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LONDON:
PRINTED BY J. OGDEN AND CO.,
172, ST. JOHN STREET, E.C.

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BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."



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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

HARD BENTLEY & SON, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty.

1876.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
VIII. THE NEW HOME	1
IX. MR. MAX BROWN	20
X. A NIGHT ALARM	46

PART THE THIRD.

I. LAUREL COTTAGE	71
II. JEALOUSY	96
III. CROPPING UP AGAIN	119
IV. HUMILIATION	141
V. THE EBONY DESK	163
VI. UNDER THE CHURCH WALLS	188
VII. MEETING AGAIN	210
VIII. HARD LINES	242
IX. TEARS	263
X. MADEMOISELLE'S LETTER	276
XI. SUNSHINE EVERYWHERE	285

EDINA.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEW HOME.

A COLD, drizzly rain was falling. We get wintry weather sometimes in July, as was the case now. The lovely summer seemed to have come to an abrupt end, and to have flown away for good. At least, it appeared so to those who were turning out of their late happy and prosperous home, to enter on another of which they knew little. Knew nothing, in fact, except that it would have to be one of poverty and labour. For this was the day that Mrs. Raynor and her children were quitting Eagles' Nest.

All superfluous effects had been disposed of, even to their personal trinkets. Charles's watch, that he set store by because it had been his father's, and had only just come into his possession, had to go. Without the sale of

these things they could not have paid all their debts and kept enough for pressing requirements. A fly took Mrs. Raynor, Alice, and the two young children to the station, Charles and Alfred having walked on; and a cart conveyed the trunks. The rain beat against the fly windows, the wind swept by in gusts, shaking the branches of the trees. Everything looked dreary and wretched, even Eagles' Nest. Oh, what a change it was, inwardly and outwardly, from that sunny day, bright with hope, when they had entered it only twelve little months before!

Charles was at the fly door when it drew up. "What class tickets am I to take?" he asked of his mother: and there ensued a blank pause. They were accustomed to go first class; but that would not do now.

"Either second, or—*third*, Charley," spoke poor Mrs. Raynor.

"There is no third class to this train," replied Charley, glad perhaps to have to say it, as he turned away to the ticket office.

And so they travelled up to London, Mrs. Raynor leaning back in the carriage with closed eyes, grateful for the rest. It had been a long scuffle to get away; and every one of them

had mentally reproached Edina for not coming to their help.

"It is just as though she had deserted us," said Mrs. Raynor. "I suppose she will be at the new house to receive us, as she says; but I think she might have come: she knows how incapable I am."

The "new house," the address of which was furnished them by Edina in plain letters, was situated in the southern district of London, some three miles, or so, from the heart of the bustle. It was about five o'clock when they approached it in two cabs, through the dirt and drizzle. The spirits of all were depressed. With the very utmost difficulty Mrs. Raynor kept down her tears.

"I expect to find it a barn with nothing in it," she said, looking out on the dreary road. "Perhaps there will not be as much as a mattress to sleep on."

The cabs stopped before the door of a convenient, roomy, but old-fashioned looking house, standing a little back from the road, with a garden behind it. A rosy servant girl opened the door. She was not as fashionable looking as the maids they had left, but she was neat and active, and very willing—a remarkably

desirable quality in a maid-of-all-work. Edina came forward ; a bright and cheery smile of welcome on her face as she took all the hands into hers that she could get, and led the way to the sitting-room. It was quite furnished, and the tea things stood on the table.

Instead of the empty barn Mrs. Raynor had expected, she found a house plainly but well stocked throughout with suitable furniture. The school-room, the airy bed-chambers, the sitting-rooms, the kitchen, all had their appropriate articles. Useful, plain furniture, quite new. Mrs. Raynor halted in the kitchen, which was not below ground, and gazed about her. The bright fire threw its warmth on the red bricks, a kettle was singing away, plates and dishes stood on the dresser shelves, other necessary articles were at hand.

"I cannot understand it, Edina. You must have obtained the things on credit, after all. Oh, that the school may succeed !—so that we may soon be enabled to pay for them."

"No credit has been asked or given, Mary," was Edina's answer. "The furniture has been bought and paid for, and it is yours."

"Bought by whom?"

“By me. You will not be too proud to accept it from your poor old friend Edina !”

Mrs. Raynor sat down on the nearest wooden chair, and burst into tears.

“You thought, I am sure, I might have come back to help you get away from Eagles’ Nest, Mary, but I could not : I had too much to do here,” explained Edina. “I find there is an opening in this neighbourhood for a school, and I also found this house, that is so suitable for one, to let. I took it, and with Frank’s help furnished it, plainly as you see : and then I went about amid the neighbours, and put an advertisement or two in the papers, asking for pupils. Two boarders, sisters, will enter to-morrow ; two more on Monday next, and five day pupils. This is not so bad a beginning, and I daresay others will drop in. I feel sure you will succeed ; that you and Alice may get a very good school together in time : and I hope Heaven will bless and prosper you.”

Mrs. Raynor was looking up from the wooden chair in her rather helpless manner. “I—I don’t understand, Edina. Did you buy the furniture, or did Frank ?”

“Not Frank, poor fellow : he has need of

help himself. Be at ease, Mary : I bought it, and I have made it over to you by a deed of gift. The house is taken in your name, and I am responsible for the first half year's rent."

"Oh, Edina! But I thought you had no money—save the poor small income Dr. Raynor secured to you."

"Please don't you disparage my income," said Edina gaily. "It is fifty pounds a year : quite enough for me. As to the money, I had a hundred pounds or two by me that my dear father secured to me over and above the income. In laying it out for you and yours in this your need, Mary, I think it is well spent."

"And we used to call Edina mean and stingy!" thought Mrs. Raynor in her repentant heart. "At least, Charles and Alice did."

With the next week, all the expected pupils had entered ; four boarders and five day pupils. Another day pupil, not expected, made six. It was a very good opening, affording hope of ultimate success.

"What do you think of it, Charley?" asked Mrs. Raynor on the third evening, as they sat together after the little boarders and Kate and Robert were in bed, Edina being out.

"Oh, I think it's first rate," answered

Charley, half seriously, half mockingly. "You and Alice will be making a fortune."

The remark did not please Alice. *She*, at least, was not reconciled to the new home and the duties.

"*You* may think it first-rate," she retorted on Charles. "It is widely different from Eagles' Nest. We were gentlepeople there; we are poor school-keepers here."

Charley made no response. The very name of Eagles' Nest would give him a turn.

"And it is nothing but work all day," went on Alice. "Lessons this hour, music that, writing next. Oh, it is wearisome!"

"But don't grumble, my dears," interposed Mrs. Raynor. "It might have been so much worse. After the strange turn our affairs took, we might now be without a roof's shelter over our heads and a morsel of bread to eat. So far as I can see, we should have been, but for Edina."

The tears were raining down Mrs. Raynor's cheeks. Alice started up and threw her arms round her in repentance. "Forgive me, dear mamma, forgive me! I was wrong to speak so repiningly."

"You were wrong, dear Alice. In dwelling

so much upon the advantages we have lost, you overlook the mercies remaining to us. And they are mercies. We are together under one roof; we have the prospect of making a good living."

"Yes," acquiesced Charley, throwing regrets behind him. "It is a very nice home indeed, compared with what might have been."

"And I think we may yet be very happy in it," said Mrs. Raynor.

Alice strove to think so too, and put on a cheerful face. But the old days were ever present to her; and she never recalled the past hopes, connected with William Stane, but her heart turned sick and faint in its hopeless despair.

"It will be your turn next, Charles," observed Edina, taking the opportunity of speaking to him the following morning when they were alone.

"My turn?" repeated Charles, vaguely: consciously sure that he knew what she meant, but not choosing to know it.

"To do something for yourself," added Edina. "You cannot intend to live upon your mother."

"Of course I do not, Edina. How stupid you are!"

"And the question is, what is that something to be?" she continued, passing over his compliment to herself.

"I should like to go into the army, Edina."

Edina shook her head. Her longer experience of life, her habits of forethought, enabled her to see obstacles that younger people did not.

"Even if you had the money to purchase a commission, Charley ——"

"But I did not think of purchasing. I should like to get one given to me."

"Is there a chance of it?"

Charles did not reply. He was standing before the window, gazing abstractedly at a young butcher boy, dashing about in a light cart for his morning orders. There was not very much chance of it, he feared, but there might be a little.

"Let us suppose that you had the commission, Charley, that it arrived here for you this very day direct from the Horse Guards—or whatever the place may be that issues them," pursued Edina. "Would it benefit you?"

"Benefit me!"

"I mean, could you take it up? How would you find your necessary outfit? Regi-

mentals cost a great deal : and there must be many other preliminary outlays. This is not all ——”

“ I could get things on credit,” interrupted Charles, “ and pay as I went on.”

“ But this would not be all the impediments, Charley. I have heard that it takes every officer more than his pay to live. I have often thought that were I an officer it should not take me more ; but it may be that I am mistaken. You would not have anything besides, Charley.”

“ Oh, I expect I should get along.”

“ Take it at the best, you would have nothing to spare. I had thought that you might choose some calling which would enable you to help them here at home.”

“ Of course. It is what I should wish to do.”

“ Alfred must be educated ; and little Robert as he comes on. Your mother may not be able to do this. And I do not see that you will have it in your power to aid her if you enter the army.”

Charles began scoring the window-pane with a pencil that he held, knowing not what to answer. In truth, his own intentions and

views as to the future were so vague and purposeless, that to dwell on it gave him the nightmare.

“What should you propose, Edina?”

“A situation,” replied Edina promptly.
“In some good city house.”

But for the obligations they were just now under to Edina, Mr. Charles Raynor would have scoffed at her well for the suggestion. It suited neither him nor his pride. A situation in some city house! That meant a clerk, he supposed. To write at desks and go on errands!

“I wish you'd not talk so, Edina,” he peevishly said, wishing he might box her ears.
“Did you ever hear of a Raynor becoming a tradesman's jack-of-all-trades?”

“Did you ever hear of a Raynor with no means of living?” retorted Edina. “No profession, and no money? Circumstances alter cases, Charley.”

“Circumstances can't make a common man a gentleman; and they can't make a gentleman take up the role of a common man.”

“Can't they! I think they often do. However, Charley, I will say no more just now, for I perceive you are not in the humour

for it. Consider the matter with yourself. *Don't* depend upon the commission, for indeed I do not see that you have a chance of one; put it out of your thoughts, if you can, and look to other ways and means. I shall be leaving you in a day or two, you know; by that time you will perhaps have decided on something."

Edina went into the school-room, and Charles stood where he was. Alfred came in with his Latin books. Mrs. Raynor was going to send Alfred to a day-school close by; but it did not open for another week or two, and meanwhile Charles made a show of keeping him to his Latin.

"What am I to do this morning, Charley?"

"Copy that last exercise over again, lad. It was so badly written yesterday I could not read it."

Alfred's pen went scratching over the copy-book. Charles remained at the window, deep in thought. He had no more wish to be living on his mother than any other good son has; but he did not see where he could go, or what he could do. The doubt had lain on his mind during these recent days more than was agreeable for its peace. His whole heart

was set upon a commission; but in truth he did not feel much more sanguine of obtaining one than Edina seemed to feel.

He wished he was something—wished it there as he stood. *Anything*, rather than be in this same helpless position. Wished he was a doctor, like Frank; or a banker, like that wretch, George Atkinson; or a barrister, like that other wretch, Stane. Had he been brought up to one of these callings he should at least have a profession before him. As it was, he felt incapable: he was fit for nothing, knew nothing. If he could get a commission given to him, he should be on his legs at once; and *that* required no special training.

But for Charles Raynor's inexperience, he might have found that a candidate for a commission in the army does require a special training now. In his father's young days the case was otherwise. The Major had been very fond of talking of those days; Charles had thence gathered his impressions, and they remained with him.

Yes, he said to himself, making a final score on the window pane, he must get the commission; and the sooner the better. Not to lose time, he thought it might be well

to see about it at once. An old acquaintance of his father's, one Colonel Cockburn, had (as Charles was wont to put it to himself) some interest in high quarters ; his brother, Sir James Cockburn, being one of the Lords of the Admiralty. Of course, reasoned Charles, Sir James must be quite able to give away posts indiscriminately in both army and navy ; and it was not likely he would refuse one to his brother, if the latter asked for it. So if he, Charles, could but get Colonel Cockburn to ask, the affair was done.

"Are you going out ?" questioned Alfred, as Charles began to brush his coat and hat.

"Yes, I am going to see Colonel Cockburn," was the reply. "No good putting it off longer. When you have finished copying that exercise, youngster, you can do another. And mind you stick at it: don't go worrying the mother."

Away went Charles, on the top of the first passing omnibus. Colonel Cockburn's club was the Army and Navy. Charles possessed no other address of his ; and to that building he found his way, and boldly entered.

"Colonel Cockburn, sir?" was the answer to his inquiry. "I don't think he is in town."

"Not in town !" cried Charles, his ardour

suddenly damped. "Why do you think that?"

"He has not been here for a day or two, sir: so we conclude he is either absent, or ill. The Colonel is sometimes laid up with gout for a week together."

"Can you tell me where he lives? I'll go and see."

"In St. James's Street," replied the man, giving at the same time the number.

To St. James's Street proceeded Charles, found the house in which the Colonel occupied rooms, and saw the landlady. Colonel Cockburn was at Bath: had gone to stay with a brother who was lying there ill.

"What a dreadful bother!" thought Charles. "Cockburn must have a whole regiment of brothers!" And he stood in indecision.

"Will the Colonel be back soon?" inquired he.

"I don't at all know," was the landlady's answer. "Should he be detained in Bath, he may not come back before October. The Colonel always leaves London the end of July. Sometimes he leaves earlier than that."

"What on earth am I to do?" cried Charles, partly aloud, his vivid hopes melting

considerably. "My business with him was urgent."

"Could you write to him?" suggested the landlady.

"I suppose I must—if you have his address. But I ought to see him."

She took an envelope from the mantelpiece, on which was written an address in the Crescent, Bath. Charles copied it down, and went out. He stood a moment, considering what he should do. The day was so fine and the town so full of life, that to go hence to that poking old southern suburb seemed a sin and a shame. So he decided to make a day of it, now he was there, and began with the Royal Academy.

Time slips away in the most wonderful manner when sight-seeing, and the day was over before Charles thought it half way through. When he reached home, it was past nine. The children were in bed; his mother also had gone there with headache; Edina and Alice were sewing by lamp-light. Alice was at some fancy work; Edina was mending a torn pinafore: one of a batch that required repairing.

While taking his supper, Charles told them

of his ill-luck in regard to Colonel Cockburn. And when the tray went away, he got paper and ink and began to write to him.

"He is sure to have heard of our misfortunes—don't you think so, Edina? I suppose I need only just allude to them."

"Of course he has heard of them," broke in Alice, resentfully. "All the world must have heard of them."

Charley went on writing. The first letter did not please him; and when it was nearly completed he tore it up and began another.

"It is always difficult to know what to say in this kind of application: and I don't think I am much of a letter-writer," observed he, candidly.

Alice grew tired, nodded over her embroidery, and at length said good night and went upstairs. Edina sent the servant to bed, and stitched on at another pinafore.

"I think that will do," said Charley: and he read the letter aloud.

"It will do very well," acquiesced Edina. "But, Charley, I foresee all kinds of difficulties. To begin with, I am not at all sure that you are eligible for a commission: I fancy you ought to go first of all to Woolwich."

"Not a bit of it," replied Charley, full of confidence. "What other difficulties do you foresee, Edina?"

"I wish you would give up the idea."

"I daresay! What would you have me do, if I did give it up?"

"Pocket your pride, and get a situation."

Charles tossed back his head. Pride was nearly as much in the ascendant with him as it ever had been. He thought how old and silly Edina was getting. But he remembered what she had done for them, and would not quarrel with her.

"Time enough to talk of that, Edina, when I shall have had Colonel Cockburn's answer."

Edina spoke no further for a few moments. She rose; shook out Robert's completed pin-afore, and folded it. "I had a scheme in my head, Charley; but you don't seem inclined to hear anything I may say upon the subject."

"Yes, I will," replied Charley, lifting his ears at the rather attractive word "scheme."

"I will hear that."

"I cannot help thinking that if George Atkinson were applied to, he would give you a post in his bank. He ought to do it. After turning you out of Eagles' Nest ——"

“I’d not apply to him; I’d not take it,” interrupted Charles fiercely, his anger aroused by the name. “If he offered me the best post in it to-morrow, I would fling it back in his face. Good night, Edina: I’m off. I don’t care to stay to hear of suggested obligations from *him*.”

On the day of Edina’s departure for Trennach, the morning post brought Colonel Cockburn’s answer to Charles. It was very short. Edina, her bonnet on, stood to read it over his shoulder. The Colonel intimated that he did not quite comprehend Charles’s application; but would see him on his return to London.

“So there’s nothing for it but to wait—and I hope he won’t be long,” remarked Charles, as he folded the scantily worded letter. “You must see there’s not, Edina.”

CHAPTER IX.

MR. MAX BROWN.

IN a very populous and rather obscure part of Lambeth, not a hundred miles away from the great hospital, Bedlam, there ran a narrow street. Not so narrow as to be inconvenient, for carts and carriages could pass each other ; but narrow in comparison with the finer streets of this vast metropolis. In the midst of the shops, on the left hand side of this street, going from London, stood a house that could not strictly be called a shop now ; though it had been one but recently, and the two counters inside it still remained, the street door opening between them in the middle. It had formerly been a small chemist's shop. About a year ago, a young medical man of the name of Brown had taken it, done away with the drugs and chemicals, so far as retailing them to the public went, and set himself up in it as a doctor. He dispensed his own medicines, so the counters were useful still, and his glass jars of powders

and liquids occupied the pigeon-holes above, where the chemist's jars had stood. The lower half of the two windows had been stained white; on one of them was written in black letters, "Mr. Max Brown, surgeon;" on the other, "Mr. Max Brown, general medical practitioner."

It was now about a year since Mr. Max Brown had thus established himself; and he had done very fairly. If his practice did not afford the promise that he would speedily become a millionaire, it at least was sufficient to keep him. And to keep him well. Mr. Brown had himself been born and reared in as crowded a part of London as this, somewhere towards Clerkenwell, therefore the locality did not offend his tastes; he looked to remain in it for good, and he had not the slightest doubt that his practice would steadily increase, and afford him a carriage and a better house in time. The tradespeople around, though far below those of Regent Street in the social scale, were tradespeople of sufficient substance, and could afford to pay Mr. Brown. He was a little dark man, of affable nature and manners, clever in his profession, liked by his patients, and winning his way more surely amid them day by day.

In the midst of this humble prosperity a check occurred. Not to the prosperity, but to Mr. Brown's plans and projects. Several years before, his elder brother had gone to the West Indies, and his mother (a widow) and his sister had subsequently followed him out. The sister had married there. The brother, Kenneth Brown, was for some years the successful manager of a planter's estate; he now managed one of his own. Altogether they were extremely prosperous; and the only one of the family left in England, Max, received pleasant letters from them by each fortnightly mail, and was entirely at ease with regard to them. It therefore took him completely by surprise, in the midst of this ease, to find himself suddenly summoned to Jamaica.

One day in this same hot summer, early in the month of June—for we must go back two or three weeks in our story—Mr. Brown, having completed his morning round of calls on patients, stood behind his counter making up the physic required by them, and waiting for his queer old maid servant, Eve, to come and tell him his one o'clock dinner was ready. The door stood open to the hot street, and to the foot passengers traversing the pavement; and

Sam, the young boy, was waiting near the opposite counter with his covered basket, until the physic should be ready.

"That's all to-day, Sam," said his master, pleasantly, as he folded the white paper round the last bottle, and motioned to the lad to bring the basket forward. "And, look here"—showing one of the packets—"this is for a fresh place. Number 26, you see, in the Walk. It's a grocer's shop."

"All right, sir. I shall find it."

"Maximilian Brown, Esq.," interrupted a voice at this juncture. It was that of the postman. He came in at the open door, and read out the address of the letter (his usual custom) as he put it down.

"Oh, the mail's in, I see," observed the doctor to him.

"Yes, sir."

The postman and the boy went out together. Mr. Brown, leisurely turning down his coat cuffs, which were never allowed to come in contact with the physic, took up the West Indian letter, and broke the seal. By that seal, as well as by the writing, he knew it was from his mother. Mrs. Brown always sealed her letters.

The letter contained but a few shaky lines. It told her son Max that she was ill ; ill, as she feared, unto death. And it enjoined him to come out to Jamaica, that she might see him before she died. A note from his brother was enclosed, which contained these words.

“ Do come out, dear Max, if you can in any way manage it. Mother’s heart is set upon it. There is no immediate danger, but she is breaking fast. Come by next mail if you can, the middle of June ; but at any rate don’t delay it longer than the beginning of July. I enclose you an order on our London bankers, that the want of funds may be no impediment. Your affectionate brother, Kenneth.”

It took a great deal to disturb the equable temperament of Max Brown. This did disturb him. He stood staring at the different missives: now at his mother’s, now at his brother’s, now at the good round sum named in the order. A thunderbolt could not have more effectually taken him aback. Eve, a clean old body in a flowery chintz gown, with a mob cap and bow of green ribbon surmounting her grey hair, came in twice to say the loin of lamb waited : but she received no notice in return.

“ I *can’t* go,” Max was repeating to himself.

“I don’t see how I *can* go. What would become of my practice?”

But his mother was his mother; and Max Brown, a dutiful son, began to feel that he should not like her to die until he had seen her once again. She was not sixty yet. The whole of the rest of the day and part of the night he was revolving matters in his mind; and in the morning he sent an advertisement to the *Times* and to a medical journal.

For more than a week the advertisement brought back no result. Answers there were to it, and subsequent interviews with those who wrote them; but none that were of any avail to Max Brown. Either the applicants did not suit him, or his offer did not suit them. He then inserted the advertisement a second time.

And it chanced to fall under the notice of Frank Raynor. Or, strictly speaking, under the notice of Frank’s friend Crisp. This was close upon the return of Frank from Eagles’ Nest. Daisy was with her sister in Westbourne Terrace, and Frank had been taken in by Mr. Crisp, a young surgeon who held an appointment at one of the London hospitals. He occupied private rooms, and could accommodate Frank with a sofa-bedstead. Mr. Crisp saw the

advertisement on the morning of its second appearance in the *Times*, and pointed it out to Frank.

“*Notice.* A qualified medical practitioner wanted, to take entire charge for a few months of a general practice in London during the absence of the principal.”

“It may be worth looking after, old fellow,” said Crisp.

Frank seized upon the suggestion eagerly. Most anxious was he to be relieved from his present state of helpless inactivity. An interview took place between him and Max Brown; and before it terminated Frank had accepted the post.

To him it looked all *couleur de rose*. During the very few days he had now been in London, that enemy, the Tiger, had troubled his mind more than was pleasant. That the man had come up in the same train, and absolutely in the compartment immediately behind his own, for the purpose of holding him in view, and of tracking out his place of abode in town, appeared to be only too evident. When Frank had deposited his wife at her sister's door, the turnings and twistings he caused the cab to make in carrying him to Crisp's, would have

been enough to baffle a detective. Frank hoped it had baffled the Tiger ; but he had scarcely liked to show himself abroad since. Therefore the obscurity of the locality in which Mr. Brown's practice lay, while it had frightened away one or two dandies who had inquired about it, was a strong recommendation in the eyes of Frank.

The terms proposed by Mr. Brown were these : That Frank Raynor should enter the house as he went out of it, take his place in all respects, carry on the practice for him until he himself returned, and live upon the proceeds. If the returns amounted to more than a certain sum, the surplus was to be put by for Mr. Brown.

Frank agreed to all : the terms were first-rate ; just what he should have chosen, he said. And surely to him they looked so. He was suddenly lifted out of his state of penniless dependence, had a house put over his head, and occupation. The very fact of possessing a home to bring Daisy to, would have lent enchantment to the view in his sanguine nature.

“ And by good luck I shall dodge the Tiger,” he assured himself. “ He will never think of looking for me *here*. Were he to find me out,

Mr. Blase Pellet would be down upon me for hush-money—for that I expect will be his move the moment he thinks I have any money in my pocket at all. Yes, better for me to be in this obscure place at present, than flourishing before the west-end world as a royal physician." So when preliminaries were arranged, he wrote to Mrs. Raynor, saying what a jolly thing he had dropped into.

But Mr. Max Brown reconsidered one item in the arrangement. Instead of Frank's coming in when he left, he had him there a week beforehand that he might introduce him to the patients. Frank was to take to the old servant, Eve, and to the boy, Sam: in short, nothing was to be altered, nothing changed, save the master. Frank was to walk in and Mr. Brown to walk out; all else was to go on as before. Mr. Brown made no sort of objection to Frank's wife sharing the home: on the contrary, he made one or two extra arrangements for her comfort. When he sailed, the beginning of July, Frank was fully installed, and Daisy might come as soon as she pleased. But her sister wished to keep her a little longer.

On one of the hot mornings in that same month, July, a well-dressed young fellow in

deep mourning might be seen picking his way amid the narrow streets of Lambeth, rendered ankle-deep in mud by the prodigal benevolence of the water-cart. It was Charles Raynor. Having nothing to do with his time, he had come forth to find out Frank.

"It *can't* be here!" cried Charley to himself, sniffing about fastidiously. "Frank would never take a practice in a low place like this! I say—here, youngster," he cried, arresting the steps of a tattered girl, who was running out of a shop, "do you chance to know where Mark Street is?"

"First turning you comes to," promptly responded the damsel, with assured confidence.

Charles found the turning and the street, and went down it, looking on all sides for the house he wanted. As he did not remember, or else did not know, the name of Frank's predecessor, the words "Mr. Max Brown" on some window panes on the opposite side the way afforded him no guide; and he might have gone on into endless wilds but for catching sight inside the house of a shapely head and some bright hair, which he knew pertained to Frank. He crossed the street at a bound, and entered.

"Frank!"

Standing in the identical spot that Max Brown was standing when we first saw him, was Frank; his head bent forward over an account-book, in which he was writing. He looked up hastily.

“Charley!”

Their hands met, and some mutual inquiries ensued. They had not seen each other since quitting Eagles’ Nest.

“We thought you must be dead and buried, Frank. You might have come to see us.”

“Just what I have been thinking—that you might have come to see me,” returned Frank. “I can’t get away. Since Brown left, and for a week before it, I have not had a minute to myself: morning, noon, and night, I am tied to my post here. Your time is your own, Charley.”

“I have been about at the West-end, finding out Colonel Cockburn, and doing one thing or another,” said Charley, by way of excuse for his laziness. “Edina left us only yesterday.”

“For Trennach?”

“Yes, for Trennach. We fancy she means to take up her abode for good in the old place. She does not feel at home anywhere else, she says, as she does there. It was good of her,

though, was it not, Frank, to set us up in the new home?"

"Very good—even for Edina. And I believe few people in this world are so practically good as she is. I did a little towards helping her choose the furniture; not much, because I arranged with Brown. How is the school progressing?"

"All right. It is a dreadful come-down: but it has to be put up with. Alice cries every night."

"And about yourself? Have you formed any plans?"

"I am waiting till Cockburn returns to town. I expect he will get me a commission."

"A commission!" exclaimed Frank dubiously; certain doubts and difficulties crossing his mind, as they had crossed Edina's.

"It will be the best thing for me if I can only obtain it. There is no other opening."

Frank remained silent. His doubts were very strong indeed; but he never liked to inflict thorns where he could not scatter flowers, and he would not damp Charley's evident ardour. Time might do that quickly enough.

Charley was looking about him. He had

been looking about him ever since he entered, somewhat after the fastidious manner that he had looked at the streets, but more furtively. Appearances were surprising him. The small shop (it seemed no better) with the door standing open to the narrow street; the two counters on either side; the glass jars aloft; the scales lying to hand, and sundry packets of pills and powders beside them: to him, it all savoured of a small retail chemist's business. Charley thought he must be in a kind of dream. He could not understand how or why Frank had descended to so inferior a position as this.

“Do you *like* this place, Frank?”

“Uncommonly,” answered Frank; and his honest blue eyes, glancing brightly into Charley's, confirmed the words. “It is a relief to be in harness again; and to have a home to bring Daisy to.”

“Will Daisy like it?” questioned Charles. And the hesitation in his tone, which he could not suppress, plainly betrayed his opinion—that she would not.

Frank's countenance fell. It was the one item of rue in the otherwise sufficiently palatable cup.

"I *wish* I could have done better for her. It is only for a time, you know, Charley."

"I see," said Charley, feeling relieved. "You are only here while looking out for something better."

"That's it, in one sense. I stay here until Brown comes back. By that time I hope to—to pick myself up again."

The slight halt was caused by a consciousness that he did not feel assured upon the point. That Mr. Blase Pellet and his emissary, the Tiger, and all their unfriendly machinations combined, would by that time be in some way satisfactorily disposed of, leaving himself a free agent again, Frank devoutly hoped and most sanguinely expected. It was only when his mind dipped into details, and he began to consider how and by what means these enemies were likely to be subdued, that he felt dubious and doubtful.

"Something good may turn up for you, Frank, before the fellow—Brown, if that's his name—comes home. I suppose you'll take it if it does."

"Not I. My bargain with Brown is to stay here until he returns. And here I shall stay."

“ Oh, well—of course a bargain’s a bargain. How long does he expect to be away ? ”

“ He did not know. He might stay four or six months with his people, he thought, if things went on well here.”

“ I say, why do you keep that street door open ? ”

“ I don’t know,” answered Frank. “ From habit, I suppose. Brown used to keep it open, and I have done the same. I like it so. It imparts some liveliness to the place.”

“ People may take the place for a shop, and come in.”

“ Some have done so,” laughed Frank. “ It was a chemist’s shop before Brown took to it. I tell them it is only a surgery now.”

“ When do you expect Daisy ? ” asked Charles, after a pause.

“ This evening.”

“ This evening ! ”

“ I shall snatch a moment at dusk to fetch her,” added Frank. “ Mrs. Townley is going into Cornwall on a visit to the Mount, and Daisy comes home.”

“ Have the people at the Mount forgiven Daisy yet ? ”

“ No. They will not do that, I expect, until

I shall be established as a first-rate practitioner, with servants and carriages about me. Mrs. St. Clare likes show."

"She'd not like this, I'm afraid," spoke Charles candidly, looking up at the low ceiling and across at the walls.

Frank was saved a reply. Sam, the boy, who had been out on an errand, entered, and he began delivering a message to his master.

"Would you like some dinner, Charley?" asked Frank. "Come along, I don't know what there is to-day."

Passing through a side door behind him, Frank stepped into a contiguous sitting-room. It was narrow but comfortable. The window looked to the street. The fireplace was at the opposite end, side by side with the door that led to the house beyond. A mahogany sofa covered with horsehair stood against the wall on one side; a low bookcase and a work-table on the other. The chairs matched the sofa; on the centre table the dinner cloth was laid; a red-and-green carpet and hearthrug completed the furniture.

"Not a bad room, this," said Charley, thinking it an improvement on the shop.

"There's a better sitting-room upstairs,"

observed Frank. "Well furnished, too. Brown liked to have decent things about him; and his people, he said, helped him liberally when he set up here. That work-table he bought the other day for Daisy's benefit."

"He must be rather a good sort of a fellow."

"He's a very good one. What have you for dinner, Eve?" Put a knife and fork for this gentleman."

"Roast beef, sir," replied the old woman, who was bringing in the dishes, and nodded graciously to Charles, as much as to say he was welcome. "I thought the new mistress might like to find a cut of cold meat in the house."

"Quite right," said Frank. "Sit down, Charley."

Charley sat down, and did ample justice to the dinner, especially to the Yorkshire pudding, a dish of which he was particularly fond, and had not lost his relish for amid the dainties of the table at Eagles' Nest. He began to think Frank's quarters were not so bad on the whole, compared with no quarters at all, and no dinner to eat in them.

"Have you chanced to see that man, Charley, since you came to London?" inquired Frank,

putting the question with a certain reluctance, for he hated to allude to the subject.

“What man?” returned Charley.

“The Tiger.”

“No, I have not seen him. I learnt at Oxford that I had been mistaken in thinking he was looking after me ——”

“He was not looking after you,” interrupted Frank.

“My creditors there all assured me—Oh, Frank, how could I forget?” broke off Charley. “What an ungrateful fellow I am! Though, indeed, not really ungrateful, but it had temporarily slipped my memory. How good it was of you to settle those two bills for me! I would not write to thank you: I preferred to wait until we met. How did you raise the money?”

Frank, whose dinner was finished, had nothing to do but stare at Charles. And he did it. “I don’t know what you are talking of, Charley. What bills have I settled for you?”

“The two wretched bills I had accepted and went about in fear of. You know. Was it not you who paid them?”

“Are they paid?”

“Yes. All paid and done with. It must

have been you, Frank. There's nobody else that it could have been."

"My good lad, I assure you I know nothing whatever about it. Where should I get a hundred pounds from? What could induce you to think it was I?"

Charles told the tale—all he knew of it. They wasted some minutes in conjectures, and then came to the conclusion that it must have been Major Raynor who had paid. That he had become acquainted in some way with Charles's trouble and had taken the means to relieve it. A lame conclusion, as both felt: for, setting aside the fact that the poor Major was short of money himself, to pay bills for his son stealthily was eminently uncharacteristic of him: he would have been far more likely to let the whole house know of it, and reproach Charley in its hearing. But they were fain to rest in the belief, from sheer lack of any other benefactor to fix upon. Not a soul was there in the wide world, so far as Charley knew, to come forth in this manner, save his father.

"I think it must have been so," concluded Charles. "Perhaps the dear old man got to know, through Lamb, of Huddles' visit that day."

“And what of Eagles’ Nest?” asked Frank, as he passed back into the surgery with Charles, and sent the boy into the kitchen to his dinner. “Has George Atkinson taken possession yet?”

“We have heard nothing of Eagles’ Nest, Frank; we don’t care to hear. Possession? Of course he has. You may depend upon it he would make an indecent rush into it the very day after we came out of it, the wretch! If he did not the same night.”

Frank could not help a smile at the burst of indignation. “Atkinson ought to do something for you, Charley,” he said. “After turning you out of one home, the least he could do would be to get you another. I daresay he might put you into some post or other.”

“And do you suppose I’d take it!” fired Charles, his eyes ablaze. “What queer ideas you must possess, Frank! You are as bad as Edina. As if ——”

“Oh, if you please, Dr. Brown, would you come to mother,” interrupted a small child, darting in at the open door. “She have fell through the back parlour window while cleaning of it, and her arm be broke, she says.”

“Who is your mother, little one?”

“At the corner shop, please sir. Number eleven.”

“Tell her I will come directly.”

Charles was taking up his hat, to leave. “Why does she call you Dr. Brown?” he questioned, as the child ran off, and Frank was making ready to follow her and summoning Sam to mind the surgery.

“Half the people here call me so. It comes more ready to them than the new name. Good-bye, Charley. My love to them all at home. Come again soon.”

He sped away in the wake of the child. Charley turned the other way on his road homewards, carrying with him a very disparaging opinion of Lambeth.

In the small back sitting-room, underneath its two lighted gas-burners, stood Mrs. Frank Raynor, her heart beating faster than usual, her breath seeming to choke her. She felt partly frightened, partly dazed by what she saw—by the aspect of the place she was brought to, as her new home. Frank had in a degree prepared her for it while they came along in the cab which brought them, Daisy’s boxes piled on the top of it: but either he had

done it insufficiently, or else she had failed to realize his description of what he called the "humble den," for the sight of it came upon her with a shock. Both as Margaret St. Clare and as Margaret Raynor her personal experiences of dwelling-places had been sunny ones.

The clock was striking ten when the cab had drawn up in Mark Street. She looked out to see why it stopped. She saw the narrow street, the inferior locality, the small shops on either side. The one before which they had halted appeared to be a shop too: the door stood open, a gas-burner was alight inside.

"Why are we stopping here, Frank?"

Frank, hastening to jump out, did not hear the question. He turned to help her.

"This is not the place, is it?" she cried in doubt.

"Yes, this is it, Daisy."

He took her inside, piloted her between the two counters into the lighted side room, and turned back to see to the luggage; leaving her utterly aghast, bewildered, and standing as still as a statue.

The door at the end of the room opened and a curious old figure, attired in a chintz gown

of antique shape, with a huge bow of green ribbon on her muslin cap, appeared at it. Eve curtsied to her new mistress: the new mistress stared at the servant.

"You are welcome to your home, ma'am. We are glad to see you. And, please, would you like the supper tray brought in?"

"Is—is this Mr. Raynor's?" questioned Daisy, in a tone that seemed to say she dreaded the answer.

"Sure enough it is, ma'am, for the present. He is here during the master's absence."

Daisy said no more. She only stood still in her grievous astonishment, striving to comprehend it all, and to hush her dismayed heart. The luggage was being brought indoors with sundry bumps, and Eve went to help with it. Frank found his wife seated on the horsehair sofa, when he came in; and he caught the blank look on her pale face.

"You are tired, Daisy. You would like to take your things off. Come upstairs, and I will show you your bed-room."

Lighting a candle, he led the way, Daisy following him mechanically up the steep and confined staircase, to which she herself seemed to present a contrast, with her supremely

fashionable attire : costly black gauze, relieved by frillings of soft white net.

“ The room’s not very large, Daisy,” he said, entering one on the first floor, the window looking out on some back leads. “ There’s a larger one in front on the upper landing, but I thought you would prefer this, and it is better furnished. It was Brown’s room. He said I had better take to it, for if I went up higher I might not hear the night bell.”

“ Yes,” replied Daisy faintly, untying the strings of her bonnet. “ Was it a—a shop we came through ? ”

“ That was the surgery. It used to be a shop, and Brown never took the trouble to alter its appearance.”

“ Have you always to come through it on entering the house ? ”

“ Yes. There is no other entrance. The houses in these crowded places are confined for space, you see, Daisy. I will help Sam to bring up the boxes,” added Frank, disappearing.

When finally left to herself, Margaret sat down and burst into a passionate flood of tears. It seemed to her that, in coming to dwell in this place, she must lose caste for ever. Frank

called to her presently, to know whether she was not coming down.

Drying her eyes as she best could, she took the candle in her hand to descend. On the opposite side of the small landing, a door stood open to a sitting-room, and she looked in. A fair-sized room this, for it was over both the surgery and the parlour, and a very nice room too, its Brussels carpet of a rich dark hue, its chairs and window hangings to match, its furniture good and handsome. She put the candle on a console, crossed to one of the windows, and gazed down at the street.

Late though it was, people were surging to and fro; not at all the kind of people Daisy had been accustomed to. Over the way was a small fish shop; a ragged man and boy, standing before it, were eating periwinkles. To pass one's days in such a street as this must be frightfully depressing, and Mrs. Raynor burst into tears again.

"Why, my darling, what is the matter?"

Frank, coming up in search of her, found her sobbing wildly, her head buried on the arm of one of the damask chairs. She lifted it, and let it lodge upon his breast.

"You are disappointed, Daisy. I see it."

“It—it is such a poor street, Frank ; and—and such a house !”

Frank flushed red. He felt the complaint to his heart's core.

“It is only for a time, Daisy. Until I can get into something better. If that may ever be !” he added to himself, as Blase Pellet's image rose before his mind.

Daisy sobbed more softly. He was holding her to him.

“I know, my poor girl, it is very inferior ; altogether different from anything you have been accustomed to ; but this home is better than none at all. We can at least be together and be happy here.”

“Yes, we can,” replied Daisy, rallying her spirits and her sweet nature, as she lifted her face to look in his. “I married you for worse, as well as for better, Frank, my best love. We *will* be happy in it.”

“As happy as a king and queen in a fairy-tale,” rejoined Frank, a whole world of unmitigated hope in his tone.

And that was Daisy's instalment in her London home.

CHAPTER X.

A NIGHT ALARM.

MISFORTUNES seldom come alone. Many of us, unhappily, have had, times and again, only too good cause to learn the truth of the saying; but few, it is to be hoped, have experienced it in an equal degree with the Raynors. For another calamity was in store for them: one that was at least, taking the difference between their present and past circumstances into consideration, as distressing as the ejection from Eagles' Nest.

But it did not happen quite immediately. The weeks were calmly passing, and Mrs. Raynor felt in spirits; for two more day-scholars had entered at the half-quarter, and another boarder was promised for Michaelmas. So that matters might be said to be progressing satisfactorily, though monotonously.

Monotony, however, does not suit young people, especially if they have been suddenly plunged into it. It did not suit Charles and

Alice Raynor. Contrasting ever, as they were, the present state of enforced quiet and obscurity with the past life at Eagles' Nest, its show, its society, its expensive luxuries, no wonder that they felt well-nigh weary unto death. At first it was almost unbearable. But they could not help themselves : *it had to be endured*. Charles was worse off than Alice ; she had her school duties to occupy her in the day ; he had nothing. Colonel Cockburn had not yet returned to London, and Charles told himself and his mother that he must wait for him. As the weeks went on, some relief suggested itself from this irksome dreariness—perhaps was the result of it.

The alleviation was found in private theatricals. They had made the acquaintance of some neighbours, named Earle ; had become intimate with them. The circumstances of the two families were much alike, and perhaps this at first drew them together. Captain Earle—a post captain in the Royal Navy—had left but a slender income for his wife at his death : just enough to enable her to live in a quiet manner, and to bring up her children inexpensively. They were gentlepeople ; and that fact went a long way with the Raynors.

The young Earles—four of them—were all in their teens; the eldest son had a post in Somerset House, the younger one went to a day-school in the neighbourhood, the two daughters had finished their education, and were at home. It chanced that these young people had a passion just now for private theatricals, and the Raynors caught the infection. After witnessing a performance at Mrs. Earle's of a popular comedy, Charles and Alice Raynor got up from it wild to perform one at their own home.

And probably the very eagerness with which they entered upon and pursued the fancy, arose out of the recent monotony of their lives. Mrs. Raynor looked grave: she did not know whether the parents of her pupils would approve of private theatricals. But her children over-ruled her objection, and she could but yield to them. She always did.

They fixed upon Goldsmith's comedy, "She Stoops to Conquer." A thoroughly good play in itself. Charles procured some sixpenny copies of it, and drew his pen through any part that he considered unsuitable to present taste, which shortened the play much. He chose the part of Charles Marlowe; Alice that

of Miss Hardcastle ; Mrs. Earle, who liked the amusement as much as her children did, would be Mrs. Hardcastle ; her eldest daughter Constance Neville ; and the young Somerset House man Tony Lumpkin. The other characters were taken by some acquaintances of the Earles.

And now, fairly launched upon this new project, the monotony of the house disappeared : for the time, they even forgot to lament after Eagles' Nest. Dresses, gauzes, tinsel, green baize curtains, and all the rest of it, were to be lent by the Earles ; so that no cost was involved. The school-room was to be the theatre, and the pupils were to have seats amid the audience.

Charles entered into it with wonderful energy. He never now had a minute for lying on three chairs, or for stretching his hands above his head to help a mournful yawn. A letter that arrived from Edina, requiring him to transact a little matter of business, was wholly neglected ; it would have involved his going to the City, and he said he had no time for it.

Edina had intended to insure the new furniture in the same Cornish office that her father had insured his in for so many years.

Perhaps she had more faith in it than in the London offices. However, after some negotiation with the Cornish company upon her return to Trennach, they declined the offer, as the furniture it related to was so far away, and recommended to her a safe and good insurance company in the City of London. She wrote to Mrs. Raynor, desiring that Charles should at once go to the City to do what was necessary and secure the policy. Charles put it off upon the plea that he was too busy ; it could wait.

"Charley, I think you ought to do it, if only to comply with Edina's wish," urged Mrs. Raynor.

"And so I will, mother, as soon as I get a little time."

"It would only take you half a day, my dear."

"But I can't spare the half day. Do you think the house is going to be burnt down?"

"Nonsense, Charley!"

"Then where's the need of hurry?" he persisted. "I have looked after everybody else's part so much and the arrangements altogether, that I scarcely know a word yet of my own. I stuck yesterday at the very first sentence Charles Marlowe has to say."

Mrs. Raynor, never able to contend against

a stronger will, gave in as usual, saying no more. And Charles was left unmolested.

But in the midst of this arduous labour, for other people as well as for himself, Charles received news from Colonel Cockburn. The Colonel wrote to say he was in London for a couple of days, and Charles might call in St. James's Street the following morning.

This mandate Charles would not put off, in spite of the exigencies of the theatricals; and of the first rehearsal, two evenings hence. The grand performance was to take place during the few days' holiday Mrs. Raynor gave at Michaelmas; and Michaelmas would be upon them in a little more than a week.

Charles went to St. James's Street. And there his hopes, in regard to the future, received a very decided check. Colonel Cockburn—who turned out to be a feeble and deaf old gentleman—informed Charles that he could not help him to obtain a commission, and moreover, explained many things to him, and assured him that he had no chance of obtaining one. Nobody, the Colonel said, could get one now, unless he had been specially prepared for it. He would advise Charles, he added, to embrace a civil

profession ; say the law. It was very easy to go to the Bar, he believed ; involving only, so far as he knew, a certain number of eaten dinners. All this sounded very cruel to Charles Raynor. Otherwise the Colonel was kind. He kept him for the day, and took him to dine at his club.

It was late when Charles got home ; thoroughly tired. Disappointment of itself inflicts weariness. Mrs. Raynor felt terribly disheartened at the news.

“ There have been so many weeks lost, you see, Charley ! ”

“ Yes,” returned Charles, gloomily. “ I’m sure I don’t know what to be at now. Cockburn suggested the Bar. He says one may qualify for almost nothing.”

“ We will talk of it to-morrow, Charley,” said Mrs. Raynor, “ It is past bed-time, and I am tired. You were not thinking of sitting up later, were you, my dear ? ” she added, as Charles took up “ *She Stoops to Conquer* ” from a side table.

“ Oh well—I suppose not, if you say it is so late,” he replied.

“ The dresses have come, ready for the rehearsal, Charley,” whispered Alice, as they

were going upstairs. "I have put them in your room. Charlotte Earle and I have been trying on ours. I mean to wear one of Edina's brown holland aprons while I am supposed to be a barmaid."

"I'll be shot if I know half my part," grumbled Charley. "It *was* a bother, having to go out to-day!"

"You can learn it before Michaelmas."

"Of course I can. But one likes to be perfect at rehearsal. Good night."

Charles turned into his room, and shut the door. It was a good-sized apartment, one that Mrs. Raynor destined for boarders later, when the school should have increased. The first thing he saw, piled up between the bed and the wall, partly on a low chest of drawers, partly on the floor, was a confused heap of gay clothes and other articles: the theatrical paraphernalia that had been brought round from Mrs. Earle's. Topmost of all, lay a yellow gauze dress edged with tinsel. Charles, all his interest in the coming rehearsal reviving at the sight, touched it gingerly here and there, and wondered whether it might be the state robe for one of the younger ladies, or for Tony Lumpkin's mother.

"I wish to goodness I was more perfect in

my part!" cried he, pulling corners out of the other things to see what their bulk consisted of. "Suppose I give half-an-hour to it, before I get into bed?"

The little book was still in his hand. He lodged the candle on the edge of the drawers amidst the finery, and sat down near, facing the side of the bed, and pausing in the act of taking off his coat. Alfred lay on the far side of the bed, fast asleep. A night or two ago, for this was by no means the first time he had sat down in his chamber to con the sayings of young Marlowe, Charles took his coat off, dropped asleep, and woke up with the cold in his arms when the night was half over. So he concluded that he would keep the coat on now.

Precisely the same event took place: Charles fell asleep. Tired with his day's journey, he had not studied the book five minutes when it fell from his hands. He was soon in a sound slumber. How long he remained in it he never knew, but he was awakened by a shout and a cry. Fire!

A shout and a cry, and a great glare of light. Fire? Yes, it was fire. Whether Charles had thrown out his arm in his sleep and turned the

candle over, or whether a spark from it had shot out spontaneously, he knew not, never would know ; but the pile of inflammable gauzes and other stuffs lying there had caught light. The flames had penetrated to the bed, and finally awakened Alfred. It was Alfred who shouted the alarm. Perhaps Charles owed his life to the fact that he had kept his coat on : its cloth sleeve was scorched.

These scenes have been often described before : it is of no use to detail another of them here. A household aroused in the depth of the night ; terrified women and children shrieking and running ; flames mounting, smoke suffocating. They all escaped with life, taking refuge at the dwelling of a neighbour ; but the house and its contents were burnt to the ground.

“ MY DEAR EDINA,—I never began a letter like this in all my life ; it will have nothing in it but ill-news and misery. Whether I am doing wrong in writing to you, I hardly know. My mother would not write. She feels a delicacy in disclosing our calamities to you, after your generous kindness in providing us with a home ; and she must be ashamed to tell you

of me. The home is lost, Edina, and I am the cause.

“ I am too wretched to go into details ; and, if I did, you might not have patience to read them ; so I will tell the story in as few words as I can. We—I, Alice, and the Earles : you may remember them as living in the low, square house, near the church—were going to act a play, ‘ She Stoops to Conquer.’ I sat up last Wednesday night to study my part, dropped asleep, and somehow the candle set light to some stage dresses that were lying ready in my chamber. When I woke up, the room was in flames. None of us are hurt ; but the house is burnt ; and everything that was in it.

“ This is not all. I hate to make the next confession to you worse than I hated this one. The insurance on the furniture had not been effected. I had put it off and off ; though my mother urged me more than once to go and do it.

“ You have spoken sometimes, Edina, of the necessity of acting aright so that we may enjoy a peaceful conscience. If you only knew what mine is now, and the torment of remorse I endure, even you might feel a passing shade of pity for me. There are moments when the weight seems more than I can bear.

“ We have taken a small, cheap lodging near ; No. 5, in the next side street ; and what the future is to be I cannot tell. It of course falls to my lot now to keep them, as it is through me they have lost their home, and *I shall try and do it*. Life will be no play-day with me now.

“ I thought it my duty to tell you this, Edina. While holding back from the task, I have yet said to myself that you would reproach me if I did not. And you will not mistake the motive, since you are aware that I know you parted with every shilling you had, to provide us with the last home.

“ Write a few words of consolation to my mother ; no one can do it as you can : and *don't spare me to her*.

“ Your unhappy cousin,

“ CHARLES.”

Frank Raynor once made the remark in our hearing that somehow everybody turned to Edina when in trouble. Charley had instinctively turned to her. Not because it might lie in his duty to let her know what had come to pass, to confess his own share in it, his imprudent folly ; but for the sake of his mother. Though Edina had no more money to give

away, and could not help them to another home, he knew that if anyone could breathe a word of comfort to her, it was Edina.

One thing lay more heavily upon his conscience than all the rest ; and if he had not mentioned this to Edina, it was not that he wished to spare himself, for he was in the mood to confess everything that could tell against him, almost with exaggeration, but that in the hurry of writing he had unintentionally omitted it. On one of the previous nights that he had been studying his part, Mrs. Raynor caught sight of the light under his door. Opening it, she found him sitting on the bed in his shirt sleeves, reading. There and then she spoke of the danger, and begged him never to sit up at night again. The fact was this: Charles Raynor had nothing on earth to do with his time ; an idle young fellow, as he was, needed not the night for work ; but his habits had grown so desultory that he could settle to no occupation in the day-time.

The answer from Edina did not come. Charles said nothing of having written to her ; but he did fully hope and expect Edina would write to his mother. Morning after morning he posted himself outside the door to watch for

the postman ; and morning after morning the man passed and gave him nothing.

“Edina is too angry to write,” concluded Charles at last. “This has been too much for even her.” And he betook himself to his walk to London.

No repentance could be more thoroughly sincere than was Charles Raynor's. The last dire calamity had taken all his pride and his high notions out of him. The family were helpless, hopeless ; and he had rendered them so. No clothes, no food, no prospects, no home, no money. A few articles of wearing apparel had been flung out of the burning house, chiefly pertaining to Alice, but not many. All the money Mrs. Raynor had in the world—four bank-notes of five pounds each—had been consumed. There had chanced to be a little gold in Charles's pockets, given him to pay the insurance, some taxes, and other needful matters ; and that was all they had to go on with. Night after night Charles lay awake, lamenting his folly, and making huge resolves to remedy it.

They must have food to eat, though it were but bread and cheese ; they must have a roof over them, let it be ever so confined. And

there was only himself to provide this. Any thought of setting up a school again could not present itself to their minds after the late ignominious failure: they had no means to do it, and the little pupils had gone from them for ever. No; all lay on Charles. He studied the columns of the *Times*, and walked up and down London till he was footsore; footsore and heartsick; trying to get one of the desirable places advertised as vacant. In vain.

He had been doing this now for four or five days. On this, the sixth day, when he reached home after his weary walk, the landlady of the house stood at the open door, bargaining for one of the pots of musk that a man was carrying about for sale. Charles wished her good evening as he passed on to the parlour; and there he had a surprise, for in it sat Edina. She had evidently just arrived. Her travelling cloak was thrown on the back of a chair, her black mantle was but unpinned, her bonnet was still on. Katie and Robert sat at her feet; the tea-things were on the table, Alice was cutting bread and butter, and Mrs. Raynor was sobbing. Charles held out his hand with hesitation, feeling that it was not worthy for Edina to touch, and a red flush dyed his face.

After tea, the conversation turned on their present position, on plans and projects. Ah! what poor ones they were! Mrs. Raynor acknowledged freely that she had only a few shillings left.

"Have you been paid for the pupils?" asked Edina.

"No," replied Mrs. Raynor. "I have not yet sent in the accounts. The children were not with me quite a quarter, you know, and perhaps some of the parents may make that a plea, combined with the termination, for not paying me at all. Even if I do get the money, there are debts to pay out of it: the tradespeople, the stationer, the maid-servant's wages. Not much will be left of it."

"Then, Mary, let us settle to-night what is to be done."

"What can be settled?" returned Mrs. Raynor hopelessly. "I see nothing at all before us. Except starvation."

"Don't talk of starvation, Mary, while Heaven spares us the use of our minds to plan, and our hands to work," said Edina, pleasantly; and the bright tone cheered Mrs. Raynor. "For one thing, I have come up to live with you."

“Edina!”

“I cannot provide you with another home : you know why,” continued Edina : “but I can share with you all I have left—my income. It is so poor a one that perhaps you will hardly thank me for it, saddled with myself; but at least it is something to fall back upon, and we can all share and share together.”

Mrs. Raynor burst into tears again. Never strong in resources, the repeated calamities she had been subjected to of late had tended to render her next door to helpless both in body and spirit. Charles turned round to Edina, brushing his eyelashes.

“I cannot presume to thank you, Edina : you would not care to receive thanks from me. I am hoping to support them.”

“In what manner, Charles?” asked Edina ; and her tone was as kind as usual. “I hear you have lost hopes of the commission.”

“By getting into some situation and earning a weekly salary at it,” spoke Charles bravely. “The worst is, situations seem to be so unattainable.”

“How do you know they are unattainable?”

“I have done nothing the last few days but try after one. Besides the advertised places, I

can't tell you how many banks and other establishments I have made bold to go into, asking if they want a clerk. A hundred a year would be something."

"It would be a great deal," replied Edina significantly. "Salaries to that amount are hard to find. I question if you would get the half of it at first."

A blank look overspread Charley's face. Edina's judgment had always been good.

"But why do you question it, Edina?"

"Because you are inexperienced: totally unused to business; to work of any kind."

"Yes, that's what some of the people say when they question me."

"There is one person who might help you to such a situation if he would," observed Edina slowly. "But I shall offend you if I speak of him, Charles: as I did once before."

"You mean George Atkinson!"

"I do. If he chose to put you into his bank, he might give you any salary he pleased; and his will might be good to do it, whether you earned it or not. I think he would if I asked him."

There was a pause. Edina's thoughts were

carrying her back to the old days when George Atkinson had been all the world to her. It would cost her something to apply to him : but for the sake of this helpless family, she must bring her mind to do it.

“What do you say, Charles?”

“I say yes, Edina. I have nothing but humble-pie to swallow just now : it will be only another slice of it. Banking work seems to consist of adding up columns of figures perpetually : I should get expert at it no doubt in time.”

“Then I will go to-morrow and see whether he is in town,” decided Edina. “If not, I must travel down to Eagles’ Nest.”

“You might write instead,” suggested Mrs. Raynor.

“No, Mary, I will not write. A personal interview gives so much more chance of success in an application of this nature.”

“*I* could not apply to him personally,” sighed Mrs. Raynor.

But Edina never shrank from a duty ; and the next morning saw her at the banking-house of Atkinson and Street : the very house where she had spent those few blissful days of her early life when she had learned to love. Mr.

Street and his wife lived in it now. She went to the private door, and asked for him. He had known her in those days; and a smile actually crossed his calm cold face as he shook hands with her: and to her he proved more communicative than he generally showed himself to the world.

"Is Mr. Atkinson in town?" she inquired, when a few courtesies had passed.

"No. He ——"

"I feared not," quickly spoke Edina, for she had quite anticipated the answer. "I thought he would be at Eagles' Nest."

"But he is not at Eagles' Nest," interposed the banker. "He is on the high seas, on his way to New Zealand."

"On his way to New Zealand!" echoed Edina, hardly thinking, in her surprise, that she heard correctly.

"He went away again immediately. I do not suppose he was in London a fortnight altogether."

"Then he could not have made much stay at Eagles' Nest?"

"He did not make any stay at it," replied Edwin Street. "I don't think he went down to Eagles' Nest at all. If he did go, he came

back the same day, for he never slept one night away from this house throughout his sojourn."

"But what could be the reason?" reiterated Edina wonderingly. "Why has he gone away so soon again?"

"He put it upon the score of his health, Miss Raynor. England does not agree with him. At least, he fancies it does not."

"And who is living at Eagles' Nest?"

"A Mr. Fairfax. He is a land agent and steward, a thoroughly efficient man, and he has been appointed steward to the charge of the estate. His orders are to take care of it, and to renovate it by all possible means that money and labour can do. Mr. Atkinson was informed on good authority that it had been neglected by Major Raynor."

"That's true," thought Edina.

"The first thing Mr. Atkinson did on his arrival, was to inquire whether the estate had been well cared for and kept up since Mrs. Atkinson's death. I was not able to say that it had been: I was obliged to tell him that the contrary was the fact. He then questioned my brother, and other people who were acquainted with the truth. It vexed him: and, as I tell

you, he is now doing all he can to remedy the late neglect."

"I am very much surprised that Mr. Atkinson did not go down to see into it for himself!" said Edina.

"Long residence in foreign lands often conduces to foster indolent habits," remarked the banker.

Edina sighed. Was her mission to be a fruitless one? Taking a moment's counsel with herself, she resolved to disclose its purport to Edwin Street. And she did so: asking him to give Charles Raynor a stool in his counting-house, and a salary with it.

But Mr. Street declined. His very manner seemed to freeze at the request. A young man, brought up as Mr. Charles Raynor had been, could not possibly be of any use in a bank, he observed.

"Suppose Mr. Atkinson were here, and had complied with my request to put him in?—what then?" said Edina.

"In that case he would have come in," was the candid answer. "But Mr. Atkinson is not here; in his absence I exercise my own discretion; and I am bound to tell you that I cannot make room for the young man. Don't

seek to put Charles Raynor in a bank : he is not fitted for the post in any way, and might do harm in it instead of good. Take an experienced man's advice for once, Miss Raynor."

"It has spared me the pain of the interview with *him*," thought Edina, as she said good morning to Mr. Street. "But what a strange thing that he should go away without seeing Eagles' Nest !"

PART THE THIRD.



PART THE THIRD.



CHAPTER I.

LAUREL COTTAGE.

A COTTAGE. A roomy cottage in a small by-road amid the environs of Kennington, bordering on South Lambeth. Frost and snow on the ground outside, and biting blasts in the air: inside, sitting round the scanty fire in a bare-looking but not very small parlour, Mrs. Raynor, Edina, and the younger children, the two former busily employed making brown chenille nets for the hair.

When Edina was out one day looking about for some abode for them, this dwelling fell under her eye. It was called Laurel Cottage, as some white letters on the slate-coloured wooden gate testified: probably because a dwarf laurel tree flourished between the palings and the window. Hanging in the window was a card, setting forth that "lodgings" were to

be let : and Edina entered. Could the Raynors have gone away into the country, she would have liked to take a whole cottage to themselves ; but then there would have been a difficulty about furniture. It was necessary they should stay in London, as Charles still expected to get employment there, and they must not be too far off the business parts of it, for he would have to walk to and fro night and morning. Laurel Cottage had a landlady, one Mrs. Fox, and a young boy, her son, in it. The rooms to let were four ; parlour, kitchen, and two bedrooms. She asked ten shillings per week : but that the house was shabby inside and poorly furnished, she might have asked more. Edina said freely she could afford to give only eight shillings per week ; and at length the bargain was struck. Edina's income was just one pound per week, fifty-two pounds a year ; eight shillings out of it for rent was a formidable sum. It left but twelve shillings for all necessaries ; and poor anxious Edina, who had all the care and responsibility on her own shoulders, and felt that she had it, did not see the future very clearly before her : but at present there was nothing to be done, save bow to circumstances. So here they were in Laure

Cottage, with a dull, dreary look-out of waste ground for a view, and some stunted trees overshadowing the gate.

Alice had gone into a school as teacher. It was situated near Richmond, in Surrey, and was chiefly for the reception of children whose parents were in India. She would have to stay during the holidays: but that was so much the better, as there was no place for her at home. Alfred ran on errands, and made a show of saying his lessons to his mother between whiles. Mrs. Raynor taught Kate and little Robert; Edina did the work, for they were not waited on; Charles spent his time tramping about after a situation. To eke out the narrow income, Edina had tried to get some sewing, or other work, to do; she had found out a City house that dealt largely in ladies' hair nets, and the house agreed to supply her with some to make. All their spare time she and Mrs. Raynor devoted to these nets; Charles carrying the parcels backwards and forwards. But for those nets, they must certainly have been three parts starved. With the nets, they were not much better.

In some mysterious way, Edina had managed to provide them all with a change of clothing,

to replace some of that which had been burnt. They never knew how she did it. Only Edina herself knew that. A few articles of plate that had been her father's; a few ornaments of her own: these were turned into money.

The light of the wintry afternoon was fading apace; the icicles outside were growing less clear to the eye. Little Robert, sitting on the floor, said at last that he could not see his picture-book. Mrs. Raynor, looking young still in her widow's cap, let fall the net on her lap for a minute's rest, and looked at the fire through her tears. Over and over again did these tears rise unbidden now. Edina, neat and nice-looking as ever, in her soft black dress, her brown hair smoothly braided on either side her attractive face—attractive in its intelligence, its goodness—caught sight of the tears from the low chair where she sat opposite.

"Take courage, Mary," she gently said. "Things will take a turn sometime."

Mrs. Raynor caught up her work and a sob together. Katie, in a grumbling tone, said she was sure it must be tea-time. They had had only potatoes for dinner, so the child was hungry. Edina rose, brought in a tray from

the small kitchen, which was on the same floor as the room they sat in, and began to put out the cups and saucers.

“What a long time Alfred is!” cried the little girl.

Alfred came in almost as she spoke, a can of milk in his hand. By sending to a dairy half a mile off, Edina had discovered that she could get unadulterated skimmed milk cheaper than any left by the milkman; so Alfred went for it morning and night.

“It is so jolly hard!” exclaimed he, with a glowing face, alluding to the ice in the roads. “The slides are beautiful.”

“Don’t you get sliding when you have the milk in your hand,” advised Edina. “Take off your cap and comforter, lad. The bread’s ready.”

She was cutting some slices of bread for him to toast. Unused to hard fare, the children could not yet get into eating dry bread with any relish: so, when there was nothing to put upon it, neither butter nor dripping, neither treacle nor honey, Edina had the bread toasted. They ate that readily. Alfred knelt down before the parlour fire—the only fire they had—and began to toast. The kettle was singing on the

hob. Edina turned the milk out of the can into a jug.

They were sitting down to the tea table when Charles came in. A glance at his weary and dispirited face told Edina that he had met with no more luck this day than usual. Putting aside a brown paper parcel that he carried, containing a fresh supply of material to be made into nets, he took his place at the table. How hungry he was, how sick from want of food, no one but himself knew. And how poor the food was that he could be supplied with !

But for the later experience of his life, Charles could not have believed that it was so difficult for a young man to obtain a situation in London. Edina, less hopeful than he, would not have believed it. Charles Raynor had not been brought up to work of any kind, had never done any ; and this seemed to be one of the stumbling-blocks in the way of his success. Perhaps he looked too much of a gentleman ; perhaps his refined manners and tones told against him in the eyes of men of business, testifying that he might prove unfit for work : at any rate, he had not found anyone to take him. Another impediment was this : no sooner

did a situation fall vacant, than so large a number of applicants made a rush to fill it. Only one of them could be engaged: and it never happened to be Charles. Charles got a sight of the *Times* advertisements in the morning, through the friendliness of a newsvendor near. He would read of a clerk being wanted in some place or another in that great mart of commerce, London, and away he would go, at the pace of a steam-engine, to present himself. But he invariably found other applicants there before him, and as invariably he seemed not to have the slightest chance.

The disappointment was beginning to tell upon him. There were times when he felt almost mad. His conscience had been awake these last many bitter weeks, and the prolonged strain often seemed more than he could bear. Had it been only himself! Ah then, as it seemed to Charles Raynor, all would have been easy. He could enlist for a soldier; he could hire himself to the labourers' emigration society to go out for a term of years to Australia, or to Canada; he could become a porter at a railway station. These wild thoughts (though perhaps they could not be called wild in his present circumstances) passed through his

mind continually : but he had to fling them aside as visionary.

Visionary, because his object was, not to support himself alone, but the family. At least to help to support them. Charles Raynor was sensitive to a degree ; and every morsel he was obliged to eat seemed as though it would choke him, because it lessened the portion of those at home. A man cannot wholly starve : but it often seemed to Charles that he really and truly would prefer to starve, and to bear the painful martyrdom of the process, rather than be a burden upon the straits of his mother and Edina ; straits to which he had reduced them. Sometimes he came home by way of Frank's and took tea there—and Frank, suspecting the truth of matters, took care to add some substantial dish to the bread-and-butter. But Charles, in his delicacy of feeling, would not do this often : the house, in point of fact, was Mr. Max Brown's, not Frank's.

How utterly subdued in spirit his mother had become, Charles did not like to see and note. She kept about, but there could be no mistake that she was both sick and suffering. Oh, if he could but lift her out of this poverty to a home of ease and plenty ! he would say

to himself, a whole world of self-reproach at work within him : if this later year or two could be blotted out of time and memory, and they had their modest home again near Bath !

No ; it might not be. The events that time brings forth must endure in the memory for ever ; our actions in it must remain in the Book of the Recording Angel as facts of the past. The home at Bath had gone ; the one at Eagles' Nest had gone ; the few transient weeks of the school-home had gone : and here they were, hopeless and prospectless, eating hard fare at Laurel Cottage.

They had left off asking him now in an evening how he had fared during the day, and what his luck had been. His answer was ever the same : he had had no luck ; he had done nothing : and it was given with pain so evident and intense, that they refrained in very compassion. On this evening Charles spoke himself of it ; spoke to Edina. The children were in bed. Mrs. Raynor had gone, as usual, to hear them say their prayers, and had not yet come back again.

“ I wonder how much longer this is to go on, Edina ? ”

Edina looked up from her work. "Do you mean your non-success, Charley?"

"As if I could mean anything else!" he rejoined, his tone utterly subdued. "I think of nothing but that, morning, noon, and night."

"It is a long lane that has no turning, Charles. And I don't think patience and perseverance often go unrewarded in the long run. How did you fare to-day?"

"Just as usual. Never got a single chance at all. Look here, Edina—my boots are beginning to wear out."

A rather ominous pause. Charley was stretching out his right foot.

"You have another pair, you know, Charley. These must be mended."

"But I am thinking of the time when neither pair will mend any longer. Edina, I wonder whether life is worth living for?"

"Charley, we cannot see into the future," spoke Edina, pausing for a moment in her work to look at him, a freshly-begun net in her hand. "If we could, we might foresee, even now, how very good and necessary this discipline is for us. It may be, Charley, that you needed it; that we all needed it, more or less. Take it as a cross that has come direct from

God ; bear it as well as you are able ; do your best in it and trust to Him. Rely upon it that, in His own good time, He will lighten it for you. And He will take care of you until it is lightened."

Charles took up the poker ; recollected himself, and put it down again. Fires might not be lavishly stirred now, as they had been at Eagles' Nest. Mrs. Raynor had been obliged to make a rule that no one should touch the fire save herself and Edina.

"It is not for myself I am thus impatient to get a place," resumed Charles. "But for the rest of them, I would go to-morrow and enlist. If I could only earn twenty pounds a year to begin with, it would be a help ; better than nothing."

Some two or three months back he had said, If I can only get a hundred a year. What lessons of humility does adversity teach !

"Twenty pounds a year would pay the rent," observed Edina. "I never thought it was so hard to get into something. I supposed that when young men wanted employment they had but to seek it. It does seem wrong, does it not, Charley, that an able and willing young fellow should not be able to work when he wishes ?"

“My enlisting would relieve you of myself : and the thought, that it would, is often in my mind,” observed Charles. “On the other hand ——”

“On the other hand, you had better not think of it,” she interposed firmly. “We should not like to see you in the ranks, Charley. A common soldier is ——”

“Hush, Edina ! Here comes mother.”

But luck was dawning for Charley. Only a small slice of luck, it is true ; and what, not so very long ago, he would have scorned and scoffed at. Estimating things by his present hopeless condition, it looked fair enough.

One bleak morning, a day or two after the above conversation, Charley was slowly pacing Fleet Street, wondering where he could go next, what do. A situation, advertised in that morning's paper in flaming colours, had brought him up, post haste. As usual, it turned out a failure : to be successful, the applicant must put down fifty pounds in cash. So that chance was gone : and there was Charles, uncertain, hungry, miserable.

“Halloa, Raynor ! Is it you ?”

A young stripling about his own age had run against him. At the first moment Charles

did not know him : but recollection flashed on his mind. It was Peter Tanting : a lad who had been a schoolfellow of his in Somersetshire.

"I am going to get my dinner," said Tanting, after a few sentences had passed. "Will you come and take some with me?"

Too thankful for the offer, Charles followed him into the Rainbow. And over the viands they grew confidential. Tanting was in a large printing and publishing establishment close by; his brother Fred was at a solicitor's, nearly out of his articles.

"Fred's ill," observed Peter. "He thinks it must be the fogs of this precious London that affect him : and I think so too. Any way, he coughs frightfully, and has had to give up for a day or two. I went to his office this morning to say he was in bed with a plaster on his chest ; and a fine way they were in at hearing it : wanting him to go, whether or not. One of their copying clerks has left ; and they can't hear of another all in a hurry."

"I wonder whether I should suit them?" spoke Charles on the spur of the moment, a flush rising to his face and a light to his eyes.

"*You!*" cried Peter Tanting.

And then Charles, encouraged perhaps by the good cheer, told a little of his history to Tanting, and why he must get a situation of some sort that would bring in its returns. Tanting, an open-hearted, country-bred lad, became all eagerness to help him, and offered to introduce him to the solicitor's firm there and then.

"It is near the Temple; almost close by," said he: "Prestleigh and Preen. A good firm: one of the best in London. Let us go at once."

Charles accompanied him to the place. Had he been aware that this same legal firm counted Mr. George Atkinson among its clients, he might have declined to try to enter it. It used to be Callard and Prestleigh. But old Mr. Callard had died very soon after Frank held the interview with him that was told of: and Charles, under the new designation, Prestleigh and Preen, did not recognise the old firm.

Peter Tanting introduced Charles to the managing clerk, Mr. Stroud. Mr. Stroud, a very tall man wearing silver-rimmed spectacles, with iron grey hair and a crabbed sort of manner, put some questions to Charles, and then told him to sit down and wait. Mr. Prestleigh

was in his private room; but it would not do to trouble him with these matters: Mr. Preen was out. Peter Tanting, in his good nature, said all he could in favour of Charles, particularly "that he would be sure to do," and then went away.

Charles sat down on one of the chairs, and passed an hour gazing at the fire and listening to the scratching of pens going on at the desks. People were perpetually passing in and out: the green baize door seemed to be ever on the swing. Some brought messages; some were marshalled to Mr. Prestleigh's room. By-and-by, a youngish gentleman—thirty-five, perhaps—came in, in a warm white overcoat; and, from the attention and seriousness suddenly evinced by the clerks generally, Charles rightly guessed him to be Mr. Preen. He passed through the room without speaking, and was followed by the head clerk.

A few minutes more, and Charles was sent for to Mr. Preen's room. That gentleman—who had a great profusion of light curling hair and a pleasant face and manner—was alone, standing with his back to the fire near his table. He asked Charles very much the same questions that Mr. Stroud had asked, and

particularly what his recent occupation had been. Charles told the truth : that he had not been brought up to any occupation, but that an unfortunate reverse of family circumstances was obliging him to seek one.

“ You have not been in a solicitor’s office, then ! Not been accustomed to the copying of deeds ? ” cried Mr. Preen.

Charles confessed he had not. But he took the courage to say he had no doubt he could do any copying required of him, and to beg that he might be tried.

“ Is your handwriting a neat one ? ”

“ Yes, it is,” said Charles eagerly, for he was speaking only truth. “ Neat and good, and very plain.”

“ You think you could copy quickly and correctly ? ”

“ I am sure I could, sir. I *hope* you will try me,” he added, a curious wail of entreaty in his tone, that perhaps he was himself unconscious of ; but which was nevertheless apparent to Mr. Preen. “ I have been seeking after something so long, day after day, week after week, that I have nearly lost heart.”

Perhaps that last avowal was not the best aid to Charles’s success ; or would not have

been with most men of business. With Mr. Preen, who was very good-natured, it told rather for than against him. The lawyer mused. They wanted a copying clerk very badly indeed ; being two hands short, including Fred Tanting, and extremely busy : but the question was, could this young man accomplish the work ? A thought struck him.

“ Suppose you were to stay now and copy a page this afternoon ? ” suggested Mr. Preen. “ You see, if you cannot do the writing, it would be useless your attempting it : but if you can, we will engage you.”

“ I shall only be too happy to stay this afternoon, sir.”

“ Very well,” said Mr. Preen, ringing his bell for the managing clerk. “ And you shall then have an answer.”

Charles was put to work by Mr. Stroud : who came and looked at him three or four times while he was doing the copying. He wrote slowly ; the consequence of his super-extra care, his intensely earnest wish to succeed : but his writing was good and clear.

“ I shall write quickly in a day or two, when I am used to it,” he said, looking up : and there was hope in his face as well as his tone.

Mr. Preen chanced to be standing by. The writing would do, he decided ; and Mr. Stroud was told to engage him. To begin with, his salary was to be fifteen shillings a week : in a short while—as soon, indeed, as his suiting them was an assured fact—it would be raised to eighteen. He was to enter on the morrow.

“Where do you live?” curtly questioned Mr. Stroud.

“Just beyond Kennington.”

“Take care that you are punctual to time. Nine o’clock is the hour for the copying clerks. You are expected to be at work by that time, therefore you must get here before the clock strikes.”

A very easy condition, as it seemed to Charles Raynor, in his elation of spirit. A copying clerk in a lawyer’s office at fifteen or eighteen shillings a week ! Had anyone told him a year back he would be capable of accepting so degrading a post—as he would then have deemed it—he had surely said the world must turn itself upside down first. *Now* he went home with a joyous step and elated heart, hardly knowing whether he trod on his head or his heels.

And there, at Laurel Cottage, they held quite a jubilee. Fifteen shillings a week, added to

the previous narrow income of twenty, seemed at the moment to look very like riches. Charles had formed all kinds of mental resolutions as he walked home : to treat his clothes tenderly lest they should get shabby ; scarcely to tread on his boots that they might not wear out : and to make his daily dinner on bread and cheese, carried in his pocket from home. Ah, these resolves are good, and more than good ; and generous, wholesome-hearted young fellows are proud to make them in the time of need. But in their inexperience they cannot foresee the long, wearing, depressing struggle that the years must entail, during which the efforts and the privation must be persevered in. And it is well they cannot.

It wanted a quarter to nine in the morning, when Charles entered the office, warm with the speed at which he had walked. He did all that he was put to do, and did it correctly. If Mr. Stroud did not praise, he did not grumble.

When told at one o'clock that he might go to dinner, Charles made his way to the more sheltered parts in the precincts of the Temple, and surreptitiously ate the bread and cheese that he had brought in his pocket from home.

That was eaten long and long before the time had expired when he would be expected to go in ; but he did not like to appear earlier, lest some discerning clerk should decide he had not been to dinner at all. It was frightfully dull and dreary here, the bitterly cold wind whistling against him down the passages and round the corners ; so he got into the open streets : they, at least, were lively with busy traversers : and walked about the Strand.

“ I must go and see Peter Tanting, to tell him of my success and thank him ; for it is to him I owe it,” thought Charles, as he quitted the office in the evening. “ Let me see ! The address was somewhere near Mecklenburgh Square.”

Taking out a small note-case, in which the address was noted down, he halted at a street corner while he turned its leaves ; some one came round the corner hastily, and Charles found himself in contact with William Stane. The gas in the streets and shops made it as light as mid-day : no chance had they to pretend not to see each other. A bow, exchanged coldly, and each passed on his way.

“ I'll not notice him at all, should we meet again,” said Charles to himself. And it might

have been that Mr. Stane was saying the same thing. "Now for Doughty Street. I wonder which is the way to it?" deliberated he.

"Does Mr. Tanting live here?" inquired Charles of the young maid-servant, when he had found the right house.

"In the parlour there," replied the girl, pointing to a room on her left.

Without further ceremony, she went away, leaving him to introduce himself. A voice, that he supposed was Peter's, bade him "come in," in answer to his knock.

But he could not see Peter. A young fellow was stretched on the sofa in front of the fire. Charles rightly judged him to be the brother, Frederick Tanting. Young men are not, as a rule, very observant of one another, but Charles was struck with the appearance of the one before him. He was extremely good-looking; with fair hair, all in disorder, that shone like threads of gold in the firelight, glistening blue eyes, and a bright hectic flush on his thin cheeks.

"I beg your pardon," said Charley, as the invalid (for such he evidently was) half rose, and gazed at him. "I came to see Peter."

"Oh, aye; sit down," was the answer, given

in a cordial tone, but without much breath.

"I expect him in every minute."

"You are Fred," observed Charles. "I daresay he told you of meeting me on Tuesday: Charles Raynor."

"Yes, he did. Do sit down. You don't mind my lying here?"

"Is it a cold you have taken?" asked Charles, bringing forward a chair to the corner of the hearth.

"I suppose so. A fresh cold. You might have heard my breathing yesterday over the way. The doctor kept me in bed. He wanted to keep me there also to-day; but to have to lie in that back room is so wretchedly dull. Poke up the fire, will you, please, and make a blaze."

With every word he spoke, his chest seemed to heave up and down. His voice was hollow. Now he had a fit of coughing; and the cough sounded as hollow as the voice had done.

Peter came in, welcomed Charles boisterously, and rang for tea. That, you may be sure, was acceptable to poor half-starved Charles. Fred, saying he was glad Charles had got the place at Prestleigh's, plunged into a few revelations touching the office politics, as

well as his frequent cough and his imperfect breath allowed, with a view of putting him au courant of affairs in general in his new position.

"I shall make things pleasant for you, after I get back," said he. "We articed fellows hold ourselves somewhat aloof from the working clerks ; but I shall let them know who you are, and that it is only a temporary move on your part."

Fred Tanting, warm-hearted as his brother, said this when Charles was bidding him good evening. That last look, taken when the invalid's face was raised, and the lamp shone full upon it, impressed Charles more than all. Peter went with him to the door.

"What does the doctor say about your brother?" asked Charles, as they stood on the pavement, in the cold.

"Says he must take care of himself."

"Don't you think he looks very ill?"

"I don't know," replied Peter, who had been in the habit of seeing his brother daily ; and therefore his looks had not particularly impressed him. "Does he?"

"Well, it strikes me so. I should say he is ill. Why don't you send for his mother to come up?"

“ So I would, if we had a mother to send for,” returned Peter. “ Our mother died two years ago; and—and father has married again. We have no longer any place in the old Somersetshire homestead, Raynor. Fred and I stand by ourselves in the world.”

“ And without means ? ” cried Charles quickly ; who had lately begun to refer every evil that the world contained to the lack of money.

“ Oh, he allows us something. Just enough to keep us going until we shall be started on our own account. I get a hundred a year from the place I’m at. Fred gains nothing yet. He is not out of his articles.”

“ Well, I’ll come to see him again soon,” cried Charley, vaulting off. “ Good-night, Peter.”

Was Fred indeed seriously ill ? Was it going to be one of those cases, of which there are too many in London : of a poor young fellow, just entering on the hopeful threshold of life, dying away from friends, and home, and care ? Whether caused by Charles’s tone or Charles’s words, the shadowy thought, that it might be so, entered for the first time into the mind of Peter.

And Charles never had "things made pleasant for him," at the office, in pursuance of the friendly wish just expressed: the opportunity was not afforded. Exactly twenty days from that evening, he was invited to attend the funeral of Frederick Tanting. And could not do so, because he lacked suitable black clothes to wear.

CHAPTER II.

JEALOUSY.

THE shabby room was smartened up for the occasion. At least, as much as a poor room that holds cane-seated chairs, and a threadbare carpet not half covering the boards, and a stained green baize table-cover, can be smartened. It was Mrs. Raynor's birthday. Frank Raynor and his wife had come to wish her many happy returns of it and to take tea ; Alice was invited to come ; Charles had said he would be home early. But the tea was over, and neither Charles nor Alice had put in an appearance ; and the little fête, wanting them, had seemed like a failure to their mother.

Mrs. Raynor was altered : worn, spiritless, always ailing, in the past year she had aged much. Disappointment and poor circumstances told on her health as well as her mind. It was not for herself she grieved and suffered, but for her children. For Charles especially. His prospects had been blighted ;

his standing in the world utterly changed. Edina had her hands full, for Mrs. Raynor could help but very little now. What Mrs. Raynor chiefly did was to gather the young ones around her, and talk to them, in her gentle voice, of resignation to God's will, of patience, of that better world that they were travelling on to; where there shall be neither sickness nor sorrow, neither mortification nor suffering. The children needed such lessons: it seemed very hard to them that they should sometimes have to eat dry bread for dinner, or baked potatoes without butter. Even with all Edina's economy and with Charles's earnings, meat could not always be had: the joint must be carved sparingly, and made to last the best part of the week. They generally had a joint on a Sunday: that was as much as could be said. Clothes cost so much: and Charles, at least, had to be tolerably well-dressed. As the experienced housewife knows, there are many items in a family's expenditure besides eating and drinking; and this applies especially to fallen gentle-people, whose habits have been formed, and who must still in a degree keep up appearances.

If the Raynors had needed discipline, as

some of the standers-by at Eagles' Nest had opined, they were certainly experiencing it in a very marked degree. Twelve months had slipped by since they took up their abode at Laurel Cottage, and there had been no change. The days and the weeks had drifted on, one day, one week after another, in the same routine of thrift, and struggle, and privation. Charles was at Prestleigh and Preen's, working to that firm's satisfaction, and bringing home a sovereign a week as wages : Alice was teaching still in the school at Richmond. Alfred went to a day-school now. Edina had sought an interview with its principal, and by dint of some magic of her own, when she told him confidentially of their misfortunes, had got him to admit the lad at almost a nominal charge. It was altogether a weary life for them, no doubt; one requiring constant patience and resignation; but, as Edina would cheerfully tell them, it might have been worse, and they had many things to be thankful for even yet.

October was passing, and the falling leaves strewed the ground. The afternoon was not sunny, but warm and dull : so sultry, in fact, as to suggest the idea of tempest in the air.

In the square patch of ground at the back of the house, called a garden, they had gathered : Frank, his wife, Edina, Mrs. Raynor, and the children : some of them stood about, looking at the bed of herbs that Edina's care had planted ; Mrs. Raynor was sitting on the narrow bench underneath the high window. For this garden had to be descended to by several steps ; and as you stood in it the back parlour window (Mrs. Raynor's bedroom) looked perched up aloft.

"Herbs are so useful," remarked Edina, in answer to their praise of the bed. "When a stew is poor in itself, thyme or mint will give a flavour to it. Do you remember, Frank?—poor papa liked thyme in the Irish stews."

"And very good the Irish stews used to be," said Frank. "Eve calls them ragouts. I often tell her they are not as tasty as those I had at Trennach. Remember, Daisy, it is thyme Eve's ragouts want."

Daisy, playing with little Robert, turned round with dancing eyes. She was as pretty as ever, in spite of the distasteful existence in Lambeth. And she had dressed herself for this occasion in one of her old grand silks.

"I'll try and remember, Frank," she said

with a laugh. "I hope I shall not say rue instead. Whatever did you plant this great bush of rue for, Edina?"

"That bush is the landlady's; it was here when we came," replied Edina. "Mrs. Fox hangs some of it at the foot of her bed, to keep the insects off."

When Mr. Max Brown departed for the West Indies, he had thought the very utmost extent of his term of absence would be less than six months. But considerably more than two sixes had elapsed, and he had not returned. Apparently he liked the life there; apparently he was quite satisfied with Frank's management of his practice at home. In writing to Frank, he put the delay down to his mother. She was dying, but very slowly: that is, her complaint was one for which there is no cure: and she wanted to keep him with her to the end. Thus Max wrote, and it was the only plea of excuse he gave for his prolonged stay. Frank could not help thinking there was some mystery about it; but he was quite content to remain at his post. It was very rare indeed that he could get an hour or two's recreation, such as this. The practice was an exacting one, and he had no assistant.

“That’s the postman’s knock!” cried out Kate.

The postman was not a frequent visitor at Laurel Cottage. When he did bring a letter, it was always for the Raynors: Mrs. Fox never had one at all, and never seemed to expect one. Kate ran to the door, and brought back the letter. It proved to be from Alice: stating why she was not able to come.

“Daisy, my darling, you must put your bonnet on,” whispered Frank. “I want to get home before dark: I have been away now longer than I care to be.”

“I should let the practice go to York for one evening,” cried Alfred, who chanced to overhear the words.

“No doubt you would,” laughed Frank.

“Well, Frank, I’m sure you seem to set that precious practice up above everything. One would think it was an idol, with a golden body and diamond wings.”

“And so I ought to set it above everything, Master Alfred. A steward must do his duty.”

Daisy went indoors unnoticed. She was feeling tired, wanted to be at home herself, and began settling on her bonnet before the glass

at the window of the crowded back room. Two beds were in the chamber, besides other furniture : in one of which slept Mrs. Raynor and Kate, in the smaller one Edina. What a change it all was for them ! Suddenly, while Daisy's attention was still given to her bonnet, certain words, spoken by Edina, broke upon her ear. She and Frank had sat down on the bench below the window, and were talking of Trennach. Mrs. Raynor and the children were at the end of the garden, bending their heads together over the untidy path, as if seeking to determine what kind of coarse gravel it might be composed of.

"Do you ever hear anything of Mrs. Bell, Frank ?"

"I saw her to-day," was Frank's unexpected answer. "Saw her yesterday as well."

"Where did you see her ? Is she in London ?" quickly repeated Edina.

"They have come to live in London. She and Rosaline."

"What has caused them to do that ?" continued Edina quite sharply, as if she did not altogether approve of the information. Daisy's fingers, tying her bonnet strings, could

not have dropped more suddenly had they been seized with paralysis.

"I'm sure I don't know. They have come into money, through the death of some relative at Falmouth, and thought, I believe, that they would like to live in London. Poor Mrs. Bell is worse than she used to be: the complaint, feared for her, is making progress—and must make it until the end. I am attending her."

"They live near you, then?"

"Close by."

There ensued a short silence. Edina was probably busy with thought. She spoke again.

"Is Rosaline as pretty as ever?"

"Not quite so pretty, perhaps: more beautiful."

"Ah, well—I would not go there too much, Frank; illness, or no illness," cried Edina.

She spoke in a dreamy tone, as if her reflections were back in the past. In her heart she believed he must have cared more or less for Rosaline. Frank laughed slightly in answer: a laugh that had some constraint in its tone. His thoughts also had gone back; back to that fatal night at Trennach.

A sudden shout in Alfred's voice from the group in the garden. "Here it is! here it is,

mamma ! ” Mrs. Raynor’s thin gold ring had slipped off her slender finger, and they had been searching for it in the twilight.

Daisy seemed to see and hear no more until some of them came running into the bedroom, saying that Frank was waiting for her. She went out, said good night in a mechanical sort of manner, and they started, arm-in-arm, for home. The old jealousy she had once felt of Rosaline Bell had sprung up again now with tenfold force.

What a strange passion it is, this jealousy ! None other, that the world knows of, is so utterly unamenable to reason. Let it once take possession of the heart of man, and it fools him to the top of its bent. Light appears dark, and dark light ; shadows, that no other eye can see, become rocks of substance, hard as adamant.

A short distance from the cottage, they met Charles. He was walking along at a strapping pace, and greeted them in a commotion of anger.

“ It was an awful shame ! Just because I wanted to get home an hour earlier than usual, it is an hour later. The office is full of work, and some of us had to stay behind and do it.”

"Never mind, Charley," said Frank, with his genial smile. "Better luck next time."

"Yes, it's all very well to say next time: that will be next year, I suppose. You hardly ever come to us, you know, Frank."

"I come when I can. You must come to us instead. Spend next Sunday with us, Charley. I can't stay talking now."

"All right," said Charley, vaulting off. "Good night to you both." And neither of them had noticed that Daisy had not spoken.

Daisy was tormenting herself in a most unnecessary manner. Rosaline Bell in London! Living near to them: *close* to them, he had said. He had seen her to-day, and yesterday as well: no doubt he saw her every day. No doubt he loved her, that Rosaline!—and had thrown off all affection for herself, his wife. Even Edina could see the state of affairs. What a frightful thing it was!—and how far had it gone?—and what would it end in?

After this, the ordinary fashion of a jealous woman, did Mrs. Frank Raynor reason; believing her fancies to be all as true as gospel. Had some angelic messenger essayed to set her right, it would have availed naught in her present frame of mind. Jealousy is as much a disease

as intermittent fever : it may have its lighter intervals, but it must run its course.

“Daisy, I think we shall have a storm !” cried Frank. “How still and hot the air is !—and look at that great black cloud coming up ! We must put our best feet foremost.”

Daisy silently acquiesced. And the pace they went at prevented much attempt at talking. So that he had no opportunity of noticing that she had suddenly lost her tongue.

The storm burst forth when they were within a few doors of their own home. Lightning, thunder, a heavy down-pour of rain. As they turned into the surgery, where Sam stood underneath the gas-light, his arms flat on the counter, his heels kicking about underneath it, Frank caught up a note that was lying there, addressed to him.

“Who brought this note ?” asked Frank as he read it.

“It was a young lady,” replied Sam. “When I told her you were not at home, she asked me for a sheet o’ paper and pen and ink, and writ that, and said it were to be gave to you as soon as you came in. And please, sir, they have been round twice from Tripp’s to say the baby’s worse.”

Frank Raynor went out again at once, in spite of the storm. His wife, who had heard what passed, turned into the parlour, her brain hard at work.

“ I wonder how long this has been going on ! —how long she has been coming here ? ” debated Mrs. Frank, her cold fingers twitching with agitation, her hot head throbbing. “ *She* wrote that note—barefaced thing ! When she found she could not see him, she wrote it, and left it for him : and he is gone out to see her ! ”

Jealousy in its way is as exciting as wine ; acting very much in the same manner on any patient who is suitably primed for it. Mrs. Frank’s blood was surging in her veins ; her thoughts were taking a wild turn ; her shaking fingers could hardly throw her bonnet off. In point of fact, the note concerned a worthy pork butcher, who feared he was sickening for some complaint, and “ the young lady,” his daughter, had written it, in preference to leaving a message, begging for Mr. Raynor’s speedy attendance.

“ Have you had your supper, Sam ? ” asked Mrs. Frank, appearing at the intervening door.

“ No, ma’am.”

“Then go and get it.”

Sam passed her on his way to the kitchen. She stepped forward to the counter, opened the day-book, and began searching for Dame Bell's address. The street door was usually kept closed now, not open as it used to be; and Daisy went to it on tip-toe, and slipped the bolt. There was nobody to hear her had she stepped ever so heavily: but we are all apt to think that secret transactions require silent movements. Taking up her place behind the counter, she turned the leaves of the book again. The windows were closed in with shutters; she was quite in privacy. But, turn and look as she would, she could not see the address sought for. It is true she was looking in a desperate hurry, standing metaphorically upon spikes and plough-shares. What if Frank were to return suddenly? Or Sam from his supper?

“No, the address is not there!”—shutting the book, and pushing back the pretty hair from her beating temples. “He is too cautious to have entered it. Other patients' names are there, but Dame Bell's is not. The affair is underhanded altogether: clandestine from beginning to end.”

And from that night Mrs. Frank Raynor

began a course of action that she previously would have believed herself incapable of. She watched her husband. In her eagerness to discover where these Bells lived—though what service the knowledge could render her she would have been at a loss to know, had she mentally asked the question—she occasionally followed him. Keeping her bonnet downstairs in readiness, she would put it on hastily when he went out, and steal after him. Three or four times a week she did this. Very contemptible indeed Daisy felt it to be, and her cheeks blazed consciously now and again : but jealousy has driven a woman to do more contemptible things than even this. But for the unsuitability of her present life, as contrasted with her previous tastes and habits and surroundings, and for its utter monotony, causing her to feel weary unto death day after day, Margaret Raynor might never so far have forgotten herself. The pursuit was quite exciting, bringing to her a kind of relief ; and she resolutely drove away all inconvenient qualms of conscience.

So, there imagine that you behold them. Frank turning out at the surgery door, and hastening this way or that way, as if his feet were aided by wings : and when he is a few

yards off, say just abreast of the oil and pickle shop, Daisy turns out after him. It would be generally a tedious and tormenting chase. He seemed to have so many patients to visit, here, there, and everywhere; on this side the street and on that side, and round the corners, and down courts, that his pursuer was generally baffled, lost him for good, and had to return home in despair.

Meanwhile, as time went on, Frank, unconscious of all this, was destined to get a shock himself. One evening, when he had been called to a case of emergency near home, upon quitting the sick man's house, he entered a chemist's for the purpose of directing some article, which it was not in the province of a medical man to supply, to be sent to the sufferer. Dashing into the shop hurriedly, for his time was not his own, he was beginning to give his order.

“ Will you send —— ”

And there his speech failed him. He stopped as suddenly and completely as though his tongue had been struck with incompetency. The young man to whom he was addressing himself, with the attentive red-brown eyes in which gleamed a smile of intelligence, and the

clean white apron tied round his waist, was Blase Pellet. They looked at one another in the full glare of the gas-light.

Blase was the first to speak. "How do you do, Mr. Raynor?"

"Is it *you*?" cried Frank, recovering himself somewhat. "Are you living here?"

"Since a week past," replied Blase.

"Why have you left Trennach?"

"I came up to better myself," said Blase demurely. "One hears great things of fortunes being made in London."

"And of being lost, Pellet," rejoined Frank.

"I can go back at any time," observed Blase. "Old Float would be only too glad to have me. The young fellow he has now in my place is not *me*, Float writes me word. Float will have to attend to business a little more himself now, and I expect it will not suit him."

Without vouchsafing any answer to this, Frank gave the order he had gone in to give, and passed out of the shop, his mind in a very disagreeable ferment.

"He has come up here as a spy upon me; he is watching my movements," said Frank to himself. "How did he know I was here—in this part of London?—how did he find it

out?" A positive conviction, that it was utterly useless to try to evade Blase Pellet, had taken sudden possession of him; that he had been tracking him all along by the means of spies and emissaries, and had now come to do it in person. He felt that if he were to sail away over the seas and set up his tent in an African desert, or on the arid shores of some remote fastness of the Indian Empire, or amid the unexplored wilds of a barren prairie, he should see Blase Pellet in another tent, side by side with him, the next morning.

For the passing moment, his several pressing engagements had gone out of his head. His patients, lying in expectation of him, might lie: self was all in all. The uneasiness that had taken hold of him amounted to tribulation.

"I wonder what Dame Bell knows of this?" it suddenly occurred to him to think. And no sooner did it occur than, acting on the moment's impulse, he determined to ask her, and walked towards her lodgings at his usual quick rate. She had taken rooms in a quiet street, one West Street, where the small houses were mostly private. It was nearly a week since Frank had seen her, for her complaint was very fluctuat-

ing, and latterly she had felt better, not requiring regular attendance.

Opening the front door without knocking, as was his custom, he went upstairs to the small sitting-room : this room and the bedchamber behind it comprising Mrs. Bell's apartments. She had come into a little money by the death of her sister at Falmouth, John Pellet's wife : and this, combined with her previous slight income, enabled her to live quietly. When Mrs. Pellet died, it had been suggested that Rosaline should take to her millinery business, and carry it on : but Rosaline positively declined to do so. Neither Rosaline nor her mother liked Falmouth, and they resolved to go to London. Chance alone—or at least, that apparently undirected impulse that is called chance—had caused them to fix on this particular part of London for their abode ; and neither of them had the slightest idea that it was within a stone's throw of the dwelling-house of Frank Raynor. On the third day after settling in it, Rosaline and Frank had met in Mark Street : and he then learnt the news of their recent movements.

Mrs. Bell was at her old employment this evening when Frank entered—that of knitting.

Lifting her eyes to see who had come in, she took the opportunity to snuff the candle by which she sat, and gazed at Frank over her spectacles.

“Hey-day!” she cried. “I thought it was Rosaline.”

This was the first time Frank had seen her alone. During all his previous visits Rosaline was present, Rosaline had gone a long way that afternoon, Dame Bell proceeded to explain, as far as Oxford Street, and was not back yet. The girl seemed to have got some crotchet in her head, she added, and would not say what she went for. Frank was glad of her absence, crotchet or no crotchet: he felt an invincible distaste to name the name of Blase Pellet in her hearing.

Seen Blase Pellet to-night!—what had Blase Pellet come to town for? repeated Dame Bell, in answer to Frank’s introduction of the subject. “Well, sir,” she added, “he tells us he was grown sick and tired of Trennach, and came up here to be near us—me and Rose. I’m sure you might have knocked me down with a feather, so surprised was I when he walked into this room last Sunday afternoon. I had dozed off in my chair here, and Rose

was reading the Bible to herself, when he came in. For a minute or two I did not believe my eyes, and that's the truth. As to Rose, she turned the colour of chalk, just as if he frightened her."

"Did he know you were living here?"

"Of course he knew that, Mr. Frank. Blase, I must say, has always been as dutiful to me as if he had been my real nephew, and he often wrote to us at Falmouth. One of his letters was sent after us from Falmouth, and I wrote to tell him where we were in return."

"Did you tell him *I* was here?" questioned Frank.

"Well no, I did not: but it is curious you should ask just that question, Mr. Frank," cried the dame. "I was just going to put in the letter that I hoped I should get better now Mr. Raynor was attending me again, but Rosaline stopped it. Mr. Raynor was nothing to Blase, she said: better not name him at all. Upon that, I asked her why she did not write the letter herself, if she thought she could word it better than me: but she never will write to him. However, you were not mentioned, sir."

"What is his object in coming to London?"

repeated Frank, unable to get the one important point out of his mind.

“I’d not wonder but it’s Rosaline,” said Dame Bell shrewdly. “Blase has wanted to make up to her this many a day; but ——”

“What an idiot the man must be!” struck in Frank.

“But she will not have anything to say to him, I was going to add,” concluded Dame Bell. “Why should you call him an idiot, Mr. Frank?”

“He must be one, if he thinks he can persuade Rosaline to like him. See how ugly he is!”

“She might do worse, sir. I don’t say Blase is handsome: he is not: but he is steady. If men and women were all chose by their looks, Mr. Frank, a good many would go unmarried. Blase Pellet is putting by money: he will be setting up for himself, some day; and he would make her a good husband.”

“Do you tell your daughter that he would?” asked Frank.

“She’ll not let me tell her, sir. I say to her sometimes that she seems frightened at hearing the young man’s very name men-

tioned : just as though it would bring her the plague. I know what I think."

"And what is it?" asked Frank.

"Why, that Rosaline pressed upon me this settling up here in London, on purpose to put a wide distance between her and Blase. Falmouth was within his reach, and he now and then came over there. I did not suspect her of this till last Sunday, Mr. Frank. When tea was over, and Blase had gone, she just sat with her hands before her, looking more dead than alive. 'After all, it seems we had better have stayed at Falmouth,' said she suddenly, as if speaking to herself: and that put the thought upon me, that she had come here to be farther away from him."

Frank made no remark.

"Blase has found a place at a druggist's close by," continued Mrs. Bell: whose tongue, once set going, did not stop readily. "I don't suppose he'll like London as well as Trennach, and so I told him. I don't. Great noisy bustling place!"

It seemed that there was nothing more to ask or learn, and Frank bethought himself of his patients. Wishing the old dame good night, he departed. His first visit led him

past the druggist's; and his glance, of its own accord, as though fascinated, turned to the window. There, amid the sheen of red and green and blue reflected from the brilliant globes, he saw the face of Blase Pellet; just as he had used to see it amid the glow of the same varied colours at Trennach.

CHAPTER III.

CROPPING UP AGAIN.

“**W**HY, Daisy! Out marketing, my dear?”

The salutation to Mrs. Frank Raynor came from her husband. One winter's morning, heedless of the extreme cold and the frost that made the streets partially deserted, she followed her husband when he went abroad after breakfast. The dwelling-place of Mrs. Bell and her daughter in West Street had become known to her long ago; and Daisy was always longing to see whether her husband's footsteps took him to it.

That most unreasoning jealousy, which had seized upon her mind, increased in force. It was growing to be almost a disease. She felt sure, sure as if she had seen it written in letters of fire, that her husband's love had been, was, and would ever be Rosaline Bell's: that it never had been hers: and over and over again she asked herself the question—why had he married her?

It all appeared so plain to Daisy. Looking back, she could, as she fully believed, trace the past out, in regard to it, bit by bit. First of all, there was the girl's unusual and dangerous beauty ; Frank Raynor's attendance at the house on the Bare Plain, under the plea of visiting the mother professionally ; and the intimacy that was reported to exist between himself and Rosaline. A great deal more frequently than was good or necessary, Daisy recalled the evening when Frank had been dining at the Mount, and the conversation had turned upon the mysterious disappearance of Bell, the miner, and on the beauty of his daughter. Frank's signs of agitation—his emotional voice, his flushings from red to white—Daisy had then been entirely unable to comprehend : she had considered them as unaccountable as was the absence of the man of whom they were speaking—Bell. Now the reason was very apparent to her : the emotion had arisen from his love of Rosaline. She remembered, as though it had been but yesterday, the tales brought home by Tabitha, and repeated to herself—that this beautiful daughter of Bell the miner was Frank Raynor's best and only love, and that the girl wor-

shipped the very ground he trod on. It was too late then to be swayed by the information, for the private marriage had taken place in the church at Trennach. Daisy had hardly known whether to believe the story or not; but it had shaken her. Later, as time went on, and she and her husband moved far away from the scene of events, and Rosaline Bell seemed to have faded out of sight, almost, so far as they were concerned, out of existence, Daisy had suffered herself to forget the doubt and the jealousy. But only to call it up with tenfold force now.

And so, Mrs. Frank Raynor had amused herself, if the word may be applied to any state of mind so painful as was hers, with the pastime of watching her husband. Not often of course, only now and then. Her steps, as of their own uncontrollable will, would take her to the quiet street in which Dame Bell lived, and she had on one or two rare occasions been rewarded by seeing him pass in or out of the house. Of course she could not be on the watch often. She dared not be. She would have been ashamed to be. As it was, she knew that Sam's eyes had taken to open with wonder whenever she followed her husband through the

surgery, and that the boy's curiosity was much exercised as to the cause. Therefore, as she was unable to make Frank's shadow frequently, and as, with all her expectation, she had been gratified so rarely by seeing what she looked for, she drew the conclusion that fortune did not favour her, and that Frank's times for going to the house were just those when she did not happen to be out herself. An ingenious inference : as all sensible people must allow.

On one of those rare occasions, Frank came out of the house accompanied by Rosaline.

They turned the opposite way to where Daisy was standing, but not before she had caught a glimpse of the beautiful face. Where were they going together, she passionately asked herself. The probability was that their coming out together was only incidental ; for in a very few minutes Daisy met the girl coming back alone, carrying a paper bag of rusks, which she had no doubt been out to buy. All the more essential was it, thought Daisy, after this little incident, that she should continue to look after her husband.

Daisy was becoming quite an adept at the work, and might have taken service as a lady detective. Of course the chief care, to be

exercised, was to keep herself out of her husband's view. It was not so difficult to do this as it would have been with some husbands; for Frank's time was always so precious, and his movements were in consequence obliged to be so fleet, that he went flying through the streets like a lamplighter, never looking to the right or the left. More than once, though, Daisy had been obliged to dart into a doorway; and it was at those times that she especially felt the humiliation of what she was doing.

But, the pitcher that goes too often to the well, gets broken at last, we are told. The old proverb was to be exemplified here. On this raw, bitter January day, when of a surety nobody would venture out who could keep in, Daisy came face to face with her husband. She had seen him enter Mrs. Bell's house; fortune for once had so far favoured her. She saw him make for the quiet street upon first leaving home, skim down it with long strides, and go straight in at the door. Her heart beat as though it would burst its bounds; her pulses coursed on with fever-heat. Nothing in the world can be so good for the doctors as indulged jealousy: it must inevitably tend to bring on heart disease. "I wonder how long he will

stay?" thought Daisy in her raging anger. "Half an hour, maybe. Of course he does not hurry himself when he goes *there*."

Sauntering onwards with slow steps, some idea in her head of waiting to see how long he did stay, and believing herself to be perfectly safe for many minutes to come, went Daisy. She longed to cross over the street and so get a sight of the upstairs window. But she did not dare: he might chance to look from it and see her. She knew all about the position of the Bells' rooms, having, in a careless, off-handed manner, questioned Sam, who took out Mrs. Bell's medicine. Abreast of the closed door, her face turned towards it, was Daisy, when—she found herself confronted with her husband. He had come quickly forth, without warning, not having stayed two minutes.

"Why, Daisy! Out marketing, my dear?"

The question was put laughingly. Daisy never did market: she was not much of a housekeeper yet, and the shops in Lambeth did not tempt her to begin. Eve did all that. Had she been committing a crime, she could not have felt more taken to in the unexpected surprise, or more awkward at finding an excuse.

"I—had the headache," she stammered, "and—came out for a little walk."

"But it is too cold for you, Daisy. The wind is in the north-east. I have never felt it keener."

"It won't hurt me," gasped Daisy, believing his appearance of solicitude for her was all put on. She had believed that for some time now. The kinder Frank showed himself, the more she despised him.

"You have been in there to see a patient?" questioned Daisy, hardly knowing and certainly not caring what she did say.

"Yes," replied Frank. "But she is better this morning; so I am off to others who want me worse than she does."

"Is it that Mrs. Bell from Trennach? I saw a bottle of medicine directed to West Street for her one day. Sam was putting it into his basket."

"It is Mrs. Bell. She is worse than she used to be, for the disorder has made progress, And I fear she will get worse, day by day now, until the last."

"What a hypocrite he is!" thought Daisy: "I daresay there is as much the matter with her as there is with me. Of course he needs

some plea of excuse—to be going there for ever to that wretched girl.”

“Do you come here pretty often?” went on Daisy, coughing to conceal the spleen in her tone, which she was unable to suppress.

“I shall have to come here oftener in future, I fear,” returned Frank, not directly answering the question, of which delay she took note. Just for these few minutes, he had slackened his pace to hers, and they were walking side by side. “I am glad she is near me: I don’t think any stranger would give her the care that I shall give.”

“You speak as though you were anxious for her!” resentfully cried Daisy.

“I am more than anxious. I would give half I am worth to be able to cure her.”

“Well, I’m sure!” exclaimed Daisy. “One would think you and these people must hold some bond of union in common.”

“And so we do,” he answered.

Perhaps the words were spoken incautiously. Daisy, looking quickly up at him, saw that he seemed lost in thought.

“What is it?” she asked in a low tone: her breathing just then seeming to be a little difficult.

"What is what?"

"The bond of union between you and these Bells."

The plain question brought him out of his abstraction. He laughed lightly: laughed, as Daisy thought, and saw, to do away with the impression the words had made: and answered carelessly.

"The bond between me and Dame Bell? Because I knew her at Trennach, Daisy, and learnt to respect her. She nursed me through a fever once."

"Oh," said Daisy, turning her head away, indignant at what she believed was an evasion. The "bond," if there was any, existed, not between him and the mother, but between him and the daughter.

"I daresay you attend them for nothing!"

"Of course I do."

"What would Mr. Max Brown say to that?"

"What he pleased. Max Brown is not a man to object, Daisy."

"You can't tell."

"Yes, I can. If he did, I should pay him the cost of the medicines. And my time, at least, I can give."

Daisy said no more. Swelling with resent-

ment, with jealousy, she walked by his side in silence. Frank saw her to the surgery door, and then turned back, on the run. She went in; passed Sam, who was leisurely dusting the counter, and sat down in the parlour by the fire.

Her state of mind was not to be envied. Jealousy, you know, makes the food it feeds on. Mrs. Frank Raynor was making very disagreeable food for herself, indeed. She gave the reins to her imagination, and it presented her with all kinds of suggestive horrors. The worst was that she did not, and could not, regard these pictured fancies as possible delusions, emanating from her own brain, and to be received cautiously; but she converted them into undoubted facts. The sounds from the surgery of Sam's movements, his answers to applicants who came in, penetrated to her, through the half open door; but, though they touched her ear in a degree, they did not touch her senses. She was as one who heard not.

Thus she sat on, until mid-day, indulging these visions to the full bent of her fancy, and utterly miserable. At least, perhaps not quite utterly so; for when people are in the state of

angry rage that Daisy was, they cannot feel very acutely: the brunt of distress is thrown off. A few minutes after twelve, Sam appeared. He stared to see his mistress sitting just as she had come in, not even her warm cloth cloak removed, or her bonnet untied.

"A letter for you, please, ma'am. The postman have just brought it in."

Daisy took the letter from him without a word. It proved to be from her sister Charlotte, Mrs. Townley. Mrs. Townley wrote to say that she was back again at the house in Westbourne Terrace, and would be glad to see Daisy. She, with her children, had been making a long visit of several months to her mother at the Mount, and she had but now returned. "I did intend to be back for the New Year," she wrote; "but mamma and Lydia would not hear of it. I have many things to tell you, Daisy: so come to me as soon as you get this note. If your husband will join us at dinner—seven o'clock—there will be no difficulty about your getting home. Say that I shall be happy to see him."

Should she go, or should she not? Mrs. Frank Raynor was in so excited a mood as not to care very much what she did. And—if she

went, and he did *not* come in the evening, he would no doubt seize on the opportunity of passing it with Rosaline Bell.

She went upstairs, took her things off, and passed into the drawing-room. The fire was burning brightly. Eve was a treasure of a servant, and attended to it carefully. Frank had given orders that a fire should be always kept up there: it was a better room for his wife than the one downstairs, and more cheerful.

Certainly more cheerful: for a greater expanse of the street could be seen, and its busy traversers. The opposite fish-shop displayed its wares more plainly to this room than to the small room below. Just now, Monsieur and Madame, the fish proprietors, were enjoying a wordy war, touching some haddock that Madame had sold under cost price. He had an oyster knife in his hand, and was laying down the law with it. She stood, in her old brown bonnet, her wrists turned back on her capacious hips, and defied his anger. Daisy had the pleasure of assisting at the quarrel, as the French say; for the tones of the disputants were pitched in a loud key, and partially reached her ears.

“What a place this is!” ejaculated Daisy.

“What people! Yes, I will go to Charlotte. It is something to get away from them for a few hours, and into civilized life again.”

“At one o’clock, the hand-bell in the passage below was rung: the signal for dinner. Daisy went down. Frank had only just come in, and was taking off his overcoat.

“I have hardly a minute, Daisy,” he said. “I have not seen all my patients yet.”

“Been hindering his time with Rosaline,” thought Daisy. And she slowly and ungraciously took her place at the table. Frank, regardless of ceremony, had already cut into the boiled leg of mutton.

“You have *generally* finished before one o’clock,” she coldly remarked, as he handed her plate to her. For Eve, good servant though she was, had no idea of staying in the room during meals.

“Yes, generally. But a good many people are ill: and I was hindered this morning by attending to an accident. A little boy was run over in the street.”

“Is he much hurt?”

“Not very much. I shall get him right again.”

The dinner proceeded in silence. Frank

was eating too fast to have leisure for anything else ; Daisy's angry spirit did not permit her to talk. As she laid down her knife and fork, Frank cut her another slice—pressed her to take it when she refused.

“ I have said no once. This is my luncheon ; not my dinner.”

Frank Raynor had become accustomed to hear his wife speak to him in cold, resentful tones : but to-day they sounded especially cold. He had long ago put it down in his own mind to dissatisfaction at their blighted prospects ; blighted, at least, in comparison to those they had so sanguinely entertained when wandering together side by side at Trennach and picturing the future. It only made him the more patient, the more tender with her.

“ Mrs. Townley has written to ask me to go to her. She is back in Westbourne Terrace. She bids me say she shall be happy to see you to dinner at seven. But I suppose you will not go.”

“ Yes, I will go,” said Frank, rapidly revolving ways and means in his mind, as regarded the exigencies of his patients. “ I think I can get away for an hour or two, Daisy. Is it dress ? ”

"Just as you please," was the frosty answer. "Mrs. Townley says nothing about dress; she would be hardly likely to say it; but she is accustomed to proper ways."

"And how shall you go, my dear?" resumed Frank, passing over the implication with his usual sweetness of temper. "You had better have a cab."

"I intend to have one," said Daisy.

She bedecked herself in some of her smartest things, for the spirit of bravado was upon her: if her husband did not choose to dress, *she* should: and set off in a cab for Westbourne Terrace. Once there, she put away her troubles; in manner at any rate: and her sister never suspected that anything was amiss.

"I shall give you a surprise, Daisy," said Mrs. Townley to her in the course of the afternoon. "An old beau of yours is coming to dinner."

"An old beau of mine! Who is that?"

"Sir Paul Trellasis."

"What an idea!" cried Daisy. "*He* a beau of mine! Mamma must have put that into your head, Charlotte. Sir Paul came to the Mount once or twice; as he was a bachelor, mamma at once jumped to the notion that he

must come for Lydia or for me. He married Miss Beauchamp that same year, you know."

"He and his wife are in London, and I asked them to come in to dinner to-day without ceremony," resumed Mrs. Townley. "Had you taken Sir Paul, Daisy, you would not have had to be buried alive amid savages in some unknown region of London."

"No, I should not," replied the miserable wife with stern emphasis.

But another surprise was in store for Daisy. For Mrs. Townley as well. At the dusk hour, a caller was ushered into the drawing-room, and he proved to be the Reverend Titus Backup. The curate had never quite severed his relations with Trennach. He had taken three months' duty there again this past autumn, when the Rector was once more laid aside by illness. He had then made the acquaintance of Mrs. Townley; and being now in London, had called to see her.

Mrs. Frank Raynor flushed red as a rose when he came in. The sight of him brought back to her memory the old time at Trennach, and its doings, with vivid intensity. She seemed to see herself once more standing with Frank Raynor before him at the altar, when he

was making them *One* together, until death should them part. Mr. Backup had lost somewhat of his former sense of nervousness, but he was shy still, and held out his hand to Mrs. Frank Raynor with timidity.

"Ah, I remember—it was you who married Daisy," observed Mrs. Townley. "My mother at first would not forgive you, I believe, Mr. Backup, until she found you did not know it was a stolen match. And for how long are you in town?"

"I am not sure," replied the parson. "I am come up to see about a curacy."

"Well, you must stay and dine with us," returned Mrs. Townley. "Nonsense! You must. I shall not let you go away. Sir Paul and Lady Trellasis are coming—you know them—and Mr. Raynor."

The curate, perhaps lacking courage to press his refusal, stayed. In due time Sir Paul and his wife arrived; and, as the clock was striking seven, Frank: dressed.

All this need not have been noticed, for in truth Mrs. Townley and her visitors have little to do with the story, but for something that occurred in the course of the evening. Mrs. Townley was on the music-stool, playing some

scientific "morceau" that was crushingly loud and seemed interminable, with Sir Paul at her elbow turning over for her, and Daisy on the other side. Lady Trellasis, a pretty young woman with black hair, sat talking with Mr. Backup on the sofa near the fire; and Frank stood just behind them, looking at photographs. In a moment, when he was least thinking of trouble, certain words spoken by the curate caught his ear.

"Josiah Bell: that was his name. No; the particulars have never been discovered. He was found eventually, as of course you know, and buried in the churchyard at Trennach."

"The affair took great hold on my imagination," observed Lady Trellasis. "I was staying at the Mount with papa and mamma at the time the man was lost. It was a story that seemed to be surrounded with romance. They spoke, I remember, of the daughter, saying she was so beautiful. Papa thought, I recollect, that the poor man must have fallen into some pit or other: and so it proved."

"Yes," said Mr. Backup, "an unprotected pit, so deep as to have gained the appellation amid the miners of the Bottomless Shaft. The mystery of course consisted in how he got in."

“But why should that be a mystery? Did he not fall in?”

“The fact is, that some superstition attaches to the place, and not a single miner, it was said, would have willingly approached it. Bell especially would not go near it: for in that respect, superstition, he was a notably weak-minded man.”

“Then how did he get in?” quickly asked Lady Trellasis.

“There was a suspicion of foul play. That the man was thrown in.”

“How very dreadful! Thrown in by whom?”

“I cannot tell you. A faint rumour arose later—as I was told by Mr. Pine—that some one in a superior walk of life was supposed to be implicated: some gentleman. The Rector tried to trace the report to its source, and to ascertain the name of the suspected man; but ——”

“And did he?” interrupted the young lady, too eager to wait for the concluding words of Mr. Backup, who was a slow and hesitating speaker.

“No, the Rector could get at nothing: but he says that an uncomfortable feeling, in regard to it, remains still on his mind. I should not

be surprised at the affair cropping up some day again."

The "morceau" came to an end with a last overwhelming crash, and the conversation with it. Frank woke up with a start, to see a man standing before him with a tray and some tea-cups on it. He took one of the cups, and drank the scalding tea at a draught, not knowing whether it was hot or cold. Certain of the words, which he could not help overhearing, had startled all feeling out of him.

"Is it not time to go Daisy?" he asked presently.

"If you think so," she freezingly answered.

"Then will you get your bonnet on, my dear," he said, never noticing the ungracious nature of her reply. After those ominous words, all other words, for the time being, fell on his ear as though he heard them not.

Not a syllable was exchanged between them as they sat together in the cab, speeding homewards. Frank was too much absorbed in unpleasant thought to speak; Daisy was indulging in resentment. That last sentence of Mr. Backup's, "I should not be surprised at the affair cropping up again," kept surging in his mind. He asked himself whether it was

spoken prophetically ; and, he also asked, what, if it did crop up, would be the consequences to himself ?

“ He is thinking of *her*,” concluded Daisy, resenting the unusual silence, although she herself by her manner invoked it. And, in good truth, so he was.

Handing Daisy out of the cab when it stopped, Frank opened the surgery door for her, and turned to pay the driver. At that self-same moment some man came strolling slowly along the pavement. He was well wrapped up in a warm coat, and seemed to be walking for pleasure.

He looked at the cab, he looked at the open door of the house, he looked at Frank. Not apparently ; not by dint of turning his head ; but by sidelong glances directed all ways from his eyes.

“ Good night, Mr. Raynor,” said he at length, as he was passing.

“ Good night to you,” replied Frank.

And Mr. Blase Pellet sauntered on, enjoying the icicles of the winter night. Frank went in, and barred and bolted his door.

“ I wish to heaven it needed nothing but bars and bolts to keep the fellow out ! ” spoke

Frank in his dismay. "How long he will be kept out, I know not. Talk of whether the affair will crop up again!—why it *is* cropping up. And I have a bitter enemy in Blase Pellet."

CHAPTER. IV.

HUMILIATION.

A GAIN the weeks and the months went on, bringing round the autumn season of another year. For in real life—and this is very much of a true history—time elapses imperceptibly when it has little of event to mark its progress. Seasons succeed each other, leaving not much to tell of behind them.

It was but a monotonous life at best—that of the Raynors'. It seemed to be spent in a quiet, constant endeavour to exist; a patient, perpetual struggle to make both ends meet: to be fed, and not to starve; to remain under that poor sheltering roof that covered Laurel Cottage, and not to have to turn out of it; to contrive that their garments should be decent, something like gentlepeople's, not in rags.

But for Edina they would never have done it. Even though they had her fifty pounds a year, without *her* they would never have got on. She managed and worked, worked and managed,

EDINA.

and had ever a cheerful word for them all. When their spirits failed, especially Mrs. Raynor's, and the onward way looked unusually dark and dreary, it was Edina who talked of the bright day-star in the distance, of the silver lining that was sure to be in every cloud. But for Edina they might almost have lost faith in Heaven.

The one most altered of them all was Charles. Altered in looks, in bearing, in manner; above all, in spirit. All his pride had flown; all his self-conscious importance had disappeared as does a summer mist: flown and disappeared for ever. Had the discipline he was subjected to been transient, lasting for a few weeks, let us say, or even months, its impressions might have worn away with renewed favourable circumstances, had such set in again, leaving no trace for good. But when this kind of depressing mortification continues for years, the lesson it implants on the mind is generally permanent. Day by day, every day of his life, and every hour in the day, Charles was subjected to the humiliations (as he looked upon them, and to him they were indeed such) that attend the position of a working clerk. He who had been reared in the notions of a

gentleman, and had believed himself to be the undoubted future possessor of Eagles' Nest, found himself reduced by fate to this subordinate capacity, ordered about by the gentlemen clerks, and regarded as an individual not at all to be associated with them. "Raynor, do this; Raynor, do the other; Raynor, go thither; Raynor, come hither!" He was at their beck and call, and obliged to be at it; he had to submit to them as his superiors, not only his superiors in the office, but his superiors as men; above all, he had to submit to their off-hand tones, which always implied, unwittingly perhaps to themselves, but all too apparent to Charles's ear, a consciousness of the distinction that existed between them. They were gentlemen; he was of the fraternity of those that labour for their bread as servants to others.

How galling this was to Charles Raynor, you, my reader, may imagine; but it can never be described. At first it was all but unbearable. Over and over again he thought he must run away from it, and escape to a land where these distinctions exist not. He might dig for gold in California; he might clear a settlement for himself in the backwoods of America: and the life in either place would be as paradise com-

pared with this one at Prestleigh and Preen's. Nothing but the broad fact that the weekly wages he earned were absolutely necessary to aid in his mother's and the family's support, detained him. To give the aid was his imperative duty before God : for had it not been through him and his supine carelessness that they were reduced to this extremity of need ? So Charles Raynor, helped on by the ever-ready whispered word of counsel from Edina, *endured* his troubles, put up with his humiliation, and bore onwards with the best resolution he could call up. Who knew, who could ever tell, *how much* of this wonderful change was really due to Edina !

And, as the time went on, he grew to feel the troubles somewhat less keenly : habit reconciles us in a degree to the worst of things, no matter what that worst may be. But he had learnt a lesson that would last him for his whole life ; never again could he be the arrogant young fellow who thought the world was made for his especial delectation. He had gained experience ; he had found his level ; he saw what existence was worth, and that those who would be happy in it must first learn and understand their duties in it. His very nature was changed :

haughty self-sufficiency, selfish indifference had given place to modest self-containment, to a subdued thoughtfulness of habit, to an earnest sense of others' needs as well as his own, and to a settled wish to help them. Frank Raynor with all his sunny-heartedness, his boundless geniality, could not be more ready with a helping hand, than was Charles. He had it not to give in money, but he had in kind. No other discipline, perhaps, that the world could inflict would have had this same effect upon Charles Raynor ; it had made a man of him, and, if a subdued, a good one. And so, he went on, reconciled in a degree to his changed life after his two years' spell at it, and looking forward to no better prospect for the future ; all prospect seemed so entirely hopeless.

A little fresh care had come upon them this autumn, in the return of Alice. Changes had taken place in the school at Richmond, and her services were no longer required. Edina borrowed the advertisement sheet of the *Times* every morning, and caused Alice to write to any notice that appeared likely. As yet—a fortnight had gone on—nothing had come of it.

“Nobody seems to want a governess,” remarked Alice one Monday morning, as they

rose from breakfast, and Charles was brushing his hat to depart. "I suppose there are too many of us."

"By the one half," assented Edina. "The field is too full. Some lady in this neighbourhood recently advertised for a governess for her daughters, directing the answers to be addressed to Jones's library, where we get these papers. Mr. Jones told me that the first day the post brought more than one hundred letters."

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Alice.

"The lady engaged one of the applicants," continued Edina, "and then discovered she was the daughter of a small inferior shop-keeper at Camberwell. That put her out of conceit of governesses, and she has sent her children to school."

"I should not wish to be hard, I'm sure, or to speak against any class of people," interposed Mrs. Raynor, in her meek, deprecating voice; "but I do think that some of the young women who put themselves forward as governesses would do much better for servants. These inferior persons are helping to jostle the gentlewomen governesses out of the field—as Edina calls it."

"Will they jostle me?" cried Alice, looking

up in fear. "Oh, Charley, I wish you could hear of something for me!—you go into the world, you know."

Charles, saying goodbye and kissing his mother, went off with a smile at the words: he was thinking how very unlikely it was that he should hear of anything. Governesses did not come within the radius of Prestleigh and Preen's. Nevertheless, singular to say, Charles did hear tell of a vacant situation that self-same day, and heard it in the office. It chanced in this way:

In the course of the afternoon the head clerk despatched Charles to Mr. Preen's room with a message. He was about to deliver it when Mr. Preen waved his hand to him to wait: a friend of his who had been sitting with him had risen to take his leave.

"When shall we see Mrs. Preen to spend her promised day with us?" asked the gentleman, as he was shaking hands. "My wife has been expecting her all the week."

"I don't know when you will see her," was the reply. "The little girls' governess has left; and, as they don't much like going back to the nursery to the younger children, Mrs. Preen has them with her."

"The governess left, has she?" was the answering remark. "I fancied you thought great things of her."

"So we did. She suited extremely well. But she was called home last week in consequence of her mother's serious illness, and now sends us word that she will not be able to leave home again."

"Well, you will easily find a substitute, Preen."

"Two or three ladies have already applied, but Mrs. Preen did not fancy them. She will have to advertise, I suppose."

Charles drank in the words. He delivered the message, and took Mr. Stroud the answer, his head full of Alice. If she could get the situation! Mrs. Preen seemed a nice woman, and the two little girls were nice: he had seen them occasionally at the office. Alice would be sure to be happy there.

Sitting down to his desk, he went on with his writing, making one or two mistakes, and drawing down upon him the anger of Mr. Stroud. But his mind was far away, deliberating whether he might, or could, do aught.

Speak to Mr. Preen? He hardly liked to do it: the copying clerks kept at a respectful dis-

tance. And yet, why should he not? It seemed to be the only chance. Then came in a thought that made Charley's face burn like fire: would *his* sister be deemed worthy of the post? Well, he could but make the trial.

Just before the time of quitting for the night, Charles went to Mr. Preen's room, knocked at the door, and was bade to enter. Mr. Preen was standing in front of his desk, in the act of locking it, and a gentleman sat close before the ~~he~~ extinguished fire in the large easy chair which had been old Mr. Callard's. Charles ~~could~~ see nothing but the back of his head, for the high, well-stuffed chair hid all the rest of him. He had a newspaper in his hand, and was reading it by the light of the one gas-burner; the other burner had been put out. To see this stranger here took Charles aback.

"What is it?" questioned Mr. Preen.

Charles hesitated. "I had thought you were alone, sir."

"All the same. Say what you want."

"I have taken the liberty of coming to speak to you on a private matter, sir; but ——" There he stopped.

"Say it, say it," cried Mr. Preen.

"When I was in this room to-day, sir, I

heard you tell a gentleman that your little girls were in want of a governess."

"Well?"

"Sir, what I am about to say may seem to you nothing but presumption—but my sister is seeking for just such a situation. If you—if Mrs. Preen—would but see her!"

"Your sister?" returned the lawyer; with, Charles thought, cold surprise. It damped him: made him feel shrinkingly, sensitively little.

"Oh, pray do not judge of my sister by me, sir!—I mean by the position I occupy here," implored Charles, all his pre-arranged speeches forgotten, and speaking straight out of his wounded feelings, his full heart. "You only know me as a young man working for his daily bread, and very poor. But indeed we are gentlepeople: not only by birth and education, but in mind and habits. I was copying a deed to-day: the lease of a farm on the estate of Eagles' Nest. Do you know it, sir?"

"Know what?" asked Mr. Preen. "That you were copying it, or the deed, or the estate?"

"Eagles' Nest."

"I know it only from being solicitor to its

owner. As my predecessor, Mr. Callard, was before me."

"That estate was ours, sir. When Mr. George Atkinson came to take possession of it he turned us out. It had come to my father from his sister, Mrs. Atkinson, and we lived in it for a year, never dreaming it possible that it could be wrested from us. But at the year's end a later will came to light: my aunt had left Eagles' Nest to Mr. George Atkinson, passing my father over."

Charles stopped to gather breath and firmness. The remembrance of his father, and of their subsequent misfortunes and privations, well-nigh unnerved him. Mr. Preen listened in evident surprise.

"But—was your father Major Raynor, of Eagles' Nest?"

"Yes, sir."

"You never mentioned it."

"To what end if I had?" returned Charles; while the stranger took a momentary glance across his shoulder at Charles, and then bent over his newspaper again, as though the matter and the young clerk were no concern of his. "Now that my position in life has so much altered, I would rather let people assume I was

born a copying clerk, than the heir to Eagles' Nest."

"It sounds like a romance," cried Mr. Preen.

"For us it has been, and is, only too stern reality. But I do not wish to trouble you with these affairs, sir; and I should not have presumed to allude to them, but for wishing to show you that Alice is superior to what you would imagine her to be as my sister. She is a very excellent governess indeed, accomplished, and a thorough lady."

"And you say she is in want of a situation?"

"Yes, sir. She has been for two years teacher in a school at Richmond. If Mrs. Preen would but consent to see her!—if she would but try her!—I think, I know she would prove worthy. I do not say so on purpose to get her the place," he continued, earnestly and truthfully, "but because I do really believe she could and would faithfully fulfil its duties. I would not otherwise urge it: for we have learnt not to press ourselves forward at the expense of other people's interests, however urgent the need."

"Well, look here, Raynor: I cannot say

anything myself about this matter ; it is Mrs. Preen's business entirely," spoke the lawyer, upon whom Charles's story and Charles's manner of telling it had made an impression. "If your sister likes to call and see Mrs. Preen she can."

"Oh, thank you ; thank you very much, sir," said Charles. "I am sure you will like Alice."

"Stay ; not so fast"—for Charley was leaving the room in eager haste. "Do you know where my house is ?"

"To be sure, sir—Bayswater. I have been up there with messages for you."

"So that's young Raynor, is it !" cried the gentleman at the fire, turning round as Charles went out, and taking a look at his back.

"It is young Raynor, one of our copying clerks," acquiesced Mr. Preen. "But I never knew he was one of the Raynors who were connected with Eagles' Nest."

"Is he steady ?—hardworking ?"

"Quite so, I think. He keeps his hours punctually, and does his work well. He has been here nearly two years."

"Is not upstart and lazy ?"

Mr. Preen laughed. "He has no opportunity

of being either. I fancy he and his family have to live in a very humble, reduced kind of way. If they were the Raynors of Eagles' Nest—and of course they were, or he would not say so—they must have been finding the world pretty hard of late."

"So much the better," remarked the stranger. "By what I have heard, they needed to find it so."

"He has to make no end of shifts, lacking means. At first the clerks made fun of him; but they left it off: he took it so helplessly and patiently. His clothes are often threadbare; he walks to and fro, instead of riding as the others do, though I fancy it is close upon three miles. I don't believe he has a proper dinner one day out of the six."

The stranger nodded complacently: as if the information gave him intense satisfaction.

"I wish I could persuade you to come home and dine with me," resumed Mr. Preen, as he concluded his preparations for departure.

"I am not well enough. I am fit for nothing to-night but bed. Will one of your people call a cab for me? Oh, here's Prestleigh."

As Charles had gone out, dashing along

the passage from his interview, he nearly dashed against Mr. Prestleigh, who was coming up it, some papers in his hand.

"Take care, Raynor! What are you in such a hurry about? Is Mr. George Atkinson gone?"

"Who, sir?" asked Charles, struck with the name.

"Mr. George Atkinson. Is he still with Mr. Preen?"

"Some gentleman is with him, sir. He is sitting over the fire."

"The same, no doubt. He is a great invalid just now."

Charles felt his face flush all over. So, it was the owner of Eagles' Nest before whom he had spoken. What a singular coincidence! The only time that a word had escaped his lips in regard to their fallen fortunes, *he* must be present, and hear it! And Charley felt inclined to wish his tongue had been tied first. All the world might have been welcome to hear it, rather than George Atkinson.

The way home was generally long and weary, but this evening Charles found it light: he seemed to tread upon air. His thoughts were filled with Alice, and with the hope he

was carrying to her. Never for a moment did he doubt she would be successful. He already saw her, in imagination, installed at Mrs. Preen's.

Edina went to Bayswater with Alice in the morning. A handsome house, well set up. Mrs. Preen, interested in what she had heard from her husband, received them graciously. She liked them at first sight. Though very plain in dress, not to say poor, she saw that they were gentlewomen.

"It cannot be that I am speaking to Mrs. Raynor?" she cried, puzzled at Edina's youthful look.

Edina set her right: she was *Miss* Raynor. "The result of possessing no cards," thought Edina. "I never had but fifty printed in my life, and most of those got discoloured with years.—Mrs. Raynor is not strong enough to walk so far as this," she said aloud.

"But surely you did not walk!" cried Mrs. Preen.

"Yes, for walking costs nothing," replied Edina with a smile.

"The Raynor family, if I have been rightly informed, have experienced a reverse of fortune."

“A reverse such as rarely is experienced,” avowed Edina. “From affluence and luxury they have been plunged into poverty. If you, madam, are what, from this short interview, I judge you to be, the avowal will not tell against our application.”

“Not in the least,” said Mrs. Preen, cordially, for she was a cordial-mannered, warm-hearted, sensible woman. “We do not expect rich young ladies to go out as governesses.”

Well, the result was that Alice was engaged, and they were invited to stay for luncheon. Alice played, and her playing was approved of; she sang one short song, and that was approved of. Mrs. Preen was really taken with her. She was to have thirty guineas a-year to begin with, and to enter the day after the morrow.

“I can buy mamma a new black silk, by-and-by, with all that money,” said Alice impulsively, with a flushed, happy face. And though Mrs. Preen laughed at the remark, she liked her all the better for it: it was so naive and genuine.

“Oh, my dear child, I am sure God is helping you!” breathed Mrs. Raynor, when they got back home and told her the news.

Then all was preparation ; two days' time, scarcely that, was not much in which to make Alice ready. Edina worked like a slave, doing the chief part towards it, even washing and ironing some light things with her own hands, trimming a bonnet, renovating more than one dress, packing, and giving snatches of pleasant counsel to her for whom all this was being done. It chanced that that week they were short of work — the nets, so far as Laurel Cottage was concerned, were taking a temporary holiday. It occasionally was so. "But see," said Edina, "how well things happen. Had we been busy this week, I could not have given my time to Alice and to this work. The one or the other must have been neglected."

On the afternoon appointed, Thursday, Alice went to take up her abode at Mrs. Preen's, accompanied, as before, by Edina. Poverty brings us acquainted with habits before unknown, and necessity, it is said, is a hard taskmaster ; but, nevertheless, it was not deemed well that Alice should walk alone in the streets of London. Edina left her in safety, and saw for a moment her pupils—two nice little girls of eight and ten years old.

Alice was taking off her bonnet in the chamber assigned her when Mrs. Preen entered it.

"We shall have a few friends with us this evening, Miss Raynor," she said. "It may give you a little pleasure to come to the drawing-room and join them."

"Oh, thank you," said Alice, her face beaming at the unexpected, and, with her, very rare treat. "If I can—if my boxes come. They were sent off this morning by the carrier."

The boxes came. Poor Alice might have looked almost as well had they stayed away, for her one best dress was an old black silk. Prettily made for evening wear, it is true; but its bits of white lace and its ribbon trimmings could not hide the fact that the silk itself was worn and shabby.

The few friends consisted of at least thirty people, most of them very smart. Mrs. Preen introduced her to a young lady, a Miss Knox, who was chatty and pleasant, and told her many of the names. But after a while Miss Knox went away into the next room, leaving Alice alone.

She felt something like a fish out of water.

Other people could move about here and there and anywhere, and talk with this acquaintance and laugh with that ; but Alice, very conscious of being only the governess, did not like to do so. She stood in the corner, near one of the open windows, within shade of the muslin curtains that were being blown about by the draught, looking alternately down on the road below and across the rooms.

Suddenly, her whole conscious being seemed struck as by a blow. Her pulses stopped, her heart felt faint, every vestige of colour forsook her cheeks. Walking slowly over the carpet, within a yard of her, came William Stane.

Not until he was close up did he see her standing there. A moment's hesitation, during which he seemed to be as surprised as she, and then he held out his hand.

“ It is Miss Raynor, I think ? ”

“ Yes,” replied Alice, her hand meeting his, and the hot crimson flushing her cheek again. How well he was looking !—how well ! Better, far better looking than he used to be. He seemed to have *grown*—and yet that could not be ; to be of more importance. In one sense of the word he was of more, for he had risen into note as a pleader, young at the Bar though

he was, and his name was often on the lips of men. His presence brought back to Alice the old days of Elysium at Eagles' Nest, and set her heart aching.

"Are Sir Philip and Lady Stane quite well?" she asked, in the sheer need of saying something: for the silence was embarrassing.

"My mother is well, thank you; my father is very poorly indeed. He is a confirmed invalid now."

The tone of his answer was frigidly cold. Alice felt it painfully. She stood there before him in the blaze of light, all too conscious of her shabby dress, of her subdued manner, of all her other detriments. Not a yard off sat a young lady in rich white silk and lace, diamond bracelets gleaming on her arms. Oh, but times had changed!

"Are any of your family here to-night, Miss Raynor? I do not see them."

"No; oh no;—I am the governess," replied poor Alice, making the confession in bitter pain. And he might hear it in her voice.

"Oh—the governess," he assented, quite unmoved. "I hope Mrs. Raynor is well."

"Not very well, thank you."

Mr. Stane moved away. She saw him

several times after that in different parts of the room ; but he did not come near her again.

And that, the first night that Alice spent at her new home, was passed in the same cruel pain, her pillow wet with tears. Pain, not so much felt for the life of ease she had once enjoyed, the one of labour she had entered upon, not so much in regret for the changed place she held in the world, but for the loss of the love of William Stane.

CHAPTER V.

THE EBONY DESK.

BUT there is something yet to tell of the afternoon. It was about five o'clock when Edina got home. Very much to her astonishment she saw a gentleman seated by Mrs. Raynor. The tea things were on the table. Bobby sat on the floor. Kate stood on one leg, her back to the window, gazing with some awe at the visitor—so unusual an event in the retired home. He was a scanty-haired little gentleman, the top of his head so white that it looked as if it were powdered; with cold, light eyes, and a trim, neat dress. Edina knew him at once, and held out her hand. It was Street, the banker.

It was evident that he had come in but a minute before her, for he had not yet spoken of his business. He entered upon it now. Edina silently took off her things as she listened, put them on the side table, and made the tea. There he sat, talking methodically, and appear-

ing to notice nothing, but in reality seeing all things: the poor and shabby room, the scanty attire of the young children, the faded appearance of Mrs. Raynor, as she sat putting fresh cuffs on a worn jacket of Alfred's, the dry toast they were about to eat with their tea, lacking butter. Edina began to pour out the tea, and brought him a cup, handing him the sugar and milk.

"Is it cream?" asked Mr. Street.

"It is skim-milk," said Edina. "But it is very good: not watered. We get it at a small farmhouse."

He had come to ask Mrs. Raynor whether she remembered a small ebony desk that was at Eagles' Nest. It had belonged to the late Mrs. Atkinson, he observed: she used to keep papers in it; receipts and things of that kind.

"I remember it quite well," replied Mrs. Raynor. "My husband took it into use, and kept papers of his own in it. He used to put all the bills there."

"Do you know what became of that desk, madam?"

"It was left in the house," said Mrs. Raynor.

"Ay: we supposed that it would be,"

nodded the banker. "But, madam, it cannot be found. I was at Eagles' Nest myself all day yesterday, searching for it. Mr. Fairfax says he does not remember to have seen it."

The name struck unfamiliarly on Mrs. Raynor's ear. "Mr. Fairfax! Who is he?"

"The land steward, who lives in the house. He thinks that had the desk been there when he entered into possession, he should have noticed it."

"Is the desk particularly wanted?" interposed Edina, struck with the fact that he, the fully-occupied man of business, should have been down, searching for a whole day.

"We should be glad to find it," was the answer, as he turned again to Mrs. Raynor. "Lamb, the butler, who remained in the house for some two or three weeks after you quitted it, says he does not remember to have seen it there after you left. So I procured your address from my brother, madam, and have come to question you."

Mrs. Raynor, who had put aside her work soon after Mr. Street entered, sat with her cup and saucer in her hand, and looked a little bewildered. He proceeded to explain further.

On the evening of Mr. George Atkinson's

arrival in London—which had only taken place on Monday, the day Charles saw him in Mr. Preen's office—he and the banker were conversing together on various matters, as would naturally be the case after his long absence. Amid other subjects touched upon was that of the lost money and the vouchers for it : neither of which had ever been discovered. While recalling—both of them—in a desultory kind of way, all kinds of supposititious places in which these vouchers (if they existed) could have been placed, Mr. Atkinson suddenly asked whether the ebony desk had been well searched. Why of course it had, and all the other desks, was Mr. Street's answer. "Ay, but," said George Atkinson, "that ebony desk had a false bottom, in which things might be concealed. I wonder I never thought of that before. It may be that the Raynors never found that out ; and I should not be much surprised if Mrs. Atkinson put the bonds in it, and if they are in it now."

Of course the suggestion was worth following up. Very especially worth it did it appear to Street the banker, who had a keen scent for money, whether of his own or other people's. He went down himself to Eagles' Nest to search the desk : but of the desk he could not find

any traces. The land agent who had since occupied the house, Mr. Fairfax, did not remember to have seen anything of the kind. He next enquired after Lamb the former butler, and heard that he was now living with Sir Philip Stane. To Sir Philip Stane's proceeded Mr. Street, and saw Lamb. Lamb said he knew the desk quite well; but he could not recollect seeing it after the Raynor family left, and he had no idea what became of it. It might have been there afterwards, he admitted, upon the point being pressed, and he not have noticed it: but still he thought he should have noticed it if it had been. Mr. Street quickly asked if he did not think he should have noticed its vacant place. Lamb replied that that ebony desk had no very particular place, for the Major was apt to carry it about with him, and to leave it anywhere: and, he added, so very many small trifles belonging to the Raynors were taken away with them that the rooms hardly looked the same, and the absence of the desk would be less likely to be noticed by him. Mr. Street recognised the good sense of this, and felt baffled. He had now come down to question Mrs. Raynor.

“ I wish, madam, I could hear that you had

brought it away with you," he observed, the explanation over. A rather long one for curt-speaking Mr. Street to give.

"We should not be likely to bring it away," spoke poor Mrs. Raynor in her mild, meek voice. "We were told that we must not remove anything that had been Mrs. Atkinson's."

"True. Those instructions were issued by Mr. George Atkinson through me, madam."

"And I can assure you, sir, we did *not* remove anything," she replied, a little flurried. "All that we brought away belonged to us strictly. But I fancy Mr. George Atkinson must be mistaken in supposing the bonds were in that desk. Had they been there my husband could not have failed to see them."

"Did he know of the false bottom?"

"I am not aware that he did. But still—he so often used that desk. It frequently stood in the little room, atop of that low cabinet, or *secrétaire*. I have seen him turn it topsyturvy and shake all the papers out many a time, when searching for any bill he had mislaid."

"But that does not prove the bonds were not in the secret compartment," remarked the banker. "He could not shake out them. No, nor suspect that they were there."

"Did you know of this secret compartment?" enquired Edina, of the banker.

"I did not, Miss Raynor. Or you may be sure it would have been searched when we were first looking for the bonds. This desk George Atkinson himself brought from Ceylon the first time he went there, and gave it to Mrs. Atkinson. It was not, I believe, really of ebony, but of some black wood peculiar to the country; handsomely carved, as you no doubt remember, if you, as I conclude, made acquaintance with the desk at Eagles' Nest. Mr. George Atkinson cannot imagine how it was he forgot that desk until now; but it had as completely slipped his memory, he says, as though it had never existed."

"I'm sure I wish it could be found!" spoke Mrs. Raynor. "It may be that the bonds are in it. That my husband never discovered the compartment you speak of, I feel sure. If he had, we should all have known it."

"And—just one last question, madam," said the banker, rising to depart. "Do you chance to remember in what room that desk was left when you quitted Eagles' Nest?"

Mrs. Raynor paused in thought; and then shook her head hopelessly. "No, I do not,"

she answered. "I know the desk must have been left there because we did not bring it away, but I have no especial recollection about it at all. Dear me! What a strange thing if the bonds were lying concealed in it all that while!"

"That they are lying in it I think more than likely—provided that there are any to lie anywhere," observed the banker, "for it is most singular that none have come to light. It is also deeply to be regretted that Mr. Atkinson did not think of the desk before this. Good evening, madam."

"We heard Mr. Atkinson was in London," remarked Edina, as she went with Mr. Street to the front door.

"For a few days only."

"For a few days only! When does he intend to enter into the possession of Eagles' Nest?"

"I cannot tell: he is an invalid just now," was the hurried answer, as if the banker did not care to be questioned. "Good day, Miss Raynor." And away he went with a brisk step.

Edina began to wash up the tea-things, wanting them away that she might get to some

ironing. Her mind was busy; busy, and somewhat troubled. Reminiscences of George Atkinson, thoughts of the missing desk and of the lost bonds that it was perhaps hiding, kept rapidly chasing each other in her brain—and there seemed to be no comfort in any one of them.

“Had the desk been brought away from Eagles’ Nest, I must have seen it,” she remarked at length, but in a dubious tone, as if not feeling altogether sure of her assertion.

“But surely, Edina, you don’t think we *should* bring it!” cried Mrs. Raynor, looking up from her work, which she had resumed—the mending of the jacket.

“Not intentionally, of course, Mary. The only chance of it would be if Charles, or anybody else, packed it up inadvertently.”

“I am sure he did not,” said Mrs. Raynor. “The desk was small, it is true, but he could not pack it up to bring away without knowing what it was, as one might a smaller parcel.”

“The unpleasant thought that has occurred to me is this,” explained Edina, pausing in her occupation to look at Mrs. Raynor. “If the desk, by any misadventure, did come away from Eagles’ Nest, it was burnt in the fire.”

Down dropped Mrs. Raynor's work and her hands together. The words startled her. "Oh, Edina!"

Edina went on very gently with what she was doing, keeping silence. It was one of those uncomfortable ideas that try the mind: for they cannot be solved.

"Oh, I hope, I hope it did not come away," sighed Mrs. Raynor. "I do not think it did. What a dreadful thing—if those bonds were in it! And one or two trunks I had not unpacked at all: they were burnt just as they were."

"If one of you could but recollect absolutely the leaving of the desk at Eagles' Nest, it would be a great relief," said Edina.

"I know that desk," spoke up Kate, looking off the spelling lesson she was learning.

"Did you see it just before we left the house?" asked Mrs. Raynor in an eager hopeful tone, catching at a straw.

Kate shook her head. "I don't think I did, mamma. I can't remember. I saw Frank empty all the papers out of it."

"Frank did?" cried Edina.

"Why yes; it was Frank who examined the desk," said Mrs. Raynor. "I now recollect that much. It was the morning of the day

after the funeral. You were upstairs, Edina, helping to pack Daisy's things for London. I was crying about the money we owed, not knowing whether it was much or little, and Frank said we had better examine the bills. I told him the bills were most likely all in the little ebony desk—and he went to get them.”

“I saw him do it,” reiterated Kate. “I was in the little room with Mademoiselle Delrue; and he came and unlocked the desk, and shook all the papers out of it, and took them away with him.”

“And what did he do with the desk?” asked Edina. “Did he leave it there?”

“I don't know. I think he took that away too.”

“Do you think you saw the desk at all after we came to this house, Kate?—Not this house of course; I don't mean this house,” added poor Mrs. Raynor, hastily correcting herself. “The one in which we were so unfortunate. Did you see it at all among the luggage, child?”

“No, mamma, I never saw it. But I did see Frank turn the papers out of it that morning at Eagles' Nest.”

“I wonder whether Frank would remember anything of it?” mused Edina. “Perhaps he put the desk somewhere for safety after taking the papers out of it: in some cupboard, or closet?”

“Oh, perhaps he did,” added Mrs. Raynor. “It is so very strange a thing where it can have got to. I—I—don’t like that suggestion about the fire, Edina,” she added in a whisper. “It seems to frighten me.”

“Then, Mary, I am very sorry I mentioned it,” replied Edina. “I may as well walk over to Frank’s, and hear what his recollections are upon the subject,” she added after a pause.

“But you must be so tired, Edina, after that walk to Bayswater.”

“Not very. I had meant to iron the boys’ collars and Charley’s wristbands this evening, but I can do that to-morrow.”

Mrs. Raynor offered no objection; and Edina set out. The visit of the banker seemed to have saddened her, rather than cheered her—as so unusual a little change in the monotony of their home might have been expected to do. They all felt faint with their depressing prospects; sick, so to say, from want of hope. Were things to go on for life as they now were?

It was a question they often asked themselves. And, for all they could see; for all the ray of opening that could be discerned; the answer given back was—Yes. Even Edina at times lost heart, and indulged in a good cry in secret.

Matters were not in a much better state at Frank Raynor's. It is true no poverty was there, no privation; but the old confidential happiness that existed between him and his wife had disappeared. Daisy was much changed. The once warm-hearted girl had become cold and silent, and frightfully apathetical. Her husband never caught a kindly look from her, or heard a loving tone. She did not complain. She did not reproach him. She did not find fault with any earthly thing. She just went through life in a dead kind of manner, as if all interest had left her for ever. Frank put it down to dissatisfaction at their changed circumstances; to the living in the obscure manner they did live. Ever and anon he would essay to speak a word of hopeful expectation that things would be different sometime: but his wife never responded to it.

Steeped to the ears in the old miserable jealousy, was Mrs. Frank Raynor. All through

this past year had she been nourishing it greedily. It had grown into a chronic ailment ; it coloured her mind by day and her dreams by night. The most provoking feature of it all was, that she could not lay hold of any tangible proof of her husband's delinquency, anything very special to make a stir of : and how intensely aggravating that deficiency is to a jealous woman, let many a one confess. That her husband did go to Mrs. Bell's frequently, was indisputable : but then, as a set-off against that, stood the fact that he went in his professional capacity. No end of pills and potions were entered to Mrs. Bell's share in the physic book, and Daisy was therefore unable to assert that the plea for his visits was a pretence. But she believed it was. Once, chance had given her an opportunity of speaking of these visits. A very serious accident happened in the street just opposite their door, through the pranks of a vicious horse. Daisy saw it from the drawing-room window ; saw the injured man brought into the surgery. She ran down to the parlour in distress. Frank was not at home. The boy flew one way to find him, Eve ran another : but Frank could not be found, and the poor senseless man had to be carried away else-

where. "I'm very sorry," said Frank, when he returned, speaking rather carelessly; "I was at Mrs. Bell's." "You appear to be pretty often there," retorted Daisy, a rasping sound in her usually cold tone. "I go every two or three days," said he. And how much oftener, I wonder! thought Daisy: but she did not say it.

No, there was no open offence for her to lay hold of. What Daisy looked for was, to *see* her husband in the company of Rosaline. And this she could not get to see. Not once, during the whole past twelvemonth, had she seen them abroad together: the pleasant sight seemed specially to evade her eyes. She did not watch Frank as at first; she had grown ashamed of that, perhaps a little weary; but she looked after him tolerably well; and she had not once been rewarded by the sight of Rosaline. Had that obnoxious individual been a myth, she could not have more completely hidden herself from her neighbours and from Daisy on a week-day. On Sundays Daisy generally saw her at church; the girl sat in a pew that was within view of Mr. Max Brown's. In that pew Rosaline would be, wearing her plain black silk gown; still, devout, seeming to notice nobody:

had she been training for a nun, the world could not have appeared to possess less interest for her. Her black lace veil was never lifted from before her face: but it could not hide that face's beauty. Frank, when at church, (which was not always), was on his good behaviour and did not hasten to follow Rosaline out. In truth, he had not the opportunity afforded him; for Rosaline seemed to glide away before anybody else stirred, and be lost to sight.

In this unsatisfactory manner the seasons had passed, Frank and his wife living in a cold, estranged atmosphere; at tacit war with one another (at least *she* was) without any acknowledged cause.

On this self-same evening when Edina was on her way to visit them, the West Indian mail brought a letter to Frank from Mr. Max Brown. That roving individual wrote regularly once a month, all his letters being filled, more or less, with vague promises of his return. Vague, because no certain time was ever mentioned for it. Frank called for Eve to light the lamp, and stood by the fire in the little parlour while he read his letter. It was genial autumn weather, and very few people had taken to

fires ; but Daisy seemed ever to feel chilly, and liked one lighted at dusk. People who live in a chronic state of discontent, fancy discomfort sometimes where none exists.

“ He says he is really coming now, Daisy,” cried Frank in a brisk tone as he looked over the letter. “ Listen : ‘ I am now positively thinking of starting for home, and may be with you soon after the beginning of the new year. I know that you have thought my prolonged absence strange, but I will fully explain all in person. My mother is, I fear, sinking now ! ’ ”

Mrs. Frank Raynor made no reply or comment of any kind. For days together she would not speak to her husband, except when anything he might say absolutely demanded an answer.

“ And when Brown comes, we shall have to leave,” went on Frank. “ You will be glad of it, I am sure.”

“ I don’t care whether we leave or not,” was the ungracious retort.

And she did not seem to care. Life, for her, had lost its sweetness. Nay, she probably would prefer, of the two, to remain where she was : if away, the field would be so entirely

free and open for her husband and that obnoxious young woman.

"I shall be at liberty, once Brown is here to take to his own practice," continued Frank; "and I will try to place you in a more genial atmosphere than this. I know you have felt it keenly, Daisy, and are feeling it still; but I have not been able to help myself."

His tone was considerably tender; he stooped unexpectedly and kissed her forehead. Daisy gave no answering kiss: she just passively endured the caress, and that was all. The tears sprang into her eyes. Frank did not see them: he carried his letter into the surgery, where a great portion of his home time was passed.

His thoughts were far away. Would Mr. Blase Pellet tolerate this anticipated removal of his when it came?—would he, so to say, *permit it*? Or, would he not rather dodge Frank's footsteps and establish himself in some other chemist's shop where he could still hold him in view? Yes: Frank felt certain that he would. Unconscious though Frank was of his wife's long-continued supervision, he felt persuaded in his mind that he was ever subjected to that of Blase Pellet. It was not, in one sense of the

word, an offensive supervision ; for not once in three months did he and Pellet come into contact : but Frank felt always just like a man chained—who can go as far as the chain allows him, but no farther. With all his heart he wished that he could better his position for Daisy's sake ; had long wished it ; but in his sense of thralldom he had been contented to let things go on as they were going, dreading any attempt at change. Over and over again had he felt thankful for the prolonged wanderings of Mr. Max Brown, which afforded him the necessary plea for putting up with his present lot.

Daisy sat on with her discontented face. A very pretty face yet ; prettier, if anything, than of yore ; with the clear eyes and their amber light, and the delicate bloom on the lovely features, and the sunny, luxuriant hair. She often dressed daintily, wishing in her secret heart, in spite of her resentment, to win her husband back. This evening she wore a dark blue silk, one of the remnants of better days, with a bit of rich white falling lace at the throat, on which a gold locket, attached to its thin chain, rested. Very, very pretty did Edina think her when she arrived, and was brought into the room by Frank.

"You never come to see me," began Daisy with unnecessary complaint. "I might be dead and buried, for all you or anybody else would know, Edina."

"Ah no, Margaret, you might not," was Edina's answer. "Not while you have your good husband at your side. If you really needed us, he would take care that we should know it."

"All the same, everybody neglects me," returned Daisy. "I'm glad you thought of me at last."

"I came this evening for a certain purpose," said Edina; who would not urge in excuse the very little time she had to give to visiting, for Daisy must know it quite well. And she forthwith, untying her bonnet-strings, told Frank of Mr. Street's visit, of its purport, and of their own conjectures at Laurel Cottage after the banker had departed.

"Why yes, it was I who emptied the ebony desk," said Frank. "A false bottom! I really can't believe it, Edina. Some of us would not have failed to find it out."

"We cannot doubt what Mr. Street says. He did not know of it himself, you hear, until Mr. George Atkinson spoke of it."

"If there was anything of the kind—well, yes, I suppose there must have been, as Atkinson says it," rejoined Frank. "But why in the world did not Atkinson speak of it before? When he was last in England the hiding-place of these bonds was being hunted for, high and low—or had been hunted for, not long before."

"He says, I tell you, that he cannot imagine how it was it did not occur to him to ask whether the desk had been searched. I should imagine," added Edina, "that he would not suppose but what the secret compartment was known, and took its search for granted. But, Frank, we cannot remedy the forgetfulness if we talk of it for ever: what I wanted to ascertain from you is, whether you remember where you left the desk."

"No, that I don't. I remember turning the bills and papers out of it wholesale, and carrying them into the room where Mrs. Raynor was sitting. As to the desk, I suppose it remained upon the table."

"You are sure you emptied it of all the papers?"

"Sure and certain," replied Frank in his usual light, gay manner. "I remember that much. I turned the desk upside down and

shook the papers out, and afterwards passed my hand inside to be satisfied that none remained."

"Kate says she saw you do it. But she does not recollect what became of the desk."

"Neither do I recollect. Except that the desk was left in the room. I did not put it elsewhere. I daresay it still remained in there when the rest of you came away from the house."

"The great fear on our minds is, whether it was packed inadvertently, and brought up with the rest of the luggage. If so, it was burnt with that."

"Not likely, Edina. Nobody could pack up that desk inadvertently."

"A servant might. I expect a great deal of the packing was left to the servants."

"Sure to have been," acknowledged Frank readily.

"Well—and there it is," concluded Edina. "I think the probability is, that the desk was put up by the servants and was brought away in some one of the large boxes. If it had remained at Eagles' Nest, it would no doubt be there now."

"Then I suppose they will never find the

lost money as long as oak and ash grow ; wanting the bonds to furnish the clue to it," observed Frank. "It is a very unsatisfactory thing. George Atkinson should have remembered to speak in time."

He was called into the surgery with the last words, being wanted there. Edina began to retie her bonnet-strings. Daisy had picked up some crochet-work.

"Why don't you take your bonnet off, Edina, and stay?"

"Because I must go home, dear."

"Not before you have had some supper.—Not stay for it! Why can't you stay?"

"I do not like going back so late."

"As if anybody would hurt you!"

"I do not fear they would. But I am not London bred, you know, Margaret, and cannot quite overcome my feeling of dislike to London streets at night."

"Oh, very well. Nobody cares to be with me now."

Edina looked at her. It was not the first indication by several that Mrs. Frank Raynor had given of a spirit of discontent.

"Will you tell me what it is that is troubling you, Margaret? Something is, I know."

“How do you know it?”

“Because I perceive it. I detect it every time I see you.”

“Then it’s nothing,” returned Daisy—who would not have spoken of her jealousy for the world. “That is, nothing that anybody could help, or hinder.”

“My dear,” said Edina, bending nearer to her, her sweet voice and loving tone sounding like pleasant music, “that some grievance or other is especially trying you, I think I cannot mistake. But oh, remember one thing, and take comfort. In the very brightest and happiest lot, lurks always some canker. Each rose, however lovely, must have its thorn. We ought not, in the interest of our true welfare, to wish it otherwise. God sends the clouds, Margaret, as well as the sunshine. He will take care of you while the trouble lasts, if you only bear patiently and put yourself under His shelter; and He will bring you out of the trouble in His own good time. *Trust to Him*, my dear, for He is a sure refuge.”

And when Edina had left, Frank walking with her through the more obscure streets, Daisy burst into tears, and sobbed bitterly. The indulgence of this jealousy might be very

gratifying to her temper ; but it had lasted long, making her at times feel low and ill and weak.

“ If God cared for me He would punish that Rosaline Bell,” was her comment on Edina’s words. “ Lay her up with a broken leg, or something.”

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE CHURCH WALLS.

“**N**O, I cannot buy the bonnet unless you will make the alteration at once. Now: so that I may take it home with me in the carriage.”

The speaker was Mrs. Townley. Daisy was spending the day with her in Westbourne Terrace, and they had come abroad, shopping. Mrs. Townley had fallen in love with a bonnet she saw in a milliner's window in Oxford Street; she entered the shop and offered to buy the bonnet, subject to some alteration. The proprietor of the business seemed rather unwilling to make it.

“I assure you, madam, it looks better as it is,” she urged. “Were we to substitute blue flowers for these grey ones and carry the side higher, it would take away all its style at once.”

The assurance somewhat shook Mrs. Townley. If there was one thing she went in for, above all else, it was “style.” But she liked

to have her own way also, and thought a great deal of her own taste.

"Three parts of these milliners object to any suggested alteration only to save themselves trouble," she said aside to Daisy. "Don't you think it would look best as I propose?"

"I hardly know," replied Daisy. "If we could see the alteration first, we might be able to judge."

But, to make the change, unless the bonnet was first bought, Madame François (her name, as it appeared on the door plate) absolutely refused. It would spoil it, she said, for another customer. Of course she would alter it, if Madam insisted after purchasing the bonnet; but she must again express her opinion that it would destroy the style.

The discussion was carried on with animation, Madame's native tongue being decidedly English, in spite of her name. Mrs. Townley still urged her own opinion, but not very strenuously; for she felt rather doubtful, and would not have risked losing the "style" for the world.

"I will call my head milliner," said Madame at length. "Her taste is very supe-

rior. Mam'selle, go and ask Miss Bell to step here."

Mam'selle — a young person, evidently French — left her place behind the counter and went into another room. Every pulse in Daisy's body seemed to go tingling to her fingers' ends when she came back with Rosaline. Quiet, self-contained, without a smile on her face to tell of any gladness of heart there might be within, Rosaline gave her opinion when the case was submitted to her. She took the bonnet in her hand, and kept it there, for a minute, or so, looking at it.

"I think, madame," she said to her mistress, "that if some grey flowers of a lighter shade were substituted for these, it would be prettier. Blue flowers would spoil the bonnet. As to the side, it certainly ought not to be carried higher. It is the right height as it is."

"Then take it, and change the flowers at once, Miss Bell," said Madame, upon Mrs. Townley's signifying her assent to the suggestion. "The lady will wait.—Miss Bell's taste is always to be depended upon," added Madame, as Rosaline went away with the bonnet.

"How extremely good-looking she is!" exclaimed Mrs. Townley: who had never seen

Rosaline before, and of course knew nothing about her. "Quite beautiful."

"Yes," assented Madame. "When I engaged her I intended her to be in this front room and wait on customers; for beauty does attract, there's no denying it. But Miss Bell refused, point blank: she had come to be in my work-room, she said, not to serve. Had I insisted, she would have left."

"Is she respectable?"

The question was interposed by Daisy. Swelling with all kinds of resentful and bitter feelings, she had allowed her tongue to get the better of her discretion; and the next moment felt ashamed of herself. Madame François did not like it at all.

"Res-pect-able!" she echoed with unnecessary deliberation. "I do not understand the question, madam."

Daisy flushed crimson. Mrs. Townley had also turned a surprised look upon her sister.

"Miss Bell is one of the best-conducted young persons I ever knew," pursued Madame. "Steady and quiet in manner always, as you saw her now. She is very superior indeed; quite a lady in her ways and thoughts. Before she came to me, nearly two years ago, she

had a business of her own down in Cornwall. That is, her aunt had; and Miss Bell was with her."

"She looks very superior indeed, to me," said Mrs. Townley, wishing to smooth away her sister's uncalled-for remark: "she has a nice tone of speech.—Have you any dentelle-de-Paris?"

The bonnet soon reappeared: but it was not brought by Rosaline. Mrs. Townley chose some lace; paid the bill, and left. As Daisy followed her sister into the carriage, her mind in a very unpleasant whirl, she knew that that matter which had puzzled her—the never seeing her husband abroad with Rosaline—was now explained. Rosaline was at this place by day; but, she supposed, at home at night.

It was so. The reader may remember that one evening when Frank went in to see Dame Bell soon after she came to London, she had told him that Rosaline had gone to Oxford Street on some mysterious errand: mysterious in so far as that Rose had not disclosed to her what she went for. The fact was, that Rosaline had then gone to this very milliner's by appointment, having procured a letter of

introduction to her from a house of business in Falmouth, with the view of tendering her services. For she knew that her mother's income was too small to live on comfortably, and it would be a good thing if she could increase it. Madame Francois, pleased with her appearance and satisfied with the letter she brought, engaged her at once. Rosaline had been there ever since: going up in a morning and returning home at night. The milliner had wished her to be entirely in the house, but she could not leave her mother.

On this day, as usual, Rosaline sat at her work in the back room, planning out new bonnets—that would be displayed afterwards in the window as “the latest fashion: just from Paris”—and directing the young women under her. That she had a wonderful aptitude and innate taste for the work, was recognised by all who saw her engaged in it, and Madame Francois had speedily made her the superintendent. The girl, as Madame thought, always seemed to have some grievous weight of care upon her: when questioned upon the point, Rosaline would answer that she was uneasy respecting the decaying health of her mother.

More thoughtful than usual, more buried in the inward life, for the appearance of Mrs. Frank Raynor, whom she knew by sight, had brought back old reminiscences of Trennach, Rosaline sat at her employment this day until it was completed, and the hours of labour had passed. Generally speaking she went home by omnibus, though she sometimes walked. She walked on this evening; for it was a mild and pleasant one, and somehow she felt in great need of the fresh air. So that it was tolerably late when she got in: close upon half-past nine.

The first thing to be noticed was, that her mother's chair was empty. As was the room. Rosaline passed quickly into the bed-chamber, and saw that her mother had undressed and was in bed.

"Why, mother! what's this for? Are you not well?"

"Not very," sighed the dame. "Your supper is ready for you on the table, Rose."

"Never mind my supper, mother," replied Rose, snuffing the candle, and putting two or three things to rights in the room generally, after taking off her bonnet. "Tell me what it is that's the matter with you. Do you feel worse?"

“Not much—that I know of,” was the answer. “But I got weary, and thought I should be better in bed. For the past week, or more, I can’t get your poor father out of my head, Rose: up or abed, he’s always in my mind, and it worries me.”

“But you know, mother, this cannot do you any good—as I have said,” cried Rosaline in a stifled tone: for she had heard the same complaint once or twice lately.

“What troubles me is this, child—how did he come by his death? That’s the question I’ve wanted answered all along; and now it seems never to leave me.”

Rosaline drooped her head. No one but herself knew how terribly the subject tried her.

“Blase Pellet called in at dusk for a minute or two to see how I got on,” resumed Mrs. Bell. “When I told him how poor Bell had been haunting my mind lately, and how much the prolonged mystery of his fate seemed to press upon me, he nodded his head like a bobbing image. ‘I want to know how he came by his death,’ I said to him; ‘I’m always wanting it?’ ‘I could tell, if I chose,’ said he, speaking up quick. ‘Then why don’t

you tell? I insist upon your telling,' I answered as quick as he. Upon that, he drew in, and declared he had meant nothing. But it's not the first time he has thrown out these hints, Rosaline."

"Blase is a dangerous man," spoke Rosaline, her voice trembling with passion. "He could be a dangerous enemy."

"Well, I don't see why you should say that, Rose. He is neither your enemy nor mine. But I should like to know what reason he has for saying these things."

"Don't listen to him, mother; don't encourage him here," implored Rosaline. "I'm sure it will be better for our peace that he should keep his distance. And now—will you have some arrowroot to-night, or ——"

"I won't have anything," interrupted Dame Bell. "I had a bit of supper before I undressed and a sup of ale with it. I shall get to sleep if I can: and I hope with all my heart that your poor father will not be coming to me in my dreams."

Rosaline, as bidden, carried away the candle and sat down to her own supper in the next room. But she could not eat. Mr. Blase Pellet's reported words were quite enough sup-

per for her, bringing before her all too vividly the calamity of that dreadful night. Would this state of semi-thralldom in which she lived ever cease, she asked herself; would she ever again, as long as for her the world should last, know an hour that was not tinged with its fatal remembrances and the fears connected with them.

In the morning her mother said she was better, and got up as usual. This was Saturday. When Rosaline reached home in the afternoon, earlier than on other days, she found her stirring about at some active housework. But on the Sunday morning she lay in bed, confessing that she felt but poorly. Rosaline wanted to call in Mr. Raynor: but her mother told her not to be silly; she was not ill enough for that.

The inward disorder which afflicted Mrs. Bell, and would eventually be her death, was making silent progress, sure if slow. Frank Raynor—and his experience was pretty extensive now—had never known a similar case develop itself so lingeringly. He thought she might have a year or two's life in her yet. Still, it was impossible to say: a change might occur at any moment.

On this Sunday afternoon, when she and

Rosaline were sitting together after dinner, Mr. Blase Pellet walked in. Rosaline only wished she could walk out. Rather than endure his company, she would have been glad to do it. But she forced herself to be civil to him.

"Look here," said Blase, pulling a newspaper out of his pocket when he had sat some minutes. "This advertisement must concern those Raynors that you know of. I'll read it to you."

"Lost. A small black carved desk that has the appearance of ebony. Was last seen at Eagles' Nest in the month of June, more than two years ago. Anybody giving information of where it may be found, or bringing it to Mr. Street, solicitor, of Lawyers' Row, shall receive ten guineas reward."

"Those Raynors, you know, came into that Eagles' Nest property, and then had to turn out of it again," added Blase.

"Ten guineas reward for an ebony desk!" commented Mrs. Bell. "I wonder what was in it?"

Blase did not get an invitation to stay for tea this afternoon, though he probably expected it. However, he was not one to intrude unwished for, and took his departure.

"I had a great mind to ask him what he meant by the remark he made the other evening about your poor father," said Mrs. Bell to Rosaline as he went out.

"Oh, mother, let it be!" exclaimed Rosaline in a piteous tone, her pale face changing to hectic. "He cannot know anything that would bring peace to you or to me."

"Well, I should like my tea now," said Dame Bell. "And I'd have asked him to stay, Rose, but for your ungracious looks."

Rosaline busied herself in getting the tea: which they took nearly in silence. While putting the things away in the cupboard afterwards, Rosaline made some remark: which was not answered. Supposing her mother did not hear, she spoke again. Still there came no reply, and Rose looked round. Mrs. Bell was lying back on the sofa, apparently insensible.

"It was the pain, child," she breathed, when Rosaline had revived her; but she had not quite fainted; "the sharp, sudden pain here. I never had it, I think, as bad as that."

Like a ghost she was still, with a pinched look in her face. Rosaline was frightened. Without telling her mother, she wrote a hasty line to Frank, to ask if he would please to come

round, twisted it up three-corner fashion, and sent it by the landlady's daughter.

The note arrived just as Frank Raynor and his wife were beginning to think of setting out for evening service. Frank chanced to have gone into a small back room near the kitchen, where he kept his store of drugs, and Daisy was alone when Sam came in, the note held between his fingers.

"For master, please, ma'am; and it is to be give to him directly."

With an impatient word—for Daisy knew what these hastily-written, unsealed missives generally meant, and she did not care to go to church at night alone—she untwisted it, and read the contents.

"Dear Mr. Raynor. If you could possibly come round this evening, I should be very much obliged to you. My mother has been taken suddenly worse, and I do not like her looks at all. Very truly yours, R. B."

"The shameless thing!" broke forth Mrs. Frank Raynor, in her rising passion. "She writes to him exactly as if she were his equal!"

Folding the paper in its twists again, she

threw it on the table, and went upstairs to put her bonnet on. It did not take her long : when people are in these moods their fingers are apt to be as quick as their temper. Frank was only returning to the parlour as she went down.

" Oh," said he, opening the note and reading it, " then I can't go with you to-night, Daisy. I am called out."

No answer.

" I will take you to the church door and leave you there," added he, pitching the note into the fire.

" Of course you could not stay the service with me and attend to your patient afterwards!" cried Daisy, not seeking to suppress the sarcasm in her tone.

" No, I cannot do that. It is Mrs. Bell I am called to."

" Oh ! Of all people *she* must not be neglected."

" Right, Daisy. I would neglect the whole list of patients rather than Mrs. Bell."

He spoke on impulse, pained by her looks and tone. But, had he taken time for thought, he would not have avowed so much. The avowal meant nothing—at least, in the sense that Daisy gave to it. But for him, Francis

Raynor, Mrs. Bell's husband might have been alive now. This lay on his conscience, and rendered him doubly solicitous for the poor widow. To Frank it had always seemed that she, in a degree, had belonged to him since that fatal night.

But Daisy knew nothing of this ; and the impression made upon her by the words was unfortunate, for she could only see matters through her own distorted view. It was for Rosaline's sake he was anxious for the mother, reasoned her mind, and it had now come to the shameful pass that he hesitated not to declare it—to declare it to her, his wife ! Perhaps, even, the woman was not ill—the girl had resorted to this ruse that they might spend an evening together !

She kept her face, its flashing eyes, its burning cheeks, turned to the fire lest he should see her agitation : she pressed her hands upon her chest, to still its laboured breath. Frank was putting his overcoat on, for it was a cool night, and noticed nothing. Thus they started : Daisy refusing to take his arm, on the plea of holding up her dress ; refusing to let him carry her prayer book ; giving no reply to the remark or two he made. The church bells were

chiming, the stars twinkled brightly in the frosty sky.

Under the silence and gloom of the church walls, away from the lights inside and out, Frank stopped, and laid his hand upon his wife's.

“ You are vexed, Daisy, because I cannot go to church ; but when my patients really require me I must not and will not neglect them. For a long while now you have seemed to live in a state of perpetual discontent—of resentment against me. What the cause is, I know not. I do not give you any, so far as I am aware. If it is that you are dissatisfied with our present position—and I am not surprised that you should be—I can only say how much for your sake I regret that I cannot alter it. But that is what I am not yet able to do ; and to find your dissatisfaction constantly vented upon me is hard to bear. Let us, rather, try to hope for better days, and cheer on one another.”

He wrung her hand with a sharp pressure, and turned away. The tone of his voice had been so loving and tender, and yet so full of pain, that Daisy found her eyes wet with sudden tears. She went into church. What with the bitter resentment against her husband,

her own strong sense of misery, and this softened mood, life seemed very sad to her that night.

And as the service proceeded, and the soothing tones of the sweet chant chosen for the *Magnificat* fell on her ear and heart, the softened mood grew more softened. Daisy cried in her lonely pew. Hiding her face when she knelt, she let the tears rain down. A vision came over her of a possible future: of Frank's love restored to her as by some miracle; of Rosaline Bell and these wretched troubles done with, lost in the memory of the past; of the world being fair for them again, and she and her husband walking hand in hand in it, down the stream of time. Poor Daisy let her veil fall when she rose, that her swollen eyes should not be seen.

And the sermon soothed her too. The text soothed her. It was one that she especially loved: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Daisy thought none had ever been so heavily laden before as she was; just as the lightly chastened are apt to think.

"If I can but be a little more pleasant with him, and have patience," said she to herself,

“who knows but things will work round again.”

But the heart of man is rebellious, as all the world knows; very especially rebellious is that of woman, when it gets jealous fancies into it. The trouble to which Mrs. Frank Raynor was subjected might bear precious fruit in the future, but it was not effecting much good in the present. No sooner was she out of church, and the sound of the parson's impressive voice and of the sweet singing had faded away on her ear, than all the old rancour of spirit came rushing up to the surface again.

“I wonder if he is there still?” she thought. “Most likely. I wish I could find out!”

Instead of bending her steps homeward, she turned them towards West Street, and paced twice before the house that contained Dame Bell and her daughter. A light shone behind the white blind of the window, indicating the probability that the room had inmates; but Daisy could not see who they were. She turned towards home, and had nearly reached it when Frank came hastily out of the surgery, a bottle of medicine in his hand.

“Is it you, Daisy? I began to think you

were late. I meant to come to the church and fetch you, but found I could not."

"Shall I walk with you?" asked Daisy, trying to commence the carrying out of the good resolutions she had made in church, and perhaps somewhat mollified by his words. "It is a fine night."

For answer he took her hand, and placed it within his arm. Ah, never would there have been a better husband than Frank Raynor, if she had but met him kindly.

"Who is the medicine for?" asked Daisy.

"For Dame Bell. I am walking fast, Daisy, but she ought to have it without delay."

"Have you been with her all this time?"

"Yes. I was coming away when she had a kind of fainting fit, the second this evening; and it took more than half an hour to get her round."

"She is really ill, then?"

"Really ill!" echoed Frank in surprise.

"Why, Daisy, she is dying. I do not mean dying to-night," he added; "or likely to die immediately; but that which she is suffering from will gradually kill her. My uncle suspected from the first what it would turn out to be."

Daisy said no more, and the house was gained. As Frank rang the bell, she left his arm and went a few steps away ; beyond sight of any one who might open the door, but not beyond the hearing of any conversation that might take place.

It was Rosaline who appeared. Frank put the bottle into her hand.

“ I brought it round myself, Rosaline, that I might be sure it came quickly. Has there been another fainting fit ? ”

“ No, not another, Mr. Frank,” replied Rosaline. “ She is in bed now and seems very quiet.”

“ Well, give her a dose of this without delay.”

“ Very well, sir. I—I wish you would tell me the truth, Mr. Frank,” she went on in a somewhat agitated voice.

“ The truth of what ? ”

“ Whether she is much worse ? Dangerously so.”

“ No, I assure you she is not : not materially so, if you mean that. Of course—as you know yourself, Rosaline, or I should not speak of it to you—she will get worse and worse with time.”

"I do know it, sir, unfortunately."

"But I think the decay will be very gradual; neither sudden nor alarming. This evening's weakness seems to me to be quite exceptional. She must have been either exerting or exciting herself: I said so up-stairs."

"True. It is excitement. But I did not like to say so before her. For the past few days she has been complaining that my father worries her," continued Rosaline, dropping her voice to a very low key. "She says he seems to be in her mind night and day: asleep, she dreams of him; awake, she dwells on him. And oh, what a dreadful thing it all is?"

"Hush, Rosaline!" whispered Frank in the like cautious tone: and as Daisy's ears could not catch the conversation now, she of course thought the more. "The fancy will subside. At times, you know, she has had it before."

"Blase Pellet excites her. I know he does. Only the other day he said something or other."

"I wish Blase Pellet was transported!" cried Frank quickly. "But it—it cannot be helped, Rosaline. Give your mother half a wine-glass of this mixture at once."

"I am so much obliged to you for all, sir,"

she gently said, as he shook hands with her. "Oh, and I beg your pardon for asking another question," she added as he was turning away. "I have been thinking that I ought perhaps to leave my situation and stay at home with my mother. I always meant to do so when she grew worse. Do you see any necessity for it?"

"Not yet. Later of course you must do it: and perhaps it might be as well that you should be at home to-morrow, though the people of the house are attentive to her. You may rely upon me to tell you when the necessity comes."

"Thank you, Mr. Frank. Good night."

"Good night, Rose."

Frank held out his arm to his wife. She took it, and they walked home together. But this time she was very chary in answering any remark he made, and did not herself volunteer one. The interview she had just been a witness to had only served to augment the sense of treason that filled the heart of Mrs. Frank Raynor.

CHAPTER VII.

MEETING AGAIN.

TIME flew. Summer had come round again : and it was now close upon three years since Mrs. Raynor and her children had quitted Eagles' Nest. Certainly, affairs could not be said to be progressing with them : rather the contrary. The past winter and spring had brought trouble. The three younger children were attacked with scarlatina, and it had left Kate so long ill that much care had to be taken with her. Mrs. Raynor was laid up at the same time for several weeks with bronchitis ; and the whole of the nursing fell upon Edina. Sickness entails expense ; not only as regards medical attendance, but in other ways : as those who have experienced it and who possess but a shallow purse can only too well testify.

With so much on her hands, and Mrs. Raynor laid by, Edina could not continue to do the work by which they were helped to live. A little of it she did continue to take, but it was

very little : and she had to sit up at night and steal hours from her needful rest to accomplish even so much. This did not please the proprietors of the warehouse that supplied her with it ; they evidently did not care to continue to supply her at all ; and when things got round again, and she and Mrs. Raynor would have been glad to do the same quantity of work as before, the work was not given them to do. Whether it was, as the warehouse people protested, that the work was growing scarce through change of fashion and consequent lack of demand, or whether it was that the people preferred to employ those whose industry was not interrupted by sickness, the result came to the same : the employment failed.

And this, in these early days of June, was the state of affairs : the family pinching and starving more than ever, for during the time of sickness Edina's private funds had been anticipated and debts contracted, and the work failing. Charles was wearing out his days at the office ; Alice was teaching at Mrs. Preen's. Never had the future looked so dark as it was looking now.

This fact was very plain to Edina. Albeit not one to despair beforehand, or to meet trouble

half way, she could not avoid apprehensions for the future. Money was wanted in so many ways—extra money—and they had it not. Mrs. Raynor was very delicate, requiring wine and other luxuries; the children wanted good nourishment in the shape of meat, and they could not get it. The common provisions within their reach were ominously dear, and seemed to get dearer with every week.

One day when they were at dinner—such dinner as it was—Alice came in. Perhaps the little pinched faces around the scanty board—and both Kate's and Robert's did look pinched—struck unpleasantly upon Alice, for she was evidently in less good spirits than usual. She had come down by the omnibus, and taken them by surprise.

“Not anything at all for me, thank you, Edina,” she said, as Edina was placing a chair for her at the table. “Mrs. Preen made me take some bread-and-butter before I came out, and I shall have some meat with my tea.”

An idea, like a fear, flashed into the mind of Mrs. Raynor. It was so very unusual for Alice to come down in this unexpected manner. “You have brought bad news, child!” she faintly said. “What is it?”

And, for answer, Alice burst into tears. The knowledge of their home privations was to her as a very nightmare, for she had a feeling heart. What with that and other thoughts, her spirits were never high now.

"I don't know how to tell it you," she sobbed; "but it is what I am come to do. Mamma, I am going to leave Mrs. Preen's."

Mrs. Raynor sank back in her chair. "Oh, child! For any fault?"

Not for any fault, Alice went on to explain, as she dried her eyes. Mrs. Preen, who had not been in strong health lately, was ordered for a lengthened term to her native place, Devonshire, where she would stay with her mother. She could not make it convenient to take her two elder little girls with her, neither did she care to leave them at home during her absence. So they were to be placed at school, and Alice had received notice to quit at the end of a month.

"If I were sure of getting another situation at once, I would not mind it so much," she said. "But it is the uncertainty that frightens me. I cannot afford to be out of a situation."

"Misfortunes never come alone," sighed Mrs. Raynor.

"Let us hope for the best," said Edina briskly, as she began putting the plates together to be carried away. "A whole month is a good while, Alice, and we can make inquiries for you at once. Perhaps Mr. Jones at the library can hear of something. I will speak to him: he is very kind and friendly."

"Do you ever come across that Bill Stane now, Alice?" burst out Alfred, as he picked up his cap to go off to school. "We saw in the paper that Sir Philip was dead. That is, we saw something about his will."

"He comes now and then to Mrs. Preen's," replied Alice, blushing vividly, for she could not hear William Stane's name without emotion. "What did you see about Sir Philip's will?" she added, in the most careless voice she could call up.

"Oh, I don't know—how his money was left, I think. Charley reckoned up that Bill Stane would have ten thousand pounds to his share. Charley says he is getting on at the Bar like a house on fire."

"Shall you not be late, Alfred?"

"I am off now. Good-bye, Alice. It will be jolly, you know, if you come home."

"Not jolly for the dinners," put in poor

Katie, who had learnt by sad experience what a vast difference an extra one to eat made.

"Oh, bother the dinners!" cried Alfred, with all a schoolboy's improvidence. "I'll eat bread-and-cheese. Good-bye, Alice."

"Did you chance to hear what Sir Philip died of, Alice?" questioned Mrs. Raynor, when the doors had done banging after Alfred.

"No, mamma."

"But you see William Stane sometimes, don't you?"

"Yes, I see Mr. Stane now and then. Not often. He has not said anything about his father in my hearing."

"I wonder at that. So friendly as we once were."

"The first time I saw Mr. Stane afterwards, I said just a few words to him—that I was sorry to hear Sir Philip was dead," resumed Alice. "I thought perhaps it was what would be expected of me. He thanked me, and said, Yes, it was a blow to them all, because his father had been latterly so much better, and the death at the last was sudden. He did not say any more."

"Is he friendly in his manner?"

"Quite so, mamma. When I first went to

Mrs. Preen's he was very cold and distant ; but latterly he has been much more friendly."

" Well, child, I can only say how unfortunate it is that you should have to be thrown out of your situation. It may be so difficult to get another."

" Mrs. Preen says she will look out for me," concluded Alice with a rising sob. " She knows that good appointments are scarce."

But not one of them felt the news as Edina felt it. It was she who took the most practical part in all their home troubles and straits, therefore she could best dread additional difficulty. Only the previous day she had gone into the City to the warehouse that had supplied her with the chenille and silk nets, and had an interview with the master. He assured her that the nets had gone almost entirely out of fashion, that they had none to give out, and suggested that she should try her hand at some other employment—say the crape-trimming work. But Edina did not know how the crape work was done, or anything about it, and had come home disheartened.

Another matter, that had been giving her and Mrs. Raynor concern for some little time, was the education of the children. Alfred

ought to go now to a better school ; Robert ought to be at one. The child was eight years old. Sometimes it had crossed Edina's mind to wish he could be got into Christ's Hospital : she deemed it high time now, with Alice coming home, to think about it practically. If poor little Bob could get admitted there, it would make room for Alice.

Talking it over with Mrs. Raynor and Charles that same evening, it was decided that the first practical step towards it must be to get a list of the governors. It might be that one of that body had known something of Major Raynor in the days gone by, and would help his little son. How was the list to be procured ? They knew not, and went to bed pondering the question.

" I will go to the library and ask Mr. Jones," said Edina the next morning. " Perhaps he has one."

Mr. Jones had not a list ; but he thought he knew where he could borrow one. And he did so, bringing it himself to the door in the after part of the day. Edina sat down to study it.

" Here is one name nearly at the beginning that we know," she said, looking up with quite a bright smile.

" Is there !" exclaimed Charles, with ani-

mation, catching sight of the smile, and taking an imaginative view of Robert, yellow-stockinged and capless. "Whose name is it, Edina? Read it out."

"George Atkinson, Esquire, Eagles' Nest."

"How unfortunate!" exclaimed Mrs. Raynor. "The very man to whom we cannot apply."

"The very man to whom we will apply," corrected Edina. "If you will not, Mary, I will."

"Would you ask a favour of *him*?"

"Yes," said Edina emphatically. "Mr. Atkinson has not behaved well to you: let us put it in his power to make some slight reparation."

"Edina, I—I hope I am not uncharitable or unforgiving, but I do not feel that I *can* ask him," breathed poor Mrs. Raynor.

"But I don't want you to ask him, Mary; I will do that," returned Edina. "Perhaps I shall not *like* doing it more than you would; but the thought of poor little Robert will give me courage."

"Those governors have only a presentation once in three years, I fancy," observed Charles. "The master of Eagles' Nest may have given away his next turn."

“We can but ascertain, Charley. And now—I wonder how we are to get his address? I hope he is in England!”

“He is at Eagles’ Nest, Edina.”

“At Eagles’ Nest!” repeated Edina. “Is he?”

“He took possession of it six months ago, and gave Fairfax, who was in it, a house hard by. And I know he is there still, for only a day or two ago I saw Preen address a letter to him.”

“You never told us he was at Eagles’ Nest, Charles,” said Edina, a shade of reproach in her tone.

“Why should I have told you?” returned Charles. “George Atkinson’s movements have nothing to do with us now; nor is his name so pleasant a one to our ears that it need be gratuitously mentioned.”

“Well, I am glad he is at Eagles’ Nest, for I shall go to him, instead of writing,” concluded Edina. “In these cases a personal application is generally of more use than a written one. And, Mary, you will, at any rate, wish me God speed.”

“With my whole heart,” replied Mrs. Raynor.

Once more Edina Raynor stood before the gates of Eagles' Nest. As she walked from the station, being unable to afford a fly, the great alteration in the place struck her. Not in Eagles' Nest itself: that looked just the same: but in the demesne pertaining to it. The land was well-cared for and flourishing; the pigsties had been renovated into decent and healthy cottages; the row of dwellings, stopped in their construction and remaining ugly skeletons, had been completed; other rows had been erected, and all were filled with contented inhabitants; and the men and women that Edina saw about as she passed, looked respectable and happy. None could look on the estate of Eagles' Nest as it was now, and not see how good and wise was its ruler. Her Aunt Ann's semi-supineness and Major Raynor's entire neglect had been remedied.

"Is Mr. Atkinson at home?" asked Edina, as a servant whom she did not know answered her ring.

"He is at home, ma'am, but I do not think you can see him," was the answer. "Mr. Atkinson is very unwell indeed, and does not see visitors."

"I think he will perhaps see me," said

Edina. And she took a leaf from her pocket-book, and wrote her name, adding that she wished to see him very much.

The man showed her to a room. He came back immediately, and ushered her into his master's presence. As she entered, George Atkinson rose from a sofa on which he had been lying near the window, and went forward to meet her.

“Edina !”

The old familiar name from the once loved lips—nay, perhaps loved still : who knew ?—in the old familiar voice, brought the tremor to her heart and the tear to her eye. Mr. Atkinson handed her to a chair and sat down in another. The window stood open to the delicious summer air, to the sweet morning sunshine—for Edina had come early, and it was not yet much past eleven—to the charming landscape that lay stretched around in the distance. But the impulse of feeling that had prompted the warm greeting seemed to die away again, and he addressed her more coldly and calmly.

“Your coming here this morning, Miss Raynor, seems to me to be a very singular coincidence. You see that letter on the table, just

written for the post : have the kindness to read the superscription."

Edina did so. It bore her own name : and was addressd to the " Care of Charles Raynor, Messrs. Prestleigh and Preen's."

" I did not know your address. That it was somewhere in or near London, I did know, but not the precise locality. The letter contains only a request that you would kindly come down to me here."

" I ! " exclaimed Edina.

" Yes. I wanted to see you. But I will ring for my housekeeper to show you to a room where you can take your bonnet off."

" I am not come to remain," replied Edina. " Half an hour—less—will be enough to transact my business with you."

" But half an hour will not transact mine with you. Stay the day with me," he pleadingly added, " and enliven a poor invalid." And Edina made no further objection.

When she returned to the room, looking so cool and fresh in her summer muslin, old though it might be, with her brown hair braided from her pleasant face, and the brown eyes sweet and earnest as of yore, George Atkinson thought how little, how very little she was altered. It

is these placid faces that do not change. Neither had he changed very much. He looked ill, and wore a beard now; a silky, long brown beard; but his face and eyes and voice were the same. And somehow, now that she was in his presence, and heard that musical voice, and met the steadfast, kindly look in the grey eyes, she nearly forgot her resentment against him for his conduct to the Raynors.

"You are a governor of Christ's Hospital, I believe," she began, entering upon her business at once as she resumed her seat.

"I am."

"I came here to ask for your next presentation to it. Is it promised?"

"Not yet. It falls due next year."

"Then will you promise it to me?" continued Edina. "It is for the youngest child of Mrs. Raynor. Will you give it to him?"

"No."

"No!" she repeated, tone and spirit alike falling with the disappointment. "But why not?"

"I have a boy in my eye who is in want of it badly: worse than Mrs. Raynor's son will be."

"It is nearly impossible that any boy

can want it much worse than poor Robert does."

"In that matter our opinions differ, Miss Raynor."

"And it would be making some trifling reparation to the family."

"Reparation for what?"

"For — what you did," answered Edina, hesitating for a moment and then speaking up bravely. "For turning them out of Eagles' Nest."

"What would you have done in my place?" questioned Mr. Atkinson good-humouredly. "Have left them in quiet possession of Eagles' Nest?"

"I — don't — know — whether I should, or not," hesitated Edina, for the question puzzled her. "Of course Eagles' Nest was legally yours, and I cannot say you were wrong to take it. But I think you might in some way have mitigated the blow. *I* could not have turned a family from their home and not inquired how they were to live."

"I am aware you could not: for, unless I am mistaken, it was you who provided them with another. The Raynors wanted a lesson read to them, and it was well they should

have it. What did I find when I came home ; what did I hear ? Was there a single good act done by any one of them while they were at Eagles' Nest ? How did they use the fine property they came into : well?—or disgracefully ? Yes, I repeat it, disgracefully. Things were going to rack and ruin. The poor tenants were ground down to the dust, the uttermost farthing of rent was exacted from them, while they were uncared for ; body and soul alike abandoned, to get through life as they could, or to perish. And all for what ?—to swell the pride and the folly and the prodigality of the puffed-up Raynors. Could you approve of all this, Edina, or find excuse for it ? ”

She shook her head in the negative. He seemed to have called her Edina again unconsciously.

“ It was self with them all ; nothing but self, from Major Raynor downwards,” he continued. “ Show, extravagance, horses, dress, vanity ! Not a sound moral, or prudent, or worthy aim was inculcated on the children, not a penny piece given away in charity. Charles Raynor, the supposed heir, was an apt pupil. Why ! he had writs out against him, though he was under age.”

Edina could not gainsay a word. It was all too true.

"You had this reported to you on your return, I presume, Mr. Atkinson?"

"I had. But I did not take the report uncorroborated. I came down here, and saw for myself. I was here for many weeks, watching."

Edina felt surprised. "How could that have been? The Raynors did not see you?"

"I came down incog. Nobody knew me in the place, and I stayed on in my lodgings at Jetty the carpenter's and looked about me. The natives took me for an inquisitive man who was fond of poking himself into matters that did not concern him; a second Paul Pry. Mr. Charles Raynor, I heard, christened me the Tiger," added the speaker, with a smile.

Edina held her breath. What a wonderful revelation it was!

"I was in Australia when I heard that Mrs. Atkinson had left Eagles' Nest to me," he resumed. "The news reached me in a letter from herself, written only a day or two before her death; written chiefly to tell me where her will would be found—in the hands of my solicitors, Callard and Prestleigh. She

also stated that a duplicate copy of the will was kept in this, her own house. But that, I think, must have been a mistake."

"Had one been here, it would have been found at the time of her death," remarked Edina.

"Just so. When this letter of hers arrived at Sydney," continued Mr. Atkinson, "I was travelling in the more remote and unfrequented parts of the country, and I did not get it for some six months afterwards, on my return to Sydney. Rather a large accumulation of letters was waiting for me at Sydney, as you may suppose; and I found, by those from my partner, Street, and his brother the lawyer, that the former will was alone known to exist, and that Major Raynor had entered into possession of Eagles' Nest. Now what did I at once resolve to do? Why, to leave him always in possession of it; never to speak of this later will, but just to put it in the fire when I got to England, and say nothing about it. The Major had a right to Eagles' Nest; I had not any right at all to it: and the resolve did not cost me a moment's thought ——"

"It is just as I should have expected you to act," put in Edina, her cheeks flushing.

“Don’t give me more credit than I deserve, Miss Raynor. I cannot tell what I might have done had I been a poor man. Kept the estate, perhaps. But I was a rich one, and I did not want it. I sailed for England; and, on landing, went direct to London, to Street the banker’s, arriving there at night. He chanced to be at home alone; his wife and children were at Brighton, and we had a few hours’ quiet chat. The first thing I heard of, was the miserable state of affairs down here. Eagles’ Nest was going to ruin, Street said, and the Major and his son were probably going to ruin with it. ‘I will go down incog. and see for myself,’ I said to Street, ‘and you need not tell anybody of my return yet awhile.’ I did go down, as I have told you; went down the next day; and Street kept counsel as to my having returned to Europe, and when he wrote to me at Grassmere, addressed his letters to ‘Mr. George.’ There I stayed, looking about at my leisure.”

“How was it my Uncle Francis did not recognise you?”

“He did not see me. At first I kept out of his way lest he should, but I soon learnt that there was little chance of our meeting, as he

never went beyond his own lawn yonder. Had he met me full, I don't think he would have known me, my beard altered me so much; and I always pulled my broad-brimmed hat well on. No, I felt quite easy, and remained on until my purpose was answered."

He paused, as if recalling the scenes of that past time. Edina made no remark. Presently he resumed.

"What I saw here shocked me. I could not detect one redeeming point in the conduct of Major Raynor and his family, though I assure you I should have been glad to do it. To leave the estate in their hands would be little less than a sin, as I looked upon it, and a cruel wrong upon the poor people who lived on it. So I deliberated on my measures, and finally took them. Edwin Street announced my speedy return, and conveyed a letter from me (apparently written in Australia) to Callard and Prestleigh, informing them that they held the will, and ordering them to produce it, that it might be proved and acted upon. I was more than justified in what I did, as I deemed then," emphatically concluded Mr. Atkinson, "and as I deem now."

"Well—yes, I cannot say you were not,"

acquiesced Edina. "But it seemed to us so bitterly hard—never to inquire what became of the Raynors; never to offer them any help."

"Stay," said he. "I did inquire. I heard that Miss Edina Raynor had come forward from Trennach with her help, and had established Mrs. Raynor in a school in which she was likely to do well. I heard that Charles Raynor was about to be taken by the hand by an old friend of his father's, one Colonel Cockburn, who meant to put him forward in the world. In short, I left England again in the belief that the Raynors were, in a smaller way, as prosperous as they had been at Eagles' Nest."

"What misapprehensions exist!" exclaimed Edina. "That home was soon lost again through a fire, and Colonel Cockburn only saw Charles to tell him he could not help him. Their life for the last three years has been one long, perpetual course of humiliation, poverty, struggle, and privation."

"Ay! and you have voluntarily shared it with them," he answered, looking straight into her eyes. "Well, they needed the lesson. But I would have been a friend to Charles Raynor had he let me be one, and not shown himself so haughtily upstart; and to his cousin the

doctor also. When Charles was in a mess at Eagles' Nest, in danger of being arrested for debt, I asked him to confide his trouble to me and let me help him. Not a bit of it. He flung my words back in my face with as much scorn as if I had been a dog. So I let him go his own way : though I privately settled the debt for him. Had he known who I was, and that I had the power to eject him and his family from their heritage, I could have understood his behaviour : but that was impossible, and I think I never met with so bad an example of conduct shown to a stranger. Yes ; Charles Raynor needed a lesson read to him, and he has had it."

"Indeed he has. They all have. Charles Raynor is as true, and good, and earnest a young man now as he was once thoughtless and self-arrogant. There will be no fear of his lapsing back in this life."

"I saw him a year ago in Preen's office," remarked Mr. Atkinson, "and liked his tone. Preen gives me the best accounts of him and of his sister."

"They deserve it," said Edina. "But oh, you do not know what a struggle it is for us all," she added, her imploring voice almost

broken by emotion, "or what a boon it would be to get the little one into the Bluecoat School. If you did, I think you would grant it me."

"No, I should not," persisted he, smiling half saucily in Edina's face. "The presentation falls due next year; and by that time little Raynor will not want it. He may be back here at Eagles' Nest."

Edina gazed at him. "What do you mean?" she gasped.

"I have not had particularly strong health—as you know; but a couple of months ago I was so ill as to fear the worst. It caused me to wish to revise my will, and to consider certain of its provisions. I think I shall leave Eagles' Nest to you."

"I won't have it," cried Edina, bursting into tears of excitement. "I will not. How can you be so unjust, Mr. Atkinson? What right have I to Eagles' Nest?"

"Right! You have shared your home with the Raynors when it was a poor one—for the home is virtually yours, I am told: you can do the like, you know, when you become rich."

"I will not have Eagles' Nest," she sobbed. "It is of no use to think of such a thing, for

I will not. I have told you the Raynors are worthy of it themselves."

He almost laughed at her alarm; at the frightened sincerity with which she spoke.

"Well, well, the bequest is not made," he said in a changed tone; and an idea flashed over Edina that he had only been joking with her. "Very thankful I am to say that health and strength appear to be returning to me; the doctors think I have taken a turn, and shall soon be completely strong, better than I have been for years. So, as my death seems to have put itself off, I have thought of making over Eagles' Nest to Charles Raynor by deed of gift. That request for your presence here," glancing at the letter on the table, "was to consult with you, as to whether he was so changed in heart and conduct that it might safely be done."

"Oh, yes, yes, indeed he is," responded Edina, drying her happy tears. "I told you so before I knew of this, and I told you the truth."

"I fully believe you. But I must have an interview with him. Let him come down here on Saturday and remain with me until Monday morning. If I find that he may be fully trusted for the future, in a short while he and his

mother will be back at Eagles' Nest. London will be hereafter my chief home. They shall come and see me there when they please : and I shall doubtless be welcome to come here occasionally."

"And you do not intend to go wandering again?"

"Never again. I have had enough of it. It may be, that I should have enjoyed better health had I been contented to take more rest. I have purchased the lease of a house in London, to which I shall remove on quitting Eagles' Nest. I am also looking out for some snug little house and property in this neighbourhood—which I have learned to like—and, when I can find it, shall purchase that."

"How was it," asked Edina, "that you did not take possession of Eagles' Nest when the Raynors went out of it? We were told you would do so."

George Atkinson smiled. "I had seen enough of Eagles' Nest while staying at Jetty's—and perhaps I did not care to be recognised immediately by the community here for that same prying individual."

"Have the lost bonds been found?"

"No. I feel more convinced than ever that

they are in the ebony desk. Unless, indeed, your aunt left no money behind her; in which case there would of course be no bonds for it. I begin to think that whoever is keeping the desk must have found and used the bonds."

"You have not heard of the desk?"

"Never at all. The advertisements Street inserted in the newspapers brought forth no more result than the previous enquiries had brought."

"Perhaps if a larger reward had been offered?" said Edina. "We thought the sum small."

"Ten pounds was the sum offered first; twenty afterwards. I suggested their increasing it to fifty, or a hundred: but the cautious lawyers said no. A reward like that, offered for a desk, would have betrayed that it contained something of value—if the possessor of the desk had not already found that out for himself. It was certainly singular that I should not have thought to ask whether the private compartment of that desk had been searched when I first knew the bonds were being looked for; but I did not. These lapses of memory, if you can call them so, do occur at times to all of us."

A servant came in to lay the cloth for dinner : since his illness Mr. Atkinson had taken that meal at one o'clock. A tempting dish of lamb cutlets and peas, and a roast duckling. On the sideboard stood some little tartlets and custard. The tears rose to Edina's eyes as she sat down to table, and a choking sensation to her throat. It was not so much that she was about to partake of such a dinner once again, as a thought of the half-famished plates at home.

"What is it, Edina?"

"I was only wishing I could transport some of this to London," she answered, glancing at him through her wet eyelashes with a smile.

They sat at the open window again after dinner, talking of the past and the future, and Edina stayed to make tea for him—which came in early. As she put her hand into his, on saying farewell, he left a small case of money in it.

"Shall you be too proud to accept it for them?"

"I have not any pride," answered Edina with a grateful smile. "If I ever had any, the experience of the past three years has taken it out of me."

"I never intended to keep Eagles' Nest," he whispered. "I think you might have divined that, Edina. You knew me well once."

"And suppose Charles Raynor had continued to be unworthy?"

"Then Eagles' Nest would have passed away from him for ever. Its inheritor would have been Edina."

The evening was getting on at Mrs. Raynor's. Charles, who had been detained late at the office, was sitting down to a plate of stewed haricot beans, which had been kept warm over the fire, and little Robert was in bed. They had been saying how late Edina was. Mrs. Raynor had a very bad headache.

"Let me place that cushion more comfortably for you, dear mamma," said Charles.

"It will do very well as it is, my dear," she answered. "Get your supper: you must want it. *How* you must want it."

"Oh, not very much," said Charles, making a pretence of eating the beans slowly, not to show his hunger. "Alfred, do be quiet!—don't you know mamma is ill? Kate, sit down."

“There’s Edina!” burst forth Alfred, clattering out to meet her in the passage.

She came in, looking pleased and gay, with sundry parcels in her hand. Kate and Alfred jumped round her.

“How have you sped, Edina?” asked Mrs. Raynor. “Has George Atkinson given Robert the presentation?”

“No; he will not give it him.”

“I feared so. He must be altogether a hard-hearted man. May Heaven have mercy upon us!”

“It will, it will,” said Edina. “I have always told you so.”

She was undoing the papers. The young eyes regarding them were opened to their utmost width. Had a fairy been out with Edina? Buns, chocolate, a jar of marmalade, a beautiful pat of butter, and—what could be in that other big parcel?

“Open it, Charley,” said Edina.

He had left his beans to look on with the others, and did as he was told. Out tumbled a whole cargo of mutton chops. Ah, that was the best sight, dear as cakes and sweets are to the young! Mrs. Raynor put her hands together softly; she could see nothing clearly for her glistening tears.

"I thought you could all eat a mutton chop for supper, Mary. I know you had but a poor dinner."

"Are we *all* to have one?" demanded Alfred, believing Aladdin's lamp must really have been at work.

"Yes, all. Charley and mamma can have two if they like. Don't go on with your beans yet, Charles."

"Robert," called out Kate, flying to the door, "Edina's come home, and she has brought us such a many things, and a mutton chop apiece."

Why, there he was, the audacious little Bob, peeping in in his white nightgown!

"A *whole* mutton chop!" cried he, amazed at the magnitude of the question.

"Yes, a whole one, dear," said Edina turning to him. "And not only for to-night. Every day you shall have a whole mutton chop, or something as good."

"And puddings too!" stammered Kate, the idea of the fairy becoming a certainty.

"And puddings too," said Edina. "Ah, children, dear children, I bring you such news! Did I not always tell you that God would remember us in His own good time? Mary,

are you listening? In a very short while you will all be back at Eagles' Nest."

Charles's heart beat wildly. He looked at Edina to see if she were joking, his eyes fearfully earnest.

"I am telling you the truth, dear ones: Eagles' Nest is to be yours again, and our struggles and privations are alike over. George Atkinson never has meant to keep it from you. You are to go down to him on Saturday, Charley, and stay over Sunday."

"I'll not abuse him again," said Charley, letting a smile stifle a rising sob. "But—my best coat is so shabby, you know, Edina. I am ashamed of it at church."

"Perhaps you may get another between now and then," nodded Edina.

"What's *this*?" cried Kate, touching the last of the parcels.

"A bottle of wine for your mamma. She will look so fat and rosy soon that we shan't know her, for we shall have nothing to do but nurse her up."

"My goodness!" cried Kate. "Wine! Mamma, here's a bottle of wine for you!"

But there was no answer. Poor Mrs. Raynor lay back in her chair unable to make

any, the silent tears stealing down her pale cheeks.

Charles bent over and kissed her. Little Bob, in [his nightgown, crouched down by her side at the fire ; while Edina, throwing off her shawl and bonnet, began to make preparations for the supper.

CHAPTER VIII.

HARD LINES.

L YING in her darkened chamber, sick almost unto death, was Mrs. Frank Raynor. A baby, some few days old, slept in a cot by the wall. No other child had been born to her, until now, since that season of peril at Eagles' Nest : and just as her life had nearly paid the forfeit then, so it had again now. She was in danger still ; she, herself, thought dying.

An attentive nurse moved noiselessly about the room. Edina stood by the bed, fanning the poor pale face resting on it. The window was open as far as it would go, behind the blind : the invalid's persistent cry throughout the morning had been, " Give me air ! "

A light, quick step on the stairs, and Frank entered. He took the fan from Edina's tired hand into his strong one ; and she seized on the opportunity to go down to the kitchen, to help Eve with the jelly ordered by Dr. Tymms ; a skilful practitioner of repute, who had been

in constant attendance. Daisy opened her eyes to look at her husband, and the nurse quitted the room, leaving them together.

“ You will soon get about again, my darling,” said Frank, in his low, earnest, and most hopeful tones, that were worth their weight in gold to a sick chamber. “ Tymms assures me you are better this morning.”

“ I don’t want to get about,” faintly responded Daisy.

“ Not want to get about ! ” cried Frank, uncertain whether it would be best to treat the remark lightly, as a passing fancy emanating from weakness, or to inquire farther into it—for everything said by his wife now bore this depressing tenor.

“ And you ought to know that I cannot wish it,” she resumed.

“ But I do not know it, Daisy, my love. I know not why you should speak so.”

“ I shall be glad to die.”

Frank bent a little lower, forgetting the fan. “ Daisy, I truly and honestly believe that you will recover ; that the turning-point has come and gone. Tymms thinks so. Why, yesterday you could not have talked as you are talking now.”

“ I know I am dying. And it is so much the better for me.”

He put his hand under the pillow, raising it slightly to bring her face nearer his, and spoke very tenderly and persuasively. He knew that she was *not* dying ; that she was, in fact, improving.

“ My darling, you are getting better ; and will get better. But, were it as you think, Daisy—otherwise—all the more reason would exist for telling me what you mean, and why you have for so long a time been in this depressed state of mind. Let me know the cause, Daisy.”

For a few minutes she did not answer, and there ensued a pause. Frank thought that she was deliberating whether or not she should answer—and he was not mistaken. She shut her eyes again, and he took up the fan.

“ I have thought, while lying here, that I should like to tell you before I die,” spoke Daisy at last. “ But you don’t need telling.”

“ I do. I do, indeed.”

“ It is because you no longer love me. Perhaps you never loved me at all. You care for somebody else ; not for me.”

In very astonishment, Frank let fall the fan on the counterpane. "And who is—'somebody else'?"

"Oh, you know."

"Daisy, this is a serious charge, and you must answer me. I do *not* know."

She turned her face towards him, but so buried it on the pillow that hardly any of it was visible, not speaking. Frank waited; he was ransacking his brains.

"*Surely* you cannot mean Edina!"

A petulant, reproachful movement betrayed her anger. Edina! Who was an angel on earth, and so good to them all!—and older, besides. The tears began to drop slowly from her closed lashes, for she thought he must be playing with her.

"You will be sorry for it when I am gone, Frank. *Edina!*"

"Who is it, Daisy?"

A flush of hectic stole into her white cheeks, and the name was whispered so faintly that Frank had much ado to catch it.

"Rosaline Bell!" he repeated, gazing at her in doubt and surprise, for the thought crossed him that her senses might be wandering. "But, Daisy, suppose we speak of this to-morrow

instead of now," he added as a measure of precaution. "You ——"

"We will speak of it now, or never," she interrupted vehemently. At least, as vehemently as anyone can speak whose voice is faint at the best and whose strength is of the lowest. And the sudden anger Frank's words gave her — for she deemed he was acting altogether a deceitful part and dared not speak — nerved her to tell out her grievances more fully than she might otherwise have had courage to do. Frank listened to the accusation with apparent equanimity; to the long line of disloyal conduct he had been indulging in since the early days at Trennach down to the present hour. His simple attempt at refutation made no impression whatever: the belief was too long and firmly rooted in her mind to be quickly dispelled.

"I could have borne any trial better than this," concluded she, with a succession of sobbing sighs: "all our misfortunes would have been but sport to me in comparison. Don't say any more, please. Perhaps she will feel some remorse when she hears I am dead."

"We will let it drop now then, Daisy," assented Frank. "But I have had no more

thought of Rosaline than of the man in the moon."

"Will you go away now, please, and send the nurse in?"

"What on earth is to be done?" thought Frank, doing as he was ordered. "With this wretched fancy hanging over her, she may never get well; never. Mental torment in these critical cases sometimes means death."

"How is she now?" asked Edina, meeting him on the stairs.

"Just the same."

"She seems so very unhappy in mind, Frank," whispered Edina. "Do you know anything about it?"

"She is low and weak at present, you see," answered Frank, evasively. And he passed on.

Frank Raynor lapsed into a review of the past. Of the admiration he *had* given to Rosaline Bell at Trennach; of the solicitude he had evinced for her (or, rather, for her mother) since their stay in London. Of his constant visits to them: visits paid every three or four days at first; later, daily or twice a day—for poor Mrs. Bell was now nearer her end than was Daisy. Yes, he did see, looking

at the years carefully and dispassionately, that Daisy (her suspicions having been, as she had now confessed, first aroused by the tattle of the waiting-maid, Tabitha) might have fancied she saw grounds to feed her jealousy. She could not know, lacking the clue, that his friendship and solicitude for the Bells proceeded from a widely different cause. That clue she would never, as he believed, have furnished to her so long as she should live.

“What a blessing it would be if some people were born without tongues!” concluded Frank, thinking of Tabitha Float.

The slight symptoms of improvement continued; and at sunset Frank Raynor knew that his wife’s condition would bear the carrying out of an idea he had formed. It was yet daylight outside, though the drawn curtains made the room dark, when Daisy was conscious of a sad, beautiful face bending over her, and an entreating voice whose gentle tone told of sadness.

“Don’t shrink from me, Mrs. Frank Raynor,” whispered Rosaline—for she it was. “I am come to strive to put straight what I hear has been crooked.”

And the few words she spoke, spoke ear-

nestly and solemnly, brought peace to the unhappy wife's heart. Daisy was too ill to feel much self-reproach then, but it was with some shame she learnt how mistaken she had been.

"Oh, believe me!" concluded Rosaline, "I have never had a wrong thought of Mr. Frank Raynor; nor has he had one of me. Had we been true brother and sister, our intercourse with each other could not have been more open and simple."

"He—he liked you at Trennach, and you liked him," murmured poor Daisy, three parts convinced, but repentant and tearful. "People talked about it."

"He liked me as an acquaintance, nothing more," sighed Rosaline, passing over all mention of her own early feelings. "He was fond of talking and laughing with me, and I would talk and laugh back again. I was light-hearted then. But never, I solemnly declare it, did a word of love, no, nor of undue affection, pass between us. And, in the midst of it, there fell upon me and my mother the dreadful grief of my father's unhappy death. I have never laughed since then."

"I have been thinking all these past two

years that he went to West Street only to see you," sobbed Daisy.

Rosaline shook her head. "He has come entirely for my mother. Without pay, for he will not take it, he has been unremittingly kind and attentive, and has assuaged her pains on the way to death. God bless him! A few days, and I shall never see him again in this world. But I shall not forget what he has done for us; and God will not forget it."

"*You* are not going to die, are you?" cried poor puzzled Daisy.

"I am going to emigrate to New Zealand," replied Rosaline. "As soon as I shall have laid my dear mother in her last home—and Death's shadow is even now upon her—I bid farewell to England for ever. We have relations who are settled near Wellington, and they are waiting to receive me. Were Mr. Raynor a free man and had never possessed any other ties, there could be no question, now or ever, of love between him and me."

Daisy's delicate hand went out to clasp the not less delicate one that rested near her on the bed, and her cheeks took quite a red tinge for her own folly and mistakes in the past. A

wonderful liking, fancy, admiration, esteem—she hardly knew what to call it—was springing up in her heart for this sad and beautiful young woman, whom she had so miserably misjudged.

“Forgive me for my foolish thoughts,” she whispered, quite a painful entreaty in her eyes. “I wish I had known you before: I would have made a friend of you.”

“Thank you, thank you!” warmly responded Rosaline. “That is all I came to say; but it is Heaven’s truth. I, the unconscious cause of the trouble, am more sorry than you can be. Farewell, Mrs. Raynor: for now I must go back to my mother. I shall ever pray for your happiness and your husband’s.”

“Won’t you kiss me?” asked Daisy with a rising sob. And Rosaline bent to do it.

“Are you convinced now, Daisy?” questioned Frank, coming into the room when he had seen Rosaline out of the house. “Are you happier?”

All the answer she made was to lie on his arm and cry silently, abjectly murmuring something that he could not hear.

“I thought it best to get Rosaline to come, as you would not believe me. When I told her of the mischief that was supposed to have been

afloat, she was more eager to come than I to send her."

"Please forgive me, Frank! Please don't be harsh with me! I am so ashamed of myself; so sorry!"

"It is over now; don't think about it any more," said he, kissing her very fervently.

"I will never be so stupid again," she sobbed. "And—Frank—I think I shall—perhaps—get well now."

Rosaline had said that Death's shadow lay upon her mother even while she was talking with Mrs. Frank Raynor. In just twenty-four hours after that, Death himself came. When the day's sunlight was fading, to give place to the tranquil stars and to the cooler air of night, Mrs. Bell passed peacefully away to her heavenly home. She had been a sad sufferer: she and her sufferings were alike at rest now.

"It was some two hours later. The attendant women had gone downstairs, and Rosaline was sitting alone, her eyes dry but her heart overwhelmed with its anguish, when Blase Pellet came to make a call of inquiry. He had evinced true anxiety for the poor sick

woman, and had often brought her little costly dainties ; such as rare, choice fruit. And once—it was a positive fact—once when Rosaline was absent, Blase had sat down and read to her from the New Testament.

“ Will you see her, Blase ? ” asked Rosaline, as he stood still, half dumb with the news. “ She looks so peaceful.”

Blase assented ; and they went together into the death chamber. Very peaceful. Yes : none could look more so.

“ Poor old lady ! ” spoke Blase. “ I’m sure I feel very sorry : almost as though it was my own mother. Was she sensible to the last ? ”

“ Quite to the very last ; and collected,” replied Rosaline, suppressing a sob in her throat. “ Mr. Frank Raynor called in the afternoon ; and I know he saw that nothing more could be done for her, though he did not say as much. She was very still after he left, lying with her eyes shut. When she opened them and saw me, she put up her hand for me to take it. ‘ I have been thinking about your father and that past trouble, dear,’ she said. ‘ I am going to him : and what has never been cleared up here will be clear there.’ They were nearly the last words she spoke.”

"It's almost a pity but what it had been cleared up for her here," said Blase. "It might have set her uncertainty at rest, don't you see. Sometimes I had three parts of a mind to tell it her. She'd have thought a little less of Mr. Frank Raynor if I had told."

Rosaline, standing on one side the bed, cast a steady look on the young man, standing on the other. "Blase," she said, "I think the time has come for me to ask you what you mean. As you well know, it is not your first hint, by many a one, in regard to what you saw that fatal night at Trennach. I have wanted to set you right; but I was obliged to avoid the subject while my mother lived; for had the real truth reached her she might have died of it."

"Died of it! Set me right!" repeated Blase, gazing back at Rosaline.

"By the half words which you have allowed to escape you from time to time, I gather that you have believed my unfortunate father owed his death to Mr. Frank Raynor."

"So he did," said Blase.

"So he did *not*, Blase. It was I who killed my father."

The assertion seemed to confound him. But

for the emotion that Rosaline was struggling with, her impressive tones, and the dead woman lying there, across whom they spoke, Blase might have deemed she was essaying to deceive him, and accorded her no belief.

“Are you doubting my words, Blase?” she asked. “Listen. In going home from Granny Sandon’s that night, I took the street way, and saw you standing outside the shop, preparing to shut it up. You nodded to me across the street, and I thought you meant to follow me as soon as you were at liberty. When I was beyond your sight, I set off to run, and should have been at home before you could have caught me up, but for meeting Clerk Trim’s wife. She kept me talking for I cannot tell how long, relating some grievous tale about an accident that had happened to her sister at Pendon. I did not like to leave her in the middle of it; but I got away as soon as I could, though I daresay a quarter of an hour had been lost. As I reached the middle of the Plain, I turned round and saw some one following me at a good distance off, and I made no doubt it was you. At that same moment, Mr. Frank Raynor met me, and began telling me of a fight that had taken place between Molly Janes and her hus-

band, and of the woman's injuries, which he had been then attending to. It did not occupy above a minute, but during that time, while I was standing, you were advancing. I feared you would catch me up ; and I wished Mr. Frank a hurried good night, and ran across to hide behind the mounds while you passed by. He did not understand the motive of my sudden movement, and followed me to ask what was the matter. I told him : that I had seen you coming, and I did not want you to join me. When I thought you must have gone by, I stole out to look ; and, as I could not see you, thought what good speed you had made, to be already out of sight. It never occurred to me to suppose you had come to the mounds, instead of passing on."

"But I had come to them," interrupted Blase eagerly. "My eyes are keener than most people's, and I knew you both ; and I saw you dart across, and Raynor after you. So I followed."

"Well—in very heedlessness, in playfulness, I ran up to the mouth of the shaft, and pretended to be listening for Dan Sandon's ghost. Mr. Raynor seized hold of me ; for I was too near the edge, and the least false step might have been fatal. Not a moment had we stood there ;

not a moment ; when a shout, followed by a blow on Mr. Raynor's shoulder, startled us. It was my poor father. He was raising his stick for another blow when I, in my terror, pushed between him and Mr. Raynor to part them. With all my strength—and a terrified woman possesses strength—I flung them apart, not knowing the mouth of the pit was so near. *I flung my father into it, Blase."*

"Good mercy!" ejaculated Blase.

"Mr. Frank Raynor leaped forward to save him, and nearly lost his own life in consequence; it was an even touch, whether he followed my father, or whether he could balance himself backwards. I seized his coat, and I believe—he believes—that that alone saved him."

"I saw the scuffle," gasped Blase. "I could have taken my oath that it was Raynor who pushed your father in."

"I am telling the truth in the presence of my dead mother and before Heaven," spoke Rosaline, lifting her hands in solemnity. "Do you doubt it, Blase Pellet?"

"No—no; I can't, I don't," confessed Blase. "Moonlight's deceptive. And the wind was rushing along, like mad, between my eyes and the shaft."

"I only meant to part them," bewailed Rosaline. "And, but that my poor father was unsteady in his gait that night, he need not have fallen. It is true I pushed him close to the brink, and there he tottered, in his unsteadiness, for the space of a second, and fell backwards: his poor lameness made him awkward at the best of times. A stronger man, sure of his feet, need not and would not have fallen in. But oh, Blase, that's no excuse for me! It does not lessen my guilt or my misery one iota. It was I who killed him; I, I!"

"Has Mr. Raynor known this all along?" asked Blase, whose faculties for the moment were somewhat confused.

Rosaline looked at him in surprise. "*Known it?* Why, he was an actor in it. Ah, Blase, you have been holding Mr. Raynor guilty in your suspicious heart; he knows you have; and he has been keeping the secret out of compassion for me, bearing your ill thoughts in silent patience. All these four years he has been dreading that you would bring the accusation against him publicly. It has been in your heart; I know it has; to accuse him of my father's murder."

"No, not really," said Blase, knitting his

brows. "I should never have done it. I only wanted him to think I should."

"And, see you not what it would have involved? I honestly believe that Frank Raynor would never have cleared himself at my expense whatever charge you might have brought, but he feared that *I* should speak and clear him. As I should have done. And that confession would have gone well nigh to kill my poor mother. For my sake Mr. Raynor has borne all this; borne with you; and done what lay in his power to ward off exposure."

"He always favoured you," spoke Blase in a crestfallen tone.

"Not for the sake of *that* has he done it," quickly returned Rosaline. "He takes his share of blame for that night's work; and *will* take it, in spite of blame not attaching to him. Had he gone straight home as I bade him, and not followed me to the mounds, it would not have happened, he says; so he reproaches himself. And that, so far, is true. It was a dreadful thing for both of us, Blase."

"I wish it had been him instead of you," retorted Blase.

"It might have been better, far better, had I spoken at the time—or allowed Mr. Raynor

to speak. To have told the whole truth—that I had done it, though not intentionally; and that my poor father was lying where he was—dead. But I did not; I was too frightened, too bewildered, too full of horror: in short, I believe I was out of my senses. And, as I did not confess at the time, I could not afterwards. Mr. Raynor would have given the alarm at the moment, but for me: later, when I in my remorse and distress would have confessed, he said it must not be. And I see that he was right.”

Blase could but nod acquiescence to this: but his nod was a sullen one.

“You know that our old clergyman at Trennach, Mr. Pine, was in London last Easter and came here to see my mother,” resumed Rosaline. “I privately asked him to let me have half an hour alone with him, and he said I might call on him at his lodgings. I went; and I told him what I have now told you, Blase; and at my request he got a lawyer there, who drew up this statement of mine in due form, and I swore to its truth and signed it in their presence. A copy of this, sealed and attested, has been handed to Mr. Raynor; Mr. Pine keeps another copy.

I do not suppose they will ever need to be used ; but there the deeds are, in case of need. It was right that some guarantee of the truth should be given to secure Mr. Raynor, as I was intending to go to the other end of the world."

"It sounds altogether like a tale," cried Blase.

"A very hideous one."

"And, as to your going to the end of the world, Rosaline, you know that you need not do it. I am well off, now my father's dead, and ——"

She held up her hand warningly. "Blase, *you* know that this is an interdicted subject. I shall never, never marry in this world : and, of all men in it, the two whom I would least marry are you and Mr. Raynor. He takes a share of that night's blame ; you may take at least an equal share : for, had you not persisted in following me from Trennach, when you knew it would be distasteful to me, I should have had no need to seek refuge in the mounds, and the calamity could not have occurred. Never speak to me of marriage again, Blase."

"It's very hard lines," grumbled Blase.

“ And are not my lines hard ?—and have not Mr. Frank Raynor’s been hard ? ” she asked with emotion. “ But oh, Blase, dear Blase,” she softly added, “ let us remember, to our consolation, that these ‘ hard lines ’ are but sent to us in mercy. Without them, and the discipline they bring, we might never seek to gain Heaven.”

CHAPTER IX.

TEARS.

Alice Raynor was sitting in a small parlour at Mrs. Preen's, dedicated to herself and the children's studies, busily employed in correcting exercises. The afternoon sun shone upon the room hotly, and she had drawn the table into the shade. Her head and fingers were given to their work, but her deeper thoughts were far away: for there existed not a minute in the day that the anxiety caused by her uncertain prospects was not present to her mind, more or less. She knew nothing of the new hopes relative to Eagles' Nest. In good truth, those hopes, both to Mrs. Raynor and Edina, seemed almost too wonderful to be true: and as yet they refrained from imparting them to Alice.

The corrections did not take long to make, and then Alice laid down the pen and sat thinking. She felt hot and thirsty and weary, and wished it was nearer tea-time. The old

days at Eagles' Nest came into her thoughts. They very often did come : and the contrast they presented to these later ones always made her sad.

A slight tap at the door—which she did not hear in the noise of the street—and a gentleman entered. William Stane. Alice blushed through her hot cheeks when she saw who it was, and brushed the tears from her eyes. But not before he had seen them.

“I beg your pardon, Miss Raynor. Mrs. Preen is out, I hear.”

“Yes ; she is out with the two little girls.”

“I am sorry. I have brought up some admission tickets for the flower-show at the Botanical : they were only given me this morning. Do you think Mrs. Preen will be back soon ? ”

“Not in time to use the tickets. They are gone to an afternoon tea at Richmond.”

“What a pity ! A great pity to lose the tickets. It is the rose show. I—suppose you could not go with me ? ” added Mr. Stane in some hesitation.

“Oh dear no,” replied Alice, glancing at him in astonishment. “Thank you very much.”

“Mrs. Preen would not like it, you think ? ”

"I am sure she would not. You forget that I am only the governess."

Down sat Mr. Stane on the other side the table, and began fingering absently one of the exercise books, looking occasionally at Alice while he did so.

"What were you crying about?" he suddenly asked.

Alice was taken aback. "I—I don't think I was quite crying."

"You were very near it. What was the matter?"

"I am very sorry to have to leave," she truthfully answered. "Mrs. Preen is about to reside for a time in Devonshire, as perhaps you know, and the little girls are to go to school. So I am no longer wanted here."

"I should consider that a subject for laughing, instead of crying. You will be spared work."

"Ah, you don't know," cried Alice, her tone one of pain. "If I do not work here, I must elsewhere. And the next place I get may be harder than this."

"And you were crying at the anticipation?"

"No. I was crying—that is, I was ready to cry—at the thought of perhaps not being

able speedily to find another situation. I—suppose,” she timidly added, “you do not happen to know of any situation vacant, Mr. Stane?”

“Why yes, I believe I do. And I think you will be just the right person to fill it.”

Her blue eyes brightened, her whole face lighted up with eagerness.

“Oh, if you can but obtain it for me! I shall be so thankful, for mamma’s sake.”

“But it is not as a governess.”

“Not as a governess! What then?”

“As a housekeeper.”

“Oh, dear!” cried Alice in dismay. “I don’t know very much about housekeeping. People would not think me old enough.”

“And as a wife.”

She did not understand him. He was rising from his seat to approach her, a smile on his face. Alice sat looking at him with parted lips.

“As *my* wife, Alice,” he said, bending low.

“Oh, my dear, surely our foolish estrangement may end! I have been wishing it for some time past. I am tired of chambers, and want to set up a real home for myself. I want a wife in it. Alice, if you will be that wife, well:

otherwise I shall probably stay as I am for ever."

Ah, there could be no longer any doubt: he was in earnest. His tender tones, his beseeching eyes, the warm clasp of his hands, told her all the joyous truth—that his love was her own still. She burst into tears of emotion, and William Stane kissed them away.

"You don't despise me because I have been a governess?" she sobbed.

"My darling, I only love you all the better for it. And shall prize you more."

He sat down by her side and quietly told her all. That for a considerable period of time, after their parting, he had steeled his heart against her, and done his best to drive her out of it. He thought he had succeeded. He believed he should have succeeded but for meeting her again at Mrs. Preen's. That showed him that she was just as dear to him as ever. Still he strove against his love; but he continued his visits to the Preens, who were old friends of his: and each time, that he chanced to see Alice, served to convince him more and more that he could not part with her. He was about to tell his father that he had made up his mind to marry Miss Raynor, when

Sir Philip died, and then he did not speak to Alice quite immediately. All this he explained to her.

“And but for your coming into this house, Alice, and my opportunities of seeing you in it, we should in all human probability have remained estranged throughout life. So, you see that I would not have had you not become a governess for the world.”

She smiled through her tears. “It was not in that light I spoke.”

“I am aware of it. But you are more fitted to make a good wife now, after your experiences and your trials, than you would have been in the old prosperous days at Eagles’ Nest. I shall be especially glad for one thing—that when you are mine I shall have a right to ease your mother’s straits and difficulties. She has deemed me very hard-hearted I daresay; but I have often and often thought of her, and wished I had a plea for calling on and helping her.”

His intention showed a good heart. But William Stane and Alice were alike ignorant of one great fact—that Mrs. Raynor no longer needed help. She would shortly be back at Eagles’ Nest, all her struggles over.

The hot sun still streamed into the little room, but Alice wondered what had become of its oppressive heat, what of her own sick weariness. The day and all things with it, without and within, had changed to Elysium.

Frank Raynor attended the funeral of old Mrs. Bell. He chose to do it: and Rosaline felt the respect warmly, and thanked him for it. He would have been just as well pleased not to have Mr. Blase Pellet for his companion mourner: but it had to be. On his return home from the cemetery, Frank's way led him through West Street, and he called in just to see Rosaline, who had been too sick in health, too depressed in spirits to attend herself. Not one minute had he been there when Mr. Blase Pellet also came in. On the third day from that, Rosaline was to sail for New Zealand.

"And I say that it is a very cruel thing of her to sail at all," struck in Blase, when Frank chanced to make some remark about the voyage. "As my wife, she would ——"

"Blase, you know the bargain," quietly interrupted Rosaline, turning her sad eyes upon him. "Not a word of that kind must ever be

spoken by you to me again. I will not hear it, or bear it."

"I'm not going to speak of it; it's of no use to speak," grumbled Blase. "But a fellow who feels his life is blighted can't be wholly silent. And you might have been so happy at Trennach! You liked the place once."

"Are you going back to Trennach?" asked Frank, in some surprise.

"Yes," said Blase. "I only came to London to be near her; and I shan't care to stay in it, once she is gone. Float, the druggist, has been wanting me for some time. I am to be his partner; and the whole concern will be mine after he has done with it."

"I wish you success, Blase," said Frank heartily. "You can make a better thing of the business than old Float makes, if you will."

"I mean to," answered Blase.

"I will take this opportunity of saying just a word to you, Blase," again spoke up Rosaline, smoothing down the crape of her gown with one finger, in what looked like nervousness. "I have informed Mr. Raynor of the conversation I had with you the night my mother died, and that you are aware of the confession he and Mr. Pine alike hold."

Frank turned quickly to Blase. "You perceive now that you have been lying under a mistake from the first, with regard to me."

"I do," said Blase: "I am never ashamed to confess myself in the wrong, once I am convinced of it. But I should never have brought it against you, Mr. Frank Raynor, never; and that, I fancy, is what you have been fearing. In future, the less said about that past night the better. Better for all of us to try and forget it."

Frank nodded an emphatic acquiescence, and took up his hat to depart. Yes, indeed, better forget it. He should have to allude to it once again, for he meant to tell the full truth to Edina; and then he would put it from his mind.

He went home, wondering whether any urgent calls had been made upon him during this morning's absence; and was standing behind the counter, questioning Sam, when a brown-looking little gentleman walked in. Frank gazed at him in amazement: for it was Mr. Max Brown.

"How are you, Raynor?" asked the traveler, grasping Frank's hand cordially.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Frank. "Have you dropped from the moon?"

"I dropped last from the Southampton train. Got into port last night."

"All well?"

"*Very* well. And my good old mother is not dead yet."

There was no mistaking the stress upon the first word : there was no mistaking the perfectly contented air that pervaded Mr. Max Brown's whole demeanour. Whatever cause might have detained him so long from his home and country, it did not appear to be an unpleasant one.

"There was a young lady in the case," he acknowledged, entering on his explanation with a smile on his tanned face. "Lota Elmaine ; old Elmaine the planter's only daughter. The old man would not let us be married ; Lota was too young, he said ; the marriage should not take place until she was in Europe. Will you believe it, Raynor, old Elmaine has kept me on like that all the blessed while I have been away, perpetually saying he was coming over here, and never coming ! Never a month passed but he gave out he should sail the next."

"And so you stayed also !"

"I stayed also. I would not leave Lota to be snapped up by some covetous rascal in my

absence. Truth to tell, I could not part with her on my own score."

"And where is Miss Lota Elmaine?"

"No longer in existence. She is Mrs. Max Brown."

"Then you have brought her over with you!"

"Poor Elmaine died a few months ago; and Lota got a touch of the native fever, which left her prostrate and thin: so I persuaded her to marry me off-hand that I might bring her here for change. She is better already. The voyage has done her no end of good."

"Where is she?"

"At a private hotel in Westminster. We have taken up our quarters there for the time being."

"Until you can come here," assumed Frank. "I suppose you want me to clear out as soon as possible. My wife is ill ——"

"I want you to stay for good, if you will," interrupted Mr. Brown. "The business is excellent, you know, better than when I left it. If you will take to it I shall make it quite easy for you."

"What are you going to do yourself?" questioned Frank.

“Nothing at present,” said Mr. Max Brown. “Lota’s relatives on the mother’s side live in Wales, and she wants to go amongst them for a time. Perhaps I shall set up in practice there. Lota’s fortune is more than enough for us, but I should be miserable with nothing to do. Will you take to this concern, Raynor?”

“I think not,” replied Frank, shaking his head. “My wife does not like the locality.”

“Neither would my wife like it. Well, there’s no hurry: it is a good offer, and you can consider it. And, look here, Raynor: if you would like a day or two’s holiday now, take it: you have been hard at work long enough. I will come down and attend for you. I should like to see my old patients again: though some of them were queer kind of people.”

“Thank you,” said Frank mechanically.

Thought after thought was passing through his mind. No, he would not stay here. He had no further motive to seek obscurity, thank Heaven, and Daisy should be removed to a more congenial atmosphere. But—what could he do for means? He must be only an assistant yet, he supposed; but better luck might come in course of time.

And better luck, though Frank knew it not, was on his way to him even then.

What with one thing and another, that day seemed destined to be somewhat of an eventful day to Frank Raynor. In the evening a letter was delivered to him from Mr. George Atkinson, requesting him to go down to Eagles' Nest on the morrow, as he wished particularly to see him.

"What can he want with me?—unless he is about to appoint me Surgeon-in-Ordinary to his high and mighty self!" quoth Frank lightly. "I should like to go. I should like to see the old place again. *Can* I go? Daisy is better. Max Brown has offered me a day or two's rest. Yes, I can. And I'll drop Max a note now to say his patients will be waiting for him to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER X.

MADEMOISELLE'S LETTER.

“A PARCEL for you, sir.”

“A parcel for me !” repeated Mr. Atkinson to his servant, some slight surprise in his tone. For he was not in the habit of receiving parcels, and wondered what was being sent to him.

The parcel was done up rather clumsily in brown paper, and appeared, by the label on it, to have come by fast train from Hereford. Mr. George Atkinson looked on the address with curiosity. It did not bear his name, but was simply directed to “The Resident of Eagles’ Nest.”

“Undo it, Thomas,” said he.

Thomas took off the string and unfolded the brown paper. This disclosed a second envelope of paper, white : and a sealed note, similarly superscribed, lying on it. Mr. Atkinson took the note in his hand : but Thomas was quick, and in a minute the long-lost

ebony desk stood revealed to view, its key tied to it.

“ Oh,” said Mr. Atkinson. “ What does the letter say ? ”

The letter proved to be from Mademoiselle Delrue, the former governess at Eagles’ Nest. In a long and rather complicated explanation, written partly in French, partly in English, the following facts came to light.

When about to leave Eagles’ Nest ; things and servants being at that time at sixes and sevens there ; the kitchen maid, one Jane—or as Mademoiselle wrote it, Jeanne—a good-natured girl, had offered to assist her to pack up. She had shown Jeanne her books, stacked ready in the small study, and Jeanne had packed them together in several parcels, for Mademoiselle’s stock of books was extensive. After leaving Mrs. Raynor’s, Mademoiselle Delrue had gone into a family who spent a large portion of their time in travelling on the Continent and elsewhere : much luggage could not be allowed to Mademoiselle, consequently her parcels of books had remained unpacked from that time to this. She had now settled down with the family in Herefordshire, had her parcels forwarded to her, and unpacked

them. To her consternation, her grief, her horror—Mademoiselle dashed all three of the words—in one of these parcels she discovered not books, but the black desk, one that she well remembered as belonging to Major Raynor: that stupid Jeanne must have taken it to be hers, and committed the error of putting it up. Mademoiselle finished by asking whether she could be forgiven: if one slight element of consolation could peep out upon her, she observed, it was to find that the desk was empty. She had lost not an instant in sending it back to Eagles' Nest, and she begged the resident gentleman there (whose name, she had the pain of confessing had quite escaped her memory) to be so kind as forward it, together with this note of contrition and explanation, to Mrs. Raynor—whose present residence she was not acquainted with. And she had the honour to salute him with respectful cordiality.

“Don't go away, Thomas,” said his master. “I want you to stay while I search the private compartment of this desk: I fancy those missing papers may be in it. Let me see? Yes, this is the way to do it—And here's the spring.”

With one touch, the false bottom was lifted

out. Beneath, quietly lay the lost bonds ; also a copy of Mrs. Atkinson's last will—the one made in favour of George Atkinson, and a few words written by her to himself.

“ You see them, Thomas ? See that I have found them here ? ”

“ Indeed I do, sir.”

“ That's all, then. People are fond of saying that truth is stranger than fiction,” said Mr. Atkinson to himself with a smile, as the man withdrew. He examined the bonds ; ascertained, to his intense astonishment, that the money they related to had been invested in his name, and in one sole profitable undertaking. And it appeared that Mrs. Atkinson had given directions that the yearly interest, arising, should remain and be added to the principal, until such time as he, George Atkinson, should step forward to claim the whole.

“ Little wonder we could not find the money,” thought he. “ And now—what is to be done with it ? ” And taking only a few minutes for consideration, he addressed the letter, spoken of in the foregoing chapter, to Frank Raynor. Which brought the latter down in person.

"I never heard of so romantic a thing!" cried Frank with his sweet smile and gay manner, that so won upon everybody; and was now winning upon George Atkinson, as he listened to the narrative on his arrival at Eagles' Nest. "I am sure I congratulate you very heartily. The hunts that poor Uncle Francis used to have over those very bonds! And to think that they were lying all the while close under his hand!"

"I expect not much of the money would have been left for me, had he found them," significantly remarked Mr. Atkinson.

Frank laughed. "To speak the truth, I don't think it would. Is it very much?"

"A little over one-and-twenty thousand pounds. That is what I make it at a rough calculation—of course including the interest to this date."

"What a lot of money!" exclaimed Frank. "You can set up a coach-and-six," added he, joking lightly.

"Ay. By the way, Mr. Francis Raynor, how came *you* to treat me so cavalierly when I was playing 'Tiger' here?—the name you and Charles were pleased to bestow ——"

"Oh, Charley gave you that name," inter-

rupted Frank, his blue eyes dancing with merriment. "He took you for a sheriff's officer about to capture him. I'm sure I never was so astonished in all my life as when Charley told me the other day that the Tiger had turned out to be, not a Tiger, but Mr. George Atkinson."

"I can understand his shunning me, under the misapprehension. But why, I ask, did you do it? You were not in fear, I presume, of a sheriff's officer?"

Frank's face grew grave at once. "No, I was not in fear of that," he said, dropping his voice, "but I had fears on another score. I had reason to fear that I was being watched—looked after—tracked; and I thought you were doing it. I am thankful to say," he added, his countenance brightening again, "that I was under a misapprehension altogether: but I only learnt that very lately. It has been a great trouble to me for years, keeping me down in the world—and yet I had done nothing myself to deserve it. I—I cannot explain further, and would be glad to drop the subject," he continued, raising his eyes ingenuously to George Atkinson's. "And I heartily beg your pardon for all the discourtesy

"I was guilty of. It is against my nature to show any—even to a Tiger."

"As I should fancy. It gave me a wrong impression of you. Made me think all you Raynors were alike — worthless. It's true, Frank. I was ready to be a good friend to you then, had you allowed me. And now tell me of your plans."

Frank, open-natured, full of candour, told freely all he knew about himself. That he did not intend to remain at Mr. Max Brown's, for Daisy disliked the locality, and he should look out for a more desirable situation at the West End, as assistant-surgeon.

"Why not set up in practice for yourself at the West End?" asked George Atkinson.

"Because I have nothing to set up upon," answered Frank. "That has been a bar all along. We must live, you see, while the practice was coming in."

"You could do it on seven thousand pounds."

"Seven thousand pounds!" echoed Frank. "Why, yes! on the half of it; on the quarter. But I have no money at all, you understand."

"Yes, you have, Frank. You have that

much. At least you will have it in the course of a few days ! ”

Frank's pleasant lips were parting with a smile. He thought it was meant as a joke.

“ Look here. This money, that has come to light, of your Aunt Atkinson's—you cannot, I hope, imagine for a moment that I should keep it. By law it is mine, for she willed it to me ; but I shall divide it into three portions, and give them to those who are her rightful heirs : her brothers' families. One portion to Mrs. Raynor ; one to you ; one to that angel of goodness, Edina —— ”

“ And she is an angel,” interrupted Frank hotly, carried away by the praise. “ How we should all have got on without Edina, I know not.—But Mr. Atkinson, you must not do by us this that you are talking of : at least as far as I am concerned. It would be too chivalrously generous.”

“ Why not by you ? ”

“ I could not think of taking it. I have no claim upon you. Who am I, that you should benefit me ? ”

“ I benefit you as your father's son. Were he alive, this money would be his : it will now be yours. There, say no more, Frank ; you

cannot talk me out of doing bare justice. You will own seven thousand pounds next week, and you can lay your plans accordingly."

"I shall not know how to thank you," cried Frank, with something like a sob in his throat. "Eagles' Nest first, and twenty-one thousand pounds next! You must have been taking a lesson from Edina. And what will Max Brown say when he hears that I shall leave him for certain? He does not believe it yet."

"Max Brown can go promenading."

CHAPTER XI.

SUNSHINE EVERYWHERE.

IT was a warm, balmy September day. The blue sky was without a cloud; the sunbeams glinted through the many-hued foliage, beginning to change with the coming autumn, and fell on the smooth velvet lawn at Eagles' Nest. On that same green lawn stood a group of people in gala attire, for this had been a gala day with them. William Stane and Alice Raynor were married that morning. They had now just driven from the gates, around which the white satin shoes lay, and the rice in showers.

It had been Mr. George Atkinson's intention to resign Eagles' Nest at the end of June, almost immediately after he first spoke of doing so. But his intention, like a great many more intentions formed in this uncertain world of ours, was frustrated. The Raynors could not so soon come down to take possession of it. Charles had given notice at once to leave Prest-

leigh and Preen's ; but he was requested, as a favour, not to do so until the second week in August, for the office had much ado to get through its work before the long vacation. And as Charles had learnt to study other people's interests more than his own, he cheerfully said he would stay. It was a proud moment for him, standing amid the fellow clerks who had looked down upon him, when one of those very clerks copied out the deed of gift by which Eagles' Nest was transferred to him by George Atkinson, and which constituted him from henceforth its rightful and legal owner. Charles, who knew a little of law by this time, proposed to himself to commence reading for the Bar : he had acquired the habit of work and knew its value, and did not wish to be an idle man. But George Atkinson, their true friend and counsellor, spoke against it. The master of Eagles' Nest need be no idle man, he said ; rather, if he did his duty faithfully, too busy a one. Better for Charles to learn how to till his land and manage his property, than to plead in a law court ; better to constitute himself the active, personal manager of his estate. Charles saw the advice was sound, and meant to follow it.

Neither was Alice ready to leave London so soon as she had expected, for Mrs. Preen's intended departure from home was delayed for some weeks, and she also requested Alice to remain. Alice was nothing loth. She saw William Stane frequently, and Mrs. Preen took a warm interest in the getting ready of her wedding clothes.

But the chief impediment to their departure from Laurel Cottage, the poor home which had sheltered them so long, lay with Mrs. Raynor. Whether the reaction, of finding their miserable troubles at an end and fortune smiling again, told too strongly upon her weakened frame; or whether that headache, which you may remember she complained of the night Edina reached home with the joyful news from Eagles' Nest, was in truth the advance symptom of an illness already attacking her, certain it was that from that night Mrs. Raynor drooped. The headache did not leave her; other feelings of discomfort crept on. At the end of a few days (which days Edina had spent at Frank's in attendance on his sick wife) a doctor was called in. He pronounced it to be low fever. Edina left Daisy, who was then out of danger, to go back home, where she was now

most wanted. For some weeks Mrs. Raynor did not quit her bed ; and altogether there had been hindrances.

It was getting towards the end of August before the day came when they went down to take possession of Eagles' Nest. Mrs. Raynor was better then ; well, so to say ; but much reduced, and still required care.

"This place will bring back your health and spirits in no time, mother dear," cried Charles, bending towards her, as they drove up to the gates of Eagles' Nest. She was leaning back in the carriage, side by side with Edina ; tears were trickling down her pale cheeks. He took her hand. "You don't speak, mother."

"Charley, I was thanking God. And wondering what we can do to show our thanks to Him in the future. I know that my life will be one long, lasting, heartfelt pæan of gratitude."

Charley leaned from the carriage window. Talking to the lodgekeeper was Jetty the carpenter. Standing with them and watching the carriage was a man whom Charles remembered as one Beck ; remembered, to his shame, what his own treatment had been of the poor fellow in the days gone by. Good heavens ! that he should have been so insolent, purse-

proud, haughty a young upstart ! his cheeks were reddening now with the recollection. Ungenerous words and deeds generally come flashing back to us as reminders when we least want them.

Could that be Charles Raynor!—their future master ? Jetty and Beck scarcely believed that in the pale, self-contained, gentle-faced man, who looked so much older than his years, they saw the arrogant braggart of other days ; scarcely believed that the sweet smile, the cordial wave of the hand, the passing word of kindly greeting, the steadfast regard shining on them from the considerate eyes, could be indeed meant for themselves. Ah yes, they might cast out fear ; it was Charles Raynor. And they saw that the good news whispered to them all by Mr. Atkinson was indeed true : that their new master would be as good and faithful a friend to them as he himself had been during these past three years.

“ God ever helping me to be so ! ” aspirated Charles to his own heart. A whole lifetime of experience, spent in prosperity, could not have worked the change wrought in him by this comparatively short period of bitter adversity.

George Atkinson stood at the door to receive

them. He had not quitted Eagles' Nest. For a week or so they were to be his guests in it: or he theirs. Some hearty joking and laughter was raised in this the first moment of meeting, as to which it would be, led to by a remark of Mrs. Raynor's: that she hoped he would not find the children—coming on with Alice in another carriage—troublesome guests.

"Nay, the house is yours, you know, not mine; you cannot be my guests," laughed George Atkinson. "How do you say, Miss Raynor?"

"I say we are your guests," answered Edina. "And very glad to be."

"At least I did not think *you* would side against me," said George Atkinson, with mock resentment. "For this day, let it be so then. To-morrow I subside into my proper place, and Mrs. Raynor begins her reign."

"I have been wondering how we can ever be sufficiently grateful to God," she whispered with emotion, taking his hand in hers. "I know not how we can ever thank *you*."

"Nay, my dear lady, I have done but what was right and just; right and just in His sight, and according to His laws," was George Atkinson's solemn answer. "We must all

strive for that, you know, if we would ensure peace at the last. Here comes the other fly with the young ones!—and that curly-headed urchin, gazing at us with his great blue eyes, must be my disappointed little candidate for the Bluecoat School.”

The week passed soon; and the wedding morning dawned. And now that was past, and the bridal carriage had driven off; and the white slippers and the rice were thrown, and the people had collected on the lawn under the shining afternoon sun. The only guests were Frank Raynor and his wife, who had arrived the night before. Street the lawyer and a brother of William Stane's had come for the morning; but had already left again to catch an up train.

Frank Raynor, aided by the seven thousand pounds made over to him, had taken to the house and practice of a deceased medical man in May Fair, and was securely established there and doing already fairly well. Mr. Max Brown, who, with his wife, had been spending a week with them, had disposed of the Lambeth practice to another purchaser. Daisy was happy again, and just as pretty and blooming as in the old days at Trennach.

Frank, without entering into actual particulars (he did that only to Edina), had disclosed to her enough of that past night's fatal work to account for his interest in, and care of, Mrs. Bell and poor Rosaline. Fifteen times at least in the day and night, Daisy, with much contrition and many repentant tears, would whisper prayers to her husband to forgive—forgive her; saying at the same time she could never forgive herself. Frank would kiss the tears away and tell her to let bygones be bygones, that they were beginning life afresh. Rosaline had sailed for her new home and country—was probably by this time nearing its shores. Most earnestly was it to be hoped she would regain happiness there.

Who so proud as Mrs. Daisy, flitting about the lawn with her three months' old baby in her arms, resplendent in its white robes! The little thing was named Francis George, and George Atkinson was its godfather. So many interests had claimed their attention that day, that not a minute had been yet found for questions and answers; and it was only now, at the first quiet moment, that Mr. Atkinson was beginning to inquire how Frank was prospering.

“First-rate,” said sanguine Frank, his kindly

face in a glow. "I wish with all my heart every beginner was getting on as well as I!"

"And my mother has come out of her tantrums," put in Daisy irreverently, handing the baby over to its nurse, who stood by. "I had quite a long letter from her yesterday morning, Mr. Atkinson, in which she graciously forgives me, and says I shall have my proper share of the money that my uncle Tom left to her last year. Which will be at least some thousands of pounds."

"It never rains but it pours, you know," smiled Frank. "Money drops in, now we don't particularly want it."

"And so," added Daisy, "we mean to set up our brougham. Frank needs one badly."

"Frank needs it for use and you for show," cried George Atkinson, laughing at her.

"Yes, that is just it," acknowledged Daisy. "I expect I shall not get much use out of it, though, as his practice increases.—When do you take possession of your town house, Mr. Atkinson? You will not be very far from us."

"I go up to it from Eagles' Nest to-morrow," was the reply. "Perhaps not to remain long in it at present. I am not yet able to form my plans."

“Not able to form your plans !” echoed Daisy, in her saucy, engaging way ; her eyes, bright as amber, gazing into his, questioningly. “Why, I should have thought you might have laid your plans on the first of January for all the year, having nobody to consult but yourself.”

“But if I am uncertain—capricious ?” returned he, in a half-jesting tone.

“Ah, that’s a different thing. I should not have thought you that at all. But—pray tell me, Mr. Atkinson ! What do the people down here say, now they have found out that it was you, yourself, who lived incog. amidst them three years ago ?”

“They say nothing to me. I daresay they conjecture that I had my reasons for it. Or perhaps they think I was only amusing myself,” continued George Atkinson, glancing at Edina.

Edina smiled at him in return. All’s well that ends well : and that incognito business had turned out very well in the end. To her only had George Atkinson spoken out fully of the motives that swayed him, the impressions he received.

Edina stood by in all her finery. She had never been so smart in her life : and perhaps

had never looked so well. A lilac silk dress, and a lovely pink rose in her bosom, nestling amid white lace. Edina was rich now—as *she* looked on riches. Seven thousand pounds, and all her own! She had held out strenuously against receiving it, pointing out to George Atkinson that it would be wrong and *unfair* to give it her, as her Aunt Ann had never meant to leave her any money at all. But Edina's arguments and objections proved of no avail. Mr. Atkinson quietly shut his ears, and transferred the money over to her, in spite of her protests. The first use Edina made of her cheque-book was to send one hundred pounds to Mr. Pine, that he might distribute it among the poor of Trennach.

Like George Atkinson, as he had just avowed, Edina had not laid out her plans. She could not decide where her chief residence should be. Mrs. Raynor and Charles naturally pressed her to stay at Eagles' Nest: but she hesitated to comply. A wish to have a home of her own, some little place of her own setting up, was making itself heard in her heart: and she could visit Eagles' Nest from time to time. Should the little homestead be near to them?—or at Trennach? It was this that she could

not decide. But she must decide very shortly, for she wished to give them her decision on the morrow.

Turning away from the busy talkers, from the excited children, capering about; Kate in white, and little Bob, not in a long-skirted blue coat and yellow stockings, but in black velvet and knickerbockers; Edina wandered away, her mind full of it, and sat down on a bench o'ershadowed by clustering trees, out of sight and sound. The small opening in the trees before her disclosed a bit of the far-off scenery—the Kentish hills, dotted with their varying foliage, lying under the calm, pale blue sky.

“I like Trennach,” argued she with herself. “I love it, for it was my girlhood’s home; and I love those who are in it. I could almost say with Ruth, ‘The people there shall be my people, and their God my God.’ On the other hand, are the claims of Eagles’ Nest, and of Frank and Daisy. I love them all. Mary Raynor says she cannot get on unless I am near her; and perhaps the young ones need me too. If I only knew!”

“Knew what?” cried a voice at her elbow—for she had spoken the last sentence aloud.

The interruption came from George Atkin-

son. He had been looking for her in and out, and at last had found her. Edina blushed at having allowed her words to be heard : as he sat down beside her.

"I was only wishing I knew whether it would be better for me to settle near London or at Trennach," she answered with a smile. "It was very silly of me to speak aloud."

"Charles Raynor has just informed us that you intend to remain for good at Eagles' Nest."

"Oh no, I do not. I have never said I would ; and to-morrow I shall tell them why. I should like to have a little place of my own ; ever so little, but my very own. Either at Trennach, or in this neighbourhood : or perhaps—in London."

"Both in this neighbourhood and in London," he interrupted. "And, sometimes sojourning elsewhere : at the seaside or at Trennach. That is what I should recommend."

"You have made me a millionaire in my own estimation, but not such a millionaire as that," laughed Edina.

"The houses are ready for you, and waiting."

Some peculiarity in his tone made her heart

stand still. He turned and took her hands in his, speaking softly.

“Edina! Don’t you know—have you not guessed—that I want you in my houses, in my home? Surely you will come to me!—you will not say me nay! I know that it is late, sadly late, for me to say this to you: but I will try and make you happy as my wife.”

Her pulses went rushing on tumultuously. As the words fell on her ear and heart, the truth was suddenly opened to her—that she loved him still.

“I am no longer young, George,” she whispered, the tears slowly coursing down her cheeks.

“Too young for me, Edina. The world may say so.”

“And I—I don’t know that others can spare me.”

“Yes, they can. Had I been wise I should have secured you in the days so long gone by, Edina. I have never ceased to care for you. Oh, my best friend, my first and only love, say you will come and make the sunshine of my home! *Say you will.*”

“I will,” she whispered.

And Mr. George Atkinson drew her to him and sheltered her face on his breast. What a refuge for her ! After all the sadness and vicissitudes of her life, what a haven of rest it felt to Edina.

“ There shall be no delay ; we cannot afford it. As soon as may be, Edina, I shall take you away. And that seven thousand pounds that you tried hard to fight me over—you can now transfer it to the others, if you like.”

“ As you will,” she breathed. “ All as you will from henceforth, George. I have found my home : and my master.”

“ God bless you, my dear one ! May He be ever with us, as now, and keep us both to the end, in this world and in the next.”

The singing birds warbled in the branches above ; the distant hills were fair and smiling ; the pale blue sky had never a cloud : all nature spoke of peace. And within their own hearts reigned that holy peace and rest which comes alone from Heaven ; the Peace that passeth all understanding.

THE END.