

SOMETHING TO DO.

A Novel.



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CHAPTER I.

AT the theatre, Saturday afternoon. The play was a fairy extravaganza. Nymphs and naiads, elves and goblins, spirits crowned with liquid fire, ghosts with hair of twisted glowing serpents, sylphs and gnomes, Queen Mab and Queen Titania, Puck and Oberon, weird fantastic shapes and shadows, passed dancing and singing, crawling and flying, across the stage in quick succession, meeting each other in impossible positions and moving in an inextricable medley of figures. A dwarf with an immense white beard waved his silver staff before great tropical lilies and gorgeous Eastern roses, and slowly their petals unfolded and disclosed the enchanted beings imprisoned within; and next a giant, whose head towered beyond the moon sailing through the blue vault above him, with a sceptre of iron touched the liberated, and changed them, in the twinkling of an eye, to green-coated toads and hissing vipers and fierce scorpions, to await the arrival of some new genii to release them once more.

Lights sparkled, flowers bloomed, trees waved, meteors flashed, perfumes spread themselves around, fountains splashed, streams dashed over mossy rocks down the mountain side, and under all and through all breathed delicious, bewitching fairy music, melting and maddening and stirring the soul to a state of ethereal ecstasy.

"Aw, yes," drawled a young fellow with a shadow of mustache, who must have been eighteen, and who was therefore *blasé*, "the ballet is vewy pwetty, I own, bawt I must beg to be excused from being gwately amused by the west

of the entawtainment. Man o' the world can't of cawrse be taken in by any illusions. To one — aw, hem, ha, ha, ha! — who knows the gween-woom so well as — aw — myself, say, there's pawatively nawthing left but the ballet."

In front of the young fellow sat a group who had not yet advanced so far into the world as to find that all is vanity of vanities except the ballet, — a gentleman with his two little daughters. The younger child had never before been at a theatre, and she was wholly absorbed in the wonderful phantasmagoria. She was a brilliant child; from the glory in her face, the waves in her hair, and the electric sparkle in her eyes, you might have guessed that drops of purified fire instead of blood throbbed through her veins.

Her sister was beautiful, like the starlight. It was light, and not fire, which permeated her being. There appeared no trace of resemblance between them; yet is not starlight also fire breathing in a loftier sphere?

The father was a gentleman, and proud; his face was grave, but touched with sweetness in the eyes. To him the little Celia clung, while her eyes dilated with rapture and her breath came quickly.

The curtain fell, but rose after a moment upon the magnificence of the caverns beneath the sea. Mermaids, with "comb of pearl and golden curl," sported with dolphins; strange, iridescent fish darted through the waters. Then came swimming a great, terrible shark, with bloody jaws and glittering teeth. He swallowed the fairest of the mermaids, and a burst of horror came from the wide-eyed little Celia. Then

suddenly, from the very blue ether, like a flash, came a spirit clothed in rainbows and dew-drops,—a spirit of dazzling beauty. The whole house applauded. "Antoinetta," "Antoinina," was heard on every side from enthusiastic voices. The beautiful spirit-child who awakened all this enthusiasm did not heed it at all, but went on with her part, which seemed to be to weave magic spells about the shark and soften and tame it, till suddenly it stood up, its skin burst off and shrivelled away, and the beautiful mermaid was a beautiful mortal, and the ugly shark was her gay young lover, who had been enchanted, and they blessed the spirit-child, who soared aloft into the sky. The scene was a very long one, and the little Antoinetta had to dance and sing in her own perfect way a dozen times; but though the audience encored and stamped and clapped and shouted, she still disregarded them utterly, and would not pause for an instant to listen, so they continued their applause but a few seconds at a time lest they might lose some of her words.

"Aw," said the *blasé* young gentleman, "little Antoinetta knows the rawpes vewy well. Believe me, Fwed, she's a little fuwy, and pwovokes the manager so that he would nevaw keep her a day longaw if ewewybody did n't wave about her so. He likes the *tin*," continued this elegant young gentleman.

"Well, what's the matter with her anyway?" asked his companion.

"Why, you awbserve how uncawnventional she is. She won't even make a courtesy when she's applauded. She *nevaw* would, fwom her *début* on. The managaw twied to make her (I heard it—aw, ahem!—fwom a *fwend*), and she was wight down impudent, and said that when she played she meant to make it as natuwal as possible, and it was n't natuwal to stop and make a bow, and she *nevaw* would faw anybody. And she won't wepeat a thing, naw appeaw in the tableau aftaw the scenes. Tell you what, Fwed, she's a wousaw!"

"Good, good little Antoinetta," whispered Alice to her father. "Isn't it beautiful that she believes in art as holy while she is yet a child?"

As for Celia, she believed so fully in the reality of the play and in the spirituality of Antoinetta that she heeded neither the remark of the young fellow nor its interpretation by Alice.

When the scene closed, there was furious calling for the reappearance of Antoinetta, as she did not show herself *en tableau* with the other actors.

She would not come then, but she came a few minutes later, in another costume, to dance again. The manager had outwitted her by arranging this addenda to the play. Now she courtied to the assemblage, evidently seeing no incongruity in doing so before a dance, and thus she gave an opportunity to her admirers to shower her with bouquets.

"Oh!" said little Celia, trembling and almost crying, "why have we brought her no flowers? There are all those cardinals and gentians in full bloom in the swamp."

And so the *Matinée* closed, and they went out from the dazzling theatre into the glad September daylight, and a little ride in the cars brought them to their own village, just after the sun had set and the clear stars were coming slowly into the blue sky.

Near the gate of their pretty stone cottage they met a sunburnt bright boy, in farmer's dress, who greeted them in the cheeriest of voices.

"So you've been down under the sea!" said he. "And I suppose you could n't stop to think of the sunset afterwards, so, on the whole, I should n't wonder if I in my cornfield had had more real æsthetic—is n't that the word, Mr. Wilding?—enjoyment than the rest of you, though I wished so much I had been going too."

"For shame!" said Alice, coloring a little in her earnestness. "If I had not found the sunset more beautiful rather than less so after seeing so gorgeous a play, I would never enter a theatre again."

The boy laughed. "What is art, I wonder? I never saw much of it, but I've always understood that it rather took the edge off nature." He spoke half to Mr. Wilding and half to Alice. The gentleman only smiled, but Alice again answered:—

"Art which was true art would not try to do that. Art interprets nature to us."

"Well," said the boy, still gayly, "that may be true; but, just for the fun of it, I wish you'd tell me what sort of nature such an extravaganza as this one interpreted to you."

"Not *directly* anything," said Alice, shaking her head gravely and thoughtfully; "but it *suggested* a thousand possibilities which I am not wise enough to put into words. Don't you think I'm right, father?"

"Yes, you express in a different way a thought which assumes more tangible form in my mind each year, that there has never been legend, fairy tale, or myth invented so wild that it has not a foundation somewhere existing in our commonplace, every-day life. Such tales are beautiful because the imagination has seized the germ of a living fact, and fantastic because it has but partially seized it and has altered its relations to other facts."

He did not speak dreamily, as to himself, expecting the children to comprehend only vaguely, but directly and fully to Alice, who had asked the question. It was this continual intercourse with a subtle and thoughtful mind which had given her, a girl of fourteen, the power of thinking and speaking so far beyond her years.

"But for Celia," continued the boy, who was himself a thinker in another form of life, "she who is too much a child to comprehend this, and for nine tenths of the people at the theatre, who are in mind children,—what is such a play to them but the substitution of art for nature?"

"They feel, though they may not think," replied Alice. "Besides, they at least see beauty."

"And for many of them," added her father, "the theatre is almost the only place where they do see the beautiful. They have factories and shops instead of cornfields to reflect in, and though there is intense spiritual significance in machinery, and richness and depth in the colorings and fabrics they vend in shops, yet those are the products of art. So, Aleck, you must allow that, since they cannot have nature, it is

better to have art than to have nothing."

"Yes," said the boy, responding to Wilding's smile. "But for people who can have nature?"

"Ah!" said Alice, eagerly, "but art is the outgrowth of minds of genius. They have been inspired directly from nature, and have translated their conceptions into language which we who are duller can understand."

"And however vaguely their meaning may be comprehended by many minds," said Wilding, "yet it is surely a grand thing that to those same minds should come a series of beautiful pictures, though their eternal relations to each and to the plan of the universe are unperceived."

"I don't know what you all mean," said Celia, half angrily. "For my part, I know it was *beautiful, beautiful, beautiful*, this afternoon, and I was perfectly happy, and I wish you'd let me be a ballet-girl."

"There, Aleck," said Alice triumphantly,

"Since eyes were made for seeing,
Beauty is its own excuse for being";

and you see, too, that 'a thing of beauty is a joy forever.' It is quite worth while that the world should be made joyful, I think."

"As if joy or happiness were the great educator or the chief end of man!" said Aleck, half scornfully.

"But joy is worth while, Aleck," said Alice, as she followed her father into the house.

The man of genius, whose inspired brain had interpreted the mysteries of nature to the duller perceptions of the cultivated Wilding and his daughters, was at that twilight hour sitting in a dirty room filled with tobacco-smoke, shuffling some dirty cards, and drinking whiskey in company with several boon companions.

Wilding was not so unsophisticated that he would have been surprised to know this, but he was optimist enough to take the best he saw without inquiring too curiously after the worst which he did not see. Furthermore, he believed with all his heart in beauty, art, genius, and God.

CHAPTER II.

WILDING did not associate with his neighbors. He had nothing in common with them, and he would not patronize. Neither did he go to church. Sunday morning he entered his study, and gathered his books around him. Alice and Celia, left to themselves, passed through the rustic gate to the meadow behind the house, across through the woodland to the swamp where the cardinals grew. The flashing flowers took root deep in the stream, and even Celia's light foot sank into the black mud, as she stepped from one tuft of rushes to another to gather them. The clear eyes of Alice, with the sunlight in them, espied far away among the cotton-grass the deep azure of the quiet gentians, and she came back with her arms full just as Celia had come up dripping from the swamp, laden with cardinals. Then they sat on a great rock under the trees, and laid the flowers against the green and golden moss which covered the stones beside the little brook at their feet. They talked in a glad, eager, childlike way of the beautiful Saturday past, the beautiful Sunday present, and the beautiful Monday coming. And still Celia came back again and again, as to a refrain: "Why did n't we carry some flowers for Antoinetta? There were none so lovely as these among all that were thrown to her."

Then Alice remembered that her father was going to the city on Monday, and suggested that they send by him a box of flowers. So they gathered the freshest and brightest mosses, and made a bed for the glowing blossoms to rest in, and at dinner they asked their father if he would do their errand.

"And then we should know just what Antoinetta said to them," remarked Celia.

But Wilding could not himself go to the theatre. He had affairs of importance before him. Still, he would take the flowers to the city and send them.

So the children wrote a note to go with them.

DEAR ANTOINETTA, — We are little

girls who live in the country. We saw you play at the theatre Saturday afternoon, and wished we too had carried flowers for you. So we have gathered our own wild-flowers to send you, for we love you, since you are beautiful and are true to art.

ALICE and CELIA WILDING.

At twilight Wilding called Alice to the study, and talked to her for an hour. Celia was grieved to be shut out, but she loved her father too well to show it; so she opened the piano and played wild melodies, founded on the themes she had heard as the undercurrent of the extravaganza.

At last Wilding and Alice came into the room, and the moonlight showed their faces grand, glad, and solemn. Alice struck some firm, full chords, and they all sang glorious old masses.

The beautiful Saturday passed, the beautiful Sunday passed, and the beautiful Monday came. At twilight, Monday evening, Alice and Celia stood on the platform of the railway station, wondering why the train was so very late. Aleck, going by from his work, stopped and talked to them a little while. At last the shriek of the whistle was heard. There were so many waiting for the cars that Aleck advised the girls to remain just outside by the great elm, promising to find Wilding and bring him to them.

"How long Aleck stays!" said Celia, "and what a noise the people are making!"

Then Aleck came back — alone. His face was pale, though so sunburnt. "How can I ever tell you?" said he, with a trembling voice.

Celia looked frightened and began to cry. Alice was as pale as the far-off stars just faintly showing in the sky, and as quiet.

"You need not tell us," she said in a low, clear voice. "Celia, by and by I will tell you about it."

There was indeed no necessity for explanation. The compassionate glances directed to the children from the bustling crowd about the station would have told the story without Aleck's pale face. Alice guessed what the men were bringing concealed under a cloth, and hur-

ried Celia away before she, too, should comprehend.

"Let them bring him in here," she said to Aleck, when they reached the house, throwing open the door of her father's pleasant little sanctum. "Celia and I will stay here to welcome him."

"But — but — ought you —" Aleck could go no further.

"Yes; only do not let any one stay here with us."

So Aleck went away, intent on doing the little he could for the sisters. He broke the tidings to Dorothy, the domestic, and calmed her paroxysms before the bearers arrived with their mournful burden. Then he motioned that the door should be closed when Wilding was laid on his own bed; for, strange as it seemed to leave the children alone with their father, he believed too fully in Alice not to think that he ought to follow her request.

A wild, terrible cry from Celia rang through the house, and the neighbors who had gathered about would have hastened to her, but Dorothy and Aleck, who knew Alice, set their faces against that.

The cry was repeated again and again, but at last grew softer and the voice broke into sobs.

"Darling," said Alice in her still tones, "sit here with me close by father, and watch his dear face, while I tell you what he said to me last night. Believe that he himself is speaking to you." She would have burst into uncontrollable weeping, but for feeling the need there was that Celia should be calmed. In a moment she went on. "He told me that he had some trouble with his heart, and that he felt it so much lately that he believed it might not be long before what *has* come might come. He thought we ought not to be unprepared for it, but he would not sadden us by speaking of it before he was obliged. I remember some of his own words, Celia. He said: 'No grief can be so great as to shatter a whole life. Every sorrow, and even every sin, comes to us with a special message, not to deaden but to quicken us. One does not understand this except through living it. When grief comes to you, remember this. Suffer

to the utmost if need be, but never be overborne. Be calm, as one who believes in God should be. Step firm, though you walk over burning coals.'"

The heroic tones of Wilding's voice rang in the words of Alice, and to her this philosophy was strong and potent. But the tear-stained, impassioned face of Celia looked up wondering. It was not because she was so much a child that she failed to comprehend, but that her nature was so utterly unlike that of her sister. Her love was a devouring flame, and abstractions, though of eternal truths, could not comfort her while no warm life breathed from the cold, prostrate figure of her father.

"He said," continued Alice, "that life in any form is a glorious and sublime thing, and that because *his* life was deepening in another phase of existence, ours, too, should deepen. Ah, Celia, every upward step he took on earth helped us on, and why not now?"

"Because we can't feel his hand leading us, or see him take a step," cried Celia, in agony.

Alice turned aside her head, so inadequate was her power to comfort another, and so fast did it seem to be failing even herself. Wilding, however, had thought of this, and had given her words purposely for Celia.

"He said, too," Alice at last added, "that love is the immortal part of our nature, and cannot die. As the soul expands, so its love expands, and so his love is close about us, closer than ever yet it has been. Let that help us on."

Celia sobbed still, but more quietly.

"God loves us," said Alice, and then they sat silent for an hour in each other's arms.

The neighbors had meantime dispersed. They had never been accustomed to enter the house while its owner lived, and were shy now, though real kindness of heart had led them to try to do something for the orphans. But they found the same unconquerable spirit of reserve still brooding over the place, and were glad not to stay.

Dorothy at last ventured to knock at the door and speak to Alice. "Seems to me Celia ought not to stay in there so long," said she, too wise to urge Alice's own needs upon her.

"Thank you, Dorothy," replied Alice, and she drew Celia, half resisting, into the little parlor, where the fire lighted on the hearth just before they had gone to meet their father still blazed cheerily. They did not think to wonder at it, but Aleck had watched it and had been determined they should miss no point of light and cheer which was yet possible in the gloom overhanging them. He was still in the house, and had suggested to Dorothy that she should make ready a little table in the parlor and try to induce the sisters to eat something. He knew it would have been useless to attempt this in the little dining-room where they had expected such a cosy tea with their father. But nothing could urge Celia to taste a mouthful, though Alice forced herself to eat a piece of toast and drink some tea, solely for her sister's sake. "No matter," said Dorothy to Aleck. "Celia will cry herself to sleep, and will get strong that way; but Miss Alice won't close her eyes this night, and I thank the Lord she's eaten something."

And so it was. Alice lay down beside Celia. The little one passed into a lethargy, but Alice did not sleep. She lay with her eyes wide open all night, watching the moon pass the arc of the sky before her window, and the stars, one by one, move beyond her vision till the clouds were flushed with morning. She had been still all night. No fever had pulsed through her veins, no horrible racking headache had maddened her; but she had been close to the borders of the spirit-world. She had proved her own soul, and her heart had beat responsive to her first full recognition that there is a God.

CHAPTER III.

THE Rev. Mrs. Buckram sat with her children around her. The Rev. Mr. Buckram, who belonged to that class of musicians denominated "second violins," was employed in beating a carpet furiously outside the sitting-room window, and by no means in such a way that the dust should enter his consort's eyes, though sufficiently near

that she might see and direct operations. The Rev. Mr. Buckram was clad in a faded red-calico dressing-gown, with blue tassels, and his feet luxuriated in some wide leather slippers systematically turned in at the heel. He might have been supposed to be thus attired in honor of his occupation; but such a supposition would have been erroneous, as he was most commonly to be observed in the same array, except on Sundays, when a seedy alpaca coat took the place of the dressing-gown, and some boots, cut down and laced up so ingeniously that the unsophisticated Buckram family supposed them not to be distinguished from shoes by uninitiated eyes, replaced the slippers. Indeed, on week-days his avocations frequently led him to discard the dressing-gown altogether, while an immense yellow tippet and a brimless hat added to his creature comfort when he found it necessary to labor out of doors on cold days. Fortune, in fact, had not smiled on Rev. Benjamin Buckram, except, indeed, that it had bestowed upon him a family so large that the gaping seams of their somewhat incongruous garments were only typical of the state of his finances in their inability to make both ends meet. The Rev. Benjamin had, however, apparently accepted his fate with resignation, and had at last come to regard certain household labors which fell to his charge as even more sociable, and hence more exhilarating, than the occupation of writing sermons; and having, at this date, served ten different parishes with *indifferent* success, he gave up sermon-writing, supposing that the stock on hand might be sufficient to support him down the vale of years. Some of his people suggested that they did not receive much for their money; but they did not say it to him, and, if they had, he might truthfully have rejoined that he did not receive much for his work. So far matters were even, and the bargain a fair enough one; and, having thus discharged his public duties so easily, our parson devoted himself to those of a domestic nature with worthy zeal, and made a very affectionate father and a supremely obedient and devoted husband.

Mrs. Buckram was not dressed in faded calico or leather slippers; she sat composedly, arrayed in a soft gray gown, which fitted her buxom figure well, and sewed quietly without undue haste or worry. The brow was placid, and you might have called her a gentle woman but for a vicious little turning down of the corners of the mouth. The eyes were clear, and the hand refined (her daughter Mary Ann did the housework, assisted by the Rev. B. B.), and you might have guessed her to be a person of culture until you heard her urging Mary Ann to play to you that beautiful new piece of hers, Fisher's Hornpipe with variations, adding that Mary Ann played a great deal of such classical music. However, she was a parson's wife and had never been to the opera, which she regarded as a device of the ill-disposed old serpent.

The children, of whom far be it from us to attempt to estimate the number, were fac-similes of the father, all with molasses-candy-colored hair, and watery blue eyes, and opaque white skins, and round adipose bodies. They were good children too, and always minded their parents, especially their mother. But as "there is no flock, however watched and tended, but one *black sheep* is there," so among this flock was one tough, wiry little sheep, a dozen years old or thereabouts, with eyes as black as coals, hair blacker yet, and face as brown as a berry. He looked somewhat like his mother; that is, if he had been a woman grown, and "subdued by grace" and the cares of a parish, he might have looked like her. Nevertheless, there may have been one more drop of black blood in him than in her, that one being just enough to turn the balance of his life on the other side. At any rate, she was saintly, and Master Frank did not look as if he either was or was likely to be a saint. At present he was employed in pinching his little sisters behind his mother's back, and terrifying them with such horrible faces of threatening that they dared not enter a complaint against him.

Mary Ann was sewing, and Jonathan, the eldest son, was reading aloud, with considerable rhetorical flourish, an essay with which he was going to take the first

prize during the next college term, — for even poor parsons who do housework for a living have energy and courage enough left to give their sons an education which thousands of well-to-do tradesmen think far beyond their means.

The primary articles in Mrs. Buckram's creed were: First, whatever I do is absolutely perfect; second, whatever my children do is absolutely perfect in comparison with the deeds of every other inhabitant of the known world except myself.

Hence Jonathan's essay met with her approbation, and consequently with the approbation of her husband and children. It may be as well to say, *en passant*, that it did not take the prize; but Mrs. Buckram said that there was the most flagrant injustice displayed in awarding the honors, and that everybody said that Jonathan Buckram *ought* to have had the first prize, and that his essay was in fact the most profound and elegant which had been read for the last ten years.

"Yes," remarked Jonathan, meditatively, having concluded, "I cannot deny to myself that it is *rather* a good thing. Perhaps it is — a — unbecoming in me to say so, but really —"

"Why, no, it isn't unbecoming," interrupted his mother, with asperity in her tones and a smile on her lips, — the smile intended for Jonathan, and the asperity for his detractors, whoever or wherever they might be. "I declare, nobody can be blamed for seeing his own merits. Nobody is self-conceited unless he thinks himself smarter than he is. And that essay is a real good one," and she laughed a delighted little laugh.

"Well — a — don't you think it might be rather soothing to my cousins when they come?" inquired Jonathan. "I suppose they need some good — well — strengthening counsel, and this would be an indirect way of — a — administering it. I *ra*-ther like that idea."

Jonathan had a fancy for the word *rather*, which he pronounced slowly and thoughtfully, giving the "a" its broad sound.

"O dear! I wish they'd come," burst out Frank, with a long-drawn sigh; "anything for a row."

"Frank!" said his mother, with con-

siderable sharpness; "there, I'm not going to correct you again for using that word. Do you go straight into my bedroom and stay there till I send for you."

Frank obeyed submissively, but, having closed the door, he began a series of the most extraordinary contortions of his face ever seen, and shook his fist in the direction of the sitting-room.

"I hate you, you old mother," said he; "and I'll do something before long, you see if I don't. I'll run away, I declare I will."

But presently espying a dress of his mother lying on the bed awaiting repairs, he solaced himself by trying it on and attitudinizing before the glass.

"O dear! I wish I could swear," said he, "but I don't quite dare; besides, I don't know how. I wonder if I shall have to go to prayer-meeting to-night. I wonder if those girls will be anything like Mary Ann; wonder if they'll cry if I pinch 'em."

The girls referred to by this amiable child were his cousins, Alice and Celia Wilding, who were coming to make their home with their aunt Buckram, and were expected that very evening.

CHAPTER IV.

A WEEK later the sisters were fairly established, for some years at least, it would appear. Prayer-meeting night had again arrived, and Mrs. Buckram announced her desire that her nieces should accompany her thither.

"I don't believe I want to go, Alice," said Celia fretfully, as she had a moment alone with her sister. "I hate Uncle Benjamin's prayers any time. What makes you go?"

"O, well," said Alice, "I don't think it would be quite polite to refuse the very first time we are asked. Since our home is to be here, I suppose we must do what we can to make the rest happy."

"O dear!" burst out Celia, "I wish you would n't say our home, because 't is n't, 't is n't, 't is n't, and I hate it! O, that old pink-and-red spread on our bed, — is n't it dreadful? I declare, I won't sleep under it again. I wish I could set it on fire."

In all the paroxysms of rage with which Celia went to Alice fifty times a day, she was sure to end with something of this kind, something wherein her marvellous intuition of beauty and fitness had been shocked. There is always something hard and severe in a child of unusual capacity, for it perceives incongruities without having become so tempered as to overlook them.

"Come on, girls," said Mary Ann; "we're all ready."

The church was a little white-painted, green-blinded affair, with a neat spire pointed with a vane which, while it is equally ornamental, is supposed by Yankees to be more useful and less Popish than a cross. The church looked, as all New England churches do, clean and pretty, and formed the climax of the village scenery which is appropriate. But though the inhabitants of Rockdale were of the strictest sect, Puritans, the Rev. Benjamin's preaching for some years past had not been of that startling nature which is calculated to draw multitudes to the house of worship; therefore the prayer-meetings were held in a small apartment called the vestry, and to this place the Buckram family now wended their way. It was a dark and dingy little room, fitted with unpainted benches, whose backs were so very upright that you instinctively wondered if they did not get tired of standing so straight.

Although the muster from the parsonage was so large, the little room was not full; in fact, the Buckram family composed about half the assembly. But Mr. Benjamin remarked cheerfully that "where two or three are gathered together, etc." As his nieces were not in the habit of attending such gatherings, they were totally at a loss to comprehend the purport of the "etc.," but the remainder of the audience appeared to feel satisfaction in it, so all was probably right. Mr. Buckram commenced the service by reading a hymn in a somewhat shambling manner, and then pitched the tune himself. One or two male voices joined, dragging and scuffling from one note to another in a manner meant, no doubt, to be solemn. Mrs. Buckram then united her treble to the chorus, but, owing to an extraordinary inability which she had always mani-

festes to discern the difference between the melodies of "All hail! the power" and "Sister, thou wast mild and lovely," except as accompanied by the words, she proceeded in a surprising and novel monotone, which failed to cheer the spirits of the solemn men. But at this era Mrs. Deacon Grumm and her hired girl entered and set in with a vigorous falsetto, at which all the singers took heart and went gloriously on to the end. Then Mr. Buckram prayed in a very easy way, without exerting himself much, and afterwards edified his hearers with expositions upon several passages of Scripture. His remarks especially referred to the differences between the "sheep and the goats." Having concluded, he lazily stated that there would now be opportunity for further observations from the brethren. There was a long and sombre pause, after which a tall and somber man, with a coat which must have seen service in a barn, arose. He began in a mournful voice, in a minor key:—

"My friends, — ahem, — I feel that it is good to be here. It is a blessed place and the 'gate of heaven.' I feel it a great privilege to be permitted to come up to the house of prayer. I feel to thank the Lord for his benefits. My friends, — ahem, — I have been interested, greatly interested, in what our minister has been sayin'. I feel that it's a great and solemn truth, and that we'd all ought to think of it a great deal more. There's a great and an awful difference between the sheep and the goats. Some on us here present is sheep, I trust and believe. I hope and pray that we may be. Some on us is goats. That's a great and an awful thought. Some on us is one, and some on us is the other. Now I beg and beseech each one here present to consider this question and to ask himself solemnly, 'Which be I?' O my friends, it's an awful question. But I can put it to myself boldly, and as boldly can I answer. I may be mistaken, none on us can know certain till we git to the judgment-seat *which* we be, but unless I'm very greatly mistaken, which I don't consider very likely, I can answer boldly, 'I'm a SHEEP.'"

"So he is—*sheepish*," said the forlorn Frank in a loud whisper to Celia,

toward whom he already began to have drawings. His mother was safe at the other end of the bench, else he would not have dared to speak; and even now she heard the whisper and favored him with a frown which would have been who can tell how many degrees blacker had she heard what he said.

Deacon Grumm arose. His voice appeared to issue from the pit of his stomach and to find no outlet through his nose.

"My brethren," said he, "I fear that we are in a very low state. I fear that I am in a very low state myself. I do not experience the joy which 'once I knew when first I knew the Lord.' I am glad that Brother Peck feels so sure of being in the 'ark of safety,' but I should feel that it was sinfulness and self-righteousness if I felt such an assurance. We are poor, blind, and miserable creatures, and 'God is angry with the wicked every day.' We are told to 'flee from the wrath to come,' and my sins hold me back with such a power that I can't flee. Yes, my brethren, I am in a very low state, and this church is in a very low state. When I look at these vacant seats I feel depressed. When I see the young people in the town around all going in the ways which 'take hold on death,' I am struck with terror. This is a wicked world we live in. Our hearts are hard and desperately wicked. 'We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.' I feel that it would be just that we should be cast at once, with our sins upon us, into the 'lake which burneth with fire,' 'where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.' But the Lord is a Lord of mercy. Jesus of Nazareth suffered 'in his own body on the tree,' and was made a propitiation for our transgressions. I cling to the cross. I have no other hope; and this hope is not a lively hope, for I confess my sins and know that there is 'none good, no, not one,' and there is great danger that when we come and say 'Lord, Lord,' he will reply, 'I never knew you; depart from me, ye wicked, to everlasting destruction.' O my brethren, 'the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night,' and I expect that I shall *not* be prepared. I'm afraid none of us will

be, the church seems to be in such a low state. Let us pray."

As Alice and Celia had not the acquaintance with certain stereotyped quotations which their aunt's children had, these remarks appeared extraordinary, and though very disjointed and incomprehensible, at least original and startling.

With the "Amen" of Deacon Grumm, a tall, loose man sprang up, and began in a very voluble manner:—

"O my dear friends, and my brethren, and my sisters too, I hev been edified and refreshed by what I've heard at this 'ere meetin'; it's a glorious thing for brethren to meet together in unity and agree. I feel my heart strengthened and enlarged by it. Nothin', no, nothin' should ever induce me to give up the prayer-meetin'. The preached word is good in its place. I'm an arduous supporter of the preached word, and on Sundays I feel a blessed peace, not of the earth, earthy. But the influence of the preached word as compared with that of the prayer-meetin' is but as a sand on the sea-shore or a drop in the ocean. I came in here feelin' that I should get good, and I've got it. I feel it here, and I know I've got it. I think with Brother Peck that I am assured that I am a sheep, for I'm sure that I've washed my robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Celia looked surprised, for the metaphor was not a familiar one to her, and she supposed it was to be taken literally, which seemed hardly possible, regarding the extremely ancient-looking linen worn by the brother in question.

"I believe," he went on, "that it is the privilege of all on us to hev this blessed assurance, and I praise the Lord that I hev it. But I think Brother Grumm is right when he says the church is in a low state. O my friends, what we need is a revival! Nothin' else can hev any effect. When I see so many young pussons, and the middle-aged, and the old, going straight down to the bottomless pit, I can but hold out a hand to restrain 'em, if so be they will listen to it. Some on 'em 'll not hear the 'voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely'; but, O my friends and brethren,

some on 'em will. Let us go out into the highways and hedges and compel 'em to come in. Let us tell 'em there is only one way to be saved from the 'wrath to come.' Let us tell 'em of the place prepared for the wicked, where they shall burn in fires 'heated seven times hotter,' through an everlastin' eternity. It is the place 'prepared for the devil and his angels' by the 'meek and lowly' Jesus, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. We ought to be thankful and praise the Lord that such a place is prepared to satisfy the holy demands of the glorious and divine Justice. I feel that I am girded to the good work, and I'm ready to set forth; and, having put my hand to the ploughshare, I will not look back, remembering Lot's wife, who turned back and became a pillow of salt. If all these members here present is only prepared to follow my example and say Amen to it, in a few, a very few, weeks we may expect a glorious outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord in this place. O my friends, let us have a revival!"

Mr. Jonathan Buckram. — "I believe, with those who have already spoken, in the deep need of a revival of pure religion in this community. I have just come from a precious season of refreshing in the college of which I am a member, and my heart is all aglow to do something in the service of Jesus. Like the chiming of distant bells is the voice of my Redeemer in my soul. He has come to seek and to save that which was lost. There is nothing which we can do ourselves which will secure to us the blessed inheritance provided for the just. All good works are as naught. We have simply to believe. I will relate a little anecdote, which to my mind seems wonderfully impressive and instructive. A poor sailor boy was very ill, and was put in a part of the ship by himself, — the 'sick bay,' I believe it is called. One night there arose a terrific storm. The waves dashed high, the billows roared, the sea was lashed into fury, and the gallant ship was tossed to and fro upon the bosom of the mighty deep as if it had been a frail shell. At last it became evident that the ship must sink, and then there was fearful despair depicted on all countenances.

All rushed for the boats. Now the poor, ill sailor-boy was unable to move, and though he shouted to others, no one heard him above the tempestuous rolling waters. He felt then that he should be left to perish. But suddenly he heard a voice above. It was his captain's voice. 'Courage, Ned!' he said in his gruff voice; 'there is room in the boats for everybody, and you shall not be left behind.' Now what did the poor boy do? He could not lift a finger for himself, but he became cheerful. And why? Because he had faith in the captain's word. He believed him. Now, my dear friends, that is exactly what we are to do. Our souls are sin-sick, so that we cannot lift a finger in our own behalf, but we have heard the voice of the blessed Redeemer, and we have only to believe. Nothing could be simpler. Ah, my friends, with such promises held out before us, shall any of us fail of the great salvation?"

Mr. Buckram now suggested that the time was passing, and, after another hymn kindred to the first, he dismissed the meeting.

A young woman came up to speak to Mrs. Buckram. The latter did not consider her nieces old enough to be introduced; but they discovered in the course of the conversation that the young woman's name was Miss Roby, and they had previously heard that she kept the district school. She was about as tall as a yardstick, but as rotund as a pin-cushion. She wore a calico dress and a big bonnet. There was a certain hint of pathos in her face and her voice, but not in her words. She had a most voluble tongue, and talked at the top of her speed till the family reached home, and then yielded to their invitation to walk in, enforced by the offer of Mr. Jonathan to attend her home whenever she wished to go.

"What a good meeting we had to-night!" said she, in a cordial tone.

"Very good," rejoined Mrs. Buckram, with her acrid little smile; "only I do wish Deacon Grumm would n't always talk about the low state of the church. I'm sure there is much more interest since Mr. Buckram came than there ever was under Mr. Meeks."

"Yes, to be sure, it is rather discouraging to hear such things, but

then Deacon Grumm is such a good old man."

"Yes, O yes; I would n't have you think that I don't think he is very good," put in Mrs. Buckram.

"Yes, and then, don't you think, Mrs. Buckram, that sometimes when people feel so low it is just the stirring of the Spirit in their hearts, and that it is an indication of a better state of things?"

"But I wish," remarked Jonathan, "that Mr. Pierce would learn to speak grammatically."

"Ah, Mr. Jonathan," said Miss Roby, vivaciously, "you must n't expect plain country people to be polished and cultivated like you collegians, and Mr. Pierce is very earnest. When he spoke about going out into the highways and hedges and gathering in the lost, I declare it made the tears come to my eyes, and I felt we should really have a revival here before long."

"But," replied Jonathan, somewhat pompously, "I think he holds a wrong doctrine. He thinks it is by showing the horrors of hell that souls are to be won, while I think it is by holding up the terms of salvation, more especially 'only believe,' as I said to-night."

"Yes, I think so too," said Miss Roby. "I hope you'll excuse my saying so, but I liked your remarks particularly. I shall not forget them for a long time. I thought that story was very beautiful and touching, and so appropriate."

"It set forth the way of salvation very strikingly," remarked Mrs. Buckram.

"Yes," said Miss Roby; "but still, if people don't want to accept them, — of course I know they ought to, but some people don't, and if they don't, why, then they must have the strongest motives set before them, and there is where such people as Mr. Pierce do good, and I sometimes think that their very ignorance and illiterate manner of speaking may impart a kind of fervor which is more effective with a certain class of minds than the graces of oratory. Now I was most benefited by Mr. Buckram's and Mr. Jonathan's remarks, but there may have been those present most affected by something which was more

within their comprehension, — though I do not mean exactly that either, for your remarks were as simple as elegant, but — Well, you understand what I mean."

At this juncture, Mrs. Buckram sent the children all to bed, as she believed in primitive hours. So they heard no more and saw no more of Miss Roby that night, though afterwards they were her pupils for three years.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN the sisters were safe in their own room, Celia spoke out, vehemently as usual, but more in a surprised than an angry way.

"Was n't it strange and dreadful, Alice? I will never go to another. What did it mean?"

"I hardly know," replied Alice, "it was so confused, but I suppose they meant it to be a religious meeting. You know they believe some very strange things, and they can't help talking about them. I only wonder that they do not speak of them oftener. If Uncle Benjamin and Aunt Lydia really think that everybody who does n't agree with them is going straight down to such awful and endless suffering, I don't see how they can ever smile or think of anything but how to save as many as possible."

"O, it's horrible!" cried Celia, clenching her little hands. "You're sure it can't be true, Alice?"

"Sure," said Alice, in the most restful tone. "It is not possible, my dear, because there is a God over us. If he had not come so near to us just now, darling, I might not be so certain, but now I cannot help believing."

"And you will never, never, never believe it?" cried Celia, in a fit of apprehension.

"No, I suppose not. How could I? Why are you afraid?"

"I don't know," said the child, still passionately; "only it makes me shudder, and if it were not so hideous, I think the very terror might make me believe it some time. Still, you know I never could, for I *must* have beauty."

I could n't believe anything true which was n't beautiful."

Mrs. Buckram had been endeavoring for the week past to implant some notions of theology in the very uninformed minds of her nieces, and had so far only succeeded in harassing them and making their new home, with all its strange incongruities, jar more and more upon the sensitive hearts so lately wrung by sorrow. Celia, who was by nature as fierce as a little tiger, had been so far subdued by her peaceful years of childhood, and now especially by her father's sudden death, that she kept herself moderately civil to her aunt, but broke out like a whirlwind when alone with Alice, who was suffering untold agonies, bravely as she held herself. It is curious and painful that people of such different natures are sometimes compelled to live together in such close companionship. Alice repressed herself partly because she had a reverent nature and recognized her aunt's position of authority over her, though she knew in her heart that only in trivialities was it possible that she could be bound to obey, and yet more because she feared the influence of this mode of life on Celia's fiery spirit; and indeed it seemed calculated to rasp and exasperate the child, and develop all the forces of passion which had lain dormant in her heart because she had been so tenderly and lovingly treated.

"I thought," continued Celia, "that religion was meant to make people good; but I don't think Aunt Lydia is very good, — do you?"

"I think," replied Alice, "that people are so differently made that it is impossible for one person to say that another is not good. We can never know the inner life of another fully, and so we can never know the entire meaning of its outward expression."

"Well, Alice," sighed the little one, "I think you are perfect, at any rate; and I wish I was as good, only I know I never shall be."

The next morning Alice sat sewing by her aunt, and Celia slipped away down through the woods at the back of the house, and amused herself by gathering great branches of the resplendent October leaves. Where the waters of

the brook sparkled clearest, the bending boughs shone most gloriously. I wonder why.

Celia was just seating herself on a mossy log, when she was startled by a gruff, hard little voice issuing from the tree over her head.

"Ho! Celia; how did you come here? Who let you come? Mother did n't, I know." Therewith Master Frank swung himself lightly down and alighted by her side.

"Why not?" replied Celia. "I did n't ask her."

"O, you did n't, — did n't you? What do you expect she'll say when you get home?"

"I don't know," said Celia, in amazement. "I never supposed she would care. I never asked my father when I wanted to go into the woods."

"But then you see you did n't have any mother," remarked Frank, with his hands in his pockets. "That makes all the difference, you know."

"No, it don't," said Celia, indignantly. "I should never have wanted to do anything my mother did n't like."

"Oho!" said Frank, raising his eyebrows, and poking his short, stiff hair till it stood up straight. "What a queer girl you are! Say, was n't your father a jolly man, though?"

"He was just like the angel Gabriel," said Celia, without any very distinct notions as to the angel in question, except that he was very grand.

"Was he?" asked Frank, softly whistling. "Well, then, I tell you, I should n't want to see him. You see I hate angels, — they're bosh! and I'm afraid I've got to go to heaven some time, and I don't want to. Don't tell mother, now, will you?" He seemed suddenly seized with a panic. "Because, you see, I don't mean that I want to go anywhere else, though, — I should like to live and never die, only I want to be a man first, for I hate to stay here; don't you, Celia?"

"Yes," said Celia, instantly and unreflectingly. "I hate it, of course; but I should n't think you would feel so, because you have your father and mother and all."

"Oho! That's just what it is! I don't want them to die, you know, but

I wish they'd all go off in some nice place where I should never see them again, and have a splendid time."

Celia sympathized so much that she had great ado to prevent herself from shaking hands then and there with her cousin upon their common sentiments. But her instinctive delicacy of feeling saved her, and she tried to say, in a manner as much like that of Alice as might be, "Hush, Frank! That is n't right."

"Pooh! I did n't suppose you would talk gammon. I hate it. I wonder how you would like to be my mother's son!" He laughed a little, and then continued: "Now you're here and I'm here, I should like to have a talk with you. Mother says Alice and you are heathen, and don't know anything about good things. And I should just like to know what you used to do at home; for I can't bear good things, only I don't see what else there is to do. Now, Sundays, for instance, what did you do if you did n't go to church and prayer-meeting and Sunday school?"

"O, we had a blessed time Sundays!" said Celia, with some excitement. "Father was sure to be at home then, though he was often away through the week. But we did n't stay with him in the morning, for that time he spent in the study."

"Why, I did n't know he was a minister," said Frank, with great surprise and disgust.

"He was n't."

"Then what did he have a study for?" demanded Frank, with asperity. "My father never goes into his study except to see about his sermons."

"But my father *loved* to study," returned Celia, proudly. "And he was very wise. On pleasant days in the summer Alice and I used to wander in the woods in the morning, and gather wild-flowers and tell stories. Then we came back just in time for dinner."

"Did you have dinner Sunday?" inquired Frank, with new surprise.

"Of course. And then in the afternoon we always walked and talked and read with father, or perhaps went sailing with him in his beautiful boat, and some rare times he took us to ride, and we carried luncheon and

had a beautiful picnic all alone by ourselves."

"That was n't any great fun, was it?" said Frank. "I like picnics well enough, but I should want somebody there besides father and Mary Ann. Boating must have been good fun, though. But were n't you dreadfully afraid of being drowned?"

"Why, no, indeed; I don't see why. Father knew all about a boat and was very careful, and we only went still days."

"O yes! I don't mean that. But you know it was Sunday. And the Sunday-school books say that all the bad people who go in a boat Sunday's are always drowned, no matter how pleasant it is when they start. I don't think I should dare to go."

"Well, I should," said Celia, "and my father was not bad, but the best man who ever lived, so I know it was right."

"Queer, though, that you were n't drowned. I don't think I should be quite so much afraid now. I supposed everybody was drowned who went sailing Sunday. No, come to think of it, there was one boy, Maurice Taylor, who was almost drowned, and that converted him. But I don't want to be converted, either, till the last minute."

"But I don't think it would be so dreadful to be drowned," said Celia. "The water is so beautiful and blue, and the sunset flushes it so, and the moon makes such a bright path across it, and there are such lovely seaweeds, and away down there are pearls and gold and ever so many strange things. O Frank, I wish you had just seen little Antoinetta at the theatre play that she was a sea-spirit."

"Did you ever go to the theatre?" questioned Frank, now fairly aghast.

"Never but that once," said Celia. "That was the last Saturday father was with us. And I'm so glad, for I believe it was the very happiest day of all my life."

"You don't suppose that's what made him die, — do you?" said Frank.

"Why, no," replied Celia, opening her eyes wide; "how could it?"

"Mother thinks so, I know," said Frank, "for she said he died very sud-

denly and that it was a direct judgment upon him; but she would n't tell me why, though I teased her. But you see that's it. It's awful wicked to go to the theatre."

"I never heard of that before," said Celia, "and I don't believe it now. It's perfectly gorgeous."

"But I tell you you'll go to hell if you go to the theatre. There's a book in our Sunday school, 'The Way to the Pit,' about a boy who went to the pit of the theatre and ended by going to the bottomless pit, I believe, — stop, let's see, I don't know but he was converted in the end, I believe he was, but if he had n't been, he would have gone there. The first part of the book is real interesting, though. Is n't there a place at a theatre called the pit?"

"No," said Celia, "I don't know of any. But, Frank, I don't believe there is any such place as hell, so of course I'm not afraid of going there."

"But of course there is such a place," said Frank, "and I'm just as afraid as I can be. I tell you what," he added confidentially, "if it was n't for that I should run away. I should like to get into a theatre myself. I know I should. think it was splendid, for we had a Sunday-school exhibition once, and I took part, and I had the best time that ever I had, though that is n't saying very much either. But I should like it bully. Only, you see, I don't dare."

"Well," said Celia, with sudden anger, "if I were a boy, — or a girl either, — I should be ashamed to be such a coward, and that's all!"

Frank flushed to the roots of his hair. "I ain't a coward. Jonathan's a coward. I had a great three-pronged tooth pulled and I never made a whimper; and I can lick any boy in school, though I don't do it when Miss Roby is there, because she'd tell mother. But when it comes to dying and getting into such an awful blistering, burning flame forever and ever and ever and ever, I tell you what, it's no joke." And he looked low and wretched.

"But you sha'n't think I'm a coward," said he, suddenly firing. "Tell me all about that theatre, and the little girl who played."

So Celia, nothing loath, lived over

again the happy excitement of her afternoon at the extravaganza. She had hardly thought of it since she heard it for the terrible sorrow which had directly befallen her, and the rapid changes through which she had lately passed had almost driven it from her mind. But now it was such a delight to get back to that beauty again that her very words glowed, and Frank was in such a whirl and fever of excitement that he quite forgot to be afraid even of his mother, which resulted in bringing them both home late to dinner, upon which strict inquiries were made, and when it was discovered that they had both been away without leave, Mrs. Buckram excused Celia with only a scolding, as it was the first time and caused by a misunderstanding, but Frank was sentenced to a solitary afternoon in his mother's room.

And so the life of the sisters went on for three years.

CHAPTER VI.

AT last came a day when to Celia's complaint Alice answered, "You are right, we cannot live here, we will go to school."

She had thought of this often and anxiously, but she had not wished to go till Celia was old enough to be benefited by it, and could realize what it would be for them to spend the little money they had, and afterwards be obliged to work for their support.

"I guess I sha'n't want to teach," said Celia, thoughtfully. "I'll be an actress, I guess."

"Perhaps so," said Alice, "when you are old enough."

"I'm as old now as Antoinina was," said Celia.

"Yes," said Alice, "but her mother was an actress, so her home was in the theatres. But you would have to go alone, and would have no one to guide you in right and wrong."

"I have my own conscience," said Celia, tossing her head loftily.

Alice smiled. "Still you want some education and culture aside from the stage; and a boarding-school seems to

be the only place where we can afford to go for it. Besides, Uncle Buckram is your guardian."

"But if you said it was best, Alice, I would run away."

Alice laughed. "I don't say so. But you may study elocution at school, and then you will be all ready to be an actress by and by."

"I shall be rather old, though," said Celia; and Alice did not tell her that her ideas of actresses would probably change before that time.

No objection was made to the plan of going to school. Mrs. Buckram vainly hinted that with a little pecuniary aid Mary Ann might accompany the sisters, and consoled herself by thinking it well, on the whole, that she should be separated from such heretical companions, though, as she justly remarked, "Mary Ann was rooted and grounded in the faith, and had no tendencies to free inquiry." In her secret heart Mrs. Buckram thought that the sisters were unwittingly jumping from the frying-pan into the fire, though she did not designate the places by those terms, for she had selected a boarding-school for them which bore the reputation of never having graduated a single unconverted young lady.

Their preparations were not very elaborate, though perhaps it took as long to make over the few simple dresses in a becoming and tasteful manner as would have been necessary for a fashionable wardrobe. But Alice worked silently and steadily, and no one realized that she was doing anything till it was done. Celia was in such high spirits that she was even gracious to Mary Ann; but she did not dare to express her exultation except in private to Alice and Frank. Frank, in the depths of his misery, had become an accomplished hypocrite and could conceal secrets.

"I tell you what, Celia," said he, confidentially, "I don't know what I shall do when you are gone. There's nobody else to have any kind of fun with, darn 'em!" This last was as near as he dared approach to swearing, and it afforded him a great deal of delight to feel that he was using an expression which would have consigned him to the dungeons if his mother had overheard it.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do," added he. "No, I won't; nobody can be trusted to keep a secret but myself. We don't know our own enemies" (in a grandiloquent tone); "but mark my words, Celia, and if you hear that I have disappeared, don't you be afraid I'm drowned."

"What!" said Celia. "Are you going to run away?"

"Never you mind," said Frank, mysteriously; "but there are some places in the world just as bad as hell, I guess. I declare I'd about as soon go there at once, and done with it, as to wait. I suppose I've got to go some time."

"For shame, Frank!" replied his cousin.

"But what do you know about it?" urged Frank. "Mother says there's such a place, and it makes her perfectly happy, though she don't want me to go there,—I don't think she cares very much,—and the reason you don't believe it is because you have n't been converted."

"Well," said Celia, "I'm never going to be converted; and I don't care what Aunt Lydia says, I know I love God and he loves me; and I'm not a bit afraid."

"Well, I don't know anything," said Frank, "but I think, if I ever get away from here, I shall be real witty and have a jolly time, and I don't care. I don't want to go to hell, but I would n't give a snap to go to heaven if mother's going to be there."

"Hush!" said Celia; "I guess that is n't right."

Belmore, in which the boarding-school was situated, was a quiet country place, full of beautiful trees, and the Seminary was neat and pleasant. As the carriage drove up the avenue with the two sisters, they saw groups of bright-faced, well-dressed girls gathered about the grounds, or walking arm-in-arm along the shaded paths.

Bright, clean, peaceful,—it was a change worth having from the jarring life of Rockdale; yet it was so intensely calm and quiet that Celia said, under her breath, "It's beautiful, but is n't it like a convent?"

"I always believed there must be a great deal of the best sort of happiness

in a convent," replied Alice; "that is, if one were there from choice, and free to go or stay at will."

A burst of merry laughter came to their ears at that moment and relieved the solemnity of the scene. Mrs. Henshaw, the principal, greeted them formally, and assigned them a room, not elegant certainly, but so neat, and with such a vision of the hills, that they felt contented at once. They felt more at home than they had done at any time since their father died.

Then came the tea, with its thin white slices of sweet bread and the finger's breadth of cake, very simple, but very neat, and only scanty to those who did not like to eat much bread and butter.

But for such, as the girls speedily learned, their parents sent huge boxes of cakes and fruits; so nobody suffered, after all.

After tea, some of the older girls came in to welcome the new-comers, and then one of the teachers, Miss Emmons, just before bedtime. Miss Emmons had the face of a saint and a low, soft voice in speaking, which captivated Celia at once. She hoped the girls were not feeling homesick at first coming to a strange place.

"O no," said Celia, and she was going to add that they came from a place they hated; but Alice, seeing the danger, interposed: "We are less likely to be homesick than most girls, as we have really no home, but have been boarding for some time with an aunt."

"I hope we may make it *very* pleasant for you here, and that you may be very happy," said Miss Emmons, sweetly. Then she kissed them good night, saying tenderly, "I hope you both love the Lord Jesus Christ, and then you can be lonely nowhere."

"I don't," said Celia, with her usual impulsiveness, and Alice said nothing. She had hoped, if possible, to avoid discussions in her new home.

Miss Emmons looked shocked, and said, "O my dear child, I shall pray for you to-night," and left the room.

"Celia looked at Alice in consternation. "Is n't she *beautiful*?" said she. "O, how I wish she would not pray

for me! I want to get acquainted with her, but of course I can't if that's the way she's going to do. But I do love her."

"She is lovely," said Alice, with a sigh. "I suppose we need never expect to find a place where we shall be free from theological discussions."

It was not many days before Celia was violently in love with Miss Emmons. It is curious, but most boarding-school girls are sure to fall in love with some teacher and endure all the little thrills and jealousies and heart-burnings which usually accompany *la grande passion*. Celia was perfectly delighted to be in a class of Miss Emmons, though in gazing at her she forgot her lesson and received a bad mark. She spent her spare moments in running up stairs and down on all sorts of errands,—for ice-water, for her lamp, her books, etc., etc., etc. Miss Emmons seldom had occasion to go anywhere without finding Celia close behind her, ready to open the doors and hold them open till she had passed through.

Alice was half amused and half anxious in seeing this. She was glad that Celia's impulsive and passionate nature had found something to love. The sisters' love between them had, of course, been a quiet thing, and otherwise there had been a dearth of objects, so that this was a wholly new experience. But to Alice Miss Emmons did not seem so perfect an angel, though she thought her lovely and sincere; but her religion was not Alice's religion, and there was a gulf fixed between them.

Alice, strangely enough, felt most attracted towards a pale, stern young woman, Miss Dixon, who spoke very little and was known to be sarcastic. She was wonderfully learned, and, with all her sarcasm, did not say unkind things to her pupils. Alice fancied that if she could only know her, she might find points in common; but Miss Dixon was unapproachable, and all Alice's attempts went for nothing.

Alice found herself as unable to escape religious importunities as ever, and in fact they were harder to withstand than they had been at Rockdale. She had no sooner made friends with a fellow-pupil over something interesting in

history or mathematics than the girl would press her hand tenderly and whisper, "We have a dear little prayer-meeting in my room this evening. I should so love to have you come." Of course all the girls were not saints, but there was not a girl of respectable standing in school with whom Alice could have any sympathy in her studies who was not devoted to prayer-meetings. Every good scholar, every decently behaved girl, besides many who were not well behaved, had been converted. The rest seemed to take the general impression of their wickedness as true, and, to make it truer, committed all sorts of enormities, which really frightened the Wildings, who had always believed that a lie was the worst sin and that one should be conscientious in the smallest matter.

To cap the climax, as winter approached, it was clear that preparations were making for a revival on a grand scale. Prayer-meetings thickened; there was one before breakfast in the morning, that the young ladies might commence the day aright. After breakfast a time was set apart for private devotions, after which the whole school assembled for public prayers in the large dining-hall. Then the business of lessons began and proceeded without interruption till one o'clock. After dinner some of the elect held another little prayer-meeting. Then came a lull until evening. Sometimes in the evening there were meetings which the young ladies were all required to attend; the elect assembling earlier and staying later, to pray for those who were still unregenerate. Then there were divers little cliques which met at odd times. Each class held meetings in the interest of its unconverted members. Each teacher invited the young ladies in her corridor to her room for prayer. Several friends fixed upon some one person to be petitioned for by name. Alice avoided all the meetings which were not compulsory; but Celia could not resist the invitation which Miss Emmons, with tears in her eyes, extended to her to join the meeting of the "wayward ones," to whom Miss Emmons talked like an angel, they all agreed.

Had Celia been alone, it is very likely that she might have become a devotee for the few years of her school life, only to have a fiercer mental struggle afterwards; for she could easily be governed by her affections. But she loved Alice dearly also, and though the latter did not restrain her in any way, in fact scarcely advised her, her very presence calmed the more impetuous nature of her sister. Yet Alice was far from being calm within. She had not found it very difficult to maintain her own convictions while at her aunt's, because she had seen no one whom she thoroughly respected both mentally and morally. She had seen a few pure, unselfish people, but she had known them to be inferior to her in intellect, and their views had not troubled her. Now she was among those who were her equals and superiors in mind, and she believed in character, and the struggle came which must come to every soul to whom the truth is ever to be a living thing. Who knows but this is the modern form of conviction for sin, and whether the calm which follows the decision of primal points is not the true conversion? Had the machinery of the revival been a little less palpable, had the converted girls shown a little change of character, had the teachers answered her anxious questions with thoughts instead of texts, (a curious way which some people have, — curious, because if one does not accept the infallibility of the Bible at first, how can texts *prove* that or anything else to him?) or if she had not felt in every day and hour of her life how good God had been to her and how good he must surely be to all his creatures, she might have helped to swell the statistics of the religious papers. As it was, she was very wretched and doubtful for months, long after the revival had entirely passed by; but by degrees she regained the balance of her mind, and the poise was firmer than it had been even in her early days of trust.

CHAPTER VII.

"A H, Dora the Invincible, do you indeed fancy your position unassailable?"

The speaker was a fresh young fellow, with a bloom on his cheek, a wave in his hair, and a bright cordial eye. The spoken to was a beautiful young girl who was mounted on the top of a hay-cart, where she brandished a long rake and laughed gayly.

"Ah, Mr. Impertinence, I see the terror in your eyes for all your bold speeches."

The young fellow, discerning a challenge, sprang lightly upon the hay in a twinkling, and Miss Dora's tender heart made her rake powerless.

"There, my dear young woman," said he, kissing her half a dozen times before she could remonstrate, "tell me again that you see terror in my eyes!"

"I dare tell you again, but I won't," said the girl, overrunning with laughter, but trying to look angry.

"Saucy girl!" exclaimed he, repeating his experiment. "I see terrors in your eyes just now."

"I'll go and tell my mother," said the girl, laughing and blushing.

"I'll wager sixpence you'll do no such thing," said the young fellow, dropping his voice. "You know you get little enough time in the open sunshine now, and you won't shorten it. Besides," he added persuasively, "just think, *ma chère*, how little time I shall be in the village, and you would n't be so cruel as not to let me see you while I do stay?"

Dora didn't reply. O no; she would not be so cruel. Cruel to whom?

She did not need to call her mother, for at that very moment the sharp voice of her mother called her. Not that her mother had seen the foregoing. A young gentleman, son of the richest man in town, and straight from the University, might do a variety of things without being too closely looked after. But Dora May was a poor girl, and Dora May's mother did her own work, and there were five younger children. So Dora had not many minutes in the out-door world.

"O dear!" began Dora.

"Dear *me*?" queried the young fellow, laughing.

"You?" said Dora, scornfully, "Don't think it, sir. But O dear! there

are those horrid biscuit to be made for supper."

"Tis horrid, I agree," said he. "I tell you what, though, put a private mark on one of them and save it for me, and then I shall know you are thinking of me even if I can't see you."

"The idea!" said Dora. "I guess you would n't want to eat a cold biscuit if I did save it for you."

"Yes, I should," said he. "I adore cold biscuit."

The mother's sharp voice called through the trees again, and the young gentleman, who had no fancy for any of the May tribe except Dora herself, jumped hastily down and helped her to the ground; then, giving her another kiss before she had time to defend herself, he mounted his horse and rode away. In spite of the repeated call, when he looked back from the little hill beyond he saw the girl still leaning on her rake and looking after him. He was too far away to see her blush at being detected in the act, but her attitude reminded him of a favorite picture, and he whistled thoughtfully to himself. Then he said beneath his breath: —

"Of all sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these, 'It might have been!'"

He added suddenly: "Suppose it had been! Ten to one they'd have sighed over it just as much. Still, she's mighty pretty, and what's one vacation? What's the odds so long as you're 'appy?'"

Thereupon he whistled to his horse and galloped homewards.

Dora meantime made her biscuit, and, as he had requested, thought of him even when he was not at hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GIRL stood ironing in a hot kitchen, without a blind, one warm July day. She was young and fair, but her face was pale and weary. She moved listlessly, and seemed to find the irons too heavy for her slender hands to use easily. She looked through the open window and saw the trees in the orchard moving their leaves softly in

answer to a little breeze; she saw their shadows lie peaceful and cool on the sweet grass, and down by the fern-bordered little brook she heard the plaintive whistle of the meadow-lark and the saucy piping of the bobolink. She was a girl who loved beautiful things, and her heart fluttered impatiently to get away from her burdensome surroundings to the loveliness so little distance from her. Ah! she had always seen the cream of life just so near her lips, and the cup was always taken away before she tasted it. The meadow-lark, so in sympathy with her mood, might have quieted her if she could have hidden her head in the long grass and listened to the strain. As it was, it only maddened her. She heard a footstep outside. She started quickly, and listened with wide-open eyes. Alas! no. It was only one of her little sisters who had been out on a ramble, and was coming in laden with all kinds of pretty things.

"See here, Dora," said a little voice, merry enough, but with a certain sharp intonation which showed she had not lived in a happy family. "Isn't this moss beautiful? And I've got lots of curiosities to show you."

Dora put down her iron and went to look at the treasures with a sigh half of envy, because when she had been a child, as she was the oldest in the family and all the little ones had to be taken care of, there had been few rambles for her. She had had to help iron every ironing-day since she could remember, even when she had to stand on a stool to reach the board. No wonder that she had clutched at every stray sunbeam of happier life that had penetrated to her. But sunbeams cannot be caught by clutching at them, and hers had all vanished and left only a sad sense of disappointment, a heavier sadness than if she had never seen them or guessed there was any light beyond the darkness.

"O Dora," called a sharp voice, from the other room, "won't you ever learn not to act like a child? You know I don't want my clean floor all covered with litter, and you stand there and encourage Nelly to bring it in. And when do you expect that ironing is

going to be done if you laze around this way? I shall have to get off my bed myself and do it, I actually believe."

"Why, mother," answered Dora, hastily, "Nelly has been just as careful as could be, and I guess one minute won't make much difference in the ironing."

"O no," fretted the mother; "one minute to look at Nelly's clutter, and another minute to watch a butterfly, and the next minute to listen to a bird. I shall get up."

"Don't, mother," said Dora, with a distressed expression, going to the bedroom door. "I shall get along very well. And it is so much better for you to keep quiet when you have the headache."

"O yes," said the mother; "the trouble is you keep quiet too. You've been half an hour ironing that shirt, for I've watched you."

"Well, that's my affair, said Dora, shortly. "As long as I get the work done, and do it right, I don't know what harm it does anybody else if I am slow."

"It makes me nervous, that's all," said her mother with a twitch. "Besides, there are those suits to be made for Nelly and Emma, and I think if you've got any time to waste you might work on those."

"Yes, of course," said Dora, curling her lip. "I've been planning to go down in the orchard after I finished the ironing, and got dinner, and washed the dishes; but there's always something to do in this house." And she thought to herself that when she was a child she had no "suits." Now though the material purchased for the younger children was the cheapest possible, they had their garments cut with a bewildering number of ruffles, points, scallops, and bows, because such trimming cost nothing, *except* the higher life of their elder sister.

"To be sure there is," retorted Mrs. May. "You'd better go somewhere else, Dora. What's become of your beau?"

"Mother, I wish you *would* keep still!" exclaimed Dora, vehemently; and unable, with all her efforts, to keep back her tears, she rushed out of the room and shut the door.

"Dora!" called her mother; but she paid no attention. She was ironing at her greatest speed, scarcely noticing how she scorched the bosom of the shirt. Her mother did not let her off so easily, however. She found her headache not too severe to prevent her from getting off her bed, and, opening the door herself, she peered through it, and spoke: "Don't be so touchy, Dora. You act just like a little child. I don't blame *you*, though I think you might have made him come to the point some time, instead of having him dangling round here for nothing every vacation and keeping away all the rest. And now he's gone away for good, I don't believe you'll ever see anything more of him, and I think you'd better set your cap for somebody not quite so high and mighty before you cry yourself sick and lose all your good looks."

"Mother!" exclaimed Dora, in a blaze of passion, "you may do the ironing yourself, but I won't stay here and hear such language,—before Nelly, too."

She threw down her flat-iron, and, covering her ears that she might hear nothing more to exasperate her, she ran out of the house and down along the side of the brook till she felt quite sure that she should not be discovered, and then flung herself sobbing and trembling on the grass.

"O mother, mother," she said, "if you only knew, you would try to spare me. And, O my dear one, why don't you spare me, either? You will break my heart. I wish I were dead."

But the paroxysm passed away. People who have to work every day and all day cannot afford the luxury of indulging in a passion for a very long time, and Dora soon remembered, and was conscience-stricken thereby, that she had left her sick mother to do a heavy work.

"Poor mother!" she said, relenting. "I am as cruel to her as she is to me. O, why am I so cross?" She bathed her face in the brook, and, binding up her hair which had fallen down, she walked towards the house, not yet very peaceful, but trying to be so on the outside, and she thought, as she went, what she had often thought before, that her mother had once been a young girl,

as pretty and as hard-worked as she; she had married a poor, good-natured man, capable of being henpecked, but not capable of understanding any of her higher tastes; she had had ten children, six of whom were living; she had worked herself into a feeble, nervous state, and this was the wreck of her. Dora knew she ought not to blame but to help and comfort her. She went into the house. Her mother was ironing, looking weak and feeble, and Dora's heart sank with shame. She steadied her voice and said: "Mother, forgive me for doing so; but I wish you would not speak to me about him. We were simply friends, and now he has gone away, and there is the end of it."

Perhaps the mother had felt herself somewhat in the wrong, or perhaps she felt too ill to quarrel longer; so she only said: "O well, Dora, I think you try to be a good girl, but you have such a passionate temper. I really don't think I can stand another minute; do help me get to bed."

So the storm passed by for this time, and Dora determined to keep watch over herself in future. Still she knew she was not treated fairly, and she felt it more and more every day. She had been fretted at all her life without minding it unduly; but then a golden haze had always lain upon the future before her. Especially for the last few years she had fancied the veil was lifted occasionally enough for her to see glimpses of the Eden; but now, alas! the veil was in reality lifted too fully and completely, and she saw a stern truth behind it. She began to see that the future did not hold for her the blessing she had believed, and if not that, then nothing; she knew well that all her wealth would go down in one ship. She tried to conceal it from herself, but day after day, slowly and surely, the veil rose. Her mother's words would have annoyed her now more than of old, even if she had not persisted in talking about her "beau," at which poor Dora writhed in torture. She had never told her mother that she was engaged; and she was thankful for it now, for she was able to make a pretence, poor as it was, that she missed "only a friend."

But the "continual dropping" became too much for her, and as the winter drew on she began to talk about going to the city to earn her living. She put the necessity of money before the eyes of her parents, though there were quite other things before her own. Her mother demurred. If Dora wanted to sew for her living, why not stay at home and sew afternoons and evenings, after her housework was done? But the higher prices which were offered in the city for some kinds of work which Dora could do finally prevailed, and she was allowed to go. In spite of herself and the rainy morning and the tears of the family, she started with a light heart. It was something to be rid of the eternal clatter of tongues, and something more, though she tried hard to keep back the thought, that *he* was in the city. What good would that do? If he was forgetting her when she was away from him, would she want him to care for her just because he saw her? Or would he be likely to do so? Yet her heart was lighter than it had been.

CHAPTER IX.

AS the time drew near for Alice to graduate, she began to think what to do next. Celia was very sure that everybody who wanted a teacher would want Alice; but, of course, they did not want a heretic at the Seminary, and she was not acquainted with any one elsewhere. She made inquiries of the girls in school, and at last heard of a lady in the city who was looking for a day-governess, to be occupied two hours each day in teaching a little girl. Of course she could not earn enough for the support of both in that way; still, it would be something, and she believed that in the city there would be opportunities for both Celia and herself to find other things to do,—so she thought herself justified in deciding to go there. They both liked the plan,—Celia for the chance of seeing something of art, and Alice because she longed to be in the very heart of humanity, she so wished to help other people.

School closed in August, and they de-

cided to go to town at once, though they would have to spend a month idly. They had lived too deep a life to have many intimate friends among the girls; and the few they had were those who, like themselves, had been developed early by poverty or some deep trial, and had no homes to which they could invite them; so their only alternative would have been to spend the vacation at Mr. Buckram's. Celia said she would sweep the streets first, and Alice replied: "He is kind-hearted, but they are poor; and we have no claim on them, because we do not love them."

So they spent a day in house-hunting, and at last alighted upon a room up so many flights of stairs that the rent was small; and as it had a large closet attached, they believed they might manage to keep house comfortably in it as long as their money held out.

They had retained a few favorite pieces of furniture from the sale after their father's death; so they were able to fit up their room in a pretty way, though the incongruity of their little coal cooking-stove troubled Celia.

On Saturday night, at the close of the first week in August, everything was arranged, and the two girls sat down, flushed and exhausted, by the open windows, and reflected on the ten dollars in their pockets, and that to have more they must earn it, or draw on the fast-failing stock in the bank.

"Oh!" sighed Celia, fanning herself, "earning one's own living is tough work."

"Only we have n't begun to do it yet," said Alice, smiling. "For my part, I feel grateful to have the high-pressure of the boarding-school taken off."

"O yes," said Celia; "think of not having to go to church to-morrow unless we like. Isn't it hot up here, though?"

"We have the stars, at any rate," said Alice, hopefully. "If we were on the first floor, the bricks would shut them out."

Till September the sisters lived on as best they could, learning all kinds of things about housekeeping, and spending very little. No work appeared for Celia, but they hoped it might be be-

cause it was the dull season. They soon saw, however, that actual effort must be made to find her a place. So Alice with a patient earnestness, and Celia with a scornful curl of the lip, set about examining the newspapers, day by day. But, alas! though many people wanted to teach, nobody seemed to want a teacher.

So September came, and with it the Craigs, by whom Alice had been engaged.

Dr. Craig was a successful, and rising young physician, but, of course, his means would not admit of his having a whole house to himself in a fashionable part of the city. Alice found the place to be in an out-of-the-way street, in which there was an unusual number of small, ill-bred boys at play. The only house which looked at all pleasant proved to be No. 15, in which the doctor's family resided. There was a great elm-tree beside it, — the only tree which the encroaching bricks had left in the street.

As Alice approached the house in one direction, she saw a strange figure approaching it in another, — the figure of a man, was it, or of a monster? The person could not have been three feet high, but his head was as large — larger than that of a full-grown man. In fact, his whole body was large, and strangely contorted and misshapen. There was no perfection in any limb which might make him one iota less hideous than he seemed at first. His hair was long, coarse, and black, and hung over his face as if attempting to conceal, so far as possible, the painfully twisted features. He walked with difficulty, but was evidently hastening with all his might, for a crowd of little boys were collecting about him, and, led by one handsome, heartless little fellow, were heaping new insults upon him at every step. At first they satisfied themselves with calling him names and imitating his movements; but at last the tide of their *fun* seemed to swell so high that they could restrain themselves no more, and the handsome boy walked up and knocked off his hat, — not a new one, to be sure, but neat and respectable. At that moment the door of No. 15 suddenly opened, and a woman, bareheaded, flew down the

steps. She was a tall, angular woman, with a hard face, a firm step, and a ladylike hand. One hand she laid on the shoulder of the dwarf, and the other she raised in a threatening manner. Her voice was firm, like her step, and she froze the blood in those little boys' hearts when she spoke.

"Boys, don't ever *dare* to let me see anything of this sort again. You shall go to jail, every one of you, before an hour from now, you vicious, ugly little wretches! You need n't skulk away. I know every one of you, and I know *you*, John Gilbert" (this to the handsome boy), "and you can't escape me. Stand here, I tell you, and hear what I have to say. You shall go to jail, as sure as I stand here, unless you do as I say."

The boys stood mute and spell-bound before the wrathful woman, from whose eyes flashed a light which showed she could and would do what she said.

"John Gilbert, do you go and pick up that hat and bring it here, and beg Mr. Rix's pardon; and do every one of you promise me here never to speak one word to Mr. Rix again, unless he speaks to you first." Most of the boys looked ashamed, but watched for a signal from Gilbert. He saw how matters stood, and determined not to give up to a woman, so he defiantly put his hands in his pockets and turned on his heel; but the woman was too quick for him. She pounced upon him and collared him, and dragged him, in spite of all his resistance, into the basement, through a door which luckily stood open. Rix went hastily into the house. One or two of the boys beat a retreat, but most of them remained from curiosity, to see what became of their companion. In a moment the woman appeared again, and locked the door behind her. She had locked all the kitchen doors, evidently, and escape was impossible to the prisoner, who appeared at the window, telegraphing in great distress. "Well!" said she, speaking to him from the outside.

"Let me out, *please* let me out," cried he. "I'll do anything you say, and never do so any more."

"Catch me letting you out!" returned the woman, grimly. "You've had one chance to do what I told you

before, and one is enough. I'll let your father know where you are, so he won't expect you home to dinner. I can easily call there on my way to the police-station."

At this John began to howl and cry, his fortitude quite deserting him. In fact, he dreaded his father more than the police. The other boys stood in mortal fear, but one of them stepped up and presented the abused hat to the woman, and said, "We's mighty sorry, Miss Twigg, and we won't do so no more. It was all him," pointing to the howling prisoner.

"I should think so," said Miss Twigg, sternly. "You who have known Mr. Rix all your lives, and who have had so many pennies and sticks of candy from him, to treat him in this mean way, just because a bad, ugly boy has moved into this street."

"Don't tell the police, please," whimpered one.

"Well," said Miss Twigg, "I won't tell the police this time, but I'll tell your fathers; and if I ever see a sign of such a thing again, you shall go to jail. I give you fair warning."

Here the prisoner redoubled his groans, and beat at the window till he had broken some glass.

"O, let me out," cried he. "I'll be good, I'll be the best kind of a boy."

"If breaking a window is a good sign of being a good boy, you look like it," said the inflexible Miss Twigg.

"But I will, I will," said the boy, subsiding into tears, "only let me out."

"I'll tell you what," said Miss Twigg. "You shall sit perfectly still and not try to get away for two hours, and then I'll believe you, and not before. So mind what you do."

The boy looked sullen, but checked his sobs and grew composed.

The other boys dispersed, and Miss Twigg stalked off to inform all their fathers what they had done, — a revenge in which she would not be balked by all their entreaties.

Alice, who had stood rooted to one spot during all this sad scene, now walked up the steps and rang the bell. She rang it twice, but no one appeared; for which, indeed, there was a sufficient reason, for it was a lodging-

house, occupied by several families, and Miss Twigg was the general attendant at the front door. But the door was ajar, as Mr. Rix had left it in walking so hastily into the house, and Alice remembered that Mrs. Craig's apartments were on the second floor, so she pushed it open and walked in. A door leading from the hall into a large room was wide open, and she could not help seeing at a glance the scene taking place there. It was a plain, uncarpeted apartment, with a grand piano on one side of it, and an empty easel, with a high chair before it, on the other. A work-table and a few chairs completed the furniture. Mr. Rix was coiled in a great chair before the table, with his head on his arms, which were spread on the table. Alice saw all this at a glance, for no sooner did he hear her footfall than he started up, and, without looking at her, cried out, in a gruff voice, "Come here."

Alice hesitated, and stood a moment before the door. The dwarf turned round with an exclamation of impatience, but, suddenly seeing who was standing there, he stopped and exclaimed furiously, "What do you mean by coming here?"

"You said, 'Come here,'" replied Alice, bewildered.

Her sweet voice seemed to pacify him a little, and he said in a tone a trifle less harsh than before, "Thought 't was Miss Twigg. I don't want strangers coming to insult me."

There was a quiver in his grating voice, and Alice saw a tear in his eye. She could not bear to go away and leave him so, and therefore she answered timidly, "I am very sorry if I have hurt your feelings in any way. I was only passing through the hall in search of Mrs. Craig, when you spoke."

The dwarf raised his eyes, which were his only beautiful and expressive feature, and looked keenly at her. Then he said abruptly, "You are beautiful, and beauty is always an insult to deformity. I should like to believe you tell the truth, but, of course, I can't."

Alice smiled a little, and said, "I am sorry, sir, that you don't believe me. Will you tell me how to find Mrs. Craig?"

"Mrs. Craig!" repeated he, with a half-scornful expression. "Are you one of her friends?"

"I have never seen her," replied Alice, "but I am to be governess to Bessie Craig."

"Oho!" said the dwarf, elevating his eyebrows. "Well, she has her sitting-room on the second floor, No. 5."

Alice turned to go, but he called out again, "See here, miss, before you go home, come here again. I want to see you."

"Yes," said she; "I shall be here about two hours, I suppose."

She knocked at the door of No. 5, and after a slight bustle within the door opened and Mrs. Craig stood before her. She was a little below the medium height, with a well-rounded form, a fair complexion, an immense coil of brown hair, dimples with every sentence, a manner of clicking her heel with every step, and she wore a perfectly clean, stiff calico dress which had no great pretension either to style or beauty. She was a pleasant-looking person, and yet to Alice, after a few moments of observation, it seemed that she was not exactly pleasant to look at. There was something covert in the dimples, and a peculiar shade of blue in her eyes, which looked as if she might not always be trusted. However, Alice said to herself that it was wrong to be prejudiced, and resigned herself to being pleased.

"Ah, Miss Wilding, good morning. I am glad to see you. I began to fear you were not coming, for it is five minutes late by my clock; but perhaps I am not quite right."

"Yes," said Alice, somewhat disturbed, "I am late, and I am sorry to be so at my very first lesson, but there was a little trouble in the street just before the door as I came up, and I was detained."

"What was it?" said Mrs. Craig, instantly on the *qui vive*. So Alice told her what had passed as briefly as possible, without adding the conversation she had had with Mr. Rix.

Mrs. Craig smiled reflectively, to keep her dimples in practice, and then said in a soft, sympathetic tone: "I do not understand how people can be so cruel. These boys are so rude it

makes me shudder, but I should have laughed to see Miss Twigg. She ought to have been made a man to begin with."

"I admired her," said Alice, simply.

"Certainly," answered Mrs. Craig, emphatically, "She's an old dear." Then in a moment she added: "I am so glad to find that there was a reason for your delay, Miss Wilding. I believe in system and promptness. I succeed in accomplishing a great deal myself, though most people as delicate as I would be unable to do very much, because I am so prompt and have so much system. Then, besides, I admire energy."

Alice felt as if she must brace herself up to the standard of this exemplary woman, and inwardly sighed.

"Bessie is my husband's sister," continued Mrs. Craig, "and he wishes to have her well educated in every way. I began teaching her myself, but I found it too severe a strain upon me, because I am not strong. But I will examine her, and you will see that she is very thorough as far as she has gone."

So saying, she called Bessie from an inner room. The child was a sweet, flaxen-haired, large-eyed little girl, winning in face and voice.

"Now, Bessie," said Mrs. Craig, with what appeared to Alice a somewhat needless expenditure of energy, "we will begin with geography. You may mention all the rivers of the United States flowing into the Atlantic Ocean, beginning with Maine."

The child stood up straight, with her hands behind her, and repeated without a mistake a list in which Alice often found herself at fault. Mrs. Craig asked several other questions of the same nature, to all of which Bessie responded promptly and pleasantly. Mrs. Craig smiled satisfaction, and seemed to find so much pleasure in showing off her own teaching that the greater part of the morning was occupied in the examination.

"Now," said the lady at last, "you see just what she knows, and you can tell her what to do for to-morrow."

Alice, with some embarrassment, designated a lesson in arithmetic; and

then said she had thought that it would be well to read with the child something which she could comprehend, — Natural History, for instance; and that, with the music-lesson, would be sufficient to occupy the next day.

Mrs. Craig was charmed. Miss Wilding's ideas were so original and at the same time so wholly in unison with her own. She promised herself much pleasure in being present at the lessons.

Alice was aghast. She had felt she should stand somewhat in awe even of a pupil who could repeat such formidable lists of places and dates, and she was utterly unable to conceive what she should feel in regard to the instructor of the pupil. But she could not find voice even to falter a request that the lessons might be private, and this was fortunate for her.

So Alice took her leave, and descended the stairs just as Miss Twigg with her culprit, who had now been confined two hours, and who looked very meek, departed from the street door. The door of the room where she had seen Mr. Rix was closed, but she knocked softly, and the dwarf himself opened it at once.

"Humph!" said he, "you keep your word well. But I don't want to see you now."

"Then I'll not come in," said Alice, quietly turning away.

"Yes, I do," said the dwarf, quickly. "Come in this minute. Go sit there in the corner," and he pointed with his thumb to a large wooden arm-chair. Alice took her seat with some trepidation, which increased as the dwarf pushed the table in front of her and mounted it. Established there, he said with a short laugh: "There, now we are comfortable, and suppose we have a talk. Come now, you despise me, I suppose. You don't look as if you would. Just for curiosity tell me whether you do." There was something eager in his way of asking which touched his listener.

"Of course not," she answered, in some wonder. "Why should you think so?"

"I told you why," he said, impatiently. "Because all beautiful people despise ugliness."

"The face or form could have nothing to do with my appreciation of any one's character," said Alice, quietly.

"Pretty talk!" growled the dwarf. "But I *am* hideous, — am I not? Come, there's a poser for your polite white lies."

Alice hesitated. Of course the truth must be told, but how could she soften it? She hated to give compliments, and yet, to be fair, she felt that she ought to give him her best as well as her worst thoughts of him.

"You are deformed," said she, "and you have no beauty of feature except your eyes. Those are expressive, and no one who had in any way the power of expressing the soul within could be hideous to me."

"You are one of the good sort, — aren't you?" said he, satirically. "Now for another poser. Did you ever see anybody who came as near being hideous as I do, — in an idiot asylum, or a side-show at a menagerie, or at an almshouse, for instance?"

"I have never been in either of those places," replied Alice, scarcely repressing a smile. "I have never seen any one as much deformed as you, but I have seen many on whom it was more painful to look, — countenances stamped with evil deeds."

The dwarf brought down his fist with a thundering blow on the table, and though he bit his lip he could not force back the tears which filled his eyes and rolled down his cheeks.

He spoke after a moment: "You have said it." Then, with a sigh, "At any rate, you tell the truth, and I shall always believe you. But I know now that the consideration which I get from people, when I do get any, can only come from pity."

Alice shook her head slowly. "I think you are wrong, Mr. Rix," said she. "No one defect can take from a man everything. A man is respected and honored for his mind and soul, and not for his form."

"O, how trite you are!" exclaimed he, with a shudder of disgust. "'Handsome is that handsome does,' I used to hear. I'm sick of it, for I know better."

"But I know it is true," said she, a

bright smile flashing across her face. "I believe, Mr. Rix, in *never* being conquered by circumstances."

She spoke with more energy than usual, and the dwarf seemed to catch a spark from her enthusiasm, for a sad smile flitted over his countenance, and he said, "Sit here a little, miss, and listen."

He jumped off the table and seated himself at the piano. He began to play with most exquisite feeling a sonata of Beethoven. The soft, warm chords crept up and up, and Alice sat in glad amazement, listening to such music as she longed for but had heard only a very few times in all her life. The force of the music grew until it seemed as if every inch of the bare and desolate room were alive with it, as if the soul of the listener were separated from the body and floating in that sea of harmony. When it ceased Robert Rix looked round with a softened and glorified expression. He had meant to ask her if his music was as beautiful as that of a perfectly formed man would have been, but he was raised too far above all such pettiness now.

"May I hear you play again some time?" asked Alice, in her sweet way.

"Yes, yes," said he; "you give me faith. Go now."

CHAPTER X.

"I HAVE a letter from Jonathan for you, Alice," said Celia, greeting her sister on her return.

"From Jonathan? What can it be?" asked Alice, in surprise; and, opening it, she read: —

MY DEAR COUSIN ALICE, — Grief has fallen on our household. We are in a darker valley than that of the shadow of death, even in the valley of the shadow of sin. My reluctant pen almost refuses to write of such sorrow as we are now so bitterly experiencing, and I write without the knowledge of the rest of the family, who perhaps would not wish me to make an appeal to you. But to the subject.

Frank, our dear, though wayward

Frank, that child of many prayers, the only wandering sheep in all our fold, — that boy whose little hands were taught in infancy to be clasped in prayer before they were old enough to grasp anything, — that one who, whatever his faults, however he might rebel, was nightly compelled to kneel by a pious mother's side, and repeat his petitions, — that one whom that mother did not neglect and leave to his own evil courses even when he grew older (she always saw him safely in bed at nine o'clock, and never allowed him to omit his prayers, no matter how tired he was), — that boy has left us, leaving no trace behind.

Secretly, silently, alone at midnight, he left his unpressed couch and stole away, taking with him a little bundle of his effects. Imagine our consternation, our sorrow, our mutual upbraidings (here Celia laughed), when he proved to be absent from the breakfast-table and when search developed the above facts. My parents were horror-stricken. Everything seems to prove that he, poor misguided boy, tired of the salutary restraints of home, has disgracefully and causelessly — can I say the coarse words? — *run away*.

Aside from our passionate grief at losing him, we have a deeper cause for anguish, beside which the first is only one drop in the bucket, only one sand on the sea-shore: we fear for his spiritual and eternal welfare. Having removed himself voluntarily and completely from the means of grace, what can we do but fear he will never again be brought under them? This fear has even more foundation than it might at first seem to you. To a school companion, — James Marsh, you will remember, — he has darkly hinted many times at a morbid, poisoned, unfounded, and inconceivable — when we think how carefully he has been brought up — longing for the theatre, that sink of iniquity. We fear he may join some theatrical company, and then his soul would indeed be lost.

I know, at least I fear, that your sympathies are not with us on these points; yet I cannot but take every means in my power to recover the lost boy, and I have thought that you, being

in the city, would perhaps see him or hear of him in some way, and I wished to enlist your services. Your sympathy with us as a family, the natural kindness of your heart, have led me to believe that you would be glad to do all in your power, though I suppose there is really almost nothing you can do.

And now, O my dear cousin, I cannot conclude my letter without begging of you to be warned by this solemn example and be wise in time. Nothing but firm Christian principle can keep us from going astray, however satisfying natural religion may be for a time. Of all our family, brought up under precisely the same influences, which is it who is thus bringing the gray hairs of his parents in sorrow to the grave? The only one who was unconverted!

In love and grief your afflicted cousin,
JONATHAN BUCKRAM.

"Now isn't that splendid?" said Celia. "I never thought he would always remain tied to Aunt Buckram's apron-string."

"I am sorry," said Alice; "for his father and mother have really tried to train him conscientiously, though they have been so unwise. And this must be terrible to them."

"I don't know," said Celia. "I think Aunt Lydia has trained her children for her own glorification. At any rate, I am glad for him."

"I am not," said Alice, "for he has done what he verily believes to be wrong, and he will lose his own self-respect."

"After all, which is braver," said Celia, — "to sin outright, or be kept from it only by fear, as he was?"

Alice nodded, and began to relate her day's adventures.

CHAPTER XI.

THE days went on, and nothing "turned up." Celia examined every newspaper, but still nobody wanted a teacher. She had excelled in composition-writing at school, and Alice suggested that she should try to write

something for the magazines; but she was so disheartened and discouraged that she had no spirit for it, and after one or two vain attempts she flung her pen aside and declared that she would not try again till she had something else to do by which she could earn her living, and so might feel calm.

Alice, too, was patiently trying to find something to do, but with no better success.

"Wanted. — A female teacher in a grammar school in M—. The committee will examine candidates Friday, — inst." Alice read this one evening. "Here, at last, a teacher is wanted," said she.

"An experienced teacher, of course?" said Celia, in a low-spirited tone.

"It does n't say so," said Alice; and she read the advertisement aloud.

"But you don't think I can do that, Alice," said Celia, impatiently. "You know I'm not fit to teach such a school. I don't know anything about arithmetic and grammar and geography. I never can teach a school I must be examined for. And in M—, too. I want to be in the city; and, besides, I won't teach stupid children their stupid lessons. It's bad enough to think of teaching at all, when I have no taste for it, and I must have something different from a public school."

Alice was silent, and in a moment Celia asked, "You can't mean, Alice, that you would advise me to try?"

"I can't advise you at all," said Alice, sadly; "but I'll tell you how I feel about it. There is every day more and more need that we should find something to do. We have searched the papers for months, and have not seen a single advertisement which we could answer. There is at least a possibility that you could secure this situation; and if you do not even try, and months hence everything else has failed, you may perhaps look back and regret that you have not made the effort."

"So you think I'm not trying to find anything to do?" said Celia, aggrieved.

"I think you are trying, and trying hard, but the time may come when you will regret not having tried your utmost."

"Well, well," said Celia, "I know that I should feel so now. It makes me feel wicked, and O, so contemptibly mean, to know that you, with your delicate health, are doing all the work and supporting us both, while I do nothing! I would do anything I could. But I do hate the idea of teaching. It seems to me people ought to do that for which they have a natural gift."

"What is your natural gift?" inquired Alice.

"There, that's unkind! though you did n't mean it, I know. I know that if I were rich I could find plenty to do. I could write if I were not harassed for my daily bread, and I could paint, and I could act. O Alice, I wish it was respectable to act!"

"It is," said Alice; "why don't you do it? I believe there you would find your real niche."

"O Alice, you unworldly child!" said her sister, with a superior air. "If I were a genius, and could show it to the world the first night, there would be something worth while in it. Then it would be respectable. But a second-rate actress—no, Alice, I'm too proud for that. O, I wish I were a man! There's nothing a woman can do."

"Yet it would n't help you to be a man," said Alice, thoughtfully. "If your *forte* is acting, it would be as little respectable to be a second-rate actor as actress. If you have decided genius in one direction, there is that one thing for you to do; and the fact that you were a man, and had your choice in an unlimited number of other callings, would still not help you there. It is only when we have made up our minds to do whatever we can do that it is useful to have a variety to choose from."

"Well, I *will*, Alice," said Celia, sadly. "But perhaps it is wrong for the children's sake. We can only do well what we love to do."

"Yet you must be wrong, my darling," said Alice; "for God so often makes it impossible for us to do what we love."

"Why impossible?" asked Celia, proudly. "Because we *fear* starvation. If we were ready to die, rather than do

wrong work, perhaps a way would open. It is the fear which conquers."

"But all must do some work," said Alice. "And you—you say you would not act, though you feel the power."

"There it is," said Celia. "I am afraid to face the world. So I shall commit the sin of doing what I do not love."

"Can it be a sin to deny ourselves?" asked Alice, in surprise.

"I'm puzzled," said Celia. "Sometimes self-sacrifice seems the highest thing. But then we lose the beautiful expansion into what we might be. And what we *are* blesses others most. Besides, we can't do well what we don't love."

"That is for geniuses," said Alice. "A painter should paint instead of writing poetry, for instance—"

"Ah!" interrupted Celia, "and though talent is not genius, everybody must have some little germ of genius,—for making paper-dolls, perhaps, and that is his work."

"But the greater comprehends the smaller," said Alice. "All can at least be faithful; and that we are greater than the work we do may make us able to do it as well, perhaps better, than he whose legitimate work it is, who stands on the same level with his work, and not above it."

"O dear!" said Celia, anxiously. "I see I can't disguise my duty."

"If I *could* earn enough for both!" said Alice. "I love so dearly my work, the very work you will hate."

"O Alice, Alice," cried Celia, "I am selfish, abominably, completely selfish! I'll do anything. Give me the paper. When must I apply?"

It is rather sad, when we have brought the whole force of our soul to bear upon making a sacrifice, to have that sacrifice then denied us, not because it has become unnecessary, but because it has become impossible. Yet even this hardest test of courage is again and again applied. And it was so in this case. Celia's application bore no fruit whatever, except that her ride in the cars left their stock of money a little lower than before. Among fifty applicants, some with influential friends, some with

years of experience to attest their capacity, what chance could there be for a lonely little girl like her? She had started with firm lips and a heart beating high with the courage of self-denial. She came back with livid lips and strengthless frame. She was so exhausted with the repression of her feelings which had been necessary during her ride home, that she had not power left to speak, and Alice comprehended that the journey had been useless.

"Ah," said Celia, sadly, as soon as she was sufficiently restored to say anything, "I am not sorry, for all those other girls needed the place as much as I. I shall *never* forget those disappointed faces. I think I should not have had the heart to take the situation, had it been offered me."

"Well," said Alice, cheerfully, "now you have done your very utmost; and, as failure is not our own fault, I have faith to believe we shall be taken care of. It is only when we have neglected something ourselves that we have any reason to despair. Our money is not quite gone yet, and something is sure to come to help us."

"O, I wish I could die!" cried Celia, passionately. "What does God mean by making creatures and then providing no place for them? Why are we told to work, and yet no work is given us to do?"

"Well, my darling," said Alice, "I don't know what to say, but I truly think that there is work enough for every one to do, and that, if we 'do the duty which lies next us,' we shall see the one beyond."

"As I have done to-day?" asked Celia, bitterly. "Yet I am more than ever blind to the next one to-night. Work? I suppose there is enough work to do, but who wants to work for the mere sake of working without being paid for it? Besides, one can't; we've got to *live* first, before we can work."

"Yes," said Alice, wearily, "it's very hard, my dear; but then"—and she looked up with shining eyes—"we know Love guides the way."

"I suppose so," said Celia. "I can't say I feel it very much myself, though. I only know I wish I was dead and

there was an end of me, and I should n't be a burden to anybody."

Alice turned quickly. "Never say that again, little sister," said she, kissing her. "Can that be a burden which we love beyond everything else in the world?"

"Hope springs immortal in the human breast."

That sentiment is sufficiently hackneyed to prove how true it is. And from day to day Celia experienced the most exhausting fluctuations of hope and despair. She searched the papers with trembling eagerness, trusting every day that she might at last find something she could do. Every day, she turned away sick at heart, for nothing appeared. Once in a long time a copyist, a compositor, or something of that nature, would be advertised for, and the proud child would press her hands on her torn and suffering heart and hasten to apply for the position. But what could she do? She wrote an abominable hand, and though she felt sure that if any one would only engage her she would take such pains to do her work faithfully as to give perfect satisfaction, how could she persuade anybody else to think so when twenty other girls stood waiting each of whom wrote like copper-plate? And who wanted to teach her to be a compositor, and be responsible for her blunders for a month or two?

"Here, Alice," said she fiercely, one day, flinging the paper aside, "they want a girl in a restaurant. I believe I'll apply for that."

"Well," said Alice, doubtfully. "Would n't that be rather hard?"

"Hard?" responded Celia, in a voice of wormwood. "Yes, I expect it is hard, but it can't be harder than sitting here from morning till night, chafing with nothing to do."

"Then suppose you try," said Alice.

"It is not very respectable," said Celia, beginning to repent.

"No," said Alice, "but it is honest, and our self-respect ought to be placed so high that no pressure of circumstances can touch it. Whatever you do, you are Celia Wilding."

"Yes," said Celia, "I believe that as much as you, and in poetry such things all come out very prettily; but in actual

life, Alice, would you really yourself respect a person just as much — of course I don't mean would you treat her as well, but would you *respect* her just as much — if you knew she had been a waiter?"

"Of course I should," said Alice, opening her eyes wide in astonishment. "What difference could it make?"

"None, I know," said Celia, angry with herself; "but I can't help feeling it is a great deal more respectable to teach, or write, or even to set type, than to do purely manual labor."

"Because you are of untainted patrician blood," said Alice, laughing.

"But you see, Alice, how much I am willing to do. I said many weeks ago that I would try *everything*, that I would be courageous, and I'll try this. Kiss me, and let me go before my courage fails."

In an hour she returned. She was as white as death. Alice had not seen her look so since the time of her first unsuccessful application for a school. Since then she had borne her disappointments sometimes with a certain stoicism, at others with her usual passionate sarcastic fury.

She trembled so that she could scarcely stand. She made no reply to Alice's questions, but pressed her hand to her head in a confused way, as if to stay some raging tumult within. Then a terrible fit of tremor commenced; her eyes dilated, her hands were clenched, and she fell down in hysterics, yet hardly in hysterics either, for she did not once laugh, nor did the tears come, but it seemed like a fit caused by severe nervous pressure. Alice had been accustomed to see her sister in paroxysms of anger and grief, — for Celia was of such ardent feelings and such an excitable temperament that she had never learned self-control well, — but she had never seen anything before so fearful as this. She was at a loss to know what to do for her. It was hours before she was calm. She refused all food, and did not speak, although she seemed to try to do so. At last, however, Alice succeeded in getting her into bed, and, exhausted by her emotions, she finally slept. It is a strange and merciful thing, that, the more violent the emotions have been,

the heavier the drowsiness which creeps over many people. Alice did not leave her sister's side, and just as twilight was closing in Celia awoke with a start of horror. The recollection seemed to come back to her, and she wept for a long time. Then she became more composed and answered Alice's inquiries, and began to talk in a sad, crushed voice. "I suppose I must tell you, Alice," said she, "what success I have met with." Alice waited breathlessly, and after a pause her sister added, "I can never tell you what was said in my ear while I stood waiting with a crowd of others. I came away in an instant, without waiting to apply. Alice, I understand that it is not manual labor which makes a position dishonorable."

Alice grew pale, and then said slowly, "I will not believe that this can be the case in all such places. I have heard, I think, that they were places of temptation, but I believed one could always guard herself."

"I hope it may be so in most places," said Celia, drearily, "I do not think the man who spoke to me could have been one of the proprietors, and yet he must have had influence with them, because —" Here she stopped suddenly, an ashen paleness overspreading her face, and then she added in a hurried whisper, "I am *afraid* at this moment, Alice. I shall never have the courage to roam about the streets alone again as I have done."

"It is horrible," said Alice, "but I believe you need not fear. There is enough honor in Boston to protect any girl who is not too daring."

Celia shuddered. "If I ever see that man again, I shall die," said she.

"And those poor young girls who were waiting with you," said Alice, thoughtfully. "It is terrible, but such a thing, against our will, makes us suspect a whole class."

"Yes," said Celia. "I shall never see a girl who belongs to that establishment without repulsion, and yet she may be innocent. Ah, how wrong this world is! The innocent are suspected with the guilty, and have no means of clearing themselves."

"God gives us lessons so hard that

they seem actually impossible," said Alice. "What infinite charity we must learn to have for those who fall under temptations which might have been our own!"

"Yes, yes, charity," said Celia. "Yet no one need *ever* fall," she added, with energy; "there is always the alternative of death."

"Yes," said Alice, in a compassionate voice, "death by starvation must contain moments of such horror that the soul becomes insane and is not responsible."

"Death by suicide, I mean," said Celia, quickly. "We have that alternative, and drowning costs nothing."

"Could suicide ever be right, though?" questioned Alice.

"If we had our choice between wrong or death, how could death be wrong?" asked Celia, with fire.

"If the choice came within a moment of time, to be sure," said Alice, "we could not hesitate. But that could never be except when physical force was exerted against us, and in that case we cannot talk of temptation at all. But where the alternative was presented to our minds alone of doing wrong, or the chance, the probability even, of dying by starvation, we should, of course, be doing right, and only right, to choose death; but could we have an equal right to choose to kill ourselves?"

"I can't see the difference," said Celia. "If one is to die at any rate, he may at least save himself as much pain as he can. A kind physician would do that for a patient dying a natural death."

"Yes," said Alice, "if we could ever be absolutely sure that we should die. But God, who gives us life, has alone the right to take it; and at the very moment we faint, believing we can live no longer, we do not know what hand he is about to stretch out to save us, nor what work there is in the world which he wishes us to do."

"If people were angels they might live according to your theories, Alice," said Celia, sharply; "but most of us are very mortal."

"But though we daily fall bitterly short of our standard, we have no right to make it lower," said Alice.

CHAPTER XII.

THE weeks went on, and still no hope came to Celia. For many days after the encounter related in the last chapter she hardly dared to leave the house alone; but at last the serene courage of her sister communicated itself to her also, and she went out as usual, coming back again and again with a slower tread and a more faded glow in her eyes. But the bitter experience was slowly teaching her a strength and composure which she had never learned in any other circumstances. She passionately loved Alice, who understood her nature and never irritated her, and, however fretting the incidents of her life were, she was not obliged to be brought in close relations with people whose injudiciousness exasperated her, as when she had been at her aunt's and at school. When we once clearly recognize that there is no individual against whom we can inveigh as the cause of our misfortunes, we suddenly stand still, remembering, if we complain, who it is against whom we complain. The most fault-finding among us all must then be dumb. And so Celia, though she had not risen to that high plane where one can look gladly and fearlessly at all things, knowing that a Father who loves us, though he dwells in mystery, sends all, bore herself patiently, and grew pale and thin without growing cross.

And, as Alice had believed it would be, they were not left in utter destitution; for Dr. Craig, who was much pleased with his little sister's governess, found a few music-scholars for her; and the two girls were now assured of the absolute necessities of life as long as Alice's health did not fail, or her patrons desert her.

Celia felt a little rebellious that this should have come to Alice instead of herself; for Alice was not strong, and, if there was not work enough to be had for them both to do, it seemed a pity that the stronger of them could not have any of it. But Celia knew nothing of music, though she played a little in her own wild way, wholly by ear, so she could not take either of the places. Alice comforted her by leav-

ing her all their little housekeeping, — which was something of a task, though they lived in one room, and so letting her feel herself of use in the world, and of use especially to Alice, who was doing so much for her.

Alice found teaching music very unsatisfactory. It was not that for which she felt herself best fitted, and it chafed her to feel her incapacity. And yet she was an excellent teacher. She dearly loved music without being of a musical temperament. It was the greatness of her soul, rather than a delicate ear, which enabled her to appreciate so exquisitely the masterpieces of musical composition. Few amateurs could play simple pieces as well as she, because she had such capacity for expression, and she had so patiently cultivated her powers that she played even difficult pieces well; and yet the natural talent for music was wanting, and no amount of expression could supply the want of execution, though it is equally true that no amount of execution could have supplied the want of expression. It probably was less irksome to her to teach music on account of her very deficiencies, because, however quickly she comprehended the spirit and meaning of a passage, her ear was less keen in detecting the harmonies on which it was built, and a false note here and there did not excruciate her as it might have done a person of quicker perception. She taught well, too, not only because she was patient and faithful, but because she herself had found music the same slow labor it is with most pupils, and was less impatient with their dullness than one would have been whose genius had made it possible to spring from height to height at once without toiling up the intermediate steps. But she knew that music was not her vocation.

In time the wardrobe of the sisters began to look very shabby. Alice always wore black, and preferred it. She laid away a nicer dress for very rare occasions, not knowing how long it might be before she could buy another, and by great care, and wearing a calico wrapper when she had any work like cooking to do, she made her other only black dress look fresh and neat always, though

it had been worn so long. But Celia had no such talent. She had always had a faculty for rushing through things, and tearing her dresses, and all the mending in the world could not make them their original selves again. Besides, although she wore black from motives of economy, and had reluctantly consented to do so usually even at school, she yet hated it heartily, and knew that she looked like a fright in such a sombre setting. If her character was gaining strength and consistency from poverty, she had not gained in beauty, as she worked day by day in their little attic in her hopelessly shabby dress and with the glow and glitter gone from her eyes. Alice patiently mended and thoughtfully contrived, and made the most of everything; while Celia felt that if she could not have all, a little more or less was of no consequence. She absolutely longed for intense color, liking monotony in dress scarcely more than in life; and one day, in desperation, she sent a soiled old school-dress to the dyer's with orders to have it dyed scarlet. The material was a poor one, and the color produced was a dingy brick-red. But Alice could see nothing wasted, and heroically took the dress herself to wear during the hours she passed in the house, that she might save her other one.

"Alice, you look like a clown," said Celia; "do let me sell that dress for rags."

"No," said Alice, smiling. "It's useful, if not beautiful, and I look no more like a clown than you would have done if the color had been brilliant and you had worn the dress into the street."

"But I can wear scarlet," said Celia. "Pshaw! of course I know, though, that it would have made me ridiculous, because everybody nowadays seems to have such an ugly taste as to wish to creep round in old sad-colored gowns when there are tints as gorgeous as Nature herself which they might wear. O dear, dear! it really seems to me that the world is completely askew. At any rate, Alice, I wish you'd take that dress off, for it sets my teeth on edge."

But Alice laughed and shook her head. "It is one of the consequences of our sins," said she, "that we have

to bear the penalty long after we have repented of the act."

In the mean time the acquaintance so strangely begun with Robert Rix was increasing. He was always harsh and sarcastic; but Alice had evidently quickened in some measure the dying embers of faith in mankind in the dwarf's heart. So he talked to her and played to her. To one who loved music so passionately as she, and who could yet hear so little of it, this was a great treat. And he liked to play to her, for he had never had another listener who appreciated him. He would never consent to see Celia, however, for he dreaded new faces; and perhaps he guessed, as he peeped at her through the blind, when she sometimes came to the door with Alice, that her physical antipathies were violent. He had but two friends, Miss Twigg and a young gentleman who had once rescued him when a scene occurred similar to the one which had introduced Alice to him. The young gentleman was an artist, and his studio was a source of unfailing delight to Robert, who was too sensitive to go to public picture-galleries. The artist was a gay young man, but in a thoughtful mood he painted the face of the dwarf, toning down the irregularities, infusing power and depth into the eyes, filling the whole hard countenance with pathetic meaning, till the picture was the highest he had ever painted. But he never showed it to any one, lest by some fatal mischance Robert should hear of it and misinterpret the motive. Forever the best we are and do is known to no one.

Miss Twigg had been brought up in riches, and was now poor. She had been brought up to work samplers and to do other equally valuable fancy-work, to draw a little with dividers, but had not been furnished many resources within herself. She had a masculine turn of mind, and had been taught the most rigid formulæ of femininity. She had been hardened, rather than crushed, by sorrow. Her friends were all dead, her fortune almost gone. She could not teach, and knew of nothing else a woman could do. So she worked chair-seats and sofa-pillows, and even copied engravings into hideous worsted work,

(crewel work, indeed!) and found herself getting excessively ugly and ill-tempered, when an old, almost forgotten friend, dying, begged her to take as a boarder her deformed boy, who was so soon to be left alone in the world. The fountains of her heart were at last stirred. She accepted the trust, and was saved from being a sour old woman. By degrees, as her fortune melted away, she filled her house with lodgers; but Robert seemed to belong to her in a different way from the rest, to be her very own.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT last Celia came home one day with a radiant face. "She has surely found something now," thought Alice; but she would not say so, in order that she might seem to receive the whole glad surprise at once. She was, however, mistaken; the world's oyster-shell was as hard as ever to open, and Celia was no nearer reaching its interior mysteries than when she started out. But she had news, nevertheless, and made Alice guess for five minutes whom she had met unexpectedly on the street.

"You guess wider of the mark every moment," said she, joyously, "and I shall have to tell you. What do you say to Aleck Hume?"

Alice flushed quickly with delight. "Why did n't you bring him home with you?" she asked. "I would rather see him than anybody else in the world."

"He could n't come just now, but he is coming very soon, perhaps this very day. I will tell you about it. In the first place, I went to Mather's for the advertisement. (Of course, it was of no use, I might have known that to begin with; but I'm glad I tried, for, if I had n't, I should always have thought that it might have done some good.) But then I began to walk along slowly, with my usual happy reflections,"—rather bitterly she said this,— "till suddenly I heard the heartiest voice close by me say, 'I tell you the woman question is getting serious.' This naturally made me look up, and I think,

at any rate, the voice would have recalled something to me without the words. At least, I should hardly have known Aleck if I had n't heard his voice, because he has changed a great deal, and wears a great beard and so forth; but as it was I knew him in a second, and before he had quite passed me I gasped out in perfect terror, lest I should miss him, 'O, are n't you Aleck Hume?' At that he stopped short and looked straight at me. 'Yes, I'm Aleck Hume,' said he, straightforward as usual, 'and I wish I could remember you, but I don't in the least.' The young gentleman with him laughed and said in a low tone, 'You old ogre! What do you always tell the truth for?' But you know, Alice, I never should think of being hurt because Aleck could n't remember me, though it was disconcerting to have such a grand young man as his companion stand laughing at me, so I said boldly, 'I'm Celia Wilding, and you ought to remember my name if you have forgotten my face.'

"O, I can imagine how he looked then!" said Alice.

"Yes, he looked exactly so!" continued Celia, gayly, "and he shook hands like a perfect tiger, and asked after you. I told him you were in the city *teaching* (think of that, Alice, but I did n't say how much), and that I lived with you. I dare say he thinks we are flourishing with an independent fortune." She laughed as merrily as a child. "Another thing, Alice, and I'm afraid you won't like this so well. I really don't know how it happened. I have tried to think since, but in some very natural way I found myself inviting Aleck's friend to come with him. He seemed to like it, and said at once that he certainly would. What do you think, Alice?"

Alice pondered. "I'd rather see Aleck by himself. Yet he will come often, I hope, and we shall see him alone. On the whole, perhaps, I am glad, because you have so few opportunities for seeing anybody."

"As many as you, blessing," rejoined Celia, gayly. "But what do you think of the *propriety* of inviting him?"

Alice laughed. "The idea of your

thinking first of the propriety! Still, of course, as we live here so much alone — But I feel sure that I need not object to any friend of Aleck whom it seemed natural to you to invite; I trust you both too much for that."

"But I don't know," said Celia, thoughtfully. "He was great and grand, yet if I depended on my intuitions as much as you do, I don't know that I should have invited him."

"It must have been intuition which made you invite him at all," said Alice. "You would never have thought of it otherwise."

The sunlight seemed brighter all day to the sisters, and they fancied it penetrated into dark nooks and corners of their little sitting-room which had always before lain in shadow. When Alice went to give her daily lesson to little Bessie Craig, she thought Mrs. Craig had never been so kind, and the few words which Robert Rix spoke to her had not an atom of bitterness. Celia took courage, for the first time in many weeks, to bring out her paints again and copy an ivy-leaf from the bough across the window. And, after the lamps were lighted and they sat cosily sewing by the little table, they heard a free, vigorous step on the stair, and another behind it, and then a firm quick knock. Alice opened the door, half expecting, notwithstanding Celia's description, to meet again the sunburnt, ruddy boy from whom she had parted. She started back, thinking Aleck's friend had come first, but the cheerful, hearty voice reassured her. "How do you do, Alice Wilding? You are just yourself."

"And you are not yourself at all," said Alice. "I don't believe I should ever have known your face, though I could not forget your voice. At any rate, there is nobody in the world I could be so glad to see."

She spoke more impulsively than usual, forgetting that Aleck was not alone. But the stranger made his presence known straightway. "Aleck, you ought to be a happy man for six months."

"Mr. Richard Stacy, Miss Alice Wilding." In the mean time Mr. Richard Stacy and Miss Celia Wilding had shaken hands.

The visitors could never have guessed

that this charming little sitting-room served also for kitchen, dining-room, and sleeping-room. It was so fresh and sweet, so full of choice little things which even the wealthy cannot buy but only the cultivated, the girls in their black dresses were so tasteful and ladylike, that one might have imagined that the whole house was theirs and this little room only a cosy boudoir where they liked to sit in the evening. Even Celia's old black dress, which she so deplored and detested, was made becoming by a jaunty little white apron she had not worn for months; and she had taken her luxuriant hair out of her ugly net, and curled it and crimped it and all the *et ceteras* with hearty interest. Alice looked always the same, serene, beautiful, blessed.

"Celia was so excited this morning that she did nothing in order," said Alice, after a few minutes, "and, so far as I can discover, she told you our whereabouts and occupations without once thinking to ask yours. Have you too come up to the city to live? I could hardly have believed you would have been satisfied to leave the woods and fields."

"Not I," replied Aleck. "I am not living here exactly; I am only in the Legislature this winter, and I shall be glad enough to get back to the fields and woods again, you may be sure."

"So art has not yet claimed you," said Alice, with a smile, as her thoughts went back to a time years before, when they, as children, had talked of art.

"Hardly. I suppose you could n't call the Legislature art, though, could you? except that it's artful."

"Ah!" said Stacy, striking in. "Aleck's coming to town is purely philanthropic. He had some slight faith in human nature at the beginning of the present session, and fancied that the State Legislature was the 'fixed point' for his lever to move the world."

"And I have some faith left still, Dick," replied Aleck, pleasantly; "that is, faith in human nature, though I must confess my confidence in the Legislature is beginning to totter. As long as people will put such faithless creatures as Dick to make the laws, what hope can there be for the world?"

Dick laughed. "It takes just such as I to keep just such as you from going to pieces headlong. The Conservative element is a little more important than the Radical."

"Ah! as long as you believe that I shall keep in politics, notwithstanding my waning faith in them,—that is, if my constituents will let me."

"That is good and grand, Aleck," said Celia, flushing and happy. Mr. Richard Stacy looked at her curiously, as if he wondered if it was quite worth his while to raise a little breeze. He apparently concluded that it was.

"I see Aleck is going to get all the glory," said he, "and that proves my unselfishness, because nobody is so sure of being lionized as he who takes an unpopular part." He said it so gayly that Celia looked disconcerted, which could not have been, had there been a trace of bitterness in his words.

"Ah, Mr. Stacy," she answered sweetly, so sweetly that Alice, who knew her usually to be too eager about any point in question, looked up surprised, "I sha'n't retract a bit, but I'm willing to acknowledge that there may be people who are noble on the opposite side, because from *their standpoint* their way is right. But then," she added, with a sparkle like a laugh in her face, "of course they are fearfully deluded."

Dick Stacy was a very free-and-easy young man, and he felt at that moment a wish that he was a little better acquainted with the young ladies, because he thought a pat on the shoulder, or even a kiss (to which he did not object), or anything to start a frolic, would have been the most expressive sort of answer, and good fun, on the whole. However, his sense of the proprieties kept him quiet. He only made a wry face as he answered: "So we are deprived of glory, and receive pity as a substitute. Perhaps that's better than nothing, especially at election-time, when it makes it more exciting for the candidate to appear in a pathetic light."

"But I don't think I do pity you," said Celia. "I think you're too wise to be one of the deluded. I'm really afraid you are rather a politician."

"The purport of that seems to be,

'You're wicked and you're wise.' I'll forget the wicked and remember the wise. Thank you, Miss Celia." Herewith he made a bow and appeared to be very much at home.

"O dear!" said Celia, "how am I ever to convert you if you persist in transmuting all my daggers into roses?"

"I don't need to be converted,—do I, Aleck? I was converted in the best manner at camp-meeting last summer. I was done up in the most thorough style, and the old female who inducted me into the various mysteries of free grace and transubstantiation and metempsychosis and elective affinities, or whatever, prayed with such unction that I might not only be converted but pickled and salted down so that I could n't spoil, that I've never had any uneasiness about myself since. I knew such fervent petitions could n't remain unanswered."

Aleck watched the girls closely while Dick was speaking. He knew that they had lived in a clergyman's family and a sectarian boarding-school ever since he had last seen them, and he had wondered what the results had been.

"What an acquisition you must be to the Methodists, Mr. Stacy!" said Alice. "You can help to swell their statistics every year."

"I should be glad to have a new baptism every season, to help on the good cause," said he; "but, being already 'pickled and salted down,' I suppose I must be perfect now and can't be any better."

"Except in politics," said Celia, slyly.

"You're bound to regenerate me without knowing my opinions," said he, pretending to look injured.

"Ah!" said Celia, "but you said you represented the Conservatives and Aleck the Radicals."

"And you are a Radical, of course?" he said, laughing. "Now Aleck is a Radical to that insane degree that I might be a thousand years behind him and still two or three hundred years in advance of everybody else."

"I like that," said Alice, with a bright face, "for I find I am more radical than anybody I meet."

"In everything?" asked Aleck, in a certain pleased, grave way.

"Yes, in everything."

"Spiritualism, Woman's Rights, Divorce Laws, Prohibition, Moral Suasion, Co-operative Housekeeping, etc., I suppose," said Dick.

Alice laughed. "We're pretty bad, Mr. Stacy."

"Or pretty good, perhaps," said that young gentleman. "The Radicals are gloriously good, but ridiculously impractical."

"Aleck looks practical, I'm sure," said Celia.

"Listen," said Dick. "Aleck not only benefits the world by making (or endeavoring to make) new laws for the happiness of his fellow-creatures, but he's also a doctor, that he may cure their sick bodies; and if he finds most of his patients too poor to pay him, he cheerfully supplies the deficiency by pulling off his coat and working on his farm. Actually, I don't know but he works on *their* farms, and gives them the produce of his own. It would be just like him. Now, is that practical?"

Dick looked very handsome as he spoke, and very proud of his friend also.

"Be still, Dick," said Aleck. "You have n't given me a chance to speak a word since we came in."

"I like you to be a physician, Aleck," said Alice, "but I did not expect it of you any more than I expected you to be in the Legislature."

"But what could I have been?—a clergyman or a lawyer?"

"Not a lawyer, at any rate, though that is rather grand too" (here Dick bowed gayly, for he was a lawyer), "and not a clergyman at just this era. I perceive that it was suitable, yet I always think of you as a farmer, pledged wholly to nature."

"So is a physician, Alice. Botany, chemistry, anatomy,—you see it is all nature in one form or another."

"Human nature too," said Dick.

"Yes," said Aleck. "As I don't live on Juan Fernandez, I must do something to help people more directly than by farming."

"You'll think I'm a heretic," said Celia; "but Alice and I are always disputing about that very thing. She believes in rushing out into the high-ways and hedges and finding some defi-

nite work to do for other people. I believe in doing it if it comes to you, and in the mean time I think it best to live out your own nature, and on the whole that will bless the world most."

"You are a cold-hearted transcendentalist," said Alice, laughing.

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Stacy, "Miss Celia is in the right. For, if everybody followed her rule, everybody would be perfect, and there would be great variety in the world, besides, to give a 'spice to life.'"

"Ah, but they will not," said Alice. "So those who see their own way clear must work for other people, or there will be a vast work left undone."

"But since nobody can be more than perfect," said Dick, carelessly, "where is the overplus to come from which is to go to the underdone people, and 'keep the balance true'?"

"Suppose perfection, or, better, goodness, consists in helping other people to it?" said Alice, eagerly.

"It may be goodness, but it can't be perfection," said he; "because if everybody was perfect there would be no such work to be done. And however we are askew now, I suppose everybody was meant to be perfect originally."

"Ah, we don't agree on first principles," said Alice. "I don't quite believe that everybody was good at first and has been growing worse ever since."

"And I don't believe it at all," said Aleck. "It's a faithless kind of belief. When we all come to Darwin, things will be clearer."

"I'm not a Darwinian," said Mr. Stacy, "though when I've wriggled through a few more stages I may be. But it's no matter where people started from; if they are ever all going to be perfect, the occupation of doing good will come to an end, so it can't be our ultimate work."

"My dear boy," said Aleck, "a universe which is constantly evolving must eternally continue to evolve."

"Hurrah!" said Dick, laughing. "That's so grand I don't understand a word. So I know I've cornered you."

"Not a bit," said Aleck. "There is now an infinite gradation of being below man as well as above him, and there must forever be ultimate particles from

which the series of evolutions begins, since there is such a thing as *infinity*. So, however our race improves, there will always be work for us to do in helping others."

"Well," said Celia, "I guess you are only *living out your own nature* in another way than I do, so we are disputing about nothing."

"Good!" said Mr. Stacy, "we are all right, and nobody is wrong. Let's shake hands all round."

When the young gentlemen went away, the sisters found themselves exhilarated into a talking mood instead of feeling that forlorn settling down of blackness which had invariably accompanied the nightfall for many weeks, carefully as they had striven to conceal it from each other by trivial remarks which they forgot before the answer came.

"I believe, Alice," said Celia, "that, for the sake of being in society one year, I would willingly die at the end of it. Just think of meeting people evening after evening, hearing conversation, riding and driving and travelling, and hearing music! I don't wonder the old alchemists sold themselves for gold. It is the *blessing* of life. It gives every blessing."

Her face was flushed, her eyes sparkled, and she looked handsome, radiant.

"Such a little sip of society as this is perfect nectar," continued Celia; "there was Aleck with his great, grand theories, and Mr. Stacy with his genial, *gentlemanly* manner, and I did n't know how good a time I was having till they were gone, and I feel lifted up so many miles beyond the ground I stood on before. O, if such a little sip as this is so sweet, what must it be to drink in the whole?"

Alice might have said, "It might be to drink the dregs." She thought it, but she never said disagreeable things that were unnecessary.

"At any rate, Celia, we are likely to get something more of it than before, for Aleck is to be here all winter, and if Mr. Stacy took interest enough in him and in you to come here once he probably will come again."

"O yes, Alice, he said he should. Is n't it very curious that we happened to meet him in just such a way?"

"It is very curious that you happened to invite him here," said Alice, "and a very happy inspiration."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Celia, in such a strange, vague way that Alice looked at her closely, and knew that, at any rate, it was not curious that her sister had invited Mr. Stacy.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE next day Alice went as usual to little Bessie Craig, leaving Celia rather cross at the idea of taking up the burden of endless, useless search after work which, during the preceding evening, she had almost forgotten was laid upon her. Mrs. Craig, as usual, sat in the room during the lessons. It annoyed Alice; she could never get over an uneasy feeling that Mrs. Craig had a boundless curiosity, and though it was used to no ill purpose, it was nevertheless offensive. Just as she was concluding her lessons, there came a sharp knock at the door.

"Miss Twigg," said Mrs. Craig, with half a laugh. "I should know her knock in Japan."

And Miss Twigg it was. She paid no attention to Mrs. Craig's greeting, but, looking beyond her, said shortly: "Miss Wilding, Robert will see you when you get through up here, if you please," and shut the door. "Whether you please or not, I should think," said Mrs. Craig, with her half-laugh. "Mother Twigg gets to be more of an ogre every day."

Alice made no reply, so Mrs. Craig was afraid she had said too much, and added, to mend the matter, "She is a bluff, downright old soul, at any rate, and sincere as a looking-glass."

"And she sincerely hates you," thought Alice, "and you hate her as much, but less sincerely."

When Alice knocked at the door of Robert Rix, she heard a hasty scrambling for a minute or two before it was opened by Robert himself. He bowed very respectfully, but did not extend his hand. Nothing would have induced him to touch any one but Miss Twigg. It was one of the saddest things about

his calamity that he was endowed with that sensitiveness which accompanies the finest and most delicate constitutions. Ugly, misshapen, horrible as he was, he too had physical repulsions as powerful as those of Celia. He divined the sensation he must cause in other people, and he never even touched the hand of another in his bitterest, most lonely moment, when his heart was half breaking for sympathy. Today there was in his eyes a painful drawing down of the corners, as in those of a child who has been weeping, but his mouth had a harsh, scornful, sarcastic expression. He closed the door after Alice, and motioned her to a seat in the very corner of the room. Then, in his usual way, he wheeled a table crosswise before her, completely blocking her up, and upon this table he mounted. This was a favorite position of his for some unexplained reason, perhaps because it enabled him to look down on people, as if he were really tall and grand.

"Come now," said he, in his hardest, gruffest voice, "you pretend to be religious, don't you?"

"I hope not," said Alice.

"Well, if you like it better, then, you are religious, whatever that may mean, — which is n't much, I think."

Alice said nothing. She wondered what had happened to make him harder than usual.

"I'm not religious," continued Robert. "I was n't made for such things. The Power that crushed my body cursed my life too." The last words he spoke with a flash of angry vehemence.

"Why don't you speak?" said he again, after a pause. "Why don't you say something consoling?" with a bitter laugh. "What did you suppose I wanted of you if you were going to sit there mum in a corner?"

"I know nothing to say," replied Alice, slowly and gently.

"Pooh! Why not?"

"I am not able to understand the intense pain you suffer, and till I can do that I have no right to insult you by offering you comfort."

"Come, I like that now," he said. "I knew you'd tell the truth, at any rate. You don't know anything about suffer-

ing, you can't so much as conceive what suffering is; the little measure of it which has been filled up to you, in comparison to mine, is so little that if it could all be compressed into one moment, that moment would be ecstasy of bliss beyond the happiest moment of all my life. You don't know anything, you can't *guess* anything, you can't guess the meaning of the word 'pain.' Yes, I'm glad you tell the truth. It's more than most people do."

There was a long pause, and then he spoke again: "Why don't you tell me I'm miserably wicked! Come, that would be some comfort."

"Because I don't think so," said Alice. "I think you are miserably tempted and tried."

"So, so," said Robert. "But you told a lie then. You believe that everybody ought to submit to the will of Fate (you call it God, I believe), and be as happy as a bird through everything."

"O yes, I believe it; but it is true that I do not think you wicked and do not blame you."

"I don't understand that," said he, shaking his head. Then he continued, with impressive slowness, "I saw you one day, Alice Wilding, when you were tempted and tried, and you said life was too bitter, and then you blamed yourself and said you had been quite wrong. You are charitable, but if you are also true you blame me for the same thing."

"I blamed myself," said Alice, "and it was right I should, because I knew within myself the whole power of the temptation and the whole power of the resistance, and I knew that I had yielded where I was able to resist. About you I know nothing, and have no right to judge. You said yourself that I could not even guess your pain."

"I thought you believed in God," said he, suddenly.

"I do," said Alice, understanding him in a moment, "and I *know* that God never laid so heavy a burden on any human soul as to make it impossible that that soul should rise up from under it erect and pure. I do not so distrust the Father. Yet the weight lies heavy, heavier on some than on others, and the soul which seems to us

most cramped and bent may really have lifted itself upward with a strength and energy beyond our capacity of conception. I think no one has done the best, yet, comparing men with men, we have no right to judge. The stains which God sees are beyond our ken, and God himself does not condemn, but pities and blesses forever."

"It may be true," said Robert, in a tired way, "I don't know but it may be a pleasant belief, but for me I am not religious and don't understand it. Do you want to know why I am more bitter to-day than I sometimes am?"

Alice nodded, and he went on: "I've tried to hide my head in this house so that I might escape some taunts if I could. It's hard not to go outside your own doors, to see the sunshine only behind brick walls, never to breathe the country air or gather flowers, never to hear the music which is within a stone's throw of you, never to see a picture, never even to look at human faces, except such as you can peep at from behind a blind; yet I've borne this rather than show my misshapen body where men could see and sneer at it. I am cursed in not having the soul of an idiot as well as the body of one. Ah well! I have some friends, it seems, after all, and one is Ralph Nickerson. He's a wild young fellow and a painter. He's bad enough, I suppose, but he adores beauty; that's why he likes me, I suppose! He thinks I can appreciate pictures, though, so he invited me to the great private exhibition of the artists. I wanted to go; I was a fool. Lately the boys about the neighborhood have been so respectful to me that I began to think they'd changed, supposed they might not show the repulsion which, of course, they must feel." (Alice sighed within herself, for she remembered her first encounter with Miss Twigg, and feared that it was from no nobleness that the boys had been silent.) "I thought, if I went in a hack, nobody need see me except as I was getting out or in, for Ralph had promised me that I might go in the morning, and no one else was invited till afternoon. O well! it went off nicely. I believe I was perfectly happy at the time. I have an intellectual remembrance of it, though I have lost the feel-

ing completely now. I must have been happy, I suppose, or I should n't have been so senseless. The green-house was opposite, and I caught a glimpse of it as I went in. Ralph said it was gorgeous beyond all he had seen before, and I wanted to see it. I *must* have been happy to have felt the determination for more happiness. So we went in. I paused beside something, I don't know what, — what *could* I have liked enough to stop? — while Miss Twigg and Ralph went on. Just then two ladies came in, and were close by me before they saw me. At the same instant they stopped and half screamed. I heard one say distinctly, under her breath, 'Horrible! there is no other such monster outside of Barnum's.' But the other lady grew white and rigid as if an uncontrollable dread, at which I could guess but too surely, had seized her. They hurried away, and I wish I had died."

The heart of Alice was aching with sympathy. She spoke quietly, keeping back her tears: "But they could not have been delicate persons, or they would not have seemed as they did. So why should you care for them?"

"O, it is not for the woman who spoke that I care!" he answered, with that forlorn drooping of the eyelid. "She was not delicate, I know; but while she was rude enough* to speak there must be thousands who would *feel* the same, though they hid it carefully from me. I had almost forgotten that. And, O God, what if my presence there among the flowers, so innocent and free and happy, should determine the life of some one yet unborn to be a life like mine! I should build me a prison cell and see no one, and that when I am *starving* for human sympathy and love. There was a bad omen, too, to greet me at home. The caterpillar which I tended all the fall, and whose cocoon I had watched all winter, had broken its coverings and emerged a moth, but a moth with its wings hopelessly twisted. And I had tended it. Who knows what strange, blighting influence my eyes had had upon it? Ah well! *that* is dead. Deformed moths do not live. Why are not such as I strangled in the cradle? Ah! it *would* be kind."

There was a sparkle in Alice's eyes, — a sparkle of hope and joy.

"Because," she said, in a thrilling tone, "life is too grand and high a thing for one moment of it to be lost under no matter what conditions. The solemn march of all created beings, from the earliest blind grasping for consciousness to the mighty angels of the sun, and beyond, must not be so interrupted. We *must* join in the procession which, feeble as we are, would be incomplete without us; and we wish it too, for we are bound to prove the utmost possible for every moment of the grand eternity God has given us."

His eye flashed responsive for an instant, and then the glow went out.

"A pretty theory," he said, scornfully; "but hundreds of sweet little children die every day. How are *their* places filled?"

"If we did not believe in immortality, and an immortality of progress too, there would be no answer," replied Alice; "but, knowing that, we know there are other places and other duties for them, and that there is still no place here actually unfilled, whatever it may seem."

"Pooh!" said Robert, "that will do for religious people; but these children die without suffering at all. Why am I made to suffer?"

"There must be conditions in your being," she said, "which make the highest life possible for you, and make you worth the most profound education."

He seemed a little softened as he answered: "Yet you who believe in God believe that every creature is worth to him exactly the same in the end, and is worth the ultimate education; and all do not suffer — alike."

"Ah, Mr. Rix," said Alice, eagerly, "it is because you believe in God yourself that you talk to me so; and your faith is the purest, because the problems which might shake it are to you unsolvable."

He shook his head impatiently. "What can you do towards solving my questions?" he asked.

"I can tell you what I think," she replied. "How do we even know that all do not suffer alike? No one can interpret another's life. And surely, if we have existed before or may exist

hereafter in older and newer forms, who can say that the measure of suffering may not be so filled up in one world or another that all shall suffer the same? And if that is not true, as is very likely, still God has not made all alike. His mind is infinite, and must evolve infinite variety, and for the highest development of each being a totally different education is no doubt needed; the points attained by each may be equal, but they need not be the same."

"O well," said Robert, harshly, "you destroy the little comfort that might be got out of such hideous, inconceivable suffering. If we could think that God had really chosen us for so high a destiny that we must suffer beyond our fellow-creatures to reach it, there might be a kind of triumph in that; but if all are to reach exactly the same point, and some are to tread barefoot over thorns while others dance over roses, where is justice?"

"That God has chosen the best possible for all of us at some time does not show that he has not also chosen the best for each of us. We are different, but not differently loved."

"You are a good child, Alice Wilding. Now go." And Robert jumped hastily off his table, and opened the door so quickly that Alice was in the street in a second. But she guessed she had left him happier; and Miss Twigg, who had known nothing about what had troubled him in the morning, though she had noticed the cloud of sadness which had enfolded him, knew that the evil spirit was exorcised when she heard the ringing chords of an anthem from his piano.

Alice pondered with some surprise, on her way home, on the fact that the conversation of the evening before had certainly had an undefined influence over everything she had said to-day. It seemed as if her mind was suddenly expanding. It was not strange, for she had come in contact with a great mind.

CHAPTER XV.

AS Alice had supposed, the girls were not left alone so much as they had been. Aleck spent half his

leisure evenings with them. He would have interested himself in them for their father's sake and for the memory of old times, for he was one of those hearty people who believe that everybody has a claim upon them; but, beyond this, he found an appreciation of his motives and a sympathy with his actions in these two unsophisticated girls that he did not meet anywhere else. Even in the special clique of politicians to which he belonged he saw too clearly a spirit of party which often disgusted him. And in Alice he found one whose thought had tended in the same direction as his own, and to whom half a word would convey his meaning as whole sentences could, not do to any one else. Mr. Stacy came very often with Aleck. He was too impulsive not to follow the whim of the moment, and he had been charmed with Celia from the first instant he saw her. It was new to him to find a person of such high culture who was yet so fresh. He knew enough young ladies, for he moved in the highest circles by virtue of his money and talent, and he knew enough fresh country girls, for he understood the art of making himself agreeable; but Celia stood on a middle ground, and was higher than either, to his thinking. She was daring and brave, too, in attacking his politics and ethics, and that he liked, for there is a great fascination in having a person who is too great a stranger to say anything harsh talk to you about your faults. Besides, he always came off victorious. He showed Celia again and again that the world was not ripe for her theories; and as he was in earnest, and truthful in believing it himself, she could not help being convinced. Then Dick was handsome, and had a rich voice. Celia worshipped beauty. Alice would shake her head, smiling, and say, "Well, Mr. Stacy, very likely you are right; but then the world never will be ready unless somebody agitates the matter, so I am ready to be one of those."

At this Dick would draw a comical picture of Alice in bloomers, stumping the State, and Celia would declare herself disgusted.

Nevertheless Dick liked Alice amazingly, though he never felt quite easy

with her. He could resist no beautiful woman. Celia was not beautiful, but her charm lay outside of and beyond the shape of her features. His feeling for her was totally new to him, and quite distinct from his admiration of young ladies in general. So it came to pass that he accompanied Aleck as often as he thought respectable to see the Wildings, and still oftener he sent them invitations to concerts and the theatre. Alice would not always go to the theatre, and Aleck never went. She liked talking to him better than seeing anything below genius on the stage, but Celia was passionately fond of it, and had never had an opportunity to gratify her liking; and Mr. Stacy used to say, laughing, "I believe in always going to the theatre when there is any grand work or grand actor to be seen. If not, I go to see the poor ones."

In this way the burden of life became easier. Celia wanted money more for the pleasure it would bring her than for any other reason, and if she had the pleasure without the money, it was, of course, just as well. But it was very galling to her to be so destitute in many ways, and to be unable to appear as well dressed as other pleasure-seekers. Dick himself cared a good deal about dress, especially in young ladies; but there was a certain glitter about Celia, even in her shabby, unbecoming black clothes, which made it impossible for him to criticise her, though this was by no means the case with his female acquaintances. Alice was always beautiful, especially in black, and her culture showed itself in every motion.

The search for work was still unsuccessful. Alice had found two or three other private pupils through Dr. Craig, but Celia was still without anything to do. And so a month had passed on since her encounter with Aleck.

One morning Celia lay with half-closed eyes while Alice was dressing.

"Come, Celia," said Alice, at last; "you will not be ready for breakfast."

"I don't want any breakfast," replied Celia, languidly.

"But you mean to rise by and by, I suppose," said Alice, smiling.

"I don't know."

"Are you ill?" said Alice, bending over her anxiously.

"No," said Celia; "only tired of living. What is the use in getting up? I have nothing to do; that is, I can work if I choose, but I can't be paid. I think the struggle is useless."

"O well, Celia, we are better off than we were, for I find more to do, and we are not left without society and pleasure."

"And what is the use of that?" asked Celia. "I only realize more and more the vast difference between our circumstances and our tastes, and I feel the contrast more keenly. I was perfectly happy at the theatre last night, but now I have to return to the same old thing this morning, though I would n't complain if I could return to some real work, but to this fretful fruitless waiting for something to turn up, it is too hard. Alice, I saw some magnificent dresses last night, and worn by people without a bit of taste,—people who looked as ugly in royal purple and sables as I do in my old black dress. I know Mr. Stacy was ashamed of me."

"You know better than that," said Alice, smiling. "Mr. Stacy would n't take any one of whom he felt ashamed to the theatre."

"I don't know about that," replied Celia, with some spirit. "Mr. Stacy is noble, and he knows I adore the theatre, so he might do many things out of kindness."

"And of course he has n't penetration enough to judge whether *you* would call that a kindness or not," said Alice, with gentle sarcasm.

"O, you know what I mean," and Celia sprang out of bed. "But I don't understand how Mr. Stacy can help being ashamed of me. He is so high-bred."

"And what are you, you absurd child?"

"I have n't the town polish. If Mr. Stacy was going to the stake, he would look as perfect a gentleman as if he were being introduced to the queen."

"And certainly would n't go without blacking his boots," said Alice, laughing. "He is precisely the reverse of you in those particulars. However, he would never go to the stake."

"What!" said Celia, with a sudden flush. "I believe, Alice, that you do not think him noble."

"Yes, he is noble," said Alice, repenting; "only not noblest."

"There, you are thinking of Aleck," said Celia, "and Aleck is grand. I love him as well as you do. But you know there *is* a little country mud on his shoes."

"And country air in his breath," said Alice, coloring proudly.

Celia was silent and looked a little vexed. After breakfast she sallied out in quest of a situation, in reply to an advertisement Alice had noticed the night before. She went in a wrathful enough mood, first vehemently declaring to Alice her horror and detestation of life.

The situation she sought was that of copyist in an office. It made her fierce when she saw there were already twenty women in the waiting-room, though it wanted ten minutes of the time that was advertised. She sat down to await her turn, feeling that, if she could be successful, she should be miserable with the memory of those twenty disappointed faces. Just as the clock reached the appointed moment the inner door opened and two gentlemen came out. One was the advertiser, and he beckoned to the girl who sat nearest the door. The other was Dick Stacy! Celia wore a thick veil. She never went to any place of the kind without one, but it seemed as if every person in the room must see her blushes, they burned so furiously. Dick, however, did not seem to notice her, as he passed out with his free step and bright, grave face. She felt herself trembling, and, like a flash, came to her soul the acknowledgment that there was no one in the wide world whose every motion was so dear to her. She sat in a stupor till the inner door was again opened, and the gentleman announced that he was satisfied with the first applicant, and courteously dismissed the others. She did not care at all. She was too nearly beside herself with shame to feel anything of this kind, even if she had been expecting any other result. Her first impulse was to hasten home at once, and then she remembered.

that she could not face Alice at present, and turned in another direction, walking fast and impatiently. But she had not taken a hundred steps when some one spoke her name, and, looking up, she saw Mr. Stacy's handsome face. She would have seen any one in all the world with less confusion at that moment. She said to herself that she was not ashamed that it should be necessary for her to earn her own bread, that she had even no right to be ashamed that she was seeking to earn and found her services wholly undesired, and that she need not be ashamed to have any one know what it was so right she should do. Nevertheless she was a born patrician, and though her education and her innate nobleness had given her appreciation for and sympathy with plebeians, in the abstract at least, the patrician blood still tingled in the very ends of her fingers. Then she had so carefully concealed from Mr. Stacy any trace of actual poverty, though he must have seen that the sisters were far from rich, that the *dénouement* was doubly painful.

They walked a few moments in silence. Then Dick said, with his easy smile, though perhaps he felt less easy than usual: "Well, Miss Celia, there is no help for it. I suppose I have unwittingly found out a secret which you would rather I should n't have known. And perhaps I might have pretended not to know and so have saved you some confusion, but you know I should never have felt very honest in that case."

He looked so handsome and so truthful as he spoke.

"You are right," said Celia, with an effort.

"Besides," continued Dick, "I could have been of no use to you if I could not have told you that I saw you. O, what a confounded noise there is in this street! You don't mind walking on the Common,—do you? It is so much quieter there, and I want to talk to you. It is of no consequence if you are not at home quite yet."

"O no!" said Celia, bitterly; "my time is of no value."

"You sha' n't say quite that," said Dick, cheerfully; "but the most valua-

ble thing you can do with the present time is to take a walk with me."

They were silent till they found a quieter spot, and then Dick went on. "I hope you won't think I am impertinent if I tell you that I don't suppose you received the situation!"

"No," said Celia; "I should hardly have wished to be fortunate at the expense of so many others who perhaps need it more than I."

"No one can be in greater need," said Dick, "because nobody else is so proud."

Celia had a moment of triumph. She had been half afraid that Dick would think her poor-spirited to go about seeking work in that way. She understood very little what he thought.

"I suppose you really wish to find a place where you can earn something?" he said, wrinkling his forehead a little.

"I must find something or die," said Celia, quickly and with a sob hidden in her voice which made it thrill. "Of course I sha' n't die of starvation," she added hastily, "for Alice is so good; but I shall die of shame that there is no place in the wide earth for me in which I can work without being a miserable clog and burden on other people."

She did not look up; but if she had, she would have seen a strange, heavy cloud pass across Dick's face. He did not answer at first, and when he did the words did not seem much to the purpose. Certainly they were not what he might have said, though Celia did not think of that.

"One could almost believe in Woman's Rights," said he. "Nevertheless there are men almost as badly off,—though, of course, they don't suffer like women."

"Miss Celia," he said, rousing himself, a moment later, "perhaps I might find you some work to do. I know a good many people here and there, and will do what I can. What would you prefer to do?"

"Anything for daily bread," said she, scornfully. "I hate work of all kinds, and am equally inexperienced in all, so it makes no difference. You are very kind."

She tried hard to say the last words gratefully, but she did not succeed, and

they both knew it. She did not understand why she failed, for she did not recognize the instinct which told her he had not, after all, been kind. Yet he had never in all his life been so kind to any one as he was at that moment to her.

"If you were a stout Yankee," said Dick, clearing his face of shadows, "my path would be plain, for I could sound a trumpet detailing your virtues in the ears of every friend I have; but I should n't like to do just that in your case. You may be sure," he added, sweetly, "that, whether I succeed or not, you shall not be annoyed by any publicity. In the mean time, when you have advertisements to answer, won't you promise to tell me about them, and then perhaps I can help you, and at any rate save you some trouble?"

"Of course not," said Celia, with a miserable attempt at gayety. "Among a dozen applicants, who would choose one who had a protector to bargain for her? No man of mercy, certainly." The instant she had said these words she suddenly remembered how much they implied, and grew crimson. Dick saw it, of course, and might have shown his tact by taking no notice; but he paused in an embarrassed sort of way, and the black cloud swept across his face again. Celia thought she had never been so wretched in all her life. She would not risk another moment with him lest she should make the matter worse, so she made it *worst* by saying abruptly, "I cannot spare any more time. Good morning," and she hurried away in one of her paroxysms. "What would he think? What could he think? What had he thought?" His embarrassment had told her too plainly. Alice had gone out, and Celia locked her door and gave way to a fit of anger and rage like one insane,—one of those fits which she had at times experienced in a less degree all through her life, since her very childish days. She perhaps had hysterics, with the modification that her passion was stronger when she was alone, and that by a terrible effort of will she was quiet when Alice came home, except that she was very cross; but this was by no means unusual, and did not surprise her sister, who

thought she was only disappointed about the situation.

Meantime Dick did not turn to look after her, as she broke away from him so suddenly. He was not so silly as to think what she supposed he did, but he knew what she supposed, and he could not conveniently contradict her. However, he was thinking of something else, and stood five minutes in the same spot grinding his heel into the snowy pavement. Then he sauntered off to a billiard saloon, and was soon absorbed in a game. He may have found it tedious though, as he never played for money.

CHAPTER XVI.

"DICK STACY has been cross to-day," said Aleck, when he called next evening, "and I could n't persuade him to come with me. He is going to apply himself more closely to business, he says,—which is absurd, I think. Work in the daytime and play in the evening, I say."

"I suspect you don't practise that," said Alice, pleasantly. "Mr. Stacy has whispered to me a secret about you."

The ruddy-faced young fellow absolutely blushed. In fact, he worked very hard in the Legislature, hoping to force through some measures rather too radical to be carried without a tussle, and then doctored poor people in the evening, sometimes even watching all night when the exigency was great. Though he did good modestly and secretly, and though he would have taken every precaution to prevent its discovery, perhaps, after all, he was not troubled to have it found out by those he respected and loved.

"Consistency, thou art a jewel!" said Celia, trying to be gay, though she felt the significance of Dick's absence.

"Exceptions to every rule," said Aleck, laughing.

"But the preacher should n't always be the exception."

"I have done nothing, after all," said Aleck.

"Except overwork," said Alice. "Mr. Stacy told me."

"Well," said Aleck, "I believe in correlation of forces. Momentum can't be gained. It is always quantity multiplied by velocity. If the amount of the work is the same, what difference does it make whether I do it in ten years or seventy?"

"There is a fallacy somewhere," said Alice, "and I suspect it has something to do with 'protoplasm,' only I don't quite know what that is."

Aleck laughed. "You are so bright, I will confess. The vital force can be supplied by protoplasm. But if we exhaust it faster than it can be supplied, we die, and can take no more, and so leave our work undone. But I don't do that. A delicate girl like you can't even imagine how strong and full of life I am. I may talk to weak girls and dyspeptic clerks to the end of time, and yet not mean to advise that great, stout creatures like myself should be lazy."

"O Aleck Hume," burst out Celia, "what a despicable thing a woman is! To be dragged down by a little mean miserable body when one might do something noble! Alice may scold you, but I envy anybody who has physical strength to escape his own pettiness."

"Ah, Aleck," said Alice, "it is a life of limitation to be a woman!"

"Yes, yes, yes," said Aleck, vehemently; "but we shall live to see woman legally free, and everything else will follow in the train of that good day."

"You can't make us stout like you, though, Aleck," said Celia, gloomily.

"By and by," said Aleck, cheerfully. "When the conditions of life are more sensible, a woman may have a constitution with never a flaw, and have bounding health, if not actual raw strength. And the delicate girls of to-day must begin to take care of themselves as a first step to that glory."

"That we do," said Alice. "Neither of us work hard."

Celia looked up scornfully, and caught an expression on Aleck's face which made her exclaim: "You think Alice must work hard to support us both."

Alice, surprised, because they had always sought to conceal their struggles from the young gentlemen, interrupted

hastily: "Aleck knows I love to teach, and would do it if we were rich instead of poor."

Celia, however, no longer cared for concealment, and spoke again, boldly and bitterly: "Aleck thinks that is no reason why I should take your earnings, which he knows must be too small to support two without self-denial. But you are unjust, Aleck, for you don't know how I have tried to find work. Only yesterday I tried for a place as copyist, and was defeated."

"Forgive me, Celia," said Aleck, with a distressed face. "But I was not so unjust as to think you knowingly took from Alice. I thought you had a little property, but were thoughtlessly using it, and would suddenly find yourself destitute; that perhaps you did n't know the value of money. I was very wrong and very stupid."

"Yes, you were," cried Celia. "I not know the value of money! I would sell my soul for enough to buy a decent calico dress, and throw this ugly black thing into the fire!"

"Are you really destitute?" asked Aleck, greatly moved.

"No," said Alice, with dignity; and then gave the few inevitable words of explanation. "We are, in fact," she added, "only quietly and privately testing the rights and wrongs of the woman question. We bear the burden of our century, and do not complain." She spoke proudly, with a glance at Celia which was almost severe, she was so hurt at seeming to ask Aleck's sympathy.

"I complain, though Alice, who works, does not," said Celia, bitterly. "And till I can find work I have rightful cause to complain."

"You should have told me before," said Aleck, reproachfully. "I might have helped. And may I tell Dick? He has a great deal of influence, you know."

Celia writhed inwardly, and answered, with curling lip: "He already knows, Aleck. I had the pleasure of meeting him yesterday in the office where I made so vain an application."

Here was the key to the riddle then.

"Well," said Aleck, "we may together devise something for you."

"Devise poison!" said she. "It is

the only sure cure. There is an over-population of women in Massachusetts, as I know by other means than the census."

"The woman question is a hard one," said Aleck; "but for any individual case we can generally find a remedy, and then we are going to move heaven and earth for her legal rights."

"I don't know what good voting would do me," said Celia, drearily.

"The over-population would be the same," said Alice.

"I thought you both believed in Woman's Rights," said Aleck.

"I believe in a 'forlorn hope,' for want of a better," said Celia, with a sigh.

"And I believe in the future," said Alice. "How can the race be broader till woman is? But in this century whoever looks for happiness had better bear every ill rather than try to stem the current of public opinion. The star to which we look is far down the future."

"In the mean time, what is the use of living?" said Celia. "I am not of the stuff of which martyrs are made. I must have love, and not cold reason, to spur me on."

"And that is just the stuff of which most martyrs are made," said Aleck. "But, courage! you won't hate life, once let you find work."

"You are right, Aleck," said Celia, with a gleam of returning hope. "I won't be a coward."

Aleck and Dick, without speaking to each other, were both busy for a week in trying to find a place for Celia, and as Dick had most money and friends he was successful. A friend of his wanted copying done and would send the work to her in her own home, so she could avoid the publicity she so dreaded. The sum to be paid was not large, and Dick wished to add to it from his own purse; but he had the delicacy not to do it, for he knew what agony of shame it would cause her should she ever find it out.

So at the end of the week he called to tell her what he had done; but, as might be supposed, the interview was embarrassing to everybody till Aleck happened in. "I did n't know Aleck knew you were looking for work," said Dick, as the sisters eagerly related what had taken place.

"Only a week ago," said Aleck. "Was n't it bad for them not to tell either of us?"

Dick's face beamed a moment; he rather liked it to be taken for granted that he stood on the same footing with so old a friend as Aleck.

"That comes of their being 'strong-minded,'" said he. "They think the rougher sex are only useless cumberers of the ground."

"That is unjust," said Alice, with a smile. "We think the world can never be what it ought to be without woman's help, and we believe that, in spite of her cramped and morbid life, the love in her outweighs most other things; but if we must make a comparison, *men* are broader and stronger."

"Don't desert your colors, Alice," said Aleck; "you know a woman's courage is as common and great a thing as a man's."

"Courage and strength are not the same," said Alice. "And though a woman can endure all things when she is sure of sympathy, without that she dies. And to almost every woman comes a time when she cannot endure silently."

"O dear!" said Dick. "To tell the truth, I must admit I don't know many saintly *men* who endure tremendous trials with a radiant face."

"But they are not so ridiculously, abominably, shamefully *morbid* as women," cried Celia. "They are *grand*. There is nothing little about them."

"Certainly not," said Dick, amused. "But I thought you believed in the 'free and equal' doctrine."

"Freedom, yes," said Celia; "but as for equality the Hindoo customs have the right of that. Still, since they are in the world, let them do what they can."

Alice tried to think it strange that Celia should speak so bitterly, just as the work she had been seeking so long had come to her. Dick was uneasy, but thought he had the sense to see that universal suffrage would do no good in this particular case.

"Men and women must meet in a more rational way than they do now," said Aleck, who could never keep still long, — "in college, for instance."

"Ah!" said Dick, "with a bevy of 'fair girl-graduates,' what fun there would be flirting!"

"The students could n't flirt more than they do now," said Aleck, "and they would know some sensible girls."

"Exactly," said Dick, airily; "but I tell you in confidence that a sensible girl would be a bore to the undergraduates."

"Tell me candidly," said Alice, smiling, "don't you like best to talk with the brightest girls you meet?"

"They may be as bright as they please," said Dick, "only they must not *think* much, or else they will be 'slow.'"

"I know that well," said Celia, eagerly; "for a woman's life is such that when she thinks at all she becomes morbid."

"No," said Aleck, with some scorn. "Boys have such an unmitigated desire to show off that they can't endure anybody who knows more than they do."

"I don't believe that," said Alice. "They will always respect those who are worth respecting."

"O well," said Dick, "it is pleasant, when we are going through a course of flirtation with some hardened fashionables, to reflect that in some quiet corner, guarded from top-boots by picket-fences, some nice girls are being brought up in an unsophisticated way, so that when we *have* graduated and become sensible ourselves, we may look about us, and cast the remnants of ourselves at the feet of those who can bestow on us the first gush of feeling, never having had a chance to flirt themselves. 'On the whole, I *don't* believe in mixed schools.'"

There was just bitterness enough in his tone to prevent him from being outrageous to the rest.

"You are mightily mistaken," said Celia. "Those born to flirt are not prevented by picket-fences, and when there is a complete dearth of other chances, there are always the 'revival seasons,' when they are urged to private conversations on personal religion with itinerant preachers; and as the handsomest man always converted the greatest number of pretty girls, I always called those *religious flirtations*."

"Let bygones be bygones," said Alice, annoyed.

"I think boarding-schools are a humbug," said Dick. "However, that is a matter of opinion and has n't much to do with the suffrage question. But what you must do if you vote is to hold office, notwithstanding your constitution and tastes."

"Their constitutions are going to be improved," said Aleck. "And nobody is obliged to hold office against his will."

"Except 'field-driver' in country towns," said Dick, gayly. "Imagine Miss Wilding elected to that office! But seriously the power to hold office would create the taste."

"Then that proves the present condition of woman a false one."

"Ah, well! but, from a selfish point of view, is it worth while to cultivate a taste in them which leaves us without homes?"

"It would n't," said Alice. "The daydream of nine out of ten of all the girls I know is to have a home of her own and make it just as beautiful and happy as she can."

"Granted," said Dick; "and the tenth is the Woman's-Rights woman of the lot."

"No," said Alice, emphatically, — "always a girl who believed herself born to be dependent on others, and never to exert herself to make others happy."

"But could they make a pie?" said Dick.

"As well as the 'clinging vine' kind," cried Celia. "And at school they always had the neatest rooms."

"Besides," said Alice, "if a woman had higher tastes, she could earn enough to pay her cook."

"Ugh!" said Dick, "the idea of one's wife working for her living!"

"Drudgery in the kitchen is n't working for a living, I suppose," broke in Aleck, indignantly.

"Nevertheless," said Dick, "if a woman don't know how to cook, she can't direct her servants."

"And a man must understand machinery to superintend a factory," said Alice. "Every good woman learns to cook when it is necessary."

"Every 'good woman.' Ah! but

how about the ranters? What is the tendency?"

"I know nothing about the 'ranters,' as you call them, though I suspect they have been misrepresented. But this I know. When people desire to do a higher work, it only makes them more faithful in a lower one. Only those who wish to be idle neglect their every-day work. And women are all their lives taught to wish that, because they are told others should support them."

"It is n't fair to dispute with a woman," said Dick. "Chivalry prevents you from cornering her. But what are you going to do about fighting to sustain your vote?"

"They can be nurses," said Aleck, "and that is as hard as facing the enemy."

"I am glad you think so," said Dick, "for it is pleasant to know one's friends are courageous."

"If men are cowards," said Aleck, "it is time they were taught better."

"I think," said Alice, "they are often taught a superstitious fear of God and eternity in their very cradles. If all felt sure that God loved them, they could n't be afraid of anything he might bring them."

A shade passed across Dick's face. "O well, we must take men as they are," said he.

"Mr. Stacy," said Celia, "when we get civilized enough for women to vote, we shall be so near the millennium that we shall not have any more wars."

"Splendid!" said Dick. "Do promise me to go to the next convention of the 'down-trodden' and see how near the millennium we are. The fact is, practical men like me are needed to keep you idealists in working order."

"But we are practical too," said Alice. "For instance, Celia and I are the best of cooks. I own I hate it, and leave all the nice operations to Celia, but I can do it."

"I believe that," said Dick, pleasantly. "I should n't have been so rude as to make remarks I thought personal. All your faults come from your being too good to appreciate average human nature. I mean that sincerely."

"Dick is incorrigible," said Aleck, breaking into a smile; but, after all, he

likes other people to believe in future possibilities which do not seem such when we look at the hard face of the every-day world."

"I like *you*, at any rate," said Dick, with a sweet look. Then his eye slowly turned to the girls. Celia's face was radiant, the clouds had all gone, every fibre was thrilling with her appreciation of the warm, rich nature of the young fellow. But as he looked at her the light in his eyes faded, and he said uneasily, "Aleck, we are staying an unconscionable time. Let us go."

And after he had parted from Aleck he walked up and down the street, musing. "Yes, Aleck," he said, as he entered his boarding-house at last, "on the whole, you are right. The woman question is getting serious."

CHAPTER XVII.

CELIA went to work next day with a lightened heart, and, having so important an object before her, she succeeded in making her pages look very neat and distinct, though they were somewhat stiff. Perhaps she hoped to show them to Dick in the evening, but Aleck came alone, and for several successive evenings no word was heard of Mr. Stacy. Celia's views of Woman's Rights veered round suddenly, and she found herself in the mood to make a most exemplary "vine," especially when the thought came over her that perhaps Mr. Stacy was more shocked by her radical principles, those being a part of herself, than at her working for a living, which he knew to be brought about by circumstances. Yet, after all, Celia's was not a weak character. It was ill-balanced, and that made her seem weak, and it was a passionately affectionate character which could expand and become stable by growing in the sunlight of love. Her sister's love had done so much for her that she was becoming firm, when a new element had come in, a new necessity for love, which forced her nature to ferment. Her being was full of "glorious insufficiencies," and the "angles" of such a "strife" cannot so soon

"round into calm," as those of "narrower perfectness."

But if Dick had made good resolutions not to go to the little room in X—Place, perhaps he speedily thought how marked such a desertion would appear, and what a wrong impression it would leave, so he very soon sent an invitation to the sisters to go to the opera with him. There was a good deal of strength in Dick, though he made no fuss about it, and for the rest of the winter he avoided as much as possible those dangerous little chats at home with the girls. He also invited them oftener to concerts than to the theatre, knowing that Alice would not refuse those; so he had no *tête-à-têtes* with Celia. He managed his attentions so skilfully that Alice, quick as she usually was in observing, did not notice that he was at all less attentive than he had been. But Celia realized how few opportunities she had to talk with him, and, understanding his character well, though wanting the key to his actions, her cheek burned as she thought, "He does not wish to hurt our feelings by leaving us, but he wishes to pay us equal attentions lest I should mistake his motives. He must have seen what I feel." It is barely possible that, with all his strength and tact, he had calculated erroneously; for the presence of a sympathetic nature is as much as words, and music and poetry develop the soul and make it more intensely susceptible to the highest influences. Perhaps lovers were never cured of their love by going to concerts together. When Dick listened to a grand and holy symphony, he felt an almost boundless power to be and endure; but when Celia sat beside him, with her richly glowing cheek, thrilling with her fine and subtle appreciation of every chord, he felt with redoubled keenness what he had to endure. He said to himself that on the whole he was glad that the business of the Legislature was being so promptly finished that the chances were that they would adjourn the last of March, which was almost at hand. Aleck was not glad. He was indignant that some measures which seemed to him imperative were considered of no immediate importance,

and that they were to be entirely ignored during the session. But the last week came, and the last day of it. He went to bid the sisters good by, as he was going home the next morning. He could not help seeing that Celia was disappointed that he was not accompanied by Dick, who had unaccountably absented himself for a week previous. Even Alice could not refrain from saying, "I thought Mr. Stacy would have come to bid us good by too."

"Perhaps he is not going to-morrow," suggested Aleck, though an instant later he remembered that Dick had distinctly told him he should be off in the first train the next day, and he reluctantly said so, but suggested that it was possible that he might have changed his mind. When Aleck was gone, a feeling of desolation came over the girls, and Alice realized how happy the winter had been to her, but Celia moved restlessly about, unwilling to go to bed, though it was too late to expect any one else. She was wakeful and feverish all night, and in the morning there was a fitful gleam in her eyes, and her hand trembled so that she found it impossible to guide her pen. Alice said nothing, she dared not say anything, and went away to her work.

Celia hurriedly set the room in perfect order, and then sat down to copy. She compelled herself to keep on, though she started with every footstep and strained her ear to catch every passing carriage. But in half an hour's time she looked at the single page she had written and saw that it was blotted and blurred till it was perfectly illegible. At that very moment the hall door certainly opened, a free, springing step came quickly up the stairs, and before Celia had time to stop trembling, there was a knock which she knew very well. She hastened to open the door, and there stood Dick Stacy with a face as bright, but less careless than usual.

"I can't come in," he said, yet stepping into the room. "I am going home in the next train, but I couldn't go without coming to say good by and thank you for making the winter very happy to me. I am sorry to be too late to see Miss Wilding, but you must say goodbye to her for me." As if he

had not purposely, though perhaps with only a half-consciousness, waited over one train that he might see Celia alone.

"I am very sorry—I mean I am very glad," began Celia, in a bewildered way, and he looked at her suddenly and saw the traces of her agitation.

He seized her hand impulsively, and said rapidly, "I am saying good-by to you forever, and you must forgive me"; he drew her closely to him and kissed her passionately, then, releasing her so suddenly that she almost fell, he dashed down stairs and was gone.

An exquisite thrill shot through her frame. If Dick had looked back, he would have thought her transfigured. The pathetic and hard lines which had been forming in her face seemed instantly to have vanished, her cheeks glowed, her hair glittered, and her eyes were soft and beautiful. The consciousness of being loved had filled up suddenly, perfectly, every dry and waste place in her nature.

"Yet he leaves me forever. O, why?" and with a low, moaning cry she threw herself on the sofa.

Are there mysterious beings who live beyond the world of sense and carry by unknown ways the sounds too feeble to beat upon the outer air? or what is the magnetic chain which binds heart to heart? Richard Stacy, tearing through the streets in a hack at a furious rate, heard that low cry, though he stopped his ears to escape it; and with a spasm of pain he pressed his foot hard on the floor of the carriage as if he were crushing the very soul of Satan beneath his feet. He had allowed only a little time to reach the station, lest in waiting for the train his courage should fail, and he should not go at all. Once in the cars, there was no stopping-place till he reached home, for the train was express; and there waited his own carriage and the coachman. As he had not arrived in the first train, they had sent the carriage the second time. He was angry, though without cause. If the carriage had not been sent, no one would have known of his arrival and retreat would not have been impossible. He might have returned to the city in the evening train. Yet he thanked his favorite sister who had been "sure Dick

would come, and would think it pleasanter to find some one waiting for him."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"GEORGE, what does this mean,— 'What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder'?"

The speaker was Bessie Craig, who had an inquiring brain, and wished her brother's views on all points.

It was a snowy, cosy day. Mrs. Craig's sitting-room was a very cheerful-looking place, for Mrs. Craig made a point of neatness and expended all her nature on trifles,—a good thing, perhaps. She had taste, in a certain way; that is, she knew when colors harmonized, and when an engraving was well executed, and whether its frame was *au fait*. The pictures which she had selected herself were all of one type,—babies and their mothers. She made a point of doting upon babies, especially her own, though it was convenient that Bessie should tend it most of the time; but then Mrs. Craig was so delicate and had so much to do. She had no flowers because flowers require time, and Mrs. Craig's time was so fully occupied. The baby was asleep in the next room now, and the mother was making an apron for it,—an apron of the plainest calico, but which she sighted at right and left, and held up to the light and asked her husband's judgment upon twenty times in five minutes, as to whether she had cut it *exactly* even, and would it be prettier scalloped or straight round the neck, till one would not wonder that she had so much to do if she did everything in the same way. Meantime she expended her remaining energies in hushing any attempt at speaking from the others by threatening them with the baby, and she instantly looked up at Bessie with her sweetest smile, and said reprovingly, "Bessie, my dear, the baby."

"O, excuse me, Susie," said Bessie, dropping her voice. "I really forgot. But, George, do tell me."

"Nonsense," said Dr. Craig, who was taking advantage of a stormy day to read at his own fireside.

"Don't disturb your brother," said Mrs. Craig, again sweetly reproving.

"It don't disturb him," said Bessie, unconsciously; "not a bit more than your asking him about that apron, only he always answers you and he thinks that I am of no consequence. I wish I had a husband, and then perhaps I should get answered sometimes." She pouted a little, and Mrs. Craig glowed with delight. A strong point with her was the harmony of herself and husband. The Doctor seemed annoyed, and, looking up, said, "You know what it means without asking."

"No, I don't," asseverated Bessie, with an injured look; "and you have always told me to ask about everything I didn't understand."

"Well, if you don't understand," said the Doctor, "you had better put the book away and try something simpler."

"But I do understand the rest of it," said Bessie, persistently, "and I think you might tell me this."

"He is busy," said Mrs. Craig, "but I will tell you. It is what ministers say when they marry people."

"O, is it?" said Bessie, opening her eyes. "Well, I don't see what it means any way."

"Why, when they are married, you know, God joins them together," explained Mrs. Craig; "and then they must always be together, that is, man must n't put them asunder."

"Of course that," said Bessie, contemptuously; "I knew that when I was a child. If people once get married, there is the end of it. But I don't understand the first part yet. I don't see what God has to do with marrying them. The minister marries them."

Mrs. Craig laughed. "Because the Bible tells people to marry," said she.

Dr. Craig looked up hastily. "Because God tells people to love each other," said he, "and people should never marry unless they love each other better than everybody else."

"O," said Bessie, "that's it, — is it? Well, I should like to know if all the people who are married do love each other so much as that."

"Mercy, no," said Mrs. Craig, gayly; "not one couple in a hundred."

The Doctor looked sternly at his wife, as if to say, "Why tell the child so? She will know it soon enough."

Mrs. Craig half colored, for she stood in awe of her husband, and he suddenly let fall his eyes on his book as if he repented the look.

Bessie's eyes opened wider than before. "Don't you?" said she.

The Doctor pretended not to hear. His face became graver and graver, but Mrs. Craig replied with the greatest ease: "Why, yes, of course; I love George and he loves me as much as we can possibly love anybody."

"Well, but what do you mean?" said Bessie, slowly. "If people get married when they don't love each other, then God *don't* join them together, — does he?"

"When you know more, you will be wiser," said Mrs. Craig, amused. Then, noticing the perplexed look on Bessie's face, she added, "No, I suppose he don't. It is wrong for people to do that way."

"Well, then," said Bessie, conclusively, "if God don't join them together, man *can* put them asunder, — can't he?"

Mrs. Craig went into such convulsions of laughter over this that the mystery was why the baby did not wake. "You would do for a lawyer," said she.

"It is n't best to interpret the Scripture too literally," said the Doctor, with a smile of which no one saw the bitterness.

"I will tell you what, Bessie," said Mrs. Craig, with great good-humor, "you must n't go to thinking such things as that, because they are wicked, and I don't know how you will turn out if you go on so. You see, if people don't love each other when they are married, they must learn to do so, and that makes it all right."

"I don't know," said Bessie, stoutly; "there are some people you *can't*."

"O, you don't understand," said Mrs. Craig, in despair; "but you will when you grow up. When people are married they *must* love each other; it is their duty, because they have always got to stay married."

"Isn't there any way of getting un-

married?" pursued Bessie, not yet satisfied.

"People can get divorced," said Mrs. Craig, "but I think that is wicked."

"Well, I don't," said Bessie, firmly. "If I got married to some ugly old man, I should want to get unmarried again, and I should hate him if I could n't. Should n't you, George? Would n't you get a divorce if you were in my place?"

George tried to laugh rather unsuccessfully, and answered seriously: "I hope never to live to see you divorced. The time for you to remember that a man is old and ugly is before you are married, and not after."

"You are against me too," said Bessie, in an aggrieved tone. "I think it is too bad. I always thought before that you and I had some — con — con — geniality." She brought out the long word as if that aggravated the offence. "But you are n't fair," continued she; "because you married somebody that was n't old and ugly, you can't understand how I should feel. I think you are selfish."

"Well, well, Bessie," said the Doctor, with a frown. "I am busy now, and you must n't talk. When you are older you will understand better what you are talking about. In the mean time don't be silly."

"I am not silly," muttered Bessie, with a cloud on her usually sweet face, "and I am sure George has always encouraged me to ask questions; I think he is cross." At that instant the baby woke most opportunely and began to cry.

"Poor little dear!" said Mrs. Craig, in a cooing voice. "Now your apron won't be finished to-day."

"Let me take her," said the Doctor, looking up pleasantly.

"No; will you, though?" said Mrs. Craig. "I know you want to read, but then it will be such a convenience."

"It is no matter about my reading," said the Doctor. "Come here, pussy."

The little one crowed and went very gladly to her father, who tossed her about and played with her in great glee.

"George, you are the best man in the world," said Mrs. Craig, sighting her apron again. "I am afraid those two button-holes are not exactly even. How

do they look to you? And yet I measured exactly, I thought."

"They are all right, so far as I can see," said the Doctor, indifferently; "and it is of no consequence if they are not."

"O what a barbarian!" said Mrs. Craig, playfully. "That is about all men know. If women seem as stupid about men's affairs as men do about ours, I should n't think anybody would need any other argument against Woman's Rights. No, George, I care too much about baby to be willing she should wear anything, even an apron, which is n't just right. 'What is worth doing at all is worth doing well.'"

"Did you ever read Charles Lamb's Popular Fallacies?" inquired the Doctor, pausing a moment in his frolic.

"No," said Mrs. Craig, uncomprehending. "You ought to know better than to ask me. With all I have to do, how can you expect me to have time to read?"

"True," said the Doctor; and, remembering that his proposal to read aloud evenings had been met with the assurance that he would disturb baby's nap, he added, with a slight shade of sarcasm in his voice, to which, however, as he well knew, his wife's ear was impenetrable, "I thought you might have had time before you were married and had the cares of life."

"O George!" said Mrs. Craig; "but, of course, you don't understand, because men never have any sewing to do. Before I was married, I used to do all my own sewing, and that is quite enough for one woman to do."

The Doctor took no notice of this remark, but went on playing with the baby. Bessie's precocious mind had taken it in, however, and she answered: "I don't see how that is, Susie. If all one woman can do is to make her own clothes, what becomes of the baby's clothes and the men's, besides all the rest of the work?"

"O, the tailors and seamstresses," said Mrs. Craig, innocently. "Besides, many people don't care about having things so nice as I do. And then I never had rude health."

"Susie," said the Doctor, suddenly, "I believe I must go and see that sick Mr. Winship. I think it will not be best.

to wait till afternoon. Can you take the baby?"

"O yes," said she; "but I think you are more particular than you need to be about him. You know you will never get a cent of money from him."

"I know he is very sick," said the Doctor with some sternness, "and very likely he can't afford to pay me."

"Well," said Mrs. Craig, with candor, "I always like to have you kind to the poor, though I think you ought not to wear yourself out over them; but when it comes to people who look as if they might pay and won't, it is another thing."

"They are just the kind of people who are least able to pay, very often," said the Doctor. "The worst kind of poverty is that which don't show. But, at any rate, it is n't best to let a man die because you have some scruples about him."

So saying he deposited the baby in its mother's arms and went out into the storm.

"Dear man!" said Mrs. Craig, affectionately, looking after him. "Bessie, George is the best man in the world. There never was a couple so happily married as we are."

The clouds on the Doctor's face settled darker and darker. He knew very well that there was nothing in Mr. Winship's case to have drawn him from his book and fireside that morning, but there was refreshment to him in the storm which beat cold against his face, and he kept saying over and over to himself impatiently, and then slowly, and then firmly, "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

He was so preoccupied that at the corner of the street he stumbled against a female form enveloped in a huge waterproof; and, stopping to apologize, he recognized Bessie's governess, Alice Wilding.

"Why, Miss Wilding," said he, in surprise, "how could you venture out in such a storm as this?"

"I thought," replied Alice, looking up brightly, though her face was wet with snow, "that, as I had made an engagement, I ought to keep it even if it did storm. But if I had known before

I started how severely it was storming, I believe I should have thought it impossible."

"Don't go home till I come with a carriage," said the Doctor. "It isn't prudent for you."

As he went on, he kept saying to himself, with a curious look on his face, "As I had made an engagement I ought to keep it, even if it did storm. But if I had known before I started how severely it was storming, I believe I should have thought it impossible." And as he approached Mr. Winship's house, he added, "After one has really started, though, the possibility of going back does not apparently occur to one."

When Alice had finished her lessons, the Doctor was still away. She did not wish to remain with Mrs. Craig, nor did she like to say she was waiting for the Doctor, since Mrs. Craig did not seem to think how the storm had increased, and so she resolved to go and see Robert a few minutes, and, if the Doctor did not come, to ask Miss Twigg's advice as to how she should get home.

Robert was at work practising. Miss Twigg was busy in the kitchen, but he was not alone. A young lady sat in a low chair by the fire, sewing. She had a sweet face, a little pale and sad perhaps, as if life had not been entirely bright to her.

Robert was in an unusually pleasant mood. "I am very glad to see you," said he. "Miss Wilding, this is Miss May, who has lately come to board with us. I think you have n't seen her before."

"No," said Alice, "but I am very glad to see her now. Don't stop practising, Mr. Rix. I want to wait here a few minutes, but I won't disturb you, and Miss May will talk to me."

So Robert went on playing, and under cover of the music the girls found it easier to talk, for they were both rather timid. It was not Alice's habit to make many advances, but Miss May had so sweet a look, and yet something so touching in it, that she felt like making a greater effort than usual. And so in the course of half an hour she had succeeded in drawing her out so far as to learn something of her history.

She learned that she was the oldest daughter of a large family, living in the country. She had had a great deal of housework to do, and had found that it wore upon her, and had determined to try sewing instead, — a less hopeless thing in her case than in many, for she was not only a rapid sewer, but had particularly learned the manner of lining furs, which proved not unprofitable. Her principal difficulty had been in finding a boarding-place. She had tried one or two boarding-houses, but the food had been poor and ill-cooked, and things not neat, and she had been obliged to share a room with three others. It was evident from her tone in speaking that her instincts were lady-like, and, however poor her life might have been, that these things annoyed her scarcely less than they would a lady born. About this time Miss Twigg, wishing to increase her income, had advertised for a boarder, much against Robert's will; but it had been necessary, as they had lost a portion of their little property in a recent fire. Miss May had thought herself fortunate to receive the place; and the fact that she and Robert sat so calmly in the same room proved to Alice that the usual repulsion between the dwarf and his fellow-creatures did not exist in this case. Miss Twigg afterwards explained how she had refused previous applications for the place because she dared not trust the people with Robert, and that with Miss May she had felt so sure of tact and delicacy that she had ventured to tell her about him and then introduce her to him. Being forewarned, she had betrayed no emotion at sight of him, and all had been well. Although Miss May was very susceptible to beauty, she was not so unaccustomed to disagreeable sights as to be affected by them in such a way as Celia, for instance, would have been.

Alice could hardly help sighing to see another joining the great army of seamstresses to escape doing housework, which she felt sure would be healthier and better in every way. Miss May explained, to be sure, that her next sister was now old enough to supply her place at home, and that the money she could earn would be more

acceptable than her services; but Alice felt sure there must have been something hard in the home life to force a girl like her alone into the city to live by sewing.

"Do you like the city advantages more than the country beauty, then?" she asked.

"Why, I don't think the city has any advantages," said Miss May, as if puzzled. "Things are cheaper, perhaps."

"I mean the advantages in art," said Alice, without smiling.

"O," said Miss May, "I did n't think of those."

It struck Alice as strange that one should think of anything else in going into the city.

"The shop-windows looked very pretty for a week or two," said Miss May; "but one soon gets tired of those, and my home is beautiful. Nothing could make up for losing that. There is a little dell just behind the house where we find the first hepaticas in the spring. I wish you could see it. Such beautiful green mosses covering the stones in the dark little brook, and such flowers all summer, — hepatica and bloodroot and anemone and columbine in the spring, and arethusa and star-flowers and Solomon's-seal in June, and in August the cardinals, and then the gentians till the late frosts. I am perfectly happy there with my little sisters."

"You will miss it when the spring days come," said Alice.

"I miss it now," said Miss May, the tears coming into her eyes; "for it is almost as beautiful in winter as in summer. I am never tired of looking at the beautiful shapes in the brook when it is frozen, and then the water gurgles underneath sometimes, and the air-bubbles rise to the surface of the ice. And when we have had a few warm days and then comes a cold snap, you can't think how beautiful the crystals are when we break off great pieces of ice and look below, for we hardly see them at all on top. And then the mosses are green all winter, and some little hardy evergreen ferns grow in beautiful tufts all about."

Color came into the girl's cheek as she spoke, and it seemed that she was speaking of something which was one

of the dearest and most intimate parts of her life. To one who loved natural beauty as Alice did, this was a key to unlock the heart, and she began at once to take an interest in the lonely girl.

Dr. Craig came in so soon that she had not time to talk longer with her that day, but she took occasion very soon to go and see her again, and before long something of acquaintance sprang up between them. It proved less, however, than Alice at first expected. It was evident, indeed, that Miss May was very lonely; that she was a person needing human sympathy, and not educated enough to have many resources within herself. Moreover, though there was great kindness of feeling between herself and Miss Twigg and Robert, it was certain that they were personally less than nothing to her, though she, with an obliging disposition and many ways of making a home pleasant, soon became much to them. She was quick-witted, and had, besides, a certain way of speaking sarcastically without being bitter which made her very entertaining, and she was sometimes so bright and gay that one who had not seen her face in repose might not have believed in its pathos. One might have thought that to her Alice would have proved the needed friend, but before they had seen each other three times, she realized that, though Miss May was not a reserved person, she yet held herself singularly in reserve, and that no one could approach her on any except the most external topics. And this was less easy. Alice felt that if they could meet soul to soul, there would be much to say, but they had scarcely any external interests in common. Alice's thorough education and keen mind, her taste for reading, and the wide range she had given herself, were a great contrast to the ignorance of her new friend. Miss May's only education had been at a district school. She could read with feeling, spell well, write a characterless, neat hand, and had no striking faults in language, — though in this respect she deserved great credit, for her pride had taught her grammar, which was a branch totally set at naught in the conversation of her parents. She knew nothing of books, nothing of art, nothing of music,

though she sang the popular airs correctly and prettily. She would have liked all these things had she been trained to do so, but they were not such inspiration and breath to her life that she felt the want of them particularly.

Alice took a great interest in her and thought about her often; but when she saw her, she could think of nothing to say. Celia, who was dreadfully lonesome, and found it difficult to live without society, wished to become acquainted with the young girl too. Of course, she could not go to see her, on account of Robert; but Miss May went to see the sisters at long intervals. Celia found even less to say to her than Alice had done, though her beautiful, sweet face touched her inexpressibly, and she found herself mentally composing a tragedy of which her new acquaintance was the heroine. Miss May went out very little, and never called except by special invitation; so in time her meetings with Alice became only casual, when the latter went in to see Robert, or insisted on taking the pale seamstress to walk, — for here she thought she saw an opportunity to do good. She took Miss May to the green-houses and to the picture galleries. Here was common ground, and they enjoyed it heartily, though Miss May was by nature a little stray wild-flower, and her eye was trained to find more quickly some rare tiny moss under brown leaves, and her heart to love it, than the gorgeous blooms of the conservatories; and for pictures, she liked them, she liked all pretty things, but she could not be said to appreciate many of them. Technically, of course, Alice was not a critic; but the soul of a picture spoke to her soul, and her insight into its poetry was marvellous. And while she was looking at that which was invisible to her companion, she loved to feel that the latter was enjoying some bouquet of wild-flowers or other Pre-Raphaelite sketch at the same moment.

Without these walks, as the summer drew on especially, Miss May might have faded completely, for she seemed not to think of the possibility of rest or recreation; perhaps she hardly felt the inclination for it, unless some one reminded her that she needed it. But

Alice could not ask her very often, for two reasons. In her daily round of duties, Bessie Craig was her first pupil, and she therefore had usually to go to all the others from that house, and by that time she found it too great a tax to retrace the whole distance in order to commence a walk. Then there was an uncomfortable number for walking, so Celia did not go with them, and Alice not only enjoyed walking with her sister most, but she felt how seriously Celia was needing her now. Since the breaking up of the Legislature the child had grown more and more restless and nervous. She worked feverishly, though bravely, for a while. The comfort of the last moments upheld her for a time. In her secret heart she believed the farewell could not have been forever. But as time passed on, and no word came, her heart sank. She had deceived herself. If Mr. Stacy had loved her, as she thought, he could not so hopelessly have left her. But what else could he have meant? She grew weak, thin, and listless. Alice was alarmed about her, and advised that she should stop working and go into the country for a few weeks. She herself would do her copying evenings, that she might not lose her situation. But, though Celia longed intensely for the green fields and quiet woods, she did not wish to go. She dreaded to be left alone without Alice to talk to, and she would not give up her work. But Alice insisted, until she told her, in her agony, of that last morning. Then, anxious as Alice was for her to try a change of scene, she realized that it would not do for her to be left without work, and that she needed a different remedy; so they stayed together through the hot, stifling summer, and when the first September breezes began to blow, Celia found life returning to her once more. She wrote her copies with a firm hand, and walked with a firm step.

"I will not be conquered, Alice," she said, one day. "The mystery of my sorrow is half its misery. But it cannot be solved, and meantime there *must* be, I suppose, a use for me in the world, and, though I don't see what it is, I know I never shall be of use till I can

stand strong in the midst of my grief and show that it has n't crushed me."

"And when you do that," said Alice, "I believe the very expression of your face may be a benediction to some who scarcely know you, and who do not know your sorrow at all."

"And yet, Alice," said Celia, with a sigh, "it is *so* hard, so hard to live, even, when there seems to be nothing for the future, and when you can see no use in living, though there may be some which you don't see. Ah, what a strange, sad world it is!

"Never morning wore
To evening but some heart did break."

If I did not cling with every fibre of my being to the belief that God gives us only just what we need, I should die."

CHAPTER XIX.

PEOPLE cannot be wretched forever. Something will happen after a while, even in the hardest lot; and that would be an argument from "analogy" against an eternal hell, if we could find no other. That election day comes in November does not make it impossible for something pleasant to happen then. The day when the election returns were published in the papers was a dull, gray day, and yet two young girls, who glanced anxiously over them, felt a sudden thrill like sunshine, for there, from their respective districts, were the names of Alexander Hume and Richard Stacy. Alice's pleasure was unalloyed, for she knew she could not fail to have a repetition of those long, delightful talks which she had enjoyed so much the previous winter. Celia tried to make herself believe that she did not expect Mr. Stacy to call, and thought perhaps she did not look elated, but still there was a freshness in her voice and a vigor in her step which told that hope had not wholly died out of her heart. Two months seemed a long time to wait for the opening of the session; but when one has hard work to do, the time does pass almost as if you were enjoying yourself. And so it came about that Christmas week was actually

present. Outwardly the sisters were far more comfortably situated than they had been a year before. Alice had as many pupils as she could teach now, though, it is true, they were all mere children, belonging to families not wealthy, and her earnings were in proportion, while it made her labor difficult to go from house to house instead of having them collected in a school; and Celia's copying really proved quite lucrative, as she became more dexterous in the use of her pen.

So it was possible for them to make each other little presents, and the afternoon before Christmas Celia sallied out in search of something for her sister. She had been looking at things for several weeks, and had nearly decided what to buy, but she had only on that day received her money. To these hungering and thirsting girls a book was worth more than anything else, and a book with close print and small margins and plain binding better than the handsome illustrated editions of a single short poem; so Celia reluctantly turned away from these latter, and bought in strong brown covers a copy of Alice's favorite "Aurora Leigh." She lingered, however, to examine the beautiful pictures and illuminated text of the others, so that it was almost dark when she left the shop to go home. The sun had already set, and Venus, large and lustrous, hung in the west, where the sky was yet rosy. As she hurried along, she tried not to say continually, "Only another week before the Legislature meets," but she could not keep the thought, and other thoughts which would come in its train, out of her mind. Walking along thus preoccupied, she met suddenly the very person of whom she was thinking, — Richard Stacy.

She stopped, with a little gasp of surprise; yet there was no reason for surprise. Mr. Stacy rarely failed to go to the city as often as once a week, and now, at any rate, what could be more natural than that he should come up to town a week before the session to see the Christmas decorations?

It was only for an instant she stopped. Then her pride came to her rescue, and she hurried on. But he had already seen her. In the moment when she

had stood irresolute there had been a shadow of irresolution on his face also, but as soon as she moved on it vanished, and he followed her. Before she knew what he did, he had taken her hand and drawn it within his arm. He held it there while he said in a low, breathless tone, "Ah, Celia, it is a kind fate which brings us together."

She summoned all her pride that she might answer without a quiver in her voice: "Why do you say that? If you had wished to see us, you might have done so. You knew where we were."

He held her still more closely, and they turned unheeding into a quiet, shaded street, where none but the stars could see them, and then he looked into her eyes and said: "Ah, Celia, if you knew how hard it has been not to go to you, you could not speak so coldly; for, dear, I *love* you."

It seemed to Celia as if the heavens suddenly opened and expanded, so beautiful and glorious was the world before her on that Christmas eve. Her pride seemed scattered to the winds. She could not ask him why he had left her so long, now that he was again with her. She could not answer him in any words but those he wished to hear, and they walked on slowly, passing through those few moments, so *very* few in the happiest life, when one may

"Press firm the lips upon the moment's brow,
And feel, for only once, I am *all* happy now."

Dick soonest remembered that he had something else to say.

"Did it seem cruel to you, darling, that I was so long away?"

"O yes," said Celia. "I thought I could not live."

"It is beautiful to hear you say that," said Dick, with a bright face, "though I would rather die than to cause you to suffer."

"But *why* were you away?" asked Celia, sweetly.

He hesitated. Could he tell her?

"Darling," said he, "can you trust me?"

"Wholly and forever," said she, instantly.

He turned his face away, and again a dark shadow came over it even in his moment of happiness; but with scarcely a pause, he answered: "Celia, I believed there was an insuperable obstacle to our love. You will think me faint-hearted, and yet you would not if I could tell you all. Even to you I cannot say all, and here is a hard test for your trust just before you. I had pledged myself in an enterprise in which others were involved, and I believed I could not honorably abandon it; but as long as I persevered, I could not say to you that I loved you. Afterwards the others abandoned it of their own accord, and in the delight of freedom I hurried to the city to see you. And yet so involved had I been that I felt it wrong to take any steps to see you; but, as I said at first, a kind fate brought us together, and I knew I was no longer hampered; so now I may be to you all I wish to be."

Vague as the explanation was, it satisfied Celia entirely, so complete was her faith in those she loved.

"I may change the old verse," said she, with a happy smile: —

"I could not love thee, sweet, so much,
Loved you not honor more."

Again he turned away, and the shadow was deeper than before.

"A lie, a lie, a lie," seemed to echo in his brain. "She is too true to discover it, but it is a lie."

"Ah! why not tell the truth?" sounded a voice in his ear.

"Yes, and lose her," said another.

"She loves you too much for that," said another; "she will cling to you still."

"But never respect you again."

"Yet you would be more worthy of respect than you are now."

"After all, you told no lie. The words were all absolutely true."

Whatever he thought, he said nothing of his thoughts to Celia; but they walked up and down the street, under the starlight, talking of the blessedness which had come to them, so long that Alice, who had returned home and found Celia out, began really to be worried, as the evening advanced, lest some harm had befallen her. But when they did

come in, — Celia with a face so radiant that it seemed as if no care or sorrow had ever laid its hand there, — it seemed scarcely necessary to ask for an explanation. Alice knew before a word was spoken what had happened.

Ah, what a happy Christmas eve it was in that little room! They had an ugly little black stove, to be sure, for economy's sake; but, with the damper open, even that managed to throw a gleam of firelight over the walls, saying dumbly but very earnestly, "I can't be a Yule log, but I will do my best." Alice had already laid the snow-white cloth on their little round table, but she had not cooked the supper, because Celia excelled in the housekeeping. So, with some merriment, the younger sister tucked up her sleeves, put on a white apron (her only one, she could not afford white aprons to do cooking on ordinary occasions), and compounded and fried a most delicious and savory omelet. The table was not big enough for three, in fact, it was a hard matter to make it do for two; but the china was beautiful and the silver solid, for Wilding and his wife had been fastidious, though not rich, and while they had left little to their children, that little had been perfect of its kind. Alice made her work-stand answer for her own tea-table.

Then the dishes had to be put in order, and Dick insisted upon wiping them, and made himself as much at home as he always did everywhere, though he had never before in this place been exactly easy.

Then there were all the days since they last met to be talked over, and all sorts of pleasant things, till Dick reluctantly tore himself away.

No more bitter days for Celia! She sprang up in the early Christmas morn, her heart full of blessing on the day in which Love was born. She danced about the house with a light step, found herself singing, dressed herself in her royal purple ribbons, — the only relief she had for the dingy black dress, and felt herself a new being.

"I shall buy me a purple dress to-morrow," said she, "I am not going to hoard up my money any longer." Then they both laughed at the idea of her

boarding money, when she had not a cent from her last quarter, and had only been paid the new one the day before.

On the breakfast-table they laid their little gifts, — the book for Alice, and a beautiful, bright, warm worsted jacket which Alice had herself knit for her sister. "I shall be presentable, after all," said Celia, joyously, putting it on, "for this covers the waist of the dress, and my white apron covers the worst of the skirt, and I don't need to have that hateful black anywhere near my face."

And she really did look like a gorgeous, glittering thing, as she heard the bounding steps of her lover coming up the stairs three at a time.

He, too, had brought his Christmas gifts, — for Alice, the most beautiful and exquisitely illustrated of all the beautiful holiday books; and for Celia a ring with a single diamond, pure and brilliant, at which she would have screamed with delight, but for the thousand-fold deeper feeling with which she received its significance. But Celia could wear diamonds, it was her right to do so.

He had brought also a magnificent bouquet to each of the girls. That for Alice was made of snowdrops and violets and pale roses and fragile heaths, lighted only by vivid green mosses and sprays of fern.

In Celia's it seemed as if all the wealth of the South American forests had been gathered. The flowers glowed and sparkled and almost burned, and the leaves were thick as wax; and they shed over the whole room a burden of fragrance.

"You were meant to live in the tropics," said Dick, rapturously. "It was never intended that you should grow up prosaically in a land of Sunday schools and the Multiplication Table. You have missed your vocation so far; now we will see what we can do. In the first place, pitch all that bundle of copying out of the window."

"All my work?" said Celia, with a slightly reproachful accent, looking straight into his face.

"Yes," said he, "you were not made for work. You were meant to dance all night by moonlight, and sleep in a lily-bell by day. O well, I see I have

hurt you, but I won't. We will save the papers. Bring them here to me. I will tie them up in royal-purple ribbons, and keep them forever and a day, because even menial work that you have done is encircled with glory." He held her softly and firmly with one hand, and reached the papers with the other; then, with a voice stifled with laughter, he added: "I meant to have worn them always in my vest-pocket, but you see my intentions are frustrated by their bulk. Good heavens! how industrious you must have been to accumulate such a bundle as this! It is forever the way, the work of this world is in antagonism with its sentiment; for though your work is just as dear to me as if I did not laugh, you could not really expect me to carry such a huge pile as this continually next my heart."

"No," said Celia, laughing; "you know very well I did not mean that. You are such a luxurious young man that you don't understand the nature of the case. I must explain to you that I work for my living, and even if your pocket would contain all my papers, I could by no means spare them."

"Nonsense!" said Dick, "do you suppose I shall let you work any more now? You know I am rich, and it is not likely I shall let you go on toiling and delving like a beetle."

"Yes, sir," said Celia, shaking her head merrily; and, lightly escaping from his arms, she stood firm, and emphasized with her foot. "I am a free and independent young woman, and I will take care of myself."

"Not to say a free and equal one," added Dick, laughing. "Listen to reason, *ma chère*; in my poor, forlorn, despised, subordinate position of cringing dependence, how do you think you would feel?"

"I think I should feel as you do," she answered, with a quick flush; "but I also know that if we changed places I should respect you more if you persevered in your determination to take care of yourself."

"Pooh!" said Dick, "I thought it was in the bargain that I was to take care of you. But, dear me! in these days of woman's rights we don't know what to expect. But *should* you object to telling me what you mean to do about it after

you are married? Of course I shall submit to everything, but do you mean to take in work or go out by the day?"

Celia blushed to the tips of her ears.

"When—when—well, when that time comes," said she, "I don't expect to do either, though I would gladly do it if my weak help *could* help you. But till then—I could not respect myself if—the knowledge of what has happened did not glorify my daily work enough to make me glad and proud to do it still."

Alice had providentially left the room, so Dick was free to express his appreciation of this sentiment in the manner best suited to himself.

"Well," said he, "I admit that, of course. You would enjoy doing it if it were necessary, but as it is not, I see no particular use in it."

"But why should I be idle?" said Celia. "I never felt less like it."

"Not idle," said Dick. "I expect to occupy quite a large portion of your time myself. You've no idea what a person I am to make calls when I once systematically set myself about it. Then the opera opens next week, and that, with all the concerts, theatres, lectures (don't make up a face at lectures; we won't go to one, for they don't have them in the tropics whence you emanate), and sleigh-rides, will make you sufficiently busy, I believe."

"Ah," said Celia, "but you have all your work to do besides those; consequently there must be left time for me to do mine."

"You are incorrigible," said Dick; "I see that you don't exactly believe that you belong to me yet."

"Yes, I do," said Celia, more earnestly than she thought. "I think an engagement is as sacred as a marriage; but then it is different, and we must still stand all alone, except the most beautiful part of all, that our souls are one."

"This was a little stronger definition of an engagement than Dick would have cared to call forth; but he checked his impatience, and answered pleasantly: "Nevertheless, I really can't see that you have proved that I have a less right to support you now than I shall have a few months hence."

"Perhaps not," said Celia; "but, at any rate, I feel it, and if I am wrong, why, at any rate, I need time to get a little accustomed to having something so grand as your—love given to me, before I can have room to receive anything more. You know, sir,"—and her voice broke into a ripple of laughter,— "that I am a Woman's-Rights woman and proportionally hard to manage."

"I know it well," said Dick, pretending to groan. "The day we are married I take you to the tropics, where they don't have any woman's rights, nor even a Woman's Journal."

"Where every prospect pleases,
And only man is vile,"

suggested Celia, with a little malice.

"Well, my dear," said Dick, "if you will work, so mote it be; but even a female orator don't object to bettering herself if she has a chance. It don't go against her conscience. I will give you ten cents a line if you will write for me instead of your present employer, and that is a deal more than you get now. I won't give you very hard work either, only one little eight-page *billet-doux* to me *per diem*."

"Be still!" said Celia, laughing. "I hope the *billets-doux* I do write you will seem worth more than ten cents a line to you."

"Well, seriously," said Dick, "I have a good deal of copying, law-papers, etc. which I want done, and I should like to employ so skilful an amanuensis as yourself to do it."

Celia laughed incredulously.

"Well," said Dick, pretending to be grieved, "so, from mistrust of my motives, you will make me go prowling about the city for a copyist. You will work for others, and not for me."

"No," said Celia, proudly; "bring your papers here, and I will do them every day after I finish my regular work. But those who love each other should not offer each other money."

"What a glorious girl you are!" said Dick, with admiration. "But I wish you would let me take care of you."

Celia shook her head slowly, and then, looking at him, said thoughtfully: "Is it possible that you, who belong to an aristocratic family, feel humiliated in

the least by having the girl to whom you are engaged work for her living?"

"Yes, it is pure selfishness on my part," said Dick, with a wicked twinkle. But when he saw her face fall suddenly, he immediately changed his tone. "No, Celia, you know better. I love you and am proud of you, *more* because you do as you do than if you did not do it. My aristocracy makes me often impatient of the ignorance and want of cultivation of many poor people, but I never yet failed to respect a man because he was poor or because he labored. I must own I should be ashamed to have people believe that I did not want to help you, though."

"They will not believe that," said Celia; "no one who knows you can ever think so, and I *feel* that I am right, so my resolution is fixed."

"Well," said Dick, "I won't bother you then, and it will only be for a little while, because the wedding-day must come before next summer."

CHAPTER XX.

THE day had dawned for Celia, but I suppose that Alice did not see the rosy flushes of the sunrise until a week later, when the Legislature again convened.

"Dick tells me he has been improving the golden moments," said Aleck, when the two called the very first evening.

"You should have come yourself and had a little Christmas lark, before the hard work began," said Dick, gayly.

"I don't believe in that for people who have any less excuse than you," said Aleck, with a smile. "I had something to do elsewhere."

"Doctoring and farming?" asked Dick.

"And a little political economy," replied Aleck. "I don't want to go home again this winter with the feeling that the country would have been as well off if I had stayed there."

"It is only a vain nature which expects to move the world," said Dick, patting him on the back.

"I don't expect it," said Aleck; yet we know he did, for he was an enthusi-

astic young man. "But I do want to do some service."

"They also serve who only stand and wait," said Celia, absently, thinking of Dick rather than of what she was saying.

"That is, if they can't 'pitch in,'" said Aleck. "But I don't think I was formed for that."

"No," said Dick; "and if you don't get reformed, you will turn into a reformer. But don't, for you will get abused."

"I wish I had ever done anything worth being abused for," said Aleck.

"Combateness large," said Dick, seizing his head in a phrenological manner. "If this individual had lived in the French Revolution, he would have assisted in carrying all his dearest friends to the guillotine for the sake of his *principles*."

"And in the days of chivalry," said Alice, sweetly, "this individual would have been a knight-errant."

And herewith the quartette resolved itself into two duets.

"I hate the way things go in the Legislature," continued Aleck. "Such confusion and inattention, and on minor matters voting at random! I think that is wicked, even if the question is about a cup of tea. And it is sickening and despicable to think how we have to bribe men to gain any point. Not by money," he went on, for he saw Alice's look of horror, "but by appeals to their passions and prejudices."

"I can hardly imagine your doing as much as that," said Alice.

"No," said Aleck, "it is n't in me. I believe in open fights, and so lose all my points. The only thing I accomplished last year was to vote for one or two new railroads. I constantly expected the older members to push on the great questions, but this year I shall not be so modest. I shall talk about everything just as many minutes as I can get the floor. I shall be called meddlesome, and perhaps gain nothing, but I shall know I have done as well as I could."

"And that is the utmost gain for ourselves, and others too," said she.

"Well, Alice," he answered, "I doubt if that would satisfy me. I doubt if it ought. That would do to think about last summer when I had nothing to do

but fret over last year's work; but when we begin a new year, we must believe in our *providentia*."

"I hardly fancy you doing nothing but lament the past all summer," said Alice, amused.

"O, not with my handkerchief at my eyes!" said Aleck. "I had doctoring and farming enough to do; but that is a sort of hand-work to which anybody may be trained. Now, when you have a chance to give your best thoughts to mould higher laws to lift the country, there is then head-work and heart-work. So you see the fascination of legislating in ever so small a way, pitifully as we seem to fail."

"Ah," said Alice, "you only seem to fail, because, as you approach nearer your ideal, it becomes so much more glorious that you do not realize that you have already passed the spot where it first shone dimly."

"I know it," said Aleck, earnestly. "It is only with you that I seem faithless."

"I arouse your antagonism, I suppose," said she, with an uncomfortable smile.

"O no," said he; "but everybody else has less faith than I, and I feel I must uphold them. But you I know I cannot injure, even if I grieve you. That is selfish."

"No," said Alice, after a moment, keeping back the tears; "I am so glad to help anybody ever so little."

He looked at her as she sat with her head a little bent forward and a faint color in her delicate face, as if he thought she could help him more than a little.

"I am not often so chicken-hearted," said he. "I am only taking advantage of seeing you to wheedle you out of a little sympathy for here and there a disconsolate hour scattered through the summer. I was so disappointed in my attempt at legislating, which, you know, *per se*, is nobler than doctoring or farming, though the reality is such a farce that I may seem ironical."

"If you are thinking of ideals," said Alice, "the ideal physician stands pretty high."

"Yes," said Aleck, "it seemed about the highest thing till I was bitten with politics. One can do a good deal in the

way of preventing disease if the people are not too pig-headed. Then if you have a very great mind, and are willing to sacrifice an unlimited number of cats and dogs, you may discover some good thing. And in surgery you can be absolutely sure of your ability before you try experiments which may kill people, and the rest is all courage and firmness, so you have a chance for heroism, and when it is done it is your own definite work; while with medicine, since you don't like to think it is you who kill, you can't be easy that it is you who cure."

"Surgery is grand," said Alice; "yet — forgive me, — it must be so disagreeable."

"We sometimes have a fictitious standard for disgust," said Aleck, "and by constant habit we get accustomed to things. But to learn dissection ought to be disgusting to anybody who does not keep the end constantly in view. Then it may be — well — sublime."

"There is *nothing* common nor unclean." With you it must be an ever-present thought."

"I read the other day," said Aleck, "of a man in a great city who traded in offal. I read how, by his arrangements, the impurities taken at once, collected and sealed, so that all offence was removed from that quarter of the city, afterwards enriched miles and miles of blooming country. The man had utilized nuisances; and to handle nuisances for that end is not sickening, but heroic."

"I suppose there are manifold uses for everything," said Alice; "and when we know them all, the earth will seem as fresh as a rose without a stain upon it anywhere."

"They are talking now," said Aleck, "about preserving the flesh of the immense herds of cattle slaughtered for their hides about Buenos Ayres, which now only disfigure the earth, and so supplying poor people with meat. When we use all our resources, think what a population the world can hold."

"Yet *some time* it will be more than full," said Alice; "and though you will laugh, I confess it troubles me. I can't believe in a moral and mental millenium with a scarcity for the body."

CHAPTER XXI.

"By that time we shall either have 'developed' into beings who need no food, or emigrate to other planets," said Aleck. "I honestly believe in eternal progression, and I don't think we shall finally burn up or freeze up, notwithstanding the philosophers, while there are unaccomplished possibilities in this world. And if God does do that, it will of course be right, and in some way best for the universe, though hard for the few individuals on this planet et."

"And the 'few individuals' are the ones I am sorry for," said Alice. "I am constantly weighed down by the destitution of those whom the earth might now support, who are yet starving. They may be few, but the suffering of each is to him the full measure possible; it is as great to him as if the whole creation suffered too."

"Not the full measure," said Aleck. "Is n't it easier to suffer anything yourself, when you know many others are happy, than if all were suffering like yourself?"

"O yes," said Alice; "but to the masses, poor and unreflecting, this comfort would not come."

"True," said Aleck; "and I too care for the individuals. But 'barley-feeding' is not the great end; and though God might have distributed the population of the earth so that all should live in comfort, we should have lost the spur which has made us mental and moral beings. I never envied Adam. I can't prove much, but I believe from my heart that 'all partial evil' is not only 'universal good,' but particular good also. A temporary sacrifice of an individual or a race may be needed, perhaps, to benefit a higher one (as I find it possible to kill butterflies to study them); but, in the end, this very sacrifice must in some way work the best good to the being sacrificed. Nothing was created for anything else, though it may be used for something else, and, in helping another, help itself."

"It is my faith that every flower enjoys the life it breathes, and 'every flower that is plucked becomes immortal in the sacrifice,'" said Alice, smiling. "Aleck, you give me a great deal of comfort."

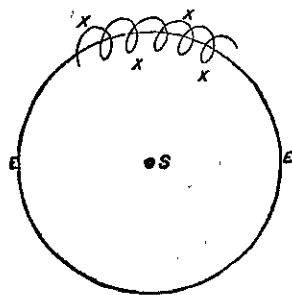
"ALECK," said Alice, one evening, "must we always be in a mud-dle? I thought when I struggled with the ubiquitous problem of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and finally felt certainty, that I could nevermore be moved, and now your scientific theories have quite upset me."

"The old story!" said Celia. "I had no sooner finished the last example in the arithmetic than a new edition was published with miscellaneous ones at the end."

"Did you expect to stick dismally in the same spot through eternity?" said Aleck to Alice.

"I expected the circle to expand forever," said Alice, "but that its centre would not change."

"See here," said Aleck, taking up a sheet of paper, and drawing upon it in this wise. "Let S be the sun, EE the earth's orbit, and x, x, x, x , the moon's



orbit. The moon seems to go backward sometimes and to be true only to her earthly centre, yet the epicycloid is as perfect as a simple curve and grander for its very complication. And when the whole solar system circles round some far-off sun which we may not even see, we may think we have wholly lost the centre. But, if we keep true to our own central sun, which we do see, that is sure to complete the vast cycle for us some day."

"Your way of enlarging the circle is better than mine of expansion from a single centre; but in science, you know, you have just been teaching me that the circles also contract, that the heat of the sun is maintained by the meteors that fall into it."

"Not yet proven," quoth Dick, from the corner where he was carrying on a parenthetical conversation with Celia.

"That is Alice's way," said Celia. "If one theory is a bit tougher than the rest, she always works out that one."

"I can't help following the theoretic suggestions which come into my head," said Alice. "And this theory of the sun's heat is most fascinating because it seems most true; but if it is true, by and by our own world will be drawn into the vortex by the same laws and will be absorbed in the sun."

"Who is afraid?" said Aleck, cheerfully. "When that happens, myriads of ages hence, the powers of the earth will have been developed to the uttermost, and the Beacon Street people by that time will be just fitted to enjoy the glorious clash of world with world. It is as sure as that the shock will come."

"Yes," said Alice; "that is n't the puzzle. But when the whole solar system becomes a unit and falls into its central sun, and so on and on, no matter how long the time is, in the end comes the aggregation of the universe, and it is *limited*, finite."

"You have forgotten that the end never comes to *infinity*," said Aleck.

"I know," said Alice. "Since every step is beautiful and the steps are infinite, one need not fear. Yet the consolidation of worlds seems less grand to me than their expansion. It is a cold theory to me."

"Though hatched up to account for all the heat in the universe," interpolated Dick.

"And the next best theory, that the condensation of the sun produces its heat, is just as selfish, still drawing in towards a centre instead of giving out from it."

"Perhaps the gravity of some yet unseen orb may shake us up in a different direction by and by," said Aleck, laughing. "So we need n't cry yet."

"But for the spiritual analogies!" said Alice.

"As what?"

"The process of aggregation instead of evolution!" said she. "No atom of matter is ever lost or created, no atom

of force, and I suppose we *must* say, no atom of soul. The infinite must then have been completed from the foundations of eternity. And what is a complete infinity? This is not a new thought to me, but a new realization. Then there is Darwin, whom I can't help believing. The race improves, but I—who am I?"

"You are not an elephant, you are a mastodon," quoth Aleck, with sparkling eyes.

"We evolve and evolve endlessly, and lose our own individuality, I am afraid," said Alice, doubtfully.

"I thought you believed in the immortality of all animate things down to flowers," said Aleck; "and began to guess at the vitality of matter."

"The correlation of forces teaches me that no vitality can ever be lost," replied Alice, "and chemistry suggests how faint is the dividing line between the animate and inanimate. It seemed strangely beautiful at first, and gave a force and vigor to the idea of immortality which thrilled me, but the conclusions do not satisfy. The plant dies, and the new one in the spring may be like it, but is not the same."

"But the very leaf that falls must still exist, under changed conditions."

"But in a lower life," said Alice; "and retrogression is worse than annihilation. Whatever life there is in the leaf *per se*, the life which made it a plant has gone,—whither?"

"*Quien sabe?*" said Aleck, lightly. "Evidently not into the new seed, for many plants and animals grow to maturity while the parent yet lives."

"Ah!" said Alice. "A plant will grow and grow as long as you cut off the flowers. But once let the seeds ripen, and it dies. That looks as if the individual life had been transmitted."

"How do we get whole acres of a plant from a single parent?" said Aleck. "That looks like evolution."

"The plant imparts to each of its children the power to absorb nourishment from the earth. It creates nothing, but transforms the earth to higher uses."

"Is n't that enough?" said Aleck.

"It is still aggregation, and not evolution."

"However, since no new spirit is created and since all lower organisms are being transmuted to higher, we must have lived from eternity, and shall live to eternity hereafter."

"I wish I need not believe that," said Alice. "We have forgotten our pre-existence and so lost our identity, and may lose it again in the same way."

"We do not lose what the past has made us, at any rate," said Aleck, stoutly. "And that is the main thing."

"O yes," said Alice. "Still I don't want to lose myself or my friends."

"Nor I," said Aleck; "but the doubt is a fancy, and I answer with a fancy. The higher we get the more we comprehend of the lower. I can understand a child better now than I could when I was a dozen years old. Perhaps in the next world I shall see back beyond my infancy. But whether our immortality is conscious individualism or not, I know it does not consist in living in our children. The body and mind of the aged wane, I know, as if they had transmitted their powers gradually; but the fact that any possible parent, who has no child, is not exempt from death or failing powers, proves that the soul does not simply pass into another of the race, or 'conservation' and 'Darwin' must fall to the ground."

"But the general law is that the soul of the child shall be greater than that of the parent," said Alice; "that is, the combined soul of the race is greater each year. Where does the *extra* spirit come from, if not from the aggregation of lower forms of life? Must I believe that by and by we are all to be absorbed in Deity?"

"I can't answer you, Alice," said Aleck. "But the infinite is infinite and must be right, so we can never come to a finality which will deaden us."

"When I talk about my puzzles, they don't seem so hopeless, after all," said Alice. "You help me a little out of the muddle."

"Which I helped you into, you say. But I will not do so any more."

"Yes, you must," said Alice, with a smile. "I like large thoughts if they

are hard. Since I *know* that God is good, nothing can really trouble me, though, of course, no one can see his way clear in a moment in anything worth thinking about."

"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," sighed Dick. "They always have such a pat text to help them out of any muddle. If they were only half as good as their doctrines!"

"If their doctrines were only half as good as they!" returned Alice. "I have seen such beautiful lives lived by Christians."

"Yes," said Aleck. "I sometimes find myself admiring the Pilgrim Fathers; (rest their souls, though they did their little utmost to keep other people's from resting!) for anybody to follow his conscience unflinchingly where it leads is grand, even if it leads him wrong."

"And that is what they really did," said Alice, musingly, "though not what they thought they did. They would not have owned that they were Kant's disciples so far as to obey their intuitions."

"The trouble was," said Aleck, "that they wanted everybody else to obey the Puritan intuition, and that made a mess."

"I like one thing about Christians," said Alice. "They believe in doing absolutely right, and that *every* transgression is wrong. When they are true to their tenets, they cannot *let things slip*."

"O Alice," exclaimed her sister, "how you have forgotten! I think we saw slipping enough at school."

"Yes," said Alice, "and so far they were untrue, and owned themselves untrue, to their profession."

"More than that," said Celia. "How many times have you heard those teachers say that no matter what a person did after he was a Christian, Christ had borne all his sins and he would consequently be perfectly safe anyway, though, of course, it was well that he should be decently moral!"

"I don't think the teachers often said that," said Alice; "though the revivalists did. And after all, there is a germ of truth in it, though they disfigured it so. They meant that no sin could shut

us out from God, except as we chose to shut ourselves out. It is right to make that the unpardonable sin, and they only failed to see that, if they make it so, there can be no such thing as eternal punishment. For when the will changes, in whatever life hereafter, then the sin ceases to be unpardonable. They say, I know, that the will *cannot* change after death, but if it really cannot, then the incapacity is from God, the creature is not responsible, and so not unpardonable."

"What a lawyer you would make, Miss Alice!" said Dick. "In the days of Woman's Rights, I shall have to look well to my fame, lest I be cut out entirely."

"There must be some vitality in Christian life," said Aleck, "or they could not at the same time believe in eternal torture and the goodness of God. It shows how deep the instinct of this must be, that any still hold it, when they believe that that very goodness demands the eternal sacrifice of themselves and all their friends."

"A Christian life is one of renunciation all through," said Alice, — "that is, a truly Christian life, — and that is its chief glory. I suppose it is because it is founded upon a sacrifice."

"The life of Christ was so sublime," said Aleck, "that his example still kindles the lives of his followers, notwithstanding that the supremely selfish doctrine they build upon — that the suffering of the guiltless can clear the guilty — is enough, one would think, to quench every spark of nobleness in the soul."

CHAPTER XXII.

"BLESSINGS on you!" exclaimed Dick, with his fresh voice, dashing into the little sewing-room one morning about the last of May, and giving a kiss to Celia while he held out his hand to Alice. "We must n't save all our good times till after we are married, Celia; so put your hat on. I have a horse at the door, and we will scour the wildwoods to-day, if you please."

"What a tantalizing creature you are!" said Celia. "Why do you sing

such a siren song in my ear when you know I can't possibly go unless I put off my wedding-day a week?"

"Nonsense!" said Dick, "you will be so much fresher after this that you will do two days' work in one to-morrow. And if you don't, you *shall* have a dress-maker."

"You had better go," said Alice; "you will be quite worn out if you go on sewing so steadily."

"It will only be for a week, though," said Celia, hesitating and flushing.

"And then you are to rest till the end of your days!" cried Dick rapturously, giving her another kiss. "Still, 'now is the accepted time.'"

"O, I shall go, of course!" said Celia. "I knew I could n't resist; but if my wedding-gown is n't done, will you agree to —"

"Marry you in a calico dress? Of course I will."

"You know I did n't mean that. I meant, will you agree to postpone the wedding?"

"Pooh!" said Dick. "As if you can ever make me believe that *you* want it postponed. By the way, *ma chère*, where is the wedding garment? Please give me a peep at it."

"Of course not," replied Celia. "That is never the way to do. You must wait till I have it on, when you are expected to be dazzled and blind."

"To be sure," said Dick; "but I have a very particular reason for wanting to see it, for I am terribly afraid it will turn out to be a white thing of some sort, and though you are the most beautiful woman in the world, Celia, you know you can't wear white without being hideous."

Celia bit her lip as if she would cry.

"There, I knew it," said Dick. "Why did n't you consult somebody who had taste, — like myself, for instance? I should have told you to wear purple."

"Half-mourning, Dick!" said Celia, scornfully and half laughing. "What would that have presaged?"

"O, bother! How can I be expected to know the language of color! But royal purple ought to do. You will be a queen on that day, and you might dress like one. But you may wear

scarlet if you like, and a wreath of cardinal flowers."

"Come, Dick, acknowledge that a man has no sense of propriety," said Celia, laughing. "Blood-red would be a worse symbol than mourning."

"Nevertheless, those are your shades, Celia, and in some way ought to be typical."

"But, Dick," said Alice, "brides must wear white, you know, and Celia will look beautiful, though you don't believe it."

"I do believe it, though," said Dick, proudly; and then added, playfully, "But I do insist that the rest of the *trousseau* shall be purple and scarlet."

"You know better than to expect me to have a *trousseau* at all," said Celia; "you must make up your mind to be satisfied with a plain bride."

Nevertheless she did not look plain as she put on her silken hat with its golden cord and tassel, and ran down stairs to the carriage. She was not beautiful, but a more incongruous word than "plain" could hardly have been used. The day was perfect, and Dick had a pride about horses. The motion was luxury to Celia, and when they reached the first stretch of beech and maple woods, the fresh green was like ecstasy.

"Dick, do you see those lovely wreaths of low blackberry, with their perfect white spheres of buds?" she said, in a moment. "I must have some."

So Dick gathered her some garlands of them, saying meantime, "I can't think of anything but bridal wreaths just now, and it strikes me this will be exactly the thing for you next week."

"If they would only keep fresh," said Celia; "besides, they are full of thorns." "And so characteristic," laughed Dick.

"Impertinent," said Celia, half smiling.

"Ah, darling child, you know I could n't love you half so well without the thorns," he said, in an intense voice.

Affectionate as Celia was, she had about her a kind of reserve which prevented her from responding when another said anything affectionate; so she only said, a few minutes later, "I seem to hear the voices of the wood-

fairies calling to me now as they literally did when I was a child."

"Literally?" said Dick, not understanding.

"Yes," said Celia. "Father made all legends real to us when we were children. He used to tell us about the good fairy, with two hundred and forty thousand eyes, for instance."

"O, what an imagination!" said Dick.

"It was true, though," said Celia. "It was a dragon-fly, you know, and we actually saw her with her eyes and wings."

"Too bad!" said Dick. "You had no room left for fancies."

"O yes. Do you suppose it shook my faith in fairies to have them appear to me in *propria persona*? Every cocoon which I kept till it opened became the consummation of a fairy tale to me. The oriole used to call to me as plainly as you could, 'Celia, look here!' I watched the ant-hills, and knew that the castles with their trains of black slaves, which were built by magic in a single night, could be no myth. I found so many of the stories come true that I was always searching the fields and woods for the end of the others."

"What a beautiful and poetical childhood!" said Dick, with a happy look.

"You see how it happens that I love the natural sciences dearly, dearly," said Celia, with enthusiasm.

"So don't I. But I *shall* love them if you talk to me," said Dick, gayly. "I begin to feel the divine spark already communicated, and by the time we have been married three months I dare say I shall have a butterfly-net and collecting-box and scour the country."

At this absurd picture, more absurd for Dick than for any one else in the world, they both laughed, and they talked no more about natural sciences that day. They found another topic more absorbing to both as they drove at twilight through the sweet woods with the solemn stars above them. Celia was perfectly happy, and Dick—perhaps. As they emerged from the last grove, just before they entered the city, the horse suddenly shied, startled, it seemed, by the figure of a girl approach-

ing. It was not too dark to see her. She looked straight into the carriage, and gave a sudden and convulsive shudder.

"Why, Dick, what's the matter?" said Celia, for she could have averred that Dick too had started.

"This confounded horse is afraid of everything," said Dick, harshly, "and that woman thought she was going to be run over."

"I am almost sure I know her," said Celia, perfectly reassured. "I think she is the young lady with the sweet, sad face who lives with Miss Twigg and Robert Rix."

Dick made no reply, but drove into the city at such a rate and with such a clatter that talking was out of the question. He kissed Celia passionately, as he said good by, but he would not go into the house. He was still driving furiously far out in the country, long after Celia was asleep, with her face in a warm, happy glow, remembering, even in her dream, that the gift of the gods had come to her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE morning of the wedding-day came. Though it had involved so much stir and confusion to the two sisters, who had no one to help them, it was a very simple and quiet affair. Dick, though a great stickler for etiquette in other people, found it too much trouble to follow it very closely himself, and Celia hated ordinary ceremonies. There were no wedding-guests except Dick's family and Aleck.

An hour before it was time to go to church came a box for Celia from Dick, full of exquisite wreaths of blackberry with not a single unfolded bud. How they were preserved no one knew, but Dick was in the good graces of the florist, and had coaxed him to use all the occult means at his command, so the flowers were as fresh as the dew which almost rested on them still. Celia twined them among her curls in a fantastic manner, which no one else could have borne, and caught them around her dress in various bizarre ways; so

when the parties met at church Dick whispered gayly in her ear that she looked "*perfectly imperfect*," "*faultlessly faulty*," notwithstanding her abominable white gown. The "white gown," in fact, was of as rich a silk as if she had been the daughter of an Indian prince. A poor girl like her must have had the pride of Lucifer to have been able to buy it. But Celia would enter no family except on equal terms. She could always wear rich things, and she was magnificent on this day.

"Ah, my dear," said Alice, proudly, "you look like the Spirit of Genius. You are all aglow, shot through and through with living fire."

Marriage was no weeping festival to Celia. She was perfectly happy. She was not like other girls in having home and friends to leave, though it is true that Alice alone had been more to her than home and friends together are to most people. But love was to her a divine elixir which permeated every cell of her being and left her no space for regret.

Alice, standing apart, was able to analyze that day, and a strange, to her unaccountable, sadness took possession of her.

Dick was handsome and flushed with gladness. Alice knew that he loved Celia wholly, and that he was a gallant and grand young gentleman; but she thought she saw a generic difference between the two lovers, the hopeless difference between genius and talent, and she believed that Dick had not the power to appreciate the deepest depths in Celia. Yet she was mistaken. In actual love there can be no deception, and the two loved each other. Celia recognized intuitively the best of Dick, but it was unconsciously, and she did not yet know him. It was necessary that Alice should know the language before she read the hieroglyph.

The marriage was over, and the party left the church. As the bride and bridegroom passed out, a veiled figure came suddenly from an angle in the porch, and brushed quickly before them. Celia did not know the figure, but as it turned, for a moment the veil was thrown back, and an intense, thrilling, despairing look rested on Dick. It was

so managed that no one else saw the face, no one but the bride saw even the figure, and it had vanished in an instant; but Dick stopped and turned pale, gentleman though he was. Celia could not help noticing it, but she was so proud in herself and so trusted him that she said nothing and asked no question. He was himself at once, and the incident was not alluded to, though the wife found that in spite of her trust she could not quite forget it.

There was not even a wedding-breakfast. Dick's family made their adieus at the church porch, and Aleck and Alice went home with the newly married couple. Half an hour later, Celia was ready in her travelling suit for her journey, and they went away at once.

Aleck went away too, rather abruptly Alice thought, and had she believed him capable of unkindness she might have thought it unkind that he should leave her so entirely alone when he must know how she would feel about losing her sister. But she never moped; so she took off her white muslin dress and put on her usual black one, and quietly put away any trifles of Celia's which had been left about, and then sat down. With half-curious amazement, she understood for the first time that she was wholly alone. Of course she had a holiday, and she could not read or write, so she seemed left utterly vacant. Aleck had said he would come in the evening, but he was going home next day, so she could henceforth have no companion but her work. She sat wearily for a few minutes, almost ready to think that life held nothing for her, and then tied her hat on and went to see Robert Rix.

Aleck came in the evening, as he had promised, and told her he was sorry for her, talked for an hour or two about science and what he hoped to do for the people at home, shook hands cheerfully and went away, leaving her with a headache and a sense of desolation stronger than if he had not come at all.

As for Dick and his bride they followed their own sweet wills for some weeks. Dick had plenty of money, and nothing that he thought of the smallest consequence to do. So they would

ride for a day in the cars, and then get a travelling-carriage fitted up, and lounge in that for a week, stopping at queer old farm-houses for the night, picnicking in the woods, and sometimes even camping out on the mountain-tops at night.

After the first few weeks they concluded this was better than travelling by rail; so Dick bought a sumptuous carriage of his own, and hired a man to do the cooking and travel in a wagon with tents, provisions, and so forth. But they could not be contented without still further variety; so sometimes they left the carriage with the servant, and had a pedestrian tour for a day, or cantered away on horseback. They would ride on indefinitely into the deep woods, trusting to luck for a shelter. They played all manner of pranks. One night they could find no place to stay in except a farm-house where several inmates were ill; it was raining too hard for them to camp out, and the people were so hospitable as to let them stay, inconvenient as it was. They found a boy poring over his books at every spare moment, and discovered that he meant to be educated, though he said, with a hopeless sort of air, that he should never have money enough to go to college. "Dick, I should like to send that boy to college," said Celia. "Let's do it," said Dick, gayly. "O, I forgot I was rich enough for such things!" said Celia, laughing; and they agreed it should be done. So from the next post-office they sent the lad a check large enough to pay his way decently through college, though Dick said it was a confoundedly small sum for a fellow; but Celia insisted on being economical, and said that no boy of spirit would want to be indebted for luxuries. She was not given to quoting Scripture and had left her Bible at home, but it was too good a joke to miss, so she scribbled on the envelope, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

"Seems to me you are getting conceited," said Dick, with a laugh.

"Yes, it would have been more modest to give them the reference, but of course I don't know it, and I shall be

abundantly happy if the quotation itself is right."

They seldom did such expensive things. But they managed to have some fun. In one village they pretended to be Italians, and begged a shelter by gestures, and were convulsed with laughter at the remarks made in their hearing about the supposed foreigners.

One day, when their jollity was at its height, they drove up in state to a little inn, and Dick had some hand-bills struck off, announcing that Professor Hippocrates, the renowned character-reader, accompanied by Madam Zucconi, the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, and the best living clairvoyant, would deliver a free lecture that evening. And Dick read characters to his heart's content, and Celia told fortunes all the evening.

"It is Midsummer to-day," said Celia, one morning. "Let's celebrate."

Of course, Dick agreed, and they concocted a plan to their minds. The man was sent to a neighboring village to buy groceries, and calico dresses, and candles, and all manner of odd things, and the bride and bridegroom spent the day in making evergreen baskets of most capacious size. At nightfall Celia, dressed in white, cast her hair loosely about her, disguised herself by drooping garlands of green leaves, and they entered the village. Dick filled her baskets with the useful things, and she carefully hung them at door after door, waiting at a little distance while the door was opened, and then vanishing like a strange ghost, so that nobody could see how she looked and only knew that a strange lady in white, with floating hair, had left the gifts; and as she left them at the poorer cottages, you may be sure they were welcome. Then they drove fast and fleetly out of the town, which they never saw before or afterwards, and left a little romance behind them for the sober Yankee people who had outgrown fancy and superstition together.

Perhaps other people who travelled among the mountains that summer will remember the odd couple they were continually meeting in the most fantastic costumes and in the queerest places.

No one knew who they were, for they stopped at no hotels, and met no one of their old acquaintances. Their only link to a past or future was the bulletin which Celia sent weekly to Alice: "Alice, my child, we are well and glorified," or, "Alice, my blessing, we are well, and have forgotten that there is a world."

There could have been no stronger proof of the love Celia bore her sister than that she allowed even this one link with the world at large, yet Alice would have remembered that a note of a line, while it shows love, does not help loneliness. Lonely as she was, however, she could not blame her wayward sister, and was only happy that the discipline and restraint had been removed from a life where it chafed so sorely. Towards the last of August Dick remarked one day that it was drawing near election time, and that perhaps he had better show himself among the haunts of men.

"True," said Celia, as if struck with a sudden thought. "What are we going to do for a living, Dick? I had actually forgotten that this summer could ever end."

"Well then," said Dick, "suppose we begin to take a genteel journey in our best clothes, though I suppose they are out of fashion by this time. Let's go to Niagara and a few such places that you have n't seen, and meantime I will write a proper letter home, and you shall correct the punctuation, and we will say we are alive and well, so my constituents can do what they see fit about me." He laughed a little, and then added: "After all, though, I believe I won't go to the Legislature again, even if they will send me, because, you know, you are radical and I am conservative, and we might quarrel, which we must n't — never."

"Pooh!" said Celia, laughing; "you are you and I am myself, and we could n't quarrel. The main thing is to work honestly for whatever opinions, and that you do."

"Bless us! you are getting conservative yourself, mine wife; for what radical ever before owned that anybody else could be right?"

"Ah!" said Celia, "I don't believe

much in your opinions, but I believe in you."

Thereupon followed a demonstration of no interest to the reader.

"So you want me to go to the Legislature, and leave you behind!" said Dick, after a minute.

"Bad boy!" said Celia. "You know I shall go with you."

"Well then," said Dick, "if I am elected, we will have a gay winter in Boston, and if not, in New York; and I will buy a house somewhere, and we will begin housekeeping in the spring."

"Agreed," said Celia; "let's go to the theatre every night this winter."

"And to the opera and concerts the rest," said Dick. "Of course. You can't be married but once—O yes, you can, though, but that's no matter,—so be sure and make the most of it. Actually, Celia, I am flattered that you want me in politics. I was afraid we should have a squabble when I proposed it."

"You know I could n't squabble," remarked Celia; and Dick laughed in great derision, which made the girl blush as she remembered several passages at arms between herself and her aunt Buckram and various other individuals.

"I mean with you, of course," she added, in a moment. "You know no one is half a man who does n't do something for the world he lives in, and I can see that your *forte* is politics. I know your motives are pure, and that you see clear, clearer perhaps as to what we need to-day than Aleck does, and I think you and I should tend towards the same goal, though you perhaps by wiser ways than I."

"O Lud!" said Dick, with a laugh to conceal his emotion, "I have tamed a shrew. You recant from Woman's Rights then, and disown Darwin and the rest of your heresies? I tell you, mine wife, I thought you had n't much confidence in me."

"Why did I marry you then?" asked Celia. Then she took him by the ears and turned his head away from her, while she added, "It isn't precisely you in whom I have confidence. It is in your angel, I think."

"O the 'possible beauty that underlies the passing phase of the meanest

thing,'" interpolated Dick, without looking round.

"Be still!" said Celia. "I mean that I know you were made to be the noblest, but I have sometimes thought that the world had scorched you just a trifle."

She said the words in a low tone, and did not look up. She did not, therefore, see the quick flush on his face, and never guessed that no one had ever before said to him anything which had caused him half the acute pain which those few words had done.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE honeymoon was over; that is, Dick and his bride had emerged from the wild woods, and done up a tour in proper orthodox fashion, and were on their way home about the last of October. Dick's name was already up as a candidate for the Legislature, and they decided to stay in New York till after election, when they could make their plans for the winter. But Mr. Stacy the elder at last wrote that Dick must come home and make one speech if he wanted to be elected, because nobody had seen him for six months, and they could not realize that he was still in the flesh.

"I don't want to go," said Dick. "I won't go. They know my opinions now, and my character, and what more do they want? Though I suppose they think I have married a radical wife, and may have *progressed*," he added, with his lightest laugh.

Celia looked rather grave. She began to think she had spoiled Dick, because she knew that in previous years he had scoured the country making stump speeches and gaining popularity everywhere, and, since he was sincere, what harm could there be in his "defining his position"? She wondered if his gay summer had made him unwilling to work, and if she was to blame.

On the contrary, he was ready to work, he believed, but did not think a seat in the Legislature worth any exertion. In fact, he knew of no work just then which seemed worth much, which

shows that he was mistaken in supposing himself ready for any. There were other reasons, however, which made him unwilling to go home. Still, he said he would go for one night. Celia was to stay in New York, and he would rejoin her in a day or two.

She found the day he went away the loneliest of her life. She tried to read a little and gave it up, and lay on the sofa dreaming. She was not very well disciplined at her best times, and her summer had perhaps unsettled her as well as her husband.

About twilight a servant came in with a letter for Mr. Stacy. Now Dick had said, "I expect some important business letters. So open them and send me a copy, for I may possibly be detained at home two or three days." Therefore Celia opened the letter at once, and as it was twilight she did not notice that it was worn and bore a very old postmark. But before she had read three lines by the fading light, she turned hastily to look at the outside, and she was pale as death as she finished the paper.

May —, 18—.

RICHARD STACY, — What do you mean? What are you doing? You are killing me. I heard to-night by chance that you are going to be married. I don't believe it. You are not so wicked as that yet, but you are a villain, and I could murder you. Why do I say that, for I love you still dearer than anybody on earth, but I am chilled through and through and desperate from neglect. You could not have believed when I broke our engagement that I wanted to do it. You know it was because I felt that you were forgetting me; but I might have held you to it, and I must now. You can't be so mad as not to remember that the day you marry all hope is forever cut off from me! You stole my love, and you stole my innocence, and you have wrecked my life. They say your wedding-day is very near, but you must save me, you *must* do it, if you have a single spark of manhood left, even if you sacrifice every hope of your perjured life. Your sacrifice can never equal mine. Write to me at once, or see me at No. —, — Street.

10

Celia had enough presence of mind to lock the door, and then she abandoned herself to her passion. She paced the floor with hasty irregular steps. She wrung her hands roughly till they ached. She clutched her hair; and drop by drop the blood trickled from her lip which she bit to keep from screaming. There was no thought in her mind. She only knew that the utmost horror happened to her.

After such paroxysms it was always her impulse to throw herself down and sleep heavily; but now she remembered suddenly that something must be *done*. With that thought she stood still, she unclasped her hands and let them fall idly at her side. She noticed the blood, and wiped and poulticed her lip carefully. "I am going, I am going," she said over and over in her mind. She had sportively dressed herself in black in the morning on account of Dick's departure. It was the last dress she had bought for herself before the wedding *trousseau*. She took down a waterproof and put it round her. She would not take a bonnet, for she had none which Dick had not given her. The letter she had thrust within the folds of her dress. She opened the door, and mechanically drew out her watch to see what time it was. The hall lights flashed upon it, and the diamonds which spelled her name and Dick's sparkled in derision. She wrenched it off, rudely breaking the delicate chain, and flung it back into the room. She heard it break as it fell, and could almost have wept that she had ruined such perfect mechanism so ruthlessly. Then she locked the door, and went swiftly down stairs and into the street. She met no one; but a waiter, lounging at the other end of the hall, espied her. It was raining, and she had drawn the hood of her waterproof over her head, so he did not wonder at her appearance.

Not until she was fairly in the street did she realize what she was doing. She now knew that she must decide at once where to go, and that it was not well for a woman who had never been in New York before, to wander about in its streets alone all night. Even in the depths of passion a woman cannot aban-

don herself to it like a man, she must remember to be prudent. Doubtless a hundred women would have turned back, and after a night's sleep would have recovered from the blow, except to taunt their husbands forever after, in any matrimonial quarrels, with the knowledge they held. And many another would have burned the letter and suffered the matter to drop. For one instant the helplessness of the situation so thrilled her that she remembered the possibility of going back, but at the same instant she threw the key of her door as far from her into the darkness as her strength would allow, and then return was impossible. She drew herself into a niche in the wall, and thought, desperately, with all the concentration she possessed. It flashed across her that there was a railroad station only a block away. In the cars she would be safe through that night. She ran swiftly to the station, and found a train just ready to start. She did not notice which way it was going, but entered it just as the last bell struck. Then she suddenly recollected that she had no money. She trembled and knew not what to do, and in the mean time the train moved on. She looked around the car and saw no other woman. There were, in fact, only half a dozen men, most of whom had composed themselves to sleep as well as they might, pillowed upon the head-rests. She could not beg of them, and if she did what chance was there that it would be of any use? Her thoughts always moved quickly, and to-night her brain seemed lightning, and the most impossible and extravagant plans rushed through it, one after another. It was almost a relief that there was something imperative to be decided at once, so that she might not revert just yet to the blow that had stunned her. But, with all her thinking, she was still at an utter loss what to do or say when the conductor entered the car. She was sitting in the remote end of it, so she had time to notice how he passed along, examining the tickets of the sleepy men, who had stuck them in their hat-bands that they might not be disturbed, and she observed especially that he waked one man who had for-

gotten such a precaution. She wondered at that instant that she had not thought of feigning sleep when the conductor came in, but now, at the same moment, she saw it would have done no good. Besides, she objected to deception. The conductor had not a bad face, but he was determined on having his dues.

He held out his hand for the ticket. Celia looked down and said nothing.

"Ticket, ma'am?" he said, not gruffly.

Celia looked at him with her wild eyes, and answered, "I have none and no money."

He knew in a moment that no common woman addressed him, and said respectfully, "Did you lose it?"

"No," said Celia, "I had to go on this train and I had no money, but I forgot it till I was fairly in the cars. I had something else to think of. Now I must go, and if I ever can, I will pay you."

"It is against the rules," said the conductor, seriously. "I'm sorry for you, but I can't do it. How far do you want to go?"

Poor girl! She had no idea in what direction they were travelling, and if she told him that, what could he think of the urgency of her journey?

"I want to go *through*," said she, in a moment of inspiration.

"What! To St. Louis?" said the conductor, in surprise and consternation.

Celia was terribly annoyed. She had fancied herself perhaps in a Boston car; but it was too late to retreat, and she answered at once, "Yes, and I *must* go. If you have no right to let me go free, then I will beg, and I beg of you to give me money for my ticket."

Her voice, always thrilling, was wild and passionate, though she spoke low lest the others should hear her.

The conductor looked thunder-struck. "What!" said he. "Do I look as if I could afford to give thirty dollars to a stranger?"

Celia was desperate. Her fingers worked nervously, and she felt her wedding-ring. Exasperated as she was, she would readily have given it away, but she thought in season of the names and dates engraved inside, and did not offer

it. She had no other jewel of any kind about her. Even her collar was fastened with a black ribbon instead of a pin.

"If you put me off the train," said she, hoarsely and fiercely, "I will crush myself under its wheels, and you shall remember that every moment till you die and after."

The conductor was an ordinary man. His one virtue was honesty, and he had no vices. But he was roused and touched by the appeal of this strange woman at last, and he answered slowly: "If I let you pass free, I should defraud the owners of the line, and I have not so much money of my own here as you need. But I will give you a pass, and when I get home I will refund the money from my own purse. But I can't afford it, you see; so, if you ever can, you must pay me for it, principal and interest."

Blessings on an honest man! This man was so honest that he believed it possible that the woman too was honest, and dared to risk a great sacrifice for her. He thought, with a sigh, that his wife must go without her new dress now, and Tommy could not have the set of tools he had wanted so long, and that he could not be so charitable every day, no matter how much he was moved; but he knew that his wife was a foolish, unworldly woman, and would perhaps uphold him. So he passed on before Celia had time to speak, his commonplace nature for once awakened to the intense romance in the world. He had never been to the theatre in his life. He thought it wrong.

There was, however, one in the car who had been many times. Celia had taken the seat next to the back one, and did not know that some one had come in behind her and taken the very last seat. Low as she had spoken, the dialogue had been too passionate for him not to hear, and he had seen her gestures too, though not her face.

"Admirable acting!" thought this gentleman. "I expect that tragedy is something real, or it would n't have been so well done; she would do well on the stage, though she would n't have real affairs to act in, and she looks just ready for it." Then he laid his head back quietly and went to sleep.

Celia, for her part, did not sleep that night, and this was a new experience for her. She had met now, for the first time, a grief which would not be stupefied.

It was like a night on the ocean with its varying surges. She remembered in a numb way the cause of her flight, but fought off the vision of it as powerfully as she was able. She thought her life was wrecked. She did not realize her father's belief that no one sorrow can destroy a life. With her, it was all or nothing. She believed herself crushed forever, and yet she did not commit suicide. It was not reason nor religion which prevented her, but a certain blind instinct, welling up from her vigorous young life. The possibility did not even occur to her, except at the moment she had spoken, to the conductor, when she thought she must kill herself, as there was no foothold for her in the wide earth. She did not even remember to wish to die. She only knew herself wholly wretched, and that she must live, and so set herself at work to consider how. But she had never had a practical or methodical mind, and had never showed decision of character except in following her impulses to their utmost, and now she had no inward self-control, though pride kept back the bodily paroxysms which would surely have come to her had she been alone. So her brain whirled from chaos to chaos, and she formed no plan. She looked out of the window and knew it was starlight, but the stars chilled her instead of calming. The engine shrieked hideously, and its smoke suffocated her; they tore through a pass in the grand mountains, and the woods were on fire. She felt herself one with the spirit of the flame, and longed to be whirled up in it to the lurid sky above. She felt herself in hell, and thought it furiously thrilling; she conceived that to one who had lost all there might be a fearful, enchanting joy of despair, a wild delight of passion,—that is, if one should purposely, wilfully sin, and suffer for it justly and irrevocably; but her suffering was not that,—she had done no wrong, but a sin had been committed against her, and she moaned aloud like a weak, miserable woman. She felt

that she could have torn herself in pieces the next moment for that betrayal (yet she thought no one heard it), and she sat erect and rigid through the remainder of the night.

It rained the next morning. The conductor brought her some sandwiches to eat, but she felt too ill and wretched to touch them; and told him she would not be indebted for anything which was not absolutely necessary. Such a journey and such a sleepless night would have been sufficient to wear out a stronger woman than Celia, even if the mental agony had not been added, and no one could have believed her the same girl who twenty-four hours before had said good by to her husband with a tear in her eye and a smile on her lip. She looked like an old woman in her dusty black dress, and with no bonnet but the hood of her waterproof. All the men in the car thought her fifty, at least, and the rumor among them was that a favorite child was dying in St. Louis and she was half crazed with grief. Except the gentleman who sat behind her. He knew that those luxurious masses of auburn hair, which he had seen when she pushed back her hood to cool her face, and the lady-like, unwrinkled though ungloved hand, belonged to one very young; and he knew that few persons at fifty have not worn out the first fervor of passionate suffering.

The conductor gave her a pass and left the train, and at dinner-time, when she began to be famished with hunger, she suddenly realized that she was entirely alone with no help. She had eaten little the previous day, being in low spirits on account of Dick's absence; so she began to feel real pain from her long fasting. She was also excessively weary, though she could not sleep. She spread out her hands under the faucet, and let the water trickle over them. She bathed her face and let it dry itself. Her handkerchief must be carefully preserved. She went back to her seat, and saw the gentleman who still sat behind her. He had not been quiet till then. He had breakfasted at one station, promenaded at another, and dined at another. He had slept a great deal the night before, and was accustomed to such jour-

neys, so he looked as fresh as the people who had just entered the train; and Celia, who had heard the door behind her open and shut all the morning, did not guess that she had had the same neighbor all the way from New York. Indeed, she would not have thought of him at all, except that in the instant her glance rested on his face she noticed that there was something strangely familiar in his appearance.

The whirl in her brain was beginning to subside, and she wondered in a vacant way where she had seen that face before. An hour passed on, she was still wondering; but for the whole afternoon she did not see his face again, and she began to feel so acutely hungry that she could think of nothing else. When the train stopped for supper, she could almost have stolen bread to satisfy herself. The gentleman behind her rose and walked the length of the car. His step and bearing were even more familiar to her than the face, and she remembered him instantly. He was the manager of a theatre to which she had often been with Dick in Boston. He had been pointed out to her one evening, and often afterwards she had seen him walking on the street. Here, then, was some one she knew, and who did not know her, and a way of escape seemed open to her.

She had often wished, ever since her first day at the theatre where she saw Antonina, that she had been bred a ballet-girl. There was a deeply rooted dramatic element in her which craved an outlet. Lately, however, she had laughed at herself, and thought how much nicer it was to be married to the best man in the world and go roaming about as they pleased; and visions of a quiet home and fireside had been much more alluring than tinsel and false thunder. Now her lip curled scornfully at the thought of a home, and she felt as if some absorbing occupation would be a blessing and a relief.

The car was by this time full, but the manager had contrived to keep a seat to himself. When he returned, Celia, almost too weak and faint to drag herself from her own seat, asked him if she might sit with him a few minutes,

as she wanted to ask him something. He assented, not perhaps so much surprised as she supposed he would be.

"Are you the manager of the — theatre?" she asked, thrilled at the instant with the possibility that she might be wrong.

"I was," said he, now a little surprised, "and I still have some interest in it."

She knew enough of him by reputation to feel sure of her ground now. "I am poor," she said, "and circumstances have placed me alone in the world. I am going to St. Louis or somewhere, I don't know where, and I know no one and have no place to go, nothing to do. I can earn my living, if I can find something to do, — some teaching, or copying, or almost anything. But I don't know how to live in the mean time. I believe I could act if you would let me try. I suppose you hardly think I could," she went on rapidly, afraid to have him speak yet, "but I am almost sure. I have had no practice, but I know something about elocution, and I am determined to succeed."

But the manager knew she could act, as well as she knew it herself, and he answered kindly: "I believe you could act, you look like it. I am in no need of any one now, for my company is merely travelling, and we make up our number from the local theatres; but then in a month we shall go back to Boston again, and I may need one or two ladies for minor parts. The salary will be only a trifle, but it will get you food till you find something better to do."

"You are kind," said Celia, fervently, though in a distressed voice; "but what am I to do in the month to come?"

"You can travel with the company," said the manager, "and if you can sew, you can get odd jobs enough from the actors to pay your way."

"I can sew," said Celia, almost joyfully, "and I thank you from my soul." Then she went back to her own seat and left him alone.

The manager was so kind a man that it is very likely he would have given the same aid to any one of whose distress he was so thoroughly convinced; yet he

had a feeling that in this case he was not losing by his charity. He saw that there was fire in Celia's veins, and perhaps genius; and though an early training on the stage is absolutely necessary to the highest results, yet she was young still, and genius is omnipotent. At any rate, he believed there were ten chances in eleven that she could make one of the local stars in a few years' time, and might probably pay her way very soon. So he composed himself to his newspaper, and she sat clenching her teeth to keep back her hunger.

He did not forget her, however, and brought her some food at the next station, which he offered, saying ladies often found it inconvenient to leave the cars at the stations, and if she was to belong to his company, he must provide for her. She was too hungry to be proud, and ate it with an eagerness which almost brought tears to the eyes of the man, who was old enough to be inured to most tragedies, actual or imaginary.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT the moment Celia was saying, "Circumstances have placed me alone in the world," Dick sprang gayly from a carriage at the door of their hotel in New York, and rushed lightly up the stairs to surprise her if possible, though he felt sure she was on the lookout for him. If she still wore her black dress, he was going to say, "Fie! are you in mourning for my return?" and if not, he would say, "That is the way with women; the moment my back was fairly turned, you left off mourning for me and dressed up gorgeously!" and so on. What a jolly evening he meant to have!

He turned the knob lightly, then with all his power, and then laughed to think that he had not reflected that she might be timid without him and lock the door; so he knocked, and shouted through the keyhole, "It is the coal-man." But even now he elicited no reply. He was annoyed as he said to himself, "She knew I meant to come in this train, and I wonder what she went out for. Besides, there is nobody

for her to see, and she don't know the way about."

So he went down to the office and asked for a duplicate key, as his wife had gone out and must have taken hers with her.

He opened the door. The watch lay broken on the floor. He was startled. It could not have come there of itself. What did it portend? He felt that there was a mystery to be solved, that his wife's absence was not accidental, that there must have been force, and that no moment was to be lost. He did not dare to think what he dreaded. He searched their rooms carefully himself. He found that Celia's waterproof and black dress were gone, but everything else was in order. In another hour a detective was in search of her, with such a reward promised that he felt his fortune was made; and it was to be trebled if he brought her back that night. Dick hated gossip, and had the inquiries at the hotel made in the most cautious manner. A week passed, and nothing had been elicited, except that one waiter had seen a woman in black pass out into the rain the night Dick was at home. He remembered nothing of her dress, but it was something to know she had gone alone. It looked as if she were insane, yet she had been well when her husband went away. The detective privately guessed she had eloped with a lover; his first hint of the kind was received with such a gesture that he dared not breathe it again; but he gave up all idea of the reward, though he agreed, for a generous sum, to keep up his search for months if need be.

Twenty-four hours changed Dick as much as the same length of time had changed his wife. If she had wished to make him suffer as much as she did herself, she had succeeded; but revenge had not been in her thought.

He telegraphed to Alice a few mysterious words, and told her he could not leave New York, and she must come to him. Even her face could not be calm with such horror and suspense in her heart; yet she was not tortured as he was, for she lived in a world in which persons have an absolute value of their own, which cannot be touched by any brutality of the world, and Celia would

always be to her the same, whatever happened to her. But as days passed on, and no clew was obtained to the mystery, Alice went sadly back to her scholars, and Dick set himself to conceal his agony as best he might. He made arrangements for the protection of his wife if she ever found her way back to that hotel again, and then left New York. The police declared that she could not be in the city; they had searched every spot, and with that half-hope he had to be contented. He cautiously had placards sent round the country, describing her as probably deranged, giving no names, anxious to save any publicity. But, of course, the occurrences soon were known to his circle of acquaintances. He had received the first announcement of his election to the Legislature in a passive way, not realizing it. Afterwards he meant to decline, but Alice urged him not to do so.

"Because," she said, in her pathetic voice, "though we will not lose hope, we can do nothing but wait, and work is the only thing that can keep us alive during such suspense."

"But why should I even live?" said Dick, brokenly. "Every trace of sweetness has gone out of my life."

"For what your life may be worth to others," said Alice, in the free, controlling tone which showed the higher powers of her nature were gaining ascendancy. "No one sorrow, though the deepest, and yours is the deepest I have yet known, can blight a whole life. Even out of it, in some strange way, may come to you the power of blessing some one else, and saving some one from just such a sorrow. Believe me, Dick, there is a God on the earth!"

"I don't know," said Dick, wearily. But he did not resign his seat in the Legislature. He employed himself upon his law-books till it should be time for the session, though with only half his brain. He could not forget his wife for a single moment, even in his sleep. His placards brought one bit of news. The conductor on the western railroad sent him word of the woman he had seen who *must* go to St. Louis. But this trace was soon lost sight of, for the manager had insisted on Celia's wearing

a hat during the last half of her journey, and had taken her so completely under his protection that no one thought of her as a single lady without a bonnet. Besides, she looked so old, and the placards described a young lady. If this had been the only news from the placards, some result might have followed; but a dozen other people had seen young ladies in black, all alone, looking as if they might be insane, and so between the dozen different tracks there seemed no choice, and even the detectives gave up in despair, though, of course, they worked on as long as they were so well paid for it.

Dick and Alice were so troubled and anxious about Celia that they thought of nothing else, and it was not until the beginning of the session of the Legislature that Aleck's absence set them wondering where he was. Alice had had a feeling that when he came she should get over the terrible despondency which was settling over her, and which she could not deny when she was alone, though in Dick's presence she was always calm and high and hopeful, knowing the need he had of support. Dick, too, had hoped something from the presence of his friend. So he inquired eagerly where he was, and learned that he had been defeated in the election. Now a seat in the Legislature is not so high an honor that the candidate from "Cranberry Centre" need mourn very long at not receiving the appointment; but Dick and Alice looked at each other in consternation when they heard of Aleck's defeat, not only for their own disappointment, but because they believed he would be acutely disappointed himself. He had tried and failed, and he was sensitive enough to feel that, though not as most would. Then he ardently desired to be in politics for the use of his high philanthropy, and he was prevented. Some one said that he had proved too radical for even his radical constituents. "If he would have compromised an inch," said this gentleman, "or even concealed his most objectionable views for a little while, all would have been well. But instead, he gave them his strongest doses of gunpowder; he said he would have no equivocation, and should do exactly what he thought

right, and he could not actually promise to vote for or against any measure till the time came, because he could not say what new light he might have on it before it came to the ballot, and more to the same purpose. He might have known, after that, that of course he stood no chance, yet he was evidently very much surprised to find he was not elected. Of course he is too plucky to look crest-fallen, but goes about his doctoring and so forth as usual."

Dick was provoked, and thought Aleck had acted like a fool. Alice said he could not have done anything else, and she honored him, but in secret she longed for him every hour. And so, in their forlornity, the winter shut down upon them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN Celia reached St. Louis, it was raining and smoky and dismal. But she was too unhappy to care for that; she felt that nothing could add to her misery. Dependent as she was, she could make no remonstrance when she found assigned to her a large room with three other ladies belonging to the theatre company. She had begged the manager not to tell any one how needy she was, so she did not receive the kindness from her new companions that the knowledge of her misfortunes would have inspired. She proved so uncommunicative that she exasperated them, and when she lay down on the outside of the bed with her dress on, for she was entirely destitute of a change of clothing, they openly rebelled and made some very harsh remarks in her hearing. One of them even plucked up courage to ask the manager what he wanted a new hand for, when they had reduced the company as much as possible in order to travel, and complained that Celia was so ill bred that no one wanted to occupy the room with her. The manager was gifted with the power of management, and though he was kind, he would bear nothing like questioning from his troupe, so he peremptorily advised the girl to mind her own affairs, and sent her back in a meeker

frame than that in which she had come to him. Still he was troubled, because he really did not know what to do with his *protégée*.

But Celia had abandoned herself utterly to fortune, and fortune favored her. The morning after her arrival, as the actors were leaving the rehearsal, Miss Ellis, the star of the second magnitude, was thrown down and badly injured by a runaway horse. Now Miss Ellis had been advertised for the comedy at the Saturday *Matinée*, and of course, the first star, Madame René, who played tragedies, would not take her place. The other three ladies of the troupe, who shared Celia's room, had all been arranged for the minor parts, and there was really need of some one to take Miss Ellis's place. The manager did not quite feel like trusting Celia in such a responsible position for her *début*; but he thought that if she could possibly take the part, it would save all wonder among the rest of the troupe as to his motive for engaging her, though of course the circumstances of the engagement would be an aggravating mystery, and, if she did well, they would all be envious. He thought the matter over carefully, and fancied that Celia certainly had genius; even if she failed, it was only the comedy, and excuses could be made for Miss Ellis's nonappearance. It was Thursday now, but he resolved on a bold stroke, and called Celia to him.

"Mrs. Brown," said he (it was the name she had given him), "could you take the part of Kate in the comedy for the Saturday *Matinée*? It was Miss Ellis's part."

Celia flushed and trembled. The worst of outlawing one's self from one's ordinary course of life, and adopting one more weird, is that one cannot always live high tragedy, but must do drudgery. When Celia had thought of being on the stage, she had fancied herself censured by people, but she had thought she should glory in that, and she had imagined herself a tragedy queen, doing startling and wonderful things, and producing artful effects. To play common comedy and sleep in a room with three other women had never entered her head. This disgusted her,

and seemed to take away her heroic spirit of daring everything against people's opinions. She recognized herself once more a weak, miserable woman, But necessity was her master, and she had not chosen such a life for herself, it had been thrust upon her; and after a moment she realized that, if she succeeded, she would have taken a long step towards living. So she answered, "I will do it. Where is the play?"

The manager felt his courage rise.

She believed it would be a terrible task to learn her part, because she had never learned by rote readily at school; but she was happily mistaken, for this was no dull history to be droned out at so many pages a day, but a living drama, and by energetically applying herself she had committed her part before the others came home from the theatre in the evening.

This was very fortunate, for it took away the necessity of letting her new acquaintances know that this was her first appearance on the stage, and both herself and the manager hoped, if possible, that it might be believed that she was an actress of some standing that he had picked up on his travels. The manager knew enough of his business to suppose she would betray herself in some small way, no matter how well she succeeded, but then she had impressed him powerfully with the idea that she had genius, and he had great confidence in that.

Her *compagnons de chambre* stared the next morning when she went to rehearsal with them, for they had not guessed who was to take Miss Ellis's place. She had not had a moment alone all the morning, and she had been too proud to glance at her book in the presence of the others; but she had carried the whole play twice through in her own mind, and she had lain awake half the night planning her manner of rendering each passage. It may be supposed that she did not feel much like comedy; in fact, it was never her choice, though she had the power of appreciating every shade of it. But people are never so witty as when entirely wretched, and, strangely enough, in all Celia's life she had never been so capable of acting comedy as she was

now. Besides, she had not often the power of concentrating her mind very long at a time, but now her overwhelming desire to escape from herself made it possible. The manager gave her a few hints privately as to the use of her voice and her positions, so that she might not show her ignorance at once. He kept near her all the time; and it was necessary, for she had never been behind the scenes in her life, and had no idea where to stand or what to do. But she was desperate, and knew how much depended on what she did. Her mind was so clear, so terribly intense, that she remembered every word of her part, every hint of the manager; she realized just what tone of voice could be heard in the farthest galleries, and never once turned her back to the empty auditorium. It was a wonderful performance, all things considered, and showed an amount of talent which Celia had never suspected in herself. There was not a break or a flaw in it, but it lacked just that divine spark which the manager had counted upon as certain, — the flavor of genius. He could do no better. The placards were already printed, stating that on account of the accident which had befallen Miss Ellis, the part of Kate would be performed by the famous actress Mara, — a *ruse* fair enough perhaps in a life in which all is pretence.

Now, notwithstanding it showed great talent in Celia to do so much in so short a time, she had, after all, done no better than the rest of the people in the play who had performed it from childhood upwards; and, as the clown of the troupe was not very forcible, the Kate had been the dependence of the whole.

The manager felt that she had done vastly better for the first time than he had dared to expect, but he felt that the hundredth time she would fall below his expectations. The *compagnons de chambre* murmured in her hearing, "Stupid! and so old and ugly!" Celia flushed a little, but half smiled to herself. They repeated the play again with the same result. She evinced the same care, and made no mistake in any way, but the performance was quite passionless. The manager encouraged

her, however; told her she had done well. He had determined to make the best of a bad matter, and he was sorry for her.

The next morning they rehearsed again in the same way. Miss Ellis, who had heard from her companions that the new star was of a very low magnitude, graciously consented that Celia should use her dresses and her paint-brushes for the occasion, by the payment of a small sum.

Celia needed paint to cover the effects of her weariness and sorrow, and she used it without scruple, though she hated herself for the deception. Then she took down her magnificent hair and wreathed it in fantastic curls, which would have been becoming to no one else, but in which she looked as if dipped in living fire. Even then she was not beautiful, but she was a thing of passion, and though ladies might call her ugly still, no man would have done so. When the manager saw her, he said to himself, "After all, she will do something in the way of tragedy. It is not strange a comedy should be so dead a thing to her."

But he had been mistaken. Celia had studiously avoided emotion during each rehearsal, because the stage was so new to her that she needed to bend every energy to making no blunders. Now that her part and her positions were comparatively familiar to her, she determined to throw her whole nature into the play. She thought she should not be likely to make great blunders, and she cared little for minor ones if she could only play with spirit. There was little chance for passion in this drama, but there was a certain wild frolicsomeness and *abandon* which is perhaps most possible to a passionate nature which has thrown off restraint, and Celia plunged into it with her soul, and played it better than it had ever been played to that audience. There was a whirl of enthusiasm in the house, and that notwithstanding she forgot her stage manners half a dozen times, stood with her back to the audience, spoke in a real whisper which could not be heard for an aside, and did twenty things which showed her a novice. But she was bewitching. She

looked so and acted so, and the manager was delighted. He cared nothing about her mistakes, for it would be for his credit now to confess that she was a *débutante*. In fact, with her consent, he stepped before the curtain at the close of the *Matinée*, while the people were yet cheering, and wondering they had never before heard of this remarkable Mara, and explained to them this little *ruse*, by which he had placed a new actress on the stage. Then followed renewed cheers, till she showed herself for one instant, courtesied, and disappeared.

For a single moment her heart beat high with exultation. Her grace, her striking face, her beautiful pronunciation, her elocutionary training, the desperate need which had made her do her utmost, — all these could not account for her marvellous success, with such meagre preparation; and she had tested herself, and knew she had proved that she possessed genius. She was of the race of the gods.

But after that moment a dull, sick feeling overwhelmed her, for she had loved. She had expended her whole strength of heart in that love, and it had turned to ashes. There was nothing more left on earth or in heaven to wish for. Her genius was good for nothing, except to make her suffer. O yes, it was, — she could earn her daily bread; and the next day she had money enough to send the railway fare to the honest conductor who had befriended her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ALICE had so few acquaintances in Boston that she had not found it necessary to tell any one of the cause of her sudden journey to New York, and, as soon as she returned, she resumed lessons as usual, though she looked paler and more fragile than ever, and there was something even haggard about her face, which would have startled any one who comprehended her character. She, the restful, was ill at ease.

But one day, early in December, as she was leaving Mrs. Craig's room, Miss Twigg accosted her abruptly, and in-

formed her that Robert was at liberty to see her. Alice blushed a little, for she had scarcely been to see him since her sister's loss, feeling too heart-sick to try to soothe him. Besides, Dora May was almost always in the room, and for some months Alice had noticed a certain *hauteur* and distance about her that led her to believe herself to be disagreeable in some way. Robert had too much pride to call for her often, and she felt that she must not neglect him now. So she went in.

The young girl sat there sewing. She half bowed, without rising. She looked weak and ill. Robert pointed peremptorily to the corner, and barricaded his visitor therein at once. Then he mounted the table, and began roughly: "So, Miss Wilding, you have given up my acquaintance, I see. You need n't begin to put on airs and think you are too good to speak to a poor hunchback like me. I won't be trampled upon, and you need n't try it. Just because your sister has married a rich man, — a rich rascal, I dare say, — you are no better than you were before."

He knew Alice better than that, of course; but he felt cross and he thought she would laugh at him. He saw his mistake in an instant, such a look of distress and pain came over her face. Neither of them saw the cold, dead look that came into the downcast eyes of the seamstress at the same moment.

"Mr. Rix," said Alice, gently, "I hardly think you believe my nature to be like that; and though I have not been to see you, it has not been because I have forgotten you."

"Why then?" asked Robert, impatiently; but he added in a moment, "O, you must forgive me. I believe you have had some sorrow of your own, and you could not attend to other people's complaints."

He spoke gently, but Alice felt the reproach and answered sadly: "It is true that I have been self-absorbed. Even my selfishness ought to have taught me that I could not still my own suffering except by caring for that of others."

"O, what have I said?" asked Robert, in a broken, despairing tone. "You must have suffered all before you have

spoken a word, and I have felt that my poor sufferings, that I have had a whole life to get used to" (this as if angry with himself), "were so great that you must listen to them every moment patiently. And you call yourself selfish, after all! Ah, Miss Alice, you must forgive me for being so rough."

"You have not been rough, Mr. Rix," said Alice. "I have been inconsiderate to you. I will tell you now what my sorrow is, and you will understand why I have not been myself."

She hesitated a moment, as she thought whether any harm could be done by her revelation. She decided not, and it was better she should speak of it herself than to wait till rumor brought it to their ears. "I wish you would tell no one but Miss Twigg at present," she said, and speaking distinctly enough for Dora May to hear. She trusted people, and would exact no promise of secrecy. "When I went away so suddenly for a few days, I went to New York in answer to a telegram from Mr. Stacy, my sister's husband. He had been to his own home for one night to speak preparatory to election, and when he returned, he found my sister gone from the hotel where he had left her. There was nothing to guide him to her. The watch he gave her on their wedding-day lay broken on the floor, and that seemed to suggest violence; but everything else was undisturbed, and the door was locked and the key was gone. He had left her in perfect health. She may have become suddenly deranged, or there may have been force. No exertions have been sufficient to bring us any clew of her, and we live in torturing suspense." She had spoken in a low, calm, rapid voice; but when she finished she felt as if her whole power of life had gone out from her in the effort. She was pale, and trembled from head to foot. Robert attempted no consolation in words. He brought her wine, which she refused, and then water. It was several minutes before she could move. Then she went away without speaking, and half wondered why she had been moved to tell the story when she might have concealed it.

When she had gone, Robert Rix laid

his head on the table and cried and sobbed for an hour. No one noticed the young seamstress, who had fainted. She gradually recovered consciousness, and went away to her little cold chamber, herself cold and rigid.

Alice lay all day on her sofa in a state of exhaustion. She had never stated the matter to herself or Dick in such plain words as she had this day spoken. They had conveyed by glances, by half sentences, what they wished to say, and she felt as if she had fixed the fate of her sister immutably by relating the circumstances so fully.

At twilight Alice felt cold, and put a little coal on the fire. It flashed up and lightened the room with a hopeful radiance, and some one tapped at the door.

"Come in," said Alice, faintly. The door opened, the light fell full on the figure in black, and in another moment the sisters were in each other's arms. Celia spoke first, in a tone which was sharply, strangely self-possessed for her to use. "Alice, my dear, I hardly thought how much I made *you* suffer, but I could not help it. Will you lock the door that *no one* may interrupt us?"

Alice obeyed with fear and dread. "Celia, where have you been? Dick and I have been too wretched to live."

Celia shuddered at Dick's name, and could not speak. She held out the soiled, tear-stained letter, and sat grimly while her sister read it by the flickering firelight.

"The direction —" began Alice, faintly.

"Yes," said Celia, in a hard tone. "You see that — that — he knew Dora May. The letter is true. You see by the postmark it should have reached him long before. I read it by accident the night he was away."

"And left him of your own will?" said Alice.

Celia told her story briefly, in an indifferent tone.

"Ah!" said Alice, distressed. "Can you guess the agony of suspense, and leave him to suffer so?"

"I don't do it to punish him," said Celia, with a quivering voice. "I don't want revenge. It is instinct. I can never see him again."

"Could I —" said Alice.

"No one can come between us. I am still his true wife. I love him, and he loves me. You don't understand," she added, as Alice looked surprised, "but if it had been otherwise I could not have married him. And love is eternal."

"Then," said Alice, eagerly, "he could marry only you."

"Alice," replied her sister, sternly, "for once in your life you are blind and hasty. He could not help loving me, but the sin had been committed before, and he should have borne its penalty. He could not marry her, but he had no right to marry me. I believe in but one love, and the right to that may be forfeited."

"And yet can there be a sin which repentance cannot wash out?" asked Alice.

"It is God who has appointed the laws," replied Celia, in a hard tone. "No one can help poor Dora May. Who then can help us? Alice, I think I've lost all religion. Now I know only enough to obey those intuitions which have cast me alone, famished and cold, on a loveless world."

Alice took both her sister's icy hands in her own, and, looking at her with clear eyes, said: "By and by, Celia, you will know that God himself is enough to fill and satisfy every soul he has created; but, O my darling, I could shed tears of blood for you!"

As she spoke, Celia started spasmodically, for they heard the footsteps which they knew too well, saddened as they were, ascending the stairs. Alice looked half pleadingly at her. "No, no, no," said Celia, trembling in every limb. And there came a knock at the door.

"Is it you, Dick?" said Alice, summoning all her powers. But she had to try several times before she recovered her voice sufficiently to be heard outside.

"Yes. May I come in?"

"Not to-night," said Alice, gently. "I am not feeling very well."

"Then good night, my dear sister," he said, and went away. His voice was calm, but very grave. It touched a chord in Celia's nature, and she was able to shed tears. By and by her face softened.

"Alice, what would you have done?" "Marriage is for eternity," said Alice, yet feeling the case could never have been her own.

"But on earth?"

"The physical tie must be broken, — snapped," said Alice, instantly; "but, O my dear! I believe you are cruel to leave him in such torture of suspense. You should have told him why you left him."

"O," said Celia, in agony, "then I could never have left him at all! Besides, I know him well. If he knew I went away of my own will, I believe it would infuriate him and ruin him. Now he may be nobler." Her voice was choking, and she hurried away.

She was only spending a day or two in the city. Of course she could not risk acting there; but she had taken advantage of the manager's coming there to make arrangements for a Southern tour to come and set Alice at rest. And then she went away, leaving no trace behind.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Alice found herself in a hard position after Celia was gone. She must see Dick, and know his terrible suspense and anxiety, seem to sympathize with it and yet not relieve it. She regretted that she had not compelled her sister to allow her some word to him. She sometimes thought she would tell him that she had had word that she was safe, though they could not see her or know more of her. But she dared not do that. She knew that if he once suspected that she knew anything of the matter, it would be impossible for her to conceal anything, and she felt bound in honor to Celia while she felt guilty in her silence to Dick. It was hard for her to meet him in a familiar, sisterly way, and betray nothing of the repugnance she felt for his sin. Celia, who had parted from him so utterly, did not think to what her silence subjected Alice. Yet to Alice this daily intercourse was far less trying, not only because she did not love him, but because she looked at his sin in a different light. It seemed ter-

rible to her, perhaps as much so as to Celia, but she could understand that one may do wrong thoughtlessly and repent it bitterly, and may deserve pity and forgiveness. Still, as Celia said, life had become hopeless for Dora May; why should it not be hopeless to him also? He had not so much to bear as she. And what a strange retribution had met him! — the consequence directly of his very own act, though he did not know that.

The task of Alice was easier than it would have been had she known the truth at first, because now Dick had almost ceased to talk about his loss. He strolled in, looking wretchedly, glanced at her always keenly, as if he hoped she might have some good news to tell, talked listlessly a few minutes, and then went restlessly away again. Her pity for him almost made her forget that his punishment was deserved. Several weeks went by in this way. He was doing nothing in the Legislature, he grew sterner and sadder every day. Alice saw, with pain, that he was being ruined by grief, and she determined to make a great effort and talk to him about it.

He came in at twilight one Sunday evening, and took a seat near Alice at the window. They watched the great stars shine out in the heavens one by one, in the winter sky. It was like an evening hardly more than a year ago when he had overtaken Celia as she hastened home with her Christmas presents.

"Dick," said Alice, "what are you doing in the Legislature?"

"Nothing," he answered moodily. "Now Aleck is out there is nobody to stir us up, and, for my own part, I don't think I should know if they were doing anything."

Alice looked at him intently a moment, and then said, "I believe you are doing wrong."

"Wrong?" said he, uneasily. "I hardly know what that means. I think how I am going to *endure*, and have not much space for my conscience to trouble me. Let me but be relieved from suspense (I think I could bear to know she is *dead*), and I should be fit for something."

"But that cannot be," said Alice, slowly and sadly.

"What!" said he, fiercely. "How can you speak like that to me? I have not lost hope yet."

How she longed to tell him what she knew.

"But even *during* the suspense there must be some meaning in it which God has put there for us."

"God!" said Dick, impatiently. "If there is a God, he is cruel. How can you expect the thought of him to help me? You have not suffered as I have, and do not understand it."

"And yet he does know what we need," she said, after a moment.

"Do I need this?" asked Dick, raising his haggard face. "I don't pretend to be very good, but I have never been a bad person. My peccadilloes don't deserve such torture as this."

Peccadilloes! So that was his term for blighting a life! But a moment after she pitied him, for she saw the black clouds gather on his face as he said, "Well, perhaps I deserve to suffer. But of what use is mere retribution? I am only crushed."

"Do not be," said Alice, earnestly. "If there is no happiness left in the world for you, there is at least work waiting to be done, and it is the part of a brave man to do it."

"I am not a coward," said he, rousing himself. "And I am willing to give money in a patronizing way, and like to bow to my inferiors, but I have n't much of the true Sir Launfal in me. I don't think I could live just for the sake of others."

Nevertheless, he had told the truth when he had said he was no coward. He was not even a moral coward. His life had been so sunshiny, so free from morbid ingredients, that with all his powers of mind, his ability in study, and his grasp of a subject, he had never learned to reflect. The blow which had fallen upon him, — to him the most horrible which could fall, — striking him in the most sensitive spot, had been so sudden, and had contained such suspense, that it had stunned him. He had kept hoping even against hope, week after week, that in some way the mystery would be cleared up, and he would find himself as happy as he had been before. While he felt this, nothing had

impelled him to think about any duty for himself. But the few words Alice said seemed to rouse him from his stupor. That she had spoken so taught him how narrow was the chance he should ever know more of his lost wife than he knew now. It showed him that her only sister had given up hope. Then how forlorn must that hope be to which he himself clung. He saw distinctly, at a flash, that if he waited till his suspense ceased before he did anything, he should probably wait all his life, and waste all his powers in fruitless self-torture.

The winter wind blew keenly on his face, the frosty stars shone clear and lighted a path for him through the snow, and he said to himself: "I am a man, and will bear my sorrow like a man, without wincing. Instead of the happiness which I longed for and lost, my life shall be spent in work, — work which may perhaps bring to others the blessing I have missed for myself. So help me God!"

Unlike Alice, who began with God always, he began with his manhood and worked upward to the Divine idea.

He began at once to carry out his resolutions. He worked early and late on all sorts of legislative business. He listened patiently to all sides of every question, and endeavored to decide conscientiously on all. He introduced bills and made speeches. His days and nights were crowded with labor. In his two previous winters in the Legislature he had made no impression except as a promising young lawyer. Now he began to be talked of as a man of great political ability, and, moreover, as a conscientious man. The combination of the two might have led people to consider him a *lusus nature*, had not his wealth, his patrician manners, and his aristocratic connections made it impossible for any one to laugh at him, even good-naturedly. He never gave anybody a loophole to call him eccentric. His somewhat conservative ideas stood him in good stead too. If he advocated the justice of a measure, it was a measure which seemed just to everybody, which nobody dared openly disapprove. But there are many things which everybody acknowledges, which

still no one seems disposed to advocate; so there was ample space for him to do good. He had not an atom of the Radical about him, so he shocked nobody's prejudices, though he often fought against their practical living, and so made himself a few enemies. He was one of those men who are born with a silver spoon in the mouth. He had all the gifts and all the graces. He was chivalrous, brave, and truthful; but it cost him less to be truthful than if he had, had a deeper insight or *on-sight*, and had been stirred by the visions of the future to attempt realizing them in the present. He took "short views," and saved himself from morbidness and his constituents from uneasiness. Yet for all his gifts, for all his "silver spoon," this man had missed the perfect rounding of his life, the happiness which one would have said was his birthright, and all through one sin, though he was unconscious of cause and sequence! Perhaps, when he was left alone so cruelly, he sometimes thought how he had left another, and recognized that God had meant his punishment to come in a similar way, though he could not guess how directly.

Work will comfort when everything else has failed, and in the fervor of his own work, the success which attended him, and the surety that through his means many were made happier, he began to recover the tone of his nature, though its elasticity was gone. He no longer bounded up the stairs, and played merry jokes, and laughed and teased. The boyish grace was gone, as, indeed, was right in a man grown. He had left society entirely, and given up all amusements. His friends feared lest his health should give way unless he took some relaxation; but he was better than when he only brooded without working, and any scene of pleasure would have awakened such painful feelings that it would have been weariness instead of rest. But a young man who has lived to be seven or eight and twenty without much care to make him prematurely old, who has a vigorous constitution, developed by all sorts of athletic exercises, who has known no illness and has never overworked, has such a stock of health on hand that it

must take a heavy blow indeed to prostrate him, and he does not commonly die in a minute.

So all the suffering and work which had now come to Dick did not make a very appreciable difference in his strength. Only those who knew him best detected that he was a shade paler and thinner than in the old days.

He did not care to go home much. His mother and sisters looked at him in such pity that he was exasperated, knowing that they believed the worst, and the worst to them meant exactly what it did to him. This enraged him, because he thought it the depth of uncharitableness for any one else not to overlook what he knew in his heart he could never overlook himself. Alice was the only person who seemed to look at things except through lenses. To her every person was just what he himself was now, without reference to his past and without reference to what the cruelty, neglect, or force of another might have made him. So, if Dick found himself longing to talk to any one, he soon learned that it was only with her that he could find any comfort. She was thus forced to live in some measure a double life, being the confidante of both her sister and her sister's husband. She wished to write to Celia and tell her she could not bear it, but she did not know how to address a letter. Celia believed that a correspondence, even under a feigned name, might lead to her discovery; and, besides, she had never cared to write letters, and felt that it would now be intolerable.

As if to make her position as hard as possible, Alice was thrown in close contact with Dora May, the third actor in the tragedy; but, as has been said, Miss May had avoided her ever since her sister's marriage. It was, at first, a relief to her. She felt guilty as she thought she knew the reason for the pathos in the face of the young sewing-girl. It was by accident, — an accident so cruel that it had shattered the lives of those dearest to her, — and yet she almost felt as if she were in some way to blame. Then she wondered why this strange sorrow had been allowed to befall her, and she saw it was meant that she should be a friend to Dora May; and

she tried so earnestly to be so, that, in spite of the reluctance on both sides, she finally won the young girl to her again. She thought she could not help her much except by drawing her out of her morbid loneliness, and yet sometimes the conversation would take a turn which made it possible for her to say words of real comfort as if by chance. It was impossible for any one to be long with Alice without feeling how sincerely with her the past was actually past, and that she took persons at their present intrinsic valuation.

Dora began to lose the depressed, shrinking look she had worn, — she could not lose the sadness, — she began to develop new energies and to find new interests. For a long time she had felt that all she could look forward to in the world was simply to earn enough to keep her alive; now she began to question whether it might not be right and well and happy for her to try to improve herself in all ways, even if there was no one to notice her improvement, or to care. So she began to read, and found herself gradually becoming more and more interested in many subjects of which she had known nothing before. The world broadened before her. Yet who shall say it was not hard?

"If I be dear to some one else,
Then I should be to myself more dear.
Shall I not take care of all that I think,
Yea, even of wretched meat and drink,
If I be dear,
If I be dear, to some one else?"

But to be dear to no one! Besides the sadness of it, how it paralyzes! Poor Dora! She needed all the strength and encouragement which the friendship of a girl like Alice could give her.

And Alice, she was poor and alone. The teaching which gained her daily bread brought scarcely anything more, since it would have been hardly possible for her to teach anywhere and gain less influence than in her present position, and influence was her grand aspiration. She was doing in such incidental ways more to bless her fellow-creatures than she dreamed. If we *could* calculate influences as we can a logarithm, we might find comfort when we have utterly failed in what we undertook with pure motives.

At last, however, Dick, with his usual kindness, found a place for her in a large private school, where she could teach more according to her ideas, and where her salary was sufficient for all her modest wishes. She could indulge quietly in small charities, which made her almost as happy as the large ones in which Celia had revelled on her wedding tour. She could hear as much music and see as many pictures as she pleased. And she could spend a month among the mountains in the summer. She was certainly the most beautiful of teachers, and found in her work the inspiration which a poet finds in poetry or a musician in music. She had all she needed to make her happy. She was happy, and tried to be entirely so; but to a girl of twenty-two a home all alone does not seem a rich and bounteous existence, however good and high it may be.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ALECK'S disappointment in politics was not the only one he had to endure. This in itself was sufficiently keen to a young man who enjoyed political life, and who had courage to believe that the world could not do without him. He was angry, too, that his honesty had proved a stumbling-block; and, had his nature not been so large and genial, he might have become bitterly cynical at this period of his life. But, determined to make the best of the position, he went on with his farm work and his physician's work without stopping to lament over what was irremediable, when lo, he began to discover by degrees that he was rapidly losing his practice. This was not because he was a less skilful physician than he had always been; indeed, with his constant study and experience, he was becoming very sure and reliable in his profession. He was forced to admit to himself reluctantly, because he believed in mankind, that his patrons were deserting him solely because he held such radical views. This was a harder test for him than the defeat upon election day. He could believe that persons might conscientiously differ from his opinions, and

think it dangerous to give him the power of making laws for them, but that any one should be so bigoted as to make hatred of beliefs a ground for hatred of himself struck him as amazing. Do not believe that he was a Verdant Green, but he was a man of deep and wide faith.

He was unconquerable. He might have been idle fairly, for he had almost finished his farm work for the winter, so confident had he been of being in the city. There was no work which he *must* do, so he was obliged to seek for some. Besides, he needed to use economy. So he proposed to discharge his hired man, and do all his work himself. But Aaron, knowing of no other place which he wanted, agreed to stay and do 'chores' for his board, if Aleck would teach him something about chemistry and agriculture. His enterprising Yankee spirit had caught fire from his employer's, and he meant to "know something." Aleck liked the plan, for then he could conscientiously take more time to study himself.

"By the way, Aleck," said Aaron, in the rural republican style, "I think you might chirp up. Nobody's been very sick yet; but when they are, I'll bet they'd a mighty sight rather have you than go all the way to the West Village for that old fogey."

"I thought so too at first," said Aleck; "but I heard to-day that half a dozen of the leading men in town, headed by Squire Jameson, have proposed to a new physician, Dr. Armstrong, to settle here, and have pledged themselves to see that he is supported for a certain time if he is n't sufficiently patronized."

Aaron whistled in amazement. "How plaguy mad they must be at you! I guess they ain't going to forgive you right away."

"They can't forgive me," returned Aleck, looking proud; "for I won't be forgiven, since I don't deserve it."

"Well," said Aaron, with a beaming smile, "I'll bet on you."

Aleck smiled too. "Perhaps I shall make a fortune off my farm, now that I've nothing else to do," said he. "And then I can go where I please, and work my way up again."

"You will, if anybody," said Aaron;

"but I think it's plaguy mean that a smart honest chap like you is down so far now. I s'pose you *could n't* see any new light on the woman question and so on, — could you now?"

Aleck laughed. "I *don't* see any new light, at any rate."

"O well," said Aaron. "I s'posed you'd done what you thought was right, and that nothing could alter you; but if you only could change in some few things, or, at any rate, make up your mind to keep mum about them when it ain't going to do any good to say anything, it would make a sight of difference in matters and things. Everybody knows you are smart, and when they first elected you to the Legislature the whole town was as proud as a peacock of you. Gracious! don't you remember how they cheered?"

Aleck winced. He did remember. At that time he had been rather unsophisticated, and, though he was not a vain fellow, the applause which had followed his speeches and the announcement of his election had made his heart bound with pleasure. His whole life had stretched before him and the game to win. Now, in only two years, his whole life seemed to stretch before him and the game was apparently lost.

"Everybody can't be a knight-errant," said he, cheerfully, "so let anybody who is faint-hearted keep his opinions to himself and get on peaceably; but, for my part, I shall never want any favor which is to be had by sacrificing my right to say what I please when I please and where I please."

And that was the end of the matter, for that time at least. The old housekeeper, Aleck, and Aaron were left to themselves in the plain farm-house for the winter. The men studied, and the housekeeper sewed and read by herself and with Aleck, who had a mania for making everybody about him interested in what interested him. He had not entirely lost his friends, to be sure. There were some men in the town who agreed with him in many ways, and still others who respected him while they differed from him; but the money, weight, influence, and education of the town were all against him.

He smiled a little and with less bit-

terness than he might have done when his poor patients also deserted him. Before the new doctor came they were all staunch friends of Dr. Hume, notwithstanding his unpopularity among the leading powers. But when Dr. Armstrong arrived, and proved himself a good, skilful physician, and unwilling to take fees from the poor though he was in such demand among the rich, they suddenly discovered that, since it would cost them nothing to desert Aleck, it was right that they too should beware how they encouraged such dangerous political opinions.

Perhaps Aleck thought rather ruefully sometimes of the cosey little chats of the previous winters and the happy quartette who had assembled in Alice's little sitting-room. Perhaps he sometimes envied the trio, whom he fancied happy without him; for such care had been observed that the news of Celia's disappearance had not found its way into the papers, and Aleck never corresponded with anybody. We do not invariably know what we are envying.

In the spring he went to work upon the farm with a will. He made great changes in it, believing that if he devoted himself to the raising of early and choice vegetables and fruits, he might soon be well-to-do in the world. But troubles do not come alone. A terrible drought, lasting nearly all summer, destroyed, one after another, all his plants, and he found his purse far more slender in August than it was in April, though it had not been plethoric then.

"A bad look," said Aaron, glancing at the parched field, in which their last hopes had withered, one evening. "I should like to have some rain, but I guess it's too late for it to do us any good."

"Yes," said Aleck, composedly; "but we have the satisfaction of knowing we have managed well, and we are not to blame."

"I must say you take things cool," said Aaron. "I have n't seen you cross once."

"It would n't do any good to be," said Aleck, with a smile. "Besides, I don't want to be. I am willing to own that I don't know what is best for me,

and I sha' n't fret about what the Lord sends."

Nevertheless, when Aaron had gone home and Aleck stood alone looking at his desolate fields, his mouth settled into a sad, grave expression. He walked carefully about, searching for any little shoots which were not yet quite withered. He found very few, and as he came back to the spot he started from, he sang softly to himself, with a comical look:—

"Years have passed on and I have n't saved a dollar,
Evelina still lives in the green, grassy holler;
I shall have money enough to marry her never,
So I should n't be surprised if I loved her forever."

CHAPTER XXX.

IT was a brilliant night in one of the Southern cities. The brilliancy with which we have to do, however, was not that of the stars, but within the theatre in which Celia had an engagement. She had been winning more and more applause in each of the neighboring cities, so that the house was crowded to see her play. The play was a tragedy, and she entered into it with her whole soul. The applause was prolonged and deep, and her courage rose. She forgot herself entirely and became the hapless queen whom she represented in very deed. She was called before the curtain again and again, and bouquets of the richest flowers fell at her feet. She had had success before; now it seemed that she was creating a *furor*. Night after night this went on. Every night the house was more and more crowded. She had no time to think of anything else, for she was constantly occupied in learning new rôles,—not an easy thing for a beginner like her. Luckily, she had the genius to improvise when she forgot her part. People were all asking, "Who is she?" "Mrs. Brown" did not prove a very satisfactory answer, but it was all they could obtain. On the night in question, as she gathered up her bouquets she caught a glimpse of something glittering in one of them; she looked at it again, and found it to be a bracelet of gold and jewels. With

sudden anger, she dashed it upon the stage, in the sight of the whole assembly. However the giver may have felt at such treatment of his gift, the rest of the audience applauded, guessing at the reason; but Celia had disappeared behind the curtain, and no amount of applause could bring her back again. She had been in the city a week, and, as we have said, she had been too thoroughly busy every moment to have time to think. But now, as she turned into her dressing-room, everything rushed to her mind at once. She locked her door, and paced the room with a blazing face.

"And has it come to this?" she said, with curling lip. "Have I so far forgotten myself, even in a place like the theatre, that a stranger dares to treat me so?—I, the wife of Richard Stacy!" She absolutely writhed at the thought. She had believed that any woman of purity and spirit could always so act that no man calling himself a gentleman would dare to make advances to her. It was a little thing, to be sure, and she might have thought of it as only a gift from one carried away by her acting. She always received the flowers in that spirit. But that any one should think she would wear jewelry given her by a stranger! Meantime the young man who had thrown the bouquet was just as angry as she, with less cause. His eagerness to see her was heightened by the repulse. He had the nature of a hunter. So he curbed the rising passion, and sauntered leisurely behind the curtain, where he was already well known.

"That 'Mara' of yours is a confounded good player," said he to the manager. "Can't you introduce me?"

"Of course not," replied the manager, with some scorn. "I never introduce actresses to young gentlemen,"—a slight stress on the last word.

"O," laughed the young man, "you need n't be so ruffled! Of course I shall see her, so it is a mere question of time. You can help me or not, as you please."

"See here, young man," replied the manager, sharply; "I won't have you going on in this way. If those whom I engage choose to make friends for them-

selves, that is none of my affair; but if anybody attempts to annoy them or intrude on them, I shall protect them. 'Mara' is wholly under my care."

"Then 'Mrs. Brown' is only a myth, I suppose," said the young man, with a furtive glance.

"That is nothing to you," said the manager, shortly.

"Oho! then I see how things are," said the young man, with a light laugh. "I only wanted to be acquainted in a friendly sort of way with a woman of genius, and you bristle up at once. I think I understand."

"And I think *you* are a fool," said the manager, "and I won't have you about. I can tell you one thing, if you are the puppy who flung the bracelet, you need never expect to advance one whit farther in Mrs. Brown's good graces than you are now. She is n't a ballet-girl; she has a temper like wildfire and a will like iron."

"What language do you use to me?" stammered the young man, red with rage.

"Better than you deserve," said the manager, coolly; "and if you do not go at once, I shall take measures to put you out."

The young man deemed it prudent to get out of the building as fast as possible, but saw nothing to prevent his lounging in the shadow outside as long as he liked.

The manager knocked at Celia's door. He heard a rustling within, but no answer. He knocked again, and this time he spoke. Reassured by his voice, she opened the door and stood there looking haughty and angry.

"Mrs. Brown," said the manager, "the fellow who annoyed you so has been to me just now."

"With an apology?" asked she, proudly.

"No," said the manager, "he wishes to see you. I took the liberty of refusing for you."

"Well?" said Celia, wondering why he did not go.

"He is an obstinate sort of fellow, who does not like to be balked," added the manager; "and I suspect that though I have ordered him out of the building he is still lurking outside,

waiting for you. I warn you to be on your guard."

"You think I shall not be safe alone in my carriage?" said Celia, her eyes glittering dangerously.

"I think the fellow will try to speak to you," said the manager. "I cannot go home with you now myself, and I therefore spoke to Siedhof, and he will accompany you, if you wish."

"Thank you," said Celia, "you are very kind"; and in a voice as low as a breath, she added, "Do such things often happen to actresses who do not encourage them?"

"O, you need not be frightened!" said the manager, good-humoredly. "There are plenty of silly fellows who can't be made to understand at first that their attentions can be unacceptable to any one. You will probably be annoyed more or less by such, it is the penalty you pay for acting well; but no harm will be done."

Celia shut her teeth together that she might not blaze out. She was learning to keep a watch upon herself. "Tell Mr. Siedhof I am ready," she said in a moment.

Mr. Siedhof was an old, bald-headed musician to whom Celia had been drawn at once by his devotion to music and his beautiful politeness. She was glad the manager had chosen him for her escort. As she went out, leaning on his arm, a figure drew back baffled into the shade, and they seated themselves in the carriage unmolested.

"Young lady," said Mr. Siedhof, with the slightest possible German manner and accent, "you played well to-night. I found myself glad to use my violin in your service."

Celia sighed wearily. She meant to say nothing, but her heart was very full. She had never learned much self-control, and she had an instinctive feeling that Siedhof was to be trusted; so, almost before she knew it, she found herself speaking.

"I wish, Mr. Siedhof, that I had not played well. I have believed, that, the more genius one displayed, the safer one must be. I have proved the contrary. I never played so well as to-night, and never met with such humiliation."

"Ah! you mean the bracelet," said

Mr. Siedhof, quietly. "My dear young lady, you must not lay that to heart. You are not to blame for what some one else does."

"I feel to blame," cried Celia. "That a man who does not know me should dare to give me a present. What must I have done? How must I have acted?"

"You have acted right, young lady," said Mr. Siedhof, who never could call her Mrs. Brown, perhaps because he could not believe it her true name; "your mistake was in believing that genius can be comprehended by those who have not its germs."

"It is no genius then," said Celia, quickly. "That which is really large, and not one-sided, must comprehend the smaller in it. And then I have made an impression and the wrong one. I despise myself."

"Do not so," answered the German. "Never despise yourself for what another does to harm you. You played well and truly. I heard you and I know. Because a man was present whose soul was so small that he saw only the brilliancy, and not the depth, of the play, you should not blame yourself."

"You are kind to tell me that," said Celia. "I believe you must be right, and am glad to feel that perhaps I need not scorn myself, though I truly think that the best genius ought to reach the roughest natures."

"The roughest? Yes," said the German, with a flashing eye; "but not a mean and polished nature, in which there is no nature, but only art."

"Tell me the truth, Mr. Siedhof," said Celia, earnestly, "have I anything more to fear from this man?"

"I do not know him," replied he, "but I fear he will not be contented to fail so entirely in attracting your attention. You need not be afraid of him, but you may be annoyed for a little while."

"So the manager said," said Celia. "What shall I do? Shall I give up my engagement and go away and find something else to do?"

"Not so," replied Siedhof, quickly, to check her impulsiveness. "You are meeting only a type of evil, not an individual. Something of this might assail

you everywhere. You will show yourself a brave woman in being above being troubled by it. *Overlook it*, but do not seem angry."

"That may do for calm natures," answered Celia, "but how can it do for one like me? O Mr. Siedhof, all my impulses lead me always towards flight!"

"It is braver to stay," quoth Siedhof.

"I will stay, said Celia, after a moment of hesitation, "and you must help me to bear what I must."

"Very well," said Mr. Siedhof. "I thought you had courage."

But they had reached Celia's hotel, and the conversation was brought to a close.

Celia's room was a good, large, airy one; but as she was to stay in it only a few weeks it contained no little home-like ornaments, simply the hotel furniture and two immense trunks for her wardrobe. The room and furniture were sufficiently handsome, for Celia's success had been such as to enable her to live in comfort; but the whole effect was dreary and lonely in the extreme. Poor girl! she had never yet really had a home since her father died, and now she had given up the hope of ever having one; so she was contented to sleep all she could, and to spend her days in committing to memory her rôles, and at present, at any rate, she found herself so busy that she had not much time to think how lonely she was; and with her, as with Dick, intense work kept her vigorous when she must have died without it.

She undressed immediately and went to bed with a fierce determination to think no more of the occurrences of the evening; but she found herself unable to sleep, and tossed and turned all night, listening to the sounds of gayety in the adjoining rooms which were kept up for hours.

These rooms were also occupied by an actress who was playing in a rival theatre, and whose reputation was of much longer standing than Celia's. Though she too was only staying at the hotel for a few weeks, her rooms had nothing of a forlorn or uninhabited appearance. Her parlor was adorned with every little knick-knack which

CHAPTER XXXI.

AS might be supposed, Celia's annoyances did not end in a single evening. For a week she was persecuted with notes in every shape and conveyed to her in all ways, — by post, left at her hotel, handed her by some of the supernumeraries about the theatre who had been bribed to see that they reached her, concealed in bouquets, till she dared not receive any flowers at all. She could not help reading some of these, for the handwriting was disguised in various ways, and she could not be quite sure, without opening them, what was their origin. The young man declared his passion in sufficiently strong terms, and she was infinitely disgusted and would certainly have taken refuge in flight but for Siedhof's advice.

"Do not lower yourself by letting him see that he troubles you," said he.

At the end of a week the young man gave over the pursuit, finding that he received no sign in reply, and endeavored to take his revenge by hissing Celia off the stage. He was unsuccessful, however, here also, for, though a few of his companions joined him, the city in general were too much pleased with the new actress to allow such a thing to go on; so the young man was, in the end, obliged to betake himself to the rival theatre and find what consolation he might in the society of the sirens of the ballet, being, however, first held up to scorn and well shaken by the sarcasms of Antoinetta Hüntén, whom he had graciously intended to allow the vacant place in his heart, but who had heard rumors of his unreciprocated affection and treated him accordingly.

Celia was left in peace so long as she remained in that city, and doubtless her conduct in this affair saved her from many disagreeable things; but as she went from city to city, winning applause among those who knew nothing of her character, it was some time before she was entirely free from importunities. It gradually became known, however, that it was useless for any stranger to attempt to see her, for she would receive no one, and, her character once established, she found herself by degrees let alone. To-

taste could devise or money could buy. Her flowers were grouped effectively, so that the whole room seemed to blossom with them. Celia always threw hers carelessly into a bowl of water, in a heap.

The other actress was not alone; she was surrounded by a group of half a dozen young men, who were partaking with her of a very elegant little supper. They were all well dressed, young, and handsome, and full of wit. The young lady was worn, but she had skilfully repaired the ravages of dissipation by paint, and looked very brilliant, and said the gayest things, constantly, in the pertest way. The young men addressed her variously, each having a different pet name for her. "Netty," and "Tony," "Antoine," "Nina," "Annie," were the various changes which they rang upon her Christian name of Antoinetta, while one addressed her brusquely always as "Hüntén."

She was still dressed as at the theatre, in a costume between a gypsy and a ballet-girl, and she laughed, danced, and sung, with the utmost freedom. She was an arrant coquette, and found nothing easier than to make all the six young men hate each other and love her at once, and each to think that she loved him and regarded all the rest as bores.

Celia, tossing in anger on her bed, became still more angry as she now and then heard snatches of the flippant conversation. It was actresses such as Antoinetta Hüntén who brought about such annoyances to actresses like Celia. It is to be feared that the latter did not excuse her even on the plea that she seemed to be thoroughly enjoying herself and entertaining other people, while Celia was gloomy and solitary. There ought to be a little allowance made for that.

The six young men wished each to outstay the other, but Miss Hüntén managed very adroitly and sent them all off at once. When they were gone, she locked and bolted her doors, walked up to the pier-glass and looked at herself intently for a long time. She turned away with a weary and sad face, drank eagerly a glass of wine, and went to bed.

wards spring the troupe resumed its journey northward, making a stay of some weeks in Baltimore. She noticed, the very first night she played, a small man sitting near the stage, who seemed quite carried away by the play. He had a good pleasant face, of much strength and also real sweetness. She felt at once that it was a face she could trust; and as her powers always increased when she saw her audience enthusiastic, she naturally found herself playing almost at him. He was in the same place the next night and the next, still intent and earnest. She began to find real comfort in seeing him. He did not look like an *habitué* of the theatre, and yet he was always there. On the fourth night she saw that he held a bouquet in his hand, and when, at the close of the fourth act, several bouquets were thrown to her, she marked well which came from him. It was the sweetest and most delicate of all, of white spring flowers and petals just tinted and veined with pink and blue, mignonette and pansies and violets.

She looked at it with a curious expression. "He is a pure, good man," said she to herself, "and he has chosen his flowers to suit his own taste; but he does n't understand me if he thinks such an offering emblematical of the fiery volcano in my heart. Poh! he does n't think of emblems at all. He looks like a practical man, though the theatre just now seems to be shaking him a little out of his nature."

A week passed away. The little man was still in his place, and at last he plucked up courage to go behind the scenes and inquire for the manager. "Sir," said he, blushing, "would it be possible for me to be introduced to 'Mara'?"

"No," said the manager, "it is quite out of the question; she sees no gentlemen whatever."

"But of course she must have some acquaintances," persisted the little man.

"None," said the manager, shortly, "and she wishes for none."

"I am so sorry," said the little man, in evident distress. "I like her playing so much, and I wish I could know her. But, of course, I would n't intrude for the world. Will you show me how to

get out of the theatre? I have never been behind the scenes before, and am turned round."

The manager looked at him again more carefully, scarcely repressing a smile, for he saw that the little man was really as innocent as he appeared. As he showed him the way, the little man spoke again.

"Would it annoy her if I sent her a note?"

"I don't know," said the manager. "I am afraid it would."

"I know what I will do," said the little man. "I will send her my card, and perhaps she will consent to see me. Will you give it to her for me?"

"Yes," said the manager, more graciously than usual.

"I will wait," said the little man.

So the manager knocked at Celia's door again. "There is a gentleman," said he, "who wishes to know if you will see him."

"Why did you bring me such a message?" said Celia, angrily. "You knew very well what I should say."

"Because the person who sent it is a gentleman," replied the manager, "and evidently knows so little of the world that I was ashamed to let him see that I suspected he could have any but the best of motives. He has been at the theatre every night you have played, and I think you must have noticed him."

Celia hesitated, and then took the card which the manager held out. "Mr. John Home, 1214 — Street."

"Where did he sit to-night?" she asked.

"He has had the same seat every night we have been here," replied the manager, and then proceeded to describe its situation.

Celia did not reply at once, but at last she laid the card on the table, and said, "Tell him I thank him for his interest in me, but that I never see gentlemen and will make no exception in his favor."

So Mr. Home was turned away more hopelessly and deeply in love than he had been before. He still appeared every night at the theatre, and sometimes threw the most delicate bouquets, but he made no further attempt to be introduced.

Celia was now much less busy than she had been the first of the season. She was appearing in the same pieces she had been playing all winter and had nothing new to learn, so that her days were in danger of becoming tedious. The gnawing disquiet at her heart forced her to do something. She had often read that girls who have lost all hope of a happy life sometimes find peace and escape from reflection by going among the poor, and, little as this was to her taste, she determined to do it. Service undertaken from such a motive might easily have proved disagreeable to the recipients; but Celia had in deed and truth so warm a heart, was so easily touched by suffering, and so ready to help when she had once conquered her repugnance to entering close, dirty rooms, that she avoided this danger, and though her residence in the city was necessarily so short, she had already found quite a little circle of poor people who welcomed her.

One day she went to visit a little sick boy, the son of a respectable kind of woman who supported herself by taking in washing. Celia carried a basket of grapes and oranges, and also a bouquet which some of her admirers had sent her the evening before, little guessing what its destination would be.

"O, how beautiful!" said the little boy, "and how kind you are, Mrs. Brown!" She was called "Mrs. Brown" among the poor, and they never dreamed that the kind lady in black was really a popular actress.

"I hope you won't care," said the little boy again; "but, if you don't, I wish you would let me give these flowers away."

"Of course, Charley," replied Celia. "I shall be glad to have you do just what you like with them. To whom do you want to give them?"

"Mrs. Pritchard is sick," said the boy; "she's been sick ever so long, and now I expect she's in consumption. She was raised in the country, and I expect maybe flowers would look good to her. She lives in the next house."

"Yes," said Celia, "I have no doubt she would like some flowers; but I have a great many at home, more than

I can find a place for, so you can keep these, and I will bring her some more. If she has lived in the country, perhaps the wild-flowers will please her best, and I have a whole basket full of mosses and little spring-flowers. Do you think she would be willing to have me call, or shall I send the things?"

Notwithstanding her missionary work among the poor, Celia still retained certain heathen ideas as to the impropriety that a person, for charity's sake alone, should force herself upon them.

"If she's anything like me, I expect she'd rather you'd come yourself," said the boy.

Celia was glad of it. It would help to wear away the tedium of the day. So she went out and purchased another basket of fruit, and, returning to the hotel, took also the basket of flowers.

She found Mrs. Pritchard quite alone. She lived with her daughter, who supported them both by working in a millinery establishment and had to be away all day. Of course the invalid was very lonely. She did not absolutely want care, because the children of another family living in the house looked in, from time to time, to see what she needed.

"And then," added she, "there is a good, kind young man who goes about among the poor, who comes here to see the children, and, when I am able to sit up, he comes in and reads to me such sweet books."

She was delighted with the fruit and flowers, especially the flowers, because they were such as she had found when a girl. Celia was touched by her loneliness and stayed some time, talking with her, and promised to visit her again the next day.

Now it so chanced that Celia had scarcely gone before the young man spoken of came in, and the first thing on which his eyes rested was the basket of flowers, at which he gazed in a somewhat bewildered way, as well he might, for his name was Mr. John Home and he had himself arranged every leaf and petal the evening before, and had seen to it that they were conveyed intact to the actress with whom he was so violently in love.

"O," said Mrs. Pritchard, "you did

n't expect to see such beautiful flowers here, — did you?"

"Why, no," said Mr. Home, still in a maze. "Where did they come from?"

Then, of course, followed the story of the morning's visit. Mrs. Pritchard said she knew nothing about the lady except that her name was Miss Brown, and that she visited the poor a great deal. She dressed in mourning, and had said that she was only staying in the city a little while. Mr. Home was more unsophisticated than the young man who had asked if Mrs. Brown was a myth. He had never heard the actress called by any name but "Mara." By that name she appeared upon all the play-bills, and he never had thought of falling into conversation with any of the other members of the troupe in regard to her. If he had thought of it, he would have at once scouted the idea as dishonorable. So the name "Brown" with Mrs. Pritchard's mispronunciation of the prefix, conveyed no idea to him; but he was too sure of the flowers to doubt that either directly or indirectly they had come from "Mara," and he was quite on the *qui vive* with excitement. It is to be feared that he read the Sunday-school book that he had brought for Mrs. Pritchard without due appreciation of its excellent moral. But he read it nevertheless, for he was a conscientious young man, and would let nothing interfere with doing a kindness to another. He managed to find out, before he went away, that Miss Brown was expected the next morning again, though he could not learn the hour.

Accordingly he made his appearance very bright and early, hypocritically alleging as a reason that he had more leisure than usual, and would be glad to finish the book he began the day before, thus allowing himself a long time to stay. Mrs. Pritchard was, of course, delighted, and everything went on smoothly.

About eleven o'clock he found himself upon the last page of the book, and was dismayed at the idea that all his manoeuvring had been in vain, when a light step came up the stair and a gentle hand knocked at the half-opened door.

Poor Mr. Home! He blushed violently,

and could hardly sit still as Mrs. Pritchard said "Come in," and the stately figure in black approached. Celia wore a heavy crape veil, and she did not see that a stranger was present until she had taken a seat. The instant she saw him she recognized him, and knew that he recognized her, but it was too late to retreat.

"Miss Brown," said Mrs. Pritchard, "this is Mr. Home, the young gentleman as I told you about as is so good to me."

Celia bowed very distantly, and Mr. Home dared not show that he knew her. His courage sank so many degrees in an instant that he would have gone away immediately if he had not been head over ears in love; so he could do nothing but stare at her.

Celia inquired composedly after Mrs. Pritchard's health, gave her some more fruit, and then said she was too busy to stay longer, but would try to come in soon again, purposely making her promise indefinite. Then she went away.

Poor Mr. Home! He was in a desperate state, and yet he dared not follow her. But then it came home to him almost with agony that this meeting had been a most extraordinary coincidence, and that it was not probable that fortune would ever so favor him again, and he screwed his courage up, and, bidding an abrupt adieu to Mrs. Pritchard, followed the lady of his love as fast as he could go.

"Miss Brown," he said, as he reached her side, "I beg your pardon, but I must speak to you."

Celia turned. She could not find it in her heart to look haughtily at him, because she felt how pure and simple he was.

"Well?" said she, pausing.

"I don't know what you will think," said he, with an agonized blush; "but if you knew how much I have wanted to speak to you, you would forgive me. I know you would not see me when I asked the manager to take my card to you, but, now you have seen me, it is different. I have tried to make up my mind not to annoy you, but now it seems as if we had met almost providentially."

"Well," said Celia, as coolly as she could, for she felt that she trembled, "since we have chanced to be introduced, if you have anything of importance to say to me, I don't know that I have any objection."

Mr. Home stopped short. It was not easy to say what he had to say after such a business-like beginning; but he knew it was his only chance, and so he said it.

"Miss Brown, don't think I expect you to understand me, or feel the same, and I know I speak very abruptly, but I have seen you play, and — and — and — why, I love you. Don't speak quite yet," added he, as she drew herself up with a look of scorn. "I know it is dreadful for me to say it here when you have never seen me before, though I have seen you so many times, but don't think I mean to trouble you. I had to say this, because you won't give me any chance to see you, and I thought — perhaps if — you knew how I felt, you might be willing to let me see you sometimes, and so get acquainted. I don't suppose you would care anything about me ever, but you see you don't know me at all now, and so you can't be sure."

If Celia's troubles had been less real, she would have laughed aloud at this. As it was, she was inexpressibly touched, though angry.

"Mr. Home," said she, looking full in his face, "I am in the habit of reading character, and I know yours now as well as I should in a year's acquaintance. Those traits which I cannot comprehend now I never could, if I should know you a lifetime. We part here."

"O, do not say that!" cried Mr. Home, plucking up a spirit. "How can you know me? You do not know half how I love you."

"Mr. Home," said Celia, her eyes full of trouble, "I will tell you what I think about you. You have not yet seen enough of life" (it was true, though he was a year her senior, and she had seen life) "to know precisely what your own aims and intents are. You are dazzled by the first glitter. You believe you love me madly now; but a few years hence I should not satisfy you, in your

quiet home, with your good father and mother and your peaceful brothers and sisters," (she spoke very slowly, and she saw by his quick breath that he understood what she meant,) "any more than you would satisfy me."

It was strange what an influence those few strong words had on him. It was like a cool hand on a feverish brow. They seemed to bring him back to himself, for it was a fact that he had never been to the theatre till the night he first heard Celia play, and that all which had followed had been as unlike himself as possible. But a love like that, however abnormal, could not be checked in one moment, and he said entreatingly: "You may be right, I don't know. Your eyes seem to pierce through my soul and see everything. But O, do not say you will not let me see you, that you will not give me even a chance!"

"Mr. Home," said Celia, again looking straight into his eyes, and making a revelation which she would have spared herself had it not been imperative, "I am married."

"O God, what have I done?" said he, starting back; and, to do him justice, it was not the feeling that he had wholly lost her which made him so distressed, but the thought that he had unwittingly committed a sin.

"Forgive me, if you ever can," said he. "I thought they called you Miss Brown. I never thought of this. Can you forgive me?"

"Yes," said Celia, "heartily. And when the time comes, as it surely will, and soon, that you understand that your feeling to-day was only a fever-heat, I hope, if you can, you will see me and tell me so. I do not want to think that I have spoiled, or even maimed, your life."

"You are very noble," said he; "and I will not even go to the theatre again to see you play, or to Mrs. Pritchard's while you stay in town."

"We go next week," said Celia, half smiling upon him. "Good by, my friend."

"Good by," faltered he, and there they parted.

Celia said fiercely to herself, "Why do I never touch happiness in myself or others?"

CHAPTER XXXII.

ONE day in spring Alice saw an announcement in the papers to the effect that one of the theatres had made an engagement for the closing weeks of the season with "Mara," the new tragedienne, and with the Queen of the Ballet, the well-known Antoinetta." The announcement produced a strange effect upon her. She was glad that she might have a chance to see her sister again. She feared that though the Legislature had adjourned, something might occur to bring Dick to town at the wrong time, and she found herself wondering what influence "Antoinetta," the idol of Celia's early dreams, had had upon her when brought into actual contact.

On the morning of the very night when they were to appear, she received a little note in a disguised handwriting, saying that the players had arrived in the city only the evening before, and that, owing to the pressure of the rehearsals, she could not see Celia till after the play. But a ticket was sent to her, and Celia promised to see her taken care of at the close of the entertainment. As the twilights were getting long, Alice felt that she would be quite safe in going to the theatre, and with considerable agitation she found herself anticipating seeing her sister act. The play was called "Elva," and this afforded no clew to its nature. She wondered what it could be which should introduce two such incongruous characters.

The curtain rose, and from that moment till the end of the play everybody was bewitched. It was a play not at all according to Gunter; it was not a tragedy, though it ended with the suicide of Leonora, who was represented by Celia, and it had too much pathos for a comedy, yet it was full of wit and sparkle, and the ballet was very fine. To Alice it possessed the intensest interest. With all her belief in Celia, she had never guessed half her dramatic power. She had a hard and bitter part to play. Alice heard some one afterwards say that the drama had been written with special reference to Antoinetta, who took the part of Elva. Leonora was a

passionate, revengeful nature, full of intrigue and plotting. Bad as the character was, Alice felt a gleam of satisfaction in seeing how perfectly her sister carried it out; and Celia had genius enough to throw shadings of tone and expression into the whole in such a way that while she was in sight she carried the sympathy of her audience with her, notwithstanding the fierceness and horror of her deeds. Elva was a dancing-girl, Leonora's rival. There was opportunity for many graceful ballet-scenes, and Antoinetta was a perfect dancer. Also, she had been educated on the stage and had real native genius, so that it was natural she should outshine Celia, who had had only a few months' practice. Alice looked at her with a great deal of curiosity to see how well she fulfilled her early idea of her. She found that she was as absolutely fascinating as she had seemed to childish eyes, and yet she was deeply disappointed in her. She had always kept her in memory as one true to her art, and who would be incapable of swerving from it. In one way this was correct, for everything she did was done in the most natural way, and she did not rant. Perhaps it was required by the exigencies of her part, for she appeared in some scenes disguised as a boy; but she had a kind of swaggering air at times, pretty and taking, to be sure, yet somewhat opposed to Alice's ideas of high art. Alice almost blamed herself for feeling so, and thought it was the result of the mixed nature of the play. Celia and Antoinetta were brought into too sharp contrast; if it had been a complete comedy, Antoinetta's air would not so have annoyed her. It seemed as if Celia felt so too, and was actually playing against her with the same rancor that she assumed. The discord made itself felt among the audience, though perhaps few realized just where the trouble lay. Antoinetta was the favorite, and her part a beautiful one and too well interpreted not to call forth great applause; yet, on the other hand, Celia, unknown, and supporting a hateful character, still delighted them, and she gained so much sympathy that at the *dénouement* half the relish of Elva's triumph was lost in pity for Leonora,

and the climax of the play was destroyed. However, both the actresses had done so well that the drama was an overwhelming success.

If Alice could excuse Antoinetta's manner as being necessary to her rendering of Elva, she found it harder to escape the impression of her face. It was exquisitely chiselled and sparkling and brilliant in its beauty; but it was painfully apparent how highly it was rouged, and there was a mocking expression on the lip which almost hid its intense pathos.

At the close of the fifth act one of those peculiar attendants at the theatre called Supes appeared at Alice's side and told her that Mrs. Brown was ready to see her. She started at the name, she had forgotten that Celia had assumed it; but she rose and followed him behind the scenes. Her sister, with her hair dishevelled as in the last suicide scene, drew her into her dressing-room. After the first greeting was over Celia said, "Now, Alice, what about my acting?"

"It was grand," replied Alice, "yet it makes me shudder to think of it."

"Because it was too intense?" said Celia, half smiling. "I tell you, Alice, you can't guess how I have learned what it is to be happy. From the moment I began to act in tragedies I have known a fierce delight which supplies the place of what I have lost — no, no, no, but it is glorious!"

"That was not the trouble," said Alice. "You did not seem happy to me to-night, you seemed vindictive. I felt as if your hatred for Elva was a real thing."

"It is," replied Celia, proudly. "Elva is the incarnation of Antoinetta herself. The play was written expressly for her, and it is exactly like her."

"But why," said Alice, in astonishment, "do you hate her so much? Is she so very different from your early dreams?"

"Alice," said Celia, "first tell me this. You know the object of the play is that Elva shall carry the house by storm by showing her actual purity under very suspicious circumstances. Now did the play to-night fulfil this object?"

"No," said Alice, "your genius frustrated it, for everybody felt your own truth, bad as you were, and to me, at least, there seemed a suppressed undercurrent of feeling that, notwithstanding the triumphant explanation of everything which had seemed against Elva during the whole affair, she was somehow wrong; and yet she played truthfully too, but I had an uneasy feeling that she was, after all, standing on a lower level than yourself, incapable of the same heights. But I am your sister, and may have misjudged."

"I don't think you have," said Celia, coolly, "for you were prejudiced in favor of Antoinetta, and I must have accomplished my aim or you would not have guessed it. Her genius is too great for me to overcome her wholly, and, more than that, she is true in her acting, and especially true to herself, for she does not stand on a very high plane; and in showing myself instead of playing the part given me, I have only put her just where she belongs."

"I don't understand you," said Alice, in a grieved tone. "Your life in theatres must have changed you very much if you find pleasure in injuring a rival."

"A rival!" said Celia, with an angry flush. "Alice, you ought to know me better than to believe me so mean as that. It is not with the hope of eclipsing her that I play as I do, but because I believe her character false and rotten as the character of the Elva she represents, and I will do the little that lies in me to stem the current of corrupt taste which can applaud that."

"But why do you feel so?" asked Alice again. "May it not be that your instinctive feeling about her is a wrong one, and that you are injuring one who needs your pity?"

"My feeling would be as strong if I had depended only on my intuitions," replied Celia, "though I might be mistaken; but then I have not depended upon those alone in this case. Antoinetta has the reputation, not only among actors, but in the world at large, of being in every sense of the word a ballet-dancer. Just at present she is the mistress of an idle, artistic sort of a young fellow who wrote the play of Elva."

"How terrible!" said Alice, shocked. "Still, we ought not to judge harshly, Celia. They may conscientiously believe that a civil tie has nothing to do with a true marriage."

"O Alice, how unsophisticated you are!" said Celia, exasperated. "Do you think even that would not be wrong?"

"I think it would be very, very wrong," replied Alice, earnestly, "for it would be an error in judgment that if believed in to any great extent would flood the world with sin; and the very purity of those who set the example would make the example stronger."

"So it would really be more wrong than for worse people to do the same thing?"

"No, for every action should be judged by its motive, and not by its effects. And actual purity *will* make itself felt, no matter how much it may at first be misunderstood."

"Well, said Celia, impatiently, "there is no use in talking about that, for it has nothing to do with the question. Antoinetta is not simply one man's mistress, but she has had lovers ever since she was a child."

"O Celia," said Alice, "that is too sad to say!"

"It is more than sad," said Celia. "I am so enraged every time I have to act with her that my only comfort is that I have a part in which I can show how I despise her. If I were not actually dependent on myself I would not do it. But the manager is determined to have Antoinetta, and even if I were well enough known to command another situation, after all his kindness to me I can't leave him."

Alice was silent; so, after a moment, Celia inquired, "What makes you look so shocked? In my place you would feel as I do."

"No," said Alice, slowly; "bad as she is, I could not *despise* her."

"Because she is so beautiful," said Celia. "Her pretty face takes everybody in, but I should have expected you to distinguish between right and wrong better than that, and anybody can see at a glance that she is bold as brass. I can have all charity for one who has been misled, but not for one who is misleading others."

"It is not the beauty of the face which touches me," said Alice, "though it is exquisite; but it is the depth of sadness in it."

"Sadness!" said Celia, scornfully. "That is the effect of having a false face,—nobody will believe anything against you! I tell you, Alice, I know her and you don't, and she is as gay and shallow a painted doll as lives."

"Because she is gay, it does not prove her shallow," said Alice; "and no one with such genius should be called a *doll*."

"That is the most charitable construction of her, though," said Celia; "and as for her genius, I admit she has art, but I don't think hopping up and hitting her heels together a dozen times before alighting, and singing comic songs in a killing way, is any proof of genius."

"Celia," said Alice, looking closely at her sister, "I have sometimes thought that you are too high to be broad; having been on the mountain-tops, you see no beauty in the valleys. You believe that power consists only in doing a great thing well, but it is just as truly shown in doing a small thing perfectly, and sometimes even more, for we feel to the heart the reserved force, and that is what I feel in Antoinetta. I doubt if you *could* play the parts she does" ("I *would n't*," interpolated Celia), "at any rate there was no proof that you could in your playing to-night; but I felt all the time Antoinetta was playing, that, had she chosen to take your part, she could have done it just as well, though perhaps she would n't have been so vindictive."

"Sure enough," answered Celia, "and there is a reason for that, for, though she might hate me as much, I suppose she is incapable of hating my character as much. But, Alice, what do you mean? Why are you forsaking your poor little desolate sister, wilful and wrong as she may be, for a stranger?"

"I am not doing that," said Alice, "though I don't like to see you so harsh, and perhaps you are not, after all. What you have told me of Antoinetta is so terrible that I cannot blame you much, though I think her sins may not be without palliation."

"Not blame me *much*?" interrupted Celia. "Why do you blame me at all? Would you have been pleased to find me a *friend* to Antoinetta?"

"I don't know," said Alice. "Certainly I should not wish you to choose such friends, yet there is something about her which intensely interests me, and I feel as though she has great possibilities in her, if she only had a friend. Did you ever tell her about the flowers we sent her so long ago?"

"Of course not," said Celia. "How absurd you are, Alice! It is my necessity to keep my disguise, and that would have betrayed my name and half my circumstances at once; and, had I been ever so free, I do not wish to fraternize with Antoinetta."

"But I do," said Alice, half musing. "I find myself so irresistibly drawn toward her that I want to speak to her. Will you introduce me?"

Celia sank down in a chair, vexed and despairing. "I will do what you like, Alice, of course; but this seems to me a curious greeting for a sister."

"Celia, my darling," said Alice, embracing her, "I am sorry if I have seemed unkind or uninterested to you. Nothing in the world is of such value to me as your affection."

"Nothing?" said Celia, curiously, and Alice, the quiet Alice, looked down and colored. "Come, Alice," said Celia, seizing her sister's hand, "I shall not be in so good a mood again very likely, so make the most of this opportunity." She drew her into a large antechamber where the actors were talking in groups. Antoinetta, apparently just ready to go home, for she wore a cloak, stood jesting with several young fellows. Celia approached her, and with great dignity, notwithstanding her *deshabille*, said, "Miss Hüntén, if you are not too much engaged, a friend of mine wishes an introduction."

Antoinetta stared, but answered good-humoredly enough: "Well, young gentlemen, I believe I am not engaged to any of you, so good night," and she followed Celia to the part of the room where Alice stood.

"Miss Wilding, Miss Hüntén," said Celia, and, turning abruptly, she entered her own dressing-room.

Alice blushed deeply with the effort of speaking to a stranger, but, summoning all her courage, she said in her own sweet way: "Miss Hüntén, I saw you play when you and I were both children, and I have always wished to thank you for the enjoyment you gave me, but I have never seen you again till now. So I begged my friend Mrs. Brown to introduce me."

"How long did you have to beg my *very good* friend, Mrs. Brown?" asked Antoinetta, lifting her eyebrows sarcastically.

Alice did not notice the question, though it annoyed her, but she went on, anxiously remembering that she must not betray her sister.

"My little sister and myself heard you at a Saturday afternoon *Matinée*, and we felt so sorry that we had no flowers to give you that the next day we gathered an armful of cardinals and gentians and sent them in a box of mosses to you."

Antoinetta started. "What!" said she, "Alice and Celia Wilding! I have the little note you sent still"; and then, as if afraid of seeming serious a single moment, she added, "It was such an unsophisticated little piece of composition that even at that early day I saw the joke, and kept it."

Alice's eyes filled with tears. "We hoped the flowers would please you, but, as you say, we were unsophisticated. At any rate, you gave us a great deal of pleasure and we thanked you."

"O, they did please me," said Antoinetta, carelessly. "*Blasé* people are always most pleased with unsophisticated things. Don't you think it must be an odd feeling to be *blasé*?"

"A very sad feeling, I should think," said Alice, earnestly. "If you really feel so, I wish you would come and see me and take as much comfort from my unsophistication as you can. I live alone in No. 7 X—Street. I teach some hours every day, but I am almost always at home after nightfall."

"Heigh-ho!" said Antoinetta; "you are a *rara avis*. Perhaps I shall come, so good night to you." She turned negligently away, and Alice was obliged to seek her sister alone.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"A LADY to see you, miss," said the maid-of-all-work in the lodging-house to Alice. "She did n't send her name, but she is dressed in black."

"Ask her to come to my room," said Alice, thinking it must be her sister, but wondering why she had not come directly up stairs.

The lady entered and bowed profoundly, but did not raise her veil till the door had been closed behind her. Although in black, she was dressed very differently from Celia, who, always perfectly neat, cared nothing for any dress except a gorgeous one, and for that, now, only on the stage. The visitor's dress was plain, yet it had a very imposing air, for her train was of enormous length and she managed it with the utmost grace. Her veil was of crape, and so thick as wholly to conceal her countenance, while in length it almost matched her train. Every article she wore was of great elegance, and though she was not tall, her figure and bearing were very striking. She raised her veil and showed a proud, clear, beautiful, pallid face. The contour of the features was exquisite, and seemed strangely familiar, yet Alice could not tell where she had seen it before.

"Don't you know me, Miss Wilding?" said the young lady. "Well, I am not painted-to-day." Her delicate lip curled with scorn.

"Antoinina!" said Alice, quickly, holding out her hand.

"Antonia. Hünter, — yes," said the young lady, without taking the offered hand. Then, glancing around the room, she added, "Do you really live all alone in this sweet, quiet, pure little room?"

"Yes," said Alice, "alone unless I can find a visitor, and I am very happy to see you. Sit here in the easy-chair, will you not?"

"No, I will not sit," said Antonia, pirouetting on one toe, "at least not in a chair. Heavens! do you think I could talk to anybody seated in a Christian way like other people?" She perched herself on a little table, with her curling lip and her mocking smile.

Alice was at a loss what to do, and said nothing.

"Won't you talk to me?" continued Antoinina. "It is impolite to make me talk for myself. I can address the parquet, but I am not accustomed to a *tête-à-tête*."

Alice was looking at her, and in an instant she half colored and said in a vexed tone, "At least, I have had few enough *tête-à-têtes* with women. I see you are like the rest of them. Perhaps you are sorry you invited me here."

"No, indeed," said Alice, earnestly. "I should not have asked you to come if I had not really wished it. If I don't talk to you, believe it is owing to my awkwardness, and not from want of interest in you."

"Want of interest! By no means," said Antonia, sarcastically, and with an expression of wormwood on her face. "The saintly benevolence with which young ladies who are immaculate look at ballet-girls should not be called want of interest, *far* from it." She drawled the last three words in her most stage-struck manner. "Most people don't approve of ballet-girls, though they stare themselves blind looking at them."

"That is wrong," said Alice; "every one should be judged for himself, and not for his occupation."

"Good sentiment!" said Antonia. "A very proper thing to say, but confess that you think yourself a good deal purer than I."

Alice was in despair. It seemed as if she was not going to be able to say anything, Antonia was on such dangerous ground.

"Oho!" laughed Antonia at her silence, and then, with her bitterest look, she added: "I suppose, on the whole, you *are* judging me for myself by what you have heard from other people. This is a beautiful and just world!"

Alice felt so condemned that she spoke at once. "Forgive me. No one has a right to let herself be prejudiced, and perhaps I have."

"Quite as much as 'perhaps,' I should think," remarked Antonia. "Miss Wilding, you think you are perfect, of course, though perhaps you call yourself a 'miserable sinner,' but you

are unjust, hard, and cruel. Do you suppose a ballet-girl ever lived of whom the worst and most shameful things were not said, whether they were true or not? You ought to know enough, to have charity enough, to guess that in a hundred cases the tales are wrong."

She spoke with such vehemence that Alice felt that she had in truth been very unjust, notwithstanding all she had heard.

"The reason you invited me here," said Antonia, "was because you wished to do me good. That shows a despicable, contemptible nature. You wished me to be humbled, to be made to feel your superiority, and to have yourself the pleasure of feeling how much better you are than I. I have come purposely to tell you what a Pharisee you are. You would be very kind, I have no doubt. I suppose you never thought what unkindness it is to trample down one's pride."

"You wrong me," said Alice, looking very much disturbed. "And I believe, as you do, that one can hardly do much good to anybody if drawn to the work by no other motive than to do good."

"Ah!" said Antonia, lifting her eyebrows, "that is not what most persons think. It is all the more meritorious to work for those they despise, and I guess you believe so too; you look like one of the 'universal brotherhood' kind of people."

"I can hardly explain just how I do feel," said Alice. "I would help *any* one whom I had power to help. But then I feel this too, — no one has power to help every one, and we should respect the reserve of any nature not in sympathy with our own, and not force ourselves upon it in the mistaken hope of doing it good."

Antonia's face softened for a moment. "You *are* a little better than the rest. I suppose that is the reason I took the trouble to tell you your faults. Yet," and she grew hard again, "that does n't affect the fact that you meant to do me good whether you meant to be rude enough to gain my confidence or not. And I tell you, you are a Pharisee. A few people in the world have arrogated to themselves the business of settling what is the unpardonable sin. Let one

make the least slip in that direction, though pure as an angel in every other, let one yield to a temptation which might make the sun stand still, and the doom is announced forever. They are the offscouring of the earth. Then 'we pious, cruel, mean people will do good to them. We will let our dainty feet walk through the mud to them, we will flash our white robes through their grimy dwellings, and be glad to do it for the satisfaction of feeling that they *are* mud and that we tread on them.'"

With color in her cheeks, Alice spoke. "Because we know that the mud is of clay and sand and soot and water, and clay crystallizes as a sapphire, and sand as an opal, and soot as a diamond, and water as a star of snow, and we know we may walk in white in the city whose 'foundations are garnished with all manner of precious stones.'"

Antonia looked thunderstruck for a moment. Then she chasséd across the room, then she stopped, and, tossing her dress over her arm so as to show her exquisite arched foot, she began a most difficult *pas*, which was so irresistibly funny that even Alice laughed till she cried. Antonia, however, preserved perfect gravity till she had finished. Then she stopped short in front of Alice with her hands on her hips, and remarked: "How much do you get a line for your poetry, Miss Wilding? They ought to pay you well, for it is really very charming. I am deeply interested in your fascinating conversation. Pray, go on."

"How can I go on," said Alice, "if you believe me insincere?"

"That sounds well," said Antonia, bowing in a patronizing way. "Do go on."

Alice was silent, really vexed that she was so wilfully misinterpreted. Antonia folded her arms. "Miss Wilding," said she, "your pretty little illustration was calculated to throw me off the track, but I have n't yet forgotten what I came to say, and I am going to say it till I make it plain enough for you to understand. I wish you to

* This idea of the mud is from Ruskin, but of course Alice could not quote him by name in such a conversation.

know that one sin is as much a sin as another, and that you are no better than I am, than I should be if the stories about me were true. You sin according to your temptations, and some one else according to hers. Because you live a life which Pharisees like yourself have agreed to call right, you think you are right. It is arbitrary. You are as bad actually in the sight of Heaven as any girl of the town. That is what I am determined you shall understand."

"Yes," said Alice, with a half-smile. "But what if I had not yielded to my temptations as others have to theirs? What then?"

"Ah! now you begin to show your nature," said Antonia, scornfully. "I thought you would not endure that without asserting yourself."

"Remember," said Alice, with pride, "that I have not yet said that I have not yielded; but you know nothing about it either way, and have no right to say that I have. I should be a hypocrite if I said I believed myself the greatest sinner on earth, but" (she now spoke gently again) "I am true when I say that I know enough evil of myself to make me think that perhaps in the eyes of God I may be the greatest sinner of all."

Antonia looked at her searchingly. "I almost believe you are sincere. What did you mean by saying you thought little good could be done except to those in sympathy with one, or something of that kind? I suppose you don't fancy yourself in sympathy with me, — do you?"

"I thought I could understand you perhaps," said Alice. "I don't mean that I thought myself able to read you, or learn any outward act of yours which you do not choose to tell; simply that I could comprehend much in your nature."

"M—m," said Antonia. "Don't you think, on the whole, that it was rather presuming to take it for granted that you were to do me good instead of my doing you good?"

"I think all good done is mutual," said Alice.

"Pooh!" said Antonia. "Whatever might have been the result, the motive is the main thing. I hardly think your

motive was the good I was to do you; if so, it was a mighty selfish one."

Alice could hardly help being amused. "What motive may I have then," asked she, with a smile, "if I may neither wish to bestow or to receive good?"

"You may make no attempt to know any one from any motive at all, except that you are attracted. Get over the everlasting desire to pry into other people's affairs."

"I suppose I must have been wrong," said Alice, perplexed; "I must have been, for I fancied I might understand you, and I am totally at fault."

"Perhaps I might give you a clew, though," broke in Antonia. But as she added no more, Alice said, sadly, "I hope you will forgive me if, by want of tact, I have wounded you, and believe that it was not wilful unkindness on my part."

Antonia began whistling thoughtfully. Then she stuck her bonnet on one side of her head and began a gay little promenade, singing meantime a comic song for which she had gained great applause. As before, she stopped before Alice with her arms akimbo, and with the same mocking look she had worn in playing the part of Mephistopheles in the burlesque drama of Faust, she said:

"On the whole, Miss Wilding, I don't mind giving you the clew. O, you are a jolly green 'un!" There was such absolute perfection and delicacy in her enunciation that she was able to use any slang phrase without in the least approaching coarseness.

"A babe could take you in, mum," continued Antonia, bowing in an exaggerated manner. "You lack ordinary understanding. I dare say you would read character admirably except for the fatal fact that you don't suppose it possible for anybody to tell a lie. I guess you might have managed to understand even me, if those unfortunate tales about me had been true; and to make the matter clear to your one-sided comprehension, I don't know but I may as well state that they are true, and worse ones, I dare say."

She looked at Alice and laughed to see her distress. "What if they are?" she continued. "Just as wrong things are true of you, though not the same

things probably. What do you make of that?"

"I believe it may be so," said Alice, "because I have no right to judge you. And yet I should be untruthful if I did not say that I think you are doing very wrong. If I do wrong too, that cannot make you right, and I have certainly listened patiently enough while you have berated me to claim that you will let me speak so to you."

"Yes, you have," said Antonia. "I will forgive you on that account. It is only fair; you have earned the right to lecture me on the heinousness of my sins, though it is supremely foolish, because you know nothing about them. Suppose I do fulfil the popular notion of a ballet-girl, just where is the harm?"

She spoke carelessly enough, yet Alice thought she detected an undercurrent of earnestness.

"In degrading the holiness of love."

"M—m," said Antonia. "That may be an open question. As for the holiness of love, what do half the people who are married care about that? Yet they are pure as snow, of course, and have a right to turn up their lofty noses at us, poor creatures."

"Then they degrade it too," said Alice; "but that does not prove you right."

"What a queer chick you are!" said Antonia, pretending to be lost in contemplating Alice. "What a funny world this would be if everybody were as logical as you and acted up to his own convictions! I really begin to think that you don't believe that custom and tradition have the power to make one thing right and another wrong arbitrarily."

"I certainly don't believe that," said Alice; "yet" (and her voice became full of earnestness) "my whole nature cries out to me that you are doing very, very wrong, and I beg you, I entreat you, by all the nobleness in you, that you will be true to yourself."

A quick, impatient flush crossed Antonia's features and then faded again. "True to myself?" she echoed, with a withering look; "I am true to myself. You had better urge me, as the Methodists do, to change my nature, if you hope to do me any good. Nothing less

than a complete metamorphosis of soul and body would answer."

"O," said Alice, "I believe that there are possibilities in your nature which you hardly suspect. Only be true to the highest in you."

"Miss Wilding," said Antonia, bending forward in her earnestness, "if you had judged me harshly I should have told you that you were unjust and cruel, yet I know — O Miss Wilding, I would gladly lay down my life this moment if I believed myself worthy to touch your hand!" She turned suddenly, and left the room and the house before Alice could speak to her.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CELIA stayed only a very short time in the city. She had not dared to make a long engagement, as she could not be certain of Dick's movements, and she had an excessive repugnance to playing with Antoinetta. The latter, however, was engaged for some weeks, and so it happened that one day, walking on the Common, Alice met her face to face. She wore the same black suit she wore when she had made her memorable visit, and was effectually disguised so far as most of her friends were concerned, but, of course, Alice knew her at once. They had nearly passed each other when Antoinetta stopped. "You did not mean to recognize me?" she said in a proud, mocking tone.

"I thought if you wished to speak to me, you would," said Alice, stopping too.

"O yes," said Antoinetta. "I did not wish to speak to you. I meant never to speak to you again. But Fate has made us meet, and makes me speak, I suppose."

Alice was silent. She was always entirely at a loss what to say to this strange girl, except in answer to a direct question. It vexed Antonia to see this, and yet she would have been incensed by any casual remark, or by any question which might show a curiosity about her affairs.

"You will not speak," said she. "Ah well! but I must say several things to

you. Would you mind walking with me?"

Alice hesitated. She hated herself for it. She wanted to be true in act to her belief that nothing external can injure us, and yet it was hard to be asked to walk in open day with such a woman as this. True, it was not probable that her companion would be recognized by any one. Still Alice thought it would be insincere to agree to do anything she should be ashamed to have known. And with Antonia sincerity was her only hope.

"I will walk with you," said she, "but you know that it could not be pleasant for me to have my friends know it. Will you go home with me and talk with me there?"

A spasm of pain passed from head to foot of the ballet-girl; but she answered, "You tell the truth, and that is some comfort. Yes, I will go with you."

They said nothing more till they were in Alice's room. Then Antoinetta threw back her veil and began.

"You ask me to be good, that is, good according to your ideas. And yet you show me how the past must always drag me down by being unwilling to walk with me."

"The past or the present?" said Alice.

"What do you know of my present, — or my past either, for that matter," said Antonia, impatiently. "Suppose, for the sake of the argument, that I had determined, just after our last talk, to change my way of living entirely, and had kept my resolution till now, it would have made no difference with you when I asked you to walk with me."

"Because I can see such a little way," replied Alice. "I can't read your heart, or know your motives. It would be natural that you should feel that I am unjust and that you have been hurt; but I think the comfort of knowing the reality would have sustained you."

"Ah, I wonder if it would!" said Antonia, musingly. "Perhaps so, because I am proud. Listen to me," she added, "I am going to tell you something about my life. You are unjust, but less so than other people, and so I

have a fancy to tell you that which would make some people pity me."

"And you are determined that I shall not pity, but justify you," said Alice, quickly.

"Perhaps. Listen, at any rate. My mother was a ballet-dancer, a good dancer, but not a good woman, nor yet a very bad one, — as good to me as mothers in general, I suppose, bringing me up in her own code, which is all that any mother does. As a child, I loved her. I have not always loved her since, when I have reflected what a difference it would have made to me if she had been a different woman. But I know now that she was n't so very much to blame. Her mother had been a ballet-dancer, and so back through generations. We have a proud pedigree, though obscure in name, since we trace it entirely through the female side of the house, — house, by the way, we have had none."

There was supreme bitterness on her lips and in her voice, and she could not resist the impulse to tuck her dress into her belt and begin a swift, whirling dance, snapping her fingers above her head to imitate castanets. She stopped in a moment, however, and said, "Is it best to go on?"

"I wish you would," said Alice, "but you must do as you like."

"O well, in a word, we have all been illegitimate children, with the usual characteristics of such. It would be mean and cruel in me to blame my mother for having been like me because she was trained as I have been. She was excessively pretty and a great flirt, that is, she would have been a great flirt if she had been a rich man's daughter; but, as it was, she was worse, — what people call worse, but I suppose her motives were about the same, love of admiration and power. I inherit the same traits, I find it very jolly to flirt."

The haggard look which came into her eyes as she spoke did not make it seem as if her words were true.

"I was familiar when a child with many things which I shall not venture to shock you by repeating. They seemed natural enough, and not hideous as they would to a child who looked at them only after learning something better. If there had been any purity in

my nature, I should have turned from them instinctively, of course."

O the bitter, bitter smile!

"However, I did not turn away, possibly because I never saw anything to contrast with my life. I learned music and dancing and writing, but as for reading I had no great taste for that except in a dramatic point of view, and we never had any books. The plays I took part in were scenic entirely, and I never heard a single tragedy, not even a comedy with a moral, till I was fifteen. There were plenty of such plays at the theatres, of course; but I liked admiration, and unless I was going to play myself I thought it would be stupid to go to the theatre, which I knew only in its dismal look behind the scenes. I had a great many gay things in my life, but I never had one element of what you would call purity till I was fifteen. I was quick and bright, but it was n't in me to think much, so while I seemed to have seen a great deal of the world, I was in absolute ignorance of any mode of life except my own till I was fifteen."

She stopped here, as if astonished at having said so much in a sober manner, and whistled the Mocking Bird with the most exquisite and comical variations.

"And when you were fifteen?" asked Alice anxiously, when she paused.

"Ah!" said Antoinetta, lifting her eyebrows, "you expect the love-story is coming in here. That is the part that interests all sentimental young ladies so; and then they pity us, O, so, — and then marry our lovers. But, for my part, I did n't fall in love at fifteen, and I guess I never did. I don't know as I can tell you what happened to me when I was fifteen."

Alice dared not ask.

"On the whole, I will tell you what happened when I was fifteen."

She paused again, and Alice almost believed she had gone to sleep, for she had leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes for so long a time. Suddenly, however, she resumed, but without opening her eyes.

"I sprained my ankle one night, not badly, but enough to make it impossible to dance for several days. I had never

been ill a day in my life, and it was very irksome to stay by myself. Somebody asked me to go to the theatre with him to while away the time. He said he would bring a carriage for me, and as I could walk with a little help, it was easy enough to go. It was strange that I had never been before to see any play in which I had not a part; and I was so ignorant that I did not know that the young gentleman would not have ventured to take me if he had not been a total stranger in the city. I thought I should enjoy going.

"O well, the play was a third-rate sort of a thing, and the acting not very good; but the story seemed to me absolutely new. It was of a girl who kept herself pure through all temptation, and married the only man she had loved at the close. Original, was n't it?"

She opened her eyes and laughed a bitter laugh.

"And what did you think?" asked Alice, almost breathlessly.

"What did I think? Oh!" There could be no mistake. A blush, a real rosy blush, spread over Antoinetta's face. There must have been reserve in her nature to make it so hard for her to tell that which had affected her so much. "I thought that if I could start pure then, I could do as the heroine did. I knew I had will and pride enough for that, and then — I knew the past was irrevocable."

Her voice suddenly quivered. She seemed to try, almost with agony, to prevent herself from faltering in her pride, but she gave way entirely, and with her face bowed in her hands she cried aloud, still struggling to control herself, but sobbing in terrible, half-repressed waves.

Alice felt her whole soul overflow with sympathy, and she could not resist the impulse to throw her arms about the convulsed figure; but Antoinetta pushed her away, and through her sobs articulated "Wait."

It was many minutes before she became quiet, but at last she was able to speak.

"I would have died before I would have spoken to you, if I had known that I should show you this," said she; "but now that I have spoken, I must

say the rest I have to say, and you must not say anything.

"I was not ignorant in every way, but I had never known before the price the world puts on what it calls virtue. After this, my senses were sharpened, and I soon learned the whole. I knew that I might go on as I had done for a hundred years, and that in the eyes of other people I should be no worse than I was then. I had done wrong, and that was the end for me."

"The world is severe," said Alice, "but not so hard as that. All are ready to forgive *one* sin, — at least, all charitable people."

"Possibly," said Antoinetta, with darkening eyes; "but mine had not been *one* sin. I had loved no one. No one can forgive that kind of sin!"

She raised her voice as if to ask a question while she made the assertion. Alice found it harder and harder to say anything of comfort to her. She was forced to reply: "It is right that the distinction should be made between love and that which debases it. It is, it ought to be, easier to excuse that which merely trespasses upon a legal right than that which is in itself wrong. There may be a true marriage, when the tie has not been sanctioned by a clergyman, though I believe it is not often so, but —"

"You need not say what," said Antoinetta. "I know very well what you mean. That is what makes me so horrible to myself. If I had sinned from love alone, do you suppose I should count myself impure?"

Alice thought sadly of Dora, and knew that the remorse would have been as bitter, though the sin would have been so much less. Is it when we have done a deeper wrong that a lesser one seems nothing?

"I have that in me," continued Antoinetta, "which would make me able to stand up gayly against the whole world if I felt myself right. If I had sinned for love, even if I counted it sin, I should hold my head up high — high; but I am ashamed to have done a — *low* thing."

Her voice sank, her head drooped, she looked hopeless in her sad beauty.

"It is not the *sin*, you see, which weighs upon me," she continued, "nor the shame before the world, but the shame to myself."

"If that is it," said Alice, suddenly, "you need not lose hope. Be what you wish you were."

A strange look crossed Antoinetta's face. The spirit of caprice again possessed her, and silently, in a musing way, she danced about the room for three or four minutes. Then she said: "I didn't finish my story. I told you that I thought all these thoughts at that time and concluded that I was completely *gone*. If I had been pure then, I think I should have stayed so; but I saw no particular reason for changing my way of life, since *nothing* could change the past. I liked the gayety of it too. But since I am telling the truth for once" (the bitter laugh again) "I will confess that from that moment to this I have never found myself thoroughly enjoying it. I have liked the glitter and excitement, have purposely involved myself deeper and deeper to keep from thinking, but I have n't enjoyed it."

"And now you are sorry," said Alice, simply.

"I don't know," said Antoinetta, with an impatient gesture. "I don't believe I want to change. No other kind of life could suit me so well, miserable as this is. I was born for a dancer. See here!" She raised her long black dress above the ankle. It was an exquisite ankle, and her foot was beautiful, slender, and arched.

"You see I was meant to dance. It is in every fibre of my being, mental and physical. You are beautiful, Miss Wilding, that is, your face is beautiful, but what can a person with a flat chest and an ankle with a bone in it like yours" (she glanced at the foot of Alice, who wore a short dress and stout loose boots) "know about the thrill I feel when the bewitching music begins and I find myself flying through space with an ecstasy as if I had wings, and see dimly the thousands of eyes which glow as I float, and feel the soft rain of roses about me?" She had spoken with great excitement, and the color came quickly. Then she stopped as suddenly as she

had begun, and seemed ashamed to have said so much of her feelings. But she tossed her head and went on: "I suppose you think I am ridiculous, but I have genius, though of a kind you can't appreciate, and it is presumption in you to ask me to give up my *life*."

"I should not dare ask it," said Alice. "You are mistaken in thinking I ever have. Every one who has genius fulfils his duty only when he is carrying out that genius. You *ought* to dance. Do you feel dancing and the rest of your life to be inseparable?"

"How can they be separated?" said Antoinetta, with energy. "The same traits which make me a good dancer act to make me a thousand other things. I might be converted, or something, but all my old friends would give me up, and of course no church body would patronize me while I dance."

"You would n't wish it," said Alice, smiling.

"No, I should n't," said Antoinetta; "but you see I should lose all companions, and that would kill me. I am social in my nature. I could have been the greatest belle in the country if I had only been brought up differently. I can't be alone. I *hate* to read, and I *won't* think."

"We can never do a great right without being willing to suffer for it," said Alice, earnestly; "and though you don't think it, you *would* find compensation, a full compensation, in knowing yourself pure in your own soul."

"Ah, yes!" said Antoinetta, with a quivering voice. "Do you suppose I *ever* could feel that if I lived pure for a hundred years?"

"Yes, I know you would," replied Alice; "you would learn that God has made it impossible for any past to crush us."

"Miss Wilding," said Antoinetta, in a thrilling tone, "I never believed that such hope and faith could come into my heart as you bring to it, but O, you do not guess what you ask of me! It is that I shall put away all pleasant dreams out of my life. I was born to love, and I can never marry."

"O, you cannot tell," began Alice, but Antoinetta stopped her sternly.

"I am not speaking at random. You won't understand, because I must seem so different to you; but I could never marry a man who did not *respect* me. Even in the wild life I have lived I have been so proud that I have forced people to respect me. I suppose you think there might be some large-souled man who would pity me perhaps enough to marry me. I think there are no such, and, if there were, I would die before I would marry a man who did not set me like a star above him. You see that could never be."

"Perhaps not," said Alice. "I think I was wrong. You must not look for happiness, though I am sure it will come to you when you look for it least, or something higher. Just think what it would be to be really as high as a star, though no one called you one. And how much higher is the star which rises from the earth than the one which has always shone in the heavens!"

"I fancy the mould would always cling to it," said Antoinetta, curling her lip. "Moreover, to change the subject, I have a lover at this present moment. I suspect I might have loved him if he had been the first. So you see my way would not be an easy one. Good night."

She rose so swiftly that Alice had barely time to seize her hand and detain her while she said: "I do not ask your confidence, I do not ask a promise; but O, I beg you to be true to the nobler life awakening in you, and I promise you that I will always and everywhere be a friend to you, that I will love you, and respect you, and help you if I can."

"You *have* helped me; but we walk different ways. I do not want you for a friend. It would be ridiculous for me to make a promise which I should break to-morrow. By-by." She laughed and waved her hand coquettishly as she broke away from Alice's grasp and ran lightly down stairs.

Nevertheless, when her lover next came to her he received the unprecedented message that she was engaged, and would he have the goodness not to repeat his call. As the worst construction is often put on the best deeds, he believed she had proved faithless to him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"ROBERT," said Miss Twigg, "that Nickerson has just sent his boy round to say he has some new paintings to show you, and he wants you to go down to his studio this afternoon."

"Don't want to see 'em," growled Robert, fiercely.

"Yes, you do," said Miss Twigg. "You shall go in a close carriage, and I will take care that nobody sees you."

Now Robert did particularly wish to go. He had no other place of amusement to which he could go, for he would never show himself in public, and he had no friends to visit. Moreover, he was passionately fond of pictures, and Nickerson painted well. Then Nickerson was always polite to him.

"Did he say nobody else would be there?" asked he, still ungraciously.

"Of course no one else will be there. He never admits any one when you go."

"Afraid they could n't appreciate the pictures for looking at me, I suppose," said Robert with a grim smile, though he knew full well that Nickerson's motive was wholly a kind one.

However, he went; Miss Twigg standing guard for a quarter of an hour before he started to see that no prying eyes should obtain a sight of the misshapen being. When they reached the studio, she helped Robert up the stairs into the anteroom, and then left him, taking that time to do some errands. Robert knocked. Usually Nickerson's voice answered instantly, but to-day Robert heard a hasty scuffling sound, and his heart sank in terror lest some one else should be present. In a moment, however, Nickerson opened the door and held out his hand with even more than his usual cordiality, but it was evident he was somewhat excited and disturbed. Robert looked about suspiciously, but saw no one.

"Perhaps you don't want to see me," said he, in his grating voice, "but you should n't send for me then."

"O, I did," said Nickerson, uneasily. "I want to show you this new little sketch of mine, worked up from one of my summer studies." He spoke hastily, and drew Robert's attention to the other side of the room. But in his

haste his arm brushed against a pile of papers, and one of them fell to the floor, carrying with it a tiny woman's glove. Robert looked at it sharply and paused.

"Ralph Nickerson," said he, "you are playing me a trick. There is somebody here, some one who will see me, though you know how I feel about it. Tell me the truth. To please a silly woman's fancy, you have promised to give her a sight of the hideous dwarf!" His voice rose fairly into fury as he went on.

"Good Heavens!" said Nickerson, "you must think me a monster to conceive such a thing. You shall know the truth, rather than believe that. There is a lady in the next room who came to me very unexpectedly to-day, and she wishes not to be seen as much as you do. She also wishes to leave this house at once. If you will promise not to look at her while she passes through this room, as she must, she will promise not to look at you."

"And how shall I know whether she keeps her promise?" asked Robert, suspiciously.

Nickerson was about to reply angrily, but the sight of the dwarf's piteous face touched him, and he said, "Conceal yourself behind that drapery, and that will answer the purpose."

Robert did as he was requested, and Nickerson went into the inner room, and spoke earnestly for several minutes with some one within. Then Robert heard footsteps in the room, and then — alas, for human nature! but Robert was morbidly sensitive — he peeped through a little hole in the curtain, and just caught one glimpse of the retreating figure, — a lady, richly and stylishly dressed, but her face was averted and covered with one of those lace veils which scarcely conceal the face at all. This veil, however, must have been particularly selected, for though it looked like others, it had a certain thickness of pattern which served completely to hide the countenance of the wearer.

In a moment Nickerson lifted the curtain, and said in a weary tone, "Well, Robert, she is gone."

Robert looked reproachfully into his face. There was sometimes a wonderful power in the eyes of this misshapen

creature, though he had not a single beauty to compensate for his deformity.

"Well, well," said Nickerson, after a moment, "what is the matter with you?"

Robert looked over from head to foot the handsome, graceful figure of the young man. "You call yourself a man," said he, in his roughest tone.

"Exactly," replied the young gentleman. "I am apparently not a woman, and I don't pretend to belong to a superior race."

"I hate you," growled Robert.

"Come, come," rejoined Nickerson, impatiently. "I can't be insulted, even by you."

"Even by you." Robert winced. Nickerson had never said anything so unkind to him before. The dwarf's head dropped on his breast, and the tears filled his eyes. Nickerson saw it, and with his usual careless kind-heartedness said: "Ah well, Robert, you must n't be vexed. You don't know the world, you'll allow. I am a man of the world, and you can't expect me to be good according to your standard. I am pretty much like the rest of mankind. I just told you that I don't pretend to belong to a superior race."

Robert stood for a moment with an air of dejection, and then said slowly and sadly, "I have often wondered why you did n't marry, Nickerson."

"Bother!" said Nickerson. "Why should I marry? I am not rich enough, either. I have enough money to live in an exceedingly cosy style as a bachelor, but not enough to live in such good style with a wife and a parcel of children. My painting will never bring in enough for that, and I don't think I am fitted for blacksmithing or anything else that would provide pennies. Besides, Robert, being a bachelor is an extremely comfortable way to live. I have a cook who knows every peculiarity of my taste, and I suppose, if I had a wife, the poor thing might want half her dishes cooked in another way, so there would be a complication to begin with. And so on and on, there would be some new asperity coming up every day, and I am so good-natured I should yield, of course, all the time, and

be wretched and miserable accordingly. I like my freedom rather too well."

"How is it?" asked Robert, in a nervous, timid way. "Did n't you ever fall in love?"

"Bless your heart, I fall in love with every pretty woman I see! I have lost my heart to thousands of girls; but it has a remarkable faculty, like some of those horrid crawling things you read about in natural histories, of being no sooner fairly gone than it sprouts out anew in as good condition as ever, all ready to be conquered by the next charmer."

"But you know what I mean," said Robert, beginning to lose his temper again.

"I am not at all sure that I do," said Nickerson, with composure. "I suppose you have some ridiculous idea of love gained from novels. I have never experienced it, so, of course, my evidence is only negative; but I guess I am justified in calling it bosh, because I have a peculiarly susceptible temperament, — artistic, you know, — so I guess, if anybody ever could go through such ridiculous performances, I should be the one."

A great tear gathered and rolled slowly down Robert's cheek. He dashed it angrily back, ashamed that his weakness and deformity had taken from him even that sign of manhood, tearlessness.

"What is the matter?" said Nickerson, now in genuine astonishment.

Robert forced himself to be calm, and then answered mournfully: "The power of love has been taken away from me. I long for it in a sick, wishful way, but to me it can never come. A woman may be tender to me, may pity me, but she can never love me. Nor can I love. I suppose that absolutely to love there must at least be the possibility that it shall be returned; that there must be a moment of hope, no matter how quickly the light of that moment is quenched. It is a mercy to me that the power of loving is denied, since the power of being loved is so cruelly withdrawn. But, O Ralph Nickerson, that a man fresh, young, strong, handsome, on whom every eye would rest with joy, whom a woman might love at first sight, whose form is so beautiful

that one *cannot* believe his soul less so, O Ralph, that such a man should so have debased his soul that *his* power of loving is also lost, that power for one grain of which I would cheerfully lay down half my life, is enough to make the very stones weep!"

Ralph paced impatiently up and down the studio. "Well, Robert," said he, in a few minutes, "I don't mind confiding in you" (still that repulsive emphasis on *you*), "though I am proud enough in general. I am vexed to the core to-day. The young lady who was just here came on a far more moral errand than you think. She has been lecturing me too, and between the two you may suppose I am beginning to realize my sins, or, at any rate, my sufferings." He smiled airily, and rather languidly.

"Nevertheless, Mr. Rix, you have hit the nail quite on the head. I have been in love so many times that I have no power of loving. I should be envious to death by any woman in a week. The only reason that any flirtation of mine lasts longer is that I know the character of my innamorata so well that there is piquancy in seeing how long I can keep her from turning traitor to me. A woman I was sure of, — bah! how insipid she would be! I should have no call to exert myself to please her, and should therefore miss that healthful activity which all natures require."

"And to gratify this evil passion you will not only debase yourself, but mislead those you pretend to love!" said Robert, indignantly.

"Not so fast, my dear sir," said Ralph. "That is just the way with all you saintly creatures, because a man has done one wrong thing, you straightway suppose him to have done all. I won't plead guilty to more than my actual share of sins. I have debased myself enough, I allow, but as for misleading any of the actresses and ballet-dancers, and so forth, that I have known, I have a higher opinion of their shrewdness than to think I have revealed any new depths of iniquity to them."

"You own you do wrong, and yet keep on," said Robert, wonderingly.

"Why, yes, most people do, though some palaver and persuade themselves that they don't do wrong. To tell you

the truth, though, I was just going to reflect on my ways as you came in, having had, as I told you, already one lecture on my evil courses to-day. But, after all, *cui bono*?"

"Why not?" said Robert, with eagerness.

"O bother!" said Ralph, "for the reason I just mentioned. I have lost the power of actually loving anybody, and therefore marriage would be too irksome an experiment to try, and you can't expect such a wretch as I to reform under any other conditions."

"But perhaps you would feel differently in a little while," urged Robert. "Perhaps, if your mind were turned in a different direction from what it is now, you would find among the many pure women you know some one whom you would love."

Ralph laughed with a little bitterness. "My dear Robert," said he, "I see no women. The world is still a little askew in this nineteenth century. If you are as rich as Croesus, as handsome as Apollo, and as talented as Webster, you may stand a chance of getting into society, such as it is; but what is that? A dance at midnight, and a call with kid gloves on in a drawing-room next day. Intensely stupid; yet there have been some saints who have persevered (I was taught in my childhood about the perseverance of the saints) till they have pierced through the social strata and come to a rational acquaintance in the end. But generally even such perseverance is not rewarded by finding anything very attractive, and there is too much drudgery in the process for me, even if I were sure of being well paid. A person out of society might as well be out of the world so far as any opportunity of becoming acquainted with modest young girls is concerned. I see plenty of faces which look attractive, but though I have a moderate share of brass and small-talk at hand, never a one do I get acquainted with. Of course not; men and women are not thrown together in any rational way. However, that isn't the rub with me, for though I have demonstrated the impossibility of knowing anybody in a decent way, I suppose I should believe

it possible, however contrary to reason, if that were the only obstacle."

He paused with a shadow on his handsome countenance, and Robert waited anxiously.

"Suppose I make a clean breast of it to you," said he in a moment, lightly laughing. "I have known one girl of whom I did not tire. She was new and original every moment, and fresh and beautiful and charming and witty and affectionate and fifty more things."

"And did not she love you?" asked Robert, in a voice full of sympathy.

"O you simpleton!" said Ralph, kindly. "Well, yes, perhaps she loved — loves me. I have no proof to the contrary. I should n't in the least wonder if she would marry me. On the whole, I think she would, though I am not sure of it."

"What then?" asked Robert, wondering.

"O well, I would n't marry her. I would marry any old maid — Miss Twigg, for instance — quicker. Robert, my innocent, this girl, the only girl I never tired of, is, in common with a dozen more whom I have tired of, — smut."

"Well," said Robert, boldly, "so are you, if you come to that. I believe, from what you say, you must have been as bad as she."

Ralph flushed in an instant, but did not look angry. "Very true, Robert, and there the matter lies in a nutshell. If I were a reformer, or a philanthropist, or a milkstop, I suppose I might say we were square, and let it go at that. But, unfortunately, I am of the earth earthy, and though my reason teaches me, as it does everybody else, that a man sins equally with a woman, I have no mind to make myself a laughing-stock for the world, who decided ages ago to heap insult and degradation on the woman and call the man a clever dog. Abstractly I admit that an impure man has no right to marry a pure woman, but practically I have found a life of pleasure exceedingly agreeable, and yet, if I ever marry, it must be the most immaculate of her sex."

"Just for the world's opinion!" said Robert, mournfully.

"Well, no, *not* just for the world's opinion; because it would be easy enough, I dare say, to make a change of residence obviate the necessity of the world's knowing anything. Italy, for instance, is a pleasant place, especially for an artist, and I might go there; but — well, the woman I could marry must be my goddess. I must respect her beyond everything; and, dear creatures! even if they demand the same thing, it is easy enough to make them respect any man, no matter how bad he has been, — I suppose because they will take one for what he now is, and not for what he *has been*. And then most of them will bow down and worship without inquiring about the respect at all. The poor things in general have such a deathly stupid life that they are glad of any change; and then they like to sacrifice themselves, and, besides, children are a compensation. So a man may set his standard as high as he pleases, and he need not fear that the ideal she will object to him, because he don't come up to *her* standard. I fancy there is something intrinsically in the nature of the case which makes it more wrong for a woman to do wrong than for a man; at any rate, so the world thinks, and I am satisfied."

"But you don't seem satisfied," said Robert, doubtfully.

"True," answered Ralph, with a flitting smile. "Such is the contradiction of human nature. 'Virtue is its own reward' used to be in the copy-books. I don't know how true that is, having never tried it; but I know its contrary, that I don't need the world to punish me for my sins, said sins having brought their own punishment. I can look forward to a pleasant animal life, eating, drinking, smoking, and so on, but I have incapacitated myself from any very high enjoyment. Some men get to my pass and are saved by marriage, but marriage is not for me. I have an indefinite remembrance of a pre-existent state in which I understood what marriage might be, and that prevents me from undertaking any sham. So here I am, and you see my pitiable condition, Robert." He smiled slightly, and with a tinge of bitterness.

"Can nothing help you?" asked Robert, earnestly.

"No," said Ralph, with composure. "I have thought the matter over, and I find it can't be done. I have n't energy and will and goodness enough to help myself up; and the only person who could help me—as I said before, she can't help me. So I shall drift along, and get as much fun out of life as I can without too much exertion. Come, Robert, look at my pictures, or that ogress Twigg will be back for you before you have seen them."

"I don't care about them," said Robert, slowly. "They are only landscapes, and they don't mean much."

"Yes," said Ralph, moodily. "Of course I should n't attempt to paint faces with such a soul as I have. And I suppose my landscapes lack something, that I have n't perception to discover the heart of a scene. Well, well, well, look at them, at all events, so that Twigg may not think you have been idle, and worm out of you what I have been saying."

Robert looked at the pictures without speaking till the carriage returned. Ralph, meantime, sat coolly smoking a cigar of the choicest brand.

"I said I was cursed beyond everybody," said Robert, as he turned to go; "but I would rather be myself, monster as I am, than live for one day like you."

"*Vice versa*," remarked Ralph in an undertone as the door closed. But his face was very grave, he looked weary, and he painted no more that day.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ONE chilly evening in the fall, Aleck sat by his open fire studying as usual, when Aaron came in with the announcement that one of Squire Jamieson's children was sick, and that the Squire had sent for Aleck to go there at once. He could hardly suppress a chuckle as he said so, for it had been many a month since Aleck had been summoned into any family who were able to pay for his services.

"Tell him I can't go," said Aleck quietly, hardly taking his eyes from his book.

Aaron was thunderstruck, and insinuated something about the child's danger, knowing his employer too well to use other arguments.

"Their regular physician is a good one," said Aleck. But an hour later the messenger returned and insisted on seeing Dr. Hume himself. The child was very sick, and Dr. Armstrong had declared he dared do nothing more without a consultation. Had the Squire been a poor uninfluential man, though twice his enemy, Aleck would not have hesitated an instant. Now all his pride was roused. And yet this strange young man cared so much more about doing right than for what the world thought, that he answered in a moment, "I will drive back with you."

The child was really in a critical state, and the only possible remedy was so dangerous a one that Dr. Armstrong had not dared to risk it on his own responsibility.

"It must be risked," said Aleck, decidedly.

The other brightened at this confirmation of his own view.

"We must not let the Squire know," said he.

"We must," said Aleck. And when the other shook his head he added, "I will take *all* the responsibility."

"No, no," said Dr. Armstrong, ashamed. And Aleck could not but be grateful to him.

The child recovered. The danger was past that night, and Aleck did not go to the house again. He had not spoken to the Squire while there, though the latter had evidently wished to come to an understanding. But the illness of the child had made it easy to silence conversation.

At last, one evening, the Squire, finding that Dr. Hume did not call, or send his bill, felt compelled to go to him and thank him for his services and offer payment.

"I should prefer to be paid *nothing*," said Aleck, proudly.

"What!" said the Squire, looking angry.

"You know that no money could

have tempted me to enter your house," said Aleck.

The Squire grew purple in the face. "I *will* pay you. It is lawful. I won't be under such obligations to you."

"I supposed not," said Aleck. "I don't force the matter, of course."

So he made out his bill as usual.

"But that is n't enough," said the Squire: "I told you, when I sent for you, that I would make it anything you said. Of course it was different for you to come than for any one else."

"Yes," said Aleck, "but the difference was not a money difference. I shall not take another cent."

"Suppose," said the Squire, fidgeting uneasily,—"suppose—ahem!—well—what if I make you an apology!"

"I don't want an apology," said Aleck. "I suppose you did what you thought right."

"O, confound it!" said the Squire, more and more discomposed. "You are so everlastingly radical. I always liked *you* well enough."

Aleck smiled in a queer way. "No doubt. But I confess I have yet to see what difference my radical opinions can make in my value as a physician."

"Confound it!" said the Squire again, in whom the heaven of gratitude had been working for days, and who was by this time fairly ashamed of himself.

"Let bygones be bygones. I wish I had n't done it now. But there is enough business in town to keep you both busy. If you would only give up two or three things that are of no practical importance, I would see that you went to Congress next year,—by George, I would!"

"I should have no wish to go to Congress except for those very two or three things," said Aleck. "And I would never accept any appointment due to your influence. I never will bind myself to any views, and I do not wish you to sacrifice your conscience on my behalf."

"By George! I believe you *could* be trusted. I can't vote for you, especially as you don't want me to, when you have such horrid opinions. But I can say, and say it heartily too, that you are a man to be respected and that you are the

best doctor in the world. There, won't you give me your hand on that?"

Aleck half smiled and held out his hand. He did not believe that dignity ever consisted in refusing to forgive another.

From that day his affairs prospered. Strange, is it not? that a wholly upright and honorable man can yet be injured or helped so much by a man of meaner mould! That is that there may be hope for the mean men, you see. The Squire's good word brought a troop of Aleck's old patients back to him, and, as far as money was concerned, he found himself in a flourishing condition. He knew, however, that he should have to live a noble life for many years before that district would trust a man of his opinions to represent them in politics, and he felt how surely the vision of his youth had passed away to return no more.

"Ah well, 'The worker dies, but the work goes on,'" he said to himself, and comforted himself thereby.

Dick Stacy, meantime, was elected to Congress,—a man of massive intellect, honorable nature, and broad but not dangerous views. He still believed that woman was made out of a rib of man.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE actor of high comedy connected with the troupe with which Celia performed fell ill. It was a question who should take his place.

"Mrs. Brown," said the manager, "the Minstrels are having a little vacation now, and I might get one of them till their building is repaired. Would you object to that very much?"

As Celia believed in high tragedy, she could not avoid an expression of disgust. The manager had suspected how it would be; but her services were so valuable that he did not want to engage any obnoxious person to act in a play with her without saying something to her about it.

"I really don't see what I can do," continued he; "there is a perfect dearth of comic actors just now, and there is one fellow, Catherty by name, in that troupe who is irresistibly funny."

"It takes something more than being funny to act a witty part," said Celia, with supreme scorn.

"Well, I believe this fellow has more in him. But, if you don't like my plan, suggest another." The manager was a little provoked.

"Do as you like," said Celia. "It does n't matter much to me. I don't suppose it will do me any harm to exchange a few sentences on the stage even with a man I can't respect."

The manager laughed a little, as he went away, at the curious ideas people have of what makes a man worth respecting or not.

The time came for rehearsal. Celia sat in an arm-chair, soliloquizing in a tragic style, when her lackey, the obnoxious minstrel, appeared to deliver a message. Celia started up to receive him, but suddenly stopped short, transfixed. All the metamorphosis of dress could not deceive her. In the coal-black eyes and hair of the pretended Catherty she recognized the eyes and hair of her dismal cousin, Frank Buckram. He recognized her at the same moment, and consternation entered his soul. He had been away from the paternal roof for many years, but the wholesome maternal discipline had been so effectual that he shrunk with terror even now at any reminder of it.

Celia recovered in an instant. She was not sure Frank knew her, and she hoped he would not. So she advanced and said the words of her part without any further token of recognition; but Frank, with trembling knees, whispered to her, while she was speaking, "Don't tell of me, — will you, Celia?"

She almost laughed outright to see him so ridiculously timid that he forgot that she had any interest in keeping quiet as well as himself. "Don't be a goose, Frank," said she, between her sentences. "Don't let anybody see we know each other. I will talk to you by and by."

Frank was irresistibly funny, notwithstanding his perturbation. Even Celia, in the most tragic scenes, could hardly keep a straight face. She had not thought her lugubrious cousin ever had half the wit in him.

"What do you think of Catherty?"

asked the manager, in an off-hand manner, between the acts.

"He does better than I expected," said Celia, carelessly; "but I want to talk with him a little about the positions he takes in some of the scenes and the rendering of some passages."

So, after the rehearsal, she sent for him. But when they were alone, instead of speaking about his rendering of passages, she began: "You need not be afraid that I shall mention that I have seen you to your mother, for I never see her. Please to be just as careful not to let any one know who I am. I pass under the name of Mrs. Brown."

"St. Peter!" said Frank. "I forgot all about that. What under the canopy are you here for? The last I knew of you, you were at school."

Celia breathed easier. It showed how entirely Frank's connection with his relatives must have ceased that he had heard nothing of her marriage or disappearance.

"You know I always liked acting," said Celia, with a smile; "even when we were children we used to talk about it. But I want to keep it a secret as well as you."

"What for?" said Frank. "You have n't got any mother, and I don't suppose Alice would care, — would she?"

"No," said Celia; "she knows it. But I don't want other people to know it. So don't say anything about it. If you do, I will tell your mother where you are."

This ridiculous childish threat disturbed Frank, as she meant it should, and he hastened to asseverate in a peculiarly strong manner that he would keep her secret to the death.

"I will tell you what, Celia," said he, when his peace of mind was restored, "is n't this a good deal jollier than being at home? Though I don't know, I should n't think there would be much fun in playing such doleful things as you do, and dressing all the time in long black dresses and thick veils."

"Fun?" said Celia, with her loftiest scorn. "What do you suppose would tempt me to play anything just for fun?"

Frank looked abashed. "I did think I had one friend," said he, in an injured tone. "I am sure you used to like jolly things, and now you look disgusted because I am a comic actor."

"Well, I must say I am," said Celia. "I think the Minstrels are decidedly low."

"I don't believe you ever went to hear them," said Frank, plucking up spirit.

"I am thankful to say I never did," replied Celia.

"Then you don't know anything about them," said Frank. "I tell you it is the jolliest place in the world. I never had a single good time in my life till I ran away and got into that company; and now — Jimini! — *don't* we get off jokes, though? and all the people laugh. O, I tell you what, it is fun! I suppose you would call it coarse, though," added he, in a moment of candor.

"I should think you would get tired to death of it," said Celia. "How can you keep saying over the same jokes night after night?"

"Just the same as you pretend you cry every night," retorted Frank; "only it is a great deal better fun to laugh. But then the rest of them do get tired of it; but I never do. I suppose it is because I had such an awful dull time when I was little that I can never get enough of the other kind."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Celia, relenting. "I don't blame you much when I think of your childhood. But I think from the way you played to-day you might do something better than low comedy. I think you might play comic parts still, but those which have pathos in them too."

"St. Peter!" said Frank, "you don't suppose I want to take to snivelling again, just after I have wiped my weeping eyes of all the tears I shed when I was a small boy! No, you don't, sir! Not if the court knows herself, and she think she do. I tell you, Celia," (he dropped his voice, mysteriously,) "it is no great fun to me to think about sober things, for I suppose the horrid things they used to say when I was little are all true, though I don't believe a word of

them. I suppose the old fellow will be after me some day, sure, but then I don't know as I can help it. Before I ran away I tried tremendously to be converted, and I found I could n't. So then I concluded that since I had got to swing for it anyway, I might as well enjoy myself the little time I could, and I ran away. I suppose it is my own fault that I ain't elected, but, you see, I can't help it, so what is the use of thinking about it?"

"Shall you ever go home again?" asked Celia, with some curiosity.

"I don't believe I shall," said Frank. "I have pangs once in a while and think I will; but then, you know, I could n't stand mother's tongue. Yet she is an awful good mother. My conscience pricks sometimes when I think how good she is, and how hard she tried to bring me up straight, and how disappointed she must be. I sometimes think I will go and see her; but, you know, if I did, there would be the end of me. I should have to be converted and be a Sunday-school teacher the rest of my life. Well, I know it is a good thing to be a Sunday-school teacher and have a through ticket to Paradise, but, you know, that ain't my style. It would n't do to run away again, but I know I should have to if I once showed my face at home. So I guess I shall let 'em slide."

Celia had always felt some interest in Frank, because he was the only wicked one in her aunt Buckram's family, and she trusted now that her influence might be sufficient to turn him from his evil ways, i. e. to act high instead of low comedy. But the mischief of his education proved ineradicable. Having had everything good and high always presented to him in nauseating doses, he was forced to believe that he liked low things best; so at the end of a week, when the building of the Minstrels had been repaired, he returned to its congenial shades, and turned somersaults, went "on the flying trapeze," danced a hornpipe in a hoop-skirt and sang "Captain Jinks," and enjoyed himself.

Celia was disgusted, but kept a little warm corner in her heart for him on account of the old days.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WEARILY Alice turned the corner of the little square on which was her lodging. It seemed as if her vitality had been drained to the dregs, that she had imparted to others without receiving for so long that her life-power was wholly spent.

A quick healthy step rang behind her. She did not look up. A hand was laid lightly but firmly on her shoulder, and a voice which always spoke cheerfully and heartily said, "Alice, I love you."

Alice started as by an electric shock. She turned and saw Aleck standing close beside her. Though it was almost dark, the deepening moonlight showed her fully his grand, courageous face, and she noticed his sudden half-withdrawal from her the moment he had spoken; and he added, half with the air of a naughty child who has been caught in mischief, "O well, Alice, I did n't mean to begin so, but I vow I could n't help it; and now, perhaps, to pay for it, you won't let me in, though I came to town purposely to see you."

"I could n't be so inhospitable, then, as to lock you out," said Alice, shyly and sweetly. "Come in." But she held herself away from him, and ran up stairs so quickly that he could not reach her.

The little room was neat, beautiful, and pure in its arrangements, as it always was; but there was something almost severe about it, perhaps because the night was chilly and there had been no fire in it since Alice went away in the morning. But everything was laid in order near the grate, and in a minute a light blazed up from the hearth, and Alice turned round to see Aleck looking at her with a pleased face and his hat in his hand.

"I meant to tell you my secret in my very best words," said he, reddening a little, "but Nature would have her way; so here I am, and you must say something to me before I can say anything more."

"You have told it in the very best way," said Alice, a little hypocritically it must be confessed. "It is very pleasant to find I have a friend, for I have been very lonely."

"A friend!" echoed Aleck, raising his eyebrows. "Alice, you know better than that. When I say 'I love you,' it means more than friendship."

Alice hung her head and blushed violently.

"Won't you speak to me?" said Aleck, in an amused and yet anxious tone.

"What shall I say?" said Alice, with a sudden little dimple in each cheek, — an unwonted sight, so long had those cheeks been thin and pale.

"Say the same words I said to you," said Aleck, joyously.

Alice only grew more scarlet. "That is expecting me to meet you half-way," said she at last, in confusion.

"And that is *right*," said Aleck, proudly. "And if you do love me you will not find it so *very* hard to say; and if you don't, why, then —"

He stood erect, and Alice looked up at him. The firelight fell upon him, and the moonlight streamed through the window over her. The color receded from her face, and she was calm and pure as always. "Well, then, Aleck," said she, and the little dimples played once more about her mouth, "I do love you."

That is enough to know, about that evening.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE spring came, and with it Alice's wedding-day. It was early in June, nearly as Celia's had been, and even simpler than that. They had no guests whatever, and Alice wore a plain, fine white muslin, and a delicate lace veil. Her pupils had sent her many little tokens made by their own hands, with which she might adorn her new home; but she had no costly gifts, nor did she need them. The best gifts had come to her.

They had decided to take no wedding-tour. Aleck was not yet rich enough to do things simply because he wished it, and Alice was worn out with the city and teaching, and could imagine nothing pleasanter than to be quiet in the beautiful country town where she had passed her childhood. So they

went home that very day, after the wedding.

How well Alice remembered the last days she had spent in that place! She seemed to feel her father's spirit near her, blessing her on her marriage day. Aaron, dressed in his best suit, was waiting with a carriage, and in the beautiful twilight they drove along the little street.

"Where are you taking me?" said Alice, suddenly. "We just passed your house. Oh, oh, oh!" and she seized his arm to still her emotion, for they were driving up the carriage-way of the stone cottage, every room of which she loved so well.

Aleck smiled. The carriage stopped. He alighted, and held out his arms to her. "This is our home, Alice," said he, with a happy face, — "my bridal gift to you."

"O Aleck, how thoughtful you are!" said Alice, as he drew her gently into the house.

What dews of peace descended upon that cottage! Since her father died, Alice had always cared for others, but though she had received large measures of love always, as such beautiful natures must do, she had never known what it was to be taken care of till now. Aleck peremptorily forbade her, underscoring his commands because he was a doctor, from doing anything that could weary her, and so by degrees vitality came back to her slight and overtasked frame. She busied herself in arranging her rooms in the prettiest and freshest ways, in contriving the most beautiful adornments of flowers, in practising once more the pieces she loved of the grand old masters, from whom she had been exiled almost during her busy life of the last few years, and in taking long rides with Aleck through the June woods.

"But remember, Aleck," said she, one day, "this is not going to last, or I would n't do it at all. It is very nice and blessed, I know, and as long as I can pretend I do it for my health I don't have many pangs of conscience. But with so much work to be done in the world, no one has a right to be idle, and some day you shall see me a notable farmer's wife."

"Never," said Aleck, drawing her close

to him. "If that had been right for you, I should not have lived here alone two or three dreary years. At least, I should have asked you to come with me. Of course, I don't know what you would have said."

Alice laughed happily. "I think you might have asked me then, when I might have helped you, instead of waiting till you could *give everything*."

"For *you* this work was not the best," said Aleck.

"Quote the rest, if you dare, sir," said Alice, stroking his hand softly. "I will quote it, properly changed: —

"Your love *was* the best,
And able to commend the kind of work
For love's sake merely."

So, if the world had n't prospered with you, you would have defrauded me. I thought you were too broad to believe in needless self-sacrifice."

"It was n't needless," said Aleck. "I could n't have borne to see your life crushed."

"As if it could do anything but expand and blossom and grow and be life with you!" remonstrated Alice.

No man, conservative or radical, transcendental or evangelical, could resist that. So Aleck kissed her before he went on.

"But now, you see, when you are quite well, you will feel free to do whatever you like in the heavens above or the earth beneath, only don't choose the first, or the angels would lay claim to you."

"You know well what I want to do," said Alice. "I want to make my home beautiful, in the first place, and I would gladly, gladly do the actual work if it were necessary; but as it isn't I shall have time to teach a little too, something like literature or botany to the young girls in town, two or three times a week."

And so it was. The blessing Alice proved to those half-cultivated young girls cannot be estimated. The world must have been always better for the sweet influences which flowed out of that quiet cottage.

Quiet, and yet there were old and new friends constantly coming there; and life was a hearty, healthy, happy thing in that same little cottage.

No life worth living is without its moments of pain. Aleck's great hope of influence in the world seemed to be dashed to the ground forever, and Alice had her sister to mourn over. But the greatness and peace of a true love overshadowed them, and they trusted always in God.

CHAPTER XL.

RICHARD STACY walked with a firm step through the streets one winter night. He turned from the broader thoroughfares, and found the narrow one in which Robert Rix lived. He counted the houses till he reached No. 15, and then he paused for a moment.

"It is not too late yet," he said to himself, with a look of pain, "but I owe it to her, and I will do it."

So he rang the bell. Miss Twigg opened the door and glared at him as if she had a pistol in her pocket ready for any emergency.

"Does Miss May — Miss Dora May — live here?" asked Dick.

"Yes, she does," said Miss Twigg, suddenly appeased; and most inconsistently forgetting her usual cautiousness she added, "I suppose you are the brother she expected. Right up four flights of stairs, and her door is directly in front of you."

It was fortunate for Dick that Dora was expecting her brother, otherwise tortures would not have induced Miss Twigg to let him see her without witnesses. As it was, he went up stairs as directed, almost to the top of the house. The door was ajar, and he looked in a moment before knocking. Dora was very poor, and it gave him a pang to remember the luxury in which he himself lived. The room was uncarpeted and almost destitute of furniture; a bed, a work-table, and a few chairs were all. She sat by the work-table, before the stove (she could not afford the extravagance of an open fire), with her back to the door. In spite of its poverty, there was an air of taste and comfort and happiness about the room which surprised Dick. Dora had taste,

but he remembered that she had never cared to exercise it except when she was happy, and he expected to find her forlorn. The effect of the room, aside from its perfect neatness, was dependent entirely on the flowers in it. Ivies and other vines covered the bare walls from floor to ceiling. Hanging plants, so luxuriant that they hid completely the rude boxes in which they grew, hung in the windows and from hooks in the wall above, and roses and heliotropes and violets bloomed all about the room and loaded the air with crushing sweetness.

He knocked, and Dora said, "Come in," rising as she did so. Her face surprised him as much as her room. He had guessed she would be thin and pale, and so she was, and his conscience reproached him bitterly as he saw it. From what he knew of her he had guessed she would be careless in dress; but the simple and rather rusty black alpaca fitted her wasted form with scrupulous neatness, and she wore a white apron and delicate blue ribbons which relieved the wanness of her countenance. It was the face itself which surprised him. It was pale and furrowed, and showed that, though still young, she must have seen very bitter sorrow and care; but it was very sweet and peaceful, with a certain indwelling happiness which seemed as if it could never be disturbed. That was the first impression only, for the moment she recognized her visitor the face changed, it hardened visibly, the corners of the eyelids were drawn down with pain, the pathetic mouth grew bitter and proud, and all the peace was gone. Her work fell from her hands, and she stood still without speaking.

"Dora," said Dick, in his sad, grand voice, "I have come to ask you to forgive me."

"I have forgiven you," she said, in a dead way, without looking at him.

"I have thought sometimes," resumed Dick, "and lately I have thought so very often, that, although you broke our engagement yourself, it was not done willingly, but because I had first neglected you, though I had held to the bond."

"You know that," said Dora, bitterly.

"I told you so in the letter I wrote you before you were married."

Dick's astonishment was genuine. "What!" said he; "I received no letter."

Dora raised her eyes and looked at him closely for a minute, and then said, "Ah! well, then, I *ought* to forgive you."

"What was it?" said Dick, anxiously. "It can't be that you renewed the engagement. Though it had been my wedding-day, I believe I should have heeded that!"

"I believed you would," said Dora, wearily, "and you robbed me of all faith when you did not send me a word in answer. But you were not to blame, and it is better as it is. I forgive you. O, *do go away!*"

The last was said with sudden energy, as if she could not breathe another moment in his presence, all the old agonies were welling up so fiercely in her heart, yet possibly she was glad he lingered.

"Dora," said he, in his most persuasive tones, which were nearly irresistible, "you must first hear what I came to say. I want to *prove* to you that I wish to be forgiven. You know that I have no wife?"

Dora bowed her head.

"Dora, be my wife," said he, "as you should have been years ago." He attempted to seize her hands, but she suddenly drew herself back, her face scarlet and her eyes sparkling with indignation.

"Richard Stacy," said she, "I did not believe you would insult me. I have forgiven you very grievous wrongs, but this is something I can never forgive."

Richard was thunderstruck. He had imagined that he might receive reproaches; but he had not thought his great sacrifice could be so misunderstood. He saw at once that he had been in error, though he could not tell exactly where the fault lay. "Believe me, Dora," said he, sadly, "I do not understand what I have said to insult you. I mean from the bottom of my soul to be perfectly true and honorable with you."

Dora was silent for a moment. She had had long practice in keeping silence,

till her nature seemed quite changed. She thought that the fewer words which could be spoken, the better. But now she was terribly shaken, and found the inward pressure too great, and spoke, the words coming so hot through her lips that she felt as if they would stifle her.

"You have no wife, — you are no free man! You have lost what you love, and want the best substitute! No free woman would marry a man that is not free. But Dora May is bound to you hand and foot, you think. She has nothing to lose, and a little petting will make all up to her!"

If Dora had ever understood him, she could not have imputed such meanness to him, for he was really incapable of it. She had once believed him saintly, infallible, but that was not understanding him.

There was bitter strife in his heart. He was angry at the taunt, yet he knew he had no right to be, and he understood how a proud and sensitive girl, like Dora, must feel.

"Dora, you are wrong," said he. "I am virtually free, and can be actually so at any time. It is seven years since — since my wife disappeared. The law provides that after seven years one may be free." He repressed a half-sigh as he said these words. It was a hard thing to acknowledge himself free and let the hope of seeing Celia forever pass away.

Dora noted the sigh, and a new and strange expression passed into her face. She bent forward slightly and said in a compressed, unnatural tone, "Richard, do you love your wife?"

Alas for Richard! He had meant to keep that question out of sight. He wanted Dora to believe that he loved *her*. But he was truthful and answered, "I do love my wife."

"Better than everything else in the world?" asked Dora, eagerly and restlessly.

"Yes," said Dick, inwardly impatient, but realizing more and more every moment what wrong he had done too much to speak impatiently.

Dora grew pale and turned partly away, as she said, "If you had been a villain, you would not have waited seven years before you came to me, and if you

are not a villain, — you — must — be — making — a — sacrifice."

She turned towards him again and looked at him steadily. He could say nothing, she had divined the truth so perfectly.

"Mr. Stacy," said she, "I will never marry you, and so you can tell me the truth. Tell me why you came here now when you did not come years ago."

She spoke imperatively and he was obliged to obey.

"I have realized the wrong I did you, and I believed that all which I could offer belonged of right to you. I believed, in short, that our old engagement was binding."

"But you did n't always believe that?" said Dora, quickly. "Why not?"

There was a painful pause before he answered.

"Though you broke the engagement yourself, I know it was really I who did it, though I would never have broken its letter. The truth was that I saw my wife and loved her."

"More than that," said Dora, slowly; "you did not love me. Before you saw Celia Wilding, I knew that, though I tried not to believe it. But I think you were honorable and would have married me if you had not seen her. Yet — you did not love me, and you don't love me now."

"There are different kinds of —" began Dick.

"Yes," said Dora, breaking in, with some harshness, "and that has nothing to do with it. You pity me, and your conscience will not let you rest. If you had never loved your wife, you might at this moment love me, for you love every woman while you are with her. But you have known a real love, and that makes every other one impossible."

Dick was astonished to hear Dora speak. Certainly, in all his knowledge of her, he had never guessed at the depths of her nature, — or had sorrow developed what would always have been only a germ had her life flowed smoothly? She showed a power of thought, of perception, of analysis, of which he had not dreamed. She showed strength and self-control too, quite unlike the Dora whom, for her pettish and impulsive ways, he had nicknamed "April."

"Oh!" continued Dora, "I am very sorry you came, for I was calm before. But now that you are here, I must tell you what these years have taught me. You ought to know."

She stood still a moment to collect herself. She bowed her head, and perhaps she prayed. When she spoke again, her face and voice were calm.

"I think one can really love but once. I think you must have been conscious all the time, that, though you were in love with me, I was not *all* you needed. With me it was different. I loved you." (A faint color rose to her cheeks.) "Perhaps if I had never seen you I might have loved some one else. It was right that our engagement was broken; but if you had *any* consciousness that I was not what you needed, the wrong was there, in leading me to love you. If you did it blindly, then there are such things as fatal mistakes, in which people do not sin, but have to bear the consequences of sin."

Here she paused and looked up suddenly.

"You can tell me which is true. Were you conscious or not?"

"I was determined not to be," said Dick in a broken voice.

"I thought so," said Dora, cold and pale. "One need not sin in the matter of love. Ah, well! you would have done wrong to marry me after you knew. Perhaps you were wrong to marry any one else. But all this is not the lesson these years with all their remorse and shame have taught me. I know now that the wrong I did was not in itself a sin, because I loved you. With you there was sin."

"But I thought I was doing wrong, and that made it wrong. Besides, we ought to keep the laws which are necessary for society."

"I still feel the shame, hidden as it is from the world. I know that the lower nature once conquered the higher in me, and that can *never* be changed. Yet it is the very thing from which I take courage. Can anything which is past affect us forever? We are worth to God just what we are at this moment. We might at this moment, perhaps, have stood higher, but the spot where we now stand is certainly our own. No

one sorrow, no one sin, can blight a lifetime."

Dick seemed almost to hear Alice speaking.

"I know myself to be pure now," said Dora, "I must suffer, for I did wrong, but I will not be crushed, I will not lose my self-respect; and though I find it hard to understand why God *could* let me have this weight to bear, I try to help and pity others so much that I may some time be thankful even for the sin in my life."

Through Dick's brain floated the lines: —

"Standing on what so long we bore
With shoulders bent and downcast eyes,
We may discern, unseen before,
The path to higher destinies.
Nor deem the irrevocable past
As wholly wasted, wholly vain,
If, rising on its wrecks, at last
To something nobler we attain."

"And so, Mr. Stacy," said Dora, with more sweetness in her tones than before, "were you actually free, you could not help me. I can be satisfied only by what I am myself, not by any outward form. Even if you knew your wife to be dead, that you do not love me would make it a sin in you to marry me. And as for me, I would not resign the life I now lead. I loved you, I hated you, — I do not care for your *friendship* now. I do not love you or hate you; you are as the dead to me. I can only be pure now by leading this lonely life. There are those to whom I am of use, and those who are of use to me, but *love* I have forfeited. Yet I am happy."

"Dora," said Dick, reverentially, "I shall always bless you for what you have said to-night. My sin is a thousand-fold greater than yours, yet for me, too, it is true that all depends on what I am now. I am willing to bear what it seems may have been sent in judgment. And, Dora, though it is no palliation of my offence, I may still receive the comfort of knowing that it was not allowed to crush you, but has made you so high and pure that I am unworthy to touch your hand. If I can ever serve you, be sure and let me know it. Nothing could be too hard. God will keep you, as he has. Good by."

So he went away, and Dora — she had done her duty and was happy in it, she would not have altered her decision, but still she had been mistaken in saying that she neither loved nor hated Dick, and that he was to her as the dead.

CHAPTER XLI.

FROM time to time Celia consented to act in New England, for though her preference was usually so strong for the South and West, when Mr. Stacy was in Washington for the winter she felt safer at the North. It was now more than seven years since she had first appeared on the stage, and her genius had been so thoroughly trained and developed that she stood very high among tragic actresses. The necessity which there was in her to go out of herself made it possible for her to throw herself vehemently into her rôle, and helped her to gain a more intense power.

She was now once more in Boston. She had taken the opportunity to meet Alice, whom she still scarcely ever saw, and only in circumstances of the greatest secrecy. Alice had gone home again, and Celia resumed her customary reserve, and only showed the fiery heart within when she was acting.

She was one evening playing Marie Antoinette, — a play she particularly liked because it dealt with strong passions and little with the passion of love. As she came upon the stage, and waited a moment for the applause to cease before she spoke, she glanced rapidly round the theatre, and with a thrill of fear and delight at once, she saw, seated in the centre of the house, looking directly at her, no other than Richard Stacy.

Once she would have fainted or had hysterics at such sudden emotion. But she had served a seven years' apprenticeship in self-control, and did not even shrink or start. It was strange that amid all the thousands of spectators that one white, grand face alone should have blazed right out at her. She had often mused and wondered if Dick had not chanced some time to see her act, careful as she had been to avoid him. She knew how impossible it was

for her to distinguish faces in the sea of them which was turned towards her every night; but she felt sure at this moment that the magnetism between them was too strong for her not to have realized his presence if they had really met before. He *must* see her, he had come for that very purpose, and he could not fail to know her. It was agony, it was bliss. The moment of respite was past, and she began to speak. She had never in all her life played with such power. The whole house was electrified. She was in such a frenzy that she hardly knew what she did. Among all the faces she saw but one, — a white, severe face. She could not look at it, but it seemed to grow and grow till it filled the whole auditorium, and all the rest were only there as a framework to it. She dreaded the end of the first act; but there was no confusion, and when she came again on the stage, the same face was in its place, immovable. Dick, too, had learned self-control in seven years. She began to feel a strange mesmeric influence stealing over her under the influence of that rigid gaze. She grew cold, and thought she should fall. Once the necessity for being quiet would have made no difference with her; she would have found it impossible to be so. But now, by a mighty effort, she shook off the spell, and acted with redoubled energy. Act after act slipped on. They seemed interminable, and yet the end had come before she had had an instant to think what she should do next. But when the curtain fell she knew not a moment was to be lost. She had worn a plain black dress in the last scene, and, hastily snatching a thick veil and throwing a heavy cloak about her, she left everything behind her, fled through a side door, and found herself in the night air alone.

She hastened on as fast as she could without attracting notice till she reached the nearest railroad station. She had before learned that one is safe at night in the cars, and she had never failed to have money about her, ready for any emergency, for the last seven years.

"Where do you go?" said the conductor.

She remembered the station. She

had a confused idea of having heard that a town named L—— was on that road, how or where she had heard it she could not tell, and she mentioned it, and paid her fare. Then she idly wondered *where* she had heard the name. She felt that her cloak was damp and her face cut, and she mechanically remembered that she had come to the station in a driving, sleety storm. She began to feel weak and dizzy after the excitement and exposure of the evening. The bell sounded a long way off, but the whistle seemed to shriek and screech in her ear all the time.

In the cold gray dawning the train stopped an instant, and the conductor told her that this was L——. She had quite forgotten till then that she was to stop there. She dragged herself wearily out of the car and looked around. It was a dull morning, but the storm had ceased, if indeed it had ever extended to this remote village. Few people seemed to be stirring, and the station was not yet open, as this was an express train which did not often stop and had done so only to accommodate Celia. She saw an old tavern standing not far away, and began to walk towards it. Then she grew suddenly too dizzy to see, and fell prostrate.

Just as Celia found herself alone with the midnight, Richard Stacy, with compressed lips, walked behind the curtain and asked the manager to say to the actress that Mr. Stacy wished to see her. There was something in the sternness with which he said it that made the manager feel that he had a right to see her, yet he answered, as he always did, "Mrs. Brown never sees gentlemen."

"Strangers!" said Mr. Stacy. "I should suppose not. I think she will see me when you give my name to her."

The manager went away, and returned in a moment to say that he could not find her, but she must be in the building, because all her dresses for the evening were scattered about in her dressing-room. So Dick waited. He was pale as death. He hardly knew what he felt. He was as sure that he had seen his wife as if it had been only

yesterday that they had parted; but he dared not guess what this strange meeting meant. It flashed across him that she must have left him of her own accord, or she could not have failed to come back the moment she was free. But this he could not believe; for he knew that she was true, and the love she had shown him could not have been feigned. Then he shuddered as he thought of the only other explanation possible, that she had been so harmed that she was too proud to return to him. He waited an hour in this terrible suspense, concentrating in that hour the accumulating suspense of seven years. Then the manager said that she must have gone home without seeing any one, though it was strange, but perhaps she did not feel well, and so had hastened away. He gave Dick her address; but at the hotel she had not been heard from. Her star was suddenly quenched. The next day the playbills announced that a severe indisposition would prevent "Mara" from appearing, that evening; but when a week had passed on and still there was no trace of her, the "mysterious disappearance," with all Dick's efforts, could no longer be kept out of the papers.

CHAPTER XLII.

WHEN Celia again opened her eyes, she found herself in a bed, — a soft white bed in a neat, airy room. Surely there is kindness in the world, so many a wanderer who falls ill in the street wakes in a comfortable home; but alas for those who wake where they fell!

There was a cheerful wood fire in the room, and in front of the fire a cushioned arm-chair in which a girl was sitting with her back turned to the bed. There were several windows in the room, and, looking through one, Celia saw a gray sky with idly drifting snow-flakes. It seemed to be growing dusk, but the firelight played over the white draperies of the chamber with inexpressible cheer. A vase of dark-green holly with red berries stood on a little table near the girl, and by it lay a book, which she

had evidently been reading until the darkness began to fall. Now she was looking at the fire, and in a moment she half turned, so that Celia was able to see her profile. It was a striking, almost a startling face. It looked like the face of the dead, and yet contained suggestions of unconquerable vitality. The skin was of unflushed whiteness, the eyes large and pale. One might have called them lifeless, yet there was intensity in them. The brown hair was pushed carelessly back, and showed the perfect brow of a woman who had a soul, and the large mouth had a pathetic curve. The face was far from handsome, but such that, once seen, it could never be forgotten. Celia, whose penetration was quick, watched it with interest, though she was too weak and confused to think much. Naturally she would have asked "Where am I?" but she could not bring herself to disturb the deep gaze into the fire. And then as her consciousness came back to her, and she remembered what had happened, the old proud shame returned, and she thought, "Why should I ask? What does it matter where I am, — I who have no business among the living?"

So neither spoke, and the moments passed on, Celia looking at the girl and the girl looking at the fire. At last she rose suddenly and began to walk the floor, with her hands tightly clasped, and Celia heard her say below her breath, "O God, I cannot, *cannot* bear it! It is killing me by inches. Father, take home thy weary child."

Celia began to feel that she was doing something dishonorable in lying there and hearing it, but she could not let the girl know that she had heard her, so she closed her eyes, that no one might suspect her of having been awake.

The girl paced up and down, up and down, up and down, till the door opened softly and some one said in a low voice, "Is she still asleep, Clara? Mother says you are to come down now and let me stay awhile."

"I don't want any tea," said Clara, impatiently, "and I like sitting here by the fire."

But the other voice insisted, and Clara went down. Celia heard the

scraping of a match, and a gleam across her closed eyelids told her that the new-comer did not care so much for twilight musings as the other, and naturally she opened her eyes, without remembering she had meant to counterfeit sleep. Her new nurse stood directly in front of her. She was a plain, lively-looking girl, with a neatly fitting dress,—a very homelike-looking body.

"O dear!" said she, as she saw with surprise that Celia was awake, "did I wake you? How thoughtless in me! How do you feel?"

"I don't know," said Celia slowly, trying to answer.

"Of course not," said the girl; "another foolish thing in me to ask. I will put the light where it won't trouble you."

"It does n't trouble me," said Celia, who had now regained the use of her tongue. "Nothing is the matter with my eyes."

"O, I forgot that you have n't been sick a long time," said the girl. "You must excuse me, for I have never had the care of sick people at all, and of course I make blunders all the time."

"How long have I been sick?" asked Celia.

"Why, I suppose only since yesterday," said the girl. "At any rate, we knew nothing about it till yesterday. I suppose you know how you felt before. But yesterday you got out of the cars here, and were attempting to walk somewhere,—to the hotel, I guess,—and you fainted away, I suppose, and father happened to be there, and he said you could n't have any care at the hotel and so he had you brought home. The doctor said you hurt your head when you fell, for you were delirious last night, and—"

"What!" said Celia, in alarm. "What did I do and say?"

"O, nothing bad," said her nurse, with a reassuring smile. "You quoted Shakespeare all night, that is all."

"You are sure I said nothing else?" said Celia in excitement, her pulses beginning to throb and a terrible thundering to come rushing through her brain.

The other saw in a moment that she had been inexcusably careless, but she

had tact enough to answer sweetly, "Nothing at all, and all you said was so disjointed that if the quotations had not been familiar we should not have guessed what you were talking about. But the doctor said I was not to talk to you when you woke, so positively not another word!" and she playfully laid her fingers on her tightly compressed lips.

Celia would have been glad now to ask more. She wondered what she had said from Shakespeare.

She inwardly fretted and chafed, but she put a powerful restraint on her feelings, for she remembered that another attack of delirium would expose her to new dangers. Her nurse took out a piece of elaborate embroidery, and began to work, with a thoughtful happy light in her eyes, till her sister came back.

"She is awake," said she, as Clara entered. The latter started, and Celia pitied her; but in a moment the other sister, who was sewing too busily to notice the start, innocently relieved her by adding, "I lighted a lamp, and that woke her."

"I was glad to be waked," said Celia, feebly, "and I don't care to go to sleep again."

"The doctor said you must n't talk," said the seamstress, with authority. "But, Clara, I am ashamed of myself. I did begin to talk right away, forgetting all about it."

"I am not surprised," said Clara, smiling. "My sister Sue is an inveterate talker."

"No matter," said Celia. "I can hear talking, if I can't talk myself. And it will be better to tell me where I am than for me to tire my brain with guessing."

"Yes," said Sue, "that is sensible. I told you father had you brought here. Father is the clergyman of this village, and his name is Fuller."

Before she had time to say more the door again opened, and a dignified woman, a thorough lady, came in. "The doctor has come," she said. "You had better go down, Sue; and, Clara, if you really insist on watching in my place to-night, I suppose you must stay and hear his directions; but I can't bear to have you do it."

"Hush!" whispered Sue. "She is awake."

Clara had turned away from her mother with the first words she had spoken, but her face was exactly in the line of Celia's vision. She saw that every tinge of color was gone even from the lips and nostrils, but that she controlled herself with a great effort to answer quietly: "I am determined to sit up, but I can just as well take the directions from you."

"No," said her mother, "it is best to have them at first hand."

So Mrs. Fuller and Sue went down, and it was a minute before the former returned with the doctor. In that minute Celia saw Clara go to the fireplace and stand tightly clutching the mantel while she bit her lip to keep herself from betraying emotion. Her face was turned nearly away from the bed, yet the attitude of passion was too familiar to Celia for her not to guess with the clew she possessed that a mighty convulsion was going on in the girl's soul.

The doctor entered,—a grave, handsome man, perhaps thirty-five years old. With her first glance at his face, Celia felt the blood shrinking from every part of her body and gathering round her heart. It was years since she had seen the face, and it had never been familiar to her, but she knew even before Mrs. Fuller pronounced the name that she could not be mistaken.

"Dr. Craig!" She forgot to notice that Clara's grasp was tightening on the shelf, and that she exchanged no salutation with the physician, so intent was she on the terrible question, "Does he know me?"

The Doctor gave no sign of recognition. He looked at her, felt her pulse, and then said gravely, "Some one has been talking to her since she woke."

"Was it you, Clara?" asked her mother.

"No," said Clara, in a cold voice. "Sue said something to her, I believe."

"It did no harm," said Celia, trying to speak coolly. "I only wanted to know how I came here."

"But it has agitated you too violently," said the Doctor. "You must not ask even the simplest questions till I give you leave, if you wish to get well."

"Humph!" said Celia, forgetting her acquired caution. "I don't much care about getting well."

Clara bent eagerly forward and looked at her. Mrs. Fuller looked as if she thought the delirium had returned, and the Doctor's face grew still graver.

"At present you are my patient," said he, "and you must obey me." Celia recognized in him a man of power, and shut her eyes and her mouth resolutely. Why should she take the trouble to oppose him when she did not care either way? If he chose to make her well, why, she would submit. He began to write some directions for the night, and Mrs. Fuller was meanwhile called away. He finished his writing, gave a few directions to Clara, who still clung to the shelf, and then said, in a tone which to almost any one would have seemed very commonplace, "Miss Fuller, I wish to see you soon. Say to-morrow evening at Mrs. Ellery's." It might be that the Doctor and Clara were on some parish committee together.

"I think I cannot be there," said Clara, in a low, nervous tone. "I shall feel tired after watching."

The physician looked fixedly at her, and then, as he heard her mother's returning footsteps, he added simply, "You will not be too tired for that. I shall expect you."

Clara made no reply. She stood quietly till her mother and the physician were both gone, and then Celia saw her sink, trembling in every fibre, into the chair by the fire. Her evident agony made Celia forget her own. She said to herself, "I must help her, yet she must not know that I suspect anything." She waited till Clara grew quiet again, and she had to wait many minutes for that. Then she called "Miss Fuller." Clara came quickly to the bedside.

"I am afraid of the physician," said Celia; "tell your mother that he must not come here again."

Clara started back. "O, I can't," said she, hastily. "You need not fear him. He is a good man."

"Yet you fear—and dislike—him too," said Celia, putting in the word "dislike" that Clara might not know her secret was guessed. "You wish he would not come here."

Clara, at this, regained her self-control. "It is true," said she, "but my prejudice is without foundation, and it would be injustice to act upon it. I should be sorry to hurt his feelings."

"But something might be done," said Celia, eagerly. "Ascribe it all to the whim of a sick person." And then she caught her breath suddenly, for she remembered that in her anxiety to help Clara she was really taking the means to confirm any suspicions which Dr. Craig might have about her identity.

"What reason can you have to fear him?" said Clara, in a surprised tone, and unconsciously emphasizing *you*.

"Prejudice, like you," said Celia, adroitly, and Clara knew not what to say. Prejudice like hers was hardly possible, and she could conceive of no other. But she could not betray herself, and so kept silence. Neither dared urge her special reason for wishing that Dr. Craig would not come again, and so it drifted on, and the next morning he came. Clara avoided being in the room, and Celia thought the Doctor too much occupied with his own thoughts to pay much unprofessional attention to her.

In the afternoon a little dispute occurred in the sick-room between Clara and her mother about going to Mrs. Ellery's. Mrs. Fuller casually said that Clara ought to lie down to be ready for the evening, and Clara said she was not going. Her mother was thus surprised into urging the matter, though she would not premeditatedly have discussed the subject in the sick-room, and she spoke in a low, mild voice. Clara mentioned her fatigue from watching. "But you slept all the morning," said her mother. "It is not sleep you need so much as change."

Celia guessed what Clara would not say, that she had not slept at all. Mrs. Fuller went on: "You have been nowhere for several weeks, and some of the people think you hold yourself aloof from them in a manner unbecoming in a minister's daughter. And this is a society affair, and I very much wish you would make the effort for my sake."

"Would not any one accept my fatigue as an excuse?" asked Clara, faintly.

"If it were the first time an excuse

had been necessary, it might be so," answered her mother. "I certainly would not request you to go if I did not really think it will do you good. You get nervous and pale and morbid by staying in the house so much. You may be tired, but it will be a healthy fatigue, and you will be rested the sooner for it."

"Perhaps so," said Clara, in a strange tone. "I will do as you wish, mother." So she went away to lie down.

But she came back for a few moments, while Sue was dressing. She was herself dressed in a strange blue-silk dress, whose pattern was full of ripples and bars. There was actual color in her dead-white cheeks, and her pale eyes looked almost black with light. She came to the bedside and looked at Celia. She looked fixedly for a long time, and then said, "I can trust you. Will you always remember, whatever happens to me, that I did not go to Mrs. Ellery's of my own accord?"

Celia seized her hand and replied impulsively, as usual, "I shall believe only the best of you always."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE minister and his two daughters entered Mrs. Ellery's parlor after most of the guests had gathered. Clara saw, like a flash of light, blinding her to everything else, that Dr. Craig stood leaning on the piano and that his eyes were fixed on her. Mrs. Craig, who was a fine pianist, was sitting on the piano-stool, though it was too early for music. Like Clara, she wore blue silk; perhaps both had remembered it was the Doctor's favorite color. But one would have scarcely thought there was any similarity in dress, for Mrs. Craig's was perfectly plain, and the softest, most delicate sky-blue. Her form was round and beautiful as always, her cheeks full of dimples when she smiled (but ah! when she smiled, you saw the false mouth), the complexion white and rosy, and the luxuriant hair simply and modestly coiled. A sweet, fresh creature she looked, artless as a child. A pang thrilled through Clara, as she re-

membered her last glance at her mirror, the sharpness of her outline, and her lustreless eyes, and then a worse thrill as she thought how wrong it was for her to feel so. She ought to wish beyond everything that Mrs. Craig should form the most decided, most beautiful contrast to herself. Yet, though she conscientiously tried, she could not help a feeling of repugnance as the lady came directly toward her, and with her sweetest, most childlike smile, took her hand, and said: "Ah, good evening, Clara. I am so glad to see you for once during my visit. You don't remember, I dare say, but I do, that I have not seen you except at church since I have been in town. Sue said you had a bad cold and could not call with her, and you were away when I called at your house. It is very naughty in you not to make more of an effort to see your old friends. You are looking well."

"I am very well," said Clara, feeling as if she should die every moment. "I have been very busy; you know we have some one ill at home."

"O yes, within a day or two, I know. I sha' n't tell you all the pretty things the Doctor says about your nursing, I don't want to make you vain."

Clara grew cold. The idea of Dr. Craig saying "pretty things" about her, and to that woman!

"He says you make quite a martyr of yourself," continued Mrs. Craig, innocently. "He said he advised you to come here to-night, for he really thought you needed the change."

What! thought Clara, could this man be so wilfully a deceiver as to represent to his own wife so falsely why he had asked Clara to the Ellery's? Or was she mistaken? had her own blind, beating heart so far misled her? Which was worse, that she should be humiliated herself or that she must lose respect for him? O, the last was infinitely worse! Yet she must believe what she had herself heard, and what the cruel, smiling woman before her was saying. Mrs. Craig forgot to tell how she had with many questions made her reserved husband say all those things.

"It was superfluous care for me," she said, in a bitter tone. "It is only

since day before yesterday that I have been in the sick-room, and I suppose I cannot yet be in any great need of change."

"Yes, you were," said Sue, "for you had been moping for some time before."

"And the Doctor is so thoughtful," said Mrs. Craig, with a very wide smile, for the express benefit of her dimples. Clara felt as if she could have shot her. With a desperate effort, she controlled herself enough to ask a few very commonplace questions, and then, watching her opportunity, crossed the room to a group of old ladies who were glad enough to see the minister's daughter, and who made room for her and encircled her so that she felt herself safe at last, and certain that she need not stir from that spot till her father was ready to take her home. Sue, in the mean time, was whisking about from one room to another, chatting with everybody, making everybody laugh, and in a little while detailed, with two or three other gay girls, to arrange the "entertainment," as the simple cake and fruit provided by the hostess was called.

"I declare, Sue, you ought to have learned to dance," said Mrs. Ellery, — a comfortable sort of a person, who had never experienced religion, — as she watched the graceful movements of the young girl.

Sue was, of course, pleased with the compliment, and then she saw an opportunity to do good, and such opportunities she never neglected. "I used to wish to dance beyond everything," said she. "I really believe I would have done it if father and mother would have consented, though I knew it was wicked. But since I have been a member of the church, I find there are so many pleasanter things to be done that I don't think of it at all."

"Especially since you were engaged, I guess," said Mrs. Ellery, laughing.

Sue blushed, but smiled good-humoredly. "Perhaps so. I used to think there was no chance for any one ever to be engaged who did not go to dances."

What is the mysterious force which compels people to approach each other? Clara had refused to go to Mrs. Ellery's solely because she wished to avoid Dr. Craig. Once there, she had seated her-

self among the old ladies, not mainly because she wished to escape Mrs. Craig, but because she was determined that she would not see Dr. Craig through the evening. He could not speak to her without leaning across several of the old ladies, and she felt absolutely safe. But after the first moment of relief, perversely came a fear, "Will the evening go by without my speaking to him?" The apprehension that it would was more terrible for the moment than the alternative had seemed a moment before. She was vexed at her own stupidity. If she had behaved like anybody else, and the meeting had come about incidentally on her part, she would have been blameless. But now she had intrenched herself so deliberately, — she was, of course, at liberty to leave her seat any moment and go about the house; it would, in fact, be her most natural course, but then, if she moved now, with her eyes wide open to the probability of the meeting, she could never again bear what her own conscience would say to her. She *would* not move, but every moment came to her bitterly the hopelessness of her position. If the meeting would only come about without any volition on her part! She loathed herself for such a thought. Then with the practical part of her mind she said she was very foolish. The Doctor had advised her to be present for the sake of her health. His grave way of saying it was the result of a mind preoccupied with other cares. If she did not speak to him, how rude and odd she would seem to him, and he might suspect her motives, — there her cheeks tingled. How it would look to everybody if she kept still in her corner all the evening! Her mother thought she held herself too much aloof from people; she had come to please her mother; was she not obeying only in letter by moping in the corner while she might be flying about like Sue, and taking an interest in everybody? Besides, she might be no more likely to come upon Dr. Craig in that way than if she sat still. She found herself blushing again at that, for she knew what she thought. But then — Mrs. Craig would prattle to the Doctor about her, and would think it so strange he had not spoken to her.

No, no, no, she would stay where she was, come what might.

Calm with conscious strength, she raised her eyes, and from the other side of the room Dr. Craig's eyes looked steadfastly into hers.

Is the initial resolve good for anything? If one fights a battle, conceiving to the utmost the power of temptation, and conquers, is it not a grand and glorious thing? If one then yields, is it not from a power outside one's self? Is there not an odyllic force which is irresistible? What is fate, what is free-will? Why does conscience reproach us most bitterly for yielding where we had determined not to yield? Is then the resolution itself *worse* than nothing?

Clara trembled. She braced herself in her chair. Nothing should stir her. Still the pitiless eyes looked at her, and she knew that she should talk to Dr. Craig some time that night. Then he turned away. She saw him talking to everybody, moving from room to room, yet her system felt a subtle magnetism, and she knew that the moment was coming swiftly, surely.

The time came for the entertainment. Dr. Craig, as one of the impromptu waiters, brought a tray of eatables to the corner where the old ladies sat, — "so thoughtful of the aged," his wife said; and, speaking in his ordinary tone, he said, "Miss Clara, your services would be acceptable in the other room."

What would have been said if she had refused an invitation so worded? Yet, when she rose to accept it, she was conscious that she was deliberately and with premeditation doing wrong as much as if she had left home with that express determination. The physician conducted her through a long entry which opened on one side into the dining-room, and on the other directly into the open air. The door leading to the dining-room was open, but no one was in the entry. A shawl hung there. He took it down, opened the outside door, and drew her out into the moonlight. He wrapped the shawl round her, returned to the dining-room with his tray, and in another moment rejoined her. Here, too, was an instant

of time in which she might have escaped, and the torture of her soul consisted in this, that, tempest-tossed as she was, she still clearly knew, moment by moment, how she *might* withstand the pressure of temptation for that moment. She was clear-eyed; her nature was full of genius and poetry, and she had been taught the faultless Calvinistic logic. There is something sublime in that. She could not deceive herself. They stood in a little side yard. On the other side of the fence, and very near, was a little uncurtained cottage, a poor though clean abode. An old lady with her back against the window partly intercepted the view, but they could see, in the farther part of the room, a child lying on the bed, and an indistinct figure bending over it.

Clara mechanically remembered that the child was a foundling which had been left at old Mrs. Dayton's door several years before, and she vaguely wondered who was caressing it, for Mrs. Dayton lived alone and had few visitors. The Doctor and herself stood in shadow, and could not be seen.

He laid his hands firmly, untremblingly, on her shoulders. He was a strong man.

"Clara," said he, with unfaltering voice, "I have determined at last to do what you may call wrong. I will not live a lie any longer; I cannot see you day after day and let you guess only by a look or a tone that I love you — love you — love you —"

He drew her close to himself, and kissed her in sudden emotion. She was horror-stricken, paralyzed; her tongue refused to speak; yet, alas! she could not urge her powerlessness to herself in extenuation, for she knew that she was destitute of the will to speak. She felt a wild gleam of rapture in the midst of her distress and humiliation.

But the Doctor was a strong man, and he held her only a moment. Then he spoke again: "I knew when I married my wife that she did not satisfy my ideal of love. But she bewitched me; I knew she loved me, and I had lost faith in the possibility of a true marriage. That was sin, a thousand-fold the sin I am committing now. Having sinned, I am willing to bear

the punishment, I am willing to protect her and care for her, but I want to ask you a question, Can it be right for me to live with her as her husband when I do not love her? Is not that cementing the old sin with new sin? The more kind and tender I am, the more false, — and then, if I love you, and if you too love me (I do not ask you to tell me whether you do or not), is there any power on earth or in heaven which ought to separate us?"

"Yes, yes, yes," exclaimed Clara, in a whisper, bringing her whole energy to bear that she might now speak, and shrinking away from him.

He looked grave and sad, and said slowly, "Putting aside what the world thinks, I mean. If you love me, and if you were sure you were not doing wrong, would you be willing to face *all* the world might say or do?"

"*All*," replied Clara, faint and white. "But it is wrong."

"I thought you would feel so," said he. "I should possibly have loved you less had you answered differently. But by giving you up I am paying the penalty of my sin. I am willing to do that, but can it be still right for me to live with my wife? Does not truth, does not purity, compel me to leave her?"

"O, have pity on her!" moaned Clara. "She is sinless."

"Yes," said he, gloomily; "her nature was too shallow to have done so great a wrong consciously. But ah! here a man has a worse fate than a woman. She need, in her perplexity, only receive passively the affection bestowed, he must be the bestower, he must actively, systematically, deceive. Can it be right?"

"It must be," said Clara. "I feel it, though my reason is paralyzed."

"Then my fate is decided," said he, grinding his heel into the sod. "I love you, and I had a right to tell you that, for we are both strong enough to bear it. But I swear to you by that love, and I can say nothing stronger, that from this day forth I will be the kindest, tenderest husband who lives, that I will cherish my wife as if I loved her. You have known my heart, and though we are silent forever, this hour has proved us

and may go with us into eternity as an essential part of ourselves."

As he spoke, the door of the cottage opened and a figure in black left the house. The old lady held the lamp so that its light shone full on the features of her visitor, and the two who stood in the shadow saw distinctly an exceedingly beautiful, wilful, sad face. The door closed and the figure moved swiftly away toward the railway station.

When the sound of her footsteps had died away, Dr. Craig once more drew Clara to himself and held her close, close for minutes. There was exultation, joy, consecration, in the embrace, — the consciousness of mutual love, the certainty that each was too pure to yield to its force, and that so the object loved was a worthy one! Then the Doctor put her softly from him, and she moved to the house, the moonlight blessing her high, pathetic, still features.

So few minutes had passed since she left the house, yet she was wholly a new creature! Life, death, and heaven had assumed new meanings to her henceforth, and she could nevermore know wretchedness. She helped to pour the coffee, — she had been away so little time that there were still many unserved, — and she moved calmly through the rooms, though her soul was far away.

CHAPTER XLIV.

CELIA was deceived by the calm of Clara's face next day. Even when Dr. Craig came she seemed quiet and self-possessed, and her patient fancied that Sue had been right in saying that Clara had stayed in the house and moped till she had become morbid, and that an evening out had done her a great deal of good. Still she could not think that all the agony she had seen had risen only from a diseased fancy.

The Doctor said it was necessary that he should return to the city immediately, but that Celia would probably require no more medical attendance, if care was taken of her.

She was in good hands. Mrs. Fuller was a sympathetic lady, who found it a delight to minister to the sick, and Sue

was like her, though she had no experience. Clara seemed particularly drawn toward Celia, and loved to do everything for her.

Yet the shock to Celia's nervous system had been so great that she lay in a low fever for weeks. Assured that her secret was safe for the present, she did not try to think, but let herself drift on in a semi-conscious state, and found herself almost enjoying it. Such a glimpse of pleasant home-life was a new thing to her. Beautiful as her childhood had been, she could not remember it all, and her father had been too silent and studious to attend much to the details of daily life, so she and Alice had been left to themselves a great deal of the time. At Mr. Buckram's, setting aside the hatred she had entertained for the whole family, there had been such a bitter pressure of poverty that it had prevented them, even among themselves, from being what they might be as a family. Next had come the boarding-school, and then the one room with Alice, and an interval of happy, happy time, both before and after her marriage, but not a day of actual home-life, and for the last seven years the theatre! It thrilled her with an inexpressible feeling to see the thousand innocent pleasures and surprises which the father and mother prepared for their children, and the children for each other and their parents. The thousand little household plans which the girls talked over in her room, when she was strong enough to bear their conversation, the bits of fancy-work to adorn the home, and the quiet books of Miss Mullock and Miss Yonge which they read aloud to each other, all seemed very charming, and though the commonest experiences of life, they were to the sick girl the most strange. Clara, too, was passionately fond of poetry, and in the evening twilight, while the fire danced on the walls, she would repeat, in a soft, strange tone, many and many a sad, sweet poem, and even sometimes would add a stanza or two of her own, which taught her listener that depths lay under the very quiet exterior which might perhaps, if she did not fade too early, make her one of the world's sweet singers.

To Celia, who had passed her life principally in boarding-houses and restaurants, the fresh, carefully cooked food, arranged on the most delicate china with the whitest linen, and the little wreaths of evergreens and scarlet berries which the tasteful fingers of the young ladies prepared each day, were a delicious change. At last she was well enough to lie on the sofa in the sitting-room part of the day, and she found herself becoming fairly interested in the parish affairs, which all the family discussed very vigorously and with great good-humor, though Clara and Sue could not always refrain from a stinging epithet at the meanness or hypocrisy of one and another. Had Celia been an actor in the scenes around her, they would have been intolerably tedious to her; but being only a spectator, she found them amusing and healthful.

Mr. Fuller was growing old, his hair was already gray, and he had never quite regained the elasticity of his spirits since the loss of his only son a few years before. He was a true pastor, a shepherd who gave his life for the sheep. Every household in the town welcomed him as a father. He was a man to whom every one could speak of joy or sorrow and be sure of sympathy. His prayers were so simple and earnest that even Celia, with all her heresies, did not find them tiresome.

The family of a quiet country minister! There was something like heaven in it all.

As Celia grew stronger she began to speculate as to her future. To return to the stage, even if it were possible, would involve an explanation which she was very unwilling to make. Then, too, even this little illness had forced to a culmination all the ills brought on by her sorrowful and irregular life for the last seven years, and she found herself so shattered, so overcome with lassitude, that it seemed impossible to undertake again anything in which nerve-power was required; and still further, after her last shock, she felt a repulsion for the theatre, and determined to play no more if it could be avoided. Yet she realized that something must be done soon. Her habit of carrying quite a sum of money always with her in a

secret pocket had served her in good stead now, and she had ample means to repay what had already been done for her. But her stock was dwindling, and she felt that it must be replenished. All the family had been too delicate to inquire in any way her history, or hint at what she should do, yet she felt that they were eagerly curious on the matter, as most people would be in such circumstances, and especially people in a small village where such an event as Celia's introduction was almost the only living romance they had ever seen. So she broached the subject herself the first moment she felt able to bear it. She had previously given her name as Mrs. Brown, and now she added a few particulars. She was from Boston, had been in the habit of supporting herself in a printing-office, had no friends except a sister to whom she had already written (this was true, for the first day she was able to walk she had found the post-office, which was only a few rods away, and sent a line to Alice, without showing the direction to any one), had been going on a journey when she felt ill and stopped in the village, where she had fainted before she reached the hotel; did not now care to continue her journey, but would like to find some means of an honest livelihood where she was.

They looked as if they wished to ask her some questions, but a certain repellant medium seemed to diffuse itself around as a shield, and they found it impossible; so, instead of that, they set themselves at work to find something for her to do. Could she sew? O yes, and she would be glad to embroider. But this would be rather an uncertain means of support, because most of the ladies of the village did their own sewing. Could she teach? That seemed the only other alternative in an unprogressive country town. She said faintly that she had never taught, and Sue declared instantly, "She can't teach, mother. She is n't half strong enough. I used to get so tired myself, last summer, in that horrid hot room with those dull children all day, that I was fit for nothing afterwards."

"Yet you liked it," said her mother.

"Yes," said Sue, "because I *do* love children in all forms and at all times; still it was too much for my strength, and of course it would be for Mrs. Brown's."

"Stay," said Mrs. Fuller. "I think I have a plan. As you have been educated in the city" (though Celia had not said so), "perhaps you have learned some of the accomplishments. Do you draw?"

"Yes," replied Celia, eagerly. "I both draw and paint, and I have been taught elocution too."

"That is fortunate," said Mrs. Fuller, with satisfaction. "Some years ago a little girl was left at the door of a Mrs. Dayton, who took her in and has cared for her ever since. A note which came with the child stated that the person who received her should be amply repaid for her education, and money is regularly sent, and directions too, it seems. The child must be eleven or twelve years old now, and the last instructions were to take her away from the district school, where she is a great favorite, as she is a very bright child and has great talent in mimicry and singing, and find a private teacher, not a governess, but some one who resides in town, who will give her the education of a lady. It is especially desired that she should be taught drawing and painting, for which she already shows great capacity. I thought one of my girls might teach her, but Sue is too busy thinking of other things just now, and Clara has promised to take the village school next term, so she would soon be interrupted. Besides, neither of them has learned to draw or paint, so it seems you have found precisely your niche, if you like to fill it."

"It seems a very good opportunity," said Celia. "I think I could teach one child, though I am not strong enough to take a school. But would the compensation be sufficient to pay my board?"

"Elf must be the child of wealthy people," said Mrs. Fuller; "and Mrs. Dayton tells me, that, if some one can be found to teach her all that is desired, she will be paid whatever she demands."

"Well," said Celia, "it seems the right thing for me to do, and, if they

will be satisfied with me, I will take the situation."

And so arrangements were made. It was agreed that Celia should still be an inmate of Mr. Fuller's household by the payment of a moderate sum for board, and she found herself once more earning her own support in a manner vastly different from what she had done hitherto. The work was very easy; the child came to her for three hours every day, was quick and bright, even brilliant, and, though very little disposed to be controlled, was exceedingly winning. Celia had not much idea of the proper way to teach, and was not by nature fitted for a teacher; so when her young charge declared that she was passionately fond of painting, and wished to do nothing else, Celia agreed, finding it easy and pleasant to spend the greater number of the school-hours in that way. Mathematics, aside from the most imperative problems in arithmetic, were wholly discarded, and the time was occupied in reading poetry and the more fascinating historical and scientific works. Celia, too, during her years at the theatre, had become a fine Italian scholar. She had met many native Italians, and had become familiar with all the operas; so, though she knew but little of the piano, and had no special talent or cultivation as a singer, she was able to teach both the language and the music in a very off-hand, inexact manner to the child, who had great talent in that direction and was charmed to learn. And so it came about that the little girl fell violently in love with her strange teacher, over whom hung the romance of a mystery, and was ready to do anything for her; at least she thought so, but she had no test, for Celia always let her have her own way. Celia had too little idea of what a teacher should do to guess that she might be doing wrong, and perhaps in the end no harm was done,—less harm, at any rate, than would have been done by rigid, unsympathetic discipline. Moreover, the education was just what had been requested for the child, and the parties who were responsible signified, through Mrs. Dayton, that they were satisfied.

Village gossips always will talk, and they had never quite recovered the mys-

tery of the foundling. Celia's mystery proving still more unintelligible, one, a very ingenious one, suggested a connection between the two; and though the good minister speedily and somewhat sternly hushed the report, there were not wanting those who believed it. In some way it came to Celia's ears. She was very angry, but in a moment she became calm and smiled, saying that it was of no consequence. And, in truth, she cared very little what was said so long as no one guessed right.

The time glided tranquilly on. Celia lay down some hours every day, and that, with her lessons, her sewing, and a daily ride, kept her constantly employed, and she found a dull, monotonous country life sufficiently pleasant for an invalid and one to whom so little remained to hope for in the world. She felt so little energy that she fancied she should not live very long, and it seemed as if the circle of her earthly life was complete (for she was in the habit of looking at things from a dramatic point of view) and that it was time she began to tread the circle of a new sphere. She believed that nothing but death could renew her exhausted life, and she hoped she might fade away without any return of strength which should stir in her a yearning for other than the passive life she now led.

Ah, poor weary one! she was yet to be startled into consciousness once more. Sue came in one morning with such a glow that her usually plain face was fairly beautiful in its radiance.

"I have a letter from John," said she. "And he promises to be here to-night. He can spend a week in town."

"O, what a pity that we have company invited for to-night!" said Clara.

"I don't care," said Sue. "He will enjoy seeing his old friends, and I shall enjoy whatever he does. We are not exclusive kind of people, and I can't see, for my part, why people who are engaged should want to shut themselves away from the rest of the world. Loving John only makes me love everybody else all the more." And thereupon she gave her sister a hearty hug, and went flying about the house for the rest of the day with a sparkle in her eyes.

"I'll tell you what I call Sue's eyes to-day," said Clara, pleasantly. "They are usually not pretty, and to-day they shine so that I call them 'love-lighted watch-fires.'"

The people came to tea, and Celia, out of regard for the family, overcame her repugnance and entered the parlor. It was the first time she had been introduced to any of the towns-people except Mrs. Dayton and her pupil.

Notwithstanding the current gossip, they all treated the stranger with respect, and appeared, in fact, rather overawed by her superior air and elegant and somewhat haughty (though she tried to be affable) manners. Sue's lover could not arrive till after tea, and Celia saw Sue peering eagerly out into the night when she heard the whistle of the approaching train. A quick step came up the walk. Sue ran out to meet him, and it was astonishing how many minutes passed before she opened the door and ushered him into the parlors. Celia did not at first see him, and as all his old friends greeted him as John, and she had never heard the family call him anything else, she was not at all prepared to escape her confusion when Sue, in a voice with a triumphant quiver, introduced Mrs. Brown to Mr. Home. Looking up, she saw the well-known face, and she felt the blood rising in a torrent to her own. Mr. Home was hardly less embarrassed. Celia perceived this, and, remembering that he could hardly wish to be recognized by her himself, and that he must naturally think she had already made known their acquaintance, determined to undeceive him before he betrayed anything. So she bowed distantly and said, as to a perfect stranger, "I am happy to meet you, Mr. Home." He looked relieved, though he was evidently puzzled and surprised.

"What is the matter, John?" said the lively Sue. "You look quite disconcerted."

"Ahem!" said John. "Mrs. — Brown, did you say?—reminded me so strikingly at first sight of a former acquaintance that I was quite —"

"Nonplussed, of course," said Sue; and then it seemed as if a thought suddenly struck her, and she looked hastily from one to the other, and said,

in a distressed, vexed tone, "Why, John!"

"O, it is nothing," said John, turning scarlet. "Sue, mayn't I have some supper? I am fearfully hungry."

Celia was beside herself with apprehension. Sue's last remark led her to believe that Mr. Home had already spoken of her, and that Sue guessed who she was. The more she thought of it, the more was she convinced of this; for she remembered the truthful, manly nature of Mr. Home, and she thought he might deem it due to his betrothed to give a complete account of his past life. She was vexed with herself for not having had foresight enough to adopt a new *nom de plume*; but she had thought Brown so inconspicuous and common, and indeed it could not have suggested anything had not Mr. Home and herself both looked so confused. Then, too, the mystery attending her would convince Sue, if she once had a clew to the matter, and it seemed that she now had a clew. In truth, she was at this moment teasing her lover, who had hoped his hunger might excuse his talking, in this wise: "Now, John, does this Mrs. Brown remind you of the real Mrs. Brown? I am terribly curious, for there is a great mystery about her, of which I will shortly tell you."

"What is it?" asked poor John, trying to evade.

"But, sir, you must answer *my* question first," said Sue. "You must own that I have a little right to be jealous in this matter."

Alas for John! What could he, the soul of truth, urged by one whom he loved, do? Yet it was evident to him that Celia was *incognito*, and wished to remain so, and he knew that if he told her secret a perfect wave of horror would run through that orthodox community, and that he might do her great harm. Besides, she had once been his goddess. No, he resolved that his duty to Sue did not oblige him to tell other people's secrets.

"The name, you know, Sue," said he, with all the ease he could assume, which was not a great deal, "naturally set me thinking of her; and she is about the same height, I should think, and

with a similar air, though her complexion is quite different, and her form too, in fact."

This he could say truthfully, for Celia's illness had altered her a good deal.

Sue was not satisfied, but she had something of a maiden's pride, and she saw her lover did not choose to tell her anything; so she asked no more questions, though she could hardly help showing herself hurt, by a little uncommon reserve through the evening, which she struggled against as best she could.

"The secret is out," said Celia to herself wearily, as she watched the lovers, "and I suppose this haven of rest can be a haven for me no longer." She determined she would speak to Sue herself, and let matters take their own course. She could not see her that night, however, for John stayed purposely to see his *fiancée* after the others went away, and Celia thought it kinder for her to retire and leave the family to their own happiness. But next morning she found the opportunity she wished.

"Perhaps," said she, "Mr. Home has already told you that he has met me before."

"No," said Sue, blushing; "he said you looked like some one he once knew."

"It is not strange he should not be certain who I was," said Celia; "for I must have changed since then, and I did not give any sign of having met him before."

"Except by blushing," said Sue. "I guessed at once that you were the Mrs. Brown of whom he had before told me."

Celia caught her breath. "And what had he told you?" said she.

"I don't care to tell you," said Sue, in an irritated tone. "I would like to have you tell me what you intended, and what you owe it to me to tell, without reference to what I already know."

Celia was very angry. She felt, what was indeed true, that Sue's suspicions were aroused, and that she wished to see how the two stories corresponded. It would have been like Celia to have closed her lips forever and gone away without any explanation. But she remembered in time that it really was due to Sue that she should be told, and she said: "As I expect to tell the

truth your precautions are useless; but I will tell you. I was an actress. I played well, and Mr. Home in those days used to go to the theatre occasionally. I hope you will not be too much shocked by that, for I believe he may have given up the practice now. At any rate, he liked my playing; and when he afterwards met me at the house of a poor sick woman whom we had both chanced to befriend, he recognized me, and so we became acquainted."

"And you think he did not recognize you last night?" asked Sue, in the same suspicious tone.

"I am sure I don't know," answered Celia, impatiently. "I thought he did at first, but I am not surprised that he concluded himself to be mistaken. Still he may have felt that for my sake he would not speak of it. This I can tell you, Miss Sue, and you ought to know it sooner than any one else, or you are not fit to marry him, that he never did, and never could do, an untrue or unmanly thing."

Sue looked ashamed. She realized that she ought, indeed, to have had a deeper faith in the one she loved. She said in a persuasive tone: "But, after all, Mrs. Brown, you cannot blame me for feeling so, because I do love him so dearly, and it is such an awful thing to —"

"To say that one has been acquainted with an actress!" said Celia, coolly. "I suppose it does seem so to the rural populace, and, in fact, there is some occasion for it; but you know Mr. Home well enough, putting aside the fact that you also know me, not to be disturbed by that."

"Oh!" said Sue, horrified, "I am not so base as to feel so. You know me very little if you think it possible for me to suspect John of ever doing anything *wrong*. But he told me," and here her voice faltered, "that he once loved you and asked you to marry him; and how can I feel sure that when he sees you again he may not find that he loves you still?"

"You need not fear that," said Celia. "His love for me was a very different thing from his love for you. It was only a temporary fascination, and I am sure it was entirely past before he told

you of it. Besides, I suppose it has now become necessary for me to go away from here, and so you need not be disturbed by me."

"O no," said Sue, hastily, "I am not so mean as to wish you to go away. Indeed," and she sighed, "if it were possible that John should ever love you better than me, I would rather know it now. O no, you must not go away on my account."

"But I suppose your father and mother will not consent to keep an actress in their house," said Celia.

"O," said Sue, eagerly, "if you are truly sorry for your past life, they would be the first to encourage you in a new one."

"But I am not sorry," said Celia, with supreme scorn. "I think it a grand and noble thing to have been on the stage as I have been, and it seems to me the most petty narrowness to consider life in the theatre a sin to be repented of."

"You should n't talk so," said Sue, reddening. "It is insulting to us."

"Not more insulting than your remark to me," said Celia; "but it is a principle with the Orthodox to insult other people. To say 'I am converted, I wish you were,' is only another form of 'I am better than thou.' But yet," and she stopped in her wrath, "it is true that I ought not to speak so to those who have been so kind, so truly Christian, in their treatment of me. I am sorry for what I have said, but I perceive I must go."

"No," said Sue, after a pause, in which she struggled with her vexation; "if you were to go, there would have to be a reason why."

"It seems to me there is a reason why now."

"But father and mother don't know it, and if you tell them —"

"I supposed you would tell them."

"I can't do it without also telling them about John's knowing you, and that I could not bring myself to do, even if he had not first seen you at a theatre. But what would they think of *him* if they knew that?"

In spite of her anger, Celia could hardly refrain from laughing; and it amused her too, bitter as it was, to

see how constantly Sue's thoughts turned over everything with reference to what would be best for John, apparently thinking and caring nothing about what happened to Celia.

"The average female," thought Celia, turning up her nose; "yet, after all, she is far more generous to me than most women would be under similar circumstances."

So it was finally decided that Mrs. Brown should stay where she was for the present; and when Mr. Home came that day, Sue related all the circumstances to him, and he convinced her that his passion for Celia had been a mere fitful flame which had blazed up before he was converted, and before he was old enough to realize that he really wished for a *Home* goddess and not a tragedy queen. They laughed a great deal over the pun, and had so fine a time that they concluded to forgive Celia entirely for disturbing for a few hours the current of their happiness.

CHAPTER XLV.

A BEAUTIFUL summer sunset. The doors and blinds of the little stone cottage were all flung wide open that the sweet air might penetrate every nook of the dear rooms. The piano stood open in the parlor. Alice had been playing, and would play again when Aleck came home. Now she sat by a window, drinking in the fragrance of the honeysuckles, and sewing meantime. It was plain common work on which she sewed, for they were not rich enough to have expensive clothing, but the stitches were beautifully set, and perhaps something of the serenity of the face which bent over them found its way to the garments, as if the needle with which she sewed were magnetic; for they always fitted magically, and there was always peace in the hearts of those who wore them.

Though Alice had enough to do to keep her very busy, she was not hurried; and she paused from time to time to look out through the gleaming trees at the rosy billows of the western clouds; and as she looked she saw a carriage

stop at the gateway. A lady, very plainly and inconspicuously dressed in deep mourning, descended, and, after giving some direction to the driver, walked in a firm, queenly way up the path.

The window by which Alice sat opened down to the ground, and she formed a full-length picture among the creepers. As the lady perceived her, she turned to the driver and waved her hand, at which he drove away. Then she came to the window, and said calmly, without any preparation, "Alice Wilding, do you remember that you once promised to be always my friend?"

Alice started with surprise at the voice. She could not fail to recognize it, though years had passed since she heard it.

"Antonia Hüntin!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," said the lady, lifting her veil. There were the same clear, beautiful features, the same pale complexion, but an expression far different from that of the old days. The face was thin and worn, there were deep lines of care in it, but there was also an expression of rest.

Alice dropped her work and held out both hands. "I am glad to see you. Come in."

Antonia stepped gracefully through the window. She did not sit down. She was still her old self in many, many ways.

"I wondered," said she, in a calm tone, "if you would remember me. If you had not, I should never have trusted mortal more."

"How could I help remembering?" said Alice, in a voice full of emotion. "I did not make my promise lightly, and I have kept it in my heart though you told me you did not want my friendship."

"Did I?" said Antonia, with a surprised look. "O, well," she added, sweetly, "I have forgotten what I said the last time we met, but I think it was true that I did not want your friendship then. I did not want anybody who knew the intolerable burden I was bearing to talk it over with me. I wanted nothing to make me think. My nature is not often morbid, and it is easier to act and be dumb inwardly

as well as outwardly. I did not want to be bound by any promises, or do anything for the sake of anybody's opinion. Still I have kept myself pure since then."

"I believed you would," said Alice, with a beaming face. "And yet I could not understand you. Will you tell me about yourself during these years?"

"Yes," said Antonia, "I have come on purpose to tell you. I said to myself that day that I would make no vow, since I might break it, but I would see what a life I could lead. I began. I refused to see him who was my lover. I did not see him once till I was ready to leave the city. Then I went to him. He had been angry with me because he believed me capricious, but he had a noble nature and understood me when I told him that I was turning over a new leaf. I laughed when I said it, and told him it probably would not last. I was determined not to make a serious matter of it, but I know he believed me, for he said not a word to detain me."

Alice flushed angrily, and said under her breath, "Ah, that was not noble in him!"

"It was," said Antonia, angry in turn. "If you were a man, you would not marry a woman like me, you would not give such a mother to your children."

"The mother and father were alike," said Alice, still indignant. "He was as guilty as you."

"O yes," said Antonia, "but a proud man cannot stoop so, and I am too proud to bear to be the wife of one who did not respect me. Yet I had cared for him more than for the rest, and if he had detained me I might have listened to him. He showed himself to be very noble. I suppose he cared for me too," she added, in a musing way, "for he has never married. Neither of us has broken our heart for the other. We did not meet till our hearts were in ashes, but I rather think if we had met sooner and I had not been a ballet-dancer, that we might have died for each other." She spoke with the utmost calmness, as if it were a matter of very little consequence.

"And what did you do then?" asked Alice. "I have looked carefully for

traces of you in the newspapers, but I have never seen your name after that engagement you were fulfilling when we last met."

"No," said Antonia; "I knew, if I appeared in my own name, it must also be in my own character. I could not set up for a saint without being talked about. I had a chance to go to Europe then, and I told the manager that I would go only on condition that no one but himself should know my name. He was angry at the freak, for of course it seemed like that to him, and told me that my name would be worth more to him than my dancing. I agreed to take half what he had offered at first, and he let me have my own way. I did my very best after that, and the new name has been worth more to me than the old one. I have been in Europe almost all the time since. I have thought it better to break from old associations. I have come here to the United States some time in every year, but only to look about me, never to play."

"And you have been steadily heroic," said Alice, with shining eyes. "O, I believed that you had that power in you!"

Antonia pirouetted round the room much in her old way. She never liked to admit she was touched. But she said in a moment: "Yes, it takes heroism to live the life I have lived,—a lonely life for one who loves society, a sober life for one who loves gayety, a reflective life for one who hates to think and whose thoughts have in them only remorse and shame. There has not been much to regret the loss of in my past, but it is hard to live without excitement."

"You have had your art," said Alice.

"Yes," said Antonia; "I like dancing while it lasts, and I like acting too, and that takes more time, for I don't have to practise much for the ballet now, and I do have to rehearse and learn my parts in any play. But my talents are for burlesque acting, and I find I don't feel like that very often."

"You could do other things, I know," said Alice. "Perhaps you could not once."

"I could do other things," said An-

tonia, "if I were willing to work myself up into tragic feelings, but my whole study is to drown feeling."

"It is better to look an emotion steadily in the face till it becomes calm," said Alice.

"Very likely," said Antonia, "but not easy at first, nor even after so many years. At any rate, a ballet-girl I was born and a ballet-girl I must be to the end of the chapter. It is an interesting puzzle to me to see what it is possible to make of one so born and so bred. I like to watch myself as I would another person."

"And you have found the possibilities great," said Alice.

"I suppose I should not have come here if I had not," replied Antonia. "I have found out two or three things, at any rate; one is, it is of no particular consequence whether I am happy or not."

"But you *are* happy when you feel that most."

"Yes, in a sort of way. I should n't think of calling myself happy at such times, but I am, I suppose. Then I have found that the present may be pure though the past was impure, and I have found too" (a long pause here) "that sin is not wholly evil."

Alice seemed almost startled. The idea was familiar to her in some forms, but she could hardly believe that it had come to Antonia fully worked out in these, and, if not, it seemed a dreadful thing to say. She waited for the explanation.

"I don't want to excuse myself," resumed Antonia, "though I often have to muster all possible excuses to keep me from killing myself; but I have wondered many times whether there was any God who was a Father over us, and thought there could n't be or he surely would n't let us do such wrong things; so I have worked away at that problem. I dare say, if I had been educated, I might have had a taste for metaphysics."

"And you have decided—" asked Alice.

"As I said, that sin is not wholly evil. I know it is at the time, and every wrong act makes it harder to turn back. You have to suffer more and more because, I suppose, God means for every-

body to turn back some time; and when you *do* turn, the sin you have done yourself and suffered for makes it possible for you to help others. That is the only thing that makes the past supportable."

She spoke vehemently and her eyes flashed. "I *have* helped others; if I were as proud as I used to be I suppose I should not tell you, but I want you to know. I have been at the head of a ballet-troupe and have known hundreds of ballet-girls and have helped them. I have saved them from dancing those things which are only immodest, and not beautiful; I have taught them how to dress purely; I have shown them how a ballet-girl can live by herself, and I have *saved* the little ones. I know well how early the poison is inserted, and how hopeless it seems to try to rise when one has fallen. I have seen only a few who seemed to have courage and will enough to do it; to them I have told my whole story, and they have believed it and learned what was possible to them."

She spoke proudly and almost gayly, as if she had found a compensation for her long sorrow; but in an instant her head drooped and tears gathered in her eyes.

Alice was speaking joyfully, saying how grand and beautiful it was that the very discordance of her life should have been the means of making so many others' harmonious, because she had learned the secret of bringing music out of the jangling; but Antonia interrupted her sadly.

"It is grand, it is a compensation, the only one, the only thing which makes life at all tolerable; but, after all, you who have lived as pure as an angel all your life could move me as much as I have moved those like me. I know I should be grateful for the compensation, for the curse, but you have had the compensation without the curse. You see every lingering support for my *pride* is battered down."

"It is not true," said Alice, full of sympathy, "that I could do all you have done, even if my power were as great. The very fact that my life has been so shielded has shut me out from the opportunity. I have helped one, you

have helped hundreds. But even if we had done the same work, the work is the important thing, and not the way in which we have been led to it; if it were really necessary to sin in order to save another, we might believe sin the best thing, which it cannot be; but that our sin *may* save another is the blessing that proves that any life, wandering in ever so crooked paths, is tending towards the fullest and best life in the end, and that the Father's hand is clasped in ours even when we tread the by-ways. But when I speak of sin between us, it is of only one phase of it. As I have thought about you all these years, I have repented that I used to be arrogant. I believe now, what you used to say, that, according to the blessings and helps I have had, my life has been a worse one than yours, which struggled in such dark ways."

"I don't believe it," said Antonia, "and I never did, though I chose to say so."

"What are you doing now?" asked Alice, after a little pause.

"I am taking a vacation," said Antonietta. "I have an engagement in Paris for the fall, but I wanted to come to this country to see you and —"

She stopped suddenly. Alice could never question her, but she added in a minute, of her own accord, "I have a child in this country."

Alice was surprised, for Antonia had never alluded to this before.

"You are married," said Antonia, abruptly. "To a Dr. Hume, some one told me. Have you any children?"

"Yes," said Alice, with a happy look. "I have a little boy who has gone with his father this afternoon to visit a sick person two or three miles away."

"So I can't see him?" said Antonia, archly, for Alice showed in her face that she felt what a loss it was to her visitor. "Well," she added, very gravely, "since you have a child you know how a mother loves a child, and you will not wonder that I come across the ocean every year to see my little girl."

"O," said Alice, with feeling, "you ought to have her always with you!"

"With me!" said Antonia, starting back. "I never was bad enough to dream of that. The child is twelve

years old now, though I am not thirty, and I have hardly seen her a dozen times in her life. She does n't even know who I am, though I am afraid she guesses. I call myself the fairy, and she has been brought up to believe fairies are real. I have fostered the belief in every way. I always go dressed in black; but I have often managed to wear a complete ballet costume, with tinsel, underneath, and have metamorphosed myself as suddenly as we do in theatres, and I have carried her toys which would spring open when I touched them with a wand, and shower bonbons all around her. She likes me, she *loves* me," Antonia said, with gleaming eyes and joyful voice. "She has a wild nature, and the romance delights her. But she likes me as a *fairy*. I could n't be her ideal of a mother. And even if I could make her happy, do you suppose that I would do by her as my mother (who loved me too) did by me?"

"No," said Alice, "you would not do the same. I can understand that at first, when you led your old life, you had no right to keep her with you. But now, when you have proved yourself, it seems to me you do wrong to put away this blessing from you."

"Don't tempt me," said Antonia, with a tortured expression. "I suppose I might leave the stage, and make a home for her, and I love her well enough to do that, though my tastes are not domestic; but in that case I must tell her the truth about myself, though I have never hesitated to deceive her in every way before this."

Alice nodded. "I see what you mean, but I think you mistake. You believe in your present self, and you know well that no shadow from the past will ever fall on her. Why distress her by speaking of it? The only one in the wide world to whom one can ever owe that is the man one marries."

"Perhaps so," said Antonia, thoughtfully; "but, disguised as I am, I can never be sure that I shall not be recognized. I have been in public so much that thousands of people must know my face well, though they are strangers to me. And suppose she *should* know after a time?" Antonia covered her face with her hands.

"I see," said Alice, in a moment. "But do not decide too hastily not to have her with you. As you yourself know, the noblest part of your life has grown from this very sorrow which you would conceal. Why not educate your child to know that it is really noble? Why not let her know that the distinction made by society is not the highest and truest distinction?"

"Because I know what sin is," cried Antonia, passionately, "and while I will use every excuse for it to myself and to others, I would not palliate it one jot to my child if my soul were at stake. I want her to hate and abhor it, and I want her to love me."

"We may hate the sin and love the sinner," said Alice, finding nothing better at hand than the hackneyed phrase.

"I won't be *pitied*," said Antonia, fiercely; "least of all, by my own child."

"I do not believe she would pity you," said Alice, "at least not in the way you mean, only as one pities terrible calamity while respecting the sufferer. If she were older, and had been taught the code of the world, it might be so. But if she goes to you now, she will see that you are worthy of respect and will judge you by no false standard, — that is, if she has the noble nature which I know she inherited, and which you would cultivate in her."

A faint color came into Antonia's pale cheeks. It was a triumph that one who knew the worst about her should speak of her in such terms. But she answered: "You are kind, but you will see in a moment that I can never educate her as you say; for, however deeply I might feel, as I do feel sometimes, that I had risen above the past and forced it to be a help to a better life, I could never tell her that. That, from my lips, would be boasting of my sin."

"You need not tell her," said Alice. "It is not by words that we influence others very much. You will tell her the past, the palliations which existed in your case, — yes, you will, — for Antonia was about to object, — 'it is only fair that you should. You will tell her your sorrow for it, because there was real wrong in it notwithstanding the palliations; you will tell her of the

present, and you will draw no conclusions. Your life day by day will teach her to respect you."

"Ay, if she lives with me," said Antonia; "but will she ever go with me when she knows the truth?"

"You mean, then, to tell her beforehand?" asked Alice.

"Yes," said Antonia, vehemently. "She would go to the end of the world with me now, but I will never entice her away under false pretences. If she goes, she shall go with her eyes open. But, O dear!" (Antonia had never used so weak a word before,) "have I any right to tell a little child such fearful things?"

"I believe you are right in wanting her to know all before she goes with you," replied Alice, thoughtfully; "and there may be reasons why it is better to tell her while she is a child, hard as it is. A child twelve years old may understand enough to decide about such a matter, and yet she would not be overwhelmed with the revelation as she would be if it came a few years later. Then she is unprejudiced now, and would decide according to the real right and wrong. If she is ever to know it, she ought to know it before she is older. If she is a child of poetic nature, as I judge she is from what you have said, I think she will go with you, feeling the sorrow of your life, and loving you all the more for it in a chivalrous sort of way."

"Never," said Antonia, loudly. "I never *will* have any such compensation as that from my own child. Her sense of right shall not be blunted for my sake."

"It will not be," said Alice, quietly; "and when you think about it, you will see that I am right."

"Well," said Antonia, wearily, "I believe I will go to see her again, and tell her the truth. She will decide rightly, for, as you tell me, she is unprejudiced, and, moreover, her soul is innocent, and wrong will seem wrong to her, and I need not fear too gentle a judgment. If she decides against me, why, then, — well, it will be the direct consequence of my own sin, and I should not be truly sorry if I were unwilling to bear it."

There was a high look on Antonia's face as she said this. She rose, after a few moments of silence, and said, "I have told you what I came to tell, and you have met me in the generous, noble way I knew you would. I believe I shall want to see you often. Now good by."

"Do not go," said Alice. "You are to be in this region for some time. Stay here with us."

Antonia looked astonished. "What will your husband say to that?" said she.

"He will say what he says to all my friends and guests," said Alice, proudly, — "that he is glad to see you."

"I am surprised," said Antonia. "Men are more lenient than women in their judgment of us, but they don't like to have their wives associate with us."

"Dr. Hume looks at the souls of people, and not at any external circumstances," said Alice, still with pride; "and, if it were otherwise, he trusts me, and believes that I shall do what is right."

"You are very good," said Antonia, softly. "I cannot stay, because, much as I love you and high as you lift me, I cannot bear such intense feeling long at a time. In your presence there would always be this strain upon my nature, because all we have ever had in common has been connected with the deepest meaning of my life. But I thank you from my very heart that you have believed in me enough to ask me to stay, — and you must have married a great and noble man. You are happy, and you should be. I, least of all, ought to envy you." She bent down and kissed the white hand of Alice, and was gone in a moment.

Alice sat thinking as the shadows gathered, and the sky grew rosy and then violet, and the stars began to shine in it. She heard carriage-wheels, and in another moment Aleck's hearty voice, telling little Harry to scamper in and tell his mother what a good time they had had, and that they were as hungry as bears. She ran to meet the little fellow, who was almost tottering under the weight of a huge bunch of azaleas which made him look like "great Birnam wood" coming to Macbeth.

As she kissed him, she could not bear to think that any mother had lived apart from her child for twelve years.

"We are hungry as bears," said the small boy.

"O, well, I have something beautiful for you to eat just the minute you get your hands washed."

In five minutes they were seated at the little round table. It was plentifully spread with simple bread and meat and delicious, fragrant raspberries, covered with green leaves. The linen was fine and white; there was no silver except for tea-spoons, but the glass was clear and sparkling, and a vase of the sweet azaleas stood in the centre. Alice always meant her table to be beautiful, having a fancy that, "whether we eat or drink," we should give our highest nature full action.

Afterwards the small boy was put, all fresh and rosy, into his little nest, and his mother sang to him till the large, heavy eyelids closed. Then she came back to the parlor. Aleck stood in the moonlight by the window, breathing the breath of the roses. She went to him and told him her story. He folded his arms about her, and said, "When everything is so beautiful, and we are so happy, we *must* believe that the ages through toil and pain are working out blessedness for every soul."

CHAPTER XLVI.

MRS. CRAIG was in the country for the summer, and spent considerable time at the minister's house. She was an inveterate gossip, but said everything with so sweet a face that Mrs. Fuller and Sue, neither of whom had particular intuitive power to read character, found her quite entertaining, and if they often mourned that they had spent a whole afternoon in speculating about their neighbors, they believed that they themselves, and not their visitor, must be blamed.

Clara, of course, could not speak of her repugnance to the lady, and attempted to treat her with an extra amount of cordiality, which no one but Celia was bright enough to see through.

Celia, too, felt unable to say anything against one who seemed agreeable to her kind entertainers. She hated Mrs. Craig heartily, and, in truth, dreaded her, though she reasoned with herself against that, for she had never seen Mrs. Craig before, nor been seen by her, so far as she knew, and, with all the inquisitiveness in that lady's character, she believed there was no danger of her discovering the truth about Mrs. Brown.

One evening Mrs. Craig appeared in a state of great excitement. "You will wonder at seeing me so late," said she, "and if my dear husband were here I need not have come. But in an affair of such importance I *must* speak to some one, and it seems to me that my minister is the fittest person."

"Dimples!" said Celia, in a scornful whisper to Clara, taking care that no one else should hear.

"I have made a discovery," pursued Mrs. Craig, with great satisfaction. "I have unravelled a mystery. Mrs. Brown, I have discovered who is the mother of your little Elf."

"Ah!" said Celia, indifferently.

"I felt it was due that *you* should know it first of all," said Mrs. Craig, persuasively, and pausing with an affectionate glance at Celia, who, however, deigned no reply, though she thought, "O, well, now, I know who originated the scandal about me."

"That child has always impressed me singularly," said Mrs. Craig. "I have always noticed a resemblance in her to some one, but who it was I have never been able to remember. I am always noticing such resemblances. There is such an one in Mrs. Brown herself. Now we have milk from Mrs. Dayton's, and to-night I thought it was so pleasant an evening that I would go for it myself. It was just about the time the train came in, and just before I reached the house I saw a lady in black coming from the direction of the station. She did not see me, and turned directly in at Mrs. Dayton's gate. I was surprised, for Mrs. Dayton never has any visitors, and somehow, I can't tell how, it suddenly occurred to me that this might have something to do with the child; of course, however, I walked on as if nothing had happened.

The curtains were not drawn, and I could not avoid seeing the interior of the room." (She neglected to state how many minutes she had stood watching outside before knocking.) "Well, in the first place, the lady went in without knocking, which you will acknowledge was in itself suspicious. Then the child sprang to meet her as if she were an old friend. She raised her veil and I saw her features. In an instant I recognized them."

Supposing her auditors wrought up to a sufficient state of curiosity, Mrs. Craig paused to take breath. Clara sat trembling like a leaf, remembering when she too had seen the lady in black. Celia was too indignant and Mr. Fuller too calm to speak, but Mrs. Fuller and Sue instantly entreated to be told the *dénouement*.

"I shall have to expose some of my own sins," said Mrs. Craig, laughing, "in order to explain; but you must make allowances for us city people who do not have the simple pleasures of the country to make us happy. To tell the truth, the Doctor and I have sometimes been to the theatre, that is, we used to go occasionally years ago. Well, we used to see on the stage at that time a girl called Antoinetta" (Celia gave a convulsive start, and though she immediately regained her self-control Mrs. Craig had seen the start), "who had been educated for the ballet, but who also played a great deal besides. This woman at Mrs. Dayton's I knew at once to be the very same, though she looked much older and thinner; and then, directly after, it occurred to me that, the last time she played, the character she took was called Elva, the very name of this child. So there is proof positive for you. She played 'Elva' against an actress who went by the name of 'Mara.' They hated each other, and it was rare fun to see them play."

Celia moved uneasily, and the lynx eye of Mrs. Craig observed her. Celia was conscious of the observation, and became more and more embarrassed. A sudden flash of recognition shone in Mrs. Craig's eyes. Celia raised her hand, pretending to shield her eyes from the light. Mrs. Craig watched every movement, but continued to talk.

"Well, I knocked at the door, and it was several minutes before Mrs. Dayton opened it, and then the woman had disappeared. Elf stood there, as brazen-faced as usual; you would never have guessed from her manner that anything had happened. I only stayed a minute, and then came straight to you. Now what shall we do about it?"

All looked at the minister, who answered quietly: "I do not see, Mrs. Craig, that we have anything to do with the matter whatever. Even if this actress is the mother of the child, as seems probable, that surely only gives her a claim to see the child as often as she chooses, and we cannot interfere. My advice would be that we should keep the discovery a secret, and not give the scandal-mongers anything to talk about."

"But for the child's sake," remonstrated Mrs. Fuller. "She ought not to be contaminated by intercourse with such a woman."

"Probably she is not," said Mr. Fuller. "The fact that the mother chose so good a woman as Mrs. Dayton to care for her child would show that she wishes Elva to grow up in the right way; and as she probably does not see her very often, she can easily show her only the best side of her character. At any rate, we could not interfere if we wished it; we can only take care that all the influences we ourselves throw around her are of the best."

Mrs. Craig professed herself delighted to find such perfect agreement between her own ideas and those of the minister, and took her leave less chagrined than she might have been; for she thought she had made discovery number two, and possibly number three, that evening.

The next morning Celia was unable to rise. She had been very weak before, and it had only been by the strongest effort of her will that she had been able to perform her daily duties; and the agitation of the preceding evening, the certainty of being recognized by one who would be pitiless, had so wrought upon her that her vitality seemed all gone. She was not in pain, but it seemed as if her life was ebbing fast. In the afternoon Mrs. Craig was

announced. "I won't see her," said Celia, feebly.

"But, my dear," said Mrs. Fuller, "she says she has something of importance to say to you; and you know she is a doctor's wife, so she will understand what is best to do for you."

"Well, let her come," said Celia, in a tired way. It may as well come first as last, she thought.

"Good morning, Mrs. Brown," said Mrs. Craig, dimpling. "I am so sorry you are not well."

Celia made no reply. The lady tried again with some commonplace remark, but, getting no answer, she determined to plunge boldly into the matter.

"My powers of observation are very good," said she, with a sidelong glance at her victim. "I seldom forget a face I have once seen." Still no reply. "Mrs. Brown, in you I recognize the 'Mara' who acted in Elva with 'Antoinetta.'"

She paused. Celia played nervously with a curious blue-enamelled ring on her finger, but said nothing.

"Well, Mrs. Brown, do you deny it?" asked Mrs. Craig, with some vexation.

"No," said Celia, "of course not. It is true."

Mrs. Craig was nonplussed. "Then I suppose the Fullers know it," said she.

"No," said Celia; "but you can tell them, if you like."

"But I have something else to tell *you* first," said Mrs. Craig, bending forward, with the expression of a serpent. "You are not only 'Mara,' you are the wife of Dick Stacy, the Congressman, — the wife who disappeared so mysteriously seven years ago, — the wife who was so mourned for, and who, it seems now, must have run away of her own accord."

Celia was now really surprised and alarmed; but she knew that to show it would only place her more fully in the power of her persecutor.

"How did you learn that?" said she, outwardly calm.

"You wonder," said Mrs. Craig, "because you think I never saw you before. It is true I did not recognize you when I saw you on the stage; but you know you often used to come to our door with your sister, and I have seen you from my window. And I don't mind telling

you how I know you. The ring you wear on your first finger belonged to your sister Alice, and I have seen it every day for years.

"This ring," replied Celia, "was my mother's dying gift to me, and I have never taken it off my finger; though, when I first had it, my finger was so tiny that it actually had to be tied on."

"Then she also gave one like it to Alice Wilding," said Mrs. Craig, fearing she should lose her prey.

"Very well," said Celia, who was completely exhausted with the conversation. "That is true. What next?"

"Would you like me to tell the Fullers that bit of scandal too?" said Mrs. Craig, with a sinister look.

"What scandal?" asked Celia.

"That you ran away from your husband and joined a theatrical company."

"For whatever I did I had reasons," said Celia, proudly, — "reasons which I will explain to those to whom an explanation may be due."

Mrs. Craig hesitated. Much as she had Celia in her power, she had yet produced apparently so little effect that her plans were completely baffled. She had little to gain by any *exposé*, and her ill-success in relating Antoinetta's secret did not inspire her to go on. She was only impelled by an inordinate curiosity and love of mischief, with no set purpose of evil before her. And she thought she had an opportunity to do still more mischief.

"Will you please go now?" said Celia, feebly.

"Not just yet," said Mrs. Craig. "If I can't interest you in yourself, I believe I have one item which may interest you. How would you like to hear something about your husband?"

Celia felt a sudden thrill, but, controlling herself with a powerful effort, she answered indifferently, "Tell me what you know."

"Well, then," said Mrs. Craig, with a gleam of satisfaction, "for some years a young lady by the name of Dora May has been living in the house with us."

Celia grew faint, but she did not move.

"She always seemed very sweet and sad," continued Mrs. Craig, "and was perfectly unexceptionable in her con-

duct in every way. Last winter, however, I happened, by the merest chance, to catch sight of a man's figure entering her room, her sleeping-room. This man I had before seen, for he is a prominent public man, no less a person than the Hon. Richard Stacy."

Celia being still quiet, Mrs. Craig asked, "What do you say to that?"

"That if I had but one room, I should receive all the visitors I chose there, and it would be nobody else's affair."

"You take it coolly," said Mrs. Craig, chagrined. "But I have still more to tell you. I distinctly heard him offer her *marriage*, he called it, saying his wife had been so long away that he was lawfully free."

Celia turned suddenly away with her face to the wall. At last Mrs. Craig had touched her. She forbore to say the bitter thing of listeners she had been ready to say, but asked, "And what did she say?"

"I could not quite make out the whole," said Mrs. Craig, "but she was angry, because it seems they ought to have been married years ago, even before your wedding, Mrs. Brown, and she thought he meant to take advantage of that now, because he wanted some one to live with him, and while the chances were that his wife lived no respectable woman would take him. But he soaped her till she thought he was all honorable and fair, but she would n't marry him, after all, so I suppose she did n't actually trust him."

Mrs. Craig believed that at last she had roused all the fury of Celia's nature and made her wretched. She was glad of it too, for she had been disappointed that her first revelations had produced so little effect. It had been merely idle curiosity which had first induced her to spy out all the facts. If they had been received less coldly, she would eagerly have assisted Celia in concealing them, and have been her bosom-friend and confidante, and never have wished her ill for a moment, though her inordinate fondness for gossip would probably have prevented her from keeping the secret; but now she felt that she owed a duty to society in unmasking the intrigues of an actress who had surrepti-

tiously introduced herself into a peaceful village and might contaminate them all before they knew it. Also, she thought the wife, bad as she probably was, *ought* to know about her husband, and thus she disguised to herself her motive in all her unpleasant disclosures. Thinking Celia sufficiently wrought up, she now took her leave, and spent the remainder of the day in amplifying her details in the shocked ears of Mrs. Fuller. Sue trembled as she thought of her own deception; Mr. Fuller was too charitable to say anything, deeply sorry as he was for what he heard; and Clara's poetical nature, her antipathy to Mrs. Craig, and her sympathy with Celia, all combined to prevent her from being at all horrified at the tale. So all three conspired against Mrs. Fuller's first exclamation of indignation, and that lady was herself so kind-hearted that she said of course Celia should stay where she was till she was perfectly well, and that they ought to take care that her circumstances should not be made known, except in cases of absolute necessity, — for instance, to those who might be willing to take her to board.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THERE came an eventful day in the quiet life of Alice. Antonia came to see her, bringing with her the beautiful little Elva. The latter having been sent into the garden with Harry, Alice spoke.

"She has decided as I knew she would."

"Yes," said Antonia, with light in her eyes, but a sigh in her voice. "I don't know as I have done right to lay such a heavy burden on such slender shoulders. It has made her ten years grayer, yet she did n't seem shocked. I told everything as lightly as I could, not, I know, for my own sake, but I would not stain her soul. She really wanted to go with me. But she wishes to be an actress. What shall I do?"

"Why should she not be?" said Alice. "It is inborn."

"I should prefer not to cultivate her

hereditary tendencies," said Antonia, in a harsh voice.

"If they are wrong," said Alice; "but genius has its rights."

"Ah," said Antonia, "she would be like me, and choose dancing and burlesque and fairy things. Now I have had a passion that my *child* should be free from reproach even in the eyes of the world. As if she ever could be while I am her mother!" Her tone was as bitter as in the old days. "I thought we would live in Italy, where no one knows us, and she might seem to all the real high-bred lady which she would be and which I might once have been."

"If you would like that best," said Alice, "her fancy is probably not so strong that it need interfere."

"But I should hate it," said Antonia.

"Only I would do anything for her sake. We should both enjoy acting so much more, but I can't bear the idea of seeing Elva grow up a ballet-dancer."

"Do you fear the influence of the life on her?" asked Alice.

"O no," said Antonia. "I know what I might have been with a pure childhood and a mother who would guard me."

"What then?" asked Alice.

"I don't mind myself much," replied Antonia; "nevertheless, the people who know me now will be surprised at my having a child, and I shall wince, though I used to bear my old reputation with a sneer; but there might come a time when she would wish the world did not know all about her. She might be in love."

"Well," said Alice, "she would be too proud to marry a man who did not love her just as much when he knew the truth."

"Yes," said Antonia, with her haughtiest look. "I should feel so; but Elva's father was an aristocrat. Still she would have too much self-respect to believe that my sin stains her. I know right well that her best life and happiness must come in living out her genius, and yet — since I have wholly lost the game for myself — I have longed for my child to be *in the eyes of the world* the kind of woman her father would have married." Antonia's face grew crim-

son, but she hurried on. "My pride torments me and drags me hither and thither. At one moment it makes me writhe that whatever I am and whatever I appear, if the world knew the whole, I should be such a blot before its eyes forever. I would sacrifice everything, not to be better, not to be *thought* better, but to be what the world thinks better. And I would do the same for my child. Next moment I say, 'I know what I am now, and the past can't alter it. The ballet is beautiful, and I *will* dance. I won't leave the stage and concede that the world has a right to its judgments. I won't own that *no* repentance can wash out my sins.' You see how I am tossed about. One who has sinned as I have is diseased and cannot decide justly. Decide for me."

"I can't," said Alice, slowly. "Let Elva decide it."

"O, she has decided," said Antonia, "but she may repent by and by. I suppose we shall go on the stage. But, if I should die, she must leave it. She mustn't be in the theatres without her mother till she is of age. Will you see to that? I will leave money invested in such a way that you can have the control of it. And I should then want her to be educated in some quiet family."

"Yes," said Alice, earnestly. "I shall love to help her in any way I can, if it should be necessary, as I hope it may never be. One thing, — I do not wish to be impertinent, — does her father know anything about her, and do you wish he should?"

Antonia's face flushed red, and her cheeks were white. She was silent for some minutes, but at last she answered in a low voice: "He used to go and see her when she was very little. He knew the woman who brought her up. The woman was his old nurse. He cared for me enough to see that I was comfortable, and the woman took care of me. Since I parted from him, seven years ago, he has not seen the child, though he was fond of her. He sends her money still, enough to support her. I have asked the nurse not to tell him that I have taken Elva with me unless he goes there. It would annoy him, and, be-

sides, I think it better, as it seems he did, that all connection between father and child should be severed. If he ever traces her out — but I hope he will not. If I were dead — but even then, I don't want to seem all wrong to her while he is all right. Besides, he would never acknowledge her as his child. O, I tell you, Alice Wilding," continued she, with a weary look and tone, "God must be very good to make life ever look bright and hopeful to one so crushed by the past as I am. Yet he does. I see glimmerings of light in the distance, and I half believe that in the life beyond the weight may be lifted, and I may be able to breathe long breaths of *pure* air."

She called Elva to her, and they went away. This was the morning after Mrs. Craig had espied Antonia embracing her child.

That evening Alice had put Harry to bed, and sat sewing by her little table. Aleck had gone away again to visit a patient. She heard the front door open without warning, and in another moment the door of the sitting-room. She glanced round, supposing it to be the domestic, when she uttered a cry of amazement, for there, on the threshold of the very room which they had left together with such sad hearts sixteen years before, stood her sister Celia, a mere skeleton of her former self, with white, pale face and hollow, sunken eyes.

"O my darling!" cried Alice, throwing her arms about her sister's neck. "How came you here?"

Celia sank down exhausted, for she was still weak and ill; but there was a peaceful look in her face.

"I have something very pleasant to tell you," said she. And when she grew stronger she told her story from the time when she had seen Dick at the theatre.

"And now?" said Alice, half doubtfully and half hopefully, when she concluded.

"Now," said Celia, raising herself on the sofa where she was lying, "I shall see Dick. He has been noble, he has done all in his power — little enough, I know — to repair the old wrong. And Dora May cannot and will not be helped by the sacrifice of others. He has

expiated, and I will send for him to come here."

Alice kissed her thoughtfully, but was silent.

"I know what you think," said Celia, in some excitement. "You think he has something to forgive as well as I. You never thought I did right to make him suffer so; but remember I did not do it because I wanted him to suffer, but because I could n't help it. I had that in my nature which made it impossible for me to do otherwise. Perhaps it was wrong. I know, at any rate, that it was very, very hard for him and for me."

When Aleck came home, Alice prepared a telegram for Dick. "Come at once. I have news for you."

"It must go to his father's," said Aleck. And then Alice remembered, what she had forgotten in her agitation, that Dick's father was lying very sick, and that Dick was at home.

The reply came at once. "I will be with you to-morrow morning."

Celia was in a state of great nervousness and excitement. She could neither sleep nor eat. Her great eyes glittered in terrible contrast to her pale face. She was too weak to sit up, so she lay on the sofa.

They heard the whistle of the hurrying train, and Celia's eyes grew brighter and deeper. They heard the gate unlatch and a quick sharp step on the walk.

Alice opened the door herself.

"What is it?" said Dick hastily, with a white face. "I can bear anything, if you will tell me quick."

Alice could hardly find voice to articulate "She is here," and motioned to the sitting-room door.

He paused from the intensity of his feeling. But it was only for an instant. Then he strode forward and opened the door. Celia sprang from the sofa with outstretched arms, and once more, after such long years, he held her in his own. He saw how weak she was, and laid her gently down, and knelt beside her. He could find no voice to ask her a question. There had been one intense moment of happiness when he had first seen her, but now the throng of fears that came up in his mind could not be stilled. Celia scarcely understood these

at all. With all her experience of the world, she was too unworldly to realize them. If it had been possible for her, perhaps she would not have inflicted such years of torture upon her husband. She knew, however, that she must speak first.

"Dick, I went away from you of my own free will. You know I have been an actress, because you saw me on the stage. But through all I have loved you."

"I don't understand," said Dick, in a strained, far-off voice.

Celia hesitated, and then drew from her bosom a yellow paper, written with faded ink.

"The day you went away, Dick," said she, "just at dusk, this letter was brought to me, and by mistake I opened it. Read it. You see it was written with tears."

Dick took it with a feeling of horror. He knew the handwriting at once, and knew well what letter from that writer had failed to reach him.

There was deadly silence in the room while he read the words mechanically.

"You were just," he said, with pale lips, and letting fall the hand which he held in his.

But Celia seized his hand, and spoke quickly, "I do not know, Dick. I was beside myself, I think; I did everything from impulse. I thought I could never bear to see you again, for you had caused wilfully such suffering."

"Not *wilfully*," said Dick, "it was thoughtlessly. I had fancied myself in love, and even when I found out my mistake I meant to be true to her, because I knew I owed her faith. Even after I saw you, you remember, you must remember, how I restrained myself, how I let you suffer when I longed to save you, how I tore myself from you when I loved you better than all the world. She saw that I had ceased to love her and released me from my engagement, or I swear to you I would have fulfilled it. This letter did not reach me. Perhaps, if it had, I should not have heeded it then."

"You justify yourself!" said Celia, withdrawing her hand.

"No," said Dick, sadly; "I tell you only the simple truth. In my years of

lonely life, I have had plenty of time to think over things. I begin to judge the magnitude of the sin according to the magnitude of its consequences. I know now what the consequences have been to me, though I did not understand before that my punishment was the direct result of my deed. But all these years I have thought only of the consequences to Dora, and when I have thought of those I have not tried to justify myself to myself, and I shall not attempt it to you."

Celia again took his hand. "I was harsh," said she. "I know what you have felt, I know how you have expiated too. I begin almost to think I was wrong at first."

"No," said Dick, "I cannot be sorry for the suffering, though it has been hard. They say that it is only when a man is willing to suffer for his sin that he has really repented of it."

Celia threw her arms about him and kissed him. "Ah, Dick, you *are* noble!"

"But scorched by the world a little," he said, quoting her old words, and trying to smile.

"Not scorched, — *purified* by fire," said Celia, energetically, in her quick, poetic way.

They talked together long. It was a sorrowful story which each had to tell of the long years that had succeeded that brief, bright honeymoon, and they had met only to part again. Dick's father was just at the point of death, and the son had promised to return by the afternoon train, little dreaming that he was to find Celia. She urged him to go. She could wait tranquilly and happily for his return.

"Aleck," said Dick, "do you tell the people who will tell everybody as briefly as you can that there was trouble between my wife and me; that she could not endure it, and went away suddenly without an explanation, but that we are reconciled now. I will tell my family the truth, I will see that Mrs. Craig is

hushed. Say, too, that she told her sister where she was soon after she went away. It will prevent gossip."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE elder Mr. Stacy was dead. Dick stayed for the last sad rites, and then telegraphed that he would be at the cottage in the evening.

The hour for the train approached. Celia was quiet, because she was happy, but she grew excited, and her cheeks glowed and her eyes glittered.

Then the hour passed and no whistle was heard, then the clock slowly and severely ticked away minute after minute, and Celia became restless. Five minutes passed, then ten, fifteen. Aleck took up his hat and went to the station. Quite a crowd had collected there, but there was no news of the missing train.

Two hours before, a young man with a grave, handsome face had stood eagerly on the platform of the car, and had said to himself, with the gladdest feeling he had ever known in his life, "The past is wholly blotted out, the sin is expiated, the expiation is received, a new life begins from this moment, and our love is beyond earth."

A shriek, an unearthly yell, — a yawning gulf of fire which receives him into its midst, — a dash of ice-cold water on his handsome, happy face, — and then —

The magnetic links which bind heart to heart may be invisible, but are no less certain for all that. The seven years of voluntary separation were over, soul had met soul; there could be no more parting. And Celia lay still and cold in the little parlor, with no trace, except in the yet fierce glitter of her hair, to tell of the tempestuous electric life which had throbbled through her veins. She had proved that love is something beyond earth.

THE END.

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