. Weir came back, stick to it you must. So you'll just breakfast on bread and milk to-morrow, and be off to the children, and I'll wait on Mrs. Homer."

"Thank you, mother!"

"I wonder," said Mr. Saffery, with a gleam of mischief in his sleepy eyes, "whether the lady will be disturbed by the mail-bag in the middle of the night."

But no! though the guard thumped and thundered as usual, Mrs. Homer slept the sleep

of an Arcadian, and never turned on her pillow. Nor, till—

> "Lapdogs give themselves the rousing shake
> Did the sleepless lady just at twelve awake ;—"

and found it wanted only an hour to dinner. She said "it would be a farce to get breakfast for her—she would just have a draught of new milk and a biscuit."

New milk, of course, was not within reach at that hour, nor had Mrs. Saffery any biscuits but twelve-a-penny, which Nessy had bought for the tiniest of her pupils. However, Mrs. Homer said it did not in the least signify ; and she dressed very leisurely, and strolled round the little garden with a parasol, and, one way and another, killed time till people came out of church.

It must here be mentioned, rather too late, that on the previous evening, while unpacking her books, Mrs. Homer, on coming to her prayer-book, had said carelessly to Nessy—

"Does that young clergyman—Mr. Weir, I think you call him—preach to-morrow morning ? "

"No, ma'am," said Nessy, "he is away at present ;" on hearing which, Mrs. Homer looked

rather blank. It may therefore be conjectured that, if she had heard he would officiate, she might so far have overcome her torpor as to get up in time for church; but this must be one of those questions which are to remain for ever unsolved.

When honest Mr. Saffery, with shining face and erect head, marched churchwards with Nessy at his side, he said—

"Your mother has lost her turn this morning, owing to our curiosity of a lodger, in spite of her providing a meat pie that I might have no trouble about dinner. However, what's her loss is my gain, though we shan't have Mr. Weir: I don't forget what he said last Sunday, that church is not the parson's house, but the house of God."

Nessy's character was now rapidly developing under the force of circumstances, though they were of the simplest kind; and when she waited on Mrs. Homer at dinner, there was such animation in her happy face, that it attracted that lady's notice, and she said—

"You look very bright, Miss Saffery."

"I feel very bright, ma'am," said Nessy. "I have had such a happy morning."

"What has tended to make it so?"

"Going to the Sunday-school, ma'am, which I had all to myself, in Mr. Weir's absence."

"Dear me, that must have been very arduous."

"It was rather so, but the children were very good."

"It must be stupid work, surely, to be a teacher in a Sunday-school. You can scarcely have a day of rest."

"It does interfere with absolute rest, certainly," said Nessy; "but I hope it is not, therefore, breaking God's commandment, since it is doing His work. You know our Saviour Himself decided that we might do good on the Sabbath day."

"Ah, yes—yes, indeed," said Mrs. Homer.

By way of doing good on the Sabbath day, Mrs. Homer afterwards strayed to a warm, sheltered bank, embowered in ivy, where she enjoyed the *dolce far niente,* and occasionally turned the leaves of a little gilt-edged volume, bound in pink watered silk, called "Sighs for Every Day in the Week," by Clementillo Sospiroso.

CHAPTER XV.

SACRED MUSIC.

TOWARDS dusk Mrs. Homer found a Sabbath-evening employment for herself. The Safferys were sitting meditatively together, expecting her to ring for candles, and Mr. Saffery was dozing a little, when all at once they heard a subdued sound like this—

Twing! Twing! Twing!

"Why, goodness, if she hasn't gone and unpacked her 'arp of a Sunday!" cried Mrs. Saffery. "What would Mr. Weir say to that, I wonder?"

"Mr. Weir said King David played the harp," said Nessy.

"That doesn't sound to me," said Mr. Saffery, waking up, "one of Mr. Weir's profoundest observations."

This solo was followed by its symphony—

Twing—twing—twing—

and then the music ceased.

"Come, she hasn't given us much of it," said Mrs. Saffery, after a pause, "and an 'arp is a sacred species of music."

"I like the tone," said Nessy.

"Yes," said Mr. Saffery, "it makes a kind of rumbustion in the atmosphere, that you can feel as well as hear. I wonder if the lady is a Roman Car-tholic."

"If I found she was," said Mrs. Saffery, "away she should go. I don't want any pro-verts in *my* house. Have you seen any cruci-fixes or images about the rooms, Nessy?"

"No, mamma. Oh, I don't think there's any danger. She seemed to wish to hear Mr. Weir."

"Mr. Weir, if he has a mind to, may do her a mint of good," said Mrs. Saffery. Then, after a little thought, "If this lady, now, would give you a few lessons on the 'arp, as Mr. Antony did in painting, you'd be a finished young lady."

Nessy turned quite red at the thought.

"Oh, mamma, don't think of it!" said she, imploringly.

"Why not? Mrs. Homer is not superior in her line to Mr. Antony in his, I fancy; so why should she be above it?"

"Mr. Antony was glad of a little ready-money."

"And why shouldn't Mrs. Homer be?"

"No, my dear, no; you've no reason to suspect that," said Mr. Saffery. "Time enough for that when she doesn't pay her bills."

"I'm certain I could never bear to play the harp," said Nessy. "Drawing is a nice, quiet employment, and may be carried on out of sight, but music can never be practised out of hearing."

"Well, and if people do hear?"

"Oh, I couldn't bear it! I don't know that I've any ear."

"You've a pretty little pipe of your own," said Mr. Saffery. "I thought so this morning when you were warbling beside me."

"I don't know that I've any finger."

"There *may* be something in that," rejoined he, reflectively. "A great deal is required of the little finger in harp-playing, or else nothing at all—I forget exactly which. Your fingers may not be adaptuated to instrumentation. I've heard tell of people whose fingers were all thumbs."

"But if Mrs. Homer were to look at her

fingers," insisted Mrs. Saffery, "she would know directly whether they would do for fingering."

"Well, my dear, we hardly know how Mrs. Homer herself plays yet."

This struck Mrs. Saffery with the force of truth. At the same instant the bell rang, and Nessy, taking the liberty of guessing what it rang for, carried in candles. In doing so she tripped over the old sacking and blanket that lay in a heap just inside the parlour-door, and the candles nearly alighted in Mrs. Homer's lap. As soon as this was apologised for and forgiven, Mrs. Homer expressed a wish to see Mr. Saffery. Nessy, having carried off the wraps, told him. Never was man more surprised.

"Want to see *me?*" said he, turning red, and settling his shirt-collar a little. "Are you sure she didn't mean your mother?"

"Quite sure," said Nessy.

"She must have something to complain of," said he, rather uneasily, adding to himself, "I'm sure I hope she hasn't heard our little remarks."

It required all the force of character he possessed to enter the lady's presence without visible trepidation. She had placed the two

candles on the chimneypiece before the little looking-glass, so that he said afterwards they were equal to the light of four, and it seemed exactly like going into company.

"Don't shut the door, Nessy," said Mrs. Saffery, in a loud whisper; "it's as much as my virtue is equal to, not to make use of the keyhole."

"Do you ever drive, Mr. Saffery?" said Mrs. Homer, sweetly.

"*Drive*, ma'am?" repeated he, at his wit's end.

"Yes—a little pony-carriage of any kind."

"Never, ma'am, never! I'm not the least of a whip. When I married Mrs. Saffery, I drove her in a one-horse shay and spilt her."

"Dear me! what a mercy she was preserved! But is there anything of the kind to let here by the day or hour?"

"No doubt, ma'am, though hacks are not much in request here, because, you see, the real gentry keep their own carriages, and the gentry that—in short, there's no great choice; but, certainly, there's a little basket-carriage at the Swan, only its near-wheel is mostly off."

"That's dangerous, is not it?"

"Well, ma'am, if it did come down, you wouldn't fall far; and the pony'd be right glad to stand still directly you said 'Woe!'"

"Well, then, I think I might try that. I want to see the environs."

"The what, ma'am?"

"The neighbourhood. I suppose you have some pretty drives, green lanes, glimpses of country-seats, and so forth?"

"Yes, ma'am, yes, to be sure," answered he, briskly. And, opening so unexpectedly on a subject with which he was perfectly familiar, he talked rapidly and with great pleasure to himself, to the satisfaction of his lodger and the amusement and curiosity of Mrs. Saffery, who could only catch a word now and then. He returned with a broad smile on his face.

"Well," said he, after cautiously shutting the door, "she's a nice, pleasant-spoken lady, when you come to know a little of her, that's a fact."

"You're captivated, Saffery, *that's* the fact."

"Stuff! She's a very fine woman, though; and what with the instrument and the lights, and all together, I hardly knew the parlour."

"Well, what was it all about?"

"She wants to hire a carriage and explore the neighbourhood, and she asked about the drives; so I told her of a few—that was all. Nessy, it's getting late, and I'm growing sleepy."

Presently Mrs. Homer's bell rang again. After a little delay Nessy answered it.

"Were you reading aloud?"

"Family prayers, ma'am."

"You seem to be very good people—*very* good. Well, I shall not want anything more to-night. It's getting late, isn't it?—Only half-past nine? Well, I shall have the more beauty-sleep."

At half-past ten next morning the little basket-carriage stood at the door, and Mrs. Homer presently stepped into it. Mrs. Saffery had implored her either to expressly order her dinners herself, or to give her authority to provide for her; on which she said—

"Well, then, let me have a plain mutton-cutlet, with tomato-sauce; and a simple rice-pudding, flavoured with vanille."

"But, dear me! where shall I get the tomatos and vanille?" said Mrs. Saffery.

"O, never mind. I don't in the least care.

I'm never very hungry. A slice of bread-and-butter, whenever I come in. What are you going to have yourselves?"

"Nothing you could touch, ma'am, I'm sure! Just what is in house, and a few sprats."

"Sprats! how very amusing. I should like to try them, by all means. I don't know the taste of a sprat. Are they dear?"

"Goodness me, no, ma'am! You may get them, sometimes, sixty a penny."

"Oh, how amusing. Do buy me a pennyworth. I shall not want more than six. You may have the rest yourselves."

"Oh, ma'am, you may have some of ours, and welcome; we shall never miss them. And I'll provide the cutlet and pudding too, only I'm afraid you can't have vanille."

The little boy jerked the pony's rein as she spoke, and the rejoinder jerked out of Mrs. Homer's roseate lips was, "Never mind!"

She was absent some hours, and came home delighted with her drive, and with the pretty, *pretty* places she had seen—but with a fearful headache; a headache that prevented her

reckoning up the money she owed for the carriage with anything like accuracy; and, then, as she half whispered across the counter,

"How much was she to give—Lubin?"

"What you please, ma'am," said Mr. Saffery, when he understood what she meant.

"Will fourpence be enough? Sixpence?"

"Well, ma'am, these boys get spoilt by the gentry. I believe a shilling will be nearer the mark, considering you've been out all the morning."

And Lubin did not seem at all overpowered by the munificence of the benefaction. Indeed, Mrs. Homer had certainly had her shilling's-worth for her shilling, for she had extracted a surprising amount of information from him concerning the people and affairs of the neighbourhood. Yet every inquiry was so plaintive, that she never gave the least idea of a gossip. During dinner she told Nessy a little of where she had been, what she had seen, and what she had learnt, so placidly and pleasantly, that Nessy was more than ever impressed in her favour. Placidity was the order of the evening; Mrs. Homer was completely tired, and was just in the condition to enjoy a book on the couch

which yielded no repose. And the book was a sensation novel.

"I believe she wants to settle among us," said Nessy to her parents.

"Why, isn't she settled among us already?"

"No; she says this would never do for a permanence; she wants more accommodation, more space. Not that she wants to receive her friends, for her passion is solitude; but she would like a place where she *could* receive them suitably, if she wished."

"Nessy, you talk like a printed book!"

"I remember her exact words, because I thought she expressed herself so nicely."

"She *does* express herself nicely," said Mr. Saffery, with decision. "She's quite the gentlewoman."

"I wonder how long she has been a widow," said Mrs. Saffery. "I wonder what her husband was."

By the end of the week they all seemed to understand each other, and they got on very comfortably, though Mrs. Saffery's indirect questions and feelers had not thrown any light on Mrs. Homer's antecedents. When she said—

"So young a lady as you, ma'am, must have suffered much, to be so early widowed."

She was checked at once with—

"Excuse me; there are some subjects so tender, that it is best not to enter on them."

And this was said so sweetly and plaintively, that Mrs. Saffery felt herself a grievous sinner for having wounded her, though there were no tears in the soft eyes under the drooping eyelids.

As for the harp, it was not much heard. It took so much tuning, that by the time it was tuned, the tuner was tired; and then the cover was put on again. Nor was it a great beauty; it was a small, single-actioned harp, very old-fashioned and tarnished; so that it was more ornamental in its handsome cover than out of it. Its tone, however, was very good; it had a good sounding-board, partly because it was old and the varnish was covered with an infinity of small cracks, through which the sound oozed. Again, Mrs. Homer kept it very loosely strung, as the wandering harpers do who go about the streets, both to save the strings from breaking, and because it was much easier to sing to a harp considerably under concert

pitch. Mrs. Homer, however, said she "never sang now."

Mrs. Saffery had less trouble now in the commissariat department, because, as she said, she had found that, though Mrs. Homer was much given to ask for extraor'nary things, she was quite content with what was or'nary; especially with a little garnish. She really was, as she had declared herself, easy to please when it came to the point; and though she frequently had the air of having much to complain of, she never complained; was never scorney.

Though she said she considered her lodging "only a temporary little lodge in the wilderness," yet this little lodge was now considerably embellished by the hand of taste. Some very pretty tablecovers, mats, penwipers, and little ornaments were produced from her stores; the muslin curtain was better hung; fresh flowers were introduced in profusion; an Affghan blanket in process of knitting formed a gorgeous bit of colour on the couch; and a globe with two gold fish gleamed in the sun. All these little elegances took up much of Mrs. Homer's time; she was evidently fonder of

arranging and re-arranging them, than of reading, working, or writing. Her stock of books was not very ample, after all; it comprised gaily-bound volumes of engravings, landscape annuals, and poems, which were laid out in due form on the table, and a good many works of fiction, French and English, too unornamental to be brought down stairs till after dark.

One day she made preparations in great state for colouring a sketch, but, after getting her paints ready, and talking very artistically to Nessy, she discovered that she should like a walk, and the paint-box was closed. She now dined at a little side-table, that her books and knick-knacks might not be disturbed; but the word "dinner" was tabooed. "She didn't dine, she never cared for dinner; she lunched at one, and had tea and a little fruit at six." Fruit was generally represented by a roasted apple, and sometimes by a baked apple dumpling. "*What's* in a name?" why, a good deal, we all know.

One day, when, to give some order to Mrs. Saffery, she stepped into the back-parlour, she saw a little sketch on the table, and said in surprise—

"That's very nicely done—who did it?"

"Our Nessy, ma'am," said Mrs. Saffery, much gratified; "she's a great one for her pencil."

"What a nice touch she has! Dear me, how curious that she should have such a talent. So quiet about it, too! I never had the least idea. —Self-taught?"

"No, ma'am; she had the best of teaching—from Mr. Antony."

"Mr. Antony! Dear me; did he condescend to give her lessons? I should never have supposed it."

"Mr. Antony, ma'am, is above giving lessons as a general rule; he objected at first, but he saw Nessy had talent—genius, indeed, he called it—and so we came to an arrangement, and he brought her very forward indeed, considering the short time. She did *this* with him, ma'am, and *this*," pointing to Nessy's millboard studies suspended against the wall.

"What, can she paint in oils? Dear me, how very singular!" Then, after a little pause, "Your daughter must be a superior person, Mrs. Saffery; perhaps older than she looks."

"Only fourteen, ma'am."

"Oh, then she looks older than she is!"

After this there was a marked difference in her manner to Nessy, which Nessy felt very gratifying, though she did not guess its origin.

Another Sunday came and went. There were considerable additions to the number of Sunday scholars; and, to Nessy's great joy, Mr. Weir made his appearance among them, though his stay was only to be from Saturday to Monday. His presence seemed to wind them all up; but there were really too many girls for a single class, so a subdivision was made, and a great girl of twelve years old, Susan Potter, was installed its teacher, to her own great elation. She performed her part exceedingly well. All were orderly and obedient, not a single black mark was yet entered in the awful book, consisting of a quire of mourning note-paper, with broad black borders, which, in a black leather cover, was known as the black book. Mr. Weir's teachings increased in spirituality as they proceeded. He began with a short extempore prayer, and then invited the boys to find and read aloud sundry texts relating to prayer and its answer; and, by reiterated efforts, in his earnest, winning way, he got them to see, understand, and feel some-

thing of the wonderful compassion of God in being actually more willing to hear than we to pray. After exemplifying it in one way and another, by illustrations suited to their capacities, he looked about on them with a hearty, "Now, is not it wonderful, boys?" And there was genuine sincerity in the sober reply of some of them. "Yes, it's very wonderful, sir."

Afterwards he spoke some encouraging words to Nessy and to Susan Potter, and, as they left the schoolroom, he asked Nessy if she had been confirmed.

"Not yet, sir; I was too young at our last confirmation."

"Well, you will not be too young for the next. Let your preparation for it begin from this hour. Be in a state of preparedness."

"I hardly know what to do, sir."

"The Bible will assist you, if you seek it for information. I do not want to bind you down by slavish rules; but I shall soon settle in my new home, and will give you a little hint and help from time to time."

CHAPTER XVI.

CLASSES.

Mrs. Homer prevailed upon herself to get ready for church in time to walk up the aisle just as Dr. Fownes entered the reading-desk. Poor Dr. Fownes was very feeble now, and his reading was so indistinct, that it was a penalty to hear him; yet he thought himself bound in duty to persist in what many people would have been pleased at his giving up. The singing was of the most primitive kind, led by a flageolet. It was a relief when Mr. Weir's fine voice was heard at the communion-table; and Mrs. Homer, who had furtively been scanning the gayer portion of the congregation with pensive glances, suddenly concentrated her attention. It was very fortunate for her, she thought, that the pew-opener had placed her in a seat immediately opposite the pulpit, so that she would have every advantage in hearing the sermon; and

directly it began, she fixed those soft, dark eyes of hers so attentively on Mr. Weir, that, if he had happened to notice her, it might have put him out; but happily his eager looks seemed to seek out his congregation in every direction but hers. He was very full of his subject, which was on the text, "Hearken, ye careless daughters;" and as there were many careless daughters in church, some of them felt the address to be personal, and bridled up, while others humbly took it home, and resolved, for the moment at least, that it should do them good; and others, careless heretofore, were careless now, and never even heard the rebukes addressed to careless womanhood in general, but composedly carried on other trains of thought. There could be no doubt that the congregation had become very slothful; and the young clergyman, in his desire to carry out sweeping reforms, was exerting almost too much force at the first start. Yet he undoubtedly commanded attention; many who were accustomed regularly to 'lay up their feet and think of nothing,' listened to him with earnest and somewhat uneasy inquiry in their faces, while the very tones which enchained

their half-unwilling ears acted at length as a soporific on Mrs. Homer, whose white lids gradually closed over her eyes in soft repose. Raising those fringed lashes after a time with a little start, she met Nessy's eyes, as ill-luck would have it, and instantly tried to look innocent. Nessy was perhaps more ashamed of catching her napping than she was of being caught, and for some minutes neither could think of anything else.

Nor would Mrs. Homer's conscience let the matter rest. At dinner, she said to Nessy—

"Mr. Weir is a very powerful preacher,—a very interesting man. I can't think how it was that the latter part of his sermon made me so lethargic. It is a mistake, I think, to make sermons so long. Perhaps I should keep up my attention better if I used tablets. Who were those pretty girls in pink?"

"The Miss Grevilles, ma'am."

"Oh! And who was the lady with the blue and white feather?"

"Mrs. Poyntz, ma'am."

"There was rather an elegant woman in a black lace shawl."

"Lady Clive, ma'am."

"Lady Clive? Oh, indeed! What, of Belforest Park?"

"Yes, ma'am."

And in this way she went idly on, without considering that she was detaining the family from their dinner.

The evenings were drawing in now, and after they were shut in for the night, she sought solace in her harp, and felt her way through Martin Luther's hymn, pausing between each chord—

"While one with moderate haste might count a hundred,"

but never playing a false note, and making the air vibrate with melody.

"Very harmonious," said Mr. Saffery, at the conclusion, after listening intently with his hands on his knees, and his head a little on one side.

"One would like to know a little more about that young lady," observed Mrs. Saffery, and to be sure that all's right."

"All's right?" repeated her husband; "why, what should be wrong? Don't go and take away an innocent young person's good name by hoping that all's right. Many a fair fame has been tarnished by innuendos like that."

"Dear me, Saffery! I really was thinking no harm. You took me up too short."

"Well, I didn't mean to do that; but you should be cautious what you say. Wasn't she recommended to us by Miss Antony? And we know who she corresponds with—Miss Crow, of Ipswich, and Messrs. Root and Branche, Lincoln's Inn. There can't be anything to sound more respectable than that."

"I wonder if Miss Antony really did send her, though," said Mrs. Saffery. "We've only her own word for it."

"Betsy, I'm ashamed of you," said Mr. Saffery, with asperity. "Is this fit for Sunday evening talk? I shall go and stamp the letters."

And soon was heard the clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, with more energy and determination than ever.

"I'm sure I wish I'd bit my tongue before ever I spoke," said Mrs. Saffery. "This comes of having music practising on Sundays, just as if there were not six week-day evenings for tweedle-deeing. Nessy, you've one of your bad headaches, I can see. That comes of the Sunday-schooling."

"My head does ache a little," said Nessy; "but it was not so bad till you and my papa had words."

"Words?" repeated Mrs. Saffery. "I really wonder, sometimes, at the unfounded things people go and say. What words did your father and I have, pray? He told me to be cautious, and I said I was thinking no harm. Sure, such remarks as those may pass between a husband and wife without their being accused of having words. Don't you ever go, Nessy, and make mischief between husband and wife, and, least of all, between your father and mother."

Nessy brushed away a tear.

"Your head won't be better till you've had a good night's sleep, depend upon it," said Mrs. Saffery, in a softer tone. "I begin to regret that I ever let you go to the Sunday-school."

"Oh, mother!"

"Yes, Nessy, because it is very hard work; and though its increasing so fast shows how much it was needed, the burthen is too heavy on you. Why should *you* be the only unpaid fag? I'm sure that every word Mr. Weir said

to-day applied to the Miss Grevilles and Miss Sturt and Miss Badger and Miss Hornblower, and not a bit of impression did it make—they were laughing and giggling directly they got outside the churchyard; and there was somebody, who is not a hundred miles off, that had a comfortable nap."

Nessy was sorry her mother had seen it, but could not help smiling. Mrs. Saffery saw the smile.

"Come," said she, "take your Bible and read a chapter to me, for my eyes don't bear much reading now; and after that you may bring out the cold meat for supper."

Mr. Saffery came in as Nessy was in the middle of her chapter, and reverently sat down and listened, with his head inclining a little towards her. Those good words were very solemnizing and edifying to them all. And then they gathered round rather a better supper than usual, and ate it cheerfully and thankfully.

"Saffery, here's just such a little brown bit as you prefer."

"You have it."

"No; I've enough on my plate. Come, you

can find room for this. Nessy, there's the parlour-bell."

Nessy went and returned.

"What is the lady doing?" (in an undertone.)

"Writing."

Mr. Saffery could not help saying, with a little malice—

"If that had been a proper inquiry, you needn't have dropped your voice."

"There was nothing improper in it."

"Suppose she were to ask what *we* were about."

"She did, last Sunday, and I heard Nessy's answer—'Family prayers.'"

"Nothing to be ashamed of, at any rate."

"No; I thought it set a good lesson."

"Why, how *can* she have family prayers when she's all by herself?" cried Mr. Saffery. "The unreasonableness of women! I don't think you've one bit of compassion for your sex. If you were bereaved, or bereft, whichever is the right word, like that young creature, would you like sitting evening after evening by yourself, all the long evenings, by the light of two mould sixes, without a creature to speak

a word of comfort or to think a kind thought of you?"

"No, Saffery, I shouldn't. I hope that will never be my case, my good man."

"Pity her whose case it is, then."

"I do, in a way, and I should do so more, if I knew how much she pitied herself. Somehow, she seems to have those soft looks and little sighs at command. I never see her with red eyes. This couldn't be the case (unless she were a flint), if she had lost such a husband as you, Saffery."

"Ah! such as me don't grow on every bush," said he, holding his hand to her and giving hers a good squeeze. "We've jogged on many a year, old lady, and shall, I hope, jog on a many more. But howsoever many, there must come the last of them at last."

The tender fall in his voice, and Mrs. Saffery's moistened eyes, were very touching to Nessy.

Next morning, when Mr. Weir brought his letters to post, he stepped into the shop, and said—

"Good morning, Miss Saffery. You had one of your bad headaches yesterday, I could

see. It shall not occur again if I can provide against it. You shall have plenty of help next Sunday."

"Oh, sir, I don't want any!" cried Nessy, in alarm. "I'd much rather go on by myself."

"Why, you're like the man in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' who wanted to play all the parts himself. How can you carry on four classes? And four classes there will be, besides mine, counting the little tots, who must form a separate class till we get an infant-school."

Nessy looked much disturbed.

"Have you secured any other teachers, then, sir?"

"The Miss Grevilles have sent in their names. Is Mrs. Homer at home?"

Nessy replied that she was.

"Take her this card, then, and say I shall be obliged if she can grant me a few minutes on business. Say that I would not intrude on her so early, but that I return to London by the 12·30 train."

Nessy obeyed; and returned, saying very gravely, that Mrs. Homer would be happy to

see him. She showed him in, and saw Mrs. Homer's look of distant politeness as she rose and gravely bowed. Then she closed the door on them, and resumed her needlework, thinking that an important interview was about to take place. Her headache came on again.

Whether the interview were important or not, Mr. Weir appeared not to care about its being public, for he spoke in such an animated tone, that it seemed as if it would have been easy to Nessy to hear every word he said, though that was just what she either could not do or was too honourable to do. Mrs. Homer's soft voice was scarcely audible. Meanwhile, the mid-day post came in, and there was the usual bustle in the shop. Just as the London mail-bag was sent off, and the Safferys were in the midst of their sorting the letters that had arrived, Mr. Weir opened the parlour-door, saying, cheerfully—

"Well, then, I shall depend on you. I shall expect great things. Don't be diffident. It will all come easy, you will see. There is nothing to discourage. You will take great interest in it in a little time. You know

where to—" (lowering his voice, and stepping back to say a few earnest words).

"Ah, yes!—yes, indeed!"

Then they shook hands, and he passed rapidly through the shop, saying to Nessy, with a smile—

"The train is almost due, and I have no time to lose. But I've secured another ally."

And she could but call up a smile in return, though she felt it no smiling matter.

"What did he mean by ally?" said Mrs. Saffery, when he was gone.

"He meant that he has got Mrs. Homer to try to teach in the Sunday-school," said Nessy, "and the Miss Grevilles are going to take classes."

"Then he has done a good morning's work," said Mrs. Saffery, with strong approval. "Think of his getting the Miss Grevilles to condescend! Your head will have a better chance now; and I'm glad in my heart that Mrs. Homer is going to try her hand at something useful."

"But," said Nessy, in a very low voice, "I don't believe she'll do a bit of good; it is not in her way. I don't think the children will

mind her when they find she can't teach them."

"Why can't she teach them?"

Nessy did not like to say; but her mother *would* have an answer.

"She is very sweet and gentle," said Nessy; "but I don't fancy her to care much for little children, or for Scripture teaching."

"Well, time will show," said Mrs. Saffery, who was not at all disposed to quarrel with the arrangement. "It will get her up earlier in the morning for one thing; and if she finds her deficiencies, she'll be less set up."

"As for my head, I believe it will be all the worse instead of the better for it," said Nessy. "There will be such a chatter, it will be all confusion."

"Don't go and meet troubles half-way, Nessy. Here comes Mr. Greville's four-in-hand."

The open carriage, with two or three pretty, lady-like girls in it, drew up for a moment, while the footman descended from his perch to inquire for their letters. Having received them, he delivered them to the ladies, who began reading them as they drove off.

Nessy, going into the parlour to lay the cloth, found Mrs. Homer pensively leaning on her hand near the window.

"That was a stylish turn-out," said she, looking round. "The Grevilles?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"They are elegant girls. Do you know their Christian names?"

"Emily and Sophia."

"How charming! Do they visit any one here?"

"Oh, no, ma'am! They're quite in a class above the village. They call on Mrs. Fownes sometimes."

"Mr. Weir is awakening in them an interest for the poor. He lunched with them yesterday on purpose. And he met Lady Clive and talked to her about mothers' meetings. She did not know about them, and I can't say I do. He got the Miss Grevilles to undertake classes at the Sunday-school. How zealous he is!"

"Very zealous!" said Nessy.

"He has offered me a class, too," said Mrs. Homer, "and as the Miss Grevilles have joined, I don't see why I should not accept it.

I suppose I ought to consider it a compliment. I tried to escape—told him I knew nothing—was quite an ignoramia—at which he only smiled."

"You will find it very interesting, ma'am," said Nessy, "when once you take it up heartily."

"It all depends," said she, languidly. "I don't know that I can take interest in anything of that kind now," she added, rather tardily.

During dinner, she asked Nessy to give her some idea of the routine. Nessy did her best, but did not make much of it; and Mrs. Homer, after a little meditation, observed that she thought it might be much better in the hands of a paid person.

"However," said she, "Mr. Weir has set his mind on it, and what he sets his mind on, we may be sure he will effect. Few could help conceding what he asked, he has such an interesting way with him. Do you think it will rain?"

"No, ma'am, I see no sign of it."

"Then let Roberto bring round the little carriage."

Finding the boy did not and would not answer to the name of Lubin, Mrs. Homer had been obliged to make his own name rather more Arcadian by adding an o final, at first sportively, and now habitually.

While she was out, a good-tempered looking old farmer, who might have sat or stood for the model of Ready-money Jack, called for a money-order, and likewise to ask his friend and gossip, Mr. Saffery, whether he had not a lodger named Homer.

"That I have," said Mr. Saffery. "D'ye know anything about her?"

"No," said Farmer Benson; "that's the very question I meant to put to you."

At which they both laughed.

"Oh! she's a nicish sort of lady," said Mr. Saffery. "Not at home this afternoon."

"No; I saw her go down street. Safe, I suppose? You had references?"

"Well, we didn't even ask for any," said Mr. Saffery, "because she came recommended—at least, she said she came recommended—by a prior lodger of ours—at least, the lodger's sister."

"That doesn't sound like much of a voucher," said the farmer, doubtfully.

"But she's as safe as the Bank, I believe."

"Which bank?" said Farmer Benson, quickly, for a country bank had lately broken, whereby he had sustained some loss.

They laughed again; and Mr. Saffery said, "The Bank of England was what I was thinking of. She pays regular, by the week; has done so ever since my good wife hinted to her the rule of former lodgers. She said, quite pleasantly, 'Oh! such is the custom of Branksome Hall, is it? It makes no difference to me. Never mind.'"

"Well, she has a pleasant way with her, that's a fact," said the farmer; "and bewidowed so young and all! I should think all was safe enough, only I thought I'd just inquire quietly; for, you see, she's thinking of taking land."

"Oh! is she?" said Mr. Saffery, with interest.

"Has been to me twice," said the farmer, "about a piece I can't nohow make over to her, because I get my very best wheat off it. I've told her she may have the pick of Brushworth and Stubblecroft, but she off-and-ons about them, because she says they're not picturskew."

"Does she want many acres?" said Mr. Saffery.

"Well, I can hardly make out what she does want," said Farmer Benson, "because she changes her mind so. Is that her natur'?"

"Why, I can scarcely tell," said Mr. Saffery; "for she has nothing to change her mind about here except her dinner, and she mostly begins by ordering what we can't in possibility get for her, and ends by putting up with whatever we have."

"Obliging, at any rate," said the farmer.

"Quite so. Oh! I think you needn't be afraid of her."

"Here comes our little painter," said Farmer Benson, holding out his broad hand to Nessy. He had bought the largest of her pictures.

"You had better come some afternoon," said he, "and see how well it looks over the mantel-piece."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE OLD LADY.

Nessy's forebodings were but too closely verified on Sunday morning. Punctually as she kept her appointment, there was a little cluster, not only of teachers, but of supernumeraries, in the middle of the schoolroom, talking very fast and all together, with their faces almost touching each other's bonnets. Around them, but at a respectful distance, stood knots of silent children, who seemed much surprised and discomfited at the presence of strangers. Nessy immediately formed a nucleus for these little stragglers, who, at a signal from her, instantly drew about her in a well-ordered semicircle, pressing closer to her than usual, that they might hear her gentle voice amid the confusion of tongues. The ladies stared at her, and then exchanged expressive looks and shrugs, as much as to say, "Is *this* the way our allotted charges

are to be taken from us? We *knew* it would be no use coming!" Then a party of boys, in thick boots, clattered in with much noise and little respect for fine ladies. Then Mrs. Homer darkened the doorway, looking curiously about her, and seeming in suspense whether to advance or retreat; then bestowing an arch look at Nessy, who greeted her with a smile of welcome, and quietly crossing the room to her. Every look, every step of her progress was noticed by the ladies, who silently scrutinized her from top to toe with open impertinence, and then huddled yet closer together to exchange remarks. Nessy had not supposed real ladies could be so ill-bred, and thought how much Mrs. Homer gained by comparison with them. She spoke to her in a low tone, and told her what there was to do, and how to do it; and while thus engaged, they started at Mr. Weir's clear, authoritative, somewhat aggrieved utterance of—

"Come, teachers!"

Dead silence. Then he gravely took his place and said,—

"Let us pray."

Down knelt boys and girls, Nessy and Mrs.

Homer; there was a prodigious rustling of silks, taken up that they might by no means come in contact with the floor, among the select specimens of the upper ten thousand, some of whom knelt in very uncomfortable and unusual attitudes. Mr. Weir prayed that a spirit of order, and unanimity, and humility, and heavenly-mindedness might prevail among them all, and that the blessed Spirit might not disdain to visit such lowly temples as their hearts, but might so fill them with its sweet and purifying influences, that there should be no room for any evil or trifling spirit to enter. One might have thought such a prayer might have sunk into all his intelligent assistants' hearts; and the Miss Grevilles did rise sobered; but their bevy of companions clustered round Mr. Weir directly they were off their knees, and tittered as one of them said—

"Oh, Mr. Weir, we're supernumeraries, please; we are not going to interfere with your work. We only came to keep the Miss Grevilles in countenance, and start them off."

He bent his head a little and said—

"We have no room for supernumeraries here, nor any need or time for those who do not work."

Rather abashed, they fluttered out of the school, whispering and giggling directly they crossed its threshold. The Miss Grevilles looked rather ashamed, and listened attentively to Mr. Weir's brief directions, which they immediately did their best to fulfil. He turned with a pleased look to Nessy and Mrs. Homer, each with her orderly little class before her, and said—

"*You* need no monition, either of you. I may look for unqualified, genuine help from *you*."

Mrs. Homer repaid him by her sweetest smile, and Nessy felt very happy. Now that the supernumeraries were dismissed, everything fell into order; there was a continuous hum, but it was easy to hear one's self speak, which, just before, had really not been the case.

"I am going to say a few words," began Mr. Weir. You might have heard a pin drop. He addressed them for a few minutes, explaining anew to them all why they were there, what they must keep in view, and in what spirit they must try to attain it. Then they all recommenced with fresh spirit, and Nessy began to be glad some of the burthen was

taken from her. She glanced now and then at Mrs. Homer, to see how she prospered, and observed her occasionally at fault. The children had read their little portion, and she did not seem to have many questions to ask. Once or twice they came to a dead stop. Then, after much consideration, she asked the little girl nearest to her—

"Who was Paul?"

No answer. "Can't you tell me who Paul was?" Not one of them could or would tell.

"He was an apostle—a very good man."

She yawned a little behind her glove. One after another all the children yawned. Nessy was in pain for her, and glad when Mr. Weir gave out the concluding hymn.

The Miss Grevilles were shy of singing in a Sunday-school. Nessy was shy of singing close to the Miss Grevilles. Mrs. Homer's self-possession stood her in good stead. She followed the lead very nicely, and then Nessy took courage, and then the Miss Grevilles took courage; and the blended voices sounded very sweetly. Then, after the benediction, the Miss Grevilles glanced at Mrs. Homer and Nessy,

and stood irresolute for a moment, but decided *not* to fraternize with them, and, with a little bow to Mr. Weir, flitted away. He looked after them, rather disappointed, and said to Mrs. Homer—

"I meant you to have made friends together, but another time will do."

"Oh, don't give it a thought; it doesn't in the least signify," said she, with her charming smile.

At Mrs. Homer's dinner, Nessy could not resist saying—

"I was so glad, ma'am, you led the singing so courageously! We were all very cowardly."

"Oh," said Mrs. Homer, "it did not require much confidence to sing to such an audience as *that.* I have had my courage more severely tried! And I did not think it worth while to throw my voice out—I just hummed a little, for the sake of the children."

"I knew," said Nessy, "that I was not singing to the Miss Grevilles, but—to the Lord; therefore it was wrong to feel ashamed, and I conquered it as soon as I could."

"Ah," said Mrs. Homer, carelessly, "I regret to say I did not take so high a view of the matter as you did."

"Are you not glad, ma'am, you went?"

"Well—yes—no—there was not much satisfaction in it. I knew I was pleasing Mr. Weir, so that supported me; but he did not know of the insulting contempt of those supernumeraries. I was glad to see them walk off."

"So was I, very glad indeed," said Nessy. "I wonder at their assurance in coming."

"Oh, there was nothing in it; and nothing to keep them out. I don't desire to meet them again. I should like to know the Miss Grevilles, I own."

"They had a great mind to speak, I think," said Nessy.

"And a greater mind not to speak. But I'm used to the ways of this curious world. I don't mind it; it does not in the least signify."

To refresh herself after her morning's toils, she took a long nap in the afternoon; and as the Miss Grevilles had already told Mr. Weir their mamma would not allow them to come to the school a second time in the day, Nessy rejoiced in having the afternoon classes entirely under the conduct of herself and Susan Potter, who had not been able to attend in the morning.

These two girls, one under fifteen, the other

turned twelve, had such zeal, sense, and goodness, that Mr. Weir might well entrust to them the chief weight of the school. For it is not always age that is needful to make a good teacher or a good nurse.

Nessy made friends with Susan Potter, the baker's daughter, for, thought she, though my mamma says my education places me above her, the Miss Grevilles are clearly much farther above me; and how pleased I should have been if they had given me, or even had only given Mrs. Homer, a kind word!

The following Sunday, the Miss Grevilles seemed rather ashamed of their exclusiveness, and made some advances. They came up to Nessy, whom they knew well by sight, and the eldest said rather gravely, but kindly—

"You are very constant at your work, Miss Saffery. You undertake more than we can do, in coming twice a day."

"I like coming," said Nessy, simply.

And after the classes were dismissed, the elder sister, closely followed by the younger, spoke to Mrs. Homer, and said—

"There has been good attendance to-day. How much the school was wanted!"

Mrs. Homer looked upwards and smiled; as much as to say—

"Oh, *so* wanted!"

Miss Emily Greville then took courage to say—

"It was rather embarrassing at first; but I get on better now, and like it."

"*So* embarrassing at first," said Mrs. Homer.

This was all that passed; and if there had been more, it would only have increased subsequent mortification; for Mrs. Greville, finding that her daughters had been guilty of these small amenities to a stranger and a nobody, told them "it would not do;" they must beware of entangling themselves in acquaintanceships they could not keep up: she had very reluctantly acceded to Mr. Weir's wish that they should take classes, and they must either keep their co-helpers at a proper distance, or give up their attendance.

So, the following Sunday, the Miss Grevilles made the stiffest, slightest inclination of the head when Mrs. Homer and Nessy came in, and abruptly engaged themselves with their pupils, to prevent the possibility of exchanging a word; feeling very uncomfortable, poor girls

in this strict obedience to orders, for they were young and thin-skinned. They left the school-room almost precipitately as soon as the classes broke up, to the keen mortification of Mrs. Homer, who had intended the opening already made to be improved. She said at dinner to Nessy—

"Those Miss Grevilles are inconsistent girls, I think; one never knows where to have them. Last Sunday they spoke civilly; to-day they would scarcely bow. It makes the attendance very unpleasant, when one is subjected to such slights. However, I don't mind it, that's one comfort!"

Nessy had put Mrs. Homer more *au courant* with respect to the routine, so that she now got through her duty not discreditably; but as her heart was not really in it, it was rather unimproving and irksome to her scholars and herself. Sometimes, on returning from a walk, she would say, "I returned by way of Fairlee Common, and stood looking at your cottage, Miss Saffery. 'Tis a pretty, *pretty* place: I only wish it were mine. I have seen nothing that has taken my fancy so much; and building seems to be very expensive. Besides, what a

long time a house takes building. Sometimes I think of taking a common labourer's cottage, and just adding to it; it is a very anxious matter to frame one's self a home."

"I wonder, ma'am," Mrs. Saffery would say, "that an elegant lady like you should think of burying yourself in a place like this."

Then said Mrs. Homer, "When the heart is buried, Mrs. Saffery, one may as well be buried altogether."

Meanwhile, Mr. Weir and his mother took possession of the cottage. He had told Mrs. Homer that he should bring his mother to call on her, which was like cutting a Gordian knot, because it seemed a difficult point to Mrs. Homer which of them should call first, if there were to be any calling—she not being a resident, but yet the first comer. She was very glad to have the matter settled by him, for she certainly wanted to be on friendly terms with mother and son. But she had said, "I cannot expect Mrs. Weir to call on a mere lodger, though I hope to have a pretty place of my own by-and-by. I quite long to have a place to lay my weary head!"

"My mother and I do not estimate people

by their houses," said Mr. Weir. "We are going into a small one ourselves."

"Oh, *your* cottage is perfection. I envy you it."

"Ah, I know you were disappointed of it; but I could not give it up—there was no other place for me. You may soon run yourself up a pretty, ornamental cottage—prettier, in fact, than mine."

She shook her head, and smiled.

Mrs. Saffery went to the cottage to put the new comers in possession, and returned very full of what she had seen. "Mrs. Weir is a stout old lady," said she, "short and red-faced. I never knew a shorter mother of a tall son. She's a sharp one, you may depend on it. She scanned the place in a moment, peeped into every hole and corner, tasted the water, held the tumbler up to the light, inquired about the drainage, the poor-rate and highway-rate—how many butchers there were, and which was the best—what was the price of bread and coals—what firewood we chiefly used—what soil the cottage was built on—where was the nearest fire-engine—who was the constable—and ever so many other things. She's a manager, and so you'll find."

"To be of any use, she should have made her inquiries before the cottage was taken," said Mr. Saffery.

"She couldn't, for he took it before he told her; and you know, Saffery, it was a good thing he took it so quick, for if he hadn't, Mrs. Homer would have had it."

Mrs. Homer awaited her visitors rather anxiously, for, if Mrs. Weir called on her, others might call, and she began to feel her solitude rather monotonous, without

> "Some friend in her retreat,
> To whom to whisper, 'Solitude is sweet.'"

At length, after much vacillating, she thought Mrs. Weir might be waiting for her to take the first step, and determined to leave a card. She left a card, and told the neat maid-servant she hoped Mrs. Weir was recovering from her fatigue; for Mrs. Weir had brought her own maid-servant, not much approving of her son's description of Mrs. Early, who remained in the house, but out of sight.

The same afternoon, Mr. Weir, coming into the post-office for stamps, met Mrs. Homer, and said—

"My mother is much obliged to you for your kind inquiries. She will return calls by-and-by, but at present is hardly settled."

"Oh! I can quite understand that," said Mrs. Homer. "I can quite feel for her."

"Oh! she is not exactly a subject for compassion," returned he, laughing. "In fact, she is quite in her element. She is very fond of domestic occupation, and will be a great help to me in the parish some day."

As he quitted the shop, Mrs. Homer murmured, half to herself, and half to Nessy, whom she felt to be a sympathizer—

"'Julia's a manager, she's born to rule;'"

a line which Nessy never afterwards forgot. And she knew quite well who was meant, and could never help smiling when Mrs. Homer now and then said, quietly—

"Here comes Julia."

Well, the visit was returned at last, but not without a stout remonstrance on Mrs. Weir's part. She said—

"Frank, how could you commit me so, by telling Mrs. Homer I should call upon her?"

"I thought you *would* call upon her," re-

plied he. "I thought you would call on everybody."

"But she is only a lodger, a summer-visitor; she is not known to anybody here."

"My dear mother, she is at any rate a fellow-creature; and my affair, and I hope yours, is to do good to as many fellow-creatures as we can reach, without considering whether they live in lodgings or houses of their own."

This was the way Mrs. Weir declared Frank always shut her up. She was very fond of telling those whom she admitted to the privileges of intimacy, that she had been a complete worldling till Frank converted her. And the corollary she very plainly deduced from it, was—"And since he has converted me, why shouldn't you let him convert *you?*"

"What makes you like her so?" she said, as they started together for the visit, "She's very pretty, I suppose."

"She is very interesting and sweet-tempered. No one without a sweet temper could have taken the Miss Balfours' contumely as she did; even her position, as a young widow, calls for sympathy, and she wishes to be useful."

"Young widows are very ensnaring."

"One would think *you* were not a widow," said he, cheerfully. "How can you be so hard on a younger sister?"

The old lady gave him one of her droll looks, which told him he had not made a bit of impression; so they talked of other things.

Happily Mrs. Homer was at home, with everything pretty about her, as far as the little room could be made pretty; and she welcomed her visitors with the sweetest smiles.

"You have got over your fatigues, I hope," said she, almost tenderly.

"Oh, nothing fatigues me," said Mrs. Weir, "except having nothing to do; and that will never be the case here, I can easily see. I never saw a place more run to waste: *you've* taken up the schools, I hear; how do you get on?"

And Mrs. Homer had, from this point, to stand a close cross-examination, not only on school-rooms, school-teachers, school-children, and school-books, but a variety of subjects which she was unprepared to be catechized on. Mrs. Weir did not exactly ask her how long she had been widowed, what her husband had been, and what he had died of; but she

approached it as nearly as she possibly could. She did ask her if she had ever had the conduct of a town or country parish; whether she had lived mostly in one neighbourhood or had gone about much; whether she had determined to settle here for a permanence; whether she had anything in view yet; whether she knew Mrs. Fownes, or the Grevilles, &c. &c.

Mr. Weir endeavoured to soften his mother's bluntness as much as he could, and Mrs. Homer took refuge in soft looks and monosyllables, and tried to carry the war into the enemy's country by asking questions in return: whether Mrs. Weir found the house perfectly dry, whether the garden was in good order, whether there would be a good winter crop of potatoes, &c. &c. When they were gone, and Nessy came in to lay the cloth, she relieved herself by drawing a deep breath, and saying,

"What a terrific old lady!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

FRIENDSHIP CEMENTED.

Shall I be believed if I say that two days from this visit, the terrific old lady and Mrs. Homer were on the best of terms? The way it came to pass was this:—

A fine, mellow, autumnal afternoon had tempted Mrs. Homer to walk to Daisylands, and work once more on Farmer Benson's feelings about the piece of ground he had no mind to sell. The farmer was not expected home before night, for he had gone to an annual "beast market;" so Mrs. Homer had only her walk for her pains,—at least it seemed so, but events often turn out different from what they seem.

She turned away a little disappointed, for the old farmer's honest blue eyes told her plainly he thought her worth looking at, and he always spoke to her cheerily. The white

farmhouse, backed by magnificent elms, stood surrounded by almost a little town of outhouses, stables, granaries, and sheds, with enormous ricks in the back-ground. Mrs. Homer had daintily picked her way through the slushy yards to see the cows and the horses, and the pigs, and the dairy; and had followed the farmer up the neat gravel-walk of his garden to see the bee-hives, and admire his fruit-trees; so that she knew the premises well, and sometimes she had thought she should like to lodge here rather than at the post-office; but Mrs. Benson did not seem inclined to accede to it.

Passing through the little white gate and along the country by-road, she came to a stile which led to what was called "the hilly field." Now, this hilly field adjoined Fairlee Common, and was, in fact, a piece taken off it. It was a short cut to the village, and a very pretty walk besides, boasting particularly fine grass, and picturesquely bordered with hedgerow timber.

Nobody being in sight, Mrs. Homer cleared the stile in a way that none but the young and very agile can do. She sprang over it, scarcely touching the third bar with her right foot, and

the top bar with her left, and was on the other side the next moment. Having accomplished this feat, she took a little foot-track to the left, amused at herself for what she had done, not having, in fact, done anything so childish for some years, and being carried back by it to memories of younger times.

Having ascended the little slope which gave the field its name, she saw, hastening up its opposite side, Mrs. Weir, at a pace very inconvenient to a woman of her age and size; and secretly rejoiced that her clearing the stile had not been seen by that lady. Mrs. Weir's face, always inclining to red, was now rubicund with heat and fear: and when Mrs. Homer civilly accosted her with "Good morning, ma'am," she said, in a troubled voice,—

"My dear, there's a mad bull!"

Mrs. Homer changed colour, and looked hastily round. There was a herd feeding on the lower ground, and nearer at hand a pond.

"Are you sure the animal is mad?" said she. "Perhaps he is only going to drink."

"Hear the low mumbling he is making; I'm sure he's not all right."

"Suppose we keep round this side of the pond."

"We shall be farther from the gate."

"Yes, but he cannot be on both sides of the pond at once."

"Now, he has his eye on us," cried Mrs. Weir, excitedly—"now he is coming towards us! he'll cut us off! Oh, my dear! run, run while you can—I can't, for I'm too heavy."

"No, I won't forsake you," said Mrs. Homer, who was very pale. "Give me your hand—don't be frightened — let us look at him steadily."

Gradually approaching the pond, and likewise approaching their enemy, they reached its brink at last, and so did he; and then, to their immense relief, he began to drink. Oh, what a deep-drawn breath Mrs. Weir gave, and how heartily she thanked Mrs. Homer, who begged her not to think of it!

"I can't think enough of it," replied she. "You showed real self-possession, and real unselfishness, too, for our danger was in common, and what hindered your running away except your thoughtfulness for me? I shall not forget it, I assure you."

And all across the common she talked garrulously to the gratified Mrs. Homer, who

accompanied her to her own gate; and then she insisted on her going in, and pressed her to stay to tea.

"No cap? Oh, never mind being in your hair for once. Or I'll lend you one; or you can keep on your bonnet; or Mary shall run down for your own."

This last offer was accepted, so Mary was sent off with a message to Nessy; and meanwhile Mrs. Weir took her visitor over the cottage, and pointed out its merits and deficiencies, took credit to herself for various contrivances, and asked her opinion of others in contemplation.

When Mr. Weir came in and found Mrs. Homer winding knitting-cotton for his mother, he looked surprised enough, but very much pleased; and was more pleased when Mrs. Weir told him graphically how Mrs. Homer had been her preserver. It gave rise to a good deal of laughing, too, for he could not be persuaded that there had been any real danger; "But if you thought there was," said he, "it amounted to the same thing. Did *you* feel really frightened, Mrs. Homer?"

"I should not have thought of being so," she

replied, "if it had not been for Mrs. Weir's alarm, but fear is contagious."

"Ah, my mother, for a strong-minded woman, has some singular fears; of every little yap-yapping dog, for instance."

"Yes, I have a great objection to being bitten," said Mrs. Weir, "and special fears of hydrophobia."

"But barking dogs don't bite."

"Oh, don't they, though! I know to the contrary."

"Yes, so do I," said Mrs. Homer.

"You partake of my mother's fears, then."

"I like large, generous dogs, with amiable eyes. And they always like me."

"They see that you like them, and love your caressing them. Ah, we generally like those who like and caress us!"

"Oh, yes, it is instinctive."

"Do you see much of Miss Saffery, Mrs. Homer?"

"In a sort of a way, of course. She waits on me. I don't make her a companion, of course."

"*Is* that of course? The poor girl has aspirations and capacities above her position."

"Is it good for girls to have aspirations

above their position?" interposed Mrs. Weir. "*I* think not."

"It depends, mother, on the nature of the aspirations. Miss Saffery does not aspire to dress like the Miss Grevilles, or to be noticed by them."

"I should hope not, indeed!"

"But for one so young, and with so few intellectual advantages, she has a cultivated mind."

"Does her cultivated mind permit her to mend her father's stockings?" said Mrs. Weir.

"Yes, it really does," said Mrs. Homer. "She is a very good, submissive, domestic girl. They are a well-conducted family."

"How do you define a well-conducted family, Mrs. Homer?" said Mr. Weir.

"They have family prayers."

"Family prayers? I should hope so!" said Mrs. Weir.

"Oh, mother, the custom is not too common. It is the exception, rather than the rule, I fear, in that class. You show discrimination, Mrs. Homer, in your example of a well-conducted family. But with regard to making more of a companion of Miss Saffery?"

"Is it not growing late?" said Mrs. Homer. "I fear I must go."

"No; quite early. And I will see you home."

She shook her head and smiled, "*Quite* out of the question."

"And as for Mrs. Homer's making Miss Saffery her companion, Frank, my dear, it's not to be expected; it wouldn't be right," said Mrs. Weir.

"Well, with two against one, I see I've no chance; but what I meant would have broken down no social barriers. A few kind words now and then, a useful hint or encouraging remark."

"Oh, she gets those already, I assure you," said Mrs. Homer.

"That's right; that's what I wanted. I was sure you would."

"Then why could not you let it alone, Frank?" said his mother. "You are but young, yet. Fancy," said she, appealing to Mrs. Homer, "fancy his saddling me with a hobbling old woman who cannot do a thing!"

"Ah, yes!—yes, indeed!" said Mrs. Homer.

"And with an obstinate old man, quite past work!"

"Ah, indeed!"

"If my mother is going to open on the subject of my delinquencies, I shall be off," said Mr. Weir, laughing.

"I really must go," said Mrs. Homer.

"Mrs. Homer, *do* you know of any one in want of such an old woman as Mrs. Early? We are really only keeping her out of charity."

"A useless old woman?"

"I cannot make my mother see," said Mr. Weir, laughing, "that it is better to give the old and infirm a day's wages for a day's work, however poor that work may be, than to pay poor-rates for them to do nothing."

"But, my dear, one's work must be done, and we can only afford one pair of hands; and if you had looked into the saucepans when we came in, or into the boiler, or at the tin covers, or into the dusthole—"

Mr. Weir and Mrs. Homer joined in a hearty laugh at the idea.

"Ah, you may laugh; but it is what I had to do, and a good deal besides. My son may pretend to be very philanthropic, Mrs. Homer, but he likes his dinner well cooked, like any other man."

"Oh, mother! I *really* don't care what I have."

"Like any other man," persisted Mrs. Weir; "and if it is to be cooked either by Mrs. Early or me, I know it must be by myself."

"Ah, well, I did not know the case was so hopeless when I engaged her," said Mr. Weir, "but we must give her a little time to look about, at all events. She *must* have a roof over her head."

"That Frenchman, whose name I forget, would have said he didn't see the necessity. And then old Watto. You'll have him muddling about the garden all the winter."

"And a very nice landscape figure he makes, with his thin silver locks stirring in the wind."

"He'll draw on your silver shillings, though, Frank, which are not much thicker than his locks."

"So be it. Of my little, a little I'll give."

"Well, I really *must* go," said Mrs. Homer plaintively.

"Do, my dear, or it will be getting dark; and you have refused Frank's escort. Quite right, quite right. You'll excuse an old woman for speaking her mind. Those are the only

terms on which an old woman can be friends with a young woman."

"*May* I come again?" said Mrs. Homer, winningly.

"Of course, of course. Good night, good night! Frank will see you to the gate."

And Frank accompanied her, without his hat, several yards beyond the gate. He told her he was so glad she had made friends with his mother; he hoped she would drop in very often. His mother was too old to like making calls, or to care for company, but she liked young people—when she *did* like them—and he could see she liked Mrs. Homer.

Mrs. Homer, on her part, assured him she had had a most delightful evening. She had taken to Mrs. Weir from the first; there was something so motherly about her, so genuine! She only hoped they might be friends—real friends; there should be no backwardness on *her* part. She was naturally very fond of old people—old ladies, especially—and Mrs. Weir was such a model old lady! But he really must not come one step farther without his hat. Quite out of the question. She would not, could not permit it. She should be home directly, if

hers could be called home. Good night. *Good* night.

"So, Frank, you went farther than the gate?"

"My dear mother, when I came in and found you and Mrs. Homer fraternizing, I *was* surprised!"

"Ah! laugh and welcome. It was no laughing matter to be nearly tossed by a mad bull. She showed great self-possession and kindness in sticking by me as she did, for she *was* frightened, whatever she may say of it—her nice colour died completely away. And there was I 'my dearing' her, and taking tight hold of her hand. Could I cast her off, Frank, directly I reached my own gate?"

"Most certainly not, mother. You did quite right, as you generally do."

"No flattery, sirrah."

"You both did just the thing you ought. You may be comforts to one another, if you will. You are fond of young persons, and like some one to drop in sometimes for a little friendly gossip. Mrs. Homer feels the want of a home and of a motherly friend."

"Did she tell you that, Mr. Frank, between this and the gate?"

"Ah!" said he, mischievously, "a great deal passed between this and the gate. There was so much time for it, and so much inclination!"

Mr. Saffery was putting up his shop-shutters when Mrs. Homer returned. Nessy was lighting the lamp, and directly she saw Mrs. Homer's bright face, she knew she had had a happy evening, and rejoiced at it. How could it be otherwise than delightful to drink tea with Mr. Weir?

Mrs. Homer threw herself on the couch of no repose. She wanted some one to talk to, though it were only Nessy Saffery. She began with—

"I dare say you were surprised enough at my not returning to tea. I had quite an adventure. There was a mad bull in a field—at least, I don't believe the poor creature was mad, but Mrs. Weir was frightened, and I rescued her—not that it was much of a rescue, but I kept by her, instead of running away, and she was so grateful and so pleased, I never saw a woman warm up so. She would make me go in and stay to tea—would take no excuse—offered me one of her own caps, which

of course, I would not wear, and then offered to send for mine."

"I am so very glad," said Nessy. "I dare say you had delightful conversation."

"Yes, we had—at least, the old lady said some foolish things, but they drew out Mr. Weir's clever things, and we had a good deal of laughing and chatting. Altogether, we had a very pleasant evening; but I *would* come away early."

"It seems like a reward for your having rescued Mrs. Weir," said Nessy.

"It had not occurred to me in that light, but now you suggest it, it really does seem so. What a very superior young man Mr. Weir is! There's something so excessively interesting about him!"

"Did he see you home, ma'am?"

"No; he offered to do so, but I would not let him. I was obliged to be quite peremptory. He walked with me to the very verge of the common without his hat."

"I hope he won't have the toothache," said Nessy.

"What! with his fine teeth? Besides, the air was balm."

"Would you like a little cold beef for supper, ma'am?"

"Well—yes, I think I should."

"I dare say," observed Nessy, as she spread the cloth, "you had a nice talk about the classes."

"On the contrary, they were never once mentioned."

"There," thought Mrs. Homer, as Nessy withdrew, "I have fulfilled Mr. Weir's wishes respecting Miss Saffery. If she does not presume, I will do so again from time to time."

Next day she did not fail to call and inquire how Mrs. Weir felt herself after her fright, and to hope she had experienced no reaction. And she took her Affghan blanket with her to show her what nice candlelight-work it was—only simple knitting—coarse knitting, with one pair of ivory needles, and the arrangement of the colours so excellent! Everything depended on the arrangement of the colours. She would write out the directions if Mrs. Weir liked, and get the wools and pins, and cast on the first row. Then there could be *no* trouble, and it would be such a warm, pleasant wrap for her feet on the sofa, when frost and snow set in.

Mrs. Weir was one of those ladies much given to complain that their eyes will not enable them to do anything useful by candle-light, and yet very averse from bestowing a little time and pains on learning a new employment that promises to be a great resource to them when it ceases to be new. She made a good many objections and excuses, and at last reluctantly yielded consent, and then they got into chat about other things; and as Mrs. Homer had not the privilege of knowing Dr. and Mrs. Fownes, Mrs. Weir had the gratification of telling her how shaky the doctor was, how little fit for duty, how probable it was he would soon be obliged to relinquish it altogether, how he disturbed Mrs. Fownes's rest every night, and what a martyr she was. All this to hear did Mrs. Homer seriously incline, or patiently incline, at any rate; and thenceforth the Affghan blanket became an excuse for almost daily calls on Mrs. Weir, till no excuse was any longer wanting. Sometimes she had a glimpse of Mr. Weir, oftener not; but now and then they had delightful snatches of dialogue, and she was beginning to find quite a new charm in her daily life.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. EARLY'S SHORTCOMINGS.

Mrs. Weir was now no longer a terrific old lady, but a dear, nice old lady, and sometimes a rather tiresome old lady—when Mr. Weir did not make his appearance; but even when Mrs. Homer thus termed her in her secret heart, she knew all the while that Mrs. Weir was not really less nice than usual, but simply that her appreciation of her niceness had been lessened by the absence of some one far nicer.

"I really *must* get rid of Mrs. Early," said Mrs. Weir to her one day. "What do you think? her attic is just like an old marine-store shop. I never climbed up to it till this morning, because the steep stairs try my breath; and when I mounted up there, I held up both my hands! for there—will you believe it?—she has stowed all her own wretched old furniture, till there's hardly room to turn

round; and when I said *that* musn't be, she began to whimper, and say she had no place to put her things. I am sorry for her, but really cannot have my garret made her Pantechnicon!"

Meanwhile, Mrs. Early was telling her woes across Mr. Saffery's counter to Nessy, and dolefully saying what a hard lady Mrs. Weir was to live with. She had given nothing but satisfaction to Mr. Weir; he was always contented, and never complained,—never so much as rang the bell oftener than he could help; but as for Mrs. Weir, she seemed to think a poor person had no feelings, no legs, and yet expected her always to be on them. As to enjoying a refreshing cup of tea, she never allowed such a thing—her word was "quick at work, quick at meat." And she had no consideration for a person not accustomed to go out to service, and thought nothing of her being reduced. She said a servant's wages covered a servant's work; and them that didn't ought to work, didn't ought to eat! And just as Mrs. Early had come to the conclusion that she must go, Mrs. Weir had told her that go she must; and where in the world should she put her things—her *dirty* old things, Mrs. Weir had unkindly

called them! But though old, they were not dirty; they were as clean as Mrs. Weir's—they were relics of better days.

Nessy soothed her, and suggested her returning to her old quarters in Providence Cottages; but they were engaged. "And if she turns my things out, there they must stay in front of the house," whimpered Mrs. Early; "and she won't like that—especially the old coal-scuttle!"

Nessy observed that no lady could be expected to like it, nor to give warehouse-room to a servant's household effects. But what harm had they done? retorted Mrs. Early, up in the garret, which Mrs. Weir had never set foot in till that morning, and would very likely never enter again? If her son George only knew the slights put upon his old mother! But George's bones, too likely, were bleaching in the desert—she had dreamed they were so, and dreams were often sent with a purpose. He was his widowed mother's only son, and so was Mr. Weir; and Mrs. Weir ought to take it into consideration.

Nessy thought so too; and, by a few kind words, sent her away consoled; and then in

came Mrs. Homer, taking the other view of the question, and saying, with a smile, "That was the widow Early, was it not? What a forlorn looking old creature she is! Mrs. Weir says she is quite a discredit to the house, and she thinks her furniture has introduced blackbeetles."

About this time, Mrs. Saffery received a surprise. Mrs. Homer was settling her weekly account, in her usual leisurely, lady-like way, and Mrs. Saffery remarked that she was as punctual and easy to please as Mr. Antony; and then asked Mrs. Homer whether she did not consider him a very nice gentleman?

Mrs. Homer quietly remarked that she had never seen him.

Mrs. Saffery let fall her account in her surprise. "Never seen him?" ejaculated she. "Why, ma'am, Saffery and I considered him your reference."

"How could you do so?" said Mrs. Homer, calmly. "If you had told me you required a reference, I should have referred you to Messrs. Root and Branche; and I will do so now, if you like."

"No, ma'am, no; there's not the least occa-

sion. We know you now, almost as well as Mr. Antony, and you pay so regular, and are so much the lady, that it would be insult to talk of wanting a reference; only when you first came, being a perfect stranger—"

"You thought I might rob the mail-bags," said Mrs. Homer, laughing quietly.

"No, ma'am," and Mrs. Saffery laughed a little too; "only I thought you did say you were recommended to us by Miss Antony."

"So I did, and such was the fact. I met her at the house of a mutual friend during a morning call. I have never seen her brother, though I have seen his pictures at the exhibitions."

Mrs. Saffery uttered a rather dolorous "Oh!"

"Miss Antony and I," continued Mrs. Homer, "were schoolfellows."

"Oh," cried Mrs. Saffery, immensely relieved; "that amounts to the same thing!"

"What does it amount to? We have seldom met since we were schoolgirls."

"No, ma'am; but being at school with Miss Antony seems quite a voucher, for she is such a very nice lady that, somehow, it seems as if every one connected with her must be all right."

"Have you known Miss Antony long?"

"No, ma'am; I have only seen her twice."

"Twice?" repeated Mrs. Homer, "why, you know a great deal more of me, then, than you do of her."

"Well, ma'am," said Mrs. Saffery, twisting the account between her fingers and then smoothing it out; "I know almost nothing of you, but that you are a very nice lady."

"And there is almost nothing to know," said Mrs. Homer, opening her writing-case and taking up her pen, which Mrs. Saffery received as a hint to withdraw.

Talk of a person and he appears. Most of us have verified that proverb occasionally. A day or two after the above dialogue, Nessy was surprised and delighted to see Miss Antony enter the post-office.

"Oh, Miss Antony!" exclaimed she, hastily putting out her hand, and then withdrawing it. Edith saw the movement, and instantly shook hands with her.

"Mrs. Homer is out," said Nessy. "I dare say you have come down to see her."

"No, I did not know she was here," said Edith: "is she in your lodgings, then?"

"Yes, ma'am, she has been here ever since."

"I thought she wanted the cottage?"

"The cottage had just been taken by our new curate, Mr. Weir."

"Oh," said Edith, reflecting a little; and at the same time, Mrs. Saffery came in, delighted to see her, and expressed her hope that Mr. Antony was well.

"He is very far from well," said Edith; "and it is on his account that I have come down to look for lodgings. He has been seriously ill, and is still in a very anxious state. He had a great fancy to come here, where he was so comfortable before, and my only objection was that there would be no room for me; but Mrs. Homer's being here settles the question. She is going to continue, I suppose?"

"She only knows herself, ma'am," said Mrs. Saffery; "she only stays from week to week, but I've no notion she thinks of leaving."

"I fancied she would want a cottage."

"She is always on the look-out for one, ma'am, and partly thinks of building."

"Dear! I should think she would never do that."

"Oh yes, ma'am, she's been in treaty for

land, and at one time things were nearly brought to a conclusion. She was much disappointed at not getting Nessy's cottage, and we were much obliged to you, ma'am, for thinking of us."

"I thought it might be a good thing for both parties," said Edith.

"And your name," said Mrs. Saffrey, "was quite a voucher. Indeed, it was the only one she gave, for we thought there was no need to ask for another; and we never knew till yesterday how slight your intimacy was, and that she had never seen Mr. Antony."

"Oh no," said Edith; "there was no chance of her doing so, for I only knew her when I was with Mrs. Crowe."

"Meaning the lady who kept the school you both went to, I suppose?" said Mrs. Saffery.

"Went to?" repeated Edith; "Why, Mrs. Crowe was her own mother."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mrs. Saffery, looking all curiosity; and Nessy, too, was anxious to hear more; seeing which, Edith went on without any reluctance:—

"Mrs. Homer's connexions are quite respectable, Mrs. Saffery. You need be under no

uneasiness about that. Her father was an officer, who retired on half-pay soon after his marriage. He had several children, of whom only his eldest and youngest daughter survived. Mrs. Homer is the youngest. He was a very good sort of man, I have been told, but his health was quite mined by injuries received in battle. As he could leave his family no provision, Mrs. Crowe, on his death, opened a school."

"At Cromer, ma'am?"

"No, near Ipswich. But, Mrs. Saffery, can you direct me to any lodgings?"

"Well, ma'am, I wish I could, but really none occur to me. Wouldn't you like to take some refreshment, Miss Antony?"

"Thank you; I should like a slice of bread and butter very much," said Edith. "I meant to have brought some biscuits, but had not time. Perhaps I may find some place in the neighbourhood, where they will take us in."

"There's a nice, quiet inn, Miss Antony."

"Oh! that would be too expensive."

"I doubt very much whether you might not make some cheap arrangement."

"Well, I will look about the neighbourhood

first. My brother is not well enough to like the bustle of an inn."

"Step in here, Miss Antony, and Nessy shall bring the bread and butter directly."

Mrs. Saffery opened the door of Mrs. Homer's parlour, and Edith was about to enter, but she drew back.

"No," she said; "Mrs. Homer's letters and papers are lying about, and I should not like to intrude. I should not like such a liberty taken with *me*."

"Come into our own little parlour, then, Miss Antony, if you don't mind."

"Not at all; I am very much obliged to you. Ah, Nessy—Miss Saffery! there are your pictures on the wall."

"Please call me 'Nessy,' ma'am, if you've no objection."

"Then you must not call me 'ma'am;' it sounds so dreadfully formal. How are you getting on with your painting?"

"Oh! not at all, at present. It has been quite set aside for other things."

"Women *must* set aside the fine arts pretty often for other things, if they are true women," said Edith; "and my brother says that is one

of the reasons why they are seldom or never good artists. Do you remember that sketch he took the last time we went to Dulwich?"

"Oh, yes!" said Nessy, laughing; "when you drew the cow lowing for her calf."

"And you the cow with the crumpled horn. A professional gentleman of some eminence saw that sketch of my brother's the other day, and commissioned a cabinet-picture of the same subject, to which he is to give the nicest finish. That is why he wants to come here instead of going to the sea."

At this moment the shop-bell tinkled, and Nessy went to attend the summons. Farmer Benson came in, and said, in rather a dissatisfied voice—

"Oh! good morning, miss. Can you give me a notion, now, whether that lady-lodger of yours has made up her mind yet about that piece of ground?"

"Mrs. Homer isn't at home, Mr. Benson, but I'll tell her you want her answer."

"Because, you see, another party's about it, and between two stools I may fall to the ground. Is she going to keep on here?"

"We don't know in the least," said Nessy.

"Because she's been sounding my good dame times oft about letting her come to our *farm*, and my mistress, you see, wouldn't say yes; but now she's thought it over a bit, and our Betsy's gone to Yarmouth, and won't be back for a month at least; so that if that would suit Mrs. Homer, you may tell her that, if she will, she may."

"Yes, I will," said Nessy, quickly; "but there's a lady in our parlour now, Mr. Benson, who has come down from London to look for country lodgings, so that if they do not suit one, they may the other."

"Ho!" said he, deliberatively. Then, lowering his voice, "What sort of lady, now, may she be?"

"I will ask her to speak to you," said Nessy. "She is sister to Mr. Antony, who lodged here in the spring, and painted so beautifully."

"Oh! I mind *him* well enough," said the farmer. "He was continually hanging about my premises at one time, and I thought he was after mischief, till I came to warn him off, and then I found he was an artist."

"Miss Antony, will you speak to Farmer Benson, please?" said Nessy. "He has some

nice lodgings, and Mr. Antony knows his farm-house, and used to admire it."

Edith came out, and her fair, frank face won the farmer's impressible heart directly.

"I know, miss, that if we please you, you'll please us," said he, cheerfully. "I can see it at a glance. We know your brother, my missis and me, and will do the best we can for you."

"But about Mrs. Homer?" said Edith, who had heard the previous dialogue; "must not she decide first?"

"Yes, she must decide first, if she *will* decide," said the farmer; "but she is a very undecideable person, and I don't see why I should go and miss selling my land, and miss letting my lodgings too, because she *will* keep shilly-shally."

"Then, perhaps," said Edith, "I may as well see your lodgings; and then, if they suit, and Mrs. Homer does not want them, we can engage them. If Mrs. Homer takes them, my brother can come here."

"Just it," said he. "You step down to my fiarm—Daisylands Fiarm—and see Mrs. Benson, and you and she will settle everything, I'll answer for it, as far as can be settled."

"It would have been as well to know Mrs. Homer's mind first," observed Edith, "because, if she decides on your farm, it would save me the trouble of going there."

"She doesn't know her *own* mind, mum, I'm thinking."

"Mrs. Homer is at Mrs. Weir's," said Nessy, "but she will return to dinner; and you will have time, meanwhile, to see the rooms at Daisylands. It is a pretty walk; shall I show you the way?"

"Yes, do, for I always feel out of my element in the country," said Edith.

"Yes, that's well planned, Miss Saffery," sai Farmer Benson. "I'm going over to Kingston, but you just tell my dame what we've been saying, and she'll take the matter up where I leave it. I shall hear the upshot when I come home, it so being you can get Mrs. Homer to say one thing or the other. She's mighty pretty; but as for business—" And with a shrug and a smile he took leave.

Nessy hastened to tell her mother she was going to show Miss Antony the way to Daisylands, and was soon ready for the walk. They chatted pleasantly all the way; and Nessy

told her friend what an interesting occupation she found her Sunday class. "It gives me something to think of all the week," said she, "and makes me brush up all the little knowledge I have, and wish for more."

"I dare say it does that," said Edith, "though I never undertook anything of the kind myself. A good, zealous, stirring clergyman never happened to cross my path."

"*We* never had one till now," said Nessy, "and it makes such a difference! His sermons give one something to think of all the week."

When they came to the hilly field, she told Edith of Mrs. Weir's fright, and Mrs. Homer's coming to her assistance. "They have been very intimate ever since," said she.

"Well, I should never have thought of Mrs. Homer's being at the trouble of rescuing *any* old lady," said Edith. "It speaks well for her. I suppose she saw there was no real danger."

"I think Mrs. Homer very amiable," said Nessy timidly.

"Do you?" said Edith. Nessy wished and yet dreaded to hear what she would add; but she added nothing.

"Oh, what a pretty old farmhouse beneath the slope! What splendid hollyhocks!"

"That's Daisylands," said Nessy, gladly. "I knew you would like it."

Edith liked it, and everything belonging to it, very much; and Mrs. Benson liked *her*, and remembered Mr. Antony, and was glad to see Nessy, and renewed her husband's invitation to have a syllabub at the farm "some of these days." A syllabub party, with Mr. and Miss Antony for two of its members, would indeed be very pleasant.

CHAPTER XX.

COUNTRY LODGINGS.

Mrs. Homer had undertaken to insert the variegated pines in the white stripes of Mrs. Weir's Affghan blanket; and, as this was a task which Mrs. Weir had no mind for herself, though she liked very well to knit the plain stripes of yellow, green, and scarlet, she gladly retained her till near dinner-time, and then begged her to stay. Mrs. Homer consented, on condition that she might run home and fetch her cap.

Now, this cap was not a little muslin skull-cap, with three heavy sausages of white muslin round the front, and long, broad-hemmed strings, like Mrs. Weir's, but an airy little fabric of French blonde, light as the gossamer that floats in summer air. Mrs. Homer had gone into a slighter stage of mourning very soon after her taking possession of the Safferys' lodgings; and

Mrs. Saffery had made use of the circumstance to express a hope that the lady was becoming a little more reconciliated to her loss; but had been checked by, "There are some bereavements, Mrs. Saffery, too sacred to approach."

But now, though she wore deep and very becoming mourning, to wit, rich black silk, trimmed with crape, her cap, as above described, was of the lightest, and concealed very little of her beautiful, silky, dark hair, banded *à la Madonna.*

Returning, then, for her cap, she heard, with some surprise, and certainly without any manifestation of pleasure, from Mrs. Saffery, that Miss Antony had called to inquire if the lodgings were vacant.

"Of course you told her they were *not*," said Mrs. Homer, with emphasis.

"Do you mean to continue in occupation then, ma'am?"

"Most certainly. Do you wish me to leave?"

"Oh no, ma'am, no! Only as you only continue by the week, I thought I should like to know whether there was any certainty of continuance. If you left, which I'm sure, ma'am,

we should regret, Mr. Antony would come in, that's all."

"I do mean to continue."

"Thank you, ma'am. I'm sure our desire is to make you comfortable to the utmost of our means."

"I'm quite satisfied, Mrs. Saffery" (with one of her sweet forgiving smiles); "you are good creatures!"

"Mr. Benson called while you was away, ma'am," pursued Mrs. Saffery, after a pause, "and wished to know if you wanted *his* lodgings."

"Oh! You should have told me that in the first instance. Of course I cannot take them, now that I have pledged myself to you. I thought Mrs. Benson did not choose to let lodgings."

"Her daughter being gone on a visit, ma'am, she is willing to let her rooms for a month."

"A month! Oh, that is no time at all! It would not be worth while to remove for only a month."

"No, ma'am, that's what I was thinking, and that's what made it slip my memory at first. I thought, 'Mrs. Homer wouldn't care to go for

a month.' And the end of it would bring you into November, when the weather mostly breaks up; and them lanes is *very* dirty. And so Nessy has took Miss Antony to see them."

"Oh, the Antonys want the lodgings at Daisylands, do they?"

"Not if you want them, ma'am. If you stay here, they'll go there. If you go there, they'll come here. Miss Antony's quite agreeable."

Mrs. Homer seemed put out. "The Antonys could not come here," said she, abruptly, "for you could not accommodate them both." Then, after a little thought, "I mean to stay here."

"Thank you, ma'am, I thought you would. You are nearer the church, and the school, and Mrs. Weir—and *at* the post-office. And you can be here as long as you like, and you could only be a month at Daisylands, which will be long enough for Mr. and Miss Antony. Farmer Benson left word particular, that he wanted your answer, ma'am, no or yes, about the land, because another party is about it."

"I dare say that is only an excuse. However, I will write to him in the evening; I cannot stay now, because I am going to dine with Mrs. Weir."

And, with her cap in a dainty little covered basket, she was lightly threading her way back, when she met Edith and Nessy, and greeted the former in pretty surprise.

"Miss Antony! Edith!—what pleasure!—are you come to stay? are you come to see me?"

"No," said Edith, "I did not know where you were, and came down about Mrs. Saffery's lodgings; but I have just seen some which will do equally well if you are not going to move."

"Do *you* wish me to move?"

"Oh, no; I prefer the Daisyland lodgings of the two, if you do not want them; they are so much more countrified."

"They *are* much more countrified; they are *much* preferable in situation; and I tried so for them!—you *know* I did, Miss Saffery. But Mrs. Benson would not hear of it; I don't think she liked my mournful face; and now she has come to terms just as I have pledged myself to Mrs. Saffery!"

"Oh, my mamma would not let that stand in the way, I'm sure," interposed Nessy, "if you really wished to go to Daisylands; and we could have Mr. Antony."

Mrs. Homer's smile of sweetness said plainly as words, "*Quite* out of the question." "My pledge is given," repeated she ; "I cannot think of departing from it. But, Miss Antony, shall I turn back with you?—Most unfortunately I am engaged to dine with Mrs. Weir, but *do* let me give it up."

"On no account," said Edith, smiling. "What would Mrs. Weir think of you? Your pledge is given."

"Oh, but I would explain—I would take it on myself—I would say, a friend from London—"

"Oh no, no, thank you. Since you decide on remaining at Mrs. Saffery's, I shall engage the Daisylands lodgings, and return at once to London."

"But *do* have a good rest first in my little retreat—have a little bread and fruit—have a glass of milk—have a glass of wine—lie down on the couch, or on my bed—"

"Oh no, no, thank you!—"

"How sorry I am—so unfortunate.—Well, we shall soon meet again, and then I hope we shall see much of each other. A mere step will divide us; and if there should be anything I can do—"

"Thank you. Good-bye."

"*Good*-bye!—So glad you're coming."

Each took her separate way, and, as Edith went onward, she said almost inaudibly, "don't believe it;" which made Nessy start.

"That young lady who came down with you last time," said she, after a little silence; "is she quite well?"

"Miss Bell, do you mean? She may be quite well—most likely is. To tell the truth, I don't much care whether she is well or not."

Again Nessy was astounded.

"In fact," resumed Edith, "I think a severe illness might do her good. It would make her feel; and if she felt suffering herself, she might come to feel for others."

"Is she rather unfeeling, then?" said Nessy.

"Rather," said Edith, with bitter emphasis. "I dare say you saw what attention my brother paid her."

"Oh, yes! I thought—my mamma thought they were engaged to be married."

"Ah! I thought so too, when we went home that afternoon; and so did my brother; but it was all illusion. She was a heartless girl. She had drawn him on at first, accepted his atten-

tions, and so forth, and actually made a false excuse that day, to be allowed to come with us —which I did not know till we were in the train. She had told them at home she was going to spend the day with *me.* Not a word about my brother, or the Dulwich Gallery, you understand."

"That was very deceiving of her," said Nessy.

"Persons who will deceive in a small thing, will deceive in a great one," said Edith. "You never can depend on them. She deceived my brother. She liked his admiration as long as she had no one else to admire her; she let him think she would marry him, though against the wishes of her friends. And directly she had the offer of a richer match, she threw him overboard."

"Oh, how base of her," exclaimed Nessy. "I hope Mr. Antony did not mind it much. She did not deserve he should."

"Mind it? Why, he had a brain fever!" said Edith. "He fancied her a very superior creature to what she was; dressed her up in all sorts of imaginary virtues and attractions, and was as bitterly disappointed as if she had really possessed them. He was very ill indeed,

Nessy, and had no one to nurse him except me and an old servant. You cannot think how unhappy I was. One night, he was delirious, and I thought he would die. I told you this morning, that I had never happened to know a good clergyman. You cannot think how, during my brother's illness, I wished for a visit from some good clergyman."

"Such as Mr. Weir," said Nessy. "How he would have comforted you!"

"I was thinking chiefly of my brother," said Edith. "He was, or seemed to me, on the very brink of another world; and, when there was an opportunity of saying a nice word or two, I did not in the least know what to say to him. However, as soon as the fever began to pass off, he made light of it—pretended nothing was the matter with him—and there was no opportunity of speaking to him *then*. And then he took cold, before he was well out of the fever, and it settled on his lungs; and he was sadly wilful and wayward, and *would* do imprudent things . . . so you may imagine what a time I have had. He is dreadfully altered."

"If Miss Bell could see him now—" said Nessy.

"There is no Miss Bell, now," said Edith, smiling sadly; "she is Mrs. Major Spinks."

"Well, perhaps it is best so," said Nessy; "for now he knows she is completely out of his reach. . . I am so sorry Mr. Antony is ill," she added, with feeling. "If he had come to our lodgings, I am sure my mamma would have nursed him as if he had been her son; but perhaps it is a good thing he will go to Daisy-lands, for the air is certainly better, and they say the breath of cows and the smell of freshly-ploughed earth are wholesome: and the men are ploughing there now. And he can have new milk, and curds and whey, and new-laid eggs, and poultry; and Mrs. Benson is very kind, and has had great experience, so that I don't believe you could go to a better place. I saw that Mrs. Benson took to you at first sight, and she *must* like Mr. Antony."

Edith smiled. "I fancy that we shall be comfortable there," said she. "Do you know, it will be a positive treat to me, to sleep in a room with a lattice-window! And that black-bird in its wicker cage is a great attraction. There are bee-hives too, and a sun-dial. Oh! I think we have a pleasant month in store;

and if my brother gets on well with his picture, it will put the faithless Rosabel out of his head. That fanciful name is just a sample of his way of idealizing things. Just as he converted Rosa Bell into Rosabel, so did he convert a very silly, commonplace, trumpery girl, into a personification of all that was good and worthy to be loved."

Here they reached the post-office, and Nessy said, "I don't know where Mrs. Homer's fruit was to come from, Miss Antony, for there is not even an apple in the house; but it is near our dinner-time, and if you don't mind hashed mutton, I am sure my papa and mamma will be very much honoured by your dining with us."

"Oh, I shall be home by *our* dinner-time, thank you," said Edith; "and you know I have lunched already. As to 'bread and fruit,' that is such an old, familiar sentimentalism of Mrs. Homer's, that I could hardly help laughing when I heard it again. I am not at all surprised at her offering it when she knew very well there was no fruit in the cupboard. She was wonderfully fond, when a girl, of saying she should delight in living on bread and fruit,

or bread and honey; but she had her fair share of beef and mutton all the same."

Mrs. Homer, on returning to Mrs. Weir's, found Mrs. Fownes calling on her; and as Mrs. Fownes had for some time had her eye on the interesting young widow, and wondered where she came from and what she was going to do, she was very glad to hear all Mrs. Weir had to tell about her. This was little enough, as regarded her antecedents, but Mrs. Weir made a capital story of her fright in the hilly field, and Mrs. Homer's self-devotion in staying by her when she might have run away; and warming with her subject, she praised her so heartily, that Mrs. Fownes was prepossessed in her favour. Therefore, when Mrs. Homer came in, she condescended to be introduced to her, and to speak to her kindly; and after a few remarks exchanged, she said,

"I hear you are looking out for a cottage in this neighbourhood. Have you seen Tresellis?"

Mrs. Homer had neither seen it nor heard of it, but she was captivated by the name.

"Let me recommend you to go and look at it, then," said Mrs. Fownes. "It is not on any road, so that you would not be likely to

see it if you were not looking for it. I have not been there myself; but we came upon it one day when the doctor and I were driving, and took the wrong lane by mistake, and I thought it a pity that such a pretty little place should be getting out of repair for want of an occupant. I remember the Doctor's quoting the first verse of Edwin and Emma. I dare say you know it—

> "'Far in the windings of a vale,
> Fast by a sheltering wood,
> The safe retreat of health and peace,
> A rustic cottage stood.'"

"Oh, I should like such a place *so* much," said Mrs. Homer, pressing her hands closely together. "I so long for a home."

"It is very secluded."

"Oh, seclusion is what I want!"

"Is that quite a healthy feeling for so young a person? Heavy griefs are apt to make us feel we can take no more interest in this world; but we have duties to fulfil in it till we are taken out of it."

Mrs. Homer's expressive look replied that *that* question had been considered in every point of view already.

"Would Tresellis be an expensive place to keep up?" said she presently.

"I don't know what repairs it may need," said Mrs. Fownes. "Probably white washing and papering, and a little carpentering; but, supposing it in tenantable repair, I should say that any one with two hundred a-year might live there in perfect comfort."

"Oh, then, it is *quite* within my reach," said Mrs. Homer. After a little silence, she said, "I have two hundred a year that came to me in a singular manner, quite independent of other resources. 'Tis a romantic little story. I am sure I might confide it to such kind, judicious friends—if they found any interest in it."

They both assured her, with sincerity, they should listen with lively interest. She drooped her eyelids, and never once looked up, while she gave the following details with charming simplicity.

"'Tis now some little time back, that a worthy man, one of the excellent of the earth, fixed his too-partial regards on me. What he could see in me to admire, I can't conceive: you know, there's no accounting for these

things. He fancied he could be happy with me—wished to marry me. My family, my friends, wished so too; but I did not—one *cannot* always rule the heart. Yet there was so much, in the ordinary point of view, to be said in favour of it, that I was—oh! so nearly persuaded! 'Tis sweet, you know, to sacrifice one's self for those one loves. So, in fact, I was on the very brink of this sacrifice—a mere child at the time—without one bit of heart in it, scarce knowing I had one, when he was carried off by a sudden seizure, and the sacrifice was spared."

"Dear me!" exclaimed both the ladies; "and have you worn widow's mourning for *him?*"

"Excuse me; no," said Mrs. Homer, with a mournful shake of the head. "I put on deep mourning for him, but not that of a widow. Will you believe it? this exemplary man, with the providence—the prevision—which marked his character, had settled two hundred per annum on me, whether our union took place or not."

"Dear me!" again ejaculated the old ladies.

"That showed great attachment to you," said Mrs. Fownes.

"Oh! ——" And Mrs. Homer looked unutterable things.

"It made a great noise at the time," she softly added. "Everybody admired him: pitied or envied me. They little understood me!"

"And then, you married . . . ."

"The subject becomes too painful," said she, covering her eyes with her white hand. "This world is *full* of sorrows. My heart is still too lacerated . . . Dear Mrs. Weir, shall I trouble you for the yellow wool?"

Meanwhile, Nessy, continuing to hover about Miss Antony as long as she possibly could, gathered her a nosegay, and as Edith was already laden with some of Mrs. Benson's new-laid eggs and a bottle of cream, Nessy begged to be allowed to carry them to the station.

"Yes, do, Nessy," said her mother. "We will put you by some dinner."

"Oh, never mind my dinner," said Nessy, supremely happy. On their way to the station, they found plenty to talk about; and among other things, Nessy ventured to ask Miss Antony if she had done anything new lately in the way of authorship.

"Oh, that has been completely set aside," said Edith, smiling. "I forgot you knew I had ever made any attempts of the kind. Authorship requires leisure and a quiet mind. Perhaps, when I come down here, I may make a new start."

"I'm sure I hope you will," said Nessy. "I think a book of your writing would be one of the nicest that ever was read."

They reached the station only a few minutes before the train came up; and remained chatting on the platform. Nessy expressed her wonder whether Mrs. Homer would stay with them through the winter. She hoped she would.

"I must say I hope she will not," said Edith, "though it is no matter of mine. She has duties to fulfil somewhere else. It was a sentimental, mistaken thing, her coming here, where she can be of no manner of use."

"She is rather useful in the school now," suggested Nessy, "though I don't think she thoroughly likes it. In that case, there is the more merit in her persevering as she does."

"Keeping up one's Scriptural knowledge must always be good," said Edith, "and I

suppose Sunday classes must at least do that. Here comes the train! Good-bye. Mind the cream!"—

"I'll give it you when you are in."

A little delay occurred after Edith had taken her seat; and they continued talking.

"This will be to Leonard a specimen of the productions of the promised land," said Edith, cheerfully. "I feel the better even for this short treat. 'Living on air' has a different meaning here.'"

"I suppose we shall see you often, Mrs. Homer being with us," said Nessy.

"Oh, I don't think I shall trouble *her* with much of my company. But I shall come to post our letters."

"Mrs. Homer's trial may have made her give way a little too much," said Nessy, anxious to raise her favourite in Miss Antony's good graces, "but I suppose her husband was a great loss—"

"'*Was?*'" repeated Edith. The whistle shrieked, the train moved on, and there was not time for another word.

END OF VOL. I.

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BELFOREST.

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A

TALE OF ENGLISH COUNTRY LIFE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

" MARY POWELL," AND " THE LADIES OF BEVER HOLLOW."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BELFOREST.

CHAPTER I.

TRESELLIS.

"Frank! Mrs. Homer has two hundred a year!" cried Mrs. Weir, the next time she and her son were together.

"Then I hope she gives away half of it," said he. "She may live very well on the other half in Saffery's lodgings."

"Nonsense, my dear, no one would do that."

"There *is* a widow, though, on record, mother, who gave away all that she had."

"All that she *then* had," said Mrs. Weir.

"Why, you would rob the example of all its force!"

"We must be guided by probabilities, Frank."

"The probability is," said he, sitting down, and leaning towards her, with one of his thoughtful looks, "that the case was exactly as our Saviour stated it to be. Otherwise He would have let it pass. If the poor woman knew that she had just then two mites in her pocket, but that she should have plenty more in the course of the day—there would have been nothing to call attention to in that! It was, just then, *her all:* and she could not well spare it."

Mrs. Weir knitted in silence a few seconds.

"As for Mrs. Homer's having two hundred a year," resumed he, "what is there in that, or what is it to us? If she has no more, she is unwise to think of building. It will go but a little way in brick and mortar."

"You took me up too short, Frank, and didn't hear me to the end. Mrs. Homer may probably have more; indeed, she said as much, I think. She may have funded property, she may have a dower; but this two hundred per annum came to her in a singular way, from a deceased lover."

"Ay?—how was that, mother?" She was quite ready to tell him. He listened to her

with interest, though without apparent surprise.

It was quite easy, he said, to imagine a man becoming deeply attached to so attractive a person as Mrs. Homer. It showed a thoughtful turn of character, to consider and act upon the possibility of sudden death; and a generous disinterested mind to provide for her whom he intended to make his wife, whether she became so or not.

"But, since you say she says that she could not return his affection," pursued he, "it was a very happy thing indeed for both parties that the marriage did not take place. Indeed, I think she did wrong and quite unwisely to be drawn to the brink of it."

"Through the persuasions of her family."

"Ah, heads of families do very wrongly in these matters sometimes. Did she tell you anything about her actual marriage?"

"Not a word, my dear. When I alluded to it, she covered her eyes with her hand, and said, 'Excuse me, there are some subjects too tender to approach.'"

"Poor thing, she feels very acutely."

"Why, yes: one would think she need not

be quite so sensitive by this time. She has changed her mourning, and has very cheerful spirits generally, though always quiet. As for building, which I agree with you in thinking very inexpedient, that was probably only a temporary fancy, before she knew the cost. I don't think we shall hear any more of it. She is going to decline Farmer Benson's land this evening."

"That's a good thing."

"And Mrs. Fownes has told her of a cottage that may suit her."

"That's good too. Where is it?"

"I cannot exactly tell you, but it is called Tresellis. Do you know the name?"

"Not in the least. It sounds well at any rate."

"It is time for you to dress, for the Grevilles' dinner."

"Yes.—Mother, I wish I were not going. What a farce it is, to dine at this time of day! My real dinner was when you dined—I want nothing more, but a cup of coffee."

"Yes; but, my dear, we read of rich men's feasts in the Bible. They draw people together who would not otherwise meet."

"Yes," he said slowly, "that was why our Lord sat occasionally at rich men's tables, even on the Sabbath : it gave Him opportunities of usefulness. And for no other reason do I go to the Grevilles', for I come back quite spoilt for study. I would rather live, like Mrs. Homer, on bread and fruit. How famous it would be now, if Mr. Greville were to say, 'My dear friends, we know we have in fact all dined already; we will just have a little wine and fruit, and enjoy a little chat; and here's a twenty-pound cheque which I hand over to Mr. Weir for the good of the parish.'"

"Oh, you absurd, you visionary fellow! There, go and dress :—I won't hear any more of such nonsense."

Mr. Weir fancied he was gaining some hold on the Grevilles, which he might make good use of; and, therefore, without any more grumbling, he prepared to make a martyr of himself.

It was vexatious to Mrs. Saffery, that, in spite of her venturing on an officious reminder, Mrs. Homer did not write to Farmer Benson that evening; but remained in a meditative state, reclining on the couch of no repose.

A little past the family bed-time, just when Michael Saffery was at his sleepiest, she requested an interview with him. Rubbing his drowsy eyes, he stumbled across the shop and entered her presence, blinking worse than before at the effulgence of her little apartment.

She wanted to inquire about Tresellis—had he ever heard of such a place?—Oh yes, he knew the name, though he seldom had occasion to hear it—it was Mr. Binks's cottage—it had long been shut up, and he should think must be greatly out of repair—he supposed it might be had for a mere song. Mr. Oldsmith had the key: it was in his hands altogether, because he had married Mr. Binks's only daughter:—old Mr. Binks was dead. So, with this information for her guide, Mrs. Homer applied next morning to Mr. Oldsmith for the key, and, he not being at home, it was given her by Mrs. Oldsmith, who, moreover, offered to send a boy with her to unlock the door and open the shutters. Finally it was agreed that the boy should be sent in advance; and he started off at a pace that promised to keep him well ahead; though, happening to start a squirrel

by the way, he was led off his path by the chase, and did not reach Tresellis much before Mrs. Homer.

Mrs. Oldsmith assured her it was a sweet retirement, and that it was named after some charming place in Cornwall, where her father had been in service during his youth.

"Is it very lonely?"

"Well, ma'am, it certainly stands quite alone-like, but I never thought of it as lonesome. You see, there were my father and two brothers in the house: and father had a gun."

This made all the difference, Mrs. Homer thought; and as she took her way along the rutty, winding lane, between steep gravelly banks, that led to Tresellis, she weighed romance *versus* thieves and murderers somewhat anxiously.

She reached it at length. There was no other cottage in the lane—it stood where the road made a little curve, and was nestled in that curve, with a patch of very green grass before it, and a green pond beside it, shaded by two or three willows. The garden was very small, but prettily laid out; as if a landscape gardener had determined to show how much might

be made of a little plot by artistic arrangement of a few simple elements. But it was weedy and seedy; the gate hung on one hinge; the trellised porch was rotting; the rose-tree trailed over it had sent forth long straggling shoots.

The boy had already opened the door, and Mrs. Homer, on entering, was aware of a peculiar odour arising from damp. When he threw open the windows, however, this passed off; and she found there were two parlours on different levels, a small kitchen and scullery, and three bedrooms. It wanted whitewashing, papering, and what Mrs. Oldsmith called "the 'and of taste;" but it did not need substantial repair, and it was undeniably romantic. It was meagrely furnished. The rent was thirty pounds. There were some scattered cottages beyond it; so that Tresellis was not quite as lonely as it looked.

Yes, Mrs. Homer thought it would do. She considered the difference that crimson drugget and muslin drapery, and books, gold fish, and a harp would make; and felt that this might be the retreat for which she was looking out. With more haste than she had taken any

measure yet, she returned to Mr. Oldsmith's, and engaged Tresellis for a year, with the privilege of continuing in occupation as long as she pleased.

"And your references, ma'am?" said Mr. Oldsmith.

"Oh!" said she, smiling, "you may ask the Safferys, or Mrs. Weir, or my solicitors, Messrs. Root and Branche, of Lincoln's Inn, if you are in any doubt about me."

"Oh, ma'am, the names you have mentioned are quite sufficient," said Mr. Oldsmith. "Nobody could desire eligibler references than Mrs. Weir and Mrs. Saffery."

"On second thoughts," said she, "perhaps you had better not trouble Mrs. Weir. It will only cost you a penny, you know, to write to Messrs. Root and Branche."

"Just so; oh, no, ma'am, I wouldn't think of doubting a lady like you. By quarter-day you shall find the house in tenantable repair."

Mrs. Homer returned and told what an important step she had taken, to Mrs. Saffery, who seemed rather dubious about its expedience.

"Why, ma'am," said she, "I never named Tresellis to you, because I felt sure it wouldn't do. It's such a gnatty little place."

"Natty? that's in its favour, surely," said Mrs. Homer. "I want a natty little place, and I fancy Tresellis will be one when I have fitted it up."

"I said gnatty, ma'am, because of the gnats over the pond and under the trees; but to be sure, the gnats will soon be over for the season. And to think of going into Tresellis before Christmas! Why, ma'am, that lane in winter is a complete squash; and the walls are very thin."

"Mrs. Oldsmith told me she had spent her happiest hours there."

"Ah, but she was brought up different from you, ma'am, and she was young, and she had a sweetheart, and her parents were alive that are now dead, and—

"'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view,'"

said Mrs. Saffery, with a prodigious effort of memory.

Mrs. Homer looked a little discomfited; but after a pause said—

"We each know our own requirements best, Mrs. Saffery. *I* am seeking for repose."

And she shut herself into her little parlour, to write for the evening post. Nessy had listened to the above little dialogue with rather anxious interest. She pictured to herself Tresellis fitted up with elegance, as the abode of refined seclusion, but her mother's discouragements made her fearful lest Mrs. Homer should have made an unfortunate mistake. Still, she thought it would be very charming for some accidental wanderer, Mr. Antony, for instance, in straying down Quagmarsh Lane, to hear the vibrating tones of the harp, and to catch the gleam of the darting gold fish through the open latticed window.

"She's been and written to Farmer Benson, at last," said Mr. Saffery under his breath at supper-time, when he came in from sorting the letters. "And there's a pretty fat packet going to Miss Crowe, at Ipswich."

"That's her sister, according to Miss Antony," said Mrs. Saffery. "Quite right to tell her all about it."

"How nice it would be for Mrs. Early to have charge of the house," said Nessy.

"Tush, child; she won't put any one into it before she goes in. Saffery, do you know anybody that lives at Ipswich?"

"Not a soul; I knew a man once that lived at Sandwich."

"Why, that isn't a bit to the purpose."

"How do I know what the purpose is? you haven't told me. I suppose you want somebody to rake at the ashes of the late Mr. Homer, like as I am this moment raking at the ashes of the fire."

"Hush, Saffery: the walls are thin. Miss Antony said she was quite respectable—"

"And it's astonishing to me that that don't satisfy you. It's something wonderful, the curiosity of women."

"It's not curiosity, it's interest—"

"Oh, gammon," said he, laughing.

Here the shop-bell tinkled, and he went to answer it. Mr. Oldsmith, under pretence of wanting some stamps, had come to inquire about Mrs. Homer; so Mr. Saffery, having signified to him by nods and winks and knowing smiles that she was barely out of hearing, told him under his breath all he could think of that would set his mind at

rest,—that she paid reg'lar, was quite the lady, attended the Sunday school, visited Mrs. Weir and Mrs. Fownes, had been known from girlhood by Miss Antony, sister of Mr. Antony the noted artist, whose pictures went to the exhibitions,—that the quality of her table-linen and the marks on her spoons showed she had been accustomed to good style—that her father had retired from the army, her mother had kept a boarding-school. "Oh, you may depend upon her, she's safe, safe as the Bank; her solicitors are Messrs. Root and Branche, Lincoln's Inn."

And what did it all amount to? Why, to as much or as little as the references we are accustomed to accept every day; testimonials worth nothing at all. A vouches for B to C. Does C know anything of A? Nothing at all. "But two heads are better than one" says the adage; and "Oh, he was recommended by A," is better than having no reference to quote, even though A's recommendation should prove valueless.

The decisive step once taken, Mrs. Homer became as busy as she had hitherto been inert. Roberto and the pony-chair were again in

requisition, that she might go to the next town to look at the paper-hangers' pattern-books; for there were none in Belforest; and she brought home little scraps of those she fancied, and took them to Tresellis, and stuck them against the walls with pins, and considered their appearance at various distances, and got Mr. Oldsmith to go and look at them, and asked his opinion. It was all in his day's work, Mr. Oldsmith thought, but it took him a good deal of what would otherwise have been his work for the day.

Often she might be seen pensively leaning her head on her hand, with a pencil and small piece of paper before her, to subserve her purpose in making out a list of "must wants," and "may wants."

Nessy was now scarcely ever without some nice book in reading. Mr. Weir lent her the lives of Oberlin, and Neff, and Sarah Martin; also Moffat's Africa, and Longfellow's smaller poems, including the Psalm of Life, and the Children of the Lord's Supper. She racked her brains with vain conjectures as to what Edith's parting monosyllable could have been: nothing could be made of it; but one thing

was pretty sure, that Mrs. Homer and Miss Antony were not cordial towards one another. Perhaps they had had differences at school: what a pity to remember them now!

CHAPTER II.

CANONS OF CRITICISM.

THE first time Nessy saw Mr. Antony was through the shop-window when he came to post his letters the morning after his arrival at Daisylands. He was unaccompanied by his sister, and he came into the post-office to speak a kind word to the Safferys, and to beg a few minutes' rest, looking so worn and weak that it pained them to see him.

"You mustn't sit down in the shop, sir; you must step into the parlour," said Mrs. Saffery, cordially. "Dear me! you *are* pulled down! Any one can see you've had a bad illness."

"Oh! that's gone and past," said he, in his old, cheerful way. "There's no good in thinking of yesterday's pain or of yesterday's dinner. Well, Miss Saffery, there's your grand performance, I see. Still up to the eyes in oil and varnish?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Got to the end of your paints, I suppose."

"No, sir; I've had other things to do. Besides which, I came to a stand."

"Artists and authors are very much given to that, Nessy; you must not think your case peculiar. They come to the end of their ideas for a time, or stick fast in some difficulty. Then their best plan is to do as you have done —turn their attention to something else. After a while their minds are replenished from one source and another; they accumulate new ideas almost insensibly; and when they take up their work again, they resume it quite naturally and easily. They are all the better for their rest."

"That is very encouraging, sir."

"But I dare say you have been doing something or other since I was here, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes, sir! but nothing to show."

"Oh, very well; if you don't want a friend's remarks—"

"But I should like them very much, sir, since you are so kind," said Nessy, running off for her little collection of unfinished attempts.

While she was gone, Mrs. Homer began to play Martin Luther's Hymn in pretty good time. Mr. Antony listened to it with pleasure and a little sadness.

"So you've a musical lodger," said he, when Nessy returned.

"Mrs. Homer, sir. I so love to hear her play."

"Her harp has a very pleasant tone. Now we shall see what we shall see. Halloa! Why you've been trying your hand at the scene I'm going to paint! Are you going to cut me out, and make me second fiddle?"

"No, sir," said Nessy, laughing; "it would be difficult to do that; but you know I was one of the party when you first attempted it, and we were all very happy and comfortable together, and I had pleasant recollections of the place, so I just made that scrawl as a remembrance."

"Yes," said he, after a pause; "we *were* all very happy and comfortable together, as you remark; and you have got the general effect pretty well in, though I mean to do something a deal better."

"Oh, of course, sir."

"Why of course? I suppose this little bandy-legged man in the foreground is intended for me. With your leave, I'll touch myself up."

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, sir."

"Beg pardon of my hat, too, while you're about it. Why, this hat, supposing it on the same scale with myself, is half a yard high! There, I've touched myself up and lowered my crest. Go on and prosper. You are doing very well."

"If I had a pattern or two—" said Nessy.

"Let nature be your pattern. However, I'll lend you a little thing or two."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

"Don't waste any more time in drawing ladies in crinolines."

"It *was* foolish, I know."

"Quite time misspent. Spoils your eye for the line of beauty. You recollect about that?"

"Oh, yes, sir! and the basketful of angels!"

He had forgotten the passing joke, and, having now rested himself, wished her good-bye. Going through the shop, he passed Mrs. Homer. Her eyes being gravely cast down, he took a good look at her.

On his return to the farm, he said, mischievously—

"Well, Edith, I've seen Mrs. Homer."

"Sorry for it," said Edith, who was deep in a book.

"And heard her play the harp."

"Do you mean she played to *you?*" cried Edith, dropping her book.

"No, I don't," replied he, laughing. "I only heard it through the wall."

"Oh! *I* know what sort of a player she is."

"She seemed to me to play very nicely. I could have listened for ever!"

"Stuff!"

She picked up her book, and presently said, with feigned unconcern—

"Did you think her pretty?"

"More than pretty. Her downcast eyelids reminded me of the Mater Dolorosa at Dulwich."

"Where did you see her, pray?"

"In passing, in Mrs. Saffery's shop. How you dislike that little woman, Edith!"

"I hope I do. Her life is an acted lie."

"Rather a coarse word from a lady's mouth."

"A true one, though, Leo."

"Perhaps she'll call upon you."

"No, I don't think she will."

"Shall you cut her, if you casually meet?"

"How can I? We exchanged cold civilities the other day. In fact, she asked me, in her hollow way, to have bread and fruit, knowing there was no fruit in the house."

"That's gratuitous, Edith. I should say she had been civil *without* being cold, unless as concerning cold victuals."

"Well, you know my reasons for objecting to her," said Edith, starting up and exchanging her book for some needlework; "if you don't think they're valid, I can't help it."

"Are you going to peach to anybody while you're here?"

"Why now, Leonard, how can you ask such an absurd question? Who is there to peach to? if that word is elegant enough for the elegant Mr. Antony!"

"Oh, there are plenty of people to peach to, if that's the only question. 'Where there's a will, there's a way.' There are Mrs. Saffery and Nessy, to begin with."

"I should not think of speaking on such subjects to a child. And Mrs. Saffery is nobody to me."

"Just so. As much a nobody as Mrs. Homer is to me."

Edith seemed relieved by this remark.

"Do you seriously think," said she, presently, "that it is my duty to keep it secret?"

"Duty here or duty there," replied Mr. Antony, "it is surely not your duty to make it public. What call have you to interfere? What good would it do? You would simply be officious. It must be a very trying and almost impossible thing, I am well aware, for a woman to keep to herself a scandal concerning her neighbour."

"Nonsense, Leo."

"But, under the circumstances, it would be commendable to rise superior to the temptation. However, I'll bet you anything you like that you'll tell, before the month's end."

"Done! A pair of gloves! Two pair!"

"No, no," said he, laughing, "one pair will be quite enough. What book have you got hold of?"

"Joanna Baillie's plays. They are so delightful!"

"Don't they contain a singular amount of swearing, for a lady?"

"They do," said Edith reluctantly, "but it was more the custom, I suppose, then, and she was a young, inexperienced writer, and thought it needful to make her men seem manly."

"So it was; only there are different ways. Nessy Saffery thinks she makes a landscape figure manly by clapping a tall hat on his head."

Here Mr. Antony had a fit of yawning, which Edith knew proceeded from weakness; so she hastened to procure him some refreshment.

"I think," said he, "if I had a second glass of wine, I might manage to crawl to the hutted knoll."

"No, not to-day."

"I think I shall try."

"I shall hide your hat. Leonard, there's going to be a harvest-feast next week—a regular harvest-home! Are we not in luck's way?"

"Seemingly. Perhaps I shall pick up some little bits *à la* Teniers or Ostade."

"Not Ostade, please. Mrs. Benson is going to make gigantic preparations—to boil plum-puddings in the copper, and bake pies in milk-

pans, and roast enormous pieces of beef. But first they will have a short service in the church, which will be decorated with corn-sheaves and bunches of grapes. Pretty, isn't it?"

"That depends. Grapes seem rather bacchanalian."

"Trophies of plenty and thankfulness—first-fruits, dedicated to the Lord. I like the idea. If you would interest yourself in it, you might improve the effect."

"No, thank you! Let the cobbler stick to his last. They would not thank me for meddling."

This harvest-feast was the grand event of the year to hospitable Mrs. Benson, who came out in great force on such occasions; and the farmer dearly loved to get a few of the gentry to grace the solemnities, like Polixenes and Camillo at the old shepherd's sheep-shearing. Thus, on the present occasion, he invited the Safferys, and he got Mr. and Mrs. Weir to promise to look in, and thought it hard that the pretty widow who had lately tried him so much by her indecision, should be left out.

"You see, old woman," said he to Mrs. Benson, "she's not minded for dinner-company

and that, and, if she were, I don't know as the gentry would ask her; but she may enjoy looking on at a harmless merry-making for all that; so if I come across her, she shall at least have the refusal."

And he did come across her; and Mrs. Homer, with one of her sweetest smiles, told him she should be happy to come, just as a looker-on.

As for Mrs. Weir, she had heard so much of Mrs. Benson as a manager, and so much of the domestic arrangements at Daisylands, that she promised herself great pleasure in looking well over the premises.

The intervening time passed busily and pleasantly enough. Mr. Antony, with Edith's assistance, managed to pitch his easel on what he chose to call "the hutted knoll," and to begin his picture, she taking care to be not very far away from him, and to be ready either to lay his palette or supply him with refreshment. We need not ask how the farmer and his wife were employed; they had their hands full, and so had their underlings. Mr. Weir was preparing a harvest sermon, and getting the school children perfect in the harvest hymn. Mrs. Homer was looking after Tresellis.

It was wonderful how quickly Mr. Antony's health improved under the advantages of country air and diet, with a picture in hand to which he was resolved to give the nicest finish. Edith, too, began to find imagination and fancy revive under such favourable auspices, and in her solitary rambles she speedily framed the outline of a simple little tale, which she had ample opportunity for committing to paper while her brother was painting. Within a stone's throw of one another, and scarcely exchanging a syllable, the sense of each other's nearness made them seem excellent companions.

When Sunday morning came, Edith was sorry that Mr. Antony meant to remain at home, reading or idling; but, as this was nothing new, she did not contest it, but took her own way across the hilly field in the direction of the church chime of three bells. Afterwards, during their early dinner, she said—

"You should have been at church this morning, Leo. There was such a nice, hearty, simple service; and I could hear the rooks cawing through the open door all the time. What do you think the text was?"

"How can I possibly guess?"

"'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.'"*

"Humph! That was a satisfactory hearing to the congregation, I suppose. You seem to have been pleased to hear it."

"It was very impressive in Mr. Weir's hands. He showed how we *might* be saved more clearly than I ever heard done before; he made it seem so simple, that it was the height of ingratitude not to avail ourselves of such attainable means."

"So it is, no doubt."

"Why don't we, then?"

"Why don't we what?"

"Avail ourselves of those means."

"My dear child, you are perfectly welcome. I don't know that any one hinders you."

"Sometimes I think we are living too much for this world. I feel a want."

"Who does not? Do you think your case peculiar?"

"Even if everything were to go straight—if you were always to sell your pictures, and I my books—that would not be sufficient to make us happy."

* Jer. viii. 20.

"I believe you," said Mr. Antony, moodily.

"And then, as to fame:—why, if we had ever so much of it, that would not satisfy."

"Very likely not."

"And even the—the affections."

"You may as well leave them alone."

"Mr. Weir did not, though. He said, 'Mad and foolish are they who despise the affections in religion, *for through them the Spirit speaks.*' That was rather nice, I think, Leonard?"

"I dare say—"

"He said, '*Silly* people can never really be believers; and believers can never be silly people.'"

"Humph. That sounds deeper, I believe, than it is."

"Or take it the other way, Leo, that it is deeper than it sounds. That good little Nessy Saffery gives up all her time between breakfast and church to the Sunday-school. Mrs. Homer has a class, too, but I don't believe she can do much."

"Edith, you uncharitable toad!"

"How can she teach when she never would learn? She cared for nothing except accomplishments, and would never be at the pains of

acquiring more than a smattering of them: so Mrs. Crowe, finding she was no good at teaching or learning, used to let her be the ornamental member of the establishment, and sit up in the parlour to receive visitors."

"And a very necessary thing to do, too. Somebody must have done it if she hadn't, and very likely not so well."

"Oh yes, her soft voice and sweet smiles were very successful; but she let her mother and sister have all the fag. And then, when that carpet-manufacturer, Mr. Brunt, came forward, she didn't care a bit for him; but she was willing to marry him, because she would then live at her ease and do nothing."

"Just like you women," grumbled Mr. Antony. "I don't believe it to be at all a remarkable case."

"And then he died and left her two hundred a year. That was a very striking proof of attachment. I suppose he had dressed her up in imaginary excellences, and fancied her face to be the index of her mind."

This cut two ways; so Mr. Antony made no answer; nor did they have much more to say to each other during dinner; and after it, Edith

established herself on the broad, low window-seat, where there were some half-dozen books she was very fond of dipping into. It was rather a curious collection for Farmer Benson to have, and he had bought it at a sale, for the sake of a book on gardening, included in the lot. There were Thomson's Seasons, Walton's Angler, an odd volume of Joanna Baillie's plays, Nathan Drake's Winter Nights, and Hazlitt's Essays, including the pretty one on painting, which Edith thought worth transcribing, though her brother said, "Pshaw!" Together with these, were a pictorial Bible in folio, with excruciating illustrations, that had been taken at the door in numbers, and afterwards bound in calf and covered with green baize; and Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Dying. Sharing the white-painted window-seat with these volumes, was a large scarlet geranium in a pot; so that not much room was left for Edith; but yet she did squeeze herself in, till she looked, Leonard said, like a reel in a bottle. After musing over a delectable sentence or two, she heard the triple chime begin, and started up, saying—

"Well, I suppose I must eat my peach alone."

"What *do* you mean?" said Mr. Antony, waking up.

"That I must go to church again by myself."

"Where's the 'must'?"

"Will you go with me, then?"

"No, Edith; I really am not strong enough."

"Poor fellow, I wish you were; perhaps you may be next Sunday."

And she took her solitary way across the hilly field, wishing dear Leo would not continually find himself so very tired on Sundays, and that she knew some way of making the day of rest less irksome to him. "Somehow, men seem to find it more difficult to get through than we do," thought she. "Why should they, I wonder?"

CHAPTER III.

ART TROUBLES.

As about this time, Nessy tasted of the cup of mortification. Finding the artistic power once more at work, she spent every spare half hour on a grand composition (in small) wherein the old background of the village-green was enlivened with so many figures that it looked like a fair. There you had the butcher with his tray, the baker with his cart, the muffin-boy with his bell, a broad-wheeled wagon, with Farmer Benson's name painted on it, a waggoner with long, slashy whip, children playing, geese in wild dismay at the barking of a little dog, chickens pecking, and a cock crowing.

"Full of life," Mr. Saffery pronounced it; and Nessy, half ashamed, half elated, let him place it, unfinished as it was, behind the counter, where everybody was safe to see it.

And many a hard stare, and many an "Oh,

my!" did it excite. And, if the voice of the common herd be what Victor Hugo says it is, Nessy had good reason to be content, without caring for the select Areopagus—said Areopagus represented on the present occasion by the two Miss Grevilles and their rude friends the Miss Balfours, who came scudding into the post-office to escape a sudden shower, and immediately began to look about for something to talk and laugh about. The shop, it should be said, was, for the moment, empty, Nessy having gone into the parlour.

"Why, there's a picture!" cried Miss Adeliza Balfour. "*What* a thing! Sophy, Emily, do come and look!"

"H—ish," said Miss Greville, warningly; but they did not hear, or did not heed.

"Well, I never!—Did *you?*" in rather a lower voice. "'Aim highly, fall nobly!'—Just look at the trees!—*And* the geese, *and* the dog, *and* the cock!"

Here Mrs. Saffery coming in, and seeing their heads clustered together, said, "That's our Nessy's doing, young ladies."

"Oh, indeed!" said Miss Adeliza, with a sudden change in her voice for which

Nessy hated her. "A first attempt, I suppose?"

"Oh, dear, no, ma'am!" said Mrs. Saffery, with motherly pride. "Nessy's done a many things, and got very good prices for some of them. She mostly sells her picture."

"The proof of a good picture is the selling," said Miss Adeliza, with mock gravity. "That pig was drawn from nature, I suppose."

"Well, ma'am, Nessy doesn't exactly get her things to sit for their likenesses."

"Doesn't have the pig into the parlour," said Miss Gussy, *sotto voce*, which made Emily Greville give her a little nudge.

"But she views things attentive like, and puts them down on little scraps of paper. I can't explain nor tell how she does it. I couldn't do a picture like that, now, if it was ever so."

"Nor I," said Miss Adeliza, with a gravity which put her companions into difficulties in suppressing their laughter.

"Do you say your daughter sells her performances?" said Miss Gussy Balfour, thinking she would have her turn in chaffing the poor woman. "Pray, now, what may be the value she sets on this one?—Ten pounds?"

"Ten pounds, ma'am?" repeated Mrs. Saffery, opening her eyes very wide.

"Fifteen, then?"

"Nessy would be very glad to take fifteen shillings, ma'am, I'll be bound to say, ready-money; but if you wish to know, I'll ask—"

"No, no!" cried Miss Balfour, in real earnest, as Mrs. Saffery took a step or two towards the parlour, "that would be quite below the picture's merits, and quite above my power to offer; for I spend all my ready money in—charity!"

This sally nearly caused her companions to explode; but it was cut short by the unexpected entrance of Nessy, who, with cheeks as red as carmine, abruptly took up her picture, and, looking neither right nor left, walked straight out of the shop with it.

The moment she had done so, she was sorry, but it could not be helped; nor was there anything really deserving regret. The young ladies instantly felt the full force of the situation, though Mrs. Saffery did not; and after an awkward pause, Emily Greville said, "I believe it has left off raining now—good morning,

Mrs. Saffery"—and stepped out into the bright, falling drops.

"Emily, you'll catch your death, you imprudent girl!" cried her sister, picking her way after her.

"Why, it is raining quite fast," cried Miss Adeliza, in urgent remonstrance, "and I've only this little parasol."

"Let us run in here, then," said Emily, darting into the baker's.

"What was that move for, Emily?" said Sophia.

"To get away from the Safferys, said Emily. "Miss Saffery was in the parlour, and must have heard every word Adeliza said."

"Oh, she could not, I'm convinced," said Miss Adeliza. "Besides, how was I to know?"

"And listeners never hear any good of themselves," added Miss Gussy; "and what Addy said might do her good—take down her pride a little."

"I really said *nothing*," said Addy. "Now, *did* I?"

"Remember her coming in, looking so red, and carrying off her picture," said Emily.

"Like a little tragedy-queen," said Miss Gussy, laughing. "I *was* so amused!"

"Only, Mr. Weir says we should never hurt another person's feelings."

"Well, I didn't mean—I hadn't the least idea—"

"Really, Emily, I think you have said enough about it," said Sophia. "And it does not rain now."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Saffery went into the parlour, and said, "Nessy, what made you carry off the picture in that way?"

"Because they were making fun of it, mother, before you came in."

"Making fun of it? Why, what fun was there to make?"

"They made fun of the geese, and the chickens, and even the trees," said Nessy, with swelling heart; "and, directly you came in, they changed their tone."

"Well, if that's manners, I don't know what manners is!" said Mrs. Saffery. "I couldn't have believed it of the Miss Grevilles."

"It wasn't the Miss Grevilles, mother, it was their friends, those rude Miss Balfours."

"Oh, as for those Miss Balfours, I don't care

a pin for them. They don't belong to Belforest, and let them like it or lump it. I'll answer for them they can't either of them do a picture like this—they haven't the brains; and I shall just set it in the window, where they may see it again, if they like, and very likely you'll get a bespeak for it in the course of the afternoon."

"No, mamma, please don't!"

"But indeed I *shall* please," said Mrs. Saffery, pouncing on it. "Here comes Mr. Antony—we'll hear what *he* says about it."

"Don't let Mr. Antony see it"—

But Mrs. Saffery would have her way; and accosted him in her blandest tones, with—

"Good morning, sir! I'm glad to see you looking so very much better.—Why, you've got a little colour in your cheeks, and you step ever so much stronger, and I do believe you're growing fat."

"Spare my blushes, Mrs. Saffery."

"Well, sir, I'm only saying what I think; and I think it will do you good to sit down and take a little rest in our parlour—and Nessy's doing something I want you to see, sir."

"Oh, let me see it then, by all means."

He sat down, took the sketch in his hand, and looked as grave as a judge; though his eyes smiled a little. His opinion was expressed in a couple of words.

"Too crowded."

"I was afraid so," said Nessy softly.

"Well now, that was what Saffery liked it for," said her mother. "He said it was full of life."

"No repose," said the artist succinctly.

"Like our hard couch," said Nessy, laughing a little.

"You see, sir," said Mrs. Saffery, "we cannot see these things from the same point of elevation commanded by yourself. You see over the whole artistical world, if I may say so—"

"You may, but you will not say true."

"While we only view this small green. When I say 'green,' I mean the people that belong to it."

"Very just."

"And these people, sir, being mostly of our own sort, some of them rather below us in attainments, though they may be better off—these people are our little world, sir, Nessy's

artistical world; and it is more an object for her to give satisfaction to it (which she does), than to your great world, sir, which she couldn't satisfy after all."

"I see."

"Don't you think so, yourself, sir?"

"No, I don't."

"What *do* you think, sir?"

"I think it better to take one step in the right direction, than a hundred in the wrong. I think it better to please one good judge than a hundred and fifty-four who are no judges."

"Just what I think," said Nessy.

"Why now, Nessy, what's the good of your thinking so?" said her mother. "You please Farmer Benson and such as him, and they pay you nice little sums and carry off your pictures. If you aspirate to please the Miss Balfours, you'll never do it, nor ever see the colour of their money."

"No, I don't call the Miss Balfours good judges," said Nessy. "I don't care to please them."

"Who do you care to please, then?"

After a little pause, she said frankly,

"Mr. Antony, and Miss Antony."

"But," said Mr. Antony, smiling, "if the course I prescribe to you renders your pictures less pleasing to those who are accustomed to buy them,—spoils your market, in short,—where are you then?"

"Can that happen, sir? If I become a better painter, can my pictures be worse?"

"I'll give you an example. Did you ever hear of Wilkie?"

They did not remember to have done so.

"He painted pretty little domestic things—'Blindman's Buff,' 'The Cut Finger,' 'The Blind Fiddler,' and so forth—'full of life,' as Mr. Saffery said. But it was common life. 'How true to Nature!' people said. But it was vulgar nature. He held the mirror up to Nature; there you saw her, with her red elbows, and her thick ancles, and her rough hair; he did not idealize her at all, gave her no smart bonnet, no crinoline. He was popular; his pictures sold well. After many years, when he came to understand and feel what high art was, he completely changed his style; he still stuck to Nature, but idealized it. He didn't hold the looking-glass before her any more, but he painted her picture; softened her features

and complexion; improved her dress. Then people said, 'How Wilkie's style is changed! how he's gone off!' No; he hadn't gone off: he had gone on. He had gone on where they couldn't follow him. D'ye see?"

"Yes, sir, I see very plainly," struck in Mrs. Saffery rapidly, lest Nessy should answer for herself, "and my voice is quite for Wilkie's *first* style; it so being as you say. Why, here has Nessy nearly laid by money enough to subscribe to the Arts Union—"

"Ah, the Art Union!" repeated Mr. Antony. "The Low Art Union, Mrs. Saffery. The subscribers seldom or never lay out their money on high art pictures. They like something full of life; common life. 'The Expected Sneeze'—'Blowing out the Rushlight'—'The Nasty Medicine'—such things as those are what they want for *their* money; and as their money is very acceptable to poor artists, their patronage lowers the tone of art."

"I see, sir—There's the shop-bell," said Mrs. Saffery, leaving him.

"And to you, Nessy—Miss Saffery—my advice is, get some good general principles, when occasion offers, to apply to practice as

you find the opportunity. They won't hamper you; they'll help you. Sir Joshua says, 'their service is perfect freedom.' It is so with *all* good rules; no matter of what sort. They are no trouble; they come naturally, just as it is natural for you to write from left to right. Habit is second nature. You know, for example, the line of beauty. You have shown it in this little dog. He is full of pretty curves. The geese, on the contrary, are angular and awkward—you meant them to be so; the contrast is good. This tree is touched in very nicely indeed. I don't think you know how well you have done it. You've got the right touch. On the whole, I consider the composition too crowded, but never mind; let your next be less so."

"Shall I burn this, sir?"

"Burn it? By no means! What in the world are you thinking of? Are you in want of paper to light your fire? I'll send you one of my sister's novels."

Nessy said that if he did, she should certainly read it instead of burning it.

"Read it first, and burn it afterwards. 'I have whitewashed my ceiling,' said a bad artist

to his friend, 'and am now going to paint upon it.' 'It's a pity,' said his friend, 'that you did not paint it first, and whitewash it afterwards.'"

"I am sure, sir, Miss Antony cannot be a bad writer."

"No, she writes very prettily; very nicely. Instead of burning this, finish it off, and get fifteen shillings for it. I wouldn't do much more to it, if I were you. And then try something simpler: something with one or two figures."

As he walked homeward, across the hilly field, he wondered why he felt so much more cheerful. It was because he had been making another person happy, and doing her good; though that person was only a little girl at a village post-office.

"Leonard!" exclaimed Edith in dismay, just as they had finished their dinner, "here comes Mr. Weir."

"Oh, he can't be coming to see *us!*"

"He is, though! He has passed the other door."

The little knocker sounded. They both listened with suspended breath.

"Is Mr. Antony at home?"

"Yes, sir."

And the next moment he was shown in, and shaking hands with each.

"I only learnt just now," said he cheerfully, "that Mrs. Benson had an invalid lodger, so I thought I would take advantage of my position, and come to offer any service in my power. You know, a shepherd's business is to look after his sheep."

"A sickly sheep infects the flock," said Mr. Antony; "so I wonder you like to have anything to do with me."

"Oh! I don't suppose your sickness is catching. Brain-work, probably. We don't work our brains too hard here," laughing.

"Well, there *was* something the matter with my brain, I fancy—I've a curious head, rather. But I'm all right now, thank you."

"I seems to me that I saw you the other day sketching."

"Yes. I saw you."

"I was rather surprised at the point of view you had chosen."

"Well, it would not strike any one but an artist, perhaps; but some good painting may

be made of it. Are you interested in painting?"

"Very much so, in a blind uneducated sort of way."

Then Mr. Antony showed him his pictures; and we may be sure that when two intelligent men fell to talking in this unpremeditated sort of way, they said many nice things. Edith thought they did, and was extremely happy. One thing led to another, till Mr. Weir had seen all the contents of Mr. Antony's portfolio.

"Do *you* draw?" said he to Edith.

"Edith writes," said Mr. Antony.

"Leonard! how *can* you?" said she quickly.

"Why, you know you do."

"That was such an atrocious treachery on your brother's part," said Mr. Weir, "that I shall take no notice of it. Of course we know that ladies never write, never play, never sing."

At which they all laughed.

"What do you think of our painted window, Mr. Antony?"

Leonard hastily said he had not seen it.

"No? oh, then you weren't at church on

Sunday. Did not feel well enough. I know that feeling exactly. I had it last summer. Used to feel so *down*, when they all went there without me! Mrs. Hemans's sonnet used to come into my mind—

" 'How many blessed groups this hour are bending
Through England's primrose-meadow paths their way;
Toward spire and tower, 'mid shadowy elms ascending,
Whence the sweet chimes proclaim the hallowed day.'

You know the lines, Miss Antony?"

"Yes," said Edith, "and admire them very much."

"What is the subject of the painted window?" said Mr. Antony.

"It is a memorial window, put up by Mr. Greville. The subject is the Crucifixion. The colours are much too vivid, I think; and I do not like the way in which the subject is treated. The cross is much too high. You are aware, I suppose, that it would only have been a few feet from the ground. The popular conceptions, based on the ignorance of the monks, who were unacquainted with details, are in some respects erroneous. Perhaps you have seen Dr. Hanna's lecture on the physical cause of the death of our Lord?"

"No."

"It would interest you, even if he did not carry you entirely with him. It would interest any thinker."

"I should like to see it."

"Yes, I really think you would. Not as a book of general reading, you know, in the midst of secular surroundings, but in some lonely, still hour. On a solitary Sunday morning, for instance. I don't know that I can immediately lay my hand on it; but at any rate you shall have it before next Sunday."

"Thank you, thank you."

And then Mr. Weir turned to Edith to talk to her of other things; asked her whether she cared for wild-flowers; told her of a bank near the hilly field where he had just counted twenty-eight different specimens; spoke of the peculiarities of soil and produce as compared with other districts, and took leave before either of them could, by any possibility, find his visit tedious.

They were flattered by the attention. People are generally pleased to find they are not overlooked. They praised his cordial, intelligent

manner. They did not say a word about the proffered book. Edith wondered whether Leonard would read it; he was not given to the study of such deeply serious subjects.

CHAPTER IV.

AUTHORSHIP.

"Edith! you look as if you were going to cut off somebody's head," said her brother. "What's the matter?"

"I've got my story all into a mess."

"Hand it over to me, old girl."

"No."

"Read it to me, then. I know you prefer that, because you correct blunders and skip weak places by the way. Let us have a mouthful of fire; draw the sofa close to it, snuff the candles, and commence proceedings. I'll lend you my ears."

"Well, that sounds rather inviting."

So, when all these arrangements were made, Edith, with a little diffidence, which the sound of her own voice speedily dispelled, began to read, Mr. Antony having conveniently disposed of himself on the sofa, with his heels on the same level with his head.

We shall spare our readers the plot of the story, but it opened with the miseries of a little Italian boy, Angelo by name, who went about the streets with a couple of white mice, and was severely beaten by his master, an ogre residing on Saffron Hill, if he failed to carry home a certain sum of money. Angelo, unable to obtain it of a compassionate public, committed a small theft; was carried to a police-office, his master was had up, iniquitous details were revealed, compassion for the orphan boy excited, &c. &c. &c. Before Edith had read many pages, Mr. Antony said—

"Cárlo Pierotti."

"No, quite different," said Edith. "Not Carlo Pierotti at all, you'll see."

Carlo Pierotti was a boy of whom Mr. Antony bought casts, and whose portrait Mr. Antony had painted.

Before Edith had proceeded much farther, Mr. Antony again said—

"Carlo Pierotti."

"Why now, Leonard, how can you say so? This boy is not in the least like Carlo Pierotti. Carlo has parents, Angelo has not. Carlo comes from Lucca, Angelo from Como. Carlo

is a good boy; Angelo has had no opportunity of being good as yet: one sells casts; the other exhibits mice; there are no two points of resemblance."

"Carlo Pierotti."

"In what respect Carlo Pierotti? They are both poor Italians—there is no other resemblance. If I am to draw characters different in every possible respect from any character that has yet existed, I may as well give up authorship at once," said Edith, desperately.

"Granted."

"If I am to draw entirely from imagination, and not in the least from observation, I know I must stop short."

"Certainly."

"What am I to do, then?"

"Give general resemblances without individual details."

"Bad art, Leo! Give general resemblances *with* individual details. Hazlitt says so."

"And Sir Joshua says the other."

"Well, I think Hazlitt, in this instance, is the best guide."

"Then you must expect me to make my best bow to Carlo Pierotti."

"Leo, I'll tell you something that will strike you dumb."

"Now, then."

"I had imagined and put together the outline of this part of my story before we knew Carlo Pierotti."

"Oh, then, I must look over the police cases."

"How hard, how almost impossible it is to get a man to acknowledge himself in the wrong."

"Almost as hard as to get an authoress to acknowledge you have detected the type of one of her characters."

"Say author, and I'll overlook the injustice. If true of female writers, it is of men."

"That's not a *sequitur*, but I will let it pass. Go on."

"No, let us have this out. Was there not a certain Zeuxis, who made a study from half-a-dozen reigning belles of Greece, for his famous picture of Helen? Would it have been fair of his friends to scoff and say, 'Aspasia's nose—Chloe's mouth—Persis's eyes . . . there is not a bit of originality here?'"

"No; because he combined. Invention is originality of combination: it *can* be nothing more."

"Very well; and *I* have combined. I have made no slavish copies. That would be bad art. I don't think it was good art for Raffaelle to introduce his own portrait into the School of Athens: any more than it would be (to compare great things with small) for me to introduce my own likeness in this story."

"Well said, Edith. I am glad Raffaelle has given us his head, all the same. Now go on with your story."

So she went on; and he enjoyed it; and she saw he enjoyed it, and was very happy. At length she paused.

"Go on," said Mr. Antony.

"That's all," said Edith.

"All? Nonsense!"

"That's where I have stopped."

"Why, you have left off in the most interesting part!"

"I don't know what to say next. Can you help me?"

"Not in the least. Make something of that fellow with the paper collar and false moustache."

"I can't."

"Set the house on fire."

"If Mrs. Benson overhears us, she will think we are in earnest, like the waiter who overheard Mademoiselle de Scuderi and her brother discussing a plot."

"Well, lock it up, and wait till something occurs to you. I dare say you won't be aground long."

Edith took his advice, simply because she could not do better for herself. And, next morning, before breakfast, there she was, scribbling again, as fast as her pen could fly over the paper.

Oh for the power of Mary Russell Mitford, to describe Farmer Benson's harvest home! The farmer's wedding-day was so close at hand, that it had been decided to wait for it, and make the feast answer two purposes: not that this arrangement had anything to do with economy, for the boards were to groan under an extra allowance of good cheer. Planks were laid upon tressels in the big barn, which was large enough for a playhouse: these planks, representing tables, were covered with new white calico, representing tablecloths. From the lofty roof were suspended hoops covered with tin foil supporting circles of candles in nozzles:

these represented chandeliers. Heaps of evergreens were brought in by the cow-boys, which Edith and Nessy Saffery helped to tie up: and basins filled with huge bouquets of gay flowers were placed at intervals down the tables. Then they arranged the salt-cellars, the knives and forks, the mugs, the piles of plates; and peeped now and then into the kitchen and bakehouse, whence savoury smells were already emitted. Then the three church-bells began to clamour with unusual spirit; but Mrs. Benson and her helps (one of whom was Mrs. Early) were far too busy to obey the summons. Edith and Nessy, however, answered the call with alacrity, for Nessy had to marshal the children, and Edith wished to witness her proceedings; and, to their surprise and joy, Mr. Antony presently came after them; accounting for his doing so, by saying he thought he might pick up some happy effect. Edith hoped his church-going might be the happy effect of Mr. Weir's pleasant visit.

Everybody in holiday clothes, of course, and with holiday faces. Dr. Fownes read prayers: the service was very short and hearty: the singing of the loudest. Then Mr. Weir gave

a very cheery sermon, which lasted just fifteen minutes. "And long enough too," Mr. Antony afterwards said; "if a man couldn't come to the point in a quarter of an hour, there was no hope of him."

"Leo, was it not a very nice sermon?"

"Very; he didn't beat out his gold-leaf too thin. He had something to say, and he said it."

And now the triple chime is at work again, and Sunday groups are moving towards the cricket-field, where the Belforest Eleven are intending to beat the next parish. As good luck will have it, (or has it been the farmer's forethought?) Punch and Judy make their appearance, and take up an advantageous position on the village green, to the great delight of a numerous audience. There is also a scramble for nuts and apples.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Farmer Benson must be understood to be in the state of the old shepherd's wife in "The Winter's Tale,"

"Her face o' fire with labour,"

now here, now there, looking into this and that saucepan; giving an additional baste or two to the beef—keeping a sharp eye to the

kitchen-chimney lest the soot should catch fire —fancying she smells the pies burning in the oven—lifting the lid of the copper, at the imminent risk of scalding, to see that the pudding water has not boiled away; verifying in a hundred ways the good old adage that a mistress's eye is worth two pair of hands; aye, and that a mistress's hands, when she knows how to use them, are worth two pair belonging to any one else; and that a mistress's tongue can wax loud, shrill, and sharp, when she has a multiplicity of orders to give to subordinates who have willing hands but no heads.

"Here comes Mrs. Wier along with the young widow across the hilly field," said Mrs. Early, glancing through the kitchen window. "Folks do say that Mrs. Homer—"

"Mrs. Early, there's a coal in the dripping-pan!" shouted Mrs. Benson. "Do mind the meat, and leave the company to take care of themselves. The ladies can perambulate the garden if they come so early."

Everybody had dined as usual at one o'clock —everybody, that is, except Mrs. Benson and her coadjutors, who had made a scambling-day

of it, getting a bite and a sup when they could or when they wanted : the banquet, whether to be viewed as late dinner or early supper, was to be at "four punctual," and yet here were the ladies dropping in at three.

"Just like quality," Mrs. Benson grumbled to herself; "never considering how a body was to dress herself, and to be in three places at once—dressing-room, parlour, and kitchen."

"You must look to the saucepans yourself, now, Mrs. Early, and mind no harm comes to anything. I must slip on my silk gown, and will look in on you again by and by."

Meeting Edith on the stairs, she said with a troubled look, "Them ladies have come sooner than wanted; you don't know them, miss, do you, so as to be able to take them for five minutes off my hands?"

"I know one of them," said Edith; and sooner than let her good-natured hostess be in a strait, she went out to meet them as they came down the broad straight gravel path, with its wide margins of turf, soft and even as green velvet.

Mrs. Weir and Mrs. Homer had not seen much of one another lately; for Mrs. Weir had been very busy with the shoe club, and

Mrs. Homer with Tresellis; but it suited them both to cross the hilly field together. When they saw Edith coming up the walk, Mrs. Homer said, with a little effort, "This is Miss Antony, ma'am," and stepped forward to meet her with outstretched hand and propitiatory smiles. Edith scarcely touched her hand, and greeted her rather coldly; perceiving which, Mrs. Homer instantly shrank back, but then renewed her courtesies with quiet pleading sweetness, as much as to say,—"*Do* be friends with me; if you spurn me like a worm, you know that, such is my nature, I cannot turn again."

Edith, addressing herself in a matter-of-fact way to Mrs. Weir, said,—

"I am sure, ma'am, you will excuse Mrs. Benson for a few minutes; she has been very busy to-day, and is now dressing. Will you let me show you the dairy? she will be ready in a few minutes."

"I should like to see the dairy very much," said Mrs. Weir; "and the cheese-room, and the bees, and in fact everything; but I hope Mrs. Benson will not hurry herself on my account, for I know how busy she must be."

Edith, therefore, did the honours of the farm; and being well up in the details, which, being quite new to her, she had taken much interest in, she was able to tell Mrs. Weir everything so fully, and in such a pleasant, animated way, that the old lady was quite delighted with her. Mrs. Homer, meanwhile, smiled sweetly, and rather absently, and feigned an interest she did not feel.

"This churn, now," said Mrs. Weir, "is quite different from the one that was most approved when I was a girl. But there are so many improvements now. I have heard of a machine for milking cows; I suppose Mr. Benson has not adopted it."

Edith smiled, and said he preferred milk-maids, and she hoped he always would.

"There is a machine, too, for laundry-work, called a dolly," said Mrs. Weir; "but I believe a live Dolly or Jenny is better. It is found to tear the clothes."

The sight of the apple-room, the pear-bin, and the cheese-closet revived Mrs. Weir's recollections of her juvenile visits to her grandfather, and she became garrulous, and, to Edith, very entertaining, in her descriptions of his open-

housekeeping; especially at Christmas and Easter. And thus, as they slowly passed from one place to another, the time did not at all drag, till Mrs. Benson came out to them, glorious in a large-patterned black poplin, and with a superb cap. Her apologies for her delay were declared quite unnecessary; and then the round was repeated, that she might do the honours herself, and give Mrs. Weir many details that Edith could not be expected to know. Then it would have been more simple for Edith and Mrs. Homer to fall back and entertain one another, but this did not seem to answer. Edith asked coldly—

"Have you heard from Miss Crowe lately?"

"Not very lately—at least—oh, yes; I had a letter from her this morning."

"She is quite well, I hope?"

"Quite, thank you."

And then neither seemed able to think of anything else to say.

"Are you going to remain here some time?" resumed Mrs. Homer at length.

"I hardly know. It depends on my brother's health in some measure."

"Ah, yes—yes, indeed."

Here they were joined by Mr. Weir, and it was surprising what a difference he speedily made. Soon they were all three in continuous and cheerful conversation: the ladies exchanging remarks with him, however, rather than with each other.

"Mrs. Benson," said he presently; "your guests are all on the other side of the hedge, but they won't come in till the clock strikes."

"Ah, that's always their notion of manners, sir," said she laughing; "and it's convenient, too, so I don't gainsay it."

At this moment, the clock struck four; and, precisely as the fourth stroke was sounded, the white swing-gate solemnly opened, and men, women, and boys walked in, in orderly procession. Mrs. Homer and Edith were amused at this quaint way of marshalling themselves, and joined in the only unconstrained laugh they had yet shared. A little in the rear of the procession, as if to show that they did not belong to it, came Mr. Saffery and Nessy; Mrs. Saffery remaining at home. Mr. Saffery's hair had been cut even too closely, and his face seemed to have been washed with a double

allowance of soap. There was a complacent smile, almost amounting to a smirk, on his shining face; while Nessy, in a clear muslin with a little purple sprig, that did not prevent the general effect from being white, and with mauve ribbons to her white straw-bonnet, looked a nice, comely, artless country-girl, as she was. There were other lookers-on—the Oldsmiths, the Browns, the Whites, and several of their class. The guests took their seats; solemn silence prevailed; Mr. Weir said grace —his voice was not very distinctly heard at the lower end of the banquet-hall; but Mr. Saffery, seeing the lads, when their plates were filled, hesitate to begin, said, "Come, boys, fall to; the curate has said grace, though we know his voice is none of the loudest."

None of the loudest, indeed!—It could be very well heard to the remotest corners of the church, by people who were not asleep or inattentive. But that's neither here nor there. Soon, amid the clatter of knives, forks, plates, and dishes, such a chatter and clamour ensued, among persons no longer afraid of hearing their own voices, that it did indeed require the vigorous lungs of Farmer Benson himself

to be heard far down the table. As for Mrs. Benson—

> "This day, she was both pantler, butler, cook,
> Both dame and servant; welcomed all, served all;
> Would sing her song and dance her turn, now here,
> At upper end o' the table, now i' the middle,"

seeing that every one got served to their liking. And oh, the loads of meat and pudding that worthy labourers will get through, when made welcome to do so at another man's cost! How was it they could sing afterwards? how was it they could dance? For sing and dance they did, Farmer and Mrs. Benson taking the lead in each . . . first, singing a duet about Hodge and Kate, with a great deal of tol-de-roodle at the end of each verse, the farmer snapping his fingers like castanets, and then, when decks were cleared, and a professional fiddler began a country dance, Mr. and Mrs. Benson led off with hands across and down the middle; at which point Mr. Weir hinted to his mother, who had laughed till she was exhausted, that it was growing dark and late, whereon she and Mrs. Homer retired under his protection.

One grand event of the evening remains untold. Mr. Antony, who had added much

to the general mirth by various sallies, asked Nessy if she would dance with him. She coloured, and looked at her father.

"Yes, Nessy, by all means, since Mr. Antony is good enough to ask you," said Mr. Saffery; "and I wish I were enough of a gentleman to offer my hand to Miss Antony."

Edith assured him she preferred looking on; and when they had worked their way down to the end, Nessy's modest aspirations were fully satisfied, and she gladly returned with her father, by the bright light of the hunter's moon.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER THE HARVEST HOME.

"How surprised I was, Leo, to see you dancing!" said Edith, as they sat at their quiet supper,

> 'To sound, far off, of village merriment.'

"I was surprised at myself," said Mr. Antony; "and I'm sure I surprised Nessy. It was almost equal to the performance of the grasshopper in the fable, when they

> "Admired the wondrous leaps he made,
> And one and all pronounced him mad."

But only think of Farmer Benson's steps! and his wife's little curtseyings! Pity one can't paint motion."

"I had no idea so much amusement could be extracted out of a harvest-supper," said Edith. "While that stolid fellow was singing a ballad as long as 'Chevy Chase,' some boys got up a psalm in a different key, and went

straight through it, so that you at the same time heard,

> "'I cannot eat
> But little meat,'

and,

> "'Come, let us all with one accord.'"

"Mr. Weir's riddles, propounded so sedately at intervals, were first-rate."

"Such wretched ones! I think he must have made them."

"Of course."

"Hark, they are breaking up now. I see dusky groups wending over the hilly field. What a splendid moon!"

The succeeding quiet seemed, by contrast, more profound. Mr. Antony was very fond of what he called "listening to the silence," and chewing the cud of sweet and bitter thoughts. The stillness was now only broken by the occasional click of plates being washed up, or a word or two exchanged in very tired voices in the kitchen and scullery.

All at once Edith exclaimed, "That man has stolen my only sensation!"

Mr. Antony looked round in astonishment, and said—

"Are you taking leave of your senses?"

"No, but it is enough to drive me out of them, or out of patience at any rate. Here is a review of a new story in the *Athenæum*, and it contains the only little sensational incident I had intended for myself."

"The man cannot have stolen what he has never seen, and you have never published."

"No; only I'm forestalled. Oh, Leo! isn't it hard?"

"Such things are continually occurring. People duplicate inventions every day. Astronomers in different countries claim to be the first discoverers of the same star. Best way, not to contest it. Look out for another star; —plenty left."

"You are talking in your sleep, I think, Leo."

"No, I heard and understood what you said. Man has cribbed your sensation incident. Don't have any sensation."

"But then what will the publishers say?" rejoined Edith, dolefully. "Don't you read sensation books yourself?"

"Only to abuse them. Don't go into that line. It won't fit you, any more than Mrs. Benson's cap. Sensation cap decidedly. Elicited several whispered criticisms and murmurs

of 'Oh, my!' Whether laudatory or not deponent sayeth not. Don't try on the sensation cap, it won't fit."

"Well, a nightcap will be more to the purpose at this time of night. I hear a general locking up."

"I hope there's a cream-bowl duly set on the hearth for Lob-lie-by-the-fire. But—

'The old belief has passed away.'

We cannot now even invent a nursery ballad equal to 'Little boy blue, come blow your horn.' Mark the imagery of the next line, 'The sheep in the meadow, the cows in the corn.' What a pastoral! High time the little boy should sound the alarm. But why blue? and with what? Blue with cold, or simply in a blue jacket? There we find one of those questions which will never be answered."

"Well, good night."

"Blake was the last who did anything good in that line—

"'Little lamb, who made you?
Little lamb, who made you?'

but who made our really old ballads? who made their tunes? who built our old abbeys? Echo answers who? And such is fame!"

"Good night!"

Let us look in on the Safferys, eating bread and cheese.

"Danced with Mr. Antony?" repeats the astonished Mrs. Saffery. "Well, what next, I wonder? Why, that he'll feel himself very stiff to-morrow morning, maybe. He that can't walk to church."

"Oh, no, I don't think he'll be stiff," said Nessy, laughing. "He seemed to think it very good fun."

"Don't let this set you up, Nessy."

"Oh, no, mother. There's nothing to set me up, only it was very pleasant. There was nobody else he could dance with, and I'm glad there was not."

"In boots, too," mused Mrs. Saffery. "Well, they were all in boots, of course. And I believe ladies dance in satin boots now. Leastways, I saw a white satin boot in a bootmaker's window, last time I was in Oxford Street."

"And a harlequin parasol over an umbrella-shop, maybe, last time you was in Seven Dials," said Mr. Saffery; "but ladies don't go about with harlequin parasols."

"Mrs. Homer had some bread and butter,

and went straight up to bed directly she came in," said Mrs. Saffery. "She came back ever so much sooner than you did. I think she got bad news this morning in that Ipswich letter. She had her handkerchief at her eyes when I went in about dinner; and she has seemed dull ever since."

"Oh no, she was not dull at Daisylands," said Nessy. "I don't mean that she danced."

"Danced? I should think not. Who ever heard of a widow dancing? Even if she ever did at other times."

"Maybe her sister doesn't like her going to Tresellis," said Mr. Saffery.

"Very natural she shouldn't, if she knew what sort of a place it is," said Mrs. Saffery. "All squampy like down in that hollow. Why, the cottage was built over a pond. And don't you remember Sally Lund falling in up to her arm-pits in that old well that had been covered in?"

"Sally Lund didn't ought to be going out through the gap in the paling at that time o' night," said Mr. Saffery. "It was a dispensation."

Proceed we now to Mrs. Weir's parlour, where

Mr. and Mrs. Weir are laughing over the details of the harvest-supper. Mrs. Weir goes on to say—

"Frank, I like that Miss Antony—a nice, pleasant, unaffected girl; but how cold she was to Mrs. Homer! They were old schoolfellows, it seems, and Mrs. Homer went up to her in her engaging way, with all the cordiality imaginable; but Miss Antony was as glum as possible, and would hardly notice her."

"Some old school-pique perhaps," said Mr. Weir. "It is a pity women should foster little grudges against one another."

"Just as if men didn't do the same!" cried his mother. "It's human nature."

"Did you speak to Mrs. Homer about the clothing-club?"

"Yes; she was so sorry she had not her purse about her, she will send her mite to-morrow."

"Oh, there is no hurry; only she has professed herself so desirous to do good in some way, and there have been no collections lately, and she does not pay anything for her seat at church; so that I dare say she will be glad to subscribe something liberal: and we are rather in want of funds just now."

Next morning, soon after breakfast, a carefully-sealed envelope was brought him, which, on opening, disclosed a small folded paper, inscribed, "From a Cheerful Giver. Prov. xix. 17," and contained two half-crowns.

"You look rather dissatisfied, Frank," said Mrs. Weir, laughing.

"Well, I *did* hope there might have been gold," said he, "if only a half-sovereign. Because, you see, she really has given nothing to our poor people yet; and she is spending so much on herself in mere pleasure at Tresellis."

"Be just before you are generous. Housekeeping is expensive, and perhaps her bills cover her quarterly receipts."

"Yes, mother; but when that is the case, she need not buy Bohemian glasses and things. I'm afraid the little lady is rather selfish,—I often observe," added he, after a pause, "that when people put these effusive prefixes to their subscriptions the donations are extremely small. 'From One who knows what Trial is—one-and-six.' 'From a poor Dust, who wants but little here below, nor wants that little long—sevenpence halfpenny.'"

"It all depends on whether the poor dust has much gold-dust," said Mrs. Weir.

"Just so: that makes all the difference. But, if you went to the root of the matter, I believe you would often find these anonymous gentry were ashamed to put their names to donations so disproportioned to their means. Mrs. Homer had better have just written, 'With kind regards,' and no more about it."

On Saturday evening, Mr. Antony received a paper parcel, "With the Rev. Francis Weir's kind regards," and found it to contain Dr. Hanna's book, "On the Last Day of Our Lord's Passion." He said, "Oh!" and not another word. Edith made no remark. Next morning, when she had gone to church, he settled himself comfortably, and read it straight through. There were three hundred and forty-three pages in it, but he skipped nothing; he read right on, taking it all in, in his strong, rapid way, without often pausing to think, weigh, and cavil, but stowing all its contents somewhere in his mind, whence he could fetch them at any time. You might have catechised him on that book afterwards, supposing him minded to answer you, and not found him wanting. I

am not giving the book undue value; it is unequally written, and sometimes takes things for granted which might be better only supposed likely or highly probable. But its merit is great; it is vivid and hearty, and all on one subject, though comprising many others. Had the book contained detached sermons, however excellent, they would probably have set Mr. Antony to sleep.

When they were dining, Edith said, expressively, "I feel as if my morning had been well spent."

"So do I," said her brother.

"Have you read any of that book?"

"I have read it all."

"I should like to look into it, when you have done with it."

"You are welcome to it. I have done with it now."

"You did not like it, I suppose?"

"I liked it very much."

In the afternoon, he went to church with her. After church, he took a solitary walk. In the course of that walk, he met Mr. Weir, returning from administering the sacrament to a dying person, and they extended their walk

together. How much resulted to him from that quiet day! It made no outward show.

"Will you believe," wrote Lacordaire, "that I am every day becoming a Christian? The progressive change which has taken place in my opinions is a singular thing."

So might Leonard Antony have written, months afterwards, only he did not. The progressive change in him was as quiet as the change of the seasons. He took several long walks with Mr. Weir, in the course of which we may be sure they were not silent; and Mrs. Weir would gladly have seen more of Edith, but for her having made out that she was not cordial with Mrs. Homer; and Mrs. Weir had no mind to take her up at the expense of the other. If they did not accord, she need not bring them together; and besides, she was now becoming very busy in parish business.

Mrs. Weir was curious to see Tresellis, but Mrs. Homer implored her not to do so till it was in company trim; and it was becoming more so every day. Having good taste in the arrangement of furniture, she was really making a pretty place of her new home; and her purchases were chiefly inexpensive; only, we all

pleasure to painting it up at his leisure during the winter, and giving it the nicest finish. Edith, too, had written out her story in the rough, and actually introduced some rather exciting little scenes in it; so that the good girl began to reckon her chickens before they were hatched, and to weigh the separate advantages of selling the copyright and getting a publisher to undertake all the expenses and share with her the profits. Meanwhile, she had before her the task of making a fair copy, which she knew would in fact be a labour of love. The last Sunday but one of her happy month at Belforest, Nessy came to her in haste, to say that Mrs. Homer had the face-ache, and could not take her class—would Miss Antony undertake it? Edith brightened at the idea; and, getting some leading hints from Nessy by the way, gladly undertook the charge. The novelty of Mr. Weir's little prayer and address affected her: she set to work with zeal, and soon inspirited her scholars, who, under Mrs. Homer's management, had become sadly careless and inattentive. So pleased was she with her office, that she readily undertook it again in the afternoon. By the week's end she had

brought out her requirements so lingeringly, that, generally speaking, it was not till the girls got out of her little parlour into the open air, that they were able to put things together, and find that they were to do more than they were inclined for. And yet some of them thought her such a nice lady, that they kept hovering and hankering, till some old mother or grandmother peremptorily insisted on their declining the situation. All this was in favour of Mrs. Early, who did not mind loneliness a bit, was too old and stiff to think herself equal to much church, and was highly pleased to have a kitchen to herself and no scolding. Mrs. Homer was not at all tender on the subject of kitchen-stuff; she only stipulated that *her* house should not be made Mrs. Early's "Pantechnicon."

And now the bright, cheerful month of October, with its twenty fine days, was drawing to a close, and the paths were strewn with dead leaves, though as yet they were not much missed. But it was becoming unsafe to sit out of doors, and the days were fast shortening; so that Mr. Antony, having made a careful study for his picture, looked forward with

pleasure to painting it up at his leisure during the winter, and giving it the nicest finish. Edith, too, had written out her story in the rough, and actually introduced some rather exciting little scenes in it; so that the good girl began to reckon her chickens before they were hatched, and to weigh the separate advantages of selling the copyright and getting a publisher to undertake all the expenses and share with her the profits. Meanwhile, she had before her the task of making a fair copy, which she knew would in fact be a labour of love. The last Sunday but one of her happy month at Belforest, Nessy came to her in haste, to say that Mrs. Homer had the face-ache, and could not take her class—would Miss Antony undertake it? Edith brightened at the idea; and, getting some leading hints from Nessy by the way, gladly undertook the charge. The novelty of Mr. Weir's little prayer and address affected her: she set to work with zeal, and soon inspirited her scholars, who, under Mrs. Homer's management, had become sadly careless and inattentive. So pleased was she with her office, that she readily undertook it again in the afternoon. By the week's end she had

made friends with all her pupils, and visited most of them in their homes. Mrs. Homer by this time was sick of her Sunday teaching, which obliged her to get up earlier than she liked even in warm weather; and now the mornings were rather cold: therefore she was heartily glad to avail herself of Miss Antony's offered services as her substitute another Sunday, to the great satisfaction of Mr. Weir, who found in Edith exactly the kind of school-teacher he wanted.

Hardly a day now passed without his having snatches of intercourse with her or her brother; often with both. He took unfeigned, lively pleasure in the progress of the picture; and Mr. Antony was gratified at the interest shewn in his work by an intellectual though unprofessional sympathizer. Here was a subject on which he could lay down the law and command his listener's attention; just as, in the pulpit, and often in their walks, Mr. Weir commanded *his*. When just deference on either side is thus paid, intercourse is sure to be profitable as well as pleasant: very different from that of persons always trying to strike in, with an "I beg your pardon, but . . ." and then go off at a tangent.

Very calmly happy was Mr. Antony during the latter half of his stay in the country: and it was pleasant to have the use of many books he had never so much as heard of till Mr. Weir mentioned them. Some of these were secular, others not. Edith, too, had plenty of books lent her that suited her taste; so that when candles were lighted, they were as quiet as mice, and enjoyed the long evenings. They generally got pretty close to each other, but back to back, with the candles close between them, that the light might fall full on the open pages and not in their eyes; so that their heads almost knocked; and Mrs. Benson smiled sometimes when she came in, at their way of making themselves comfortable. Mr. Antony looked into the kitchen when she was making a pudding: he took up a piece of dough, and moulded it into a little man, "as natural as life," she delightedly exclaimed; and thenceforth that little model occupied an honourable position in her china closet with glass doors.

Mrs. Homer took possession of Tresellis, a day or two before the Antonys returned to London: and during their last evening walk, which was not, in fact, later than five o'clock,

they chanced to find themselves in the lane which passed her gate, and heard the mellow sound of her harp.

"A pretty little place," said Edith, eyeing it wistfully. "How happy you and I could be there, Leo!"

"We should be bored to death," was his answer. "There is not a window in the cottage large enough to admit a broad light for painting; and the aspect is bad. Daisylands for my money, with no bother about housekeeping."

"Lodgings certainly have their great conveniences," Edith admitted.

And so they wished good-bye to the few friends they had made—to Mr. Weir, and to cordial Farmer Benson and his wife; and the kind, pleasant Safferys. Nessy's regret at their departure was undisguised.

"Oh, what a dull winter we are going to have!" said she. "Mrs. Homer is gone, and we no longer see her pretty face and hear her pretty music. You are going, Miss Antony, just as the children are getting used to you, and Mr. Weir calls you his best teacher! Do you think you shall ever return? *When* do you think you shall?"

> " 'When shepherds pipe on oaten straws,
> And merry larks are ploughmen's clocks,' "

said Mr. Antony. "Depend on it, we shall look you up in the spring."

With this she was obliged to be content. They shook hands all round, and she and her mother watched them out of sight.

Arrived on the railway-platform, where the engine was already fuming and fussing, they took their tickets, saw to their luggage, and speedily found themselves sole occupants of a nice, clean, second-class carriage. Edith then clapped her hands at her brother, and said—

"A pair of Houbigant's best, if you please, Mr. Leo! Mouse-colour, number seven!"

He looked at her a moment in surprise: then burst out laughing.

CHAPTER VI.

A QUIET WINTER.

So now I have housed all my troops very comfortably in winter-quarters. Mr. Antony has his picture to paint, Edith has her story to write out, Nessy has prizes to prepare for her class, Mrs. Homer has Tresellis to enjoy, Mr. Weir has his parish to attend to, Mrs. Weir has her clothing-club, Dr. Fownes is counting over his old sermons, and tearing up the least good ones, Mrs. Fownes is deep in the calculated demands for coals and blankets: everybody is as well and as prosperous as they are likely to be; and why should not I leave them so? True, they have not married, they have not made love, they have not come into large fortunes; but "what's the odds, so you're happy?"

Not an elegant expression? Oh, I am quite too old a story-maker to mind being told

that. I make a story as a bird builds its nest—

> "A little straw, a little stick,
> A little mud to make it thick,
> Some little bits of wool and feather,
> Can't be so hard to put together."

So thinks Mrs. Cuckoo, who never builds a nest or a story.

> "But when she comes herself to try,
> She'll find the task as hard as I."

Hard, that is, if it be not a labour of love, which, however, it is. Very sorry should I be not to tell you what is going to happen to these good people. Prepare, however, for a quiet winter. A winter of no events, which, therefore, I shall briefly pass over. Winter is, with many, the happiest, cosiest time of all the year, boasting nice rainy days when visitors are sure not to interrupt one in the midst of a general turning out of closets and drawers; it has its long, uninterrupted evenings; it has also its field-sports, for those who like them—its snow, ice, and skating. How, then, did Mrs. Homer welcome peaceful winter in? She began by having a succession of girls on trial, at five pounds a year; to be raised to six if they

stayed over the first month, which none of them did. And we are bold to think this was partly owing to Mrs. Early, who did not want them. Mrs. Homer soon found herself obliged to hire a boy to go on errands; his name was Richard Arnold, familiarly known as Dick, but she thought Arnold a lovely name, and called him by it. He was speedily fitted with a suit richly embellished with buttons, and threatened with its sequestration if he did not keep his hands clean, which he did for three days.

Mrs. Homer now sat up to receive visitors. And the visitors who called were Mrs. Fownes, Mr. and Mrs. Weir, Mr. Bush (the medical man) and his wife, and a Miss Hornblower, of whom nothing as yet has been said, because there was nothing to say. This Miss Hornblower turned out to be rather a nuisance to Mrs. Homer, whose position in some respects resembled her own. Miss Hornblower had a small income, lived in a small cottage, and frequently changed her domestics. She was of a very inquisitive turn, and asked so many questions, that Mrs. Homer thought her ill-bred (which she was), and resolved not to be too intimate with her. But to what purpose?

The first girl who came to Mrs. Homer on trial, and whom she parted with for being so very inquisitive—meddling with her keys, her boxes, and her letter-case—went straight from her to Miss Hornblower, with whom she stayed a fortnight. By the time Miss Hornblower had heard all the gossip she had to impart, a second of Mrs. Homer's experimentalists was ready for her, and so on through the whole succession; till Mrs. Homer was so annoyed at it, that, keeping no company and requiring nothing for herself, as she said, but a little bread and fruit (or, as Mrs. Early said, but plain roast and boiled), she determined to dispense with a parlour-maid altogether, during the winter.

"Just like Mrs. Homer," Mrs. Saffery observed with a little malice, after a really nice, respectable young woman, whom she had recommended to apply for the situation, had been to and from Tresellis in a pouring rain, and returned to her in disappointment, saying the lady would not want a parlour-maid till the spring. "Just like Mrs. Homer," observed Mrs. Saffery in the bosom of her family, "looking about for a housekeeper, lady's-maid, and general servant, who understands French cookery; and

then putting up with an old woman, and a boy that cleans knives."

"Why, my dear, what of that?" said Mr. Saffery. "You must always have your fling at Mrs. Homer."

"I know I daren't say a word before *you*, Saffery; and all I meant to say was, that it was just of a piece with her wanting vanille and tomatos, and then dining off sprats."

Mr. Saffery could not help according a smile to this parallel, and the smile appeased his wife.

Seeing Tresellis on a bright, sunny afternoon, everybody who called there said how pretty it was, and how tastefully fitted up, which, of course, much pleased Mrs. Homer. There was the pretty little gate, and the neat pebbled walk, and the pretty door glazed with crown glass, and the nice little passage (Mrs. Homer called it the hall) which, to be sure, was rather narrow; and the chubby-cheeked little boy in green and gold, and the pretty little sitting-room, with its blue and white draperies, and the harp near the window. Mr. Bush declared it reminded him of—

"In my cottage near a wood,"

and of that other sweet ballad—

> "In front of a cottage with woodbine grown o'er,
> Sweet Lucy sat twirling her wheel."

To which Mrs. Homer responded—

"Ah, yes!—yes, indeed!" and softly sighed.

Mr. Weir asked her what she meant her resources to be when she was snowed up. She said books: she could always be happy with a book. Seeing him look around for anything approaching to a bookcase, she said that she meant to subscribe to two good libraries in London, and have a box down every fortnight.

"*Two?*"

"Yes—English and foreign."

This carried a very impressive sound with it.

Before they left her, she pleaded with them to fix an early day for taking an early tea with her, and going home early. She should like it so much! She should be so disappointed if they would not! So an evening was named, when there would be a moon.

The evening came, but not the moon. Of course, Quagmarsh Lane was not lighted by gas; it was dark as pitch. Mrs. Weir's fly was nearly overturned into a ditch; and she told

her son, with some acerbity, that nothing should induce her to go to Tresellis again on a dark night.

The tea-party was rather slow. Mrs. Homer dispensed very nice tea, but she was so long making it, and so long pouring it out, that it was a lengthy affair. There was thin bread and butter, and a dish of fruit; but Mrs. Weir did not eat fruit, so she returned home hungry.

"I don't think, Frank," said she, afterwards, "that there is much good in young people dragging out old people on dark, cold nights, up rutty lanes. I don't think they've a right to expect it. And apples and pears, Frank! and a bunch of grapes! What could the poor thing be thinking of? People of my age don't eat hard apples. I can't think how she will get through the winter."

Mrs. Homer got through the winter by the aid of novels. It turned out a very wet season; nobody stirred out who could stay in; the lanes were ancle-deep in mud and water; and Mrs. Homer, feeding on the contents of two circulating-libraries, one French, one English, by a good fire, was as snug as a squirrel in its nest with plenty of nuts.

Arnold's chief employment was to trudge to and from the station in all weathers with ponderous parcels of books; but he made amends to himself in many ways on the road —looking in on his mother and talking grand to his younger brothers, and playing with all the boys he met. He had plenty of scolding from Mrs. Early, whom he remorselessly kept waiting for flour, eggs, or sugar, when she was wanting to make the pudding; but if she scolded him one minute, she petted him the next, so he did not mind her at all.

Mrs. Homer had the face-ache one damp Sunday, so she sent an excuse for not attending her class; and, having done it once, she did it twice, and then wrote Mr. Weir a pretty note, saying she was always such a susceptible creature in the winter, that she was reluctantly compelled to give up her Sunday-school attendance altogether. After this, she fell into the habit of never attending morning service, and very irregularly in the afternoon, which vexed Mr. Weir. Now and then, tired of her studies, she enlivened herself by a brisk walk, and called on Mrs. Weir, so fresh and animated that she received the heartiest welcome, and

left a pleasing impression behind her when she went away. Mr. Weir, however, thought she was leading a completely self-indulgent life, and asked, "When she dies, who will miss her? Probably she has a long life before her, and is it to be thus frittered away? I wish she had even one, though *but* one, useful purpose."

One day, Mrs. Fownes called on Mrs. Weir, evidently with something on her mind. After making two or three false starts, she began at length to tell her that she had had a long talk with Mrs. Greville, who was becoming anxious about Emily. She did not like the way she was going on, so different from other young persons, fancying this was not right, and that was not right, and withdrawing from so many innocent pleasures that were natural to young people. She would not dance on Christmas-night, alleging that she had received the Holy Communion in the morning, and she was always reading serious books, and making little flannel-petticoats and knitting socks and comforters for the poor; and she thought it was all traceable to Mr. Weir.

"I said how nice I thought it of her," continued Mrs. Fownes; "but I could not make

any impression. Mrs. Greville, you know, has lived in the world all her life, and there is nothing she so shrinks from as being serious."

"Oh! I know all about it, and understand her exactly," said Mrs. Weir, nodding her head complacently; "I've been such a thorough worldling myself. Till Frank converted me, I really thought of nothing but the affairs of this life."

"Mrs. Greville is afraid of his converting her daughters," said Mrs. Fownes, reluctantly; "and more than that, she is afraid that the youngest— In short, though she minced the matter, there is no reason why I should, for she evidently is afraid lest an attachment should spring up between them."

"Between my son and her daughter?" cried Mrs. Weir. "Not the least chance of it, my dear madam! Not the remotest chance of it! My son has no thought in that quarter, I can assure you. My son is difficult to please; he is a singular young man; it is not every pretty girl that would suit him, I can tell you, even with a pretty fortune. My son doesn't care for money. He is *too* disinterested, I tell him. He would rather marry a girl without a fortune

than with one. He has no notion of being beholden to a wife. Mrs. Greville need not give herself the *least* uneasiness. I think she has been rather premature in warning my son off."

"But I assure you— "

"My dear Mrs. Fownes, not another word, let me beg of you. If I have a little bit of pride left, it is concerning my son. You don't know a mother's feelings—I own mine are very sensitive. Why, if Frank had chosen, he might have had—but it is not worth noticing. He will not make any pretensions to either of the Miss Grevilles. He is quite above anything of the kind."

"I am sure he is all that is honourable," said Mrs. Fownes, "and so I told her; and she does every justice to his merits; only, you see, he *has* unsettled Emily, and they are desirous it should go no farther; so that Mrs. Greville wants you to understand—this is quite *entre nous*, you know—that there must be a little change—a little withdrawal—a little more distance put between the young people—not that he wants any reminder, I'm sure."

"I should think not," said Mrs. Weir, indig-

nantly. "My Frank want a reminder! When Frank thinks it worth his while to propose to any young lady, I don't think you will find him refused."

"Well, I'm sure I hope not—in any but this quarter;—and, as you say, he won't need a reminder. It has not been at all a pleasant thing for me to speak about this, only Mrs. Greville so exacted it of my friendship; and I thought I might perhaps save the young people sorrow in the end."

"There's no sorrow to save in this instance," said Mrs. Weir, "unless on Miss Emily's part. My son has no thought of her, and has given her no encouragement."

Mrs. Fownes went away with the unpleasant consciousness of having given offence and pain; and Mrs. Homer, coming in at the same instant, afforded a happy diversion to Mrs. Weir's thoughts. She pressed her to spend the afternoon with her, which she did, and they were uncommonly chatty.

"Are you tired of Tresellis yet, Mrs. Homer?" said Mr. Weir, when he came in.

"Oh, no!" said she, "I so enjoy it!"

"Perhaps you are writing a book."

"Oh, no!—no, indeed," with her sweet smile.

"You study, then?"

"A little" (pensively).

"May it be permitted to ask the favourite course of a lady's studies?"

"Well—I like studying characters."

"So do I. You read history, then?"

"Not exactly a regular course—"

"You would find a regular course very interesting, though, and very profitable. You have plenty of time—"

"Frank always thinks women have plenty of time," said Mrs. Weir, coming to the rescue. "He never can fancy we have employments that have nothing to do with books."

Mr. Weir persevered in sifting her till he made out that she was not reading history at all, except as used for the framework of novels. He told her how enervating he thought her course of reading, unqualified by any of a more substantial sort, or by any of the active duties of life: and though he put it very strongly, and spoke very plainly, she did not show any resentment, but only replied, "Ah, yes—yes—indeed, I'm a sad, weak, erring creature." He

reproached himself, afterwards, for having been almost uncivil, and thought how sweetly she had taken it; but yet he could not have the satisfaction of thinking he had done her any good.

"You are not afraid, in that lonely cottage of yours?" he said, as she stepped out into the dusk.

She smiled, and shook her head. "I've no fears."

Yet that very night she had a horrible panic. There were no shutters to any of the casemented windows upstairs; and she was undressing very leisurely, with only a white curtain between her and the dark, when a gruff, hollow voice outside, seemingly in the cherry-tree that grew close to the cottage, pronounced some cabalistic words.

Two steps seemed to convey Mrs. Homer to Mrs. Early's door, which she shook violently.

"Mrs. Early, Mrs. Early! There's some one in the tree outside my window!"

"My goodness gracious!" cried Mrs. Early, scrambling something on, and coming forth in extraordinary guise.

"Do go and look out," said Mrs. Homer.

Mrs. Early took a furtive peep behind the white curtain, without offering to open the lattice.

"There's nothing, ma'am," she was beginning to say ;—when again the hollow voice resounded close beneath ; and this time its utterance was distinguishable. It growled—

"You've got a candle ! !"

"Deary me," said Mrs. Early, laughing, "'tis only Tom Arnold." Then, opening the casement, she called out—

"Tom, whatever are you about, making such a noise under Mrs. Homer's window ? This isn't Dick's room, it's missis's. Go your ways."

Tom, seemingly surprised and ashamed, said he didn't know the lady was at Tresellis—he'd walked over from Croydon, and, hearing Dick was in the cottage, had meant to jeer him a bit for sleeping with a light.

So the matter was satisfactorily explained ; but Mrs. Homer's nerves, previously excited by a sensation tale, did not immediately recover from the shock. And one or two burglai taking place, about this time, in the county, though not in the village, her feeling of secu-

rity was quite gone. She got a little dog that not only yap-yapped at every visitor, but at rats and mice, and at the moon, and at the distant railway-whistle, so that it occasioned her constant alarm: and one night, when Arnold was supposed to be in his bed, Arnold proved to be out of it. This showed him to be unworthy of trust; and another time, when a mysterious click click, as if of a centre-bit, was heard outside, Mrs. Early declared she trembled like a leaf; so *she* did not seem much of a bulwark. Then Mrs. Homer declared she really could not go on so any longer; it made her wretched—she must look out for a more efficient servant: and Mrs. Early began to cry, and to say she had always given satisfaction before—nobody had ever complained of her; but Mrs. Homer bestirred herself, and made inquiries, and at length secured "a daughter of the plough," strong enough to hold her own against a grenadier, let alone a cowardly burglar; and she was blithe and good-humoured, and used to a lone house and hard work, and a pretty good cook. So Esther Sprague was engaged, and poor Mrs. Early was most reluctantly obliged to turn out of her snug quarters.

Having saved every penny of her wages, however, she was not immediately in want.

Next, Mrs. Homer invited a companion to stay with her—a Miss Stone, who looked as if she had swallowed the poker, and who was chiefly characterised by a great talent for silence. Miss Stone went to church, and Miss Stone took solitary walks, and Miss Stone did quantities of knitting, netting, and crotchet; and nobody knew who she was, whence she came, nor anything about her. She seemed a perfect nonentity: glad to have her board and lodging in return for abating Mrs. Homer's fears. Perhaps, when they were shut in for the night, she read novels too: otherwise she must have been in want of a little change.

Now, when the rains gave place to clear, cold, frosty weather, a change for the better was apparent in Mrs. Homer. She had read sensation books to satiety—had exhausted the libraries. On the first dry, bright Sunday afternoon, she went to church, and paid marked attention to the service and sermon. Something in the latter appeared to touch her: a tear strayed down her cheek, which was quietly wiped away. From this time, her attendance

was regular, morning and afternoon, though she did not resume her school teaching. Her demeanour was serious, almost devout: she not unfrequently shed tears, but never made a display of them. Mr. Weir did not know what to make of it; he betrayed no observance of it; but, always prone to hope the best, he trusted that some good thing was at length about to be manifest in her.

CHAPTER VII.

PEARLY DROPS.

"How Mrs. Homer did cry, this morning!" said Mrs. Weir. "While she was stealing her handkerchief so quietly out of her pocket, the bright drops caught the light as they fell. You must have touched some very tender chord."

"I had no thought of touching her at all," said Mr. Weir. "In preaching on 'Wives, be obedient to your husbands,' I had an eye to women who had husbands to obey. If what I said touched her at all, I'm afraid it must have been with some too late remorse."

"That is the severest thing I ever heard you say, Frank."

"How was it severe, mother? She has no husband to disobey now, so if she ever were guilty in that way, it must be past reparation."

"I'll answer for it, that poor little woman

never committed a fault past reparation. Her feelings are very tender, and you brought up tender recollections."

"Well, I used to think her *not* very sensitive, but she has seemed more so lately. I wish she would take a class again. Miss Saffery does wonders, but she and Susan Potter are the only regular teachers now. I must speak rather strongly to the Grevilles."

"Better not, Frank!"

"Why not?" said he in surprise.

"Mrs. Greville will not like it—Mrs. Greville does not like it."

"How do you know?" said he, closing the door and returning to her.

"Mrs. Fownes says so."

"Mrs. Fownes? Has Mrs. Greville told her so?"

"Yes."

"Did she tell her to tell you?"

"I believe so."

"Mrs. Greville should have told me herself," said Mr. Weir, rather hurt. "I don't like roundabout messages."

"Mrs. Greville seems afraid—lest in short, that you and Miss Emily should like one another."

"I *do* like her, and she likes me, I believe, in a kind, open sort of way; but, mother, Mrs. Greville could not be so mistaken, surely, as to think we should ever want to marry one another?"

"There's no knowing what mistakes mothers will make, when their children are concerned," said Mrs. Weir. "You and I know very well there is no danger, but we cannot prevent her having silly fancies, so our only course is, not to give them any foundation. Forewarned is forearmed."

"Just so, mother." And he left her, thinking how tiresome unfounded fancies were. His mother thought, "If he would look a little nearer home, and see whether he could not be happy with Mrs. Homer and her two hundred a year, I don't believe she would say him nay; and they might get on very comfortably together." But, like a prudent woman, she kept her thoughts to herself.

Mr. Weir obtained Dr. Fownes's consent to his delivering a course of Lent lectures. There had been no Lent lectures at Belforest for many a year; and Dr. Fownes had been wont to excuse his idleness in this respect by saying

that if people would not come to week-day prayers without having their ears tickled, they did not deserve to be indulged. But he was getting in years now, and very shaky; the thought of death was daily growing a more personal matter to him; he felt that his working days were nearly over, and, not having a particle of jealousy, was glad that his active young curate should take every legitimate means of benefiting not only his flock but himself. Perhaps there was not a more teachable hearer of Mr. Weir's Lent lectures on spiritual-mindedness than the calm old rector; and the sight of his earnest, attentive face, as he leant his head a little forward to catch every word, had its influence on the attention of others; for, without any excitement, there could not be a more reverential set of listeners. Of course it was deeply gratifying to Mrs. Weir to see her son so appreciated by his rector, and this reacted on her manner to Mrs. Fownes, and this again on Mrs. Fownes's manner towards her, so that there was a sweet, sympathetic link connecting them all in one. Mrs. Homer constantly used tablets. Nessy envied her the power of doing so, but doubted if it

were quite right, and contented herself with listening with concentrated and almost painful attention to every syllable, and writing down all she could carry away, as soon as she had leisure, in the old ledger. This strained effort brought on her headaches again, but she succeeded in not letting them excite notice.

There were two dressmakers, "the Misses Brown," always in great request on account of their good work, obliging manners, and moderate charges. They lived in an infinitesimally little cottage, with a little strip of garden, hardly broader than a sash-ribbon, dividing it from the road; and this little border was always as gay with geraniums, larkspurs, sweet williams, nemophilas, or whatever happened to be in season, as border could be. Very pleasant was it to see these two Miss Browns, the neatest of the neat, one slim and pale, the other round and rosy-cheeked, accompanying their mother to church. Mr. Weir lent them books, which they read at their dinner-hour, and for half an hour before they went to bed, and he tried to get them to help in the Sunday-school, but without success. They said that they worked so very hard all the week, that they wanted the

Sabbath for a real day of rest; and this rest consisted in lying in bed an hour later in the morning, and a walk in the afternoon. But, somehow or other, they managed matters so as to take it in turn to hear these Lent lectures; and the result was, that Carry Brown, the youngest, offered her services in the Sunday-school, which were gladly accepted. She proved an efficient help.

Some people contrive to tell you very commonplace truths in very fine words, arranged in very long sentences. This was not Mr. Weir's custom. He mastered a subject by hard thinking, not forgetting to ask God's blessing on his thoughts; and then he gave the substance of what he had thought out in the plainest, most forcible words he could use. And so they were remembered.

He never hunted about for a simile because he thought a simile would be ornamental, and pegged it down as a naturalist claps down a butterfly with a pin stuck through it; but, in speaking with all his heart of something he had studied with all his head, metaphors came to him like the sweet scents on summer airs, and use them he must.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Early was getting very low in the world. She now occupied a poor room in one of the meanest of the Providence Cottages, where her crazy four-post bed took up the greater part of the floor, and, husband her savings as she would, they were nearly spent. She came to Nessy, with her pitiful face, and said—

"Miss Saffery, could you get Mrs. Saffery to give me a little turn, do you think, in the way of charing or washing? I'm not very strong, but I'm willing."

"Well," said Nessy, "you see we always have Mrs. Jones, who has eight children, and her husband is out of work now."

"Ah, I don't want to take a morsel of bread out of Mrs. Jones's mouth," said Mrs. Early; "but *my* mouth hasn't had a bit of meat in it this many a day!"

Nessy, touched with quick pity, went to the little box in which she kept her savings for the Art Union, which had not lately been augmented, and brought thence a half-sovereign, saying—

"Will you like to take this? I'll lend it you, if you like, till you can comfortably return it."

"Bless your heart," said poor Mrs. Early, with tears starting into her eyes, "you don't know how it will ease me, for rent *must* be paid, you know, and I can't get anybody to take any of my old things, and I don't want 'em seized; so that I really am that stinted, that I can scarce keep body and soul together. I always knew and said you were good, from a child. Can you spare it, Miss Saffery?"

"Oh, yes," said Nessy.

"Then the Lord's blessing be on you," said the widow. "He *will* bless you, I'm sure. I'll pay it back, Miss Saffery, as soon as ever I can, and if I never should be able—"

"Oh, I dare say you will, some of these days," cried Nessy, lightly. "Do go and buy a little bit of meat, it will do you good."

"I *will* go and buy a little bit of meat, and bless you for it," said she, gratefully.

Now, it came to pass, that Mrs. Saffery, in making up the money for an account, that day, was short of change, and knowing very well what Nessy had had by her, she asked her for half a sovereign.

Nessy reddened, and said she could lend her

a sovereign and a few shillings, but she had not a half-sovereign.

"Why, you had one the other day," said Mrs. Saffery. "What have you done with it?"

Nessy reluctantly said, "I gave it to Mrs. Early."

"Gave it to Mrs. Early?" crid Mrs. Saffery, in great amaze; "how, in the name of wonder, came you to do that?"

Nessy was always very much discomfited when her mother spoke sharply to her, and she hesitated, almost stammered, as she replied,

"I lent it to her . . . that is, for as long as she wanted. She's so very much in want."

"In want? with her lodging choke-full of furniture?" retorted Mrs. Saffery. "Don't tell me such nonsense as that. What hinders her going out to work? She can work, or she can nurse, or she can chare."

"She would gladly, only she can't get anybody to have her."

"Stuff and nonsense; I don't believe she has tried. She is set up with her grand notions, and pretences of having known better times, till she is above applying for parish relief, or

doing something for her livelihood, and prefers sponging upon you. You'll never see your half-sovereign again, take my word for it."

"She came here to know if you could give her any washing or charing," said Nessy.

"Oh, as for that, she knows as well as you do that I always have Mrs. Jones. Her washing wouldn't do for me. She couldn't keep a good place when she had one, or she would be still at Tresellis. Now, mind, Nessy, you don't go fooling away any more of your money in this way; if you do, it will be against my orders. You are saving it for a purpose, and have no call to break into it."

Nessy smothered a sigh. The money in her little box had all been earned by herself, and she had fondly believed herself the irresponsible mistress of it; but she never disputed her mother's will. I wish more young people resembled her in this respect; though I think she had done well to relieve Mrs. Early.

Mrs. Saffery went off to see after her dinner; and Nessy was standing behind the counter, with one hand resting on it, in not very cheerful reverie, when a fine-looking young man, sunburnt and freckled, came hastily into the

post-office, and said to her in some agitation,

"Can you tell me where Mrs. Early lives?"

"Why—are you George Early?" exclaimed Nessy.

"Yes, I am," replied he. "How come you to know me? I don't think I know *you*, unless—Can you be Nessy Saffery?"

"Yes," said Nessy.

"Where's my mother?" rejoined he; "surely no harm—?"

"She was here just now," said Nessy; "she is quite well. Oh, how glad she will be that you have come back! She lives in the last house in Providence Cottages."

"I don't know Providence Cottages."

"They have been built since you went away. I'll show you, if you like."

He nodded; for he could not speak just then, being under the influence of strong feeling. He followed Nessy, who first walked fast, then ran, and then flew along the narrow, ill-kept lane, on one side of which were Providence Cottages.

"What a nasty place," was the only sentence he uttered.

Nessy drummed on the door with her closed hand, and, without waiting for permission, hastily entered the room, in which Mrs. Early was preparing to cook half a pound of beef-steak.

"Mrs. Early," she exclaimed, out of breath, "here's a visitor!"

"Oh!—it *can't* be George?" shrieked the poor mother. Nessy thought she never should forget that pitiful cry.

"Yes, it's my very own self," said George, hugging her. "My dear, old, blessed mother!"

Nessy thought she had better withdraw quietly, but Mrs. Early was so hysterical that George, with an imploring look, said,

"Please don't go. I don't know what in the world to do—"

"I shall be—better presently—you darling boy," sobbed Mrs. Early, clasping his hand convulsively. "People die of—joy sometimes—and if I die, it—will only be that."

Tears here came to her relief; and George began to cry too, and yet be ashamed that Nessy should see him. She said cheerfully,

"I don't think you'll die this time, Mrs. Early. You'll have to cook dinner for two

instead of one. Good-bye; I wish you joy."

And as she retreated, she heard Mrs. Early say,

"George, if it hadn't been for that girl—"

She ran home: her own feelings her sufficient recompense.

It was a grand piece of news to have the first telling of.

"George Early?" exclaimed Mrs. Saffery breathlessly. "Do you really mean George Early? Well, I never! To think of *his* turning up at last, to find his mother gone down so. Enough to prick his heart, if he has one."

"He cried," said Nessy.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Saffery, a little touched. "Men's tears don't come easy. I dare say he was sorry he'd neglected her so long, and brought her within an inch of the parish. What account does he give of himself?"

"I have not heard a word; I left them together. Mrs. Early was crying as if her heart would break."

"Dear, how very sad," said Mrs. Saffery. "She was always so wrapped up in him. I

hope he's not come home to be a drain upon her; he ought to keep *her* now. Does he look respectable-like, as if he'd made money?"

"He was very well dressed," said Nessy; "something like a gentleman-sailor, I should think."

"Is he good-looking?"

"Yes, very; only very much tanned."

"Oh, that will go off. Dear me, it's a pity he didn't send word he was coming."

Mr. Saffery coming in, it was all gone over again. And with great glee did Mr. Saffery tell every one it could possibly concern—

"George Early's come home!"

In fact, he made it a duty to cross the green and impart the fact to the landlord of the Swan; and while he was absent, George Early came into the post-office. He held out his hand to Nessy in a frank, manly way, as if they were on an equal footing, and said—

"My mother has told me how good you have been to her, Miss Saffery, so you will please to accept her son's thanks."

"Oh, it was nothing," said Nessy, shyly.

"*I* think quite differently," said he. "You were kind to her when everybody else neglected

her. She has quite worn herself out, now, and is lying down on the bed, so I've left her for a little; and now, what do you think I'm going to do? I've not made a large fortune, but I've come into a nice lot of money, and my one purpose is to set my mother up nicely. She shall not remain twenty-four hours where she is, if I can help it. I shall look about for some suitable place for her directly; but, meantime, I want to get a silk gown made up for her. I've got it with me, and I want it made up ready for Sunday. Can you direct me to a milliner?"

Mrs. Early in a silk gown! Nessy could hardly help betraying her amused surprise; but he looked so sure of its being the right thing, and so pleased with himself for having provided it, that she could not but enter into his feelings.

"There are the Miss Browns," said she, "across the green; but their hands are generally full, and whether—"

Whether they would like to make for Mrs. Early, was her doubt, but she did not like to hurt him by expressing it.

George, however, had no misgivings. "All

right," said he, "I bought it at Portsmouth. Good shops there, of course, sailors being so free with their ready-money. I hope I've chosen a good silk" (beginning to open the paper). "I've had precious trouble in taking care of it, because they said good silks always creased. I knew she wouldn't like anything but black, so I've bought black; otherwise I should have preferred green, with a crimson shawl."

"It's very nice silk, indeed," said Nessy.

Here they were joined by Mrs. Saffery, who, having first viewed him through the glass door, and received a favourable impression of his exterior, came forth dressed in her blandest smiles, with—

"Who would have thought of *your* dropping in on us, Mr. Early? I hope I see you well, sir!"

And then Mr. Saffery came in from the Swan, with—

"Why, bless my heart, Mr. Early, I never was more surprised in my life! Here have we been thinking your bones were bleaching in the desert, and in you walk upon us! Made your fortune, sir, and come home to settle, I suppose?"

"Well, I certainly haven't come home with an empty purse," said George, complacently. "My chief and I only landed this morning, and he has run up to report himself to the Geographical Society, and I came straight on here, as soon as I'd bought a dress for my mother."

"Is this silk for Mrs. Early?" said Mrs. Saffery, feeling it. "What a sweet thing!"

"And you've a famous string of adventures to tell us, no doubt," pursued Mr. Saffery; "enough to outlast a winter's night and bring us to the small hours?"

"Why, yes, I've a pretty good yarn to spin," says George. "You see, we've been where no other has ever been before us, unless the 'black fellows.' Went right across the continent, sir, and came out t'other side! I was the first, riding in advance, to perceive the sea, so may, in fact, be called the discoverer of the Indian Ocean, though of course my chief gets the credit of it. I pulled up my horse, bawled out 'The sea! the sea!' and oh, if you'd seen the fellows running!"

"Extraordinary!" said Mr. Saffery, immensely edified.

"And then," pursued George excitedly, using a good deal of action, "the first thing we did was to give three cheers. And then we ran and washed our hands and faces in the sea, and tasted it, to be quite sure it was it, and no mistake. Our chief cut his initials on a tree; and we fell to, and cleared a plot of ground around one of the largest trees, and hoisted the Union Jack at the top of it, and stripped off the lowest branches, and took possession of the country in the name of the Queen. We buried a tin case under the tree, with written particulars inside. Then we fell to gathering shells; there's one of them" (pulling it out of his trousers pocket, and slapping it down on the counter), "and did enjoy ourselves!"

They all handled and examined the shell with interest.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DISCOVERER OF THE INDIAN OCEAN.

"DID you see any cannibawls?" inquired Mr. Saffery.

"No," said George; "the natives are not cannibalaceous. They'll eat worms and snakes, and anything like that; but don't make victuals of the human subject. Coming home, however, we passed some islands where they are fond of human-flesh meat, whether white or black, but missionarizing is proving a great check to that."

Mrs. Saffery continued testing the silk between her thumb and fingers, and thinking it much too good for Mrs. Early.

"We met natives occasionally," continued George, "sometimes hostile, sometimes friendly, and glad enough we were of the latter, for they helped us to food and water, where we should never have found it; and, times oft,

we were driven to appease our appetites with nardoo seeds, which allay hunger, but afford no sustenance whatever, no more than the husks which the swine did eat."

"Ah; I was thinking of that parable just now," remarked Mrs. Saffery.

George did not feel the allusion very complimentary, and said—

"I've never been a prodigal, Mrs. Saffery; and I've been working as hard for my mother abroad as I could have done at home, and encountered a precious number more hardships. I wonder what people here would think of lying night after night on the bare ground, after scooping out a little hollow for their hips! To say nothing of hostile natives shying a boomerang at you from time to time."

"What may a boomerang be, now, pray?" said Mr. Saffery.

"A boomerang," said George, "is shaped on the model of the bent human arm; and the curiosity of it is, that if it does not hit the mark, it returns to the hand that sent it, like an obedient slave to its master. I see you don't believe this—if Miss Saffery will oblige me with a card and a pair of scissors, I'll show

you the principle of it. Thank you—there, this will do, small as it is; of course it does not carry weight enough to go far—See!"

They saw, and wondered; and tried it themselves, and were satisfied.

"Yes," said George complacently; "it isn't the most comfortable thing in the world to find one's self knocked over by a heavy instrument of that make, sent from a surprising distance, with unerring aim. However, we had fire-arms, the report of which sent them to the right about without need for bloodshed; and those who were friendly were rewarded with beads. But I must be off now, with this dress—"

"Mrs. Early will want something less likely to spoil than this, for morning wear, I should say, Mr. Early," said Mrs. Saffery.

"Aye, that she will," said he heartily. "Have you anything to show me, that will suit?"

She immediately took down some pieces of print, rather to Nessy's discomfort, and actually persuaded him to buy two dress-lengths, and a pretty black and white checked shawl.

"So now my good mother will be pretty

well fitted out," said he, "when I've got her a bonnet."

"Shall we send the parcel, sir?"

"Oh dear, no!" said he laughing. "I shall carry it right across to Miss Brown."

Directly he was gone, Mrs. Saffery vented her spleen in sundry little outbursts like this—

"The idea of having to say 'sir,' to the like of George Early! And his mother must be 'madamed,' no doubt. She that was borrowing ten shillings of you, this very morning! I hope she may remember to pay it. When folks come unexpectedly into money, they often have short memories for those that helped them at a pinch. The idea of Mrs. Early, with her black hands and black face, in a black silk gown! Hooh! . . ."

This hurt Nessy, but she knew her mother would recover her temper by and by, though she was cross with herself just now because she had recently been unfeeling to Mrs. Early.

Mrs. Saffery began to rake the kitchen-fire between the two lower bars with much *fracas*, and to hit the large coals at top with asperity; while Nessy continued behind the counter, and watched George Early across the green. She

was interested in knowing whether the Misses Brown would make for Mrs. Early, and thought that if they excused themselves under the plea of having their hands full, which they often might do with truth, his visit there would be short. Instead of which, he went in, and remained at least twenty minutes, and when he came out, he stood lingering and chatting with the two sisters, on the best of terms, and his merry laugh could be heard across the green. Priscilla, the short sister, withdrew first; Carry remained; her light, neat figure, in its mazarin blue merino dress, and little white collar, advantageously seen against the dark background of the doorway. George briskly proceeded to the baker's and the grocer's, and came out with a fancy loaf in a paper bag, and a pound of tea and a pound of loaf-sugar, and he went to the "Swan," and ordered a dozen of Scotch ale, and he went back to the baker's for a shilling plum-cake, and he fell in with an itinerant fishmonger and bought a lobster. All these things, except the ale, he carried home openly and in broad daylight himself, nothing ashamed—a man who had crossed Australia from sea to sea was not likely

to mind carrying an armful of parcels along the whole range of Providence Cottages; and many a speaking smile did he exchange with people standing at their doors. It was well that those who had been accustomed to think him neglectful of his mother should see him thus busying himself to replenish her with every comfort money could procure; and he was speedily invested with a high character for filial piety.

When Job was in distress, only three friends came to condole with him, and their words were as goads. When Job's afflictions were removed, friends flocked about him from far and near, and each man brought him a piece of money. Nessy was the only one, that morning, to whom Mrs. Early had poured out her complaint, not in vain. Now that George Early had returned, and was buying heaps of things and paying for them in ready-money, neighbours crowded the narrow doorway with felicitations, so that when he returned with his purchases, they were obliged to turn out to make way for him. And then they left the mother and son alone.

George had exactly suited his mother's taste,

and consulted his mother's feelings. That he should come back to her in the sight of them all, laden with the bread, the tea, the sugar, the plum-cake, the lobster, rejoiced her very heart. The silk gown, to be made up by the Miss Browns, was the crown of all. No sense of unfitness troubled good widow Early. It was fit, she thought and felt, that he should express his unchilled love in this form, and fit that she should walk in silk attire beside him, a proud and happy mother, to church, to offer humble and hearty thanks for her lost sheep found.

We will drop a veil over their supper, and conclude it enjoyed. George slept at the Swan; but in the morning, he began to look about for a new home for his mother. And, opening the subject to his host of the Swan, whom he had already captivated by his wonderful stories, his landlord told him that Mr. Oldsmith had just finished a new house which would fit him to a T.

In fact, Mr. Oldsmith, charmed at getting Tresellis off his hands, and stimulated by the frequent inquiries made during the summer by the Antonys, Mr. Weir, and Mrs. Homer, for

lodgings, had taken it into his head that Belforest was going to be a rising place, and that it would be a good speculation to run up another house or two. During the autumn, therefore, and up to the time of the frost, he kept his men at work, and actually succeeded in roofing in, before Christmas, a frightful little red-brick house, with narrow door in the middle, opening into a narrow passage, on each side of which was a small square parlour, with kitchen and scullery at the back, and three small bedrooms on the upper floor. True, the walls had not yet been papered, nor the grates set; the garden was only productive of shavings and saw-dust, and the door-posts were sacrilegiously scribbled by the hand of some shameless boy with "Knock and ring"—"House bell"—"Office bell"—"Servants' bell," &c.; but these were trifles to George Early, who saw nothing but what he wanted, and no deficiencies but such as it would be an amusement to supply. Therefore, he engaged the house out of hand of Mr. Oldsmith, and triumphantly carried the news of what he had done to his mother, whose feelings on the occasion were ecstatic. For had she not

fruitlessly preferred her humble request to Mr. Oldsmith to let her keep the house open till it was let? and now she was going to occupy it as tenant. Surely we may allow her heart to swell with gratified feeling.

"You must have somebody to clean it down, mother!"

"Oh no, my boy; let me do it every bit myself."

Then he said he must go and see if his chief had sent him a letter. But, before he crossed the green to the post-office, he left one of his mother's gowns, carefully done up in an old newspaper, with the Miss Browns, for a pattern; and took the opportunity of consulting them about a bonnet, which, he told them, was to be a very handsome one—just such a bonnet as they would like to fit their own mother with, on returning to her after long absence. On entering into details, the Misses Brown found that his idea of a suitable bonnet was of a very different kind from anything that Mrs. Brown would have consented to wear under any circumstances: they therefore begged him to trust to their judgment, and they would do their very best for him.

After which, they fell into general conversation of a lively cast, quite remote from dressmaking, and separated in about half-an-hour, mutually pleased.

Michael Saffery is stamping letters for the out-going post; and as he does so, he mutters—

"Pill-box in that envelope—maybe containing a live slug for some insect fancier. I've known Mr. Greville send such things. This envelope's unfastened—this one's torn—this, again, contains a coin of some sort, and yet hasn't been registered: when will people use their reason, I wonder? Here's a sharp instrument—what a shame! 'Patric Blarney, oppst the church, Co. Cork'—I wonder if that will reach him.—Some work for the clerks at the blind-letter office in the next—'Marey Wite, Obern Onion'—Holborn Union, maybe. Here again—'Garge Gray, Ride, Oiley White'—That's only blind o' one eye, like."

Nor are these addresses to be considered incredible, since some of them are verified in "Her Majesty's Mails;" and from the same authentic source we learn that the sorter at the Central Office has actually pored over an envelope with this address—

"Coneyach lunentic a siliam,"

and made it out to be intended for Colney Hatch. In like manner,

"Haspedellar-such,"

has been found to do duty, occasionally, for Ashby-de-la-Zouch.

By the time Mr. Saffery had made up the London bag, the little mail-cart came for it, and brought the morning mail from London. These would, in due course, be stamped and sent round by the postman; but some impatient privileged individuals now and then came to the office to get their letters as soon as they were sorted, though this was not strictly allowable.

"Here's one for Mr. George Early," remarked Mr. Saffery. "Oh! he's coming across for it now."

Accordingly, George Early came in, with a cheerful,

"Good morning, Mr. Saffery. Any epistle from my chief?"

"Here's a letter for you, Mr. Early, directed 'Belforest.'"

"Ay, that was all the direction I could give

him, you know. Henceforward, I shall be able to have my letters addressed 'Australian Villa, Belforest.'"

"Indeed? And where may Australian Villa be?" said Mr. Saffery.

"Oldsmith's house—the new one he's building. Hum, hum, hum;" and George ran through his letter.

"Oh, I'm to be off again," said he, starting up, "but only for a day or two. Sir Roderick Murchison is going to give a *soirée*, and my chief is to be big lion, and I little one. No end of grand people there. Ha, ha! for once in a way it will be pleasant. Celebrated people, too—M'Clintock and Livingstone. We had something of this sort at the governor's before we came over. But nothing comes up to London. I wonder if I'm to do duty in white kids and silk socks. Shouldn't wonder!"

"I dare say we can fit you, Mr. Early," said Mrs. Saffery, pulling out a drawer containing two or three pairs of very yellow white gloves.

"No, no, I'll wait till I get to town; my chief will tell me all about it. Mustn't cut him out, you know; and it may not be a dress party after all. He seems likely to get a gold

medal; and, perhaps, I shall have a watch. However, we won't reckon our chickens before they are hatched. I must run home and tell my mother, and start by the 1.30 train."

And he smiled at them, one after the other, as he spoke, secure of general sympathy.

"Set him up for a conceited young prig," said Mrs. Saffery, contemptuously, when he was out of hearing. "Talking in that consequential way of 'my chief,' when the better word would be 'my master.'"

"I don't know that, my dear," said Mr. Saffery. "The head of the expedition was a Scotchman, and would naturally be called The Chief; and hence all the inferior members of it would call him my, or our, chief, in speaking of him in mixed company. It does not appear that George Early's connexion with him had anything of the nature of servitude. I take it, they all went out on their own hook, independent explorers, agreeing for general convenience to submit to one as their leader."

"He was the chief's travelling-servant, and nothing more or less," said Mrs. Saffery, who knew no more of the matter than her husband, but made up by bold assertion for lack of

knowledge. It will be seen that she has not yet recovered the tone of her fine mind, is still captious, and contradictory. What a pity! she will cross herself more than anybody else by it.

Mrs. Saffery was expiring with curiosity to see what an old figure Mrs. Early would make of herself on Sunday, and determined to witness *La Glorieuse Entrée;* meanwhile, Mrs. Early, in her simplicity, little guessing the envy and enmity of which she was the subject, came, as soon as George had started, to return Nessy's half-sovereign with heartfelt thanks, and to receive her congratulations. She looked ten years younger already: the puckers and wrinkles of care and want had disappeared.

"So, Mrs. Early," said Mrs. Saffery, taking the whip-hand of her, and still very high and mighty, "your son's come back to you at last."

"Praise the Lord, he has," said Mrs. Early, thankfully; "it was my nightly prayer that he might."

"Prayer? Yes, but you ought to have had more faith. Nobody but you thought he would die in the desert."

"It was nobody's concern so much as mine," said Mrs. Early; "and, where we've staked

most, we tremble most. But there! he's been preserved, and like unto my fear, so is my rejoicing."

"Quite right that it should be so," said Mrs. Saffery. "And now, you'll go and forget all that's gone and past."

"No, I don't think I shall ever forget it," said Mrs. Early. "I don't ought to. If a great piece of flesh was torn off us with hot pincers, the wound might heal, but we should never forget it. But the Lord has made all things equal. I'm quite unworthy to be the mother of such a boy."

"Oh, I don't see that at all, Mrs. Early," patronizingly.

"*I* do, though. Isn't he a beauty?"

"Your son? Well, he's a fine-grown, comely young man. The whites of his eyes are so clear."

Mrs. Early laughed, and said she supposed that was the only beauty of his that she had overlooked.

"And now," said she, confidentially, "I want to fit myself with a pair of gloves—not Berlin, but kid; for I mustn't go about without gloves now, and beaver won't do for Sundays."

"I should recommend you, Mrs. Early, a pair of beaver for week-days, and kid for Sundays. You'll have nothing to do now, I suppose, but sit up with your hands before you."

"Oh! that would never suit *me*," said Mrs. Early. "My boy has taken a house—'Australian Villa' he means to call it; and I'm going to begin by scrubbing it right down from top to bottom. I shall sweep it down this afternoon, and begin scouring at six o'clock to-morrow morning. Then there will be the windows to clean."

The idea of Mrs. Early the wealthy scrubbing her own floors and cleaning her own windows relieved Mrs. Saffery's heart of that lingering black drop which, in some form or other, infects every heart till it is well wrung out of it. She now saw the bright, sympathetic side of things, and wound up with a downright gossip, which sent Mrs. Early away with a light heart.

When George returned, he found his mother had indeed made a wonderful clearance. She had cleaned down the house, had the grates set, ordered in coals, arranged her kitchen-battery in a brilliant state of lustre, changed

her old four-poster for a convenient iron bedstead, and received a few shillings for her old carpets, which, when in painful want of money, she could not sell.

As for George, he had been to Shoolbred's, in Tottenham Court Road, where, as he told her, he might have bought everything a house could want; and, having told the gentleman who served him how much he meant to lay out, he had had the benefit of that gentleman's selection, which proved a very good one. So here was a porter's truck full of packages coming from the station, and the luggage-van charged with more unwieldy articles, and Mrs. Early had to sign the porter's book three times in one day.

If she were happy in-doors, George was equally so without, superintending the painting the name of his cottage outside. A formidable error was in the first instance committed by the journeyman, who inserted two "l's" in "Australian." And there was the garden to be railed in, and a knocker and scraper to be supplied. But George did not like to see his mother go about in that old, shabby dress; so he found it necessary to step over to the Miss

Browns, to ask, quite confidentially, how soon one of the print dresses would be finished; and then, after binding them down to promise it should be completed out of hand, he thought it incumbent on him to go back and beg them not to overwork themselves. He should never forgive himself if either of them were ill in consequence. And they gaily assured him there was no danger of it; and they wished all their customers were equally considerate. Still the bonnet remained a very weighty question, because it was to be a surprise, and they had not the circumference of Mrs. Early's head. But George engaged to get this by stealth; and he did so, and the Misses Brown were very merry upon it; and, in short, about one thing or another, he contrived to look in on them once or twice every day.

CHAPTER IX.

LA GLORIEUSE ENTRÈE.

How Mrs. Early contrived to look so eminently neat and respectable in that bonnet with the glistening, quivering black currants in the cap-front, can only be accounted for by the fact that Miss Caroline Brown was good-natured enough to be her lady's-maid on the occasion. Not content with bringing Mrs. Early's outfit on Saturday evening, and trying it on, she ran across, next morning, to give the finishing touch to the toilette, and start the old lady with the comfortable assurance that she was "all right behind." Leaning heavily on her son's arm with one hand, and grasping her new umbrella with the other, she was prevailed on by George to put her folded pocket-handkerchief in her pocket, and to let him carry her prayer-book. In this style and state, they proceeded to church, he smiling complacently at

every one who looked at him, and disarming ridicule by his evident disposition to back his old mother against all England. That Mrs. Early did not take in much of the sermon may be easily understood: the unusual tightness of her gloves, and rustling of her dress, prevented her having much attention to spare for Mr. Weir; but a general emotion of thankfulness and unworthiness pervaded her inner nature, and doubtless rendered her attendance in the sanctuary acceptable.

Somehow, George had picked up more information and better manners in the course of his wanderings than his mother had ever had it in her power to impart: probably from his constant association with thorough gentlemen during that long exploring expedition. Certain it is, his manner was quite well-bred and self-possessed when Mr. Greville spoke to him going from church; nor was he at all eager to lionize himself, though he civilly answered questions. Altogether, Mr. Greville was surprised to find him such a well-behaved young man, and rather tantalized at his not volunteering some details of Sir Roderick's *soirée*, nor adding anything piquant to the anecdotes

that were already creeping into the newspapers. Mr. Greville told him patronizingly to come over to the Abbey some forenoon, and he would hear what he had to say. George bowed like a gentleman born, and replied, "Sir, you do me honour."

The next thing to be done, was to give a tea-party. George proposed it to his mother as she carved the veal pie, and she was pleased, yet rather fluttered at the suggestion. Who should they ask? Why, the Safferys, to be sure, and those pretty girls the Miss Browns, and their mother, if she ever went out; and Mr. and Mrs. Oldsmith. With themselves, that would make ten, and perhaps that was as many as their parlour would hold; certainly, they could not muster more than ten chairs all the house through; and they had only six cups and saucers; but they could buy, borrow, or beg.

The undertaking seemed tremendous, but Mrs. Early trusted that some who were invited would decline, and so it proved. Nessy gladly accepted, and Mr. Saffery would look in for an hour; but Mrs. Saffery could not leave the house, and had no disposition to be on visiting

terms with Mrs. Early. Mrs. Brown, again, never went out; but her daughters gladly promised to come, and so did Mrs. Oldsmith. Mrs. Early's experiences under Mrs. Weir and Mrs. Homer now came into play. She knew how gentlefolks had things, and without carrying imitation too far, she managed the details of the feast pretty well. And there was a good deal of talking and laughing; and George had some adventures to relate that made them very serious; and he traced the course of the expedition on a map he had hung up against the wall; and he produced his little collection of curiosities, and had something interesting to tell of each. Mrs. Early sat in silent transport, as she saw him fixing every one's attention. Nor was Mr. Saffery at all a bad hand at drawing him out, asking him most extraordinary questions that had not the least connexion. Mr. Saffery returned early to his official duties, but Nessy remained to walk home with the Miss Browns. They were afraid of keeping their mother up late; but it was quite dark when they took leave, and George insisted on seeing them to their homes. They all walked merrily to the Browns' door, but

Nessy then told George she would not trouble him, and ran off across the green.

After this, the Misses Brown came to the conclusion that they must requite the hospitality of Mrs. Early by a counter-invitation to her and her son. This led to another pleasant evening, in which Nessy was the only other participant, by reason of the smallness of the room. And they all agreed that the party was all the pleasanter for being so select; and George was more entertaining than ever; and Nessy took a strange idea into her head, that he was on the very brink of falling in love with Miss Carry Brown.

After this outburst of dissipation, things subsided pretty much into their usual course, George always finding something to do in or about the house, or running up to town to see his chief, or looking in on the Miss Browns to ask them confidentially how they thought his mother's bonnet was wearing, and whether it wanted doing up yet.

It appeared that he did not mean to lead this idle life long; his services had met with the attention of the Colonial Government, and he was promised some appointment when there

should be an opening; but, meanwhile, he was taking rest and refreshment, saying he needed it and had earned it. He had between two and three hundred pounds in hand, which he meant to devote to the benefit of his mother; and as his expected appointment would recall him to Australia, and he was quite sure she would never screw her courage to the point of accompanying him there, he thought it the best way to provide for her in her own line at home, by fitting up her cottage so as to enable her to let lodgings. This was a very congenial mode of life to Mrs. Early; the only drawback was the prospect of his going away; and whenever she began to be out of spirits about that, he used to say—

"Come along with me, then. You'll get over the sea-sickness in a few weeks, and you won't be very frightened at being out of sight of land when you are used to it, and you won't mind sea-serpents, and flying-fish, and waterspouts, and whirlpools, or icebergs, or coral-reefs, as long as I am with you."

But this catalogue of terrors always sufficed, and she would shake her head, and say—

"No, my boy; you are young, and able to

cope with flying-serpents and such like; but I'm getting older every day, and too glad to have my head under a roof of my own to wish to change it for a ship."

Mr. Antony, having finished what he called his job-work, and received a very acceptable cheque for the same, had filled up the winter by painting two charming little pictures, with very little trouble to himself, or, at any rate, with such love and zest, that he was unconscious of any toil. They were done "at the first intention," so to say—painted in at once, so thinly that you might see the cross lines of the canvas through the paint. He called one "The Blackberry Gatherers." It represented the same glade he had painted to order, taken from another point of view, with a group of children blackberrying, whom he had sketched on the spot. The other was "The Mendicant" —the tall old man who had sat to him at Mr. Saffery's, soliciting relief at a cottage-door. The searching look of the housewife, the intense pity in the face of a girl looking over her shoulder, were both suggested by the Safferys. These pictures were no sooner seen than sold. He sent them to the early exhi-

bition at the British Institution, and each had a little yellow ticket in the corner the first day. "Two sixties!" He felt himself a prosperous man, and began to talk of a visit to Rome. He had a commission, however, which put it out of the question for the present; but he agreed with Edith that it would be very pleasant to spend Easter at Belforest, and she wrote to Mrs. Benson to ask if she could take them in. Mrs. Benson was glad to have them again, and promised they should find everything ready.

And now it was Passion-week, and Mr. Weir's lectures had become more and more spiritual and practical, and he had made a good many feel that—

> "Life is real, life is earnest,
> And this world is not its goal,"

nor is time to be desultorily spent in vague dreams, and idle talks, and profitless readings, and useless workings; but that every one has a mission of kindness and usefulness and self-training to fulfil, even in the trivial round and common task. And then he crowned the course by a set of very short addresses during Passion-week, scarcely extending over a quarter

of an hour, each illustrating some portion of our Lord's sufferings, and closing them with practical application. The Antonys could not come down till the Thursday, so they lost the greater part of the course.

On the Wednesday Mr. Oldsmith, who, it may be remembered, had the letting of Tresellis, came to Mr. Saffery, and said, with a curious sort of smile on his face—

"Weren't you a guarantee to me about Mrs. Homer when she took the cottage?"

"Guarantee? no!" returned Mr. Saffery, in quick alarm. "I never guarantee anybody. I said you'd better write to Messrs. Root and Branche."

"I know you said you were quite sure she was safe."

"Isn't she, then? She paid here quite regular."

"And so she's paid me, ten days or so after the quarter. Only, if she hadn't, we might have whistled for our money. Her husband's alive and abroad."

"Alive? Mr. Homer alive?" ejaculated Mr. Saffery, in profound astonishment. "Why then, she's no widow."

"No more than you."

Nessy, who had come into the shop, turned very pale.

"Mr. Homer's a scamp, then, I reckon," said Mr. Saffery. "To think of our making such a mistake!"

"Mistake? 'Twas deceit! Didn't she wear a widow's cap?"

"Only a little while," said Mr. Saffery, reluctant to give up his favourite.

Mr. Oldsmith laughed sardonically as he repeated, "Only a little while!"

"How did you find it out?" said Mr. Saffery.

"Well," said Mr. Oldsmith, "I thought, from the first, your guarantee wasn't worth much, and that I must keep my eye upon her; only, as long as her things were in the house, I had security for my rent. But then she might move them off any night, with the railway so near. So towards quarter-day I got fidgetty; and when we went to dine with the old folks at Christmas—*my* father and mother, you know—I said what I was doubtful about, and how I knew nothing about my tenant but that she came from Ipswich. 'Oh!' says my sister

Kate, 'a schoolfellow of mine has married an ironmonger at Ipswich.' 'Then do you write to her,' says I, 'and ask if she can tell you anything about Mrs. Homer.' So Kate said she would, but, however, we are not a very writing family, and I suppose she forgot it. Meantime, my rent was received, so I cared no more about it. This morning, however, I got a letter from Kate, and she says, 'Mrs. Smith writes word that Mrs. Homer was a Miss Crowe; her sister keeps a school here. Captain Homer is abroad.'"

"A captain, is he?" said Mr. Saffery. "Well, it's curious. Look you, the captain may have died abroad."

"But she says, 'he *is* abroad.'"

"Depend on it, he's a scamp, then," said Mr. Saffery, "and she considers him as good as buried."

"*That's* no excuse for taking us in," said Mr. Oldsmith.

"How should this friend of your sister's know whether he's dead or alive?" persisted Mr. Saffery. "Most likely her intelligence is not very recent. 'He *was* alive, and *is* dead.' That's how it will turn out to be, most likely."

"I see you are determined he shall be very dead indeed," said Mr. Oldsmith, laughing, and turning away.

"Are you going to take any steps?"

"Steps? no! There are no steps to take, as she doesn't owe me money."

"Well, it's an odd thing—unpleasant, I may say," observed Mr. Saffery. "But really I can't remember that Mrs. Homer ever said she was a widow. Did she, Nessy."

"No," said Nessy.

"Of course," said Mr. Oldsmith, "she wouldn't go about saying, 'I am a widow, thou art a widow, she is a widow;' her cap said that!"

There was no getting over the cap.

Nessy felt this deception very much. It was the first acted falsehood she had ever known perpetrated; and she was habitually, and on principle, a truth-loving girl. She could not take refuge in her father's repudiation of the report as a calumny: she had no doubt that, since the ironmonger's wife said it, Captain Homer was alive. Then why should Mrs. Homer pretend he was dead? Nessy was afraid that the question could not be satisfac-

torily answered: she shrank from hearing her mother's remarks when she learnt the truth from Mr. Saffery, and she found something to do in the upper part of the house till it might be supposed the news had been told.

That same day, Miss Hornblower called on Mrs. Weir, evidently with something noteworthy to communicate. Hurrying over preliminaries, she said,

"My dear Mrs. Weir, I have come to consult you on rather an awkward affair. I subscribe to Mudie's Library, and have down a box of books once a month. Yesterday evening I received a fresh set; and when I was shut in for the night, I sat down to enjoy a good novel. I had scarcely established myself comfortably before the fire, with my feet on the fender, and the lamp at my side, when, from between the leaves of the book, out dropped a little note without an envelope. I opened it, thinking it might somehow belong to myself; instead of which, I read to myself (here it is) as follows:—

"Tristan d'Acunha, *Jan.* 3, 18—.

"I should hope that by this time your romance has spent itself, and you are in a

better disposition to face realities. None of us are perfect—certainly I am not. I have been very ill; and partly with vexation about you. Much the best way will be to let bygones be bygones, and for you at once to rejoin your affectionate husband (for I don't pretend to be indifferent about you),

CHARLES HOMER."

"Homer! O dear! we ought not to have read this letter!" cried Mrs. Weir, in great trouble.

"You haven't read it, and I read it quite by chance, quite involuntarily," said Miss Hornblower, triumphantly. "So you see what she is! The date of this letter shows she must recently have received it."

"But—dear me, what an extraordinary thing! how very strange! how unfortunate for such a letter to have got into the book!"

"Do you call it unfortunate? I think it quite the reverse. She deserves to be exposed."

"Poor young thing! We don't know how she may have been tried. It is not a kind letter. Very likely he is a tyrannical man. What are you going to do with the letter?"

Miss Hornblower looked staggered by this inquiry, as if she had intended to preserve it among her archives.

"It would serve her right," said she, "to return it in an envelope, with these words: 'You are Found Out.'"

"Oh no, oh no!" said Mrs. Weir; "I could not bear such a thing. You must not be so severe. You do not even know the letter is for her."

"Yes, I do," said Miss Hornblower hastily; "for the envelope dropped afterwards. Here it is—see, it has the Belforest post-mark. 'Mrs. Homer, Belforest, Surrey, England.'"

"I could almost wish you had replaced the letter in the envelope, fastened it, and posted it again."

"I can do that now, if you think I had better. Only it will have the Belforest stamp. She will know it has been read here."

"No, she won't know it has been read."

"I should think few would have had the opportunity without availing themselves of it," said Miss Hornblower. "Nobody, I think."

They paused. Mr. Weir came in.

"Frank," said his mother quickly, "Mrs. Homer's husband is alive!"

He coloured up to the temples. Mrs. Weir saw it, and instantly drew her inference from it.

"Has she just learnt it?" said he. "What a shock!"

"She has known him to be alive all the time," said Miss Hornblower.

"We *suppose* so," said Mrs. Weir, checking her. "We know nothing."

"Only that her husband, Captain Homer, is alive now, in Tristan d'Acunha. Judge for yourself."

She handed him the note.

"Oh, we must not read this!" exclaimed he, directly his eye rested on it. "How *could* you?" with strong reproach.

"How could I do otherwise?" said Miss Hornblower, in hot self-defence. "I couldn't help it; it fell out of a book."

"That did not oblige you to read it. Well, the mischief is done now."

"Frank, what do you think of it?" said his mother, as he turned away.

"I don't know yet what I think of it."

"Stay, my dear—don't go. We want to know what to do with this note."

"Why, return it, to be sure!" said he indignantly. "Return it, now you have stolen its secret."

"But how? by post? She will take it for granted it has been read, and will torment herself in fruitless guesses as to who is the anonymous sender."

"That's true. The true, the honest way, is the only right way. You are blaming her with all your hearts at this moment for having concealed something, which was more her own affair, poor creature, than yours; and will *you* use concealment? You must return her the letter yourselves; and tell her kindly, but truly, how you came by it."

"Oh, *I* can't take it," cried Miss Hornblower with a little shrick. "I wouldn't face her for the world. Do *you* take it, Mrs. Weir."

"I could no more walk to Tresellis than I could fly," said Mrs. Weir. "You forget my ancle."

"Give it me, I will take it," said Mr. Weir, in a short, quick voice. As he put it in his

pocket-book, Miss Hornblower could not forbear saying—

"I must call it a very sinful thing. I've no patience with her."

He replied, "Our Lord had mercy on a woman which was a sinner."

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

Mr. Antony was summoned from home for twenty-four hours, to attend the funeral of a relative he had never seen; and as he knew Edith was longing to be at Daisylands, he advised her to go down there at once, promising to join her as soon as he could. She resolved to act on this suggestion.

He therefore put her into a railway-carriage, and went to find himself a seat in another train. Edith was congratulating herself on being placed in an empty carriage, when, just at the last moment, a porter unlocked the door, and put in a lady, on whom he turned the key, and, the next instant they were off.

No sooner did the travelling companions exchange glances, than they exclaimed, "Miss

Crowe!" "Edith!" and immediately kissed one another.

"Why, how unexpected this is!" said Miss Crowe, "and how pleasant! What a time it is since we saw each other last! How curious that we should be put into the same carriage! I'm going to Belforest, to see Eugenia."

"I'm going to Belforest, too," said Edith.

"Oh, you know the place, do you?"

"Yes, we spent a month there last autumn, and liked it so much that we are going there again for Easter week."

"You know all about Eugenia, then."

"I can't say I do. She passed for a widow at Belforest."

"Do you mean she wore weeds?"

"Yes."

"That was too bad," said Miss Crowe reddening. "I could not have thought it of her, though I know her pretty well. What heaps of stories she must have told."

Edith was on the verge of laughing, but Miss Crowe saw it, and said,

"It is no laughing matter. Do tell me how she went on. I want to know all about her."

"She went on very quietly," said Edith.

"Everybody seemed to like her. She had put up in very small lodgings at the post-office."

"Because she was short of money."

"What, with her two hundred a-year?"

"She had never thought of saving, and had very little in hand. *I* hoped Root and Branche would be a little behindhand with her quarterage, but they are quite allies of hers, and she can have her own way with them. You know they were Mr. Brunt's solicitors and are in her interest—they don't care for the Crowes; I think they are influenced by her pretty face."

"It *is* a pretty face," said Edith heartily. "I used to sit looking at it in church, and admiring that soft Madonna look, till it made me forget the sermon."

"Oh, I'm sick of that soft Madonna look!" said Miss Crowe, with such vehemence that Edith could not help laughing. "I've regretted sometimes being so plain, and thought how nice it would be to be as pretty as Eugenia; but since I've seen the results of her good looks, I've been content to be as I am. First, her beauty made her spoilt as a child; then my mother continued to spoil her for my father's sake. Her

sitting up to receive visitors did not lessen her vanity, though the sly little thing used to look so unconscious that mamma was quite taken in by it. *You* know how provoked I used to be sometimes!"

Edith laughed and nodded.

"When we gave our annual dance," pursued Miss Crowe, excitedly, "*you* know what a fight there used to be among the boys, who should secure Eugenia for a partner. The little Queen of Beauty looked so demure all the while; but *I* knew the vain little thoughts that were swelling that little heart. *I* know what girls are! I've a kind of intuition that enables me to know, without any telling, the really vain from the really modest,—the really pious from the hypocritical shammers,—the really clever from the merely superficial. Now, cannot I?"

"You certainly have great perception of character," said Edith.

"And some knowledge of the various treatments that different characters require," said Miss Crowe. "Why, you might as well bestow the same proportions of heat, light, and moisture, on different species of plants, as apply the same régime to all the girls of one school. I

don't want to praise myself, but I believe that if I had had the training of Eugenia from the first, I could have made a very different girl of her. I could have made her as good as *you*, Edith."

Here the deafening noise of a passing train compelled a short silence.

"I can't think," resumed she, "how Eugenia came to take a house at Belforest. I can well understand her going there for a few weeks, while she was short of money, till she got her dividends: it was near London, and out of the way of observation; but there must have been some powerful attraction, one would think."

"I don't know of any," said Edith. "A very good young clergyman and his mother were very kind to her, and she used to be a good deal with them, but I believe she saw no other society."

"An unmarried clergyman?"

"Oh, yes."

"Why, I call that wicked!" cried Miss Crowe, exasperated. "The young man might have fallen in love with those nasty Madonna looks; and where would she have been then? You think me very violent against Eugenia,"

she added, calming herself, "but the more I love her, the more I'm provoked with her; and I don't think she loves me at all."

"Oh, yes, she does—she must."

"No."

And her throat swelled, and tears shone in her eyes.

"Go on about her," said she, presently.

"There is not much to say. She lived very quietly, and was certainly liked."

"How did she employ herself? how did she fill up her time? Not in needle-work, *I* know."

"I think she read a good deal."

"Novels."

"And she had her harp. And she taught in the Sunday-school."

"Oh, what teaching it must have been," said Miss Crowe, turning up her eyes. "I should like just to have heard her questions! Did you?"

"No; but Mr. Weir really prized her assistance; and was sorry when she gave up attending."

"A good thing for him, maybe, that she did," said Miss Crowe, gloomily.

Edith wanted to know more; so she presently resumed the conversation with—

"It was a singular proof of attachment in Mr. Brunt, his leaving her that annuity."

"Very singular," said Miss Crowe, "at his time of life. Shows the power of a pretty face, even over men of mature years."

"Beauty *is* a power; and I think it must be meant to be one. You see, Mrs. Homer is more than pretty;—she has such expression."

"Yes, her face expresses things she does not in the least feel."

"Were you satisfied with her marriage with Captain Homer?"

"Satisfied? Anything but that. I could not bear it. I did not want her to marry into the army. We knew too well the trials poor papa's narrow means entailed on us: and I knew Eugenia had no management."

"How did she meet him?"

"At the end of Mary Beaufort's last half, she invited Eugenia to stay with her. The Beauforts lived in a garrison town. I did not much like Eugenia's going, but she laughed at my objections, and you know, after my mother's death, no one had any control over her. She was of age, with two hundred a year for her sole and separate use, whether single or

married. How much good she might have done with that money! But she spent it all on herself, and, to go to the Beauforts, she provided a very gay outfit. They were dressy people, and went out a great deal. I believe Eugenia and Mary were sufficiently admired; for Eugenia's letters were ecstatic; and at the end of three weeks, she wrote to me that she was engaged to Captain Homer. I stormed—implored—but quite in vain. She said she knew best what was for her happiness; and since I was so against her marriage, she supposed I did not want to be present at it. I had a good cry; and wrote that though protesting against it, I wished to be present. She would not be married from home, however, because of the school; and the marriage was to take place before the holidays; so I could only leave the girls for a few hours, under charge of Miss Stone."

"What was Captain Homer like?" inquired Edith, with interest.

"Well, it's difficult to see what a man's like, when he's all over moustache. There was a tall column of scarlet and gold, and a cropped black head at the top of it, and so much

beard and whisker that I declare I doubt if I should know the man, if I met him in the street. However," she continued, "he was Eugenia's husband, whom she promised to love, cherish, and obey, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health. And how has she performed it? In less than six weeks, they separated. She had expected, I believe, the continued gaiety of a garrison life, instead of which, he had to take command of a small detachment ordered to relieve the soldiers at Tristan d'Acunha. And she refused to go."

"That was very bad of her," said Edith. "I don't know much of Tristan d'Acunha; but I suppose it is very hot. Still, many officers leave their wives behind."

"There would have been nothing in that, nothing at all," said Miss Crowe. "For my part, I should have preferred Eugenia's being left behind with us, and for us to have the opportunity of forgetting the captain altogether. And it might have been so, with such a very little management! Instead of which, they must get mutually dissatisfied, and have a desperate quarrel, and each say things that the

other could not forgive—she accusing him of wanting her money, and he repaying her with abuse of her selfishness and romance. Even then, she would have done better to come quietly back to me; but she scouted the idea, called Crowsnest a dungeon, a desert, and what not, and accused me of interested motives. When she came to that pass, I ceased to have anything to do with her. I thought she might be wretched her own way—for wretched she would and must be."

Miss Crowe here put her handkerchief to her eyes, and cried. Edith, to console her, said—

"I don't think you need suppose her wretched. She seemed very composed and even-spirited. I don't think she feels things as you do."

"I know," sobbed Miss Crowe, "that I've a very hot temper, and I do all I can to control it. I don't think you ever saw me give way to it much."

"Never, never!"

"I'm fond of young people, and like to make them happy, but not by spoiling them. Where there's no order, there's no law; where there's

no law, there's no safety; and where there's no safety, there's no happiness. I don't think that the young ladies of Crowsnest, generally speaking, find it a dungeon."

"Why, we used to call it 'our other home!'" said Edith. "And at one time it was my only one."

Miss Crowe looked pleased, and remained silent a little while.

"As for Tristan d'Acunha," resumed she, presently, "Eugenia certainly said truly, that she should be buried alive there. But, for *her* to allege that, when her head is stuffed full of novels, and disinterested sacrifices, and love in a cottage—'the world forgetting, by the world forgot!'—is inconsistent enough. Tristan d'Acunha lies about fifteen hundred miles from the Cape, and about the same distance from St. Helena."

"That does sound very isolated, certainly," said Edith.

"The only habitable patch of land," continued Miss Crowe, exactly as if she were repeating a geography lesson, "is a narrow plain or shelf, formed from the *débris* of the vast, overhanging cliffs, about four miles long,

and from a mile to a mile and a half broad. The rest of the island is about nine thousand feet high, and nearly inaccessible."

"Dear me, I should not like such a place at all!" exclaimed Edith. "I don't think you can wonder Mrs. Homer does not like to go to it."

"Other people are obliged to go to it, and remain on it," said Miss Crowe; "and I suppose they have their feelings as well as Eugenia."

"I wonder Government can keep up such a place."

"In time of war, if our enemies got possession of it, they might make our position at St. Helena and the Cape very perilous."

"I see. Dear me, one reads about such stations without caring about them in the least; but it makes all the difference if some one we care for is there."

"Just so," said Miss Crowe, "and Captain Homer is there."

"How many people live on the island?"

"About a hundred; chiefly the descendants of a score or so of soldiers and their wives, who were left there, many years ago, and seemed at

one time to be pretty nearly forgotten. Rather an awkward thing, too, to be forgotten at Tristan d'Acunha, for it depends for its supplies of food and clothing from the whale ships, and sometimes they have been reduced to great extremities. Some of the young people would gladly get away, and see something of the world, if they could but carry their property with them, consisting chiefly of live stock. And many fine young men have gone forth from them as sailors. There are, however, two 'old salts' on the island, who declare they will stick by it to the last: one of them served under Nelson. There are large families of grown-up daughters; the female population much exceeds the male. They are moral, and, indeed, eminently religious."

"Ah, then," said Edith, "I believe I could be happy there—happy if Leo were with me."

Here they stopped at a station, and two gentlemen were put into their carriage, which prevented any more personal conversation. Edith transported herself in reverie to Tristan d'Acunha, and fancied herself training the girls, enlivening the old people, scrambling up

the rocks, gazing over the wide, wide sea, making beautiful collections of ferns, sea-weeds, and shells, and reading Shakspeare, like Gertrude of Wyoming, in some retired nook.

When they reached Belforest, Miss Crowe asked her the way to Tresellis; and Edith offered to be her pioneer. "Are you going to stay here?" said she.

"I don't know that Eugenia will offer me a bed," said Miss Crowe, "for she has been anything but sisterly. I have only had three letters from her in six months; and when I was very ill, in the Christmas holidays, and wanted her to come and nurse me, she excused herself, under plea of being 'such a silly creature about infection.' And this at the very time she was declaring she didn't care how soon she laid down her weary, weary life! Bosh!"

"Was your illness infectious, then?"

"We had had scarlet fever in the house, and I had overtaxed my strength in nursing the girls. But I had no fever; Eugenia and I had it when we were children. People take it a second, and even a third, time occasionally; but too rarely to be quoted as warnings by any but cowards. Eugenia's last letter, however,

was kind, and on the strength of it I am coming to see her; but I am not at all sure of my reception. I have heard from Captain Homer lately. He writes a good letter, and he wants to make it up with her, and to persuade her to go out to him. I don't believe she will, though."

"I think she should," said Edith; "but yet there are many excuses for her, if she cannot make up her mind to such complete isolation."

They were now threading Quagmire Lane.

"I should think she must be tolerably isolated at the end of such a lane as this," said Miss Crowe, as she picked her way through the mud. "Few visitors, I should think, would wade through this clay to call on her, unless the young clergyman, in seven league boots. She told me what a delightful preacher he was, and I was pleased to find she could call any preacher delightful; but my pleasure is dashed, now that I find she has been passing herself off as a widow. What would Captain Homer say to that, I wonder? He *might* say, 'the wish was father to the thought.' Do you remember Miss Stone?"

"The half-boarder? Oh, yes," said Edith. "A silent, stupid girl."

"After you left, she became a paid teacher. She was a tolerable drudge; but she got conceited, fancied herself worth a better salary, and went away. This winter she has been staying with Eugenia."

"A very good arrangement, if Mrs. Homer can put up with so stolid a companion," said Edith. "Miss Stone must have been glad of a home, and Mrs. Homer would have found Tresellis very lonely without any one to share her seclusion."

"Jemima Stone is such a perfect nonentity," said Miss Crowe, "that I think Eugenia must have selected her because she knew she would be not the least restraint. 'Speak when you're spoken to, do as you're bid,' is the whole duty of woman, in Miss Stone's opinion. But, dear me, will this long lane never have a turning? I think, as the Irishman said of the rope he was hauling in, 'the end must be cut off.'"

But at this instant they came in view of the picturesque gables of Tresellis.

"And now I will wish you good-bye," said Edith, "for you cannot miss your way."

"She may be out, or she may deny herself," said Miss Crowe, nervously. "Do go with me to the gate, and see whether I am admitted."

"But she may see me from the window, and will think it so odd."

"Stay here, then, a minute or two, behind the hedge. If I do not join you in five minutes, conclude that I have gone in."

CHAPTER XI.

EUGENIA.

Mr. Weir started on his uncomfortable mission in no very pleasant frame of mind. The very basis of his character was truth; he read it inscribed on every page of the Gospel; he adored the Master who emphatically called Himself *the* Truth; he saw, in every newspaper he took up, the foundations of society sapped by its infraction;—in every broken treaty, in every quarrel about boundaries, in every breach of peace, in frauds on the revenue, in contractors' cheats, in clerks' embezzlements, in forged wills, in the law-courts, the police-courts, the criminal-courts—everywhere he saw sin and sorrow that might have been avoided, had mothers taught, and children learnt, the truth.

When will the altars of that trumpery idol, Society, with her painted cheeks and tinsel frippery, be forsaken for the pure white pedestal

of her who hides in no remote solitude, difficult of access, but utters her voice in the streets, cries in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates, and in the city, saying, "Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil"? But the father of lies is believed sooner than she is.

So at least, thought Mr. Weir; and when he read of celestial personages in pure white garments, whiter than any fuller on earth can white them, cinctured with a band of fine gold, that golden thread, to him, was the girdle of truth, which confines within just limits, and strengthens while it binds.

Arrived at Tresellis, he sent in his name, and was admitted. Mrs. Homer was illuminating a book-marker. Miss Stone was at either knitting, netting, or crochet, and speedily disappeared. Mrs. Homer welcomed him with her sweet smile, and said it was quite a privilege to see him in her little nest. He went at once into the matter in hand, and said with a constrained air—

"I come on rather an unpleasant mission. A lady who subscribes to Mudie's Library, has found a letter of yours, which you may have used as a marker, in a book she has just received from town."

"A Belforest lady? has she read it?" said Mrs. Homer, quickly.

"Yes."

He gave her the note. Directly she saw what it was, she coloured violently—painfully, and was quite unable to look up or speak.

"It was unpardonable of her to read it," said he, pitying her.

"It was;" she replied in a low voice. "Have—*you* read it?"

"Oh, no! but I know your secret; it was told me abruptly. Why did you deceive us so?" said he very gently, very kindly.

She burst into tears.

"I never said—" she faltered.

"Nay, an acted falsehood is just the same as if spoken."

"For protection—so young!" she sobbed.

"Yes, you were very young—you were unprotected," said he compassionately. "But permit me to speak for once like a friend—an

old friend; may I? How came you to be so unprotected? Was it in any degree your own fault?

"Partly."

"Are not you sorry?"

"Yes."

"Why, now we are coming to the heart of the matter," said he cheerfully. "I have long seen you had something on your mind. And here it is. You have done something you are sorry for—you wish you could set it straight; let me see if I cannot help you."

She dried her eyes, and gave him an April smile.

"Yes, you have done very wrong," said he, quickly; "and if a good Providence had not been watching over you, and others, it might have been the occasion of great sin—great sorrow. Thank God, this day, on your knees, that it has not been so. He is your great, your best Friend; you have offended Him—you must tell Him you are sorry, and ask Him to pardon you; then He will make all things even yet work together for good."

"Pray for me—"

"I will, if you will pray for yourself. Will you?"

"Yes."

"Don't rise from your knees till you feel you *have* prayed. It need not take you long; I am exacting no penance. I am trying to set you right with the only Friend who can keep you right. When you are right with Him, you will be right with your husband. God bless you."

He quitted her, and opening the house door for himself, nearly ran against Miss Crowe. She said,

"I beg your pardon; is Mrs. Homer at home?"

"Yes," he replied; "she—"

Seeing him hesitate, and scarcely make way for her, Miss Crowe said abruptly,

"I'm her sister!"

On which he immediately made way for her with a low bow, and walked out, while she walked in. Entering the parlour thus unannounced, there she found Mrs. Homer, drowned in tears.

"Eugenia!" said she, abruptly.

"Oh, Marianne! why have you come?"

said Mrs. Homer, with a start, and then relapsing into grief.

"Time enough I should come, I think;" said Miss Crowe, planting herself in a chair as if she meant to take root in it. "Things seem to be going on strangely."

"I don't know what you mean by strange, nor why it is time for you to come," said Mrs. Homer, drying her tears, and beginning to stand at bay. "What *do* you mean?"

"Certainly, Eugenia, I can't think it very respectable for you in this out-of-the-way place, to be receiving *tête-à-tête* visits from an unmarried young clergyman, who supposes you to be a widow."

"He doesn't!" said Mrs. Homer, colouring scarlet; "and he never called without his mother before; and Miss Stone has but just gone out of the room; so *now* am I respectable?" And she cried afresh.

"Well, all I can say is, it seems very curious, meeting him going out of the house all in a flurry, and finding you crying like a scolded child—"

"Marianne!"

"It's no good Mariannning me, Eugenia; the

fact was so, and what would Captain Homer have thought of it? He'd have collared him, maybe."

"Oh, Marianne! how *can* you talk in that dreadful way? Have pity on my feelings—"

"No, Eugenia, because you have no pity on your husband. And wearing that black gown, too! Faugh! Who are you in mourning for, pray? And how came you to wear a widow's cap?"

Mrs. Homer was, for the moment, struck dumb, but the traitor colour rose in her cheeks. She turned away her face; buried it in her handkerchief, and murmured,

"Oh, the meanness of the world!"

"Ay, the world is very mean, and so are the persons who compose it," said Miss Crowe. "The world has been mean enough to make its remarks on you already, and will proceed to very unpleasant constructions if you don't take care what you are about. Oh! Eugenia, why *must* I talk in this manner? You know I love you," said Miss Crowe, beginning to cry, "and you don't return it in the least."

"Marianne, you say such cruel, cruel things;

I really feel so ill that I must go and lie down—"

"Do stop, Eugenia, just a moment—am I to go or stay? Here have I come this long journey, the moment I was at liberty, entirely on your account; though you would not come near me at Christmas, and are you going to take me in or not?"

"If you had but written me a line—(my head is splitting)—if you had given me the shortest notice, instead of bursting in upon me in this agitating way—"

"I see!—You don't wish to have me."

"Miss Stone has my only spare room—"

"Ah, Eugenia! time has been when you and I have shared the same little bed, and not found it too small; and when I have lain on the floor beside you, when you were tossing with fever—"

Mrs. Homer put her arm round her sister's neck, and kissed her two or three times. Miss Crowe returned the caress with emotion.

"You were always a dreadful plague, you tiresome thing," said she; "and why won't you be a good child for once, and make us all happy?"

"Oh! Marianne, you can't think how I long, how I yearn to do so; but really at this moment you don't understand me—I had an agitating surprise just before you came in, and I've had no time to recover. . . . I believe I'm going to faint—A glass of wine, please—"

She changed colour, and looked so unmistakably ill, that Miss Crowe, in alarm, pulled the bell, and then held her in her arms. Arnold answered the summons so instantaneously as to provoke suspicion that his ear had been recently at the key-hole. He looked hard at Miss Crowe, who eyed him with severity.

"Call Miss Stone," said she.

Miss Stone came in, looking all surprise at seeing Miss Crowe, and was beginning a little set speech, when she was cut short with—

"Get Mrs. Homer a glass of wine."

"I believe I'd better go up to my room," said Mrs. Homer, faintly. "Your arm, Jemima."

Miss Stone's arm on one side, and Miss Crowe's on the other, met across her waist, and they supported her up the narrow little staircase, Miss Crowe convinced that, "if she

would make an effort," this faintness might be thrown off.

But her lips were blue, and her cheeks were white, and her arms were limp, and her hands were cold—so there could be no mistake.

They put her in bed, and they tucked her in, and Miss Stone went for hot bottles; and Miss Crowe looked with contempt and provocation at the graceful white net draperies of the little canopy-bed, and the flounced toilette, clear muslin over pink, and the draped looking-glass with wax-lights, and the couch, and the ottoman, and the table loaded with novels.

Mrs. Homer's faintness, instead of decreasing, became worse; and she was as nearly insensible as she could be, without going off into a dead faint. Everything that affection and energy could do for her was done by Miss Crowe; and when she recovered a little, the tears oozed through her closed eyelashes, and she softly whispered (her sister's face being close to her own), "Don't leave me, dear. I think I'm going to be very ill. Don't go away."

"I won't leave you, dear," said Miss Crowe, kissing her.

Later in the day, Miss Crowe said to Miss Stone, with a troubled air, "Do send that buttoned boy for the doctor."

Mr. Weir, on quitting Tresellis, not exactly *hors de lui-même*, but certainly under excitement, came unexpectedly upon Edith, outside the gate.

"You here?" said he, in surprise, and he held out his hand to her.

"I have but just come down," said Edith, in explanation. "We are going to spend our Easter at Daisylands."

"I am very glad of it. Were you going to call on Mrs. Homer?"

"No! I only walked down the lane with Miss Crowe."

"That is well, because I do not think Mrs. Homer is quite prepared just now for visitors. Miss Crowe was the lady, I suppose, who went in as I came out. She called herself Mrs. Homer's sister."

"Yes, she is," said Edith.

"You know her very well, then?"

"Oh, yes! I went to school at Miss Crowe's."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Is she gone in? Is she going to remain?"

"She went in, and seems to be staying."

"Then I need not wait," said Edith; and she began to walk away.

Mr. Weir accompanied her. "The sisters are not at all alike," said he.

"No," said Edith. "Eugenia is so pretty, and Miss Crowe is rather plain. But I never think of her plainness: there is something so sterling about her—only she is rather blunt."

"She does not make her young ladies blunt, I hope."

"No," said Edith, smiling. "I am not aware that she does. But she is a great stickler for truth. She says Truth and Honesty are twins: one is equal to the other."

"I am of her mind. Is she come to stay?"

"That is as Mrs. Homer wills, I believe. At the utmost, she can only remain a few days."

"Well, I hope she will remain as long as she can, for it will be an advantage to Mrs. Homer to have a female relative with her in her present position."

Edith gave him a look, as much as to say, "You know, then, what her position is?"

At least, he read it so, and answered, "I know about Captain Homer."

"Oh, I am so glad you do," said Edith.

"I know the bare fact of his existence, but no more. Stay, I think I heard he was at Tristan d'Acunha. Is that true?"

"Yes, he commands a detachment there."

"What an out-of-the-way spot! Does he expect his wife to join him?"

"I am told he wishes it. He has written to Miss Crowe about it."

"Poor Mrs. Homer!" said Mr. Weir, with strong pity. "Such monotonous isolation, under such a burning sun! I doubt if her health would stand it."

"You think not?"

"Well, I think she may be very fairly excused for feeling rather discouraged. I was reading about the island lately, in the Bishop of Capetown's *Visitation Journal.* It is of volcanic origin, and has the crater of an extinct volcano at the summit."

"Dear me, I should not like to live on a volcano at all," said Edith.

He smiled and said, "The British Islands are volcanic." Presently he resumed, "It will

be a matter of some interest, some anxiety, to await Mrs. Homer's decision. As a question of duty, she should go. She should not have voluntarily linked her fate to another, and have shrunk from the very first trial exacted of her. Soldiers are always expecting to be sent to scenes of danger. In general, the contest among their wives is, *not to be left behind.* Esquiros says, 'they share the soldier's dangers, hardships, privations—everything except the glory.' Dangers come to us at home, dodge them as we may. English people have lived for years at Tristan d'Acunha, in content and health. Solitary it undoubtedly is; but there is no crime."

Reaching the end of the lane, where their roads parted, he said, "I hope you and my mother will make acquaintance, Miss Antony."

She said she should be very happy. As she passed the post-office, she met Nessy's anxious eyes, and went in.

"Well, Miss Saffery, here we are again," said she. "We are going to spend the week at Daisylands."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" said Nessy. "I saw you

pass the green, about an hour ago, with a stranger."

"Miss Crowe, Mrs. Homer's sister. We came down in the same carriage, and I showed her the way to Tresellis."

"Oh! then you know—"

"Know what?" said Edith.

"About Mrs. Homer," said Nessy.

"About her not being a widow? Oh, I knew that last summer. I always knew it."

"Did you? Oh, I'm so glad!"

"Why?"

"Because it shows she was not a deceiver, as my mamma thinks she was. I'm sure she never said she was a widow, in my hearing."

"I am afraid she lent herself to a deceit," said Edith. "Indeed, I am quite sure she did. But happily we are not called on to sit in judgment on our neighbour's thoughts, words, or works—

> "'Let each give credit to his neighbour's share,
> But analyse his own with utmost care.'"

"I wonder if Mr. Weir knows about it," said Nessy.

"I can tell you. He does."

"Oh, that's a relief! I could not bear that he should be misled."

"He thinks she has done wrong, but he pities her."

"He has given us a course of such delightful Lent lectures, Miss Antony."

"I wish I had been here to hear them."

"There's Dick Arnold stopping Mr. Bush in his chaise," said Nessy, looking out; "and Mr. Bush is turning about and going down Quagmire Lane. Can Mrs. Homer be ill?"

"I should hope not," said Edith.

"Oh, Miss Antony! do you know that George Early is come back?"

"Yes; I saw it in the *Times*. He has been going the round of the scientific *soirées*. Curious! Not a bit of a gentleman, I suppose?"

"He is, and yet he is not," said Nessy. "I can't explain what I mean. You would never miss anything in him—you would not miss anything in his manner that ought to be there. At least, I believe you would not; but perhaps that is only my ignorance."

"He must have plenty to tell."

"Oh, plenty. And he is so good to his mother; they live so happily."

Mr. Weir returned to his mother with what she called his thoughtful, tired look. She had

been vexing herself in his absence by settling that he had certainly become attached to Mrs. Homer—that vivid, sudden colouring up had betrayed it. And she, silly mother, had been doing what she could to add fuel to the flame, by talking frequently of her, praising her, and inviting her to the house.

"Well?" she said.

"Well, mother, it was a painful scene. She felt it very sadly."

"How could she have been so stupid as to use such a note for a marker?"

"We never entered upon that. I just told her what had happened, and gave her the note. She coloured; oh, so painfully! cheek, brow, throat, one universal blush. I spoke very plainly to her about her deception. She said she was so young,—she wanted protection. I showed her that was no excuse."

"No, indeed!" ejaculated Mrs. Weir. "Where was the protection to you and other young men?"

"My dear mother," said he, smiling a little; "I was quite safe."

"May I really believe it, Frank? I am so glad!"

"Yes, you may be, because it might have

been otherwise; but I am quite safe. I've no personal feeling in the matter."

Mrs. Weir was very much relieved, and able to take some interest in Mrs. Homer's story as a matter of enlightened curiosity.

"What did she say for herself, my dear?"

"She said nothing: I liked her the better for it. She did not try to exculpate herself. She admitted she had herself partly to blame for the separation. I said, 'Are you sorry?' She said, 'Yes,' and cried bitterly."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Weir.

"But oh, mother! if she rejoins her husband, it will be in such a desolate island; its nearest neighbour is St. Helena, fifteen hundred miles off."

"St. Helena? why, that's where Buonaparte was. Oh, I couldn't undertake that, if I had twenty husbands there," said Mrs. Weir.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CREATURE.

Mr. Bush, returning from Tresellis, reported Mrs. Homer suffering from a severe nervous attack, and teazed his wife by calling her "the interesting invalid." Mrs. Bush, who was in Miss Hornblower's confidence, did not know what right such a "creature" had to be interesting, and was not at all surprised to hear of her nervous attack. She officiously informed Mrs. Weir of it, and as Mrs. Weir has already shown herself to be anything but a terrific old lady, we are not to be surprised at her finding, after morning service, that her ancle would permit her to call at Tresellis. She found Mrs. Homer surrounded

"With everything that pretty is,"

reclining on a couch, very pale, and heavy-eyed. A little colour rose into her cheeks as she met Mrs. Weir with a culprit's deprecating look;

seeing which, Mrs. Weir took her by the hand, and said—"Don't leave the sofa—you really must not," so kindly, that the tears came into Mrs. Homer's eyes.

"You are very kind—to come," she said, in broken accents.

"Why, you know we all take interest in you," said Mrs. Weir; "so what is there in it? Frank has so many things and people to attend to, that we never expect—but *I* have always thought with interest about you from the first, looking on you, you know, as a widow indeed;" (here Mrs. Homer turned very red) "but that turns out to have been a *ruse* of your not very wise little head."

"Oh, you kind, *kind* friend!"

"Yes, I am that, I know," said Mrs. Weir, smiling a little; "because you have done a wrong thing, and deserve a good scolding; but *who from?* Why, from Captain Homer, of course, and I hope he'll give you a good trimming when he catches you."

Miss Crowe, who had sat quite silent hitherto, now said, "Eugenia has determined on quite the right course—the course of duty." Here Eugenia began to cry.

"Then she will be happy; I know she will," said Mrs. Weir, laying her hand on Mrs. Homer's; "we are always happy in giving ourselves unreservedly to our duty, though we don't expect to be so at the time. And the difficulties that appear to surround it, often prove to have no existence but in our fancies. Not that I have always known or felt this, or acted upon it. No, no! there never was a more selfish, worldly toad than I was, till my dear boy brought me to a better way of thinking. So don't think yourself the worst person in Belforest, my dear; for I'll venture to say you can't have been as bad as I was; and now you're going to be quite good, are you not?"

"I'll try" (rather sentimentally).

"That's right; and how are you going to try?"

"She means to give up Tresellis," said Miss Crowe, afraid of her hesitating, "and to—"

"Nothing is fixed yet," interrupted Mrs. Homer. "I'm too much overcome just now, by—recent events;—you must not want to tie me down, Marianne, and say everything is settled because it is not so."

"Why, now, Eugenia, did not you say—"

"What do you say to a little drive?" said Mrs. Weir. "My ancle is not very strong yet, and a fly is coming for me presently. Will it not revive you to take a little turn with me round the lanes?"

Mrs. Homer could not help looking pleased at the idea; but then—oh, what must become of the invalidism? She let herself be waited upon and dressed by her sister and Miss Stone, dropping her arms in a limp sort of way, and declining her head like a lily on its broken stalk; but she suffered herself to be put into the fly, and immense was Miss Crowe's satisfaction when she saw it drive off.

"And now we can have a nice, quiet, confidential talk," said Mrs. Weir, in a motherly way; "and though I would never have forced your confidence, yet since the subject has come before us, do let me hear all about it, and not go away with any wrong ideas in my stupid old head."

"Oh, I do think you are the kindest, the *very* kindest person in the world," said Mrs. Homer. "Mr. Weir's words were like swords."

"Were they? Well, he does not usually

speak so sharply: but, you see, he wounds to heal: he reproves in order to correct. It's his office, my dear, but, luckily, it is not mine."

"I feel as if I could tell *you* everything," said Mrs. Homer; and then she began from the very beginning: and it was curious, when she came to tell her story her own way, what an air of utterly fictitious romance she threw about it, partly from her deceiving herself, and partly because she wanted to seem a heroine to others. Mrs. Weir, with all her disposition to see the best side of things, could not evade a certain feeling of dissatisfaction, and contented herself with no more committing interjection than "humph!" And when Mrs. Homer ended her long, plaintive monologue with—

"And now, what *am* I to do?" she said—

"I think the best answer is summed up in your husband's own words—let bygones be bygones. If he is willing to make peace, do not be backward in accepting it. You loved him once, or thought you did."

"Oh, I love him better than all the world, *now!*"

"Prove to him you do, then. Don't let him

think you love yourself, your own way, your own indulgences, better than you love him. What's the good of money? Why, to supply our wants, and make us happy, and useful to others. I don't know of any other good in it. Now, the only good of your money, surely, is to secure your happiness, not to destroy it— and what happiness can it secure you? Has it made you happy here, all by yourself?"

"You may think me wrong to say so, dear Mrs. Weir, but I really was *very* happy and comfortable all this winter, at Tresellis—very happy, till Mr. Weir spoke daggers from the pulpit."

"Well, I really never noticed my son to be severe—and I never sleep under *his* sermons. I'm quite sure he was guiltless of *intending* any personal application, and if he hit the mark, it must have been because your own conscience, my young friend, was tender."

"That *was* it, that *was* it," said Mrs. Homer. "He quite pierced me; because he seemed to allude to my declining to go to my sister at Christmas; and I really was afraid of infection, and did not think she much cared to have me. I'm such a *poor* creature in a sick room."

"Well, with a husband at St. What-d'ye-call-him, and a sister ill in bed at home, I do wonder a little at your being so happy and comfortable at Tresellis," said Mrs. Weir, with good-humoured irony. Mrs. Homer felt ashamed, and did not know what to say.

"Marianne and I were never much of companions," said she presently. "She is all roughness, and I am all softness; she is all for the real; I, for the beau-ideal."

"Well, but when the beau who was your ideal turned up," said Mrs. Weir, "you were not ready to keep your promise to him, 'for better for worse.'"

"Oh, I was so *désillusionnée!* he proved so different from what he seemed!"

"It is always so, when we deal with ideals. I dare say he is, at least, a brave officer and well-bred man."

"Oh, a great deal more than that. Only it was so dreadfully mercenary of him to want me to cash that bill for him. And then when I told him so, if a look could have killed me, it would."

"Pooh, pooh, you would have done better to have paid the bill first, and remonstrated good-

humouredly afterwards. No man, I think, will endure to be told by his wife that he has married her for her money. And it is not at all likely to have been the case. You, with your attractions, my dear, did not want money to make people like you."

"Well—no—I hope not. I think Charles really loved me."

"Go off to him, then, as fast as you can, by the next ship: and leave your good sister to manage matters for you."

"Oh, what a place it is to go to!"—

"There I agree with you! there I feel for you!" said Mrs. Weir heartily. "It *is* a sacrifice. But what is a woman's life but a sacrifice?"

Directly Mrs. Homer saw her case in that light, she saw that there would be credit in being jolly under the circumstances.

"Oh, yes, it has come to that, now—go I must," said she, folding her hands, and looking up with her Madonna expression. "I lay my life at his feet—the remnant of it, for most likely it won't be long."

"Oh yes, very likely it will," said Mrs. Weir, consolingly. "It's wonderful what young peo-

ple will go through, and you've gone through nothing yet, my dear."

"I'm quite passive, henceforth, in the hands of fate—let him spurn me if he will."

"Oh, he'll be too much of a gentleman for that. Pray is he tall or short?"

"His height is perfect—very little under six feet. And such splendid eyes! With a look he could kill. And so dreadfully acute! I used to say to him, 'Charles, your words are swords.'"

"Hem! Well, he will count the days till he sees you."

"But what outfit to provide? what ship to go out in?"

"Oh! all these things are easily settled. They will tell you at any outfitter's what you will want, and you may see a list of ships in the *Times* any day."

"But to go out alone—unprotected—to an unknown land—cast among strangers—this poor, poor, foolish heart!—I, so inexperienced, so young!"

"Why, you're one or two and twenty, are not you? Oh! I don't call that so very young. A woman may do anything respectable at that age."

This cut Mrs. Homer off from one of her favourite appeals for commiseration; and, just at that moment, she had an opportunity of pensively bowing to Miss Hornblower, who was looking hard into the fly, hardly able to believe her eyes.

"Miss Hornblower can scarcely understand how you can forgive her," said Mrs. Weir; "but you are quite right."

"Forgive? What have I to forgive her for?" said Mrs. Homer.

"Oh! I thought you knew it was she who read your letter."

"Not till this moment. I never asked."

"That was very generous of you."

Now, in fact, she had been too preoccupied and humiliated to think of it; but it was pleasant to be thus told she was genèrous. Nor would it do to owe Miss Hornblower a grudge now, since she had accepted the praise of having forgiven her.

On the whole, her mind, though in a very sore, humiliated, agitated state, was relieved of a load that had oppressed it ever since she last saw her husband. She was no longer wilful, she was no longer carrying on a deceit, and

she could not help a secret joy that it was so.

They reached Tresellis in silence; and as she took leave of Mrs. Weir, she ventured to kiss her, saying, "You are my real, true friend; and I so wanted one! I shall always have reason to be glad of the accident that brought us together. I owe a debt of gratitude to —Taurus."

When Mrs. Weir, who was not without her sense of humour, repeated this last little bit of finery to her son, he burst out laughing.

"Ah! it is no laughing matter, Frank," said she. "The poor thing has been on the brink of a great wrong, and is now anxious to do right."

"I don't know what you call brink," said he. "She *did* wrong; but since you say she is now determined to do right, that is the best reparation she can make for it. Does she seem to mind it much?"

"She is determined to go through with her sacrifice—for it is one, and declares that she loves the captain better than all the world; but I fear he has a trying temper. She says his words are swords."

"Ah! that's bad."

"But she said *you* had spoken daggers to her."

"Oh! then it's only her *façon de parler*," said Mr. Weir, laughing. "If his swords are no more than my daggers, I don't think they'll kill her. When does she mean to sail?"

"By the first opportunity; but she does not know about the ships."

"There are always plenty of advertisements;" and he took up the *Times*.

"Why, here is one—the *Ariadne*," cried he, presently. "'Cape of Good Hope. The *Ariadne*, Cape Royal Mail Steamer, leaves Southampton on the 4th'—that's to-morrow week. No time to lose, if she means to go by it. I'll just run down and tell her, mother."

"It is nearly dinner-time, my dear."

"I won't keep you waiting."

And away he hurried. He found Mrs. Homer languidly occupying a large easy-chair, and using her smelling-bottle; but she rose and welcomed him with a sweet smile. Miss Crowe looked at him with a more favourable eye than when he had stood in the doorway.

"I must not stay a minute," said he, "or I

shall be late for dinner; but I thought you would like to know that the *Ariadne* mail-steamer sails from Southampton on the 4th."

"Dear, that will do exactly," cried Miss Crowe. "You had better take your passage at once, hadn't you, Eugenia?"

"You all seem in a great hurry to get rid of me," said Mrs. Homer, sinking back into her seat, and putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

"You must not judge of us by our seeming," said Mr. Weir. "I can assure you, for my own part, that I shall be very sorry to lose you. Though you have not been here long, you will be missed."

She still shed tears.

"You were very kind and useful in the school when we were in difficulties, and I hope and am persuaded you will be useful wherever you are. All the loss will be ours; but you are going to one who is ill and longing to see you, and to new and interesting scenes. Why, you will be quite the queen of the little island."

This suggestion was not unpleasing or without its consolation.

"I think I've shown here that I don't mind isolation," said she, tremulously. "Who has come near me? I've been as lonely here as I could be at Tristan d'Acunha. Solitude has no terrors for me. And the islanders are clothed and Christian. With my harp, a book, and a little bread and fruit, I could be not unhappy anywhere."

"*That's* well," said Mr. Weir, cheerily, while Miss Crowe muttered, "I doubt how the harp will bear carrying through the surf; and there will be no circulating-library."

"Privations I accept," said Mrs. Homer; "dangers I look for; but unkindness I hope, I trust to be spared."

"Oh, yes!—

"'Birds in their little nests agree,'

so will you."

"It is a venture—a problem. But I have said I would go, and I shall not depart from my word. Think of me sometimes."

"Oh, yes! we'll think of you."

"Dear me, so many young ladies undertake the voyage for mere pleasure," said Miss Crowe.

"Not to land on a rock nine thousand feet high," said Mrs. Homer quickly, "and with only a hundred inhabitants."

"It *is* a trial; don't let us affect to make light of it," said Mr. Weir. "You will depend much on books; you must take out a small, well-chosen collection. With your leave, I will add a few to it."

"Oh, thanks, thanks!"

"And Sir Edward Seaward's narrative shall be among them. It is a fiction, but you will not like it the worse for that."

"I shall be grateful for every alleviation," said she. "I complain no more, but I pretend not to composure. I shall please others, let that suffice. I shall please *you*, Marianne."

"If you mean I shall be glad to get rid of you, you know I shall not, Eugenia. But I own I shall be glad to see you in the path of duty."

"In another little week, then, I shall sail. You may write to the ship-brokers, or whatever you call them. I've nailed my colours to the mast. *Ariadne*, is the vessel called? It will have another Ariadne on board, on her way to Patmos."

"Do talk of what you understand, Eugenia," cried Miss Crowe, who was well up in mythology, and who caught the sudden smile that brightened Mr. Weir's face, though he sedulously endeavoured to suppress it. "Ariadne's lover ran away from her, not she from him, and the island was Naxos."

"My mother will scold me, with reason, if I don't hasten home," said Mr. Weir. "I have heavy duty this week, and we are on the eve of a solemn and affecting commemoration. You will be at church to-morrow, I hope? I am glad you are going to be with us on Easter Sunday. Such a joyous celebration! Who can be sorrowful, or repining, or unloving, on bright Easter morning?"

"I hope to be at church," she sadly said. "It will be an affecting service to me; perhaps the last I shall ever attend in my own country."

A tear of genuine feeling shone in her eye. Mr. Weir respected it, and took leave kindly. Miss Crowe, too, was softened, and with much subdued abruptness made inquiries and received directions concerning the steps that were to be taken preparatory to this momentous journey.

CHAPTER XIII.

BRIGHT EASTER MORNING.

Either the holy influence of the season, or of Mr. Weir's previous ministrations, or Mrs. Weir's healing kindness, or some better, higher influence yet, was at work in Eugenia's heart, and producing in it something more of a hopeful change than it had ever hitherto experienced.

She could not, for shame, forget or neglect her promise to Mr. Weir, when he had said he would pray for her if she would pray for herself. When she tried to do so, nothing would come at first but sighs and tears; but presently she found herself forming thoughts and wishes into words of entreaty and confession, and she did not desist till she felt that she had indeed prayed.

> "The morning mists have passed away,
> But still the face of heaven is grey."

Mrs. Homer felt as if she would give the world to be free for a time from Miss Crowe's incessant talking and haranguing; but when she remembered how soon they were to part, and how long their separation might prove, she had not the heart to complain. Miss Stone was to have left her at Easter, but now Miss Stone might as well remain a few days more, and make herself useful.

Good Friday was very quietly, reverentially spent; and many tears fell from Mrs. Homer's eyes behind her black veil. On Saturday the sisters started early for London. When they returned in the evening, the berth was secured, the outfit bespoken, and Miss Crowe had made the acquaintance of a good old missionary and his wife, who were going out in the same ship, and who readily engaged to take Mrs. Homer under their protection. Many searchings of heart exercised the sisters in their silent journey back.

"This is a day on which all should be glad, even those who are parting," said Miss Crowe, as they met at breakfast on Easter Sunday; "and I do assure you, Eugenia, that I shall go home with a far lighter heart than I expected to do."

"You never would trust me," said Mrs. Homer. "I have scarcely ever had fair play. It was always, 'Oh, I'm sure Eugenia can't do that,' till I got into the way of thinking I could not, and need not. However, Marianne, I have been here eight months and have got into no money troubles, though you know I had very little to begin with."

"My dear child, the discipline has been very good for you, and I'm glad that it has not been wholly thrown away.—Jemima, I see you have not left off sucking your tongue."

These two paragons of meekness took their respective snubbings without a word. It was, indeed, habitual to Miss Crowe to be on the look out for defects; and she was especially sharp on Miss Stone just now, firstly, because she felt hurt at her taking up with, or being taken up by, Mrs. Homer, and quitting herself; secondly, to keep down her pride, which had betrayed itself in the avowal that she aspired to an engagement as private governess, for which Miss Crowe assured her she was wholly unfit. And, in the event of Jemima's being brought to see her own deficiencies, and to know her proper level, Miss Crowe thought of

taking her on again, at a slight increase of salary.

Behold, then, these three very different characters starting for church, in tolerable harmony. There has been a great practising of Easter hymns in the school-room, where Nessy has been very busy; and the children have new bonnets and spring nosegays—crocuses, and a few early primroses. The service was joyous and animating, and Mr. Weir preached on "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" and bade his hearers not seek for living sources of interest, living strength and support, in the perishing things of this life, else they would prove to have gone for water to broken cisterns. The serious, sorrowful expression of Mrs. Homer, so different from her studied attention of old, was so marked, that Edith could not but notice it; and her frank, honest nature was drawn towards her old schoolfellow by it, though she did not know how stedfastly she had turned into a new path. There was a full attendance at the sacramental table; and afterwards, when cheerful family parties poured into the churchyard, many hearty greetings were exchanged.

The Grevilles in full force, with sundry Easter guests, made quite a showy train; and conspicuous among them was a tall, military-looking man, bearded and moustached, who was doing himself the honour of escorting Miss Emily Greville. He looked fixedly at Mrs. Homer, as if to catch her attention. Catching her eye at length, she started a little, coloured, and bowed. Instantly his hat was raised; he hoped she was very well—hoped she had good accounts of Captain Homer.

"Not very good; he has been ill. I am going out to him in a few days."

"Going out? is it possible?" exclaimed the major.

For Major Johnson it was, who was in her husband's regiment, and whom she had frequently met in the garrison town where she had married. And now, had an *éclaircissement* not already taken place, how abruptly it would now have been made, to her utter disgrace, in the presence of all the little Belforest world! Instead of which, looks of surprise and respect attended her, as she exchanged these few words with the major, then bent with quiet dignity, and passed on. Her

heart beat fast all the way home, and she cut short Miss Crowe's remarks on the sermon somewhat curtly, with "Please, Marianne, don't talk to me."

Marianne, hurt, fell apart, and demanded the text of Miss Stone, who unfortunately boggled.

Mrs. Homer, running up to her room, and locking herself in, sat down and relieved herself by one or two deep sighs, mentally exclaiming, "What an escape! Even if Marianne and Edith had kept my secret, and if the letter had not betrayed it, I should now have been found out. I think I must have sunk to the earth, penetrated with shame; instead of which, I was able to preserve my self-respect. I am very, *very* thankful." And she clasped her hands tightly together. She did not know that detection had reached her through yet another source—Mr. Oldsmith.

Mrs. Weir sent a pressing message to Mrs. Homer and her sister to drink tea with her; not including Miss Stone, who was accustomed to be ignored. They went, and had a very delightful visit; Mr. Weir improving their last meeting to the utmost. All his high-minded,

soul-strengthening words, all his mother's kindly hopes and homely counsels, were treasured by tearful Mrs. Homer; while Miss Crowe, appreciating their value, was thankful Eugenia had fallen among such true friends.

"And you must write, my dear, and let us know how you are, and how you get on."

"May I? Oh, I shall like it so much!"

"Of course you may, and we shall be much gratified at your doing so. We shall continue to take interest in you, great interest."

"And she is going out with such nice people," said Miss Crowe. "Dr. Vanderburg is quite an old apostle, and his wife a thorough 'good creature.' They will be quite parents to Eugenia."

"Oh, how *can* you say so, Marianne, of people you only saw for half an hour?" remonstrated Mrs. Homer. She resisted having her bitter pill gilded in this way.

"When a thing is disagreeable," she said, presently, "one must do it, and not mind it, if it needs to be done. But it is no good to pretend to us that it is what it is not."

"I quite agree with you," said Mr. Weir. "It is a bad rule, in any case, to pretend that anything is what it is not."

Directly he saw her vivid blush, he was sorry for what he had said, for he had been guiltless of intending any painful application. They all started for the evening service together, and the sisters sat with Mrs. Weir, which was not without its impression on the congregation. As they came out of church, Edith and Mr. Antony waited for them, and Edith shook hands with Miss Crowe and Mrs. Homer, and introduced her brother to them. They all walked a little way down the lane together; Arnold in advance with a lantern, Miss Crowe and Mr. Antony following, and Mrs. Homer and Edith bringing up the rear. Mrs. Homer said—

"Edith, I think you may be interested in knowing that I am going out to join my husband."

"Are you?" cried Edith. "Oh, I am so glad."

"You are like every one else then," said Mrs. Homer, rather bitterly. "No one affects to regret me."

"Consider how little I see of you already," said Edith. "Why, I could not have seen less of you than I have done, since I left school, if you had been in the West Indies. It was

your marriage that altered your domestic relations. When you 'turned your twenty-one shillings into a guinea,' your twenty-one friends submitted to it on the understanding that you had found in one what compensated for the many. And I trust you will find it so."

"Oh! I trust that I shall, but my future is very, very dark."

"So is every one's future," said Edith. "We all equally need the same protection, every minute, though we are not conscious of needing it. But, indeed, dear Eugenia, I feel for you very much, and admire you too, now you are going to do your best. I own I was very cross with you when I found you were deceiving people."

"For pity's sake, don't say anything more about that; forget it if you can. I don't know what possessed me to do such a silly thing. I seemed to find relief and pleasure at the time, in fancying I had severed every tie between us. And now I am going away, little knowing what awaits me. But Mr. Weir has so clearly pointed out my duty, that I mean to pursue it, at whatever cost."

"What an excellent man he is!"

"Oh, you've no idea—You *can* have no idea of the friend he has been to me!"

Edith's too vivid imagination immediately conjured up a friendship, cemented by so many interesting interviews, that it gave her a little pang.

"Captain Homer will be your best friend henceforth," said she; "but you must not forget the friends who are thinking of you at home."

"Oh, Edith, do write to me sometimes. I shall pine so for home news, and I know Marianne won't write, or if she does, it will only be preaching. Do write."

"I will very gladly write occasionally, if you wish me to do so," said Edith; "only what shall I write about?"

"Oh, anything, everything. Your letters will lie at the Cape till they can be brought over to us; perhaps we shall not have letters more than once or twice a year!"

"That does sound lonely; but think how lonely Captain Homer must be all by himself, whereas you will have him."

"Oh, men have so many resources!"

"We have our needles," said Edith, laughing.

"And they have their cigars. They can hunt, shoot, fish."

"And you can teach the children to sing. Your Sunday-school teaching has been nice training for you."

"Oh, I'm such a poor creature!"

By the time they reached Tresellis, they were quite cordial. Mrs. Homer insisted on their going in, and remaining to supper. The little rooms looked so pretty, lighted up, to persons entering them from the dark, that Edith expressed herself charmed with them. "Just such a cottage as would suit us, Leo!"

"I wish you would take it off my hands, then," said Mrs. Homer. But this was not in their power.

As this was the last *soirée* Mrs. Homer would give, everything the house afforded that could be put on the table made its appearance; and she gaily pressed and smiled, and did the honours so pleasantly, that an agreeable evening closed the happy, well-spent day. As Mr. Antony returned home with his sister, he remarked—

"You may say what you will, Edith; but

Mrs. Homer is the most charming little person I have seen for a long time."

"Oh, you may say what you like *now*," said Edith.

"And pray, why '*now*,' with that marked emphasis, as opposed to 'then'?"

"All the difference between widow and wife."

"But I knew her to be wife then, so I was as safe as I am now."

"But she was playing a false part, and I despised and disliked her for it. She is doing right now, so I am friends with her, and wish her well."

"What a martinet Miss Crowe is!"

"It has grown upon her, but I am very fond of her. She is really a good woman."

"That Miss Stone looks as if she were always sucking a lump of sugar."

"She is a lump, herself," said Edith. "Even Miss Crowe could never make anything of her."

The next day was a busy one at Tresellis. Arnold was despatched for Mr. Oldsmith, who obeyed the summons in anxiety, having gathered that something unusual was on foot. Indeed,

Arnold had already volunteered to two or three parties the information that Mrs. Homer was preparing to leave.

"Mr. Oldsmith," said Mrs. Homer, "I am going to join my husband, who is on foreign service."

"Dear me, ma'am, then you're not a widow?"—(oh, the fox!)

"I am not. We must make some arrangement about the house and furniture. If you are inclined to take it off my hands for a moderate consideration, I shall be glad; otherwise, I am prepared to pay my rent to the year's end, and perhaps the house may let furnished."

Mr. Oldsmith hummed and hawed, and did not want to disoblige a lady, nor yet to encumber himself with things he did not want. The end of it was, that he took some of the planned furniture; and the rest was to be packed in cases and sent to Miss Crowe. In consideration of what she had done for the house, he took off a quarter's rent. Before he left her, Mrs. Homer paid him what she owed, and took his receipt.

Miss Stone was meanwhile packing books

and nicknacks; and Miss Crowe, on her knees before a large trunk, was packing her sister's apparel and table-linen. Opening a crushed bandbox, what should she find in it but *the* widow's cap, which Eugenia had always forgotten to burn! Viewing it with intense disgust, she took it up with the fire-tongs, and carried it down to the parlour, where Mrs. Homer was sitting thoughtfully before the fire.

"Eugenia, make way—I'm going to have a conflagration."

Mrs. Homer looked round, and, directly she saw what it was, started up, snatched the cap from between the tongs, and thrust it into the fire herself, holding it down with the poker, lest the sparks should fly up the chimney. As soon as the deed was done, they joined in an irrepressible fit of laughter, though Mrs. Homer was considerably annoyed. To divert her thoughts from the subject, she left Miss Crowe to complete her packing, and went into the village, to pay her few bills. Wherever Marianne was, she must take the lead; and Marianne might therefore as well take the trouble. And she knew that Marianne would be, in some measure, repaid for that trouble, by

having the opportunity of observing how her marks had washed out, her handkerchiefs were getting thin, her hems were beginning to fray, &c.

Miss Stone, as half-boarder to Miss Crowe, had originally requited her for gratuitous instruction by looking after the young ladies' wardrobes. She was quite in her element, therefore, making such little repairs as Miss Crowe found wanting: and they were thus engaged, when Esther came to say that Mrs. Weir was below.

"Go down, Jemima, and say Mrs. Homer is gone into the village," said Miss Crowe. "You need say nothing about me." For Eugenia's properties were scattered like hay, and she did not think it right to leave them.

Mrs. Weir told Miss Stone that, having a weak ancle, she should be glad of a little rest; so Miss Stone continued talking with her some little time, which appeared longer than it was to Miss Crowe, who determined at length to see what was going on. For this purpose, she descended into the parlour, and found Miss Stone, with intense gratification, pocketing twelve shillings!—the proceeds of a set of

crochet d'oyleys she had just disposed of to Mrs. Weir. The idea of turning a morning-visitor to account in this way, almost petrified Miss Crowe. She simply ejaculated—"Well, Jemima!" in an under-tone. But oh, the depth of expression in that "Well, Jemima!" Miss Stone looked stolid and uncomprehending. It was something for her, on the point of losing a comfortable home, to pocket twelve shillings: and Miss Crowe might "Well, Jemima!" her if she would; she had no real authority over her now. As for the old lady, she was nodding and smiling over her bargain, and wrapping it up in a crumpled piece of whitey-brown paper; and she deliberately forced the parcel into her capacious pocket as soon as she had greeted Miss Crowe.

"I wished to see your sister," said she, "because, as Dick Arnold will now be out of place, I think he will do very well to pull Dr. Fownes's wheel-chair. As for Esther, she is, from what I have heard Mrs. Homer say, so valuable a servant, that I shall be glad to engage her myself, as my Mary is going to be married. You are all at sixes and sevens, I see. You won't have any more comfort in

the house, now the dust is set flying; and rooms always look forlorn when the furniture is displaced. So, as soon as your packing is done, come and spend your evening with us. Miss Stone, too, if she likes."

"Miss Stone never goes out, thank you," said Miss Crowe; "her position is rather undefined, but she is *not* adapted for society. If Eugenia is inclined, I shall be most happy to wait on you."

Then, after a little more chat, Mrs. Weir started homewards, observing the ground was now in her favour. Then Miss Crowe turned on the doomed Miss Stone, with—

"Well, I'm sure, Jemima! What next, I wonder? The idea of asking a morning visitor to buy your d'oyleys! *You* aspire to be a private governess, indeed!"

Miss Stone, in a thick voice, replied,

"She was admiring them when I came in. And I said she might have them. And she said, 'How much?' And I said, 'A shilling each.' I've my living to get, Miss Crowe."

"Yes, Jemima, and I think you must regret by this time having thrown yourself out of a living at *my* house. Now, I'll tell you what.

You're an orphan girl, and I've known you a good while. Friendship's thicker than water, and I don't think badly of you. I make you, therefore, this offer: Return to your duties; I need not recapitulate them, you know what they are. Make yourself generally useful in the school, and keep your eye on everything when my back's turned: I can't be in two places at once. Be faithful and diligent; and I'll raise your salary five pounds."

"And I'll take it, and thank you, Miss Crowe!" said Jemima.

CHAPTER XIV.

LEAVE-TAKING.

Arnold, being one of those lively geniuses who always find some mischief for their idle hands to do, and being, moreover, addicted to romantic literature, had allowed the romances which lay about at Tresellis to absorb a considerable portion of that time which he should have devoted before breakfast to rubbing the tables. Therefore, being well up in fiction, and thinking Mrs. Homer more of a heroine than any other lady who came under his observation, he endued her not only with heroic attributes, but with a romantic history; and having obtained only a partial and broken version of facts, he thought it expedient to piece them together with fragments of his own fancy. Thus, when the "tea-grocer" asked him what was going on at Tresellis, he, with many nods and grimaces, stated oracularly that

mistress's husband had come to life again; and on being asked, had she then falsely supposed him dead? he did not say Yes in so many words, but nodded his head like a China mandarin. "He could tell an' if he would"—only he wouldn't—what cryings and faintings and satirical fits there had been; and now she was going all round the world after him.

These hints, though received with dubious credit, were circulated and slightly distorted; so that many versions of Mrs. Homer's story were afloat, all of them romantic, and none to her discredit. Moreover, Mr. Oldsmith had hastened to inform Mr. Saffery that she had been quite the lady, and he had had pleasure in obliging her; so that when Mrs. Homer went round to pay her bills, it gratified her to find herself everywhere the object of respectful sympathy. Of course she could not guess how it came about, and would never have suspected Arnold of having a hand in it. Of all others, Nessy was the most relieved at this recovery of her popularity, and most sorry she was going away. She said, "I'm so glad, ma'am," and then stopped short, and coloured, adding, "and so sorry too."

"Life is a mingled web of joy and woe, Miss Saffery," said Mrs. Homer; and her expressive smile gave it the force of a new axiom.

"Wherever you go, ma'am, I hope joy will go with you," said Mr. Saffery, her partizan to the last: and, as she passed out of sight, he looked attentively after her, and muttered—

"As pretty a little woman as ever stepped on shoeleather."

"And not a bit like me, Saffery," said his wife, mischievously.

"My dear, comparisons are odious. Mrs. Homer would have been no help in the posting and drapery line; but it was very pleasant to see her flit in and out, and to enjoy a little good music on Sunday evenings through the wall."

"I'll tell you how you used to enjoy it, my good man—by going to sleep!"

After a pause, he remarked—

"I've an impression that we are going to have a bad season."

"Then I wish you'd keep such impressions to yourself, Saffery."

"Why, papa," said Nessy, "you said so last year, the very day that Mr. Weir and Mrs. Homer came after the cottage."

"Did I? Then my bad impressions are good omens, and you ought to be glad of them. But look you here. Tresellis will be to be let; Mrs. Early has rooms to let: the Bensons have taken to letting: so we've many rivals in the field."

"Did you catch the name of the place Mrs. Homer's going to, Saffery?" said his wife.

"Not I," replied Mr. Saffery; "it's not a posting-place. Fancy a place that's neither postaceous nor railwayceous."

"A dismal look-out indeed," said Mr. Antony, who came in for stamps, and heard the last three or four words. "Where is that benighted place?"

"Where Mrs. Homer's going to, sir. The name slipped off her tongue like a plate off a shelf that has no rim to it."

"Oh, Tristan d'Acunha! It's an island off the Cape of Good Hope."

"Then I should say they'd be better of a submarine telegraph, sir."

"Why, the place has but a hundred souls! I don't think they've much call for a post."

"No more, perhaps, than the Scotch had

before Mr. Palmer's mails came in, sir. I've heard my grandfather tell of the Edinburgh mail-bag coming to London with only one letter in it."

"Your grandfather could tell some curious tales, I dare say, Mr. Saffery."

"Sir, I've heard him tell how the mails used to be entrusted to a set of raw boys, who would call at every pot-house for beer, and frequently get robbed of their bags. Sometimes, sir, villains would tie a string across a street through which the post would pass, and trip up the horse, and the boy would pitch over his head, while they ran away with his bags. And then he would go back and report his loss. It was Mr. Palmer, sir, who remedied that, in the year my father was born, which was 1783. Mr. Palmer, sir, started the mail-coaches, with guards properly armed and accoutred; and my grandfather, sir, was one of the guards. Sir," said Mr. Saffery, with fine professional animation, "he looked noble, in his scarlet coat and gilt buttons, with his blunderbuss and horn, on which he could play no end of tunes. To hear that horn, on a dark night, coming over Hounslow Heath, blowing defiance to the highway-

men to the tune of 'Nancy Dawson,' was enough to cow the most impudent."

"No doubt," said Mr. Anthony. "Fine institution."

"Very, sir. My grandfather was a fine, powerful-built man, conspicuous for pluck and probity; and came to be looked on as quite a public character. Country bankers used to trust him with money-parcels, the amount of which would surprise you. He used to carry public news all down the road by word of mouth to people on the look-out for him; and thus the news of a victory, an election, a race, or, may be, the death of some royal personage, was spread far and wide. When I was a little boy, sir, I have been carried on my mother's knee, inside one of the mail-coaches going in procession to Lombard Street on the King's birthday; and very handsome looked my grandfather in his new scarlet coat, with a nosegay in his button-hole. But, sir, begging your pardon, I'm detaining you; and I must stamp the letters."

Mr. Antony took his stamps and walked off, thinking whether an effective little picture might not be made of "A Mail-coach attacked

by Highwaymen on Bagshot Heath." It might be a sensation picture under proper treatment.

Mrs. Weir, retracing her way from Tresellis, fell in with Edith, and chatted with her down the lane; and finding she was now quite cordial with Mrs. Homer, she invited her and her brother to join her little tea-party, which Edith gladly accepted. Perhaps it was because Mrs. Homer's caps were packed, that she wore nothing on her head this evening. She looked so like the Eugenia of school-days that Edith warmed to her at once; and Mr. Antony furtively studied the contour of her head, and found it perfectly Grecian. Mr. Weir missed he did not know what, and when his mother afterwards told him it was the cap, he gave a long-drawn "Oh!" and said, "That explains. She does not look half as well without it."

It was a pleasant evening. As they were at tea, Mr. Weir said,

"I went over to the Abbey to-day. There I met your Major Johnson, Mrs. Homer."

"Pray don't call him my Major," said she quickly. "May I ask what he said?"

"Well, he said so many things—about artil-

lery, and engineering, and the ventilation of barracks, and recruiting, and—ever so many things besides. But I know what you mean. You mean, did he speak about Captain Homer? He did: he said he was a good officer; and that his brother-officers thought him a lucky fellow to secure such a wife; but that they . . ."

"Go on, please."

"That they thought you were down upon him rather too quickly, and hardly gave him fair play."

"There, Eugenia!" said Miss Crowe.

"Marianne, please don't," said Mrs. Homer, imploringly.

"But he said he admired your resolution very much now: it argued a higher cast of character than he had supposed you possessed."

Mrs. Homer could not resist saying, "There, Marianne!" in her sister's tone; at which they all laughed; and then Mr. Weir began to ask Miss Crowe about her system, and whether she aimed at making her young ladies professors, and qualifying them for diplomas.

"No, indeed," Miss Crowe said. "I've no notion of making them what nature never

intended them to be. A sound, plain English education—a Christian education—for the basis, and accomplishments for the decoration of the structure. That's my system."

"And a very good one, too. When accomplishments take the first place, and solid acquirements the second, it reminds me of Mrs. Raffarty's mounting her Grecian portico to the top of her Italian verandah. One of our greatest logicians has lately said that, as rude times, with their physical perils, despised a womanish man, so civilization would err if it attempted to produce mannish women."

"Oh, *so* just," said Mrs. Homer softly.

Miss Crowe immediately took the remark as a personality, and said,

"I don't know what the term mannish is intended to express; but unless a woman is self-possessed, and brave, and resolute, and has presence of mind, and industry, and judgment, I think her a poor creature."

"She may be all that," said Mr. Weir, "and yet a very woman."

"Oh, yes!" said Mr. Antony. "Her cultivation cannot be carried too far; but it must be the cultivation proper to her gentler character.

We don't want ladies to be jockeys, or swimmers, or skaters, or to kill game in a *battue*, though pretty women have been so mistaken as to seek notoriety in all these ways."

"Charles wanted to teach me to shoot at a mark, but I would not," said Mrs. Homer.

"And were frightened out of your wits at Tresellis," said Miss Crowe.

Then they began to speculate on the capabilities of Tristan d'Acunha, and Mr. Weir said that peaches and apricots were naturalized there, so that she would have her favourite repast of bread and fruit within reach.

"Oh," said she, "I shall be very happy when I get there, I've no doubt; only just now, you know, it's like tearing the limpet from the rock. —A little Eden, where there's no sin."

"I said there was no crime," said Mr. Weir; "but you will find no inhabited island without sin; and sin is crime's mother."

"Ah, yes—yes, indeed."

"My fondest dream used to be of a desert island," said Mr. Antony. "I thought, if I had been Robinson Crusoe, I should never have wanted to come away."

"Nor I, if you and I had been like Ambrose

and Eleanor," said Edith; "or Prospero and Miranda."

"I own," said Mr. Weir, laughing, "I should prefer Caprera—an island in sight of land."

"Or, better still," said Mr. Antony, "the island of Barataria, which had no water round it."

This led to a good deal of amusing talk about "Don Quixote;" and Mr. Weir said he thought the sentimental characters might as well have been omitted; on which Mr. Antony exclaimed, "What, Dorothea and Cardenio?" and declared he could not spare them on any account. And he went on to speak of Inglis's pretty little romance, "Wanderings in the Footsteps of Don Quixote," which Mr. Weir had never met with.

"If I knew a little Spanish," he said, "I should much like an autumn ramble among the cork trees of the Sierra Morena."

"The illusion would be dispelled," said Mr. Weir; and they fell into desultory talk about illusion and reality, and the influence of imagination on happiness and misery, and the distinction between imagination and fancy; all of which delighted Edith exceedingly; but

the other ladies were preoccupied with more personal interests. Miss Crowe at length reminded her sister that they had yet a great deal to do; so then Mrs. Homer took her last leave of Mrs. Weir, and received her parting kiss and good wishes with tearful eyes. The Antonys and Mr. Weir walked with them to the gate of Tresellis; and then farewells were spoken by the cold light of a March moon.

Mrs. Homer cried a little, before she came down from her room; but after that, she never gave way. Meanwhile, her late companions were talking of her as they pursued their way; and Mr. Antony declared that Captain Homer would be a brute if he did not do his best to make her happy.

Mr. Weir was silent and thoughtful on his return home. The silence was broken by his mother's abruptly saying, "Yes, I do indeed hope the poor thing may do well and be happy. With all her pretty, winning ways, it is right she should be under her husband's eye."

"I believe you were rather afraid of her pretty, winning ways," said Mr. Weir smiling.

"Well, Frank, I was."

"No danger to me from them, mother, from first to last. She is not of the type that would affect my peace."

"What *is* the type?"

"Something more open, fresh, and cheerful; more intellectual, and rather more passably up in the 'ologies.' I should not like a wife of mine to confound Naxos with Patmos. One may be amused at it in a stranger."

"Oh! you are referring to her mental acquirements. You are a better judge than I am. She is a well-bred, interesting little woman; and, to my mind, completely pretty."

"Not so pretty as Miss Antony."

The moment he had said so, he was sorry for it; for he knew that his mother would thence infer that he was falling in love with Edith, and would always be watching, and drawing wrong conclusions. However, he let it pass, and would gladly have changed the conversation, but could not think of one word to say. Mrs. Weir was equally silent.

Next day, the deportation began. Nessy was almost all the morning behind the counter, watching the end of the Tresellis lane across the green, and pensively following with her

eyes the cart and barrow, laden with packages for the station. Last of all, she saw Mrs. Homer and Miss Crowe, with Miss Stone a step or two in the rear, walking briskly, as if afraid of losing the train. Mrs. Homer looked once all round the green, as if to take it in in one last, comprehensive glance. She could not see Nessy, but Nessy felt for the moment as if their eyes had met, and wistfully looked after her till she passed out of sight. The rest of the day was rather a dull one to Nessy.

Miss Hornblower and Mrs. Bush considered Belforest the safer for Mrs. Homer's departure; and themselves rescued from the contaminating influence of bad example. It was not without complacency that Miss Hornblower (knowing some of the details) considered herself the triumphant cause of Mrs. Homer's "decamping," within a week from the betrayal of her secret. She walked up the lane that afternoon, to see how Tresellis looked, deserted. Doors and windows stood open; the entrance was littered with wisps of straw, crumpled brown paper, and ends of cord. The rooms were carpetless and curtainless, chairs and tables piled in the middle of the rooms, in preparation

for a general scouring; the harp, the gold fish, the books, the net draperies, the white over pink, all vanished :—

> "Nè più il palagio appar, nè pur le sue
> Vestigia, nè dir puossi, egli qui fue."

However, that is putting it rather strongly.

Tell me, ye British mothers, what was the reason that, during the remainder of this holiday week, Mrs. Weir took no more steps towards intimacy with the Antonys? True, she could not help seeing Edith, who, after drinking tea with her, thought it her duty to call; and seeing her, we may be sure she did not treat her coldly, for, indeed, it would have been difficult for any but a flint to meet Edith's warmhearted cordiality with frigidity; but, though Mrs. Weir certainly liked her, and pitied the young girl when she ingenuously told her that she had not an elderly female relative in the world, and often felt the want of one, yet Mr. Weir's mother did not say, "Look upon me as an aunt, my dear."

No: she remained perfectly inert; impassive; she was fond of young faces and cheerful voices, but just now, she did not draw them about her. She let things take their course.

The brother and sister were always cheerful and contented together : they had only come into the country for a few days' relaxation ; and they were returning to London, having had it. On the last morning of their stay, Edith again called on Mrs. Weir, to show her a note she had received from Miss Crowe. It was dated Southampton, and she said she had accompanied Eugenia on board, had satisfied herself that she would have everything comfortable, and had left her in charge of the good old missionary and his wife, who had promised to be as careful of her as if she were their daughter. "So now I have seen the last of her," added Miss Crowe, "and have had a good cry, after watching the ship weigh anchor. But I return home with a much lighter heart than if Eugenia had persisted in remaining at Tresellis, neglectful of her duties."

Mrs. Weir and Edith had a serious, interesting conversation after this ; and something pricked Mrs. Weir's heart for having left undone something or other she ought to have done. But she would not attend to it. She was going to London herself, for a few hours, by a later train. They parted in a very friendly manner

but not like persons who expected to see any more of each other.

Mrs. Weir was a coward in travelling, and never ventured without some efficient protector —generally her son. It was inconvenient to Frank to leave home to-day, and she regretted that she had not put herself under the Antonys' protection, and trusted to a safe return.

Arrived on the platform, to her surprise she saw Mr. Antony and Edith on it. They had missed the first train, owing to Edith's visit to Mrs. Weir. Mrs. Weir expressed her regret, but then said, "Frank, my dear, you need not go. I shall be quite safe with Mr. and Miss Antony." This was a good hearing to Frank, and in a few moments the plan was arranged. Edith had already taken her seat; Mr. Antony was about to do so, and already in the carriage, when, finding Mrs. Weir, who was heavy and had no spring in her, was about to follow, he leant forward, holding out both his hands, to help her in. At the same moment, a porter put his hand on her shoulder—a tremendous concussion took place—screams and cries were heard—and Mr. Antony was thrown forward on the ground.

CHAPTER XV.

COLLISION.

It struck Mrs. Weir like a lightning-flash, that she was the cause of this young man's accident. Edith had precipitated herself after him, and was instantly beside him on her knees, trying to raise him; but he painfully said, "Oh!—don't!"

The confusion, the agitation were indescribable. Hoarse, angry voices, groans, moans and sobbings—the harassed superintendent everywhere at once; the porters running to and fro: those who have never seen such a scene ought to be very thankful for their immunity. Meanwhile, a little cluster stood about Mr. Antony. Was the gentleman much hurt? Did he want to go on in the train?

"No, no!" said Mrs. Weir, hastily adding in a whisper to her son, "It was owing to me—we ought to nurse him."

"Just like you, mother," answered he warmly: and he assisted a railway porter to carry Mr. Antony into the waiting-room. There were many other cases to attend to—some of them worse—and half the persons seemed to have lost their self-control and presence of mind, so that it was a sad scene; and over all rose the shrieking whistle and clanging bell, with the shrill treble of crying babies. Mr. Antony was the only Belforest passenger who was hurt, and he resisted, at first, being carried; but, on trying to stand, his knee bent under him, and his right arm dangled painfully at his side. Edith supported his arm while he was carried, and then contrived a temporary sling for it. Happily a surgeon was on the platform, but he was so busy that he could not immediately be obtained. Mrs. Weir meanwhile put her hand gently on Edith's arm, and said—

"My dear, I was the cause of this; and you must make my house your home for the present."

"Oh, ma'm, how good of you!" said Edith, with tears starting into her eyes. "Will it not be encumbering you too much?"

"Not at all. I cannot be comfortable otherwise. My son and I have settled it."

"You are very, *very* kind."

Here Mr. Weir came in with the doctor, who speedily pronounced the arm broken, the knee only severely sprained; but he advised that if his home were in the neighbourhood, he should at once be carried to it. Meanwhile the train, like a wounded leviathan, went snorting on its way; carrying, oh, how many sufferers with it, who, a quarter of an hour before, had been painless and unconscious of impending evil! Our business is with an isolated case, and not the worst, for Mr. Antony was not the head of a numerous household, depending on him for subsistence; but that ill-omened train must speed out of sight, leaving untold the present pains and changed prospects of many of those who are moaning in the different carriages.

The station being a little off the high road, the catastrophe did not immediately draw a crowd of anxious and curious lookers-on, but a few idlers are invariably to be found; and among them was a boy—Arnold, in short—whom Mr. Weir instantly sent in advance to bespeak Mr. Bush's attendance: and we know

Arnold's habits sufficiently to be sure that having briskly discharged his errand, he spread horrific reports round the green, of dozens of people being killed, hundreds wounded, and Mr. Antony's arm and leg being broken all to smash. What excited simple wonder and pity among some, filled Nessy with consternation, and she ran out across the green to the little group already collected to witness a procession that looked hardly less sad than a walking funeral, viz. Mr. Antony carried on a light cane couch by two strong porters, with Mr. Weir on one side and Mrs. Weir and Edith on the other. In pain as he was, Mr. Antony caught Nessy's look of wistful pity, and could not help being pleased at it. He was stout-hearted, and regarded the whole affair in the light of "an intense bother:" solacing himself by calculating, even already, how much he would lay his damages at.

Arrived at the cottage, he was immediately carried up into the best bedroom, which had a cheerful little dressing-room attached; and Mrs. Weir settled with the porters, though Edith wanted to do so.

"My dear," said she, "this is my affair; the accident has been wholly owing to me;

and I can make your poor brother no amends for his suffering and confinement."

"Oh, ma'am, don't think of that."

"But I must think of it. Had it not been that I might hear about poor Mrs. Homer, you would not have lost the early train; so that I have been doubly the cause.—Oh! here comes Mr. Bush."

Mr. Bush set the arm and bandaged the knee, and ordered the patient to be kept quiet, and promised to send him a little something; and then left him in charge of Edith, and went down into the parlour for a chat with Mrs. Weir. He assured her there was no danger at present, nor did he think there was likely to be, unless fever supervened; he lauded her friendliness in receiving the young man as her guest, which she hastened to explain away the merit of, by showing how she had been doubly the instrument of his hurt; however, Mr. Bush insisted on it she was very kind; and then went into the details of the accident to the train, which he said was safe to come before a jury; and he hoped Mr. Antony and his fellow-sufferers would get handsome damages. Mr. Weir, who had joined the con-

clave, thought that no monetary compensation could diminish suffering, and insisting on it would partake of the nature of revenge, when they might be quite sure the company's servants would not have let the accident happen if they could help it; but Mr. Bush contended that this was quite a mistake. A very fair action would lie against them for culpable carelessness; and would not money be some compensation, however inadequate, to those whose professional engagements were rendered nugatory, and to whom the expense of surgical assistance was not a matter of indifference?

As soon as Mr. Bush had left them, Mr. Weir said,

"Mother, how well Miss Antony behaved; she neither screamed nor fainted; she showed self-control and presence of mind. Except for her white cheeks, no one would have seen what she felt. She did not shed a tear."

"Not till I said this house should be their home," said Mrs. Weir, with feeling. "Then tears came into her eyes."

Mr. Antony, on being left with Edith, asked why he had been brought to Mrs. Weir's, and

seemed troubled about it, till she explained it to him, on which he muttered, "Very kind of her;" and expressed a wish to be left alone. He said it was so new to him to be laid aside, that having any one in attendance worried him. So she put the bell-cord within reach of his left hand, and went down to Mrs. Weir, and he soon turned his solitude to account by going to sleep.

"This is the dreadfullest, disfiguringest railway accident I've heard tell of for a long time," said Mr. Saffery, returning from a visit to the station. "Think of a young lady going up to be bridesmaid at a wedding, having two of her front teeth knocked out."

"That's not near so bad as Mr. Antony's accident," said Nessy. "I think I pity Miss Antony most; her feelings must be dreadful."

"George Early, too, has been giving his friends a deal of trouble," said Mr. Saffery. "He was going up by the train, and, receiving no hurt, went right on up to town, without thinking what effect it might have on his mother and other people, who didn't know how it had fared with him."

"Who do you mean by other friends, Saffery?" said his wife.

"Well, then, if you will have it, I mean the Miss Browns. Carry Brown, I understand, went off in a faint when she heard of the cat-astrope."

"Dear me, that was rather premature of her," said Mrs. Saffery, "unless they are engaged."

"Can people have no feelings till they're engaged? Well, I never knew that before."

The faint was one of Dick Arnold's bold inventions; but poor Caroline had turned very white, and caught hold of a chair, when he burst in on her (having been a frequent emissary to her from Mrs. Homer) with the appalling news. George Early, coming home quite safe by the six o'clock train, highly pleased with an interview he had just had with his chief, was quite surprised at his mother's excited ejaculations, and remarked, "Oh, it's safest to travel directly after a collision—the chaps are all extra careful." But she told him the Browns had been as anxious about him as herself, and had twice sent the girl over to ask if he had returned. This made him serious,

and he said, "Oh, I'll go and show myself after tea;" which he did, after smartening himself a little. Directly he knocked at the door, it was quickly opened by Caroline, who no sooner saw him than she said, "Oh! is it you, Mr. Early?" and turned away in tears. George followed her into the little parlour, with the table strewn with "Magazines des Modes," and said,

"Can those tears be for me, Miss Caroline?"

"Tears of weakness—of gratitude that you are safe," said she, very softly.

"And can you really care for the safety of such an unworthy fellow as I am?"

"Oh, Mr. Early, who could call *you* unworthy?" &c. &c. Such tender things, in fact, were said on both sides, that George speedily found himself asking her whether she could bring herself to link her fate with that of such a wanderer and vagabond as himself; and she smiled shyly and said, "Cain was a vagabond, but you are not; a wanderer you may be, but you have found your way back into the fold."

Then said George, "Oh, but a wanderer and vagabond I am and ever shall be; *don't* say you will have me, Miss Carry, if you don't like to."

And Carry replied, "That's such a very odd way of putting it, Mr. Early. What *can* I say that I haven't said already? I only fear I've said too much."

"No, quite the other way," says George, "I could listen to you for ever; there can never be enough said on so delightful a subject; but *may* I understand, Miss Carry, that you don't behold me with indifference?"

"Why should you call me by so distant a name?" said she; "I am Caroline to my real friends."

"And I am the warmest of them all," cried George Early.

When they became a little calmer, she said,

"Oh, Mr. Early, you may call it weakness if you will; but you must not claim me for your own in my dear mother's lifetime."

"Why, you will make a wicked fellow of me if you talk like that," said he, "and prevent my wishing her length of days. You've a mother, and I've a mother; let us set the two old ladies up together, and pension them handsomely, with your sister to look after them."

"You must be jesting to talk of pensioning handsomely," said Caroline. "I'm sure I don't

know where the handsome pension is to come from."

"Would you call fifty pounds a year handsome?" said George.

"Certainly I should," said she.

"Well, then, look here. You've accepted me, just as I stand in my shoes; at least, so I understand—am I mistaken? If not, give me your hand—that's right, you dear girl! You've accepted me just as I am; and now, hear a piece of news. The government over yonder have given me an appointment in the post-office, worth three hundred a year."

Caroline clasped her hands in transport.

"Now, if you're the girl I take you to be, you'll not mind living with me on two hundred, while we give fifty a-piece to the old ladies."

"Oh, you generous, noble creature! But hear me, George—Mr. Early, I mean."

"No; you mean George."

"It is not merely a question of money, but of affection. I could follow you round the wide, wide world, were myself only concerned; but I cannot go to that far distant land and leave my mother."

George looked hampered.

"I don't see what's to be done, then," said he, "unless she'll go with us. Perhaps we had better take both the old ladies; only I know they won't like it."

"Oh, no! my mother will never bear ex—patriating. We women are weak creatures, and cleave to our native shores."

"Have you ever seen the sea?" inquired George, abruptly.

"No, never."

"Then what do you know about its shores?"

Carry laughed, and called him too bad to make fun of her. Men were always fond of vaunting their superior knowledge. Playful badinage ensued, and serious talk was resumed, terminating in a sort of compromise, that if he would wait for her two years, she would then join her fate to his, circumstances permitting. And from that time they were as happy as an artless pair of engaged young lovers could well be.

Nessy was now always on the watch for tidings of Mr. Antony, which sometimes reached her through one of the female servants, but oftener from Dick Arnold, who was taken on by Mr. Weir as a temporary help,

and who often brought letters to post. Nessy did not mind attacking him with, "Well, how is Mr. Antony? do you know how he is going on? is he thought to be in danger? do you ever see him?" Dick answered these questions more truthfully than was his wont; for Mr. Weir, who had long had his eye upon him as a young scapegrace, had already taken him in hand, and told him that he was neither his slave nor apprentice, and was perfectly welcome to leave his service if he liked; but that *if* he stayed, he must invariably speak the truth, and, in a general way, turn over a new leaf and a clean one. Dick desired to stay with all his heart, especially as he was allowed to continue in buttons, and therefore he sincerely determined to be a reclaimed character if he could.

Dick, then, confessed that he had not yet seen Mr. Antony, but that he had carried up things to his door, and heard his voice inside, cheerful-like. He might have added that he had had a private view of him through the keyhole; but he only observed that they all seemed mighty comfortable, and the ladies made much of him, and Mr. Weir often looked

in on him, and they could be heard talking and laughing. All this was very reassuring to Nessy, who formed many imaginary dialogues and pictures as she mended her father's stockings.

Of course, there was plenty about the accident in the newspapers. A poor man died from the injuries he had received, and there was an inquest, and a great many witnesses were examined, and many letters appeared in the *Times*, signed "One of the Sufferers," "Another Sufferer," &c.; and one, who had received a severe blow on the eye, signed herself, "Black-eyed Susan." Mr. Antony's injuries were reported; he was spoken of as "the unfortunate young gentleman," and "one of our most promising artists;" so, as he said, they advertised him without his having to pay for it.

"I think you are paying for it pretty severely," Edith said.

"No; I might have had the pain without the puffery."

He got her to write, in his name, to a brother-artist to watch his interests, and this friend took care they should not suffer for

want of his attention to them. Mr. Antony had sold three pictures during the winter; he had three commissions on hand, which he was disabled from executing; he laid his damages at five hundred pounds. "Don't I wish I may get it!" said Mr. Antony. "If I do, you and I, Edith, will pay our respects to the Eternal City."

"That will be delightful; but, Leo, it is very delightful to be here."

"Well, they are very kind indeed—as kind as can be; but I am getting awfully tired of lying on this sofa."

"You must bear it a little longer, poor fellow! We all wonder you bear it as well as you do."

"Oh, come, that puts me on my mettle."

"And Mrs. Weir is so very kind. And the household ways are so nice, Leo."

"What do you mean by household ways?"

"Think how long it is since we have had anything like a real home. Mrs. Weir has been asking me all about ourselves, and she seemed glad that papa was a civil engineer, and she took great interest in his disappointment in being forestalled in his great invention,

and was not surprised at its preying on his mind and preventing his recovery, after having been buoyed up so about it. I told her all about his last illness, and about poor mamma, and the way she used to deny herself for the sake of educating you."

Here Mr. Antony sighed.

"And how good you were, after her death, in paying for my schooling, and then providing for me."

"Oh, gammon."

"Mrs. Weir did not think it gammon, for she repeated it all to Mr. Weir afterwards. I went into the room unwittingly, while she was doing so, and there was strong approval on his face. Her back was towards me, and, as a few words told me what her subject was, I slipped out again. It was better, you know, that they should know a little of our antecedents; they quite deserve it."

"Quite so. What about those household ways you were speaking of?"

"Family prayers, morning and evening, is one of them. It is so nice to see the two neat, orderly maids in their clean aprons, come in with their Bibles, and Richard too, though he

is a bit of a fidget. It seemed to me that Mr. Weir must have had an eye to him in the passages he selected; but he assured me it was not so—they came in the regular course of reading."

"All the better. People don't like being preached at, prayed at, or read at."

"Then Mrs. Weir manages her servants so nicely. She seems to me to know everything that is going on in the house, without being vexatiously interfering. She says, 'If I see my maids doing a thing well, I don't mind their doing it in their own way instead of mine. If I see that their way is not as good as mine, I point it out to them, and make them change it.' She has a cheerful, kindly way of speaking to them; manages that they shall not be an entire day indoors; lets them openly see a relative or friend occasionally, and invites them to stay to tea. She says she knows in twenty-four hours whether a servant will suit her or not. She was sure, from the first, that Mrs. Early would not suit her, only Mr. Weir made such a point of her keeping her on. Alice has been with her four years, and she hopes she will never leave her unless to marry,

as Mary has done. She finds Mrs. Homer's cook a valuable servant."

"Edith, when you have a house of your own, mind you copy Mrs. Weir."

"Ah! I don't believe I ever shall have a house of my own; I don't want one, as long as I may be with you, Leo."

"Fudge.—We'll go to Rome, old girl, some of these days."

"Let us go along the Riviera."

"To find a Doctor Antonio?"

CHAPTER XVI.

HOSPITALITY.

When Edith found herself in the quiet and solitude of her little room the first night under Mrs. Weir's roof, she sat down and clasped her hands in utter amazement and thankfulness at the events of the day. What a peril had been escaped! What friends had been raised up! Where and what should she have been now, had Leo been killed? or had he been excruciatingly mangled like that poor man whose shrieks yet rang in her ears?

"Oh!" thought she; "in the midst of life we are in death. How is it that we feel it so little? Surely we sometimes have glimpses given us of the sufferings God *could* inflict if He were so inclined! What gratitude we owe Him, then, for having spared us!"

On the following evening, Mr. Weir offered to read to Mr. Antony, while Edith sat with

his mother. She begged him not to read too long, nor anything too exciting, which he promised; and, to keep his word, took up a *Cornhill Magazine.* The essay he selected was pleasant reading; but somehow it settled Mr. Antony into a very composing sleep; seeing which, Mr. Weir quietly left him, and joined the ladies.

"Now," said he, sitting down near Edith, "I want to have a talk with you as an authoress. Do not you remember your brother saying, 'Edith writes,' the first time I called on you?"

"Yes, now you recall it to me," said Edith, "and very abominable of him it was."

"Why so? Are you at all sore about it? I should have thought it had been rather the other way."

"I don't know how it may be with great writers; but, as a small one, I feel it much pleasantest to keep out of sight. There's nothing more horrible, in a small way, than for some one you scarcely know, and certainly do not care about, to sit down beside you and say, 'What a sweet thing that last work of yours was!—what a charming talent you possess!'"

"Yes, I think that must be detestable," said Mr. Weir, laughing; "almost as bad as being praised for one's sermons, which is an absolute offence against good manners. Some pompous magnate comes up, perhaps, with, 'What a powerful discourse you have favoured us with, Mr. So-and-so'—the victim bows—'I assure you I have not heard such a powerful discourse for a long time"—another bow—'such original thought — such vigorous language'— bow — 'such delivery—such rhetoric—such logic—such spirituality!' bow, bow, bow, till he comes to the last, which the clergyman can bear no longer!"

"Mr. Greville, Frank?"

"Oh, no, mother; but I've been a bystander at such scenes. *Revenons à nous moutons,* Miss Antony. Do you find authorship an entirely safe employment?"

"How safe?" said Edith.

"Do you not live too much in an ideal world?"

"Oh, no! my mental world is real. One must observe realities, observe nature and fact, to write to any purpose. At least, so I find it in my small way."

"Well, certainly, if you are an objective writer, that must be the case, and I'm glad to find yours is so healthy a line. But observation and reflection go hand in hand; otherwise we do not observe to much purpose. And reflection leads to analysis: to the analysis of one's mind, which assists us in attempting to analyse the minds of others. But self-analysis, pursued too far, becomes morbid. Then again, there is a faculty we have not yet taken into account—imagination. Without imagination, the artist or novelist becomes an uninteresting copyist; but imagination is a bad master, though a good servant; and if it enables us at will to transport ourselves into an unreal world, where spring ever reigns, and heroes and heroines are always having piquant dialogues, does not it disincline us very much to take our share in the concerns of every-day life?"

"Really," said Edith, "you have conjured up around me such a host of 'Gorgons and chimeras dire,' that I feel almost like the lady surrounded by Comus's rabble rout. Morbid analysis on one hand, imagination run mad on the other!—I think you little know that I am merely a writer for the young. And in answer

to your question, do I find it unfits me for the duties of common life? I say boldly, No!"

"Well, I am very glad of it, because I am sure you are sincere; and my experience of authoresses has been small. I had formed some crude notions of my own which I wished to rectify."

"Why should any one who has written a tale or two be call authoress?" said Edith. "You do not find an epithet for the young lady who plays, or the young lady who paints."

"Directly people step into print, they have left the mild majesty of private life, and cannot claim its protection."

"They have a right to its protection, though," said Edith. "What! because we seek by interesting to instruct, and by amusing to improve, are we putting ourselves beyond the pale of protection?"

"You are putting yourselves within reach of the claws of criticism, from which there is no protection."

"Very sharp claws they are," said Edith, laughing.

"Oh, you have felt how they scratch! Do you mind it?"

"The first time, it made me cry. But I have since learnt to turn censure and ridicule to some account, and to take unalloyed pleasure in praise."

"But make you cry? Was it worth crying about?"

"Yes, I think so; because there are certain intelligent serials that one's friends and acquaintance are sure to see, and to draw their opinions from; therefore it is very trying to be censured by them, because, though you may not admit the justice of the censure, you think that your acquaintance will."

"I see. Then are the opinions of those acquaintance to be much valued?"

"One cannot help valuing them in some degree," said Edith. "It would be sufficiently absurd to cease to esteem Mrs. A. or Mrs. B. simply because she thought you had written a poor book."

"I see. Well, if you lived in this neighbourhood, and I saw you in the distance, coming towards me, I should think, 'Here comes Miss Antony; she has now launched Ferdinando on a sea of troubles, and she is meditating how to bring him out of them again.'"

"Then I'm very glad I don't live in this neighbourhood," said Edith, laughing. "That is—"

"That is,—what?"

"I ought not to say I should not like to live in this neighbourhood; for I should like it very much. Only it would not do for Leo; but the more I see of the country, the more I like it. So that, if we could live in it, I would take it, Ferdinando and all."

After this, Mr. Weir, when he now and then saw her look pensive, would inquire of her, with affected gravity,

"How's Ferdinando?"

"What a pretty Affghan blanket this is," she said one day, as she arranged it for Mrs. Weir. "Did you make it?"

"Yes, my dear, under the direction of poor Mrs. Homer. She put in all the pines."

"One would think," said Mr. Weir, "from your calling her poor Mrs. Homer, that she had lost her husband, instead of gone to find him."

"Psyche in search of Cupid," said Mr. Antony, who had now reached such a stage of convalescence as to come down stairs with his arm in a sling.

"I hope she will not have as many misadventures as Mrs. Tighe's Psyche," said Edith.

"Oh, it's a safe and easy passage enough to the Cape!"

"It's a safe and easy journey from Belforest to London generally," said Edith, "but your arm was broken, Leo."

"Which nobody can deny."

"Frank," said Mrs. Weir, "do you think that a woman cannot be justified, under any circumstances, in refusing to accompany her husband where he wants her to go?"

"That's a difficult question, mother. But, in a general way, I think the best rule is to refuse nothing that Christ appoints us to do. *There*'s the true secret of strength and success."

"That's taking very high ground," said Edith thoughtfully.

"The higher your ground, the farther you see," said Mr. Antony.

The brother and sister spent three weeks with the Weirs. During that time, Mr. Antony became convalescent, but he was unable to use his right arm, and was therefore fairly entitled

to compensation for being debarred the exercise of his art. Eventually he received three hundred pounds. He and his sister agreed, therefore, that there could not be a better time for them to travel in Italy, since here were the means supplied, and he could use his eyes though not his hand.

During those three weeks, hosts and guests had become mutually attached. Mrs. Weir liked both her visitors, and she was quite aware of a strong attraction between her son and Miss Antony; but she did not think its severance would seriously disturb their happiness—at any rate, in these early days. She did nothing to favour it; she did nothing to blight it; the Antonys would soon go abroad, and Edith was anticipating it with such pleasure, that it was plain she would not leave her heart behind. Mrs. Weir thought her more adapted to Frank, and more pleasant to herself, than any young person she had met with; yet, O ye mothers of England, you will not be surprised that she did not care that Frank should marry her. Did she want wealth—connexion? Frank had objected to Mrs. Homer's two hundred a year, and did not like two interests.

The Grevilles had wealth, and connexion too; and they liked him, and had drawn him forward, and then suddenly dropped him, repulsed him, so that he was hurt. A daughter-in-law who plumed herself on her advantages of birth or fortune would not be very comfortable to live with. Mrs. Weir turned all these matters very composedly in her mind, as she sat knitting, and seeming to be wholly absorbed in the recapitulation of "drop one, knit one, cast off two."

The country was now very charming, for it was nearly the end of April,

> "When merry larks are ploughmen's clocks,"

and Mr. Antony was impatient for Mr. Bush's sanction to his departure. At length it was given, and as the few remaining days of their stay passed by, the intercourse between them all deepened in friendship and interest: though Mr. Weir, like young Edwin in the ballad, "never spoke of love." It seemed to have no place in his thoughts. Life was, to him, an arduous journey they were all engaged in; and they were encouraged, like Christian and Hopeful, to hold pleasant discourse by the

way; but the incidents of the road itself were enough to occupy the mind, without straying into Bypath Meadow in search of flowers. Often he spoke with passionate admiration of missionaries who had spent their lives in spreading the gospel, and sealed their testimony by their deaths. Edith's eye kindled and her heart swelled as he dilated on their examples; but Mrs. Weir was always uncomfortable when he got upon such subjects, and could not bear to hear him say that Belforest afforded hardly sufficient work for a man in his full strength.

In the last week of April, then, Mr. Antony and his sister took leave of their kind friends with affectionate gratitude, the sincerity of which could not be doubted; and Edith's eyes shone with tears as she kissed Mrs. Weir. But Mrs. Weir did not beg her to write to her, as she had begged Mrs. Homer: it was Mr. Weir who said earnestly, as he detained her hand, "You will write to my mother?"

"Oh, yes," she said, looking towards Mrs. Weir; but Mrs. Weir was speaking to Mr. Antony, and charging him to be prudent.

And so they started; and Mr. Weir accom-

panied them to the station; and Nessy regretfully saw them cross the green. Edith suddenly ran across to the post-office, and shook hands with her, saying, "Good-bye, Miss Saffery;" and Nessy was surprised and happy.

They left England in a few days; and then ensued one of those intermediate passages which occur in the lives of all, and which we are so apt to think dull and profitless. Dull they may be, if we let them be; profitless they never ought to be; for how likely is it that they are the preparations for some great joy, great temptation, or great sorrow?

Is it not often so with regard to great public events? "The Lord waits, that He may be gracious unto us, in the *pauses* between the different judgments with which He visits the world. Heaven listens, the earth is silent, that the low, faint whisper of the penitent's prayer may be heard. What need, therefore, that we should redouble our prayers and our efforts while yet there is time; lest the moment should arrive when God has no *leisure*, so to speak, for individual cases amid general chastisements!"

There was a lull at Belforest, and it was the

precursor of sorrow. To speak first of that which, perhaps, was not the lightest—George Early started for his appointment, after a tender leave-taking of his mother and his promised bride. The young feel sorrow sharply; but their spirits are very buoyant. George was his own man again before he had been many hours at sea. Carry Brown cried heartily the first day, and shed a quiet tear now and then afterwards; but she was hopeful and trustful, and felt sure that they should come together again at the two years' end. Widow Early did not expect to see him any more; but she resigned herself as the old and wayworn do to what is inevitable, and, after a time, regained her pleasure in the substantial comforts with which she was surrounded. If she had lost a son, Carry Brown endeavoured to show her the kindness of a daughter.

Mr. Saffery's health suddenly gave way. Oh, what a new, strange, unwelcome thing illness was in that house! How ominous Mr. Bush's visits were! especially when he brought another doctor; and how petrified poor Michael Saffery was, when he learnt that there would probably be no rest for him but in the grave, and

before the end of many months. Mrs. Saffery was dismayed, incredulous, and angry with them for thinking so unfavourably of her husband.

"And then, as if they could not keep their own counsel, but must go and tell him of it, the gabies!" said she, passionately.

"Mother," said Nessy, who was crying bitterly, "father insisted on it that they should tell him the truth."

"And if he did, were they to mind him? There's his stick, knocking the ground;—run you up, Nessy, and tell him I'm coming. I don't want him to notice my red eyes. Tell him I'm going to bring him up a little something."

Just then Mr. Weir entered.

"Oh, sir!" said Nessy, quick as thought, "my father's very ill, and likely never to be well again. Will you come and see him sometimes?"

"Well, I'm sure, Nessy!" ejaculated Mrs. Saffery, while Mr. Weir said, heartily—

"That I will! When would he like me to see him?"

"I'll run up, sir, and ask."

And in two minutes she returned.

"Father says, if you wouldn't mind seeing him just as he is, he would like to see you now, sir."

"Show me the way, then," said Mr. Weir, following her, and leaving Mrs. Saffery confounded at Nessy's assurance and its success. After a blank pause, she took the beaten egg she had been preparing for him in her hand, and went softly up to see what they were all about. There was Nessy kneeling by the bed, with her face hidden by the bedclothes, and Michael Saffery, with every furrow of care dismissed from his patient face, lying with his hands meekly folded, while Mr. Weir prayed aloud and then pronounced the benediction. Mrs. Saffery stood awkwardly in the doorway, with the egg-flip in her hand.

"And now good-bye for the present, my good friend," said Mr. Weir, shaking hands with him. "I will look in on you frequently; and mind you don't scruple to send for me whenever you wish for me. You have a heavy burthen put upon you to bear; but a burthen is easier borne by two than by one, and here are your wife and your daughter who, I can see,

are trying to take some of its weight off you. It gives us an opportunity of seeing what is in them, Mr. Saffery."

"And, sir," said Mr. Saffery, faintly smiling, "it gives us an opportunity of seeing what is in *you*. You're the sick man's friend, sir."

"That is what every faithful minister ought to be."

"Don't think, sir, that I'm anyways rebellious; only it took me sudden-like. I knew I was in very bad pain, I thought it might take long to set me up again; but I no more thought of dying, sir, than I thought of going to France. It gave me a thrill; I don't deny it; but, the moment, sir, that was over, I felt I could say, 'Thy will be done.' Don't cry so, Nessy. Come and kiss me, my dear."

"I wish I could bear it for you, papa."

She spoke quite sincerely, and he felt that she did; but Mrs. Saffery thought her expression of feeling exaggerated. Grief had not elevated her, poor woman, above her ordinary self. She felt the doctors to blame for signing Saffery's death-warrant, and a ministerial visit premature and awkward.

Some seem by nature to have a vocation for nursing; others not. Again, nursing has its separate branches; some have the light step, the pleasant voice, the cheering smile, the dexterous hand, the gentle touch—others are gifted in cookery for the sick. Mrs. Saffery was better at the second than the first; her unaccustomed care stamped a settled frown on her face which, to a sick man, was anything but cheering; and she was too sudden and bustling in her efforts to make him comfortable; but she was excellent at making slops, and he relished and praised them. A person named Porter was deputed by the post-office authorities to act in Mr. Saffery's place during his illness; and he lodged at Mrs. Early's. He was a quiet, well-behaved man, but Nessy did not much like him.

With that quick instinct of affection which supplies the place of experience, she seemed to know by intuition when her father liked to be talked or read to, when to be silent; when to have refreshment, when to try to sleep; how much light, how much air to have in the room; when to interest him in some

little piece of news, and when to talk of death and eternity.

Mrs. Saffery went away, whenever they touched on this theme, saying it gave her the horrors.

CHAPTER XVII.

MINISTRY.

> " Wish not, dear friends, my pain away,
> Wish me a calm and thankful heart,
> With God in all my griefs to stay,
> Nor from His loved correction start."

What a pretty verse that is! It was a great favourite with Nessy; for she was now very familiar with the "Christian Year" and the "Invalid's Hymn-book." Mr. Saffery liked her to read a hymn to him the last thing at night; and sometimes she would sit beside him, as he slept during the day, and consider and re-consider one hymn after another, endeavouring to realize to herself how she should feel them in his place. At times, she knew, his placidity forsook him, and he quailed before the terrors of an unknown state. At these times no one could compose him but Mr. Weir, till Nessy found and read to him, in her gentle, lulling voice—

> " O much beloved ! fear not to die,
> Lift up to heaven thy tearful eye,
> And see, prepared for thee,
> A mansion where no sins, no foes,
> Shall ever break thy sweet repose
> Through all eternity."

This verse never lost its charm for Michael Saffery. He would also get Nessy to sing the Evening Hymn to him over and over again, and likewise " Rock of ages."

Mr. Weir, coming in sometimes, and finding her thus singing over her work, thought how she was being spiritualized by affliction, and what treasures the rough waves of tribulation were casting on her mind to enrich it long after the storm should have subsided.

One day she said to him, " Have you heard anything yet of Mrs. Homer, sir ? "

" Oh, yes," said he, " did not you know it ? I forgot your interest in her, she having been your inmate. Yes, we have had a letter full of brightness and thankfulness. She had a safe and pleasant voyage to the Cape ; and though the good old missionary she went out with belongs to a different denomination from mine, I think he must be a true servant of Christ. He did a great deal more for her than I had

power to do, or even had resolution to attempt. She seems to me to be a changed character. When she reached the Cape, to her surprise and delight she was received and welcomed by her husband, who, not knowing she was coming, was as surprised and delighted as she was."

"Oh, I am very glad!" said Nessy. "I always liked her very much."

"A pretty little woman," placidly observed Mr. Saffery, "as ever stepped on shoe-leather."

Mr. Weir smiled, and seeing the subject gave pleasure to them both, went on.

"It seems that Captain Homer's detachment had been suddenly recalled from the island, and for a very good reason; they had nothing to eat. The whale ships on which they chiefly depended for supplies had neglected to call, and left them in such extremities, that several of the islanders availed themselves of the opportunity of accompanying the soldiers to the Cape. So that's what comes, Mr. Saffery, of living on an island that's neither postiferous nor railwiferous."

"Is Mrs. Homer likely to remain at the Cape, then, sir?" said Nessy.

"For the present, at all events; and she has met with some pleasant society there, and finds Capetown a very pleasant substitute for Tristan d'Acunha. She is amused and interested by the novelty of the place and people; and has a light heart, because she is in the right path."

After a short pause, he added, "As you know about the deception she practised here, I may as well tell you that she confessed it to her husband. He did not take it up quite as seriously as we did; military men do not trouble themselves like others. I believe he called her 'a silly puss' and 'a vagabond.'"

"I'm very glad, sir, she told him," said Michael Saffery. "Women, be they ladies or otherways, should have no concealments from their husbands. And if they knew they must tell them everything, it would tendify, I should say, to keep them out of scrapes."

Mr. Weir, it will be observed, spoke to Nessy as an equal—as a woman. She had shot up, during the last twelve months, into a tall, slight girl, with dark blue eyes and brown hair. Her complexion was colourless; her expression pleasing. She was now a little more than fifteen, and had a thoughtfulness beyond her

years, which made her seem older, and increased reliance in her. Mr. Weir habitually treated those whom he conversed with as equals; he maintained an honest independence in his intercourse with the most self-important, and conversed as friend with friend with Mr. Saffery and Nessy; thus eliciting hidden qualities in both. Mr. Saffery's mind was naturally neither of a deep nor high order; but he had great simplicity of character, and we know how a critical illness ripens and refines, if it be but used aright. He now occasionally uttered thoughts that cost him a good deal of pains to work out, though they were quaintly expressed. Not the least perception of all this had Mrs. Saffery; she, poor woman, occasionally dropped hot tears on her saucepans and flat irons, but she reminded herself that she must not give way; that she had a good deal before her to go through, and must keep herself up; so while Nessy ate less and less, she ate more, and took more stimulants, saying all the while that they went against her, and perhaps they did.

One day, as Nessy was going into the Sunday-school, Mr. Weir said compassionately,

"You don't look very well to-day, Miss Saffery." She immediately burst into tears. He said, "You are not equal to your class, now that you have so much nursing. Go in to my mother, and let her give you a glass of wine."

"No, thank you, sir," said Nessy, drying her tears, and feeling much ashamed of them; "it has been a relief to me to cry, but I ought not to have given way. My father likes me to attend my class, and my mother likes being with him on the only day she has leisure. The class makes a little change for me. I often think of it during the week."

"Oh, well! . . . ."

"Please, sir, will you excuse my asking if you know how Mr. and Miss Antony are getting on? I have often thought of asking you."

"Oh, they are enjoying themselves extremely, and Mr. Antony is almost well. He said at the end of his last letter, 'I hope the Safferys are going on well.' I ought to have told you sooner."

"Thank you, sir." And this slight remembrance from her distant friend made Nessy brighter for the rest of the day.

The event came at last that comes to all. Michael Saffery reached his journey's end, thankful that the gates of immortality were about to open to him. He had latterly sunk rapidly, but painlessly. Nessy almost lived in his sight—and lived on the sight of him. His mind grew clearer and brighter to the end. On Mr. Weir's last visit but one to him, he expressed a wish to receive the sacrament.

> "He came again: the place was bright
> With something of celestial light;
> A simple altar by the bed
> For high communion meetly spread,
> Chalice, and plate, and snowy vest;—
> They ate and drank; then, calmly blest,
> All mourners, one with dying breath—
> They sat and talked of Jesus' death."

He passed away quite tranquilly. Much sympathy was felt and expressed for the widow and orphan. Mrs. Saffery's greatest consolation was talking, with streaming eyes, to some of her old gossips, and recounting all the details of poor Saffery's illness; but Nessy could neither talk, nor, for a time, shed a tear.

When this reached the ears of Mrs. Weir, who had been very kind throughout, calling to inquire, and sending various nice things, she

contrived little occasions for Nessy to come to her, and tried to break the chain of her ideas. But Nessy's grief was too real and deep to be easily alleviated. Whatever her hands might be busied about, the feeling of her heart was—

> "But he is in his grave—and oh,
> The difference to me!"

Domestic life at the post-office was now spiritless and miserable. There was no longer one mind between mother and daughter, as of old. It was impossible to trace the source of Mrs. Saffery's irritability; whether she were jealous of Nessy's more zealous attendance on the dying bed than her own; or of her looking higher than she did for her only consolation; or of Mr. Saffery's having shown such trust in her as to have his express wish set down in Mr. Weir's handwriting, that Nessy's thirty pounds a year were henceforth to be put at once into her hands, as soon as received, in quarterly payments. All these things together may have contributed to embitter her; or it may have been only her soreness of heart, which she knew no other refuge from than in cross words and dreary silences.

Her position was not what it had been, for though she still acted as auxiliary in the postal department, it made all the difference whether the principal were her husband or a stranger; and her little drapery business was not enough to keep her, nor yet to keep her employed, for a better shop of the kind had been opened in the neighbourhood.

Once she spoke sharply to Nessy for not refusing at once to receive her annuity till she was of age, and called her mean. The hot tears started into Nessy's eyes; but though it had been in her mind to put the whole of her quarterage into her mother's hands and beg her to make use of it, she knew that her father had intended her to have the spending it, and it did seem Quixotic to put this once and altogether out of her power because she was unjustly and unkindly accused of meanness. But how many tears wetted her pillow!

Such precious seed, however, had been sown in her mind, softened by sorrow like garden earth by spring rain, that she knew where to apply for true comfort, and sought it. But it was not yet found.

Mrs. Saffery hated to see her dipping into

her Bible from time to time, in the midst of the day's work, and said it was the best of Sabbath reading, but week-days had their own requirements, and she should beware of anything that might be taken for hypocrisy. So Nessy carried her little Bible out of sight.

Again, Mrs. Saffery had talked of their sleeping together, and letting Nessy's attic to Mr. Porter, but Nessy said imploringly, "Oh, mamma! please not." And Michael Saffery had left his particular injunctions that she was not henceforth to take any single man as lodger, so that she was obliged to give it up. Only, she said, Mr. Porter was in the business, and therefore she was sure Saffery would have made an exception in his favour.

It seemed as if troubles were to thicken. Mrs. Saffery made a terrible blunder, one day, in a money-order for one of the Grevilles, and Mr. Greville, in wrath, wrote to the postmaster-general. Down came a great foolscap letter, "On Her Majesty's Service," and a series of apologies, explanations, and reprimands ensued, and Mrs. Saffery narrowly escaped being turned out of office. After this she was more taciturn to Nessy than ever.

At length the blow fell. It is best to finish this affair at once, though it covered some months. They were sitting one day over their comfortless dinner in dull silence, when Mrs. Saffery suddenly exclaimed—

"Nessy, it's no use going on any longer. Here's a piece of news for you: I'm going to be married."

Nessy's knife and fork dropped from her hands; her eyes saw only confused, floating specks; and her ears rang with murmurs like the hum of innumerable bees. Something in her look must have struck Mrs. Saffery as strange and dreadful, for she exclaimed, hoarsely—

"Don't stare like a pig. I could get up and shake you, Nessy!"

Nessy burst into tears.

"Why, what's the use of crying?" continued Mrs. Saffery, louder and louder. "What's to be done, I say? The business going to ruin, and I an unprotected widow, and you the poorest help mother *ever* had!"

"Oh, mamma! don't! don't!"

"You're not to call me 'mamma,' Nessy. John Porter says it's ridiculous; and he's a

sensible, right-judging man. It was all very well in our days of prosperity; but I don't want to be always reminding people of better days, like Mrs. Early."

Still Nessy wept.

"You had better go upstairs into your own room till you've done crying," said her mother.

"I would go out to service—I would give up my thirty pounds, rather than you should do this," sobbed Nessy.

"Very far thirty pounds would go!" said Mrs. Saffery, contemptuously. "You'll know what a little way it will go, even on your selfish pleasures, when you come to try."

Nessy lifted up her hand in mute protest, and let it fall again beside her.

"Oh, you affected, theatrical creature! Wherever could you have got such ways? Of Mrs. Homer, maybe, or Miss Antony."

Nessy here took advantage of her having previously been ordered to her room. She locked herself in, knelt down, and sobbed. She could not pray, she could not think. When her tears were exhausted, she washed her face, put on her bonnet, shawl, and gloves as tidily as she could, and went down stairs

and through the shop. It was just about the time Mr. Porter would return from his dinner, and she hated the thought of seeing him.

"Going to tell tales, I suppose," said her mother, from behind the counter. Nessy passed out.

"Nessy, come back!"

But Nessy was already outside, and though she heard the call, she did not attend to it. I am not saying she was right.

Directly she was out of sight of the house, her walk became a run. She flew rather than ran to Mrs. Weir's, and rang the bell. At the same instant, the door was opened by Mr. Weir.

"Why, Nessy—Miss Saffery, is it you!" said he, kindly. "Come in. What's the matter?"

"May I speak to you for a minute, sir, please?"

"Certainly. Come in here."

He showed her into Mrs. Weir's morning-room, where Mrs. Weir's work-basket and work lay about, but where Mrs. Weir was not.

"What's the matter?" repeated he kindly.

"Sir, I've had a dreadful blow. My mother's going to be married."

"Your mother?" cried he, looking amused the first moment, and truly concerned for her the next.

"I can't reconcile myself to it, sir;" and Nessy's tears began to trickle down.

> "Yet did she not lament, with loud allew,
> As women wont, but with deep sighs and singulfs few."

"This is a great, a sore trial indeed, to you!"

"Oh, sir! will you go and speak to her?"

He looked rather at a loss.

"That will be an awkward thing. You see, if she has made up her mind, I may only make bad worse."

"But perhaps she hasn't made up her mind. She has only just named it to me. Pray forgive me, sir. I know I owe you a hundred apologies for coming to you about it, but it's a matter of life and death, almost, to me."

He could suppose that she might feel and think it to be so.

"Well," said he, after a moment's consideration, "I'll go over to her, since you wish it. What is the man's name?"

"Mr. Porter—John Porter, sir."

"Ah! the person who succeeded your father.

This is by way of smoothing business affairs, I suspect."

"But oh, what a wretched way! I'd rather do anything. I can't think how my mother can bring herself to it."

"Well, I'll go and inquire a little into it. If it is not too late, I shall advise her very strongly to reconsider it; but it may be that affairs have gone so far that she cannot, in justice to the man, break it off. In that case, you must make the best of it. Remain here a little.—Mother, keep Miss Saffery here till I return, please. I shall not long be gone."

For Mrs. Weir had just come in, and drawn her large work-basket towards her. "What is all this about?" said she to Nessy, when they were left to themselves.

Nessy sighed deeply, and said—

"That my mother is going to be married again, ma'am."

"Married? disgusting! disgraceful!" said the plain-spoken old lady. "Why, your father has not been dead three months, has he? I forget exactly how time goes, but I know strawberries had come in. And what did you ask Mr. Weir to do?"

"To speak to my mother, if he would be so very good," said Nessy, "and he said he would."

"Not a bit of use, and so you'll see," said Mrs. Weir. "Only troubling my son for nothing. I'm sorry for you, Miss Saffery, very sorry indeed; but if your mother has allowed herself even to think of such a thing, nothing on earth will turn her. I know the world, and human nature."

Nessy, who knew neither, awaited the event rather hopefully.

It was an awkward task for the young man. People of the respectable tradesmen class are so much more difficult to speak to on personal affairs than the very poor; and Nessy's start had been so sudden, even by her own showing, that he doubted whether she might not have been too hasty.

Reaching the post-office, and observing, to his relief, no one but Mrs. Saffery in it, he asked her for some stamps, and then said—

"I hear, Mrs. Saffery, there is some prospect of your changing your condition."

"Then Nessy's been telling of it," said she, with asperity. "I knew she would! That girl,

sir, is the grief of my heart. I can't think what has upset her so, ever since her father died. I fear he cockered her too much. One cannot say the least word, but—Why, just for something I chanced to say at dinner, off she flies upstairs, bangs on her bonnet, puts on her best shawl no how, and off to you! I'll be judged by you, whether that's like a dutiful daughter."

"But is the report, then, incorrect?" said he, gently.

"Incorrect?—well, I don't say it's incorrect; only there are such different ways of putting things. Nessy has your ear, sir, and Nessy's young, and knows little of the world's troubles; it's always been our care she *should* know little of them. But she's grown wilful and set up, that's the fact—most young people do at one time or other; and the upshot of it is, sir, that my life's been a misery to me—a misery!" and she burst out crying. "What with the business dropping off, and the reprimand from the Central Office, and Nessy's contrary ways, and all, my life's been a burthen, sir. Talk of my being a widow two months—why, it seems like two years! and I'm so sick of it, that I'm

glad to be quit of it, and get somebody to help bear my burdens. And we're to be asked in church next Sunday, and if Nessy doesn't like it she may leave it, and set up grand on her thirty pounds a year. It's better, any way, to be subject to a husband than a daughter."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONFLICT.

Mrs. Saffery's speech after Nessy's was like Mark Antony's after Brutus's: it reversed all the lights and shadows. Mr. Weir, like Sir Roger de Coverly, thought something might be said on both sides; but yet he pitied Nessy, and strongly disapproved of Mrs. Saffery's precipitation. That could not be recalled now; nor was his disapproval likely to be of any consequence to her; all that remained for him was to say he hoped whatever she had done had been prefaced by praying for direction; and that young and old could not be expected to see things in the same light; but he hoped it would make no difference in her feelings to her daughter.

"Of course it will not, sir," said Mrs. Saffery. "I only wish every mother did her duty by her children as I've done by Nessy; and that

Nessy would do her duty by me as I've done mine by her. High time, I think, the house should have a master, when this is the way she goes on to her mother."

A customer coming in, the dialogue was summarily ended; and Mr. Weir returned to tell Nessy that it seemed quite too late to alter Mrs. Saffery's decision, but that she promised it should make no difference in her kindness to her. "So do you be kind too," continued he; "and remember the first commandment with promise."

"I do remember it, sir," said Nessy, with swelling heart; "and it's because I honour my father that I can't bear my mother to slight his memory."

"Still, she *is* your mother, and I always thought there had been a very strong tie of affection between you. I am quite surprised to find it otherwise."

"There *was*, sir, such a tie," she said, crying.

"Let there be again, then. You *cannot* help yourself, but you may harm yourself very much. Do not make things worse. Try conciliation; practise submission; carry your burden to God. He careth for you."

With this they parted; and she carried her heavy heart back again. "Yes," she thought, "He indeed careth for me; no earthly friend does. I *had* one, once.

> "'But he is in his grave—and oh,
> The difference to me!'"

As she re-entered the shop, her mother said—

"You didn't get much by that move, Nessy."

She made no answer, but dejectedly took off her things and sat down to needlework.

A great conflict was going on in Mr. Weir's mind. Much earlier in the year he had happened to revisit Cambridge, just at the time when a certain devoted missionary explorer had returned from his wanderings, and was preaching a crusade at the universities. His burning words kindled the enthusiasm of some, and were as the very lovely music of an instrument to others—the lay ended, its impression ended too. But a few more thoughtful, and, among them, a knot of college friends with whom Mr. Weir was breakfasting, discussed the subject very earnestly, and one of them said—

"I really cannot see why one or two of us should not go. I'm afraid it is because we cannot make up our minds to the self-denial."

An awkward pause ensued, and he resumed the question yet more earnestly; but spoilt all by concluding with—

"Don't be afraid: I'm not going myself." And so it passed off.

Yet this young man ended by laying down his life in the mission field; and his praise is now in the churches.

His words found an echo in Frank Weir's heart; and when they met again soon after they had a quiet chat about it.

"Do you know," said he, "after we parted the other morning, I read a bit of Henry Martyn's life, and it determined me to seek direction to find what was best to be done, *and to do it.*"

"And did you?" said Mr. Weir.

"Certainly. My main argument is this. We may, it is true, serve God and show our love to Christ in one place as well as another; but here is a field where labour is wanted, and no one else will go, so I will."

These simple words could not have had more

effect on Mr. Weir had he added to them, "Go thou and do likewise." From that time, the missionary question would allow him no rest—

"I suoi pensieri in lui dormir non ponno"

—but as he knew pretty well how his mother would be shocked if she knew what was on his mind, he was very guarded in approaching it. He began by writing animated accounts of the distinguished lecturer's eloquence, and the enthusiasm it had excited; adding piquant extracts from the shorthand notes he had taken. When he returned to Belforest, he read her these notes in full; and described the traveller in so attractive a manner, that Mrs. Weir's interest in him was secured. Shortly after, in the course of a tour through the provinces, this new Peter the Hermit came to a large market-town in the neighbourhood of Belforest, and all the country round flocked to hear him. Mr. Weir induced his mother to accompany him to the Town Hall: it was crowded to overflowing—the enthusiasm was immense. The Grevilles, in prominent places, saw Mr. Weir vainly looking for a seat for his mother, and kindly made room for her: she was much

pleased at the attention. Mr. Weir went on the platform, and added a unit to the group of clergy already there. When the lecturer came forward, there was a tumultuous welcome. He spoke: you might have heard a pin drop. He spoke for an hour—two hours—no one felt the lapse of time. A fine, invisible link of sympathy seemed to unite their souls to his: he could use them as a skilled musician uses his instrument, and play on them what airs he would. When he ended, there was a deep, universal sigh of too long suspended breath; and then, oh! such reiterated applause! The lecturer was hot and exhausted: but he had to shake hands and exchange greetings with successive shoals of enthusiastic ladies and gentlemen, who triumphed afterwards in having touched his hand.

Mrs. Weir was one of these. As they returned to Belforest in their fly, she quite chuckled at the distinguished man's having not merely touched, but held her hand, and said, "Madam, you do me honour."

"And his smile, Frank, quite illuminated his face. You may say what you will, but *I* call him handsome."

Upon this hint, Frank spake. Very guardedly, very gently, he told her the settled purpose of his soul. She heard him in blank dismay; and then met him with voluble remonstrance. Very momentous, very painful, was that stout battle in the fly. It brought her to tears; and they scalded Frank's heart. But they did not shake his purpose—no, no more than the billows shake the rock.

And now I have explained why Mr. Weir's mind was in a very painful state.

There was plenty of excited talk in the little world of Belforest, when it began to be bruited abroad that Mr. Weir was going to Central Africa, and that Mrs. Saffery was going to marry Mr. Porter. Two incongruous subjects these, of widely different values, yet each in its turn excited strong expressions of feeling. With regard to Mrs. Saffery,—they could not have believed it of her; they had always respected her hitherto, but now she showed what she was; and Mrs. Early, who was very sore at losing her lodger, confided to the Browns that her loss would not be altogether gain to Mrs. Saffery, who little knew what she was undertaking. Nessy excited

pity, but she shrank from hearing it expressed, and bore her grief in isolation.

As for Mr. Weir, the general voice declared that he was throwing himself away. What would the heathen be the better for such a man, who did not even know their language? He was going to the white man's grave, and would be another human sacrifice. He said, "That was as God pleased. His Master had said, 'Whosoever loveth father or mother more than me, cannot be my disciple;' and 'Preach the Gospel throughout the world;' while yet there were thousands of unconverted in and about Jerusalem. Every one of the apostles might have alleged that their first duty lay at home in their own neighbourhood."

And he preached a sermon that carried persuasion and conviction to the minds of many on the text, "And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done."

As he sat with his mother afterwards, she said—

"Frank, I've given up the hope of moving you. I think you mistaken, and you know I think it; but after your sermon of this

evening, my dissuasions are ended. There is one very earnest request I have to make to you, however."

"What is it, my blessed mother? If I can fulfil it, I will. What is it?"

"That you will take out a wife."

He gave a great start.

"This from *you*, mother!"

"I cannot go out with you myself, Frank, though there is scarcely anything I wouldn't do for you. I'm too old, my dear; but it would relieve me of much of my anxiety about you, if I knew you had one who would cheer and assist you in your remote home as only a wife could."

"I have not much time for preliminaries," said he, wistfully; "and how do I know that any one would have me?"

"You can't deceive me by that, Frank. There is one who, I am pretty sure, would have you, and who is not far from your thoughts—Miss Antony."

He coloured, and said, "She is the only one I would ask."

"Ask her, then," said Mrs. Weir, with a little pang; "I'm mistaken if she says you nay."

"But, oh, mother! will it be fair? will it be right to take her out?"

"Really, Frank, if Africa is such a magnet as you make it out to be, I think it may do for her as well as for you."

"A woman is so different—*I* shall not in the least mind roughing it in the bush."

"You, who have never slept in unaired sheets in your life! How often do people talk at random!"

"The climate is so different," said he laughing.

"I believe you there," said his mother, shaking her head at him. "No heavy rains, I suppose—no wet seasons—no jungle fevers—no lives lost for want of quinine!"

"It might not do for Miss Antony," he said, after a thoughtful pause.

"Well, perhaps not. I need not have raised the subject."

"I don't say that, mother."

And all the rest of the evening he was meditative and silent. During the ensuing night, he was wakeful and prayerful. In the morning, he told his mother he was going to London.

"For what?"

"Do not ask till I return."

She did not need to ask. During the short railway journey, he found the continuous motion favourable to intense thought. Arrived at the terminus, he sprang out, and walked rapidly till he reached Newman Street. It was yet early: all the more likely to find her at home. He remembered the number, found the house, learnt she was within, and sent in his name. The Antonys had the first and third floors of a not very large house. The front drawing-room was Mr. Antony's studio, in all the picturesque litter that artists love; but the small back room appropriated to Edith's use, and to meals, was order itself. As he had asked for her and not for her brother, he was shown into this room, where Edith, still holding his card, was standing at the table awaiting him with pleased expectation.

"This is a very agreeable surprise," said she, coming forward and holding out her hand. And all the difficulty and awkwardness he had been prepared for disappeared. She was full of the visit to Italy; he let her talk about it

for a time, thinking all the while he might lose his opportunity; and before she had half done with the Catacombs, he said—

"My visit is rather on business this morning."

Instantly she became all attention.

"Perhaps you have heard of my intended change of life?"

"No," said she, blushing suddenly. Then she added, "We hear no Belforest news."

"I am going to join the Church Mission party from Cambridge. I am going to Africa."

She gave a little start, and looked much concerned.

"Will not that be a great pity?"

"Why?"

"There is so much to do at home."

"There was much to do in Jerusalem, but the apostles were told to go and preach to all nations."

"Did not that apply to the apostles only?"

"Twelve men could not go to all nations; it therefore applied to all who were actuated by the same spirit."

"True: well it seems a great pity." She gave a little sigh.

"Why?" said Frank.

"That we should lose you."

"England has many better sons than I."

"But the little Belforest world—"

"Is so small! I could do a hundred times more good with the same effort. You don't sympathize with me, then?" said he, with disappointment.

"I admire you for it very much," said Edith. (What a bound his heart gave!) "What made you think I should not? Why, it is just what I should like to do in your place, if I had not a mother."

"Ah, that is the one sorrowful point," said he. "It has cost me much pain. But I rather think, I rather hope I have brought my mother to see the subject in some measure as I do."

"That is more than I should have expected," said Edith. "In that case, I can only say, and say heartily, 'Go forward! Go on and prosper.'"

"You encourage and animate me more than I can describe," said Frank. "Do you really, then, take living interest in the missionary cause?"

"In the spread of Christianity? Why, of course I do! What do you take me for?"

said she gaily. "I only wish I could help it!"

"Oh, Edith, that is exactly the thing I wanted you to say!"

And before she could do more than look her surprise at his calling her by her name, he was pouring out, with all his warmth and persuasiveness, what had so long lain in his heart. Edith's surprise and emotion were extreme; but to say that she felt any umbrage, any pain, would not be the fact. She had often felt that there was no one in the world whom she could feel a stronger interest in than for her brother, except Mr. Weir; but the absolute absurdity of thinking he cared seriously for her, even if she dwelt at all in his memory, had successfully smothered this feeling. It had smouldered, but was not dead; for the first breath of love fanned it into gentle, steady warmth and light.

"So you thought no one could follow that narrow path but yourself," said she, sweetly.

"Oh, Edith! My mother will be happy now."

"But what will Leo say? Oh, I'm afraid he won't hear of it."

"But has he a right over you?"

"The right of affection—a very strong one. Hitherto we have been all in all to one another. I cannot tell you what a good brother he has been! And to leave him in *this* way, solely for my own—"

"And *my* happiness? Why, he did not expect to keep you all his life, did he? Some of these days, if you would have waited for it, he would have left *you*."

"No, he would always have given me a home."

"But an altered one. Well, these things are not the result of calculation, are they? A strong personal feeling comes in like a flood, and carries all before it—"

"Hark, here comes Leo! I hear his step—(*Enter Leo.*) Leo, only think! Mr. Weir is going to Africa."

"Ha! Mr. Weir? What a pleasant surprise this visit is! I was thinking of you five minutes ago. Will you dine here?"

"That depends—I don't know whether you'll like to have me."

"*I* shall like it; I can't answer for Edith. Perhaps this is scambling day with us, and she knows there's nothing to be had."

"Oh, not quite so," said Edith; "but I should like just to run away for a minute—"

And on pretence of revising her orders for dinner, she slipped away and ran up to her room. There she tried to arrange her bewildered thoughts, and still her heart's tumultuous beatings. Had she done wrong? had she done right? Would Leo think her wrong? She could not tell—she should know by his first look, and yet she dreaded to meet it. She was very thankful, very happy. She knelt, and laid her head on her arms; her feelings found no words; tears were in her eyes; she brushed them away, fell into a musing fit, lingered too long, heard herself called, and was obliged to go down. When she went in to them, Leo's face was reddened: he said quickly, "Oh Edith, I don't like this at all. I can't have it."

"Can't you?" said she anxiously, and laying her hand on his arm without looking at him. He took her by the chin, and *would* look full into her eyes.

"Old girl, what has tired you of me?"

"Nothing, Leo. You know I love you better than all the world."

"Oh, you story-teller!" said he; on which

they all three burst out laughing. But Edith took his hand and began to stroke it, and was going to make some insincere little speech; when he cut it short with—

"After that jolly laugh, heroics are out of the question. *I* can't play the sentimental, nor can you. Here's the thing. Mr. Weir's going to make a martyr of himself. I say, how fine it is. He says his mother doesn't like it. I say domestic obstacles always occur at the outset of a great course. He says she wants him to take out a wife. 'By all means,' say I. 'Would it be fair to the lady?' he asks. 'Why not?' I inquire. And so we go on, smooth as glass, till it slips out that *you* are the lady; and that alters the whole matter."

"But why should it, Leo?"

"Well, Edith, if *you* have no natural affection, I hope I have."

Seeing that this cut deeper than he intended, he pulled her hair, and said,

"You silly! do you suppose it a matter of indifference to me that you should go and catch the jungle fever? Let Mr. Weir go and try it for a year first. If it does not attack him, it may not you."

CHAPTER XIX.

COMPROMISE.

And thus, for the moment, it was arranged, after infinite debating, *pro* and *con*. And, being all of them considerably on the spring side of thirty, it is wonderful how little foreboding and anxiety troubled them regarding so momentous a future. Mr. Antony began to sketch mischievous pictures of his jolly bachelor life, when there should be no young maiden sister to compel attention to orderly living. Edith's happiness was as yet too tremulous to find expression in playfulness, but the animation of her companions took her out of herself; and Mr. Weir had never been so delightful. Joyousness, while it lasts, is far more brilliant than cheerfulness, and has a thousand amusing, enchanting little sprites in its train.

When Mrs. Weir heard the course things had taken, she was much disappointed. Engaged

beyond recall to Miss Antony, and yet going to leave her behind him, was, in the mother's opinion, a most lame and impotent conclusion. But Frank was so buoyant and lively, and it was such delight to her to see him so, that, considering how short a time they were to be together, she would not embitter it to him. From first to last, in short, she played the part of a judicious, devoted mother.

Always regretting, as we do, the needless expenditure of money, it is matter of regret to us that Frank Weir did not now buy a season ticket, seeing he was for ever on the rail, though this intermediate passage of his life would soon be over. Mrs. Weir so grudged the time consumed in these frequent flights, that she thought the best remedy would be to invite Edith to stay with her; and as Edith would perhaps prefer being accompanied by her brother, she invited them both. Mr. Antony brought her down, but only remained twenty-four hours, as he had a commission picture in hand. Nessy, pensive at her attic-window, saw them cross the green together, and felt a ray of sunshine, for the moment, cheer her forlorn heart. Afterwards, when she saw

Mr. Weir and Edith walking about together, in a way that convinced even her inexperience they were lovers—his eyes so bright with animation, and hers in downcast happiness—she lost the sense of her own isolation in unaffected sympathy with them both. Edith was now anxious to acquire something of the practical habits of a minister's wife; she accompanied Mr. Weir to the cottages, and heard him counsel and comfort the poor people; she was very sedulous in her attendance at the Sunday-school, and here Nessy and she had their first long talk, which led to subsequent little glimpses of Edith and snatches of dialogue with her that brightened Nessy's days.

But Mr. Weir's departure would be a heavy loss to Nessy, as well as to many others; and if it were mourned in lowly dwellings, so in at least one manorial seat, where Emily Greville was sinking in rapid decline. There had been great talk of her marrying the Major in the spring; but the pernicious influences of a London season had undermined her health, and sudden transition from a heated ball-room to the chill night air and a keen east wind had brought on a cold which fixed on her lungs.

Too late the danger was made apparent, and remedies were fruitlessly tried. A milder climate for the winter was prescribed; but it was too evident that she would not live to see another winter. At first they tried to keep her ignorant of her danger; but she knew it by intuition, and so pleaded for the support and comfort of some good minister, that Mr. Weir was admitted to her sick room. He cheered and strengthened the young girl, and enabled her to meet her great change with hopefulness and desire. He administered her last sacrament the week before he sailed.

It was early in November that the mission-party commenced their voyage. Mrs. Weir and the Antonys accompanied Frank on board, and there parted with him. It was a tender, sacred scene. There were a colonial bishop and several clergy with their wives, a school-master, and several emigrants on board, including some reformatory boys. We may take it for granted they would not start without an earnest commendatory service that would sanctify and soften the parting scene. The last thing that caught Mrs. Weir's eyes, dimmed with tears, was the cheerful, unconcerned face

of a boy from the Cambridge Industrial School, eating an orange.

A lady, who was one of the mission-party, and of whom Mrs. Weir had some slight knowledge, wrote to her on the voyage:—"It would please you to see how much at home your son makes himself on board. He and I are the only two who have not been ill, and we have made it our common care to wait on the steerage passengers, many of whom were very down-hearted. It was hard work, but ended in making a very friendly feeling between the two parts of the ship. You would have laughed had you seen him making the bed for some poor man or woman in a dark little cabin, or standing outside the ship-kitchen, begging the black cook for some 'fresh water boil' to make arrowroot, which he can now make quite famously—or helping me across the slippery deck, each of us carrying two cups of arrowroot: he with his pockets filled with a brandy flask, a tumbler, a bottle of raspberry vinegar, and two eggs! In the morning, he is either running for the children's breakfast, or holding one while the nurse dresses the other." *

* Vide Bishop Mackenzie's Life.

"Fancy Frank," cried Mrs. Weir, amused and delighted; and this domestic little sketch did more to reconcile her to his going out than anything had done yet.

"We should never have known what was in him," said she. "I never in my life saw him hold a baby in his arms, except at the font; but he always kissed it."

Mr. Weir reached Capetown in safety, but he did not find Mrs. Homer there, nor did he expect to find her. She had accompanied her husband to India, whence she wrote long, enthusiastic letters to Mrs. Weir and Miss Crowe, full of punkahs and palkees, gariwans and khansamans, dâk-garis and buggies, the Jumma Musjid and the Taj Mahal. Mrs. Weir would make splendid mistakes in retailing scraps of these letters; for instance, she told Mrs. Fownes that Mrs. Homer was very fond of eating khansamans, when she meant chupattees; but as Mrs. Fownes did not know that a khansaman was a steward, it did as well for her as a chupattee. Meanwhile—

> "The village seems asleep or dead,
> Now Lubin is away."

One would have thought there had been plenty

of active, energetic, unselfish young curates, ready to step into Mr. Weir's place; and Mr. Weir had made sure of it, or he would have reproached himself for leaving Belforest unprovided. But whatever the young men of England are about, or what they value themselves at, or what they think the main end and aim of the ministry, I don't happen to know, for they all seem just now—at any rate a good many of them—to be hanging back from the church, or writing grumbling, earthly-minded letters in it, to the *Times* and other public organs, because they don't get well-endowed benefices. Dear friends, I wonder if you ever heard of the great Hooker travelling to London on foot, and of the horse which Bishop Jewel gave him, which was a walking-stick; or of godly Mr. Ball of Whitmore, who boasted that he had two dishes of meat to his Sabbath dinner—*i.e.* a dish of hot milk and a dish of cold milk, and that that was enough and enough; or of Bernard Gilpin, whose parish contained fourteen villages, and who laboured among them till he was called the Northern Apostle; or of Robert Walker, who dressed all his fresh meat for the week on

the Sabbath, that the poor who came from afar might dine in his kitchen on the broth; or of Oberlin, who, when a student, put a slice of dry bread at eight o'clock every evening into a little pan over his reading-lamp, sprinkled it with salt, and poured a little water over it, and then let it stew while he pursued his studies till ten or eleven o'clock, when he ate his supper with appetite? *These men were all of them long-lived:* and doubtless every one of them will sit down at the marriage-supper of the Lamb. Of course it would be fine to have an army in which every soldier was a general officer, and a navy with an admiral for every sailor, and a church with a bishop for every minister; but I do not wish to live to see it. My father had a man-servant, who, at the time the Reform Bill was in agitation, was very anxious for it to pass; and when he was asked why, he said he believed it would make every poor man a gentleman. In one sense, every poor man may be a gentleman; and it is quite certain that many a thorough gentleman is a poor man.

Poor Dr. Fownes, being hard up for a curate, was obliged, for a time, to resume the duty

himself; and very feeble work he made of it, every one respecting him for his exertion, and listening with strained attention, in the hope, often disappointed, of catching one word in ten. At length he got a Mr. Lamb, with a voice like a lion; and Mr. Lamb lodged with Mrs. Early, who was very thankful to have him; but nobody else was, except Dr. Fownes.

Slowly pass the winter months, and slowly the foreign mails come round; and the General Post-office seems to have a particular spite against Edith and Mrs. Weir, for they always get their letters after the merchants have had theirs—sometimes too late to answer them by the next mail. Of course it must be fancy; but it seems as if the sorters set their particular letters on one side, saying to themselves, "That's for a lady—no hurry for that." But when at length they came to hand, how they were treasured! First, Frank and Co.—for of course he stood first with them—reached the Cape, and were most kindly received by the bishop. Then they embarked for the scene of their labours, which they reached in a thankful and hopeful state of mind. There were dark woods running along the shore, and swelling hills in

the distance. For the first week they all remained at the port town, landing their luggage, &c. After this, they went up the country in waggons drawn by oxen to a town where Mr. Weir for a time had his work assigned him. When we cannot have the work we wish, it is best to undertake cheerfully the work that is set us.

"And Frank is ten thousand times better there," said Mrs. Weir, "than up among the blacks."

"I am quite of your opinion, my dear madam," said Dr. Fownes. "He is doubtless doing far more good among his countrymen there than if directly employed in converting the heathen. How a fine young fellow like him *could* so mistake his vocation! as if we had no spiritual destitution at home!"

At length they heard of his starting for the interior in quest of a proper spot for a settlement. Having heard, by what seemed chance in the course of a ride with the surveyor-general, of a grant of land of three thousand acres, which must be applied for in two or three days, he, at his companion's urgent instance, first applied for it, and then hastened

to survey it. Waggon-roads there were none —scarcely a bridle-path; but he proceeded on horseback on his journey, with a surveyor and two Kafirs for his companions.

Their way first led up a steep ascent, then down by a narrow footpath to a country broken into eccentric irregularities, where all trace of roads was lost. The descents often resembled steps, and were so precipitous that they were obliged to dismount and lead their horses. Then they came to a green valley, the grass of which was so tall as to reach their heads as they rode through it. Next, they came among thorn-bushes, which often compelled them to dismount, as the only way of passing under their branches. After this, they came to a thick forest, which eventually brought them to the banks of a little stream winding through most lovely scenery. This was the third day of their journeying, and here Mr. Weir determined to make his settlement, and to call it Belforest.

There was a small native village in the neighbourhood, and the chief came to them, evidently alarmed at the prospect of white settlers bringing the lung sickness among his

cattle. Frank Weir, who had studied the language on his way out, and ever since, assured him that he had no other object than to do him and his people good, and that when they came to know him better, all their fears would pass away.

After a long conversation—for these lords of the wilderness are leisurely and fond of talking—he succeeded in creating a favourable impression. They feasted him on what they had, and after some more exploring, he retraced his way back.

"How Frank could get down their nasty messes, is more than I can conceive," said Mrs. Weir. "However, Mrs. Early broke him in a little."

Frank did *not* tell her, that on returning to head-quarters, some of his friends told him he had been too hasty, and would find the district unhealthy. For one thing, he did not quite believe them. "The slothful saith, There is a lion in the path." He had secured the grant now, and meant to turn it to good account. When next he wrote home, he dated from a round bee-hive hut at New Belforest, with a grey Kafir blanket hung up at the doorway.

"It is now night," he wrote. "The soft, sweet air is blowing gently round me, full of the chirping of strange frogs, and fire-flies are glancing about on all sides."

Another time, "You would be amused at my picturesque costume—a shooting coat, and trousers of Oxford grey, and a broad-brimmed wide-awake, with a white cover to keep the sun off. The people are growing fond of me and I of them. They have a great gift for music."

Edith wrote to him that she should enjoy such a gipsy-life amazingly; and almost as good as said she was ready to join him at the shortest notice. On this he wrote back—

"*This is no place for ladies.*"

She did not know whether to take fright or take umbrage at this; so took both. The umbrage soon died out, however. Meanwhile, two mails came in, without any letter from Frank, which made Edith and Mrs. Weir very wretched. Oh the misery of depending much on a letter that does not come! They wrote urgent, affectionate chidings; but did not know he would ever read them.

They counted the days, the hours to the

next mail. Leonard Antony hated the very name of Africa by this time, it so preyed on Edith. At length came a letter from Frank's diocesan. "Dear Mrs. Weir—Don't be alarmed at your son's absence. He is invalided, and I am sending him home."

CHAPTER XX.

VIVE UT VIVAS.

CONTENDING emotions of sorrow and joy made Mrs. Weir ill. She hardly knew whether it were worse for Frank to come home and die, or live out of reach in that horrible country; so it was well the choice did not lie with her. Edith came to nurse her, share her anxieties, and console her as she best might. As soon as Mrs. Weir was a little better, they went to the sea-side to await Frank's arrival. Meanwhile, good old Dr. Fownes died, after a few days' illness, leaving the parish in the very poor hands of Mr. Lamb.

Nessy was not in Belforest. Sometimes when our affairs are at their lowest ebb—when we are at our wit's end, and our faith's end too, events take a course so wholly unexpected, yet so simple—just as we float round the

bend of a river and find ourselves in new scenery—that we are perfectly amazed afterwards, if not at the time, how such changes were brought about. We never feel ourselves more in the hands of God than at such times: when we can look back and see we were benefited by something *not* the result of our own will—of having been destined for some good thing of which we had no preconception. This is what may in a sense be called predestination, though it is a sadly misused, misunderstood word.

Mrs. Saffery—pshaw—Mrs. Porter had no sympathy with Nessy's fine feelings, partly because she did not understand them; but she was quite clear on one point, that fine feeling was utterly out of place in the drapery line or postal department. Her mournfulness she considered waywardness, and after vainly endeavouring to scold her out of it, she thought it best to ignore it. But physical suffering Mrs. Porter understood and could pity; therefore when, by a certain peculiar look about Nessy's eyes, she knew that her bad headaches had returned—though, when asked if her head ached, she invariably said "Not much"—

Mrs. Porter felt for her, and cast about for a remedy.

Now, it was a sister of Mrs. Porter's—the childless widow of a tobacconist—who had left Nessy thirty pounds a year, and desired that she might have the tastes of a lady—little good they had done her, her mother said. Mrs. Porter also had a sister, still surviving, married to a Guernsey man, and the mother of several children. This Mrs. Lacoste generally wrote to her sister once a year; and as her letters were the fruit of a good deal of labour, on successive Sunday afternoons, she had scarcely sent her condolence on Mr. Saffery's death, before her sister had to tell her of her marriage to Mr. Porter. This, however, she deferred doing, relying on Mrs. Lacoste's hearing of it from no other source; and thinking a little longer interval might make it appear more seemly. Having once put it off, the longer she delayed it, the less inclined she felt to write; and at length thought she might as well give it up altogether. Now, however, her purpose changed: and she wrote to this effect:—

"Belforest, *Oct.* 21.

"Dear Sister,—

"Poor Saffery's loss troubled me and Nessy very much. The house did not seem the same. I quite hated to be by myself. I was always fancying I heard his voice in the office, or his step on the stairs. I hope you may never know what it is to feel so. The two first months seemed as long as two years: almost longer. My spirits being weak, I felt I required protection, and we have sometimes large sums of money passing through our hands, so that a lone woman was hardly safe; and yet Saffery left his charge we was to have no man to sleep on the premises. I have put up a very nice stone over him. You was very good to ask Nessy over to Guernsey. At the time, she was not equal to it; but now I think it would do her great good. She cannot get reconciliated to the great change in the house; and nothing would get rid of her vagaries so well as a little change of scene. I should like you to see what a tall daughter I have, and for her to make acquaintance with Josephine and Etienne, and Louis and Lucette. I am now united to John Porter, who is appointed to

the post-office. It was too much for me, and I nearly lost it. With love to your numerous family, I remain, dear Susanna, your affectionate sister,

"ELIZ. PORTER."

What Mrs. Lacoste thought of her sister's letter, nobody knew but herself and her good husband. She lost no time, however, in sending for Nessy, who to her immense surprise and satisfaction, soon found herself, under a homely but safe escort, on her way to Guernsey.

It may readily be understood how wholesome and happy a change it was for this too nervous, meditative girl to be taken from a silent home, full of sad memories, into the midst of a family circle full of young life, mirth, and action. Her tall cousin Etienne, her pretty cousin Josephine, her droll cousin Louis, and her plaything cousin Lucette, all strove, in their artless, hearty way, which could cheer her most. It is no wonder, therefore, that she had a most delightful visit, and returned to Belforest bright and happy, being promised a second invitation to Guernsey the ensuing year.

The annals of Belforest are nearly ended.

The sea voyage did so much for Mr. Weir, that when he reached England, he did not look nearly as ill as his friends expected to see him, though thinner and darker. In fact, he soon became quite well; and Mr. Greville thinking he could not place a fitter man in the living, which was in his gift, presented him to the rectory of Belforest, and he read himself in, the same week that he married Edith Antony.

How sweetly the wedding-peal swells and dies away again in the gentle air! How brightly the mellow sunshine touches up the old tree opposite "The Swan," and the little islet of mossy turf, and the geraniums in Mrs. Brown's window, and the blue merino dress of Carry Brown, as she stands shading her eyes at the door!

So thinks, at least, a slender, sallow girl, who stands in deep shadow at a door on the opposite side of the green. She notes it all with an artist's eye; not one happy effect is lost on her, though she could not fitly express it either in words or in writing or with her pencil. She feels it as a poet would feel it, though she never wrote a verse of poetry in her life. She feels it as a Christian, who

feels that this world is very fair, very dear, but that it will all pass away; and that, at its best, it is but the shadow of a better world, prepared in the heavens. Nessy has been at the wedding: she is full of happiness at the return of Mr. Weir and his marriage with Miss Antony: to live near them and work under them will henceforth shed perpetual sunshine on her path: the thought of it does so already. She has accepted her home lot; and sometimes she looks forward to a future stay at Guernsey, and sometimes to a future life in the presence of her Heavenly Father, where she shall regain her earthly father too; so that I can say of her, as I hope I can say of you, that Nessy is happy.

THE END.

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