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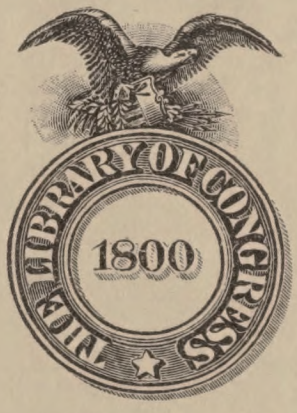

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HOME AGAIN

BY

GEORGE MAC DONALD

AUTHOR OF

"MALCOLM," "ANNALS OF A QUIET NEIGHBORHOOD," ETC.

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HOME AGAIN.

CHAPTER I.

THE PARLOUR.

In the dusk of the old-fashioned best room of a farm-house, in the faint glow of the buried sun through the sods of his July grave, sat two elderly persons, dimly visible, breathing the odour which roses unseen sent through the twilight and open window. One of the two was scarcely conscious of the odour, for she did not believe in roses; she believed mainly in mahogany, linen, and hams; to the other it brought too much sadness to be welcomed, for it seemed, like the sunlight, to issue from the grave of his vanished youth. He was

not by nature a sad man; he was only one that had found the past more delightful than the present, and had not left his first loves. The twilight of his years had crept upon him and was deepening; and he felt his youth slowly withering under their fallen leaves. With more education, and perhaps more receptivity than most farmers, he had married a woman he fervently loved, whose rarely truthful nature, to which she had striven to keep true, had developed the delicate flower of moral and social refinement; and her influence upon him had been of the eternal sort. While many of their neighbours were vying with each other in the effort to dress, and dwell, and live up to their notion of *gentility*, Richard Colman and his wife had never troubled themselves about fashion, but had sought to please each the taste of the other, and cultivate their own. Perhaps now as he sat thus silent in the *dimmits*, he was holding closer converse than he knew, or any of us can know, with one who seemed to have

vanished from all this side of things, except the heart of her husband. That clung to what people would call *her memory;* I prefer to call it *her.*

The rose-scented hush was torn by the strident, cicala-like shrilling of a self-confident, self-satisfied female voice:—

"Richard, that son of yours will come to no good! You may take my word for it!"

Mr. Colman made no answer; the dusky, sweet-smelling waves of the silence closed over its laceration.

"I am well aware my opinion is of no value in your eyes, Richard; but that does not absolve me from the duty of stating it: if you allow him to go on as he is doing now, Walter will never eat bread of his own earning!"

"There are many who do, and yet don't come to much!" half thought, but nowise said the father.

"What do you mean to make of him?" persisted Miss Hancock, the half-sister of his wife,

the *a* in whose name Walter said ought to have been an *e*.

"Whatever he is able to make himself. He must have the main hand in it, whatever it be," answered Mr. Colman.

"It is time twice over he had set about something! You let him go on dawdling and dawdling without even making up his mind whether or not he ought to do anything! Take my word for it, Richard, you'll have him on your hands till the day of your death!"

The father did not reply that he could wish nothing better, that the threat was more than he could hope for. He did not want to provoke his sister-in-law, and he knew there was a shadow of reason in what she said, though even perfect reason could not have sweetened the mode in which she said it. Nothing could make up for the total absence of sympathy in her utterance of any modicum of truth she was capable of uttering. She was a very dusty woman, and never more dusty than when she

fought against dust as in a warfare worthy of all a woman's energies—one who, because she had not a spark of Mary in her, imagined herself a Martha. She was true as steel to the interests of those in whose life hers was involved, but only their dusty interests, not those which make man worth God's trouble. She was a vessel of clay in an outhouse of the temple, and took on her the airs—not of gold, for gold has no airs—but the airs of clay imagining itself gold, and all the golden vessels nothing but clay.

"I put it to you, Richard Colman," she went on, "whether good ever came of reading poetry, and falling asleep under hay-stacks! He actually writes poetry!—and we all know what that leads to!"

"Do we?" ventured her brother-in-law. "King David wrote poetry!"

"Richard, don't garble! I will not have you garble! You know what I mean as well as I do myself! And you know as well as I do what

comes of writing poetry! That friend of Walter's who borrowed ten pounds of you—did he ever pay it you?"

"He did, Ann."

"You didn't tell *me!*"

"I did not want to disappoint you!" replied Richard, with a sarcasm she did not feel.

"It was worth telling!" she returned.

"I did not think so. Everybody does not stick to a bank-note like a snail to the wall!—I returned him the money."

"Returned him the money!"

"Yes."

"Made him a present of *ten pounds!*"

"Why not?"

"Why then?"

"I had more reasons than one."

"And no call to explain them! It was just like you to throw away your hard earnings upon a fellow that would never earn anything for himself! As if one such wasn't enough to take all you'd got!"

"How could he send back the money if that had been the case! He proved himself what I believed him, ready and willing to work! The money went for a fellow's bread and cheese, and what better money's worth would you have?"

"You may some day want the bread and cheese for yourself!"

"One stomach is as good as another!"

"It never was and never will be any use talking to some people!" concluded sister Ann, in the same tone she began with, for she seldom lost her temper—though no one would have much minded her losing it, it was so little worth keeping. Rarely angry, she was always disagreeable. The good that was in her had no flower, but bore its fruits, in the shape of good food, clean linen, mended socks, and such like, without any blossom of sweet intercourse to make life pleasant.

Aunt Ann would have been quite justified in looking on poetry with contempt had it been

what she imagined it. Like many others, she had decided opinions concerning things of which her idea nowise corresponded with the things themselves.

CHAPTER II.

THE ARBOUR.

WHILE the elders thus conversed in the dusky drawing-room, where the smell of the old roses almost overpowered that of the new, another couple sat in a little homely bower in the garden. It was Walter and his rather distant cousin Molly Wentworth, who for fifteen years had been as brother and sister. Their fathers had been great friends, and when Molly's died in India, and her mother speedily followed him, Richard Colman took the little orphan, who was at the time with a nurse in England, home to his house, much to the joy of his wife, who had often longed for a daughter to perfect the family idea. The more motherly a woman is, the nearer will

the child of another satisfy the necessities of her motherhood. Mrs. Colman could not have said which child she loved best.

Over the still summer garden rested a weight of peace. It was a night to the very mind of the fastidious, twilight-loving bat, flitting about, coming and going, like a thought we cannot help. Most of Walter's thoughts came and went thus. He had not yet learned to think; he was hardly more than a medium in which thought came and went. Yet when a thought seemed worth anything, he always gave himself the credit of it!—as if a man were author of his own thoughts any more than of his own existence! A man can but live so with the life given him, that this or that kind of thoughts shall call on him, and to this or that kind he shall not be at home. Walter was only at that early stage of development where a man is in love with what he calls his own thoughts.

Even in the dark of the summer-house one might have seen that he was pale, and might

have suspected him handsome. In the daylight his gray eyes might almost seem the source of his paleness. His features were well marked though delicate, and had a notable look of distinction. He was above the middle height, and slenderly built; had a wide forehead, and a small, pale moustache on an otherwise smooth face. His mouth was the least interesting feature; it had great mobility, but when at rest, little shape and no attraction. For this, however, his smile made considerable amends.

The girl was dark, almost swarthy, with the clear, pure complexion, and fine-grained skin, which more commonly accompany the hue. If at first she gave the impression of delicacy, it soon changed into one of compressed life, of latent power. Through the night, where she now sat, her eyes were too dark to appear; they sank into it, and were as the unseen soul of the dark; while her mouth, rather large and exquisitely shaped, with the curve of a strong bow, seemed as often as she smiled to make a pale

window in the blackness. Her hair came rather low down the steep of her forehead, and, with the strength of her chin, made her face look rounder than seemed fitting.

They sat for a time as silent as the night that infolded them. They were not lovers, though they loved each other, perhaps, more than either knew. They were watching to see the moon rise at the head of the valley on one of whose high sloping sides they sat.

The moon kept her tryst, and revealed a loveliness beyond what the day had to show. She looked upon a wide valley, that gleamed with the windings of a river. She brightened the river, and dimmed in the houses and cottages the lights with which the opposite hill sparkled like a celestial map. Lovelily she did her work in the heavens, her poor mirror-work—all she was fit for now, affording fit room, atmosphere, and medium to young imaginations, unable yet to spread their wings in the sunlight, and believe what lies hid in the light of the workaday world.

Nor was what she showed the less true for what lay unshown in shrouded antagonism. The vulgar cry for the real would bury in deepest grave every eternal fact. It is the cry, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" The day would reveal a river stained with loathsome refuse, and rich gardens on hillsides mantled in sooty smoke and evil-smelling vapours, sent up from a valley where men, like gnomes, toiled and caused to toil too eagerly. What would one think of a housekeeper so intent upon saving that she could waste no time on beauty or cleanliness? How many who would storm if they came home to an untidy house, feel no shadow of uneasiness that they have all day been defiling the house of the Father, nor at night lifted hand to cleanse it! Such men regard him as a fool, whose joy a foul river can poison; yet, as soon as they have by pollution gathered and saved their god, they make haste to depart from the spot they have ruined! Oh for an invasion of indignant ghosts, to drive from the old places the generation that

dishonours the ancient Earth! The sun shows all their disfiguring, but the friendly night comes at length to hide her disgrace; and that well hidden, slowly ascends the brooding moon to unveil her beauty.

For there was a *thriving* town full of awful chimneys in the valley, and the clouds that rose from it ascended above the Colmans' farm to the great moor which stretched miles and miles beyond it. In the autumn sun its low forest of heather burned purple; in the pale winter it lay white under snow and frost; but through all the year winds would blow across it the dull smell of the smoke from below. Had such a fume risen to the earthly paradise, Dante would have imagined his purgatory sinking into hell. On all this inferno the night had sunk like a foretaste of cleansing death. The fires lay smouldering like poor, hopeless devils, fain to sleep. The world was merged in a tidal wave from the ocean of hope, and seemed to heave a restful sigh under its cooling renovation.

CHAPTER III.

A PENNYWORTH OF THINKING.

"A PENNY for your thought, Walter!" said the girl after a long silence, in which the night seemed at length to clasp her too close.

"Your penny, then! I was thinking how wild and sweet the dark wind would be blowing up there among the ringing bells of the heather."

"You shall have the penny. I will pay you with your own coin. I keep all the pennies I win of you. What do you do with those you win of me?"

"Oh, I don't know! I take them because you insist on paying your bets, but——"

"Debts, you mean, Walter! You know I never bet, even in fun! I hate taking things for nothing! I wouldn't do it!"

"Then what are you making me do now?"

"Take a penny for the thought I bought of you for a penny. That's fair trade, not gambling. And your thought to-night is well worth a penny. I felt the very wind on the moor for a moment!"

"I'm afraid I shan't get a penny a thought in London!"

"Then you are going to London, Walter?"

"Yes, indeed! What else! What is a man to do here?"

"What is a man to do there?"

"Make his way in the world."

"But, Walter, please let me understand! indeed I don't want to be disagreeable! What do you wish to make your way to?"

"To such a position as——"

Here he stopped unsure.

"You mean to fame, and honour, and riches, don't you, Walter?" ventured Molly.

"No—not riches. Did you ever hear of a poet and riches in the same breath?"

"Oh, yes, I have!—though somehow they don't seem to go together comfortably. If a poet is rich, he ought to show he couldn't help it."

"Suppose he was made a lord, where would he then be without money?"

"If to be a lord one must be rich, he ought never to wish to be a lord. But you do not want to be either lord or millionaire, Walter, do you?"

"I hope I know better!"

"Where does the way you speak of lead then, Walter? To fame?"

"If it did, what would you have to say against it? Even Milton calls it 'That last infirmity of noble mind'!"

"But he calls it an infirmity, and such a bad infirmity, apparently, that it is the hardest of all to get rid of!"

The fact was that Walter wanted to be—thought he was a poet, but was far from certain—feared indeed it might not be so, therefore

desired greatly the verdict of men in his favour, if but for his own satisfaction. Fame was precious to him as determining, he thought, his position in the world of letters—his kingdom of heaven. Well read, he had not used his reading practically enough to perceive that the praise of one generation may be the contempt of another, perhaps of the very next, so that the repute of his time could assure him of nothing. He did not know the worthlessness of the opinion that either grants or withholds fame.

He looked through the dark at his cousin, thinking, "What sets her talking of such things? How can a girl understand a man with his career before him!"

She read him through the night and his silence.

"I know what you are thinking, Walter!" she said. "You are thinking women can't think. But I should be ashamed not to have common sense, and I cannot see the sense of doing

anything for a praise that can help nothing and settle nothing."

"Why then should all men have the desire for it?"

"That they may get rid of it. Why have all men vanity? Where would the world be on the way to now, if Jesus Christ had sought the praise of men?"

"But he has it!"

"Not much of it yet, I suspect. He does not care for the praise that comes before obedience! —That's what I have heard your father say."

"I never heard him!"

"I have heard him say it often. What could Jesus care for the praise of one whose object in life was the praise of men!"

Walter had not lived so as to destroy the reverence of his childhood. He believed himself to have high ideals. He felt that a man must be upright, or lose his life. So strongly did he feel it, that he imagined himself therefore upright, incapable of a dishonest or mean thing. He had

never done, never could, he thought, do anything unfair. But to what Molly said, he had no answer. What he half thought in his silence, was something like this: that Jesus Christ was not the type of manhood, but a man by himself, who came to do a certain work; that it was both absurd and irreverent to talk as if other men had to do as he did, to think and feel like him; that he was so high above the world he could not care for its fame, while to mere man its praises must be dear. Nor did Walter make any right distinction between the approbation of understanding men, who know the thing they praise, and the empty voice of the unwise many.

In a word, Walter thought, without knowing he did, that Jesus Christ was not a man.

"I think, Molly," he said, "we had better avoid the danger of irreverence."

For the sake of his poor reverence he would frustrate the mission of the Son of God; by its wretched mockery justify himself in refusing the judgment of Jesus!

"I know you think kindly of me, Molly," he went on, "and I should be sorry to have you misunderstand me; but surely a man should not require religion to make him honest! I scorn the notion. A man must be just and true because he is a man! Surely a man may keep clear of the thing he loathes!—For my own honour," he added, with a curl of his lip, "I shall at least do nothing disgraceful, however I may fall short of the angelic."

"I doubt," murmured Molly, "whether a man is a man until he knows God."

But Walter, if he heard the words, neither heeded nor answered them. He was far from understanding the absurdity of doing right from love of self.

He was no hypocrite. He did turn from what seemed to him degrading. But there were things degrading which he did not see to be such, things on which some men to whom he did not yet look up, would have looked down. Also there was that in his effort to sustain his self-

respect which was far from pure: he despised such as had failed; and to despise the human because it has fallen, is to fall from the human. He had done many little things he ought to be, and one day must be, but as yet felt no occasion to be—ashamed of. So long as they did not trouble him they seemed nowhere. Many a youth starts in life like him, possessed with the idea, not exactly formulated, that he is a most precious specimen of pure and honourable humanity. It comes of self-ignorance, and a low ideal taken for a high one. Such are mainly among the well-behaved, and never doubt themselves a prize for any woman. They colour their notion of themselves with their ideal, and then mistake the one for the other. The mass of weaknesses and conceits that compose their being they compress into their ideal mould of man, and then regard the shape as their own. What composes it they do not heed.

No man, however, could look in the refined face of Walter Colman and imagine him

cherishing sordid views of life. Asked what of all things he most admired, he might truly answer, "The imaginative intellect." He was a fledgling poet. He worshipped what he called thoughts, would rave about a thought in the abstract, apostrophize an uncaught idea. When a concrete thinkable one fell to him, he was jubilant over the isolate thing, and with his joy its value had nothing to do. He would stand wrapt in the delight of what he counted its beauty, and yet more in the delight that his was the mind that had generated such a meteor! To be able to think pretty things was to him a gigantic distinction! A thought that could never be soul to any action, would be more valuable to him than the perception of some vitality of relation demanding the activity of the whole being. He would call thoughts the stars that glorify the firmament of humanity, but the stars of his firmament were merely atmospheric—pretty fancies, external likenesses. That the grandest thing in the world is to be an

accepted poet, is the despotic craze of a vast number of the weak-minded and half-made of both sexes. It feeds poetic fountains of plentiful yield, but insipid and enfeebling flow, the mere sweat of weakness under the stimulus of self-admiration.

CHAPTER IV.

A LIVING FORCE.

WALTER was the very antipode of the Molly he counted commonplace, one outside the region of poetry: she had a passion for turning a *think* into a thing. She had a strong instinctive feeling that she was in the world to do something, and she saw that if nobody tried to keep things right, they would go terribly wrong: what then could she be there for but to set or keep things right! and if she could do nothing with the big things, she must be the busier with the little things! Besides, who could tell how much the little might have to do with the big things! The whole machine depended on every tiny wheel! She could not order the clouds, but she could keep some weeds from

growing, and then when the rain came, they would not take away the good of it!

The world might be divided into those who let things go, and those who do not; into the forces and facts, the slaves and fancies; those who are always doing something on God's creative lines, and those that are always grumbling and striving against them.

"Another penny for your thought, Walter!" said Molly.

"I am not going to deal with you. This time you would not think it worth a penny! Why are you so inquisitive about my thoughts?"

"I want to know what you meant when you said the other day that thoughts were better than things."

Walter hesitated. The question was an inclined plane leading to unknown depths of argument!

"See, Walter," said Molly, "here is a narcissus —a pheasant's eye: tell me the thought that is better than this thing!"

How troublesome girls were when they asked questions!

"Well," he said, not very logically, "that narcissus has nothing but air around it; my thought of the narcissus has mind around it."

"Then a thought is better than a thing because it has thought round about it?"

"Well, yes."

"Did the thing come there of itself, or did it come of God's thinking?"

"Of God's thinking."

"And God is always the same?"

"Yes."

"Then God's thought is about the narcissus still—and the narcissus is better than your thought of it!"

Walter was silent.

"I should so like to understand!" said Molly. "If you have a thought more beautiful than the narcissus, Walter, I should like to see it! Only if I could see it, it would be a thing, would it not? A thing must be a think before it be a

thing. A thing is a ripe think, and must be better than a think—except it lose something in ripening—which may very well be with man's thoughts, but hardly with God's! I will keep in front of the things, and look through them to the thoughts behind them. I want to understand! If a thing were not a thought first, it would not be worth anything! And every thing has to be thought about, else we don't see what it is! I haven't got it quite!"

Instead of replying, Walter rose, and they walked to the house side by side in silence.

"Could a thought be worth anything that God had never cared to think?" said Molly to herself as they went.

CHAPTER V.

FLUTTERBIES.

MR. COLMAN and his adopted daughter were fast friends—so fast and so near that they could talk together about Walter, though but the adoptive brother of the one, and the real son of the other. Richard had inherited, apparently, his wife's love to Molly, and added it to his own; but their union had its root in the perfect truthfulness of the two. Real approximation, real union must ever be in proportion to mutual truthfulness. It was quite after the usual fashion, therefore, between them, when Molly began to tell her father about the conversation she had had with Walter.

"What first made you think, Molly, of such

a difference between thoughts and things?" asked Mr. Colman.

"I know quite well," answered Molly. "You remember our visit to your old school-friend, Mr. Dobson?"

"Of course; perfectly."

Mr. Dobson was a worthy clergyman, doing his weary best in a rural parish.

"And you remember Mrs. Evermore?"

"Yes."

"You thought her name a funny one; but you said it ought to have been '*Nevermore*,' because she seemed never to get any farther!"

"Come, come, Molly! that won't do! It was you, not I, that said such a spiteful thing!"

"It was true anyway!" answered Molly; "and you agreed with me; so if I said it first, you said it last! Well, I had to study this Mrs. Evermore. From morning to night she was evermore on the hunt after new fancies. She watched for them, stalked them, followed them like a boy with a butterfly-net. She caught

them too, of the sort she wanted, plentifully. But none ever came to anything, so far as I could see. She never did anything with one of them. Whatever she caught had a cage to itself, where it sat on 'the all-alone-stone.' Every other moment, while you and Mr. Dobson were talking, she would cry 'oh! oh! o—o—oh!' and pull out her note-book, which was the cork-box in which she pinned her butterflies. She must have had a whole museum of ideas! The most accidental resemblance between words would suffice to start one: after it she would go, catch it, pin it down, and call it a correspondence. Now and then a very pretty notion would fall to her net, and often a silly one; but all were equally game to her. I found her amusing and interesting for two days, but then began to see she only led nothing nowhere. She was touchy, and jealous, and said things that disgusted me; never did anything for anybody; and though she hunted religious ideas most, never seemed to imagine

they could have anything to do with her life. It was only the fineness of a good thought even that she seemed to prize. She would startle you any moment by an exclamation of delight at some religious fancy or sentimentality, and down it must go in her book, but it went no farther than her book: she was just as common as before, vulgar even, in her judgments of motives and actions. She seemed made for a refined and delicate woman, but not to take the trouble to be what she was made for. You told me, you know, that God makes us, but *we* have to be. She talked about afflictions as one might of manure: by these afflictions, of which she would complain bitterly, she was being fashioned for life eternal! It was all the most dreary, noisome rubbish I had ever come across. I used to lie awake thinking what could ever rouse such a woman to see that she had to *do* something; that man nor woman can become anything without having a hand in the matter. She seemed to expect the spirit of

God to work in her like yeast in flour, although there was not a sign of the dough rising. That is how I came to see that one may have any number of fine thoughts and fancies and be nothing the better, any more than the poor woman in the gospel with her doctors! And when Walter, the next time he came home, talked as he did about thoughts, and quoted Keats to the same effect, as if the finest thing in the universe were a fine thought, I could not bear it, and that made me speak to him as I did."

"You have made it very clear, Molly; and I quite agree with you: thinks are of no use except they be turned into things."

"But perhaps, after all, I may have been unfair to her!" said Molly. "People are so queer! They seem sometimes to be altogether made up of odd bits of different people. There's Aunt Ann now! she would not do a tradesman out of a ha'penny, but she will cheat at backgammon!"

"I know she will, and that is why I never

play with her. It is so seldom she will give herself any recreation, that it makes me sorry to refuse her."

"There is one thing that troubles me," said Molly, after a little pause.

"What is it, my child? I always like to hear something troubles you, for then I know you are going to have something. To miss is the preparation for receiving."

"I can't care—much—about poetry—and Walter says such fine things about it! Walter is no fool!"

"Far from one, I am glad to think!" said Richard laughing. Molly's straight-forward, humble confidence, he found as delightful as amusing.

"It seems to me so silly to scoff at things because you can't go in for them! I sometimes hear people make insulting remarks about music, and music I *know* to be a good and precious and lovely thing. Then I think with myself, they must be in the same condition with regard to

music, that I am in with regard to poetry. So I take care not to be a fool in talking about what I don't know. That I am stupid is no reason for being a fool. Any one whom God has made stupid, has a right to be stupid, but no right to call others fools because they are not stupid."

"I thought you liked poetry, Molly!"

"So I do when you read it, or talk about it. It seems as if you made your way of it grow my way of it. I hear the poetry and feel your feeling of it. But when I try to read it myself, then I don't care for it. Sometimes I turn it into prose, and then I get a hold of it."

"That is about the best and hardest test you could put it to, Molly! But perhaps you have been trying to like what ought not, because it does not deserve to be liked. There is much in the shape of poetry that set in gold and diamonds would be worth nothing."

"I think the difficulty is in myself. Sometimes I am in the fit mood, and other times not. A single line will now and then set something

churning, churning in me, so that I cannot understand myself. It will make me think of music, and sunrise, and the wind, and the song of the lark, and all lovely things. But sometimes prose will serve me the same. And the next minute, perhaps, either of them will be boring me more than I can bear! I know it is my own fault, but——"

"Stop there, Molly! It may sometimes be your own fault, but certainly not always! You are fastidious, little one; and in exquisite things how can one be too fastidious!—When Walter is gone, suppose we read a little more poetry together?"

Richard Colman had made some money in one of the good farming times, but of late had not been increasing his store. But he was a man too genuinely practical to set his mind upon making money.

There are parents who, notwithstanding they have found possession powerless for their own

peace, not the less heap up for the sons coming after, in the weak but unquestioned fancy that possession will do for them what it could not do for their fathers and mothers. Richard was above such stupidity. He had early come to see that the best thing money could do for his son, was to help in preparing him for some work fit to employ what faculty had been given him, in accordance with the tastes also given him. He saw, the last thing a foolish father will see, that the best a father can do, is to enable his son to earn his livelihood in the exercise of a genial and righteous labour. He saw that possession generates artificial and enfeebling wants, overlaying and smothering the God-given necessities of our nature, whence alone issue golden hopes and manly endeavours.

He had therefore been in no haste to draw from his son a declaration of choice as to profession. When every man shall feel in himself a call to this or that, and scarce needs make

a choice, the generations will be well served; but that is not yet, and what Walter was fit for was not yet quite manifest. It was only clear to the father that his son must labour for others with a labour, if possible, whose reflex action should be life to himself. Agriculture seemed inadequate to the full employment of the gifts which, whether from paternal partiality or genuine insight, he believed his son to possess; neither had Walter shown inclination or aptitude for any department of it. All Richard could do, therefore, was to give him such preparation as would be fundamentally available for any superstructure: he might, he hoped, turn to medicine or the law. Partly for financial reasons, he sent him to Edinburgh.

There Walter neither distinguished nor disgraced himself, and developed no inclination to one more than another of the careers open to a young man of education. He read a good deal, however, and showed taste in literature—was indeed regarded by his companions as an authority

in its more imaginative ranges, and specially in matters belonging to verse, having an exceptionally fine ear for its vocal delicacies. This is one of the rarest of gifts; but rarity does not determine value, and Walter greatly over-estimated its relative importance. The consciousness of its presence had far more than a reasonable share in turning his thoughts to literature as a profession.

When his bent became apparent, it troubled his father a little. He knew that to gain the level of excellence at which labour in that calling ensured the merest livelihood, required in most cases a severe struggle; and for such effort he doubted his son's capacity, perceiving in him none of the stoic strength that comes of a high ideal, and can encounter disappointment, even privation, without injury. Other and deeper dangers the good parent did not see. He comforted himself that, even if things went no better than now, he could at least give his son a fair chance of discovering

whether the career would suit him, and support him, if it did suit him, until he should attain the material end of it. Long before Miss Hancock's attack upon his supposed indifference to his son's idleness, he had made up his mind to let him try how far he could go in the way to which he was drawn ; and the next day told his son, to his unspeakable delight, that he was ready to do what lay in his power to further his desire; that his own earthly life was precious to him only for the sake of the children he must by and by leave; and that when he saw him busy, contented, and useful, he would gladly yield his hold upon it.

Walter's imagination took fire at the prospect of realizing all he had longed for but feared to subject to paternal scrutiny, and he was at once eager to go out into the great unhomely world, in the hope of being soon regarded by his peers as the possessor of certain gifts and faculties which had not yet handed in their vouchers to himself. For, as the conscience of

many a man seems never to trouble him until the looks of his neighbours bring their consciences to bear upon his, so the mind of many a man seems never to satisfy him that he has a gift until other men grant his possession of it. Around Walter, nevertheless, the world broke at once into rare bloom. He became like a windy day in the house, vexing his aunt with his loud, foolish gladness, and causing the wise heart of Molly many a sudden, chilly foreboding. She knew him better than his father knew him. His father had not played whole days with him, and day after day! She knew that happiness made him feel strong for anything, but that his happiness was easily dashed, and he was then a rain-wet, wind-beaten butterfly. He had no soul for bad weather. He could not therefore be kept in wadding, however! He must have his trial; must, in one way or another, encounter life, and disclose what amount of the real might be in him—what little, but enlargeable claim he might have to manhood!

CHAPTER VI.

FROM HOME.

EVERY morning, a man may say,
Calls him up with a new birth-day;
Every day is a little life,
Sunny with love, stormy with strife;
Every night is a little death,
From which too soon he awakeneth—

—as Walter himself wrote, not then knowing half that the words meant. As with the skirt of her mantle the dark wipes out the day, so with her sleep the night makes a man fresh for the new day's journey. If it were not for sleep, the world could not go on. To feel the mystery of day and night, to gaze into the far receding spaces of their marvel, is more than to know all the combinations of chemistry. A little wonder is worth tons of knowledge.

But to Walter the new day did not come as a call to new life in the world of will and action, but only as the harbinger of a bliss borne hitherward on the wind of the world. Was he not going forth as a Titanic child to become a great man amongst great men! Who would be strong among the weak! who would be great among the small! He did not suspect in himself what Molly saw, or at least suspected in him. When a man is hopeful, he feels strong, and can work. The thoughts come and the pen runs. Were he always at his best, what might not a man do! But not many can determine their moods; and none, be they poets or economists, can any more secure the conditions of faculty than they can create the faculty. When the mood changes and hope departs, and the inward atmosphere is grown damp and dismal, there may be whose imagination will yet respond to their call; but let some certain kind of illness come, and every one must lose his power; his creature-condition

will assert itself; he is compelled to discover that we did not create ourselves, neither live by ourselves.

Walter loved his father, but did not mind leaving him; he loved Molly, but did not mind leaving her; and we cannot blame him if he was glad to escape from his aunt. If people are not lovable, it takes a saint to love them, or at least one who is not afraid of them. Yet it was with a sense of somewhat dreary though welcome liberty, that Walter found himself, but for the young man his father had befriended, alone in London. With his help he found a humble lodging not far from the British Museum, to the neighbourhood of which his love of books led him; and for a time, feeling no necessity for immediate effort, he gave himself to the study of certain departments of our literature not hitherto within his easy reach. In the evening he would write, or accompany his new friend to some lecture or amusement; and so the weeks passed. To earn something seemed but a slowly

approaching necessity, and the weeks grew to months. He was never idle, for his tastes were strong, and he had delight in his pen ; but so sensitive was his social skin, partly from the licking of his aunt's dry, feline tongue, that he shrank from submitting anything he wrote to Harold Sullivan, who, a man of firmer and more world-capable stuff than he, would at least have shown him how things which the author saw and judged from the inner side of the web, must appear on the other side. There are few weavers of thought capable of turning round the web and contemplating with unprejudiced regard the side of it about to be offered to the world, so as to perceive how it will look to eyes alien to its genesis.

It would be to repeat a story often told, to relate how he sent poem after poem, now to this now to that periodical, with the same result —that he never heard of them again. The verses over which he had laboured with delight, in the crimson glory they reflected on the heart

whence they issued, were nothing in any eyes to which he submitted them. In truth, except for a good line here and there, they were by no means on the outer side what they looked to him on the inner. He read them in the light of the feeling in which he had written them; whoever else read them had not this light to interpret them by, had no correspondent mood ready to receive them. It was the business of the verse itself, by witchery of sound and magic of phrase, to rouse receptive mood: of this it was incapable. A course of reading in the first attempts of such as rose after to well merited distinction, might reveal not a few things—among the rest, their frequent poverty. Much mere babbling often issues before worthy speech begins. There was nothing in Walter's mind to be put in form except a few of the vague lovely sensations belonging to a poetic temperament. And as he grew more and more of a reader, his inspiration came more and more from what he read, less and less from knowledge of his own

heart or the hearts of others. He had no revelation to give. He had, like most of our preachers, set out to run before he could walk, begun to cry aloud before he had any truth to utter; to teach, or at least to interest others, before he was himself interested in others. Now and then, indeed, especially when some fading joy of childhood gleamed up, words would come unbidden, and he would throw off a song destitute neither of feeling nor music; but this kind of thing he scarcely valued, for it seemed to cost him nothing.

He comforted himself by concluding that his work was of a kind too original to be at once recognized by dulled and sated editors; that he must labour on and keep sending.

"Why do you not write something?" his friend would say; and he would answer that his time was not come.

The friends he made were not many. Instinctively he shrank from what was coarse, feeling it destructive to every finer element.

How could he write of beauty, if, false to beauty, he had but for a moment turned to the unclean? But he was not satisfied with himself: he had done nothing, even in his own eyes, while the recognition of the world was lacking!

He was in no anxiety, for he did not imagine it of consequence to his father whether he began a little sooner or a little later to earn. The governor knew, he said to himself, that to earn ought not to be a man's first object in life, even when necessity compelled him to make it first in order of time, which was not the case with him! But he did not ask himself whether he had substituted a better object. A greater man than himself, he reflected—no less a man, indeed, than Milton—had never earned a dinner till after he was thirty years of age! He did not consider how and to what ends Milton had all the time been diligent. He was no student yet of men's lives; he was interested almost only in their imaginations, and not half fastidious enough as to whether those imaginations ran

upon the rails of truth or not. He was rapidly filling his mind with the good and bad of the literature of his country, but he had not yet gone far in distinguishing between the bad and the good in it. Books were to him the geological deposits of literary forces. He pursued his acquaintance with them to nourish the literary faculty in himself. They afforded him atmosphere and stimulant, and store of matter. He was in full training for the profession that cultivates literature for and upon literature, and neither for nor upon truth.

CHAPTER VII

A CHANGE.

A BIG stone fell suddenly into the smooth pool of Walter's conditions. A letter from his father brought the news that the bank where he had deposited his savings had proved but a swollen mushroom. He had lost all.

"Indeed, my son," wrote the sorrowful Richard, "I do not see how with honesty to send you a shilling more! If you have exhausted the proceeds of my last cheque, and cannot earn a sufficiency, come home. Thank God, the land yet remains!—so long as I can pay the rent."

In the heart of Walter woke a new impulse. He drew himself up for combat and endurance.

I am afraid he did not feel much trouble for his father's trouble, but he would have scorned adding to it. He wrote at once that he must not think of him in the affair; he would do very well. It was not a comforting letter exactly, but it showed courage, and his father was glad.

He set himself to find employment in some one of the mechanical departments of literature —the only region in which he could think to do anything. When the architect comes to necessity, it is well if stones are near, and the mason's hammer: if he be not the better mason that he is an architect, alas for his architecture! Walter was nothing yet, however, neither architect nor mason, when the stern hand of necessity laid hold of him. But it is a fine thing for any man to be compelled to work. It is the first divine decree, issuing from love and help. How would it have been with Adam and Eve had they been left to plenty and idleness, the voice of God no more heard in the cool of the day?

But the search for work was a difficult and disheartening task. He who has encountered it, however, has had an experience whose value far more than equals its unpleasantness. A man out of work needs the God that cares for the sparrows, as much as the man whose heart is torn with ingratitude, or crushed under a secret crime. Walter went hither and thither, communicated his quest to each of his few acquaintances, procured introductions, and even without any applied to some who might have employment to bestow, putting so much pride in his pockets that, had it been a solid, they must have bulged in unsightly fashion, and walked till worn with weariness, giving good proof that he was no fool, but had the right stuff in him. He neither yielded to false fastidiousness, nor relaxed effort because of disappointment—not even when disappointment became the very atmosphere of his consciousness. To the father it would have been the worst of his loss to see his son wiping the sweat and dust from the forehead

his mother had been so motherly proud of, and hear the heavy sigh with which he would sink in the not too easy chair that was all his haven after the tossing of the day's weary ground-swell. He did not rise quite above self-pity; he thought he was hardly dealt with; but so long as he did not respond to the foolish and weakening sentiment by relaxation of effort, it could not do him much harm; he would soon grow out of it, and learn to despise it. What one man has borne, why should not another bear? Why should it be unfit for him any more than the other? Certainly he who has never borne has yet to bear. The new experience is awaiting every member of the Dives clan. Walter wore out his shoes, and could not buy another pair; his clothes grew shabby, and he must wear them: it was no small part of his suffering, to have to show himself in a guise which made him so unlike the Walter he felt. But he did not let his father know even a small part of what he confronted.

He had never drawn close to his father; they had come to no spiritual contact. Walter, the gentleman, saw in Richard the farmer. He knew him an honourable man, and in a way honoured him; but he would have been dissatisfied with him in such society to which he considered himself belonging. It is a sore thing for a father, when he has shoved his son up a craggy steep, to see him walk away without looking behind. Walter felt a difference between them.

He had to give up his lodging. Sullivan took him into his, and shared his bed with him—doing all he could in return for his father's kindness.

Where now was Walter's poetry? Naturally, vanished. He was man enough to work, but not man enough to continue a poet. *His* poetry!—how could such a jade stand the spur!

But to bestir himself was better than to make verses; and indeed of all the labours for a livelihood in which a man may cultivate verse, that

of literature is the last he should choose. Compare the literary efforts of Burns with the songs he wrote when home from his plough!

Walter's hope had begun to faint outright, when Sullivan came in one evening as he lay on the floor, and told him that the editor of a new periodical, whom he had met at a friend's house, would make a place for him. The remuneration could suffice only to a grinding economy, but it was bread!—more, it was work, and an opening to possibilities! Walter felt himself equal to any endurance short of incapacitating hunger, and gladly accepted the offer. His duty was the merest agglomeration; but even in that he might show faculty, and who could tell what might follow! It was wearisome but not arduous, and above all, it left him time!

CHAPTER VIII.

AT WORK.

WALTER found that compulsory employment, while taking from his time for genial labour, quickened his desire after it, increased his faculty for it, and made him more careful of his precious hours of leisure. Life, too, had now an interest greater than before; and almost as soon as anxiety gave place, the impulse to utterance began again to urge him. What this impulse is, who can define, or who can trace its origin? The result of it in Walter's case was ordered words, or, conventionally, poetry. Seldom is such a result of any value, but the process is for the man invaluable: it remained to be seen whether in Walter it was for others as well as himself.

He became rapidly capable of better work. His duty was drudgery, but drudgery well encountered will reveal itself as of potent and precious reaction, both intellectual and moral. One incapable of drudgery cannot be capable of the finest work. Many a man may do many things well, and be far from reception into the most ancient guild of workers.

Walter laboured with conscience and diligence, and brought his good taste to tell on the quality of his drudgery. He is a contemptible workman who thinks of his claims before his duties, of his poor wages instead of his undertaken work. There was a strong sense of fairness in Walter; he saw the meanness of pocketing the poorest wages without giving good work in return; he saw that its own badness, and nothing else, makes any work mean—and the workman with it. That he believed himself capable of higher work was the worst of reasons for not giving money's worth for his money. That a thing is of little value is a poor excuse for giving bad measure

of it. Walter carried his hod full, and was a man.

Sullivan was mainly employed in writing the reviews of "current literature." One evening he brought Walter a book of some pretension, told him he was hard pressed, and begged him to write a notice of it. Walter, glad of the opportunity of both serving his friend and trying his own hand, set himself at once to read the book. The moment he thus took the attitude of a reviewer, he found the paragraphs begin, like potatoes, to sprout, and generate other paragraphs. Between agreeing and disagreeing he had soon far more than enough to say, and sought his table, as a workman his bench.

To many people who think, writing is the greatest of bores; but Walter enjoyed it, even to the mechanical part of the operation. Heedless of the length of his article, he wrote until long after midnight, and next morning handed the result to his friend. He burst out laughing.

"Here's a paper for a quarterly!" he cried.

"Man, it is almost as long as the book itself! This will never do! The world has neither time, space, money, nor brains for so much! But I will take it, and see what can be done with it."

About a sixth part of it was printed. In that sixth Walter could not recognize his hand; neither could he have gathered from it any idea of the book.

A few days after, Harold brought him a batch of books to review, taking care, however, to limit him to an average length for each. Walter entered thus upon a short apprenticeship, the end of which was that, a vacancy happening to occur, he was placed on "the staff" of the journal, to aid in reviewing the books sent by their publishers. His income was considerably augmented, but the work was harder, and required more of his time.

From the first he was troubled to find how much more honesty demanded than pay made possible. He had not learned this while merely

supplementing the labour of his friend, and taking his time. But now he became aware that to make acquaintance with a book, and pass upon it a justifiable judgment, required at least four times the attention he could afford it and live. Many, however, he could knock off without compunction, regarding them as too slight to deserve attention: "indifferent honest," he was not so sensitive in justice as to reflect that the poorest thing has a right to fair play; that, free to say nothing, you must, if you speak, say the truth of the meanest. But Walter had not yet sunk to believe there can be *necessity* for doing wrong. The world is divided, very unequally, into those that think a man cannot avoid, and those who believe he *must* avoid doing wrong. Those live in fear of death; these set death in one eye and right in the other.

His first important review, Walter was compelled to print without having finished it. The next he worked at harder, and finished, but with less deliberation. He grew more and more

careless toward the books he counted of little consequence, while he imagined himself growing more and more capable of getting at the heart of a book by skimming its pages. If to skim be ever a true faculty, it must come of long experience in the art of reading, and is not possible to a beginner. To skim and judge, is to wake from a doze and give the charge to a jury.

Writing more and more smartly, he found the usual difficulty in abstaining from a smartness which was unjust because irrelevant.

So far as his employers were concerned, Walter did his duty, but forgot that, apart from his obligation to the mere and paramount truth, it was from the books he reviewed—good, bad, or indifferent, whichever they were—that he drew the food he ate and the clothes that covered him.

His talent was increasingly recognized by the editors of the newspaper, and they began to put other, and what they counted more important

work in his way, intrusting him with the discussion of certain social questions of the day, in regard to which, like many another youth of small experience, he found it the easier to give a confident opinion that his experience was so small. In general he wrote logically, and, which is rarer, was even capable of being made to see where his logic was wrong. But his premises were much too scanty. What he took for granted was very often by no means granted. It mattered little to editors or owners, however, so long as he wrote lucidly, sparklingly, "crisply," leaving those who read willing to read more from the same pen.

CHAPTER IX.

FLATTERY.

WITHIN a year Walter began to be known—to the profession, at least—as a promising writer; and was already, to more than a few, personally known as a very agreeable, gentlemanly fellow, so that in the following season he had a good many invitations. It was by nothing beyond the ephemeral that he was known; but may not the man who has invented a good umbrella one day build a good palace?

His acquaintance was considerably varied, but of the social terraces above the professional, he knew for a time nothing.

One evening, however, he happened to meet, and was presented to lady Tremaine: she had

asked to have the refined-looking young man, of whom she had just heard as one of the principal writers in the *Field Battery*, introduced to her. She was a matronly, handsome woman, with cordial manners and a cold eye; frank, easy, confident, unassuming. Under the shield of her position, she would walk straight up to any subject, and speak her mind of it plainly. It was more than easy to become acquainted with her when she chose.

The company was not a large one, and they soon found themselves alone in a quiet corner.

"You are a celebrated literary man, Mr. Colman, they tell me!" said lady Tremaine.

"Not in the least," answered Walter. "I am but a poor hack."

"It is well to be modest; but I am not bound to take your description of yourself. Your class at least is in a fair way to take the lead!"

"In what, pray?"

"In politics, in society, in everything."

"Your ladyship cannot think it desirable."

"I do not pretend to desire it. I am not false to my own people. But the fact remains that you are coming to the front, and we are falling behind. And the sooner you get to the front, the better it will be for the world, and for us too."

"I cannot say I understand you."

"I will tell you why. There are now no fewer than three aristocracies. There is one of rank, and one of brains. I belong to the one, you to the other. But there is a third."

"If you recognize the rich as an aristocracy, you must allow me to differ from you—very much!"

"Naturally. I quite agree with you. But what can your opinion and mine avail against the rising popular tide! All the old families are melting away, swallowed by the *nouveaux riches*. I should not mind, or at least I should feel it in me to submit with a good grace, if we were pushed from our stools by a new aristocracy of literature and science, but I do rebel against the social *régime* which is every day more

strongly asserting itself. All the gradations are fast disappearing; the palisades of good manners, dignity, and respect, are vanishing with the hedges; the country is positively inundated with slang and vulgarity—all from the ill-breeding, presumption, and self-satisfaction of new people."

Walter felt tempted to ask whether it was not the fault of the existent aristocracy in receiving and flattering them; whether it could not protect society if it would; whether in truth the aristocracy did not love, even honour money as much as they; but he was silent.

As if she read his thought, lady Tremaine resumed:—

"The plague of it is that younger sons must live! Money they must have!—and there's the gate off the hinges! The best, and indeed the only thing to help is, that the two other aristocracies make common cause to keep the rich in their proper place."

It was not a very subtle flattery, but Walter was pleased. The lady saw she had so far

gained her end, for she had an end in view, and changed the subject.

"You go out of an evening, I see!" she said at length. "I am glad. Some authors will not."

"I do when I can. The evening, however, to one who—who——"

"—has an eye on posterity! Of course! It is gold and diamonds! How silly all our pursuits must appear in your eyes! But I hope you will make an exception in my favour!"

"I shall be most happy," responded Walter cordially.

"I will not ask you to come and be absorbed in a crowd—not the first time at least! Could you not manage to come and see me in the morning?"

"I am at your ladyship's service," replied Walter.

"Then come—let me see!—the day after to-morrow—about five o'clock.—17, Goodrich-square."

Walter could not but be flattered that lady

Tremaine was so evidently pleased with him. She called his profession an aristocracy too! therefore she was not patronizing him, but receiving him on the same social level! We cannot blame him for the inexperience which allowed him to hold his head a little higher as he walked home.

There was little danger of his forgetting the appointment. Lady Tremaine received him in what she called her growlery, with cordiality. By and by she led the way toward literature, and after they had talked of several new books—

"We are not in this house altogether strange," she said, "to your profession. My daughter Lufa is an authoress in her way. You, of course, never heard of her, but it is twelve months since her volume of verse came out."

Surely Walter had, somewhere about that time, when helping his friend Sullivan, seen a small ornate volume of verses, with a strange name like that on the title-page! Whether

he had written a notice of it he could not remember.

"It was exceedingly well received—for a first, of course! Lufa hardly thought so herself, but I told her what could she expect, altogether unknown as she was. Tell me honestly, Mr. Colman, is there not quite as much jealousy in your profession as in any other?"

Walter allowed it was not immaculate in respect of envy and evil speaking.

"You have so much opportunity for revenge, you see!" said lady Tremaine; "—and such a coat of darkness for protection! With a few strokes of the pen a man may ruin his rival!"

"Scarcely that!" returned Walter. "If a book be a good book, the worst of us cannot do it much harm; nor do I believe there are more than a few in the profession who would condescend to give a false opinion upon the work of a rival; though doubtless personal feeling may pervert the judgment."

"That, of course," returned the lady, "is but human! You cannot deny, however, that authors occasionally make furious assaults on each other!"

"Authors ought not to be reviewers," replied Walter. "I fancy most reviewers avoid the work of an acquaintance even, not to say a friend or enemy."

The door opened, and what seemed to Walter as lovely a face as could ever have dawned on the world, peeped in, and would have withdrawn.

"Lufa," said lady Tremaine, "you need not go away. Mr. Colman and I have no secrets. Come and be introduced to him."

She entered—a small, pale creature, below the middle height, with the daintiest figure, and childlike eyes of dark blue, very clear, and—must I say it?—for the occasion "worn" wide. Her hair was brown, on the side of black, divided in the middle, and gathered behind in a great mass. Her dress was something white,

with a shimmer of red about it, and a blush-rose in the front. She greeted Walter in the simplest, friendliest way, holding out her tiny hand very frankly. Her features were no smaller than for her size they ought to be, in themselves perfect, Walter thought, and in harmony with her whole being and carriage. Her manner was a gentle, unassuming assurance —almost as if they knew each other, but had not met for some time. Walter felt some ancient primeval bond between them—dim, but indubitable.

The mother withdrew to her writing-table, and began to write, now and then throwing in a word as they talked. Lady Lufa seemed pleased with her new acquaintance; Walter was bewitched. Bewitchment I take to be the approach of the real to our ideal. Perhaps upon that, however, depends even the comforting or the restful. In the heart of every one lies the necessity for homeliest intercourse with the perfectly lovely; we are made for it. Yet

so far are we in ourselves from the ideal, which no man can come near until absolutely devoted to its quest, that we continually take that for sufficing which is a little beyond.

"I think, Mr. Colman, I have seen something of yours!—You do put your name to what you write?" said lady Lufa.

"Not always," replied Walter.

"I think the song must have been yours!"

Walter had, just then, for the first time published a thing of his own. That it should have arrested the eye of this lovely creature! He acknowledged that he had printed a trifle in *The Observatory*.

"I was *charmed* with it!" said the girl, the word charmingly drawled.

"The merest trifle!" remarked Walter. "It cost me nothing."

He meant what he said, unwilling to be judged by such a slight thing.

"That is the beauty of it!" she answered. "Your song left your soul as the thrush's leaves

his throat! Should we prize the thrush's more if we came upon him practising it?"

Walter laughed.

"But we are not meant to sing like the birds!"

"That you could write such a song without effort, shows you to possess the bird-gift of spontaneity."

Walter was surprised at her talk, and willing to believe it profound.

"The will and the deed in one may be the highest art!" he said. "I hardly know."

"May I write music to it?" asked lady Lufa, with upward glance, sweet smile, and gently apologetic look.

"I am delighted you should think of doing so. It is more than it deserves!" answered Walter. "My only condition is, that you will let me hear it."

"That you have a right to. Besides, I dared not publish it without knowing you liked it."

"Thank you so much! To hear you sing it

will let me know at once whether the song itself be genuine."

"No, no! I may fail in my part, and yours be all I take it to be. But I shall not fail. It holds me too fast for that!"

"Then I may hope for a summons?" said Walter, rising.

"Before long. One cannot order the mood, you know!"

CHAPTER X.

THE ROUND OF THE WORLD.

BIRDS when they leave the nest, carry, I presume, their hearts with them; not a few humans leave their hearts behind them—too often, alas! to be sent for afterwards. The whole round of the world, many a cloudrack on the ridge of it, and many a mist on the top of that, rises between them and the eyes and hearts which gave their very life that they might live. Some as they approach middle age, some only when they are old, wake up to understand that they have parents. To some the perception comes with their children; to others with the pang of seeing them walk away light-hearted out into the world, as they themselves turned their backs on their parents: they had been all

their own, and now they have done with them! Less or more have we not all thus taken our journey into a far country? But many a man of sixty is more of a son to the father gone from the earth, than he was while under his roof. What a disintegrated mass were the world, what a lump of half-baked brick, if death were indeed the end of affection! if there were no chance more of setting right what was so wrong in the loveliest relations! How gladly would many a son who once thought it a weariness to serve his parents, minister now to their lightest need! and in the boundless eternity is there no help?

Walter was not a prodigal; he was a well-behaved youth. He was *only* proud, *only* thought much of himself; was *only* pharisaical, not hypocritical; was *only* neglectful of those nearest him, always polite to those comparatively nothing to him! Compassionate and generous to necessity, he let his father and his sister-cousin starve for the only real food a man can give, that is, *himself*. As to him who thought his

very thoughts into him, he heeded him not at all, or mocked him by merest ceremony. There are who refuse God the draught of water he desires, on the ground that their vessel is not fit for him to drink from: Walter thought his too good to fill with the water fit for God to drink.

He had the feeling, far from worded, not even formed, but certainly in him, that he was a superior man to his father. But it is a fundamental necessity of the kingdom of heaven, impossible as it must seem to all outside it, that each shall count other better than himself; it is the natural condition of the man God made, in relation to the other men God has made. Man is made, not to contemplate himself, but to behold in others the beauty of the Father. A man who lives to meditate upon and worship himself, is in the slime of hell. Walter knew his father a reading man, but because he had not been to a university, placed no value on his reading. Yet this father was a man who had intercourse with high countries, intercourse

in which his son would not have perceived the presence of an idea.

In like manner, Richard's carriage of mind, and the expression of the same in his modes and behaviour, must have been far other than objectionable to the ushers of those high countries; his was a certain quiet, simple, direct way, reminding one of Nathanael, in whom was no guile. In another man Walter would have called it bucolic; in his father he shut his eyes to it as well as he could, and was ashamed of it. He would scarcely, in his circle, be regarded as a gentleman! he would look odd! He therefore had not encouraged the idea of his coming to see him. He was not satisfied with the father by whom the Father of fathers had sent him into the world! But Richard was the truest of gentlemen even in his outward carriage, for he was not only courteous and humble, but that rare thing —natural; and the natural, be it old as the Greek must be beautiful. The natural dwells

deep, and is not the careless, any more than the studied or assumed.

Walter loved his father, but the root of his love did not go deep enough to send aloft a fine flower: deep in is high out. He seldom wrote, and wrote briefly. He did not make a confidant of his father. He did not even tell him what he was doing, or what he hoped to do. He might mention a success, but of hopes, fears, aspirations, or defeats, of thoughts or desires, he said nothing. As to his theories, he never imagined his father entering into such things as occupied *his* mind! The ordinary young man takes it for granted that he and the world are far ahead of "the governor;" the father may have left behind him, as nebulæ sinking below the horizon of youth, questions the world is but just waking to put.

The blame, however, may lie in part at the parent's door. The hearts of the fathers need turning to the children, as much as the hearts of the children need turning to the fathers. Few

men open up to their children; and where a man does not, the schism, the separation begins with him, for all his love be deep and true. That it is unmanly to show one's feelings, is a superstition prevalent with all English-speaking people. Now, wherever feeling means weakness, falsehood, or excitement, it ought not merely not to be shown, but not to exist; but for a man to hide from his son his loving and his loathing, is to refuse him the divinest fashion of teaching. Richard read the best things, and loved best the best writers: never once had he read a poem with his son, or talked to him about any poet! If Walter had even suspected his father's insight into certain things, he would have loved him more. Closely bound as they were, neither knew the other. Each would have been astonished at what he might have found in the other. The father might have discovered many handles by which to lay hold of his son; the son might have seen the lamp bright in his father's chamber which he was but trimming in his.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SONG.

At length came the summons from lady Lufa to hear her music to his verses.

It was not much of a song, neither did he think it was.

Mist and vapour and cloud
  Filled the earth and the air!
My heart was wrapt in a shroud,
  And death was everywhere.

The sun went silently down
  To his rest in the unseen wave;
But my heart, in its purple and crown,
  Lay already in its grave.

For a cloud had darkened the brow
  Of the lady who is my queen;
I had been a monarch, but now
  All things had only been!

I sprang from the couch of death :
  Who called my soul? Who spake?
No sound! no answer! no breath!
  Yet my soul was wide awake!

And my heart began to blunder
  Into rhythmic pulse the while ;
I turned—away was the wonder—
  My queen had begun to smile!

Outbrake the sun in the west!
  Outlaughed the crested sea!
And my heart was alive in my breast
  With light, and love, and thee!

There was a little music in the verses, and they had a meaning—though not a very new or valuable one.

He went in the morning—the real, not the conventional—and was shown into the drawing-room, his heart beating with expectation. Lady Lufa was alone, and already at the piano. She was in a grey stuff with red rosebuds, and looked as simple as any country parson's daughter. She gave him no greeting beyond a little nod, at once struck a chord or two, and began to sing.

Walter was charmed. The singing, and the

song through the singing, altogether exceeded his expectation. He had feared he should not be able to laud heartily, for he had not lost his desire to be truthful—but she was an artist! There was indeed nothing original in her music; it was mainly a reconstruction of common phrases afloat in the musical atmosphere; but she managed the slight dramatic element in the lyric with taste and skill, following tone and sentiment with chord and inflection; so that the music was worthy of the verses—which is not saying very much for either; while the expression the girl threw into the song went to the heart of the youth, and made him foolish.

She ceased; he was silent for a moment, then fervent in thanks and admiration.

"The verses are mine no more," he said. "I shall care for them now!"

"You won't mind if I publish them with the music?"

"I shall feel more honoured than I dare tell

you. But how *am* I to go to my work after this taste of paradise! It was too cruel of you, lady Lufa, to make me come in the morning!"

"I am very sorry!"

"Will you grant me one favour to make up?"

"Yes."

"Never to sing the song to any one when I am present. I could not bear it."

"I promise," she answered, looking up in his face with a glance of sympathetic consciousness.

There was an acknowledged secret between them, and Walter hugged it.

"I gave you a frozen bird," he said, "and you have warmed it, and made it soar and sing."

"Thank you; a very pretty compliment!" she answered—and there was a moment's silence.

"I am so glad we know each other!" she resumed. "You could help me so much if you would! Next time you come, you must

tell me something about those old French rimes that have come into fashion of late! They say a pretty thing so much more prettily for their quaint, antique, courtly liberty! The *triolet* now—how deliciously impertinent it is!—Is it not?"

Walter knew nothing about the old French modes of versifying; and, unwilling to place himself at a disadvantage, made an evasive reply, and went. But when at length he reached home, it was with several ancient volumes, among the rest *Clement Marot*, in pockets and hands. Ere an hour was over, he was in delight with the variety of dainty modes in which, by shape and sound, a very pretty French something was carved out of nothing at all. Their fantastic surprises, the ring of their bell-like returns upon themselves, their music of triangle and cymbal, gave him quite a new pleasure. In some of them poetry seemed to approach the nearest possible to bird-song—to unconscious seeming through most conscious

art, imitating the carelessness and impromptu of warblings as old as the existence of birds, and as new as every fresh individual joy ; for each new generation grows its own feathers, and sings its own song, yet always the feathers of its kind, and the song of its kind.

The same night he sent her the following *triolet.*

Oh, why is the moon
Awake when thou sleepest?
To the nightingale's tune,
Why is the moon
Making a noon,
When night is the deepest?
Why is the moon
Awake when thou sleepest?

In the evening came a little note, with a coronet on the paper, but neither date nor signature :—

"Perfectly delicious! How *can* such a little gem hold so much colour? Thank you a thousand times!"

CHAPTER XII.

LOVE.

By this Walter was in love with lady Lufa. He said as much to himself, at least; and in truth he was almost possessed with her. Every thought that rose in his mind began at once to drift toward her. Every hour of the day had a rose-tinge from the dress in which he first saw her.

One might write a long essay on this they call *love*, and yet contribute little to the understanding of it in the individual case. Its kind is to be interpreted after the kind of person who loves. There are as many hues and shades, not to say forms and constructions of love, as there are human countenances, human hearts,

human judgments and schemes of life. Walter had not been an impressionable youth, because he had an imagination which both made him fastidious, and stood him in stead of falling in love. When a man can give form to the things that move in him, he is less driven to fall in love. But now Walter saw everything through a window, and the window was the face of Lufa. His thinking was always done in the presence and light of that window. She seemed an intrinsic component of every one of his mental operations. In every beauty and attraction of life he saw her. He was possessed by her, almost as some are possessed by evil spirits. And to be possessed, even by a human being, may be to take refuge in the tombs, there to cry, and cut one's self with fierce thoughts.

But not yet was Walter troubled. He lived in love's eternal present, and did not look forward. Even jealousy had not yet begun to show itself in any shape. He was not in lady Lufa's set, and therefore not much drawn to

conjecture what might be going on. In the glamour of literary ambition, he took for granted that lady Lufa allotted his world a higher orbit than that of her social life, and prized most the pleasures they had in common, which so few were capable of sharing.

She had indeed in her own circle never found one who knew more of the refinements of verse than a school-girl does of Beethoven; and it was a great satisfaction to her to know one who not merely recognized her proficiency, but could guide her farther into the depths of an art which every one thinks he understands, and only one here and there does. It was therefore a real welcome she was able to give him when they met, as they did again and again during the season. How much she cared for him, how much she would have been glad to do for him, my reader shall judge for himself. I think she cared for him very nearly as much as for a dress made to her liking. An injustice from him would have brought the tears into her eyes.

A poem he disapproved of she would have thrown aside, *perhaps* into the fire.

She did not, however, submit much of her work to his judgment. She was afraid of what might put her out of heart with it. Before making his acquaintance, she had a fresh volume, a more ambitious one, well on its way, but fearing lack of his praise, had said nothing to him about it. And besides this diffidence, she did not wish to *appear* to solicit from him a good review. She might cast herself on his mercy, but it should not be confessedly. She had pride though not conscience in the matter. The mother was capable of begging, not the daughter. She might use fascination, but never entreaty; that would be to degrade herself!

Walter had, of course, taken a second look at her volume. It did not reveal that he had said of it what was not true; but he did see that, had he been anxious to praise, he might have found passages to commend, or in which, at least, he could have pointed out merit. But no

allusion was made to the book, on the one hand because lady Lufa was aware he had written the review, and on the other because Walter did not wish to give his opinion of it. He placed it in the category of first works; and, knowing how poor those of afterwards distinguished writers may be, it did not annoy him that one who could talk so well should have written such rubbish.

Lady Lufa had indeed a craze for composition, and the indulgence of it was encouraged by her facility. There was no reason in heaven, earth, or the other place, why what she wrote should see the light, for it had little to do with light of any sort. "Autumn Leaves" had had no such reception as her mother would have Walter believe. Lady Tremaine was one of those good mothers who, like "good churchmen," will wrong any other to get for their own. She had paid her court to Walter that she might gain a reviewer who would yield her daughter what she called justice: for justice-

sake she would curry favour! A half merry, half retaliative humour in Lufa, may have wrought for revenge by making Walter fall in love with her; at all events it was a consolation to her wounded vanity when she saw him in love with her; but it was chiefly in the hope of a "good" review of her next book that she cultivated his acquaintance, and now she felt sure of her end.

Most people liked Walter, even when they laughed at his simplicity, for it was the simplicity of a generous nature; we cannot therefore wonder if he was too confident, and from lady Lufa's behaviour presumed to think she looked upon him as worthy of a growing privilege. If she regarded literature as she professed to regard it, he had but to distinguish himself, he thought, to be more acceptable than wealth or nobility could have made him. As to material possibilities, the youth never thought of them; a worshipper does not meditate how to feed his goddess! Lady Lufa was his

universe and everything in it—a small universe and scantily furnished for a human soul, had she been the prime of women! He scarcely thought of his home now, or of the father who made it home. As to God, it is hardly a question whether he had ever thought of him. For can that be called thinking of another, which is the mere passing of a name through the mind, without one following thought of relation or duty? Many think it a horrible thing to say there is no God, who never think how much worse a thing it is not to heed him. If God be not worth minding, what great ruin can it be to imagine his non-existence?

What, then, had Walter made of it by leaving home? He had almost forgotten his father; had learned to be at home in London; had passed many judgments, some of them more or less just, all of them more or less unjust; had printed enough for a volume of little better than truisms concerning life, society, fashion,

dress, etc., etc.; had published two or three rather nice songs, and had a volume of poems almost ready; had kept himself the greater part of the time, and had fallen in love with an earl's daughter.

"Everybody is gone," said lady Lufa, "and we are going to-morrow."

"To-day," he rejoined, "London is full; to-morrow it will be a desert!"

She looked up at him, and did not seem glad.

"I have enjoyed the season so much!" she said.

He thought her lip trembled.

"But you will come and see us at Comberidge, will you not?" she added.

"Do you think your mother will ask me?" he said.

"I think she will. I do so want to show you our library! And I have so many things to ask you!"

"I am your slave, the jin of your lamp."

"I would I had such a lamp as would call you!"

"It will need no lamp to make me come."

Lamps to call moths are plenty, and Lufa was herself one.

CHAPTER XIII.

"HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS?"

LONDON was very hot, very dusty, and as dreary as Walter had anticipated. When Lufa went, the moon went out of the heavens, the stars chose banishment with their mistress, and only the bright, labour-urging sun was left.

He might now take a holiday when he pleased, and he had money enough in hand. His father wanted him to pay them a visit; but what if an invitation to Comberidge should arrive! Home was a great way in the other direction! And then it would be so dull! He would of course be glad to see his father! He ought to go! He was owing there! What was he to do? He would not willingly even

run the risk of losing his delight, for the sake of his first, best, truest earthly friend!

But he must take his holiday now, in the slack of the London year, and the heat was great! He need not be all day with his father, and the thought of Lufa would be entrancing in the wide solitudes of the moor! Molly he scarce thought of, and his aunt was to be forgotten. He would go for a few days, he said, thus keeping the door open for a speedy departure.

Just before he left, the invitation did arrive. He would have a week to dream about it under the old roof!

His heart warmed a little as he approached his home. Certain memories came to meet him. The thought of his mother was in the air. How long it was since she had spoken to him! He remembered her and his father watching by his bed while he tossed in a misery of which he could even now recall the prevailing delirious fancies. He remembered his mother's last rebuke—for insolence to a servant; remem-

bered her last embrace, her last words; and his heart turned tenderly to his father. Yet when he entered the house and faced the old surroundings, an unexpected gloom overclouded him. Had he been heart-free and humble, they would have been full of delight for him; but pride had been busy in his soul. Its home was in higher planes! How many essential refinements, as he foolishly and vulgarly counted them, were lacking here! What would lady Lufa think of his *entourage?* Did it well become one of the second aristocracy? He had been gradually filling with a sense of importance—which had no being except in his own brain; and the notion took the meanest of mean forms—that of looking down on his own history. He was too much of a gentleman still not to repress the show of the feeling, but its mere presence caused a sense of alienation between him and his. When the first greetings were over, nothing came readily to follow. The wave had broken on the shore, and there was not another behind

it. Things did not, however, go badly; for the father when disappointed always tried to account for everything to the advantage of the other; and on his part, Walter did his best to respond to his father's love-courtesy. He was not of such as keep no rule over themselves; not willingly would he allow discomfort to wake temper; he did not brood over defect in those he loved; but it did comfort him that he was so soon to leave his *uncongenial* surroundings, and go where all would be as a gentleman desired to see it. No one needs find it hard to believe such snobbishness in a youth gifted like Walter Colman; for a sweet temper, fine sympathies, warmth of affection, cannot be called a man's own, so long as he has felt and acted without co-operation of the will; and Walter had never yet fought a battle within himself. He had never set his will against his inclination. He had, indeed, bravely fronted the necessity of the world, but we cannot regard it as *assurance* of a noble nature that one is ready to

labour for the things that are needful. A man is indeed contemptible who is not ready to work; but not to be contemptible is hardly to be honourable. Walter had never actively *chosen* the right way, or put out any energy to walk in it. There are usurers and sinners nearer the kingdom of heaven than many a respectable, socially successful youth of education and ambition. Walter was not simple. He judged things not in themselves, but after an artificial and altogether foolish standard, for his aim was a false one—social distinction.

The ways of his father's house were nowise sordid, though so simple that his losses had made scarcely a difference in them; they were hardly even humble—only old-fashioned; but Walter was ashamed of them. He even thought it unladylike of Molly to rise from the table to wait on her uncle or himself; and once, when she brought the tea-kettle in her own little brown hand, he actually reproved her.

The notion that success lies in reaching the

modes of life in the next higher social stratum; the fancy that those ways are the standard of what is worthy, becoming, or proper; the idea that our standing is determined by our knowledge of what is or is not *the thing*, is one of the degrading influences of modern times. It is only the lack of dignity at once and courtesy that makes such points of any interest or consequence.

Fortunately for Walter's temper, his aunt was discreetly silent, too busy taking the youth's measure afresh to talk much; intent on material wherewith to make up her mind concerning him. She had had to alter her idea of him as incapable of providing his own bread and cheese; but as to what reflection of him was henceforth to inhabit the glass of her judgment, she had not yet determined, farther than that it should be an unfavourable one.

It was a relief when bedtime came, and he was alone in what was always called his room, where he soon fell asleep, to dream of Lufa and the luxuries around her—facilities accumulated even

to encumbrance, and grown antagonistic to comfort, as Helots to liberty. How different from his dreams were the things that stood around them! how different his thoughts from those of the father who kneeled in the moonlight at the side of his bed, and said something to him who never sleeps! When he woke, his first feeling was a pang: the things about him were as walls between him and Lufa!

From indifference, or preoccupation—from some cause—he avoided any *tête-à-tête* with Molly. He had no true idea of the girl, neither indeed was capable of one. She was a whole nature; he was of many parts, not yet begun to cohere. This unlikeness, probably, was at the root of his avoidance of her. Perhaps he had an undefined sense of rebuke, and feared her without being aware of it. Never going farther than half-way into a thing, he had never relished Molly's questions; they went deeper than he saw difficulty; he was not even conscious of the darkness upon which Molly desired light cast.

And now when, either from instinct, or sense of presence, he became aware that Molly was looking at him, he did not like it; he felt as if she saw some lack of harmony between his consciousness and his history. He was annoyed, even irritated, with the olive-cheeked, black-eyed girl, who had been for so many years like his sister: she was making remarks upon him in that questioning laboratory of her brain!

Molly was indeed trying to understand what had gone different between them. She had never felt Walter come very near her, for he was not one who had learned, or would easily learn, to give himself; and no man who does not give at least something of himself, gives anything; but now she knew that he had gone further away, and she saw his father look disappointed. To Molly it was a sad relief when his departure came. They had not once disputed; she had not once offered him a penny for his thoughts, or asked him a single question, yet he did not even want her to go to the station with him.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MIDNIGHT REVIEW.

FROM Comberidge a dogcart had been sent to meet him at the railway. He drove up the avenue as the sun was setting behind the house, and its long, low, terraced front received him into a cold shadow. The servant who opened the door said her ladyship was on the lawn ; and following him across the hall, Walter came out into the glory of a red sunset. Like a lovely carpet, or rather, like a green, silent river, the lawn appeared to flow from the house as from its fountain, issuing by the open doors and windows, and descending like a gentle rapid, to lose itself far away among trees and shrubs. Over it were scattered groups and couples and indi-

viduals, looking like the creatures of a half angelic paradise. A little way off, under the boughs of a huge beech tree, sat Lufa, reading, with a pencil in her hand as if she made notes. As he stepped from the house, she looked up and saw him. She laid her book on the grass, rose, and came toward him. He went to meet her, but the light of the low sun was directly in his eyes, and he could not see her shadowed face. But her voice of welcome came athwart the luminous darkness, and their hands found each other. He thought hers trembled, but it was his own. She led him to her mother.

"I am glad to see you," said lady Tremaine. "You are just in time!"

"For what, may I ask?" returned Walter.

"It is out at last!"

"No, mamma," interrupted Lufa; "the book is not out! It is almost ready, but I have only had one or two early copies. I am so glad Mr. Colman will be the first to see it! He will prepare me for the operation!"

"What *do* you mean?" asked Walter, bewildered. It was the first word he had heard of her new book.

"Of course I shall be cut up! The weekly papers especially would lose half their readers did they not go in for vivisection! But mamma shouldn't have asked you now!"

"Why?"

"Well—you mightn't—I shouldn't like you to feel an atom less comfortable in speaking your mind."

"There is no fear of that sort in my thoughts," answered Walter, laughing.

But it troubled him a little that she had not let him know what she was doing.

"Besides," he went on, "you need never know what I think. There are other reviewers on the *Battery!*"

"I should recognize your hand anywhere! And more than that, I should only have to pick out the most rigid and unbending criticism to know which must be yours. It is your way, and

you know it! Are you not always showing me up to myself! That's why I was in such mortal terror of your finding out what I was doing. If you had said anything to make me hate my work," she went on, looking up at him with earnest eyes, "I should never have touched it again; and I did want to finish it! You have been my master now for—let me see—how many months? I do not know how I shall ever thank you!" Here she changed tone. "If I come off with a pound of flesh left, it will be owing entirely to the pains you have taken with me! I wonder whether you will like any of my triolets! But it is time to dress for dinner, so I will leave you in peace—but not all night, for when you go to bed you shall take *your* copy with you to help you asleep."

While dressing he was full of the dread of not liking the book well enough to praise it as he wished. A first book was nothing, he said to himself; it might be what it would; but the second—that was another matter! He recalled

what first books he knew. "Poems by Two Brothers" gave not a foretaste of what was to come so soon after them! Shelley's prose attempts in his boyhood were below criticism! Byron's "Hours of Idleness" were as idle as he called them! He knew what followed these and others, but what had followed lady Lufa's? That he was now to discover! What if it should be no better than what preceded! For his own part he did not, he would not much care. It was not for her poetry, it was for herself he loved her! What she wrote was not she, and could make no difference! It was not as if she had no genuine understanding of poetry, no admiration or feeling for it! A poet could do well enough with a wife who never wrote a verse, but hardly with one who had no natural relation to it, no perception what it was! A poet in love with one who laughed at his poetry!—that would want scanning! What or wherein could be their relation to each other?

He is a poor poet—and Walter was such a

poet—who does not know there are better things than poetry. Keats began to discover it just ere he died.

Walter feared therefore the coming gift, as he might that of a doubted enchantress. It was not the less a delight, however, to remember that she said, "*your* copy." But he must leave thinking and put on his neck-tie! There are other things than time and tide that wait for no man!

Lady Tremaine gave him Lufa, and she took his arm with old familiarity. The talk at table was but such as it could hardly help being—only for Walter it was talk with Lufa! The pleasure of talk often owes not much to the sense of it. There is more than the intellect concerned in talk; there is more at its root than fact or logic or lying.

When the scene changed to the drawing-room, Lufa played tolerably and sang well, delighting Walter. She asked and received his permission to sing "my song," as she called it, and pleased

him with it more than ever. He managed to get her into the conservatory, which was large, and there he talked much, and she seemed to listen much. It was but the vague, twilit, allusive talk which, coming readily to all men in love, came the more readily to one always a poet, and not merely a poet by being in love. Every one in love sees a little farther into things, but few see clearly, and hence love-talk has in general so little meaning. Ordinary men in love gain glimpses of truth more and other than they usually see, but from having so little dealing with the truth, they do not even try to get a hold of it, they do not know it for truth even when dallying with it. It is the true man's dreams that come true.

He raised her hand to his lips as at length she turned toward the drawing-room, and he thought she more than yielded it, but could not be sure. Anyhow she was not offended, for she smiled with her usual sweetness as she bade him good night.

"One instant, Mr. Colman!" she added: "I promised you a sedative! I will run and get it.—No, I won't keep you; I will send it to your room."

He had scarce shut his door when it opened again, and there was Lufa.

"I beg your pardon!" she said; "I thought you would not be come up, and I wanted to make my little offering with my own hand: it owes so much to you!"

She slipped past him, laid her book on his table, and went.

He lighted his candles with eager anxiety, and took it up. It was a dramatic poem of some length, daintily bound in white vellum, with gilt edges. On the title-page was written "The Master's copy," with the date and Lufa's initials. He threw himself into a great soft chair that with open arms invited him, and began to read.

He had taken champagne pretty freely at dinner; his mind was yet in the commotion left by the summer-wind of their many words that

might mean so much; he felt his kiss of her dainty hand, and her pressure of it to his lips; as he read, she seemed still and always in the doorway, entering with the book; its inscription was continually turning up with a shine: such was the mood in which he read the poem. Through he read it, every word, some of it many times; then rose and went to his writing-table, to set down his judgment of his lady's poem. He wrote and wrote, almost without pause. The dawn began to glimmer, the red blood of the morning came back to chase the swoon of the night, ere at last, throwing down his pen, he gave a sigh of weary joy, tore off his clothes, plunged into his bed, and there lay afloat on the soft waves of sleep. And as he slept, the sun came slowly up to shake the falsehood out of the earth.

CHAPTER XV.

REFLECTION.

WALTER slept until nearly noon, then rose, very weary, but with a gladness at his heart. On his table were spread such pages as must please Lufa! His thoughts went back to the poem, but, to his uneasy surprise, he found he did not recall it with any special pleasure. He had had great delight in reading it, and in giving shape to his delight, but he could not now think what kind of thing it was that had given him such satisfaction. He had worked too long, he said to himself, and this was the reaction; he was too tired to enjoy the memory of what he had so heartily admired. Æsthetic judgment was so dependent on mood! He would glance over what he had done, correct it a little, and inclose

it for the afternoon-post, that it might appear in the next issue!

He drank the cup of cold tea by his bedside, sat down, and took up his hurriedly written sheets. He found in them much that seemed good work—of his own; and the passages quoted gave ostensible ground for the remarks made upon them; but somehow the whole affair seemed quite different. The review would incline any lover of verse to read the book; and the passages cited were preceded and followed by rich and praiseful epithets; but neither quotations nor remarks moved in him any echo of response. He gave the manuscript what correction it required, which was not much, for Walter was an accurate as well as ready writer, laid it aside, and took up the poem.

What could be the matter? There was nothing but embers where had been glow and flame! Something must be amiss with him! He recalled an occasion on which, feeling similarly with regard to certain poems till then

favourites, he was sorely troubled, but a serious attack of illness very soon relieved his perplexity: something like it must surely be at hand to account for the contradiction between Walter last night and Walter this morning! Closer and closer he scanned what he read, peering if he might to its very roots, in agonized endeavour to see what he had seen as he wrote. But his critical consciousness neither acknowledged what he had felt, nor would grant him in a condition of poetic collapse. He read on and on; read the poem through; turned back, and read passage after passage again; but without one individual approach to the revival of former impression. "Commonplace! commonplace!" echoed in his inner ear, as if whispered by some mocking spirit. He argued that he had often found himself too fastidious. His demand for finish ruined many of his verses, rubbing and melting and wearing them away, like frost and wind and rain, till they were worthless! The predominance and over-keenness of the critical

had turned in him to disease! His eye was sharpened to see the point of a needle, but a tree only as a blotted mass! A man's mind was meant to receive as a mirror, not to concentrate rays like a convex lens! Was it not then likely that the first reading gave the true impression of the ethereal, the vital, the flowing, the iridescent? Did not the solitary and silent night brood like a hen on the nest of the poet's imaginings? Was it not the night that waked the soul? Did not the commonplace vanish along with the "garish" day? How then could its light afford the mood fit for judging a poem —the cold sick morning, when life is but half worth living! Walter did not think how much champagne he had taken, nor how much that might have to do with one judgment at night and another in the morning. "Set one mood against another," he said, conscious all the time it was a piece of special pleading, "and the one weighs as much as the other!" For it was horrible to him to think that the morning was

the clear-eyed, and that the praise he had lavished on the book was but a vapour of the night. How was he to carry himself to the lady of his love, who at most did not care half as much for him as for her book?

How poetry could be such a passion with her when her own was but mediocre, was a question Walter dared not shape—not, however, that he saw the same question might be put with regard to himself: his own poetry was neither strong nor fresh nor revealing. He had not noted that an unpoetic person will occasionally go into a mild ecstasy over phrase or passage or verse in which a poet may see little or nothing.

He came back to this:—his one hour had as good a claim to insight as his other; if he saw the thing so once, why not say what he had seen? Why should not the thing stand? His consciousness of the night before had certainly been nearer that of a complete, capable being, than that of to-day! He was in a higher human condition then than now!

But here came another doubt: what was he to conclude concerning his other numerous judgments passed irrevocably? Was he called and appointed to influence the world's opinion of the labour of hundreds according to the mood he happened to be in, or the hour at which he read their volumes? But if he must write another judgment of that poem in vellum and gold, he must first pack his portmanteau! To write in her home as he felt now, would be treachery!

Not confessing it, he was persuading himself to send on the review. Of course, had he the writing of it now, he would not write a paper like that! But the thing being written, it could claim as good a chance of being right as another! Had it not been written as honestly as another of to-day would be? Might it not be just as true? The laws of art are so undefined!

Thus on and on went the windmill of heart and brain, until at last the devil, or the devil's

shadow—that is, the bad part of the man himself—got the better, and Walter, not being true, did a lie—published the thing he would no longer have said. He thought he worshipped the truth, but he did not. He knew that the truth was everything, but a lie came that seemed better than the truth. In his soul he knew he was not acting truly; that had he honestly loved the truth, he would not have played hocus pocus with metaphysics and logic, but would have made haste to a manly conclusion. He took the packet, and on his way to the dining-room, dropped it into the post-box in the hall.

During lunch he was rather silent and abstracted: the packet was not gone, and his conscience might yet command him to recall it! When the hour was past, and the paper beyond recovery, he felt easier, saying to himself, what was done could not be undone; he would be more careful another time. One comfort was, that at least he had done no injustice to Lufa! He did not reflect that he had done her the

greatest injustice in helping her to believe that worthy which was not worthy, herself worshipful who was not worshipful. He told her that he finished her drama before going to bed, and was perfectly charmed with it. That it as much exceeded his expectations then as it had fallen below them since, he did not say.

In the evening was he not so bright as before. Lufa saw it and was troubled. She feared he doubted the success of her poem. She led the way, and found he avoided talking about it. She feared he was not so well pleased with it as he had said. Walter asked if he might not read from it in the drawing-room. She would not consent.

"None there are of our sort!" she said. "They think literature foolishness. Even my mother, the best of mothers, doesn't care about poetry, cannot tell one measure from another. Come and read a page or two of it in the summer house in the wilderness instead. I want to know how it will sound in people's ears."

Walter was ready enough. He was fond of reading aloud, and believed he could so read the poem that he need not say anything. And certainly, if justice meant making the words express more than was in them, he did it justice. But in truth the situation was sometimes touching; and the more so to Walter that the hero was the lady's inferior in birth, means, and position—much more her inferior than Walter was Lufa's. The lady alone was on the side of the lowly born; father, mother, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins to the remotest degree, against him even to hatred. The general pathos of the idea disabled the criticism of the audience, composed of the authoress and the reader, blinding perhaps both to not a little that was neither brilliant nor poetic. The lady wept at the sound of her own verses from the lips of one who was to her in the position of the hero toward the heroine; and the lover, critic as he was, could not but be touched when he saw her weep at passages suggesting his

relation to her; so that, when they found the hand of the one resting in that of the other, it did not seem strange to either. When suddenly the lady snatched hers away, it was only because a mischievous little bird spying them, and hurrying away to tell, made a great fluttering in the foliage. Then was Walter's conscience not a little consoled, for he was aware of a hearty love for the poem. Under such conditions he could have gone on reading it all the night!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RIDE TOGETHER.

DAYS passed, and things went on much the same, Walter not daring to tell the girl all he felt, but seizing every opportunity of a *tête-à-tête*, and missing none of the proximity she allowed him, and she never seeming other than pleased to be his companion. Her ways with him were always pretty, and sometimes playful. She was almost studious to please him; and if she never took a liberty with him, she never resented any he took with her, which certainly were neither numerous nor daring, for Walter was not presumptuous, least of all with women.

But Lufa was careful not to neglect their other guests. She was always ready to ac-

company any of the ladies riding out of a morning; and a Mr. Sefton, who was there when Walter arrived, generally rode with them. He was older than Walter, and had taken little notice of him, which Walter resented more than he would have cared to acknowledge. He was tall and lanky, with a look of not having been in the oven quite long enough, but handsome nevertheless. Without an atom of contempt, he cared nothing for what people might think; and when accused of anything, laughed, and never defended himself. Having no doubt he was in the right, he had no anxiety as to the impression he might make. In the hunting field he was now reckless, now so cautious that the men would chaff him. But they knew well enough that whatever he did came either of pure whim or downright good sense; no one ever questioned his pluck. I believe an intermittent laziness had something to do with his inconsistency.

It had been taken for granted by Lufa that

Walter could not ride; whereas, not only had he had some experience, but he was one of the few possessed of an individual influence over the lower brotherhood of animals, and his was especially equine.

One morning, from an ailment in one of the horses, Lufa found that her mount required consideration. Sefton said the horse he had been riding would carry her perfectly.

"What will you do for a horse?"

"Go without."

"What shall we do for a gentleman?"

"Go without."

"I saw a groom this morning," suggested Walter, "on a lovely little roan!"

"Ah, Red Racket!" answered lady Lufa. "He is no horse; he is a little fiend. Goes as gently as a lamb with my father, though, or any one that he knows can ride him. Try Red Racket, George."

They were cousins, though not in the next degree.

"I would if I could sit him. But I'm not a rough rider, and much disinclined to have my bones broken. It's not as if there was anything to be got by it, even a brush!"

"Two hours of your sister, your cousin, and their friend!" said Lufa.

"Much of you I should have with Red Racket under me—or over me as likely! at best jumping about, and taking all the attention I had! No, thank you!"

"Come, George," said his sister, "you will make them think you are no horseman!"

"Neither I am; I have not a good seat, and you know it! I am not going to make a fool of myself on compulsion! I know what I can do, and what I can't do."

"I wish I had the chance!" murmured Walter, as if to himself, but so that Lufa heard.

"You can ride?" said Lufa, with pleased surprise.

"Why not?" returned Walter. "Every Englishman should ride."

"Yes; every Englishman should swim; but Englishmen are drowned every day!"

"That is as often because they can swim, but have not Mr. Sefton's prudence."

"You mustn't think my cousin afraid of Red Racket!" she returned.

"I don't. He doesn't look like it!"

"Do you really wish to ride the roan?"

"Indeed I do!"

"I will order him round," she said, rising.

Walter did not quite enjoy her consenting so easily: had she no fear for him of the risk Mr. Sefton would not run?

"She wants me to cut a good figure!" he said to himself, and went to get ready.

I have no deed of prowess on Walter's part to record. The instant he was in the saddle, Red Racket recognized a master.

"You can't have ridden him before?" questioned Lufa.

"I never saw him till this morning."

"He likes you, I suppose!" she said.

As they returned, the other ladies being in front, and the groom some distance behind, Walter brought his roan side by side with Lufa's horse, and said—

"You know Browning's 'Last Ride Together'?"

"Yes," she answered, with a faint blush; "but this is not our last ride! It is our first! Why didn't you tell me? We might have had many rides together!"

"Promise me a last one," he said.

"How can I? How should I know it was the last?"

"Promise," he persisted, "that if ever you see just one last ride possible, you will let me know."

She hesitated a moment, then answered—

"I will."

"Thank you!" said Walter with fervour.

As by consent, they rode after the others.

Walter had not yet the courage to say anything definite. But he had said many things

that must have compelled her to imagine what he had not said; therefore the promise she had given him seemed encouraging. They rode in silence the rest of the way.

When Sefton saw Red Racket as quiet as a lamb, he went up to him, stroked his neck, and said to Walter:

"With me he would have capered like an idiot till he had thrown me. It is always my luck with horses of his colour! You must have a light hand!"

He stroked his neck once more, turned aside, and was too late to help the ladies dismount.

It was the last ride for the present, because of a change in the weather. In a few days came *The Field Battery* with Walter's review, bringing a revival of the self-reproach he had begun to forget. The paper felt in his hand like bad news or something nasty. He could not bear the thought of having to take his part in the talk it would occasion. It could not now be helped, however, and that was a great comfort! It was

impossible, none the less, to keep it up! As he had foreseen, all this time came no revival of his first impression of the poem. He went to find his hostess, and told her he must go to London that same afternoon. As he took his leave, he put the paper in Lufa's hand, saying,

"You will find there what I have said about the poem."

CHAPTER XVII.

HIS BOOK.

I NEED hardly say he found his first lonely evening dull. He was not yet capable of looking beneath the look of anything. He felt cabined, cribbed, confined. His world-clothing came too near him. From the flowing robes of a park, a great house, large rooms, wide staircases—with plenty of air and space, colour, softness, fitness, completeness, he found himself in the worn, tight, shabby garment of a cheap London lodging! But Walter, far from being a wise man, was not therefore a fool; he was not one whom this world cannot teach, and who has therefore to be sent to some idiot-asylum in the next, before sense can be got into him, or, rather, out of him. No man is a fool, who,

having work to do, sets himself to do it, and Walter did. He had begun a poem to lead the van of a volume, of which the rest was nearly ready: into it he now set himself to weave a sequel to her drama, from the point where she had left the story. Every hour he could spare from drudgery he devoted to it—urged by the delightful prospect of letting Lufa see what he could do. Gaining facility with his stanza as he went on, the pleasure of it grew, and more than comforted his loneliness. Sullivan could hardly get him from his room.

Finding a young publisher prepared to undertake half the risk, on the ground, unexpressed, of the author's proximity to the judgment-seat, Walter, too experienced to look for any gain, yet hoped to clear his expenses, and became liable for much more than he possessed.

He had one little note from Lufa, concerning a point in rhythm which perplexed her. She had a good ear, and was conscientious in her mechanics. There was not a cockney-rime

from beginning to end of her poem, which is more than the uninitiated will give its weight to. But she understood nothing of the broken music which a master of verse will turn to such high service. There are lines in Milton which Walter, who knew far more than she, could not read until long after, when Dante taught him how.

In the month of December came another note from lady Lufa, inviting him to spend a week with them after Christmas.

"Perhaps then we may have yet a ride together," added a postscript.

"What does she mean?" thought Walter, a pale fear at his heart. "She cannot mean our last ride!"

One conclusion he came to—that he must tell her plainly he loved her. The thing was only right, though of course ridiculous in the eyes of worldly people, said the far from unworldly poet. True, she was the daughter of an earl, and he the son of a farmer; and

those who called the land their own looked down upon those who tilled it! But a banker, or a brewer, or the son of a contractor who had wielded the spade, might marry an earl's daughter: why should not the son of a farmer —not to say one who, according to the lady's mother, himself belonged to an aristocracy? The farmer's son indeed was poor, and who would look at a poor banker, or a poor brewer, more than a poor farmer! it was all money! But was he going to give in to that? Was he to grant that possession made a man honourable, and the want of it despicable! To act as if she could think after such a silly fashion, would be to insult her! He would lay bare his heart to her! There were things in it which she knew what value to set upon—things as far before birth as birth was before money! He would accept the invitation, and if possible get his volume out before the day mentioned, so as, he hoped, to be a little in the mouth of the public when he went!

Walter, like many another youth, imagined the way to make a woman love him, was to humble himself before her, tell her how beautiful she was, and how much he loved her. I do not see why any woman should therefore love a man. If she loves him already, anything will do to make her love him more; if she does not, no entreaty will wake what is not there to be waked. Even wrong and cruelty and carelessness may increase love already rooted; but neither love, nor kindness, nor worship, will prevail to plant it.

In his formal acceptance of the invitation, he inclosed some verses destined for his volume, in which he poured out his boyish passion over his lady's hair, and eyes, and hands—a poem not without some of the merits made much of by the rising school of the day, and possessing qualities higher, perhaps, than those upon which that school chiefly prided itself. She made, and he expected, no acknowledgment, but she did not return the verses.

Lyric after lyric, with Lufa for its inspiration, he wrought, like damask flowers, into his poem. Every evening, and all the evening, sometimes late into the morning, he fashioned and filed, until at length it was finished.

When the toiling girl who waited on him appeared with the proof-sheets in her hand, she came like a winged ministrant laying a wondrous gift before him. And in truth, poor as he came to think it, was it not a gift greater than any angel could have brought him? Was not the seed of it sown in his being by him that loved him before he was? These were the poor first flowers, come to make way for better—themselves a gift none but God could give.

The book was rapidly approaching its birth, as the day of Lufa's summons drew near. He had inscribed the volume to her, not by name, but in a dedication she could not but understand and no other would, founded on her promise of a last ride: it was so delightful to have a secret with her! He hoped to the last to take a copy

with him, but was disappointed by some *contretemps* connected with the binding—about which he was as particular as if it had been itself a poem: he had to pack his portmanteau without it.

Continuously almost, on his way to the station, he kept repeating to himself: "Is it to be the last ride, or only another?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WINTER AFTERNOON.

WHEN Walter arrived, he found the paradise under snow. But the summer had only run in-doors, and there was blooming. Lufa was kinder than ever, but, he fancied, a little embarrassed, which he interpreted to his advantage. He was shown to the room he had before occupied.

It did not take him long to learn the winter ways of the house. Mr. and Miss Sefton were there; and all seemed glad of his help against consciousness; for there could be no riding so long as the frost lasted and the snow kept falling, and the ladies did not care to go out; and in some country-houses Time has as many lives as a cat, and wants a great deal of killing—

a butchery to be one day bitterly repented, perhaps; but as a savage cannot be a citizen, so cannot people of fashion belong to the kingdom of heaven.

The third morning came a thaw, with a storm of wind and rain; and after lunch they gathered in the glooming library, and began to tell ghost stories. Walter happened to know a few of the rarer sort, and found himself in his element. His art came to help him, and the eyes of the ladies, and he rose to his best. As he was working one of his tales to its climax, Mr. Sefton entered the room, where Walter had been the only gentleman, and took a chair beside Lufa. She rose, saying,

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Colman, but would you mind stopping a minute while I get a little more red silk for my imperial dragon? Mr. Sefton has already taken the sting out of the snake!"

"What snake?" asked Sefton.

"The snake of terror," she answered. "Did

you not see him as you came in—erect on his coiled tail, drawing his head back for his darting spring?"

"I am very sorry," said Sefton. "I have injured everybody, and I hope everybody will pardon me!"

When Lufa had found her silk, she took a seat nearer to Walter, who resumed and finished his narrative.

"I wonder she lived to tell it!" said one of the ladies.

"For my part," rejoined their hostess, "I do not see why every one should be so terrified at the thought of meeting a ghost! It seems to me cowardly."

"I don't think it cowardly," said Sefton, "to be frightened at a ghost, or at anything else."

"Now don't say you would run away!" remonstrated his sister.

"I couldn't very well, don't you know, if I was in bed! But I might—I don't know—hide my head under the blankets!"

"I don't believe it a bit!"

"To be sure," continued Sefton reflectively, "there does seem a difference! To hide is one thing, and to run is another—quite another thing! If you are frightened, you are frightened and you can't help it; but if you run away, then you are a coward. Yes; quite true! And yet there are things some men, whom other men would be afraid to call cowards, would run from fast enough!—Your story, Mr. Colman," he went on, "reminds me of an adventure I had—if that be an adventure where was no danger—except, indeed, of losing my wits, which Lufa would say was no great loss. I don't often tell the story, for I have an odd weakness for being believed; and nobody ever does believe that story, though it is as true as I live; and when a thing is true, the blame lies with those that don't believe it. Ain't you of my mind, Mr. Colman?"

"You had better not appeal to him!" said Lufa. "Mr. Colman does not believe a word of the stories he has been telling. He regards

them entirely from the artistic point of view, and cares only for their effect. He is writing a novel, and wants to study people under a ghost-story."

"I don't endorse your judgment of me, lady Lufa," said Walter, who did not quite like what she said. "I am ready to believe anything in which I can see reason. I should like much to hear Mr. Sefton's story. I never saw the man that saw a ghost, except Mr. Sefton be that man."

"You shall say what you will when you have heard. I shall offer no explanation, only tell you what I saw, or, if you prefer it, experienced; you must then fall back on your own metaphysics. I don't care what anybody thinks about it."

"You are not very polite!" said Lufa.

"Only truthful," replied Sefton.

"Please go on?"

"We are dying to hear!"

"A real ghost story!"

"Is it your best, George?"

"It is my only one," Sefton answered, and was silent a few moments, as if arranging his thoughts.

"Well, here goes!" he began. "I was staying at a country house——"

"Not here, I hope!" said Lufa.

"I have reasons for not saying where it was, or where it wasn't. It may have been in Ireland, it may have been in Scotland, it may have been in England; it was in one of the three—an old house, parts very old. One morning I happened to be late, and found the breakfast-table deserted. I was not the last, however; for presently another man appeared, whom I had met at dinner the day before for the first time. We both happened to be in the army, and had drawn a little together. The moment I saw him, I knew he had passed an uncomfortable night. His face was like dough, with livid spots under the eyes. He sat down and poured himself out a cup of tea. 'Game-pie?' I said, but he did not heed

me. There was nobody in the room but ourselves, and I thought it best to leave him alone. 'Are you an old friend of the family?' he said at length. 'About the age of most friends,' I answered. He was silent again for a bit, then said, 'I'm going to cut!' 'Ha, ha!' thought I, and something more. 'No, it's not that!' he said, reading my thought, which had been about a lady in the house with us. 'Pray don't imagine I want to know,' I replied. 'Neither do I want to tell,' he rejoined. 'I don't care to have fellows laugh at me!' 'That's just what I don't care to do. Nothing hurts me less than being laughed at, so I take no pleasure in it,' I said. 'What I do want,' said he, 'is to have you tell Mrs.—' —There! I was on the very edge of saying her name! and you would have known who she was, all of you! I *am* glad I caught myself in time! —'tell Mrs. Blank,' said he, 'why I went.' 'Very well! I will. Why are you going?' 'Can't you help a fellow to an excuse? I'm not going to give *her* the reason.' 'Tell me what you want

me to say, and I will tell her you told me to say so.' 'I will tell *you* the truth.' 'Fire away, then.' 'I was in a beastly funk last night. I dare say you think as I did, that a man ought never to be a hair off the cool?' 'That depends,' I replied; 'there are some things, and there may be more, at which any but an idiot might well be scared; but some fools are such fools they can't shiver! What's the matter? I give you my word I'll not make game of it.' The fellow looked so seedy, don't you know, I couldn't but be brotherly, or, at least, cousinly to him!—that don't go for much, does it, Lufa? 'Well,' he said, 'I will tell you. Last night, I had been in bed about five minutes, and hadn't even had time to grow sleepy, when I heard a curious shuffling in the passage outside my door, and an indescribable terror came over me. To be perfectly open with you, however, I *had* heard that was the sign she was coming!' '*Who* coming?' said I. 'The ghost, of course!' he answered. 'The ghost!' 'You don't mean

to say you never heard of the ghost?' 'Never heard a word of it.' 'Well, they don't like to speak of it, but everybody knows it!' 'Go on,' said I; and he did, but plainly with a tearing effort. 'The shuffling was like feet in slippers much too big. As if I had been five instead of five and thirty, I dived under the blankets, and lay so for minutes after the shuffling had ceased. But at length I persuaded myself it was but a foolish fancy, and I had never really heard anything. What with fear and heat I was much in want of breath too, I can tell you! So I came to the surface, and looked out.' Here he paused a moment, and turned almost livid. 'There stood a horrible old woman, staring at me, as if she had been seeing me all the time, and the blankets made no difference!' 'Was she really ugly?' I asked. 'Well, I don't know what you call ugly,' he answered, 'but if you had seen her stare, you would have thought her ugly enough! Had she been as beautiful as a houri, though, I don't imagine I should have been less frightened!'

'Well,' said I, for he had come to a pause, 'and what came next?' 'I cannot tell. I came to myself all trembling, and as cold and as wet as if I had been dipped in a well.' 'You are sure you were not dreaming?' I said. '*I was not.* But I do not expect you to believe me!' 'You must not be offended,' I said, 'if I find the thing stiff to stow! I believe *you* all the same.' 'What?' he said, not quite understanding me. 'An honest man and a gentleman,' I answered. 'And a coward to boot!' 'God forbid!' I returned: 'what man can answer for himself at every moment! If I remember, Hector turned at last and ran from Achilles!' He said nothing, and I went on. 'I once heard a preaching fellow say, "When a wise man is always wise, then is the kingdom of heaven!" and I thought he knew something!' I talked, don't you know, to quiet him. 'I once saw,' I said, 'the best-tempered man I ever knew, in the worst rage I ever saw man in—though I must allow he had good reason!' He drank his cup of tea, got up,

and said, 'I'm off. Good-bye—and thank you! A million of money wouldn't make me stay in the house another hour! There is that in it I fear ten times worse than the ghost?' 'Gracious! what is that?' I said. 'This horrible cowardice oozing from her like a mist. The house is full of it!' 'But what shall I say to Mrs. Blank?' 'Anything you like.' 'I will say then, that you are very sorry, but were compelled to go.' 'Say what you please, only let me go! Tell them to send my traps after me. Good-bye! I'm in a sepulchre! I shall have to throw up my commission!' So he went."

"And what became of him?"

"I've neither seen nor heard of him to this day!"

He ceased with the cadence of an ended story.

"Is that all?"

"You spoke of an adventure of your own!"

"I was flattering myself," said Lufa, "that in our house Mr. Colman was at last to hear a ghost story from the man's own lips!"

"The sun is coming out!" said Sefton. "I will have a cigar at the stables."

The company protested, but he turned a deaf ear to expostulation, and went.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BODILESS.

IN the drawing-room after dinner, some of the ladies gathered about him, and begged the story of his own adventure. He smiled queerly.

"Very well, you shall have it!" he answered.

They seated themselves, and the company came from all parts of the room—among the rest, Lufa and Walter.

"It was three days, if I remember," began Sefton, "after my military friend left, when one night I found myself alone in the drawing-room, just waked from a brown study. No one had said good night to me. I looked at my watch; it was half-past eleven. I rose and went. My bedroom was on the first floor.

"The stairs were peculiar—a construction later than much of the house, but by no means modern. When you reached the landing of the first floor and looked up, you could see above you the second floor, defended by a balustrade between arches. There were no carpets on stairs or landings, which were all of oak.

"I cannot certainly say what made me look up; but I think, indeed I am almost sure, I had heard a noise like that the ghost was said to make, as of one walking in shoes too large: I saw a lady looking down over the balusters on the second floor. I thought some one was playing me a trick, and imitating the ghost, for the ladies had been chaffing me a good deal that night; they often do. She wore an old-fashioned, browny, silky looking dress. I rushed up to see who was taking the rise out of me. I looked up at her as I ran, and she kept looking down, but apparently not at me. Her face was that of a middle-aged woman, beginning, indeed, to be old, and had an intent, rather troubled

look, I should say; but I did not consider it closely.

"I was at the top in a moment, on the level where she stood leaning over the handrail. Turning, I approached her. Apparently, she neither saw nor heard me. 'Well acted!' I said to myself—but even then I was beginning to be afraid, without knowing why. Every man's impulse, I fancy, is to go right up to anything that frightens him—at least, I have always found it so. I walked close up to the woman. She moved her head and turned in my direction, but only as if about to go away. Whether she looked at me I cannot tell, but I saw her eyes plain enough. By this time, I suppose, the idea of a ghost must have been uppermost, for, being now quite close to her, I put out my hand as if to touch her. *My hand went through her—through her head and body!* I am not joking in the least; I mean you to believe, if you can, exactly what I say. What then she did, or whether she took any notice of my movement, I cannot tell;

I only know what *I* did, or rather what I did not do. For, had I been capable, I should have uttered a shriek that would have filled the house with ghastliest terror; but there was a load of iron on my chest, and the hand of a giant at my throat. I could not help opening my mouth, for something drew all the muscles of my jaws and throat, but I could not utter a sound. The horror I was in, was entirely new to me, and no more under my control than a fever. I only wonder it did not paralyze me, that I was able to turn and run down the stair! I ran as if all the cardinal sins were at my heels. I flew, never seeming to touch the stairs as I went. I darted along the passage, burst into my room, shut and locked the door, lighted my candles, fell into a chair, shuddered, and began to breathe again."

He ceased, not without present signs of the agitation he described.

"But that's not all!"

"And what else?"

"Did anything happen?"

"Do tell us more."

"I have nothing more to tell," answered Sefton. "But I haven't done wondering what could have put me in such an awful funk! You can't have a notion what it was like!"

"I know I should have been in a worse!"

"Perhaps—but why? Why should any one have been terrified? The poor thing had lost her body, it is true, but there she was notwithstanding—all the same! It might be nicer or not so nice to her, but why should it so affect me? that's what I want to know! Am I not, as Hamlet says, 'a thing immortal as itself'? I don't see the sense of it! Sure I am that one meets constantly—sits down with, eats and drinks with, hears sing, and play, and remark on the weather, and the fate of the nation,——"

He paused, his eyes fixed on Walter.

"What *are* you driving at?" said Lufa.

"I was thinking of a much more fearful kind of creature," he answered.

"What kind of creature?" she asked.

"A creature," he said slowly, "that has a body, but no soul to it. All body, with brain enough for its affairs, it has *no* soul. Such will never wander about after they are dead! there will be nothing to wander! Good night, ladies! Were I to tell you the history of a woman whose acquaintance I made some years ago at Baden, you would understand the sort. Good night!"

There was silence for a moment or two. Had his sister not been present, something other than complimentary to Sefton might have crept about the drawing-room—to judge from the expression of two or three faces. Walter felt the man worth knowing, but felt also something about him that repelled him.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SOULLESS.

IN his room, Walter threw himself in a chair, and sat without thinking, for the mental presence of Lufa was hardly thought. Gradually Sefton's story revived, and for a time displaced the image of Lufa. It was the first immediately authenticated ghost-narration he had ever heard. His fancy alone had hitherto been attracted by such tales; but this brought him close to things of import as profound as marvellous. He began to wonder how he was likely to carry himself in such an interview. Courage such as Mr. Sefton's he dared not claim—any more than hope for the distinction of ever putting his hand through a

ghost! To be sure, the question philosophically considered, Sefton could have done no such thing; for where no relation existed, he reasoned, or rather assumed, the one could not be materially present to the other; *a fortiori* there could be no passing of the one through the other! Where the ghost was, the hand was; both existed in the same space at the same time; therefore the one did not penetrate the other! The ghost, he held, never saw Sefton, knew or thought of his presence, or was aware of any intrusive outrage from his hand! He shrank none the less, however, from such phantasmic presence as Sefton had described; a man's philosophy made but a fool of him when it came to the pinch! He would indeed like to see a ghost, but not to be alone with one!

Here came back to him a certain look in Lufa's face, which he had not understood: was it possible she knew something about the thing? Could this be the house where it took place, where the ghost appeared? The room in which

he sat was very old! the pictures in it none but for their age would hang up on any wall! And the bed was a huger and gloomier than he had ever elsewhere seen! It was on the second floor too! What if this was the very room the officer slept in!

He must run into port, find shelter from the terrors of the shoreless sea of the unknown! But all the harbour he could seek, was bed and closed eyes! The dark is a strange refuge from the darkness—yet that which most men seek. It is so dark! let us go further from the light! Thus deeper they go, and come upon greater terrors! He undressed hurriedly, blew out his candles, and by the light of the fire, glowing rather than blazing, plunged into the expanse which glimmered before him like a lake of sleep in the moonshine of dreams.

The moment he laid down his head, he became aware of what seemed unnatural stillness. Throughout the evening a strong wind had been blowing about the house; it had ceased, and

without having noted the tumult, he was now aware of the calm. But what made him so cold? The surface of the linen was like a film of ice! He rolled himself round, and like a hedgehog sought shelter within the circumference of his own person. But he could not get warm, lie close as he might to his own door; there was no admittance! Had the room turned suddenly cold? Could it be that the ghost was near, making the air like that of the sepulchre from which she had issued? for such ghosts as walk the world at night, what refuge so fit as their tombs in the daytime! The thought was a worse horror than he had known himself capable of feeling. He shivered with the cold. It seemed to pierce to his very bones. A strange and hideous constriction seized the muscles of his neck and throat: had not Sefton described the sensation? Was it not a sure sign of ghostly presence?

How much longer he could have endured, or what would have been the result of the pro-

longation of his suffering, I cannot tell. Molly would have found immediate refuge with him to whom belong all the ghosts wherever they roam or rest—with him who can deliver from the terrors of the night as well as from the perplexities of the day; but Walter felt his lonely being exposed on all sides.

The handle of the door moved. I am not sure whether ghosts always enter and leave a room in silence, but the sound horribly shook Walter's nerves, and nearly made an end of him for a time. But a voice said, "May I come in?" What he answered or whether he answered, Walter could not have told, but his terror subsided. The door opened wider, some one entered, closed it softly, and approached the bed through the dull firelight.

"I did not think you would be in bed!" said the voice, which Walter now knew for Sefton's; "but at the risk of waking you, even of giving you a sleepless night, I must have a little talk with you!"

"I shall be glad," answered Walter.

Sefton little thought how welcome was his visit!

But he was come to do him a service for which he could hardly at once be grateful. The best things done for any are generally those for which they are at the moment least grateful; it needs the result of the service to make them able to prize it.

Walter thought he had more of the story to tell—something he had not chosen to talk of to the ladies.

Sefton stood, and for a few moments there was silence. He seemed to be meditating, yet looked like one who wanted to light his cigar.

"Won't you take a seat?" said Walter.

"Thank you!" returned Sefton, and sat on the bed.

"I am twenty-seven," he said at length. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-three," answered Walter.

"When I was twenty-three, I knew ever so

much more than I do now! I'm not half so sure about things as I was. I wonder if you will find it so!"

"I hope I shall—otherwise I shan't have got on."

"Well, now, couldn't you just—why not?—forestall your experience by making use of mine? I'm talking like a fool, I know, but never mind; it is the more genuine! Look here, Mr. Colman! I like you, and believe you will one day be something more than a gentleman. There, that won't do! What's my opinion, good or bad, to you! Listen to me anyhow: you're on the wrong tack here, old boy!"

"I'm sorry I don't understand you," said Walter.

"Naturally not; how could you? I will explain."

"Please. Don't mind me. I shall do my best not to be offended."

"That is more than I should have presumed to ask."

Again a brief silence followed.

"You heard my story about the ghost?" said Sefton.

"I was on the point of asking you if I might tell it in print!"

"You may do what you like with it, except the other fellow's part."

"Thank you.—But I wish you would tell me what you meant by that other more fearful—apparition—or what did you call it? Were you alluding to the vampire?"

"No. There are live women worse than vampires. Scared as I confess I was, I would rather meet ten such ghosts as I told you of, than another woman such as I mean. I know one, and she's enough. By the time you had seen ten ghosts you would have got used to them, and found there was no danger from them; but a woman without a soul will devour any number of men. You see she's all room inside! Look here! I must be open with you: tell me you are not in love with my cousin Lufa, and I will bid you good night."

"I am so much in love with her, that I dare not think what may come of it," replied Walter.

"Then for God's sake tell her, and have done with it! Anything will be better than going on like this. I will not say what Lufa is; indeed I don't know what name would at all fit her! You think me a queer, dry, odd sort of a customer: I was different when I fell in love with Lufa. She is older than you think her, though not so old as I am. I kept saying to myself she was hardly a woman yet; I must give her time. I was better brought up than she; I thought things of consequence that she thought of none. I hadn't a stupid ordinary mother like hers. She's my second cousin. She took my love-making, never drew me on, never pushed me back; never refused my love, never returned it. Whatever I did or said, she seemed content. She was always writing poetry. 'But where's her own poetry?' I would say to myself. I was always trying to

get nearer to what I admired; she never seemed to suspect the least relation between the ideal and life, between thought and action. To have an ideal implied no aspiration after it! She has not a thought of the smallest obligation to carry out one of the fine things she writes of, any more than people that go to church think they have anything to do with what they hear there. Most people's nature seems all in pieces. They wear and change their moods as they wear and change their dresses. Their moods make them, and not they their moods. They are different with every different mood. But Lufa seems never to change, and yet never to be in one and the same mood. She is always in two moods, and the one mood has nothing to do with the other. The one mood never influences, never modifies the other. They run side by side and do not mingle. The one mood is enthusiasm for what is not, the other indifference to what is. She has no faintest desire to make what is not into what is. For love, I believe all

she knows about it is, that it is a fine thing to be loved. She loves nobody but her mother, and her only after a fashion. I had my leg broken in the hunting-field once; my horse got up and galloped off; I lay still. She saw what had happened, and went after the hounds. She said she could do no good; Dr. Black was in the field, and she went to find him. She didn't find him, and he didn't come. I believe she forgot. But it's worth telling you, though it has nothing to do with her, that I wasn't forgot. Old Truefoot went straight home, and kept wheeling and tearing up and down before the windows, but, till his own groom came, would let no one touch him. Then when he would have led him to the stable, he set his fore feet out in front of him, and wouldn't budge. The groom got on his back, but was scarce in the saddle when Truefoot was off in a bee-line over everything to where I was lying. There's a horse for you! And there's a woman!—I'm telling you all this, mind, not to blame her, but to warn you.

Whether she is to blame or not, I don't know; I don't understand her.

"I was free to come and go, and say what I pleased, for both families favoured the match. She never objected; never said she would not have me; said she liked me as well as any other. In a word she would have married me, if I would have taken her. There are men, I believe, who would make the best of such a consent, saying they were so in love with the woman they would rejoice to take her on any terms: I don't understand that sort of love! I would as soon think of marrying a woman I hated as a woman that did not love me. I know no reason why any woman should love me, and if no woman can find any, I must go alone. Lufa has found none yet, and life and love too seem to have gone out of me waiting. If you ask me why I do not give it all up, I have no answer. You will say for Lufa, it is only that the right man is not come! It may be so; but I believe there is more than that in it. I fear she is all

outside. It is true her poetry is even passionate sometimes; but I suspect all her inspiration comes of the poetry she reads, not of the nature or human nature around her; it comes of ambition, not of love. I don't know much about verse, but to me there is an air of artificiality about all hers. I cannot understand how you could praise her long poem so much—if you were in love with her. She has grown to me like the ghost I told you of. I put out my hand to her, and it goes through her. It makes me feel dead myself to be with her. I wonder sometimes how it would be if suddenly she said she loved me. Should I love her, or should we have changed parts? She is very dainty—very lady-like—but womanly! At one time—and for this I am now punished—the ambition to wake love in her had no small part in my feeling toward her—ambition to be the first and only man so to move her: despair has long cured me of that; but not before I had come to love her in a way I cannot now understand. Why

I should love her I cannot tell; and were it not that I scorn to marry her without love, I should despise my very love. You are thinking, 'Well then, the way is clear for me!" It is; I only want to prepare you for what I am confident will follow: you will have the heart taken out of you!—That you are poor will be little obstacle if she loves you. She is the heiress, and can do much as she pleases. If she were in love, she would be obstinate. It must be in her somewhere, you will say, else how could she write as she does? But, I say again, look at the multitudes that go to church, and communicate, with whose being religion has no more to do than with that of Satan! I've said my say. Good night!"

He rose, and stood.

He had not uttered the depth of what he feared concerning Lufa—that she was simply, unobtrusively, unconsciously, absolutely selfish.

Walter had listened with a beating heart, now full of hope that he was to be Hildebrand to

this Undine, now sick with the conviction that he was destined to fare no better that Sefton.

"Let me have my say before you go," he protested. "It will sound as presumptuous in your ears as it does in mine—but what is to be done except put the thing to the question?"

"There is nothing else. That is all I want. You must not go on like this. It is sucking the life out of you. I can't bear to see it. Pray do not misunderstand me."

"That is impossible," returned Walter.

Not a wink did he sleep that night. But ever and again across his anxiety, throughout the dark hours, came the flattering thought that she had never loved man yet, and he was teaching her to love. He did not doubt Sefton, but Sefton might be right only for himself!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LAST RIDE.

In the morning, as Walter was dressing, he received a copy of his poems which he had taken in sheets to a bookbinder to put in morocco for lady Lufa. Pleased like a child, he handled it as if he might hurt it. Such a feeling he had never had before, would never have again. He was an author! One might think, after the way in which he had treated not a few books and not a few authors, he could scarcely consider it such a very fine thing to be an author; but there is always a difference between thine and mine, treated by the man of this world as essential. The book was Walter's book and not another's!—no common prose or poetry this, but the first-born of his deepest feeling!

At length it had taken body and shape! From the unseen it had emerged in red morocco, the colour of his heart, its edges golden with the light of his hopes!

As to the communication of the night, its pain had nearly vanished. Was not Sefton a disappointed lover? His honesty, however evident, could not alter that fact! Least of all could a man himself tell whether disguised jealousy and lingering hope might not be potently present, while he believed himself solely influenced by friendly anxiety!

"I will take his advice, however," said Walter to himself, "and put an end to my anxiety this very day!"

"Do you feel inclined for a gallop, Mr. Colman?" asked Lufa as they sat at the breakfast-table. "It feels just like a spring morning. The wind changed in the night. You won't mind a little mud—will you?"

In common phrase, but with a foolish look of adoring gratitude, Walter accepted the invi-

tation. "How handsome he is!" thought Lufa; for Walter's countenance was not only handsome but expressive. Most women, however, found him attractive chiefly from his frank address and open look; for, though yet far from a true man, he was of a true nature. Every man's nature indeed is true, though the man be not true; but some have come into the world so much nearer the point where they may begin to be true, that, comparing them with the rest, we say their nature is true.

Lufa rose and went to get ready. Walter followed, and overtook her on the stair.

"I have something for you," he said; "may I bring it you?"

He could not postpone the effect his book might have. Authors young and old think so much of their books that they seldom conceive how little others care about them.

She was hardly in her room, when he followed her with the volume.

She took it, and opened it.

"Yours!" she cried. "And poetry! Why, Walter!"

She had once or twice called him by his name before.

He took it from her hand, and turning the title page, gave it her again to read the dedication. A slight rose-tinge suffused her face. She said nothing, but shut the book, and gave it a tender little hug.

"She never did that to anything Sefton gave her!" thought Walter.

"Make haste," she said, and turning, went in, and closed her door.

He walked up and down the hall for half an hour before she appeared. When she came tripping down the wide, softly descending stair, in her tight-fitting habit and hat and feather, holding up her skirt, so that he saw her feet racing each other like a little cataract across the steps, saying as she came near him, "I have kept you waiting, but I could not help it; my habit was torn!" he thought he had never seen

her so lovely. Indeed she looked lovely, and had she loved, would have been lovely. As it was, her outer loveliness was but a promise whose fulfilment had been too long postponed. His heart swelled into his throat and eyes as he followed her, and helped her to mount.

"Nobody puts me up so well as you!" she said.

He could hardly repress the triumph that filled him from head to foot. Anyhow, and whoever might object, she liked him! If she loved him and would confess it, he could live on the pride of it all the rest of his days!

They were unattended, but neither spoke until they were well beyond the lodge-gate. Winter though it was, a sweet air was all abroad, and the day was full of spring-prophecies: all winters have such days, even those of the heart! how could we get through without them! Their horses were in excellent spirits—it was their first gallop for more than a week; Walter's roan was like a flame under him. They gave

them so much to do, that no such talk as Walter longed for, was possible. It consoled him, however, to think that he had never had such a chance of letting Lufa see he could ride.

At length, after a great gallop, they were quieter, seeming to remember they were horses and not colts, and must not overpass the limits of equine propriety.

"Is it our last ride, Lufa?" said Walter.

"Why should it be?" she answered, opening her eyes wide on him.

"There is no reason I know," he returned, "except—except you are tired of me."

"Nobody is tired of you—except perhaps George, and you need not mind him; he is odd. I have known him from childhood, and don't understand him yet."

"He is clever!" said Walter.

"I dare say he is—if he would take the trouble to show it."

"You hardly do him justice, I think!"

"How can I? he bores me! and when I am

bored, I am horribly bored. I have been very patient with him."

"Why do you ask him so often then?"

"*I* don't ask him. Mamma is fond of him, and so——"

"You are the victim!"

"I can bear it; I have consolations!"

She laughed merrily.

"How do you like my binding?" he asked, when they had ridden a while in silence.

She looked up with a question.

"The binding of my book, I mean," he explained.

"It is a good colour."

He felt his hope rather damped.

"Will you let me read a little from it?"

"With pleasure. You shall have an audience in the drawing-room, after luncheon."

"Oh, Lufa! how could you think I would read my own poems to a lot of people!"

"I beg your pardon! Will the summer-house do?"

"Yes, indeed; nowhere better."

"Very well! The summer-house, after lunch!"

This was not encouraging! Did she suspect what was coming? and was she careful not to lead the way to it? She had never been like this before! Perhaps she did not like having the book dedicated to her! But there was no mention of her name, or anything to let "the heartless world" know to whom it was offered!

As they approached the house, Walter said,

"Would you mind coming at once to the summer-house?"

"Lunch will be ready."

"Then sit down in your habit, and come immediately after. Let me have my way for once, Lufa."

"Very well."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SUMMER-HOUSE.

THE moment the meal was over, he left the room, and in five minutes they met at the place appointed—a building like a miniature Roman temple.

"Oh," said Lufa as she entered, "I forgot the book! How stupid of me!"

"Never mind," returned Walter. "It was you, not the book I wanted."

A broad bench went round the circular wall; Lufa seated herself on it, and Walter placed himself beside her, as near as he dared. For some moments he did not speak. She looked up at him inquiringly. He sank at her feet, bowed his head toward her, and but for lack of courage would have laid it on her knees.

"Oh Lufa!" he said, "you cannot think how I love you!"

"Poor, dear boy!" she returned, in the tone of a careless mother to whom a son has unburdened his sorrows, and laid her hand lightly on his curls.

The words were not repellent, but neither was the tone encouraging.

"You do not mind my saying it?" he resumed, feeling his way timidly.

"What could you do but tell me?" she answered. "What could I do for you if you did not let me know! I'm *so* sorry, Walter!"

"Why should you be sorry? You can do with me as you please!"

"I don't know about such things. I don't quite know what you mean, or what you want. I will be as kind to you as I can—while you stay with us."

"But, Lufa—I may call you Lufa?"

"Yes, surely! if that is any comfort to you."

"Nothing but your love, Lufa, can be a

comfort to me. That would make me one of the blessed!"

"I like you very much. If you were a girl, I should say I loved you."

"Why not say it as it is?"

"Would you be content with the love I should give a girl? Some of you want so much!"

"I will be glad of any love you can give me. But to say I should be *content* with *any* love you could give me, would be false. My love to you is such, I don't know how to bear it! It aches so! My heart is full of you, and longs for you till I can hardly endure the pain. You are so beautiful that your beauty burns me. Night nor day can I forget you!"

"You try to forget me then?"

"Never. Your eyes have so dazzled my soul that I can see nothing but your eyes.—Do look at me—just for one moment, Lufa."

She turned her face and looked him straight in the eyes—looked into them as if they were windows through which she could peer into the

convolutions of his brain. She held her eyes steady until his dropped, unable to sustain the nearness of her presence.

"You see," she said, "I am ready to do anything I can to please you!"

He felt strangely defeated, rose, and sat down beside her again, with the sickness of a hot summer-noon in his soul. But he must leave no room for mistake! He had been dreaming long enough! What had not Sefton told him!

"Is it possible you do not understand, Lufa, what a man means when he says, 'I love you'?"

"I think I do! I don't mind it!"

"That means you will love me again?"

"Yes; I will be good to you."

"You will love me as a woman loves a man?"

"I will let you love me as much as you please."

"To love you as much as I please, would be to call you my own; to marry you; to say *wife* to you; to have you altogether, with nobody to come between, or try to stop my

worshipping of you—not father, not mother—nobody!"

"Now you are foolish, Walter! You know I never meant that! You must have known that never *could* be! I never imagined you could make such a fantastic blunder! But then how should *you* know how *we* think about things! I must remember that, and not be hard upon you!"

"You mean that your father and mother would not like it?"

"There it is! You do not understand! I thought so! I do not mean my father and mother in particular; I mean our people—people of our position—I would say *rank*, but that might hurt you! We are brought up so differently from you, that you cannot understand how we think of such things. It grieves me to appear unkind, but really, Walter! There is not a man I love more than you—but marriage! —*Lady Lufà* would be in everybody's mouth, the same as if I had run off with my groom!

Our people are so blind that, believe me, they would hardly see the difference. The thing is simply impossible!"

"It would not be impossible if you loved me!"

"Then I don't, never did, never could love you. Don't imagine you can persuade me to anything unbecoming, anything treacherous to my people! You will find yourself awfully mistaken!"

"But I may make myself a name! If I were as famous as lord Tennyson, would it be just as impossible?"

"To say it would not, would be to confess myself worldly, and that I never was! No, Walter; I admire you; if you could be trusted not to misunderstand, I might even say I loved you! I shall always be glad to see you, always enjoy hearing you read; but there is a line as impassable as the Persian river of death. Talk about something else, or I must go!"

Here Walter, who had been shivering with

cold, began to grow warm again as he answered :—

"How could you write that poem, lady Lufa —full of such grand things about love, declaring love everything and rank nothing; and then, when it came to yourself, treat me like this! I could not have believed it possible! You cannot know what love is, however much you write about it!"

"I hope I never shall, if it means any confusion between friendship and folly! It shall not make a fool of *me!* I will *not* be talked about! It is all very well and very right in poetry! The idea of letting all go for love is so splendid, it is the greatest pity it should be impossible. There may be some planet, whose social habits are different, where it might work well enough; but here it is not to be thought of—except in poetry, of course, or novels. Of all human relations, the idea of such love is certainly the fittest for verse, therefore we have no choice; we must use it. But because I think with pleasure

of such lovers, why must I consent to be looked at with pleasure myself? What obligation does my heroine lay on me to do likewise? I don't see the thing. I don't want to pose as a lover. Why should I fall in love with you in real life, because I like you to read my poem about lovers? Can't you see the absurdity of the argument? Life and books are two different spheres. The one is the sphere of thoughts, the other of things, and they don't touch."

But for pride, Walter could have wept with shame: why should he care that one with such principles should grant or refuse him anything! Yet he did care!

"There is no reason at all," she resumed, "why we should not be friends. Mr. Colman, I am not a flirt. It is in my heart to be a sister to you! I would have you the first to congratulate me when the man appears whom I may choose to love as you mean! He need not be a poet to make you jealous! If he were, I should yet always regard you as my poet."

"And you would let me kiss your shoe, or perhaps your glove, if I was very good!" said Walter.

She took no notice of the outburst : it was but a bit of childish temper!

"You must learn," she went on, "to keep your life and your imagination apart. You are always letting them mix, and that confuses everything. A poet of all men ought not to make the mistake. It is quite monstrous! as monstrous as if a painter joined the halves of two different animals! Poetry is so unlike life, that to carry the one into the other is to make the poet a ridiculous parody of a man! The moment that, instead of standing aloof and regarding, he plunges in, he becomes a traitor to his art, and is no longer able to represent things as they ought to be, but cannot be. My mother and I will open to you the best doors in London because we like you; but pray do not dream of more. Do, please, Walter, leave it possible for me to say I like you—oh, so much!"

She had been staring out of the window as she spoke; now she turned her eyes upon him where he sat, crushed and broken, beside her. A breath of compassion seemed to ruffle the cold lake of her spirit, and she looked at him in silence for a moment. He did not raise his eyes, but her tone made her present to his whole being as she said,

"I *don't* want to break your heart, my poet! It was a lovely thought—why did you spoil it? —that we two understood and loved each other in a way nobody could have a right to interfere with!"

Walter lifted his head. The word *loved* wrought on him like a spell: he was sadly a creature of words! He looked at her with flushed face and flashing eyes. Often had Lufa thought him handsome, but she had never felt it as she did now.

"Let it be so!" he said. "Be my sister-friend, Lufa. Leave it only to me to remember how foolish I once made myself in your beautiful

eyes—how miserable always in my own blind heart."

So little of a man was our poet, that out of pure disappointment and self-pity he burst into a passion of weeping. The world seemed lost to him, as it has seemed at such a time to many a better man. But to the true the truth of things will sooner or later assert itself, and neither this world nor the next prove lost to him. A man's wellbeing does not depend on any woman. The woman did not create, and could not have contented him. No woman can ruin a man by refusing him, or even by accepting him, though she may go far toward it. There is one who has upon him a perfect claim, at the entrancing recognition of which he will one day cry out, "This, then, is what it all meant!" The lamp of poetry may for a time go out in the heart of the poet, and nature seem a blank; but where the truth is, the poetry must be; and truth is, however the untrue may fail to see it. Surely that man is a fool who, on the ground

that there cannot be such a God as other fools assert, or such a God as alone he is able to imagine, says there is no God!

Lufa's bosom heaved, and she gave a little sob; her sentiment, the skin of her heart, was touched, for the thing was pathetic! A mist came over her eyes, and might, had she ever wept, have turned to tears.

Walter sat with his head in his hands and wept. She had never before seen a man weep, yet never a tear left its heavenly spring to flow from her eyes! She rose, took his face between her hands, raised it, and kissed him on the forehead.

He rose also, suddenly calmed.

"Then it *was* our last ride, Lufa!" he said, and left the summer-house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PARK.

WALTER did not know where he was going when he turned from Lufa. It was solitude he sought, without being aware that he sought anything. Must it not be a deep spiritual instinct that drives trouble into solitude? There are times when only the highest can comfort even the lowest, and solitude is the antechamber to his presence. With him is the only possibility of essential comfort, the comfort that turns an evil into a good. But it was certainly not *knowledge* of this that drove Walter into the wide, lonely park. "Away from men!" moans the wounded life. Away from the herd flies the wounded deer; away from the flock staggers the sickly sheep—to the solitary covert

to die. The man too thinks it is to die; but it is in truth so to return to life—if indeed he be a man, and not an abortion that can console himself with vile consolations. "You cannot soothe me, my friends! leave me to my misery," cries the man; and lo his misery is the wind of the waving garments of him that walks in the garden in the cool of the day! All misery is *God unknown.*

Hurt and bleeding Walter wandered away. His life was palled with a sudden hail-cloud which hung low, and blotted out colour and light and loveliness. It was the afternoon; the sun was fast going down; the dreary north wind had begun again to blow, and the trees to moan in response; they seemed to say, "How sad thou art, wind of winter! see how sad thou makest us! we moan and shiver! each alone, we are sad!" The sorrow of nature was all about him; but the sighing of the wind-sifting trees around his head, and the hardening of the earth about the ancient roots under his feet, was

better than the glow of the bright drawing-room, with its lamps and blazing fires, its warm colours and caressing softnesses. Who would take joy in paradise with hell in his heart! Let him stay out in the night with the suffering, groaning trees, with the clouds that have swallowed the moon and the stars, with the frost and the silent gathering of the companies, troops, and battalions of snow!

Every man understands something of what Walter felt. His soul was seared with cold. The ways of life were a dull sickness. There was no reason why things should be, why the world should ever have been made! The night was come: why should he keep awake! How cold the river looked in its low, wet channel! How listlessly the long grasses hung over its bank! And the boy on the other side was whistling!

It grew darker. He had made a long round, and unaware was approaching the house. He had not thought what he must do. Nothing so

practical as going away had yet occurred to him. She had not been unkind! She had even pressed on him a sister's love! The moth had not yet burned away enough of its wings to prevent it from burning its whole body! it kept fluttering about the flame. Nor was absent the childish weakness, the unmanly but common impulse, to make the woman feel how miserable she had made him. For this poor satisfaction, not a few men have blown their brains out; not a few women drowned themselves or taken poison—and generally without success! Walter would stand before her the ruin she had made him, then vanish from her sight. To-morrow he would leave the house, but she must see him yet once, alone, before he went! Once more he must hang his shrivelled pinions in the presence of the seraph whose radiance had scorched him! And still the most hideous thought of all would keep lifting its vague ugly head out of chaos—the thought that, lovely as she was, she was not worshipful.

The windows were dimly shining through their thick curtains. The house looked a great jewel of bliss, in which the spirits of paradise might come and go, while such as he could not enter! What should he do? Where should he go? To his room, and dress for dinner? It was impossible! How could he sit feeling her eyes, and facing Sefton! How endure the company, the talk, the horrible eating! All so lately full of refinement, of enchantment—the music, the pictures, the easy intercourse—all was stupid, wearisome, meaningless! He would go to his room and say he had a headache! But first he would peep into the drawing-room: she might be there—and looking sad!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DRAWING-ROOM.

HE opened a door into one of the smaller compartments of the drawing-room, looked, crept in, and closed the door behind him.

Lufa was there—alone! He durst not approach her, but if he seated himself in a certain corner, he could see her and she him! He did not, however, apprehend that the corner he had chosen was entirely in shadow, or reflect that the globe of a lamp was almost straight between them. He thought she saw him, but she did not.

The room seemed to fold him round with softness as he entered from the dreary night; and he could not help being pervaded by the warmth, and weakened by the bodily comfort.

He sat and gazed at his goddess—a mere idol, seeming, not being, until he hardly knew whether she was actually before him, or only present to his thought. She was indeed a little pale—but that she always was when quiet; no sorrow, not a shadow was on her face. She seemed brooding, but over nothing painful. At length she smiled.

"She is pleased to think that I love her!" thought Walter. "She leans to me a little! When the gray hair comes and the wrinkles, it will be a gracious memory that she was so loved by one who had but his life to give her! 'He was poor,' she will say, 'but I have not found the riches he would have given me! I have been greatly loved!'"

I believe myself, she was ruminating a verse that had come to her in the summer-house, while Walter was weeping by her side.

A door opened, and Sefton came in.

"Have you seen the *Onlooker?*" he said—a journal at the time in much favour with the

more educated populace. "There is a review in it that would amuse you."

"Of what?" she asked listlessly.

"I didn't notice the name of the book, but it is a poem, and just your sort, I should say. The article is in the *Onlooker's* best style."

"Pray let me see it!" she answered, holding out her hand.

"I will read it to you, if I may."

She did not object. He sat down a little way from her, and read.

He had not gone far before Walter knew, although its name had not occurred as Sefton read, that the book was his own. The discovery enraged him: how had the reviewer got hold of it when he himself had seen no copy except Lufa's? It was a puzzle he never got at the root of. Probably someone he had offended had contrived to see as much of it, at the printer's or binder's, as had enabled him to forestall its appearance with the most stinging, mocking, playfully insolent paper that had ever rejoiced

the readers of the *Onlooker*. But he had more to complain of than rudeness, a thing of which I doubt if any reviewer is ever aware. For he soon found that, by the blunder of reviewer or printer, the best of the verses quoted were misquoted, and so rendered worthy of the epithet attached to them. This unpleasant discovery was presently followed by another—that the rudest and most contemptuous personal remark was founded on an ignorant misapprehension of the reviewer's own; while in ridicule of a mere misprint which happened to carry a comic suggestion on the face of it, the reviewer surpassed himself.

As Sefton read, Lufa laughed often and heartily: the thing was gamesomely, cleverly, almost brilliantly written. Annoyed as he was, Walter did not fail to note, however, that Sefton did not stop to let Lufa laugh, but read quietly on. Suddenly she caught the paper from his hand, for she was quick as a kitten, saying:

"I must see who the author of the precious book is!"

Her cousin did not interfere, but sat watching her—almost solemnly.

"Ah, I thought so!" she cried, with a shriek of laughter. "I thought so! I could hardly be mistaken! What *will* the poor fellow say to it! It will kill him!" She laughed immoderately. "I hope it will give him a lesson, however!" she went on. "It is most amusing to see how much he thinks of his own verses! He worships them! And then makes up for the idolatry by handling without mercy those of other people! It was he who so maltreated my poor first! I never saw anything so unfair in my life!"

Sefton said nothing, but looked grim.

"You *should* see—I will show it you—the gorgeous copy of this same comical stuff he gave me to-day! I am so glad he is going: he won't be able to ask me how I like it, and I shan't have to tell a story! I'm sorry for him, though—truly! He is a very nice sort of boy, though *rather* presuming. I must find out who

the writer of that review is, and get mamma to invite him! He is a host in himself! I don't think I ever read anything so clever—or more just!"

"Oh, then, you have read the book?" spoke her cousin at length.

"No; but ain't those extracts enough? Don't they speak for themselves—for their silliness and sentimentality?"

"How would you like a book of yours judged by scraps chopped off anywhere, Lufa!—or chosen for the look they would have in the humorous frame of the critic's remarks! It is less than fair! I do not feel that I know in the least what sort of book this is. I only know that again and again, having happened to come afterwards upon the book itself, I have set down the reviewer as a knave, who for ends of his own did not scruple to make fools of his readers. I am ashamed, Lufa, that you should so accept everything as gospel against a man who believes you his friend!"

Walter's heart had been as water, now it had turned to ice, and with the coldness came strength: he could bear anything except this desert of a woman. The moment Sefton had thus spoken, he rose and came forward—not so much, I imagine, to Sefton's surprise as Lufa's, and said,

"Thank you, Mr. Sefton, for undeceiving me. I owe you, lady Lufa, the debt of a deep distrust hereafter of poetic ladies."

"They will hardly be annihilated by it, Mr. Colman!" returned Lufa. "But, indeed, I did not know you were in the room; and perhaps you did not know that in our circle it is counted bad manners to listen!"

"I was foolishly paralyzed for a moment," said Walter, "as well as unprepared for the part you would take."

"I am very glad, Mr. Colman," said Sefton, "that you have had the opportunity of discovering the truth! My cousin well deserves the pillory in which I know you will not place her!"

"Lady Lufa needs fear nothing from me. I have some regard left for the idea of her—the thing she is not! If you will be kind, come and help me out of the house."

"There is no train to-night.'

"I will wait at the station for the slow train."

"I cannot press you to stay an hour where you have been so treated, but——"

"It is high time I went!" said Walter—not without the dignity that endurance gives. "May I ask you to do one thing for me, Mr. Sefton?"

"Twenty things, if I can."

Then please send my portmanteau after me."

With that he left the room, and went to his own, far on the way of cure, though not quite so far as he imagined. The blood, however, was surging healthily through his veins: he had been made a fool of, but he would be a wiser man for it!

He had hardly closed his door when Sefton appeared.

"Can I help you?" he said.

"To pack my portmanteau? Did you ever pack your own?"

"Oftener than you, I suspect! I never had but one orderly I could bear about me, and he's dead, poor fellow! I shall see him again, though, I do trust, let believers in dirt say what they will! Never till I myself think no more, will I cease hoping to see my old Archie again! Fellows must learn something through the Lufas, or they would make raving maniacs of us! God be thanked, he has her in his great idiot-cage, and will do something with her yet! May you and I be there to see when she comes out in her right mind!"

"Amen!" said Walter.

"And now, my dear fellow," said Sefton, "if you will listen to me, you will not go till to-morrow morning.—No, I don't want you to stay to breakfast! You shall go by the early train as any other visitor might. The least scrap of a note to lady Tremaine, and all will go without remark."

He waited in silence. Walter went on putting up his things.

"I daresay you are right!" he said at length. "I will stay till the morning. But you will not ask me to go down again?"

"It would be a victory if you could!"

"Very well, I will. I am a fool, but this much less of a fool, that I know I am one."

Somehow Walter had a sense of relief. He began to dress, and spent some pains on the process. He felt sure Sefton would take care the *Onlooker* should not be seen—before his departure anyhow. During dinner he talked almost brilliantly, making Lufa open her eyes without knowing she did.

He retired at length to his room with very mingled feelings. There was the closing paragraph of the most interesting chapter of his life yet constructed! What was to follow?

Into the gulf of an empty heart
Something must always come.
"What will it be?" I think with a start,
And a fear that makes me dumb

I cannot sit at my outer gate
  And call what shall soothe my grief;
I cannot unlock to a king in state,
  Cannot bar a wind-swept leaf!

Hopeless were I if a loving Care
  Sat not at the spring of my thought—
At the birth of my history, blank and bare,
  Of the thing I have not wrought.

If God were not, this hollow need,
  All that I now call *me*,
Might wallow with demons of hate and greed
  In a lawless and shoreless sea!

Watch the door of this sepulchre,
  Sit, my Lord, on the stone,
Till the life within it rise and stir,
  And walk forth to claim its own.

This was how Walter felt and wrote some twelve months after, when he had come to understand a little of the process that had been conducted in him; when he knew that the life he had been living was a mere life in death, a being not worth being.

But the knowledge of this process had not yet begun. A thousand subtle influences, wrapt in the tattered cloak of dull old Time, had to come

into secret, potent play, ere he would be able to write thus.

And even this paragraph was not yet quite at an end.

CHAPTER XXV.

A MIDNIGHT INTERVIEW.

WALTER drew his table near the fire, and sat down to concoct a brief note of thanks and farewell to his hostess informing her that he was compelled to leave in haste. He found it rather difficult, though what Lufa might tell her mother, he neither thought nor cared, if only he had his back to the house, and his soul out of it. It was now the one place on the earth which he would sink in the abyss of forgetfulness.

He could not get the note to his mind, falling constantly into thought that led nowhither, and at last threw himself back in his chair, wearied with the emotions of the day. Under the soothing influence of the heat and the

lambent motions of the flames, he fell into a condition which was not sleep, and as little was waking. His childhood crept back to him, with all the delights of the sacred time when home was the universe, and father and mother the divinities that filled it. A something now vanished from his life, looked at him across a gulf of lapse, and said, "Am I likewise false? The present you desire to forget; you say, it were better it had never been: do you wish I too had never been? Why else have you left my soul in the grave of oblivion?" Thus talking with his past, he fell asleep.

It could have been but for a few minutes, though when he woke it seemed a century had passed, he had dreamed of so much. But something had happened! What was it? The fire was blazing as before, but he was chilled to the marrow! A wind seemed blowing upon him, cold as if it issued from the jaws of the sepulchre! His imagination and memory together linked the time to the night of Sefton's

warning: was the ghost now really come? Had Sefton's presence only saved him from her for the time? He sat bolt upright in his chair listening, the same horror upon him as then. It seemed minutes he thus sat motionless, but moments of fearful expectation are long drawn out; their nature is of centuries, not years. One thing was certain, and one only—that there was a wind, and a very cold one, blowing upon him. He stared at the door. It moved. It opened a little. A light tap followed. He could not speak. Then came a louder, and the spell was broken. He started to his feet, and with the courage of terror extreme, opened the door—not opened it a little, as if he feared an unwelcome human presence, but pulled it, with a sudden wide yawn, open as the grave!

There stood no bodiless soul, but soulless Lufa!

He stood aside, and invited her to enter. Little as he desired to see her, it was a relief

that it was she, and not an elderly lady in brown silk, through whose person you might thrust your hand without injury or offence.

As a reward of his promptitude in opening the door, he caught sight of lady Tremaine disappearing in the corridor.

Lady Lufa walked in without a word, and Walter followed her, leaving the door wide. She seated herself in the chair he had just left, and turned to him with a quiet, magisterial air, as if she sat on the seat of judgment.

"You had better shut the door," she said.

"I thought lady Tremaine might wish to hear," answered Walter.

"Not at all. She only lighted me to the door."

"As you please," said Walter, and having done as she requested, returned, and stood before her.

"Will you not take a seat?" she said, in the tone of—"You may sit down."

"Your ladyship will excuse me!" he answered.

She gave a condescending motion to her pretty neck, and said,

"I need hardly explain, Mr. Colman, why I have sought this interview. You must by this time be aware how peculiar, how unreasonable indeed, your behaviour was!"

"Pardon me! I do not see the necessity for a word on the matter. I leave by the first train in the morning!"

"I will not dwell on the rudeness of listening——"

"To a review of my own book read by a friend!" interrupted Walter, with indignation; "—in a drawing-room where I sat right in front of you, and knew no reason why you should not see me! I did make a great mistake, but it was in trusting a lady who, an hour or two before, had offered to be my sister! How could I suspect she might speak of me in a way she would not like me to hear!"

Lady Lufa was not quite prepared for the tone he took. She had expected to find him

easy to cow. Her object was to bring him into humble acceptance of the treatment against which he had rebelled, lest he should afterward avenge himself! She sat a moment in silence.

"Such ignorance of the ways of the world," she said, "is excusable in a poet—especially——"

"Such a poet!" supplemented Walter, who found it difficult to keep his temper in face of her arrogance.

"But the world is made up of those that laugh and those that are laughed at."

"They change places, however, sometimes!" said Walter—which alarmed Lufa, though she did not show her anxiety.

"Certainly!" she replied. "Everybody laughs at everybody when he gets a chance! What is society but a club for mutual criticism! The business of its members is to pass judgment on each other! Why not take the accident, which seems so to annoy you, with the philosophy of a gentleman—like one of us! None of us think anything of what is said of us; we do not heed

what we say of each other! Everyone knows that all his friends pull him to pieces the moment he is out of sight—as heartily as they had just been assisting him to pull others to pieces. Every gathering is a temporary committee, composed of those who are present, and sitting upon those who are not present. Nobody dreams of courtesy extending beyond presence! when that is over, obligation is over. Any such imaginary restriction would render society impossible. It is only the most inexperienced person that could suppose things going on in his absence the same as in his presence! It is I who ought to be pitied, not you! I am the loser, not you!"

Walter bowed and was silent. He did not yet see her drift. If his regard had been worth anything, she certainly had lost a good deal, but, as it was, he did not understand how the loss could be of importance to her.

With sudden change of tone and expression, she broke out—

"Be generous, Walter! Forgive me. I will make any atonement you please, and never again speak of you as if you were not my own brother!"

"It is not of the least consequence how you speak of me now, lady Lufa: I have had the good though painful fortune to learn your real feelings, and prefer the truth to the most agreeable deception. Your worst opinion of me I could have borne and loved you still; but there is nothing of you, no appearance of anything even, left to love! I know now that a woman may be sweet as Hybla honey, and false as an apple of Sodom!"

"Well, you *are* ungenerous! I hope there are not many in the world to whom one might confess a fault and not be forgiven. This is indeed humiliating!"

"I beg your pardon; I heard no confession!"

"I asked you to forgive me."

"For what?"

"For talking of you as I did."

"Which you justified as the custom of society!"

"I confess, then, that in your case I ought not to have done so."

"Then I forgive you; and we part in peace."

"Is that what you call forgiveness?"

"Is it not all that is required? Knowing now your true feeling toward me, I know that in this house I am a mistake. Nothing like a true relation exists, nothing more than the merest acquaintance can exist between us!"

"It is terrible to have such an enemy!"

"I do not understand you!"

"The match is not fair! Here stands poor me undefended, chained to the rock! There you lurk, behind the hedge, invisible, and taking every advantage! Do you think it fair?"

"I begin to understand! The objection did not seem to strike you while I was the person shot at! But still I fail to see your object. Please explain."

"You *must* know perfectly what I mean,

Walter! and I cannot but believe you too just to allow a personal misunderstanding to influence your public judgment! You gave your real unbiassed opinion of my last book, and you are bound by that!"

"Is it possible," cried Walter, "that at last I understand you! That you should come to me on such an errand, lady Lufa, reveals yet more your opinion of me! *Could* you believe me capable of such vileness as to take my revenge by abusing your work?"

"Ah, no!—Promise me you will not."

"If such a promise were necessary, how could it set you at your ease? The man who could do such a thing would break any promise!"

"Then whatever rudeness is offered me in your journal, I shall take as springing from your resentment!"

"If you do, you will wrong me far worse than you have yet done. I shall not merely never review work of yours, I will never utter an opinion of it to any man."

"Thank you. So we part friends!"

"Conventionally."

She rose. He turned to the door and opened it. She passed him, her head thrown back, her eyes looking poisonous, and let a gaze of contemptuous doubt rest on him for a moment. His eyes did not quail before hers.

She had left a taper burning on a slab outside the door. Walter had but half closed it behind her when she reappeared with the taper in one hand and the volume he had given her in the other. He took the book without a word, and again she went; but he had hardly thrown it on the hot coals when once more she appeared. I believe she had herself blown her taper out.

"Let me have a light, please," she said.

He took the taper from her hand, and turned to light it. She followed him into the room, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Walter," she said, "it was all because of Sefton! He does not like you, and can't bear

me to like you! I am engaged to him. I ought to have told you!"

"I will congratulate him next time I see him!" said Walter.

"No, no!" she cried, looking at once angry and scared.

"I will not, then," answered Walter; "but allow me to say I do not believe Sefton dislikes me. Anyhow, keep your mind at ease, pray. I shall certainly not in any way revenge myself."

She looked up in his eyes with a momentary glimmer of her old sweetness, said "Thank you!" gently, and left the room. Her last glance left a faint, sad sting in Walter's heart, and he began to think whether he had not been too hard upon her. In any case, the sooner he was out of the house the better! He must no more trifle with the girl, than a dipsomaniac with the brandy bottle!

All the time of this last scene, the gorgeous book was frizzling and curling and cracking on the embers. Whether she saw it or not I cannot

say, but she was followed all along the corridor by the smell of the burning leather, which got into some sleeping noses, and made their owners dream the house was on fire.

In the morning, Sefton woke him, helped him to dress, got him away in time, and went with him to the station. Not a word passed between them about Lufa. All the way to London Walter pondered whether there could be any reality in what she had said about Sefton. Was it not possible that she might have imagined him jealous? Sefton's dislike of her treatment of him might to her have seemed displeasure at her familiarity with him! "And indeed," thought Walter, "there are few friends who care so much for any author, I suspect, as to be indignant with his reviewers!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

A PERIOD.

IF London was dreary when Lufa left it, it was worse than dreary to Walter now that she was gone from his world; gone from the universe past and future both—for the Lufa he had dreamed of was not, and had never been! He had no longer any one to dream about, waking or asleep. The space she had occupied was a blank spot, black and cold, charred with the fire of passion, cracked with the frost of disappointment and scorn. It had its intellectual trouble too—the impossibility of bringing together the long-cherished idea of Lufa, and the reality of Lufa revealed by herself; the two stared at each other in mortal irreconcilement. Now also,

he had no book to occupy him with pleasant labour. It had passed from him into the dark; the thought of it was painful, almost loathsome to him. No one, however, he was glad to find, referred to it. His friends pitied him, and his foes were silent. Three copies of it were sold. The sneaking review had had influence enough with the courted public to annihilate it.

But the expenses of printing it remained; he had yet to pay his share of them; and, alas, he did not know how! The publisher would give him time, no doubt, but, work his hardest, it would be a slow clearance! There was the shame too of having undertaken what he was unable at once to fulfil! He set himself to grind and starve.

At times the clouds would close in upon him, and there would seem nothing in life worth living for; though in truth his life was so much the more valuable that Lufa was out of it. Occasionally his heart would grow very gentle toward her, and he would burrow for possible

way to her excuse. But his conclusion was ever the same: how could he forget that laugh of utter merriment and delight when she found it was indeed himself under the castigation of such a mighty beadle of literature! In his most melting mood, therefore, he could only pity her. But what would have become of him had she not thus unmasked herself! He would now be believing her the truest, best of women, with no fault but a coldness of which he had no right to complain, a coldness comforted by the extent of its freezing!

But there was far more to make London miserable to him: he was now at last disgusted with his trade: this continuous feeding on the labour of others was no work for a gentleman! he began to descry in it certain analogies which grew more and more unpleasant as he regarded them. For his poetizing he was sick of that also. True, the quality or value of what he had written was nowise in itself affected by its failure to meet acceptance. It had certainly not had fair play; it had been represented as it was not; its char-

acter had been lied away! But now that the blinding influence of their chief subject was removed, he saw the verses themselves to be little worth. The soul of them was not the grand all-informing love, but his own private self-seeking little passion for a poor show of the lovable. No one could care for such verses, except indeed it were some dumb soul in love with a woman like, or imaginably like the woman of their thin worship! Not a few were pretty, he allowed, and some were quaint—that is, had curious old-flavoured phrases and fantastic turns of thought; but throughout there was no revelation! They sparkled too with the names of things in themselves beautiful, but whether these things were in general wisely or fairly used in his figures and tropes and comparisons, he was now more than doubtful. He had put on his singing robes to whisper his secret love into the two great red ears of the public!—desiring, not sympathy from love and truth, but recognition from fame and report! That he had not received

it was better than he deserved! Then what a life was it thus to lie wallowing among the mushrooms of the press! To spend gifts which, whatever they were, were divine, in publishing the tidings that this man had done ill, that other had done well, that he was amusing, and she was dull! Was it worth calling work, only because it was hard and dreary? His conscience, his taste, his impulses, all declined to back him in it any longer. What was he doing for the world? they asked him. How many books had he guided men to read, by whose help they might steer their way through the shoals of life? He could count on the fingers of one hand such as he had heartily recommended. If he had but pointed out what was good in books otherwise poor, it would have been something! He had not found it easy to be at once clever, honest, and serviceable to his race: the press was but for the utterance of opinion, true or false, not for the education of thought! And why should such as he write

books, who had nothing to tell men that could make them braver, stronger, purer, more loving, less selfish!

What next was to be done? His calling had vanished! It was not work worthy of a man! It was contemptible as that of the parson to whom the church is a profession! He owed his landlady money: how was he to pay her? He must eat, or how was he to work? There must be something honest for him to do! Was a man to do the wrong in order to do the right?

The true Walter was waking—beginning to see things as they were, and not as men regarded them. He was tormented with doubts and fears of all kinds, high and low. But for the change in his father's circumstances, he would have asked his help, cleared off everything, and gone home at once; and had he been truer to his father, he would have known that such a decision would even now have rejoiced his heart.

He had no longer confidence enough to write on any social question. Of the books sent him,

he chose such as seemed worthiest of notice, but could not do much. He felt not merely a growing disinclination, but a growing incapacity for the work. How much the feeling may have been increased by the fact that his health was giving way, I cannot tell; but certainly the root of it was moral.

His funds began to fail his immediate necessities, and he had just come from pawning the watch which he would have sold but that it had been his mother's, and was the gift of his father, when he met Harold Sullivan, who persuaded him to go with him to a certain theatre in which the stalls had not yet entirely usurped upon the enjoyable portion of the pit. Between the first and second acts, he caught sight of lady Lufa in a box, with Sefton standing behind her. There was hardly a chance of their seeing him, and he regarded them at his ease, glad to see Sefton, and not sorry to see Lufa, for it was an opportunity of testing himself. He soon perceived that they held almost no communication

with each other, but was not surprised, knowing in how peculiar a relation they stood. Lufa was not looking unhappy—far from it; her countenance expressed absolute self-contentment: in all parts of the house she was attracting attention, especially from the young men. Sefton's look was certainly not one of content; but neither, as certainly, was it one of discontent; it suggested power waiting opportunity, strength quietly attendant upon, hardly expectant of the moment of activity. Walter imagined one watching a beloved cataleptic: till she came alive, what was to be done but wait! God has had more waiting than any one else! Lufa was an iceberg that would not melt even in the warm southward sea, watched by a still volcano, whose fires were of no avail, for they could not reach her. Sparklingly pretty, not radiantly beautiful, she sat, glancing, coruscating, glittering, anything except glowing: glow she could not even put on! She did not know what it was. Now and then a soft sadness would for

a moment settle on Sefton's face—like the gray of a cloudy summer evening, about to gather into a warm rain; but this was never when he looked at her; it was only when, without seeing, he thought about her. Hitherto Walter had not been capable of understanding the devotion, the quiet strength, the persistent purpose of the man; now he began to see into it and wonder. While a spark of hope lay alive in those ashes of disappointment that had often seemed as if they would make but a dust-heap of his bosom, there he must remain, by the clean, cold hearth, swept and garnished, of the woman he loved—loved strangely, mysteriously, inexplicably even to himself!

Walter sat gazing; and as he gazed, simultaneously the two became aware of his presence. A friendly smile spread over Sefton's face, but, with quick perception, he abstained from any movement that might seem to claim recognition. To Walter's wonder, Lufa, so perfectly self-contained, so unchangingly self-obedient,

coloured—faintly indeed, but plainly enough to the eyes of one so well used to the white rose of her countenance. She moved neither head nor person, only turned her eyes away, and seemed, like the dove for its foot, to seek some resting-place for her vision—and with the sight awoke in Walter the first unselfish resolve of his life. Would he not do anything—could he not do something to bring those two together? The thought seemed even to himself almost a foolish one; but spiritual relations and potencies go far beyond intellectual ones, and a man must become a fool to be wise. Many a foolish thought, many a most improbable idea, has proved itself seed-bearing fruit of the kingdom of heaven. A man may fail to effect, or be unable to set hand to work he would fain do—and be judged, as Browning says in his Saul, by what he would have done if he could. Only the *would* must be as true as a deed; then it is a deed. The kingdom of heaven is for the dreamers of true dreams only!

Was there then anything Walter could do to help the man to gain the woman he had so faithfully helped Walter to lose? It was no plain task. The thing was not to enable him to marry her—that Sefton could have done long ago—might do anyday without help from him! As she then was, she was no gain for any true man! But if he could help to open the eyes of the cold-hearted, conceited, foolish girl, either to her own valuelessness as she was, or her worth as she might be, or again to the value, the eternal treasure of the heart she was turning from, she would then be a gift that in the giving grew worthy even of such a man!

Here, however, came a different thought, bearing nevertheless in the same direction. It was very well to think of Lufa's behaviour to Sefton, but what had Walter's been to Lufa? It may seem strange that the reflection had not come to him before; but in nothing are we slower than in discovering our own blame—and the

slower that we are so quick to perceive or imagine we perceive the blame of others. For, the very fact that we see and heartily condemn the faults of others, we use, unconsciously perhaps, as an argument that we must be right ourselves. We must take heed not to judge with the idea that so we shall escape judgment —that by condemning evil we clear ourselves. Walter's eyes were opened to see that he had done Lufa a great wrong; that he had helped immensely to buttress and exalt her self-esteem. Had he not in his whole behaviour toward her, been far more anxious that he should please her than that she should be worthy? Had he not known that she was far more anxious to be accepted as a poet than to be admired as a woman?—more anxious indeed to be accepted than, even in the matter of her art, to be worthy of acceptance—to be the thing she wished to be thought? In that review which, in spite of his own soul, he had persuaded himself to publish, knowing it to be false, had he not

actively, most unconscientiously, and altogether selfishly, done her serious intellectual wrong, and heavy moral injury? Was he not bound to make what poor reparation might be possible? It mattered nothing that she did not desire any such reparation; that she would look upon the attempt as the first wrong in the affair—possibly as a pretence for the sake of insult, and the revenge of giving her the deepest possible pain: having told her the lies, he must confess they were lies! having given her the poison of falsehood, he must at least follow it with the only antidote, the truth! It was not his part to judge of consequences, so long as a duty remained to be done! and what could be more a duty than to undeceive where he had deceived, especially where the deception was aggravating that worst of diseases, self-conceit, self-satisfaction, self-worship? It was doubtful whether she would read what he might write; but the fact that she did not trust him, that, notwithstanding his assurance, she would still be in fear of how

he might depreciate her work in the eyes of the public, would, he thought, secure for him a reading. She might, when she got far enough to see his drift, destroy the letter in disgust; that would be the loss of his labour; but he would have done what he could! He had begun to turn a new leaf, and here was a thing the new leaf required written upon it!

As to Sefton, what better thing could he do for him, than make her think less of herself! or, if that were impossible, at least make her understand that other people did not think so much of her as she had been willingly led to believe! In wronging her he had wronged his friend as well, throwing obstacles in the way of his reception! He had wronged the truth itself!

When the play was over, and the crowd was dispersing, he found himself close to them on the pavement as they waited for their carriage. So near to Lufa was he that he could not help touching her dress. But what a change had

passed on him! Not once did he wish her to look round and brighten when she saw him! Sefton, moved perhaps by that unknown power of presence, operating in bodily proximity, but savouring of the spiritual, looked suddenly round and saw him. He smiled and did not speak, but, stretching out a quiet hand, sought his. Walter grasped it as if it was come to lift him from some evil doom. Neither spoke, and Lufa did not know that hands had clasped in the swaying human flood. No psychical influence passed between Walter and her.

Having made up his mind on the way, he set to work as soon as he reached home. He wrote and destroyed and rewrote, erased and substituted, until, as near as he could, he had said what he intended, so at least as it should not be mistaken for what he did not intend, which is the main problem in writing. Then he copied all out fair and plain, so that she could read it easily—and here is his letter, word for word :

"My dear lady Lufa,

"In part by means of the severe lesson I received through you, a great change has passed upon me. I am no longer able to think of myself as the important person I used to take myself for. It is startling to have one's eyes opened to see oneself as one is, but it very soon begins to make one glad, and the gladness, I find, goes on growing. One's nature is so elevated by being delivered from the honouring and valuing of that which is neither honourable nor valuable, that the seeming loss is annihilated by the essential gain; the being better makes up—infinitely makes up for showing to myself worse. I would millions of times rather know myself a fool, than imagine myself a great poet. For to know oneself a fool is to begin to be wise; and I would be loyal among the sane, not royal among lunatics. Who would be the highest, in virtue of the largest mistake, of the profoundest self-idolatry!

"But it was not to tell you this I began to

write; it was to confess a great wrong which once I did you; for I cannot rest, I cannot make it up with my conscience until I have told you the truth. It may be you will dislike me more for confessing the wrong than for committing it—I cannot tell; but it is my part to let you know it—and none the less my part that I must therein confess myself more weak and foolish than already I appear.

"You will remember that you gave me a copy of your drama while I was at your house: the review of it which appeared in the *Battery* I wrote that same night. I am ashamed to have to confess the fact, but I had taken more champagne than, I hope, I ever shall again; and, irreverent as it must seem to mention the fact in such a connection, I was possessed almost to insanity with your beauty, and the graciousness of your behaviour to me. Everything around me was pervaded with rose-colour and rose-odour, when, my head and heart, my imagination and senses, my memory and hope full of yourself, I

sat down to read your poem. I was like one in an opium-dream. I saw everything in the glory of an everlasting sunset, for every word I read, I heard in the tones of your voice; thorough the radiant consciousness of your present beauty, received every thought that awoke. If ever one being was possessed by another, I was that night possessed by you. In this mood, like that, I say again, of an opium-dream, I wrote the criticism of your book.

"But on the morning after the writing of it, I found, when I began to read it, I could so little enter into the feeling of it, that I could hardly believe I had actually written what lay before me in my own hand. I took the poem again, and scanned it most carefully, reading it with deep, anxious desire to justify the things I had set down. But I failed altogether. Even my love could not blind me enough to persuade me that what I had said was true, or that I should be other than false to print it. I had to put myself through a succession of special

pleadings before I could quiet my conscience enough to let the thing go, and tell its lies in the ears of the disciples of the *Battery*. I will show you how falsely I dealt. I said to myself that, in the first place, one mood had, in itself, as good a claim, with regard to the worth of what it produced, as another; but that the opinion of the night, when the imagination was awake, was more likely to be just with regard to a poem, than that of the cold, hard, unpoetic day. I was wrong in taking it for granted that my moods had equal claims; and the worse wrong, that all the time I knew I was not behaving honestly, for I persisted in leaving out, as factor in one of the moods, the champagne I had drunk, not to mention *the time* of the night, and the glamour of your influence. The latter was still present, but could no longer blind me to believe what I would, most of all things, have gladly believed. With the mood the judgment was altered, and a true judgment is the same in all moods, inhabiting a region above mood.

"In confession, a man must use plain words: I was a coward, a false friend, a false man. Having tried my hardest to keep myself from seeing the fact as plainly as I might have seen it, had I looked it in the face with the intent of meeting what the truth might render necessary, yet knowing that I was acting falsely, I sent off, regardless of duty, and in the sole desire of pleasing you, and had printed, as my opinion concerning your book, what was not my opinion, had never been my opinion, except during that one night of hallucination—a hallucination recognized as such, for the oftener I read, the more I was convinced that I had given such an opinion as must stamp me the most incompetent, or the falsest of critics. Lady Lufa, there is nothing remarkable in your poem. It is nicely, correctly written, and in parts skilfully contrived; but had it been sent me among other books, and without indication of the author, I should certainly have thrown it aside as the attempt of a schoolgirl, who, having more pocket money than was

good for her, had been able to print it without asking her parents or guardians. You may say this judgment is the outcome of my jealous disappointment; I say the former was the outcome of my loving fascination; and I cannot but think something in yourself will speak for me, and tell you that I am speaking honestly. Mr. Sefton considers me worthy of belief; and I know myself worthier of belief than ever before —how much worthier than when I wrote that review! Then I loved you—selfishly; now I love the truth, and would serve you, though I do not love you the same way as before. Through the disappointment you caused me, my eyes have been opened to see the way in which I was going, and to turn from it, for I was on the way of falsehood. Oh, lady Lufa, let me speak; forget my presumption; you bore with my folly —bear now with what is true though it come from a foolish heart! What would it be to us, if we gained the praises of the whole world, and found afterwards they were for what was

counted of no value in the great universe into which we had passed! Let us be true, whatever come of it, and look the facts of things in the face! If I am a poor creature, let me be content to know it! for have I not the joy that God can make me great! And is not the first step toward greatness, to refuse to call that great which is not great, or to think myself great when I am small? Is it not an essential and impassable bar to greatness, for a man to imagine himself great when there is not in him one single element of greatness? Let us confess ourselves that which we cannot consent to remain! The confession of not being, is the sole foundation for becoming. Self is a quicksand; God is the only rock. I have been learning a little.

"Having thus far dared, why should I not go farther, and say one thing more which is burning within me! There was a time when I might have said it better in verse, but that time has gone by—to come again, I trust, when I have

that to say which is worth saying; when I shall be true enough to help my fellows to be true. The calling of a poet, if it be a calling, must come from heaven. To be bred to a thing is to have the ears closed to any call.

"There is a man I know who for ever sits watching, as one might watch at evening for the first star to come creeping out of the infinite heaven; but it is for a higher and lovelier star this man watches; he is waiting for a woman, for the first dawn of her soul. He knows well the spot where the star of his hope must appear, the spot where, out of the vast unknown, she must open her shining eyes that he may love her. But alas, she will not arise and shine. He believes or at least hopes his star is on the way, and what can he do but wait, for he is laden with the burden of a wealth given him to give—the love of a true heart—the rarest, as the most precious thing on the face of this half-baked brick of a world. It was easy for me to love you, lady Lufa, while I took that for granted in you

which did not yet exist in myself! But he knows the truth of you, and yet loves. Lady Lufa, you are not true! If you do not know it, it is because you will not know it, lest the sight of what you are should unendurably urge you toward that you will not choose to be. God is my witness I speak in no poor anger, no mean jealousy! Not a word I say is for myself. I am but begging you to be that which God, making you, intended you to be. I would have the star shine through the cloud—shine on the heart of the watcher! the real Lufa lies hidden under a dusky garment of untruth; none but the eye of God can see through to the lovely thing he made, out of which the false Lufa is smothering the life. When the beautiful child, the real Lufa, the thing you now know you are not, but ought to be, walks out like an angel from a sepulchre, then will the heart of God, and the heart of George Sefton, rejoice with a great joy. Think what the love of such a man is.

It is your very self he loves; he loves like God, even before the real self has begun to exist. It is not the beauty you show, but the beauty showing you, that he loves—the hidden self of your perfect idea. Outward beauty alone is not for the divine lover; it is a mere show. Until the woman makes it real, it is but a show; and until she makes it true, she is herself a lie. With you, lady Lufa, it rests to make your beauty a truth, that is, a divine fact.

"For myself, I have been but a false poet—a mask among poets, a builder with hay and stubble, babbling before I had words, singing before I had a song, without a ray of revelation from the world unseen, carving at clay instead of shaping it in the hope of marble. I am humbler now, and trust the divine humility has begun to work out mine. Of all things I would be true, and pretend nothing.

"Lady Lufa, if a woman's shadow came out of her mirror, and went about the world pre-

tending to be herself and deceiving the eyes of men, that figure thus walking the world and stealing hearts, would be you. Would to God I were such an exorcist as could lay that ghost of you! as could say, 'Go back, forsake your seeming, false image of the true, the lovely Lufa that God made! You are but her unmaking! Get back into the mirror; live but in the land of shows; leave the true Lufa to wake from the swoon into which you have cast her; she must live and grow, and become, till she is perfect in loveliness.'

"I shall know nothing of the fate of my words. I shall see you no more in this world—except it be as I saw you to-night, standing close to you in a crowd. The touch of your garment sent no thrill through me; you were to me as a walking shadow. But the man who loves you sees the sleeping beauty within you! His lips are silent, but by the very silence of his lips his love speaks. I shall soon—but what matters it! If we are true, we shall meet, and have much to say.

If we are not true, all we know is that falsehood must perish. For me, I will arise and go to my father, and lie no more. I will be a man, and live in the truth—try at least so to live, in the hope of one day being true.

"Walter Colman."

Walter sent the letter—posted it the next morning as he went to the office. It is many years since, and he has not heard of it yet. But there is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed.

The writing of this letter was a great strain to him, but he felt much relieved when it was gone. How differently did he feel after that other lying, flattering utterance, with his half-sleeping conscience muttering and grumbling as it lay. He walked then full of pride and hope, in the midmost of his dream of love and ambition; now he was poor and sad ,and bowed down, but the earth was a place that might be lived in notwithstanding! If only he could find some

thoroughly honest work! He would rather have his weakness and dejection with his humility, than ten times the false pride with which he paced the street before. It was better to be thus than so!

But as he came home that night, he found himself far from well, and altogether incapable of work. He was indeed ill, for he could neither eat nor sleep, nor take interest in anything. His friend Sullivan was shocked to see him look so pale and wild, and insisted he must go home. Walter said it might be but a passing attack, and it would be a pity to alarm them; he would wait a day or two. At length he felt so ill, that one morning he did not get up. There was no one in the house who cared to nurse him; his landlady did little or nothing for him, beyond getting him the cup of tea he occasionally wanted; Sullivan was himself ill, and for some days neither saw nor heard of him; and Walter had such an experience of loneliness and desertion as he had never had

before. But it was a purgatorial suffering. He began to learn how insufficient he was for himself; how little self-sustaining power there was in him. Not there was the fountain of life! Words that had been mere platitudes of theological commonplace, began to show a golden root through their ancient mould. The time came back to him when father and mother bent anxiously over their child. He remembered how their love took from him all fear; how even the pain seemed to melt in their presence; all was right when they knew all about it! they would see that the suffering went at the proper time! All gentle ministrations to his comfort, the moving of his pillows, the things cooked by his mother's own hands, her watch to play with—all came back, as if the tide of life had set in the other direction, and he was fast drifting back into childhood. What sleep he had was filled with alternate dreams of suffering and home-deliverance. He recalled how different his aunt had been when he was

ill: in this isolation her face looking in at his door would have been as that of an angel! And he knew that all the time his debts were increasing, and when would he begin to pay them off! His mind wandered; and when Sullivan came at length, he was talking wildly, imagining himself the prodigal son in the parable.

Sullivan wrote at once to Mr. Colman.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A FRUITLESS JOURNEY.

IT was the afternoon when Sullivan's letter, on the lower left-hand corner of which he had written *Har. Sul.*, arrived. Mr. Colman had gone to a town at some distance, whence he would not return till the last train. Not many letters came to him, and this, with the London post-mark, naturally drew the attention of aunt Ann and Molly. The moment the eyes of the former fell on the contracted name in the corner, they blazed.

"The shameless fellow!" she cried; "—writing to beg another ten-pound-note from my poor foolish brother!"

"I don't think that is it, aunt," returned Molly.

"And why not, pray? How should you know?"

"Mr. Sullivan has had plenty of work, and cannot need to borrow money.—Why are you so suspicious, auntie?"

"I am not. I never was suspicious. You are a rude girl to say so! If it is not money, you may depend upon it, it is something worse!"

"What worse can you mean?"

"That Walter has got into some scrape."

"Why should he not write himself if it were so?"

"He is too much ashamed, and gets his friend to do it for him. I know the ways of young men!"

"Perhaps he is ill!" said Molly.

"Perhaps. It is long since I saw a letter from him! I am never allowed to read or hear one!"

"Can you wonder at that, when you are always abusing him? If he were my son, I should take care you never saw a scrap of his writing! It makes me wild to hear those I love

talked of as you talk of him—always with a sniff!"

"Love, indeed! Do you suppose no one loves him but you?"

"His father loves him dearly!"

"How dare you hint that I do not love him!"

"If yours is love, auntie, I wish I may never meet it where I've no chance of defending myself!"

Molly had a hot temper where her friends were concerned, though she would bear a good deal without retorting.

"There!" said aunt Ann, giving her the letter; "put that on the mantlepiece till he comes."

Molly took it, and gazed wistfully at it, as if fain to read it through the envelope. She had had that morning a strange and painful dream about Walter—that he lay in his coffin, with a white cat across his face.

"What if he *should* be ill, auntie?" she said.

"Who ill?"

"Walter, of course!"

"What then? We must wait to know!"

"Father wouldn't mind if we just opened it to make sure it was not about Walter!"

"Open my brother's letter! Goodness gracious, what next! Well, you *are* a girl! I should just like to see him after you had opened one of his letters!"

Miss Hancock had herself once done so—out of pure curiosity, though on another pretence—a letter, as it happened, which he would rather not have read himself than have had her read, for it contained thanks for a favour secretly done; and he was more angry than any one had ever seen him. Molly remembered the occurrence, though she had been too young to have it explained to her; but Molly's idea of a father, and of Richard Colman as that father, was much grander than that of most children concerning fathers. There is indeed a much closer relation between some good men and any good child, than there is between far the greater number of parents and their children.

She put the letter on the chimney-piece, and went to the dairy; but it was to think about the letter. Her mind kept hovering about it where it stood on the chimney-piece, leaning against the vase with the bunch of silvery honesty in it. What if Walter was ill! Her father would not be home till the last train, and there would be none to town before the slow train in the morning! He might be very ill! —and longing for some one to come to him—his father of course—longing all day long! Her father was as reasonable as he was loving: she was sure he would never be angry without reason! He was a man with whom one who loved him, and was not presuming, might take any honest liberty! He could hardly be a good man with whom one must never take a liberty! A good man was not the man to stand on his dignity! To treat him as if he were, was to treat him as those who cannot trust in God behave to him! They call him the supreme Ruler! the Almighty! the Disposer of events!

the Judge of the whole earth!—and would not "presume" to say "Father, help thy little child!" She would not wrong her father by not trusting him! she would open the letter! she would not read one word more than was needful to know whether it came to say that Walter was ill! Why should Mr. Sullivan have put his name outside, except to make sure of its being attended to immediately!

She went back to the room where lay the letter. Her aunt was there still. Molly was glad of it: the easiest way of letting her know, for she would not have done it without, was to let her see her do what she did! She went straight to the chimney, reached up, and took the letter.

"Leave that alone!" cried Miss Hancock. "I know what you are after! You want to give it to my brother, and be the first to know what is in it! Put it back this moment!"

Molly stood with the letter in her hand.

"You are mistaken, auntie," she said. "I am going to open it."

"You shall do nothing of the sort—not if I live!" returned aunt Ann, and flew to take the letter from her.

But Molly was prepared for the attack, and was on the other side of the door before she could pounce.

She sped to her room, locked the door, and read the letter, then went instantly to her bonnet and cloak. There was time to catch the last train! She enclosed the letter, addressed it to her father, and wrote inside the envelope that she had opened it against the wish of her aunt, and was gone to nurse Walter. Then taking money from her drawer, she returned to aunt Ann.

"It is about Walter. He is very ill," she said. "I have enclosed the letter, and told him it was I that opened it."

"Why such a fuss?" cried aunt Ann. "You can tell him your impertinence just as well as write it! Oh, you've got your bonnet on!—going to run away in a fright at what you've done! Well, perhaps you'd better!"

"I am going to Walter."

"*Where?*"

"To London to Walter."

"You!"

"Yes; who else?"

"You shall *not*. I will go myself!"

Molly knew too well how Walter felt toward his aunt to consent to this. She would doubtless behave kindly if she found him really ill, but she would hardly be a comfort to him!

"I shall be ready in one moment!" continued Miss Hancock. "There is plenty of time, and you can drive me to the station if you like. Richard shall not say I left the care of his son to a chit of a girl!"

Molly said nothing, but rushed to the stable. Nobody was there! She harnessed the horse, and put him to the dog-cart with her own hands, in terror lest her aunt should be ready before her.

She was driving from the yard when her aunt appeared, in her Sunday-best.

"That's right!" she said, expecting her to pull up and take her in.

But Molly touched up her horse, and he, having done nothing for some time, was fresh, and started at speed. Aunt Ann was left standing, but it was some time before she understood that the horse had not run away.

Ere Molly reached the station, she left the dog-cart at a neighbouring inn, then told one of the porters, to whom her father was well known, to look out for him by the last train, and let him know where the trap was.

As the train was approaching London, it stopped at a station where already stood another train, bound in the opposite direction, which began to move while hers stood. Molly was looking out of her window, as it went past her with the slow beginnings of speed, watching the faces that drifted by, in a kind of phantasmagoric show, never more to be repeated, when, in the farther corner of a third-class carriage near the end of the train, she caught sight of a huddled

figure that reminded her of Walter ; a pale face was staring as if it saw nothing, but dreamed of something it could not see. She jumped up and put her head out of the window, but her own train also was now moving, and if it were Walter, there was no possibility of overtaking him. She was by no means sure however that it was he. The only way was to go on to her journey's end !

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DOING AND DREAMING.

WALTER had passed a very troubled night, and was worse, though he thought himself better. His friend looked in to see him before going to the office, and told him that he would come again in the evening. He did not tell him that he had written to his father.

Walter slept and woke and slept again. All the afternoon he was restless, as one who dreams without sleeping. The things presented to his mind, and seeming with him, were not those about him. Late in the afternoon, the fever abated a little, and he felt as one who wakes out of a dream. For a few minutes he lay staring into the room, then rose and with difficulty dressed himself, one moment shivering,

the next burning. He knew perfectly what he was doing: his mind was possessed with an unappeasable longing and absolute determination to go home. The longing had been there all the night and all the day, except when it was quieted by the shadowy assuagement of his visions; and now with the first return of his consciousness to present conditions, came resolve. Better die at home, he said to himself, than recover in such a horrible place! On he went with his preparations, mechanical but methodical, till at last he put on his great coat, took his rug, searched his purse, found enough to pay a cab to the railway station, went softly down the stair, and was in the street, a man lonely and feeble, but with a great joy of escape. Happily a cab was just passing, and he was borne in safety, half asleep again after his exertions, to the station. There he sought the stationmaster, and telling him his condition, prevailed upon him to take his watch as a pledge that he would send him the price of his ticket.

It was a wet night, but not very cold, and he did not suffer at first—was in fact more comfortable than he had been in bed. He seemed to himself perfectly sane when he started, but of the latter half of his journey he remembered nothing connectedly. What fragments of it returned to his recollection, appeared as the remnants of a feverish dream.

The train arrived late in the dark night, at an hour when a conveyance was rarely to be had. He remembered nothing, however, of setting out to walk home, and nothing clearly as to how he fared on the way. His dreaming memory gave him but a sense of climbing, climbing, with a cold wind buffeting him back, and bits of paper, which must have been snowflakes, beating in his face: he thought they were the shreds of the unsold copies of his book, torn to pieces by the angry publisher, and sent swirling about his face in clouds to annoy him. After that came a great blank.

The same train had taken up Mr. Colman at

a junction. The moment he got out of it, the porter to whom Molly had spoken in the morning, addressed him, with the message Molly had left for him. Surprised and uneasy, he was putting some anxious questions to the man, when his son passed him. The night was still dark, and cloudy with snow, the wind was coming in gusts, now and then fiercely, and the lamps were wildly struggling against being blown out: neither saw the other. Walter staggered away, and Richard set out for the inn, to drive home as fast as possible: there only could he get light on Molly's sudden departure for London! In her haste she had not left message enough. But he knew his son must be ill; nothing else could have caused it! He met with some delay at the inn, but at length was driving home as fast as he dared through the thick darkness of the rough ascent.

He had not driven far, before one of those little accidents occurred to his harness which, small in themselves, have so often serious results:

the strap of the hames gave way, and the traces dropped by the horse's sides. Mr. Colman never went unprovided for accidents, but in a dark night, in the middle of the road, with a horse fresh and eager to get home, it takes time to rectify anything.

At length he arrived in safety, and having roused the man, hastened into the house. There he speedily learned the truth of his conjecture, and it was a great comfort to him that Molly had acted so promptly. But he bethought himself that, by driving to another station some miles farther off, at which a luggage train stopped in the night, he could reach town a few hours earlier. He went again to the stable, and gave orders to have the horse well fed and ready in an hour. Then he tried to eat the supper his sister-in-law had prepared for him, but with small success. Every few minutes he rose, opened the door, and looked out. It was a very dark morning, full of wind and snow.

By and by he could bear it no longer, and though he knew there was much time to spare, got up to go to the stable. The wind met him with an angry blast as he opened the door, and sharp pellets of keen snow stung him in the face. He had taken a lantern in his hand, but, going with his head bent against the wind, he all but stumbled over a stone seat, where they would sit by the door of a summer evening. As he recovered himself, the light of his lantern fell upon a figure huddled crouching upon the seat, but in the very act of tumbling forward from off it. He caught it with one arm, set down the light, raised its head, and in the wild, worn, death-pale features and wandering eyes, knew the face of his son. He uttered one wailing groan, which seemed to spend his life, gathered him to his bosom, and taking him up like a child, almost ran to the house with him. As he went he heard at his ear the murmured words,

"Father, I have sinned . . . not worthy . . ."

His heart gave a great heave, but he uttered no second cry.

Aunt Ann, however, had heard the first. She ran, and, opening the door, met him with the youth in his arms.

"I'm afraid he's dead!" gasped Richard. "He is cold as a stone!"

Aunt Ann darted to the kitchen, made a blazing fire, set the kettle on it and bricks around it, then ran to see if she could help.

Richard had got his boy into his own bed, had put off his own clothes, and was lying with him in his arms to warm him. Aunt Ann went about like a steam-engine, but noiseless. She got the hot bricks, then hot bottles, and more blankets. The father thought he would die before the heat got to him. As soon as he was a little warm, he mounted his horse, and rode to fetch the doctor. It was terrible to him to think that he must have passed his boy on the way, and left him to struggle home without help.

Ere he returned, Walter had begun to show a little more life. He moaned and murmured, and seemed going through a succession of painful events. Now he would utter a cry of disgust, now call out for his father; then he would be fighting the storm with a wild despair of ever reaching his father.

The doctor came, examined him, said they were doing quite right, but looked solemn over him.

Had it not been for that glimpse she had at the station where last the train stopped, Molly would have been in misery indeed when, on arriving at Walter's lodging, and being told that he was ill in bed, she went up to his room, and could find him nowhere. It was like a bad dream. She almost doubted whether she might not be asleep. The landlady had never heard him go out, and until she had searched the whole house, would not believe he was not somewhere in it. Rather unwillingly, she allowed Molly to occupy his room for the night; and Molly, that she

might start by the first train, stretched herself in her clothes on the miserable little horse-hair sofa. She could not sleep, and was not a little anxious about Walter's travelling in such a condition; but for all that, she could not help laughing more than once or twice to think how aunt Ann would be crowing over her: basely deserted, left standing in the yard in her Sunday clothes, it was to her care after all that Walter was given, not Molly's! But Molly could well enough afford to join in her aunt's laugh: she had done her duty, and did not need to be told that we have nothing to do with consequences, only with what is right. So she waited patiently for the morning.

But how was she to do when she got home? Aunt Ann would have installed herself as nurse! It would not matter much while Walter was really ill; so long aunt Ann would be good to him! but when he began to be himself again—for that time Molly must look out and be ready!

When she reached home, she was received at

the door by her father who had been watching for her, and learned all he had to tell her. Aunt Ann spoke to her as if she had but the minute before left the room, vouchsafing not a single remark concerning Walter, and yielding her a position of service as narrow as she could contrive to make it. Molly did everything she desired without complaint, fetching and carrying for her as usual. She received no recognition from the half unconscious Walter.

If it had not been that aunt Ann must, like other nurses, have rest, Molly's ministering soul would have been sorely pinched and hampered; but when her aunt retired, she could do her part for the patient's peace. In a few days he had come to himself enough to know who were about him, and seemed to manifest a preference for Molly's nursing. To aunt Ann this seemed very hard—and hard it would have been, but that, through all her kindness, Walter could not help foreseeing how she would treat him in the health to which she was doing her best to

bring him back. He sorely dreaded the time when, strong enough to be tormented, but not able to lock his door against her, he would be at her mercy. But he cherished a hope that his father would interfere. If necessary he would appeal to him, and beg him to depose aunt Ann, and put sweet Molly in her stead!

One morning—Molly had been sitting up the night with the invalid—she found aunt Ann alone at the breakfast-table.

"His father is with him now," said Molly. "I think he is a little better; he slept more quietly."

"He'll do well enough!" grunted aunt Ann. "There's no fear of *him!* he's not of the sort to die early! This is what comes of letting young people have their own way! My brother will be wiser now! and so, I hope, will Walter! It shall not be my fault if he's not made to understand! Old or young wouldn't listen to me! Now perhaps, while they are smarting from the rod, it may be of use to speak!"

"Aunt," said Molly, with her heart in her throat, but determined, "please do not say anything to him for a long time yet; you might make him ill again! You do not know how he hates being talked at!"

"Don't you be afraid! I won't talk *at* him! He shall be well talked *to*, and straight!"

"He won't stand it any more, auntie! He's a man now, you know! And when a mere boy, he used to complain that you were always finding fault with him!"

"Highty, tighty! What next! The gentleman has the choice, has he, when to be found fault with, and when not!"

"I give you fair warning," said Molly hurriedly, "that I will do what I can to prevent you!"

Aunt Ann was indignant.

"You dare to tell me, in my own—" —she was going to say *house*, but corrected herself— "—in my own home, where you live on the charity of——"

Molly interrupted her.

"I shall ask my father," she said, "whether he wishes me to have such words from you. If he does, you shall say what you please to me. But as to Walter, I will ask nobody. Till he is able to take care of himself, I shall not let you plague him. I will fight you first! There now!"

The flashing eyes and determined mouth of Molly, who had risen, and stood regarding her aunt in a flame of honest anger, cowed her. She shut her jaws close, and looked the picture of postponement.

That instant came the voice of Mr. Colman:

"Molly! Molly!"

"Yes, Richard!" answered Miss Hancock, rising.

But Molly was out of the door, almost before her aunt was out of her chair.

Walter had asked where she was, and wanted to see her. It was the first wish of any sort he had expressed!

CHAPTER XXIX.

DREAM-MOLLY.

So far better as to be able to talk, Walter one day told Molly the strange dream, which, as he looked back, seemed to fill the whole time almost from his leaving his lodging to his recognition of his father by his bedside.

It was a sweet day in the first of the spring. He lay with his head toward the window, and the sun was shining into the room, with the tearful radiance of sorrows overlived and winter gone, when Molly entered. She was at once whelmed in the sunlight, so that she could see nothing, while Walter could almost have counted her eye-lashes.

"Stand there, Molly," he cried, "— one moment! I want to look at you!"

"It is not fair!" returned Molly. "The sun is in my eyes! I am as blind as a bat!"

"I won't ask you, if you mind, Molly!" returned Walter.

In these days he had grown very gentle. He seemed to dread the least appearance of exaction.

"I will stand where you like, and as long as you like, Walter! Have you not consented to live a little longer with us! Oh, Walter, you don't know what it was like when the doctor looked grave!"

Molly stood in the sun, and Walter looked at her till his eyes were wearied with the brightness she reflected, and his heart made strong by the better brightness she radiated. For Molly was the very type of a creature born of the sun and ripened by his light and heat—a glowing fruit of the tree of life amid its healing foliage, all splendour, and colour, and overflowing strength. Self-will is weakness; the will to do right is strength; Molly willed the right thing

and held to it. Hence it was that she was so gentle. She walked lightly over the carpet, because she could run up a hill like a hare. When she caught selfishness in her, she was down upon it with the knee and grasp of a giant. Strong is man or woman whose eternal life subjects the individual liking to the perfect will. Such man, such woman, is free man, free woman.

Molly was in a daring dress of orange and red. Scarce a girl in London would have ventured to wear it; few girls would not have looked vulgar in it; yet Molly was right. Like a dark-cored sunflower, she caught and kept the sun.

Having gazed at her in silence for a while, Walter said,

"Come and sit by me, Molly. I want to tell the dream I have been having."

She came at once, glad to get out of the sun. But she sat where he could still see her, and waited.

"I think I remember reaching the railway, Molly, but I remember nothing after that, until I thought I was in a coal-pit, with a great roaring everywhere about me. I was shut up for ever by an explosion, and the tumbling subterranean waters were coming nearer and nearer! They never came, but they were always coming! Suddenly some one took me by the arm, and pulled me out of the pit. Then I was on the hill above the pit, and had to get to the top of it. But it was in the teeth of a snow-storm! My breath was very short, and I could hardly drag one foot up after the other. All at once there was an angel with wings by my side, and I knew it was Molly. I never wondered that she had wings. I only said to myself, 'How clever she must be to stow them away when she doesn't want them!' Up and up we toiled, and the way was very long. But when I got too tired, you stood before me, and I leaned against you, and you folded your wings about my head, and so I got breath to go on

again. And I tried to say, 'How can you be so kind to me! I never was good to you!'"

"You dreamed quite wrong there, Walter!" interposed Molly. "You were always good to me—except, perhaps, when I asked you too many questions!"

"Your questions were too wise for me, Molly! If I had been able to answer them, this trouble would never have come upon me. But I do wish I could tell you how delightful the dream was, for all the wind and the snow! I remember exactly how I felt, standing shadowed by your wings, and leaning against you!"

Molly's face flushed, and a hazy look came into her eyes, but she did not turn them away.

He stopped, and lay brooding on his dream.

"But all at once," he resumed, "it went away in a chaos of coal-pits, and snow-storms, and eyes not like yours, Molly! I was tossed about for ages in heat and cold, in thirst and loathing, with now one now another horrid draught held to my lips, thirst telling me to drink, and dis-

gust making me dash it on the ground—only to be back at my lips the next moment. Once I was a king sitting upon a great tarnished throne, dusty and worm-eaten, in a lofty room of state, the doors standing wide, and the spiders weaving webs across them, for nobody ever came in, and no sound shook the moat-filled air: on that throne I had to sit to all eternity, because I had said I was a poet and was not! I was a fellow that had stolen the poet-book of the universe, torn leaves from it, and pieced the words together so that only one could make sense of them—and she would not do it! This vanished—and I was lying under a heap of dead on a battlefield. All above me had died doing their duty, and I lay at the bottom of the heap and could not die, because I had fought, not for the right, but for the glory of a soldier. I was full of shame, for I was not worthy to die! I was not permitted to give my life for the great cause for which the rest were dead. But one of the dead woke, and turned, and clasped me;

and then I woke, and it was your arms about me, Molly! and my head was leaning where it leant when your wings were about me!"

By this time Molly was quietly weeping.

"I wish I had wings, Walter, to flap from morning to night for you!" she said, laughing through her tears.

"You are always flapping them, Molly! only nobody can see them except in a dream. There are many true things that cannot be seen with the naked eye! The eye must be clothed and in its right mind first!"

"Your poetry is beginning to come, Walter! I don't think it ever did before!" said Molly.

Walter gazed at her wonderingly: was little Molly going to turn out a sibyl? How grown she was! What a peace and strength shone from her countenance! She was woman, girl, and child, all in one! What a fire of life there was in this lady with the brown hands—so different from the white, wax-doll ends to Lufa's arms! She was of the cold and ice, of

the white death and lies! Here was the warm, live, woman-truth! He would never more love woman as he had! Could that be a good thing which a creature like Lufa roused in him? Could that be true which had made him lie? If his love had been of the truth, would it not have known that she was not a live thing? True love would have known when it took in its arms a dead thing, a body without a soul, a material ghost!

Another time—it was a cold evening; the wind howled about the house; but the fire was burning bright, and Molly, having been reading to him, had stopped for a moment—Walter said,

"I could not have imagined I should ever feel at home as I do now! I wonder why it is!"

"I think I could tell you!" said Molly.

"Tell me then."

"It is because you are beginning to know your father!"

"Beginning to know my father, Moll!"

"You never came right in sight of him till now. He has been the same always, but you did not—could not see him!"

"Why couldn't I see him, wise woman?" said Walter.

"Because you were never your father's son till now," answered Molly. "Oh, Walter, if you had heard Jane tell what a cry he gave when he found his boy on the cold bench, in the gusty dark of the winter morning! Half your father's heart is with your mother, and the other half with you! I did not know how a man could love till I saw his face as he stood over you once when he thought no one was near!"

"Did he find me on the stone bench?"

"Yes, indeed! Oh, Walter, I have known God better, and loved him more, since I have *seen* how your father loves you!"

Walter fell a thinking. He had indeed, since he came to himself, loved his father as he had never loved him before; but he had not thought how he had been forgetting him. And herewith

a gentle repentance began, which had a curing and healing effect on his spirit. Nor did the repentance leave him at his earthly father's door, but led him on to his father in heaven.

The next day he said,

"I know another thing that makes me feel more at home: aunt Ann never scolds at me now. True, she seldom comes near me, and I cannot say I want her to come! But just tell me, do you think she has been converted?"

"Not that I know of. The angels will have a bad time of it before they bring her to her knees—her real knees, I mean, not her church-knees! For aunt Ann to say she was wrong, would imply a change I am incapable of imagining. Yet it must come, you know, else how is she to enter the kingdom of heaven?"

"What then makes her so considerate?"

"It's only that I've managed to make her afraid of me."

CHAPTER XXX.

WORK-A-DAY MOLLY.

THE days passed; week after week went down the hill—or, is it not rather, up the hill?—and out of sight; the moon kept on changelessly changing; and at length Walter was well, though rather thin and white.

Molly saw that he was beginning to brood. She saw also, as clearly as if he had opened his mind to her, what troubled him: it needed no witch to divine that! he must work: what was his work to be?

Whatever he do, if he be not called to it, a man but takes it up "at his own hand, as the devil did sinning."

Molly was one of the wise women of the world —and thus: thoughts grew for her first out of

things, and not things out of thoughts. God's things come out of his thoughts; our realities are God's thoughts made manifest in things; and out of them our thoughts must come; then the things that come out of our thoughts will be real. Neither our own fancies, nor the judgments of the world, must be the ground of our theories or behaviour. This, at least, was Molly's working theory of life. She saw plainly that her business, every day, hour, moment, was to order her way as he who had sent her into being would have her order her way; doing God's things, God's thoughts would come to her; God's things were better than man's thoughts; man's best thoughts the discovery of the thoughts hidden in God's things? Obeying him, perhaps a day would come in which God would think directly into the mind of his child, without the intervention of things! *

* It may interest some of my readers to be told that I had got thus far in preparation for this volume, when I took a book from the floor, shaken with hundreds beside from my shelves by an earthquake the same morning,

For Molly had made the one rational, one practical discovery, that life is to be lived, not by helpless assent or aimless drifting, but by active co-operation with the Life that has said "Live." To her everything was part of a whole, which, with its parts, she was learning to know, was finding out, by obedience to what she already knew. There is nothing for developing even the common intellect like obedience, that is, duty done. Those who obey are soon wiser than all their lessons; while from those who do not, will be taken away even what knowledge they started with.

Molly was not prepared to attempt convincing Walter, who was so much more learned and clever than she, that the things that rose in men's minds, even in their best moods, were not necessarily a valuable commodity, but that

and opening it—it was a life of Lavater which I had not known I possessed—found these words, written by him on a card, for a friend to read after his death :—"Act according to thy faith in Christ, and thy faith will soon become sight.'

their character depended on the soil whence they sprang. She believed, however, that she had it in her power to make him doubt his judgment in regard to the work of other people, and that might lead him to doubt his judgment of himself, and the thoughts he made so much of.

One lovely evening in July, they were sitting together in the twilight, after a burial of the sun that had left great heaps of golden rubbish on the sides of his grave, in which little cherubs were busy dyeing their wings.

"Walter," said Molly, "do you remember the little story—quite a little story, and not very clever—that I read when you were ill, called 'Bootless Betty'?"

"I should think I do! I thought it one of the prettiest stories I had ever read, or heard read. Its fearless directness, without the least affectation of boldness, enchanted me. How one —clearly a woman—whose grammar was nowise to be depended upon, should yet get so swiftly

and unerringly at what she wanted to say, has remained ever since a worshipful wonder to me. But I have seen something like it before, probably by the same writer!"

"You may have seen the same review of it I saw; it was in your own paper."

"You don't mean you take in *The Field Battery?*"

"We did. Your father went for it himself, every week regularly. But we could not *always* be sure which things you had written!"

Walter gave a sigh of distaste, but said nothing. The idea of that paper representing his mind to his father and Molly, was painful to him.

"I have it here: may I read it to you?"

"Well—I don't know!—if you like. I can't say I care about reviews."

"Of course not! Nobody should. They are only thoughts about thoughts about things. —But I want you to hear this!" pleaded Molly, drawing the paper from her pocket.

The review was of the shortest—long enough, however, to express much humorous contempt for the kind of thing of which it said this was a specimen. It showed no suspicion of the presence in it of the things Walter had just said he saw there. But as Molly read, he stopped her.

"There is nothing like that in the story! The statement is false!" he exclaimed.

"Not a doubt of it!" responded Molly, and went on.

But, arrested by a certain phrase, Walter presently stopped her again.

"Molly," he said, seizing her hand, "is it any wonder I cannot bear the thought of touching that kind of work again? Have pity upon me, Molly! It was I, I myself, who wrote that review! I had forgotten all about it! I did not mean to lie, but I was not careful enough not to lie! I have been very unjust to some one!"

"You could learn her name, and how to find

her, from the publisher of the little book!" suggested Molly.

"I will find her, and make a humble apology. The evil, alas! is done; but I could—and will write another notice quite different."

Molly burst into the merriest laugh.

"The apology is made, Walter, and the writer forgives you heartily! Oh, what fun! The story is mine! You needn't stare so—as if you thought I couldn't do it! Think of the bad grammar! It was not a strong point at Miss Talebury's! Yes, Walter," she continued, talking like a child to her doll, "it was little Molly's first! and her big brother cut it all up into weeny weeny pieces for her! Poor Molly! But then it was a great honour, you know —greater than ever she could have hoped for!"

Walter stared bewildered, hardly trusting his ears. Molly an authoress!—in a small way, it might be, but did God ever with anything begin it big? Here was he, home again

defeated!—to find the little bird he had left in the nest beautifully successful!

The lords of creation have a curious way of patronizing the beings they profess to worship. Man was made a little lower than the angels; he calls woman an angel, and then looks down upon her! Certainly, however, he has done his best to make her worthy of his condescension! But Walter had begun to learn humility, and no longer sought the chief place at the feast.

"Molly!" he said, in a low, wondering voice

"Yes?" answered Molly.

"Forgive me, Molly. I am unworthy."

"I forgive you with all my heart, and love you for thinking it worth while to ask me."

"I am full of admiration of your story!"

"Why? It was not difficult."

Walter took her little hand and kissed it as if she had been a princess. Molly blushed, but did not take her hand from him. Walter might do what he liked with her ugly little hand! It was only to herself she called it ugly, however, not

to Walter! Anyhow she was wrong; her hand was a very pretty one. It was indeed a little spoiled with work, but it was gloved with honour! It were good for many a heart that its hands were so spoiled! Human feet get a little broadened with walking; human hands get a little roughened with labour; but what matter! There are others, after like pattern but better finished, making, and to be ready by the time these are worn out, for all who have not shirked work.

Walter rose and went up the stair to his own room, a chamber in the roof, crowded with memories. There he sat down to think, and thinking led to something else. Molly sat still and cried; for though it made her very glad to see him take it so humbly, it made her sad to give him pain. But not once did she wish she had not told him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THIS PICTURE AND THIS.

AFTER a while, as he did not appear, Molly went up to find him: she was anxious he should know how heartily she valued his *real* opinion.

"I have got a little poem here—if you can call it a poem—a few lines I wrote last Christmas: would you mind looking at it, and telling me if it is anything?"

"So, my bird of paradise, you sing too?" said Walter.

"Very little. A friend to whom I sent it, took it, without asking me, to one of the magazines for children, but they wouldn't have it. Tell me if it is worth printing. Not that I want it printed—not a bit!"

"I begin to think, Molly, that anything you write must be worth printing! But I wonder you should ask one who has proved himself so incompetent to give a true opinion, that even what he has given he is unable to defend!"

"I shall always trust your opinion, Walter—only it must be an opinion: you gave a judgment then without having formed an opinion. Shall I read?"

"Yes, please, Molly. I never used to like having poetry read to me, but you *can* read poetry!"

"This is easy to read!" said Molly.

"See the countless angels hover!
See the mother bending over!

See the shepherds, kings, and cow!
What is baby thinking now?

Oh, to think what baby thinks
Would be worth all holy inks!

But he smiles such lovingness,
That I will not fear to guess!—

'Father called; you would not come!
'Here I am to take you home!

'For the father feels the dearth
'Of his children round his hearth—

'Wants them round and on his knee—
'That's his throne for you and me!'

Something lovely like to this
Surely lights that look of bliss!

Or if something else be there,
Then 'tis something yet more fair;

For within the father's breast
Lies the whole world in its nest."

She ceased.

Walter said nothing. His heart was full. What verses were these beside Lufa's fire-works!

"You don't care for them!" said Molly, sadly, but with the sweetest smile. "It's not that I care so much about the poetry; but I do love what I thought the baby might be thinking: it seems so true! so fit to be true!"

"The poetry is lovely, anyhow!" said Walter. "And one thing I am sure of—the father will not take me on his knee, if I go on as I have been doing!—You must let me see everything

you write, or have written, Molly! Should you mind?"

"Surely not, Walter! We used to read everything we thought might be yours!"

"Oh, don't!" cried Walter. "I can't bear to think of the beastly business!—I beg your pardon, Molly; but I am ashamed of the thing. There was not one stroke of good in the whole affair!"

"I admit," said Molly, "the kind of thing is not real work, though it may well be hard enough! But all writing about books and authors is not of that kind. A good book, like a true man, is well worth writing about by any one who understands it. That is very different from making it one's business to sit in judgment on the work of others. The mental condition itself of habitual judgment is a false one. Such an attitude toward any book requiring thought, and worthy of thought, renders it impossible for the would-be judge to know what is in the book. If, on the other hand, the

book is worth little or nothing, it is not worth writing about, and yet has a perfect claim to fair play. If we feel differently at different times about a book we know, how am I to know the right mood for doing justice to a new book?"

"I am afraid the object is to write, not to judge righteous judgment!"

"One whose object is to write, and with whom judgment is the mere pretext for writing, is a parasite, and very pitiful, because, being a man, he lives as a flea lives. You see, Walter, by becoming a critic, you have made us critical—your father and me! We have talked about these things ever since you took to the profession!"

"Trade, Molly!" said Walter, gruffly.

"A profession, at least, that is greater than its performance! But it has been to me an education. We got as many as we were able of the books you took pains with, and sometimes could not help doubting whether you had seen the object of the writer. In one you dwelt scornfully

on the unscientific allusions, where the design of the book was perfectly served by those allusions, which were merely to illustrate what the author meant. Your social papers, too, were but criticism in another direction. We could not help fearing that your criticism would prove a quicksand, swallowing your faculty for original, individual work.—Then there was one horrid book you reviewed!"

"Well, I did no harm there! I made it out horrid enough, surely!"

"I think you did harm. I, for one, should never have heard of the book, and nobody down here would, I believe, if you had not written about it! You advertized it! Let bad books lie as much unheard of as may be. There is no injustice in leaving them alone."

Walter was silent.

"I have no doubt," he said at length, "that you are out and out right, Molly! Where my work has not been useless, it has been bad!"

"I do not believe it has been always useless,"

returned Molly. "Do you know, for instance, what a difference there was between your notices of the first and second books of one author—a lady with an odd name—I forget it? I have not seen the books, but I have the reviews. You must have helped her to improve!"

Walter gave a groan.

"My sins are indeed finding me out!" he said. Then, after a pause—"Molly," he resumed, "you can't help yourself—you've got to be my confessor! I am going to tell you an ugly fact—an absolute dishonesty!"

From beginning to end he told her the story of his relations with Lufa and her books; how he had got the better of his conscience, persuading himself that he thought that which he did not think, and that a book was largely worthy, where at best it was worthy but in a low degree; how he had suffered and been punished; how he had loved her, and how his love came to a miserable and contemptible end.

That it had indeed come to an end, Molly drew from the quiet way in which he spoke of it; and his account of the letter he had written to Lufa, confirmed her conclusion.

How delighted she was to be so thoroughly trusted by him!

"I'm so glad, Walter!" she said.

"What are you glad of, Molly?"

"That you know one sort of girl, and are not so likely to take the next upon trust."

"We must take some things on trust, Molly, else we should never have anything!"

"That is true, Walter; but we needn't without a question empty our pockets to the first beggar that comes! When you were at home last, I wondered whether the girl could be worthy of your love."

"What girl?" asked Walter, surprised.

"Why, that girl, of course!"

"But I never said anything!"

"Twenty times a day."

"What then made you doubt her worth?"

"That you cared less for your father."

"I am a brute, Molly!—Did he feel it very much?"

"He always spoke to God about it, not to me. He never finds it easy to talk to his fellow-man; but I always know when he is talking to God! —May I tell your father what you have just told me, Walter?—But of course not! You will tell him yourself!"

"No, Molly! I would rather you should tell him. I want him to know, and would tell him myself, if you were not handy. Then, if he chooses, we can have a talk about it!—But now, Molly, what am I to do?"

"You still feel as if you had a call to literature, Walter?"

"I have no pleasure in any other kind of work."

"Might not that be because you have not tried anything else?"

"I don't know. I am drawn to nothing else."

"Well, it seems to me that a man who would like to make a saddle, must first have some pig-

skin to make it of!—Have you any pigskin, Walter?"

"I see well enough what you mean!"

"A man must want long leisure for thought before he can have any material for his literary faculty to work with. You could write a history, but could you write one *now?* Even for a biography, you would have to read and study for months—perhaps years. As to the social questions you have been treating, men generally change their opinions about such things when they know a little more; and who would utter his opinions, knowing he must by and by wish he had not uttered them!"

"No one; but unhappily every one is cocksure of his opinion till he changes it—and then he is as sure as before till he changes it again!"

"Opinion is not sight, your father says," answered Molly; and again a little pause followed.

"Well, but, Molly," resumed Walter, "how is that precious thing, leisure for thought, to be

come by? Write reviews I will not! Write a history, I cannot. Write a poem I might, but they wouldn't buy copies enough of it to pay for the paper and printing. Write a novel I might, if I had time; but how to live, not to say how to think, while I was writing it? Perhaps I ought to be a tutor, or a schoolmaster!"

"Do you feel drawn to that, Walter?"

"I do not."

"And you do feel drawn to write?"

"I dare not say I have thoughts which demand expression; and yet somehow I want to write."

"And you say that some begin by writing what is of no value, but come to write things that are precious?"

"It is true."

"Then perhaps you have served your apprenticeship in worthless things, and the inclination to write comes now of precious things on their way, which you do not yet see or suspect, not to say know!"

"But many men and women have the impulse to write, who never write anything of much worth!"

Molly thought a while.

"What if they yielded to the impulse before they ought? What if their eagerness to write when they ought to have been doing something else, destroyed the call in them? That is perhaps the reason why there are so many dull preachers—that they begin to speak before they have anything to say!"

"Teaching would be favourable to learning!"

"It would tire your brain, and give you too much to do with books! You would learn chiefly from thoughts, and I stand up for things first.—And where would be your leisure?"

"You have something in your mind, Molly! I will do whatever you would have me!"

"No, Walter," exclaimed Molly, with a flash, "I will take no such promise! You will, I know, do what I or any one else may propose, if it appears to you right! But don't you think

that, for the best work, a man ought to be independent of the work?"

"You would have your poet a rich man!"

"Just the contrary, Walter! A rich man is the most dependent of all—at least most rich men are. Take his riches, and what could himself do for himself? He depends on his money. No; I would have the poet earn his bread by the sweat of his brow—with his hands feed his body, and with his heart and brain the hearts of his brothers and sisters. We have talked much about this, your father and I. That a man is not a gentleman who works with his hands, is the meanest, silliest article in the social creed of our country. He who would be a better gentleman than the Carpenter of Nazareth, is not worthy of him. He gave up his working only to do better work for his brothers and sisters, and then he let the men and women, but mostly, I suspect, the women, that loved him, support him! Thousands upon thousands of young men think it more gentlemanly to be

clerks than to be carpenters, but, if I were a man, I would rather *make* anything, than add up figures and copy stupid letters all day long! If I had brothers, I would ten times rather see them masons, or carpenters, or bookbinders, or shoemakers, than have them doing what ought to be left for the weaker and more delicate!"

"Which do you want me to be, Molly—a carpenter or a shoemaker?"

"Neither, Walter—but a farmer: you don't want to be a finer gentleman than your father! Stay at home and help him, and grow strong. Plough and cart, and do the work of a labouring man. Nature will be your mate in her own workshop!"

Molly was right. If Burns had but kept to his plough and his fields, to the birds and the beasts, to the storms and the sunshine! He was a free man while he lived by his labour among his own people! Ambition makes of gentlemen time-servers and paltry politicians; of the ploughman-poet it made an exciseman!

"What will then become of the leisure you want me to have, Molly?"

"Your father will see that you have it! In winter, which you say is the season for poetry, there will be plenty of time, and in summer there will be some. Not a stroke of your pen will have to go for a dinner or a pair of shoes! Thoughts born of the heaven and the earth and the fountains of water, will spring up in your soul, and have time to ripen. If you find you are not wanted for an author, you will thank God you are not an author. What songs you would write then, Walter!"

He sat motionless most of the time. Now and then he would lift his head as if to speak, but he did not speak; and when Molly was silent, he rose and again went to his room. What passed there, I need not say. Walter was a true man in that he was ready to become truer: what better thing could be said of any unfinished man!

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LAST, BUT NOT THE END.

IT was the second spring, and Molly and Walter sat again in the twilit garden. Walter had just come home from his day's work; he had been ploughing. He was a broad-shouldered, lean, powerful, handsome fellow, with a rather slow step, but soldierly carriage. His hands were brown and mighty, and took a little more washing than before.

"My father does not seem quite himself!" he said to Molly.

"He has been a little depressed for a day or two," she answered.

"There's nothing wrong, is there, Molly?"

"No, nothing. It is only his spirits. They

have never been good since your mother died. He declares himself the happiest man in the county, now you are at home with us."

Walter was up early the next morning, and again at his work. A new-born wind blew on his face, and sent the blood singing through his veins. If we could hear all finest sounds, we might, perhaps, gather not only the mood, but the character of a man, by listening to the music or the discord the river of his blood was making, as through countless channels it irrigated lungs and brain: Walter's that morning must have been weaving lovely harmonies! It was a fresh spring wind, the breath of the world reviving from its winter-swoon. His father had managed to pay his debts; his hopes were high, his imagination active; his horses were pulling strong; the plough was going free, turning over the furrow smooth and clean; he was one of the powers of nature at work for the harvest of the year; he was in obedient consent with the will that makes the world and all its summers

and winters! He was a thinking, choosing, willing part of the living whole, in vital fountain issuing from the heart of the Father of men! Work lay all about him, and he was doing the work! And Molly was at home, singing about hers! At night, when the sun was set, and his day's work done, he would go home to her and his father, to his room and his books and his writing!

But as he laboured, his thought this day was most of his father: he was trying to *make* something to cheer him. The eyes of the old man never lost their love, but when he forgot to smile, Molly looked grave, and Walter felt that a cloud was over the sun. They were a true family: when one member suffered, all the members suffered with it.

So throughout the morning, as his horses pulled, and the earth opened, and the plough folded the furrow back, Walter thought, and made, and remembered: he had a gift for remembering completions, and forgetting the chips

and rejected rubbish of the process. In the evening he carried home with him these verses :—

How shall he sing who hath no song,
He laugh who hath no mirth?
Will strongest cannot wake a song!
It is no use to strive or long
To sing with them that have a song,
And mirthless laugh with mirth!
Though sad, he must confront the wrong,
And for the right face any throng,
Waiting, with patience sweet and strong,
Until God's glory fills the earth;
Then shall he sing who had no song,
He laugh who had no mirth!

Yea, if like barren rock thou sit
Upon a land of dearth,
Round which but phantom waters flit,
Of visionary birth—
Yet be thou still, and wait, wait long;
There comes a sea to drown the wrong,
His glory shall o'erwhelm the earth,
And thou, no more a scathed rock,
Shalt start alive with gladsome shock,
Shalt a hand-clapping billow be,
And shout with the eternal sea!

To righteousness and love belong
The dance, the jubilance, the song!
For, lo, the right hath quelled the wrong,
And truth hath stilled the lying tongue!
For, lo, the glad God fills the earth,
And Love sits down by every hearth!
Now must thou sing because of song,
Now laugh because of mirth!

Molly read the verses, and rose to run with them to her father. But Walter caught and held her.

"Remember, Molly," he said, "I wrote it for my father; it is not my own feeling at the moment. For me, God *has* sent a wave of his glory over the earth; it has come swelling out of the deep sea of his thought, has caught me up, and is making me joyful as the morning. That wave is my love for you, Molly—is you, my Molly!"

She turned and kissed him, then ran to his father. He read, turned, and kissed Molly.

In his heart he sang this song:

"Blessed art thou among women! for thou hast given me a son of consolation!"

And to Molly he said,

"Let us go to Walter!"

THE END.

The Flight of the Shadow

BY

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THE FLIGHT OF THE SHADOW.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. DAY BEGINS THE STORY.

I AM old, else, I think, I should not have the courage to tell the story I am going to tell. All those concerned in it about whose feelings I am careful, are gone where, thank God, there are no secrets! If they know what I am doing, I know they do not mind. If they were alive to read as I record, they might perhaps now and again look a little paler and wish the leaf turned, but to see the things set down would not make them unhappy; they do not love secrecy. Half the misery in the world comes from trying to look, instead of trying to be, what one is not. I would that not God only but all good men and women might see me through and through. They would not be pleased with everything they saw, but then neither am I, and I would have no coals of fire in my soul's pockets! But my very nature would shudder at the thought of letting one person that loved a secret see

into it. Such a one never sees things as they are—would not indeed see what was there, but something shaped and colored after his own likeness. No one who loves and chooses a secret can be of the pure in heart that shall see God.

Yet how shall I tell even who I am? Which of us is other than a secret to all but God! Which of us can tell, with poorest approximation, what he or she is! Not to touch the mystery of life—that one who is not myself has made me able to say *I*, how little can any of us tell about even those ancestors whose names we know, while yet the nature, and still more the character, of hundreds of them, have shared in determining what *I* means every time one of us utters the word! For myself, I remember neither father nor mother, nor one of their fathers or mothers: how little then can I say as to what I am! But I will tell as much as most of my readers, if ever I have any, will care to know.

I come of a long yeoman-line of the name of Whichcote. In Scotland the Whichcotes would have been called *lairds;* in England they were not called *squires.* Repeatedly had younger sons of it risen to rank and honor, and in several generations would his property have entitled the head of the family to rank as a squire, but at the time when I began to be aware of existence, the family possessions had dwindled

to one large farm, on which I found myself. Naturally, while some of the family had risen, others had sunk in the social scale; and of the latter was Miss Martha Moon, far more to my life than can appear in my story. I should imagine there are few families in England covering a larger range of social difference than ours. But I begin to think the chief difficulty in writing a book must be to keep out what does not belong to it.

I may mention, however, my conviction, that I owe many special delights to the gradual development of my race in certain special relations to the natural ways of the world. That I was myself brought up in such relations, appears not enough to account for the intensity of my pleasure in things belonging to simplest life—in everything of the open air, in animals of all kinds, in the economy of field and meadow and moor. I can no more understand my delight in the sweet breath of a cow, than I can explain the process by which, that day in the garden—but I must not forestall, and will say rather—than I can account for the tears which, now I am an old woman, fill my eyes just as they used when I was a child, at sight of the year's first primrose. A harebell, much as I have always loved harebells, never moved me that way! Some will say the cause, whatever it be, lies in my nature, not in my ancestry; that, anyhow, it must have

come first to some one—and why not to me? I answer, Everything lies in every one of us, but has to be brought to the surface. It grows a little in one, more in that one's child, more in that child's child, and so on and on—with curious breaks as of a river which every now and then takes to an underground course. One thing I am sure of—that, however any good thing came, I did not make it; I can only be glad and thankful that in me it came to the surface, to tell me how beautiful must he be who thought of it, and made it in me. Then surely one is nearer, if not to God himself, yet to the things God loves, in the country than amid ugly houses—things that could not have been invented by God, though he made the man that made them. It is not the fashionable only that love the town and not the country; the men and women who live in dirt and squalor—their counterparts in this and worse things far more than they think—are afraid of loneliness, and hate God's lovely dark.

CHAPTER II.

MISS MARTHA MOON.

LET me look back and see what first things I first remember!

All about my uncle first; but I keep him to the last. Next, all about Rover, the dog—though for roving, I hardly remember him away from my side! Alas, he did not live to come into the story, but I must mention him here, for I shall not write another book, and, in the briefest summary of my childhood, to make no allusion to him would be disloyalty. I almost believe that at one period, had I been set to say who I was, I should have included Rover as an essential part of myself. His tail was my tail; his legs were my legs; his tongue was my tongue!—so much more did I, as we gamboled together, seem conscious of his joy than of my own! Surely, among other and greater mercies, I shall find him again!

The next person I see busy about the place, now here now there in the house, and seldom outside it, is Miss Martha Moon. The house is large, built at a

time when the family was one of consequence, and there was always much to be done in it. The largest room in it is now called the kitchen, but was doubtless called the hall when first it was built. This was Miss Martha Moon's headquarters.

She was my uncle's second cousin, and as he always called her Martha, so did I, without rebuke: every one else about the place called her Miss Martha.

Of much greater worth and much more genuine refinement than tens of thousands the world calls ladies, she never claimed the distinction. Indeed she strongly objected to it. If you had said or implied she was a lady, she would have shrunk as from a covert reflection on the quality of her work. Had she known certain of such as nowadays call themselves lady-helps, I could have understood her objection. I think, however, it came from a stern adherence to the factness—if I may coin the word—of things. She never called a lie a fib.

When she was angry, she always held her tongue; she feared being unfair. She had indeed a rare power of silence. To this day I do not *know*, but am nevertheless sure, that, by an instinct of understanding, she saw into my uncle's trouble, and descried, more or less plainly, the secret of it, while yet she never even alluded to the existence of such a trouble. She had a regard for woman's dignity as profound as silent.

She was not of those that prate or rave about their rights, forget their duties, and care only for what they count their victories.

She declared herself dead against marriage. One day, while yet hardly more than a child, I said to her thoughtfully,

"I wonder why you hate gentlemen, Martha!"

"Hate 'em! What on earth makes you say such a wicked thing, Orbie?" she answered. "Hate 'em, the poor dears! I love 'em! What did you ever see to make you think I hated your uncle now?"

"Oh! of course! uncle!" I returned; for my uncle was all the world to me. "Nobody could hate uncle!"

"She'd be a bad woman, anyhow, that did!" rejoined Martha. "But did anybody ever hate the person that couldn't do without her, Orbie?"

My name—suggested by my uncle because my mother died at my birth—was a curious one; I believe he made it himself. *Belorba* it was, and it means *Fair Orphan.*

"I don't know, Martha," I replied.

"Well, you watch and see!" she returned. "Do you think I would stay here and work from morning to night if I hadn't some reason for it?—Oh, I like work!" she went on; "I don't deny that. I should be miserable if I didn't work. But I'm not bound

to this sort of work. I have money of my own, and I'm no beggar for house-room. But rather than leave your uncle, poor man! I would do the work of a plowman for him."

"Then why don't you marry him, Martha?" I said, with innocent impertinence.

"Marry him! I wouldn't marry him for ten thousand pounds, child!"

"Why not, if you love him so much? I'm sure he wouldn't mind!"

"Marry him!" repeated Miss Martha, and stood looking at me as if here at last was a creature she could *not* understand; "marry the poor dear man, and make him miserable! I could love any man better than that! Just you open your eyes, my dear, and see what goes on about you. Do you see so many men made happy by their wives? I don't say it's all the wives' fault, poor things! But the fact's the same: there's the poor husbands all the time trying hard to bear it! What with the babies, and the headaches, and the rest of it, that's what it comes to—the husbands are not happy! No, no! A woman can do better for a man than marry him!"

"But mayn't it be the husband's fault—sometimes, Martha?"

"It may; but what better is it for that? What better is the wife for knowing it, or how much happier

the husband for not knowing it? As soon as you come to weighing who's in fault, and counting how much, it's all up with the marriage. There's no more comfort in life for either of them! Women are sent into the world to make men happy. I was sent to your uncle, and I'm trying to do my duty. It's nothing to me what other women think; I'm here to serve your uncle. What comes of me, I don't care, so long as I do my work, and don't keep him waiting that made me for it. You may think it a small thing to make a man happy! I don't. God thought him worth making, and he wouldn't be if he was miserable. I've seen one woman make ten men unhappy! I know my calling, Orbie. Nothing would make me marry one of them, poor things!"

"But if they all said as you do, Martha?"

"No doubt the world would come to an end, but it would go out singing, not crying. I don't see that that would matter. There would be enough to make each other happy in heaven, and the Lord could make more as they were wanted."

"Uncle says it takes God a long time to make a man!" I ventured to remark.

Miss Martha was silent for a moment. She did not see how my remark bore on the matter in hand, but she had such respect for anything my uncle said, that when she did not grasp it she held her peace.

"Anyhow there's no fear of it for the present!" she answered. "You heard the screed of banns last Sunday!"

I thought you would have a better idea of Miss Martha Moon from hearing her talk, than from any talk about her. To hear one talk is better than to see one. But I would not have you think she often spoke at such length. She was in truth a woman of few words, never troubled or troubling with any verbal catarrh. Especially silent she was when any one she loved was in distress. I have seen her stand moveless for moments, with a look that was the incarnation of essential motherhood—as if her eyes were swallowing up sorrow; as if her soul was ready to be the sacrifice for sin. Then she would turn away with a droop of the eyelids that seemed to say she saw what it was, but saw also how little she could do for it. Oh the depth of the love-trouble in those eyes of hers!

Martha never set herself to teach me anything, but I could not know Martha without learning something of the genuine human heart. I gathered from her by unconscious assimilation. Possibly, a spiritual action analogous to exosmose and endosmose, takes place between certain souls.

CHAPTER III.

MY UNCLE.

Now I must tell you what my uncle was like.

The first thing that struck you about him would have been, how tall and thin he was. The next thing would have been, how he stooped; and the next, how sad he looked. It scarcely seemed that Martha Moon had been able to do much for him. Yet doubtless she had done, and was doing, more than either he or she knew. He had rather a small head on the top of his long body; and when he stood straight up, which was not very often, it seemed so far away, that some one said he took him for Zaccheus looking down from the sycamore. *I* never thought of analyzing his appearance, never thought of comparing him with any one else. To me he was the best and most beautiful of men — the first man in all the world. Nor did I change my mind about him ever—I only came to want another to think of him as I did.

His features were in fine proportion, though perhaps too delicate. Perhaps they were a little too

small to be properly beautiful. When first I saw a likeness of the poet Shelley, I called out "My uncle!" and immediately began to see differences. He wore a small but long mustache, brushed away from his mouth; and over it his eyes looked large. They were of a clear gray, and very gentle. I know from the testimony of others, that I was right in imagining him a really learned man. That small head of his contained more and better than many a larger head of greater note. He was constantly reading—that is, when not thinking, or giving me the lessons which make me now thank him for half my conscious soul.

Reading or writing or thinking, he made me always welcome to share his room with him; but he seldom took me out walking. He was by no means regular in his habits—regarded neither times nor seasons—went and came like a bird. His hour for going out was unknown to himself, was seldom two days together the same. He would rise up suddenly, even in the middle of a lesson—he always called it "a lesson together"—and without a word walk from the room and the house. I had soon observed that in gloomy weather he went out often, in the sunshine seldom.

The house had a large garden, of a very old-fashioned sort, such a place for the charm of both glory and gloom as I have never seen elsewhere. I have

had other eyes opened within me to deeper beauties than I saw in that garden then; my remembrance of it is none the less of an enchanted ground. But my uncle never walked in it. When he walked it was always out on the moor he went, and what time he would return no one ever knew. His meals were uninteresting to him—no concern to any one but Martha, who never uttered a word of impatience, and seldom a word of anxiety. At whatever hour of the day he went, it was almost always night when he came home, often late night. In the house he much preferred his own room to any other.

This room, not so large as the kitchen-hall, but quite as long, seems to me, when I look back, my earliest surrounding. It was the center from which my roving fancies issued as from their source, and the end of their journey to which as to their home they returned. It was a curious place. Were you to see first the inside of the house and then the outside, you would find yourself at a loss to conjecture where within it could be situated such a room. It was not, however, contained in what, to a cursory glance, passed for the habitable house, and a stranger would not easily have found the entrance to it.

Both its nature and situation were in keeping with certain peculiarities of my uncle's mental being. He was given to curious inquiries. He would set out to

solve now one now another historical point as odd as uninteresting to any but a mind capable of starting such a question. To determine it, he would search book after book, as if it were a live thing, in whose memory must remain, darkly stored, thousands of facts, requiring only to be recollected; among them might nestle the thing he sought, and he would dig for it as in a mine that went branching through the hardened dust of ages. I fancy he read any old book whatever of English history with the haunting sense that next moment he might come upon the trace of certain of his own ancestors of whom he specially desired to enlarge his knowledge. Whether he started any new thing in mathematics I can not tell, but he would sit absorbed, every day and all day long for weeks, over his slate, suddenly throw it down, walk out for the rest of the day, and leave his calculus, or whatever it was, for months. He read Shakespeare as with a microscope, propounding and answering the most curious little questions. It seemed to me sometimes, I confess, that he missed a plain point from his eyes being so sharp that they looked through it without seeing it, having focused themselves beyond it.

A specimen of the kind of question he would ask and answer himself, occurs to me as I write, for he put it to me once as we read together.

"Why," he said, "did Margaret, in *Much ado about Nothing*, try to persuade Hero to wear her other rabato?"

And the answer was:

"Because she feared her mistress would find out that she had been wearing it—namely, the night before, when she personated her."

And here I may put down a remark I heard him make in reference to a theory which itself must seem nothing less than idiotic to any one who knows Shakespeare as my uncle knew him. The remark was this —that whoever sought to enhance the fame of Lord St. Albans—he was careful to use the real title—by attributing to him the works of Shakespeare, must either be a man of weak intellect, of great ignorance, or of low moral perception; for he cast on the memory of a man already more to be pitied than any, a weight of obloquy such as it were hard to believe any one capable of deserving. A being with Shakespeare's love of human nature, and Bacon's insight into essential truth, guilty of the moral and social atrocities into which his lordship's eagerness after money for scientific research betrayed him, would be a monster as grotesque as abominable.

I record the remark the rather that it shows my uncle could look at things in a large way as well as hunt with a knife-edge. At the same time, devoutly as I

honor him, I can not but count him intended for thinkings of larger scope than such as then seemed characteristic of him. I imagine his early history had affected his faculties, and influenced the mode of their working. How indeed could it have been otherwise!

CHAPTER IV.

MY UNCLE'S ROOM, AND MY UNCLE IN IT.

At right angles to the long, black and white house, stood a building behind it, of possibly earlier date, but uncertain intent. It had been used for many things before my uncle's time—once as part of a small brewery. My uncle was positive that, whether built for the purpose or not, it had been used as a chapel, and that the house was originally the out-lying cell of some convent. The signs on which he founded this conclusion, I was never able to appreciate: to me, as containing my uncle's study, the wonder-house of my childhood, it was far more interesting than any history could have made it. It had very thick walls, two low stories, and a high roof. Entering it from the court behind the house, every portion of it would seem to an ordinary beholder quite accounted for; but it might have suggested itself to a more comprehending observer, that a considerable space must lie between the roof and the low ceiling of the first floor, which was taken up with

the servants' rooms. Of the ground floor, part was used as a dairy, part as a woodhouse, part for certain vegetables, while part stored the turf dug for fuel from the neighboring moor.

Between this building and the house was a smaller and lower erection, a mere out-house. It also was strongly built, however, and the roof, in perfect condition, seemed newer than the walls: it had been raised and strengthened when used by my uncle to contain a passage leading from the house to the roof of the building just described, in which he was fashioning for himself the retreat which he rightly called his study, for few must be the rooms more continuously thought and read in during one lifetime than this.

I have now to tell how it was reached from the house. You could hardly have found the way to it, even had you set yourself seriously to the task, without having in you a good share of the constructive faculty. The whole was my uncle's contrivance, but might well have been supposed to belong to the troubled times when a good hiding-place would have added to the value of any home.

There was a large recess in the kitchen, of which the hearth, raised a foot or so above the flagged floor, had filled the whole—a huge chimney in fact, built out from the wall. At some later time an oblong space

had been cut out of the hearth to a level with the floor, and in it an iron grate constructed for the more convenient burning of coal. Hence the remnant of the raised hearth looked like wide hobs to the grate. The recess as a chimney-corner was thereby spoiled, for coal makes a very different kind of smoke from the aromatic product of wood or peat.

Right and left within the recess were two common unpainted doors, with latches. If you opened either, you found an ordinary shallow cupboard, that on the right filled with shelves and crockery, that on the left with brooms and other household implements.

But if, in the frame of the door to the left, you pressed what looked like the head of a large nail, not its door only but the whole cupboard turned inward on unseen hinges, and revealed an ascending stair, which was the approach to my uncle's room. At the head of the stair you went through the wall of the house to the passage under the roof of the out-house, at the end of which a few more steps led up to the door of the study. By that door you entered the roof of the more ancient building. Lighted almost entirely from above, there was no indication outside of the existence of this floor, except one tiny window, with vaguely pointed arch, almost in the very top of the gable. Here lay my nest; this was the bower of my bliss.

Its walls rose but about three feet from the floor ere the slope of the roof began, so that there was a considerable portion of the room in which my tall uncle could not stand upright. There was width enough notwithstanding, in which four as tall as he might have walked abreast up and down a length of at least five and thirty feet.

Not merely the low walls but the slopes of the roof were filled with books as high as the narrow level portion of the ceiling. On the slopes the bookshelves had of course to be peculiar. My uncle had contrived, and partly himself made them, with the assistance of a carpenter he had known all his life. They were individually fixed to the rafters, each projecting over that beneath it. To get at the highest, he had to stand on a few steps; to reach the lowest, he had to stoop at a right angle. The place was almost a tunnel of books.

By setting a chair on an ancient chest that stood against the gable, and a footstool on the chair, I could mount high enough to get into the deep embrasure of the little window, whence alone to gain a glimpse of the lower world, while from the floor I could see heaven through six skylights, deep framed in books. As far back as I can remember, it was my care to see that the inside of their glass was always bright, so that sun and moon and stars might look in.

The books were mostly in old and dingy bindings, but there were a few to attract the eyes of a child—especially some annuals, in red silk, or embossed leather, or, most bewitching of all, in paper, protected by a tight case of the same, from which, with the help of a ribbon, you drew out the precious little green volume, with its gilt edges and lovely engravings—one of which in particular I remember—a castle in the distance, a wood, a ghastly man at the head of a rearing horse, and a white, mistlike, fleeting ghost, the cause of the consternation. These books had a large share in the witchery of the chamber.

At the end of the room, near the gable-window, but under one of the skylights, was a table of white deal, without cover, at which my uncle generally sat, sometimes writing, oftener leaning over a book. Occasionally, however, he would occupy a large old-fashioned easy-chair, under the slope of the roof, in the same end of the room, sitting silent, neither writing nor reading, his eyes fixed straight before him, but plainly upon nothing. They looked as if sights were going out of them rather than coming in at them. When he sat thus I would sit gazing at him. Oh how I loved him—loved every line of his gentle, troubled countenance! I do not remember the time when I did not know that his face was troubled. It

gave the last finishing tenderness to my love for him. It was from no meddlesome curiosity that I sat watching him, from no longing to learn what he was thinking about, or what pictures were going and coming before the eyes of his mind, but from such a longing to comfort him as amounted to pain. I think it was the desire to be near him—in spirit, I mean, for I could be near him in the body any time except when he was out on one of his lonely walks or rides—that made me attend so closely to my studies. He taught me everything, and I yearned to please him, but without this other half-conscious yearning I do not believe I should ever have made the progress he praised. I took indeed a true delight in learning, but I would not so often have shut the book I was enjoying to the full and taken up another, but for the sight or the thought of my uncle's countenance.

I think he never once sat down in the chair I have mentioned without sooner or later rising hurriedly, and going out on one of his solitary rambles.

When we were having our lessons together, as he phrased it, we sat at the table side by side, and he taught me as if we were two children finding out together what it all meant. Those lessons had, I think, the largest share in the charm of the place; yet when, as not unfrequently, my uncle would, in the middle of

one of them, rise abruptly and leave me without a word, to go, I knew, far away from the house, I was neither dismayed nor uneasy; I had got used to the thing before I could wonder what it meant. I would just go back to the book I had been reading, or to any other that attracted me; he never required the preparation of any lessons. It was of no use to climb to the window in the hope of catching sight of him, for thence was nothing to be seen immediately below but the tops of high trees and a corner of the yard into which the cow-houses opened, and my uncle was never there. He neither understood nor cared about farming. His elder brother, my father, had been bred to carry on the yeoman-line of the family, and my uncle was trained to the medical profession. My father dying rather suddenly, my uncle, who was abroad at the time, and had not begun to practice, returned to take his place, but never paid practical attention to the farming any more than to his profession. He gave the land in charge to a bailiff, and at once settled down, Martha told me, into what we now saw him. She seemed to imply that grief at my father's death was the cause of his depression, but I soon came to the conclusion that it lasted too long to be so accounted for. Gradually I grew aware—so gradually that at length I seemed to have known it from the first—that the soul of my uncle was harassed

with an undying trouble, that some worm lay among the very roots of his life. What change could ever dispel such a sadness as I often saw in that chair! Now and then he would sit there for hours, an open book in his hand perhaps, at which he cast never a glance, all unaware of the eyes of the small maiden fixed upon him, with a whole world of sympathy behind them. I suspect, however, as I believe I have said, that Martha Moon, in her silence, had pierced the heart of the mystery, though she *knew* nothing.

One practical lesson given me now and then in varying form by my uncle, I at length, one day, suddenly and involuntarily associated with the darkness that haunted him. In substance it was this: "Never, my little one, hide anything from those that love you. Never let anything that makes itself a nest in your heart, grow into a secret, for then at once it will begin to eat a hole in it." He would so often say the kind of thing, that I seemed to know when it was coming. But I had heard it as a thing of course, never realizing its truth, and listening to it only because he whom I loved said it.

I see with my mind's eye the fine small head and large eyes so far above me, as we sit beside each other at the deal table. He looked down on me like a bird of prey. His hair—gray, Martha told me, before he was thirty—was tufted out a little, like ruffled feath-

ers, on each side. But the eyes were not those of an eagle; they were a dove's eyes.

"A secret, little one, is a mole that burrows," said my uncle.

The moment of insight was come. A voice seemed suddenly to say within me, "He has a secret; it is biting his heart!" My affection, my devotion, my sacred concern for him, as suddenly swelled to twice their size. It was as if a God were in pain, and I could not help him. I had no desire to learn his secret; I only yearned heart and soul to comfort him. Before long, I had a secret myself for half a day; ever after, I shared so in the trouble of his secret, that I seemed myself to possess or rather to be possessed by one—such a secret that I did not myself know it.

But in truth I had a secret then; for the moment I knew that he had a secret, his secret—the outward fact of its existence, I mean—was my secret. And besides this secret of his, I had then a secret of my own. For I knew that my uncle had a secret, and he did not know that I knew. Therewith came, of course, the question—Ought I to tell him? At once, by the instinct of love, I saw that to tell him would put him in a great difficulty. He might wish me never to let any one else know of it, and how could he say so when he had been constantly warning me to let nothing grow

to a secret in my heart? As to telling Martha Moon, much as I loved her, much as I knew she loved my uncle, and sure as I was that anything concerning him was as sacred to her as to me, I dared not commit such a breach of confidence as even to think in her presence that my uncle had a secret. From that hour I had recurrent fits of a morbid terror at the very idea of a secret—as if a secret were in itself a treacherous, poisonous guest, that ate away the life of its host.

But to return, my half-day secret came in this wise.

CHAPTER V.

MY FIRST SECRET.

I WAS one morning with my uncle in his room. Lessons were over, and I was reading a marvelous story in one of my favorite annuals; my uncle had so taught me from infancy the right handling of books, that he would have trusted me with the most valuable in his possession. I do not know how old I was, but that is no matter; man or woman is aged according to the development of the conscience. Looking up, I saw him stooping over an open drawer in a cabinet behind the door. I sat on the great chest under the gable-window, and was away from him the whole length of the room. He had never told me not to look at him, had never seemed to object to the presence of my eyes on anything he did, and as a matter of course I sat observing him, partly because I had never seen any portion of that cabinet open. He turned toward the sky-light near him, and held up between him and it a small something, of which I could just see that it was red, and shone in the light.

Then he turned hurriedly, threw it in the drawer, and went straight out, leaving the drawer open. I knew I had lost his company for the day.

The moment he was gone, the phantasm of the pretty thing he had been looking at so intently came back to me. Somehow I seemed to understand that I had no right to know what it was, seeing my uncle had not shown it me! At the same time I had no law to guide me. He had never said I was not to look at this or that in the room. If he had, even if the cabinet had not been mentioned, I do not think I should have offended; but that does not make the fault less. For which is the more guilty—the man who knows there is a law against doing a certain thing and does it, or the man who feels an authority in the depth of his nature forbidding the thing, and yet does it? Surely the latter is greatly the more guilty.

I rose, and went to the cabinet. But when the contents of the drawer began to show themselves as I drew near, "I closed my lids, and kept them close," until I had seated myself on the floor, with my back to the cabinet, and the drawer projecting over my head like the shelf of a bracket over its supporting figure. I could touch it with the top of my head by straightening my back. How long I sat there motionless, I can not say, but it seems in retrospect at least

a week, such a multitude of thinkings went through my mind. The logical discussion of a thing that has to be done, a thing awaiting action and not decision—the experiment, that is, whether the duty or the temptation has the more to say for itself, is one of the straight roads to the pit. Similarly, there are multitudes who lose their lives pondering what they ought to believe, while something lies at their door waiting to be done, and rendering it impossible for him who makes it wait ever to know what to believe. Only a pure heart can understand, and a pure heart is one that sends out ready hands. I knew perfectly well what I ought to do—namely, to shut that drawer with the back of my head, then get up and do something, and forget the shining stone I had seen between my uncle's finger and thumb; yet there I sat debating whether I was not at liberty to do in my uncle's room what he had not told me not to do.

I will not weary my reader with any further description of the evil path by which I arrived at the evil act. To myself it is pain even now to tell that I got on my feet, saw a blaze of shining things, banged to the drawer, and knew that Eve had eaten the apple. The eyes of my consciousness were opened to the evil in me, through the evil done by me. Evil seemed now a part of myself, so that nevermore should I get rid of it. It may be easy for one regarding it from

afar, through the telescope only of a book, to exclaim, "Such a little thing!" but it was I who did it, and not another! it was I, and only I, who could know what I had done, and it was not a little thing! That peep into my uncle's drawer lies in my soul the type of sin. Never have I done anything wrong with such a clear assurance that I was doing wrong, as when I did the thing I had taken most pains to reason out as right.

Like one stunned by an electric shock, I had neither feeling nor care left for anything. I walked to the end of the long room, as far as I could go from the scene of my crime, and sat down on the great chest, with my coffin, the cabinet, facing me in the distance. The first thing, I think, that I grew conscious of, was dreariness. There was nothing interesting anywhere. What should I do? There was nothing to do, nothing to think about, not a book worth reading. Story was suddenly dried up at its fountain. Life was a plain without water-brooks. If the sky was not "a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors," it was nothing better than a canopy of gray and blue. By degrees my thought settled on what I had done, and in a moment I realized it as it was—a vile thing, and I had lost my life for it! This is the nearest I can come to the expression of what I felt. I was simply in despair. I had done wrong, and the

world had closed in upon me; the sky had come down and was crushing me! The lid of my coffin was closed! I should come no more out!

But deliverance came speedily—and in how lovely a way! Into my thought, not into the room, came my uncle! Present to my deepest consciousness, he stood tall, loving, beautiful, sad. I read no rebuke in his countenance, only sorrow that I had sinned, and sympathy with my suffering because of my sin. Then first I knew that I had *wronged* him in looking into his drawer; then first I saw it was his being that made the thing I had done an evil thing. If the drawer had been nobody's, there would have been no wrong in looking into it! And what made it so very bad was that my uncle was so good to me!

With the discovery came a rush of gladsome relief. Strange to say, with the clearer perception of the greatness of the wrong I had done, came the gladness of redemption. It was almost a pure joy to find that it was against my uncle, my own uncle, that I had sinned! That joy was the first gleam through a darkness that had seemed settled on my soul for ever. But a brighter followed; for thus spake the truth within me: "The thing is in your uncle's hands; he is the lord of the wrong you have done; it is to him it makes you a debtor:—he loves you, and will forgive you. Of course he will! He can not make

undone what is done, but he will comfort you, and find some way of setting things right. There must be some way! I can not be doomed to be a contemptible child to all eternity! It is so easy to go wrong, and so hard to get right! He must help me!"

I sat the rest of the day alone in that solitary room, away from Martha and Rover and everybody. I would that even now in my old age I waited for God as then I waited for my uncle! If only he would come, that I might pour out the story of my fall, for I had sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression!—only I was worse, for neither serpent nor wife had tempted me!

At tea-time Martha came to find me. I would not go with her. She would bring me my tea, she said. I would not have any tea. With a look like that she sometimes cast on my uncle, she left me. Dear Martha! She had the lovely gift of leaving alone. That evening there was no tea in the house; Martha did not have any.

With the conceit peculiar to repentance and humiliation, I took a curious satisfaction in being hard on myself. I could have taken my meal tolerably well: with the new hope in my uncle as my savior, came comfort enough for the natural process of getting hungry, and desiring food; but with common,

indeed vulgar, foolishness, my own righteousness in taking vengeance on my fault was a satisfaction to me. I did not then see the presumption of the sinner's taking vengeance on her own fault, did not see that I had no right to do that. For how should a thing defiled punish? With all my great joy in the discovery that the fault was against my uncle, I forgot that therefore I was in his jurisdiction, that he only had to deal with it, he alone could punish, as he alone could forgive it.

It was the end of August, and the night stole swiftly upon the day. It began to grow very dusk, but I would not stir. I and the cabinet kept each other dismal company while the gloom deepened into night. Nor did the night part us, for I and the cabinet filled all the darkness. Had my uncle remained the whole night away, I believe I should have sat till he came. But happily, both for my mental suffering and my bodily endurance, he returned sooner than many a time. I heard the house-door open. I knew he would come to the study before going to his bedroom, and my heart gave a bound of awe-filled eagerness. I knew also that Martha never spoke to him when he returned from one of his late rambles, and that he would not know I was there: long before she died Martha knew how grateful he was for her delicate consideration. Martha Moon was not one of

this world's ladies; but there is a country where the social question is not, "Is she a lady?" but "How much of a woman is she?" Martha's name must, I think, stand well up in the book of life.

My uncle, then, approached his room without knowing there was a live kernel to the dark that filled it. I hearkened to every nearer step as he came up the stair, along the corridor, and up the short final ascent to the door of the study. I had crept from my place to the middle of the room, and, without a thought of consequences, stood waiting the arrival through the dark, of my deliverer from the dark. I did not know that many a man who would face a battery calmly, will spring a yard aside if a yelping cur dart at him.

My uncle opened the door, and closed it behind him. His lamp and matches stood ready on his table: it was my part to see they were there. With a sigh, which seemed to seek me in the darkness and find me, he came forward through it. I caught him round the legs, and clung to him. He gave a great gasp and a smothered cry, staggered, and nearly fell. "My God!" he murmured.

"Uncle! uncle!" I cried, in greater terror than he; "it's only Orbie! It's only your little one!"

"Oh! it's only my little one, is it?" he rejoined, at once recovering his equanimity, and not for a

moment losing the temper so ready, like a nervous cat, to spring from most of us when startled.

He caught me up in his arms, and held me to his heart. I could feel it beat against my little person.

"Uncle! uncle!" I cried again. "Don't! Don't!"

"Did I hurt you, my little one?" he said, and relaxing his embrace, held me more gently, but did not set me down.

"No, no!" I answered. "But I've got a secret, and you mustn't kiss me till it is gone. I wish there was a swine to send it into!"

"Give it to me, little one. I will treat it better than a swine would."

"But it mustn't be treated, uncle! It might come again!"

"There is no fear of that, my child! As soon as a secret is told, it is dead. It is a secret no longer."

"Will it be dead, uncle?" I returned. "—But it will be there, all the same, when it is dead—an ugly thing. It will only put off its cloak and show itself!"

"All secrets are not ugly things when their cloaks are off. The cloak may be the ugly thing, and nothing else."

He stood in the dark, holding me in his arms. But the clouds had cleared off a little, and though there was no moon, I could see the dim blue of the

sky-lights, and a little shine from the gray of his hair.

"But mine is an ugly thing," I said, "and I hate it. Please let me put it out of my mouth. Perhaps then it will go dead."

"Out with it, little one."

"Put me down, please," I returned.

He walked to the old chest under the gable-window, seated himself on it, and set me down beside him. I slipped from the chest, and knelt on the floor at his feet, a little way in front of him. I did not touch him, and all was again quite dark about us.

I told him my story from beginning to end, along with a great part of my meditations while hesitating to do the deed. I felt very choky, but forced my way through, talking with a throat that did not seem my own, and sending out a voice I seemed never to have heard before. The moment I ceased, a sound like a sob came out of the darkness. Was it possible my big uncle was crying? Then indeed there was no hope for me! He was horrified at my wickedness, and very sorry to have to give me up! I howled like a wild beast.

"Please, uncle, will you kill me?" I cried, through a riot of sobs that came from me like potatoes from a sack.

"Yes, yes, I will kill you, my darling!" he an-

swered—"this way! this way!" and stretching out his arms he found me in the dark, drew me to him, and covered my face with kisses.

"Now," he resumed, "I've killed you alive again, and the ugly secret is dead, and will never come to life any more. And I think, besides, we have killed the hen that lays the egg-secrets!"

He rose with me in his arms, set me down on the chest, lighted his lamp, and carried it to the cabinet. Then he returned, and taking me by the hand, led me to it, opened wide the drawer of offense, lifted me, and held me so that I could see well into it. The light flashed in a hundred glories of color from a multitude of cut but unset stones that lay loose in it. I soon learned that most of them were of small money-value, but their beauty was none the less entrancing. There were stones of price among them, however, and these were the first he taught me, because they were the most beautiful. My fault had opened a new source of delight: my stone-lesson was now one of the great pleasures of the week. In after years I saw in it the richness of God not content with setting right what is wrong, but making from it a gain: he will not have his children the worse for the wrong they have done! We shall lose nothing by it: he is our father! For the hurting sand-grain, he gives his oyster a pearl.

"There," said my uncle, "you may look at them as often as you please; only mind you put every one back as soon as you have satisfied your eyes with it. You must not put one in your pocket, or carry it about in your hand."

Then he set me down, saying:

"Now you must go to bed, and dream about the pretty things. I will tell you a lot of stories about them afterward."

We had a way of calling any kind of statement *a story*.

I never cared to ask how it was that, seeing all the same I had done the wrong thing, the whole weight of it was gone from me. So utterly was it gone, that I did not even inquire whether I ought so to let it pass from me. It was nowhere. In the fire of my uncle's love to me and mine to him, the thing vanished. It was annihilated. Should I not be a creature unworthy of life, if, now in my old age, I, who had such an uncle in my childhood, did not with my very life believe in God!

I have wondered whether, if my father had lived to bring me up instead of my uncle, I should have been very different; but the useless speculation has only driven me to believe that the relations on the surface of life are but the symbols of far deeper ties, which may exist without those correspondent external

ones. At the same time, now that, being old, I naturally think of the coming change, I feel that, when I see my father, I shall have a different feeling for him just because he is my father, although my uncle did all the fatherly toward me. But we need not trouble ourselves about our hearts, and all their varying hues and shades of feeling. Truth is at the root of all existence, therefore everything must come right if only we are obedient to the truth; and right is the deepest satisfaction of every creature as well as of God. I wait in confidence. If things be not as we think, they will both arouse and satisfy a better *think*, making us glad they are not as we expected.

CHAPTER VI.

I LOSE MYSELF.

I HAVE one incident more to relate ere my narrative begins to flow from a quite clear memory.

I was by no means a small bookworm, neither spent all my time in the enchanted ground of my uncle's study. It is true I loved the house, and often felt like a burrowing animal that would rather not leave its hole; but occasionally even at such times would suddenly wake the passion for the open air: I must get into it or die! I was well known in the farmyard, not to the men only, but to the animals also. In the absence of human playfellows, they did much to keep me from selfishness. But far beyond it I took no unfrequent flight—always alone. Neither Martha nor my uncle ever seemed to think I needed looking after; and I am not aware that I should have gained anything by it. I speak for myself; I have no theories about the bringing up of children. I went where and when I pleased, as little challenged as my uncle himself. Like him, I took now and then a

long ramble over the moor, fearing nothing, and knowing nothing to fear. I went sometimes where it seemed as if human foot could never have trod before, so wild and waste was the prospect, so unknown it somehow looked. The house was built on the more sloping side of a high hollow just within the moor, which stretched wide away from the very edge of the farm. If you climbed the slope, following a certain rough country road, at the top of it you saw on the one side the farm, in all the colors and shades of its outspread, well-tilled fields; on the other side, the heath. If you went another way, through the garden, through the belt of shrubs and pines that encircled it, and through the wilderness behind that, you were at once upon the heath. If then you went as far as the highest point in sight, wading through the heather, among the rocks and great stones which in childhood I never doubted grew also, you saw before you nothing but a wide, wild level, whose horizon was here and there broken by low hills. But the seeming level was far from flat or smooth, as I found on the day of the adventure I am about to relate. I wonder I had never lost myself before. I suppose then first my legs were able to wander beyond the ground with which my eyes were familiar.

It had rained all the morning and afternoon. When our last lesson was over, my uncle went out

and I betook myself to the barn, where I amused myself in the straw. By this time Rover must have gone back to his Maker, for I remember as with me a large, respectable dog of the old-fashioned mastiff type, who endured me with a patience that amounted almost to friendliness, but never followed me about. When I grew hungry I went into the house to have my afternoon-meal. It was called tea, but I knew nothing about tea, while in milk I was a connoisseur. I could tell perfectly to which of the cows I was indebted for the milk I happened at any time to be drinking; Miss Martha never allowed the milks of the different cows to be mingled.

Just as my meal was over, the sun shone with sudden brilliance into my very eyes. The storm was breaking up, and vanishing in the west. I threw down my spoon and ran, hatless as usual, from the house. The sun was on the edge of the hollow; I made straight for him. The bracken was so wet that my legs almost seemed walking through a brook, and my body through a thick rain. In a moment I was sopping; but to be wet was of no consequence to me. Not for many years was I able to believe that damp could hurt.

When I reached the top, the sun was yet some distance above the horizon, and I had gone a good way toward him before he went down. As he sank he sent

up a wind, which blew a sense of coming dark. The wind of the sunset brings me, ever since, a foreboding of tears: it seems to say—"Your day is done; the hour of your darkness is at hand." It grew cold, and a feeling of threat filled the air. All about the grave of the buried sun, the clouds were angry with dusky yellow and splashes of gold. They lowered tumulous and menacing, Then, lo! they had lost courage; their bulk melted off in fierce vapor, gold and gray, and the sharp outcry of their shape was gone. As I recall the airy scene, that horizon looks like the void between a cataclysm and the moving afresh of the spirit of God upon the face of the waters. I went on, and on, I do not know why. Something enticed me, or I was plunged in some meditation, then absorbing, now forgotten, not necessarily worthless. I am jealous of moods that can be forgotten, but such may leave traces in the character. I wandered on. What ups and downs there were! how uneven was the surface of the moor! The feet learned what the eyes had not seen.

All at once I woke to the fact that mountains hemmed me in. They looked mountains, though they were but hills. What had become of home? where was it? The light lingering in the west might surely have shown me the direction of it, but I remember no west—nothing but a deep hollow and dark hills. I was lost!

I was not exactly frightened at first. I knew no cause of dread. I had never seen a tramp even; I had no sense of the inimical. I knew nothing of the danger from cold and exposure. But awe of the fading light and coming darkness awoke in me. I began to be frightened, and fear is like other live things: once started, it grows. Then first I thought with dismay, which became terror, of the slimy bogs and the deep pools in them. But just as my heart was dying within me, I looked to the hills—with no hope that from them would come my aid—and there, on the edge of the sky, lifted against it, in a dip between two of the hills, was the form of a lady on horseback. I could see the skirt of her habit flying out against the clouds as she rode. Had she been a few feet lower, so as to come between me and the side of the hill instead of the sky, I should not have seen her; neither should I if she had been a few hundred yards farther off. I shrieked at the thought that she did not see me, and I could not make her hear me. She started, turned, seemed to look whence the cry could have come, but kept on her way. Then I shrieked in earnest, and began to run wildly toward her. I think she saw me—that my quicker change of place detached my shape sufficiently to make it discernible. She pulled up, and sat like a statue waiting me. I kept on calling as I ran, to assure her I was doing my utmost, for I feared

she might grow impatient and leave me. But at last it was slowly indeed I staggered up to her, spent. My foot caught, and as I fell I clasped the leg of her horse; I had no fear of animals more than of human beings. He was startled, and rearing drew his leg from my arms. But he took care not to come down on me. I rose to my feet, and stood panting.

What the lady said, or what I answered, I can not recall. The next thing I remember is stumbling along by her side, for she made her horse walk that I might keep up with her. She talked a little, but I do not remember what she said. It is all a dream now, a far-off one. It must have been like a dream at the time, I was so exhausted. I remember a voice descending now and then, as if from the clouds—a cold musical voice, with something in it that made me not want to hear it. I remember her saying that we were near her house, and would soon be there. I think she had found out from me where I lived.

All the time I never saw her face; it was too dark. I do not think she once spoke kindly to me. She said I had no business to be out alone; she wondered at my father and mother. I think I was too tired to tell her I had no father or mother. When I did speak, she indicated neither by sound nor movement that she heard or heeded what I said. She sat up above me in the dark, unpleasant, and all but unseen—a riddle

which the troubled child stumbling along by her horse's side did not want solved. Had there been anything to call light, I should have run away from her. Vague doubts of witches and ogresses crossed my mind, but I said to myself the stories about them were not true, and kept on as best I could.

Before we reached the house we had left the heath, and were moving along lanes. The horse seemed to walk with more confidence, and it was harder for me to keep up with him. I was so tired that I could not feel my legs. I stumbled often, and once the horse trod on my foot. I fell; he went on; I had to run limping after him. At last we stopped. I could see nothing. The lady gave a musical cry. A voice and footsteps made answer; and presently came the sound of a gate on its hinges. A long dark piece of road followed. I knew we were among trees, for I heard the wind in them over our heads. Then I saw lights in windows, and presently we stopped at the door of a great house. I remember nothing more of that night.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MIRROR.

I WOKE the next morning in a strange bed, and for a long time could not think how I came to be there. A maid appeared, and told me it was time to get up. Greatly to my dislike, she would insist on dressing me. My clothes looked very miserable, I remember, in consequence of what they had gone through the night before. She was kind to me, and asked a great many questions, but paid no heed to my answers—a treatment to which I had not been used; I think she must have been the lady's maid. When I was ready, she took me to the housekeeper's room, where I had bread and milk for breakfast. Several servants, men and women, came and went, and I thought they all looked at me strangely. I concluded they had no little girls in that house. Assuredly there was small favor for children in it. In some houses the child is as a stranger; in others he rules: neither such house is in the kingdom of heaven. I must have looked a forlorn creature as I sat, or perched rather, on the old

horsehair-sofa in that dingy room. Nobody said more than a word or so to me. I wondered what was going to be done with me, but I had long been able to wait for what would come. At length, after, as it seemed, hours of weary waiting, during which my heart grew sick with longing after my uncle, I was, without a word of explanation, led through long passages into a room which appeared enormous. There I was again left a long while—this time alone. It was all white and gold, and had its walls nearly covered with great mirrors from floor to ceiling, which, while it was indeed of great size, was the cause of its looking so immeasurably large. But it was some time before I discovered this, for I was not accustomed to mirrors. Except the small one on my little dressing-table, and one still less on Martha's, I had scarcely seen a mirror, and was not prepared for those sheets of glass in narrow gold frames.

I went about looking at one thing and another, but handling nothing; my late secret had cured me of that. Weary at last, I dropped upon a low chair, and would probably have soon fallen asleep, had not the door opened and some one come in. I could not see the door without turning, and was too tired and sleepy to move. I sat still, staring, hardly conscious, into the mirror in front of me. All at once I descried in it my uncle—but only to see him grow white as

death, and turn away, reeling as if he would fall. The sight so bewildered me that, instead of rushing to embrace him, I sat frozen. He clapped his hands to his eyes, steadied himself, stood for a moment rigid, then came straight toward me. But, to my added astonishment, he gave me no greeting, or showed any sign of joy at having found me. Never before had he seen me for the first time any day, without giving me a kiss; never before, it seemed to me, had he spoken to me without a smile: I had been lost and was found, and he was not glad! The strange reception fell on me like a numbing spell. I had nothing to say, no impulse to move, no part in the present world. He caught me up in his arms, hid his face upon me, knocked his shoulder heavily against the door-post as he went from the room, walked straight through the hall, and out of the house. I think no one saw us as we went; I am sure neither of us saw any one. With long strides he walked down the avenue, never turning his head. Not until we were on the moor, out of sight of the house, did he stop. Then he set me down; and then first we discovered that he had left his hat behind. For all his carrying of me, and going so fast—and I must have been rather heavy—his face had no color in it.

"Shall I run and get it, uncle?" I said, as I saw him raise his hand to his head and find no hat

there to be taken off. "I should be back in a minute!"

It was the first word spoken between us.

"No, my little one," he answered, wiping his forehead: his voice sounded far away, like that of one speaking in a dream: "I can't let you out of my sight. I've been wandering the moor all night looking for you!"

With that he caught me up again, and pressing his face to mine, walked with me thus for a long quarter of a mile, I should think. Oh how safe I felt!—and how happy!—happy beyond smiling! I loved him before, but I never knew before what it was to lose him and find him again.

"Tell me," he said at length.

I told him all, and he did not speak a word until my tale was finished.

"Were you very frightened," he then asked, "when you found you had lost your way, and darkness was coming?"

"I was frightened, or I would not have gone to the lady. But I wish I had stayed on the moor for you to find me. I knew you would soon be out looking for me. Until she came I comforted myself with thinking that perhaps even then you were on the moor, and I might see you any moment."

"What else did you think of?"

"I thought that God was out on the moor, and if you were not there, he would keep me company."

"Ah!" said my uncle, as if thinking to himself; "she but needs him the more when I am with her!"

"Yes, of course!" I answered; "I need him then for you as well as for myself."

"That is very true, my child!—Shall I tell you one thing I thought of while looking for you?"

"Please, uncle."

"I thought how Jesus' father and mother must have felt when they were looking for him."

"And they needn't have been so unhappy if they had thought who he was—need they?"

"Certainly not. And I needn't have been so unhappy if I had thought who you were. But I was terribly frightened, and there I was wrong."

"Who am I, uncle?"

"Another little one of the same father as he."

"Why were you frightened, uncle?"

"I was afraid of your being frightened."

"I hardly had time to be frightened before the lady came."

"Yes; you see I needn't have been so unhappy!"

My uncle always treated me as if I could understand him perfectly. This came, I see now, from the essential childlikeness of his nature, and from no educational theory.

"Sometimes," he went on, "I look all around me to see if Jesus is out anywhere, but I have never seen him yet!"

"We shall see him one day, sha'n't we?" I said, craning round to look into his eyes, which were my earthly paradise. Nor are they a whit less dear to me, nay, they are dearer, that he has been in God's somewhere, that is, the heavenly paradise, for many a year.

"I think so," he answered, with a sigh that seemed to swell like a sea-wave against me, as I sat on his arm; "—I hope so. I live but for that—and for one thing more."

There are some, I fancy, who would blame him for not being sure, and bring text after text to prove that he ought to have been sure. But oh those text-people! They look to me, not like the clay-sparrows that Jesus made fly, but like bird-skins in a glass-case, stuffed with texts. The doubt of a man like my uncle must be a far better thing than their assurance!

"Would you have been frightened if you had met him on the moor last night, little one?" he asked after a pause.

"Oh, no, uncle!" I returned. "I should have thought it was you till I came nearer, and then I should have known who it was! He wouldn't like a big girl like me to be frightened at him—would he?"

"Indeed not!" answered my uncle fervently; but again his words brought with them a great sigh, and he said no more.

When we reached home, he gave me up to Martha, and went out again—nor returned before I was in bed. But he came to my room, and waked me with a kiss, which sent me faster asleep than before.

CHAPTER VIII.

THANATOS AND ZOE.

I THINK it must have been soon after this that my uncle bought himself a horse. I know something of horses now—that is, if much riding and much love suffice to give a knowledge of them—and the horse which was a glory and a wonder to me then, is a glory and a wonder to me still. He was large, big-boned, and powerful, with less beauty but more grandeur than a thoroughbred, and full of a fiery gentleness. He was the very horse for Sir Philip Sidney.

One day, after he had had him for several months, and had let no one saddle him but himself, therefore knew him perfectly, and knew that the horse knew his master, I happened to be in the yard as he mounted. The moment he was in the saddle he bent down to me, and held out his hand.

"Come with me, little one," he said.

Almost ere I knew, I was in the saddle before him. I grasped his hand, instinctively caught with my foot at his, and was astride the pommel. I will not say I

sat very comfortably, but the memory of that day's delight will never leave me—not "through all the secular to be." There must be a God to the world that could give any such delight as fell then to the share of one little girl! I think my uncle must soon after have got another saddle, for I have no recollection of any more discomfort; I remember only the delight of the motion of the horse under me.

For, after this, I rode with him often, and he taught me to ride as surely not many have been taught. When he saw me so at home in my seat as to require no support, he made me change my position, and go behind him. There I sat sideways on a cloth, like a lady of old time on a pillion. When I had got used to this, my uncle made me stand on the horse's broad back, holding on by his shoulders; and it was wonderful how soon, and how unconsciously, I accommodated myself to every motion of the strength that bore me, learning to keep my place by pure balance like a rope-dancer. I had soon quite forgotten to hold by my uncle, and without the least support rode as comfortably, and with as much confidence, as any rider in a circus, though with a far less easy pace under me. When my uncle found me capable of this, he was much pleased, though a little nervous at times.

Able now to ride his big horse any way, he brought me one afternoon the loveliest of Shetland ponies, not

very small. With the ordinary human distrust in good, I could hardly believe she was meant for me. She was a dappled gray—like the twilight of a morning after rain, my uncle said. He called her Zoe, which means Life. His own horse he called Thanatos, which means Death. Such as understood it, thought it a terrible name to give a horse. For most people are so afraid of Death that they regard his very name with awe.

My uncle had a riding-habit made for me, and after a week found I could give him no more trouble with my horsewomanship. At once I was at home on my new friend's back, with vistas of delight innumerable opening around me, and from that day my uncle seldom rode without me. When he went wandering, it was almost always on foot, and then, as before, he was always alone. The idea of offering to accompany him on such an occasion had never occurred to me.

But one stormy autumn afternoon—most of my memories seem of the autumn — my uncle looked worse than usual when he went out, and I felt, I think for the first time, a vague uneasiness about him. Perhaps I had been thinking of him more ; perhaps I had begun to wonder what the secret could be that made him so often seem unhappy. Anyhow this evening the desire awoke to be with him in his trouble what-

ever it was. There was no curiosity in the feeling, I think, only the desire to serve him as I had never served him yet. I had been, as long as I could remember, always at his beck or lightest call; now I wanted to come when needed without being called. Was it impossible a girl should do anything for a man in his trouble? He, a great man, had helped a little girl out of the deepest despair; could the little girl do nothing for the great man? That the big people should do everything, did not seem fair! He had told me once that the world was held together by what every one could do that the others could not do: there must be something I could do that he could not do!

The rain was coming down on the roof like the steady tramp of distant squadrons. I was in the study, therefore near the tiles, and that was how the rain always sounded upon them. Tramp, tramp, tramp, came the whole army of things, riding, riding, to befall my uncle and me. Tramp, tramp, came the troops of the future, to take the citadel of the present! I was not afraid of them, neither sought to imagine myself afraid! I had no picture in my mind of any evil that could assail me. A little grove of black poplars under the gable-window kept swaying their expostulations and moaning their entreaties. The great rushing blasts of the wind through their rooted

resistance, made the music of the band that accompanied the march of the unknown. I sat and listened, with the vague conviction that something was being done somewhere. It could not be that only the wind and the trees and the rain were all in that wailing and marching! The Powers of life and death must somewhere be at work! Then rose before me the face of my uncle, as he walked from the room, haloed in a sorrowful stillness. If only I could be with him! If only I knew where to seek him! Wishing, wishing, I sat and listened to the rain and the wind.

Suddenly I found myself on my feet, making for the door. I would not have ventured alone upon the moor in such a night, but I should have Zoe with me, who knew all the ways of it—had doubtless been used to bogs in her own country, and her mother before her! Like a small elephant, she would put out her little foot, and tap, and sound, to see if the surface would bear her—if the questionable spot was what it looked to her mistress, or what she herself doubted it. When she had once made up her mind in the negative, no foolish attempt of mine could overpersuade her—could make her trust our weight on it a hair's-breadth. In a bog the greenest spots are the most dangerous, and Zoe knew it: the matted roots might be afloat on a fathomless depth of water. Backed by

my uncle, she soon taught me to be as much afraid of those green spots as she was herself. I had learned to trust her thoroughly.

I took my way to the stable, with a hug and a kiss to Martha as I passed her in the kitchen. I got the cowboy to saddle Zoe, fearing I might not persuade one of the big men on such a night, and I was not quite able myself to tighten the girths properly. She had not been out all day, and, when I mounted, she danced at the prospect of a gallop.

I took with me the little lantern I went about the place with when there was no moon, and, with this alight in my hand, we darted off at a tight-reined gallop into the wet blowing night. What I was going for I did not know, beyond being with my uncle. So far was I from any fear, that, but for my shadowy uneasiness about him, I should have been filled full of the wild joy of battle with the elements. The first part of the way I had to cling to the saddle: not otherwise could I keep my seat against the wind, which blew so fiercely on me sideways, that it threatened to blow me out of it.

I had not gone far before the saddle began to turn round with me; I was slipping to the ground. I pulled up, dismounted, undid the girths with difficulty, set the saddle straight, then pulled at every strap with all my might. It was to no purpose: I could not

get another hole out of one of them. I mounted and set off again; but the moment a stronger blast came, the saddle began to turn. Then I thought of something to try: dismounting once more, I got up on the off side. The wind now pushed me on to the saddle, freeing it from my leverage, while I had, besides, the use of my legs against the wind, so that we got on bravely, my Zoe and I. But, alas! my lantern was out, and it was impossible to light it again, so that I had now no arrow to shoot at random for my uncle's eye. Before long we reached a tolerable cart-track, which led across the waste to a village, and the wind being now behind us, I resumed the more comfortable seat in the saddle.

We were going at a good speed, and had ridden, as I judged, about three miles, when there came a great flash of lightning—not like any flash I had ever seen before. It was neither the reflection of lightning below the horizon, nor the sudden zigzagged blade, the very idea of force without weight; it was the burst of a ball-headed torrent of fire from a dark cloud, like water sudden from a mountain's heart, which went rushing down a rugged channel, as if the cloud were indeed a mountain, and the fire one of its cataracts. Its endurance was momentary, but its moments might have been counted, for it lasted appreciably longer than an ordinary flash, revealing to my eyes what re-

mains on my mind clear as the picture of some neighboring tree on the skin of one slain by lightning. The torrent tumbled down the cloud and vanished, but left with me the vision of a man, plainly my uncle, a few hundred yards from me, on a gigantic gray horse, which reared high with fright. But for its size, I could have testified before a magistrate that I had not only seen that horse in the stable as my pony was being saddled, but had stroked and kissed him on the nose. I conceived at once that his apparent size was an illusion caused by the suddenness and keenness of the light, and that my uncle had come home before I had well reached the moor, and had ridden out after me. With a wild cry of delight, I turned at once to leave the road and join him. But the thunder that moment burst with a terrific bellow and swallowed my cry. The same instant, however, came through it from the other side the voice of my uncle only a few yards away.

"Stay, little one," he shouted; "stay where you are. I will be with you in a moment."

I obeyed, as ever and always without a thought I obeyed the slightest word of my uncle: Zoe and I stood as if never yet parted from chaos and the dark, for Zoe too loved his voice. The wind rose suddenly from a lull to a great roar, emptying a huge cloudful of rain upon us, so that I heard no sound of my uncle's

approach; but presently out of the dark an arm was around me, and my head was lying on my uncle's bosom. Then the dark and the rain seemed the natural elements for love and confidence.

"But, uncle," I murmured, full of wonder which had had no time to take shape, "how is it?"

He answered in a whisper that seemed to dread the ear of the wind, lest it should hear him—

"You saw, did you?"

"I saw you upon Death away there in the middle of the lightning. I was going to you. I don't know what to think."

My uncle and I often called the horse by his English name.

"Neither do I," he returned, with a strange half-voice, as if he were choking. "It must have been—I don't know what. There is a deep bog away just there. It must be a lake by now!"

"Yes, uncle; I might have remembered! but how was I to think of that when I saw you there—on dear old Death too! He's the last of horses to get into a bog: he knows his own weight too well!"

"But why did you come out on such a night? What possessed you, little one—in such a storm? I begin to be afraid what next you may do."

"I never do anything—now—that I think you would mind me doing," I answered. "But if you will

write out a little book of *mays* and *maynots*, I will learn it by heart."

"No, no," he returned; "we are not going back to the tables of the law! You have a better law written in your heart, my child; I will trust to that.—But tell me why you came out on such a night—and as dark as pitch."

"Just because it was such a night, uncle, and you were out in it," I answered. "Ain't I your own little girl? I hope you ain't sorry I came, uncle! I am glad; and I shouldn't like ever to be glad at what made you sorry."

"What are you glad of?"

"That I came—because I've found you. I came to look for you."

"Why did you come to-night more than any other night?"

"Because I wanted so much to see you. I thought I might be of use to you."

"You are always of use to me; but why did you think of it just to-night?"

"I don't know.—I am older than I was last night," I replied.

He seemed to understand me, and asked me no more questions.

All the time, we had been standing still in the storm. He took Zoe's head and turned it toward

home. The dear creature set out with slow, leisurely step, heedless apparently of storm and stable. She knew who was by her side, and he must set the pace!

As we went my uncle seemed lost in thought—and no wonder! for how could the sight we had seen be accounted for? Or what might it indicate?

Many were the strange tales I had read, and my conviction was that the vision belonged to the inexplicable. It grew upon me that I had seen my uncle's double. That he should see his own double would not in itself have much surprised me—or, indeed, that I should see it; but I had never read of another person seeing a double at the same time with the person doubled. During the next few days I sought hard for some possible explanation of what had occurred, but could find nothing parallel to it within the scope of my knowledge. I tried *fata morgana*, *mirage*, *parhelion*, and whatever I had learned of recognized illusion, but in vain sought satisfaction, or anything pointing in the direction of satisfaction. I was compelled to leave the thing alone. My uncle kept silence about it, but seemed to brood more than usual. I think he too was convinced that it must have another explanation than present science would afford him. Once I ventured to ask if he had come to any conclusion; with a sad smile, he answered,

"I am waiting, little one. There is much we have to wait for. Where would be the good of having your mind made up wrong? It only stands in the way of getting it made up right!"

By degrees the thing went into the distance, and I ceased even speculating upon it. But one little fact I may mention ere I leave it—that, just as I was ing a state of quiet mental prorogation, I suddenly remembered that, the moment after the flash, my Zoe, startled as she was, gave out a low whinny; I remembered the quiver of it under me; she too must have seen her master's double!

CHAPTER IX.

THE GARDEN.

I REMEMBER nothing more to disturb the even flow of my life till I was nearly seventeen. Many pleasant things had come and gone; many pleasant things kept coming and going. I had studied tolerably well—at least my uncle showed himself pleased with the progress I had made and was making. I know even yet a good deal more than would be required for one of these modern degrecs feminine. I had besides read more of the older literature of my country than any one I have met except my uncle. I had also this advantage over most students, that my knowledge was gained without the slightest prick of the spur of emulation—purely in following the same delight in myself that shone radiant in the eyes of my uncle as he read with me. I had this advantage also over many, that, perhaps from impression of the higher mind, I saw and learned a thing not merely as a fact whose glory lay in the mystery of its undeveloped harmonics, but as the harbinger of an unknown advent. For as long as I can

remember, my heart was given to expectation, was tuned to long waiting. I constantly felt—felt without thinking—that something was coming. I feel it now. Were I young I dared not say so. How could I, compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses to the commonplace! Do I not see their superior smile, as, with voices sweetly acidulous, they quote in reply—

> Love is well on the way;
> He'll be here to-day,
> Or, at latest, the end of the week;
> Too soon you will find him,
> And the sorrow behind him
> You will not go out to seek!

Would they not tell me that such expectation was but the shadow of the cloud called love, hanging no bigger than a man's hand on the far horizon, but fraught with storm for mind and soul, which, when it withdrew, would carry with it the glow and the glory and the hope of life! being at best but the mirage of an unattainable paradise, therefore direst of deceptions! Little do such suspect that their own behavior has withered their faith, and their unbelief dried up their life. They can now no more believe in what they once felt, than a cloud can believe in the rainbow it once bore on its bosom. But I am old, therefore dare to say that I expect more and better and higher and lovelier things than I have ever had. I am not going home to God to say—"Father, I have imagined more

beautiful things than thou art able to make true! They were so good that thou thyself art either not good enough to will them, or not strong enough to make them. Thou couldst but make thy creature dream of them, because thou canst but dream of them thyself!" Nay, nay! In the faith of him to whom the Father shows all things he does, I expect lovelier gifts than I ever have been, ever shall be, able to dream of asleep, or imagine awake.

I was now approaching the verge of womanhood. What lay beyond it I could ill descry, though surely a vague power of undeveloped prophecy dwells in every created thing—even in the bird ere he chips his shell.

Should I dare, or could I endure, to write of what lies now to my hand, if I did not believe that not our worst but our best moments, not our low but our lofty moods, not our times logical and scientific but our times instinctive and imaginative, are those in which we perceive the truth! In them we behold it with a beholding which is one with believing. And,

> Though nothing can bring back the hour
> Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower,

could not Wordsworth, and can not we, call up the vision of that hour? and has not its memory almost, or even altogether, the potency of its presence? Is not the very thought of any certain flower enough to make me believe in that flower—believe it to mean all

it ever seemed to mean? That *these* eyes may never more rest upon it with the old delight, means little, and matters nothing. I have other eyes, and shall have yet others. If I thought, as so many have degraded themselves to think, that the glory of things in the morning of love was a glamour cast upon the world, no outshine of indwelling radiance, should I care to breathe one day more the air of this or of any world? Nay, nay, but there dwells in everything the Father hath made, the fire of the burning bush, as at home in his Son dwelt the glory that, set free, broke out from him on the mount of his transfiguration. The happy-making vision of things that floods the gaze of the youth, when first he lives in the marvel of loving and being loved by a woman, is the true vision—and the more likely to be the true one, that, when he gives way to selfishness, he loses faith in the vision, and sinks back into the commonplace unfaith of the beggarly world—a disappointed, sneering worshiper of power and money—with this remnant of the light yet in him, that he grumbles at the gloom its departure has left behind. He confesses by his soreness that the illusion ought to have been true; he seldom confesses that he loved himself more than the woman, and so lost her. He lays the blame on God, on the woman, on the soullessness of the universe—anywhere but on the one being in which he is

interested enough to be sure it exists—his own precious, greedy, vulgar self. Would I dare to write of love, if I did not believe it a true, that is, an eternal thing!

It was a summer of exceptional splendor in which my eyes were opened to "the glory of the sum of things." It was not so hot of the sun as summers I have known, but there were so many gentle and loving winds about, with never point or knife-edge in them, that it seemed all the housework of the universe was being done by ladies Then the way the odors went and came on those sweet winds! and the way the twilight fell asleep into the dark! and the way the sun rushed up in the morning, as if he cried, like a boy, "Here I am! The Father has sent me! Isn't it jolly!" I saw more sunrises that year than any year before or since. And the grass was so thick and soft! There must be grass in heaven! And the roses, both wild and tame, that grew together in the wilderness! —I think you would like to hear about the wilderness.

When I grew to notice, and think, and put things together, I began to wonder how the wilderness came there. I could understand that the solemn garden, with its great yew-hedges and alleys, and its oddly cut box-trees, was a survival of the stately old gardens haunted by ruffs and farthingales; but the wil-

derness looked so much younger that I was perplexed with it, especially as I saw nothing like it anywhere else. I asked my uncle about it, and he explained that it was indeed after an old fashion, but that he had himself made the wilderness, mostly with his own hands, when he was young. This surprised me, for I had never seen him touch a spade, and hardly ever saw him in the garden: when I did, I always felt as if something was going to happen. He said he had in it tried to copy the wilderness laid out by Lord St. Alban's in his essays. I found the volume, and soon came upon the essay, On Gardens. The passage concerning the wilderness gave me, and still gives me, so much delight, that I will transplant it like a rose-bush into this wilderness of mine, hoping it will give like pleasure to my reader.

"For the heath, which was the third part of our plot, I wish it to be framed, as much as may be, to a naturall wildnesse. Trees I would have none in it; but some thickets, made onely of sweetbriar, and honnysuckle, and some wild vine amongst; and the ground set with violets, strawberries, and primeroses. For these are sweete, and prosper in the shade. And these to be in the heath, here and there not in any order. I like also little heapes, in the nature of mole-hils (such as are in wilde heaths) to be set, some with wilde thyme; some with pincks; some with german-

der, that gives a good flower to the eye; some with periwinckle; some with violets; some with strawberries; some with couslips; some with daisies; some with red roses; some with lilium convallium; some with sweet-williams red; some with beares-foot; and the like low flowers, being withall sweet and sightly. Part of which heapes, to be with standards, of little bushes, prickt upon their top, and part without. The standards to be roses; juniper; holly; beareberries (but here and there, because of the smell of their blossome;) red currans; gooseberries; rosemary; bayes; sweetbriar; and such like. But these standards, to be kept with cutting, that they grow not out of course."

Just such, in all but the gooseberries and currants, was the wilderness of our garden: you came on it by a sudden labyrinthine twist at the end of a narrow alley of yew, and a sudden door in the high wall. My uncle said he liked well to see roses in the kitchen-garden, but not gooseberries in the flower-garden, especially a wild flower-garden. Wherein lies the difference, I never quite made out, but I feel a difference. My main delight in the wilderness was to see the roses among the heather—particularly the wild roses. When I was grown up, the wilderness always affected me like one of Blake's or one of Beddoes's yet wilder lyrics. To make it, my uncle had taken in a part of the heath, which came close up to the garden, leaving

plenty of the heather and ling. The protecting fence inclosed a good bit of the heath just as it was, so that the wilderness melted away into the heath, and into the wide moor—the fence, though contrived so as to be difficult to cross, being so low that one had to look for it.

Everywhere the inner garden was surrounded with brick walls, and hedges of yew within them; but immediately behind the house, the wall to the lane was not very high.

CHAPTER X.

ONCE MORE A SECRET.

One day in June I had gone into the garden about one o'clock, whether with or without object I forget. I had just seen my uncle start for Wittenage. Hearing a horse's hoofs in the lane that ran along the outside of the wall, I looked up. The same moment the horse stopped, and the face of his rider appeared over the wall, between two stems of yew and two great flowers of purple lilac, in shape like two perfect bunches of swarming bees. It was the face of a youth of eighteen, and beautiful with a right manly beauty.

The moment I looked on this face, I fell into a sort of trance—that is, I entered for a moment some condition of existence beyond the ramparts of what commonly we call life. Love at first sight it was that initiated the strange experience. But understand me: real as what immediately followed was to the consciousness, there was no actual fact in it.

I stood gazing. My eyes seemed drawn, and drawing my person toward the vision. Isolate over the

garden-wall was the face; the rest of the man and all the horse were hidden behind it. Betwixt the yew stems and the two great lilac flowers—how heart and brain are yet filled with the old scent of them!—my face, my mouth, my lips met his. I grew blind as with all my heart I kissed him. Then came a flash of icy terror, and a shudder which it frights me even now to recall. Instantly I knew that but a moment had passed, and that I had not moved an inch from the spot where first my eyes met his.

But my eyes yet rested on his; I could not draw them away. I could not free myself. Helplessness was growing agony. His voice broke the spell. He lifted his hunting-cap, and begged me to tell him the way to the next village. My self-possession returned, and the joy of its restoration drove from me any lingering embarrassment. I went forward, and without a faltering tone, I believe, gave him detailed directions. He told me afterward that, himself in a state of bewildered surprise, he thought me the coolest young person he had ever had the fortune to meet. Why should one be pleased to know that she looked quite different from what she felt? There is something wrong there, surely! I acknowledge the something wrong, but do not understand it. He lifted his cap again, and rode away.

I stood still at the foot of the lilac-tree, and, from

a vapor, condensed, not to a stone, but to a world, in which a new Flora was about to be developed. If no new spiritual sense was awakened in me, at least I was aware of a new consciousness. I had never been to myself what I was now.

Terror again seized me: the face might once more look over the wall, and find me where it had left me! I turned, and went slowly away from the house, gravitating to the darkest part of the garden.

"What has come to me," I said, "that I seek the darkness? Is this another secret? Am I in the grasp of a new enemy?"

And with that came the whirlwind of perplexity. Must I go the first moment I knew I could find him, and tell my uncle what had happened, and how I felt? or must I have, and hold, and cherish in silent heart, a thing so wondrous, so precious, so absorbing? Had I not deliberately promised—of my own will and at my own instance—never again to have a secret from him? Was this a secret? Was it not a secret?

The storm was up, and went on. The wonder is that, in the fire of the new torment, I did not come to loathe the very thought of the young man—which would have delivered me, if not from the necessity of confession, yet from the main difficulty in confessing.

I said to myself that the old secret was of a wrong done to my uncle; that what had made me miserable

then was a bad secret. The perception of this difference gave me comfort for a time, but not for long. The fact remained, that I knew something concerning myself which my best friend did not know. It was, and I could not prevent it from being, a barrier between us?

Yet what was it I was concealing from him? What had I to tell him? How was I to represent a thing of which I knew neither the name nor the nature, a thing I could not describe? Could I confess what I did not understand? The thing might be what, in the tales I had read, was called love, but I did not know that it was. It might be something new, peculiar to myself; something for which there was no word in the language! How was I to tell? I saw plainly that, if I tried to convey my new experience, I should not get beyond the statement that I had a new experience. It did not occur to me that the thing might be so well known, that a mere hint of the feelings concerned would enable any older person to classify the consciousness. I said to myself I should merely perplex my uncle. And in truth I believe that love, in every mind in which it arises, will vary in color and form—will always partake of that mind's individual isolation in difference. This, however, is nothing to the present point.

Comfort myself as I might, that the impossible

was required of no one, and granted that the thing was impossible, it was none the less a cause of misery, a present disaster: I was aware, and soon my uncle would be aware, of an impenetrable something separating us. I felt that we had already begun to grow strange to each other, and the feeling lay like death at my heart.

Our lessons together were still going on; that I was no longer a child had made only the difference that progress must make; and I had no thought that they would not thus go on always. They were never for a moment irksome to me; I might be tired by them, but never of them. We were regularly at work together by seven, and after half an hour for breakfast, resumed work; at half-past eleven our lessons were over. But although the day was then clear of the imperative, much the greater part of it was in general passed in each other's company. We might not speak a word, but we would be hours together in the study. We might not speak a word, but we would be hours together on horseback.

For this day, then, our lessons were over, and my uncle was from home. This was an indisputable relief, yet the fact that it was so pained me keenly, for I recognized in it the first of the schism. How I got through the day I can not tell. I was in a dream, not all a dream of delight. Haunted with the face I

had seen, and living in the new consciousness it had waked in me, I spent most of it in the garden, now in the glooms of the yew-walks, and now in the smiling wilderness. It was odd, however, that, although I was not *expected* to be in my uncle's room at any time but that of lessons, all the morning I had a feeling as if I ought to be there, while yet glad that my uncle was not there.

It was late before he returned, and I went to bed. Perhaps I retired so soon that I might not have to look into his eyes. Usually, I sat up now until he came home. I was long in getting to sleep, and then I dreamed. I thought I was out in the storm, and the flash came which revealed the horse and his rider, but they were both different. The horse in the dream was black as coal, as if carved out of the night itself; and the man upon him was the beautiful stranger whose horse I had not seen for the garden-wall. The darkness fell, and the voice of my uncle called to me. I waited for him in the storm with a troubled heart, for I knew he had not seen that vision, and I could no more tell him of it, than could Christabel tell her father what she had seen after she lay down. I woke, but my waking was no relief.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MOLE BURROWS.

I SLEPT again after my dream, and do not know whether he came into my room as he generally did when he had not said good-night to me. Of course I woke unhappy, and the morning-world had lost something of its natural glow, its lovely freshness: it was not this time a thing new-born of the creating word. I dawdled with my dressing. The face kept coming, and brought me no peace, yet brought me something for which it seemed worth while even to lose my peace. But I did not know then, and do not yet know, what the loss of peace actually means. I only know that it must be something far more terrible than anything I have ever known. I remained so far true to my uncle, however, that not even for what the face seemed to promise me would I have consented to cause him trouble. For what I saw in the face, I would do anything, I thought, except that.

I went to him at the usual hour, determined that nothing should distract me from my work—that he

should perceive no difference in me. I was not at the moment awake to the fact that here again were love and deception hand in hand. But another love than mine was there: my uncle loved me immeasurably more than I yet loved that heavenly vision. True love is keen-sighted as the eagle, and my uncle's love was love true, therefore he saw what I sought to hide. It is only the shadow of love, generally a grotesque, ugly thing, like so many other shadows, that is blind either to the troubles or the faults of the shadow it seems to love. The moment our eyes met, I saw that he saw something in mine that was not there when last we parted. But he said nothing, and we sat down to our lessons. Every now and then as they proceeded, however, I felt rather than saw his eyes rest on me for a moment, questioning. I had never known them rest on me so before. Plainly he was aware of some change; and could there be anything different in the relation of two who so long had loved each other, without something being less well and good than before? Nor was it indeed wonderful he should see a difference; for, with all the might of my resolve to do even better than usual, I would now and then find myself unconscious of what either of us had last been saying. The face had come yet again, and driven everything from its presence! I grew angry—not with the youth, but with his face, for appearing so

often when I did not invite it. Once I caught myself on the verge of crying out, "Can't you wait? I will come presently!" and my uncle looked up as if I had spoken. Perhaps he had as good as heard the words; he possessed what almost seemed a supernatural faculty of divining the thought of another—not, I was sure, by any effort to perceive it, but by involuntary intuition. He uttered no inquiring word, but a light sigh escaped him, which all but made me burst into tears. I was on one side of a widening gulf, and he on the other!

Our lessons ended, he rose immediately and left the room. Five minutes passed, and then came the clatter of his horse's feet on the stones of the yard. A moment more, and I heard him ride away at a quick trot. I burst into tears where I still sat beside my uncle's empty chair. I was weary like one in a dream searching in vain for a spot whereupon to set down her heart-breaking burden. There was no one but my uncle to whom I could tell any trouble, and the trouble I could not have told him had hitherto been unimaginable! From this my reader may judge what a trouble it was that I could not tell him my trouble. I was a traitor to my only friend! Had I begun to love him less? had I begun to turn away from him? I dared not believe it. That would have been to give eternity to my misery. But it might be that at heart I was a

bad, treacherous girl! I had again a secret from him! I was not *with* him!

I went into the garden. The day was sultry and oppressive. Coolness or comfort was nowhere. I sought the shadow of the live yew-walls; there was shelter in the shadow, but it oppressed the lungs while it comforted the eyes. Not a breath of wind breathed; the atmosphere seemed to have lost its life-giving. I went out into the wilderness. There the air was filled and heaped with the odors of the heavenly plants that crowded its humble floor, but they gave me no welcome. Between two bushes that flamed out roses, I lay down, and the heather and the rose-trees closed above me. My mind was in such a confusion of pain and pleasure—not without a hope of deliverance somewhere in its clouded sky—that I could think no more, and fell asleep.

I imagine that, had I never again seen the young man, I should not have suffered. I think that, by slow natural degrees, his phantasmal presence would have ceased to haunt me, and gradually I should have returned to my former condition. I do not mean I should have forgotten him, but neither should I have been troubled when I thought of him. I know I should never have regretted having seen him. In that, I had nothing to blame myself for, and should have felt, not that a glory had passed away from the earth, but

that I had had a vision of bliss. What it was, I should not have had the power to recall, but it would have left with me the faith that I had beheld something too ethereal for my memory to store. I should have consoled myself both with the dream, and with the conviction that I should not dream it again. The peaceful sense of recovered nearness to my uncle would have been far more precious than the dream. The sudden fire of transfiguration that had for a moment flamed out of the All, and straightway withdrawn, would have become a memory only; but none the less would that enlargement of the child-way of seeing things have remained with me. I do not think that would ever have left me: it is the care of the prudent wise that bleaches the grass, and is as the fumes of sulphur to the red rose of life.

Outwearied with inward conflict, I slept a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XII.

A LETTER.

A COOL soft breeze went through the curtains of my couch, and I awoke. The blooms of the peasant-briars and the court-roses were waving together over my head. The sigh of the wind had breathed itself out over the far heath, and, ere it died in my fairy forest of lowly plants and bushes, had found and fanned the cheeks that lay down hot and athirst for air. It gave me new life, and I rose refreshed. Something fluttered to the ground. I thought it was a leaf from a white rose above me, but I looked. At my feet lay a piece of paper. I took it up. It had been folded very hastily, and had no address, but who could have a better right to unfold it than I! It might be nothing; it might be a letter. Should I open it? Should I not rather seize the opportunity of setting things right between my heart and my uncle by taking it to him unopened? Only, if it were indeed—I dared hardly even in thought complete the supposition—might it not be a wrong to the youth? Might not the

paper contain a confidence? might it not be the messenger of a heart that trusted me before even it knew my name? Would I inaugurate our acquaintance with an act of treachery, or at least distrust? Right or wrong, thus my heart reasoned, and to its reasoning I gave heed. "It will," I said, "be time enough to resolve when I know concerning what!" This, I now see, was juggling; for the question was whether I should be open with my uncle or not. "It might be," I said to myself, "that, the moment I knew the contents of the paper, I should reproach myself that I had not read it at once!"

I sat down on a bush of heather, and unfolded it. This is what I found, written with a pencil:

"I am the man to whom you talked so kindly over your garden wall yesterday. I fear you may think me presuming and impertinent. Presuming I may be, but impertinent surely not! If I were, would not my heart tell me so, seeing it is all on your side?

"My name is John Day; I do not yet know yours. I have not dared to inquire after it, lest I should hear of some impassable gulf between us. The fear of such a gulf haunts me. I can think of nothing but the face I saw over the wall through the clusters of lilac: the wall seems to keep rising and rising, as if it would hide you forever.

"Is it wrong to think thus of you without your

leave? If one may not love the loveliest, then is the world but a fly-trap hung in the great heaven, to catch and ruin souls!

"If I am writing nonsense—I can not tell whether I am or not—it is because my wits wander with my eyes to gaze at you through the leaves of the wild white rose under which you are asleep. Loveliest of faces, may no gentlest wind of thought ripple thy perfect calm, until I have said what I must, and laid it where she will find it!

"I live at Rising, the manor-house over the heath. I am the son of Lady Cairnedge by a former marriage. I am twenty years of age, and have just ended my last term at Oxford. May I come and see you? If you will not see me, why then did you walk into my quiet house, and turn everything upside down? I shall come to-night, in the dusk, and wait in the heather, outside the fence. If you come, thank God! if you do not, I shall believe you could not, and come again and again and again, till hope is dead. But I warn you I am a terrible hoper.

"It would startle, perhaps offend you, to wake and see me; but I can not bear to leave you asleep. Something might come too near you. I will write until you move, and then make haste to go.

"My heart swells with words too shy to go out.

Surely a Will has brought us together! I believe in fate, never in chance!

"When we see each other again, will the wall be down between us, or shall I know it will part us all our mortal lives? Longer than that it can not. If you say to me, 'I must not see you, but I will think of you,' not one shall ever know I have other than a light heart. Even now I begin the endeavor to be such that, when we meet at last, as meet we must, you shall not say, 'Is this the man, alas, who dared to love me!'

"I love you as one might love a woman-angel who, at the merest breath going to fashion a word unfit, would spread her wings and soar. Do not, I pray you, fear to let me come! There are things that must be done in faith, else they never have being: let this be one of them.—You stir."

As I came to these last words, hurriedly written, I heard behind me, over the height, the quick gallop of a horse, and knew the piece of firm turf he was crossing. The same moment I was there in spirit, and the imagination was almost vision. I saw him speeding away—"to come again!" said my heart, solemn with gladness.

Rising-manor was the house to which the lady took me that dread night when first I knew what it was to be alone in darkness and silence and space.

Was that lady his mother? Had she rescued me for her son? I was not willing to believe it, though I had never actually seen her. The way was mostly dark, and during the latter portion of it I was much too weary to look up where she sat on her great horse. I had never to my knowledge heard who lived at Rising. I was not born inquisitive, and there were miles between us.

I sat still, without impulse to move a finger. I lived essentially. Now I knew what had come to me. It was no merely idiosyncratic experience, for the youth had the same: it was love! How otherwise could we thus be drawn together from both sides! Verily it seemed also good enough to be that wondrous thing ever on the lips of poets and tale-weaving magicians! Was it not far beyond any notion of it their words had give me?

But my uncle! There lay bitterness! Was I indeed false to him, that now the thought of him was a pain? Had I begun a new life apart from him? To tell him would perhaps check the terrible separation! But how was I to tell him? For the first time I knew that I had no mother! Would Mr. Day's mother be my mother too, and help me? But from no woman save my own mother, hardly even from her, would I ask mediation with the uncle I had loved and trusted all my life and with my whole heart. I had never

known father or mother, save as he had been father and mother and everybody to me! What was I to do? Gladly would I have hurried to some desert place, and there waited for the light I needed. That I was no longer in any uncertainty as to the word that described my condition, did not, I found, make it easy to use the word. "Perhaps," I argued, struggling in the toils of my new liberty, "my uncle knows nothing of this kind of love, and would be unable to understand me! Suppose I confessed to him what I felt toward a man I had spoken to but once, and then only to tell him the way to Dumbleton, would he not think me out of my mind?"

At length I bethought me that, so long as I did not know what to do, I was not required to do anything; I must wait till I did know what to do. But with the thought came suffering enough to be the wages of any sin that, so far as I knew, I had ever committed. For the conviction awoke that already the love that had hitherto been the chief joy of my being had begun to pale and fade. Was it possible I was ceasing to love my uncle? What could any love be worth if mine should fail my uncle! Love itself must be a mockery, and life but a ceaseless sliding down to the death of indifference! Even if I never ceased to love him, it was just as bad to love him less! Had he not been everything to me?—and this

man, what had he ever done for me? Doubtless we are to love even our enemies; but are we to love them as tenderly as we love our friends? Or are we to love the friend of yesterday, of whom we know nothing though we may believe everything, as we love those who have taken all the trouble to make true men and women of us? "What can be the matter with my soul?" I said. "Can that soul be right made, in which one love begins to wither the moment another begins to grow? If I be so made, I can not help being worthless!"

It was then first, I think, that I received a notion —anything like a true notion, that is—of my need of a God, whence afterward I came to see the one need of the whole race. Of course, not being able to make ourselves, it needed a God to make us; but that making were a small thing indeed, if he left us so unfinished that we could come to nothing right;—if he left us so that we could think or do or be nothing right; —if our souls were created so puny, for instance, that there was not room in them to love as they could not help loving, without ceasing to love where they were bound by every obligation to love right heartily, and more and more deeply! But had I not been growing all the time I had been in the world? There must then be the possibility of growing still! If there was not room in me, there must be room in God for me

to become larger! The room in God must be made room in me! God had not done making me, in fact, and I sorely needed him to go on making me; I sorely needed to be made out! What if this new joy and this new terror had come, had been sent, in order to make me grow? At least the doors were open; I could go out and forsake myself! If a living power had caused me—and certainly I did not cause myself—then that living power knew all about me, knew every smallness that distressed me! Where should I find him? He could not be so far that the misery of one of his own children could not reach him! I turned my face into the grass, and prayed as I had never prayed before. I had always gone to church, and made the responses attentively, while I knew that was not praying, and tried to pray better than that; but now I was really asking from God something I sorely wanted. "Father in heaven," I said, "I am so miserable! Please, help me!"

I rose, went into the house, and up to the study, took a sock I was knitting for my uncle, and sat down to wait what would come. I could think no more; I could only wait.

CHAPTER XIII.

OLD LOVE AND NEW.

WHILE I waited, as nearly a log, under the weariness of spiritual unrest, as a girl could well be, the door opened. Very seldom did that door open to any one but my uncle or myself: he would let no one but me touch his books, or even dust the room. I jumped from the chest where I sat.

It was only Martha Moon.

"How you startled me, Martha!" I cried.

"No wonder, child!" she answered. "I come with bad news! Your uncle has had a fall. He is laid up at Wittenage with a broken right arm."

I burst into tears.

"Oh, Martha," I cried; "I must go to him!"

"He has sent for me," she answered quietly. "Dick is putting the horse to the phaeton."

"He doesn't want me, then!" I said; but it seemed a voice not my own that shrieked the words.

The punishment of my sin was upon me. Never would he have sent for Martha and not me, I thought,

had he not seen that I had gone wrong again, and was no more to be trusted.

"My dear," said Martha, "which of us two ought to be the better nurse? You never saw your uncle ill; I've nursed him at death's door!"

"Then you don't think he is angry with me, Martha?" I said, humbled before myself.

"Was he ever angry with you, Orbie? What is there to be angry about? I never saw him even displeased with you!"

I had not realized that my uncle was suffering—only that he was disabled; now the fact flashed upon me, and with it the perception that I had been thinking only of myself: I was fast ceasing to care for him! And then, horrible to tell! a flash of joy went through me that he would not be home that day, and therefore I *could* not tell him anything!

The moment Martha left me I threw myself on the floor of the desert room. I was in utter misery.

"Gladly would I bear every pang of his pain," I said to myself; "yet I have not asked one question about his accident! He must be in danger, or he would not have sent for Martha instead of me!"

How had the thing happened, I wondered. Had Death fallen with him—perhaps on him? He was such a horseman, I could not think he had been thrown. Besides, Death was a good horse who loved

his master—dearly, I was sure, and would never have thrown him or let him fall! A great gush of the old love poured from the fountain in my heart: sympathy with the horse had unsealed it. I sprang from the floor, and ran down to entreat Martha to take me with her: if my uncle did not want me, I could return with Dick! But she was gone. Even the sound of her wheels was gone. I had lain on the floor longer than I knew.

I went back to the study a little relieved. I understood now that I was not glad he was disabled; that I was anything but glad he was suffering; that I had only been glad for an instant that the crisis of my perplexity was postponed. In the mean time I should see John Day, who would help me to understand what I ought to do!

Very strange were my feelings that afternoon in the lonely house. I had always felt it lonely when Martha, never when my uncle, was out. Yet when my uncle was in, I was mostly with him, and seldom more than a few minutes at a time with Martha. Our feelings are odd creatures! Now that both were away, there was neither time nor space in my heart for feeling the house desolate; while the world outside was rich as a treasure-house of mighty kings. The moment I was a little more comfortable with myself, my thoughts went in a flock to the face that looked over the garden-wall,

to the man that watched me while I slept, the man that wrote that lovely letter. Inside was old Penny with her broom; she took advantage of every absence to sweep or scour or dust; outside was John Day, and the roses of the wilderness! He was waiting the hour to come for me, wondering how I would receive him!

Slowly went the afternoon. I had fallen in love at first sight, it is true: not therefore was I eager to meet my lover. I was only more than willing to see him. It was as sweet, or nearly as sweet, to dream of his coming, as to have him before me—so long as I knew he was indeed coming. I was just a little anxious lest I should not find him altogether so beautiful as I was imagining him. That he was good, I never doubted: could I otherwise have fallen in love with him? And his letter was so straightforward—so manly!

The afternoon was cloudy, and the twilight came the sooner. From the realms of the dark, where all the birds of night build their nests, lining them with their own sooty down, the sweet odorous filmy dusk of the summer, haunted with wings of noiseless bats, began at length to come flickering earthward, in a snow infinitesimal of fluffiest gray and black: I crept out into the garden. It was dark as wintry night among the yews, but I could have gone any time through every alley of them blindfolded. An owl cried and I started,

for my soul was sunk in its own love-dawn. There came a sudden sense of light as I opened the door into the wilderness, but light how thin and pale, and how full of expectation! The earth and the vast air, up to the great vault, seemed to throb and heave with life—or was it that my spirit lay an open thoroughfare to the life of the All? With the scent of the roses and the humbler sweet-odored inhabitants of the wilderness; with the sound of the brook that ran through it, flowing from the heath and down the hill; with the silent starbeams, and the insects that make all the little noises they can; with the thoughts that went out of me, and returned possessed of the earth;—with all these, and the sense of thought eternal, the universe was full as it could hold. I stood in the doorway of the wall, and looked out on the wild: suddenly, by some strange reaction, it seemed out of creation's doors, out in the illimitable, given up to the bare, to the space that had no walls! A shiver ran through me; I turned back among the yews. It was early; I would wait yet a while! If he were already there, he too would enjoy the calm of a lovely little wait.

A small wind came searching about, and found, and caressed me. I turned to it; it played with my hair, and cooled my face. After a while I left the alley, passed out, closed the door behind me, and went

straying through the broken ground of the wilderness, among the low bushes, meandering, as if with some frolicsome brook for a companion—a brook of capricious windings—but still coming nearer to the fence that parted the wilderness from the heath, my eyes bent down, partly to avoid the hillocks and bushes, and partly from shyness of the moment when first I should see him who was in my heart and somewhere near. Softly the moon rose, round and full. There was still so much light in the sky that she made no sudden change, and for a moment I did not feel her presence or look up. In front of me, the high ground of the moor sank into a hollow, deeply indenting the horizon-line: the moon was rising just in the gap, and when I did look up, the lower edge of her disk was just clear of the earth, and the head of a man looking over the fence was in the middle of the great moon. It was like the head of a saint in a missal, girt with a halo of solid gold. I could not see the face, for the halo hid it, as such attributions are apt to do, but it must be he; and strengthened by the heavenly vision, I went toward him. Walking less carefully than before, however, I caught my foot, stumbled, and fell. There came a rush through the bushes: he was by my side, lifted me like a child, and held me in his arms; neither was I more frightened than a child caught up in the arms of any well-known friend: I

had been bred in faith, and not mistrust! But indeed my head had struck the ground with such force, that, had I been inclined, I could scarcely have resisted—though why should I have resisted, being where I would be! Does not philosophy tell us that growth and development, cause and effect, are all, and that the days and years are of no account? And does not more than philosophy tell us that truth is everything?

"My darling! Are you hurt?" murmured the voice, whose echoes seemed to have haunted me for centuries.

"A little," I answered. "I shall be all right in a minute." I did not add, "Put me down, please;" for I did not want to be put down directly. I could not have stood if he had put me down. I grew faint.

Life came back, and I felt myself growing heavy in his arms.

"I think I can stand now," I said. "Please put me down."

He obeyed immediately.

"I've nearly broken your arms," I said, ashamed of having become a burden to him the moment we met.

"I could run with you to the top of the hill," he answered.

"I don't think you could," I returned.

Perhaps I leaned a little toward him; I do not know. He put his arm round me.

"You are not able to stand," he said. "Shall we sit a moment?"

CHAPTER XIV.

MOTHER AND UNCLE.

I WAS glad enough to sink on a clump of white clover. He stretched himself on the heather, a little way from me. Silence followed. He was giving me time to recover myself. As soon, therefore, as I was able, it was my part to speak.

"Where is your horse?" I asked.

The first word is generally one hardly worth saying.

"I left him at a little farmhouse, about a mile from here. I was afraid to bring him farther, lest my mother should learn where I had been. She takes pains to know."

"Then will she not find out?"

"I don't know."

"Will she not ask you where you were?"

"Perhaps. There's no knowing."

"You will tell her, of course, if she does?"

"I think not."

"Oughtn't you?"

"No."

"You are sure?"

"Yes."

"You don't mean you will tell her a story?"

"Certainly not."

"What will you do, then?"

"I will tell her that I will not tell her."

"Would that be right?"

Through the dusk I could see the light of his smile as he answered,

"I think so. I shall not tell her."

"But," I began.

He interrupted me.

My heart was sinking within me. Not only had I wanted him to help me to tell my uncle, but I shuddered at the idea of having with any man a secret from his mother.

"It must look strange to you," he said; "but you do not know my mother!"

"I think I do know your mother," I rejoined. "She saved my poor little life once.—I am not sure it was your mother, but I think it was."

"How was that?" he said, much surprised. "When was it?"

"Many years ago—I can not tell how many," I answered. "But I remember all about it well enough. I can not have been more than eight, I imagine."

"Could she have been at the manor, then?" he said, putting the question to himself, not me. "How was it? Tell me," he went on, rising to his feet, and looking at me with almost a frightened expression.

I told him the incident, and he heard me in absolute silence. When I had done,—

"It *was* my mother!" he broke out; "I don't know one other woman who would have let a child walk like that! Any other would have taken you up, or put you on the horse and walked beside you!"

"A gentleman would, I know," I replied. "But it would not be so easy for a lady!"

"*She* could have done either well enough. She's as strong as a horse herself, and rides like an Amazon. But I am not in the least surprised: it was just like her! You poor little darling! It nearly makes me cry to think of the tiny feet going tramp, tramp, all that horrible way, and she high up on her big horse! She always rides the biggest horse she can get!—And then never to say a word to you after she brought you home, or see you the next morning!"

"Mr. Day," I returned, "I would not have told you, had I known it would give you occasion to speak so naughtily of your mother. You make me unhappy."

He was silent. I thought he was ashamed of himself, and was sorry for him. But my sympathy was

wasted. He broke into a murmuring laugh of merriment.

"When is a mother not a mother?" he said.—"Do you give it up?—When she's a north wind. When she's a Roman emperor. When she's an iceberg. When she's a brass tiger.—There! that'll do. Good-by, mother, for the present! I mayn't know much, as she's always telling me, but I do know that a noun is not a thing, nor a name a person!"

I would have expostulated.

"For love's sake, dearest," he pleaded, "we will not dispute where only one of us knows! I will tell you all some day—soon, I hope, very soon. I am angry now!—Poor little tramping child!"

I saw I had been behaving presumptuously: I had wanted to argue while yet in absolute ignorance of the thing in hand? Had not my uncle taught me the folly of reasoning from the ideal where I knew nothing of the actual! The ideal must be our guide how to treat the actual, but the actual must be there to treat! One thing more I saw—that there could be no likeness between his mother and my uncle!

"Will you tell me something about yourself, then?" I said.

"That would not be interesting!" he objected.

"Then why are you here?" I returned. "Can any person without a history be interesting?"

"Yes," he answered; "a person that was going to have a history might be interesting."

"Could a person with a history that was not worth telling be interesting? But I know yours will interest me in the hearing, therefore it ought to interest you in the telling."

"I see," he rejoined, with his merry laugh, "I shall have to be careful! My lady will at once pounce upon the weak points of my logic!"

"I am no logician," I answered; "I only know when I don't know a thing. My uncle has taught me that wisdom lies in that."

"Yours must be a very unusual kind of uncle!" he returned.

"If God had made many men like my uncle, I think the world wouldn't be the same place."

"I wonder why he didn't!" he said thoughtfully.

"I have wondered much, and can not tell," I replied.

"What if it wouldn't be good for the world to have many good men in it before it was ready to treat them properly?" he suggested.

The words let me know that at least he could think. Hitherto my uncle had seemed to me the only man that thought. But I had seen very few men.

"Perhaps that is it," I answered. "I will think about it.—Were you brought up at Rising? Have

you been there all the time? Were you there that night? I should surely have known had you been in the house!"

He looked at me with a grateful smile.

"I was not brought up there," he answered. "Rising is mine, however—at least it will be when I come of age; it was left some ten years ago by a great-aunt. My father's property will be mine too, of course. My mother's is in Ireland. She ought to be there, not here; but she likes my estates better than her own, and makes the most of being my guardian."

"You would not have her there if she is happier here?"

"All who have land ought to live on it, or else give it to those who will. What makes it theirs, if their only connection with it is the money it brings them? If I let my horse run wild over the country, how could I claim him, and refuse to pay his damages?"

"I don't quite understand you."

"I only mean there is no bond where both ends are not tied. My mother has no sense of obligation, so far as ever I have been able to see. But do not be afraid: I would as soon take a wife to the house she was in, as I would ask her to creep with me into the den of a hyena."

It was too dreadful! I rose. He sprang to his feet.

"You must excuse me, sir!" I said. "With one who can speak so of his mother, I am where I ought not to be."

"You have a right to know what my mother is," he answered—coldly, I thought; "and I should not be a true man if I spoke of her otherwise than truly."

He would pretend nothing to please me! I saw that I was again in the wrong. Was I so ill read as to imagine that a mother must of necessity be a good woman? Was he to speak of his mother as he did not believe of her, or be unfit for my company? Would untruth be a bond between us?

"I beg your pardon," I said; "I was wrong. But you can hardly wonder I should be shocked to hear a son speak so of his mother—and to one all but a stranger!"

"What!" he returned, with a look of surprise; "do you think of me so? I feel as if I had known you all my life—and before it!"

I felt ashamed, and was silent. If he was such a stranger, why was I there alone with him?

"You must not think I speak so to *any* one," he went on. "Of those who know my mother, not one has a right to demand of me anything concerning her. But how could I ask you to see me, and hide from you

the truth about her? Prudence would tell you to have nothing to do with the son of such a woman: could I be a true man, true to you, and hold my tongue about her? I should be a liar of the worst sort!"

He felt far too strongly, it was plain, to heed a world of commonplaces.

"Forgive me," I said. "May I sit down again?"

He held out his hand. I took it, and reseated myself on the clover-hillock. He laid himself again beside me, and after a little silence began to relate what occurred to him of his external history, while all the time I was watching for hints as to how he had come to be the man he was. It was clear he did not find it easy to talk about himself. But soon I no longer doubted whether I ought to have met him, and loved him a great deal more by the time he had done.

I then told him in return what my life had hitherto been; how I knew nothing of father or mother; how my uncle had been everything to me; how he had taught me all I knew, had helped me to love what was good and hate what was evil, had enabled me to value good books and turn away from foolish ones. In short, I made him feel that all his mother had not been to him, my uncle had been to me; and that it would take a long time to make me as much indebted to a husband as already I was to my uncle. Then I put the question:

"What would you think of me if I had a secret from an uncle like that?"

"If I had an uncle like that," he answered, "I would sooner cut my throat than keep anything from him!"

"I have not told him," I said, "what happened to-day—or yesterday."

"But you will tell him?"

"The first moment I can. But I hope you understand it is hard to do. My love for my uncle makes it hard. It has the look of turning away from him to love another!"

With that I burst out crying. I could not help it. He let me cry, and did not interfere. I was grateful for that. When at length I raised my head, he spoke.

"It has that look," he said; "but I trust it is only a look. Anyhow, he knows that such things must be; and the more of a good man and a gentleman he is, the less will he be pained that we should love one another!"

"I am sure of that," I replied. "I am only afraid that he may never have been in love himself, and does not know how it feels, and may think I have forsaken him for you."

"Are you with him *always?*"

"No; I am sometimes a good deal alone. I can

be alone as much as I like; he always gives me perfect liberty. But I never before wanted to be alone when I could be with him."

"But he *could* live without you?"

"Yes, indeed!" I cried. "He would be a poor creature that could not live without another!"

He said nothing, and I added,

"He often goes out alone—sometimes in the darkest nights."

"Then be sure he knows what love is.—But, if you would rather, I will tell him."

"I could not have any one, even you, tell my uncle about me."

"You are right. When will you tell him?"

"I can not be sure. I would go to him to-morrow, but I am afraid they will not let me until he has got a little over this accident," I answered—and told him what had happened. "It is dreadful to think how he must have suffered," I said, "and how much more I should have thought about it but for you! It tears my heart. Why wasn't it made bigger?"

"Perhaps that is just what is now being done with it!" he answered.

"I hope it may be!" I returned.—"But it is time I went in."

"Shall I not see you again to-morrow evening?" he asked.

"No," I answered. "I must not see you again till I have told my uncle everything."

"You do not mean for weeks and weeks—till he is well enough to come home? How *am* I to live till then?"

"As I shall have to live. But I hope it will be but for a few days at most. Only, then, it will depend on what my uncle thinks of the thing."

"Will he decide for you what you are to do?"

"Yes—I think so. Perhaps if he were—"

I was on the point of saying, "like your mother," but I stopped in time—or hardly, for I think he saw what I just saved myself from.

It was but the other morning I made the discovery that, all our life together, John has never once pressed me to complete a sentence I broke off.

He looked so sorrowful that I was driven to add something.

"I don't think there is much good," I said, "in resolving what you will or will not do, before the occasion appears, for it may have something in it you never reckoned on. All I can say is, I will try to do what is right. I can not promise anything without knowing what my uncle thinks."

We rose; he took me in his arms for just an instant; and we parted with the understanding that I was to write to him as soon as I had spoken with my uncle.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TIME BETWEEN.

I NOW felt quite able to confess to my uncle both what I had thought and what I had done. True, I had much more to confess than when my trouble first awoke; but the growth in the matter of the confession had been such a growth in definiteness as well, as to make its utterance, though more weighty, yet much easier. If I might be in doubt about revealing my thoughts, I could be in none about revealing my actions; and I found it was much less appalling to make known my feelings, when I had the words of John Day to confess as well.

I may here be allowed to remark, how much easier an action is when demanded, than it seems while in the contingent future—how much easier when the thing is before you in its reality, and not as a mere thought-specter. The thing itself, and the idea of it, are two such different grounds upon which to come either to a decision or to action!

One thing more: when a woman wants to do the

right—I do not mean, wants to coax the right to side with her—she will, somehow, be led up to it.

My uncle was very feverish and troubled the first night, and had a good deal of delirium, during which his care and anxiety seemed all about me. Martha had to assure him every other moment that I was well, and in no danger of any sort: he would be silent for a time, and then again show himself tormented with forebodings about me. In the morning, however, he was better; only he looked sadder than usual. She thought he was, for some cause or other, in reality anxious about me. So much I gathered from Martha's letter, by no means scholarly, but graphic enough.

It gave me much pain. My uncle was miserable about me: he had plainly seen, he knew and felt that something had come between us! Alas, it was no fancy of his brain-troubled soul! Whether I was in fault or not, there was that something! It troubled the unity that had hitherto seemed a thing essential and indivisible!

Dared I go to him without a summons? I knew Martha would call me the moment the doctor allowed her: it would not be right to go without that call. What I had to tell might justify far more anxiety than the sight of me would counteract. If I said nothing, the keen eye of his love would assure itself of the

something hid in my silence, and he would not see that I was but waiting his improvement to tell him everything. I resolved, therefore, to remain where I was.

The next two days were perhaps the most uncomfortable ever I spent. A secret one desires to turn out of doors at the first opportunity, is not a pleasant companion. I do not say I was unhappy, still less that once I wished I had not seen John Day, but oh, how I longed to love him openly! how I longed for my uncle's sanction, without which our love could not be perfected! Then, John's mother was by no means a gladsome thought—except that he must be a good man indeed, who was good in spite of being unable to love, respect, or trust his mother! The true notion of heaven is to be with everybody one loves: to him the presence of his mother—such as she was, that is—would destroy any heaven! What a painful but salutary shock it will be to those whose existence is such a glorifying of themselves that they imagine their presence necessary to all about them, when they learn that their disappearance from the world sent a thrill of relief through the hearts of those nearest them! To learn how little they were prized, will one day prove a strong medicine for souls self-absorbed.

"There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed."

CHAPTER XVI.

FAULT AND NO FAULT.

THE next day I kept the house till the evening, and then went walking in the garden in the twilight. Between the dark alleys and the open wilderness I flitted and wandered, alternating gloom and gleam outside me, even as they chased one another within me.

In the wilderness I looked up—and there was John! He stood outside the fence, just as I had seen him the night before, only now there was no aureole about his head: the moon had not yet reached the horizon.

My first feeling was anger: he had broken our agreement! I did not reflect that there was such a thing as breaking a law, or even a promise, and being blameless. He leaped the fence, and, clearing every bush like a deer, came straight toward me. It was no use trying to escape him. I turned my back, and stood. He stopped close behind me, a yard or two away.

"Will you not speak to me?" he said. "It is not my fault I am come."

"Whose fault then, pray?" I rejoined, with difficulty keeping my position. "Is it mine?"

"My mother's," he answered.

I turned and looked him in the eyes, through the dusk saw that he was troubled, ran to him, and put my arms about him.

"She has been spying," he said, as soon as he could speak. "She will part us at any risk, if she can. She is having us watched this very moment, most likely. She may be watching us herself. She is a terrible woman when she is for or against anything. Literally, I do not know what she would not do to get her own way. She lives for her own way. The loss of it would be to her as the loss of her soul. She will lose it this time though! She will fail this time—if she never did before!"

"Well," I returned, nowise inclined to take her part, "I hope she will fail! What does she say?"

"She says she would rather go to her grave than see me your husband."

"Why?"

"Your family seems objectionable to her."

"What is there against it?"

"Nothing that I know."

"What is there against my uncle? Is there anything against Martha Moon?" I was indignant at the idea of a whisper against either. "What have *I*

done?" I went on. "We are all of the family I know: what is it?"

"I don't think she has had time to invent anything yet; but she pretends there is something, and says if I don't give you up, if I don't swear never to look at you again, she will tell it."

"What did you answer her?"

"I said no power on earth should make me give you up. Whatever she knew, she could know nothing against *you*, and I was as ready to go to my grave as she was. 'Mother,' I said, 'you may tell my determination by your own! Whether I marry her or not, you and I part company the day I come of age; and if you speak word or do deed against one of her family, my lawyer shall look strictly into your accounts as my guardian.' You see I knew where to touch her!"

"It is dreadful you should have to speak like that to your mother!"

"It is; but you would feel to her just as I do if you knew all—though you wouldn't speak so roughly, I know."

"Can you guess what she has in her mind?"

"Not in the least. She will pretend anything. It is enough that she is determined to part us. How, she cares nothing, so she succeed."

"But she can not!"

"It rests with you."

"How with me?"

"It will be war to the knife between her and me. If she succeed, it must be with you. I will do anything to foil her except lie."

"What if she should make you see it your duty to give me up?"

"What if there were no difference between right and wrong! We're as good as married!"

"Yes, of course; but I can not quite promise, you know, until I hear what my uncle will say."

"If your uncle is half so good a man as you have made me think him, he will do what he can on our side. He loves what is fair; and what can be fairer than that those who love each other should marry?"

I knew my uncle would not willingly interfere with my happiness, and for myself, I should never marry another than John Day—that was a thing of course: had he not kissed me? But the best of lovers had been parted, and that which had been might be again, though I could not see how! It *was* good, nevertheless, to hear John talk! It was the right way for a lover to talk! Still, he had no supremacy over what was to be!

"Some would say it can not be so great a matter to us, when we have known each other such a little while!" I remarked.

"The true time is the long time!" he replied. "Would it be a sign that our love was strong, that it took a great while to come to anything? The strongest things——"

There he stopped, and I saw why: strongest things are not generally of quickest growth! But there was the eucalyptus! And was not St. Paul as good a Christian as any of them? I said nothing, however: there was indeed no rule in the matter!

"You must allow it possible," I said, "that we may not be married!"

"I will not," he answered. "It is true my mother may get me brought in as incapable of managing my own affairs; but—"

"What mother would do such a wicked thing!" I cried.

"*My* mother," he answered.

"Oh!"

"She *would!*"

"I can't believe it."

"I am sure of it."

I held my peace. I could not help a sense of dismay at finding myself so near such a woman. I knew of bad women, but only in books: it would appear they were in other places as well!

"We must be on our guard," he said.

"Against what?"

"I don't know; whatever she may do."

"We can't do anything till she begins!"

"She has begun."

"How?" I asked, incredulous.

"Leander is lame," he answered.

"I am so sorry!"

"I am so angry!"

"Is it possible I understand you?"

"Quite. *She* did it."

"How do you know?"

"I can no more prove it than I can doubt it. I can not inquire into my mother's proceedings. I leave that sort of thing to her. Let her spy on me as she will, I am not going to spy on her."

"Of course not! But if you have no proof, how can you state the thing as a fact?"

"I have what is proof enough for saying it to my own soul."

"But you have spoken of it to me!"

"You are my better soul. If you are not, then I have done wrong in saying it to you."

I hastened to tell him I had only made him say what I hoped he meant—only I wasn't his *better* soul. He wanted me then to promise that I would marry him in spite of any and every thing. I promised that I would never marry any one but him. I could not say more, I said, not knowing what my uncle might think,

but so much it was only fair to say. For I had gone so far as to let him know distinctly that I loved him; and what sort would that love be that could regard it as possible, at any distance of time, to marry another! or what sort of woman could she be that would shrink from such a pledge! The mischief lies in promises made without forecasting thought. I knew what I was about. I saw forward and backward and all around me. A solitary education opens eyes that, in the midst of companions and engagements, are apt to remain shut. Knowledge of the world is no safeguard to man or woman. In the knowledge and love of truth lies our only safety.

With that promise he had to be and was content.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SUMMONS.

NEXT morning the post brought me the following letter from my uncle. Whoever of my readers may care to enter into my feelings as I read, must imagine them for herself; I will not attempt to describe them. The letter was not easy to read, as it was written in bed, and with his left hand.

"My little one,—I think I know more than you imagine. I think the secret flew into your heart of itself; you did not take it up and put it there. I think you tried to drive it out, and it would not go: the same Fate that clips the thread of life, had clipped its wings that it could fly no more! Did my little one think I had not a heart big enough to hold her secret? I wish it had not been so: it has made her suffer! I pray my little one to be sure that I am all on her side; that my will is to do and contrive the best for her that lies in my power. Should I be unable to do what she would like, she must yet believe me true to her as to my God, less than whom only I love her:—less be-

cause God is so much bigger, that so much more love will hang upon him. I love you, dear, more than any other creature except one, and that one is not in this world. Be sure that, whatever it may cost me, I will be to you what your own perfected soul will approve. Not to do my best for you, would be to be false, not to God only, but to your father as well, whom I loved and love dearly. Come to me, my child, and tell me all. I know you have done nothing wrong, nothing to be ashamed of. Some things are so difficult to tell, that it needs help to make way for them: I will help you. I am better. Come to me at once, and we will break the creature's shell together, and see what it is like, the shy thing!—Your uncle."

I was so eager to go to him, that it was with difficulty I finished his letter before starting. Death had been sent home, and was in the stable, sorely missing his master. I called Dick, and told him to get ready to ride with me to Wittenage; he must take Thanatos, and be at the door with Zoe in twenty minutes.

We started. As we left the gate, I caught sight of John coming from the other direction, his eyes on the ground, lost in meditation. I stopped. He looked up, saw me, and was at my side in two moments.

"I have heard from my uncle," I said. "He wants me. I am going to him."

"If only I had my horse!" he answered.

"Why shouldn't you take Thanatos?" I rejoined.

"No," he answered, after a moment's hesitation. "It would be an impertinence. I will walk, and perhaps see you there. It's only sixteen miles, I think.—What a splendid creature he is!"

"He's getting into years now," I replied; "but he has been in the stable several days, and I am doubtful whether Dick will feel quite at home on him."

"Then your uncle would rather I rode him! He knows I am no tailor!" said John.

"How?" I asked.

"I don't mean he knows who I am, but he saw me a fortnight ago, in one of our fields, giving Leander, who is but three, a lesson or two. He stopped and looked on for a good many minutes, and said a kind word about my handling of the horse. He will remember, I am sure."

"How glad I am he knows something of you! If you don't mind being seen with me, then, there is no reason why you should not give me your escort."

Dick was not sorry to dismount, and we rode away together.

I was glad of this for one definite reason, as well as many indefinite: I wanted John to see my letter, and know what cause I had to love my uncle. I forgot for the moment my resolution not to meet him again before telling my uncle everything. Somehow

he seemed to be going with me to receive my uncle's approval.

He read the letter, old Death carrying him all the time as gently as he carried myself—I often rode him now—and returned it with the tears in his eyes. For a moment or two he did not speak. Then he said in a very solemn way,

"I see! I oughtn't to have a chance if he be against me! I understand now why I could not get you to promise!—All right! The Lord have mercy upon me!"

"That He will! He is always having mercy upon us!" I answered, loving John and my uncle and God more than ever. I loved John for this especially, at the moment—that his nature remained uninjured toward others by his distrust of her who should have had the first claim on his confidence. I said to myself that, if a man had a bad mother, and yet was a good man, there could be no limit to the goodness he must come to. That he was a man after my uncle's own heart, I had no longer the least doubt. Nor was it a small thing to me that he rode beautifully—never seeming to heed his horse, and yet in constant touch with him.

We reached the town, and the inn where my uncle was lying. On the road we had arranged where he would be waiting me to hear what came next. He

went to see the horses put up, and I ran to find Martha. She met me on the stair, and went straight to my uncle to tell him I was come, returned almost immediately, and led me to his room.

I was shocked to see how pale and ill he looked. I feared, and was right in fearing, that anxiety about myself had not a little to do with his condition. His face brightened when he saw me, but his eyes gazed into mine with a searching inquiry. His face brightened yet more when he found his eager look answered by the smile which my perfect satisfaction inspired. I knelt by the bedside, afraid to touch him lest I should hurt his arm.

Slowly he laid his left hand on my head, and I knew he blessed me silently. For a minute or two he lay still.

"Now tell me all about it," he said at length, turning his patient blue eyes on mine.

I began at once, and if I did not tell him all, I let it be plain there was more of the sort behind, concerning which he might question me. When I had ended,

"Is that everything?" he asked, with a smile so like all he had ever been to me, that my whole heart seemed to go out to meet it.

"Yes, uncle," I answered; "I think I may say so —except that I have not dwelt upon my feelings.

Love, they say, is shy: and I fancy you will pardon me that portion."

"Willingly, my child. More is quite unnecessary."

"Then you know all about it, uncle?" I ventured. "I was afraid you might not understand me. Could any one, do you think, that had not had the same experience?"

He made me no answer. I looked up. He was ghastly white; his head had fallen back against the bed. I started up, hardly smothering a shriek.

"What is it, uncle?" I gasped. "Shall I fetch Martha?"

"No, my child," he answered. "I shall be better in a moment. I am subject to little attacks of the heart, but they do not mean much. Give me some of that medicine on the table."

In a few minutes his color began to return, and the smile which was forced at first, gradually brightened until it was genuine.

"I will tell you the whole story one day," he said, "—whether in this world, I am doubtful. But *when* is nothing, or *where*, with eternity before us."

"Yes, uncle," I answered vaguely, as I knelt again by the bedside.

"A person," he said, after a while, slowly, and with hesitating effort, "may look and feel a much better

person at one time than at another. Upon occasion, he is so happy, or perhaps so well pleased with himself, that the good in him comes all to the surface."

"Would he be the better or the worse man if it did not, uncle?" I asked.

"You must not get me into a metaphysical discussion, little one," he answered. "We have something more important on our hands. I want you to note that, when a person is happy, he may look lovable; whereas, things going as he does not like, another and very unfinished phase of his character may appear."

"Surely, everybody must know that, uncle!"

"Then you can hardly expect me to be confident that your new friend would appear as lovable if he were unhappy?"

"I have seen you, uncle, look as if nothing would ever make you smile again; but I knew you loved me all the time."

"Did you, my darling? Then you were right. *I* dare not require of any man that he should be as good-tempered in trouble as out of it—though he must come to that at last; but a man must be *just*, whatever mood he is in."

"That is what I always knew you to be, uncle! I never waited for a change in your looks, to tell you

anything I wanted to tell you.—I know you, uncle!" I added, with a glow of still triumph.

"Thank you, little one!" he returned, half-playfully, yet gravely. "All I want to say comes to this," he resumed after a pause, "that when a man is in love, you see only the best of him, or something better than he really is. Much good may be in a man, for God made him, and the man yet not be good, for he has done nothing, since his making, to make himself. Before you can say you know a man, you must have seen him in a few at least of his opposite moods. Therefore you can not wonder that I should desire a fuller assurance of this young man, than your testimony, founded on an acquaintance of three or four days, can give me."

"Let me tell you, then, something that happened to-day," I answered. "When first I asked him to come with me this morning, it was a temptation to him of course, not knowing when we might see each other again; but he hadn't his own horse, and said it would be an impertinence to ride yours."

"I hope you did not come alone!"

"Oh, no. I had set out with Dick, but John came after all."

"Then his refusal to ride my horse does not come to much. It is a small thing to have good impulses, if temptation is too much for them."

"But I haven't done telling you, uncle!"

"I am hasty, little one. I beg your pardon."

"I have to tell you what made him give in to riding your horse. I confessed I was a little anxious lest Death, who had not been exercised for some days, should be too much for Dick. John said then he thought he might venture, for you had once spoken very kindly to him of the way he handled his own horse."

"Oh, that's the young fellow, is it!" cried my uncle, in a tone that could not be taken for other than one of pleasure. "That's the fellow, is it?" he repeated. "H'm!"

"I hope you liked the look of him, uncle!" I said.

"The boy is a gentleman anyhow!" he answered. —You may think whether I was pleased!—"I never saw man carry himself better horseward!" he added with a smile

"Then you won't object to his riding Death home again?"

"Not in the least!" he replied. "The man can ride."

"And may I go with him?—that is, if you do not want me!—I wish I could stay with you!"

"Rather than ride home with him?"

"Yes, indeed, if it were to be of use to you!"

"The only way you can be of use to me, is to ride

home with Mr. Day, and not see him again until I have had a little talk with him. Tyranny may be a sense of duty, you know, little one!"

"Tyranny, uncle!" I cried, as I laid my cheek on his hand, which was very cold. "You *could* not make me think you a tyrant!"

"I should not like you to think me one, darling! Still less would I like to deserve it, whether you thought me one or not! But I could not be a tyrant to you if I would. You may defy me when you please."

"That would be to poison my own soul!" I answered.

"You must understand," he continued, "that I have no authority over you. If you were going to marry Mr. Day to-morrow, I should have no right to interfere. I am but a make-shift father to you, not a legal guardian."

"Don't cast me off, uncle!" I cried. "You *know* I belong to you as much as if you were my very own father! I am sure my father will say so when we see him. He will never come between you and me."

He gave a great sigh, and his face grew so intense that I felt as if I had no right to look on it.

"It is one of the deepest hopes of my existence," he said, "to give you back to him the best of daugh-

ters. Be good, my darling, be good, even if you die of sorrow because of it."

The intensity had faded to a deep sadness, and there came a silence.

"Would you like me to go now, uncle?" I asked.

"I wish I could see Mr. Day at once," he returned, "but I am so far from strong, that I fear both weakness and injustice. Tell him I want very much to see him, and will let him know as soon as I am able."

"Thank you, uncle! He will be so glad! Of course he can't feel as I do, but he does feel that to do anything you did not like, would be just horrid."

"And you will not see him again, little one, after he has taken you home, till I have had some talk with him?"

"Of course I will not, uncle."

I bade him good-by, had a few moments' conference with Martha, and found John at the place appointed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JOHN SEES SOMETHING.

As we rode, I told him everything. It did not seem in the least strange that I should be so close to one of whom a few days before I had never heard; it seemed as if all my life I had been waiting for him, and now he was come, and everything was only as it should be! We were very quiet in our gladness. Some slight anxiety about my uncle's decision, and the certain foreboding of trouble on the part of his mother, stilled us both, sending the delight of having found each other a little deeper and out of the way of the practical and reasoning.

We did not urge our horses to their speed, but I felt that, for my uncle's sake, I must not prolong the journey, forcing the last farthing of bliss from his generosity, while yet he was uncertain of his duty. The moon was rising just as we reached my home, and I was glad: John would have to walk miles to reach his, for he absolutely refused to take Death on, saying he did not know what might happen to him.

As we stopped at the gate I bethought myself that neither of us had eaten since we left in the afternoon. I dismounted, and, leaving him with the horses, got what I could find for him, and then roused Dick, who was asleep. John confessed that, now I had made him think of it, he was hungry enough to eat anything less than an ox. We parted merrily, but when next we met, each confessed it had not been without a presentiment of impending danger. For my part, notwithstanding the position I had presumed to take with John when first he spoke of his mother, I was now as distrustful as he, and more afraid of her.

Much the nearest way between the two houses lay across the heath. John walked along, eating the supper I had given him, and now and then casting a glance round the horizon. He had got about halfway, when, looking up, he thought he saw, dim in the ghosty light of the moon, a speck upon the track before him. He said to himself it could hardly be any one on the moor at such a time of the night, and went on with his supper. Looking up again after an interval, he saw that the object was much larger, but hardly less vague, because of a light fog which had in the mean time risen. By and by, however, as they drew nearer to each other, a strange thrill of recognition went through him: on the way before him, which was little better than a footpath, and slowly approaching,

came what certainly could be neither the horse that had carried him that day, nor his double, but what was so like him in color, size, and bone, while so unlike him in muscle and bearing, that he might have been he, worn but for his skin to a skeleton. Straight down upon John he came, spectral through the fog, as if he were asleep, and saw nothing in his way. John stepped aside to let him pass, and then first looked in the face of his rider: with a shock of fear that struck him in the middle of the body, making him gasp and choke, he saw before him—so plainly that, but for the impossibility, he could have sworn to him in any court of justice—the man whom he knew to be at that moment confined to his bed, twenty miles away, with a broken arm. Sole other human being within sight or sound in that still moonlight, on that desolate moor, the horseman never lifted his head, never raised his eyes to look at him. John stood stunned. He hardly doubted he saw an apparition. When at length he roused himself, and looked in the direction in which it went, it had all but vanished in the thickening white mist.

He found the rest of his way home almost mechanically, and went straight to bed, but for a long time could not sleep.

For what might not the apparition portend? Mr. Whichcote lay hurt by a fall from his horse, and he

had met his very image on the back of just such a horse, only turned to a skeleton! Was he bearing him away to the tomb?

Then he remembered that the horse's name was Death.

CHAPTER XIX.

JOHN IS TAKEN ILL.

In the middle of the night he woke with a start, ill enough to feel that he was going to be worse. His head throbbed; the room seemed turning round with him, and when it settled, he saw strange shapes in it. A few rays of the sinking moon had got in between the curtains of one of the windows, and had waked up everything! The furniture looked odd—unpleasantly odd. Something unnatural, or at least unearthly, must be near him! The room was an old-fashioned one, in thorough keeping with the age of the house—the very haunt for a ghost, but he had heard of no ghost in that room! He got up to get himself some water, and drew the curtains aside. He could have been in no thralldom to an apprehensive imagination; for what man, with a brooding terror couched in him, would, in the middle of the night, let in the moon? To such a passion, she is worse than the deepest darkness, especially when going down, as she was then, with the weary look she gets by the time her work is

about over, and she has long been forsaken of the poor mortals for whom she has so often to be up and shining all night. He poured himself some water and drank it, but thought it did not taste nice. Then he turned to the window, and looked out.

The house was in a large park. Its few trees served mainly to show how wide the unbroken spaces of grass. Before the house, motionless as a statue, stood a great gray horse with hanging neck, his shadow stretched in mighty grotesque behind him, and on his back the very effigy of my uncle, motionless too as marble. The horse stood sidewise to the house, but the face of his rider was turned toward it, as if scanning its windows in the dying glitter of the moon. John thought he heard a cry somewhere, and went to his door, but, listening hard, heard nothing. When he looked again from the window, the apparition seemed fainter, and farther away, though neither horse nor rider had changed posture. He rubbed his eyes to see more plainly, could no longer distinguish the appearance, and went back to bed. In the morning he was in a high fever—unconscious save of restless discomfort and undefined trouble.

He learned afterward from the housekeeper that his mother herself nursed him, but he would take neither food nor medicine from her hand. No doctor was sent for. John thought, and I can not but think,

that the water in his bottle had to do with his sudden illness. His mother may have merely wished to prevent him from coming to me; but, for the time at least, the conviction had got possession of him that she was attempting his life. He may have argued in semi-conscious moments, that she would not scruple to take again what she was capable of imagining she had given. Her attentions, however, may have arisen from alarm at seeing him worse than she had intended to make him, and desire to counteract what she had done.

For several days he was prostrate with extreme exhaustion. Necessarily, I knew nothing of this; neither was I, notwithstanding my more than doubt of his mother, in any immediate dread of what she might do. The cessation of his visits could, of course, cause me no anxiety, seeing it was thoroughly understood between us that we were not at liberty to meet.

CHAPTER XX.

A STRANGE VISIT.

On the fifth night after that on which he left me to walk home, I was roused, about two o'clock, by a sharp sound as of sudden hail against my window, ceasing as soon as it began. Wondering what it was, for hail it could hardly be, I sprang from the bed, pulled aside the curtain, and looked out. There was light enough in the moon to show me a man looking up at the window, and love enough in my heart to tell me who he was. How he knew the window mine, I have always forgotten to ask him. I would have drawn back, for it vexed me sorely to think him too weak to hold to our agreement, but the face I looked down upon was so ghastly and deathlike, that I perceived at once his coming must have its justification. I did not speak, for I would not have any in the house hear; but, putting on my shoes and a big cloak, I went softly down the stair, opened the door noiselessly, and ran to the other side of the house. There stood John, with his eyes fixed on my window. As I

turned the corner I could see, by their weary flashing, that either something terrible had happened, or he was very ill. He stood motionless, unaware of my approach.

"What is it?" I said under my breath, putting a hand on his shoulder.

He did not turn his head or answer me, but grew yet whiter, gasped, and seemed ready to fall. I put my arm round him, and his head sank on the top of mine.

Whatever might be the matter, the first thing was to get him into the house, and make him lie down. I moved a little, holding him fast, and mechanically he followed his support; so that, although with some difficulty, I soon got him round the house, and into the great hall-kitchen, our usual sitting-room; there was fire there that would only want rousing, and, warm as was the night, I felt him very cold. I let him sink on the wide sofa, covered him with my cloak, and ran to rouse old Penny. The aged sleep lightly, and she was up in an instant. I told her that a gentleman I knew had come to the house, either sleep-walking or delirious, and she must come and help me with him. She struck a light, and followed me to the kitchen.

John lay with his eyes closed, in a dead faint. We got him to swallow some brandy, and presently he came to himself a little. Then we put him in my warm

bed, and covered him with blankets. In a minute or so he was fast asleep. He had not spoken a word. I left Penny to watch him, and went and dressed myself, thinking hard. The result was, that, having enjoined Penny to let no one near him, *whoever* it might be, I went to the stable, saddled Zoe, and set off for Wittenage.

It was sixteen miles of a ride. The moon went down, and the last of my journey was very dark, for the night was cloudy; but we arrived in safety, just as the dawn was promising to come as soon as it could. No one in the town seemed up, or thinking of getting up. I had learned a lesson from John, however, and I knew Martha's window, which happily looked on the street. I got off Zoe, who was tired enough to stand still, for she was getting old and I had not spared her, and proceeded to search for a stone small enough to throw at the window. The scared face of Martha showed itself almost immediately.

"It's me!" I cried, no louder than she could just hear; "it's me, Martha! Come down and let me in."

Without a word of reply, she left the window, and, after some fumbling with the lock, opened the door and came out to me, looking gray with scare, but none the less with all her wits to her hand.

"How is my uncle, Martha?" I said.

"Much better," she answered.

"Then I must see him at once!"

"He's fast asleep, child! It would be a world's pity to wake him!"

"It would be a worse pity not!" I returned.

"Very well: must-be must!" she answered.

I made Zoe fast to the lamp-post: the night was warm, and, hot as she was, she would take no hurt. Then I followed Martha up the stair.

But my uncle was awake. He had heard a little of our motions and whisperings, and lay in expectation of something.

"I thought I should hear from you soon!" he said. "I wrote to Mr. Day on Thursday, but have had no reply. What has happened? Nothing serious, I hope?"

"I hardly know, uncle. John Day is lying at our house unable to move or speak."

My uncle started up as if to spring from his bed, but fell back again with a groan.

"Don't be alarmed, uncle!" I said. "He is, I hope, safe for the moment, with Penny to watch him; but I am very anxious Dr. Southwell should see him."

"How did it come about, little one?"

"There has been no accident that I know of. But I scarcely know more than you," I replied—and told him all that had taken place within my ken.

He lay silent a moment, thinking.

"I can't say I like his lying there with only Penny to protect him!" he said. "He must have come seeking refuge! I don't like the thing at all! He is in some danger we do not know!"

"I will go back at once, uncle," I replied, and rose from the bedside, where I had seated myself a little tired.

"You must, if we can not do better. But I think we can. Martha shall go, and you will stay with me. Run at once, and wake Dr. Southwell. Ask him to come directly."

I ran all the way—it was not far—and pulled the doctor's night-bell. He answered it himself. I gave him my uncle's message, and he was at the inn a few minutes after me. My uncle told him what had happened, and begged him to go and see the patient, carrying Martha with him in his gig.

The doctor said he would start at once. My uncle begged him to give strictest orders that *no* one was to see Mr. Day, whoever it might be. Martha heard, and grew like a colonel of dragoons ordered to charge with his regiment.

In less than half an hour they started—at a pace that delighted me.

When Zoe was put up and attended to, and I was alone with my uncle, I got him some breakfast to

make up for the loss of his sleep. He told me it was better than sleep to have me near him.

What I went through that night and the following day, I need not recount. Whoever has loved one in danger and out of her reach, will know what it was like. The doctor did not make his appearance until five o'clock, having seen several patients on his way back. The young man, he reported, was certainly in for a fever of some kind—he could not yet pronounce which. He would see him again on the morrow, he said, and by that time it would have declared itself. Some one in the neighborhood must watch the case; it was impossible for him to give it sufficient attention. My uncle told him he was now quite equal to the task himself, and we would all go together the next day. My delight at the proposal was almost equaled by my satisfaction that the doctor made no objection to it.

For joy I scarcely slept that night: I was going to nurse John! But I was anxious about my uncle. He assured me, however, that in one day more he would in any case have insisted on returning. If it had not been for a little lingering fever, he said, he would have gone much sooner.

"That was because of me, uncle!" I answered with contrition.

"Perhaps," he replied; "but I had a blow on the head, you know!"

"There is one good thing," I said: "you will know John the sooner from seeing him ill! But perhaps you will count that only a mood, uncle, and not to be trusted!"

He smiled. I think he was not *very* anxious about the result of a nearer acquaintance with John Day. I believe he had some faith in my spiritual instinct.

Uncle went with the doctor in his brougham, and I rode Zoe. The back of the house came first in sight, and I saw the window-blinds of my room still down. The doctor had pronounced it the fittest for the invalid, and would not have him moved to the guest-chamber Penny had prepared for him.

In the only room I had ever occupied as my own, I nursed John for a space of three weeks.

From the moment he saw me, he began to improve. My uncle noted this, and I fancy liked John the better for it. Nor did he fail to note the gentleness and gratitude of the invalid.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FOILED ATTEMPT.

THE morning after my uncle's return, came a messenger from Rising with his lady's compliments, asking if Mr. Whichcote could tell her anything of her son: he had left the house unseen, during a feverish attack, and as she could get no tidings of him, she was in great anxiety. She had accidentally heard that he had made Mr. Whichcote's acquaintance, and therefore took the liberty of extending to him the inquiry she had already made everywhere else among his friends. My uncle wrote in answer, that her son had come to his house in a high fever; that he had been under medical care ever since; and that he hoped in a day or two he might be able to return. If he expressed a desire to see his mother, he would immediately let her know, but in the mean time it was imperative he should be kept quiet.

From this letter, Lady Cairnedge might surmise that her relations with her son were at least suspected. Within two hours came another message—

that she would send a close carriage to bring him home the next day. Then indeed were my uncle and I glad that we had come. For though Martha would certainly have defended the citadel to her utmost, she might have been sorely put to it if his mother proceeded to carry him away by force. My uncle, in reply, begged her not to give herself the useless trouble of sending to fetch him : in the state he was in at present, it would be tantamount to murder to remove him, and he would not be a party to it.

When I yielded my place in the sick-room to Martha and went to bed, my heart was not only at ease for the night, but I feared nothing for the next day with my uncle on my side—or rather on John's side.

We were just rising from our early dinner, for we were old-fashioned people, when up drove a grand carriage, with two strong footmen behind, and a servvant in plain clothes on the box by the coachman. It pulled up at the door, and the man on the box got down and rang the bell, while his fellows behind got down also, and stood together a little way behind him. My uncle at once went to the hall, but no more than in time, for there was Penny already on her way to open the door. He opened it himself, and stood on the threshold.

"If you please, sir," said the man, not without arrogance, "we're come to take Mr. Day home."

"Tell your mistress," returned my uncle, "that Mr. Day has expressed no desire to return, and is much too unwell to be informed of her ladyship's wish."

"Begging your pardon, sir," said the man, "we have her ladyship's orders to bring him. We will take every possibly care of him. The carriage is an extra-easy one, and I'll sit inside with the young gentleman myself. If he ain't right in his head, he'll never know nothink till he comes to himself in his own bed."

My uncle had let the man talk, but his anger was fast rising.

"I can not let him go. I would not send a beggar to the hospital in the state he is in."

"But, indeed sir, you must! We have our orders."

"If you fancy I will dismiss a guest of mine at the order of any human being, were it the queen's own majesty," said my uncle—I heard the words, and with my mind's eyes saw the blue flash of his as he said them—"you will find yourself mistaken."

"I'm sorry," said the man quietly, "but I have my orders! Let me pass, please. It is my business to find the young gentleman, and take him home. No one can have the right to keep him against his mother's will, especially when he's not in a fit state to judge for himself."

"Happily I am in a fit state to judge for him," said my uncle, coldly.

"I dare not go back without him. Let me pass," he returned, raising his voice a little, and approaching the door as if he would force his way.

I ought to have mentioned that, as my uncle went to the door, he took from a rack in the hall a whip with a bamboo stock, which he generally carried when he rode. His answer to the man was a smart, though left-handed blow with the stock across his face: they were too near for the thong. He staggered back, and stood holding his hand to his face. His fellow-servants, who, during the colloquy, had looked on with gentlemanlike imperturbability, made a simultaneous step forward. My uncle sent the thong with a hiss about their ears. They sprang toward him in a fury, but halted immediately and recoiled. He had drawn a small swordlike weapon, which I did not know to be there, from the stock of the whip. He gave one swift glance behind him. I was in the hall at his back.

"Shut the door, Orba," he cried.

I shut him out, and ran to a window in the little drawing-room, which commanded the door. Never had I seen him look as now—his pale face pale no longer, but flushed with anger. Neither, indeed, until that moment had I ever seen the *natural* look of anger, the expression of *pure* anger. There was nothing mean

or ugly in it—not an atom of hate. But how his eyes blazed!

"Go back," he cried, in a voice far more stern than loud. "If one of you set foot on the lowest step, I will run him through."

The men saw he meant it; they saw the closed door, and my uncle with his back to it. They turned and spoke to each other. The coachman sat immovable on his box. They mounted, and he drove away.

I ran and opened the door. My uncle came in with a smile. He went up the stair, and I followed him to the room where the invalid lay. We were both anxious to learn if he had been disturbed.

He was leaning on his elbow, listening. He looked a good deal more like himself.

"I knew you would defend me, sir!' he said, with a respectful confidence which could not but please my uncle.

"You did not want to go home—did you?" he asked with a smile.

"I should have thrown myself out of the carriage!" answered John; "—that is, if they had got me into it. But, please, tell me, sir," he went on, "how it is I find myself in your house? I have been puzzling over it all the morning. I have no recollection of coming."

"You understand, I fancy," rejoined my uncle, "that one of the family has a notion she can take

better care of you than anybody else! Is not that enough to account for it?"

"Hardly, sir. Belorba can not have gone and rescued me from my mother!"

"How do you know that? Belorba is a terrible creature when she is roused. But you have talked enough. Shut your eyes, and don't trouble yourself to recollect. As you get stronger, it will all come back to you. Then you will be able to tell us, instead of asking us to tell you."

He left us together. I quieted John by reading to him, and absolutely declining to talk.

"You are a captive. The castle is enchanted: speak a single word," I said, "and you will find yourself in the dungeon of your own room."

He looked at me an instant, closed his eyes, and in a few minutes was fast asleep. He slept for two hours, and when he woke was quite himself. He was very weak, but the fever was gone, and we had now only to feed him up, and keep him quiet.

CHAPTER XXII.

JOHN RECALLS AND REMEMBERS.

WHAT a weight was off my heart! It seemed as if nothing more could go wrong. But, though John was plainly happy, he was not quite comfortable: he worried himself with trying to remember how he had come to us. The last thing he could definitely recall before finding himself with us, was his mother looking at him through a night that seemed made of blackness so solid that he marveled she could move in it. She brought him something to drink, but he fancied it blood, and would not touch it. He remembered now that there was a red tumbler in his room. He could recall nothing after, except a cold wind, and a sense of utter weariness but absolute compulsion: he must keep on and on till he found the gate of heaven, to which he seemed only forever coming nearer. His conclusion was that he knew what he was about every individual moment, but had no memory; each thing he did was immediately forgotten, while the knowledge of what he had to do next remained with him. It

was, he thought, a mental condition analogous with walking, in which every step is a frustrated fall. I set this down here, because, when I told my uncle what John had been saying, myself not sure that I perceived what he meant, he declared the boy a philosopher of the finest grain. But he warned me not to encourage his talking, and especially not to ask him to explain. There was nothing, he said, worse for a weak brain, than to set a strong will to work it.

I tried to obey him, but it grew harder as the days went on. There were not many of them, however; he recovered rapidly. When at length my uncle talked not only to but with him, I regarded it as a virtual withdrawal of his prohibition, and after that spoke to John of whatever came into his or my head.

It was then he told me all he could remember since the moment he left me with his supper in his hand. A great part of his recollection was the vision of my uncle on the moor, and afterward in the park. We did not know what to make of it. I should at once have concluded it caused by prelusive illness, but from my remembrance of what both my uncle and myself had seen, so long before, in the thunder-storm; while John, willing enough to attribute its recurrence to that cause, found it impossible to concede that he was anything but well when crossing the moor. I thought, however, that excitement, fatigue, and lack

of food, might have something to do with it, and with his illness too; while, if he was in a state to see anything phantasmal, what shape more likely to appear than that of my uncle!

He would not hear of my mentioning the thing to my uncle. I would for my own part have gone to him with it immediately; but could not with John's prayer in my ears. I resolved, however, to gain his consent if I could.

He had by this time as great a respect for my uncle as I had myself, but could not feel at home with him as I did. Whether the vision was only a vision, or indeed my uncle's double, whatever a double may be, the tale of it could hardly be an agreeable one to him; and naturally John shrank from the risk of causing him the least annoyance.

The question of course came up, what he was to do when able to leave us. He had spoken very plainly to my uncle concerning his relations with his mother —had told him indeed that he could not help suspecting he owed his illness to her.

I was nearly always present when they talked, but remember in especial a part of what passed on one occasion.

"I believe I understand my mother," said John, "—but only after much thinking. I loved her when a child; and if she had not left me for the sake of

liberty and influence—that at least is how I account for her doing so—I might at this moment be struggling for personal freedom, instead of having that over."

"There are women," returned my uncle, "some of them of the most admired, who are slaves to a demoniacal love of power. The very pleasure of their consciousness consists in the knowledge that they have power—not power to do things, but power to make other people do things. It is an insanity, but a devilishly immoral and hateful insanity.—I do not say the lady in question is one of such, for I do not know her; I only say I have known such a one."

John replied that certainly the love of power was his mother's special weakness. She was spoiled when a child, he had been told; had her every wish regarded, her every whim respected. This ruinous treatment sprang, he said, from the self-same ambition, in another form, on the part of her mother—the longing, namely, to secure her child's supreme affection—with the natural consequence that they came to hate one another. His father and she had been married but fifteen months, when he died of a fall, following the hounds. Within six months she was engaged, but the engagement was broken off, and she went abroad, leaving him behind her. She married Lord Cairnedge in Venice, and returned to England when John was

nearly four, and seemed to have lost all memory of her. His stepfather was good to him, but died when he was about eight. His mother was very severe. Her object plainly was to plant her authority so in his very nature that he should never think of disputing her will.

"But," said John, "she killed my love, and so I grew able to cast off her yoke."

"The world would fare worse, I fancy," remarked my uncle, "if violent women bore patient children. The evil would become irremediable. The children might not be ruined, but they would bring no discipline to the mother!"

"Her servants," continued John, "obey her implicitly, except when they are sure she will never know. She treats them so imperiously that they admire her, and are proud to have such a mistress. But she is convinced at last, I believe, that she will never get me to do as she pleases; and therefore hates me so heartily, that she can hardly keep her ladylike hands off me. I do not think I have been unreasonable; I have not found it difficult to obey others that were set over me; but when I found almost her every requirement part of a system for reducing me to a slavish obedience, I began to lay down lines of my own. I resolved to do at once whatever she asked me, whether pleasant to me or not, so long as I saw

no reason why it should not be done. Then I was surprised to find how seldom I had to make a stand against her wishes. At the same time, the mode in which she conveyed her pleasure was invariably such as to make a pretty strong effort of the will necessary for compliance with it. But the effort to overcome the difficulty caused by her manner, helped to develop in me the strength to resist where it was not right to yield. By far the most serious difference we had yet had, arose about six months ago, when she insisted I should make myself agreeable to a certain lady, whom I by no means disliked. She had planned our marriage, I believe, as one of her parallels in the siege of the lady's noble father, then a widower of a year. I told her I would not lay myself out to please any lady, except I wanted to marry her. 'And why, pray, should you not marry her?' she returned. I answered that I did not love her, and would not marry until I saw the woman I could not be happy without, and she accepted me. She went into a terrible passion, but I found myself quite unmoved by it: it is a wonderful heartener to know yourself not merely standing up for a right, but for the right to do the right thing! 'You wouldn't surely have me marry a woman I didn't care a straw for!' I said. 'Quench my soul!' she cried—I have often wondered where she learned the oath—'what would that matter? She wouldn't care a straw

for you in a month?'—'Why should I marry her then?'—'Because your mother wishes it,' she replied, and turned to march from the room as if that settled the thing. But I could not leave it so. The sooner she understood, the better? 'Mother!' I cried, 'I will not marry the lady. I will not pay her the least attention that could be mistaken to mean the possibility of it.' She turned upon me. I have just respect enough left for her, not to say what her face suggested to me. She was pale as a corpse; her very lips were colorless; her eyes—but I will not go on. 'Your father all over!' she snarled—yes, snarled, with an inarticulate cry of fiercest loathing, and turned again and went. If I do not quite think my mother, *at present*, would murder me, I do think she would do anything short of murder to gain her ends with me. But do not be afraid; I am sufficiently afraid to be on my guard.

"My father was a rich man, and left my mother more than enough; there was no occasion for her to marry again, except she loved, and I am sure she did not love Lord Cairnedge. I wish, for my sake, not for his, he were alive now. But the moment I am one and twenty I shall be my own master, and hope, sir, you will not count me unworthy to be the more Belorba's servant. One thing I am determined upon: my mother shall not cross my threshold but at my wife's in-

vitation; and I shall never ask my wife to invite her. She is too dangerous.

"We had another altercation about Miss Miles, an hour or two before I first saw Orba. They were far from worthy feelings that possessed me up to the moment when I caught sight of her over the wall. It was a leap out of hell into paradise. The glimpse of such a face, without shadow of scheme or plan or selfish end, was salvation to me. I thank God!"

Perhaps I ought not to let those words about myself stand, but he said them.

He had talked too long. He fell back in his chair, and the tears began to gather in his eyes. My uncle rose, put his arm about me, and led me to the study.

"Let him rest a bit, little one," he said as we entered. "It is long since we had a good talk!"

He seated himself in his think-chair—a name which, when a child, I had given it, and I slid to the floor at his feet.

"I can not help thinking, little one," he began, "that you are going to be a happy woman! I do believe that is a man to be trusted. As for the mother, there is no occasion to think of her, beyond being on your guard against her. You will have no trouble with her after you are married."

"I can not help fearing she will do us a mischief, uncle," I returned.

"Sir Philip Sidney says—'Since a man is bound no further to himself than to do wisely, chance is only to trouble them that stand upon chance.' That is, we are responsible only for our actions, not for their results. Trust first in God, then in John Day."

"I was sure you would like him, uncle!" I cried, with a flutter of loving triumph.

"I was nearly as sure myself—such confidence had I in the instinct of my little one. I think that I, of the two of us, may, in this instance, claim the greater faith!"

"You are always before me, uncle!" I said. "I only follow where you lead. But what do you think the woman will do next?"

"I don't think. It is no use. We shall hear of her before long. If all mothers were like her, the world would hardly be saved!"

"It would not be worth saving, uncle."

"Whatever can be saved, must be worth saving, my child."

"Yes, uncle; I shouldn't have said that," I replied.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LETTER AND ANSWER.

We did hear of her before long. The next morning a letter was handed to my uncle as we sat at breakfast. He looked hard at the address, changed countenance, and frowned very dark, but I could not read the frown. Then his face cleared a little; he opened, read, and handed the letter to me.

Lady Cairnedge hoped Mr. Whichcote would excuse one who had so lately come to the neighborhood, that, until an hour ago, she knew nothing of the position and character of the gentleman in whose house her son had, in a momentary, but, alas! not unusual aberration, sought shelter, and found generous hospitality. She apologized heartily for the unceremonious way in which she had sent for him. In her anxiety to have him home, if possible, before he should realize his awkward position in the house of a stranger, she had been inconsiderate! She left it to the judgment of his kind host whether she should herself come to fetch him, or send her carriage with the medical man who

usually attended him. In either case her servants must accompany the carriage, as he would probably object to being removed. He might, however, be perfectly manageable, for he was, when himself, the gentlest creature in the world!

I was in a rage. I looked up, expecting to see my uncle as indignant with the diabolical woman as I was myself. But he seemed sunk in reverie, his body present, his spirit far away. A pang shot through my heart. Could the wicked device have told already?

"May I ask, uncle," I said, and tried hard to keep my voice steady, "how you mean to answer this vile epistle?"

He looked up with a wan smile, such as might have broke from Lazarus when he found himself again in his body.

"I will take it to the young man," he answered.

"Please, let us go at once then, uncle! I can not sit still."

He rose, and we went together to John's room.

He was much better—sitting up in bed, and eating the breakfast Penny had carried him.

"I have just had a letter from your mother, Day," said my uncle.

"Indeed!" returned John dryly.

"Will you read it, and tell me what answer you would like me to return."

"Hardly like her usual writing—though there's her own strange S!" remarked John as he looked at it.

"Does she always make an S like that?" asked my uncle, with something peculiar in his tone, I thought.

"Always—like a snake just going to strike."

My uncle's face grew ghastly pale. He almost snatched the letter from John's hand, looked at it, gave it back to him, and, to our dismay, left the room.

"What can be the matter, John?" I said, my heart sinking within me.

"Go to him," said John.

I dared not. I had often seen him *like* that before walking out into the night; but there was something in his face now which I had not seen there before. It looked as if some terrible suspicion were suddenly confirmed.

"You see what my mother is after!" said John. "You have now to believe *her*, that I am subject to fits of insanity, or to believe *me*, that there is nothing she will not do to get her way."

"Her object is clear," I replied. "But if she thinks to fool my uncle, she will find herself mistaken!"

"She hopes to fool both you and your uncle," he rejoined. "The only wise thing I could do, she will handle so as to convince any expert of my madness—I mean, my coming to you! My reasons will go for

nothing—less than nothing—with any one she chooses to bewitch. She will look at me with an anxious love no doctor could doubt. No one can know—*you* do not know that I am not mad—or at least subject to attacks of madness!"

"Oh, John, don't frighten me!" I cried.

"There! you are not sure about it!"

It seemed cruel of him to tease me so; but I saw presently why he did it: he thought his mother's letter had waked a doubt in my uncle; and he wanted me not to be vexed with my uncle, even if he deserted him and went over to his mother's side.

"I love your uncle," he said. "I know he is a true man! I *will* not be angry with him if my mother do mislead him. The time will come when he will know the truth. It must appear at last! I shall have to fight her alone, that's all! The worst is, if he thinks with my mother I shall have to go at once!—If only somebody would sell my horse for me!"

I guessed that his mother kept him short of money, and remembered with gladness that I was not quite penniless at that moment.

"In the mean time, you must keep as quiet as you can, John," I said. "Where is the good of planning upon an *if?* To trust is to get ready, uncle says. Trust is better than foresight."

John required little such persuading. And indeed

something very different was in my uncle's mind from what John feared.

Presently I caught a glimpse of him riding out of the yard. I ran to a window from which I could see the edge of the moor, and saw him cross it at an up-hill gallop.

He was gone about four hours, and on his return went straight to his own room. Not until nine o'clock did I go to him, and then he came with me to supper.

He looked worn, but was kind and genial as usual. After supper he sent for Dick, and told him to ride to Rising, the first thing in the morning, with a letter he would find on the hall-table.

The letter he read to us before we parted for the night. It was all we could have wished. He wrote that he must not have any one in his house interfered with; so long as a man was his guest, he was his servant. Her ladyship had, however, a perfect right to see her son, and would be welcome; only the decision as to his going or remaining must rest with the young man himself. If he chose to accompany his mother, well and good! though he should be sorry to lose him. If he declined to return with her, he and his house continued at his service.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HAND TO HAND.

We looked for Lady Cairnedge all the next day. John was up by noon, and ready to receive her in the drawing-room; he would not see her in his bedroom. But the hours passed, and she did not come.

In the evening, however, when the twilight was thickening, and already all was dark in the alleys of the garden, her carriage drove quietly up—with a startling scramble of arrest at the door. The same servants were outside, and a very handsome dame within. As she descended, I saw that she was tall, and, if rather stout, not stouter than suited her age and style. Her face was pale, but she seemed in perfect health. When I saw her closer, I found her features the most regular I had ever seen. Had the soul within it filled the mold of that face, it would have been beautiful. As it was, it was only handsome—to me repulsive. The moment I saw it, I knew myself in the presence of a masked battery.

My uncle had insisted that she should be received

where we usually sat, and had given Penny orders to show her into the hall-kitchen.

I was alone there, preparing something for John. We were not expecting her, for it seemed now too late to look for her. My uncle was in the study, and Martha somewhere about the house. My heart sank as I turned from the window, and sank yet lower when she appeared in the doorway of the kitchen, but as I advanced, I caught sight of my uncle, and went boldly to meet the enemy. He had come down his stair, and had just stepped into a clear blaze of light, which that moment burst from the wood I had some time ago laid damp upon the fire. The next instant I saw the lady's countenance ghastly with terror, looking beyond me. I turned, but saw nothing, save that my uncle had disappeared. When I faced her again, only a shadow of her fright remained. I offered her my hand—for she was John's mother—but she did not take it. She stood scanning me from head to foot.

"I am Lady Cairnedge," she said. "Where is my son?"

I turned yet again. My uncle had not come back. I was not prepared to take his part. I was bewildered. A dead silence fell. For the first time in my life, my uncle seemed to have deserted me, and at the moment when most I needed him! I turned once more to the lady, and said, hardly knowing what,

"You wish to see Mr. Day?"

She answered me with a cold stare.

"I will go and tell him you are here," I faltered; and passing her, I sped along the passage to the drawing-room.

"John!" I cried, bursting in, "she's come! Do you still mean to see her? Are you able? Uncle—"

There I stopped, for his eyes were stern, and not looking at me, but at something behind me. One moment I thought his fever had returned, but following his gaze I looked round:—there stood Lady Cairnedge! John was face to face with his mother, and my uncle was not there to defend him!

"Are you ready?" she said, nor pretended greeting. She seemed slightly discomposed, and in haste.

I was by this time well aware of my lover's determination of character, but I was not prepared for the tone in which he addressed the icy woman calling herself his mother.

"I am ready to listen," he answered.

"John!" she returned, with mingled severity and sharpness, "let us have no masquerading! You are perfectly fit to come home, and you must come at once The carriage is at the door."

"You are quite right, mother," answered John calmly; "I *am* fit to go home with you. But Rising

does not quite agree with me. I dread such another attack, and do not mean to go."

The drawing-room had a rectangular bay-window, one of whose three sides commanded the door. The opposite side looked into a little grove of larches. Lady Cairnedge had already realized the position of the room. She darted to the window, and saw her carriage but a few yards away.

She would have thrown up the sash, but found she could not. She twisted her handkerchief round her gloved hand, and dashed it through a pane.

"Men!" she cried, in a loud, commanding voice, "come at once."

The moment she went to the window, I sprang to the door, locked it, put the key in my pocket, and set my back to the door.

I heard the men thundering at the hall-door. Lady Cairnedge turned as if she would herself go and open to them, but seeing me she understood what I had done, and went back to the window.

"Come here! Come to me here—to the window!" she cried.

John had been watching with a calm, determined look. He came and stood between us.

"John," I said, "leave your mother to me."

"She will kill you!" he answered.

"You might kill her!" I replied.

I darted to the chimney, where a clear fire was burning, caught up the poker, and thrust it between the bars.

"That's for you!" I whispered. "They will not touch you with that in your hand! Never mind me. If your mother move hand or foot to help them, it will be my turn!"

He gave me a smile and a nod, and his eyes lightened. I saw that he trusted me, and I felt fearless as a bull-dog.

In the mean time, she had spoken to her servants, and was now trying to open the window, which had a peculiar catch. I saw that John could defend himself much better at the window than in the room. I went softly behind his mother, put my hands round her neck, and, clasping them in front, pulled her backward with all my strength. We fell on the floor together, I under of course, but clutching as if all my soul were in my fingers. Neither should she meddle with John, nor should he lay hand on her! I did not mind much what I did to her myself.

"To the window, John," I cried, "and break their heads!"

He snatched the poker from the fire, and the next moment I heard a crashing of glass, but of course I could not see what was going on. Mine was no grand way of fighting, but what was dignity where John was

in danger! For the moment I had the advantage, but, while determined to hold on to the last, I feared she would get the better of me, for she was much bigger and stronger, and crushed and kicked, and dug her elbows into me, struggling like a mad woman.

All at once the tug of her hands on mine ceased. She gave a great shriek, and I felt a shudder go through her. Then she lay still. I relaxed my hold cautiously, for I feared a trick. She did not move. Horror seized me; I thought I had killed her. I writhed from under her to see. As I did so I caught sight of the pale face of my uncle, looking in at the part of the window next the larch-grove. Immediately I remembered Lady Cairnedge's terror in the kitchen, and knew that the cause of it, and of her present cry, must be the same, to wit, the sight of my uncle. I had not hurt her! I was not yet on my feet when my uncle left the window, flew to the other side of it, and fell upon the men with a stick so furiously that he drove them to the carriage. The horses took fright, and went prancing about, rearing and jibbing. At the call of the coachman, two of the men flew to their heads. I saw no more of their assailant.

John, who had not got a fair blow at one of his besiegers, left the window, and came to me where I was trying to restore his mother. The third man, the butler, came back to the window, put his hand through,

undid the catch, and flung the sash wide. John caught up the poker from the floor and darted to it.

"Set foot within the window, Parker," he cried, "and I will break your head."

The man did not believe he would hurt him, and put foot and head through the window.

Now John had honestly threatened, but to perform he found harder than he had thought: it is one thing to raise a poker, and another to strike a head with it. The window was narrow, and the whole man was not yet in the room, when John raised his weapon; but he could not bring the horrid poker down upon the dumb blind back of the stooping man's head. He threw it from him, and casting his eyes about, spied a huge family Bible on a side-table. He sprang to it, and caught it up—just in time. The man had got one foot firm on the floor, and was slowly drawing in the other, when down came the bible on his head, with all the force John could add to its weight. The butler tumbled senseless on the floor.

"Here, Orbie!" cried John; "help me to bundle him out before he comes to himself.—Take what you would have!" he said, as between us we shoved him out on the gravel.

I fetched smelling-salts and brandy, and everything I could think of—fetched Martha too, and between us we got her on the sofa, but Lady Cairn-

edge lay motionless. She breathed indeed, but did not open her eyes. John stood ready to do anything for her, but his countenance revealed little compassion. Whatever the cause of his mother's swoon—he had never seen her in one before—he was certain it had to do with some bad passage in her life. He said so to me that same evening. "But what could the sight of my uncle have to do with it?" I asked. "Probably he knows something, or she thinks he does," he answered.

"Wouldn't it be better to put her to bed, and send for the doctor, John?" I suggested at last.

Perhaps the sound of my voice calling her son by his Christian name, stung her proud ear, for the same moment she sat up, passed her hands over her eyes, and cast a scared gaze about the room.

"Where am I? Is it gone?" she murmured, looking ghastly.

No one answered her.

"Call Parker," she said, feebly, yet imperiously.

Still no one spoke.

She kept glancing sideways at the window, where nothing was to be seen but the gathering night. In a few moments she rose and walked straight from the room, erect, but white as a corpse. I followed, passed her, and opened the hall-door. There stood the carriage, waiting, as if nothing unusual had happened,

Parker seated in the rumble, with one of the footmen beside him. The other man stood by the carriage-door. He opened it immediately; her ladyship stepped in, and dropped on the seat; the carriage rolled away.

I went back to John.

"I must leave you, darling!" he said. "I can not subject you to the risk of such another outrage! I fear sometimes my mother may be what she would have you think me. I ought to have said, I hope she is. It would be the only possible excuse for her behavior. The natural end of loving one's own way, is to go mad. If you don't get it, you go mad; if you do get it, you go madder—that's all the difference!—I must go!"

I tried to expostulate with him, but it was of no use.

"Where will you go?" I said. "You can not go home!"

"I would at once," he answered, "if I could take the reins in my own hands. But I will go to London, and see the family-lawyer. He will tell me what I had better do."

"You have no money!" I said.

"How do you know that?" he returned with a smile. "Have you been searching my pockets?"

"John!" I cried.

He broke into a merry laugh.

"Your uncle will lend me a five-pound-note," he said.

"He will lend you as much as you want; but I don't think he's in the house," I answered. "I have two myself, though! I'll run and fetch them."

I bounded away to get the notes. It was like having a common purse already, to lend John ten pounds! But I had no intention of letting him leave the house the same day he was first out of his room after such an illness—that was, if I could help it.

My uncle had given me the use of a drawer in that same cabinet in which were the precious stones; and there, partly, I think, from the pride of sharing the cabinet with my uncle, I had long kept everything I counted precious; I should have kept Zoe there if she had not been alive and too big!

CHAPTER XXV.

A VERY STRANGE THING.

THE moment I opened the door of the study, I saw my uncle—in his think-chair, his head against the back of it, his face turned to the ceiling. I ran to his side and dropped on my knees, thinking he was dead. He opened his eyes and looked at me, but with such a wan, woe-begone countenance, that I burst into a passion of tears.

"What is it, uncle dear?" I gasped and sobbed.

"Nothing very new, little one," he answered.

"It is something terrible, uncle," I cried, "or you would not look like that! Did those horrid men hurt you? You did give it them well! You came down on them like the angel on the Assyrians!"

"I don't know what you're talking about, little one!" he returned. "What men?"

"The men that came with John's mother to carry him off. If it hadn't been for my beautiful uncle, they would have done it too! How I wondered what had become of you! I was almost in despair. I

thought you had left us to ourselves—and you only waiting, like God, for the right moment!"

He sat up, and stared at me, bewildered.

"I had forgotten all about John!" he said. "As to what you think I did, I know nothing about it. I haven't been out of this room since I saw—that specter in the kitchen."

"John's mother, you mean, uncle?"

"Ah! she's John's mother, is she? Yes, I thought as much—and it was more than my poor brain could stand! It was too terrible!—My little one, this is death to you and me!"

My heart sank within me. One thought only went through my head—that, come what might, I would no more give up John, than if I were already married to him in the church.

"But why—what is it, uncle?" I said, hardly able to get the words out.

"I will tell you another time," he answered, and rising, went to the door.

"John is going to London," I said, following him.

"Is he?" he returned listlessly.

"He wants to see his lawyer, and try to get things on a footing of some sort between his mother and him."

"That is very proper," he replied, with his hand on the lock.

"But you don't think it would be safe for him to

travel to-night—do you, uncle—so soon after his illness?" I asked.

"No, I can not say I do. It would not be safe. He is welcome to stop till to-morrow."

"Will you not tell him so, uncle? He is bent on going!"

"I would rather not see him! There is no occasion. It will be a great relief to me when he is able—quite able, I mean—to go home to his mother—or where it may suit him best."

It was indeed like death to hear my uncle talk so differently about John. What had he done to be treated in this way—taken up and made a friend of, and then cast off without reason given! My dear uncle was not at all like himself! To say he forgot our trouble and danger, and never came near us in our sore peril, when we owed our deliverance to him! and now to speak like this concerning John! Something was terribly wrong with him! I dared hardly think what it could be.

I stood speechless.

My uncle opened the door, and went down the steps. The sound of his feet along the corridor and down the stair to the kitchen, died away in my ears. My life seemed to go ebbing with it. I was stranded on a desert shore, and he in whom I had trusted was leaving me there!

I came to myself a little, got the two five-pound-notes, and returned to John.

When I reached the door of the room, I found my heart in my throat, and my brains upside down. What was I to say to him? How could I let him go away so late? and how could I let him stay where his departure would be a relief? Even I would have him gone from where he was not wanted! I saw, however, that my uncle must not have John's death at his door—that I must persuade him to stay the night. I went in, and gave him the notes, but begged him, for my love, to go to bed. In the morning, I said, I would drive him to the station.

He yielded with difficulty—but with how little suspicion that all the time I wished him gone! I went to bed only to lie listening for my uncle's return. It was long past midnight ere he came.

In the morning I sent Penny to order the phaeton, and then ran to my uncle's room, in the hope he would want to see John before he left: I was not sure he had realized that he was going.

He was neither in his bed-room nor in the study. I went to the stable. Dick was putting the horse to the phaeton. He told me he had heard his master, two hours before, saddle Thanatos, and ride away. This made me yet more anxious about him. He did not often ride out early—seldom indeed after coming

home late! Things seemed to threaten complication!

John looked so much better, and was so eager after the projected interview with his lawyer, that I felt comforted concerning him. I did not tell him what my uncle had said the night before. It would, I felt, be wrong to mention what my uncle might wish forgotten; and as I did not know what he meant, it could serve no end. We parted at the station very much as if we had been married half a century, and I returned home to brood over the strange things that had happened. But before long I found myself in a weltering swamp of futile speculation, and turned my thoughts perforce into other channels, lest I should lose the power of thinking, and be drowned in reverie: my uncle had taught me that reverie is Phaeton in the chariot of Apollo.

The weary hours passed, and my uncle did not come. I had never before been really uneasy at his longest absence; but now I was far more anxious about him than about John. Alas, through me fresh trouble had befallen my uncle as well as John! When the night came, I went to bed, for I was very tired: I must keep myself strong, for something unfriendly was on its way and I must be able to meet it! I knew well I should not sleep until I heard the sounds of his arrival: those came about one o'clock, and in a moment I was dreaming.

In my dream I was still awake, and still watching for my uncle's return. I heard the sound of Death's hoofs, not on the stones of the yard, but on the gravel before the house, and coming round the house till under my window. There he stopped, and I heard my uncle call to me to come down: he wanted me. In my dream I was a child; I sprang out of bed, ran from the house on my bare feet, jumped into his down-stretched arms, and was in a moment seated in front of him. Death gave a great plunge, and went off like the wind, cleared the gate in a flying stride, and rushed up the hill to the heath. The wind was blowing behind us furiously: I could hear it roaring, but did not feel it, for it could not overtake us; we outstripped and kept ahead of it; if for a moment we slackened speed, it fell upon us raging.

We came at length to the pool near the heart of the heath, and I wondered that, at the speed we were making, we had been such a time in reaching it. It was the dismalest spot, with its crumbling peaty banks, and its water brown as tea. Tradition declared it had no bottom—went down into nowhere.

"Here," said my uncle, bringing his horse to a sudden halt, "we had a terrible battle once, Death and I, with the worm that lives in this hole. You know what worm it is, do you not?"

I had heard of the worm, and any time I happened,

in galloping about the heath, to find myself near the pool, the thought would always come back with a fresh shudder—what if the legend were a true one, and the worm was down there biding his time! but anything more about the worm I had never heard.

"No, uncle," I answered; "I don't know what worm it is."

"Ah," he answered, with a sigh, "if you do not take the more care, little one, you will some day learn, not what the worm is called, but what it is! The worm that lives there, is the worm that never dies."

I gave a shriek; I had never heard of the horrible creature before—so it seemed in my dream. To think of its being so near us, and never dying, was too terrible.

"Don't be frightened, little one," he said, pressing me closer to his bosom. "Death and I killed it. Come with me to the other side, and you will see it lying there, stiff and stark."

"But, uncle," I said, "how can it be dead—how can you have killed it, if it never dies?"

"Ah, that is the mystery!" he returned. "But come and see. It was a terrible fight. I never had such a fight—or dear old Death either. But she's dead now! It was worth living for, to make away with such a monster!"

We rode round the pool, cautiously because of the crumbling banks, to see the worm lie dead. On and on we rode. I began to think we must have ridden many times round the hole.

"I wonder where it can be, uncle!" I said at length.

"We shall come to it very soon," he answered.

"But," I said, "mayn't we have ridden past it without seeing it?"

He laughed a loud and terrible laugh.

"When once you have seen it, little one," he replied, "you too will laugh at the notion of having ridden past it without seeing it. The worm that never dies is hardly a thing to escape notice!"

We rode on and on. All at once my uncle threw up his hands, dropping the reins, and with a fearful cry covered his face.

"It is gone! I have not killed it! No, I have *not!* It is here! it is here!" he cried, pressing his hand to his heart. It is here, and it *was* here all the time I thought it dead! What will become of me! I am lost, lost!"

At the word, old Death gave a scream, and laying himself out, flew with all the might of his swift limbs to get away from the place. But the wind, which was behind us as we came, now stormed in our faces; and presently I saw we should never reach home, for,

with all Death's fierce endeavor, we moved but an inch or two in the minute, and that with a killing struggle.

"Little one," said my uncle, "if you don't get down we shall all be lost. I feel the worm rising. It is your weight that keeps poor Death from making any progress."

I turned my head, leaning past my uncle, so as to see behind him. A long neck, surmounted by a head of indescribable horror, was slowly rising straight up out of the middle of the pool. It should not catch them! I slid down by my uncle's leg. The moment I touched the ground and let go, away went Death, and in an instant was out of sight. I was not afraid. My heart was lifted up with the thought that I was going to die for my uncle and old Death. The red worm was on the bank. It was crawling toward me. I went to meet it. It sprang from the ground, threw itself upon me, and twisted itself about me. It was a human embrace, the embrace of some one unknown that loved me.

I awoke and left the dream. But the dream never left me.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE EVIL DRAWS NIGHER.

I ROSE early, and went to my uncle's room. He was awake, but complained of headache. I took him a cup of tea, and at his request left him.

About noon Martha brought me a letter where I sat alone in the drawing-room. I carried it to my uncle. He took it with a trembling hand, read it, and fell back with his eyes closed. I ran for brandy.

"Don't be frightened, little one," he called after me. "I don't want anything."

"Won't you tell me what is the matter, uncle?" I said, returning. "Is it necessary I should be kept ignorant?"

"Not at all, my little one."

"Don't you think, uncle," I dared to continue, forgetting in my love all difference of years, "that, whatever it be that troubles us, it must be better those who love us should know it? Is there some good in a secret after all?"

"None, my darling," he answered. "The thing

that made me talk to you so against secrets when you were a child, was, that I had one myself—one that was, and is, eating the heart out of me. But that woman shall not know and you be ignorant! I will not have a secret with *her!*—Leave me now, please, little one."

I rose at once.

"May I take the letter with me, uncle?" I asked.

He rubbed his forehead with a still trembling hand. The trembling of that beloved hand filled me with such a divine sense of pity, that for the first time I seemed to know God, causing in me that consciousness! The whole human mother was roused in me for my uncle. I would die, I would kill to save him! The worm was welcome to swallow me! My very being was a well of loving pity, pouring itself out over that trembling hand.

He took up the letter, gave it to me, and turned his face away with a groan. I left the room in strange exaltation—the exaltation of merest love.

I went to the study, and there read the hateful letter.

Here it is. Having transcribed it, I shall destroy it.

"Sir,—For one who persists in coming between a woman and her son, who will blame the mother if she

cast aside forbearance! I would have spared you as hitherto; I will spare you no longer. You little thought when you crossed me who I was—the one in the world in whose power you lay! I would perish everlastingly rather than permit one of my blood to marry one of yours. My words are strong; you are welcome to call them unladylike; but you shall not doubt what I mean. You know perfectly that, if I denounce you as a murderer, I can prove what I say; and as to my silence for so many years, I am able thoroughly to account for it. I shall give you no further warning. You know where my son is: if he is not in my house within two days, I shall have you arrested. *I have made up my mind.*

"LUCRETIA CAIRNEDGE.

"Rising-Manor, July 15, 18—."

"Whoever be the father, she's the mother of lies!' I exclaimed.—"My uncle—the best and gentlest of men, a murderer!"

I laughed aloud in my indignation and wrath.

But, though the woman was a liar, she must have something to say with a show of truth! How else would she dare intimidation with such a man? How else could her threat have so wrought upon my uncle? What did she know, or imagine she knew? What could be the something on which she founded her lie?—

That my uncle was going to tell me, nor did I dread hearing his story. No revelation would lower him in my eyes! Of that I was confident. But I little thought how long it would be before it came, or what a terrible tale it would prove.

I ran down the stair with the vile paper in my hand.

"The wicked woman!" I cried. "If she *be* John's mother, I don't care: she's a devil and a liar!"

"Hush, hush, little one!" said my uncle, with a smile in which the sadness seemed to intensify the sweetness; "you do not *know* anything against her! You do not *know* she is a liar!"

"There are things, uncle, one knows without knowing!"

"What if I said she told no lie?"

"I should say she was a liar although she told no lie. My uncle is not what she threatens to say he is!"

"But men have repented, and grown so different you would not know them: how can you tell it has not been so with me? I may have been a bad man once, and grown better!"

"I know you are trying to prepare me for what you think will be a shock, uncle!" I answered; "but I want no preparing. Out with your worst! I defy you!"

Ah me, confident! But I had not to repent of my confidence!

My uncle gave a great sigh. He looked as if there was nothing for him now but to tell all. Evidently he shrank from the task.

He put his hand over his eyes, and said slowly:

"You belong to a world, little one, of which you know next to nothing. More than Satan have fallen as lightning from heaven!"

He lay silent so long that I was constrained to speak again.

"Well, uncle dear," I said, "are you not going to tell me?"

"I can not," he answered.

There was absolute silence for, I should think, about twenty minutes. I could not and would not urge him to speak. What right had I to rouse a killing effort! He was not bound to tell *me* anything! But I mourned the impossibility of doing my best for him, poor as that best might be.

"Do not think, my darling," he said at last, and laid his hand on my head as I knelt beside him, "that I have the least difficulty in trusting you; it is only in telling you. I would trust you with my eternal soul. You can see well enough there is something terrible to tell for would I not otherwise laugh to scorn the threat of that bad woman? No one on the earth

has so little right to say what she knows of me. Yet I do share a secret with her which feels as if it would burst my heart. I wish it would. That would open the one way out of all my trouble. Believe me, little one, if any ever needed God, I need him. I need the pardon that goes hand in hand with righteous judgment, the pardon of him who alone can make lawful excuse."

"May God be your judge, uncle, and neither man nor woman!"

"I do not think *you* would altogether condemn me, little one, much as I loathe myself—terribly as I deserve condemnation."

"Condemn you, uncle! I want to know all, just to show you that nothing can make the least difference. If you were as bad as that bad woman says, you should find there was one of your own blood who knew what love meant. But I know you are good, uncle, whatever you may have done."

"Little one, you comfort me," sighed my uncle. "I can not tell you this thing, for when I had told it, I should want to kill myself more than ever. But neither can I bear that you should not know it. I will *not* have a secret with that woman. I have always intended to tell you everything. I have the whole fearful story set down for your eyes—and those of any you may wish to see it: I can not speak the

words into your ears. The paper I will give you now; but you will not open it until I give you leave."

"Certainly not, uncle."

"If I should die before you have read it, I permit and desire you to read it. I know your loyalty so well, that I believe you would not look at it even after my death, if I had not given you permission. There are those who treat the dead as if they had no more rights of any kind. 'Get away to Hades,' they say; 'you are nothing now.' But you will not behave so to your uncle, little one! When the time comes for you to read my story, remember that I *now*, in preparation for the knowledge that will give you, ask you to pardon me *then* for all the pain it will cause you and your husband—John being that husband. I have tried to do my best for you, Orbie: how much better I might have done had I had a clear conscience, God only knows. It may be that I was the tenderer uncle that I could not be a better one."

He hid his face in his hands and burst into a tempest of weeping.

It was terrible to see the man to whom I had all my life looked with a reverence that prepared me for knowing the great Father, weeping like a bitterly repentant and self-abhorrent child. It seemed sacrilege to be present. I felt as if my eyes, only for seeing him thus, deserved the ravens to pick them out.

I could not contain myself. I rose and threw my arms about him, got close to him as a child to her mother, and, as soon as the passion of my love would let me, sobbed out:

"Uncle! darling uncle! I love you more than ever! I did not know before that I could love so much! I could *kill* that woman with my own hands! I wish I had killed her when I pulled her down that day! It is right to kill poisonous creatures: she is worse than any snake!"

He smiled a sad little smile, and shook his head. Then first I seemed to understand a little. A dull flash went through me.

I stood up, drew back, and gazed at him. My eyes fixed themselves on his. I stared into them. He had ceased to weep, and lay regarding me with calm response.

"You don't mean, uncle,—"

"Yes, little one, I do. That woman was the cause of the action for which she threatens to denounce me as a murderer. I do not say she intended to bring it about; but none the less was she the consciously wicked and willful cause of it.—And you will marry her son, and be her daughter!" he added, with a groan as of one in unutterable despair.

I sprang back from him. My very proximity was a pollution to him while he believed such a thing of me!

"Never, uncle, never!" I cried. "How can you think so ill of one who loves you as I do! I will denounce *her!* She will be hanged, and we shall be at peace!"

"And John?" said my uncle.

"John must look after himself!" I answered, fiercely. "Because he chooses to have such a mother, am I to bring her a hair's-breadth nearer to my uncle! Not for any man that ever was born! John must discard his mother, or he and I are as we were! A mother! she is a hyena, a shark, a monster! Uncle, she is a *devil!*—I don't care! It is true; and what is true is the right thing to say. I will go to her, and tell her to her face what she is!"

I turned and made for the door. My heart felt as big as the biggest man's.

"If she kill you, little one," said my uncle, quietly, "I shall be left with nobody to take care of me!"

I burst into fresh tears. I saw that I was a fool, and could do nothing.

"Poor John!—To have such a mother!" I sobbed. Then in a rage of rebellion I cried, "I don't believe she *is* his mother! Is it possible now, uncle—does it stand to reason, that such a pestilence of a woman should ever have borne such a child as my John? I don't, I can't, I won't believe it!"

"I am afraid there are mysteries in the world quite

as hard to explain!" replied my uncle. "I confess, if I had known who was his mother, I should have been far from ready to yield my consent to your engagement."

"What does it matter?" I said. "Of course I shall not marry him!"

"Not marry him, child!" returned my uncle. "What are you thinking of? Is the poor fellow to suffer for, as well as by, the sins of his mother?"

"If you think, uncle, that I will bring you into any kind of relation with that horrible woman, if the worst of it were only that you would have to see her once because she was my husband's mother, you are mistaken. She to threaten you if you did not send back her son, as if John were a horse you had stolen! You have been the angel of God about me all the days of my life, but even to please you, I can not consent to despise myself. Besides, you know what she threatens!"

"She shall not hurt me. I will take care of myself for your sakes. Your life shall not be clouded by scandal about your uncle."

"How are you to prevent it, uncle dear? Fulfill her threat or not, she would be sure to talk!"

"When she sees it can serve no purpose, she will hardly risk reprisals."

"She will certainly not risk them when she finds we have said good-by."

"But how would that serve me, little one? What! would you heap on your uncle's conscience, already overburdened, the misery of keeping two lovely lovers apart? I will tell you what I have resolved upon. I will have no more secrets from you, Orba. Oh, how I thank you, dearest, for not casting me off!"

Again I threw myself on my knees by his bed.

"Uncle," I cried, my heart ready to break with the effort to show itself, "if I did not now love you more than ever, I should deserve to be cast out, and trodden under foot!—What do you think of doing?"

"I shall leave the country, not to return while the woman lives."

"I'm ready, uncle," I said, springing to my feet; "—at least I shall be in a few minutes!"

"But hear me out, little one," he rejoined, with a smile of genuine pleasure; "you don't know half my plan yet. How am I to live abroad, if my property go to rack and ruin? Listen, and don't say anything till I have done; I have no time to lose; I must get up at once.—As soon as I am on board at Dover for Paris, you and John must get yourselves married the first possible moment, and settle down here—to make the best of the farm you can, and send me what you can spare. I shall not want much, and John will

have his own soon. I know you will be good to Martha!"

"John may take the farm if he will. It would be immeasurably better than living with his mother. For me, I am going with my uncle. Why, uncle, I should be miserable in John's very arms and you out of the country for our sakes! Is there to be nobody in the world but husbands, forsooth! I should love John ever so much more away with you and my duty, than if I had him with me, and you a wanderer. How happy I shall be, thinking of John, and taking care of you!"

He let me run on. When I stopped at length—

"In any case," he said with a smile, "we can not do much till I am dressed!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN ENCOUNTER.

I LEFT my uncle's room, and went to my own, to make what preparation I could for going abroad with him. I got out my biggest box, and put in all my best things, and all the trifles I thought I could not do without. Then, as there was room, I put in things I could do without, which yet would be useful. Still there was room; the contents would shake about in the continent! So I began to put in things I should like to have, but which were neither necessary nor useful. Before I had got these in, the box was more than full, and some of them had to be taken out again. In choosing which were to go and which to be left, I lost time; but I did not know anything about the trains, and expected to be ready before my uncle, who would call me when he thought fit.

My thoughts also hindered my hands. Very likely I should never marry John; I would not heed that; he would be mine all the same! but to promise that I would not marry him, because it suited such a

mother's plans to marry him to some one else—that I would not do to save my life! I would have done it to save my uncle's, but our exile would render it unnecessary!

At last I was ready, and went to find my uncle, reproaching myself that I had been so long away from him. Besides, I ought to have been helping him to pack, for neither he nor his arm was quite strong yet. With a heartful of apology, I sought his room. He was not there. Neither was he in the study. I went all over the house, and then to the stable; but he was nowhere, neither had any one seen him. And Death was gone too!

The truth burst upon me: I was to see him no more while that terrible woman lived! No one was to know whither he had gone! He had given himself for my happiness! Vain intention! I should never be happy! To be in Paradise without him, would not be to be in heaven!

John was in London; I could do nothing! I threw myself on my uncle's bed, and lay lost in despair! Even if John were with me, and we found him, what could we do? I knew it now as impossible for him to separate us that he might be unmolested, as it was for us to accept the sacrifice of his life that we might be happy. I knew that John's way would be to leave everything and go with me and my uncle, only we

could not live upon nothing—least of all in a strange land! Martha, to be sure, could manage well enough with the bailiff, but John could not burden my uncle, and could not lay his hands on his own! In the mean time my uncle was gone we knew not whither! I was like one lost on the dark mountains.—If only John would come to take part in my despair!

With a sudden agony, I reproached myself that I had made no attempt to overtake my uncle. It was true I did not know, for nobody could tell me, in what direction he had gone; but Zoe's instinct might have sufficed where mine was useless! Zoe might have followed and found Thanatos! It was hopeless now!

But I could no longer be still. I got Zoe, and fled to the moor. All the rest of the day I rode hither and thither, nor saw a single soul on its wide expanse. The very life seemed to have gone out of it. When most we take comfort in loneliness, it is because there is some one behind it.

The sun was set and the twilight deepening toward night when I turned to ride home. I had eaten nothing since breakfast, and though not hungry, was thoroughly tired. Through the great dark hush, where was no sound of water, though here and there, like lurking live thing, it lay about me, I rode slowly back. My fasting and the dusk made everything in turn take a

shape that was not its own. I seemed to be haunted by things unknown. I have sometimes thought whether the spirits that love solitary places may not delight in appropriating, for embodiment momentary and partial, such a present shape as may happen to fit one of their passing moods; whether it is always the *mere* gnarled, crone-like hawthorn, or misshapen rock, that, between the wanderer and the pale sky, suddenly appals him with the sense of *another*. The hawthorn, the rock, the dead pine, is indeed there, but is it alone there?

Some such thought was, I remember, in my mind, when, about half-way from home, I grew aware of something a little way in front that rose between me and a dark part of the sky. It seemed a figure on a huge horse. My first thought, very naturally, was of my uncle; the next, of the great gray horse and his rider that John and I had both seen on the moor. I confess to a little awe at the thought of the latter; but I am somehow made so as to be capable of awe without terror, and of the latter I felt nothing. The composite figure drew nearer: it was a woman on horseback. Immediately I recalled the adventure of my childhood; and then remembered that John had said his mother always rode the biggest horse she could find: could that shape, towering in the half-dark before me, be indeed my deadly enemy—she

who, my uncle had warned me, would kill me if she had the chance? A fear far other than ghostly invaded me, and for a moment I hesitated whether to ride on, or turn and make for some covert, until she should have passed from between me and my home. I hope it was something better than pride that made me hold on my way. If the wicked, I thought, flee when no man pursueth, it ill becomes the righteous to flee before the wicked. By this time it was all but dark night, and I had a vague hope of passing unquestioned: there had been a good deal of rain, and we were in a very marshy part of the heath, so that I did not care to leave the track. But, just ere we met, the lady turned her great animal right across the way, and there made him stand.

"Ah," thought I, "what could Zoe do in a race with that terrible horse!"

He seemed made of the darkness, and rose like the figure-head of a frigate above a yacht.

"Show me the way to Rising," said his rider.

The hard bell voice was unmistakable.

"When you come where the track forks," I began.

She interrupted me.

"How can I distinguish in the dark?" she returned angrily. "Go on before, and show me the way."

Now I had good reason for thinking she knew the

way perfectly well; and still better reason for declining to go on in front of her.

"You must excuse me," I said, "for it is time I were at home; but if you will turn and ride on in front of me, I will show you a better, though rather longer way to Rising."

"Go on, or I will ride you down," she cried, turning her horse's head toward me, and making her whip hiss through the air.

The sound of it so startled Zoe, that she sprang aside, and was off the road a few yards before I could pull her up. Then I saw the woman urging her horse to follow. I knew the danger she was in, and, though tempted to be silent, called to her with a loud warning.

"Mind what you are doing, Lady Cairnedge!" I cried. "The ground here will not carry the weight of a horse like yours."

But as I spoke he gave in, and sprang across the ditch at the wayside. There, however, he stood.

"You think to escape me," she answered, in a low, yet clear voice, with a cat-like growl in it. "You make a mistake!"

"Your ladyship will make a worse mistake if you follow me here," I replied.

Her only rejoinder was a cut with her whip to her horse, which had stood motionless since taking his

unwilling jump. I spoke to Zoe; she bounded off like a fawn. I pulled her up, and looked back.

Lady Cairnedge continued urging her horse. I heard and saw her whipping him furiously. She had lost her temper.

I warned her once more, but she persisted.

"Then you must take the consequences!" I said; and Zoe and I made for the road, but at a point nearer home.

Had she not been in a passion, she would have seen that her better way was to return to the road, and intercept us; but her anger blinded her both to that and to the danger of the spot she was in.

We had not gone far when we heard behind us the soft plunging and sucking of the big hoofs through the boggy ground. I looked over my shoulder. There was the huge bulk, like Wordsworth's Peak, towering between us and the stars!

"Go, Zoe!" I shrieked.

She bounded away. The next moment, a cry came from the horse behind us, and I heard the woman say "Good God!" I stopped, and peered through the dark. I saw something, but it was no higher above the ground than myself. Terror seized me. I turned and rode back.

"My stupid animal has bogged himself!" said Lady Cairnedge quietly.

Deep in the dark watery peat, as thick as porridge, her horse gave a fruitless plunge or two and sank lower.

"For God's sake," I cried, "get off! your weight is sinking the poor animal! You will smother him!"

"It will serve him right," she said venomously, and gave the helpless creature a cut across the ears.

"You will go down with him, if you do not make haste," I insisted.

Another moment and she stood erect on the back of the slowly sinking horse.

"Come and give me your hand," she cried.

"You want to smother me with him! I think I will not," I answered. "You can get on the solid well enough. I will ride home and bring help for your horse, poor fellow! Stay by him, talk to him, and keep him as quiet as you can. If he go on struggling, nothing will save him."

She replied with a contemptuous laugh.

I got to the road as quickly as possible, and galloped home as fast as Zoe could touch and lift. Ere I reached the stable-yard, I shouted so as to bring out all the men. When I told them a lady had her horse fast in the bog, they bustled and coiled ropes, put collars and chains on four draught horses, lighted several lanterns, and set out with me. I knew the

spot perfectly. No moment was lost either in getting ready, or in reaching the place.

Neither the lady nor her horse was to be seen.

A great horror wrapped me round. I felt a murderess. She might have failed to spring to the bank of the hole for lack of the hand she had asked me to reach out! Or her habit might have been entangled, so that she fell short, and went to the bottom—to be found, one day, hardly changed, by the side of her peat-embalmed stead!—no ill-fitting fate for her, but a ghastly thing to have a hand in!

She might, however, be on her way to Rising on foot! I told two of the men to mount a pair of the horses, and go with me on the chance of rendering her assistance.

We took the way to Rising, and had gone about two miles when we saw her, through the starlight, walking steadily along the track. I rode up to her, and offered her one of the cart-horses: I would not have trusted my Zoe with her any more than with an American lion that lives upon horses. She declined the proffer with quiet scorn. I offered her one or both men to see her home, but the way in which she refused their service made them glad they had not to go with her. We had no choice, therefore turned and left her to get home as she might.

Not until we were on the way back did it occur to me that I had not asked Martha whether she knew anything about my uncle's departure. She was never one to volunteer news, and, besides, would naturally think me in his confidence!

I found she knew nothing of our expedition, as no one had gone into the house—had only heard the horses and voices, and wondered. I was able to tell her what had happened; but the moment I began to question her as to any knowledge of my uncle's intentions, my strength gave way, and I burst into tears.

"Don't be silly, Belorba!" cried Martha, almost severely. "You an engaged young lady, and tied so to your uncle's apron-strings that you cry the minute he's out of your sight! You didn't cry when Mr. Day left you!"

"No," I answered; "he was going only for a day or two!"

"And for how many is your uncle gone?"

"That is what I want to know. He means to be away a long time, I fear."

"Then it's nothing but your fancy sets you crying!—But I'll just see!" she returned. "I shall know by the money he left for the housekeeping! Only I won't budge till I see you eat."

Faint for want of food, I had no appetite. But I

began at once to eat, and she left me to fetch the money he had given her as he went.

She came back with a pocket-book, opened it, and looked into it. Then she looked at me. Her expression was of unmistakable dismay. I took the pocket-book from her hand: it was full of notes!

I learned afterward, that it was his habit to have money in the house, in readiness for some possible sudden need of it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ANOTHER VISION.

THAT same night, within an hour, to my unspeakable relief, John came home—at least he came to me, who he always said was his home. It was rather late, but we went out to the wilderness, where I had a good cry on his shoulder; after which I felt better, and hope began to show signs of life in me. I never asked him how he had got on in London, but told him all that had happened since he went. It was worse than painful to tell him about his mother's letter, and what my uncle told me in consequence of it, also my personal adventure with her so lately; but I felt I must hide nothing. If a man's mother is a devil, it is well he should know it.

He sat like a sleeping hurricane while I spoke, saying never a word. When I had ended—

"Is that all?" he asked.

"It is all, John: is it not enough?" I answered.

"It is enough," he cried, with an oath that fright-

ened me, and started to his feet. The hurricane was awake.

I threw my arms round him.

"Where are you going?" I said.

"To *her*," he answered.

"What for?"

"To *kill* her," he said—then threw himself on the ground, and lay motionless at my feet.

I kept silence. I thought with myself he was fighting the nature his mother had given him.

He lay still for about two minutes, then quietly rose.

"Good-night, dearest!" he said; "—no; good-by! It is not fit the son of such a mother should marry any honest woman."

"I beg your pardon, John!" I returned; "I hope *I* may have a word in the matter! If I choose to marry you, what right have you to draw back? Let us leave alone the thing that has to be, and remember that my uncle must not be denounced as a murderer! Something must be done. That he is beyond personal danger for the present is something; but is he to be the talk of the country?"

"No harm shall come to him," said John. "If I don't throttle the tigress, I'll muzzle her. I know how to deal with her. She has learned at least, that what her stupid son says, he does! I shall make her

understand that, on her slightest movement to disgrace your uncle, I will marry you right off, come what may; and if she goes on, I shall get myself summoned for the defense, that, if I can say nothing for *him*, I may say something against *her*. Besides, I will tell her that, when my time comes, if I find anything amiss with her accounts, I will give her no quarter.—But, Orbie," he continued, "as I will not threaten what I may not be able to perform, you must promise not to prevent me from carrying it out."

"I promise," I said, "that, if it be necessary for your truth, I will marry you at once. I only hope she may not already have taken steps!"

"Her two days are not yet expired. I shall present myself in good time.—But I wonder you are not afraid to trust yourself alone with the son of such a mother!"

"To be what I know you, John," I answered, "and the son of that woman, shows a good angel was not far off at your birth. But why talk of angels? Whoever was your mother, God is your father!"

He made no reply beyond a loving pressure of my hand. Then he asked me whether I could lend him something to ride home upon. I told him there was an old horse the bailiff rode sometimes; I was very sorry he could not have Zoe: she had been out all day and was too tired! He said Zoe was much too

precious for a hulking fellow like him to ride, but he would be glad of the old horse.

I went to the stable with him, and saw him mount. What a determined look there was on his face! He seemed quite a middle-aged man.

I have now to tell how he fared on the moor as he rode.

It had turned gusty and rather cold, and was still a dark night. The moon would be up by and by, however, and giving light enough, he thought, before he came to the spot where his way parted company with that to Dumbleton. The moon, however, did not see fit to rise so soon as John expected her: he was not at that time quite *up* in moons, any more than in the paths across that moor.

Now as he had not an idea where his rider wanted to be carried, and as John did for a while—he confessed it—fall into a reverie or something worse, old Sturdy had to choose for himself where to go, and took a path he had often had to take some years before; nor did John discover that he was out of the way, until he felt him going steep down, and thought of Sleipner bearing Hermod to the realm of Hela. But he let him keep on, wishing to know, as he said, what the old fellow was up to. Presently, he came to a dead halt.

John had not the least notion where they were, but

I knew the spot the moment he began to describe it. By the removal of the peat on the side of a slope, the skeleton of the hill had been a little exposed, and had for a good many years been blasted for building-stones. Nothing was going on in the quarry at present. Above, it was rather a dangerous place; there was a legend of man and horse having fallen into it, and both being killed. John had never seen or heard of it.

When his horse stopped, he became aware of an indefinite sensation which inclined him to await the expected moon before attempting either to advance or return. He thought afterward it might have been some feeling of the stone about him, but at the time he took the place for an abrupt natural dip of the surface of the moor, in the bottom of which might be a pool. Sturdy stood as still as if he had been part of the quarry, stood as if never of himself would he move again.

The light slowly grew, or rather, the darkness slowly thinned. All at once John became aware that, some yards away from him, there was something whitish. A moment, and it began to move like a flitting mist through the darkness. The same instant Sturdy began to pull his feet from the ground, and move after the mist, which rose and rose until it came for a second or two between John and the sky: it was

a big white horse, with my uncle on his back: Death and he, John concluded, were out on one of their dark wanderings! His impulse, of course, was to follow them. But, as they went up the steep way, Sturdy came down on his old knees, and John got off his back to let him recover himself the easier. When they reached the level, where the moon, showing a blunt horn above the horizon, made it possible to see a little, the white horse and his rider had disappeared—in some shadow, or behind some knoll, I fancy; and John, having not the least notion in what part of the moor he was, or in which direction he ought to go, threw the reins on the horse's neck. Sturdy brought him back almost to his stable, before he knew where he was. Then he turned into the road, for he had had enough of the moor, and took the long way home.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MOTHER AND SON.

In the morning he breakfasted alone. A son with a different sort of mother, might then have sought her in her bed-room; but John had never within his memory seen his mother in her bed-room, and, after what he had heard the night before, could hardly be inclined to go there to her now. Within half an hour however, a message was brought him, requesting his presence in her ladyship's dressing-room.

He went with his teeth set.

"Whose horse is that in the stable, John?" she said, the moment their eyes met.

"Mr. Whichcote's, madam," answered John: *mother* he could not say.

"You intend to keep up your late relations with those persons?"

"I do."

"You mean to marry the hussy?"

"I mean to marry the lady to whom you give that

epithet. There are those who think it not quite safe for you to call other people names!"

She rose and came at him as if she would strike him. John stood motionless. Except a woman had a knife in her hand, he said, he would not even avoid a blow from her. "A woman can't hurt you much; she can only break your heart!" he said. "My mother would not know a heart when she had broken it!" he added.

He stood and looked at her.

She turned away, and sat down again. I think she felt the term of her power at hand.

"The man told you, then, that if you did not return immediately, I would get him into trouble?"

"He has told me nothing. I have not seen him for some days. I have been to London."

"You should have contrived your story better: you contradict yourself."

"I am not aware that I do."

"You have the man's horse!"

"His horse is in my stable; he is not himself at home."

"Fled from justice! It shall not avail him!"

"It may avail you though, madam! It is sometimes prudent to let well alone. May I not suggest that a hostile attempt on your part, might lead to awkward revelations?"

"Ah, where could the seed of slander find fitter soil than the heart of a son with whom the prayer of his mother is powerless!"

To all appearance she had thoroughly regained her composure, and looked at him with a quite artistic reproach.

"The prayer of a mother that never prayed in her life!" returned John; "—of a woman that never had an anxiety but for herself!—I don't believe you are my mother. If I was born of you, there must have been some juggling with my soul in antenatal regions! I disown you!" cried John with indignation that grew as he gave it issue.

Her face turned ashy white; but whether it was from conscience or fear, or only with rage, who could tell!

She was silent for a moment. Then again recovering herself—

"And what, pray, would you make of me?" she said coolly. "Your slave?"

"I would have you an honest woman! I would die for that!—Oh, mother! mother!" he cried bitterly.

"That being apparently impossible, what else does my dutiful son demand of his mother?"

"That she should leave me unmolested in my choice of a wife. It does not seem to me an unreasonable demand!"

"Nor does it seem to me an unreasonable reply, that any mother would object to her son's marrying a girl whose father she could throw into a felon's prison with a word!"

"That the girl does not happen to be the daughter of the gentleman you mean, signifies nothing: I am very willing she should pass for such. But take care. He is ready to meet whatever you have to say. He is not gone for his own sake, but to be out of the way of our happiness—to prevent you from blasting us with a public scandal. If you proceed in your purpose, we shall marry at once, and make your scheme futile."

"How are you to live, pray?"

"Madam, that is my business," answered John.

"Are you aware of the penalty on your marrying without my consent?" pursued his mother.

"I am not. I do not believe there is any such penalty."

"You dare me?"

"I do."

"Marry, then, and take the consequences."

"If there were any, you would not thus warn me of them."

"John Day, you are no gentleman!'

"I shall not ask your definition of a gentleman, madam."

"Your father was a clown!"

"If my father were present, he would show himself a gentleman by making you no answer. If you say a word more against him, I will leave the room."

"I tell you your father was a clown and a fool—like yourself!"

John turned and went to the stable, had old Sturdy saddled, and came to me.

On his way over the heath, he spent an hour trying to find the place where he had been the night before, but without success. I presume that Sturdy, with his nose in that direction, preferred his stall, and did not choose to find the quarry. As often as John left him to himself, he went homeward. When John turned his head in another direction, he would set out in that direction, but gradually work round for the farm.

John told me all I have just set down, and then we talked.

"I have already begun to learn farming," I said.

"You are the right sort, Orbie!" returned John. "I shall be glad to teach you anything I know."

"If you will show me how a farmer keeps his books," I answered, "that I may understand the bailiff's, I shall be greatly obliged to you. As to the dairy, and poultry-yard, and that kind of thing, Martha can teach me as well as any."

"I'll do my best," said John.

"Come along then, and have a talk with Simmons! I feel as if I could bear anything after what you saw last night. My uncle is not far off! He is somewhere about with the rest of the angels!"

CHAPTER XXX.

ONCE MORE, AND YET AGAIN.

From that hour I set myself to look after my uncle's affairs. It was the only way to endure his absence. Working for him, thinking what he would like, trying to carry it out, referring every perplexity to him and imagining his answer, he grew so much dearer to me, that his absence was filled with hope. My heart being in it, I had soon learned enough of the management to perceive where, in more than one quarter, improvement, generally in the way of saving, was possible: I do not mean by any lowering of wages; my uncle would have conned me small thanks for such improvement as that! Neither was it long before I began to delight in the feeling that I was in partnership with the powers of life; that I had to do with the operation and government and preservation of things created; that I was doing a work to which I was set by the Highest; that I was at least a floor-sweeper in the house of God, a servant for the good of his world. Existence had grown fuller and richer;

I had come like a toad out of a rock, into a larger, therefore truer universe, in which I had work to do that was wanted. Had I not been thus expanded and strengthened, how should I have patiently waited while hearing nothing of my uncle!

It was not many days before John began to press me to let my uncle have his way: where was the good any longer, he said, in our not being married? But I could not endure the thought of being married without my uncle: it would not seem real marriage without his giving me to my husband. And when John was convinced that I could not be prevailed upon, I found him think the more of me because of my resolve, and my persistency in it. For John was always reasonable, and that is more than can be said of most men. Some, indeed, who are reasonable enough with men, are often unreasonable with women. If in course of time the management of affairs be taken from men and given to women—which may God for our sakes forbid—it will be because men have made it necessary by their arrogance. But when they have been kept down long enough to learn that they are not the lords of creation one bit more than the weakest woman, I hope they will be allowed to take the lead again, lest women should become what men were, and go strutting in their importance. Only the true man knows the true woman; only the true woman

knows the true man: the difficulty between men and women comes all from the prevailing selfishness, that is, untruth, of both. Who, while such is their character, would be judge or divider between them, save one of their own kind? When such ceases to be their character, they will call for no umpire.

John lived in his own house with his mother, but they did not meet. His mother managed his affairs, to whose advantage I need hardly say; and John helped me to manage my uncle's, to the advantage of all concerned. Every morning he came to see me, and every night rode back to his worse than dreary home. At my earnest request, he had a strong bolt put on his bed-room door, the use of which he promised me never to neglect. At my suggestion too, he let it be known that he had always a brace of loaded pistols within his reach, and showed himself well practiced in shooting with them. I feared much for John.

After I no longer only believed, but knew the bailiff trustworthy, and had got some few points in his management bettered, I ceased giving so much attention to details, and allowed myself more time to read and walk and ride with John. I laid myself out to make up to him, as much as ever I could, for the miserable lack of any home-life. At Rising he had not the least sense of comfort or even security. He could never tell what his mother might not be plotting

against him. He had a very strong close box made for Leander, and always locked him up in it at night, never allowing one of the men there to touch him. The horse had all the attention any master could desire, when, having locked his box behind him, he brought him over to us in the morning.

One lovely, cold day, in the month of March, with ice on some of the pools, and the wind blowing from the north, I mounted Zoe to meet John midway on the moor, and had gone about two thirds of the distance, when I saw him, as I thought, a long way to my right, and concluded he had not expected me so soon, and had gone exploring. I turned aside, therefore, to join him; but had gone only a few yards when from some shift in the shadow, or some change in his position with regard to the light, I saw that the horse was not John's; it was a gray, or rather, a white horse. Could the rider be my uncle? Even at that distance I almost thought I recognized him. It must indeed have been he John saw at the quarry! He was not gone abroad! He had been all this long time lingering about the place, lest ill should befall us! "Just like him!" said my heart, as I gave Zoe the rein, and she sprang off at her best speed. But after riding some distance, I lost sight of the horseman, whoever he was, and then saw that, if I did not turn at once, I should not keep my appointment with John. Of course had I *believed*

it was my uncle, I should have followed and followed; and the incident would not have been worth mentioning, for gray horses are not so uncommon that there might not be one upon the heath at any moment, but for something more I saw the same night.

It was bright moonlight. I had taken down a curtain of my window to mend, and the moon shone in so that I could not sleep. My thoughts were all with my uncle—wondering what he was about; whether he was very dull; whether he wanted me much; whether he was going about Paris, or haunting the moor that stretched far into the distance from where I lay. Perhaps at that moment he was out there in the moonlight, would be there alone, in the cold, wide night, while I slept! The thought made me feel lonely myself: one is indeed apt to feel lonely when sleepless; and as the moon was having a night of it, or rather making a day of it, all alone with herself, why should we not keep each other a little company? I rose, drew the other curtain of my window aside, and looked out.

I have said that the house lay on the slope of a hollow: from whichever window of it you glanced, you saw the line of your private horizon either close to you, or but a little way off. If you wanted an outlook, you must climb: and then you were on the moor.

From my window I could see the more distant

edge of the hollow: looking thitherward, I saw against the sky the shape of a man on horseback. Not for a moment could I doubt it was my uncle. The figure was plainly his. My heart seemed to stand still with awe, or was it with intensity of gladness? Perhaps every night he was thus near me while I slept—a heavenly sentinel patrolling the house—the visible one of a whole camp unseen, of horses of fire and chariots of fire. So entrancing was the notion, that I stood there a little child, a mere incarnate love, the tears running down my cheeks for very bliss.

But presently my mood changed: what had befallen him? When first I saw him, horse and man were standing still, and I noted nothing strange, blinded perhaps by the tears of my gladness. But presently they moved on, keeping so to the horizon-line that it was plain my uncle's object was to have the house full in view; and as thus they skirted the edge of heaven, oh, how changed he seemed! His tall figure hung bent over the pommel, his neck drooped heavily. And the horse was so thin that I seemed to see, almost to feel his bones. Poor Thanatos! he looked tired to death, and I fancied his bent knees quivering, each short slow step he took. Ah, how unlike the happy old horse that had been! I thought of Death returning home weary from the slaughter of many kings, and cast the thought away.

I thought of Death returning home on the eve of the great dawn, worn with his age-long work, pleased that at last it was over, and no more need of him: I kept that thought. Along the sky-line they held their slow way, toilsome through weakness, the rider with weary swing in the saddle, the horse with long gray neck hanging low to his hoofs, as if picking his path with purblind eyes. When his rider should collapse and fall from his back, not a step farther would he take, but stand there till he fell to pieces!

Fancy gave way to reality. I woke up, called myself hard names, and hurried on a few of my clothes. My blessed uncle out in the night and weary to dissolution, and I at a window, contemplating him like a picture! I was an evil, heartless brute!

By the time I had my shoes on, and went again to the window, he had passed out of its range. I ran to one on the stair that looked at right angles to mine: he had not yet come within its field. I stood and waited. Presently he appeared, crawling along, a gray mounted ghost, in the light that so strangely befits lovers wandering in the May of hope, and the wasted specter no less, whose imagination of the past reveals him to the eyes of men. For an instant I almost wished him dead and at rest; the next I was out of the house—then up on the moor, looking eagerly this way and that, poised on the swift feet of

love, ready to spring to his bosom. How I longed to lead him to his own warm bed, and watch by him as he slept, while the great Father kept watch over every heart in his universe. I gazed and gazed, but nowhere could I see the death-jaded horseman.

I bounded down the hill, through the wilderness and the dark alleys, and hurried to the stable. Trembling with haste I led Zoe out, sprang on her bare back, and darted off to scout the moor. Not a man or a horse or a live thing was to be seen in any direction! Once more I all but concluded I had looked on an apparition. Was my uncle dead? Had he come back thus to let me know? And was he now gone home indeed? Cold and disappointed, I returned to bed, full of the conviction that I had seen my uncle, but whether in the body or out of the body, I could not tell.

When John came, the notion of my having been out alone on the moor in the middle of the night, did not please him. He would have me promise not again, for any vision or apparition whatever, to leave the house without his company. But he could not persuade me. He asked what I would have done, if, having overtaken the horseman, I had found neither my uncle nor Death. I told him I would have given Zoe the use of her heels, when *that* horse would soon have seen the last of her. At the same time, he was

inclined to believe with me, that I had seen my uncle. His intended proximity would account, he said, for his making no arrangement to hear from me; and if he continued to haunt the moor in such fashion, we could not fail to encounter him before long. In the mean time he thought it well to show no sign of suspecting his neighborhood.

That I had seen my uncle, John was for a moment convinced when, the very next day, having gone to Wittenage, he saw Thanatos carrying Dr. Southwell, my uncle's friend. On the other hand, Thanatos looked very much alive, and in lovely condition! The doctor would not confess to knowing anything about my uncle, and expressed wonder that he had not yet returned, but said he did not mind how long he had the loan of such a horse.

Things went on as before for a while.

John began again to press me to marry him. I think it was mainly, I am sure it was in part, that I might never again ride the midnight moor—"like a witch out on her own mischievous hook," as he had once said. He knew that, if I caught sight of anything like my uncle anywhere, John or no John, I would go after it.

There was another good reason, however, besides the absence of my uncle, for our not marrying: John was not yet of legal age, and who could tell what

might not lurk in his mother's threat! Who could tell what such a woman might not have prevailed on her husband to set down in his will! I was ready enough to marry a poor man, but I was not ready to let my lover become a poor man by marrying me a few months sooner. Were we not happy enough, seeing each other every day, and mostly all day long? No doubt people talked, but why not let them talk? The mind of the many is not the mind of God! As to society, John called it an oyster of a divinity. He argued, however, that probably my uncle was keeping close until he saw us married. I answered that, if we were married, his mother would only be the more eager to have her revenge on us all, and my uncle the more careful of himself for our sakes. Anyhow, I said, I would not consent to be happier than we were, until we found him. The greater happiness I would receive only from his hand.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MY UNCLE COMES HOME.

TIME went on, and it was now the depth of a cold, miserable winter. I remember the day to which I have now come so well! It was a black day. There was such a thickness of snow in the air, that what light got through had a lost look. It was almost more like a London fog than an honest darkness of the atmosphere, bred in its own bounds. But while the light lasted, the snow did not fall. I went about the house doing what I could find to do, and wondering John did not come.

His horse had again fallen lame—this time through an accident, which made it necessary for him to stay with the poor animal long after his usual time of starting to come to me. When he did start, it was on foot, with the short winter afternoon closing in. But he knew the moor by this time nearly as well as I did.

It was quite dark when he drew near the house, which he generally entered through the wilderness and the garden. The snow had begun at last, and was

coming down in deliberate earnest. It would lie feet deep over the moor before the morning! He was thinking what a dreary tramp home it would be by the road—for the wind was threatening to wake, and in a snow-wind the moor was a place to be avoided—when he struck his foot against something soft, in the path his own feet had worn to the wilderness, and fell over it. A groan followed, and John rose with the miserable feeling of having hurt some creature. Dropping on his knees to discover what it was, he found a man almost covered with snow, and nearly insensible. He swept the snow off him, contrived to get him on his back, and brought him round to the door, for the fence would have been awkward to cross with him. Just as I began to be really uneasy at his prolonged absence, there he was, with a man on his back apparently lifeless!

I did not stop to stare or question, but made haste to help him. His burden was slipping sideways, so we lowered it on a chair, and then carried it between us into the kitchen, I holding the legs. The moment a ray of light fell upon the face, I saw it was my uncle.

I just saved myself from a scream. My heart stopped, then bumped as if it would break through. I turned sick and cold. We laid him on the sofa, but I still held on to the legs; I was half unconscious.

Martha set me on a chair, and in a moment or two I came to myself, and was able to help her. She said never a word, but was quite collected, looking every now and then in the face of her cousin with a dog-like devotion, but never stopping an instant to gaze. We got him some brandy first, then some hot milk, and then some soup. He took a little of everything we offered him. We did not ask him a single question, but, the moment he revived, carried him up the stair, and laid him in bed. Once he cast his eye about, and gave a sigh as of relief to find himself in his own room, then went off into a light doze, which, broken with starts and half-wakings, lasted until next day about noon. Either John or Martha or I was by his bedside all the time, so that he should not wake without seeing one of us near him.

But the sad thing was, that, when he did wake, he did not seem to come to himself. He never spoke, but just lay and looked out of his eyes, if indeed it was more than his eyes that looked, if indeed *he* looked out of them at all!

"He has overdone his strength!" we said to each other. "He has not been taking care of himself!—And then to have lain perhaps hours in the snow! It's a wonder he's alive!"

"He's nothing but skin and bone!" said Martha. "It will take weeks to get him up again!—And just

look at his clothes! How ever did he come nigh such! They're fit only for a beggar! They must have knocked him down and stripped him!—Look at his poor boots!" she said pitifully, taking up one of them, and stroking it with her hand. "He'll never recover it!"

"He will," I said. "Here are three of us to give him of our life! He'll soon be himself again, now that we have him!"

But my heart was like to break at the sad sight. I can not put in words what I felt.

"He would get well much quicker," said John, "if only we could tell him we were married!"

"It will do just as well to invite him to the wedding," I answered.

"I do hope he will give you away," said Martha.

"He will never give me away," I returned; "but he will give me to John. And I will not have the wedding until he is able to do that."

"You are right," said John. "And we mustn't ask him anything, or even refer to anything, till he wants to hear."

Days went and came, and still he did not seem to know quite where he was; if he did know, he seemed so content with knowing it, that he did not want to know anything more in heaven or earth. We grew very anxious about him. He did not heed a word that

Dr. Southwell said. His mind seemed as exhausted as his body. The doctor justified John's resolve, saying he must not be troubled with questions, or the least attempt to rouse his memory.

John was now almost constantly with us. One day I asked him whether his mother took any notice of his being now so seldom home at night. He answered she did not; and, but for being up to her ways, he would imagine she knew nothing at all about his doings.

"What does she do herself all day long?" I asked.

"Goes over her books, I imagine," he answered. "She knows the hour is at hand when she must render account of her stewardship, and I suppose she is getting ready to meet it;—how, I would rather not conjecture. She gives me no trouble now, and I have no wish to trouble her."

"Have you no hope of ever being on filial terms with her again?" I said.

"There can be few things more unlikely," he replied.

I was a little troubled, notwithstanding my knowledge of her and my feeling toward her, that he should regard a complete alienation from his mother with such indifference. I could not, however, balance the account between them! If she had a strong claim in the sole fact that she was his mother, how much had

she not injured him simply by not being lovable! Love unpaid is the worst possible debt; and to make it impossible to pay it, is the worst of wrongs.

But, oh, what a heart-oppression it was, that my uncle had returned so different! We were glad to have him, but how gladly would we not have let him go again to restore him to himself, even were it never more to rest our eyes upon him in this world! Dearly as I loved John, it seemed as if nothing could make me happy while my uncle remained as he was. It was a kind of cold despair to know him such impassable miles from me. I could not get near him! I went about all day with a sense not merely of loss, but of a loss that gnawed at me with a sickening pain. He never spoke. He never said *little one* to me now! He never looked in my eyes as if he loved me! He was very gentle, never complained, never even frowned, but lay there with a dead question in his eyes. We feared his mind was utterly gone.

By degrees his health returned, but apparently neither his memory, nor his interest in life. Yet he had a far-away look in his eyes, as if he remembered something, and started and turned at every opening of the door, as if he expected something. He took to wandering about the yard and the stable and the cow-house; would gaze for an hour at some animal in its stall; would watch the men thrash-

ing the corn, or twisting straw-ropes. When Dr. Southwell sent back his horse, it was in great hope that the sight of Death would wake him up; that he would recognize his old companion, jump on his back, and be well again; but my uncle only looked at him with a faint admiration, went round him and examined him as if he were a horse he thought of buying, then turned away and left him. Death was troubled at his treatment of him. He on his part showed him all the old attention, using every equine blandishment he knew; but having met with no response, he too turned slowly away, and walked to his stable. Dr. Southwell would gladly have bought him, but neither John nor I would hear of parting with him: he was almost a portion of his master! My uncle might come to himself any moment: how could we look him in the face if Death was gone from us! Besides, we loved the horse for his own sake as well as my uncle's, and John would be but too glad to ride him!

My uncle would wander over the house, up and down, but seemed to prefer the little drawing-room: I made it my special business to keep a good fire there. He never went to the study; never opened the door in the chimney-corner. He very seldom spoke, and seldomer to me than to any other. It *was* a dreary time! Our very souls had longed for him back, and thus he came to us!

Sorely I wept over the change that had passed upon the good man. He must have received some terrible shock! It was just as if his mother, John said, had got hold of him, and put a knife in his heart! It was well, however, that he was not wandering about the heath, exposed to the elements! and there was yet time for many a good thing to come! Where one *must* wait, one *can* wait

John had to learn this, for, say what he would, the idea of marrying while my uncle remained in such plight, was to me unendurable.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TWICE TWO IS ONE.

THE spring came, but brought little change in the condition of my uncle. In the month of May, Dr. Southwell advised our taking him abroad. When we proposed it to him, he passed his hand wearily over his forehead, as if he felt something wrong there, and gave us no reply. We made our preparations, and when the day arrived, he did not object to go.

We were an odd party: John and I, bachelor and spinster; my uncle, a silent, moody man, who did whatever we asked him; and the still, open-eyed Martha Moon, who, I sometimes think, understood more about it all than any of us. I could talk a little French, John a good deal of German. When we got to Paris, we found my uncle considerably at home there. When he cared to speak, he spoke like a native, and was never at a loss for word or phrase.

It was he, indeed, who took us to a quiet little hotel he knew; and when we were comfortably settled in it, he began to take the lead in all our plans. By

degrees he assumed the care and guidance of the whole party: and so well did he carry out what he had silently, perhaps almost unconsciously undertaken, that we conceived the greatest hopes of the result to himself. A mind might lie quiescent so long as it was ministered to, and hedged from cares and duties, but wake up when something was required of it! No one would have thought anything amiss with my uncle, that heard him giving his orders for the day, or acting cicerone to the little company—there for his sake, though he did not know it. How often John and I looked at each other, and how glad were our hearts! My uncle was fast coming to himself! It was like watching the dead grow alive.

One day he proposed taking a carriage and a good pair of horses, and driving to Versailles to see the palace. We agreed, and all went well. I had not, in my wildest dreams, imagined a place so grand and beautiful. We wandered about it for hours, and were just tired enough to begin thinking with pleasure of the start homeward, when we found ourselves in a very long, straight corridor. I was walking alone, a little ahead of the rest; my uncle was coming along next, but a good way behind me; a few paces behind my uncle came John with Martha, to whom he was more scrupulously attentive than to myself.

In front of me was a door, dividing the corridor in

two, apparently filled with plain plate-glass, to break the draught without obscuring the effect of the great length of the corridor, which stretched away as far on the other side as we had come on this. I paused and stood aside, leaning against the wall to wait for my uncle, and gazing listlessly out of a window opposite me. But as my uncle came nearer to open the door for us, I happened to cast my eyes again upon it, and saw, as it seemed, my uncle coming in the opposite direction; whence I concluded, of course, that I had made a mistake, and that what I had taken for a clear plate of glass, was a mirror, reflecting the corridor behind me. I looked back at my uncle with a little anxiety. My reader may remember that, when he came to fetch me from Rising, the day after I was lost on the moor, encountering a mirror at unawares, he started and nearly fell: from this occurrence, and from the absence of mirrors about the house, I had imagined in his life some painful story connected with a mirror.

Once again I saw him start, and then stand like stone. Almost immediately a marvelous light overspread his countenance, and with a cry he bounded forward. I looked again at the mirror, and there I saw the self-same light-irradiated countenance coming straight, as was natural, to meet that of which it was the reflection. Then all at once the solid foundations

of fact seemed to melt into vaporous dream, for as I saw the two figures come together, the one in the mirror, the other in the world, and was starting forward to prevent my uncle from shattering the mirror and wounding himself, the figures fell into each other's arms, and I heard two voices weeping and sobbing, as the substance and the shadow embraced.

Two men had for a moment been deceived like myself: neither glass nor mirror was there—only the frame from which a swing-door had been removed. They walked each into the arms of the other, whom they had at first each taken for himself.

They paused in their weeping, held each other at arm's-length, and gazed as in mute appeal for yet better assurance; then, smiling like two suns from opposing rain-clouds, fell again each on the other's neck, and wept anew. Neither had killed the other! Neither had lost the other! The world had been a grave-yard; it was a paradise!

We stood aside in reverence. Martha Moon's eyes glowed, but she manifested no surprise. John and I stared in utter bewilderment. The two embraced each other, kissed and hugged and patted each other, wept and murmured and laughed, then all at once, with one great sigh between them, grew aware of witnesses. They were too happy to blush, yet indeed they could not have blushed, so red were they with the fire of

heaven's own delight. Utterly unembarrassed they turned toward us—and then came a fresh astonishment, an old and new joy together out of the treasure of the divine householder: the uncle of the mirror, radiant with a joy such as I had never before beheld upon human countenance, came straight to me, cried, "Ah, little one!" took me in his arms, and embraced me with all the old tenderness. Then I knew that my own old uncle was the same as ever I had known him, the same as when I used to go to sleep in his arms.

The jubilation that followed it is impossible for me to describe; and my husband, who approves of all I have yet written, begs me not to attempt an adumbration of it.

"It would be a pity," he says, "to end a won race with a tumble-down at the post!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HALF ONE IS ONE.

I AM going to give you the whole story, but not this moment; I want to talk a little first. I need not say that I had twin uncles. They were but one man to the world; to themselves only were they a veritable two. The word *twin* means one of two that once were one. To *twin* means to *divide*, they tell me. The opposite action is, of *twain* to make one. To me as well as the world, I believe, but for the close individual contact of all my life with my uncle Edward, the two would have been but as one man. I hardly know that I felt any richer at first for having two uncles; it was long before I should have felt much poorer for the loss of uncle Edmund. Uncle Edward was to me the substance of which uncle Edmund was the shadow. But at length I learned to love him dearly through perceiving how dearly my own uncle loved him. I loved the one because he was what he was, the other because he was not that one. Creative Love commonly differentiates that it may unite; in the

case of my uncles it seemed only to have divided that it might unite. I am hardly intelligible to myself; in my mind at least I have got into a bog of confused metaphysics, out of which it is time I scrambled. What I would say is this—that what made the world not care there should be two of them, made the earth a heaven to those two. By their not being one, they were able to love, and so were one. Like twin planets they revolved around each other, and in a common orbit around God their sun. It was a beautiful thing to see how uncle Edmund revived and expanded in the light of his brother's presence, until he grew plainly himself. He had suffered more than my own uncle, and had not had an orphan child to love and be loved by.

What a drive home that was! Paris, anywhere seemed home now! I had John and my uncles; John had me and my uncle; my uncles had each other; and I suspect, if we could have looked into Martha, we should have seen that she, through her lovely unselfishness, possessed us all more than any one of us another. Oh the outbursts of gladness on the way!—the talks!—the silences! The past fell off like an ugly veil from the true face of things; the present was sunshine; the future a rosy cloud.

When we reached our hotel it was dinner-time, and John ordered champagne. He and I were hungry

as two happy children; the brothers ate little, and scarcely drank. They were too full of each other to have room for any animal need. A strange solemnity crowned and dominated their gladness. Each was to the other a Lazarus given back from the grave. But to understand the depth of their rapture, you must know their story. That of Martha and Mary and Lazarus could not have equaled it but for the presence of the Master, for neither sisters nor brother had done each other any wrong. They looked to me like men walking in a luminous mist—a mist of unspeakable suffering radiant with a joy as unspeakable—the very stuff to fashion into glorious dreams.

When we drew round the fire, for the evenings were chilly, they laid their whole history open to us. What a tale it was! and what a telling of it! My own uncle Edward, was the principal narrator, but was occasionally helped out by my newer uncle, Edmund. I had the story already, my reader will remember, in my uncle's writing, at home: when we returned I read it—not with the same absorption as if it had come first, but with as much interest, and certainly with the more thorough comprehension that I had listened to it before. That same written story I shall presently give, supplemented by what, necessarily, my uncle Edmund had to supply, and with some elucidation from the spoken narrative of my uncle Edward.

As the story proceeded, overcome with the horror of the revelation I foresaw, I forgot myself and cried out—

"And that woman is John's mother!"

"Whose mother?" asked uncle Edmund, with scornful curiosity.

"John Day's," I answered.

"It can not be!" he cried, blazing up. "Are you sure of it?"

"I have always been given so to understand," replied John for me; "but I am by no means sure of it. I have doubted it a thousand times."

"No wonder! Then we may go on! But, indeed, to believe you her son, would be to doubt you! I *don't* believe it."

"You could not help doubting me!" responded John. "—I might be true, though, even if I were her son!" he added.

"Ed," said Edmund to Edward, "let us lay our heads together!"

"Ready, Ed!" said Edward to Edmund.

Thereupon they began comparing memories and recollections—to find, however, that they had by no means data enough. One thing was clear to me—that nothing would be too bad for them to believe of her.

"She would pick out the eye of a corpse if she

thought a sovereign lay behind it!" said uncle Edmund.

"To have the turning over of his rents—" said uncle Edward, and checked himself.

"Yes—it would be just one of her devil-tricks!" agreed uncle Edmund.

"I beg your pardon, John," said uncle Edward, as if it were he that had used the phrase, and uncle Edmund nodded to John, as if he had himself made the apology.

John said nothing. His eyes looked wild with hope. He felt like one who, having been taught that he is a child of the devil, begins to know that God is his father—the one discovery worth making by son of man.

Then, at my request, they went on with their story, which I had interrupted.

When it was at length all poured out, and the last drops shaken from the memory of each, there fell a long silence, which my own uncle broke.

"When shall we start, Ed?" he said.

"To-morrow, Ed."

"This business of John's must come first, Ed!"

"It shall, Ed!"

"You know where you were born, John?"

"On my father's estate of Rubworth in Gloucestershire, I *believe*," answered John.

"You must be prepared for the worst, you know!"

"I am prepared. As Orba told me once, God is my father, whoever my mother may be!"

"That's right. Hold by that!" said my uncles, as with one breath.

"Do you know the year you were born?" asked uncle Edmund.

"My *mother* says I was born in 1820."

"You have not seen the entry?"

"No. One does not naturally doubt such statements."

"Assuredly not—until—"

He paused.

How uncle Edmund had regained his wits! And how young the brothers looked!

"You mean," said John, "until he has known my mother!"

Now for the story of my twin uncles, mainly as written by my uncle Edward!

CHAPTER XXXI

THE STORY OF MY TWIN UNCLES.

"My brother and I were marvelously like. Very few of our friends, none of them with certainty, could name either of us apart—or even together. Only two persons knew absolutely which either of us was, and those two were ourselves. Our mother certainly did not—at least without seeing one or other of our backs. Even we ourselves have each made the blunder occasionally of calling the other by the wrong name. Our indistinguishableness was the source of ever-recurring mistake, of constant amusement, of frequent bewilderment, and sometimes of annoyance in the family. I once heard my father say to a friend, that God had never made two things alike, except his twins. We two enjoyed the fun of it so much, that we did our best to increase the confusions resulting from our resemblance. We did not lie, but we dodged and pretended, questioned and looked mysterious, till I verily believe the person concerned, having in himself so vague an idea of our individuality, not unfrequently

forgot which he had blamed, or which he had wanted, and became hopelessly muddled.

"A man might well have started the question what good could lie in the existence of a duality in which the appearance was, if not exactly, yet so nearly identical, that no one but my brother or myself could have pointed out definite differences; but it could have been started only by an outsider: my brother and I had no doubt concerning the advantage of a duality in which each was the other's double; the fact was to us a never-ceasing source of delight. Each seemed to the other created such, expressly that he might love him as a special, individual property of his own. It was as if the image of Narcissus had risen bodily out of the watery mirror, to be what it had before but seemed. It was as if we had been made two, that each might love himself, and yet not be selfish.

"We were almost always together, but sometimes we got into individual scrapes, when—which will appear to some incredible—the one accused always accepted punishment without denial or subterfuge or attempt to perplex: it was all one which was the culprit, and which should be the sufferer. Nor did this indistinction work badly: that the other was just as likely to suffer as the doer of the wrong, wrought rather as a deterrent. The mode of behavior may

have had its origin in the instinctive perception of the impossibility of proving innocence; but had we, loving as we did, been capable of truthfully accusing each other, I think we should have been capable of lying also. The delight of existence lay, embodied and objective to each, in the existence of the other.

"At school we learned the same things, and only long after did any differences in taste begin to develop themselves.

"Our brother, elder by five years, who would succeed to the property, had the education my father thought would best fit him for the management of land. We twins were trained to be lawyer and doctor —I the doctor.

"We went to college together, and shared the same rooms.

"Having finished our separate courses, our father sent us to a German university: he would not have us insular!

"There we did not work hard, nor was hard work required of us. We went out a good deal in the evenings, for the students that lived at home in the town were hospitable. We seemed to be rather popular, owing probably to our singular likeness, which we found was regarded as a serious disadvantage. The reason of this opinion we never could find, flattering

ourselves indeed that what it typified gave us each double the base and double the strength.

"We had all our friends in common. Every friend to one of us was a friend to both. If one met man or woman he was pleased with, he never rested until the other knew that man or woman also. Our delight in our friends must have been greater than that of other men, because of the constant sharing.

"Our all but identity of form, our inseparability, our unanimity, and our mutual devotion, were often, although we did not know it, a subject of talk in the social gatherings of the place. It was more than once or twice openly mooted—what, in the chances of life, would be likeliest to strain the bond that united us. Not a few agreed that a terrible catastrophe might almost be expected from what they considered such an unnatural relation.

"I think you must already be able to foresee from what the first difference between us would arise: discord itself was rooted in the very unison—for unison it was, not harmony—of our tastes and instincts; and will now begin to understand why it was so difficult, indeed impossible, for me not to have a secret from my little one.

"Among the persons we met in the home-circles of our fellow-students, appeared by and by an English lady—a young widow, they said, though little in her

dress or carriage suggested widowhood. We met her again and again. Each thought her the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, but neither was much interested in her at first. Nor do I believe either would, of himself, ever have been. Our likings and dislikings always hitherto had gone together, and, left to themselves, would have done so always, I believe; whence it seems probable that, left to ourselves, we should also have found, when required, a common strength of abnegation. But in the present case, our feelings were not left to themselves; the lady gave the initiative, and the dividing regard was born in the one, and had time to establish itself, ere the provoking influence was brought to bear on the other.

"Within the last few years I have had a visit from an old companion of the period. I dare say you will remember the German gentleman who amused you with the funny way in which he pronounced certain words—one of the truest-hearted and truest-tongued men I have ever known: he gave me much unexpected insight into the evil affair. He had learned certain things from a sister, the knowledge of which, old as the story they concerned by that time was, chiefly moved his coming to England to find me.

"One evening, he told me, when a number of the ladies we were in the habit of meeting happened to be

together without any gentleman present, the talk turned, half in a philosophical, half in a gossipy spirit, upon the consequences that might follow, should two men, bound in such strange fashion as my brother and I, fall in love with the same woman—a thing not merely possible, but to be expected. The talk, my friend said, was full of a certain speculative sort of metaphysics, which in the present state of human development is far from healthy, both because of our incompleteness, and because we are too near to what we seem to know, to judge it aright. One lady was present—a lady by us more admired and trusted than any of the rest—who alone declared a conviction that love of no woman would ever separate us, provided the one fell in love first, and the other knew the fact before he saw the lady. For, she said, no jealousy would in that case be roused; and the relation of the brother to his brother and sister would be so close as to satisfy his heart. In a few days probably he too would fall in love, and his lady in like manner be received by his brother, when they would form a square impregnable to attack. The theory was a good one, and worthy of realization. But, alas, the Prince of the Power of the Air was already present in force, in the heart of the English widow! Young in years, but old in pride and self-confidence, she smiled at the notion of our advocate. She said that the idea of

any such friendship between men was nonsense; that she knew more about men than some present could be expected to know: their love was but a matter of custom and use; the moment self took part in the play, it would burst; it was but a bubble company! As for love proper—she meant the love between man and woman—its law was the opposite to that of friendship; its birth and continuance depended on the parties *not* getting accustomed to each other; the less they knew each other, the more they would love each other.

"Upon this followed much confused talk, during which the English lady declared nothing easier than to prove friendship, or the love of brothers, the kind of thing she had said.

"Most of the company believed the young widow but talking to show off; while not a few felt that they desired no nearer acquaintance with one whose words, whatever might be her thoughts, degraded humanity. The circle was very speedily broken into two segments, one that liked the English lady, and one that almost hated her.

"From that moment, the English widow set before her the devil-victory of alienating two hearts that loved each other—and she gained it for a time—until Death proved stronger than the Devil. People said we could not be parted: *she* would part us! She be-

gan with my brother. To tell how I know that she began with him, I should have to tell how she began with me, and that I can not do ; for, little one, I dare not let the tale of the treacheries of a bad woman toward an unsuspecting youth enter your ears. Suffice it to say, such a woman has well studied those regions of a man's nature into which, being less divine, the devil in her can easier find entrance. There, she knows him better than he knows himself ; and makes use of her knowledge, not to elevate but to degrade him. She fills him with herself, and her animal influences. She gets into his self-consciousness beside himself, by means of his self-love. Through the ever-open funnel of his self-greed, she pours in flattery. By depreciation of others she hints admiration of himself. By the slightest motion of a finger, of an eyelid, of her person, she will pay him a homage of which first he can not, then he will not, then he dares not doubt the truth. Not such a woman only, but almost any silly woman, may speedily make the most ordinary, and hitherto modest youth, imagine himself the pink of creation, the triumph of the Deity. No man alive is beyond the danger of imagining himself exceptional among men : if such as think well of themselves were right in so doing, truly the world were ill worth God's making ! He is the wisest who has learned to 'be naught a while ! ' The silly soul becomes

so full of his tempter, and of himself in and through her, that he loses interest in all else, cares for nobody but her, prizes nothing but her regard, broods upon nothing but her favors, looks forward to nothing but again her presence and further favors. God is nowhere; fellow-man in the way like a buzzing fly—else no more to be regarded than a speck of dust neither upon his person nor his garment. And this terrible disintegration of life rises out of the most wonderful, mysterious, beautiful, and profound relation in humanity! Its roots go down into the very deeps of God, and out of its foliage creeps the old serpent, and the worm that never dies! Out of it steams the horror of corruption, wrapped in whose living death a man cries out that God himself can do nothing for him. It is but the natural result of his making the loveliest of God's gifts into his God, and worshiping and serving the creature more than the Creator. Oh my child, it is a terrible thing to be! Except he knows God the Saviour, man stands face to face with a torturing enigma, hopeless of solution!

"The woman sought and found the enemy, my false self, in the house of my life. To that she gave herself, as if she gave herself to me. Oh, how she made me love her!—if that be love which is a deification of self, the foul worship of one's own paltry being!—and that when most it seems swallowed up

and lost! No, it is not love! Does love make ashamed? The memories of it may be full of pain, but can the soul ever turn from love with sick contempt? That which at length is loathed, can never have been loved!

"Of my brother she would speak as of a poor creature not for a moment to be compared with myself. How I could have believed her true when she spoke thus, knowing that in the mirror I could not have told myself from my brother, knowing also that our minds, tastes, and faculties bore as strong a resemblance as our bodies, I can not tell, but she fooled me to a fool through the indwelling folly of my self-love. At other times, wishing to tighten the bonds of my thralldom that she might the better work her evil end, proving herself a powerful devil, she would rouse my jealousy by some sign of strong admiration of Edmund. She must have acted the same way with my brother. I saw him enslaved just as I—knew we were faring alike—knew the very thoughts as well as feelings in his heart, and instead of being consumed with sorrow, chuckled at the *knowledge* that *I* was the favored one! I suspect now that she showed him more favor than myself, and taught him to put on the look of the hopeless one. I fancied I caught at times a covert flash in his eye: he knew what he knew! If so, poor Edmund, thou hadst the worst of it every way!

"Shall I ever get her kisses off my lips, her poison out of my brain! From my heart, her image was burned in a moment, as utterly as if by years of hell!

"The estrangement between us was sudden; there were degrees only in the widening of it. First came embarrassment at meeting. Then, all commerce of wish, thought, and speculation ended. There was no more merrymaking jugglery with identity; each was himself only, and for himself alone. Gone was all brother-gladness. We avoided each other more and more. When we must meet, we made haste to part. Heaven was gone from home. Each yet felt the same way toward the other, but it was the way of repelling, not drawing. When we passed in the street, it was with a look that said, or at least meant—'You are my brother! I don't want you!' We ceased even to nod to each other. Still in our separation we could not separate. Each took a room in another part of the town, but under the same pseudonym. Our common lodging was first deserted, then formally given up by each. Always what one did, that did the other, though no longer intending to act in concert with him. He could not help it though he tried, for the other tried also, and did the same thing. One of us might for months have played the part of both without detection—especially if it had been understood

that we had parted company; but I think it was never suspected, although now we were rarely for a moment together, and still more rarely spoke. A few weeks sufficed to bring us to the verge of madness.

"To this day I doubt if the woman, our common disease, knew the one of us from the other. That in any part of her being there was the least approach to a genuine womanly interest in either of us, I do not believe. I am very sure she never cared for me. Preference I can not think possible; she could not, it seems to me, have felt anything for one of us without feeling the same for both; I do not see how, with all she knew of us, we could have made two impressions upon her moral sensorium.

"It was at length the height of summer, and every one sought change of scene and air. It was time for us to go home; but I wrote to my father, and got longer leave."

"I wrote too," interposed my uncle Edmund at this point of the story, when my own uncle was telling it that evening in Paris.

"The day after the date of his answer to my letter, my father died. But Edmund and I were already on our way, by different routes, to the mountain-village whither the lady had preceded us; and having, in our infatuation, left no address, my brother never saw

the letter announcing our loss, and I not for months.

"A few weeks more, and our elder brother, who had always been delicate, followed our father. This also remained for a time unknown to me. My mother had died many years before, and we had now scarce a relation in the world. Martha Moon is the nearest relative you and I have. Besides her and you, there were left therefore of the family but myself and your uncle Edmund—both absorbed in the same worthless woman.

"At the village there were two hostelries. I thought my brother would go to the better; he thought I would go to the better; so we met at the worse! I remember a sort of grin on his face when we saw each other, and have no doubt the same grin was on mine. We always did the same thing, just as of old. The next morning we set out, I need hardly say each by himself, to find the lady.

She had rented a small chalet on the banks of a swift mountain-stream, and thither, for a week or so, we went every day, often encountering. The efforts we made to avoid each other being similar and simultaneous, they oftener resulted in our meeting. When one did nothing, the other generally did nothing also, and when one schemed the other also schemed, and similarly. Thus what had been the greatest pleasure

of our peculiar relation, our mental and moral resemblance, namely, became a large factor in our mutual hate. For with self-loathing shame, and a misery that makes me curse the day I was born, I confess that for a time I hated the brother of my heart; and I have but too good ground for believing that he also hated me!"

"I did! I did!" cried uncle Edmund, when my own uncle, in his verbal narrative, mentioned his belief that his brother hated him; whereupon uncle Edward turned to me, saying:

"Is it not terrible, my little one, that out of a passion called by the same name with that which binds you and John Day, the hellish smoke of such a hate should arise! God must understand it! that is a comfort: in vain I seek to sound it. Even then I knew that I dwelt in an evil house. Amid the highest of such hopes as the woman roused in me, I scented the vapors of the pit. I was haunted by the dim shape of the coming hour when I should hate the woman that enthralled me, more than ever I had loved her. The greater sinner I am, that I yet yielded her dominion over me. I was the willing slave of a woman who sought nothing but the consciousness of power; who, to the indulgence of that vilest of passions, would sacrifice the lives, the loves, the very souls of men! She lived to separate, where Jesus died to make one.

How weak and unworthy was I to be canght in her snares! how wicked and vile not to tear myself loose! The woman whose touch would defile the Pharisee, is pure beside such a woman!"

I return to his manuscript.

"The lady must have had plenty of money, and she loved company and show; I can not but think, therefore, that she had her design in choosing such a solitary place: its loveliness would subserve her intent of enthralling thoroughly heart and soul and brain of the fools she had in her toils. I doubt, however, if the fools were alive to any beauty but hers, if they were not dead to the wavings of God's garment about them. Was I ever truly aware of the presence of those peaks that dwelt alone with their whiteness in the desert of the sky—awfully alone—of the world, but not with the world? I think we saw nothing save with our bodily eyes, and very little with them; for we were blinded by a passion fitter to wander the halls of Eblis, than the palaces of God.

"The chalet stood in a little valley, high in the mountains, whose surface was gently undulating, with here and there the rocks breaking through its rich-flowering meadows. Down the middle of it ran the deep swift stream, swift with the weight of its fullness as well as the steep slope of its descent. It was not more than seven or eight feet across, but a great body

of water went rushing along its deep course. About a quarter of a mile from the chalet, it reached the first of a series of falls of moderate height and slope, after which it divided into a number of channels, mostly shallow, in a wide pebbly torrent-bed. These, a little lower down, reunited into a narrower and yet swifter stream—a small fierce river, which presently, at one reckless bound, shot into the air, to tumble to a valley a thousand feet below, shattered into spray as it fell.

"The chalet stood alone. The village was at no great distance, but not a house was visible from any of its windows. It had no garden. The meadow, one blaze of color, softened by the green of the mingling grass, came up to its wooden walls, and stretched from them down to the rocky bank of the river, in many parts to the very water's edge. The chalet stood like a yellow rock in a green sea. The meadow was the drawing-room where the lady generally received us.

"One lovely evening, I strolled out of the hostelry, and went walking up the road that led to the village of Auerbach, so named from the stream and the meadow I have described. The moon was up, and promised the loveliest night. I was in no haste, for the lady had, in our common hearing, said, she was going to pass that night with a friend, in a town some ten miles away. I dawdled along, therefore, thinking only to greet the place, walk with the stream, and lie

in the meadow, sacred with the shadow of her demonian presence. Quit of the restless hope of seeing her, I found myself taking some little pleasure in the things about me, and spent two hours on the way, amid the sound of rushing water, now swelling, now sinking, all the time.

"It had not crossed me to wonder where my brother might be. I banished the thought of him as often as it intruded. Not able to help meeting, we had almost given up avoiding each other; but when we met, our desire was to part. I do not know that, apart, we had ever yet felt actual hate, either to the other.

"The road led through the village. It was asleep. I remember a gleam in just one of the houses. The moonlight seemed to have drowned all the lamps of the world. I came to the stream, rushing cold from its far-off glacier-mother, crossed it, and went down the bank opposite the chalet: I had taken a fancy to see it from that side. Glittering and glancing under the moon, the wild little river rushed joyous to its fearful fall. A short distance away, it was even now falling—falling from off the face of the world! This moment it was falling from my very feet into the void —falling, falling, unupheld, down, down, through the moonlight, to the ghastly rock-foot below!

"The chalet seemed deserted. With the same

wofully desolate look, it constantly comes back in my dreams. I went farther down the valley. The full-rushing stream went with me like a dog. It made no murmur, only a low gurgle as it shot along. It seemed to draw me with it to its last leap. As I looked at its swiftness, I thought how hard it would be to get out of. The swiftness of it comes to me yet in my dreams.

"I came to a familiar rock, which, part of the bank whereon I walked, rose some six or seven feet above the meadow, just opposite a little hollow where the lady oftenest sat. Two were on the grass together, one a lady seated, the other a man, with his head in the lady's lap. I gave a leap as if a bullet had gone through my heart, then instinctively drew back behind the rock. There I came to myself, and began to take courage. She had gone away for the night: it could not be she! I peeped. The man had raised his head, and was leaning on his elbow. It was Edmund. I was certain! She stooped and kissed him. I scrambled to the top of the rock, and sprang across the stream, which ran below me like a flooded mill-race. Would to God I had missed the bank, and been swept to the great fall! I was careless, and when I lighted, I fell. Her clear mocking laugh rang through the air, and echoed from the scoop of some still mountain. When I rose, they were on their feet.

"'Quite a chamois-spring!' remarked the lady with derision.

"She saw the last moment was come. Neither of us two spoke.

"'I told you,' she said, 'neither of you was to trouble me to-night: you have paid no regard to my wish for quiet! It is time the foolery should end! I am weary of it. A woman can not marry a double man—or half a man either—without at least being able to tell which is which of the two halves!'

"She ended with a toneless laugh, in which my brother joined. She turned upon him with a pitiless mockery which, I see now, must have left in his mind the conviction that she had been but making game of him; while I never doubted myself the dupe. Not once had she received me as I now saw her: though the night was warm, her deshabille was yet a somewhat prodigal unmasking of her beauty to the moon! The conviction in each of us was, that she and the other were laughing at him.

"We locked in a deadly struggle, with what object I can not tell. I do not believe either of us had an object. It was a mere blind conflict of pointless enmity, in which each cared but to overpower the other. Which first laid hold, which, if either, began to drag, I have not a suspicion. The next thing I know is, we were in the water, each in the grasp of the other, now

rolling, now sweeping, now tumbling along, in deadly embrace.

"The shock of the ice-cold water, and the sense of our danger, brought me to myself. I let my brother go, but he clutched me still. Down we shot together toward the sheer descent. Already we seemed falling. The terror of it overmastered me. It was not the crash I feared, but the stayless rush through the whistling emptiness. In the agony of my despair, I pushed him from me with all my strength, striking at him a fierce, wild, aimless blow—the only blow struck in the wrestle. His hold relaxed. I remember nothing more."

At this point of the verbal narrative, my uncle Edmund again spoke:

"You never struck me, Ed," he cried; "or if you did, I was already senseless. I remember nothing of the water."

"When I came to myself," the manuscript goes on, "I was lying in a pebbly shoal. The moon was aloft in heaven. I was cold to the heart, cold to the marrow of my bones. I could move neither hand nor foot, and thought I was dead. By slow degrees a little power came back, and I managed at length, after much agonizing effort, to get up on my feet—only to fall again. After several such failures, I found myself capable of dragging myself along like a serpent, and

so got out of the water, and on the next endeavor was able to stand. I had forgotten everything; but when my eyes fell on the darting torrent, I remembered all —not as a fact, but as a terrible dream from which I thanked heaven I had come awake.

"But as I tottered along, I came slowly to myself, and a fearful doubt awoke. If it was a dream, where had I dreamed it? How had I come to wake where I found myself? How had the dream turned real about me? Where was I last in my remembrance? Where was my brother? Where was the lady in the moonlight? No, it was not a dream! If my brother had not got out of the water, I was his murderer! I had struck him!—Oh, the horror of it! If only I could stop dreaming it—three times almost every night!"

Again uncle Edmund interposed—not altogether logically:

"I tell you, I don't believe you struck me, Ed! And you must remember, neither of us would have got out if you hadn't!"

"You might have let me go!" said the other.

"On the way down the Degenfall, perhaps!" rejoined uncle Edmund. "—I believe it was that blow brought me to my senses, and made me get out!"

"Thank you, Ed!" said uncle Edward.

Once more I write from the manuscript.

"I said to myself he *must* have got out! It could not be that I had drowned my own brother! Such a ghastly thing could not have been permitted! It was too terrible to be possible!

"How, then, had we been living the last few months? What brothers had we been? Had we been loving one another? Had I been a neighbor to my nearest? Had I been a brother to my twin? Was not murder the natural outcome of it all? He that loveth not his brother is a murderer! If so, where the good of saving me from being indeed what I was in nature? I had cast off my brother for a treacherous woman! My very thought sickened within me.

"My soul seemed to grow luminous and understand everything. I saw my whole behavior as it was. The scales fell from my inward eyes, and there came a sudden, total, and absolute revulsion in my conscious self—like what takes place, I presume, at the day of judgment, when the God in every man sits in judgment upon the man. Had the gate of heaven stood wide open, neither angel with flaming sword, nor Peter with the keys to dispute my entrance, I would have turned away from it, and sought the deepest hell. I loathed the woman and myself; in my heart the sealed fountain of old affection had broken out, and flooded it.

"All the time this thinking went on, I was crawl-

ing slowly up the endless river toward the chalet, driven by a hope inconsistent with what I knew of my brother. What I felt, he, if he were alive, must be feeling also: how then could I say to myself that I should find him with her? It was the last dying hope that I had not killed him that thus fooled me. 'She will be warming him in her bosom!' I said. But at the very touch, the idea turned and presented its opposite pole. 'Good God!' I cried in my heart, 'how shall I compass his deliverance? Better he lay at the bottom of the fall, than live to be devoured by that serpent of hell! I will go straight to the den of the monster, and demand my brother!'"

But to see the eyes of uncle Edmund at this point of the story!

"At last I approached the chalet. All was still. A handkerchief lay on the grass, white in the moonlight. I went up to it, hoping to find it my brother's. It was the lady's. I flung it from me like a filthy rag.

"What was the passion worth which in a moment could die so utterly?

"I turned to the house. I would tear him from her: he was mine, not hers!

"My wits were nigh gone. I thought the moonlight was dissolving the chalet, that the two within might escape me. I held it fast with my eyes. The moon drew back: she only possessed and filled it!

No; the moon was too pure: she but shone reflected from the windows; she would not go in! *I* would go in! I was Justice! The woman was a thief! She had broken into the house of life, and was stealing!

"I stood for a moment looking up at her window. There was neither motion nor sound. Was she gone away, and my brother with her? Could she be in bed and asleep, after seeing us swept down the river to the Degenfall? Could he be with her and at rest, believing me dashed to pieces? I must be resolved! The door was not bolted; I stole up the stair to her chamber. The door of it was wide open. I entered, and stood. The moon filled the tiny room with a clear, sharp-edged, pale-yellow light. She lay asleep, lovely to look at as an angel of God. Her hair, part of it thrown across the top-rail of the little iron bed, streamed out on each side over the pillow, and in the midst of it lay her face, a radiant isle in a dark sea. I stood and gazed. Fascinated by her beauty? God forbid! I was fascinated by the awful incongruity between that face, pure as the moonlight, and the charnel-house that lay unseen behind it. She was to me, henceforth, not a woman, but a live Death. I had no sense of sacredness, such as always in the chamber even of a little girl. How should I? It was no chamber; it was a den. She was no woman, but a female monster. I stood and gazed.

"My presence was more potent than I knew. She opened her eyes—opened them straight into mine. All the color sank away out of her face, and it stiffened to that of a corpse. With the staring eyes of one strangled, she lay as motionless as I stood. I moved not an inch, spoke not a word, drew not a step nearer, retreated not a hair's-breadth. Motion was taken from me. Was it hate that fixed my eyes on hers, and turned my limbs into marble? It certainly was not love, but neither was it hate.

"Agony had been burrowing in me like a mole; the half of what I felt I have not told you: I came to find my brother, and found only, in a sweet sleep, the woman who had just killed him. The bewilderment of it all, with my long insensibility and wet garments, had taken from me either the power of motion or of volition, I do not know which: speechless in the moonlight, I must have looked to the wretched woman both ghostly and ghastly.

"Two or three long moments she gazed with those horror-struck eyes; then a frightful shriek broke from her drawn, death-like lips. She who could sleep after turning love into hate, life into death, would have fled into hell to escape the eyes of the dead! Insensibility is not courage. Wake in the scornfullest mortal the conviction that one of the disembodied stands before him, and he will shiver like an aspen-

leaf. Scream followed scream. Volition or strength, whichever it was that had left me, returned. I backed from the room, went noiseless from the house, and fled, as if she had been the ghost and I the mortal. Would I had been the specter for which she took me!"

Here uncle Edmund again spoke:

"Small wonder she screamed, the wretch!" he cried: "that was her second dose of the horrible that night! You found the door unbolted because I had been there before you. I too entered her room, and saw her asleep as you describe. I went close to her bedside, and cried out, 'Where is my brother?' She woke, and fainted, and I left her."

"Then," said I, "when she came to herself, thinking she had had a bad dream, she rearranged her hair, and went to sleep again!"

"Just so, I dare say, little one!" answered uncle Edward.

"I had not yet begun to think what I should do, when I found myself at our little inn," the manuscript continues. "No idea of danger to myself awoke in my mind, nor was there any cause to heed such an idea, had it come. Nobody there knew the one from the other of us. Not many would know there were two of us. Any one who saw me twice, might well think he had seen us both. If my brother's body

were found in the valley-stream, it was not likely to be recognized, or to be indeed recognizable. The only one who could tell what happened at the top of the fall, would hardly volunteer information. But, while I knew myself my brother's murderer, I thought no more of these sheltering facts than I did of danger. I made it no secret that my brother had gone over the fall. I went to the foot of the cataract, thence to search and inquire all down the stream, but no one had heard of any dead body being found. They told me that the poor gentleman must, before morning, have been far on his way to the Danube.

"Giving up the quest in despair, I resigned myself to a torture which has hitherto come no nearer expending itself than the consuming fire of God.

"I dared not carry home the terrible news, which must either involve me in lying, or elicit such confession as would multiply tenfold my father's anguish, and was in utter perplexity what to do, when it occurred to me that I ought to inquire after letters at the lodgings where last we had lived together. Then first I learned that both my father and my elder brother, your father, little one, were dead.

"The sense of guilt had not destroyed in me the sense of duty. I did not care what became of the property, but I did care for my brother's child, and the interests of her succession.

"Your father had all his life been delicate, and had suffered not a little. When your mother died, about a year after their marriage, leaving us you, it soon grew plain to see that, while he loved you dearly, and was yet more friendly to all about him than before, his heart had given up the world. When I knew he was gone, I shed more tears over him than I had yet shed over my twin: the worm that never dies made my brain too hot to weep much for Edmund. Then first I saw that my elder brother had been a brother indeed, and that we twins had never been real to each other. I saw, what nothing but self-loathing would ever have brought me to see, that my love to Edmund had not been profound: while a man is himself shallow, how should his love be deep! I saw that we had each loved our elder brother in a truer and better fashion than we had loved each other. One of the chief active bonds between us had been fun; another, habit; and another, constitutional resemblance—not one of them strong. Underneath were bonds far stronger, but they had never come into conscious play; no strain had reached them. They were there, I say; for wherever is the poorest flower of love, it is there in virtue of the perfect root of love; and love's root must one day blossom into love's perfect rose. My chief consolation under the burden of my guilt is, that I love my brother since I killed him,

far more than I loved him when we were all to each other. Had we never quarreled, and were he alive, I should not be loving him thus!

"That we shall meet again, and live in the devotion of a far deeper love, I feel in the very heart of my soul. That it is my miserable need that has wrought in me this confidence, is no argument against the confidence. As misery alone sees miracles, so is there many a truth into which misery alone can enter. My little one, do not pity your uncle much; I have learned to lift up my heart to God. I look to him who is the saviour of men to deliver me from blood-guiltiness—to lead me into my brother's pardon, and enable me somehow to make up to him for the wrong I did him.

"Some would think I ought to give myself up to justice. But I felt and feel that I owe my brother reparation, not my country the opportunity of retribution. It can not be demanded of me to pretermit, because of my crime, the duty more strongly required of me because of the crime. Must I not use my best endeavor to turn aside its evil consequences from others? Was I, were it even for the cleansing of my vile soul, to leave the child of my brother alone with a property, exposing her to the machinations of prowling selfishness! Would it atone for the wrong of depriving her of one uncle, to take the other from

her, and so leave her defenseless with a burden she could not carry? Must I take so-called justice on myself at her expense—to the oppression, darkening, and endangering of her life? Were I accused, I would tell the truth; but I would not volunteer a phantasmal atonement. What comfort would it be to my brother that I was hanged? Let the punishment God pleased come upon me, I said; as far as lay in me, I would live for my brother's child! I have lived for her.

"But I am, and have been, and shall, I trust, throughout my earthly time, and what time thereafter may be needful, always be, in Purgatory. I should tremble at the thought of coming out of it a moment ere it had done its part.

"One day, after my return home, as I unpacked a portmanteau, my fingers slipped into the pocket of a waistcoat, and came upon something which, when I brought it to the light, proved a large ruby. A pang went to my heart. I looked at the waistcoat, and found it the one I had worn that terrible night: the ruby was the stone of the ring Edmund always wore. It must have been loose, and had got there in our struggle. Every now and then I am drawn to look at it. At first I saw in it only the blood; now I see the light also. The moon of hope rises higher as the sun of life approaches the horizon.

"I was never questioned about the death of my twin brother. One, of two so like, must seem enough. Our resemblance, I believe, was a bore, which the teasing use we made of it aggravated; therefore the fact that there was no longer a pair of us, could not be regarded as cause for regret, and things quickly settled down to the state in which you so long knew them. If there be one with a suspicion of the terrible truth, it is cousin Martha.

"You will not be surprised that you should never have heard of your uncle Edmund.

"I dare not ask you, my child, not to love me less; for perhaps you ought to do so. If you do, I have my consolation in the fact that my little one can not make me love *her* less."

Thus ended the manuscript, signed with my uncle's name and address in full, and directed to me at the bottom of the last page.

CHAPTER XXXV.

UNCLE EDMUND'S APPENDIX.

WHEN my uncle Edward had told his story, corresponding, though more conversational in form, with that I have now transcribed, my uncle Edmund took up his part of the tale from the moment when he came to himself after their fearful rush down the river. It was to this effect:

He lay on the very verge of the hideous void. How it was that he got thus far and no farther, he never could think. He was out of the central channel, and the water that ran all about him and poured immediately over the edge of the precipice, could not have sufficed to roll him there. Finding himself on his back, and trying to turn on his side in order to rise, his elbow found no support, and lifting his head a little, he looked down into a moon-pervaded abyss, where thin silvery vapors were stealing about. One turn, and he would have been on his way, plumb-down, to the valley below—say, rather, on his way off the face of the world into the vast that bosoms the stars

and the systems and the cloudy worlds. His very soul quivered with terror. The pang of it was so keen that it saved him from the swoon in which he might yet have dropped from the edge of the world. Not daring to rise, and unable to roll himself up the slight slope, he shifted himself sideways along the ground, inch by inch, for a few yards, then rose, and ran staggering away, as from a monster that might wake and pursue and overtake him. He doubted if he would ever have recovered the sudden shock of his awful position, of his one glance into the ghastly depth, but for the worse horror of the all-but-conviction that his brother had gone down to Hades through that terrible descent. If only he too had gone, he cried in his misery, they would now be together, with no wicked woman between their hearts! For his love too was changed into loathing. He too was at once, and entirely, and forever freed from her fascination. The very thought of her was hateful to him.

With straight course, but wavering walk, he made his way through the moonlight to demand his brother. He too picked up the handkerchief and dropped it with disgust.

What followed in the lady's chamber, I have already given in his own words.

When he fled from the chalet it was with self-slaughter in his heart. But he endured in the comfort

of the thought that the door of death was always open, that he might enter when he would. He sought the foot of the fall the same night; then, as one possessed of demons to the tombs, fled to the solitary places of the dark mountains.

He went through many a sore stress. Ignorant of the death of his father and his elder brother, the dread misery of encountering them with his brother's blood on his soul barred his way home. He could not bear the thought of reading in their eyes his own horror of himself His money was soon spent, and for months he had to endure severe hardships—of simple, wholesome human sort. He thought afterward that, if he had had no trouble of that kind, his brain would have yielded. He would have surrendered himself but for the uselessness of it, and the misery and public stare it would bring upon his family.

Knowing German well, and contriving at length to reach Berlin, he found employment there of various kinds, and for a good many years managed to live as well as he had any heart for, and spare a little for some worse off than himself. Having no regard to his health, however, he had at length a terrible attack of brain-fever, and, but partially recovering his faculties after it, was placed in an asylum. There he dreamed every night of his home, came awake with the joy of the dream, and could sleep no more for

longing, not to go home—that he dared not think of —but to look upon the place, if only once again. The longing grew till it became intolerable. By his talk in his sleep, the good people about him, learning his condition, gave and gathered money to send him home. On his way, he came to himself quite, but when he reached England, he found he dared not go near the place of his birth. He remained therefore in London, where he made the barest livelihood by copying legal documents. In this way he spent a few miserable years, and then suddenly set out to walk to the house of his fathers. He had but five shillings in his possession when the impulse came upon him.

He reached the moor, and had fallen exhausted, when a solitary gypsy, rare phenomenon, I presume, with a divine spot awake in his heart, found him, gave him some gin, and took him to a hut he had in the wildest part of the heath. He lay helpless for a week, and then began to recover. When he was sufficiently restored, he helped his host to weave the baskets which, as soon as he had enough to make a load, he took about the country in a cart. He soon became so clever at the work as quite to earn his food and shelter, making more baskets while the gypsy was away selling the others. At home, the old horse managed to live, or rather not to die, on the moor, and, all things considered, had not a very hard life of

it. On his back, uncle Edmund, ill able to walk so far — for he was anything but strong now, would sometimes go wandering in the twilight, or when the moon shone, to some spot whence he could see his old home. Occasionally he would even go round and round the house while we slept, like a ghost dreaming of ancient days.

"But," I said, interrupting his narrative, "the horseman I saw that night in the storm could not have been you, uncle; for the horse was a grand creature, rearing like the horse with Peter the Great on his back, in the corner of the map of Russia!"

"Were *you* out that terrible night?" he returned. "The lightning was enough to frighten even an older horse than the gypsy's.—I wonder how my friend is getting on! He must think me very ungrateful! But I dare say he imagines me lying fathom-deep in the bog.—You will do something for him, won't you, Ed?"

"You shall do for him yourself what you please, Ed," answered my own uncle, "and I will help you."

"But, uncle Edmund," I said, "if it was you we saw, the place you were in was a very boggy one always, and nearly a lake then!"

"I thought I should never get out!" he replied. "But for the poor horse and his owner, I should not have minded."

"How *did* you get out of it, uncle?" I persisted. "Lady Cairnedge smothered a splendid black horse not far from there. Through the darkness I heard him going down. It makes me shudder every time I think of it."

"I can not tell you, child. I suppose my gray was such a skeleton that the bog couldn't hold him. I left it all to him, and he got himself and me too out of it somehow. It was too dark, as you know, to see anything between the flashes. I remember we were pretty deep sometimes."

He went back to London after that, and had come and gone once or twice, he said. When he came he always lodged with his gypsy friend. He had learned that his father was dead, but took the Mr. Whichcote he heard mentioned, for his elder brother, David, my father.

I asked him how it was he appeared to such purpose, and in the very nick of time, that afternoon when Lady Cairnedge had come with her servants to carry John away; for of course I knew now that our champion must have been uncle Edmund. He answered he had that very morning made up his mind to present himself at the house, and had walked there for the purpose, resolved to tell his brother all. He got in by the end of the garden, as John was in the way of doing, and had reached the little grove of

firs by the house, when he saw a carriage at the door, and drew back. Hearing then the noises of attack and defense, he came to the window and looked in, heard Lady Cairnedge's shriek, saw her on the floor, and the men attempting to force an entrance at the other side of the window. Hardly knowing what he did, he rushed at them and beat them off. Then suddenly turning faint, for his heart was troublesome, he retired into the grove, and lay there helpless for a time. He recovered only to hear the carriage drive away, leaving quiet behind it.

To see that woman in the house of his fathers, was a terrible shock to him. Could it be that David had married her? He stole from his covert, and crawled across the moor to the gypsy's hut. There he was consoled by learning that the mistress of the house was a young girl, whom he rightly concluded to be the daughter of his brother David.

In making a second visit with the same intent, he had another attack of the heart, and now knew that he would have died in the snow had not John found him.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

We returned to England the next day. All the journey through, my uncles were continually reverting to the matter of John's parentage: the more they saw of him, the less could they believe Lady Cairnedge his mother. Through questions put to him, and inquiries afterward made, they discovered that, when he went to London, he had gone to Lady Cairnedge's lawyer, not his father's, of whom he had never heard—which accounted for his having on that occasion learned nothing of consequence to him. When we reached London, my uncle Edmund, who, having been bred a lawyer, knew how to act, went at once to examine the will left by John's father. That done, he set out for the place where John was born. The rest of us went home.

The second day after our arrival there uncle Edmund came. He had found perfect proof, not only that Lady Cairnedge was John's step-mother, but that

she had no authority over him or his property whatever.

A long discussion took place in my uncles' study—I have to shift the apostrophe of possession—as to whether John ought to compel restitution of what she might have wrongfully spent or otherwise appropriated. She had been left an income by each of her husbands, upon either of which incomes she might have lived at ease; but they had a strong suspicion, soon entirely justified, that while spending John's money, she had been saving up far more than her own. But in the discussion, John held to it that, as she had once been the wife of his father, he would spare her so far—provided she had nowise impoverished either of the estates. He would insist only upon her immediate departure.

"Yes, little one," said my uncle, one summer evening, as he and I talked together, seated alone in the wilderness, "what we call misfortune is always the only good fortune. Few will say *yes* in response, but Truth is independent of supporters, being justified by her children.

"Until *misfortune* found us," he went on, "my brother and I had indeed loved one another, but with a love so poor that a wicked woman was able to send it to sleep. To what she might have brought us, had she had full scope, God

only knows: *now* all the women in hell could not separate us!"

"And all the women in paradise would but bring you closer!" I ventured to add.

The day after our marriage, which took place within a month of our return from Paris, John went to Rising, on a visit to Lady Cairnedge of anything but ceremony, and took his uncles and myself with him.

"Will you tell her ladyship," he said to the footman, "that Mr. Day desires to see her."

The man would have shut the door in our faces, with the words, "I will see if my lady is at home," but John was prepared for him. He put his foot between the door and the jamb, and his two hands against the door, driving it to the wall with the man behind it. There he held him till we were all in, then closed the door, and said to him, in a tone I had never heard him use till that moment,

"Let Lady Cairnedge know at once that Mr. Day desires to see her."

The man went. We walked into the white drawing-room, the same where I sat alone among the mirrors the morning after I was lost on the moor. How well I remembered it!

There we waited. The gentlemen stood, but, John

insisting, I sat—my eyes fixed on the door by which we had entered. In a few minutes, however, a slight sound in another part of the room caused me to turn them thitherward. There stood Lady Cairnedge, in a riding-habit, with a whip in her hand, staring, pale as death, at my uncles. Then, with a scornful laugh, she turned and went through a door immediately behind her, which closed instantly, and became part of the wainscot, hardly distinguishable. John darted to it. It was bolted on the outside. He sought another door, and ran hither and thither through the house to find the woman. My uncles ran after him, afraid something might befall him. I remained where I was, far from comfortable. Two or three minutes passed, and then I heard the thunder of hoofs. I ran to the window. There she was tearing across the park at full gallop, on just such a huge black horse as she had smothered in the bog! I was the only one of us that saw her, and not one of us ever set eyes upon her again.

When we went over the house, it soon became plain to us that she had been in readiness for a sudden retreat, having prepared for it after a fashion of her own: not a single small article of value was to be discovered in it. John's great-aunt, who left him the property, died in the house, possessed of a large number of jewels, many of them of great price both in

themselves and because of their antiquity: not one of them was ever found.

A report reached us long after, that Lady Cairnedge was found dead in her bed in a hotel in the Tyrol.

My uncles lived for many years on the old farm. Uncle Edmund bought a gray horse, as like uncle Edward's as he could find one, only younger. I often wondered what Death must think—to know he had his master on his back, and yet see him mounted by his side. Every day one or the other, most days both, would ride across the moor to see us. For many years Martha walked in at the door at least once every week.

My uncles took no pains, for they had no desire, to be distinguished the one from the other. Each was always ready to meet any obligation of the other. If one made an appointment, few could tell which it was and nobody which would keep it. No one could tell, except, perhaps, one who had been present, which of them had signed any document; their two hands were absolutely indistinguishable. I do not believe either of them, after a time, always himself knew whether the name was his or his brother's. He could only be always certain it must have been written by one of them. But each indifferently was ready to honor the signature, *Ed. Whichcote.*

They died within a month of each other. Their bodies lie side by side. On their one tombstone is the inscription :

HERE LIE THE DISUSED GARMENTS OF
EDWARD AND EDMUND WHICHCOTE,
BORN FEB. 29, 1804;
DIED JUNE 30, AND
JULY 28, 1864.
THEY ARE NOT HERE; THEY ARE RISEN.

John and I are waiting.

BELORBA DAY.

THE END.