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THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

A *Nobel*.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "OLIVE" AND "THE OGILVIES."

Craig, David Home Gordon

"NON TI LAGNAR, MA SOFFRI, E TACI!"

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

NINIAN and his sister were living at The Gowans, they two alone together. They had lived so for more than a year. Over that year let a veil fall; to uplift it could do no good to any human being.

In our youth, we sigh, and say with the poet,

“ Love's pain is very sweet.”

We linger with a charmed interest indescribable over stories of much-enduring, disappointed, or hopeless affection. But as every one of us—man or woman—is born to suffer, and most of us, in some way or other, to suffer love, we all either have come, or shall come in time,

to know the things we once only dreamed of. The truth of these things lies not with the weepers and wailers, the melancholy poets, the pathetic delineators of woe—foolish nightingales that go and press their breast against a thorn, that they may have the pleasure of singing over it. Sometimes this same truth—for it is a truth, though, like many others, frequently garbled into an easy jest, or a beautiful lie—is preached by a dumb life-history; ruined health, heart-nobleness tainted, sympathies crushed, temper soured;—and for such short-comings man has no charity, nor woman either! Or perhaps this awful verity is indicated by some outward show of calamity, and we are forced to see that Heaven was merciful in sending to the broken-hearted a quiet early death, or the oblivion of a harmless and moonstruck melancholy, to heal over what otherwise never could be healed on earth.

But beyond all these truths—which appertain only to the many who were born without strength enough to resist or to endure—is a deeper truth still. You may read it on the title-page of this book,

“ Non ti lagnar, ma soffri, e taci.”

It was the motto of Ninian Græme's whole

life; but especially of that one year which we shall leave unchronicled. Its history Ninian himself never told to living creature, neither then, or at any future time. But many years afterwards Lindsay showed to one very dear to her the sole record of what her brother had passed through. It was a verse—the only verse marked in his Bible—for Mr. Græme was not one of those self-important pietists who score their own petty approvals or experience upon every chapter of the Word of Life. This text was only indicated by a faint line, and the date of the year:

“When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.”

And as, on this day after the year's closing, he sat reading in the lamp-light, his faithful elder sister working opposite, there was in his appearance something which furnished a fit comment on these words. He looked like a man who had traversed “the valley of the shadow of death,” and therein had been “comforted.”

He was much changed—seemed a good deal older—nor could there now be any doubt about the fact, which Tinie always contested to the

very death—that her brother was growing grey. But some people look far handsomer in age than they ever do in youth; the hard lines soften down, the restless expression wears away, and the inward beauty of spirit deepening more and more, becomes independent of mere external form. There was no doubt that at fifty Ninian Græme would be a very fine-looking man.

“How quiet the house seems, Lindsay.”

“Yes, very;” and, as he laid down his book, his sister laid down her work, ready to talk if he were so inclined. “I think we feel the difference, after Ruth and Esther and their babies being here all day. You are quite sure you did not mind it, brother,—the noise I mean?”

“Oh, no; they did not cry more than babies generally do, and those two girls were so pleased and proud to bring them. We must be considerate, Lindsay. It is a grand thing to be uncle and aunt, you know.”

So said he, with a cheerful smile, and sank into his book again. He was the same Ninian, leaning in the same arm-chair, with the old pet cat on his knee. There was no change in the room,—the merry parlour once so resonant

with voices;—no change, except in its perfect silence.

The brother and sister—very like one another always, and growing liker every day—sat thus, as they sat night after night keeping quiet vigil together, old bachelor and old maid.

“Have you not read enough? You look tired,” said Miss Græme, after a long pause, during which she had watched how Ninian’s eyes, though still fixed upon the book, grew blank and dull, as if he were studying a harder page than that which lay opened before him. Otherwise, his attentive sister would never have ventured the interruption.

He started slightly, and closed the book.

“I believe I am rather sleepy. Is it late? I almost wish it were bed-time.”

Very sad it is to hear any one in health say this; with that weary look too, indicating worse than mere bodily exhaustion. The unconscious longing for rest always seems to imply a deeper longing still—for that repose which closes the world’s perpetual strife.

“It is only ten o’clock. But just as you like, brother. I can shut up the house at once; still, if you are not tired, I should like to talk to you a little.”

“Talk then. Truly, my silent sister can be quite loquacious and entertaining, as I found out when I was ill,” said Mr. Græme, with an affectionate look.

Lindsay smiled, and then became serious. “I wanted you to read this letter, which Esther had from Tinie yesterday. We thought it would be as well to show it to you.”

He took it. “Really Tinie’s hand-writing is getting more careless than ever. A nice scrawl she must make of the poor Professor’s papers. I can’t make out anything clearly, except ‘Christina Reay,’ with the grand flourish, and the queer sketches of heads below. The lassie is as daft as ever.”

He said this with a touching attempt at his old cheerfulness, and began to decipher the illegible hieroglyphics. Sometimes they made him smile, especially a comical imaginary sketch of Esther’s baby, doubtless as amusing to the young mother as it was to the uncle, who was trying hard to feel on these topics a proper avuncular interest. But, as he went on, he began to look grave.

“Who is this Mrs. Armadale whom Edmund is always going to see, and about whom Tinie seems so vexed?”

“I believe she is one of the actresses at the — Theatre ; and Edmund said something about her influence having been of advantage to his play, which is accepted there. But the boy writes me such short letters now, and so seldom,” added Lindsay, sighing.

Ninian continued to read. “I think,” he said, pausing, “that Tinie should have told us these things before, or else have tried by her own means to influence her brother. Instead of which, she seems only to scold him. Edmund will never bear that, I know.”

Lindsay looked alarmed. “You don’t think he is seriously going wrong? He was always fond of amusement; every boy is. The theatre is a great treat to him, as he told me; but he said there was no harm in it; none at all. And what is this place which Tinie calls a Casino? I never heard of that before.”

“I have. It is not such a very awful place, so don’t look terrified, Lindsay. It is just a room where young men go to dance, and hear singing. Still, Edmund might do better than waste his evenings there. I will write and tell him so.”

(Perhaps if young Edmund had been hidden behind the door, he would have laughed

heartily at the simplicity of his *douce* Scottish brother and sister, and plumed himself upon knowing so much more of the world than they.)

“It is not good news of the boy, on the whole. I must look after him a little more, now that I am stronger,” said Ninian. “But the letter does not end here. You have not given me the whole of it.”

“There is one page more. You can read it if you like; but——” Lindsay hesitated, with an anxious glance towards her brother. He drew back his hand a moment, and then, shading his eyes, said, in a low voice,

“Read it aloud, Lindsay—every word, mind.”

It was a serio-comic description of the young wife’s happy life, day by day, including a hearty wish that everybody had as good a husband as Kenneth Reay.

“‘I wonder if Hope has, by-the-by?’” continued the paragraph. “‘She does not often speak of him in her letters. I had one the other day, dated at Florence, where they will stay another year. She says she wonders you do not write, and is afraid you were not pleased at her marrying so hastily. But there were reasons very likely! How could she help it, poor child? That

Mr. Ulverston could wile a bird off a bush, as *I* know. A mercy he never succeeded with me! I often make Kenneth jealous of him, though, by talking of old times. Heigho! who would have thought that Desdichado would have married quiet little Hope, and I should have taken up with my poor old Professor? Still, I wouldn't like to change.' ”

All this Ninian listened to without stirring, except a convulsive movement of the fingers of his left hand, which made his old favourite on his knee turn round and purr. He paused, and stroked it,—poor fellow! he could not afford to reject even a dumb animal's love.

There was a silence. Afterwards Mr. Græme said, slowly, “Lindsay, write to her. She will be hurt else.”—This was the only comment he made.

Very soon he recurred to the subject of Edmund's wild ways, about which he was evidently more anxious than he liked to show. So was Lindsay. They talked the matter over for some time. At last the elder sister said, timidly,

“You must judge best. Still, if we could persuade Edmund to come home, or if you

would not mind going to see him in London——”

Ninian started nervously. “I can’t, sister—I can’t! Don’t ask me.” But on reflection his mind seemed to waver. He sat long in a thoughtful mood, and then, just as they were going to bed, said, cheerfully, “Make yourself easy; I will go and see your boy. To-morrow—no! the day after, I will start for London.”

Mr. Græme’s making up his mind never cost any one any trouble. There were no more discussions, but at the time specified he was on his way to the metropolis.

London on a bright May-day, the streets full of cabs, carriages, and gay pedestrians; visions of “Jack-in-the-green” appearing at stray corners; long lines of posted play-bills, showing that all the amusements of the season have begun; Regent-street pavements glimmering almost clean enough for white satin shoes, and the Duke of York on his column, standing vividly out against a sky as blue as that of Canaletto’s “Venice”—such was the phantasmagorical picture which greeted Ninian Græme.

He did not look a fit adjunct to its pleasurable brightness. He had a tired, dull aspect,

such as he rarely wore when Lindsay was watching him at The Gowans. If ever he had that look, he invariably left it behind him at his office, lest it should mar the quiet of a heart which now had little other thought or care than himself in the whole wide world.

Some inward feeling made him unwilling that his own kindred should see him in this jaded, melancholy condition; so he went to an inn, and after a few hours' rest proceeded to his sister's house.

"They're a' gane frae hame—there's naebody here," was the doleful response of Katie, the Græmes' old servant, who had been kindly transferred from the elder sister to the younger ("an' muckle need o't," as the staid handmaiden once declared, eying her inexperienced girlish mistress). "They're gane to a tea-drinking, and Master Edmund's awa' to see some play-acting—some new havers o' his ain—o' the whilk I dinna ken nor care."

And she pursed up her lips with an indication of high disapproval, scarcely tempered by the delight she testified at seeing her old master.

"Ye're unco' welcome, Mr. Ninian," said she, when she had settled him in the parlour. "It

does an auld body gude to set their een upon ye. Wae's me! There's ne'er a ane o' your father's sons that will grow up the like o' yoursel'!"

"Why do you say that, Katie?"

"It's nae business o' mine; but I'm aye glad ye're come, sir. It gies me a sair heart to see young laddies gaun a' wrang for want o' a bridle i' their mou', and a father or a brither to haud it fast."

"That means, the bridle is necessary for poor Edmund? Is he so very wrong, then?"

"Eh, sir—but I wadna like to bring the laddie into trouble that gate."

"You shall not. Still I must know all."

"I canna tell ye then—nor the half o't. But when laddies gang abroad a' the day, and amaist a' the nicht, naebody kens whar; comin' hame in the wee hours, ane, twa, three, or maybe no comin' ava;—it's awfu' to see the like o' that. An' him that was a wee toddling bairn at my knee, it's no twenty year sin syne!"

The old Scotswoman shook her head, half in sternness, half in sorrow. Ninian asked no more questions; he felt a reluctance to finding out by stealth his brother's errors. And be-

sides, there was a vague self-reproach troubling him, as if he were to blame for those many months when he had been forced to sit in dull repose by the fireside at The Gowans, and see the world and its affairs, even those pertaining to his near kindred, go by like shadows.

Many have known such a time—when feeling and being were utterly paralysed, except as regarded the ordinary mechanical round of life. But few, at their waking, have experienced the compunction of this good man; whose existence had previously been so filled with manifold duties, that their partial cessation seemed to him almost like a crime.

“ I ought to have taken more care over the boy,” thought the elder brother, as he reflected on the many stories which had reached him of the young prodigal. Then learning from Katie how that the family would not be home for some hours, and how this was the first night of Edmund’s play—his maiden work—Mr. Græme set off to the theatre.

It was one of those entitled “ minor,” but elevated by the lingerings of the legitimate drama. The scene was a goodly one—such as old Shakspeare might have taken pleasure in.

Ninian had some difficulty in making his way through the crowd of intelligent, critical playgoers—none very aristocratic, but belonging to that honest, life-abundant mass, entitled “the people.” Tradesmen, with their wives and daughters; brisk, sensible young fellows, who struggled after information from behind counters, solemn city worthies, and respectable mechanics; with a sprinkling here and there of appreciators of the drama of a higher intellectual grade—these constituted the audience.

And a capital audience they were—warm, earnest, and alive to delicate perceptions in a remarkable degree. Mr. Græme, unused to theatre-going, had not been ten minutes in the house before he felt interested in them, and with them. He was alone too, for he could not see his brother anywhere. He almost thought he had made some error, for the play in the bill was marked as being by a “celebrated author;” and he never imagined his boy Edmund to be anything of the kind.

However, he resolved to stay where he was, and await the end of the performance.

There are few more pleasurable excitements than that attending the first night of a new play

—well acted, with a good-natured, appreciative audience. Even if Ninian had had no fraternal stake in the matter, he would have entered warmly into the interest of the night. He saw, likewise, what at last convinced him that the “celebrated author” must, in some metaphorical sense, be meant to indicate Edmund; since the heroine of the play, as marked on the bills, was Mrs. Armadale—the object of Tinie’s alarm and indignation. He looked with some curiosity to her entrance on the stage.

At last there was a round of welcome applause; the heroine had appeared.

She was a grand-looking woman, stately and tall. Her robes, of mediæval fashion, were worn with a most regal air; and there was a fierce, restless glitter in her eyes, which exactly suited the half-barbaric princess of Edmund’s rather romantic play. When she spoke, her voice gave Ninian a start. It was one of the finest of stage-voices—deep, not high; her elocution and accent were perfect; though now and then a quick ear might detect a slight Northern tone—a broadening or softening of vowels.

“That is Mrs. Armadale?” said he, in-

quiringly of his neighbour, who was gazing, dumb with admiration—being a youth of that age when all fine actresses appear divinities.

“Yes, it’s her. Isn’t she a stunner? Ah!”

Ninian felt inclined to smile; but soon his own attention was fixed, with a deeper interest than that of the stage.

The mediæval princess had a part of great passion—love, of course, being the moving agent therein. In the first act, she maintained her frigid dignity; in the second, she came down step by step from that icy height, and melted into a torrent of passion; in the third, she had to enact a woman scorned. Then, it was fearful to see the power of tragedy developed by this young actress—for she was still young. Her delineation, though sometimes crude, abrupt—wanting the refinement of experience—was a piece of natural painting, marvellous in energy, and vivid as truth itself.

The house grew still as death. Even Ninian drew in his breath, fascinated by something which seemed to him half familiar in the voice, though the disguise effected by stage costume and high tragedy aspect bewildered him completely as to the person of the heroine. But

when at last, in a climax of despair, the poor princess dashed the crown from her head, and rushed to the front of the stage, the footlights shining distinctly on her face—that face, of a dead pallor, with the wavy auburn locks falling about it all unbound—Of a sudden, the truth flashed upon Ninian Græme.

The young actress was Rachel Armstrong.

This then explained all: the anonymous gifts sent to John Forsyth; the mystery of Edmund's association with Mrs. Armadale. The youth had kept her secret well, whatever had been his motive for so doing. Perhaps—and a painful misgiving crossed the brother's mind—perhaps the “wronged sinner” had now become a sinner indeed—or worse, a temptress.

It was a bitter, probably an unjust thought; but Mr. Græme was a Scotsman, not quite free from the almost universal Scottish prejudice against “play-actors.” For the moment, he felt as if he would rather have found Rachel Armstrong toiling in the meanest hut, than a successful actress on the stage.

The third act ended; the audience began to emerge from behind their pocket-handker-

chiefs and talk of the play. Many comments reached Ninian, pleasant enough to his brotherly ears; but he had now another interest equal to that of Edmund. He listened eagerly to what was said of Mrs. Armadale.

“She’s a grand actress. Her genius wants a little form—art—cultivation, and then—she’ll beat old Siddons hollow,” said a Young England critic, a puller down of the ancient traditions of the stage.

“She’s a fine woman, too,” added a sallow-looking young fellow, something between a man of fashion and a green-room *habitué*. “Quite as handsome off the stage as on—only so confoundedly frosty. Did you hear the story about her and Sir Arthur B——?”

The two began to laugh together—that bitter, under-toned laugh, that comes like an ice-breath across a woman’s fame. Ninian felt his blood boil as he listened.

There was a young girl in the box—probably sister to one of these—an innocent-looking creature, behind whose back they were talking. She turned with red eyes, and sighed out, “How nice it was to cry over a play, and how

naturally that beautiful Mrs. Armadale acted, just as if she felt it all. What a pity it was only acting!"

Ninian listened to these idle comments on the sham tragedy, and then thought of the real tragedy of the woman's life. How strange these things were!

When again Rachel appeared, her mien brightened by the supposed gleam of hope, which, according to due dramatic recipe, Edmund had given in the fourth act of his tragedy; when she moved beneath the glare of theatrical show, mimicking—not sorrow—that had been no mimicry!—but happiness,—Ninian closed his eyes with a sense of indescribable repulsion. He wished she had become a poverty-stricken drudge, a melancholy mourner—anything but an actress.

But as the play went on, the woman's genius drew him out of himself once more. Fate darkened again over the poor barbaric princess. Well had the young dramatist sketched her, and nobly did the actress vivify his conception. She grew once more magnificent—inspired—sublime! She wielded the power which a great tragedian can wield over the highest moral

consciousness and most refined emotions of the soul.

Whatever the individual man may be, mankind when assembled in masses is always alive to the highest ideal of human virtue. In the drama especially—that is, the heroic drama, the only worthy form of theatrical representation—this feeling is most powerful. The thronged house was hushed into silence, thrilled with awe, melted into pity. Many women were in tears—nay, here and there, some sturdy man was seen with quivering features, half-yielding to the strong emotion. Young and old, rich and poor, ignorant and refined, were subdued, moved, guided, as if they had but one soul, and this woman were its ruler.

The curtain fell upon a death-scene, to which the genius of the actress had lent a superhuman beauty that seemed almost the transfiguration of death. The mimic life-history was ended.

Ninian woke as out of a trance. On his mind, fresh and unused to such impressions, the effect was overpowering. Touch by touch, all the deepest wells of his spirit had been stirred into motion—not merely by compelled sympathy for what was piteous or beautiful, but by

many an individual feeling, which was his daily care to deaden, yet which the excitement of the drama had caused to quiver one by one into painful life. Over all fell the calm which belongs to that sphere whither the tragic poet or actor can lift us, when even sorrow becomes serene, and death itself appears sublimated into inexpressible peace.

So Ninian felt. When, after one hushed pause, the house burst into thunders of acclamation,—with a long, deep sigh, he threw off the enchantment. But his mind had somewhat changed—he no longer so deeply lamented over Rachel and her calling. To be an actress—and such an actress—was not altogether an unworthy destiny.

The storm of applause increased apace, mingled with various calls and exclamations perfectly unintelligible to an unpractised ear. Then all the sea of faces bent one way, and Mr. Græme, looking thitherwards, saw bowing from a private box, that favourite of an audience for one night only—the Author!

A thrill passed through the brotherly heart of a silent unit in that shouting crowd. It was Edmund—his boy Edmund!

As soon as he could, the elder brother made his way to the box. It was filled with various men of note—laughing, talking, and congratulating. In the midst of the circle stood the young author.

He had been a mere stripling a year ago, and though glorying in the full manhood of twenty-one looked quite a stripling still, except his face, which was very haggard. His eyes, sometimes gleaming with genius, then glittering with excitement, his mouth, trembling at every breath of feeling, were the sole traces left of that innocent boyish face which Lindsay had thought so fair.

For a minute or two, Ninian, being kept outside, listened to the young author, who was talking loudly—dashingly—daringly, making himself the very centre of the group, until in the midst of it appeared the grave, quiet aspect of his elder brother.

Edmund started—grew pale—looked confused. What could there be in Ninian to alarm him so? It was an evidently unpleasant surprise. But Mr. Grame was too happy to notice this.

“ You did not expect to see me here, my

dear boy? It was a mere chance that I came to London to-day. But I am so glad, and so proud, Edmund."

He grasped the hand—now offered to him almost as to a stranger; the same hand by which he had once led his favourite brother, the wee toddling fellow that he taught to walk!

The circle in the box, second-rate authors, actors, wits about town, looked with curious, half-sarcastic eyes on the stranger who had so thoroughly damped young Græme's flow of spirits.

"My brother, gentlemen," said Edmund, colouring painfully. "My elder brother from Scotland."

Ninian bowed, glanced quickly over the young man's associates—thought in his own mind that they were a queer dissipated looking set—and assuming what was certainly his right, began to talk to his brother, the "celebrated author."

"How long have you grown so renowned, Edmund? Why did you keep all this from me?"

"I thought probably you would take no interest in the matter."

"You were mistaken, you see." Ninian said

no more, for he was hurt. He began talking of the play in his clear, homely style, which sounded curiously, almost ludicrously different from the stage-familiar cant which play-going critics use. Edmund looked half-ashamed—his companions turned aside to smile. One by one they dropped away with a nod and hint at a rendezvous, which signal Edmund answered quite as mysteriously.

When they were gone, the youth seemed more at ease; and asked, for the first time, after Lindsay and his other sisters.

“They are all well. They will be so proud of your success. God bless you, my boy! I always said you would be the genius of the family.”

Edmund's eyes faintly gleamed once more, and then his long-sustained excitement having at last burned itself out, he sat down at the back of the box, quite exhausted.

Ninian put his hand on his young brother's head in the old familiar way. “You don't look well. You are not taking care of yourself, Edmund.”

“Oh yes, as much as I can, with the life I lead;” and the real sense of weariness he felt

was mingled with a slightly affected "used-up" air, such as young people often delight in.

"Do you like that life? Are you really happy, my boy?"

Edmund looked up, and his young face darkened into bitterness—bitterness that was quite real. "Happy! Pshaw—an adjective belonging to the language of Arcadia;—a dead language now. Nobody is ever happy. But I'm very merry, which is enough."

He laughed out loud, and changed the conversation. "This is a nice little theatre, brother. Plays well got up—well acted. Ah!" and a sudden thought appeared to strike him, "how did you like Mrs. Armadale?"

"She is a woman of great genius. I always *knew* she was," answered Ninian, pointedly.

"Knew! Why when did you know her before?" said Edmund, evidently anxious either to find out how much his brother had discovered, or to turn him off the scent altogether, with regard to Rachel.

"I don't know why you should be playing with me, Edmund," returned Ninian, gravely. "Did you think I could not see at once who

this young actress is? Why did you not tell me long before?"

"Because she bade me not."

"Wherefore! She need not have been afraid of me—poor Rachel Armstrong!"

"Hush! nobody knows — nobody dreams that such is her name. That is, no one but me. She told me the whole story."

"How strange!" thought Ninian.

"All but his name,—I wish I knew it! Curse him!" muttered the youth, fiercely.

"How very strange!" repeated Ninian, aloud. "What could have been her reason in telling you this?"

Edmund's sallow cheek grew scarlet. "I do not see, brother, that you have any right to speculate on that. I am not a boy now. Leave me to guide my own affairs."

Ninian's reply was stopped by a knock at the box-door. There was a lady waiting. The elder brother might have known, by the sudden changing of Edmund's look—who it was. He turned half aside, lest he might startle Rachel.

She came into the box. Her stage-dress was of course put off. She had on a close black

gown, with a black veil thrown over her head. The paint removed, her features had a death-like whiteness and stillness.

“You did not come round to me, so I thought I would come round to you. I congratulate you, Edmund,” said she, in cold clear tones.

“Thanks! Forgive me for not coming to thank *you*, through whom alone I have won this triumph,” murmured the young man, with a gesture as if he were about to kiss her hand; but either the recollection of his brother’s presence, or some slight repellent action of Rachel herself, prevented him.

“It has been a great success—all in the theatre say so. But we will talk it over another time. You are engaged now, I see.”

She was retiring, when Ninian came forward with extended hand.

“Rachel!”

A start—a quiver—but only momentary. Her whole mien, face, and voice indicated the change that had passed over her, utterly withering up her heart. There was not life enough left in it to suffer pain.

Rachel drew herself up, looked right forward with those wonderful eyes, clear and deep as

ever, but cold like a frozen spring. She said, with scarce a change in her passionless voice, "This is unexpected. But I am very glad to see you, Mr. Græme."

Ninian was perfectly confounded. Whether she had entirely overcome, forgotten, or desired to ignore the past, he could not tell. One thing was evident from her manner, that she wished him in meeting her to recognise only the actress Mrs. Armadale. Why she had assumed that name, he could guess, but never inquired; nor did she ever explain.

"It was a beautiful play, was it not?" she added, breaking the pause. "You may well be proud of your brother Edmund." (She did not call him Geoffrey now.) "I must congratulate you both; and then say adieu, for my maid is waiting."

And through the half-opened door was seen the withered face and crooked figure of old Jane Sedley.

"Shall we not see you to-night?" whispered Edmund, anxiously. "Ah, you could not be so cruel!"

She paused a little, but afterwards said, "I will come."

Then, with the same perfectly self-possessed manner—cold, not positively, but negatively, from the utter absence of anything like feeling or warmth—the young actress left the box.

“Is she always thus?” asked Ninian, in a low tone.

“Always—except when she is acting.”

“Poor soul!” Neither of the two brothers made any other remark. Both felt that the silence her demeanour imposed must not be broken even between themselves.

Likewise, from Edmund’s unconscious betrayals, Ninian began to guess at a secret which made him still more careful how he mentioned the name of Mrs. Armadale to his young brother.—The thing was improbable; yet it might be. What if all Edmund’s light, poetical loves were settling into one serious passion? Wrung with pity and pain, the elder brother turned to look at him.

He was evidently in strong but pleasurable excitement. Smiling, he stood and beat time to the orchestra, who were strumming away at some merry waltzes, prior to the second piece.

“You will stay for the farce, I suppose, brother?” said he, looking as if he heartily

wished Ninian would do so. "For me—I hate after-pieces; we regular play-goers always do. Besides, I have an engagement."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Græme. He thought he certainly might put that simple question to his younger brother.

But Edmund did not seem to relish it. "Really, it cannot interest you. A little harmless amusement, that is all."

"Come—surely I am not growing an old ogre to you, my boy," said Ninian, good-naturedly. "Tell me, now; pray do."

"Nothing worth telling. Everybody does it, after a successful play. Just a little sort of supper to actors and actresses—pleasant enough—but still, not what you would care for."

"We don't know that. Let me try. Among all your guests you'll not shut out your brother?"

There was no resisting Ninian's frank, kindly ways; Edmund, with the best grace he could, took his arm, and with him quitted the box.

CHAPTER II.

It may speak very ill for Mr. Græme's knowledge of the world, to confess that until this night he had never been "behind the scenes" of a theatre. He was a good deal amused to observe this strange region of odd contrasts and explained illusions. The green-room, with its lounging throng of people in all sorts of costumes, was not uninteresting to his simple mind, which, unused to the dark side of theatrical life, viewed all things in their best light. He noticed how perfectly *au fait* young Edmund seemed in all the mysteries of the place—how he exchanged greetings with actors apparently of every grade, and indulged in gay and not too respectful badinage with many a fair painted *comediennne*. Ninian was really astonished to find what a popular, brilliant, and self-assured young dandy Edmund had turned out.

He seemed merry, too—like a person ever ready to lose himself in the enchantment of the moment, which, indeed, had been the boy's characteristic always. There was no detecting that restless, uneasy look—except once, when Ninian heard him ask with apparent carelessness, “If Mrs. Armadale had gone?”

“Some time since,” answered a young man, whom Mr. Græme recognised as his neighbour during the play, who had so emphatically decided the question of Rachel's charms “off the stage.” “I offered to escort her, but was met by that crusty, hump-backed little dragon of the Herperides, and so!—Bah! It really was not worth while to urge. However, we shall see her at your supper to-night, Græme? That is, unless she objects to meeting the other two or three charming little persons.”

“Whom you made me invite. Well, you must bear the brunt of it,” laughed Edmund. And then, catching his brother's eye, he looked uncomfortable.

“Who is he with whom you were talking?” said Ninian.

“Mr. Lyonell—a rich young merchant, and a Jew; though he is rather ashamed than otherwise of Father Abraham.”

So, with a quick, sarcastic comment upon almost every one they met, concerning whom the elder brother had a very justifiable curiosity, this young man, so worldly wise and withal so bitter, led Ninian through the mazes of the theatre. Perhaps, his first instinctive confusion being gone, Edmund even took a pleasure in exhibiting how much he had eaten of the tree of knowledge, and how deeply he had become acquainted with what parents and guardians frowningly consider "the wickedness of the world."

Of course, it was impossible for young Græme's little festival to be holden at his own home in his brother-in-law's house; so it "came off" at some place of public entertainment within the purlieus of Covent Garden, where Edmund seemed quite familiar.

"All ready for the champagne-supper in No. 3?" Ninian heard him observe to the waiter.

— It was rather peculiar certainly, the brother thought. His own moderate allowance to Edmund would certainly not admit of such festivities. However, he made no remark, but determined to conduct himself in every way as a mere guest, and not a watch-

ful censor of the youth's manners and customs.

The guests assembled; in number about a dozen men, with a light sprinkling of ladies. At first, the master of the feast looked rather awkward, especially in introducing his fair friends, to whom Ninian bowed with the grave politeness with which he ever treated all women,—a deference, however, which the rest of the company did not imitate, but evidently considered the genus actress as a creation of lower order.

“I wonder, will the Armadale come?” observed Mr. Lyonell. “You’re a lucky fellow, Græme, to get her to indulge us with the light of her countenance—it is not often she condescends so far.”

This was well, Ninian thought. He had begun to doubt whether this fair-seeming company was exactly fitted for any woman who, whether actress or not, had a woman's natural self-respect. There might be nothing positively evil in this set, with all of whom Edmund was evidently hand-in-glove, still there was a certain *laissez-faire* in their talk, a bandying about of theatrical jests and theatrical scandal, which

jarred painfully on Ninian's mind, and brought him down from that calm ideal height on which Rachel's grand acting had placed him. He found the theatre was but the theatre after all, and speculated within himself whether in this sphere where Mrs. Armadale was compelled to move, "one could touch pitch and not be defiled."

He began to wish that she would not come, but scarcely had he done so than she appeared, followed by her faithful little "dragon," who, however, soon vanished.

If Rachel had meant to draw the line between tragedy and comedy, she could not better have done so than by the contrast her own appearance formed to her gaudily and rather too flimsily attired sisters of the stage. She was still in her high, black dress, plain even to severity. She had no jewels—not one; but when she took off her glove, Ninian saw there was still on her left hand her mother's guard, which to herself had been made the piteous mockery of a wedding-ring.

The other guests received with a sort of compelled respect the chief guest of the evening, the successful tragic actress. She bowed to

them all, and shook hands with a few, especially with Edmund, to whom her manner had a marked but dignified kindness. Ninian thought that she could not, or would not, see what he, alas ! saw too plainly—the infatuation which was either dawning, or struggling through crushed hopelessness, in the breast of the young man.

However, Edmund was too thoroughly world-taught to betray himself much ; he soon recovered his self-possession, and the supper began. Mrs. Armadale's entrance had unconsciously given a different tone to the conversation, which was now resumed with new zest. The badinage and scandal-mongers felt their energies flag, while the keen wits and brilliant critics recovered their better selves for a while. Then Ninian, sitting rather silent and retired, had an opportunity of observing into what a creature Rachel Armstrong had developed.

— A woman of intellect strong and clear, sometimes even sparkling, but with a frosty glitter in which there was no warmth. She talked a good deal, and talked well, though chiefly on her own profession in its higher sense. In her manner was little assumed

haughtiness, and no positive reserve, but a kind of passionless reticence, which enshrined her as it were in an atmosphere too rare for any intruder therein to breathe. There would be no stain on the marble, because it *was* marble—hard, repulsive, lifeless, and pure.

Ninian watched her—the centre of attraction to a circle of admiring men about town and brilliant, easy-principled men of letters—controlling the one set by a few occasional words, keen enough, though scarcely condescending to sarcasm; meeting the others upon their own ground—that of pure intellect—and in conversation showing powers of almost masculine vigour, combined with a susceptibility to everything beautiful which could be received and appreciated by the mind alone. But the heart was utterly dead.

Yet there she was, beautiful, admired, successful, and aware of success. Ninian thought of the woman whom he had seen, not quite three years ago, creeping staggeringly into his dark office at midnight, to receive her doom. Did she remember it? He spoke to her little, nor she to him, but more than once he

caught her eye. It was quite expressionless, except for the hard, cold glitter, which indicated her mental power, and her consciousness of possessing the same.

By degrees the supper grew into what a champagne-supper after the play was not unlikely to degenerate. Men talked—not much minding what they talked. Women laughed—more loudly than women ought to laugh. More painful than either to Ninian Græme, was it to see his brother—the boy so tenderly and fondly reared—the loudest laugher and the wildest talker; sitting with cheek flushed and eyes sparkling with wine, a victim to orgies, which, though not yet obscuring his faculties, perhaps even brightening his genius, were in a man so young the warning of after ruin.

Did Rachel see all this? She did not, as far as Mr. Græme could discern. She sat, testifying neither repulsion nor shame; a little more silent perhaps, but that was all. Some of the men she had been talking with seceded to their more amusing female acquaintance, and Ninian was able to get nearer to her. He thought he would venture to speak, mingling a little of

his old friendliness with the distance she apparently wished to preserve between them.

“Mrs. Armadale!”

She turned—a slight contracting of her brows alone showing that she remembered her questioner was Ninian Græme. “I beg your pardon. Did you speak to me?”

“You look wearied, and it is late. Can I be of any assistance should you wish to go home?”

“Thank you, I have no such wish at present. My hours are always late,” she replied, using the same under tone in which Mr. Græme had spoken. Some time longer she sat, amid the uproar of wit and jesting, until at last even Ninian wondered at her stay.

“Do you like this?” said he, trying if possible to arouse her to some sense of her position.

“It is amusing; it passes time away,” she answered coldly.

“But surely to see clever men—wise men—men of genius, thus lowering themselves.”

“It is their own affair; it matters not to me.”

More and more silent, the young actress sat by Mr. Græme, until his manly spirit almost recoiled to know a woman was beside him in

such a company. He thought he would make one last attempt to recover the influence he once possessed over the poor girl whom he had befriended.

“Will you forgive me; but indeed, Rachel—”

A slight shiver passed over her, as she interrupted, in a low voice, “*Mrs. Armadale.*”

“I understand. Forgive me, when I tell you how much it pains me that you should remain here. Will you let me call a carriage?”

“As you choose; or let my maid do it. She is probably here, or else I can wait her coming,” was the careless reply, though Rachel made no attempt to move.

“Excuse me, but you must go. It is right you should;” and the clear eye which had controlled her even in the days of her temporary madness was fixed kindly but firmly on her now.

Rachel moved restlessly, as if it brought back some touch of old feelings to her poor frozen heart. “You are very good, Mr. Græme, I will go.” She took his offered arm and rose.

But the tide of gaiety was now running too high to allow even of due respect to *Mrs. Armadale* herself. The young gallants of the party

declared that it was impossible the light of the meeting could be suffered to eclipse herself so soon. And when Ninian, having quietly made arrangements for her departure, came to fetch her away, he found his intent marred by Lyonell and one or two others, who proceeded with boisterous mirth to fasten the door and prevent the lady's retreat.

Ninian, unwilling to come to an open contention, tried pacific measures, but in vain. He turned to his brother.

“Edmund, it is your place, not mine, to interfere here. You surely will not see all this without remonstrating with your friends?”

Edmund tried reasoning as well as he could with his half-fumed brain; directing meanwhile imploring looks at Mrs. Armadale, who stood perfectly passive, though her heavy brows darkened slightly.

“It will not do, gentlemen,” interposed Mr. Græme, at last. “I myself must desire you to release this lady—if my brother has so far forgotten all courtesy and kind feeling towards her.”

“It is not his fault—Poor boy! poor boy!” said Rachel, with a faint touch of pity, as she

looked at Edmund, who seemed struggling against his bewilderment and trying vainly to control the alarm he felt at missing his beautiful idol.

Rachel went up to him with a commanding, yet kindly air. "Edmund, good night. Go home at once with your brother—mind, I say, go home."

The youth muttered something, kissing her hand with a maudlin chivalric air. But Rachel abruptly drew aside, and advanced to the half-intoxicated fellows who held the door and were parleying the while with Mr. Græme's scarcely repressible anger.

"Allow *me* to speak," she said to Ninian. And then, motioning the young men aside with a gesture that was neither haughty nor contemptuous but thoroughly unconcerned and indifferent, she added: "Mr. Lyonell, you will be kind enough to let me pass—Mr. Barker and Mr. White—I wish you good evening."

Way was made at once: Rachel unlocked the door and went out, Mr. Græme following. Ere long, while the two yet stood in the ante-room, they heard a chorus of laughter, and one or two loud spoken jests—that caused Ninian to feel the colour flushing in his cheek.

“Rachel!” said he in his earnestness, forgetting her prohibition, “forgive an old friend’s plainness. Tell me, why did you come to such a place as this?”

“Edmund asked me. I wished not to be unkind to the boy.”

Ninian glanced sharply at her, but there was no change in Rachel’s manner to indicate that she believed Edmund felt towards her in any way but as a “boy.”—“That was good of you, and very thoughtless of my brother. I entreat you, be more careful in future. Forgive my bluntness, but you know we are old friends.”

“Are we? Yes, I owe you much kindness,” said she; but even this acknowledgment of the past was made with the same expressionless demeanour.

“Then, let me resume a friend’s place once more. May I come and see you?”

“Yes, to-morrow, if you will.”

“Thank you. And for Heaven’s sake, let me beg of you not to adventure yourself in such a position again. The best woman in the world cannot join such a set as these here, without in some way losing her character.”

“You know well, I have none to lose.”

In those words, slow and cold, evincing the calm of utter despair, was the key to the woman's whole present life.

They so overwhelmed Ninian that he could find no answer. Thoroughly subdued with pity, he led Rachel out into the street, where he had a carriage waiting.

"I think," said he, pausing with kindly tact—"I think I will say good night now. It is better for you to go home alone."

"Not alone—Jane is sure to be here." And creeping from a corner of the piazza came a little dark figure—the poor faithful attendant—the sole protection this desolate young creature had.

"Is that you, Mrs. Sedley? You remember me?" whispered Ninian with a smile, as the old woman looked suspiciously at him, but on the recognition, uttered his name with a cry of pleasure and thankfulness. He lifted her into the carriage; he could not have done so with more respect had the poor servant been the greatest lady in the land. And so he sent them home.

Mr. Græme stayed and took a turn or two up the solitary street, considering whether or

not he should return to the party. Nothing would have induced him so to do, except anxiety for his brother and some lurking feeling that even on Mrs. Armadale's account it would be better for him to reappear.

Therefore he went back, and for two more hours endured what to a man of his temperament and with his delicate health—for he was not so strong as he had been—were, to say the least, two hours of positive martyrdom. At dawn the assembly broke up; the young host being left in a state of wild excitement that cut his brother to the heart.

The sleepy waiter came up with the bill.

“I can't pay,” stammered the unfortunate giver of the feast. “Quite impossible, at this time of night, or morning is it? And I promised that adorable little Colvin to take her a drive to Richmond at noon. You'll go too, eh brother? Only you'll promise not to spoil sport?”

“Edmund—the man is waiting. Have you the money?”

“I had it—I think—but, by Jove! it has somehow melted away. And now, I remember, Colvin wanted a ring, and that jealous little

Adèle a brooch—and then White plagued me about that small debt of honour. Upon my life, waiter, I haven't a farthing, or indeed it would give me the greatest satisfaction—delight—ecstatic felicity, as Lyonell says,—conical fellow, that Lyonell!”

Thus meandered on the unlucky reveller—poor Lindsay's “handsome boy.” If she could have seen him now, it would have broken her heart!

Ninian took the bill and paid it; its tolerably large amount ridding him of the last shilling he had about him.

“Now Edmund, come,” said he, in a voice strangely stern.

“Well, I'm ready. Get a cab,” answered Edmund, sulkily.

“No, we must walk home.”

And so through the quiet streets and squares already freshening with the morning air, the two brothers went; the younger leaning on the elder, sometimes so unsteadily that Ninian had to support him as he walked. At such a time remonstrances or reproofs would have been idle; Mr. Græme attempted none. With heart borne down by a shame that seemed to outweigh

all sense of personal misery which he had ever known, he led home the boy in whom he had placed so much of pride, hope, and tenderness.

“Silence, Katie,” whispered he, as the old servant began loudly to rail. “Go to bed; and, do you hear me? say nothing of this. Remember, *I* am here now.”

He stayed with Edmund until the luckless youth had fallen into a heavy stupor; then, looking at him as he slept, the elder brother groaned in the anguish of his spirit, and prayed that he might not have come too late to save poor Lindsay’s boy.

CHAPTER III.

NINIAN had charged Katie to keep the secret of his arrival; consequently, his appearance at the Professor's breakfast-table had exactly the effect of somebody's "dropping from the clouds." It would have done any one's heart good to hear the scream of delight with which little Mrs. Reay, now a pretty young matron as ever was seen, sprung into her brother's arms.

"Oh, you darling!—oh, you nice old fellow!—to come and surprise us thus! Beat him, Kenneth; do beat him, for not coming long ago."

Half-laughing, half-crying, the little woman jumped from husband to brother, performing between the two a charming oscillation,

or perhaps, to improve upon the word, *osculat-ion*; an old propensity of the warm-hearted Tinie, which evidently had not been corrected since her marriage.

At last, having settled down into something like calmness and propriety, Mrs. Reay placed herself at the head of her table, with a comical, sly glance at her brother, as if to say, "Look how very dignified I can be!"

Ninian took his seat beside her, lest her quick eye should read too closely many feelings which the sight of her happiness had stirred from their firmly-guarded repose.

"Well, Kenneth, and how does this wee sister of mine behave herself? Do you wish to give her back to me?"

"Let him, if he dares!" laughed the young wife. While the Professor—whose outward man was greatly improved, his hair being combed properly, instead of flying all abroad like a hayrick in a high wind, and the rusty brown coat of his bachelor days being exchanged for a most respectable dressing-gown—smiled in full content, while his soft grey eyes twinkled perceptibly.

"Tinie is a very good wife, indeed," said he,

his honest cheek blushing like a boy's. "She writes so clearly that I never blunder over my college lectures now. She keeps my eyes so idle that they hardly pain me at all. And she knows how to handle a telescope cleverly. Herschel's sister will be nothing to her, in time."

"There—hold your tongue, Kenneth, or my brother will wonder he never found out all my perfections, and be wishing me back again? Do you, Ninian?" added she, half seriously. "Do you miss me very much?"

"No, Mrs. Vanity—not I!" Then speaking in earnest, "I am glad my wee thing is happy—very glad!" And something in his manner ended the pleasant jest.

"We were talking of you but now," said Tinie. "Guess what news is here—all surprises come together! I think."

She held up a foreign letter, superscribed in the hand which Ninian had now taught himself to see without agitation. "I conclude, it is from Mrs. Ulverston," he answered.—He could even say that name now.

"Ay—and only fancy what tidings!" continued the little matron, with a slight blush. "How Esther and Ruth would sympathise if

they knew! Their two infantile angels will be at a discount now. There's one come to Hope likewise."

Ninian moved abruptly and with unsteady step, towards the window, through which the morning sun was shining. "It dazzles me," he muttered—pulled the blind down, and returned to his seat.

"Well, are you not delighted, brother? I am sure Hope is; only read her note—a very brief one."

He took and read every word:—the bursting forth of a young mother's passionate, proud delight. Then he gave back the letter to his sister.

"Isn't she happy, poor little thing?" Tinie cried.

"God bless her!" said Ninian, in a low voice. This new holiness of motherhood seemed so to surround her, that he felt he *might* bless her, with a heart assured that neither in her sight, or in the sight of God, was there anything unhallowed in its tenderness.

But he could not talk much; very soon made an excuse to leave the house, and take a quiet walk in the morning air

Neither the Reays nor himself had made any mention of Edmund. Before Ninian went out, he came and looked at "the boy," as he still fondly called him. Edmund was lying sound asleep; but in his sleep he muttered uneasily something about Rachel.

"I will go and see Rachel," thought Ninian, knowing that to do or think of something for another was the best way to recover the tone of his own mind. He did not know Mrs. Armadale's address; but that was easily attainable at the theatre, so, without much trouble, he found her out.

She was living in homely but decent-looking lodgings, in a quiet street. He hardly knew why, but he was glad to find her abode so retired and poor. Everything within it was very pretty and neat; and when Mrs. Armadale entered, her appearance was neat likewise. She was not of those queens of the stage who sink into careless slatterns in the morning.

Rachel came in, looking much as she had sometimes done in her most quiet days at Musselburgh—except that her face had lost ten years, as it were, of youth; and her always colourless complexion had settled into an unalterable

pallor. She entered from the inner of the two little drawing-rooms, with a manuscript in her hand.

“I am studying my part, you see,” said she, when the first greeting was over. “I fancied, in spite of the pleasant thunders of last night, that more might be made of Edmund’s ‘Princess.’ She is a fine sketch of a character, is she not?”

“I thought so ; and rendered doubly fine by your acting. I never was more overwhelmed in my life—you almost made a baby of me,” answered Mr. Græme, finding that he must meet her on her own ground, and converse with her only as the actress Mrs. Armadale.

“I am glad you were pleased,” and a cold brightness, the first ray of human feeling he had yet seen there, sparkled in her eyes. “That is what I wish and work for. I care but little for common praise, but I am proud when a man like you comes and tells me I have made him feel thus. It is something to be—or try to be—a good actress.”

“Are you happy in your profession, then?”

“It gives me constant work, thought, and care—and entire forgetfulness.”

A slight lowering of her voice encouraged

Ninian to ask what he so much longed to know concerning her life during the early part of those three years which had resulted in her gaining the position which was the first step to future greatness. "Will you tell me why you chose the stage as your career, and where you acted first?" said he, cautiously putting the question which might probe so bitter a wound.

But she seemed to feel it not, and only replied in her hard manner: "We actresses have no time to think of anything but the present. All you wish to know you can learn of Jane."

Ninian was silenced.

They soon resumed the conversation, chiefly talking about Edmund and his play. Mr. Græme quickly discerned the half-maternal relation in which Rachel had stood, or intended to have stood, to this youth of genius—having over him the influence which a woman's older and more ripened mind can often wield. It was evident that half the young dramatist's triumph was owing to her. She had guided him to success, and thereby, from her contempt or ignorance of the world, had placed him in the very midst of its temptations and dangers, while the utter deadness of her own heart made her in-

sensible to a deeper ruin in which her kindness was involving him.—It was the story of an Aspasia marble-cold, and of a dumb, passionate Alcibiades, driven into all evil by the desperation of a hopeless love.

Ninian, sorely troubled, saw that this enthrallment must be ended. But how? He could neither accuse nor explain—Rachel gave him no opportunity for either. He must only trust to some chance awakening Edmund's confidence towards himself, when he, the elder brother, by some resolute means,—perhaps even by drawing the boy's tortured heart to his own, and showing him the scarce-healed wound there—might teach him that it was possible to endure and conquer at last.

Rachel and Mr. Græme had talked some time, when there came an interruption in the shape of some costumes which had to be tried.

“I shall turn you out now,” said Mrs. Armadale; “since, this duty being done, I would like half an hour's more study for my ‘Princess’ to-night. I let nothing interfere with work. Indeed for that reason I scarcely ever admit visitors.”

“Thank you for admitting me.”

“There are no thanks needed. It pleased me to welcome one whom I respect, and to whom I am very grateful. Will you come here again in about an hour?”

He promised; and occupied himself during the prescribed time in walking about the quiet streets and squares, musing strangely on all the things which had come to pass since his father died, and since the even current of his life had been troubled with cares of his own and of others, until he feared that it would never sink into its old, quiet boundary again. At the hour fixed, he returned to Mrs. Armadale's door.

Near it, pacing up and down with that discreditable lounge which excites the indignant gossip of all respectable streets, was a gentleman's cab and tiger.

“My mistress desired that when you came, you might be shown in here,” said Jane Sedley, bringing Mr. Græme into the small inner drawing-room. “She is engaged just now.”

“So it appears,” said Ninian, as he instinctively went to close the folding-doors, which were a few inches ajar, admitting the clear sound of voices in the adjoining room.

But Jane Sedley prevented him. “Let them

stay as they are, sir, I'm sure my mistress would wish it, and I too. She is foolish enough sometimes; and it's a vile set she lives among. But she has lived innocent as a baby. God help her!"

Speaking this in a whisper, the old woman disappeared.

Ninian, with all his world-wisdom, could not divine the reason why he was subjected to this sort of compelled eaves-dropping, a scheme which savoured too much of theatrical device for him much to approve of. It required all his old friendship and deep pity for Rachel to enable him to have any sympathy with her new position and strange wild ways.

Placed as he was, he could not choose but listen to what passed between her and her visitor — a gentleman, or at least one of those bipeds who by courtesy bear the name.

"I have told you, Mr. Lyonell," Rachel was saying, "that these long apologies are quite unnecessary; I am not in the least annoyed at what passed last night, nor did I either expect or require this visit."

"But I was dying to pay it. Upon my soul, I haven't slept a wink, for thinking how

rude we were to you. Now do pardon it, my gracious Princess. Ah! what an enchanting Princess you seemed last night!"

"Did I?"

"As sure as I'm a living man, you ought to be a Princess in reality. I wish I could only make you one."

"Thank you, Mr. Lyonell."

"So you are but a woman then, after all—my charming Mrs. Armadale," was the retort with a laugh. "You would'nt object to become a Princess, even though it was one of my making?"

"That fact being impossible, it seems to me that we are only wasting words. Cannot you find a subject more interesting?"

"Nothing can be more interesting to me, and there might be a few things more impossible, in the results at least. There's many a poor German prince who has not half so much in his power as the house of Lyonell, and its unworthy representative."

"Who, I suppose, expects me to contradict his statement of unworthiness, except, that no doubt the answer of his own conscience will save me that trouble," Ninian heard Rachel answer,

with just the slightest touch of sarcasm perceptible through her invariable civility. "But really this is a most needless expenditure of your kindness: and you have not yet entered upon the business which I understood you had to communicate, and which made me break through my rule. You know I have no time for visitors.

"Except Edmund Græme. Ah, he is a most enviable fellow, and you are, indeed too cruel, beautiful Mrs. Armadale. Your unkindness will kill me, as it killed poor Sir Arthur."

"Indeed, Mr. Lyonell, you seem well-acquainted with my affairs."

"It was your affair, then? you acknowledge it at last! So you really refused the poor devil, and brought down his grey hairs to the grave with sorrow, or with gout?"

"I never heard before that it was allowable to cast ridicule on a woman, or on a dead man who could not defend himself. This, however, is one of the many new truths that society has the opportunity of learning from Mr. Lyonell."

"Now, indeed, you are too hard upon me,

by my soul you are! and all because of my intense adoration for the most bewitching woman I know."

"Really, this conversation is of a character quite new on your part, and—excuse me for saying so—rather wearisome to me. Doubtless you think an actress can never have enough of flattery; but my small requirements in that line are very soon satisfied. Will you now condescend to plain English, and let me hear what I believe you had to communicate."

"I—I—really, Mrs. Armadale, your wit is so brilliant, it quite dazzles one."

"I will be silent then. See, I only look at you."

"That's worse and worse, unless you will smile too. It is quite impossible for me to exist longer, unless you smile upon me—beautiful Princess."

"There—I smile. Now what have you to say? Is it concerning your share in the theatre? or—you see I am acquainted with some secrets—has it to do with that little transaction of L. S. D., which you are always holding over the head of Mr. Edmund Græme."

“Confound Mr. Edmund Græme! No, no, I never thought of him. I came to tell you that—in short—I—I adore you.”

(Ninian understood now why Mrs. Armadale, or at least Jane Sedley, had placed him there; but indignantly he chafed in a position from which he had no power to free himself.)

“You adore me,” said Rachel’s tones, freezing with the most indifferent politeness. “So many have told me; so did my lover in the play last night. You seem to be imitating him now. But really, Mr. Lyonell, the kneeling position only appears graceful on the stage. Oblige me by rising.”

“Mrs. Armadale, you are too severe; you are, indeed; when a man makes an offer in good earnest—an offer of his heart and fortune.”

“Since you are in earnest, I will be so too. I can only answer, as you seem to be aware I have done more than once before—that I have no intention of marrying.”

“Marrying! Hum—ha! Quite right, my fair Princess. A great actress is much better without any such unnecessary tie. But still, if my devotion might hope——”

“Hope what, sir?”

“Why, as I before said—only I fear I did not quite explain myself—my heart, my fortune—an enormous fortune too—are yours eternally.”

“I thank you. This then is what you came to tell me.”

“I did—I did, my angel.”

“Again, I thank you.”

Saying this, distinctly and clearly, as she had apparently taken care to say every word, she walked into the room where Ninian was. No fire lit her eyes, no glow of insulted womanhood was on her cheek. Only her lips, a little paler than usual, were pressed forcibly together.

“Mr. Grame, I am glad to find you here ; you, being an old friend, can perhaps confirm my answer to a communication I have received. Will you come into this room ?”

He obeyed. Distasteful as his position was, even he could not resist the fascination of control which Rachel seemed at times to exercise over every one. As for Mr. Lyonell, he was now positively dumb-founded.

“This gentleman,” said Mrs. Armadale, in her slow clear voice “this gentleman a few minutes ago did me the honour, and himself too,

to make me what I believed to be a proposal of marriage. I refused him courteously, as a lady ought, but which courtesy I now find was quite unnecessary, since I had only to decline an offered fortune, not a hand. Will you, Mr. Græme, from your knowledge of the whole history of my life, tell him—what doubtless will, in twenty-four hours, be repeated to half my acquaintance—that, while it is impossible for me to become his *wife*, it is equally impossible for me to dispense with that name. Therefore, himself and his friends will oblige me by seeing in me only the actress, and not again interfering with the private life or private feelings of the woman. Now, Mr. Lyonell, shall I ring for your carriage?"

Thoroughly crestfallen, shamed even beyond the power of returning insult, the man crept away, a fellow too cowardly and lukewarm in passion to be stirred up even to the sincerity of rage.

When he was gone, the actress stood a few moments gazing forwards with her blank cold eye, and then, putting out her hand as if for something to lean against, sat down.

"Oh, Rachel!" cried Ninian, touched by her silence now, more than by any of the

passionate outbreaks which he had formerly witnessed in her. "Rachel, why do you expose yourself to all this? Why have you not more care over your womanly feelings; nay, your honour."

"*My* honour!" Keen, even fierce, was the sarcasm that pointed these words—the only words she said. They revealed the grinding sense of degradation never to be wiped away—the burning agony of humiliation which in the proud woman's breast had survived even the quenching of love. How should she repel men's insults with scorn?—she, who was already the thing they would have made her!

Poor wretch! who had had no teaching but that of imagination, passion, and cruel wrong—who had been brought at once from her darkness into the world's false glare, to be judged by the world's creed of honour and dishonour, ignorant of any higher hope, refuge, or pardon.

Ninian was thinking how he could talk to her—how soften her frozen nature into some womanly pain, or perhaps win her from a career, for the constant suffering and degradation of which her public triumphs offered but poor atonement.

Just as he was considering how best to do this, there entered his brother Edmund.

The youth looked surprised and discomfited at seeing who was with Rachel, but her kind welcome soon reassured him. It was a curious fact—showing how, when the individual idol is crushed to dust, the memory of the love itself still lingers—that if in Rachel lingered one touch of human tenderness, it was for the boy whom she had once fancied like what Geoffrey Sabine used to be. If ever she smiled or spoke softly, it was to Edmund. His entrance seemed to rouse her now.

“I am glad you are come. I have pleasant tidings for you, my young dramatist,” said she, taking up a heap of newspapers that lay on the table. “Here—read—see what the critics say of you.”

For a moment forgetting himself, the young author took the papers and read with glittering eyes; then a great cloud of shame seemed to come over him.

“And I who wrote thus, and whom these people praise—was—what you saw me last night!” He dashed the papers down and walked

to the window, touched to the quick by the contrast between his outward triumph and his conscious disgrace.

“ I came,” he continued, advancing to Rachel, though not looking at his brother—“ I came to say, will you forgive me for what must have been so odious to you last night?” And as he stood, in a humble attitude, his haggard cheeks were dyed with a shame deeper than the blush of boyhood.

“ Forgive you? So I will. But you must take care for the future, my poor Edmund!” said Rachel, gravely. “ I must not have you turning out as other men—vile, degraded.”

“ This is at least the first time I ever degraded myself in *your* eyes,” interrupted Edmund, in a hoarse voice. “ Whatever I am, I know what made me so; if you knew too, you would forgive me. You ought!”

“ That is true,” Rachel answered, but as if her thoughts were wandering away. She held out her hand to Edmund. “ Say no more of this: let us talk about the play; and see! you have scarcely yet spoken to your brother.”

Edmund looked ready to brave the reproof that he expected to read in Ninian’s face, but

there was none—only a slight sadness. This silence on his brother's part was the keenest rebuke he could have had. He tried to rouse himself and struggle into conversation, but it was useless. The weak and sensitive nature which led him astray, effectually kept from him that hardness which is the only support of vice.

“I must go,” said he, after trying in vain to keep up a restless gaiety and to shake off the melancholy that possessed him. “I am very stupid, and I must go.”

“To Richmond?” asked Ninian, with a penetrating look.

Edmund became scarlet. Poor fellow! all his world-hardening could not keep down that token of an almost feminine susceptibility. “No—not to Richmond; but somewhere with Lyonell. I met him at the end of the street.”

“Very likely. He has just left here. Did he tell you so?” said Rachel; and Ninian, though watching her closely, could not trace any change of look or manner. But Edmund seemed under an uneasy fear.

“He told me nothing. That was strange, when he has never been here before.”

“Nor will be again. I do not take pleasure in Mr. Lyonell’s acquaintance.”

Edmund was silent, but he looked glad. The poor, foolish, jealous boy!

“I wish,” said Ninian, in a voice that was very kind, and as free as he could make it from the admonitory tone—“I wish, Edmund, you would not ally yourself so closely with this young man. He does not seem a fit friend for you. Do not go to him to-day.”

“Why not? Lyonell is a very good fellow—foppish, perhaps, and not over wise—but amusing in his way. And surely I am old enough to choose my own companions.”

“If you knew them—but you don’t really know this man. Besides, what claim can he have upon you?”

“Claim, indeed. Who said he had any?” cried Edmund, flashing up, and terrified lest his brother should be further acquainted with his secrets. But Ninian knew them not; and if Rachel knew, she at least betrayed none. “Don’t interfere between me and Lyonell. He is not exactly a gentleman, and perhaps a degree short of a saint; but I like him, and shall associate with him if I choose.”

“I warn you not,” said the elder brother, gravely.

“I, too, warn you,” added Rachel. The youth, angry as he was, turned to listen to *her*.

“Why do you speak thus? What is your reason?” asked he. Ninian tried to silence his brother; but Rachel prevented this.

“You think I should feel shame in telling him,” she said in a low tone to Mr. Græme. “What, shame in *me!*” Then she added, “Listen, Edmund. You may keep up civility with him, as I am forced to do; but you must have no friendship with Mr. Lyonell.”

“Why not?”

“Because he has acted like what virtuous people would call a villain, but which I, being only an actress, call—the way of the world. He came and offered me what to any other woman would have been an insult—love without marriage.”

Edmund clenched his hands.

“Nay, do not mind this, it neither harms nor angers me. I tell it to you—boy as you are—because it may warn you, and on me the telling casts no shame—or else I feel it not.”

She spoke thus, in pitiable calmness; but

the youth who loved her was shaken by ungovernable rage.

“The coward—the scoundrel! But he shall answer this.”

“How? Are you going to rise up on my behalf?” said she, with a bitter smile. “Are you thinking to fight a duel in defence of my——” She stopped; she could not utter the word “honour.”

“Oh that I could fight for you, that I could defend you!” cried Edmund wildly. In his agitation all sense of restraint vanished, even his brother’s presence was forgotten. He came up to Mrs. Armadale, and his impetuous boyish passion broke forth like a tide.

“Rachel, these things are horrible for you to be exposed to—it has been so before and will be again. This is a wicked world, as *I* know—for I have plunged into all its wickedness.”

“I little knew that.”

“No; nor did you know the reason why. Because I was mad—wretched, and tried to drown my misery. Because I loved you, Rachel!”

She looked at him with a sort of incredulous pity.

“Don’t speak, I know you will never love either me, or anybody—I knew it from the first. But, listen to me. I am not a boy now—soon, I may be a man of both fortune and fame. I shall never ask you for love, but I can save you from all these miseries—I can give you my home, my protection, and my name. Will you marry me, Rachel?”

He heard a sigh—it was not hers. He looked round and perceived Ninian, whose whole soul was moved within him at sight of the unhappy boy.

“Yes! I say it again—in Ninian’s presence, that he may bear me witness—I will be to you in reality brother, friend—anything you like; only in the world’s eye let me be your husband.”

Rachel paused, holding his hands and looking at him with sorrowful tenderness.

“He loves *me*—he would marry *me*! Poor boy—poor boy!”

Her lip began to quiver, there came a faint dew to her stony eyes,—then she unloosed her hands, slowly and gently.

“No, Edmund, it cannot be. If I had foreseen this—but you are young, and will forget the pain. Go to your brother, he will

comfort you. Take care of him, Mr. Græme—pray do !”

So saying she rose and walked half-way towards the door, then turned and looked at the youth, who had sunk with his head buried in the cushions of her chair.

“Poor Edmund—generous Edmund!” she murmured ; and coming back touched his forehead with her lips, coldly but softly—as a mother might have done. Her kindness, her tender pity, were more conclusive than any harsh refusal ; and when her face vanished from his sight, the boy knew that his youthful dream had likewise vanished—for ever.

Passively—without resistance—he suffered himself to be taken home by his brother.

CHAPTER IV.

“YOU’LL stay at home with us to-night, will you not, Edmund?” said Ninian, the first words he had ventured to say since they left Mrs. Armadale’s house.

“Stay?—Why should I? You don’t want me—not one of you! I’m not fit for such saints, nor they for me. Leave me alone!”

There was a fierce desperation about the young man which made it vain to argue. Edmund said no more, but went up into his own room. He locked himself in there, never stirring, until late in the evening Ninian heard his quick footsteps descending the staircase and passing out at the front door.

It was no time for hesitation—a madman was not less to be trusted than this passionate boy. Ninian lost no time, but followed.

Edmund went where his brother guessed he would go,—to the theatre. It was the second night of his play, when the house was full of strangers who were not likely to recognise the author. However, Ninian saw him go into the retired region called in theatrical parlance “the slips;” while he himself crept unobserved to the back of the boxes, and watched thence every movement of the boy.

It was a piteous sight. The shouters in the gallery—the lady-weepers in the boxes—the pleased critics in the pit—all enjoying the play, little thought of its unhappy author sitting there, looking so boyish still, though his delicate features were stamped with the unmistakable signs of youth grown too soon wise in the evil of the world. He sat very quiet, concealing himself as much as possible, until Mrs. Armadale came on the stage.

She performed—as actresses must, whatever be their inner life or suffering;—the public has nothing to do with that. The audience knew not of a little room in a by-street, where was rehearsed some hours before a drama of real life, touching as that of the barbaric princess. Even Rachel herself seemed to have

forgotten it. Her acting, more magnificent than ever, brought down the house in thunders of applause. Some people also praised the play and its author, condescendingly, as untaught audiences do, revelling in the thing created, and not understanding the creative original soul.

Meanwhile Edmund sat, his greedy eye fixed upon his heroine, the living embodiment of all his dreams. Ah! there was no doubting under what inspiration the young poet had written his beautiful play! Of all temporary fascinations there can be none greater than that exercised by a great actress over an ardent mind still influenced by the poetic glamour of the stage. It becomes a wild idolatry, which invests one woman with the qualities of all her impersonations, and identifies her with the ideal creations of the grandest dramatic art. And when, besides being an actress—every night a three hours' goddess—she is in herself such a woman as Rachel, truly her worshipper is in a more hopeless condition still! Even Ninian—the grave Ninian—did not so much wonder at the madness of the boy.

It might not last—its very fervidness might

foretel its end. And he was so young still ; it must be a strong passion that happening to a youth of only twenty-one can leave behind it a life-long pain. But now, at its climax, there was no saying to what desperation it might goad the unhappy Edmund.

During the performance, Ninian, hidden himself, never took his eyes off his brother. When the curtain fell, and the beautiful princess gratified the house with that most unpleasant resurrection of dead heroes and heroines which has become necessary to the feelings of an admiring audience—when, dressed in the mockery of customary smiles, Rachel crossed the stage—Ninian looked up and saw poor Edmund watching her with his ghastly quivering face and burning eyes. Immediately afterwards the boy disappeared.

Had he gone to seek his idol ? No, that was not likely. Mr. Græme knew, that blind and insensible to all emotion as she was, Rachel would at least have the womanly forethought and pity to keep the youth out of her sight. Still, after some consideration, he went and inquired for her ; but she had as usual left immediately after the play.

He knew the way she went, for Edmund had told him; adding, how night after night the stage princess crept home through the dark quiet streets with her faithful servant—two poor humble women. There was something touching about the romance of the thing—sufficient to rouse Edmund's excited imagination. Ninian was sure that many a night there must have been a guardian shadow watching at street corners, as he himself was watching now.

At last he saw them—Rachel's tall figure, and the little old woman that crept close to her, ever turning round with anxiety at every passing footstep. But Rachel walked straight on, heeding nothing.

“Mrs. Armadale!” She stopped. “It is only I—Ninian Græme. Do not be afraid.”

“Afraid?—I afraid!” It was indeed an unnecessary caution.

“I will not keep you a minute. I am looking for Edmund. Have you seen him?”

“I have not.” The answer was subdued, even sad.

“I am glad. You will not see him again, Rachel?”

“ No !”

“ Thank you. And now tell me, where am I likely to find him? He was at the theatre to-night, and left.”

“ Poor Edmund !” She half-sighed and walked on, without answering the question. But Jane Sedley whispered,

“ There’s a place they call ‘ The Stores,’ where gentlemen go to drink and smoke after the play ; most like you’ll find the poor lad there. Now good night, Mr. Græme. My mistress must go home by herself,” sharply added the faithful “ dragon”—object of Lyonell’s hate—and no wonder.

To say “ The Stores ” was a discreditable place for a gentleman to frequent, would perhaps be captious, seeing to what lengths “ gentlemen ” are accustomed to go in these days. But it was not exactly a paradise to the taste of Ninian Græme, who happened to be neither a smoker nor a lover of wine. He waited there in considerable mental and physical discomfort for nearly an hour, but Edmund never came. At last he made up his mind to go home, to the honest, peaceful, rather “ slow ” fireside of Pro-

fessor Reay; where the worthy man was probably at this moment sitting, in slippered ease, his little wife brewing for him the only spirituous drink he ever indulged in—the weakest and most harmless of whisky-toddy. Perhaps Ninian himself was so feeble-minded as to prefer this sort of domestic coziness to the noise and cigar fumes of the Stores, for he rose up, determining to make his exit from that admirable place of gentlemanly entertainment, in the faint hope that perhaps his brother might after all be found safe at home.

Just as he was passing out, he saw Edmund, with some other young men, coming in.

He had pictured the unhappy boy wandering about hither and thither—solitary, moody, despairing; he saw him in the midst of his gayest companions of the previous night, laughing loudly—talking wildly, with an incoherence that was either excitement or drink. Nay, the other men, older than himself—clever men, too—were even making a jest and mock of the youth. It was fine sport for them.

“So, my young Achilles, you are quite determined, and are thirsting for his blood. Poor Lyonell!” said one of them.

“And you’ll not say whence comes this fearful vengeance—

‘Direful spring
Of woes unnumbered.’

Who is the Briseis, my boy?”

“I—I will not tell,” stammered Edmund, keeping in his confused brain just wisdom enough for this.

“Mind you pay one debt of honour before you claim another,” hinted a bitter-tongued wit. “People might say, if you winged Lyonell, that it was to prevent his putting his hand in your pockets with a polite reminder of the three letters, I.O.U.”

Edmund started, and a dim light seemed to break upon his bewildered faculties. From the corner where—afraid of irritating his brother by his presence—Ninian had drawn back, he could see distinctly the workings of the poor lad’s face; though he lost much of the conversation that passed. He could trace the vague strugglings of reason with which Edmund strove to govern his excitement, and settle some connected plan. It was for money, evidently; and the rest of them were amusing themselves with proposing imaginary schemes.

“— Borrow Fortunatus’s purse!”

“—Petition the Literary Fund!”

“—Go to California!”

“No—try a Scotch gold mine, if there is such a thing, my dear fellow,” said the most sneering of the number. “Make an onslaught upon that solemn brother of yours, who buttons up his coat as though there were a plum in bank-notes lying in each pocket. He seems a bland, mild sort of a fellow too.”

Edmund laughed—and then recollecting what he was laughing at, some sense of shame and indignation arose. “I did not notice what you said. My brother—he is a good brother. No one shall dare to ridicule him.”

This flash of real feeling piercing through the poor fellow’s stupified mind, touched Ninian keenly.

“Well, old fellow, pray keep cool. Now, gentlemen—oyez! oyez! Ten pounds reward to whoever will win two hundred for Mr. Edmund Græme!”

“I have a plan,” said the gentleman of the bitter tongue. “I wonder—considering all his experience in that line—that our young friend here never thought of it before.”

“What is it?”

“Not quite so loud if you please; Græme might not like his little peculiarities to be generally known.” He made a few remarks in a lower tone, to which Edmund listened greedily. Very soon afterwards, Ninian saw the latter rise and go out.

He followed. It was late; the theatres had disembogued their last relics of audience, and the streets were growing quiet and deserted. From lamp to lamp Ninian easily traced that tall, thin, boyish figure, with the long, light-brown curls—the same vision which Lindsay used to watch so proudly, as day by day it passed up the avenue at The Gowans.—Poor Lindsay! How foolish women are!

Edmund turned along Regent-street. All the shops and houses were shut up, except that through some second-floor windows might be seen lights—generally two high lamps, visible through the thin blinds. There were no open doors visible, but these lamps were sufficient beacon to those who knew the mysteries of the place.

Ninian watched his brother approach one of these—pass it—return again, and examine more closely. Then Edmund went to the next street-

lamp, took out his purse and seemed to be reckoning its contents. At last, so quickly that Mr. Græme hardly perceived how he entered, the youth disappeared into the house.

It was one of those places—rightly named “hells”—a London gambling-house.

Ninian was uncertain what to do. To follow and command the boy home, was impossible; Edmund was of age, and his brother had no legal right over him. Even the thought of being watched might drive him to desperation. But to leave him was out of the question. Ninian resolved to wait, if it were the whole night, until he had seen him quit the house.

He did so before very long, rushing out half-maddened—not with ruin, but success. He staggered into the street, recklessly holding a handful of bank-notes, gazing at them with eyes that seemed positively to feast on the sight. So occupied was he, that he never looked up until he ran against some one standing in the street.

“What are you doing here, Edmund?”

The cold, clear voice was his brother’s—the arm, stern and strong, that linked itself in his, was his brother’s also. Edmund stood speechless.

They walked on a few paces, Ninian keeping firm hold,—and then the boy rebelled.

“What is this for? Have you been dogging my heels? Let me go, I say.”

Ninian let him go.

Edmund stopped a moment, hardly comprehending where he was, and what he had intended to do. Then his mind seemed to grow clearer. Secretly he clutched the money in his hand, and assuming an unconcerned air said, “Good night, brother; this is my way.”

“And mine too,” added the other quietly.

“Do you mean to follow me? Am I to be watched about like a child? Do it at your peril!” And the frantic boy shook his clenched fist in his brother’s face.

“Edmund!” Somehow, at the tone of that voice, perfectly self-possessed—neither haughty nor angry—the passionate hand dropped down rebuked.

“What do you want with me, brother? Make haste, and let me go; I have an engagement to-night.”

“Where?”

“I shall not tell you.”

“I will tell *you*, then. You have been gaming,

in order to win the money you owe Mr. Lyonell. You are now going to find him—pay him—then seek a quarrel with him, and have either a duel to-morrow morning or a street row to-night.”

Edmund drew back thoroughly confounded. In his face was the confession of all which Ninian's penetration had lighted upon as the truth.

“But,” the other continued, “I, being a good deal older and a little wiser than you, think this proceeding would not be to my brother's credit, or that of our family. Therefore I will prevent it if I can.”

Edmund—gentle by nature, and unaccustomed to contend, especially with his elder brother—seemed desirous not of warfare but escape. He tried to cross the street, but the fumes of wine in his brain were too much for him.

Ninian laid on his shoulder a firm hand.

“Come home, my boy—come home.”

Quiet—even gentle, as the manner was, it contained something of command against which the weak Edmund struggled in vain. He suffered his brother to take his arm and walk with him down the street towards home.

After a while his frantic purpose seemed to dawn upon him again.

“Brother!—Ninian!—I must go,” entreated he. “I will do no harm. I only want to pay the fellow what I owe, and tell him he is a villain. I’ll not fight—if you don’t wish it. Only let me give him the money.”

“Where is it?”

“Here, in my hand! I won it all—luck was with me. Never was there such a run of cards. Ha, ha!”

“Have you been often to that place?”

“Come now, don’t be pumping me,” stammered Edmund, in half-intoxicated cajoling. “Be a good fellow, can’t you! It is a very respectable place, and does no harm.”

“And you won the whole sum to-night? You have it in your hand there!”

“Yes, every pound. All right—count it! Hurra! Hazard’s the king of all games.” And he flourished the notes triumphantly.

Ninian took them out of his hand—spread them out one over the other, doubled them, and before the youth could resist, tore them once—twice—thrice—until they were converted into the smallest fragments. Then he

threw them into the street, carelessly, as if they had been a handful of dust.

“What are you doing?” cried Edmund furiously.

“Just what I would always do with stolen property.”

“Do you dare to call mine stolen? Am I a thief?”

“Every gambler is, for the time being—I will show you that clearly to-morrow. Now, come home.”

His stern calmness, his unflinching will, positively appalled the boy. Unresisting, Edmund suffered himself to be led home.

Arrived there, all his remaining faculties became numbed in the stupor of intemperance and the exhaustion of spent fury. The whole night, Ninian, fearing to leave him, remained by the poor lad's bedside. Never had he kept such a vigil since the night his father died. Little he then thought that the next watch would be beside his dead father's ruined son.

Ruined!—no! Edmund, the child of such pride and tenderness, should not be ruined. That tenderness must win him back still—or

else, abjuring it, his elder brother must assume a father's place and hold the rein with a tight hand. Ninian thought he could if need be make his brotherly heart as hard as adamant; but he would try gentle means first. Only, in some way or other, the boy *must* be saved.

The first thing was to shield him from that disgrace which in a mind like his was sure to produce utter desperation. Therefore, he managed so that even Katie knew not the whole extent of his brother's shame. He sat alone by the boy's bedside; until towards morning Edmund, being a little recovered, fell into a sound sleep. Then Ninian went to his own room, lay down for an hour, rose, and breakfasted—lest by his look Tinie should suspect anything wrong. When late in the forenoon Edmund awoke, he found his brother sitting beside him. Their eyes met—one was cold, the other defiant.

“Are you better?”

“Nothing was wrong with me. What are you here for?”

Ninian made no answer.

“I will not be watched in this manner—Leave me; I want to dress and go out.”

“It would be better not, I think—after last night.”

“What of last night? But, in any case, it was no affair of yours.”

“None—except that I object to see any young man, much less my own brother, ruined—if I can help it.”

“Well, suppose I do go to ruin—or to the devil, what will it signify? Who cares?”

“*I* care.”

“And who will prevent me?”

“*I* will!”

The boy started up in bed with passionate violence.

“Dare you?”—But his dizzy, hot, drink-oppressed brain was too strong for his will—he sank back upon his pillow with a groan.

“Keep quiet, Edmund! You must, or God knows what may happen to you.” And with a care almost womanly, he bound a wet cloth round the poor lad’s burning head. “Are you easier now?”

“Don’t speak to me—let me alone. I wish I were dead!—that’s the only thing for such a miserable wretch as I!”

“Not quite ; when you have your brother and Lindsay.”

Edmund clasped his hands over his wan face, and hid it on the pillow. He did not speak another word for many minutes. Ninian asked him softly “if he were asleep?”

“No! It would be better if I were. It would be a blessing if I never woke again. You would think so, and Lindsay too. But I don’t care—whatever becomes of me, I don’t care!”

He tried to assume a daring indifference, but in vain. Physical prostration, and the natural gentleness and irresolution of his character, overcame him. A prodigal he might be, but nothing would ever make Edmund a hardened sinner.

“My boy, whether you care or not, *we* care,” said Ninian, kindly. “But I will talk to you another time. Now, try to rise, and come and take a walk with me. It is a lovely morning.”

“I hate it!—I hate the light!—I hate everything!”

“Nay, that is wild talking. You must be reasonable. Only get a little better, and in a few days you shall come back with me to Scotland.”

“No—no. Your quiet life at home would drive me mad ! Besides, I must stay here, and go on with my old ways. I can’t get free.”

“You *must* get free—I will help you. Have confidence in your brother. Remember,” and Ninian smiled sorrowfully, “I was a young man myself once.”

Slowly, imperceptibly, so that they seemed less confessions than exclamations of remorse and pain, the elder brother won from the younger a story which it is needless to repeat here. Enough,—that it had been the story of thousands cast into the whirlpool of life, adding to all the passions of youth that keen susceptibility to every form of pleasurable sensation, which is the peculiar characteristic of genius. Heaven have mercy on such ! for Heaven only knows with how much they have to struggle. And all honour be unto the noble few — not those who were never tempted, but those who, being tempted, have come out from the warfare victorious !

Edmund’s heart once opened, poured itself out unrestrained. The elder brother listened, without betraying any gesture of contempt or rebuke to this sorrowful revelation of extrava-

gance, intemperance, degrading companionships and unholy loves; over the long catalogue of which rested the perpetual shade of the one misery of which Edmund did not speak, though probably it was the origin of all—his hopeless passion for Rachel.

“Now,” said the young man at last, with a bitter laugh—“now you see the consequence of my ambitious notions. Such is the end of ‘the Genius of the Family!’”

“Not the end—God forbid!”

“He cannot—or He will not,” was the reckless answer. “This life is slowly killing me. Look here!” and he held up his hand, thin, withered, and shaking like that of an old man. “You might ‘almost see through it,’ as people say. No—no; a year or two more will finish me, and the sooner the better.”

Perhaps Ninian judged at their true value these ravings, always the resource of miserable youth. He only said: “We will not talk of the future, my dear boy. The question is, what must be done at present? Again I would *advise*,”—he laid a gentle stress on the word—“that you go home with me for a time.”

“And I say again, I cannot!”

“Why not?”

“First, because I will not. Secondly—if you want the plain common sense of the matter—I dare not. Look in that desk, and you’ll find three hundred pounds’ worth of good reasons why Edmund Græme, just come of age, should, if he left London, be caught and sent to prison as a runaway debtor. There!—that would be a credit to the family—would it not?”

Ninian had not yet considered this difficulty. He looked very grave. Edmund watched closely his elder brother’s face; it seemed to bring back to his variable mind old times, far more innocent and happy than these.

“I wish,” he sighed—“I almost wish I could go back to The Gowans.”

Ninian made no answer—he was in deep thought. At last he said: “Edmund, give me the key of your desk. You would not show me only half-confidence, would you?”

Edmund objected at first, then answered despondently: “Do as you like. Whatever you find out, it’s no matter to a poor half-dead fellow like me. I shall not trouble you long.”

Mr. Græme unlocked the desk, and passing over a farrago of papers—doubtless containing many a revelation of the poor youth's history—confined himself to the business secrets,—the numerous unpaid debts; that one to Mr. Lyonell, which the world's ironical speech would entitle “a debt of honour,”—being at the head of the list. It was a list long enough to drag the young author down into a hopeless slough of despond. The like has happened to many another,—forced to work his brains with a perpetual millstone of debt around his neck, knowing that by nothing except dishonesty can he free himself from the burden.

Ninian looked over the bills; tied them up again in his business-like way, without any comment whatsoever. Edmund was silent too, either in sullen despondency, or else, exhausted and half-stupified, he had fallen into a doze. The elder brother moved away, and stood in the clear light by the half-open window, which jutted out on the leads. There was a long box of mignonette, over which the pert London sparrows came hopping and twittering. A thought,—not inconsequent, nor irreverent,—

fitted across Ninian's mind, of those who were once bade to "fear not," being "*of more value than many sparrows.*"

It touched nearly upon a plan he had in view. The sum laid up as he deemed for his marriage, and then vainly intended to be sacrificed for the good of Hope's father, was of course in his possession still. The first pain being conquered, he had placed it by securely; from the feeling that now, weakened as his health was, he had no certainty for the future. He found a comfort in thinking, that did anything happen, he had at least something to keep him for a time from positive dependence on the children he had brought up. It was the only trace of pride, the only thought of self, that dwelt in the breast of the elder brother.

This sum would be just sufficient to shield Edmund from the results of his sad career. Freed from debt—unshamed before the world—placed for a while out of reach of temptation—the young man might yet be saved. Nay, he must be saved—poor Lindsay's boy!

Ninian stood—the bright light from the attic-window showing every line in his worn face, every white thread—there were but too many—

in his hair. But he looked at peace, even glad. Quickly in his own mind he portioned out this money of love's heaping, of which every coin had been laid together with a quivering of the heart.—Thus often we gather up treasures, and find them end as sacrifices; but the sacrifice is the holier after all.

Mr. Græme went up to his brother once more. “Are you awake, Edmund?”

“Ay!”

“You had better rise now. Leave me these.” He glanced at the bundle of bills he held. “You cannot pay them, so I will. But I think it right to tell you that I do so at a great sacrifice—of which, knowing our circumstances, you must yourself be aware. Nevertheless, I do it with full trust that the same will not happen again, and that for the future I will have no need to blush for my brother Edmund.”

His voice, firm and grave as it was, trembled at the close. He held out his hand to the poor prodigal;—Edmund sprung up in bed.

“You don't mean this? It is impossible! You cannot do it—or if you could, I would not suffer it.”

“You must! Some day, when you are a

great author, and I an old man—we will have our reckoning.”

Edmund looked up into the face that wore a kind though serious smile. “Oh Ninian—oh my brother!” he cried, and grasping the outstretched hand, sobbed over it like a child.

CHAPTER V.

EDMUND was saved ; but not without many weeks of languishing under that best chastener, and oftentimes chief preserver—severe bodily illness. All the world, the foul hollow world in which he had lately lived, faded from the poor boy's knowledge ; all his arena of pain and pleasure dwindled into one small chamber, where Lindsay's face brought back nothing but childish days ;—Lindsay, who knew nothing—and whom Ninian took care never should know—of her boy's degradation. After a season, Edmund woke out of his physical and moral delirium, thoroughly whole and sound.

He went back with Lindsay to The Gowans ;—with Lindsay only—for Ninian fancied he seemed more at ease with her. There are so

many crises in men's lives when they shrink from their own sex, and can only find comfort with mother, sister, or wife. So Mr. Græme made some excuse for remaining behind a week or two longer, and sent Edmund home with Lindsay.

The morning they started he had been to see them off; and walked back with his sister Tinie under his arm, cheerfully, even merrily,—for his heart was so lightened about his brother that there dawned in it a feeling very like happiness.

Happiness! Perhaps that is a wrong word to apply. No one, either man or woman, who has undergone what Ninian had, can ever again know the sensation which young people call "being happy." You might as well expect quiet middle age to play baby-play, or dance as a child dances in a field of daisies. It is impossible!—as impossible as that there should be dew in the afternoon. But to say that those whom God in His infinite wisdom does not see fit to make happy in the one thing which is life's greatest need, are therefore to be unhappy evermore, is a false and wrong saying. Ninian Græme was now neither broken-hearted, nor, what is worse, bitter-hearted. He indulged

neither in melancholy nor cynicism, but walked steadily and serenely on, with his face turned heavenwards—living his appointed life; ay, and in many ways enjoying it.

To see him now, walking with Tinie along the streets—which even in London looked bright on that summer morning—chatting and laughing with her, planning how in a month or two she and he were to lay a tremendous plot against the Professor's peace of mind and of household, by dragging him northwards for a holiday and reinstating Miss Reay in — street *pro tem.*,—to see all this, any one would have thought Mr. Græme the merriest of all middle-aged gentlemen; for he was fast attaining that era now.

“ I declare you have almost talked me to death, you little Mrs. Professor. I'm sure, for loquacity and versatility of humour, the college would have a much better bargain in you than in Kenneth,” said Ninian, as with a comical pretence of exhaustion he threw himself into the first easy chair he came to, and settled himself there, to ponder in quiet thankful mood how well these weeks of anxiety had ended. Remembering, too, with a peace and fatherly

joy that was inexpressible, how full of grateful meaning had been Edmund's parting look. He thought that in course of time, when his scattered flock had all formed into settled homesteads, and especially when the third generation was springing up, he should certainly be the most contented old bachelor-uncle in Christendom!

Many a poet has sung laments over departed youth; did any ever sing, or chant—for it would be like a psalm—the peace, the joy, the comfort of growing old; of knowing passions dead, temptations conquered, experience won; individual interests become universal, and vain fantastic hopes merged into sublime strong-built faith—faith which makes of death its foundation-stone, and has for its summit—Eternity? The “Hymn to Old Age” would be one not unworthy of a great poet. Who will write it?

Ninian Græme certainly could not; but he lived it and looked it, sitting in his arm-chair and listening to “the small *Professoress*,” as he sometimes called her, singing up and down the stairs. At last there was a slight pause in her vocalism, and she burst into the room like

a May-breeze, laden with some invisible but unequivocal pleasure.

“ Only to think!—Dear me!—And Our Sister gone home this very day!—If she had but known !”

“ Known what ?”

“ Ah, guess !—I’ll put the letter on the back of your head, as the mesmerists do. Now, read.”

Ninian changed countenance slightly. “ Tell me, Tinie. No ill news ?”

“ Not a bit of it—I am delighted, and so will you be. We’ll go and call for her this very day. Oh, what fun ! to see little Hope with a baby !”

I have said how Ninian’s feelings had sunk down to a calm level; but he would not have been a living man, could he have heard these tidings unmoved. He felt the blood rushing to his heart, and his lips whitening—all those painful physical signs of emotion which some can control : he could more than any one, in the time when he was young and strong. But this struggle did not last. He rose from it no weak sentimentalist, but a brave man, who when passion became unlawful had beaten it down,

until in its ashes was only warmth enough to keep alit the affection which he might duly feel for the child of his guiding, without any wrong to the wife of Mr. Ulverston.

“Hope is come home, then. Is she well?” The steady voice, the composed look—good angels, who teach humanity to wrestle and to conquer, would have rejoiced in both!

“She is not quite well, she says, and so has been sent home with baby. But read the note yourself—quickly, too—for I’ll just order Kenneth’s dinner, and off we go, you and I, this very morning to Brompton.”

Ninian shrank back, not outwardly, but in his heart. “I cannot—I have some engagement. And it seems to me you two had better meet alone.”

“Now, that *is* nonsense! I call it a shame, too, when Hope was so fond of you. Are you afraid, because her husband is absent? Do you think it would make him jealous?”

Mr. Græme looked at Tinie so gravely, that the young wife felt herself rebuked for her foolish jest. He added, grasping at a reason which had not struck him till then, “I know, though you do not, that Mr. Ulverston has no

great liking for me. He may not choose me to renew acquaintance with him or with his wife."

"Now that is ridiculous punctilio. I'll tell Hope all about it. And if you don't come with me to Brompton, I vow I'll go and fetch her here," cried the resolute Mrs. Kenneth.

Ninian made no reply. His spirit was whirled to and fro like a reed.

"And she, poor lassie, who was so unhappy, as I know, because she feared you were offended at her marrying so suddenly without consulting you! She will think you are angry with her still, and that is why you do not come. It is quite cruel of you, brother Ninian. Here am I so pleased—and there you sit with your head on your hands, as quiet as possible, just as if you did not care a straw for Hope and her baby! Ah, now, say you'll come!"

He rose up slowly, and said, "I will." Then muttering something about an engagement he could fulfil while she was getting ready, he took his hat and quitted the house. When he returned, Tinie was waiting—merry, bonnie, blooming—dressed with the care natural

to a young wife, who wishes to impress upon a former companion the sense of her own newly-attained matrimonial consequence.

Her elder brother rather silently gave her his arm, and they went off to Brompton together.

Mrs. Reay, fast talker as she was, could not talk in omnibuses, consequently she smothered her little feelings beneath enforced taciturnity. Only at times Ninian vainly lent an ear to ejaculations, in which there was something about "Hope," and "Hope's baby." (Query—What on earth would women do for conversation, if they belonged to a sphere of being where there were no such things as babies?)

As they rolled on in that dull, heavy-laden people's equipage, with passengers turning in or turning out, each bent on his or her own doings, each with a life and its history—Ninian sat in his corner with head depressed, so that all the features were in shadow. So best!—Perhaps if one could read hearts, or even faces, there would be many a strange story learnt in a London omnibus!

The brother and sister neared their destination, and got out.

“It is only a wee bit further—I know the house quite well,” Tinie said. “Lady Ulverston lives there—keeping it for them,—I suppose. Hope sent her to call for me—and I have called several times for her—but that poor old Sir Peter is *so* stupid! Did you ever see him?”

Ninian could not recollect. He seemed stupid himself, and silent too; but Tinie’s joyance sufficed for both.

“There’s the house; I know it by those acacia-trees. And the magnolia—isn’t it beautiful?”

He lifted up his eyes and said “Yes.” He had a notion, too, that it was indeed beautiful—that there was a sleepy warm air—a stirring of acacia-boughs—a soft languid sense of summer. But everything around him seemed in a sort of haze.

Tinie’s hand was on the bell, which rung sharply—startlingly, as bells always will, when one waits some life or death answer to the summons.

“Is Mrs. Ulverston at home?” Yes—she was. Ninian walked up the garden, knowing that in one minute he should see her. The face

—his darling's face—so well remembered—glimmered before his fancy. But crossing the threshold he paused, and, with an inward convulsive throes, the dream melted into nothingness.

— He was merely Ninian Græme, coming with his sister to pay a visit to their old friend, now Mrs. Ulverston.

With a step that never faltered, he followed Tinie into the drawing-room—a pretty room, with glass doors that opened on a little lawn.

“ She is not here—I hope she will not keep us waiting long. Really I feel quite nervous and sentimental,” cried Tinie, moving about. Ninian did not move, but sat down.

“ I declare—that must be Hope—look — brother !” He looked out. On the lawn, under the shadow of a great acacia-tree, was a lady, with a nurse and child; she had just taken the baby, and stood—her figure thrown back in that attitude which makes a young mother with an infant in her arms one of the most graceful pictures in the world. Her head was half-turned round, and her curls—Hope's long brown curls—were tangled in the fingers of Hope's child !

He had used to see that picture often in days gone by, when his soul was thrilled with

future dreamings. He saw it now—not as he had longed, but as Heaven had willed it. His eyes did not close; he tried to look calmly out; but for a moment he felt his strength fail, and all his limbs tremble. Timie had bounded out of the window, and he was alone for a minute or two. It was well! He had time to gather firmness and to pray. Very soon, he went forward to meet Mrs. Ulverston.

She had seen him and was crossing the lawn with Timie. Her step was not hurried, but quiet and matronly, for she had her baby still in her arms. Coming closer, there was visible in her face that inexplicable change which marks even the most girlish wife and mother. As she advanced, holding out one hand while the other was round her babe, this her new likeness mercifully obliterated the former one. Ninian saw in her—not the “child” so passionately beloved; but the woman standing in her sanctity of motherhood, awaking only a tender reverence and regard.

Hope gave him her hand, but did not speak. She was pale, and tears trembled on her eyelids. It was natural, when after the great change in her life she again met these dear old friends. She said as much—in a sort of excuse for being

thus moved. And once more, with a half-pleading gesture, which expressed all the doubts which had troubled her mind, she held out her hand to Mr. Græme.

“It was kind of you to come and see me. I should have been so hurt—as Tinie says—if you had not.”

“Then I am glad I came.” He pressed cordially the little hand—which once more returned and folded itself over the baby.

“Look at it!” cried Tinie, pulling the shawl aside in perfectly feminine delight at the infantile creation. “Isn’t it the prettiest baby that ever was seen? And it’s only four months old!”

“Four months and twelve days,” smiled the young mother, with that pertinacity of tenderness which counts every hour since the possession of its joy. Looking upon the tiny features, all the paleness of her own grew into roses; and the shadow in her eyes—for there was a faint shadow there—lightened into perfect happiness. Proudly she disenvolved her beauty—showed the little face, and soft pink hands clutching at everything; then, holding the baby up to the best advantage, said, with an appealing glance to Ninian, “Here he is—here is my boy!”

“Take him, uncle Ninian,” exclaimed Mrs. Reay, laughing. “You’ll not hurt him. You know you have practised upon Esther’s baby before now.”

Ninian did not exactly obey; but he stooped and kissed the infant. The little thing, just beginning to notice faces, put its fingers on his quivering lips and eyes. It gave him a strange feeling—this touch of Hope’s child. He kissed it once more, and his voice was hoarse and choked as he murmured, “God bless it!”

“What is his name? His papa’s, I suppose?” inquired Tinie, to put a stop to a certain degree of pathos and sentiment that was creeping over the two others.

“No; Mr. Ulverston does not like his own Christian name.”

“— Which, by-the-by, I never chanced to hear. What is it? A *very* ugly one?”

But here the child made one of those sudden bounds which lively babies are always attempting—at the imminent risk of broken necks and dislocated spines. Whereupon the frightened young mother quite forgot everything but his infant majesty, who evidently ruled all her thoughts and affections.

“ I am hardly strong enough to hold him—he is so active even now, and has such a will of his own. I fear he will turn out a most headstrong young gentleman, will Master Walter.”

“ Is that his name, then ?”

“ Yes. I longed to call him Ninian,” said Hope, with a timidly affectionate look. “ But my husband does not like Scottish names. Otherwise it would have been a pleasure to have called my boy after my dear friend and brother.”

“ Thank you—that was kind,” Ninian answered. His voice was very low—but his steady look never wavered.

“ You left Mr. Ulverston abroad ? Will he follow you soon ? Are you not very dull living here without your husband ? Why did he not bring you himself ?” questioned the loquacious Mrs. Reay.

Hope looked grave—much graver than when she had been talking about her baby. She merely said, “ He was detained—he will follow when he can ;”—and suffered the conversation to change. Very soon, the baby-tyrant manifesting symptoms of rebellion in the shape of various loud outcries, was dismissed

lingeringly from her tender arms; and Mrs. Ulverston re-entered the drawing-room with her guests.

Once there, the excitement of her child's presence and of her own passing emotion having quite subsided, it became apparent how great was the difference between the Hope that now was, and the Hope that had been. "She looked still youthful; nor, though delicate and pale, did she seem greatly worn, or ill, or even unhappy. But there was something wanting—a change visible perhaps to no eye save that which had long learnt to watch her and read her through; nevertheless, it was there.

She talked with all her old tender warmth of her friends at The Gowans—lingering over pleasant scenes gone by—remembering every little thing about everybody—smiling with Tinie over the eccentric love-passages which terminated in that young damsel's marrying the worthy Professor.

"Well, it was funny," cried Mrs. Kenneth, laughing and blushing. "Only to think that you and I were daundering about the Clyde with our future husbands! You little knew that I had all the while a sort of kindness for mine,

poor fellow. And I'm sure no one ever suspected that you were in love with Mr. Ulverston. Why, he was *my* true-love then !”

“Was he ?” and there lurked something painful beneath Hope's smile. “Oh ! he is always having some poetic love or other. I never ask any jealous questions of my husband.”

“But you *were* in love with him ?—Confess, now,” persisted Tinie.

“I loved him when I married him, or I should not have married at all,” answered Hope gravely. But in the tone of the words “I loved him” was something which broke the completeness of their meaning. They were said plainly, in duty-like openness, not with the drooping tremulous smile which lurks beneath the confession of that tenderness which, however confessed, can never express half its own fulness.

Shortly afterwards, Lady Ulverston came in ; and while she and Mrs. Reay entered into conversation, Hope came towards Ninian, who was sitting by the window. He rose and gave her his chair, thus unintentionally marking the difference between Mrs. Ulverston and the young Hope, in relation to whom he had been accus-

tomed to receive respect rather than show it. She seemed aware of this, for her manner, though gentle, was full of the dignity of a mother and a wife. There was in it not a trace of "the child."

"I cannot tell you how glad I am you came," said she. "I thought from your not writing that perhaps you were displeased with me."

He smiled, and said "No; how could that be?"

"I feared," she continued, with an effort, "that you must suppose it so strange in me to say what I did to you about Mr. Ulverston, and to marry him a week after. But there were urgent reasons, as you would acknowledge did you know all."

"I know whatever you did would be done from right motives," said Ninian, seeing she paused.

"—If I could only explain! My father, for instance, whom Mr. Ulverston could only aid when he was *his* father. Then he—Mr. Ulverston I mean—had to go abroad at once, and could not bear to leave me unprotected—he was so kind, and I so grateful—and Lady

Ulverston and my father urged me. I cannot tell how it was, but I yielded, and we were married. Still, I should have been happier if I had but had my adopted brother to say ‘God bless her!’”

“He says so now,” answered Ninian. And they shook hands, the gesture of advance being on Hope’s part. But it was a mere hand-shaking—a testifying of cordial kindness. By tacit consent, both seemed to understand that the outward tenderness of the fraternal bond between them was necessarily ended for evermore.

They ceased the conversation, during which Hope had seemed slightly agitated, and returning to the others, talked of ordinary things, interesting to all parties, for an hour or more. Then Mrs. Reay began to speculate on the probability of Kenneth’s coming home and being horrified to find his wife absent.

“Is that so very wonderful?” said Hope, smiling. “Are you really grown domesticated, Tinie?”

“Domesticated!—I’m the steadiest, most sedate little wife imaginable! and Kenneth is certainly the best husband in England—ahem!

—Mr. Ulverston being now in France, you know ; so don't be cross."

"Oh, no !" Hope smiled, but it was rather a pensive smile, or else Ninian thought so. There was one thing only which weighed on his spirit now—a doubt, a question which it was impossible he could ask, but which by watchful observance he tried to discover—whether Hope's marriage had been happy.

"You can't think what a cosie couple we are," continued little Mrs. Reay. "Kenneth wouldn't eat his dinner without having me to look at him—no, not for his life!"

"Indeed !"

"And as for staying at home, I don't believe he has spent one evening out of the house—at least away from me—ever since we were married!"

Hope sighed — almost imperceptibly — and then some trifle brought up for the hundredth time the only subject which made her face look not merely peaceful but radiant—her baby-boy.

It is a sign contrary to God's ordinance, and in itself always betokening sad mysteries—when mother-love is evidently the strongest devotion

and the keenest happiness of a young wife's heart.

Before leaving, Tinie began to plan all sorts of future meetings—her affectionate spirit made warmer still by its own full content, seemed running over with tenderness towards Hope and Hope's child;—except that in the latter case was a shadowing of the lightest possible jealousy for her friend's having attained one degree of feminine dignity before herself. Still, she comported herself with all possible benevolence towards the infantile Master Walter.

“ You must come and spend a long day with us—baby, nurse, and all. We'll find room for them somewhere—and except for that little improvement our meeting will be quite like old times—so pleasant! Will it not, brother?”

“ To us—if pleasant to—Mrs. Ulverston.”

This was the first time he had called her by her married name. It sounded unnatural, both to his lips, and to her ears. Nevertheless, she made no observation but let it pass, as if conscious that it must be so.

“ It will be very pleasant to me to come. What say you, Baby?” added she, in her playful caressing of the child, who had made his

appearance again in all the glory of a short white frock and pink bows. "How will Baby like going a-visiting? He has never done such a thing in his life, and I am sure his mamma has scarcely ever been out since she was married."

"How strange! I heard—through Edmund I think—how Mr. Ulverston was at Paris, Rome, and Florence—in the very midst of all gay society. Did he never take you with him?"

The young wife's cheek flushed painfully.

"Not always—I did not wish; manners are so different abroad, you know. Well, must he really come then—my baby Walter?" added she suddenly, as if to prevent more questionings. But she could not prevent the quick-witted Tinie from lifting her eyebrows and glancing to Ninian with a mysterious air, as she whispered apart,

"I wouldn't change my Kenneth, after all."

But feminine curiosity was too deeply implanted in the little lady's breast for even her brother's warning eye to restrain her.

"Is not Mr. Ulverston very proud of his boy?" asked she, as Hope, with a pardonable

discourtesy, stood tossing her treasure and talking to it rather than to her guests.

Hope answered "Yes," and continued her play.

"Of course he is," added Lady Ulverston, who seemed very fond of the little fellow. "With his fortune, anybody might envy him such a son and heir. The boy will be a Sir Walter too, some of these days, when my poor husband and his own papa are both gone."

"I remember Mr. Ulverston's saying something about a title in the family, but he gave no particulars, or I have forgotten them. So he was heir to a baronetcy?" pursued Tinie, who was blest with a most inquiring mind.

"My poor Sir Peter was the right heir; but his father thought him dead, or wished him so, and adopted a nephew, his half-brother's son, who was——"

Hope turned round with quiet dignity—"My dear Lady Ulverston, I think my husband would rather speak himself about these family matters than have them talked over in his absence."

"Indeed, I wouldn't vex him then. He has been most kind to Sir Peter—and I'm sure is

quite welcome to his uncle's property—and his cousin, poor old man! won't keep him out of the title long."

Ninian had not listened to all this gossip—that is, he heard it—but it scarcely passed into his apprehension, for he was watching Hope's smiles and gestures with her boy, and thinking that in this tie at least seemed sufficient joy to fill her whole soul. Suddenly she paused at the sound of carriage-wheels stopping at the gate. Her colour changed slightly, and her face had a look similar to one Ninian had seen years before, when Mr. Ansted came down the avenue at The Gowans.

"Who can that be?" said the nervous Lady Ulverston, running to the window. "It is not the doctor, who was with Sir Peter an hour ago; and we know no one else in London. Who can it be?"

"It is Mr. Ulverston," said Hope. She gave her baby into the nurse's arms, and went out to meet her husband.

"Well—he is a flash of lightning," cried Tinie, in some trepidation. "Goodness, brother, how very unpleasant! What will we do?"

“ We will wait here.”

He said no more, but stood smothering the fierce conflict that was raging within him—determined to stay and meet the issue. He was conscious of no wrong, yet remembering their last meeting, it was a most trying position for the husband's declared foe to be found here in friendly relations with the wife. Still, the cause of their enmity was a secret that for his own honour's sake Mr. Ulverston would not choose to betray. Perhaps, considering all things, he might even wish to preserve outward civility. If so, Ninian resolved that no act of his should wound Hope's feelings by producing external warfare between her old friend and the man she had married.

The brother and sister waited in the drawing-room for a quarter of an hour, a space interminable, but broken by the frequent entrance of Lady Ulverston, who seemed to have a great reverence for her husband's cousin; and who kept entreating of them not to go without seeing him.

At last the door opened and Mr. Ulverston entered; his wife, very quiet and pale, leaning on his arm. Ninian looked at them, once

and no more. It was a sight that a year ago would have been almost maddening; but his spirit was calmer now. He only stood upright, a little more rigid and cold, waiting to see how Hope's husband would meet him.

A moment's pause decided that question. Mr. Ulverston's eye met his, and sank. For some cause or other he evidently feared to be on ill terms with Ninian Græme. He dropped his wife's arm—carelessly, as a man would treat no other woman but a wife who had ceased to charm—and crossed the room.

“You are welcome. Any of Mrs. Ulverston's friends will always be welcome to my house.”

He touched the hand which he had once refused. Ninian would gladly have never touched his more; but did so for Hope's sake.

A little of brief conversation passed—chiefly compliments to Mrs. Reay on her marriage—and then the visit terminated.

Tinie waited until she had got outside the gate and then poured out her feelings upon her silent brother.

“Well, she keeps her secrets to herself, poor thing! and perhaps it is all the better. But I can see as far through a stone wall as most

people; and, upon my word and honour, I'd rather starve with my Kenneth in a Highland hut than I would be Mrs. Ulverston. God help her!"

"Amen!" was Ninian's sole answer.

CHAPTER VI.

“Now, that is too bad, brother! You promised to stay a whole week longer; and here before two days are over you want to go back to the North! It’s a positive shame.”

Mr. Græme listened patiently to these vituperations, only shaking his head and repeating that he must go.

“But why? Are you not quite independent of that stupid office now that you have taken a partner? Don’t you deserve a holiday? And I am sure you need one; you are not half such a stout, hearty individual as you used to be. I could almost fancy you getting old.”

“Well—so I will be—and you too some day, Mrs. Christina. If I look ill now, put it down to the effect of your London air, and let me run away.”

“Ah, but wait and go with us! Please, do!”

said the little matron, in her coaxing way. "There's Hope coming this week, poor child! And Mr. Forsyth!—Unless you stay and help me, whatever will I do with John Forsyth? I can't tease him now—he quite frightens me. What on earth could have made him come to London?"

"He wanders about everywhere, but I did not know he was here, until Kenneth and I met him this morning. However, we can learn all when he comes to-night."

But when Mr. Forsyth did come, his manner was sufficient to discountenance any curious inquiries. It was strange how a youth so gentle could have hardened into such a man—grave, severe, at times even forbidding. Little Mrs. Reay shrank into silence and a corner, whence she never emerged until their early tea—the social Scotch tea, which the Professor loved; after which, Mr. Forsyth rose to leave.

"I will walk with you—I am going out too," said Ninian, anxious to have a quiet talk with his old friend.

"Where are you going? You surely might stay with us this evening, brother?" was Tinie's plaint. It was unanswered; for Mr. Græme

did not choose to explain what was his intended errand—to the theatre, in hopes of once more meeting Mrs. Armadale.

By tacit consent between the brothers, Rachel's secret had been safely kept. None of the family knew that the actress Mrs. Armadale was their old acquaintance Rachel Armstrong. Some vague scheme Ninian had had, in which the gentle Lindsay was to be a redeeming angel to this poor woman—poor and desolate amidst all her glory, as every woman is whose heart- riches are lost or crumbled into dust. But second thoughts showed the impossibility of any meeting points between the meek-spirited and timid Lindsay, or Tinie, the wife of a stanch, strict Presbyterian—and the young actress. Mr. Græme at last determined to let things rest as they were, only never again to lose sight of Rachel. She, deadened as she was to every kind of sympathy or friendship, seemed perfectly indifferent on the subject.

It was a curious coincidence that on this night he should be walking with John Forsyth. Once even, as they came in the neighbourhood of the theatre, they approached Rachel's very door. Continually they passed by great play-

bills, with her name—large-lettered—staring them in the face. Once, by some unaccountable sympathy, it seemed to catch John Forsyth's notice, and Ninian, to his great surprise, saw the young minister stop suddenly, and bend his stern eye to con over a play-bill. Not less strange was his abrupt question—

“Whereabouts is that place?”

“What place? Do you mean the —— Theatre?”

“Yes.”

“It is close by. Indeed, to tell the truth—which I am not ashamed of, for whatever you may think, I consider there is no harm in a good play—I was going there to-night.”

“I will go with you.”

Ninian looked at him with undisguised astonishment. “What, have you changed your opinions? Have you found out that a theatre is not quite such a den of wickedness as you supposed?”

“I think, as ever, that it is the very entrance-gate of hell; but I would go even there to pluck a soul out of the devil's clutches.”

“You speak strangely. What do you mean, John?”

“What I say. I am going into that foul place—I, a minister of God—just as I go in all the foul places of the earth, to save souls.”

A conjecture, possible yet most improbable, struck Ninian. He said, with great earnestness, “I don’t often pry into other men’s affairs, but I wish you would explain to me your reasons for this?”

Forsyth pointed to the name of Mrs. Armadale. “Have you ever seen that woman?”

“Yes!” replied Ninian, watching him closely, and marvelling whether by any chance he had penetrated the secret. “She is a great actress, as probably you have heard.”

“I? What are such worldly vanities to me? But I have lately discovered that there was among the Durham play-actors a woman named Armadale, who seemed somewhat less wicked or more sorrowful than the rest. It might have been she who ever since has sent me money for my alms-givings. With that chance, for months past I have been seeking her out, that perhaps by my ministry it may please God to redeem a soul from hell.”

“And what course do you intend to pursue?”

“ I will go to the play-house—I have been in viler places than that ere now; I will scan the woman’s face closely, as I have learnt to look into human faces. There, behind all her paint and gewgaws, I shall read her heart. Ay, I shall be able to do it, for God has strangely given me this power,” persisted the enthusiast.

“ And then ?”

“ If I trace one look of misery—one hope of penitence—I will seek her out through the lowest deeps of iniquity. She called herself a ‘ sinner,’ and she showed charity, ‘ which covers a multitude of sins.’ The devil shall not have that woman’s soul !”

He turned round, his eyes gleaming with a light that seemed half-devotion, half-frenzy. (Yet, Heaven knows ! there has been hardly a prophet, either of ancient or modern ages, of whom it was not sometimes said, “ He is a fanatic,” or “ He is mad.”)

Ninian looked at his friend, much moved. “ John, to that I answer Amen ! and I know more of her than you.”

“ You do know her, then ? Is she young, or has she grown old and hardened in sin ? Is there any hope for her ? How can I get access

to her, and make her hear words of truth and life?"

"In no way. She is not what you suppose. She is a poor young creature — innocent in God's sight, but who never can be happy in this world. You could do her no good. Renounce this wild scheme; indeed, it were best you did."

John Forsyth smiled, with a sarcasm new to his character. "Ay, that is what the world always says. 'Wild schemes,' 'mad schemes,' are they!—schemes not for mere pleasure, but for saving souls. Still, I did not expect this from Ninian Græme."

"You are not going to drop my arm, John?"

"Yes. You take your way—I mine. Nothing shall hinder me. With you, or without you, I shall go to that house of the devil's rearing to-night."

"Listen to me—for old friendship's sake you must!" said Ninian, alarmed for the result of such a step. "Walk round this quiet square, and let me reason with you. You don't know who Mrs. Armadale is."

"No, nor care to know. Enough for me that she has a soul to save. God would not have thrown her in my path had He not meant me to

be His messenger towards her. See her I must and will."

"You have seen her many times." John Forsyth started. "If she sent you that money, it was because she knew to whom she sent it. She always honoured you, though she made you suffer once. Have you forgotten?"

He stood still. The glow of enthusiasm passed from his features; they hardened slowly, though they were turned full upward in the light of the evening sky.

"I hardly like to speak about these things," continued Ninian; "but you see I must. Cannot you guess the truth? This Mrs. Armadale—it is a false name, such as play-actors frequently use—her real name is——"

"Say it. Do not be afraid."

"Rachel Armstrong."

The young minister shivered, his head fell on his breast. Once his lips moved, as if he was praying. But a minute's count included and ended all.

"Heaven did not bring me here in vain, then," said he, in the hard tones which had become habitual to him. "There is still a soul to be saved, even my cousin Rachel's. Let us go."

And with a will that there was evidently no changing, he led the way back towards the theatre. Ninian had no resource but to follow; trusting that his own influence and that of the woman whom John Forsyth had once loved, would keep the religious enthusiast within reasonable bounds.

It is a truth, strange, even sorrowful to think of, but nevertheless a truth, that love can come to an end. That is, love of a certain kind, which is frequently nothing more than the passionate idealisation of selfishness. Under some strong counteracting influence—pride, remorse, or bitter self-contempt—this feeling can die out of a man's breast; perhaps even out of a woman's, though that is a harder thing. Sometimes holier and higher aims will extinguish it, as the sun puts out a fire; else it will slowly burn itself into dead ashes, which neither the same hand nor any other can ever set alight more.

Such ending—either one or both—had come to John Forsyth's love; the only passion which this man, who seemed made as some men are not for himself but to work out a destiny—was ever fated to know. Ninian saw from the first glance which John Forsyth cast towards Rachel, that all

passion was dead in his heart—that he looked on her as on any other woman—ay, and as he would look on every woman until the day of his death. He was a man made to be neither lover, husband, nor father, but to go forth, one of God's pilgrims and servants, carrying neither staff nor scrip—giving to friends no payment save a “Peace be unto you”—and leaving for foes no curse except the dust shaken from the feet.

It was a strange thing to see this man sitting there—young still—but from his youth the more severely hard. He scarcely spoke to Ninian, but sat upright—sometimes looking forward at the stage—sometimes looking down, until startled into attention by the tones of Rachel's voice.

The play to-night was not Edmund's, which had already died out of the theatrical world's brief memory, but a stock tragedy, worth little in itself, and yet grand from its one sketch of character—Milman's “Fazio.” Ninian suddenly remembered how one night at The Gowans Rachel had in sport acted a scene from it with Edmund. She had liked the play then; perhaps it was one of the relics of the time when everything she liked was of love's teaching. From the little Mr. Græme knew of the tragedy, he felt that

there was something of the heroine's nature—ay, and story, too—in Rachel herself. He did not wonder to hear the people around him say that *Bianca* was one of her best parts.

Nevertheless, her first act was not good. There was no grace—no beauty in her playfulness. Alas, the element of happiness was not in her! But in the second act, when the wife's jealousy begins to dawn, the great tragic actress was herself again—her true self—as she never was anywhere but on the stage. That was her life and its reality. All passions, all womanly tendernesses and emotions dammed up eternally in her heart, rushed to swell the tide of her genius. What seemed acting was her true being, transformed into varied phases of character; but in its depths still one and the same.

“Is she not grand?” said Ninian, when between the acts the drop-scene fell.

“I know not and care not. But she must be snatched from the burning,” was John Forsyth's sole answer.

Ninian, hopeless of conversation, began to look round the house. His idly-wandering eye was soon fixed: it seemed as if fate were heaping up more strange accidents in this one night.

Opposite to him, bowing and smiling from a private box, was a face he knew—the plain, honest countenance of Lady Ulverston. And from behind the curtain he saw brown curls droop: Hope too must surely be there. Shortly, there came a message from her to himself and Mr. Forsyth, whom she had recognised, requesting that they would both go round to her box.

“Who is she?” inquired the young minister absently.

“My sister’s friend, Miss Ansted, now Mrs. Ulverston. You must surely remember her. You saw Mr. Ulverston also, the day the twins were married.”

“Ulverston? I had forgotten the name, but I remember the man. He is a guileful man—I discerned it in his face.”

“Nay—you must not judge so harshly.”

“I judge not; I only see according to the power given me. Again I say, the man I saw is an evil man, and will come to an evil end.”

“God forbid—for her sake!” said Ninian, hastily, for the fanaticism was so earnest that it seemed half-supernatural. “But as you perceive Mr. Ulverston is not in the box, you can have no objection to come with me?”

For, believing that he would start the next day, Ninian had determined to go and say good-bye to Hope, then and there. It would be easy to do so in the theatre, and after then he would take care not to see that face any more. Had it been a happy face—as a young wife's should be—he had not feared to meet it ; but now, pale and clouded, it roused in him feelings approaching hatred towards the man who had stolen his treasure from him, perhaps only to cast it away.

Just, and honourable, and virtuous man though he was, Ninian felt that—seeing there was no need for him to run in the way of misery—it would be better, all things considered, tacitly to let this be the last time of his meeting Mrs. Ulverston.

There was no one in the box except the two ladies, and a boy, Lady Ulverston's nephew, whom she had made her messenger. As Ninian entered, Hope turned round, her listless look brightening.

“I am so glad to see you! Who would have thought we should meet here? Where is Tinie?”

“At home. The Professor does not like

theatres, so his good little wife stays away to please her husband."

"And Mrs. Ulverston to please *her* husband goes," interrupted the elder lady ; "when all the while I think she is longing to be back with little Walter."

The young mother smiled. "Nay, I am quite well satisfied. It was very kind of Mr. Ulverston to take this box for us. He will join us soon, I should think, and will be so pleased to see you, Mr. Græme."

She evidently knew nothing of the enmity between them. Ninian wondered what strong motive could constrain Ulverston to desire to keep up an outward civility with one whom he must secretly hate.

"You too will stay, Mr. Forsyth?" continued Hope, extending her greeting to him ; "I have always a warm welcome for my Scottish friends."

Forsyth appeared indifferent to where he was, and so they stayed.

The play proceeded. Hope seemed little interested therein. In her was nothing of the *Bianca* nature ; she only looked with a kind of child-like wonder and pity on the struggles

of the passionately-loving jealous wife. Perhaps, in herself the first feeling being absent, she could not understand the second. Sometimes, however, she sighed, and her thoughts apparently wandered, especially in the scene where *Bianca* keeps her solitary midnight watch for the husband who revels abroad. Perchance she herself had known many such weary vigils. But, what was rather surprising, except for the very slight acquaintance that had ever existed between Rachel and herself and the thorough change effected by theatrical show—Hope seemed unconscious that she had ever before seen Mrs. Armadale.

In the middle of the play Mr. Ulverston came into the box with a friend, whom he carelessly introduced as Mr. Vernon. Their entrance was quiet, for the house was all hushed in attention to the actress's great scene, when *Bianca* accuses her faithless husband before the judges. Rachel was standing, her face turned from the audience, and veiled.

“Is that Mrs. Armadale?” whispered Ulverston to the gentleman he had brought in. “She is to be a second Siddons, I hear; but I have no faith in these theatrical prodigies. However,

she seems a fine woman—very!” He came forward, and leaning behind his wife’s chair, looked carelessly at the stage.

But when *Bianca* turned round, her face still covered with that aerial gauze which is comically enough deemed sufficient for all theatrical wraps and disguises—the “*nil admirari*” haughtiness of the young man’s look changed into keen observation. He knitted his brows: suddenly took the play-bill from Hope’s hand, and scanned it closely. But at that instant Mrs. Armadale’s acting absorbed all attention.

She stood facing the audience, in the dead pause of silence with which *Bianca* waits the entrance of her accused husband. Her large eyes—open and glassy—were seen to wander over the theatre. Suddenly her face was crossed by a spasm, deeper even than *Bianca*’s assumed despair. She staggered and sank—not insensible, but crouching down, her head turned over her shoulder, her eyes fixed with a frightful glare—on the *Fazio* of the night apparently, though Ninian thought that gaze seemed to pass beyond even to the side-box where they all were.

It was grand acting—almost as fine as nature!

The audience broke into an awe-stricken murmur. Even the careless critic Mr. Ulverston drew back appalled.

“That is a new attitude. She did not do it last night—very fine, though,” said Mr. Vernon.

There was a pause on the stage, for the next speech was *Bianca's*; and the actress, in the perfection of her acting, seemed to be incapable of utterance. A shiver ran over all her limbs; then she rose upright, and her voice was heard once more. It sounded hollow—unnatural. Once or twice she paused in her speech, as if the words were floating away from her memory—as would be in the poor maddened *Bianca!* All the awful inspiration of her genius came upon her. Never was there acting so vividly, fearfully real.

Even Hope was moved at last. When the scene ended she sighed deeply.

“That woman terrifies me; the more so as now and then her look seems familiar. I am sure I have seen her before somewhere.”

“Impossible,” said the husband sharply. “You are always taking foolish fancies into your head, Mrs. Ulverston.”

Hope coloured painfully, and was silent.

“Indeed, my dear,” observed Lady Ulverston,

“you must be mistaken. You never could have had anything to do with actresses.”

“No. Perhaps it was some chance likeness that struck me,” said the yielding Hope. “Most certainly, I never knew any one of the name of Armadale.”

“It is a false name,” sternly interposed John Forsyth, who had hitherto sat back in silence. “I at least will abet no lies. The woman is my cousin, Rachel Armstrong.”

Mr. Ulverston started, and then apologised. “You there, Mr. Forsyth? I beg your pardon. But who would have thought to see you in a theatre, claiming cousinship with an actress! Is it really so? Come, explain.”

“Let *me* explain,” interposed Ninian, lest the sarcastic tone of Mr. Ulverston should rouse Forsyth into more betrayals. “I know Rachel Armstrong. She is indeed Mr. Forsyth’s cousin—a Scotswoman, from the Border. Her life has been a strange and sad history.”

“Very instructive, no doubt; but we are not curious to hear a theatrical biography,” said Mr. Ulverston, hastily. “At least, my wife is not; and for myself I am quite tired of such things. Vernon, shall we go and have a cigar?”—He

made his escape almost immediately, and appeared in the box no more.

There was but little pause ere Rachel again came on the stage. Throughout the rest of the play she acted with almost superhuman grandeur. In her mad scene she seemed a perfect Pythones of despair. Her curses against her rival, the exulting ferocity that glittered in her eyes, made the gentle Hope shudder; especially, as almost the moment ere those eyes closed in *Bianca's* mimic death, their glare seemed to reach and almost confront her own.

When the curtain fell Mrs. Ulverston drew back, pale with excitement. "I was always afraid of Rachel Armstrong. No wonder!—She is an awful woman."

"And yet a most unhappy and broken-hearted one," said Ninian, in a low voice.

"Is she? Then, do you know her still?—You, who can do so much good to every one, could you not do good to her?"

"No one can. Some griefs are incurable. Of such is hers."

"Poor soul! Could you not bring her to me, Mr. Græme? I could at least be kind to her and comfort her. Indeed, I would try!"

Ninian's answer was stopped by John Forsyth's abrupt summons: "Now, will you come? Show me where I can see my cousin Rachel."

There was no withholding him, and Ninian, dreading any evil result, determined to accompany him. He bade good night to the two ladies, who were left in the charge of their boy-cavalier.

"Mr. Ulverston will return, of course?"

"I think not," said Hope. "But we can go home alone."

Ninian hesitated slightly. "I would come back for you——"

"Indeed, you must not. Only come and see me to-morrow, just to say good-by. You will promise?"

"I promise," said he, finding that resistance would appear strange; and so he departed.

They learnt in the theatre that Mrs. Armadale, overcome by her exertions that night, had been very ill. One of the women about the stage even said she heard shrieks and groans issue from the dressing-room, whither the celebrated actress had crawled between the acts.

"You see what an arduous, dreadful life she

leads. It is cruel to see her to-night, Forsyth. What do you mean to say to her?"

"To warn, counsel, threaten her; so that she may turn from this way of vanity and sin. It would be my duty towards any human being; how much more towards one of my own blood. And if I save her soul," he added in a lower voice, "will it not be the best atonement for that madness by which I once perilled my own, when I forgot my holy calling for the sake of earthly desires; and losing them, could almost have turned to 'curse God and die.' But He saved me—and I am here."

Talking thus, Forsyth and Ninian walked up and down in the open air behind the theatre—strange scene for such a conversation! At last, seeing no resource, Mr. Græme led the way towards Rachel's home. They had hardly reached the door, when they saw her following, walking slowly and seeming to rest on her little old servant, who was soothing her like a child.

"Who is that? Stand off, sir, if it be you!" cried the old woman's shrill voice;—but she grew pacified on seeing it was Ninian. "It is only Mr. Græme. Come in—my mistress wants you."

"Yes—I want you," repeated Rachel, feebly,

snatching his hand and leading him in. John Forsyth, whether by his own hesitation or by Jane Sedley's contrivance, was left without the door.

Rachel sank down, and her servant unfastened her cloak and hood. The old woman was weeping; but Rachel herself was apparently without emotion, though all her face was one pallor. She spoke at last.

"You were at the theatre to-night—I saw you. Who were you with?"

"John Forsyth."

"I know that; I saw him too. But with you in the box were others—a lady—a gentleman. Their names? Quick—quick!"

"There was Mr. Ulverston, an acquaintance of mine whom you may have heard of at The Gowans."

Her hands clutched one another impatiently. "Go on—who else?"

"A young lady whom you probably recognised; Miss Ansted—now Mrs. Ulverston. Her husband stood behind her."

"Close? Leaning over her chair? Was *his* name Ulverston? And she was his wife?"

The words hissed from between her lips; her

eyes were like two burning fires. A horrible suspicion burst on Ninian's mind.

"Rachel—did you ever see this man before? do you know anything of him?"

"Did I *say* anything?" And she set her teeth together, as if determined that the grave itself should not be more silent than she.

"Will you not tell me? You know what is in my mind. Is he——?"

"You said he was your friend—Mr. Ulverston. What have I said more?" answered Rachel, with a ghastly smile.

"Nothing; but I guess what you suspect. It cannot be true,—God forbid!"

"And so he is married to little Hope Ansted! And his name is Ulverston! A friend of yours too? I would like to meet him, Mr. Græme."

The deadly, sarcastic coldness of her speech could have but one meaning—one purpose—revenge. She stood, a living, real *Bianca*, ready for any deed that brought down her vengeance upon the head on which had once rested her passionate love.

Without need of her confession, Ninian discerned all. Like lightning, a thousand confirmatory proofs flashed upon his mind. He felt

that he must have been mad or blind not to have long before guessed the truth;—that Rachel's betrayer was no other than Mr. Ulverston.

“ Oh my poor Hope—my unhappy child !” groaned Ninian. And the next thought showed him that for this wretchedness there was no cure. The discovery came too late. The deceit practised upon Rachel could not in the least affect Ulverston's union with a legally-married wife. All now left was to save Hope from the knowledge of what a villain her husband had been.

How could Ninian do this? While he paused, the wronged and desperate woman stood beside him, her relentless purpose gleaming in her eyes.

“ Well!—Are you planning this pleasant meeting? I tell you, I wish to be introduced to your friend Mr. Ulverston.”

“ Wherefore? Do not try to deceive me, Rachel—you cannot. I understand all. What good will it do you again to meet this—this villain?”

Was it one latent lingering of her olden love that made Rachel start to hear this word so applied? “ ‘ Villain !’ it is a hard name, especially as given to *your friend*.”

“ He is not my friend; he never was. It was

a chance intercourse merely. Would to Heaven that ——”

Ninian stopped. He had yet strength and wisdom to control himself, nor lay bare his own life's secrets to this woman, who stood, hard as a rock externally, but within —— Now only he began to guess what a fiery earthquake of passions was seething there !

“ Rachel, what are you going to do ? Rather —— what have you power to do ? ”

“ Anything ! ” For a moment's space the torrent of passion was let loose and chained again. But that one moment showed she was indeed a woman who could do “ anything. ”

“ Govern yourself,” said Ninian sternly, for he felt he must not waver.

“ Govern myself ?—I saw that sight in the middle of the play—I acted on to the end. Grandly, too, did I not ? I am, as people say, a good actress ! ” she answered, with slow, fierce irony.

There was a pause between these two conflicting wills, and then Rachel returned to the charge.

“ Once more, Mr. Græme, will you bring me face to face with your friend ? Or shall I have to seek him in that pleasant home-circle of his,

with his wife that he loves—his lawful married wife, Heaven bless her!—No, Heaven curse her!”

Low and bitterly smiling was the blessing, but the curse rose laden with an unfathomable burden of hate.

“Take heed what you do,” Ninian cried, grasping her arm. “You cannot alter what is past. You are not his wife, and she is ; but she never wronged you. He only is guilty—doubly so—towards both. Still, if you accuse him, you will only cast dishonour on yourself, make her miserable, and yet not punish him. So are such things judged in the world.”

“The world! The wise, virtuous, generous world!”

“—You will not do it, Rachel? You will not bring down misery on that innocent girl?”

“She is happy, then? They are very happy together? They love one another—do they? She sits by his fireside—perhaps this very minute—watching him—smiling at him—kissing him—ah!”

And Rachel gasped as if, low as her voice was, each word suffocated her. Then recovering herself, she stood up once more, confronting Ninian.

“You will think I am acting *Bianca* over

again for your private amusement. A pity we have no audience here! That pretty Hope, for instance, who once looked so terrified when I acted in the parlour at *The Gowans*! How would she bear a little reality now?"

Ninian saw that with all the might of his influence he must struggle for mastery over this woman's furious will, or else the slender thread on which hung the peace of Hope's married life—its peace, for something told him there was in it little happiness—would be broken at once. Her pure nature would never recover the shock of such a discovery. Better let her go dreaming on in a half-twilight existence that was neither love nor its opposite, neither joy nor pain, than be roused thoroughly to despise her husband—the father of her child.

Still, he persisted; determined either to soothe, warn, or entreat Rachel into silence.

"Let us talk plain reason," said he. "Supposing all were disclosed, and Mr. Ulverston were renounced by his wife, or she by him, what were the result? Would you return to him again, or force him to take you, and make you—not his wife—that could never be; but—you know what? That is all you could be, even if he loved you still, as you love him."

“— I, love him?—If he were lying on that floor before me, and, dying, asked me for a forgiving hand, I would do—thus.” She turned away, and knitted her hands so tightly together that the blue marks of the fingers were left in the flesh.

“What do you desire then?”

“His punishment.”

“I tell you over again; you cannot compass that. All you can do is against poor Hope. You have not the heart?” implored Ninian, forgetting everything but the fear of coming evil. “You could not harm the child I loved—my adopted sister? You don’t know how tenderly she spoke of you—how, recognising you——”

“She did recognise me! He will hear her speak of me!” muttered Rachel.

“—How, thinking you were lonely or unhappy, she wished to do you good—asked me to bring you to her house.”

“I will go,” said Rachel; and her voice, which in all this time had scarcely risen above a breath, became almost inaudible. “I will go and see his wife.”

“What are you saying to yourself!”

“Nothing.” And after that, talk as Ninian

might, he won no further answer. She scarcely seemed to notice him, but gradually sank into a chair, where she sat, white as a statue, with nothing of life or motion about her, except the lights which the lamp cast over the heavy waves of red-brown hair.

“You had better leave her, I think,” said Mrs. Sedley, at last venturing to interfere. “She will sit in that way whole days sometimes. Go away, pray! No one understands my poor mistress but me.”

Ninian thought it best to obey, knowing that as yet Hope was safe, since Rachel was not aware of her abode.

“Good night! You will let me come and see you to-morrow? And for all I have said forgive me. You would, if you knew!” And he looked with a strange pity and compassion on this young creature, whose life had been crushed by the same hand that came between himself and his happiness. “Let us be at peace with one another, my poor Rachel!”

She bent her head without speaking; and Ninian left her.

At the moment he remembered John Forsyth.

“You will not find him,” Jane Sedley an-

swered to his question. "He came to the door, looking very queer, so I told him you were gone, and that Mrs. Armadale would not see him. Keep him away, Mr. Græme, for the love of Heaven! Among you all, you'll drive my poor mistress off her head again."

It seemed almost probable; for as Ninian left the door, he might have heard from the room within the unhappy woman muttering to herself, first softly, then rising almost into a shriek, the words whose intent involved the last power of collected reason:

"I will go and see his wife!—I will go and see his wife!"

CHAPTER VII.

It was yet early in the forenoon when Ninian found himself on the Brompton Road. He was impelled thither by the fear of some quick-coming misery on her whom he would once have shielded like a pet lamb in his bosom from every shadow of harm.

Let no one say that passion is unconquerable. It can never be so in a pure heart. Inevitable necessity—the stern sense of right—the will at last bent to that Holier Will which maps out human life—can in time crush down the individual longing that would wholly appropriate to itself what seems fairest both to its spiritual and visual eye. Yet nothing can obliterate tenderness—that hallowed lingering of memory which seems to say, “Thou art not mine,—I have ceased to hope or even wish it

so; but no one can ever be to me in thy stead, and at any time I would give my life to pour out blessings upon thee and thine."

With this sort of feeling, strangely intense though calm, Ninian went to see Mrs. Ulverston.

His mind had changed much since the previous day. As soon as the real threatening of trouble rose up against her, it overshadowed and suppressed every restless strife in his own breast. He began to think that the desire or need to fly must have had its root in some feeling, selfish or erring. During the long night of wakefulness, he resolved that at present it was best and right for him to stay, if in any way he might control Rachel, and ward off the threatening results of the discovery she had made.

He found Hope sitting alone with her baby. Happy mother! she wanted nothing else to cheer and comfort her. The maternal feeling reigned paramount in her heart, as it does in that of some gentle and tender women—an all-sufficient consolation for every other want. She looked so pretty—so sweet—so young—lying on the little yellow damask couch, with one knee raised as a well-poised throne for the baby-

king. He was lording it in grand style,—was the illustrious Walter; his face, wonderfully bright and intelligent for such a young infant—dimpling in thorough satisfaction, doubtless at the taste of his mother's dainty finger, which he was biting in rare glee. How she laughed—the happy one!—and how she let him bite away, and pull her ribbons, and tear her curls, inflicting severe bodily suffering—the little tyrant! who after all was only punished with kisses.

Upon this picture Ninian's entrance broke.

“Ah, how good of you to come so early. You will stay an hour or two—nay, you must. Shall I send Baby away?”

But somehow she looked as if that would be a great act of self-denial, so Mr. Græme prevented it. Besides, he had an inward consciousness that it was better for him to see her thus, as unlike as possible to Hope Ansted—Hope, his “child.”

Therefore he took his place near, while Mrs. Ulverston sat with Walter laid across her lap, rocking him softly. Her little hands—they seemed the same pretty hands as of old, except for the wedding-ring—were beating a gentle

tattoo upon the shoulders of his infant majesty, who at last condescended to sleep.

And these two innocent ones—the mother not less innocent than the child—belonged to that deceitful, heartless man, and were the rivals of the poor maddened Rachel! For a moment Ninian could hardly bear to look at them; again there seemed to ring in his ears the curse of the wronged woman. A terror seized him—lest, ripe for anything, she might visit her wrongs upon these two.

He asked, so suddenly that Mrs. Ulverston seemed surprised, how long they were going to stay in London?

“A year, I thought; but this morning my husband told me he had changed his mind, and that we should leave soon, either for some sea-side place, or else for the Continent. I do not quite like it; I would wish to teach my boy to be happy in a quiet English home.” And looking on the little sleeper, she half sighed, as with that dim foreboding of the future which all mothers feel.

“Will this plan soon be settled?” said Ninian, thinking with some relief that Hope would

probably have left London before Rachel discovered her abode.

“ Mr. Ulverston said he would tell me more to-night. He has gone to town earlier than usual; but I believe some urgent business called him. He will doubtless return before you leave.”

She did not speak about her husband again. For nearly an hour she sat with the child asleep on her lap, talking of old times—they seemed so far back now!—of her girlish days among the Græme family, or of a still happier theme, the future of her boy.

“ I hope he will grow up a great man, and a good man—almost as good as you,” said she, turning round to Mr. Græme with an affectionate smile. “ For, though he does not bear your Christian name, as I wished, you must always remember that he is your little nephew by adoption; and whenever his mamma wishes to hold out a good example, she will tell him to try and be like his dear uncle Ninian.”

Ninian smiled, but made no reply. He thought, hearing her thus frankly confess the honour in which she held him, how bitterly he

had been mistaken once—and what a difference there was between the heart-flood “I love,” and the clear ice-drops “I esteem.” A difference which has driven many a thirsting soul mad ere now! unless Heaven mercifully puts into their hands the cup of peace and water of life, so that they drink and thirst after earthly waters no more!

“I must really talk about other things than my boy, or you will consider my conversation quite stupid,” said the young mother. “And first I want to hear of Rachel Armstrong—Mrs. Armstrong, I think you used to call her. Is she a widow?”

The simple, natural question struck Ninian like a thunderbolt. He stammered out some answer concerning “an unhappy marriage,” then remembered that this was a false expression—when there was no marriage at all. At last, finding that Hope noticed his confusion, and that some faint colour was beginning to tinge her cheek, he took refuge in the only real stronghold any one can use—the truth.

“I cannot answer your question without telling you her whole history, which I have no right to do. Enough, that it has been very sad

—but there is nothing in it for which she need blush in the sight of Heaven, or of any generous-hearted man or woman.”

“If you say so, it is enough. And you know all her story? My husband was asking me if I thought you did. He seems rather displeased that we—that is, you and I, and your sisters—should have known Mrs. Armstrong at all: he will not let me go and see her, as I desired.”

“You asked him, then?” And Ninian could scarcely bear to look at the guileless, deceived wife.

“Yes; I would have gone to-day, for Mr. Vernon knows her slightly, and I could have learnt her address from him—but, of course, against Mr. Ulverston’s wish it is impossible.”

“Quite—do not think of it. Promise me you will not!”

“I believe,” said Hope, with the lightest tinge of dignity, “there is little need for me to promise not to disobey my husband.”

“True, true—pardon me.”

At this moment there was a ring at the hall-bell, startling the child out of its sleep. The little fellow stretched his arms, and set up a loud cry.

“ I must run away with him. Mr. Ulverston does not like crying babies—no papas do. Come, hide the wee face, and away with mamma, my darling,” said she, soothingly, as she hastily disappeared with the child.

Ninian wound up his self-command to meet the man to whom, now, his sense of repulsion was almost beyond control. When the door opened, he saw—not Mr. Ulverston, but one the sight of whom he infinitely dreaded more—Rachel Armstrong. She was speaking to the servant:

“ Mr. Ulverston is not at home—but that is no matter, I prefer seeing Mrs. Ulverston. Will you tell her I am here !”

“ What name shall I say, ma’am ?”

She hesitated a moment—she, who could claim no name !—and then gave that of “ Mrs. Armadale.”

The moment after, she perceived Ninian Græme.

“ You here, so early ! I thought my visit would have been the first,” she said, meeting him with external composure. All the tempest of the previous night had sunk to a dead calm. He beheld in her merely Mrs. Armadale,

—the finished actress, perfect in other rôles than that of the mimic stage. Her greeting was as easy as if they two had met on an every-day morning call—then she sat down, facing him.

She was, indeed, the very picture of that rare thing—"a lady." Her attire, all black—she never wore anything else when off the stage—was exquisite in taste, rich, yet plain. Beautiful her face was not, because nothing could change the coarse outlines of her mouth; but it was, as ever, a startling, wierd-like, glorious face—worth all the mere prettinesses in the world. And then she had about her that rare charm, without which beauty itself is nothing—the inexplicable grace which, radiating from the genius within, surrounds the outward form as with an atmosphere of light. Such she looked—sitting in the home of the man who, humanly speaking, had been the creating influence of her life, and but for whom she might have been still a mere farmer's daughter on the Border-side.

Rachel lifted her veil far back from her face, and looked round.

"It is a pretty house," she said.

Her manner, so ruthless in its composure, struck Ninian with positive horror.

“Rachel,” he answered, with an agitation he could not quite repress; “how can you try to deceive me thus? What purpose have you in coming to this house, from which I had thought every womanly feeling would have kept you away?”

“My purpose? Cannot one lady visit another at her request? Ought I not to respond to the kind message you yourself brought me from Mrs. Ulverston?”

“I wish to Heaven I had never delivered it! But it is vain. Her husband forbids your meeting.”

“Does he?—*her* husband. We shall see.”

“Rachel!” cried Ninian, in despair, “if you have anything womanly in your heart think what you do. You cannot punish that man, he is too hardened. You can only destroy the peace of a young creature who never injured you. A mother too—you should have seen her, a few minutes since, sitting where you sit, her child in her arms.” Rachel started and moved from the place. “Can you not feel for her?”

“How can I? Heaven saved me that shame, and denied me that comfort — I never had a child.” And she ceased to answer Ninian, who at last turned from entreaties to the exercise of that authority he had once had over her, even in her maddest days.

“Mark me, Rachel! I have been a good friend to you. You trusted me, and I kept your confidence. I would have righted you if I could, but it was impossible. Nothing can redeem you in the world’s sight; the more public your vengeance, the deeper your own ruin. Renounce this scheme, and I will guard you like a brother; follow it up — but no, you will not do that? You will take this warning, and act as a generous, Christian woman ought?”

“*You will,*” spoken as he spoke it, sounded like “*you must.*” Rachel’s eyes fell, and there was an uneasy quivering in her features. But at that moment Hope’s sudden entrance put a bar upon all further reasoning. Ninian, thoroughly hopeless, could only stand by and watch the result.

She came forward—the gentle young matron—looking rather timid and confused. Rachel

rose from her seat, and the two women stood face to face.

“Mrs. Armadale—or Mrs. ——” said Hope, hesitating by what name to address her.

Rachel never answered. Her eyes were fixed piercingly upon her rival, as if drinking in every lineament of Hope’s face—every line of her delicate form. So intent and fiery was the gaze, that the young creature began to colour sensitively.

“You know me then?” Hope said. “I remembered you.” And she held out her hand.

Mechanically, Rachel touched it, and let it drop again as though it burnt her. She tried to speak, but her tongue seemed dried up. Hope looked surprised, and then, out of the soft compassion of her heart, she went up to Rachel and kissed her.

Either the act was too sudden for repulse, or else beneath those innocent eyes every vengeful passion was for the moment subdued—but Rachel was perfectly passive. At length, she found speech.

“Miss Ansted—Mrs. Ulverston I mean—I believe you wished to see me. I too was

very anxious to see you. Mr. Vernon gave me your address, and therefore I came; I hope not unwelcome?"

"Oh no—no!" cried Hope, forgetting the conjugal prohibition, until a glance towards Ninian brought it to her mind. She looked uneasy. Mr. Græme determined to take the chance of one bold act of truth-speaking.

"I was this moment telling Mrs. Armadale that Mr. Ulverston had expressed his objection to your visiting each other."

"Oh, hush!" whispered Hope, entreatingly. "It was only on account of her profession; he has some peculiar notions against the stage. But she must forgive his prejudices. They would cease at once, if he were only to know her."

"You think so?" said Rachel, with one of her fearful smiles. "Therefore, to try an experiment——"

"None shall be tried!" interposed Ninian. "I trust that my friend Rachel Armstrong has more good feeling and generosity. She will, I know, return to town at once with me."

"Now, Mrs. Ulverston, what say you? Will you turn me out of your house, as Mr. Græme

persists in doing? Are you afraid lest my presence should read you a lesson in conjugal rebellion?"

"Oh no!" said Hope, touched with sympathy for the young actress, who, despite the smiles which she forced to her lips, had changed gradually to a hue that was positively livid. Though she kept standing—upright and motionless.

"You must not go," continued Mrs. Ulverston, "you seem quite exhausted; but you shall rest here. I know my husband would wish it."

"Are you quite sure? Is he so generous? Or perhaps on your persuasion he will yield his prejudices, being, as I conclude, such a loving husband!"

Poor little Hope! She shrank confused and troubled before that keen gaze, which seemed to read her through. Apparently in the young wife's pained and hesitating manner Rachel discerned some secret which struck her with triumph. She glanced towards Ninian.

"It would be a pity to make my unworthy self a subject of contention between a married couple so *loving*." She again laid a sar-

castic emphasis on the word, and watched how Hope started, colouring deeply. "But I believe, nevertheless, if Mr. Ulverston found me here, I should be able to satisfy him as to the reasons and excuses for my visit."

"That is needless. It would be better for you to go," persisted Ninian.

"I will, if my old acquaintance Mrs. Ulverston desires it."

What could Hope do? Nothing, but what her gentle loving-kindness prompted, to a creature whom she knew to be unhappy and forlorn.

"You must stay," she said; "you shall rest for an hour or two, and take a walk round the garden; and besides," she added, with simple maternal vanity, "I should like to show you my baby-boy."

Ninian looked apprehensively at Rachel. But the latter, whatever were her emotions or her purposes, betrayed neither. She seemed determined to hover yet longer over her victim, and find out every heart-secret of the poor young wife before destroying her peace for ever.

"You are a proud mother, I see, Mrs. Ulverston. I should like to look at your boy.—Your only one?"

“Yes,” said Hope, while she delightedly rang for the nurse and her treasure.

“You have not been married long, then?”

“A year and a half.”

“You are Mr. Ulverston’s first wife, of course?”

Hope looked surprised, even startled. Mr. Græme came forward: “Perhaps, Mrs. Armadale, as I happen to have been that young lady’s *guardian*”—he imperceptibly marked the word—“and even now am unwilling quite to relinquish the name,—it would be as well if you were to catechise *me*.”

His manner, though perfectly courteous, indicated that he would admit no contest. It silenced Rachel in spite of herself, for the moment. Further conversation was stopped by the advent of the baby.

The mother, now all smiling, took her beauty in her arms, and held him aloft for Mrs. Armadale’s admiration. She, poor wretch! sat, clenching her hands upon the chair—her eyes, wild with unutterable agony, glaring upon the child—*his* child.

“Calm yourself, Rachel,” whispered Ninian, as he passed her by. He knew, out of his own

knowledge, something of her tortures now. They were but brief, for suddenly she rose.

“It is a beautiful boy—very beautiful.”

“Would you like to hold him?” said the young mother, evidently feeling this offer to be the height of generosity.

Rachel seemed to recoil, as if from some horrible temptation. “No, no,” she gasped. “Keep him from me. I might dash him—that is, let him fall, and he might be—killed, you know!” The mother shuddered. “Excuse me,” continued Rachel, in her ordinary voice, “but I really know nothing about children.”

“Ah!” sighed Hope, regarding with a pitying interest the young creature whom she deemed to be probably an unhappy and childless wife. And she hugged the little Walter closer to her breast.

“Let me look at him, though I shall not harm him,” added Rachel, as she composed her features into smiles. “Is he like his father?”

“I think not.”

“No,” said the other, fixedly examining the child, and speaking in an under tone. “It is not like him. The mouth is not his mouth; the eyes—they are full and blue, and his were deep-set, and dark—so dark!”

“What! have you ever seen my husband?”

“At the play. Mr. Ulverston was with you at the play, you know,” was Ninian’s quick answer to the question.

“Did you notice my husband so much, even though you were acting?” continued Hope, smiling, and turning to Mrs. Armadale. “He would be very much flattered, indeed.”

“Would he? Tell him, then! Tell him I saw him, and that this pleasant sight half-induced me to come here to-day. But his wife need not be jealous. Ha, ha! Ask him if he thinks his wife need be jealous of me?”

Hope looked as if in her simplicity she did not quite fathom the jest, at which she, nevertheless, smiled.

“Tell him, too, that I have enjoyed my visit much—that it will delight me to pursue this acquaintance—that I hope ere long to be thoroughly known by him and his wife, and that I leave my benison on his child. There—take it, little—What is the child’s name?”

“Walter.”

“His father’s, perhaps. Is it his father’s?”
And she drew her breath hard.

“No; my husband’s Christian name is not half so pretty. He said—— But there he is. He has come in by the garden. He will see us directly!”

And, much frightened, the wife looked at her forbidden guest.

“We will go at once. Come, Rachel,” said Ninian, resolutely.

“I thank you; but it is too late now. I prefer to stay.”

She kept her position, never wavering. She was half-concealed by Hope and the child; so that when Mr. Ulverston came up to the glass door, he at first only perceived that some lady was with his wife. He came in, bowing and smiling, with that cheerful, frank, *dégagé* air which was peculiar to him. And then confronting him—rising up like an accusing spirit from beside his wife and child—he saw the countenance of Rachel Armstrong.

He would not have been man if at that sight he had not shrunk back and turned pale—pale with anger, the poor wife thought, and hastened to appease him.

“This is Mrs. Armadale—the Rachel Armstrong whom I once knew. She did so long to

see me, she says; and I thought—I felt sure—Mrs. Armadale, let me introduce my husband.”

He recovered courage, seeing that as yet he was secure. He advanced a step, and met Rachel's eyes—clear in their recognition—relentless in their hate.

“I am fortunate at last to be introduced, and *thus* introduced, to Mr. Ulverston,” said she, laying a light accent on the name. Her words seemed to fall upon his ear, drop by drop, like molten lead. Scarcely looking at her, he moved away, and at the further end of the room met Ninian Græme.

“You here, too? Mrs. Ulverston holds a levee this morning,” he said, trying to brave it out.

But at the first glance interchanged between himself and Mr. Græme, he knew he was in the power of *two*. Conscience-stricken, he once more drew back, strangely confused. Wherever he moved, he seemed to feel upon him the pitiless eye of the woman he had wronged, and to expect every moment that her lips would open to betray him.

But they did not open. It was not thus that

Rachel apparently designed to work out her slow revenge.

“Excuse him, pray,” whispered Hope to Mrs. Armadale. “I know, after his first surprise he will be quite glad to see you, and willing for us to become friends.”

“Say that aloud,” answered Rachel, in a perfectly audible tone. “There ought to be no secrets between wives and husbands. Let Mr. Ulverston hear.”

He started and turned round.

“I was saying,” Hope observed, timidly, “that I know you will be glad to see Mrs. Armadale.”

Mr. Ulverston looked despairingly round him—then stammered out, “Certainly! if——”

“Thanks!” said Rachel, still addressing the wife, and never the husband. “A novel position I stand in; but there are reasons. If Mr. Ulverston would allow me to explain——”

“No need—no need,” muttered the cowed man. “I shall always be happy, in any way she can point out, to serve —— this lady.”

“Thanks again; but that is not what I desire.” She turned and met the gaze of the two men—Mr. Ulverston and Ninian Græme. The first was alarmed, abject, imploring; the

second controlled her with a dumb warning, which expressed all his terror for what was coming upon Hope. Instinctively, he had drawn closer to where the latter stood at the window with little Walter, who was crowing and leaping towards the sunshine, so as to engross her whole attention.

“What is your desire?” said Ulverston, in an under tone.

“To have sometimes the honour of visiting here—of cultivating the friendship Mrs. Ulverston is so kind as to feel for me. I trust—indeed, I am sure—her husband will not prevent it, for the sake of old times.”

“Ah, no! he will not,” said Hope, turning round. “It is such pleasure to me to have my Scottish friends about me. You must try all your influence, Mrs. Armadale, and we will conquer both his prejudices—against Scotland, and against the stage. Come, shake hands, will you not?” added she, making a marvellous effort at gaiety. “Mr. Græme, tell them to shake hands.”

Ulverston rose with an *empressement* somewhat exaggerated. There was a reassured swagger in his manner and a daring curiosity in his look, as now for the first time he ventured to

eye steadily the country girl whom he had made love to by hedge-row sides—the faithful creature who had stolen over the snow to watch by his sick bed—the devoted woman who had believed herself his wife. Perhaps—seeing what she was now—there came back to him memories which, in another man had been alike sad and holy; but in him, full of all unholiness, could only spring from, and tend to wrong. After a rather eager gaze he extended his hand.

Ninian waited to see what Rachel would do. She did nothing. Her hand lay passive by her side; for, after she spoke last, she had sunk back into her chair, and sat as if all power had left her limbs; though still her indomitable will governed her features, and kept them from bearing any outward witness to what she felt within.

“Will you take my hand?” His voice was soft—how softly he could speak sometimes! Rachel’s whole frame seemed to quiver at the sound. She looked up quickly.—There he stood, in his own likeness, the young “Norman baron,” smiling, handsome, gay, as if there had never been a shadow on his countenance, or a care in his heart—the very impersonation of that light nature which had come like sum-

mer sunshine to her own graver and darker spirit.

Unresisted, Ulverston took her hand. She felt the olden touch—unfelt for years—the touch of the beloved, which, to all who love, seems distinct from that of any other human hand. A shudder ran over her; she looked wildly round as if everything were a dream—all her vengeance, all her hate—and she were again an innocent girl, sitting on the green ruined mound of the Border Castle, smiling up into her young lover's eyes.

Hope came behind. "We are all friends now. You will often come and see us. It will be so pleasant both to me and to my husband."

"Yes, but she must go now at once," interposed Ninian; for he saw a fury that was almost insanity gathering slowly in the miserable woman's face. Another eye saw it too. Terrified for the result, Ulverston made some excuse and crept out of the room. There was only Hope left—whose attention had been all along much distracted from what was passing around her by the gambols of the child. Her looks were at last drawn towards Rachel.

"Mrs. Armadale seems ill, probably from ex-

haustion. Shall I send for wine? No I will fetch it myself."

"Do so," said Ninian, thankful for any excuse to get her out of Rachel's sight. When she was gone, he took the latter by the hand.

"Come, quick! before she returns." Rachel looked at him bewildered. "There is no help for you. You are not able to control yourself. You *must* obey me. Come!"

He drew her hand under his arm, and half-leading, half-guiding her,—for there seemed no resistance in her spirit, no strength in her frame,—he got her safely out of the house. Scarcely had they left it, than he saw Hope crossing the few yards that led to the garden-gate. He went to her.

"You must excuse all," he said, hurriedly. "Mrs. Armadale is a strange, impulsive creature, and her mind is weak through suffering. She had best go home at once. I will explain everything to-morrow."

Hope assented; so he rejoined Rachel, and never left her till he saw her safe in the care of one, who was as usual waiting outside, ready to guard and watch over her mistress,—the faithful Jane Sedley.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was on a Saturday morning that Rachel had gone to Brompton. By mere chance, she was not to act that night. So far, Ninian was at rest. He spent all day in vain reasonings, plannings, conjectures. Sunday came—the quiet Sabbath-day which had used to be such a happy one at The Gowans; but he found no rest. He had risen late, outworn with anxiety, when he heard that a little old woman wished to see him.

It was Rachel's servant.

“What news? Is she more calm? You know all, of course?”

“Yes, Mr. Græme, I do know all,” said Jane, curtsying herself into the back-parlour, with the evident determination of a *tête-à-tête*. “My mis-

tress has been very ill, but she is asleep now, poor dear! and so I came away that I might speak to you without her knowing."

Here Mrs. Reay's voice was heard without, laden with a rather imperative warning to her brother, that it was church time.

"Have you much to tell me, Mrs. Sedley?"

"A great deal, sir; but if you have not patience enough, or regard enough for my dear mistress to hear me, I dare say I shall find some good Christian gentleman who will," said the old servant, testily.

"Is it so important?"

"May be, or may not be—wait and see."

He went out and told his sister that she must go to church alone. She grumbled a good deal, for their old Edinburgh minister was that day come to preach among the small Presbyterian gathering which nestled itself in the London wilderness. "It would seem like old times, brother, when you used to walk to church between Hope and me. Ah! if I had only thought of telling Hope."

Ninian drew back hastily into the room. There he sat down, listening mechanically to the clang of the church-bells, and waiting, almost

fearing, the communication that Jane Sedley had to make.

She went about it slowly and with much reduplication, as old people do. She told a long story about her mistress's having made an engagement in Ireland, at one of the provincial theatres, how everybody raved about her, and she might have mixed in the first society, but she held aloof—as she always did.

“I know,” said Ninian. “She told me she had lately been in Ireland. But what concerning that?”

“More than you think, or she either; for I would not tell her. That same time, in Ireland, I heard something;—for you must know, sir, I always kept my eyes and ears open to anything that might concern my dear mistress, or that villain, who I wish may——”

“What did you hear?” said Ninian, stopping her short. Startled by his manner, for once the worthy woman expressed herself concisely.

“I heard that there was in Limerick a family called Sabine.”

“Sabine!” repeated Ninian. “Was not that Mr. Ulverston's name?—the false name he used to deceive Rachel?”

· “Ay, he did deceive her, poor lamb! God punish him for it!” cried the old woman, her little black eyes glittering with indignation. “But, sir, though the marriage was good for nought, I’m not sure that the name was false.”

“How so?”

“I’m just going to tell you. These Sabines,—they were decent enough people, but not quite gentlefolk. I know what real gentlefolk are, Mr. Græme;—I lived in grand families myself once,” added Mrs. Sedley, her speech showing an intelligence and refinement which Ninian had hitherto not observed; but he was too anxious to think about that.

“You got acquainted with those people? Well, go on!”

“I am going on, sir, if you’ll let me.—Old Mrs. Sabine made much of me, because I was an Englishwoman, and she said she had grand relations in England. Her husband’s half-brother on the mother’s side—you see, sir, I took pains to remember all—was an English baronet, who, having quarrelled with his only son, sent for Mrs. Sabine’s eldest boy, brought him up, and made a gentleman of him. A

pretty gentleman he has turned out! Do you understand, Mr. Græme?"

"You mean," said Ninian, "that you suspect this son to be no other than Mr. Ulverston, whom your mistress saw lately, and declares to be the man who so cruelly deceived her?"

"Declares to be? He is! *I* saw him too, coming in at his own door. I'd take my oath that it is him, the villain—Mr. Geoffrey Sabine."

"I believe it too. But what of that? The name is nothing; he might have assumed it by chance. There can be no doubt his right name is Ulverston."

"You're hard to convince, sir, with your Scotch caution," said Jane, rather bitterly. "Will you hear more? This young Geoffrey Sabine hadn't been near his relations since he was a youth. And a man that's ashamed of his own family, especially of his mother, has no good in him."

Suddenly there recurred to Mr. Græme the conversation at Ardmore, when Mr. Ulverston had betrayed, seemingly with reluctance, that he was born in Ireland. Also, he remembered the words, then unheeded, which Lady Ulverston had dropped about the young man's having

been his uncle's adopted heir, until his cousin Peter stepped in between.

"Young Sabine's uncle was by the half-blood only," said Ninian, musing. "He might have had a different name, which he made his nephew assume. Mrs. Sedley, did you ask what was the name of this English uncle?"

"Not I! It was nothing to me. I had heard enough to make me sure that Sabine was his true name, and he had afterwards denied it, thinking a poor broken-hearted girl and a foolish old woman would never find him out. But we have, though; and should have done so before, only my mistress came away from Ireland suddenly, and I couldn't tell her why I wanted to stay."

"You told her nothing about the Sabines, then?"

"No, no! She has never mentioned his name—nor have I—ever since the night we left you in Edinburgh. I durst not let her know anything, lest it should send her off her wits again. But now that this Sabine or Ulverston, or whatever he is, has turned up, I thought I ought to tell you, Mr. Græme, all that I heard."

“You were quite right,” said Ninian, absently.

“But, sir, you must help me to get her out of his way. She must never see him again—villain as he is. What good could come of it? She can't make him right her. You yourself said he had cheated her, and that she was not married—not even in your queer Scotch fashion—which, to my thinking, and that of all decent folk, is little better than no marrying at all.”

Perhaps, despite his engrossing anxiety, Mr. Græme, as a Scotsman and a W.S., felt the dignity of his country's law impugned by this speech. “My good woman,” said he, “you talk about what you do not understand; our marriage law is clear enough, and binding enough too. Whether the name of Geoffrey Sabine were true or not, would have made no difference, if he had only married her in any legal way that could be proved. For instance, that written acknowledgment of which she may have told you——”

“I know, sir; my mistress kept nothing back from me,” interrupted the old servant, proudly.

“If he had not—cunning as he was—obtained it and destroyed it; or if even now there were

any legal evidence—a letter or writing of any kind, calling her his wife, she might prove herself as such.”

The old woman turned sharply round. “What’s that you say, sir. Say it again. I’m not over quick at law.”

Ninian explained himself more clearly.

“You mean to say, then,” continued Jane, her loquacity changing into wonderful acuteness, “that if this Mr. Ulverston is really Mr. Geoffrey Sabine, or whether he is or not, if I can swear he is the man that was my mistress’s husband, and if there was only a bit or scrap of his writing saying so, it would be a true marriage, and she would be his only lawful wife, and the lady that he now has would be—no better than she should be?”

At this thought, and at her unusual manner, a terror too great for utterance shot through Ninian’s heart. If the mystery of this pretended marriage could be solved—if, by any evidence, Rachel were proved to be the first and legal wife—what then was Hope? The bare thought was almost too horrible to be borne.

“Be silent!” he gasped. “Say no word against Mrs. Ulverston. Don’t harm her, for God’s sake!”

And in the agony of such a fear, Ninian's self-control nearly deserted him.

Mrs. Sedley took no notice. She was fumbling in her great pockets, her hands trembling with avidity. Her anxiety was so great, that she evidently could not find what she wanted. She went to the window, and turned out all the contents of her pockets one by one.

Meanwhile Ninian was nigh distracted with the thoughts that crowded upon him. Could it be that Ulverston, knowing the truth of what he outwardly denied, that his first marriage was valid, had as much from revenge, as from insatiable passion, gone through the form of marriage with Hope, aware that he could at any time get free from a tie which the first bond made illegal? Could this be the reason he apparently stooped from his pride to wed the bankrupt's daughter? Or perhaps, seeing at last that it was not so easy to cast her off on such a plea without running a few unpleasant chances of the law, did Rachel's appearance awaken the dread that she was come not merely as a deserted mistress to upbraid her lover, but as an outraged and revengeful wife, determined

to claim her husband and bring him to an open shame?

Yet how could this be? Ninian said over and over again to himself,—“There is no proof—no proof.” Not a letter, not a line, not even a second witness to the fact of marriage. Oh, hard conjuncture! when he, an honourable man, felt himself taking comfort from this; unconsciously rejoicing that one woman had no evidence to remove the blot from her fame, lest in so doing the same doom might fall upon another.

If it were so, Ninian felt that he had almost rather have seen his lost darling die broken-hearted from her husband's unkindness, than withering under such a future of shame.

All these thoughts followed each other wild and fast. It was but a minute or two since the old woman's last speech, and yet when she spoke again he started as if from a long trance.

“There, sir,” Jane Sedley cried, triumphantly, but with some agitation, “you said a line would be enough. Look! Would that prove my poor mistress to be an honest woman after all?”

She placed before him a small Bible, open at

the fly-leaf. Thereon were written, in Mr. Ulverston's hand, the following inscription:

"Given to my dear wife, Rachel Armstrong, by her faithful husband, Geoffrey Sabine."

The date was February 7, 18—. Underneath was written, in a faint, trembling woman's hand, the text, chosen habitually by Scottish lovers in their troth plight, "*Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform to the Lord thine oaths.*" Below it came the signature, signed by her for the first time and the last, "*Rachel Sabine.*"

Ninian read this writing—once, twice, thrice—to see that there was in it no flaw. Then he stood dumb, aghast. The truth had at length appeared, but in a form so awful in its results, that he hardly dared to believe.

"Will it do, Mr. Græme? Is it enough proof?" cried Jane Sedley, watching him eagerly. "May I go and tell my dear mistress that she is lawfully married? Can't you speak? Isn't it so?"

"I cannot tell—I must consider," muttered Ninian, trying to keep his thoughts clear, and weigh the case as there were not life and death hanging on the balance. "Stop, Mrs. Sedley, give me a minute's time to think."

He sat down, his hand upon his brow. Even

in that terrible moment there was some lingering of calm judgment. This he tried to use.

For several minutes there was in the little parlour perfect silence, broken only by the old woman's short cough, and the merry singing of Mrs. Reay's canary. Amid that pause, Ninian had time to think what he should say, knowing that on his next words might rest the doom of her to save whose happiness he would have given his life.

At length he spoke, in a very low tone but without sign of emotion,—just like a lawyer questioning an important witness,

“When did this book come into your possession?”

“It was under a heap of old newspapers in Mr. Sabine's room. I found it when I cleaned out my cottage, just before I gave it up.”

“After you and Rachel saw me in Edinburgh?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How did it come there?”

“Mr. Sabine must have lost it; he was very careless of all his things. He went away in a great hurry at last. I remember his calling me in, and asking me if I had seen some of his

books — especially a Bible or Testament that was missing. I noticed, because he was not very particular about his Bible, and I wondered that he should make a fuss over it now. At last he went away, telling me to look over his books, and keep all his things safe till he sent for them.”

“Did he send?”

“Ay, and had them all; but as I said, I didn’t find this till long afterwards. Anyhow, I should not have sent it, because you see it was *her* book—not his.”

“Did you give it to her, or tell her when you found it?”

“I wasn’t quite so foolish as that, Mr. Græme. Bless you! it would have driven her mad at once. No, no, poor darling! I kept it out of her sight, and have carried it about in my pocket always. Many a time I thought of burning it; but somehow I couldn’t burn God’s Holy Word, even though that wicked man had written in it.”

“Was this, do you think, the acknowledgment of marriage Rachel spoke of?”

“No; not it. He wrote another paper—the one he kept. Who’d ever think that this was a marriage? just a name written in a leaf of a

Bible! We English people would never believe such a thing. But little care I, if it only holds good in law, and brings my dear mistress to her rights? Are you sure of this, Mr. Græme?"

He was silent. He knew that from one assent of his, Jane Sedley in her passionate fidelity, and Rachel maddened with her wrong, would both at once proceed to desperate measures. Perhaps that very night, without pause or preparation, the blow might fall;—the blow which, whether she loved Ulverston or not, would crush Hope for ever.

"Won't you answer, sir?" persisted the old woman, angrily. "Here have you been questioning me, and got all out of me. How do I know that you'll not use it against my mistress? You are a friend of Mr. Ulverston's."

"I his friend?" muttered Ninian, hardly able to suppress the fierce passion that shook his manhood—the burning desire for vengeance on the destroyer of his own peace and that of the girl he had loved. "If I had that man here, and God's law did not forbid murder——"

"Eh—what, sir?" cried Jane Sedley, half-frightened at his looks. At once, Ninian came to his right senses again.

"I am no friend to Mr. Ulverston," said he,

calmly. "But in cases like these, we must not hastily judge. We must take time! Though Ulverston may be the man who married Rachel, there is no clear proof that the name under which he married her was really his own. It might be that of some friend which he used," added Ninian, clinging to every chance of delay.

Mrs. Sedley looked alarmed.

"Would that make the marriage void, sir?"

"No; but it would increase the difficulty of proving it. There would be an action in the Court of Session—costing much time, much expense, lasting perhaps for years. I repeat again," said he, in the eagerness of his fear, "you must do nothing hastily—as yet, you must not even tell your mistress."

"Not tell her!—not let her know that she is an honestly married wife—even though her husband is a villain! What do you mean, Mr. Græme? I'll not listen to you—I'll go and tell her at once—my poor, poor girl—my mistress, I mean—though sometimes I talk as if she were my own Jessie that's dead and gone. She shall hold up her head yet, my darling! as good and lawful a wife as any in the land."

And the faithful creature, who from her own

anxiety and her respect to Mr. Græme had hitherto controlled herself, now began to weep like a child.

But Ninian seemed to have no sympathy—no feeling left. Both were dried up in one overpowering horror of what was coming upon Hope.

“I entreat you—I desire you, not to tell her yet,” persisted he. “Consider her weakness,—her present state of excitement; she could not bear such a shock—not even of joy. Wait only a week—a day!” While saying this, the hypocrisy of his words smote him with humiliation. But that was nothing. At all risks, he must gain time.

Jane Sedley seemed rather struck with his reasons.

“You may be right, Mr. Græme—you were always thoughtful over her, and you are a just and kind gentleman. I believe you would not keep her a day out of her rights if you could.”

Poor Ninian! he felt almost as if there had been guiltiness in the agony with which he strove to ward off, only for a time, the impending woe.

“I can’t wait any longer now,” said the old woman, as the footsteps of returning church-

goers began to come pattering beneath the window.

“Then you will promise me, Mrs. Sedley, that for a few days at least, until I have gained more evidence and am clearer in my mind, Rachel shall be told nothing? Mind—I say, nothing!”

“Well, I’ll promise. Poor thing! she has no friend but you. And you’ll see to her—you’ll take care of her interests, and bring her to her rights! I know you will, for you are a good and honest gentleman, Mr. Græme,” said the old woman, as she went out, rather hastily, for Mrs. Reay and the Professor were just entering the door.

Ninian scarcely heard them. All his mind was absorbed in the future opened to him by Jane Sedley’s last words.

He, then, was to be the one with whom rested judgment! It was he, who as Rachel’s only friend must guide her to the restitution of her honour—it was he who in so doing must bring Hope to the knowledge of the truth, and cast her forth to bear the doom which had once been Rachel’s. Nay, worse,—for there was the child!

Thinking so much of her, he had never before thought of her child. Horror upon horror seemed to rise before him. The young wife, patient, if not content—the young mother, so happy, so proud! He, and he alone, must be the one to tear her life's hopes away; telling the wife that she was no wife, and the mother that her child was base-born.

He laid his head upon the table; he wrung his hands and groaned. The anguish of that moment was keener than he had ever known—ay, even than that on the day he first heard of Hope's marriage. Then the suffering was only for himself—it is often easy to bear torture which no one shares and no one sees;—but now he felt utterly prostrated.

Many a man, who had loved and seen another preferred before him, might have felt some selfish exultation; perhaps have even built on this misery some vague hope of winning, righteously or unrighteously, his heart's desire; but this thought could never once visit such a man as Ninian Græme. He saw before him only one vision—Hope and her unutterable wretchedness. He almost wished that this discovery had never been made; that Rachel had

lived on in her supposed shame, and Hope in her blind innocence. But at last there came to him one thought which seems to live—a vivifying light—in the depths of every good heart, shining through all darkness of conflicting duties, emotions, and desires—the sense of right and justice.

This showed him at once that there was no medium course—that Hope was either a wife or no wife. If the former were proved, nothing could harm her; if the latter, she must be at once snatched from what became henceforward a life—not of sanctified marriage, but of undoubted infamy.

At this thought, the last of an infinite multitude that had come and gone like lightning, during the time that Tinie was running up-stairs and calling rather crossly for “Brother Ninian,”—Mr. Græme rose and struggled with his conscience no more.

There remained one doubt still—was the name of Geoffrey Sabine feigned or real? On this fact much, though not all, depended—since the proof that at the time of marriage it was the husband’s true name, would prevent much delay. If false—perhaps, as there was

only one witness to his identity, the first marriage might be with difficulty established, or even held doubtful; too much so, being a childless union, to warrant the disinheriting of an heir. This slender and cruel chance—cruel in every way—was yet the only one left.

Unable to endure suspense, Ninian determined to go at once and find out from the man himself—as the plainest and least underhand course, or if not, from Hope, though this possibility made him recoil,—whether Mr. Ulverston had always borne his present name. With this intention Mr. Græme escaped from the house before his sister saw him.

Walking fast, and in the burning summer sun, before reaching Brompton he was thoroughly exhausted. This was even a blessing. In moments of great mental pain, there often is a sense of lulling comfort in intense bodily fatigue. Yet when he reached the house—the pretty house with its magnolia blossoms and its overhanging acacia-trees—he felt as if it were impossible to enter it. From the high-road he could see into the half-open windows. Beside one of them, her profile turned towards him, stood Hope with the baby. He saw her bright

face, he heard her laughter, not exactly merry, but full of an inward content. A cold shudder crept over him; involuntarily he passed on.

There was close by a little lane leading off from the high-road—one of those frequent Love-lanes which on summer-Sundays become worthy the name. Ninian turned down it, thinking to be quiet and recover himself. He leaned against a tree, and had taken off his hat, trying to feel the rustle of the cool chestnut-leaves. But there came by, continually, that sight he most fled from—happiness; the love-couples strolling by—the town-children walking with their parents, and each and all turning to look at the strange gentleman who stood alone by the road-side. Ninian fancied there must be in him some outward sign of what he was enduring, and once more he struggled to recover his ordinary look and manner before he entered Hope's presence.

After a while, he went back again, and came once more within the scent of the magnolias.

“Mrs. Ulverston was alone in the house,” the servant said; “Mr. Ulverston was not expected

home until night." Ninian paused, but there was no hesitating now—he entered the hall.

Hope was sitting by herself, singing. A holy, peaceful, Sabbath song it was—"O rest in the Lord," from Mendelssohn's "Elijah." Nevertheless, there was a wail in it—to some ears at least, who hearing the words, "*He shall give thee thy heart's desire*,"—knew that He sees fit not thus to give unto all.—Ninian had thought so many a time when she used to sing this at The Gowans, and yet, somehow, while she sang it, he had often half believed that it would come to him as a truth one day. But it never had done so; teaching him that the "*waiting patiently*" must last until death.

— He remained outside until Hope had ceased; then he went in and spoke to her. For him her welcome and its frank affection never changed.

"I knew you would come, otherwise I think I should have come to you. I want you to tell me about Mrs. Armstrong—is she better? I would have gone to see her last night, but my husband wished me not. Is she really better?—What made her ill?"

Mrs. Ulverston went on with all these ques-

tions, but received no answer. Ninian could give none. To see her—so cheerful, so smiling, so kind—and know what he knew! It was almost too horrible to endure.

He looked at her—sat down—tried to speak—but it was only a gasp.

“What is the matter? You look ill. Can I do anything for you?” And Hope came and took his hand, more in the way his “child” used to do, than with the slight reserve she had unconsciously maintained as Mrs. Ulverston.

“Water—give me water. I am so tired. That is all.”

He thought that plea would get her out of the room, if for a moment only, that he might groan out his soul and grow calm again. When she returned he took the glass, drained it, and gave it back again with a faint smile.

“You see I am not so strong as I used to be. I am getting an old man now.”

“You must not think so,” said Hope, affectionately. “Tinie would be very angry to hear you say that, and so would I. We can’t have a grim, ancient uncle for our bairns. We must have one that will laugh and play with them.”

She spoke gaily, but evidently to hide her

anxiety. Wistfully she regarded the face—whose secret she never had read, and never might read.

“Indeed?” said Ninian, trying to answer her playfulness. “Well, let me begin my duties. Where is Walter?”—He thought that anything, even the sight of that poor child, would be better than Hope’s eye watching him thus.

“Walter is asleep up-stairs. Pray let him stay there, the young tyrant!” cried Hope, once more smiling. “When he is awake there is no peace in the house. You shall see him before you go,” she added, as a piece of consolation. “But have you dined? We always dine early on Sundays. How tired you look still! What can I give you?”

“Nothing. I could not eat. Only let me rest for an hour or two.”

“That you shall, and I will sit and talk to you, as I used to do.” And in her old fashion, as customary on rare occasions when the elder brother came home wearied, to have the novelty of his sisters waiting upon him—Hope placed a cushion for his head and a stool for his feet, to make him “comfortable.”

She began to talk—of pleasant little trifles; she was still, as ever, one of those gentle women

who have no "conversation," yet to whose speech many a wise and clever man will listen as to the easy flowing of a rivulet, which has no set music, but is only lulling, sweet, and clear.

It was in vain—Ninian could not rest.

"The house is close—this weather is awful," he said. "Will you come into the garden?" He thought, moving about under the shadow of the mulberry-trees, where he did not see her face—nor she his—it would be possible to bring the conversation to the point it had to reach.

So for half an hour they walked slowly round and round the garden, sometimes side by side, sometimes apart, as Hope stopped to look at a flower, or to glance back and listen underneath the open window of Walter's nursery.

"He sleeps a long time," she said, at last, with another wistful look. "Will you spare me a minute to go and peep at him?"

Ninian assented. All he did, said, and saw, was mechanically, as if there were upon him a horrible incubus which he could neither struggle with nor cast off. He had been with Hope an hour and yet had not learned that for which he came. At length chance brought the question nearer.

“My boy is fast asleep still,” said Hope, returning. “A good thing too, for he was tired out with screaming. He does go in such passions sometimes,—my little ‘Sir Walter,’ as Lady Ulverston calls him.”

“Why Sir Walter?”

“Because he may be a baronet some of these days—after Sir Peter and—his papa.”

“Your husband, then, will inherit a baronetage on Sir Peter’s death?”

“Yes. He expected to have done so before—for every one thought his cousin Peter Ulverston had died abroad. The first Sir Peter—the present Sir Peter’s father—was my husband’s uncle, and had educated and adopted him. But I dare say you know all this?”

Ninian could not but say the truth—that he did.

“Of course, Mr. Ulverston would tell you—though he does not like to talk much about these things, even to me. I fancy his own family were never very kind to him, nor his uncle either, though, dying, he left him all his fortune.”

“Is it long since this uncle died?”

“Some time, I think. It must have been

before you knew my husband; for I remember, the first time I saw him, you spoke of him as *Mr. Ulverston*. Of course you knew that that was not his name always?"

Ninian gasped for breath. For his life—not a word could he have answered.

Hope went on in her innocent talk with her own long-trusted friend, and, as she believed, her husband's likewise.

"It was really quite a surprise to me—for I did not know it until very lately. Would it not have been strange to have first met my husband under one surname, and then married him under another? It might have so happened, since, as you know, he inherited his uncle's estate and assumed his name just before coming to Edinburgh. Look—look! what a pretty lizard you are treading on!" added the young creature, stopping short. She stooped and picked it up from under Ninian's feet, for he was staggering blindly on like one who neither heard nor saw. Then she joined him again.

He said, forgetting everything but that the question must be asked and answered, "Tell me—for I would like to know—what was Mr. Ulverston's former name?"

"Did you never hear it? It was Sabine, I

believe—Geoffrey Sabine.” And then she lagged behind again—the compassionate one!—to pull off a caterpillar that was eating a beautiful rose.

Ninian strode on—quickly—wildly. He felt conscious of nothing but that he must hurry from Hope’s presence,—rush out of hearing of her unconscious voice, out of sight of her innocent face.

“Where are you going, Mr. Græme? Not home, surely?”

He muttered some excuse about having mistaken the hour, and that he must leave.

“But you will stay a minute, just to see my boy?”

“Not now—another time.”

“That other time may be long in coming; for as I was just about to tell you, Mr. Ulverston is going abroad, and Walter and I are to spend the summer by ourselves in the country.”

“Thank God,” murmured Ninian.

Hope looked very much astonished, even frightened, not for herself but him. She evidently thought he must be ill, or troubled in his mind. Her manner grew tender and compassionate beyond expression.

“My dear brother—my own brother—what ails you? Has anything happened?”

He could not tell a falsehood—he never did. “Yes, Hope”—in his agony he called her by that long-silent and carefully-avoided name—“something, not to me or mine personally, but what grieves me much. Let me away now. Only go and pray, my child—go to God and pray!”

He quitted her abruptly, for his reason seemed to reel. When scarcely gone, he remembered with terror the last words forced from him in his anguish—but the remembrance came too late. Little it mattered now, when all must be soon known.

He hurried along the high-road that burned beneath the afternoon sun, scarcely feeling where he was, looking neither to the right nor to the left.—Otherwise he might have seen, slipping out of his way, and peering in and out at the corner of the road near Mr. Ulverston’s house,—a little figure in black.

It was Jane Sedley.

CHAPTER IX.

“OH, brother! what do you think that horrid Mr. Ulverston has gone and done?” cried Tinie, as bonneted and shawled she entered Ninian’s room—two days after that Sunday.

How the two days had passed, he never knew. He had done nothing—for there was nothing to be done: he felt as if Fate must have her own will, and he only sit by and watch. He had never been near Rachel; nor indeed had he stirred out at all. Some indistinct notion he had of life’s daily routine going on as usual; of having to rise in the morning, and go to bed at night; of Tinie’s telling him he looked ill, and should stay a little longer with her, whether he liked it or not, and of his tacitly consenting. This was all the history of the eight-and-forty hours.

“ Brother Ninian, how dull you are ! Listen, —what do you think Hope’s husband has done ? He is gone off to Paris to enjoy himself, and has sent her and the baby to stay at a stupid ugly farmhouse somewhere in Kent, a place where Lady Ulverston declares she will be buried alive. And yet Hope has actually gone !”

Ninian heaved a sigh of relief and thanksgiving.

“ Gone, so suddenly too ! He hurried her off, hardly giving her time to pack up her things. What a very unpleasant husband the ‘Flash of Lightning’ must be !”

Mrs. Reay shrugged her shoulders, and without waiting for any answer went on chattering; unfolding to her brother all that Lady Ulverston had the same morning, by a curious chance, informed her of Mr. Ulverston’s family history, change of name, &c. Such an amount of gossiping intelligence quite overwhelmed the little woman. She talked on in a small fever of excitement, occasionally pausing to see if Ninian listened. But his replies were brief, and he scarce once lifted his head the while.

“ Is that all ?” said he at last, when she had

run through the whole voluminous history, with her own comments thereon.

“Dear me—no! I had another queer little adventure—no end to the secrets I have found out to-day.” Ninian looked up. “Why, how frightened you seem! Perhaps you knew it, and never told me? Well, it is shocking, I own, and unpleasant enough to think of, but still——”

“For God’s sake, speak openly, Christina,” said the brother, as a cold fear stole over him.

“Now, why should you be so agitated, unless to be sure, as I once half-fancied, you were in love with her—only just a wee bit? Confess, brother!” And the wicked young lassie began to laugh heartily.

Her laughter was a relief; Ninian thought she could not laugh if she knew what he dreaded. He forced his quivering lips to smile. “This is an idle jest, Tinie. What, or who are you talking about?”

“Don’t you guess? About Rachel Armstrong. Ha, ha! your look betrays you. So my wise elder brother *was* in love with her after all.”

“ Never ! Talk no such folly again, Tinie. Tell me what you were going to say.”

Made somewhat graver by his look, Tinie continued : “ Of course I’ll tell you, only you are not to look so cross. I’m married now, and won’t be scolded, brother Ninian. There, be good now and you shall hear.”

He listened with painful intentness.

“ I was just coming out of the house at Brompton, when a little old woman met me, and asked me if I were not Mrs. Ulverston ? Of course I said ‘ No ’ (with a little quiet thanksgiving to myself for the same),—‘ but that I was a friend of hers,’ on which the old woman questioned me to a most comical extent ; until I, being rather inclined to curiosity, questioned her in return. And what do you think came out ? That she knew all about the Ulverstons, and, more than that, she even knew Mr. Ulverston’s former name—Sabine, I think it was.”

Ninian almost groaned : “ Did you tell her ? ”

“ Either I told her, or she me, I forget. But we had a long chat ; she amused me ; she was such a funny-looking old woman. Besides, she said she had seen you and Edmund too, which quite puzzled me at first, until the mystery came

out—ah ! brother, it was too bad not to let me know. Only think that the celebrated Mrs. Armadale should turn out to be that queer daft body, Rachel Armstrong !”

She stopped, half-vexed, half-amused. The gay, easy manner relieved Ninian. Evidently, whatever Jane Sedley had discovered, she herself had in return betrayed little; Mrs. Reay, however proud of this small mystery, knew nothing of the greater one that lay beneath.

“I can’t imagine why neither you nor Edmund ever told. What a shocking thing for Mrs. Armstrong to have turned play-actress ! What would the Forsyths say ! And think of John Forsyth’s being in town so lately ! He might have found out all if he had not gone back so suddenly. Well, they are a queer family, Armstrongs, Forsyths, and all. But,” added Tinie, abruptly, “the thing I can’t make out is, What could Rachel’s servant want with the Ulverstons ?”

“She knows nothing—thank God she knows nothing,” said Ninian to himself. But brief was this comfort, when he thought how soon everything must be known. The more so, as now he had no doubt of the purpose of Jane

Sedley's visit to Ulverston's house. By this time her keen fidelity must have learnt all, and discovered it to her mistress likewise.

"Did you answer the old woman's questions? Did you tell her where Mrs. Ulverston was gone?" he asked.

"No, for I had forgotten the name of the place. When I offered to deliver any message, she said, 'No, she had none to send. Only I might tell my brother——'" And then she stopped, seemed to change her mind, and at last hurried away without speaking any more. Now, Ninian, what does all this mystery mean? Mrs. Radcliffe's novels are nothing to it. What is the matter? Stand and unfold yourself!"

He made a vain attempt to quit the room, but his sister opposed him,—half playfully, half in earnest. He saw there was no putting off Tinie's curiosity. Her suspicions were aroused, and she was determined to be satisfied. A jest availed not, and his truthful nature recoiled from a lie. He resolved to trust—not her secrecy, but her sense of honour.

"Christina," said he, gravely, trying to control voice and speech so as not to betray

himself more than necessary. "You see something is wrong, and that a great anxiety troubles me. It is not my secret or yours, but belongs to others. I cannot tell you more now, but time will explain all."

Tinie looked frightened—too frightened even for curiosity.

- "Meanwhile," Ninian continued, "you must show kindness to your brother by helping him to keep a secret which you yourself do not know. You must ask me no questions—take no notice of me—tell no one what I say. Promise!"

"I will," said she, subdued into obedience. "Only one thing. Does my husband know? Is it any trouble coming upon us—upon my Kenneth?"

"No!" said Ninian, sadly. "Be at rest, my little sister, it will not harm you or Kenneth."

"Nor you either, brother? You said it was nothing that concerned yourself?"

He made some vague answer, enough to content the wife, whose chief anxiety was already satisfied. For a moment, amidst all his cares, the brother painfully noticed this, and then felt that all was as it ought to be. Alas! he had

long been accustomed to the lot, which every solitary one must learn to bear—that of knowing himself to be first object, first care, to no living soul!

Tinie, on recovering herself, hardly knew whether to be annoyed at being kept in a dim twilight of mystery, or proud of being considered in some measure a trustworthy little woman, as indeed, in extreme cases, Ninian always held her to be. But he left her no chance of finding out more, for immediately afterwards he quitted the house.

He went at once to Mrs. Armadale's,—with what purpose he scarcely paused to reflect; still he felt impelled to go. So hasty were his movements, that Jane Sedley had not returned, and his first sight of Rachel convinced him that the old woman had kept her promise. As yet the deserted wife was evidently not aware of the secret which proved her marriage.

It was with difficulty that he had gained admittance; nor on seeing her did he marvel at that. She was lying on a sofa, exhausted and ghastly pale; but on his entrance she tried to rise, and assume her usual manner.

“I have been waiting for you, Mr. Græme, these several days. My servant, or rather I

should say my friend,—the only one I have—said she thought you would be sure to come.”

“I would, could I have been of any service to you,” was the somewhat hesitating answer. “But I did not expect to find you so ill,” continued he, noticing that, after the exertion of speaking, she had leaned back, thoroughly overpowered. “I saw by the play-bills that you were acting last night and the night before.”

“So I did.”

“Good Heavens! How was it possible?”

“I make everything possible that I have the will to do. Besides, I could stand and walk, had no physical ailment,—therefore I must appear. We actors have no choice.”

She spoke in a dull, mechanical tone, as though to any ordinary visitor. It was apparently the tone that, from some motive or other, she had determined to keep with Ninian Græme. Before he could break the ice, or move her from that strange reserve, which, seemingly in defiance, she observed towards him,—their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Jane Sedley.

The old woman came in, heated and worn;

and, unobservant of all beside, stole to her mistress.

“Are you better, my dear—my love? Does your head ache less, do you think?” said she, in a manner half-caressing, half-respectful, but much agitated.

Rachel touched her on the shoulder, speaking more gently and tenderly than it had seemed possible for Mrs. Armadale to speak:

“Never mind me, Jane; you are tired, rest a little. You see, Mr. Græme is here.”

At sight of Ninian, the old woman seemed hardly able to control herself. She crossed the room to him. “You’re come at last, sir! It’s well you have—I wouldn’t have held my tongue another day. I have found out all, and I’ll tell her all! Prevent me if you dare!”

Though she still had the caution to speak in an under tone, her words caught the ear of Rachel, who turned languidly round. “What is that you are saying about preventing? Have you not been to the theatre, as you intended?”

“No, no!” cried Jane Sedley, running to her. “I’ve cheated you every day, because I durst not tell you where I was going. But you’ll forgive me? You would if you knew!”

Rachel lifted her head, wakened into life and energy by the one thought which alone was likely to present itself. "You have been—ay, tell me the truth—you have been to *him*?"

"I have, I have," muttered the poor woman, confounded by the sternness of her manner.

"I told you not. I told you none should deal with him but myself. Why did you go?"

"Because——" and, startled by her mistress's sudden anger, the old woman hesitated. Ninian came to her side. He too had noted the change in Rachel's face, and how fearfully the spirit seemed writhing within her shattered frame.

"Take care," whispered he to Jane, forgetting all but present pity. "I know what you know; but tell her gently. People have died from joy sometimes."

Died from joy! Even while he uttered them, what a mockery seemed the words!

"Why did you go? Did you see him? Did you speak to him?" cried Rachel.

"I see him? I speak to him? No, no! Better not! I should have told him something that would have made him quake where he stood. Oh, he's a villain—a cowardly villain—though he is your husband!"

Rachel started and sat upright. "What do you mean? Are you insulting me—even you?"

"It's all true, quite true! Ask Mr. Græme. He knows it."

Instinctively she turned to Ninian, but with a vacant stunned look. He was silent; he could not thus for the first time give utterance to the truth—a truth which, by the confirmation of his own lips, would pronounce Hope's ruin.

"Why don't you speak, Mr. Græme? Why don't you tell my dear mistress all we know? She can bear it—ay, that she can."

"Tell her yourself," said Ninian, for he saw something of the old insane glare rising to Rachel's eyes.

"It has all come out, my dear child—my lady, I mean, for you will be proved a wedded lady yet. Hush—keep quiet, love; it is all as I say. He told a wicked lie—not at first, but afterwards. His name was Geoffrey Sabine after all."

Rachel sprang to her feet, and tottered forward towards Ninian. He must speak now. The right—the truth—compassion—even fear—constrained him.

“It is even as she says, Rachel; things have happened strangely; but I would not tell you until I was quite certain.”

“Is that all?—speak quicker, Mr. Græme; don’t you see she is choking—dying?” screamed Jane Sedley.

“It is quite true,” Ninian continued. “He tried to deceive you, but in vain. He has changed his name since then, but if, as I believe, you can prove your marriage according to our Scottish law—you are now Rachel Ulverston, his wedded wife.”

She uttered a shriek of hysteric laughter—wild, fierce, and long—then fell back speechless into her old servant’s arms.

But the silence was brief, for she had not fainted, nor were her senses benumbed. Very soon she rose, and the laughter broke forth again—low, but almost maniacal in its triumph, for it was the triumph of neither pride, nor virtue, nor love—but of revenge. Not a word said she; not a sign of womanly agitation did she give—nothing was heard but that awful laughter.

“She’ll go out of her mind,” sobbed Jane Sedley, in extreme terror. “Speak to her, Mr. Græme—only speak!”

He advanced, trying to regain the self-control whereby he might control another.

“Do you hear me, Rachel? Cease! This time is not for laughter—have you thought of the misery that is coming? Cease—and look at me, I say!”

She did so, and something in his face seemed to awe her, for her laughter was stilled.

“Do you know that even if you prove yourself to be his wife, your husband will not own you? He cannot—for his pride; he dare not—for his cowardice. He had already ceased to love you, but now he will begin to hate. Probably, you will never meet him more.”

“I am glad!” she muttered; and her frenzied exultation did not sink, but rose.

Ninian went on: “To prove your marriage, you will have to pursue him—bring him to open shame—show him to have been a liar—a false swearer. He will be held as a dishonoured man, liable to the punishment of the law.”

“I thank Heaven!” she cried; and the lips were parted wide as if for smiles, and the words came hissing through her white glittering teeth. “I thank Heaven for giving me my revenge!”

Saying this, she sank down half paralysed; and nothing that Mr. Græme or her old faithful

servant could say had power to rouse her. There she sat, her eyes dry and bright, her mouth bent into its perpetual ghastly smile.

He turned aside in horror. There was something fiend-like in this triumph. All the woman seemed to have died out of her soul; she looked like one possessed.

Ninian thought, nay almost hoped, that it was some passing madness. For her own sake, lest this delirium of joy might overpower her reason, he tried once more to move her—not to compassion, for that availed not—but to some ray of feeling, which might produce a reaction in her mind.

“Rachel,” said he, “there is one thing of which you have never thought. You remember Hope, and the child—the boy she was so proud of? If you are Geoffrey Ulverston’s only lawful wife, what are they?”

Rachel looked startled, and seemed trying to collect her ideas. “I am not quite clear; say that again.”

“You were wronged once; think now of her wrong. Think of the shame—hopeless, irretrievable—which must last her life, and descend upon her boy. Your misery was nothing to hers. And she so innocent—such a child still! Oh,

my God! where is Thy justice?" He bowed his head, and groaned aloud.

A change came over Rachel. "I begin to understand. You mean Hope Ansted—the pretty, gentle creature I saw; she that was his wife. But that cannot be. He is *my* husband, you say—only mine. I have won my revenge upon him; and as for her——" Rachel paused. "I see it now," she said. "God pity her! Poor thing—poor thing!"

Her mouth quivered, and her dry blanched cheeks became damp with tears. It was the first touch of tenderness which for years the woman's soul had known.

"It is too late," continued she, speaking in a voice softer and more natural, though still firm. "The wrong lies with him—not me. I must restore my honour. Even you have nothing to urge or to plead against that."

"No," answered Ninian, sorrowfully. "There is no help. Heaven's will be done. But oh!" he added, in the agony of his spirit, "it is hard to bear. My child—my little Hope—would to God she had died in that fever, rather than have lived to see this day!"

These words, spoken more to himself than

aloud, were unheeded by Rachel. Afterwards, there came a silence upon both—the lull of the tempest when its first outburst was overpast. Now they began to look around, and see with calmer eyes the ruin which had been wrought, and that which was still to come.

“You have not told me,” said Rachel, “how it is that this has happened?”

Jane Sedley showed her the Bible—the chief evidence of her marriage. She looked at the page, and her whole face was convulsed. The writing—the date, never beheld since—God knows what must have been her thoughts! but they were all dumb.

At first she seemed to gaze, seeing nothing—then read, line by line, the writing there. At length she closed the book, as one would close the book of an eternal past that can never be renewed. Turning to Mr. Græme, she said very steadily and coldly,

“This, then, which I thought a love-token, lost or destroyed—will be sufficient to prove my marriage?”

“I have no doubt of that.”

“Sufficient to make him, with or against his will, acknowledge me as his wife before the world?”

“ It is indeed so.”

“ While I live, all his other ties are unlawful? He is fast bound to me as my husband, and can call no other woman wife but me?”

“ That is most true.”

Rachel stopped. Her spirit seemed to dilate within her, glorying in such entire vengeance. It lent strength to her feeble body—clearness to her disordered mind. She rose and walked up to Ninian, speaking as firmly as if the topic were some ordinary legal consultation.

“ Then, Mr. Græme, since you have discovered these proofs, you can tell me how to proceed. What shall I do to establish my marriage?”

He stood aghast at the necessity before him. “ How do you mean?” stammered he. “ With what view do you ask me this? Would you be reconciled to your husband? Would you have him put away those two, mother and child, and take you back to him again?”

Rachel smiled. “ Look you, Mr. Græme— if I were starving in the streets, with not a door open to me but his,—and he stood beseeching me to forgive him and enter,—I

would turn away to die where I lay, *outside* his threshold."

"What then is your purpose?"

"To redeem my own good name—to blast his—to tear away from him everything he has—wife, child, home and friends—to see him as he has made me, wholly desolate,—and then to spurn him!"

Saying this, she stood, the reality of all which her acting at times simulated—a picture showing to what awful heights of evil an injured woman can rise. A warning too that all passions, even the purest and deepest, often tremble on the very verge of their opposite crime. God knows, we have all need of His mercy preventing us and of His love sanctifying and subduing all other loves, otherwise there are few of us who, looking on some wrecked brother or sister, could not say, "So tempted, I might have been as thou."

"You are long silent, Mr. Græme. Must I repeat my former question? What is the course, the legal course, for me to take? Understand, I will only deal with him by the law; I want nothing from him but justice and a name—Sabine or Ulverston I care not, so that it is

the name of his lawful wife. How am I to obtain this?"

"There must be an action raised in the Court of Session. You must gather together witnesses, proofs," said Ninian, mechanically. "All must be made public; our Edinburgh law courts will ring with it. Possibly there may follow a criminal trial for intermarriage with the second wife. Oh, how will she bear such horrors!"

His voice, steady at first, sank into a groan; but Rachel heeded him not.

"It is all clear now. I am glad to have a friend like you. Money, too," she added, speaking quickly, her mind seeming endowed with a new and strange acuteness in worldly things; "you will want money! Well, I shall have abundance for you. I can act every night; they will double my salary then. Jane has saved something for me likewise — how much is it, Jane? There, give it to him. Take it, Mr. Græme; pay yourself and all others. You will conduct my case?"

He put aside the money, sickening at the sight. "I cannot—it is impossible."

She looked amazed — displeased. “Why not?”

“I give no reasons; simply, I cannot do it. My refusal harms you not; there need be no secrecy now. Many friends will aid you; any Edinburgh advocate would take up your cause. It is a just one, God knows; but you must not ask this of me.”

He attempted to go away, when Jane Sedley angrily stopped him. “You are a worse friend and a less honest man than I took you for, Mr. Græme; you ought to be glad to punish that villain, and right my mistress! Or, if you will not do this yourself, find for her somebody that can.”

“How do you mean?”

“Send somebody to her—some kind-hearted, honest lawyer, if there is such a thing—who will help her to get justice. You say she has the right with her, and yet you will not stir a step for her sake. Where is your conscience gone to?”

Ninian started. The upright man was touched to the core. “Hush!” he said; “give me paper and a pen.”

He wrote—his fair hand-writing seeming half illegible—the address of one of his Edinburgh brethren. This he gave to Mrs. Sedley; or rather she took it, clutching it as eagerly as if on it rested the fate of her beloved mistress. Truly there must have been something noble in the woman to have awakened in this old withered heart an attachment almost as passionate as that of youth.

“Now, Rachel, I must leave you; I can do no more,” said Ninian, feeling himself all but spent. “Go to Edinburgh; prove all you can.” And he remembered—he hardly knew whether with relief or pain—that she could prove nothing for some time; since it would be November before the law courts were sitting. “Whatever the event, God judge the right and support the innocent. Farewell.”

“Is it farewell?”

“For the present. I shall probably quit London. Anyhow, it will be best for us not to meet just yet.”

She held out her hand, uttering some thanks; but she was too much absorbed to notice anything much. Her nature had been always restricted within its own emotions; engrossed

first by its passionate love, then by its intensity of vengeance. From these two things—two, yet one in their root—all her sympathies culminated, and then drew back within their boundary. Beyond was nothing, either to feel, or hope, or become.

Poor wretch ! It must have been a crushed and lifeless heart that could thus let tried friendship go, like a broken reed.

But she did let it go, almost without questioning, or consciousness of what was being done. Ninian, when he quitted Rachel's door, felt a presentiment that the bond between them, so strangely formed, which had cost him so much of interest, anxiety, and pain, was thus tacitly dissolved. It was best for all.

CHAPTER X.

It was yet summer, though the leaves were beginning to turn. The red hedge-roses were mingled with that sickly-scented white one—the first signal that the time for wild flowers is passing and the year has begun to wane. The wheat-fields were of a pale yellow, the hop-gardens rich and green. For this scene, a faint fragment of landscape—was in Kent, and the traveller who filled its foreground was Ninian Græme.

He was going down to the farmhouse where for some time past Hope and Tinie had been staying together, in innocent unconsciousness of the future, renewing their girlish pleasures, enjoying the additional one, dearest to all young matrons—the baby.

Once or twice Mrs. Reay had given her

brother frightened hints about the secret with which he had half-trusted her; but as he had soon gone back to Edinburgh, and weeks slipped by and nothing occurred, he seemed to grow content, nay, even to forget it altogether. Her letters, full of fun and happiness, informed Ninian of all that happened in the safe out-of-the-way hiding-place, where probably by Mr. Ulverston's planning, Hope lived retired. On all the looming horrors of the future seemed to have fallen a lull so complete, that Ninian at times hardly believed in their reality. Nothing was heard of Rachel, nor could Mr. Græme learn anything of her plans.

But still he could not rest. Though all appeared so calm, at any moment the storm might break. And when Lindsay proposed taking Edmund to their old haunts on the Clyde, Ninian could bear suspense no longer, but determined to go south once more.

He did not visit Rachel, though, passing through London, he saw on the playbills of the —— Theatre Mrs. Armadale's name—staring in its large-lettered popularity. What a mockery it was!

The Reays' household was empty—Kenneth

being doing the geological along the coast; therefore it would not appear strange that Mr. Græme should follow his sister into her Kentish solitudes. He had gone down the river to Gravesend, and was now riding across the country to Eastbrook Court.

It still bore the aristocratic name of "Court," though it had now declined into a farmhouse, where upon walls thick and ancient as those of the many-centuried village church close by, were built modern chambers, making the whole erection as composite and queer-looking as well could be. There was only a wall between the flower-garden and the garden of graves; the same great yew-tree which overhung the churchyard-gate covered likewise the entrance-path to the house. It was the sole house in the village; all the rest being mere sheds or cottages; so Ninian found his way without difficulty, and dismounted under the yew-tree gate.

Though it was mid-day, he felt a damp chill come over him as he passed under that shadow; an idle fancy—but he was in that restless state of mind which induces a keen susceptibility to the most trivial external impressions. Even the

silence of the garden and house, the door standing open, and the little parlour empty,—struck him with a vague dread; groundless enough, for this deserted aspect was the mere result of harvest-time. Very soon he found some farm-servant, who told him that all the establishment, together with the lady inmates, were in the wheat-field at the back of the house. Ninian went thither, passing through a huge grim dairy, which probably had once been a feasting-hall for some old baron of King John's day,—through a poultry-yard, where the chickens were fattening under crumbling ivy-wreathed walls that according to Tinie's account were supposed to have been the old chapel attached to Eastbrook Court. All these things Ninian noted with a curious mechanical exactness, perhaps wishing by external objects to drive away the one perpetual horror that was every day growing to a nearer climax—but which nevertheless he resolved to hold secret until the latest possible moment.

The poor doomed one, the unconscious happy mother—who would not have let her enjoy to the full the last hour, day, or week of her happiness? It was indeed happiness; no need of

Mrs. Reay's letters to show that. Ninian's first sight of them was enough. A merry group they were, sunning themselves in that little peep of Arcadia—an English wheat-field. He saw them at a distance, all half-hidden under a hedge, Tinie, Hope, the nurse, and the little one, who was enjoying the first summer of its baby existence. But they did not see him, so occupied were they. He came near; he could even hear the laughter of the two women as they played all sorts of antics with the infant emperor. At last Hope emerged, her warm rosy face looking rosier and happier than Ninian had seen it since she was a gay lassie on the shores of Clyde. He could hardly bear the sight, but stole behind some wheat-sheaves and hid himself until he could appear before them with an aspect less fearfully unlike to theirs.

Hope was the first to notice that a gentleman was coming towards them. She started, and her laughter abruptly ceased.

"It's only Ninian — brother Ninian," cried Tinie, bounding to him; moreover giving him half a dozen sisterly kisses in full presence of the sky, the wheat-field, a stray gleaner or two, and Master Walter's nurse.

Hope came forward, but slowly—still a good deal fluttered by the surprise.

“Why, she looks as frightened as if my harmless brother had been the Flash of Lightning himself!” remarked Mrs. Reay.

Hope said gently, “I wish, Tinie, as I have often told you, that you would not speak so of my husband.”

“Well, don’t be cross, lassie; I meant no harm. But you see Mr. Ulverston *is* a flash of lightning. Here were you expecting him every day for a fortnight, and now when he says he is not coming, ten to one but he makes his appearance, and carries you off.”

Hope looked uneasy. “Is not this a sweet place, Mr. Græme? and does not my boy look like a thorough country boy? How grieved I should be to go. But”—and a sudden discomfort troubled her face—“perhaps that is what you are come for? Do you bring any news, or any message from Mr. Ulverston?”

“No,” he said, turning away, but added quickly, “Nothing brings me here but my own inclination and the wish to see my sister and yourself.”

“How kind! Ah, I am so glad!” answered

Hope, quite relieved. And then the two girls—they were still little else—hovered affectionately round him, brought him to the house, would have him tell all his travels' history, and be taken care of and made much of, in the way that kind-hearted women love. All that afternoon Ninian sat with them in the little cottage parlour, oppressed with a heavy bewildering dream; among them, and yet apart; obliged to smile, talk, and be merry, when his very heart was sick with fear; haunted with questions that he could not answer, pursued with inquiring looks that made him quail as if his secret had been one of guilt, instead of most utter wretchedness.

Hours fled without his being able clearly to apprehend anything, or to decide what he had to do, or what was his purpose in coming. At last the bees' hum died away in the little flower-garden, the low evening sun passed from the room and only lit the tower of the old church.

“It is Baby's bedtime,” said Hope. “For days I have always been putting him to sleep just when the sunshine reaches the old tower. It is his clock, you see, and a very poetical clock too. The sparrows in the ivy use it; they are going to their nests, and so must my wee birdie.”

She laughed, and gathering the sleepy face close to her breast, quitted the room.

“Well, Hope is a mother among a thousand!” cried Mrs. Reay. “That little fellow would drive any other body wild sometimes, but she is never tired of him. I’m sure I should be if he were mine!”

— She was a little piece of affectation, was Kenneth’s blithe wife! since all the time her eyes were moist. For a minute she stopped her chatter, then again broke out with—

“I wonder whether we will have Hope with us in London this winter. She would come I know, if that old ogre of a husband would only let her. But she can’t learn anything of him and his plans. He has not written for weeks, and she does not even know his address.”

“How does she bear his silence?”

“Wonderfully! She certainly is the most easily-contented wife I ever knew. She said once, accidentally, that the chief comfort of matrimony was in having children to love. Very fine! and simply explained too. In my humble opinion, she never loved anything so well as she does little Walter. She has

done as some young girls do, married merely because she was asked and didn't happen to like anybody else better. As for real love, not knowing anything about it, her affection has just stepped over the husband and on to the bairn. She knows a mother's feeling well enough; but as for a wife's—bah! what would my Kenneth say if I were as cool and quiet about him as Hope is about Mr. Ulverston?"

Tinie, uninterrupted, delivered this long harangue. Her brother sat listening. Some little comfort he drew, but not much. If the wife's heart would not be broken, there was still the woman's, and most of all the mother's. Nothing could lighten that blow.

Hope returned, wearing the sweet look that fond mothers wear, when they have left their beloved little torment in the beautiful quiet slumber that exalts a babe into the likeness of an angel.

"He is asleep at last. You should have seen him, the wee lammie!"—It was curious to note how fondly Hope kept to the words and phrases which she had learned during her happy time in Scotland—the happiest year of her life, she always said.—"He shut his bonnie eyes, and let me lay him out of my arms. He

did not feel it at all, but slept as softly and sound as if nothing could ever wake him."

As she spoke, the words,—used unwittingly, as we sometimes use words at which we afterwards start, perceiving the double meaning they bear,—seemed to frighten the young mother. She changed the subject hastily, proposing a twilight walk across the fields.

Again this day, which seemed to crawl by inches, and be drawing out into a thousand fragments of life, presented itself in a new aspect to Ninian Græme. He was once more walking with his sister and Hope, as he used to walk in evenings gone by.

"It will almost be like our Scottish walks," said the latter. "For, look, what a wavy landscape it is!—and afar there is something which we can almost imagine a hill. We'll climb it and try!"

They did so, mounting a steep slope, and laughing the while. Even Ninian, deluded into forgetfulness, heard himself laugh too, and started at the sound.

"You are happy now," said Hope, looking at him; "and better, too," she added softly. "I knew you were ill, or that something was troubling your mind, the last time I saw you at

Brompton. I should have been very unhappy about you, but that Tinie said it was nothing. Whatever it was, it is all past now, I trust?"

He made no answer, and she ceased; but nevertheless often glanced at him with a tender anxiety. And when they were on the top of the hill—really a respectable sort of hill for a southern county—when they stood still and looked on the landscape around and below, growing solemnly beautiful with the grey shades of evening—she came and put her arm in his, tenderly.

"Don't you like this?" she whispered. "Is not everything so quiet and peaceful? There is that great star—Jupiter, you know, for you taught me—shining out by itself in the east; and there is the west so clear, all but that heavy bank of dark clouds."

"There will be a storm to-night. It is coming, I see," answered Ninian, hardly knowing what he said.

"Never mind, it will not come yet; don't let us fear it before the time. And when it does come, I dare say we shall be safe at home; or else it will happen to us with the rain as it

always does with trouble—we shall find some place to creep into until it is over.”

She said this evidently with some kind and gentle meaning, that might touch a heart which she fancied was suffering. Encouraged by his silence, she went on preaching in her simple way

“I think if I were ever so unhappy, I should grow content and quiet on such a night as this—standing among fields and woods—feeling that there is nothing near me but God and the creatures that He takes care of—the grass that He makes grow, the stars that He keeps always shining, and the little birds that He finds food for. One feels sure that He would always take care of us too, whatever happened.”

“Do *you* feel this, Hope?”

“Yes, I do. No trouble would quite weigh me down, I think, if I felt that God loved me, and other people loved me, and I had done nothing very wicked. Likewise,” she added, with a natural, momentary impulse, “if I had my baby with me.”

They were both silent; but with one of the two it was the silence of inward thanksgiving. He looked at the serene face, half-lifted towards

the sky, and felt that in some way or other there would be compensation—that God would not suffer the innocent to perish.

The walk home was very quiet—even Tinie's gaiety being hushed. Long they lingered in the lane, in the garden, in the churchyard, as if loath to pass from under the solemn restful heaven to any roof upon which might hang the shadow of human disquiet and woe.

At last they came to the door; for Hope had seen a light moving in the room where her boy slept. She crossed the threshold hastily, and went up-stairs. Very soon Ninian and Tinie indistinctly heard her voice, in a startled exclamation.

“There's a lady here,” explained the child's nurse, who was descending the staircase. “She came an hour ago, and has waited for my mistress. I had just taken her up to the nursery, for she wanted to see Master Walter.”

“It can't be Lindsay, or Ruth, or Esther. Perhaps it is Lady Ulverston,” cried Tinie, much surprised.

But Ninian knew better. There was but one woman likely to be here. He felt that the crisis was come. Without saying a word he

went up-stairs. Stumbling and groping his way through the dark house, he reached the room where Hope was. He heard her speaking.

“It is very kind of you to seek me out here. Forgive my being so startled; but I did not at first recollect you. Have you seen Mr. Ulverston? But, I forget, he is in Paris.”

“Is he?”

Ninian knew the voice—only too well! Regardless of everything, he pressed forward, and scarcely knocking at the door went into the nursery.

Rachel was standing over the little bed; Hope being at the opposite side. The child, still asleep, lay between the two. Both looked at it, and from it to one another; neither observed Ninian until he spoke.

“Forgive me; but I must see Rachel Armstrong.”

“You here?” she said, hurriedly.

“I am here, thank God,” he answered, in a low tone.

“You dare not prevent me? You cannot! It is too late.”

“What is too late?” interposed Hope.
“Why do you speak so strangely to Mr.

Græme? I am sure he is very glad to see you, and so am I. Will you come down stairs, Mrs. Armstrong?"

"That is not my name; I must not hear it any more."

Hope, afraid lest she had touched some painful chord, turned uneasily to Mr. Græme, who came to her side, as if vainly thinking he could protect her still.

"I am very sorry—I did not know," she murmured. There was a pause. Then Ninian said,

"Rachel, I know why you have come here. Your purpose must be done, but it shall be done when and how I think best. Meanwhile, will you retire, or shall I take away this lady?"

But Rachel never stirred. Her wild eyes were fixed upon the young mother, who at some slight movement of the little one had knelt down and put her face beside it.

"He taunts me with being childless," she muttered. "He says, he would not have disowned me if I had given him an heir. And now he wishes to bind my tongue—to lure or threaten me into silence—for the sake of these! But I will speak."

Ninian grasped her arm. "Not a word! She must be told, but I only must tell her. Go you away."

His commanding gesture, and Rachel's vehement resistance, frightened Hope.

"What is the matter? What am I to be told! Nothing has happened—nothing can happen. Oh, no!"

She snatched the child, who woke, nestled close to her, and smiled. Re-assured of this, evidently her chief terror—the mother turned again to Ninian.

"I don't understand. Why does she look at me?—what does she want? If there is anything dreadful to hear, tell me!"

He could not speak, and even Rachel seemed silenced at thought of the misery that by her means was the next moment to be brought upon that young trembling creature—who, clasping her child, gazed from one to the other with a face of such piteous supplication.

"Why does no one tell me? Is it any misfortune—or——" and her voice sank, more with awe than terror, "is it anything that has happened to my husband?"

"Your husband!" said Rachel, in bitter

scorn. "Poor, foolish girl! he told you so, and you believed him? As if it had been the first lie his cruel lips had told!"

"Come away, Hope," cried Ninian in despair. "Come with me, and you shall know all."

Terrified as she was, Hope stood irresolute.

"First, tell me what does she mean by speaking so ill of my husband?"

"*Your* husband!" again Rachel echoed, and now the torrent of her passion poured forth unrestrained. "It is false—he is *my* husband. He married me, years ago, and then forsook me. I loved him—as you never loved him—you weak, simple child! Now, I hate him—as no woman ever hated man before. But for all that, he is my husband."

Hope looked at her in a wonder wholly unmixed with suspicion—her innocent nature could not fathom such an abyss of wrong. She only held her baby closer, and drew towards Ninian, whispering,

"She is mad, I think—poor Rachel! Take care of us, Mr. Græme."

"Mad, am I? Ask him—he knows!" and she pointed to Ninian. "Ask Geoffrey Ulver-

ston, who is coming here to-night! He will say who is the true wife! You, and the poor wretch in your arms, are——”

“Hush — have you no mercy?” groaned Ninian, as he tried once more to draw Hope from the room; but she turned towards him her white imploring face.

“Stay one minute—Mr. Græme! Brother! *you* would not deceive me. It is not true what she says? You are sure it is not true?”

He did not answer, but turned away from her. It was enough. Hope sobbed out, “The child! the child!” and fell senseless, still fast clasping the poor babe.

The long-impending horror had fallen. All was over now. This was Ninian’s first thought—almost a thought of relief. Without looking or speaking to Rachel, he took Hope and her child at once in his arms, carried them from the room, and called loudly for his sister.

It is strange, in such scenes of misery, how brief an explanation reveals all. In a minute or two Tinie knew everything that could be told.

At heart Kenneth’s merry wife was a good little woman—tender, sensible, and brave. She

showed these qualities now. One burst of womanly wrath and horror relieved her mind, and then she became perfectly self-collected. She took the child from its mother's rigid arms.

"Carry her to my room, brother—quick! She is recovering now."

Hope did recover, as soon as she was laid down. Instinctively she missed little Walter from her clasp, and uttered a heart-rending cry.

"Give her the child," said Ninian.

He was right. The touch of the little arms dissolved the poor young mother's agony to tears. "My baby—my own boy—oh, what will become of my baby!" she moaned, over and over again; but by degrees the moans grew softer, and the tears only flowed.

"Don't speak to her, she does not notice us," Ninian whispered. "Let her alone; the child will comfort her best."

There was a broken-heartedness in his voice, as if he felt keenly that even this power—that of comforting—was not his. Very soon he stole out of the room. She would not miss him, he knew.

He bethought himself of Rachel, and went to her. She was still sitting in the child's nursery, mute and quiet, with a dull resolve fixed on her countenance.

“Are you satisfied?” said Ninian. “What do you mean to do?”

“To wait and meet him. He is coming to-night.”

“Mr. Ulverston? And you will stay here?”

“Why not? Is it so strange that a wife should appear in her husband's house?”

“So you have met him—you will be reconciled to him?”

She laughed bitterly.

“He is not abroad, then? I thought not—all false as he is. Doubtless he has been with you, or has tried some compromise to prevent this public disgrace?”

“You guess right. He thinks he will tame and soothe me. He tells me he does not love this girl he married; that he never loved any one but me. He would own me, but for the worldly shame of so doing, and for the sake of the boy, his heir. So, instead, he offers me half his fortune, together with his love and his generous protection! He has planned to come hither and

take away the mother and child to some poor hiding-place, and then, he says, he will fly to me. Instead of which—he will find me here.”

And the deadly resolve with which she spoke showed what he would find—no loving, humbled woman—but a relentless avenger. Ninian shuddered lest her purpose should not even hold sacred her enemy’s life.

“I know what you think,” said she suddenly. “Do not be afraid; I shall not murder him. Perhaps”—and her tone fell—“perhaps I might forgive him after he was dead; therefore he must not die.”

Saying this, she relapsed into a sullen silence, and after a few words Ninian left her. His only thought was a thankfulness that the end had come; his only hope, that he might never see Rachel’s face more.

But there was no time to be lost. He returned to where Hope was. She had grown calmer now, and sat rocking the child, who slept—the mother’s milk scarce dry upon its lips—the mother’s tears still dropping on its brow. Alas, on that brow they might eternally fall, and never wash out the brand of shame! Whether it was that in her ignorance she

hardly realised her position, or whether her mild and pure nature was the more fitted to bear any sorrow, but Hope seemed less overwhelmed than Ninian had expected. Her pale looks—her mute extended hand—touched him to an almost womanly weakness.

He came and leaned over her. “God pity thee, innocent one!”

“I know He will,” said she, weeping. “He will forgive me too, for I meant no wrong. But, oh! my child—my child!”

That was her chief agony, and for that alone could there be no comfort or hope.

Once she seemed to snatch at the faint doubt which seizes many in cases of horrible calamity. “It cannot be real; I have been foolish or dreaming. Brother, you yourself always called me Mrs. Ulverston;—and look—here is the ring with which he married me. He does not love me—I knew that long ago; but I am his wife, and this is his boy—his heir. Oh! tell me that what Rachel said is not true!”

But in Ninian’s countenance she read her answer. She sank back and asked no more.

Suddenly a new thought appalled her. “If I am not his wife, what am I? Does he know

anything? Where is he? Did she not say he would come to-night?"

Ninian assented.

The poor young creature seemed waking to a full consciousness of her position. "To-night," she almost shrieked. "He will be here to-night, and he is not my husband. I must run—I must fly; anywhere—anywhere."

She rose, and clutching her baby tighter tried to stagger to the door. But Mr. Græme stopped her, and Tinie clung round her sobbing.

"Don't hold me—don't!" Hope cried, frantically. "He will be here, and I am not his wife. Perhaps he will take my baby from me: he used to threaten it sometimes. Oh! let us go and hide ourselves, I and my child."

"She is right," said Ninian to his sister. "She must go. Be patient, Hope," he added; "I will take you away to-night. You will be safe with me."

"And I'll go too. I would not for worlds stay and meet that wicked, wicked man," exclaimed Tinie passionately.

But Hope turned from her to Ninian. One look at his face, so full of grief, tenderness,

and consolation, seemed to calm her. She drew close to him, she and her poor child.

“You will take care of us—you will never forsake us, brother?”

“Never, so help me God!” It was the last promise, which marked his renunciation of every lingering of human passion, and consecrated to him this sacred wreck of perpetual sorrow, whom henceforth his hearth must receive as a sister beloved, to be comforted and cherished until death.

He took her away. It was almost midnight, and they had miles to go before they could reach the nearest point on their road to London. There was no conveyance to be had; so he got a waggon from the farm-people, half filled it with straw, and there placed Hope and her child. She was very patient, doing all that he and Tinie bade. She had even thought enough to take warm clothes to wrap the boy, but of herself she was wholly regardless. Mrs. Reay left the nurse with orders to follow next day to her house in London.

“There, we’re all right now,” said the energetic little woman, as she settled Hope and

the baby comfortably in the waggon, sheltering them from the heavy summer-storm, which, as threatened in their evening walk, was now coming on fast. Alas! fate had travelled faster than the clouds!

“It will be an awful midnight journey, but no matter if we get her away safe,” said Ninian, as he prepared himself to walk alongside.

Scarcely had they started, winding heavily down under the black walls of the old church, when they heard the sound of a horse’s hoofs in an opposite direction. It dashed up the farmyard, and the rider’s voice was audible, calling impatiently.

“He is come,” whispered Tinie to her brother, though Hope lay quite still and dumb. “We are only just in time. But hasten on. He may follow.”

“Let him, if he dare!” muttered Ninian, with an almost savage joy. He felt that now this man could thwart him no more; that at last his treasure—ruined and blighted, but still a treasure—was henceforward his own.

CHAPTER XI.

It was daylight—the grim, pale daylight which dawns after a storm,—when they reached Gravesend. Ninian would have stayed a few hours, but Hope resisted; all she said was, “Oh, let us go on and get far away!” She seemed to have a vague terror that her child would be claimed by Mr. Ulverston.

“You need have no fear,” answered Ninian, driven at last to explain the hard truth. “It is only over his lawful children that a father has any right. Poor Walter is safe—he is the same as if he had no father.”

These words—which Mr. Græme uttered with pain and hesitation, were caught up by Hope as if they had been words of bliss.

“My boy is then mine—all mine! Nobody

has any right over him—nobody can take him from me, or teach him to grow up a bad, cruel man ! Oh! thank God, thank God !” Thus she cried, and snatching her darling covered him with kisses.

Tinie whispered her brother :

“ There’s mystery here. What a wretch of a husband he must have been, when she is so glad to get the boy out of his way that she never minds herself at all. Hope,” she added, aloud, “ did he ever try to take away the baby, or send you away and keep Walter, or anything very dreadful ?”

Hope shuddered, and did not speak. Heaven knows what might have been the secrets of her married life—but she never told them.

“ Let her alone, she must have no questionings,” said Ninian to his over-curious sister. And so, still in silence—except for the low, incessant wail of the child, they travelled on to town.

It was bright morning when they drove through London streets. Very haggard and tired showed the faces of all three. When they came to Tinie’s home, the good little woman—who, forgetful of her own fatigue, had

been trying for an hour to quiet little Walter—heaved a sigh of relief.

“Thank Heaven! it is all done. We can be at rest here.”

But Hope could not rest. She seemed to sicken with fear at the very sight of London. She refused to go to bed, or even to undress the child.

“I must travel further yet,” she said, and turned entreatingly to Ninian, whom hitherto she had hardly noticed; indeed, she noticed nothing but the babe. “Oh, take me and hide me safe in Scotland! Oh, let me go home to Lindsay.”

“You shall go home,” said he, gently. “But we must wait a day or two, to give my sister time to come back to The Gowans. Besides, we ought to stay until the nurse returns from Eastbrook. That will occupy to-day—to-morrow—on Friday morning we will start for Edinburgh.”

The quiet way in which he settled everything seemed to calm Hope. She assented without any more resistance. But still, as if incapable of thinking or acting for herself, she sat in the little back-parlour, the only portion of the house at present habitable; sat in

desolate plight, her hair falling loose, her dress travel-soiled and still damp with rain, rocking on her knee the restless child, whose beautiful babyhood seemed to have faded away under the shock of the great calamity which had befallen his mother.

“He does not look like my bonnie boy, who was so rosy and so neat,” sighed she, in a piteous simplicity. “Even his little frock is all tossed and spoiled, and I have not another for him.”

“Never mind,” said Tinie. “He will do very well; but we must first think of his mother. Look at your wet shawl and dress. You have been half-drowned with rain in spite of all our care. What’s to be done? To think of your having to run away in this fashion! Poor lassie, to be left with nothing but the clothes you wear!”

Hope looked down helplessly and shook her head. “No,” said she, mournfully. “We two have nothing in the wide world but one another. What will become of us, Walter my child?”

Ninian stood by and listened. His heart groaned—and then dilated with a strange content.

He called Tinie aside, and bade her see that

the mother and child had everything needful for their comfort, to be provided at his cost. "You know," he said, "we must think of her as wholly our sister now."

Hope and the poor infant were taken to bed, and he did not see them again. But many a time, passing up and down stairs, he stopped on the landing-place and listened—even as he had listened when his darling was ill of the fever. How strangely changed his feelings were! Into what a holy serenity had his passion died! He could look at the mother and child, in their double image so sacred, without one thought of the girl Hope, whom he had loved, not wholly in mere tenderness, but at times with the desperate frenzy with which men can love. All that was gone now. No more wild longings for an unattainable good! He knew, of a surety, that even had he still hoped or desired it, there was now no possible chance of Hope's being his own. He looked into the future, and saw nothing but blackness. There was the law-trial, which, with all its painful suspense and exposure, might last for years. Even when its doubtful issue appeared, should Hope be pronounced no wife, still, her conscience—ay, and his own—would shrink from the idea of her

forming another marriage while her child's father lived. And in any case, what future could there be to one so wrecked, so desolated as she ?

All these things, as was meet, Ninian weighed well in his clear mind, acute understanding, and good heart, conscious of its own integrity—conscious, too, that the secret it once held was confessed to none, and guessed only by Lindsay. But she would have trust in him, as he in her; he need not fear his sister. There could be no question as to the propriety and justice of the course which instinctively he had decided upon—to take the forlorn mother and child to live at The Gowans.

Once this plan would have smote him with terror, but he was calmer, older, and wiser now. Even should a change come in the course of time, and, unchecked by the sacredness of sorrow, the ashes of his olden love revive, he could not suffer more than he had suffered in the days when she was a girl with his sisters. And still, as ever, the suffering would be all his own. Determined to face all probabilities, he faced even this; but it never made him waver. Hope must come home to the house of her adopted brother, who for life vowed to be a

tender and faithful guardian over her and her worse than fatherless child.

In the evening the nursemaid came from Eastbrook, bringing Mrs. Reay's properties, but nothing of her own mistress's. She had not dared, she said. Her master had been all night like some wild creature, raving about the room.

"Was it because his wife had gone?" asked Tinie.

The woman answered, "She hardly thought that. He had come into the house tired and cross, and had called for Mrs. Ulverston; at which the lady in the parlour came and met him, just as if she was answering to that name, only she looked so desperately savage, and he so confounded with surprise. She pointed for him to go into the parlour, went in after him, and shut the door."

"What else? Do tell us all," cried Tinie, her curiosity getting the better of her.

"There's little to tell, ma'am. There was terrible loud talking—his voice, not the lady's. I suppose they thought nobody heard—as indeed nobody did but me, for all the house were in bed. In a little while the parlour-door opened,

and the lady came out, he after her. He seemed begging something or other, but she took no notice. At last he touched her arm—I think he was going to kiss her—a bad sort of man was my master always! But she just came quietly to the kitchen-table, and took up a knife and showed it to him, with such a smile! Gracious me! whoever she is, she's an awful creature!"

The woman looked quite frightened, and so did Mrs. Reay. But Ninian, who was standing a little apart, said, "What became of her?"

"Goodness only knows! All I know is, that Mr. Ulverston went back, looking frightened enough, and that I let her out at the house-door. She would go, though it was the middle of the night and the rain was pelting down. But where she went to or what became of her, nobody can tell."

Thus ended one act of the tragedy; but it was not over yet, as Ninian too well knew. All he wished was to get Hope safely housed before the tempest came. Shut up in the retirement of The Gowans, with only himself and Lindsay—for Edmund might still

remain from home during the winter—it would be quite possible to keep her from the knowledge what was passing in the world. That Ulverston would claim her there was little fear; still Ninian was anxious to get the journey over, and place the poor mother and child in Lindsay's arms.

Chance favoured him. The same evening he got a letter, saying that Lindsay had come home, leaving Edmund to wander about the Highlands alone. There was, therefore, no impediment to their starting at once.

“But you will rest, just one night,” entreated Tinie. “Poor Hope has not slept at all; only lain outside the bed, watching little Walter. She is quiet enough; but she never seems to close her eyes. And by-the by,” added the sensible little matron, “I think there's something not right with the baby too. No wonder, after such a shock as the mother has had.”

Ninian did not understand babies. He only wanted to get Hope safe to The Gowans, out of the reach of more misery. So he left it with herself to decide.

“Oh, let us go,” was all she cried. “Let us go to Lindsay!”

It was Lindsay, still Lindsay, who seemed uppermost in her thoughts! Ninian sighed and consented.

Afraid to torture her by more delays, they started the same night—Mr. Græme, Hope, the nurse, and child.

Any one who under circumstances of great mental trial has taken a long railway journey—had the struggling spirit and restless frame compelled within the bounds of silence and inaction—been obliged to sit quiet and look like other people, trying to put on a fictitious aspect, from the feeling that every stray passenger was peering into the depths of his mystery—any one who has known this will have some idea of how the night was spent by Ninian Græme.

He was glad it was night, and that their only fellow-passenger was a sound sleeper, who could not gaze curiously into his own face, or Hope's, or that of the frightened but affectionate nurse, who had been only too satisfied to follow her mistress.

All the journey they scarcely spoke; the nurse fell asleep, and so did the child, whose heavy eyes seemed at last laden with a strange

stupor. Sometimes Hope was so still that Ninian thought even the mother's griefs were forgotten in a brief repose; but whenever he looked at her, there she always sat with her eyes wide open, fixed on the little face that was her only comfort in the world.

Ninian never spoke to her or disturbed her, but watched incessantly the profile, once so delicate in girlish fairness, now thin, sunken, and worn. Even her beauty was leaving fast; so quickly this last misery, the culmination of all other secret pangs, had done its work. His fair darling of old would soon be a shattered, worn-out woman. But he who, while loving her beauty—for no man is blind to that—yet in her beauty had loved herself—her own sweet, loveable, right-minded self—felt that whatever she was or whatever she might become, there was about her a sacred charm which no other woman could ever have in his eyes.

He watched her, fondly, mournfully, as a child watches a wounded bird that has been driven home through the storm, which he knows will never sing to him more, which he may not even touch, or lift to his bosom. So

Ninian sat and watched "the child" upon whom his manhood had risked its all of love—and lost it.

They reached The Gowans early in the forenoon. Miss Græme was standing beside the hall-door, pulling the dead leaves from her late autumn roses. Hearing the carriage, she turned round.

"She knows not what has happened," said Ninian in sudden alarm to Hope. "You must not mind what she may ask. Nothing must pain you. You know you are safe here."

"Yes, yes," she said mechanically, casting her poor dim eyes over the old place, seeming scarcely conscious where she was;—conscious of nothing except of the child at her bosom, who had been wailing incessantly for an hour or more.

Ninian leaped out of the carriage. His astonished sister could hardly forbear a scream.

"Hush, Lindsay!" he said, hastily. "No questions, only take them—Hope and the child. They are here!"

Lindsay gave vent to another little scream of joy, and darted forward.

"Stay—go into the house. I'll bring them

to you there." He lifted out the mother and child and placed them in his sister's arms.

"My dear Hope! how good of you to come! how kind!" sobbed the simple woman. "And is this your baby? And how is your husband?"

For a moment—pale, bewildered, tearless—Hope gazed into the old, familiar face.—"I have no husband!—my boy has no father!—we have nobody but you! Take us, Lindsay!—take us!" she cried, in piteous tones, and throwing herself on her old friend's neck, wept violently.

"Is he dead?" said Lindsay to her brother, in a frightened whisper.

"Worse than dead. Do not speak of him yet. Please God—she shall never see him more," muttered Ninian fiercely. The sight of the old place—and her there, returned such an utter wreck—well-nigh drove him mad. He almost wished that his answer to Lindsay's question had been one brief affirmative word, or that his saying of it could have worked its fulfilment, so that Geoffrey Ulverston was left to cumber the earth no more.

But he checked his emotion—for it was

sinful. "I will tell you all soon," said he to Lindsay—"Meanwhile—take her away—comfort her—let her rest."

Miss Græme had drawn her into the little study and laid her down on the sofa, while she herself stood by with Walter in her arms—Lindsay's kind old-maid's arms, always open to "ither folks' bairns." Hope leaned her tired head in the same place where she had rested for hours and days, when she was recovering from the fever. It seemed to comfort her—her tears flowed more softly, and her aspect had less of wild misery.

"I feel safe now," she sighed. "Nobody will be unkind to me here. Nobody will ever take away my baby. Ah, we may be content, Walter and I."

She turned, holding one hand to Ninian and the other to Lindsay, just as she had used to do when in old times lying on that sofa. Miss Græme kissed her and wept; but Ninian, just touching her offered hand and speaking a few words that were inaudible, went softly away.

That night, when the mother and child were gone to rest, in the same room where Hope and Tinie used to sleep or sometimes to lie awake

half the night chattering—Ninian told his sister the whole story, strange as fiction, yet true as many an agonising history that we meet with in real life. The simple-minded Lindsay could hardly believe in the existence of so much guilt. She kept silent with horror, only repeating now and then “that it was a wicked, wicked world.”

“It is,” said Ninian, “and therefore in future we must shield her from it.”

“We will indeed. But how?”

“She has no home anywhere,” continued the brother. “Though she has done nothing morally wrong, yet while she lives—and that poor child—nothing can take away the disgrace from both. She must keep away from the world, and live quietly with those that know her to be innocent, who will care for her tenderly, and never forsake her. Do you understand me, sister?”

“Not quite,” said Lindsay, still bewildered with the tale.

“I mean—she must live always with us here.”

Lindsay uttered a glad affirmation—then suddenly paused and looked anxiously at her

brother. He changed colour, but only for a moment, and went on firmly :

“ She must live with us as a dear and sorrow-stricken sister, who, though she can never know happiness, may at least know peace, perhaps even through our means. We will comfort her, and bring up her child, poor desolate boy that he is! And perhaps, when he has grown a man, he may succeed me in my office, and be a credit to his old bachelor uncle after all.”

“ Ninian !” was all that Lindsay said. But as she looked at his face, which first hid its quiverings beneath a smile and then grew serene and brave—her eyes were streaming over. Silently the brother and sister grasped each other’s hands, reading each other’s hearts the while. Thus the compact was sealed.

They sat together for an hour longer, talking over every needful arrangement; Lindsay now and then recurring to many a point in the strange history—especially the time when John Forsyth had sought Rachel’s hand, and been refused.

“ Does he likewise know the truth ?” asked she.

“ I think not. I did not see him after that night when his cousin refused him admittance. He left London abruptly.”

“He is in Edinburgh this week, I think,” said Lindsay. “He promised to come and see me soon. I am glad, for he is a good man and a minister; he will help us to comfort Hope.”

Ninian looked doubtful, but had not time to answer, before, to his astonishment, the door opened, and Hope herself came in.

She had evidently just risen from bed, and thrown on a white dressing-gown. She was ghastly pale, and seemed full of alarm.

“I am glad you are here—I heard you talking,” she cried breathlessly. “Lindsay, come up-stairs; there is something the matter with my baby.”

She always said “*my* baby,” with a touching emphasis of maternal right; now she said it in an agony.

Lindsay followed her, and Ninian too, for the poor mother’s terror gave him a presentiment of evil.

There had been a fire lit in Lindsay’s dressing-room; by its last embers sat the nurse, with little Walter lying across her knees. The baby’s face and limbs were deadly white; and though he was quite awake there seemed a dim haze over his blue eyes, always so bright and intelligent.

“He has lain so a long time. He is not in pain—he does not cry. What can ail him, Lindsay?” whispered Hope, imploringly.

Now, Miss Græme was an old maid, set apart from mother’s joys and mother’s terrors; but she had in the course of her lifetime gathered up much of that knowledge concerning sickness which all women ought to acquire, not knowing when or how often it may be needed. She saw at a glance that there was coming on Hope’s darling that most terrible disease of infancy—convulsions.

“What is the matter with him?” again groaned Hope. “I am so young and ignorant, I know scarcely anything about children. And he has been so healthy all his little life. Oh, my baby! my baby!”

She threw herself on her knees and kissed the little cold limbs, that now began to stir and writhe frightfully. She snatched him and tried to hold him still; but in vain. Her eyes, half-glazed with terror, sought Miss Græme’s.

Lindsay, like many another timid woman, had always full presence of mind in cases of sickness and emergency. She gave her orders

at once for the necessary remedies, and began to undress the struggling child.

“Don’t be frightened, Hope. I know what it is. I have seen Esther’s little girl the same, and she recovered. Many a child recovers from convulsions.”

At the word Hope shrieked aloud.

“Keep quiet,” said Ninian, in her half insensible ear. “Trust in God. I will go and fetch help.”

It was a long time before he came back, for he had to go some distance, and the hour was so late—or rather early. Dawn was peeping when he and the surgeon he succeeded in bringing came back to The Gowans.

The first fit of convulsions had subsided, and the boy was somewhat better. He lay in his bath—the water glistening over his little limbs, that were white almost as those of a dead child. His eyes, too, were shut in exhaustion. His mother knelt beside him, with a face from which every ray of consciousness had vanished, save that which drew her gaze to him.

“Will he live? Will he live?” was all she murmured.

The doctor looked grave, though not very

grave; most people think so little of the death of infant children. No one feels that but the mother, to whom the scarcely-begun life—so lately one with her own—is as precious as any fully developed existence.

“Will he live?” again rung the broken-hearted cry.

“He may; we’ll hope so. Children get through so much,” said the surgeon, kindly.—He was the same who had attended at The Gowans during the fever, and knew Hope well.

“Mrs. Ulverston’s only child, I see,” he whispered to Ninian. “A son and heir! That is hard, but we must hope for the best. Does the father know?”

Hope’s ear caught the word. “No,” she cried, frantically. “My child has no one but me, and I no one but him. Oh, save him for me—my love! my darling! my beautiful boy!”

The doctor made no reply, but looked anxiously at the poor babe, whose state of death-like exhaustion began to change into another convulsive fit worse than the last. For half an hour did these four—Lindsay, Ninian, the surgeon, and the unfortunate mother—watch that spectacle so agonising, so hopeless of relief—

the dumb struggles of a dying child. Hope's misery sank into mute despair. There was no more crying and tears; she seemed quite paralysed. At last, when all remedies had been tried and failed, she lifted little Walter out of the bath.

Lindsay would have interfered, but the doctor said, "No, let her!" And by his look they knew that all hope was over—that the mother was only taking her baby in her arms to die.

The feeble breath lingered a few minutes still. Hope had time to press her last mother's kisses on the little breast and the round limbs, already growing cold. During a momentary pause of consciousness, the baby-lips, that would never learn to speak, tried instinctively to cling to the maternal bosom. Then came a last, long, writhing struggle, and in that struggle the child died.

For nearly an hour Hope sat with the little pale body on her knee, and would not believe that this was death. Whatever those about her said or did she took no heed. Once Lindsay ventured to touch the dead body, and the look the mother turned was frantic—furious. The surgeon quietly left the room; when he was gone, Lindsay undrew the curtains and let in

day, thinking that perhaps the light would reveal a truth which she herself had not courage to utter.

It did so. The mother saw the baby-form and baby-face, which, all struggle now over, were sinking into the beautiful likeness which dead infants wear. So beautiful, and yet so solemn was it, that she made no outcry—only she looked up with a sort of bewildered questioning.

“Tell her,” whispered Ninian. “Go and take it from her.”—*It*—only *it*, now !—

Lindsay tried to speak and could not. Tender-hearted ever, she could “weep with those that weep,” but a task like this was beyond her power.

It was Ninian’s part to do it—he in whose hand Fate seemed to have laid every arrow that must be guided into the beloved heart.

He went up to her, and touched her shoulder.

“Hope,” he said; but the face that was sharply raised to his seemed to make him dumb. Of his own words, what could he say? So he only uttered those consecrated of old by the deepest affliction, and balm to all other affliction since: “*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord!*”

His manner, his voice—low, but firm, controlled the mourner inexpressibly. She suffered him to take the little corpse from her knees, and give it to the nurse.

“Come,” he said, in a tremulous voice, as with grave tenderness he put his arm round her, while his sister supported her on the other side,—“come to Lindsay and me.”

And Hope came.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE are many griefs which the world calls awful calamities, but which are borne by pure natures with a strange calmness. These miseries, termed by false pietists “visitations,” “chastisements,” yet which, nevertheless, often seem curiously to light upon the most innocent of earth—ought to be measured, not in themselves, but through the medium of their infliction, and according to the character of those on whom they fall. Thus only can we reconcile to ourselves the justice of those misfortunes which seem outwardly the relentless hand of Providence crushing its creatures at will, while inwardly the sufferer feels that Hand as a soothing weight, cold yet soft, solemn yet peaceful.

And howsoever heavy it may lie, there is something of awful repose in knowing that it is the visible hand of God.

Thus Hope, though at one blow made husbandless and childless, was even by the double force of the stroke enabled more patiently to bear it. In one sense there was mercy in the death of the babe, taken in his innocence from evil to come. The mother, amidst all her affliction, seemed dimly to comprehend this; since more than once, among the few words she uttered during the first day when the child "*was not*," Ninian heard the touching expression, "Now, nobody will ever taunt my boy with having no father."

Towards evening she grew more composed, wandered quietly about the house, which could only remind her of her girlish days, and bore no token of her brief joys of motherhood—none save the little marble image that she went to look at from time to time, and each time came back more full of awful calm, as if that likeness made her think less of the baby she had lost from her earthly arms, than of the angel she had that day given unto Heaven.

She was very ill too, and physical illness is

oftentimes a great blessing. Lindsay had been terrified in looking forward to the hour when the poor mother would have to go to rest and miss the "wee birdie" nestling to her bosom; but when evening came, Hope, feverish and worn, suffered herself to be put to bed; and Miss Græme took her place beside, to spend the night in watching.

Next morning Ninian went out early to fulfil the brotherly duty of finding a grave for the child. He chose the Dean Cemetery, thinking Hope would like best that her darling should be laid to sleep in such a sweet spot. On the way thither—emerging out of one of the mean streets that still neighbour the Dean Bridge—he met John Forsyth.

It was their first time of meeting since they had walked together to Mrs. Armadale's door. Ninian wondered whether Forsyth would bear any grudge against him, but the young minister's greeting, always cold, was not more so than ordinary.

"I wanted to see you," said he shortly to Ninian—"I will walk with you. Where are you going?"

Mr. Græme told him.

“A child’s grave only? Well—happy the child that dies so young! Is it one of your sisters’?”

“Not my twin-sisters’”—said Ninian, reluctant to explain further.

Forsyth seemed indifferent. He was apparently in a restless state, and walked a good way without speaking, until his friend asked kindly—

“Tell me, John, how you have been all this while? And what did you want to see me about? I have time for a long talk to-day.”

“But I have not,” replied Forsyth, abruptly, and, turning round, he fixed his keen eyes on his friend’s face. “Where is my cousin Rachel?”

Ninian was somewhat startled. “You have heard nothing of her?”

“No—not since the night when she admitted you, and spurned me.”

“Nay—not spurned, John.”

“I say she did. The message must have come from her own mouth. She desired me never to visit her again, neither as her cousin nor as a minister. So I took that for a sign that she was one doomed. I shook off the dust

of my feet against her, and left her in her iniquity."

"Do not be so hard, John. You will know the truth one day."

"What truth? Again I say—where is my cousin Rachel?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"To keep some one else from knowing. There has been a man here, seeking me at my mother's house, trying to find out all he can about her. But little good he got—the villain."

"How do you know this? Who is he?"

"A friend of yours; Mr. Ulverston."

Even before Forsyth answered, Ninian had guessed as much. What could be the reason of Ulverston's coming? Was it, that, meeting Rachel in her new beauty, and moreover in her intense and scornful hate, some strange contradiction had again rekindled the passion of his boyhood? Would he wish to pacify and reclaim her as his wife—or else to gather evidence that might prove his safeguard in the forthcoming law-trial? In any case, it was important that Ninian should be acquainted with what had passed at the Forsyths.

“John,” said he, earnestly, “Mr. Ulverston is not my friend. “I call him a villain, and know him to be such; but what reason had you for that opinion?”

“Because the world ‘lieth in wickedness,’ and I read his in his face. Besides, as the world itself would say, when a man—a fine gentleman—leaves his young wife and goes seeking about for a play-actress, are not the chances great that he is a villain? I would have told him that, and nothing more; but I was from home; and my poor mother has a wilful tongue. So he learnt all she knew.”

“About Rachel’s past life?”

“Ay,” and a light tremulousness of voice betrayed that Forsyth was not quite so hardened to all pity as he seemed. “Of the days when she was an innocent girl at the Border—of the fever she had, and her delusions about being married. When my mother told of that, Ulverston laughed, and said it was a story he had heard before. If I knew why he said so, or how he learnt it!”

“I know,” said Ninian; “I knew years ago, but was pledged to secrecy. It was no delu-

sion. She *was* even then married, and Ulverston is the man who was her husband."

Forsyth started, and his sallow features were overspread with a livid hue. They had just reached the cemetery-gate; he clung to it, as if unable to support himself. Then baring his head, he murmured aloud,

"I thank Thee, O God!—Thou hast been very merciful to me, a sinner!"

Awe-struck, it was some minutes before he could say more. Ninian took him into the cemetery, and they sat down on a grave.

"You have been saved from misery, Forsyth," said he, "but not so with others. The story is an awful one. Will you hear it?"

The young minister bowed his head in assent; he seemed quite overpowered. As briefly as he could Ninian related the whole story; ending with that of the unhappy mother, for whose child he was now come to provide a grave. But, as was natural enough, John Forsyth scarcely heeded that part of the history.

"Has he acknowledged her?" he said, hoarsely. "Will she be now made his lawful wife before the world?"

“Do you mean Rachel?—I cannot tell. He seems unwilling still. If so, there must be a trial, which will force him to right her.”

“I will force him!” cried the young minister, starting up in vehement passion. “You talk of human law—I will compel him by the law of God—I will hurl upon him the anathemas of God’s minister. I tell you,” added the enthusiast, standing erect, “I *am* God’s minister. Whomsoever I bind is bound, and whomsoever I loose is loosed. If he repents, and I pray for him, he may be forgiven; if he repents not, and I curse him, the curse will fall!”

So speaking, with a solemnity that was appalling, he moved forward to the gate. Ninian stopped him.

“How can you find this man? Is he in Edinburgh?”

“He is; my mother knows where.”

“But you will only speak to him concerning Rachel. You will not tell him that poor Hope is here; or let him come, with his cruelty, to torture her in her grief, or molest the grave of his dead child?”

“No,” answered Forsyth. “These are no-

thing to me. They are innocent; I have to do only with the guilty."

He quitted the spot abruptly, leaving Ninian to calm himself from all the world's cares in this quiet place of graves, and there to find one grave more, for the little being who was safe taken out of all earth's passions, misery, and sin. And, as often happens when we feel ourselves tangled in a maze of trouble for which there seems no end, Ninian almost envied the blessed lot of the innocent who had thus dropped softly from its mother's breast into the tomb.

But such thoughts were not likely to rest permanently in a mind like his, whose energies and patience always rose in proportion as they were needed. He went to his office, and then home—to a silent house, for Hope still continued ill in bed, though there was no fear of danger. On the whole, it was best thus, since to have seen her would only have added to the cares which were heavy upon him. And well he knew that for any great sorrow there is at first no such thing as consolation; that the wisest sympathy the most tender

friend can give, is only, "Weep on, I weep likewise."

Towards evening he felt so restless to know what was the result of Forsyth's interview with Mr. Ulverston, that he walked out towards his friend's lodgings by the Calton Hill. Passing the theatre, he was thunderstruck to see posted up in large letters, "For this night, and the week following, the celebrated London actress, Mrs. Armadale."

She was then in Edinburgh, and acting! It seemed almost incredible, until he reflected that she must of necessity come to arrange concerning the proceedings in the Court of Session; and that her only means for carrying on her case were those derived from her profession. As for the pain or revulsion of feeling from acting during such a crisis, a woman of her fierce will could, as she said, "do anything." Her arrival must have been sudden though, or John Forsyth would never have had need for the question, "Where is my cousin Rachel?"

"Still—if he does not see the announcement, I will not tell him," thought Ninian. "It could do no good."

Mr. Forsyth was not at home, but he came in shortly afterwards. He looked frightfully haggard and much excited.

“I am glad you are here,” cried he; “you will tell me what to do.”

“How? Have you seen Ulverston?”

“I have. I followed him, found him, accused him. But he will not right her. He called me fanatic—madman—fool; still I bore it; I urged upon him God’s law, and he made a mock of it. Now, I will bring upon him the law of man. I told him so.”

“You mean,” said Ninian, in his plain way, “that you will lodge an information against him, for criminally marrying a second wife, his first being alive; that so he may be arrested and brought to trial?”

“That is it. I do not understand these things of the world. I would have dealt with him according to God and His judgments, but he is hardened. Listen,” continued Forsyth, in excited tones: “I gave him to his face the ‘Anathema Maranatha,’ and he never blenched. Can it be that Heaven’s justice sleeps?”

“It never sleeps.”

“Can it be that I must smite him, not only

with the arm of the Lord, but with an arm of flesh?" cried the enthusiast, in a tone that made Ninian shudder.

"John Forsyth, you cannot mean——no, it is impossible! You only mean that you will accuse him openly and have him punished by the law of the land? But you cannot do it; you forget the marriage is not proved. Until that is done, no judge would listen to you for a moment."

Forsyth's countenance fell.

"It is strange—I cannot fathom it. Can it be God's will thus to let the guilty go unpunished?"

"No," said Ninian, thinking to moderate that ruthless condemnation which seemed the faith into which the young minister, once so gentle, had hardened. "No; but it may be God's will that the guilty should live to repent and atone."

Forsyth was silent. He seemed touched by this recurrence to a doctrine which had once been his own—the doctrine of forgiveness and love.

"Come," Ninian continued, "let us take a walk together; we will both grow quiet then."

He led him, intentionally, so as to avoid the

theatre—round the Calton Hill, and down the slope that leads towards Leith. At the head of Leith-walk, Forsyth drew back from his arm.

“There he is—there!”

A gentleman, passing in a carriage, had just put his head out, and shouted to the driver, in an angry voice, “Quick—to Leith Pier.” It was Mr. Ulverston.

“Did you hear—Leith Pier!” said Forsyth. “My threats alarmed him, and he means to escape. He will go on board one of the foreign steamers that are lying there, and I shall never find him again.”

Ninian thought this deduction by no means clear, but it was so firmly fixed in the other’s excited mind, that opposition seemed useless.

“I will go and stop him,” Forsyth continued. “Once more I will try persuasions—entreaties; if these fail, my curse, which I hold from God, shall follow him over God’s seas. And then,” he added, sinking his voice awfully, “I should not marvel if there came to this vile man—in all but the rescue—the fate of Jonah.”

“Hush, John,” said Ninian, inexpressibly

shocked at such a state of mind. He determined whithersoever the young minister went to follow him.

It was already dusk when they reached the pier of Leith. The tide was near high-water, and coming in heavily. A sharp east gale blew over the Firth and cleared off the mist, so that along the opposite coast of Fife the lights of Kirkaldy and Burntisland were dimly visible.

“He must be somewhere on the pier. Let us follow,” said John Forsyth, dragging his friend onward.

It was an idle chance, Ninian thought, but soon his mind misgave him for using the word—a word often so blindly uttered even by those who feel most deeply that in the lightest affairs of life there is an unerring Providence ruling over all.

Lounging about with a cigar in his mouth, and recognisable in the dusk less by his appearance than by his English voice, as he talked to a boatman, was the very man they sought,—Geoffrey Ulverston.

Forsyth walked up and addressed him by name. Ulverston started, and at first seemed

more alarmed than angry. But seeing that his pursuer was alone—for Ninian, unwilling to be mixed up in the matter, had held back—he became more courageous.

“What do you mean by dogging a gentleman’s steps in this manner? You have said your say, and I have answered it. Can’t you let me alone?”

“No,” said Forsyth, solemnly, and by the sound of his voice Ninian knew what strong control he was exercising over himself. “It is not I that speak, but One who will never let a man like you alone, until it is too late and his time is come. Once more, will you hear me?”

“Hear you? That is too good—an open-air preaching on Leith Pier!” laughed the young man, on whose light temperament the sense of mirth was ever intruding. “Preach away then; and if you convert me you can end with an extempore baptism, washing away all my sins in the water of the Forth. But make haste, for the boat sails in half an hour.”

“You are going then, and will not do your wife justice?”

“Bah!—Am I to walk into Edinburgh Theatre to-night, point to the fine painted

creature that is entertaining the galleries, and say, 'Ladies and gentlemen, this is my wife, Mrs. Ulverston?' Nay, my good fellow, you must be a complete visionary to expect such a thing."

While he spoke, beneath the ridicule and bravado of this speech lurked a tone of uneasiness and vexation. But apparently he was afraid to commence open hostilities with John Forsyth, who on his part was struck dumb by the announcement that Rachel was so near.

"You did not know she was here, I suppose?" said Ulverston, ironically. "A strange thing—considering what used to be. Very odd, that you should try so hard to force upon me as a wife the woman you yourself once wished to marry! How do I know that it is not a plot between you both?"

"My God—my God—Thou seest me!" groaned John Forsyth. And once more, as if that old and bitter remembrance goaded him to further energy, he launched out against Ulverston all the persuasions, warnings, and abjurations, by which he was accustomed to call sinners to repentance.

They walked forward, and their voices died away in silence. Ninian remained, unwilling

to follow, and yet afraid to leave the spot. He watched them moving forward as far as was practicable on the still unfinished pier, until blocks, stones, and the *débris* of workmen impeded their passage. A most unsafe place it was for two men heedless of their steps, and engaged in excited talk. It was a great relief to Ninian when he saw them turn.

He determined to wait until they came up. Loud above the sound of the waves he heard their angry voices, for the pier was almost deserted, and the spot where even he himself stood was far out into the Firth. He stood and watched the two figures, both too indistinct to be recognised, except that he saw they walked,—as such bitter foes naturally would walk,—far asunder as the narrow pier allowed; one being under the east wall, the other lounging along the unprotected edge on the opposite side. They were near enough for Ninian to hear—not their words, but the tone of their voices. That of Forsyth was loud and stern, such as he used in the anathemas of vengeance which he believed himself deputed to bear. Ulverston's voice was furious with rage.

Suddenly it ceased. Ninian strained his eyes through the dusk,—of the two advancing figures he now only saw *one*.

In a moment the truth flashed upon him. That bare verge—the stones slippery with rain—the footing of both rendered unsteady by excitement—a single false step, and in a moment either would be plunged over into the waves.

Thus, doubtless, one had fallen, but which?

Quick as lightning Ninian was at the spot. There was a man standing, gazing blankly upon the sea.

“John Forsyth! You did not——”

“No,” he said, in hollow tones, “I did not do it. But I cursed him—and God heard!”

Paralysed with horror, Forsyth staggered back against the wall. There was not a moment to be lost. Ninian saw a few people moving on the pier; with all his might he shouted for help, and almost instantaneously help came.

“A boat, quick! He can swim, I know. Hold up, Ulverston!” shouted he, over the dusky water.

“Swimming’s little use,” said a gentleman near. “The tide runs high, and he may be

dashed against the wooden framework. It must have been so, or he would have answered when you shouted."

Ninian hesitated no more, but threw off his coat and leaped into the water. It was a frantic, perhaps needless exposure of life. He might not have suffered another to do it, nor perhaps have done it himself for a stranger, but to stand and see an enemy perish seemed something little short of murder.

Heaven was merciful, though not to him was vouchsafed the preservation of his foe. Ulverston was quickly found, and dragged senseless into the boat; but some minutes elapsed before Ninian, buffeted about in the waves, was likewise rescued from danger.

All the while Forsyth stood looking on, ghastly, terrified, feeble as a woman. When his enemy came to life again, there broke out the audible thanksgivings, even tears, of this man, who was not born to be the stern fanatic he had become.

Ulverston opened his eyes in the lighthouse on the pier. He was not drowned, nor, though he was a good deal bruised, was there upon him any visible wound. Still, something was

wrong, and he did not recover his senses as clearly as might have been expected from the short time he had been immersed. He could scarcely speak intelligibly, and at every touch he groaned.

“Take him home,” some one hinted; “he may have received some internal injury that we do not know of.”

At the word home, Ulverston had turned his dulled eyes round; they met no faces he knew, but those of the two men whom he believed his implacable foes. Once more he bitterly groaned. He had learned the lesson which the wicked must surely one day learn—that for them in their time of sickness and death there are neither friends nor home.

Ninian reflected a minute. So free would have been his own forgiveness, that he could at once have taken Ulverston to The Gowans, but for Hope. However, in any case, the distance made such a removal impracticable. There was no alternative but to convey the exhausted man to the only home open to him—the nearest inn.

There, after much apparent suffering, he lay, extended upon the bed from which, as his fast

changing look foretold, he would rise up no more.

“Will he die after all?” muttered Forsyth in an agony, as the surgeon pronounced the injury to be of some internal kind—produced no doubt by dashing against the piles under the pier. “Will he die? And Thou, God, givest me this torture, because I arrogated to myself Thy power of doom!”

“It was an accident, John,” said his friend, soothingly.

“Ay,—but of my causing. In calm blood he might have walked there safely. I angered him, and in his rage he stumbled and fell. Oh my God!—and with all his guilt upon his head I have sent this sinner unto Thee.”

He paused at the room-door, quite overcome, and then burst forth again:

“There is another thing;—if he dies, he can make no atonement. And she loved him too! How will I ever meet my cousin Rachel!”

“Hush,” said Ninian, “he will hear you—nay, he has already heard.”

It was so. The sound of this name—which might once have been dear—seemed to pierce the stupor in which Ulverston lay. His half-open eyes sought Ninian’s, and his lips moved.

Mr. Græme approached him. "Can I do anything for you? You know I will do it; anything—everything. Treat me like a friend."

Ulverston tried to speak, and after some difficulty pronounced the words, "Bring Rachel!"

The voice—the look—were that of a dying man. Ay, that very concession and entreaty convinced Ninian that he was dying, and knew it.

As fast as possible Mr. Græme drove to the theatre, on the stage of which this very hour Rachel was probably acting. As he came to laughter of the audience over *Beatrice*—Shakespeare's *Beatrice*—the only comic part in which the wings, he saw her;—he heard the delighted Mrs. Armadale excelled. Gaily she was chasing the *Benedick*—in and out—until she came to the side-entrance, and saw Mr. Græme. He touched her arm, and addressed her by name.

Rachel's countenance was lit with anger, as she said in an under tone—"Why are you here?"

"I am sent to fetch you—you must return with me immediately."

"Whither?"

"I will tell you as we go."

She turned aside haughtily "This is insuf-

ferable, if not ridiculous." And noticing that a few supernumeraries were gazing curiously at the rencontre, she added, "I will see you to-morrow, Mr. Græme ; I must return to the stage now."

"You cannot ! Listen !" he whispered ;—"I come from Mr. Ulverston. He is not well ; he wishes—entreats—to see you."

She laughed triumphantly. "Entreats ?—Then let him wait." And she moved on, for the audience were getting impatient. Once more Ninian tried to detain her, without telling her the plain truth, which, if any ray of womanly feeling lingered in her breast, might be a startling shock. But his attempts were vain, and at last the manager came to her rescue.

"This is impossible, sir. Whatever urgent cause there be, an audience will not be trifled with ; we cannot stop the play."

"You must !" said Ninian's imperative voice, loud enough for all near him to hear. "Tell the audience that Mrs. Armadale is sent for to her husband—who is dying."

The words reached Rachel's ear just when she was beginning to utter one of the brilliant

sallies of *Beatrice*. She stopped, gasped, staggered off the stage, and fell senseless.

“She loved him!” said Ninian to himself, as, scarcely waiting to recover her, he bore her away unopposed. “She loves him even until now.”

When placed in a carriage, Rachel came to herself entirely. With cautious kindness, Ninian broke to her all that had happened. She sat still, and never answered a word. He thought that all her hardness was coming back, until, lifting her out at the inn-door, he saw that her whole frame was collapsing and shivering.

“Will you go up now?” he said. “I fear there is no time to lose.”

Rachel bent her head—the feathery head-dress of *Beatrice* was still nodding there. Ninian touched it.

“Take off this,” he said gently. “Do not let him see you so.”

With quivering hands she tore off her head-tire, and threw it on the ground; then drew over her bare arms and gleaming neck an old shawl that some one had brought to her in the theatre, and followed Ninian to the door of the room where Ulverston lay.

There she paused.—“I vowed once, that if he lay dying, and asked me to cross the threshold to him, I would not come.”

“That was an evil vow. You will come nevertheless?”

Still she hesitated, as if the fierce revenge into which her love had merged were not conquered yet. While she lingered, there was a groan heard within.—The next moment she had entered, and walked with trembling steps to the foot of the bed.

“You sent for me—I am come.”

These few words she said in a hard clear voice. While saying them, she caught sight of the dying man — the face she had looked up to as to that of an angel — the face wept over during many a vigil of sickness—the face that had lain close against her bosom, as if there she could ward off death—then feared, now close at hand!

She saw, and all the woman came into her again. She flung herself beside the bed, and her tears poured out in floods.

Ulverston opened his eyes, looked upon her, and faintly smiled. His consciousness was evidently failing fast.

“Geoffrey, speak to me,” she frantically cried,

throwing one arm over him, and drawing his round her neck. "Speak to your poor Rachel that loves you—that always loved you! Only one word!"

The dying man tried to raise himself up, though he did not look at her but at Ninian and Forsyth, who were standing near. He seemed collecting all his energies for speech. At last he gasped out, as if every word were a dying breath—

"Remember—both of you—this is my wife—Rachel!"

His head sank back—his eyes closed slowly, never to open more.

"Kiss me, Geoffrey—kiss me, my husband!" cried Rachel, laying her head on the pillow beside him. He smiled again—his lips slightly moved. Hers clung to them—wildly—closely; clung until long after those she pressed were cold.

Geoffrey Ulverston was dead! The All-merciful had taken his soul to do with it as pleased Him. Its future no other living soul had a right to judge.

"Yet," whispered Ninian to John Forsyth, who knelt by the bedside praying—ay, and as he prayed, weeping like a woman, though the

woman near him wept not—"Yet, since he repented towards her, he may also have repented towards Heaven. If she could forgive him, surely a Diviner One may."

The young minister groaned "Amen!" He rose from his knees by that death-bed a changed and humbled man. The divine spirit of his youth returned to him; he became again, in all his acts and doctrines, a very likeness of the mild, meek, loving Apostle John.

After he was gone, Ninian stood alone by the husband and wife, whose two heads still lay on the same pillow, both so white and motionless that it could hardly be told which was the dead and which the living. Rachel's eyes had never opened since Ulverston died. He had died softly, without pain or convulsion; so probably she had not even known that his spirit was gone.

Death in a young man—strong, handsome, full of life, without any previous sickness to sharpen the check, or waste the frame—is a thing once seen never to be forgotten. It is the awful hand of Omnipotence laid upon all the currents of life, saying, "Peace, be still!" and in a moment, as it were, the grand

organisation of man, with all its physical and mental perfection, becomes a mere image of clay. It is a sight to make one not weep, but shudder—a sight that afterwards, in all times and in all places, will come back and force itself upon the memory—a vision of death in all its horror and with none of its sublime calm, until the survivor's only comfort is to bow in the dust, and cry, "*Verily, there is a God that judgeth righteously—verily, there is a God that ruleth in the earth.*"

Ninian looked at the dead face of the man who had once been, if not his friend, at least his familiar acquaintance, and who had since become the only enemy he had in the world—the only one of whom he felt that the world would appear brighter to him if no longer cumbered by that man's footsteps. It was so now. Enmity, disgust, and vengeance, were alike ended. The very name of Geoffrey Ulverston would be silent for ever—silent as a name must be which leaves no blessing behind it.

He closed the glassy eyes, his own being dim the while. Gently he moved the head away from Rachel's, and parted their two hands—one

clasping so warm and tight, the other closing rigidly and cold. This solemn division of life from death roused the miserable woman.

She rose and looked fixedly at him.—There, to his horror, he saw the peculiar look—banished for years from her face, but which he well remembered.

“Why do you disturb me?” she said in an angry whisper. “Don’t you see my husband is asleep? And I, too, am so tired—so tired.”

She touched gently the brown hair of the dead man—Ninian had turned the face away—and laid her cheek again on the pillow.

“He has been very ill, you know. He will sleep a long time yet, I hope. You had better go away and leave us.”

Ninian was startled,—except that it was possible this misery might have stunned her faculties for the moment, and made her hysterical or delirious. He felt her wrist, but its pulses were quite calm. He determined to arouse her to the truth.

“Your husband is not asleep, Rachel,” said he sorrowfully. “Look at him—touch him. Now, my poor girl, do you understand?”

She leaned over, and looked long at the face,

whose muscles were slowly settling into repose. Despite the hue of death, the thick brown hair and curling beard, hiding the fallen mouth, gave it a lifelike aspect.

Rachel smiled fondly. "How very handsome Geoffrey looks when he is asleep! I always told him so." She stooped, kissed the forehead, and for a moment drew back.

"He is very cold—but so am I too," and she shivered. "This is such a hard winter; my feet were quite frozen in the snow as I came."

"Rachel—listen to me," cried Ninian again.

But she only motioned him to be silent, and took her place beside the bed, holding one of the lifeless hands with a contented, unconscious smile.

There was a noise at the door; Jane Sedley tottered in, and ran hastily towards her mistress, sobbing.

"My darling! I could not find you before, and now they tell me it is too late."

"Oh no," whispered Rachel cheerfully. "Not at all too late. He has wanted nothing; you see he is sound asleep."

Ninian and the old servant looked at one another, and then at the wretched wife—the

widow now—who sat smiling at them both. The expression of that vacant smile could not be mistaken. The shock had brought back the disease latent in her brain;—she was once more mad.

Mr. Græme, awe-struck by the spectacle, could find no words; but Jane Sedley clung to her beloved mistress, weeping as if her faithful heart were like to break.

“Don’t cry, don’t cry,” said Rachel, gently putting her away. “It will disturb him—and he is so much better. Indeed, I am quite happy now.”

“It may be, God knows!” thought Ninian; and he saw mercy even in the sudden taking away of that reason, whose only awakening would have been to such an unfathomable, irremediable woe.

He went to poor old Jane Sedley, and tried to comfort her, but in vain. She stood moaning, sometimes over the dead—towards whom even her hatred had melted into pity—and then again over that spectacle, sadder still, the living dead. Many minutes were thus spent; until at last Rachel spoke.

“What o’clock is it?”

It was early morning, almost daybreak. They told her so. She seemed troubled.

“Ah!—and he will not wake—and I must be going soon!”

“Ay,” said Ninian; and seizing at her words, he whispered to Jane Sedley, that under this pretence she might be removed from the room.

“How soon will my husband wake, do you think, Jane?” again asked Rachel. “It’s hard to go without one kiss—and yet the farm is such a weary distance.”

“She thinks herself nursing him at my cottage, as she used to do. Oh, my poor girl!” cried Jane Sedley.

— It was a scene more touching than any mad scene the renowned actress had ever played!

“Speak to her—persuade her to leave him,” whispered Ninian, as he drew back out of sight. The old woman, conquering her tears, obeyed.

“I know—I know,” answered Rachel. “Let me alone—I’ll go soon!”

A few minutes longer she sat watching the beloved features, which at times seemed almost

to stir in the stirring shadows of the lamp-light. Tears, one after the other, came stealing down her face—tears not of grief, but tenderness.

“Oh, Geoffrey,” she murmured. “How I love you, my Geoffrey! I dreamt — I suppose when I was asleep, a little while ago—that I had been angry with you; but it is all over now! What a foolish, foolish girl I was!”

“Come,” said Mrs. Sedley, “it’s quite time.”

“I am coming! You’ll be sure to take great care of him till I am here again to-morrow night? Tell him I would not wake him, but that I kissed him before I went away.—No,” she added, pausing as she stooped, “I think I will not kiss him. It might disturb him, and he is so sound asleep.”

So with many lingering looks of farewell—an eternal farewell, given tenderly and with smiles—she contentedly quitted the room, followed by Jane Sedley.

Ninian was left alone with the dead.

CHAPTER XIII.

* * * * *

“HERE is news!” said Mr. Græme, as he entered cheerily the parlour at The Gowans. “Charlie’s ship is lying in Leith Roads. He will be at home to-morrow.”

“Oh, brother !” eagerly cried the two women who sat working together. They both called him “brother,” though one only had any right to use the name.

“Yes, he will really come—our sailor laddie, who has been all round the world. I wonder, will he be much changed? Let me see, how long has he been away?”

“Two years last Christmas; he sailed the week Tinie’s little girl was born,” said a low voice.

The speaker was Hope. She sat at the window, making a child’s frock. She could do

so now, without any tears falling on the work. Her expression, if grave, was yet serene and sweet; she had outlived all agony—all shame. Even her sorrow was over now; and, though she could never again be the merry Hope Ansted, whose girlhood had scarcely known a cloud, still she was not unhappy.

God is very merciful to those who have to suffer early. It is almost incredible—the power of renewed life in a heart still young. A pure spirit, though crushed by whatsoever weight, will continually rise, if not to joy, always to resignation and peace. It is a truth which we would fain all preachers preached, all poets sang, all authors taught—that no grief is of itself incurable—that God never meant His creatures, unto whom in His wisdom He has dealt affliction, to pass a long lifetime of despair. Sooner or later the balm will come; and soonest unto guileless, gentle natures—as was Hope's.

“Is that frock for Tinie's daughter?” said Ninian, as at the sound of the low voice he turned and walked towards her.

“No,” she answered, looking up to him and

smiling—a smile the more sweet, that it was still pensive. “Little Agnes has outgrown my skill. This is for her wee brother, the new comer. I must get it done quickly, that it may be ready for the baptism to-morrow.”

“You are very neat-handed, Hope, and very kind.”

He said no more, but stood leaning against the window, watching her at her work.

The manner of both showed how solemnly during the time—more than two years—that they had lived in the same house together, Ninian had observed the pledge he made to himself when the desolate girl came for shelter to his home. He had respected her sorrow—to this day she was ignorant of his love. A love, that when her eyes were off him and her notice otherwise directed, was visible in his every look, every turn;—a love that as the sanctity of her grief wore away, as, so young still—her beauty dawned again, making the brief time of her wifehood and motherhood to seem like a dream—grew strong, passionate, and wild. How great had been his self-control, and how frightfully he had sometimes suffered in

the ordeal of a position that hardly one man in a thousand could endure and conquer, Heaven alone knew!

It had made him grow old before his time, as such conflicts always do. His head was grey ere he had counted more than forty years.

Still, at intervals—for in every heroic and virtuous struggle intervals of peace will come—he had known great content. And there was one source of comfort ever open to him, to feel that amidst all his own agonies he had succeeded in bringing comfort to *her*.

“Shall you be going down to Portobello to-night, brother?” said Hope, suddenly. “If so, don’t tell Mrs. Reay anything of this wee frock. I mean it for a surprise.” And she shook out the beautiful lace, looking at her handiwork in feminine pride, until slowly—slowly—deeper thoughts came over her. Her lip began to quiver. Perhaps she was thinking of her own brief motherhood—perhaps of the robes, whiter and fairer than earthly mother’s hands could fashion, which her little angel in heaven wore now.

“Hope!” said Ninian, tenderly, for he had

long learned to watch and read every change in her countenance.

“Yes, I understand!” she faltered. “I am quite content—quite. And Tinie says I shall have her boy, to call him what name I like, and keep him for my pet and godson—English fashion. I shall love him very much, and he may be a great comfort to me when I grow old.”

Ninian was silent.

Soon after, he quitted the house for one of his journeys, made every week to a solitary but pretty dwelling that lay under the slope of Corstorphine Hill. It had a large garden, almost large enough to be a pleasure-ground, with high walls that entirely secluded the inmates from the view of passers-by.

This seclusion was necessary. In one of those inmates, and there were but three—Heaven had seen fit to close the doors of the soul even as the gates of the outer world were closed upon the body. From that living grave, awful, yet restful, neither body nor soul would ever come out more. Never, until God unloosed the prison-house of clay, and took unto Himself the darkened spirit which He of His mercy had chosen thus to seal up from the knowledge of its woe.

Rachel was incurably mad, but her insanity took a form so gentle, so harmless, so happy, that the few who knew of it and of her could only say, "Thus best!"

Ninian rang at the garden-door. It was opened by Mrs. Forsyth's servant, Jean—the same who had been kind to Rachel at Musselburgh. There was no one else in the house except that faithful old woman who was to her mistress at once mother, nurse, companion, and friend.

Jane Sedley came to meet Mr. Græme directly.

"How is Mrs. Sabine to-day?" (They had decided, after long consideration, that it was best to call her by that name. In fact she would not answer to any other.)

"She is just as usual, poor lamb! Come and see her, Mr. Græme."

"Presently; only first you and I must settle our affairs. It is the first week in April you know."

He and Mrs. Sedley went into a little parlour, and transacted various business affairs belonging to her whose worldly consciousness was dead for evermore. What matter was it to

her that she was the lawful widow of the rich Geoffrey Ulverston, and that but for her insanity she would have succeeded to all that Hope and little Walter once enjoyed? Yet when Ninian, who from the first had arranged everything for her with the heir, Sir Peter, month by month dealt out her ample allowance, taking care she should have all comfort and pleasures that her clouded mind could know—he felt glad to think that the one who had once possessed these things was living in his home at The Gowans, utterly destitute, dependent upon himself for every necessary of life. He rejoiced that from the hour Hope knew of the cruel wrong done her—a wrong concerning which she herself never uttered a bitter word—not for one penny, either in his life or death, had she been indebted to the man whom she once believed her husband.

“Sir Peter was in Edinburgh a week ago,” observed Mr. Græme, as he and Jane Sedley concluded their business. “He would have called here to pay respect to his cousin’s widow, but I said how useless it was. Besides, she would remember nothing—not even the name.

I told him how she persisted in calling herself Mrs. Sabine."

"Ah, poor dear!" sighed the faithful servant.

"He seemed sorry at first that she should not go by her proper name, but afterwards agreed that as there were no children, and no hope remained of her ever recovering—all these things were best left as when Mr. Ulverston died, hushed up from the knowledge of the world. It would do no harm to any one, and would save one to whom Lady Ulverston was much attached. Are you satisfied, Mrs. Sedley?" he added, with a considerate and friendly air. Truly the good old woman had a right to be treated as an equal.

"Yes, Mr. Græme," she said. "Everything you do is right and good; and kind to my poor mistress."

Without saying more, she led the way into the garden where Rachel sat.

The impassioned girl—the frenzied wife—the severe, coldly beautiful woman—the magnificent actress who from her renown had dropped suddenly, the world's waves closing over her head in an oblivion as entire as though she had never been—all had sank to this!

—A quiet, pale, listless creature, with a face rarely sad, and often dressed in vacant smiles, was walking slowly up and down the garden-walks, pulling leaves to pieces, talking to herself, sometimes stopping abruptly, and listening to carriage-wheels or footsteps without the wall, whose boundary shut her out from the noisy world of life—for ever!

Ninian came up to her, and she held out her hand cheerfully.

“Ah, it is you? You have been a good while away. Any letter from my husband?”

“Not yet,” he said, in a low voice. “It is not time.”

“Ah, true; I always forget what Geoffrey told me of the continental post. But still it is a long while to wait.—Isn't that a bonnie mavis now? It's singing among the apple-blossoms.”—And she ran off with childish eagerness, but soon came back. “I would so like to climb that tree and find the mavis's nest, as I used to do. But Mr. Sabine would not like it, you know. I was only a poor girl then; now I must try to make myself a lady, such as his wife should be. He will not love me else.”

She said this, talking to herself; but turning suddenly again perceived Ninian.

“Who are you? I know your face; but though you come so often I can’t remember your name.”

“Ninian Græme.”

“Ninian Græme,” she repeated. “It’s pretty enough. I heard it somewhere, I think, but I can’t tell.” And the vacancy of her eyes showed her mind was wandering more than usual. Suddenly she came back to the old subject.

“Jane—can you not find out something about the post? I am so wearying for a letter.”

“It will come—it will come, my poor child.”

“You always say that,” she returned, angrily. “And you always call me ‘poor child’—and ‘poor dear’—though I am very happy. How should I be otherwise, when I am my Geoffrey’s own wife? But I wish he would send, or come. I am so weary of waiting.”

She began to walk up and down in extreme irritation.

“Oh, Mr. Græme, talk to her—quiet her. Nobody can do that like you,” whispered Jane Sedley.

Ninian went and drew her arm in his, say-

ing, in a voice that was most gentle and firm, save that ever and anon it trembled with pity.

“Rachel—you must be good and patient. You cannot hear from your husband for a long time. He is a great way off; but he will not forget you. He may be troubled if you grieve; and glad to know you are quiet and content.”

She listened eagerly. “Ah, then, I will be content! I wouldn’t grieve him for the whole world. But you are quite sure he will come back? or do you think that I shall have to go to him?”

“Yes,” said Ninian. His voice failed—his manly heart was deeply moved.

Rachel went on, talking happily. It was evident that all nearer times were completely blotted from her remembrance; that her mind dwelt in a perpetual present—those long-past days when her lover and husband had first wooed her at the Border-farm. The last conscious link of memory was his departure then; but even that was without its sting. Day after day she waited for him—sometimes restlessly—sometimes in joyful anticipation—never with grief. All sense of pain seemed deadened in her mind; her existence flowed on, placid as that of a

child, or rather as that state of deeper quietude when all sensation dies gradually — second childhood. One only feeling remained—the love which had been the sole passion, aim, and ruin of her life—its beginning and its end.

Ninian left her standing whispering her thoughts aloud—thoughts, sweet, dreamy, and tender as those of a girl in her first love-dream. She was hardly conscious of his adieu, but when he was gone she ran after him.

“ You will come again soon, and talk to me about my husband ? You know how I like to listen to you. It makes me so content—so *happy!*”

That word, silent during all her days of reason and of suffering, was now perpetually on her lips. Truly Heaven had been very merciful to the poor maniac ! This was the only peaceful ending her sorrow could ever have known.

* * * * *

Mr. Græme did not reach home till late at night, for he walked round by Newington to see Reuben and invite him to the family meeting ; if so be the young doctor, lately established on his own account, could find time and condescension enough to adorn with his presence

the christening of the first boy vouchsafed to the new generation of the Græme race. Mr. Reuben, however, grown older, wiser, and less cynical, was benevolently minded, and promised; though, as he declared, not for the sake of his wee nephew, but entirely for the fun of seeing Charlie back from sea.

There was one more missing of the now scattered flock—Edmund. Since the bitter but salutary change that came over his youth, he had never been much at home. He had wandered about his own country, living humbly in Highland glens and Lowland villages, writing hard for daily bread; since he would never suffer his elder brother to aid him in any way. But Ninian knew that work was happiness, and while he watched over the young man continually, still he let him fulfil a young man's best duty—honourable toil.

Once—Edmund, restlessly thirsting for new scenes, had even crossed the ocean to America. Thence he accidentally brought back news, that an Englishman named Ansted had created a great sensation at Saratoga Springs, and been on the point of marriage with a Virginian

planter's widow, until one night he was found dead of apoplexy, leaving only money enough to lay him in a stranger's grave. Thus Hope was an orphan. The tie through life unfulfilled or betrayed, ceased, as all such ties must, without much sense of loss or pain. But death solemnised it to that gentle spirit, and Hope had truly mourned for her father.

“I wonder where the boy is now,” thought Ninian, as he swung-to and fastened the gate—always in old times a cause of domestic difference between him and the thoughtless Edmund, whose laziness perpetually admitted four-footed beasts to trample upon his brother's precious flowers. “I wish he would cease roaming, and settle somewhere. But he must have his way!”

Thus pondering, Mr. Græme let himself into the house as usual; he would never allow his women-kind to sit up for him. But often, when he had chanced to be late, he had seen a light still burning in Hope's room, as if she were uneasy until she heard him come safe home. Not seeing it to-night, he felt rather disappointed, and walked slowly toward the parlour.

A happy twain were sitting there — Lindsay and her “boy.” Edmund had come home.

He was leaning in his elder brother’s arm-chair, in his old attitude of gazing thoughtfully into the fire, which lit up every line of his beautiful face. Beautiful it was still, but with the grave, composed beauty of manhood. Edmund was twenty-five years old now.

At the sound of Ninian’s footstep he rose up and met him at the door. The brothers grasped each other’s hands warmly, in the silent greeting of men and equals. Edmund had ceased to be a pet, except Lindsay’s pet, which he would remain as long as that loving sister lived. But even she began to view him with awe and respect, as though in his fully-formed character and dignity of acknowledged genius he were growing beyond her caressing affection.

“You two were talking very seriously when I came in,” observed Ninian, when the first glad welcome was over. “What was it all about? Any news, Edmund? Any more successes for the Great Man of the Family?”

Lindsay’s eyes were flooded with delight;

Edmund himself smiled, but with the serious joy of a man who knows that whatever heights his genius may climb, there is a greater height beyond.

“Yes, brother,” he said, “I have been very successful. I have toiled hard in necessary work that I did not like; and now, at last, I have attained what I wanted—I have published my poem.”

“Brave boy!—noble boy! And what does the world say of it?”

Edmund’s lip trembled as with modest, yet proud air, he told what the world did say; how to him had chanced, what scarcely happens once in a century,—but nevertheless does so happen sometimes, and has done to one of our own day—that the first essay of his genius placed him at once among the brotherhood of poets. Not rhymers for the mere hour, but Poets.

He had indeed become the Great Man of the Family.

“And was that what you and Lindsay were looking so grave about?” asked Ninian, trying to smile away the emotion that made his eyes moisten as he looked proudly on the brother

he had reared—nay more, had saved from destruction and guided to honour.

Miss Græme explained that they were talking about a plan of Edmund's. He wished to return once more to the great home of labour and of genius,—London.

As she spoke, the colour rose in Edmund's face. Afterwards he said, humbly, "Brother, will you let me go?"

"Yes," the brother answered,—“fully, freely;” and his manner showed how entirely he trusted in the young genius now.

“I shall not go only to be a poet,” Edmund continued. “I know well that one must live, and that it is no disgrace to labour for bread in the ordinary work of literature, giving the rarest and best fruits of one's mind to those writings which we esteem the highest. Thus I shall neither starve, nor dream away my life, though I am a poet. Only, as a safeguard against all temptation, all folly and laziness, I want somebody to take care of me.”

“A wife?” smiled Ninian.

“No,” was the steady but rather sad answer. “I shall never marry. Poets are best alone.”

The young man had outlived his youthful

dreams, yet their sting remained in his soul. So it might for some time longer, but not for ever. Ninian knew that, and was content.

“I’ll tell you whom I want,” continued Edmund, after a pause. “I want my sister Lindsay.”

“And I said — and say,” Lindsay herself added, softly, “that not even for this boy can I leave my brother Ninian, while Ninian is unmarried.”

There was a light meaning in her tone which startled Mr. Græme. His heart’s pulses rose like a torrent, and then he grew very white.

“I—I can’t talk much now. We will wait till to-morrow.”

So, very soon the conversation ceased, and there fell silence and sleep over every chamber in the house—save one.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE was great mirth on the christening-day—more so than the simple Scottish home baptism usually creates. But there was the joy of a complete family reunion—now becoming rarer each year, as each member was scattered far and wide; and there was the great honour of Tinie's boy being the first boy—the only nephew vouchsafed to the elders dwelling at The Gowans. Thereupon Mrs. William and Mrs. Patrick Frazer were slightly jealous, except that their own juvenile brood certainly made up in quantity what was wanting in quality.

The naming of the little hero was a grand difficulty. All had supposed that he would bear the paternal appellation, until Mrs. Reay declared that “old Kenneth” and “young

Kenneth" would be perfectly abhorrent to her feelings. Then there was a proposition for "Ninian," which the original owner of the name decidedly opposed. Finally the matter was left in doubt. Tinie privately informed Hope that she should keep to her agreement, and that the boy should bear whatsoever name the latter chose. But no one spoke or hinted at it until the time came.

Living so retired during these two years, Hope had not before now met all the family at once. Some of them viewed her—who had been so singled out for misfortune—with a good deal of awe and shyness, until they saw how very quiet and mild she was. Esther whispered to Ruth, "It was a wonder and a blessing that poor Hope had so well got over it."

Got over it! Strangely do people talk of "getting over" a great sorrow—over-leaping it, passing it by, thrusting it into oblivion. Not so! No one ever does that—at least no nature which can be touched by the feeling of grief at all. The only way is to pass through the ocean of affliction, solemnly, slowly, with humility and faith—as the Israelites passed through the sea. Then its very waves of misery will divide

and become to us a wall on the right side and on the left, until the gulf narrows and narrows before our eyes, and we land safe on the opposite shore.

Thus had Hope landed, and found rest.

Therefore, after this lapse of time, she could smile among her adopted sisters, nor in any way trouble their happiness with the misfortunes that had fallen to her own lot.

The only visible difference between her and them was in her more subdued manner, and her well-worn black dress.

“I thought Hope would have put off her mourning,” whispered Mrs. Patrick to Mrs. William Frazer. “She has really worn it quite long enough, and it looks so melancholy.”

Hope asked what they were saying?

“Don’t mind them, dear,” answered Mrs. Reay. “It was only about this;” and she touched the obnoxious dress. “They think black is unlucky at a baptism. But I don’t care; and I’m baby’s mamma,—not they, you know.”

Hope said nothing; but when she came down to join in the ceremony, they noticed she had changed her mourning dress for one of white.

Lindsay noticed too—and Lindsay only—that her eyelids were a little reddened, showing that what she had done was not done without emotion. But otherwise her aspect was quiet and content.

Ninian, coming in the room late, saw her, and started—she looked so like the little Hope Ansted of old. The sight of her made his strong heart reel.

He went near her as she stood at the window, and touched her dress—“I hardly knew you; how is this?”

Her lip quivered slightly. “They wished it, and it matters little; the feeling is the same.”

Ninian said no more.

And now came up the proud and happy Professor, to advertise her that he was about to present his little son to the minister. Hope followed to the circle that stood round the table.

“What is the wee fellow’s name to be?” whispered Kenneth Reay.

Somehow, with an instinct of sympathy, no one looked at Hope while she answered—perhaps more than one guessed what that answer would be. It was given in a low tone, but very clear.

“ Call him—*Walter*.”

And the boy was so called.

No one of the family made any remark there-upon, though many a time during the day they saw the childless mother steal aside with Tinie's boy in her arms—to kiss him and cry over him, but softly, as if there was more of tender memory than of grief in her tears.

Towards evening, the whole party—such a family party as The Gowans had never witnessed before—grew very blithe; so blithe that the elder brother crept quietly away and hid himself in his study.

Thither he had not been long when there came a gentle tap at the door—one that had used to come years ago, making him start and tremble,—as he did now.

Hope spoke, standing at the threshold.

“ May I come in and talk to you for a little?”

He said “ Yes,” mechanically, and then would have given worlds to have retracted that permission.

She came and placed herself on the little sofa under the window. It was open, admitting both the air and sun of the first of real spring evenings; Ninian closed it in-

stinctively, saying something about her taking cold.

“How kind—how thoughtful you always are over me!” sighed Hope; and then resolutely began again,—“I had best say at once what I wanted to say to you.”

“Say it, then,” he answered, and sat down opposite, trying to prepare himself for anything.

“Edmund has been telling me what you three were talking about after I went to bed last night.”

“Of his success, I suppose?”

“Yes—and of his desire that Lindsay should go and live with him in London. He asked me to urge you to let her go.”

“Indeed!”

“Would you object to that, dear brother? Would you not like this plan to be carried out? It seems a very good plan, in all but the parting with Lindsay. And yet, she would be content anywhere, if it were for Edmund’s good. I asked her this, and she said ‘Yes, if she knew that you were happy too.’ Should you not be happy, brother?”

Ninian made no intelligible answer, and her innocent pleading continued:

“It might not be for long, you know. Edmund may marry, and then Lindsay would come back again. And, meanwhile——” Here she hesitated, but so slightly as to show the utter ignorance of the world in which her simple heart still lay, or else its thorough confidence in itself—“Meanwhile, you would not be left desolate, or sisterless. I would take as much care of you as ever Lindsay did.”

He looked wildly into her guileless eyes. She was evidently perfectly sincere in what she said—she meant merely that, and no more.

“Besides,” she continued, apparently reassured by meeting no contradiction, “the twins would be living near us, so you would not be dull, even alone with me. And, if I must speak of what you never suffer me to think,—it would ease my mind to know I was somewhat useful, and no longer a burden to you. I would be a good housekeeper, and a cheerful sister—indeed I would !”

Ninian was still silent.

“Will you consent? May I tell Edmund so?”

“No, Hope; you do not know what you are asking. It cannot be.”

His voice, hollow and cold, half frightened

the gentle petitioner; but still she asked, timidly, "Why not?"

"Is it possible you do not see?"

Perhaps some dawning of the truth then visited her, for her colour slightly rose.

Ninian went on desperately, "Do you not see that the world will not think as you think; that if Lindsay goes, *you* cannot stay and live with me here alone, being—not my sister?"

Deeper Hope's blush grew, dyeing cheek, throat, and brow all scarlet. If he had seen her!—but he did not—he had put his hand over his eyes. After a while hers were raised to look at him; there was in them a new expression—half reserve, half pain—mingled with something deeper than both.

"Then I must go away?"

Ninian replied not. Something in her tone, and more than that, in the agony of his own mind, made him feel that the crisis of his destiny was come; that, after this, they could no more go on like brother and sister, as heretofore.

Hope added, in a subdued accent, "Perhaps, in any case, it is better I should go away. I have been to you a great burden and great care.

And though not really my brother, you have been such, and more—to me. God bless you!”

Her voice faltered; she seemed to struggle against tears. Yet still he was silent, and his silence made her shrink into composure. She half rose to leave the room.

“I will not detain you any longer now. Only the first time you have to spare, give me your advice—your brotherly advice—as to what I ought to do; whether I shall be a governess, or companion, or what?”

“Hush! hush!” he groaned, holding out his hand to her, but turning his head away.

Hope’s courage broke down. “Oh, it is a hard, hard world, my brother! I thought you would have always taken care of me, and that I should have lived content with you at The Gowans!”

Ninian grasped tightly the hand he held. He looked her steadily in the face, as he said, “Hope, if you will—there is one way.”

She guessed what he meant—any woman would. But it was his words only she discerned, not his heart. She turned very pale, and let his hand fall.

“I understand,” said Ninian, slowly. “You

feel—I thought you would—that *that* is impossible. Forgive me!”

There was a heavy silence for some minutes. At last Hope said,

“ I know not why you ask me to forgive you. It is I who should say that. I feel how noble, how generous, this is of you. All these years you have been making many sacrifices for me, and now you would sacrifice—*yourself*.”

Ninian started wildly.

“ Don’t speak—I know it is thus. But I will not suffer it. No man shall ever degrade himself by marrying *me*”—and her voice shook—“ least of all you, the best man I ever knew. You must choose some one who is happy and honoured before the world ; also—some one whom you love.”

“ Some one whom I love!” he repeated, hoarsely. He saw her, as if through a misty dream—standing beside his chair—her tears fast falling, though she spoke so quietly. Once more, by an irresistible impulse, he grasped her hand. “ Stay here only a little—don’t be afraid, my sister.”

“ I am not afraid!” she said, softly, and kept her place.

“ Stay, and I will tell you about—some one

whom I loved. It is a long time ago, you'll hardly remember it. I was a grown man—nay, almost an old man—and she was quite a girl. I could not marry, or if I could, she did not care for me. So I never told her of my love—not one word. I used to carry her in my arms, and pet her, and call her 'my child,' and 'my darling.' But she knew nothing—nothing!"

He felt Hope's hand trembling—but still he held it tight.

"I am glad it was so! I am glad she did not know! It might have grieved her when it was too late, or—afterwards she might not have been willing to come to me in her trouble, for safety, and comfort, and tenderness. She received it as being quite natural, kind, and brotherly—whilst I—Oh my God! Thou knowest all."

His voice ceased—its utterance was choked. Hope, thoroughly overwhelmed by his words, sunk lower and lower, until she was kneeling beside him.

A sudden fear struck Ninian. "Don't mistake me," he cried. "I did this with no vain hope; I had none from the first—I have none now. I know she will never care for me, except in her own quiet sisterly way. She will not

cease from that, surely?" And he pressed the little hand between both his.

Hope bent her head and sobbed.

"My child," he said—using the word he had never used since she was married. "If it had been possible—if you had known this——"

"Oh that I had, years ago!"

"Would you—answer solemnly, for it is an awful answer to me—would you have loved me then?"

"I might, if you had tried—but I cannot tell."

She spoke wildly amid her sobs; her agitation was becoming so intense, that, seeing it, Ninian forgot all his own.

He put his left hand on her head.

"My child," he repeated, "my dear child; do not grieve—do not think about this any more. I am getting an old man, and people do not suffer so much when they are old. I will try to love you then, in the quiet way that you would like me to love you—Shall it be so?"

"I am not worthy—not half worthy," she cried. But upon his hand—the strong hand which had upheld and guided her so long—her small soft lips were tremblingly pressed.

Ninian drew back—all the man in him was shaken.

“Hope,” he said, in a low, quivering voice, “we must not trifle now—but decide one way or the other. If you will keep me as your brother, we must part altogether for a year or two, and afterwards I will learn to meet you as I ought. If, by any possible chance, you could take me as—your husband——”

He paused, but she recoiled not—she did not even remove her cheek from his hand.

“If so, and you could be content to let me love you, I would spend my life in making you happy. My child—my little Hope!”—and the agony of his voice changed into the music of infinite tenderness—“I would take such care of you—I would hide you in my arms, as I did long ago, and keep every trouble from you. My love—my darling!—will she come?”

While he spoke, Hope’s sobbing had gradually ceased. She looked up to him—this man, so good, so true, whom for years she had revered, trusted, loved—with a love that perhaps one betrayal of feeling on his part might once have changed into the very love he now sought.

“Will she come?” Ninian repeated, holding out his arms.

She came. Slowly and softly she crept to

his bosom, and lay there—still weeping, but at rest.

So Ninian knew that she would be his wife at last. He thanked God, and was satisfied.

* * * *

They were married not many weeks after, just before Lindsay and Edmund went away. It was a marriage quite private, none even of their own family being present, except Miss Græme, Edmund, and the Reays. John Forsyth was the minister.

There was no wedding journey either, for Ninian had no time. Nor was there any new home chosen whereto to bring his wife; neither of them wished to leave The Gowans. Little outward change would the marriage cause, except the blessed change within, of hope for desolation, and peace for mourning. Even joy might come, in time.

On the evening of that day the Reays went home to Portobello, taking with them Lindsay and Edmund, on a brief visit, before the latter left for the south.

Ninian went with them to the gate, and came back again. He had been silent and grave all day—very grave for a bridegroom. He looked pale, and even exhausted, as he threw himself in

his arm-chair, and softly called to Hope, who was sitting in her favourite place by the window.

She obeyed, as she had been long accustomed to obey him; it was no new lesson to be learnt now. She came and knelt beside him. He took her hands, and, putting one on each of his shoulders, held her firmly—but far apart from him, so that he could look into her face.

“Tell me truly, is my darling content?”

Their eyes met; hers were laden with the fulness of love, such love as, wife and mother though she had been, she had never really known until now.

“Ninian—my Ninian!” she whispered timidly, calling him for the first time by his Christian name.

Ninian Græme lifted her up, little creature as she was, and folded—nay, almost buried her in his breast. And, as his wife hid her face there, she felt on her cheek and neck not only his kisses but his tears.

THE END.







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