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THE
ORPHAN OF CHARNLEY.

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THE ORPHAN OF CHARNLEY.

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CHAPTER I.

'Oh, his was a weary wandering,
And a song or two might cheer him.
The pious youth began to sing
As the weary man drew near him;
The lark was mute as he touched the string,
And the thrush said, 'hear him—hear him!'"

PREAD.

It was Christmas time in London. The days were dark and foggy, but the faces which looked upon them were bright enough; and even the beggars in the streets, seemed to have a consciousness, through all their misery, that the time had come when hearts and hands, hard and closed on other days, must soften and open at their appeals. Holly and mistletoe abounded on every side, as a matter of course. The green-grocers' shops were perfect arbours of glossy leaves and crimson and white berries;—the prize pigs and sheep, at the butchers', were decked with wreaths and artificial roses; and you could hardly stir three paces on the side-walks without meeting some jolly-faced servant girl, grinning suggestively over the boughs she was carrying home "to missus."

Troops of children, ragged, but keenly imaginative, hung about the windows, where Christmas trees, whose burden was not for such as them, were displayed;—children happier in their birth and friends went in and bought those wonderful toys, or crowded the Lowther Arcade to suffocation, while they tried, in vain, to make a choice out of the small glories that surrounded them. All was bustle and happy confusion—every face seemed to say, "Christmas comes but once a year"—every heart seemed determined to make the most of the general season of jollity while it remained to them.

Every heart, did I say? Nay, in "Merry England," there is many a crushed and bleeding spirit even at Christmas time; and one of the number had

found her way into the lighted, bustling streets, at the time of which I write. There she stood alone, among the busy throng, unheeded and unnoticed, looking in at a glittering shop-window, and wondering vaguely why no one would buy such pretty things for her—wondering still more vaguely how she was to get her Christmas dinner on the morrow—or, indeed, any dinner on any day. For she was a solitary orphan, without a penny or a friend—without beauty, or grace, or any good gift save one—and of that she was as yet unconscious.

No one stopped to look at her as she passed—no one seemed to care for her—for her misery, her hunger, or her forlorn or desolate state; and a strange sinking at her heart kept her from making her wants known aloud, as the beggars standing in the kennels were doing all up and down the streets.

She could not stand in the gutter—she could not beg—therefore she must starve; and as she thought these thoughts in her childish way, a woman with two children took her stand in the street before her, and began to sing the Christmas hymn. As the familiar notes fell upon the girl's ear, she left the shop window, and loitered that way.

A memory of her dead mother, who used to sing her to sleep with that same hymn, in tones like an angel's, touched her heart, and she too joined in the chorus, "Oh, come let us adore Him," half unconsciously. As her pure, clear tones rang out upon the frosty air, the ballad-singer stopped, and looked round with surprise; and from the little crowd which had collected, a murmur of delight and admiration arose.

Blushing and confused, the child shrank back.—But as she reached the corner of the street, a hand was laid upon her shoulder, and a kind voice said:

"Where are you running to, my little nightingale?"

She looked up in the speaker's face. He was a man of thirty-five, tall, handsome, and aristocratic

looking. He wore a grey over-coat, and a common round hat, but "gentleman" spoke even through this rough disguise. Giving one glance at his dark face, his abundant whiskers and moustache, his keen eyes, and small white hand, the child stood still, abashed and unable to speak.

"A swell! a regular swell, and no mistake!" was her first thought—for her education was but a Whitechappie one at the best; and though her voice was very sweet, her language was not always of the choicest. What could he want with her? Did he fancy she had picked his pocket, and was he going to give her in charge to the police?

"Come this way," he said, leading her down a little side street, where they were out of the way of the small crowd, who always seem to be out for the express purpose of attending to every one's business except their own.

Placing her under the lamp-post, the gentleman pushed back her bonnet and looked into her face. It was not pretty—it could boast of nothing better than a sallow skin, large dark grey eyes, and irregular features. But her hair was beautiful, long, abundant, golden, and falling in natural curls around her thin cheeks.

"What a contrast!" he said to his friend, a youth of twenty-one. "Did you ever see such hair, with such a complexion and eyes, in your life?"

"Never," replied the young gentleman addressed, looking at the child with a smile of scorn.—"What business has she with it?"

"You had better ask the mother who gave it to her," said the elder gentleman, with a sneer. "As she has it, she will probably keep it, in spite of you or me. Now my little girl, don't look so frightened. We are not going to harm you. I only wanted to see if your face was as pretty as your voice.—How old are you?"

"Ten, sir," said the girl, with a courtesy.

"There, don't be bobbing in that absurd way to me," he said, hastily. "Stand up and look me in the face. Where do you live?"

"Nowhere, sir."

"What do you mean? Where's your father?" he asked.

"I haven't got any father—never had any," was the reply.

"Hum!—and your mother?"

"Oh, she's dead!"

The words seemed spoken indifferently enough, but the speaker's lip trembled and her eyes were full of tears.

"There, never mind, poor child! But have you no home—no one to whom you belong, or who takes care of you?"

"No, sir, there's a woman in the Whitechapel Road let me sleep in her room, and gave me some-

thing to eat ever since mother died in the hospital, but she took ill with a fever last week, and they won't let me stay there now."

"Then where are you going?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Where are you going to sleep to-night?" he inquired, anxiously.

"On one of those door-steps, I suppose, if the Bobbies don't turn me away," she replied, looking quietly at the nearest house, from whose lighted windows came sweet sound of music and of festive mirth.

"Have you any money?"

"No, sir."

"Then how are you going to get anything to eat to-morrow?"

"I don't know, sir, unless I beg it," was the sad reply.

"Have you been begging to-night?" he asked, pityingly.

"No, sir."

"Have you had supper?"

"No, sir."

"Dinner?"

"No, sir."

"Breakfast?"

"Yes, sir. They gave me a piece of bread before they sent me away from the Whitechapel Road this morning."

"A piece of bread! And why didn't you beg to-day?"

"I can't till I'm a little hungrier," she said, sadly.

"Good heavens! Do you hear that, Aubrey? That is what your mother's confounded schemes for the South-Sea-Islanders do. They get shoes and stockings, which they don't know how to wear, and these poor little devils in London freeze and starve under our very eyes."

Aubrey smiled.

"My mother is a goose—on some points. But we shall lose the train, Richard, if we stop here any longer. We'll give the girl a sovereign between us, and she will be set up for life."

The child pricked up her ears greedily.

She knew the worth of a sovereign better, far better, than either of its donors possibly could do; and visions of a fairy future—visions of a hot dinner, a cosy fire, a pair of whole shoes, and a new six-penny doll—were already dancing before her eyes, when the elder of the two friends spoke again.

"No!" he said, meditatively; "I'll do something better for her than that. I generally have an odd whim or two about Christmas time, and this is one. I'll take the girl to Charnley with me."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Captain Aubrey,

looking as if he thought his friend had suddenly gone mad.

"Yes, I will—that is, if she will go. I'll adopt her, educate her, etc. There can be no scandal about her, thank goodness, for six or seven years to come; and long before then I shall be reformed, married, settled, taken in and done for. So here goes! My little girl, would you like a good home, and kind friends, and plenty to eat, drink, and wear, and a nice school, and lots of toys?"

"My eye! shouldn't I!" ejaculated the child, to whom this future opened like a dream of Elysium. The stranger laughed.

"I thought so. And you are quite sure you have no one in London who has a better right to you than I have? No friends—no relations?"

"No, sir."

"Very well. What is your name?"

"Rely, sir."

"Rely—"

"Reliance, sir."

"What could your mother have been thinking of to give you such a name? I shall christen you over again. Have you any objections?"

"I should like to be called Rely, sir," was the hesitating reply, "because she used to say it."

"Very well. I'll call you Aurelia. Will that do?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what is your last—your other name?"

"Gresham, sir."

"That will do beautifully! Now, Miss Gresham, you are sure you are willing to go with me? Because I don't want to be taken up by your friends, the 'Bobbies,' for kidnapping any fair damsel of tender years."

"Yes, sir; I'm very willing to go with you!"

"All right. Then I am the guardian of your fortune in future; so be good enough to follow us, and as quickly as possible, or we shall lose the train, which would be no joke, and, what is worse, no Charnley to-night."

Bewildered with the good fortune that had so unexpectedly befallen her, the girl trudged after the two gentlemen, as they went, jesting, laughing, and smoking, towards the London Bridge Station.

As they entered the door, her protector looked round, nodded kindly at her, and, beckoning to a porter, gave him some instructions; acting upon which, he took possession of her, much as if she had been a Christmas hamper, or a puppy dog, and stowed her away in a second-class carriage of a train that stood, panting and puffing, upon the platform.

"But where am I going?" she asked, faintly, as the man turned away.

"All right!" was the cheerful reply. "The two

gentlemen are in the next carriage, first class.—They'll look after you when you get to your journey's end. Good night, little 'un, and a merry Christmas to you!"

The forlorn creature's heart warmed at the kindly words. Setting off in that strange journey into an unknown land, they seemed like a benison on her path.

"Good night, and a merry Christmas to you, sir!" she said timidly. "You are the kindest man I ever saw in my life!"

"Well, it's something to have a young lady tell me that!" replied the good-tempered fellow, as he vanished, with his jolly laugh, into the darkness of the platform.

Aurelia strained her eyes after him till he was out of sight.

The train started, and the whistling, the shrieking, slamming of doors, and confusion of voices terrified her beyond measure.

Clinging tightly to her wooden seat—as if that could protect her—and with the direst visions of a collision—"a smash," she called it—she was borne away.

It was late before they reached their destination; so late that the tired child was sound asleep when the train stopped, and the already familiar name of "Charnley" was shouted by the guard as he flashed the light of his lantern into her drowsy eyes.

She arose at once, and stumbled towards the door.

Her friend received her—muttered "Poor little wretch!" and stowed her comfortably away on the back seat of a carriage that was in waiting for them.

Aubrey rode outside, and smoked; the child slept placidly opposite her benefactor, who was also drowsy.

At last they stopped, and Aurelia, rubbing eyes, found herself led up a flight of steps, and into a small square hall, paved with black and white marble, where a benevolent-looking lady, wearing a close cap and steel spectacles, stood waiting to receive them.

Her benefactor introduced her very curtly.

"One of the waifs and strays of London, that you are always preaching about, Marshall. Get her to bed as quick as you can."

"The Lord a mercy! whatever will come next?" said the person addressed as Marshall; but she took the child away at once, and after a nice warm bath, dressed her in soft clean clothes, and left her in a bed, whose feathery abundance was grateful enough to the poor little limbs that, for months past, had reclined, with the scantiest of coverings, upon the bare, hard boards of a Whitechapel lodging-house.

CHAPTER II.

"That thrilling voice, so soft and clear—

Was it familiar to his ear?

And those delicious, drooping eyes,

As soft and pure as summer skies,

Had he, indeed, in other days,

Been blessed in the light of their holy rays?"

PRÆD.

THE walking in an unfamiliar place is to every one a peculiar and puzzling sensation. But what fancy, what the waking of that lonely orphan child, in her home, must have been.

She unclosed her eyes as the first bright rays of sunshine fell upon them, and starting up in bed, looked round with a glance of surprise that was at once ludicrous and pathetic. Those fine linen sheets and pillow-cases—those snow-white curtains, toilet cloths, and counterpane—how came they in any room of which she was the inmate?

She sprang out of bed, and her naked feet sank into a soft, warm carpet, like velvet to tread.

She went to the window; and, in the place of a smoky, foggy atmosphere, and a squalid, noisome street, wide fields, and smiling blue skies spread out before her.

The poor little wretch had never had a glimpse of the country before, except during one memorable Sunday school excursion to Epping Forest, where she had actually knelt down and kissed the grass and flowers beneath her feet, to the scornful amusement of her less enthusiastic and more city-minded companions.

And now the country—the broad, free, open country, was to be her beautiful home.

It was Christmas time, it is true, and the flowers had faded, and the grass looked dead and sere; but there were holly trees in abundance, enough, in themselves, to make a summer for her childish heart.

The ringing of a bell below, drew her away from the window.

She went to the marble-topped wash-stand, with a look of awe.

What if she should break one of those painted china jugs or basins—would they turn her out of the house at once? And the scented soap, like a polished ball of ruby crystal—and the soft, white towels; oh, surely they could never be meant for her to use!

As she stood eyeing the things with great perplexity, the door opened, and the kind-faced spectacled lady who had put her to bed on the previous night entered, laden with different articles of attire.

"Bless the child!" she ejaculated, when she

caught sight of her; "Do you want to catch your death of cold, standing there in your bare feet? Here, put on your shoes and stockings—quick!"

Aurelia mutely submitted to her ministrations.

One after another, the different articles of her dress were fitted on by the old lady, who kept up a running commentary of pitiful remarks over her wasted and worn appearance, as the task proceeded. The child scarcely heard what she was saying; she was thinking of the first, last, and only pantomime she had ever seen, where poor Cinderella was left on the ball night, desolate and forlorn, and sitting in the ashes (for which untidy trick she ought, by rights, to be punished, rather than rewarded), where, sobbing and crying, and wishing herself and her disagreeable sisters dead, she heard soft music, and saw a little old woman skipping out upon the floor, who turned her weeping into rejoicing, her rags into splendid raiment, her down-at-the-heel shoes into the beautiful glass slippers, and sent her off with a coach of pumpkins, and coachmen and footmen, fresh from the trap, to meet her handsome prince, and set his young heart in a flame.

To Aurelia every word of that delicious story was perfectly true; and now, looking down at her crimson frock, her dainty black kid slippers and stockings, "white as snow," she saw in herself a perfect heroine of the scullery, and wondered secretly where it was all to end.

She was too young to dream of a handsome prince as yet; but Mr. Richard Leroy's dark, saturnine, and melancholy countenance certainly beamed like the face of an angel, at the end of her fairy dream.

"There, my dear!" ejaculated the old lady, with a smile of satisfaction. "If you don't look as handsome as a picture—at least, you are as clean as a pin; and you may kiss me if you like."

Aurelia was not backward in availing herself of this kind invitation.

No one had ever kissed her since her mother died, and she said so simply as she threw her arms around the housekeeper's neck.

"Poor little girl! Well, as you are an orphan, and as Charnley is to be your home for a long time, I will try and be like a mother to you. And you may call me Aunt Betsy. That is what Mr. Richard always used to call me when he was a young man. Now take my hand, and come down to the breakfast-room, for Mr. Richard wants to see you."

Aurelia followed her kind protectress with some timidity.

They passed down the stairs, through the marble-paved hall, and into a small library on the ground floor, which overlooked the garden, and was always used by the master of the house as a breakfast-room when he was a resident.

The walls of this room were lined with books;

the furniture was old and massive; the bow-windows had broad seats, and steps outside, leading into the garden; and their heavy crimson hangings swept the floor.

A bright fire was blazing on the marble hearth; and on the rug, full in the light and warmth, basked an immense black Newfoundland dog, with the tiniest mite of a grey and white kitten sound asleep between his paws.

Mr. Aubrey sat reading the morning paper near the fire.

Mr. Leroy still remained at the table, idly stirring his tea, and glancing now and then at a number of letters that laid beside his plate.

Poor Aurelia's eyes opened to their fullest extent. They had never looked on such a scene of luxury, comfort, and elegance before.

Both gentlemen turned round when she entered the room.

Mr. Aubrey gave a long, low whistle, and eyed her with a whizzical look, which she resented without fully understanding.

But Mr. Leroy held out his hand, with a pleasant smile, and drew her to his knee.

"Upon my word, Mrs. Marshall, you have made such an improvement here that I can hardly recognize my young friend," he said. "Where on earth did you get all these nice things to dress her in so soon?"

Mrs. Marshall colored and fidgeted with her apron a moment or two before she answered.

"You see, sir, the poor child's clothes were nothing but dirty rags. I really could not bring her to you in such a state. And so as these things were all in the house, and of no use to any one, I thought you would not be angry if I put them on her."

"Whose were they?" asked Mr. Leroy, briefly. "Miss Helen wore them when she was a child, sir."

His face clouded over instantly, and Aubrey looked up at him with a quick glance of curiosity.

"That will do, Marshall. You may go."

"I hope you are not angry, sir," the housekeeper ventured to say, as she still lingered at the door.

"Not at all. Why should I be? But you need not give Aurelia any more of—those things. See to-day that she has a good and sufficient wardrobe. You can easily get proper things for her in the town. They have all kinds of articles ready made at Madame Smith's."

"Very well, sir."

"And, stay—take her with you till the things arrive. Go with Mrs. Marshall, my dear, and she will give you some breakfast—there's a good little girl."

Aurelia would far rather have remained in the

pleasant library, to make acquaintance with the great black dog and his pretty little playmate; but Mrs. Marshall seized her by the hand, and hurried her from the room so quickly that she had scarcely time to make her curtesy properly at the door.

A warm and plentiful breakfast awaited her in the kitchen.

The cook, a stout, florid woman of forty; her husband who acted as gardener and coachman, and the housekeeper, partook of the meal with her. But through all the delight of tasting coffee, and hot rolls, and Hampshire bacon, all at once, for the first time in her life, Aurelia had quickness enough to discover that her unfortunate dress, which she thought so very beautiful, was the chief subject of discussion.

"To think of him noticing it, after all this time!" ejaculated Mrs. Marshall, during her third cup of coffee. "And to think of my being such a fool! Though what was I to do, when he wanted to see the child the first thing, and she with not a decent rag to put on?"

"What ails the clothes, Aunt Betsy?" asked Aurelia; "I think they are very pretty."

"So they are, child."

"Then why didn't he like them? And who is Miss Helen?"

There was a long and solemn silence. No one answered the question. Only, as they rose from the table, Mrs. Marshall observed that little girls should be seen and not heard, which hint had the effect of entirely silencing Aurelia for the next two or three hours.

CHAPTER III.

"When Helen sings young hearts away,

I'm deaf as the deep;

When Leonora goes to play,

I sometimes go to sleep;

When Mary draws her white gloves out,

I never dance, I vow—

Too hot to kick one's heels about!—

I'm not a lover now!"

PRÆD.

As soon as dinner was over, Aurelia was left in charge of the good-tempered cook, while Mrs. Marshall departed on an expedition of her own, from which she returned just before tea, accompanied by a locked and corded trunk, of large size, which, on being opened, displayed dresses, shoes, stockings and pinafores, enough to last any reasonable child a long time.

Aurelia stood like one bewildered when she heard that all those beautiful things were intended for her.

The obnoxious red frock was taken off, and replaced by a dark blue merino, which suited her much better.

A snowy pinafore came next, and then some ravishing little high-heeled boots of blue cloth to match her dress, and a knot of blue ribbon for her yellow curls.

As soon as tea was over, the cook assisted at her toilet.

When it was finished, Mrs. Marshall took her by the hand, and with a look of perfect satisfaction on her face, led her at once into the presence of her master.

The two gentlemen had been out together until five o'clock, at which hour they had returned to dine.

They were no longer in the little library, but in the dining-room, a pleasant apartment hung with pictures, that showed well against the dark crimson paper.

Wax candles were burning on the table and the mantle-piece; a bright fire blazed upon the hearth; and cut-glass decanters sparkled, and the wine flashed ruby and gold in the brilliant rays.

Oranges, apples, nuts, figs, and grapes were upon the table.

Mr. Aubrey, looking flushed but very handsome, was leaning over the rug and tickling the grey and white kitten with a straw; and the great dog had his head on his master's knee, and was gravely contemplating the game through his half-closed eyes.

Mrs. Marshall led her little charge beside the Newfoundland.

"Ha!" said Mr. Leroy, with a slight start, "you have really been very quick about the matter, and you have managed very well. The little thing looks quite pretty!"

Mrs. Marshall smiled, curtsied, and withdrew.

Mr. Leroy drew the child close to his knee, and playing with her soft hair, looked into her blushing face.

"Roses, if not lilies," he remarked; "and such eyes—wonderful eyes, Aubrey! How well they have dressed you! Tell Mrs. Marshall that she is always to put you into blue for the future. You shall be my little 'Blue Girl'—will you, Aurelia?"

"I will be anything you wish, sir," she said with a gratified look.

"Hum! Rather a dangerous promise that, if I was not a staid old bachelor. Well, we shall see. Do you like dogs?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"And cats?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Then you will be kind to these two friends of mine, for my sake, when I am gone?"

"Are you going away, sir?"

"To-morrow."

Her face fell.

"What is the matter now?"

"I thought you were going to stay here, sir; I thought I was to live with you."

"You will live in my house, my dear, and I shall often come down for a day or two. In the meantime I expect you to study very hard, and be a very good girl, so that when I see you again I shall be surprised at the improvement you have made. Don't you see?"

Yes, she saw.

And here at least was an inducement for her to work night and day; but to lose sight of him for days and weeks seemed inexpressibly dreary.

However she said nothing more.

Young as she was, she had learned the one great lesson of life—that it is useless to rebel against the inevitable—so she only caressed the black dog, and was silent.

"There don't be sad," said Mr. Leroy, patting her head gently. "Time will pass sooner than you think, and you will find yourself so happy here, that you will have no thoughts to waste upon me. And now that matter is settled, I want you to sing to me. Sing the 'Christmas Carol.'"

Aurelia obeyed instantly. Aubrey left off teasing the kitten, and leaned back in the arm-chair to listen. When she had finished, he applauded enthusiastically, and Mr. Leroy looked greatly delighted.

"Now what do you think, Aubrey?" he asked, triumphantly.

"You are quite right, my dear fellow. One can judge better of her voice in a room. I have heard many a worse one at the Italian Opera House."

"You think it worth while to go on, then?"

"By all means. Educate her thoroughly, and if the worst comes to the worst, she can always support herself handsomely by opening her mouth."

"Ah! I don't want her to go on the stage. I hope she won't do that," said Mr. Leroy, frowning, and biting his lips. "But I will certainly give her every advantage that lies in my power, and if she does not make use of them, so much the worse for her."

He turned to the child, whose golden curls were now mingling the black ones of the Newfoundland.

"That is right, my dear. Make a friend of old Tender, for he will be the most faithful one you will ever have. Remember that I leave him and the little kitten in your care, and see that they are well fed every day. And now, if you will take the trouble to look on that side-table, you will find a Christmas present for a good little girl. Look at it quietly, though, because Mr. Aubrey and I are busy."

Aurelia went to the table, and found a large package, wrapped in silver paper.

Carefully removing this, she took one long, unbelieving look, and then covered her mouth tightly with her hand, lest she should break into joyful exclamations that would disturb the two gentlemen.

There laid the most magnificent wax doll that mortal eyes had ever seen—a fairy princess, dressed in blue satin, with a wreath of mistletoe berries in her brown hair, loveliest smiling dark eyes, and cheeks as rosy as a milkmaid's!

In a silent delirium of joy, the child hugged her treasure to her heart, and showed it to Tender who first looked with his large eyes, and then smelt at it, to see if it was good to eat.

Finding that it was not, he stretched himself at Aurelia's feet, and she sat quietly on the ottoman, wondering if she was really Reliance Gresham or not, to be the happy possessor of so beautiful a creature.

Absorbed in this new sensation of delight, she paid no attention to the conversation of the two gentlemen; but, at last, a name fell upon her ear that made her listen, because she had heard it once before on that very day, and under most peculiar circumstances.

It was Aubrey who had spoken; and, as she glanced round, he was lifting his wine-glass to his lips, and saying, with an arch look at his friend, "I feel sure that there is something in it, and so I shall drink her health."

This to the fair Helen!"

"Absurd!" muttered Mr. Leroy, looking intensely annoyed.

"Why absurd?"

"In the first place, she is not pretty!"

"Your taste and mine differ!"

"She looks faded—insipid!"

"How can you say so? Who is fresher and fairer?"

"At night!" replied Mr. Leroy, significantly.

"But I was her last partner once at a ball, and shall not forget it in a hurry. It was exactly four a. m., and I handed her to her carriage. My dear fellow, she looked almost ninety."

"After dancing all night. What woman can stand that test? We all of us look as yellow as guineas when we come late from a ball-room, in the height of season. I never saw but one woman who looked well after dancing, and she as the song has it—

"She's black, but that's no matter!"

"Black!" said Mr. Leroy, with a look that made his young friend burst out laughing.

"Not exactly a negress, my dear fellow. She was a Spanish lady."

"Oh!"

"And she used to dance all night, and then get into her carriage as fresh as a daisy. However, let that pass. I am not to drink Miss Helen?"

"Not on my account."

"I wish I knew why."

"I just gave you one reason."

"No reason at all."

"Well then take another. If not quite a fool, she is nearly one."

"What an ungallant speech! And an innocent one, too. Who wants a clever wife?"

Mr. Leroy looked at him with a lazy scorn in his handsome eyes.

"Not an experienced *blase* man of the world like yourself, Harry—we all know that. But I have outgrown some of my youthful follies, and I confess I prefer a woman who can do something more than simper in my face continually, while I am talking to her. A kind heart, a generous nature, a noble soul, and intellect—intellect—intellect—that is what I want."

"Bless me!" said Mr. Aubrey, candidly; "I wouldn't marry a clever woman if she was cased in diamonds!"

"What clever woman would have you, you puppy?" was the good-humoured reply. "And yet I don't know; clever women have eyes as well as silly ones; and your good figure and handsome face might serve you instead of brains."

"Thank you," replied Mr. Aubrey, lighting his cigar. "And now for your last reason against the lady."

"My last?"

"Yes. I know there is another in the background, of more importance than all the rest."

"She is rich!"

"That's not it. Who objects to money. Come, let us hear the last one."

"I don't know that I shall tell you."

"Out with it!"

"Well then her name. I detest the name of Helen. I think if an angel bore the name of Helen, I should hate her."

"Good gracious! what can be the reason?"

"Never mind that."

"Have you ever known a Helen?"

Mr. Leroy flushed a vivid crimson.

"There are some questions, Aubrey, which should never be asked, and can never be answered," said he, gravely. "Yours is one of them. I have known a Helen, and to my sorrow. Now speak of it no more."

As he arose from his seat his eye fell upon Aurelia bending over her doll.

"I had forgotten the child," he exclaimed:—

"Luckily, she is too far up in the seventh heaven to

know what we have been saying. Come, little one, it is time for you to go to bed."

Aurelia rose instantly, and he took her hand in his.

"Be a good girl, now, and do all that Mrs. Marshall tells you. I shall engage some masters for you to-morrow, in London, and I expect you to be very diligent. Above all, pay the greatest attention to your music. You shall be my little David, and play before me when I am sad. I think your voice would cure me of the most desperate fit of the blues. Will you attend to the music, my dear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then go and say good bye to Mr. Aubrey, for it may be a long time before you see him again."

She went, but somewhat timidly. Between Aubrey and herself a strange antipathy seemed to spring up from the very first, and she scarcely knew what to say to him. But he settled the question very speedily by giving a tug at her curls that brought the tears into her eyes.

"That is what your music master will do," he said, laughing at the wry face she made. "Good-bye, little 'un, and take care of yourself, or I shall come down from London with a big stick, and then we'll see."

Her Whitechapel breeding prompted her to make a spiteful grimace at him, as the most effectual means of expressing her dislike, but her natural instincts came to her aid, and she refrained.

Dropping a low courtesy, she turned to Mr. Leroy, who had been watching his friend's proceeding with a look of the greatest distaste.

"Good-bye, my child," he said, laying his hand kindly on her head. "Be kind to poor Tender and the kittens, and write to me if any one treats you badly. You must always look upon me as your best friend. Now go, and let Mrs. Marshall put you to bed."

She raised the hand he gave her to her lips, and he felt a hot tear upon it.

"Poor little thing!" he said kindly; and kissing her on the forehead, he led her to the door as courteously as if she had been the greatest lady in the land, and delivered her himself into the care of Mrs. Marshall, who happened to be passing down the passage just at that moment.

The next morning, when Aurelia rose Mr. Leroy and his friend were gone.

She wept herself sick at first, but gradually grew calm, because of a bright idea that had crept into her head.

Her name luckily was not Helen—she was not quite a fool, and it was possible that she might grow up very good-looking.

She would study, oh, so hard!—and grow, oh, so clever!

And then Mr. Leroy would marry *her*, and never be sad or lonely any more!

It was a ludicrous dream, it is true, but it served to keep her happy for many a day thereafter.

CHAPTER IV.

Love took me softly by the hand,
Love led me all the country o'er,
And showed me beauty in the land
That I had never dreamt before.
Never before!—oh, love, sweet love!

"There was a glory in the morn,
There was a calmness in the night,
A mildness by the south wind borne,
That I had never felt aright.
Never aright!—oh, love, sweet love!"

W. R. CASSELS.

A GOVERNESS came from London to Charnley Cottage on the day after its master left it, and a tutor followed the next week, who undertook to instruct the little ballad-singer in the more polite branches of education—music, Italian, French, and German, for instance.

The dancing-master at Charnley came over twice a week to teach her to hold up her head, and turn out her toes; and, between them all, she seemed in a fair way to accomplish that feat which every one would like to perform—namely, setting the Thames on fire.

They did not try to make a little prodigy of her, however.

In one way and another she studied six hours every day; but the remaining six hours were her own, to spend as she chose.

And here was manifested a strange contradiction in her character.

Within the house, she was as quiet, orderly, and well-behaved as any child could possibly be—diligent in her studies, devoted to her music, peculiarly respectful to her teachers, and as happy as the day was long.

Out of doors she was the veriest romp imaginable.

Aided and abetted by Tender, who was her constant companion, she got into all kinds of mischief—scaled fences, forded streams, and climbed trees, as if she had been a great rough schoolboy, instead of a nice "young lady" of ten.

She used to come home all tattered and torn it is true, but looking so healthy and well that Mrs. Marshall had not the heart to scold her, even when

she surveyed the dismal rents in frocks and aprons, and the great yawning holes in her stockings and sandals, which were invariably consequent on these expeditions.

At last, having decided in her own mind that "cast-iron" would be the most suitable dress for her young charge to wear, she made her a nondescript garment of the strongest linsey which could be procured, gave her a coarse straw gipsy hat, and a pair of strong, double-soled gaiter-boots; and thus equipped, allowed her to roam wherever her vagabond instincts led her, during the pleasant summer days.

By this wise arrangement, the slender, puny child grew strong, and stout and rosy; the sallow complexion cleared, the pinched features filled out, the dark eyes grew brighter and prettier, and the beautiful yellow curls took an added tinge of burnished gold.

Aurelia began to bid fair to develope into, not only a very clever, but also a very handsome woman.

And in this happy manner more than five years passed away.

During this time Mr. Leroy never came near the cottage.

Days lengthened into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years, yet Aurelia never saw the hero of her dreams.

The tutor and the dancing-master were dismissed by his orders, and their places filled by a professor of music, to whom Aurelia was expected to devote four consecutive hours of each day, and against this strict decree she never once had a thought of rebellion.

The master was kind, and she was passionately fond of the study—so fond that she was making most rapid progress in it; and was told by Mrs. Marshall privately that she was sure the Queen could play no better.

Mr. Leroy went abroad, yet still she worked on, with the one thought of giving him pleasure, when he came again.

But even with music and dancing and Mrs. Marshall's praise, life at Charnley was very dull for poor Aurelia.

There comes a time in every fledgling's experience, when, although the powers of locomotion are but small, the bright eyes look out wistfully into the great wide world, and long to tempt its deceits and dangers.

Sage advisers, always at hand, are ready to sing the warning of Tennyson's mother-bird to its impatient nestling—

"Birdie, wait a little longer,
Wait till the little wings grow stronger;"

advice which every birdie feels inclined mightily to resent.

This critical period in young lives had come to Aurelia.

Young girls are naturally the wildest of created beings; their thoughts, their dreams and their desires will ever far outstrip the maddest visions of a boy.

Aurelia, shut up in that lonely little cottage, with only Mrs. Marshall and the fat cook for her companions, had a head full of strange conceits, at which those good women would have shrieked outright, had they known them.

How such ideas get into innocent minds like hers heaven only knows.

She went soberly enough about when in their presence.

She played, she sung, she read and sewed day after day as demurely as any girl of fifteen could have done.

It was only when she was quite alone, either in her own chamber or out upon the quiet and silent moor, that the wild side of her nature showed itself.

Then she danced, she sung, she leaped, she talked to herself, she acted plays, she planned schemes at the sight and sound of which Mrs. Marshall's few remaining hairs would certainly have stood straight on end.

She vowed to herself that she would not stay vegetating there forever.

She would run away, first putting on a suit of boy's clothes, and follow her guardian all up and down the world, sharing every danger and fatigue he knew.

If she failed to find him, she would go to sea as a cabin-boy, or as a powder-monkey on board a man-of-war.

Then, in the height of a general engagement, when the captain was shot down and the flag torn away, and the officers and men falling rapidly back before the force of overwhelming numbers, she would start suddenly up, sword in hand, fling herself into the thickest of the fight, and cheer them on with such fire and bravery, that they would instantly form and follow—officers and all—and the battle would be won!

Of course, after such an achievement, the Queen would hear of her bravery, and reward it personally.

Honors would come pouring in upon thick as blackberries—and, her kind guardian returning, she would lay them all at his feet, with joy and pride that she was thus enabled to reward his fostering care.

A very splendid prospect, to say the least of it, for a young lady of fifteen.

But the time was at hand when Aurelia's dreamings were soon to be exchanged for some very stern realities.

Although the master of Charnley Cottage was still abroad, there were other arrivals that created much more excitement in the minds of the villagers than his would have done.

The lord of the manor, the patriarchal Squire, who had been spending the winter in Nice, for the benefit of one of his daughters, whose health was delicate, suddenly returned to Charnley Manor House.

The family consisted of the Squire, his wife, his invalid daughter, another girl who was universally acknowledged to be the belle of the county, and a son just emancipated from the restraints of school, who was a much greater man, in his own estimation, than his father had been before or his son was likely to be after him.

He was a handsome, dark-eyed youth of seventeen, with a turn for reading and writing sentimental poetry.

He took long walks in all directions, and raved by the hour about the pleasures of solitude, to the amusement of his sisters and the dismay of his father, who thought to himself at such times, that, "handsome, and clever as Fred was on some points, he was certainly cracked—a little gone off in his head."

In every country but England great latitude of opinion is allowed, but if your manners and customs and modes of speech and thoughts differ greatly from those of an Englishman or woman, he or she sets you down at once as a fit inmate for Hanwell or Colney Hatch.

"A clever person, but a little cranky," is the mildest verdict they will pass upon you in such a case.

So the Squire thought the same thing of his son and heir.

But lunacy, now-a-days, is no bar to the possession of a handsome estate, and Fred seemed capable enough of managing his own affairs, was a good judge of a horse and a bottle of wine—rode, shot, and danced well—and bade as fair to succeed in the game of life as many of his betters who had none of his advantages.

The squire was satisfied, and Master Frederick had leave and license to roam to and fro, and write and recite bad verses, to his heart's content.

In one of his long excursions, he trespassed upon the grounds of Charnley Cottage, in search of his dog, who had leaped the fence, and disappeared from his sight.

Never having even heard of the existence of Aurelia, he was considerably surprised to see her seated on the lawn, caressing the truant, while Tender,

by her side, manifested his intense disapproval of such a proceeding by low growls, and the most unamiable of countenances.

The growls changed into a deep indignant bark, when Frederick approached his mistress, hat in hand.

Aurelia rose at once and looked at the intruder with a frank, curious gaze that charmed him beyond expression.

He stood in silence, admiring her face, her figure, her large grey eyes, and lovely yellow hair, and she was the first to speak.

"Is this your dog?" she asked, pointing to the setter, who was fawning upon his master, as if to atone for his temporary infidelity.

"It is," he replied, with a graceful bow. "And I came after him, feeling strongly inclined to give him a good beating for deserting me. But I shall thank him now with all my heart, for giving me the opportunity of listening to the sweetest voice I ever heard—of looking on the fairest face I ever saw."

Aurelia blushed with pleasure.

It was the first compliment she had ever received in all her life; and to be told that she was pretty, and had a sweet voice, by so handsome a youth as Frederick Landell, was an event indeed, in her usually uneventful existence.

But they were both too young to pay or to listen to compliments very long, and in less than ten minutes they were walking, side by side, down the garden, to gather some flowers, for which Frederick professed a great admiration.

The two dogs followed—so did the kitten, now grown into a very Methuselah of a cat—and the sun shone, and the flowers bloomed, and everything was full of light, and life, and happiness around them.

The golden time had dawned at last—for both were young, and beautiful, and romantic, and innocent, and both were in love—an idle, studied, happy, foolish, perfectly delicious state of existence.

There is an engraving in one edition of Moore's melodies, which more perfectly illustrates this season of exquisite folly than any words could do; and in a garden, hidden from prying eyes, by a sunny south wall, covered with clusters of grapes, a young man sits upon a rustic bench, holding a garland of flowers across his hands, while a girl kneels before him, with her gipsy hat pushed back, and her sweet, earnest face intent upon her task, the tying of a ribbon round the stems.

Flowers bloom in wild luxuriance all around—a pair of doves are cooing in a laburnum tree; and the stillness, the peace, the untroubled bliss of the scene, come like a vision of Eden to the

troubled and weary soul, that has long since outlived such unforgotten delights.

"There's nothing half so sweet in life

As love's young dream!"

The words rise involuntary to your lips, as you gaze upon the happy pair.

Aurelia and Frederick might have sat as the originals of those portraits, during the summer of their acquaintance.

They read, they walked, they sang, they drew together; and good Mrs. Marshall, almost as innocent as they, looked on with pleased and approving eyes.

Aurelia, in her opinion, was perfection personified and if she looked farther into the future than they did she saw nothing there that would warrant her putting a veto on their pleasant companionship.

She had never met any of the other inmates of the Manor House—she never dreamed of the fine lady sisters, or the haughty father, who would as soon have seen his only son lying dead at his feet, as married to a girl of whose birth and parentage no one knew anything.

The Manor House and the Cottage both stood far out from the village, and in different directions; consequently there were no prying eyes to watch the heir's frequent visits to the cottage—no tattling tongues to carry the news to his father at the Hall.

The Squire had seen Aurelia at church with Mrs. Marshall. It is true, and his eldest daughter had remarked that the girl was "all eyes," but they never took any further notice of her, to the great delight of Master Frederick, who was trembling lest his cherished secret should be discovered.

It generally happens, when people are doing anything which they wish to keep secret, that if a long time elapses without bringing about a discovery, they become careless—and thus work more mischief for themselves than any one else, however willing, could work for them.

In this case, Master Frederick was the victim of his own imprudence. Day after day he visited the Cottage without inquiry or detection, but he never ventured to accompany Aurelia beyond the limits of the garden gate.

Now however, the autumn was coming on, and the ripe nuts were dropping from the trees, and the ripe berries growing in the hedges all around.

He longed so for an expedition into the still green woodlands with her—and she was equally anxious to go.

They consulted Mrs. Marshall, who demurred at first; but afterwards, saying to herself that they were "only children, after all," consented, on condition that they should be home in time for tea, and that

the gardener's son, a stout lad of eighteen, should accompany them, to bring back the nuts, and prevent them from losing their way on the wide common they had to cross.

It was high noon before they started.

Tender and the setter were left behind to keep each other company in the stables, they being far more inquisitive touching the welfare of sheep and cows than was convenient upon an open common, where hundreds of the animals were grazing.

So, unattended and unwatched, save by the good-natured gardener's boy, the young lovers walked hand in hand down through the green lanes, across the open common, and into the coppice where the nuts and berries grew.

The walk all over, the nuts all gathered and given safely into the charge of their attendant. It seemed that they might rest awhile.

So, going back to the common, they sat down upon the pink, blossoming heath, and looked around them like voyagers who had found some lovely and lonely island far out at sea, where they might dwell together for ever, the happiest beings upon this happy earth.

For more than a mile on either side, the solitary moor spread out in patches pink and yellow bloom; and only a faint blue line of smoke curling up here and there on its borders, told that a human habitation was near.

The gardener's son was lying upon his back among the heather, looking up into the blue sky and whistling vaguely; and Frederick, with his arm around Aurelia's waist, began to repeat a poem of his favourite Wordsworth's, about a day when he also went a nutting as a boy.

"It seemed a day

(I speak of one from many singled out)—

One of those heavenly days which cannot die,

When forth I sallied from our cottage door,

With a huge wallet o'er my shoulders slung,

A nutting crook in hand, and turned my steps

Towards the distant woods,—a figure quaint,

Tricked out in proud disguise of cast off weeds,

Which for that service had been husbanded,

By exhortation of my frugal dame.

* * * * *

Among the woods

And o'er the pathless rocks I forced my way,

Until, at length, I came to on dear nook

Unvisited; where not a broken bough

Drooped with its withered leaves—ungracious sign

Of devastation—but the hazels rose

Tall and erect, with milk-white clusters hung,

A virgin scene."

"It was like the place we visited to-day," he said, breaking off suddenly. "And I know that not a poet of them all ever got any finer nuts than John has in the bag, over yonder. Are you tired, Aurelia?"

"No," she said, looking out over the common with an absent expression that annoyed him, he knew not why.

"Then what are you thinking about, and why do you look so serious, Aurelia?" he asked, a little pettishly.

"I was thinking of Mr. Leroy then. This is his birthday."

How old is he?"

"Forty-five, I believe."

"A regular grandfather—old enough at least to be your father or mine. Don't think any more of him now, but talk to me. Is not this a heavenly day?"

"It is, indeed."

"They wanted me to go out in the carriage with them at home this morning, but I knew better. I was not going to be boxed up on four wheels such a day as this for any one. I told Clara so. She is going to see some wonderful view or other. You are not listening Aurelia, and it is very rude of you."

"I beg ten thousand pardons, dear Frederick! But I was thinking of something else just at that instant."

"Yes," said the jealous boy, "you are always thinking of something except me, when you know that I live and breathe and move only for you! You have no more heart than a flying fish! Do you understand that?"

"Perfectly," she answered, with her musical laugh.

"Tiresome little thing! When any one is really scolding, you fancy it is all a joke. Now, Aurelia, to pay for your rudeness, you shall sing me a song."

"What will you have?"

"My favorite, of course, 'Bonny Dundee.' And don't be afraid of letting your voice out. No one can hear you here except the birds and the rabbits. That is the best of a great, rambling common.

You can give tongue on it as long as you like without the risk of offending anybody's ears. Now for it."

Aurelia began to sing.

It was a wonderful thing to hear such a magnificent voice in so lonely a place.

Frederick and John joined lustily in the chorus and if the birds and the rabbits were indeed listening, they might have thought themselves very lucky to hear such music without first undergoing the penance of sitting half an hour in a close and crowded

room, with the thermometer at seventy-five degrees in the shade.

CHAPTER V.

"Like some vision olden,
Of far other time,
When the age was golden,
In the young world's prime,
Is thy soft pipe ringing,
Oh, lonely shepherd boy;
What song art thou singing
In thy youth and joy?"

L. E. L.

THE song was scarcely finished when another sound broke upon the air—a much more startling one—a loud "view halloo" given in true professional style.

"The hunt!" cried Aurelia, starting to her feet and turning pale. "Those wicked wretches are riding this way after some poor hare! O, I wish they would every one of them fall off their horses and break their necks! I hate them!"

Frederick opened his eyes wildly at this indignant outburst. It had never occurred to him before that hunting hares was cruelty; but if Aurelia said so, of course it must be, and he resolved in his heart never to follow the hounds again.

Before he had time to tell her so, however, the view halloo was repeated, and two young men burst through the furze bushes and stood before them.

"Go away, you cruel wretches!" said Aurelia stamping her foot. "There are no hares here for you to worry to death."

"Faith, I think we have unearthed a very pretty one!" said the elder of the two, a bold, handsome, military-looking man of about twenty-five. "How are you, Miss Pussy, and how fast can you run?"

Aurelia curled her lip in superb disdain, and turned her back upon them.

"Why surely that is young Landell," said the second gentleman, turning towards Frederick, who had recognized them from the first, but who, for some unexplained reason, had kept himself in the background.

"Young Landell! Why, so it is!" replied the first speaker.

Frederick being obliged to speak, came forward very sulkily, and "hoped both the gentlemen were well."

"Of course we are," was the mischievous reply. "And there is no need to ask after your welfare and happiness, with such a charming companion in such a lovely place."

The lad's cheek flushed hotly.

He knew both the young men well.

They were officers from a neighbouring town, and frequent visitors at his father's house. Indeed it was currently reported in the neighbourhood that Captain Grey was paying his addresses to Miss Landall, and would eventually win her for his bride. However this might be, Frederick did not like him, and he was determined that this adventure should not be a subject of ridicule at the mess-table, for a week afterwards, if he could possibly help it.

So looking very fiercely at the Captain, he said, in a tone which could not be mistaken;

"Sir, this young lady is my dearest friend, and the man who dares to couple her name with a breath of anything that is wrong must answer for it to me."

It was almost impossible to help laughing at this bravado, and the Captain's friend displayed a range of very white teeth when he heard it.

"I'll be your second, or bottleholder, as you like, Freddy," he remarked. But the Captain looked as solemn as an owl, and said, in a very polite tone, though he was nearly bursting with inward laughter, that Mr. Landall had entirely mistaken him if he supposed he had intended to say anything offensive to the lady.

He was not capable of offering an insult to any woman, much less to one so young and beautiful, and if any remark of his had seemed rude, he begged to apologize for it then and there with all his heart.

Women being naturally almost as vain as men, it was no wonder that Aurelia condescended to turn the light of her countenance on the gallant Captain as he made this pretty speech.

Ensign Smith stared, and Frederick looked very sulky; but Aurelia accepted the apology and smiled upon its maker, which was all he wanted. So, with a low bow to her, he went on again.

"The real reason of our unceremonious appearance and somewhat rude greeting was this. From the glen yonder we heard a most exquisite voice, which was evidently neither the property of the beasts of the field nor the birds of the air. The ladies (for you must know we are having a pic-nic party under the old oaks) sent me to find out and to bring back the singer. May I hope that she will allow me the honour?"

He offered his arm to Aurelia as he spoke.

Somewhat bewildered, she looked at Frederick as if asking his advice.

"Don't go, Aurelia!" he said shortly. "You have a right to sing in the open air, I suppose, without being dragged into every pic-nic party that happens to be eating its dinner within three miles of the place. Come home with me."

"Now that is very unkind, Mr. Landall!" said the Captain. "For it was your own sister who fell

in love with the voice, and sent me to look for its owner. What will she say to me, or you either, when I return and tell her why I failed to do her bidding?"

"Hang Clara—and her bidding, too!" muttered Frederick, kicking the stones from the path with a vicious energy. The Captain stroked his moustache and smiled, then turned to Aurelia again.

"My dear young lady—I have not the honour of knowing your name—"

"My name is Gresham!"

"Thanks. Pray, Miss Gresham, be merciful enough to come with me for five minutes. I shall get into the deepest disgrace if I return without you."

"For five minutes only, then. Come, Frederick!" and Aurelia took the proffered arm, and moved off, with her unwilling lover in her train, as if she had been an empress, followed by her attendant slaves. Captain Grey wondered at her ease and self-possession. She seemed to dread the pic-nic party no more than she would have dreaded an assemblage of dolls.

But that self-possession rose solely from ignorance. In her own home she was petted and caressed—everything which she said or did was sure to be right in the eyes of her partial attendants.

Consequently she was not aware that there were in the world people who would ridicule her for awkwardness, depreciate her good looks, call her affected rather than artless, and simple rather than purely natural.

She was going to meet some of those people now for the first time, yet she went on as joyously and unconsciously as the lamb, with garlands round its neck, walks up to the altar, and offers its innocent existence to the hand of the sacrificer.

The pic-nic party were grouped most picturesquely around a small fire in a hollow dell.

Great trees hung their half-stripped branches protectingly over them, and the sides of the dell were clothed with ragged bushes, and furz and gorse in blossom.

Overhead was the calm blue sky, and beyond, the common seemed to spread out for many a mile, lonely and silent, yet beautiful and calm.

Far away the high road could be seen—a narrow strip of white between the distant hills—and there was no sound of human voices upon the wide expanse, save from the dell itself.

A windmill in the centre of the common, and a great brush heap by its side marked the miller's home and the cricketers' ground; but the sails of the mill hung idly, and the cricketers were all busy on their fields and farms.

Aurelia, with her artist's eye, took in all the beauties of the scene in one rapid glance, as she stood on the brink of the dell.

Then she turned towards the party itself, charmed by the bright dresses, the ringing voices, and the eager faces all turned her way.

"How happy they look!" she said to the Captain. "I should like to paint a picture now!"

"You draw, then?" he asked.

"Oh, yes."

"Very well. I will make them all sit for the sketch to you. Now, descend with me. We are going into a perfect Garden of Eden—as you will see,—and every man below there is an Adam, and every woman an Eve!"

She looked up in his face doubtingly, as he spoke, but it was perfectly serious.

"I only hope we may not be four serpents, coming to destroy the beautiful harmony of the grove. Mind how you step, for these sides are very treacherous. Give me your hand. There, now you are safe. Now, ladies, I expect you will offer me some very beautiful and valuable testimonial for my services; for I have caught the nightingale, if I have not tamed her—and here she is before you. Miss Gresham, my good friends, one and all!"

They all flocked round Aurelia with words of praise and greeting.

She received them a little shyly, but with a manner that won her golden opinions from the gentlemen, who had already decided between themselves upon the merits of her foot and ankle, as she descended the steep hill.

And though she was only dressed in a plain, blue gingham frock, with a linen collar and ribbon tie, and a straw hat, of very coarse material,—still, her tall and graceful figure, her fresh, fair complexion, her beaming eyes and golden hair, and, above all, her frank smile, and happy, innocent look, made them still more inclined to hail her as an immense acquisition to their party.

The ladies, of course, had their doubts about her dress—and wondered at her thick shoes—and thought her features unformed—precisely as the gentlemen would have done, had she been a lad instead of a lass, of fifteen. But no one greeted her unkindly, or stared at her offensively, save one!

This was the sister of Frederick Landall, the beauty and the belle of the county.

She was a slender, exquisitely graceful damsel of twenty, arrayed in the most expensive of summer dresses, and gifted with beauty of a most patrician stamp.

She was as fair as a lily, with dark blue eyes, and dark brown hair. Her mouth was small; her nose was straight; her chin was dimpled; her teeth were like seed pearls; her hands and feet were models for the sculptor.

She did nothing but take care of her beauty, and, in consequence, it was nearly perfect.

No young lady in the county could exhibit such lovely arms, or so white a neck, at the assembly balls; and now, as she stood before Aurelia, with a pink fringed parasol carefully interposed between her delicate complexion and the setting sun, the young girl could not keep her eyes off her.

She had never seen any one so beautiful before; and as she glanced at her rich dress, and noted her perfect air of fashion and high breeding, she no longer wondered at the scornful glance she herself had received from those bright blue eyes.

How coarse, how ugly, how awkward she must look beside that delicate and high-born creature!

A memory of the old whitechapel days flushed oddly through her mind, and she was ready to sink into the earth with confusion at the mere thought of having presumed to come, on terms of equality, into the presence of that petted belle and her circle of intimate friends.

She little knew in the meantime what Miss Landall was thinking and feeling about her.

From the moment when that lady had seen Aurelia standing above her, and leaning upon Captain Grey's arm, a gnawing jealousy had filled her heart.

The gallant Captain had been given to her by the common consent of the neighbourhood over and over again, but never by his own; and she was by no means sure, in her own heart, that he ever would be.

That he admired her was very easy to be seen, and he had paid her compliments on her beauty by the score.

But he had never sought to make that beauty entirely his own.

He might have had it for asking, for what little affection Miss Landall had to spare was lavished upon his handsome face and form.

It might be that he knew this too well, and therefore set less value upon a heart that sought to win, rather than to be won. At all events, though six months had passed from the time of their first meeting, he had never made anything which Miss Landall could possibly construe into an avowal of love.

But somehow, as she glanced up that afternoon, and saw him standing on the hill with Aurelia, plainly dressed, and by no means handsome, leaning on his arm, a sudden qualm disturbed her mind, and for the first time in her life she had given a thought to the possibility of his liking some one else better than he liked her.

The girl was young, and unformed, and a little awkward, it is true. Then again so far as mere beauty of feature and complexion are concerned, she

could not hold a candle to Miss Clara; and Miss Clara knew it well.

But she had often read, and sometimes heard, of men who were won less by a pretty face than by a strong mind or a gentle heart.

And whether this child was handsome or not, she certainly had a magnificent voice—no one could deny that—and Captain Grey was simply music mad.

How often had she seen him turn away from the pianoforte with an ill-concealed gesture of impatience, when she sang the fashionable songs of the day!

How seldom he asked for music in their house—simply because it was not that which his fastidious taste called good!

Yet when the lame old music-master came from the next town to tune the instrument, how eagerly he listened to him!

Yes—music was the rock on which she might chance to split; and now, as the malignant Fates would have it, here was a horrid girl, the mere sound of whose voice at a distance had drawn him from her side, and sent him flying up the steep sides of the dell, as if the Syrens who beguiled Ulysses had caught him in their toils.

Even at that moment, as Aurelia stood talking to him, there was a look of interest—an animation in his face, the absence of which she had often wondered at when he conversed with her.

He could wake up, then, and for a plain little thing like that!

Was it any wonder that she regarded this poor girl with the most unfavourable eyes as the Captain related the circumstances of their meeting.

Frederick still sulked in the background: but his sister, hearing his name mentioned, began to listen more carefully, and soon made out enough of the story to see that her brother was chiefly to blame for this unwelcome addition to their party.

So, taking advantage of the Babel tongues, she crossed over to where he stood, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"What is the matter, Fred?" she asked. "You look as if you had lost every friend you ever had on earth."

"Is that you, Clara?" he said, impatiently, still keeping his eyes fixed on Aurelia and her attendant group of cavaliers. "What in the name of goodness did you send him after her for? I think it is very hard, when I never interfere with you in any way, that you should go and spoil the greatest pleasure I have on earth."

"What in the world are you talking about, Fred? What pleasure of yours have I spoiled? And who do you mean by him and her? I am entirely in the dark!"

"I mean Aurelia and that—that thundering jack-

anapes, Captain Grey!" burst out poor Fred, growing unmanageable as he thought upon his wrongs.

"Here we came out on a beautiful nutting excursion and we were so happy together, when you must bring your stupid pic-nic party where they could hear Aurelia sing, and come after her—and be hanged to them all! How could she go and leave me like that for a lot of strangers, who knew nothing about her half an hour ago? But you are all alike, you women; and I'll have no more to do with any of you as long as I live!"

Miss Clara eyed the young misanthrope with a thoughtful glance.

She longed to be at the bottom of the whole mystery, but he was too frantic to be cautious—he would tell every one as well as her, and that was not what she wanted.

So she put her hand through his arm in a very sisterly sort of way, and drew him apart among the thickest groups of trees.

"Never mind Captain Grey just this moment, Fred," she said, soothingly; "but tell me all about this friend of yours. What did you call her?"

"Aurelia."

"What else?"

"Gresham."

"And what is she?"

"Why, a young lady, to be sure! Can't you see that for yourself, without asking me?"

"Don't be rude and stupid, Frederick! I want to help you if you will only let me: but how can I if you talk like that?"

Poor Fred crammed his fists into his eyes.

"You are very good, and I am a great bear!" he said, in a choked voice. "But that horrid Captain has upset me so that I don't know what I am about! How dared he tell me you sent him to bring Aurelia here?"

"He told you that, then?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"It was when I asked Aurelia not to go with him. He said he did not know how to excuse himself to my sister, and then Aurelia was ready to run to get here! I shall punch that fellow's head for him yet—I know I shall! Why can't he make love to you, and let my Aurelia alone?"

There never was a more unfortunate speech made. Miss Landall winced as she heard it, and hated Aurelia worse than ever.

But she kept close to Frederick's side till she had learned all he had to tell about the girl.

It was not much; but it was a sufficient clue to follow up, and she promised herself that the "little pauper" should not stand in her light many days longer.

She returned to the party, which was beginning to break up.

Frederick had looked for an explanation of Aurelia's conduct during their long walk; but as if her conscience reproached her, she pleaded fatigue, and gladly accepted the offer of a seat in the carriage of a lady who would pass the gates of Charnley Cottage on her way home.

So Frederick went off moodily by himself, and Clara secured the Captain for her cavalier; but she questioned, in her own mind (so absent and preoccupied was his manner) whether he heard ten consecutive words of all she said to him on the way.

CHAPTER VI.

"Oh, Mary, canst thou wreck his peace,
Who for thy sake would gladly die?
Or canst thou break that heart of his,
Whose only fault is loving thee?
If love for love thou wilt not give,
At least be pity to me shown;
A thought ungentle cannot be
The thought of Mary Morison."

BURNS.

MISS LANDELL was by no means a person to let the grass grow under her feet. When she had once determined on any line of action, she lost no time in forming her ranks, and getting her weapons ready for attack. Consequently the very next morning, while the Squire sat comfortably over his paper at the breakfast-table, she begged his attention for one moment, in a tone of voice that implied there ought to be no delay in complying with her request.

Nothing is much more provoking than to be required to lay down a morning paper to listen to anything foreign to its news. The Squire fumed and fretted a little, but Miss Landell had a habit of going into tantrums, when she fancied herself slighted or neglected, and he remembered it just in time. So, he laid the paper aside, pushed his spectacles up on his forehead with a short grunt of dissatisfaction, and asked what she wanted.

"I want to speak to you about Frederick, papa," she said, composedly sipping her tea.

"Eh—what? What has he been doing? And, by the way, where is he?"

"I am sure I can't say, papa."

"Half-past eight, and not down to breakfast! Bad habit—very—must be checked. Hate to see young people so lazy."

He rang the bell violently. A servant made his appearance.

"Go up to Mr. Frederick's room John, and say

that breakfast is ready, and that I am waiting for him."

The man left the room, but returned in about five minutes to say that Mr. Frederick was not in his chamber—in fact that he was not in the house. None of the servants had seen him that morning.

The Squire began to growl inwardly as the man retreated. Miss Landell stirred her tea.

"Bad plan—bad plan!" muttered the Squire. "Can't have this sort of thing going on in my house. That young chap must be regular in his hours, and at his meals, or I'll know the reason why."

"Frederick is never very regular about anything now, papa," said his fair daughter with a slight smile.

"What do you mean by that? He is always in early of an evening!"

"Yes, I know; but half the time when you are away from home, he is neither here at dinner nor at tea."

"Where does he go?"

"I only found that out yesterday, myself; and I think it my duty to tell you at once. He goes to Charnley Cottage!"

The Squire looked puzzled.

"What the deuce can he want there? There are no boys at Charnley Cottage?"

"No, papa, but there is a girl!"

"That slender s'ip of a thing with the yellow hair? Why, she is only twelve years old!"

"Good gracious, papa! You forget that Time does not stand still with the young any more than with the old! That slip of a thing is nearer sixteen than ten; and she is quite a good-looking girl, into the bargain!"

"Bless me, Clara! You don't mean to tell me that Frederick is dangling after the girls already! A stupid little lad like him, who was only set free from the master's rod at school a few months ago?"

"Frederick is a very handsome youth, papa, and I think the young lady sees it as well as any one; and you know, yourself, how very romantic he is."

"God bless me! What fools boys are!" said the Squire, rubbing his bald head ruefully.

Miss Landell burst out laughing.

"It is well that girls are so wise, papa, and that you have two daughters to one son!"

"Yes, you may laugh, but you didn't begin to bother me so early as this! How long has this stupid affair been going on?"

"Ever since we came, I fancy; for yesterday our picnic party met them on the moor——"

"Together?"

"Yes; they were going nutting—or something of the kind."

"How very improper!"

"So I thought. Really that old housekeeper ought to know better than to let the girl go wandering about the county with our Fred the way she does. You must know that she sings well, and some of the gentlemen heard her and brought her down to the party. She sang there; and Mrs. Walters took her home in her carriage. Master Freddy was as sulky as a calf about it, and I daresay he has gone to the cottage this morning, instead of eating his breakfast, to accuse her of the crimes she committed yesterday."

"Very likely. What a bother it is to have a son, after he gets out of his first jacket and trousers! I say, Clara, what am I to do?"

"That depends. If you want the young lady to become your daughter-in-law——"

"Good gracious!"

"You have only to let Fred stay here."

"But who is this girl?"

Miss Landell shrugged her shoulders, and helped herself to a slice of toast.

"Leroy brought her down, did he not?"

"I believe so."

"You women are generally very quick at getting at the root of such things—have you never heard anything about her?"

"I may have heard something, but perhaps there is no truth in it. It is rather a delicate subject——"

"I see. Yes, you are quite right, my dear Clara, and we must stop it at any price of present discomfort to the boy," said the Squire, looking displeased and thoughtful. Miss Clara smiled in her sleeve at her worthy father's simplicity. There is nothing more easy than to make any one believe something to the disadvantage of a third person. A word—a look—a shake of the head—a shrug of the shoulders—they are invested in the listener's mind with half or the whole of the crimes that are on or off the calendar. Considering how fast and how inconsiderately most people talk, and how easy it is, by these means, to take a character away, every one has cause, at times, to bless their stars that they have a shred of reputation left.

Without uttering a single word, Miss Landell had impressed upon her father's mind the firm conviction that Aurelia was the daughter of Mr. Leroy, but not his legitimate daughter. The child herself was, of course, rather to be pitied than blamed, but it was extremely distasteful to him to think that his only son and heir should have formed an intimate friendship with a girl so situated. There was no need of another word to confirm him in his purpose. While that thought remained, he would be like adamant to Aurelia's beauty, grace, and genius, and Frederick's heartfelt sorrow at the thought of giving her up. They must be separated at once and for ever. That fiat, as unalterable as the laws of the

Medes and Persians, had gone forth, from the moment, in his mind.

Knowing this as well as possible, Miss Landell felt quite safe in making a proposition relative to the matter.

"The girl has been well educated, and is perfectly well behaved, I am told," she said, as she pushed back her chair. "A little imprudent, perhaps, about Frederick; but what can you expect from a child like that, who has never seen anything of the world? It is the housekeeper's fault—not hers."

"Quite true, my dear."

"And she certainly sings well. Shall you send Frederick away, papa?"

"Immediately, my dear. I shall pack him off to Oxford the first of next week; and before he comes home again I hope Mr. Leroy will have taken this young person away."

"No doubt he will. I believe she is to go on the stage or something of the kind, when she is a little older," said Clara, making a most unconscious prophecy. "I should really like you to hear her sing, papa. I think I will ask her to come up next Friday, when Mrs. Walter dines here. She took to her amazingly at the picnic party yesterday."

The Squire demurred.

"Is it wise, Clara, or prudent, to throw her in Fred's way, just as we are going to get rid of him for her sake?"

"Dear papa, you know as well as I, that Fred is as obstinate as a mule!"

"I am afraid you are right, my dear."

"Well, if he fancies for a moment that we are sending him out of her way, wild horses will not drag him to Oxford. But if we seem to humour him—if we ask her here, and treat her kindly—he will go off like a lamb, thinking she will be a protégé of mine while he is away. And as he is already most absurdly jealous of her if she looks at any one else for an instant, that will be no small consideration with him, I can assure you."

"Well, perhaps you are right, my dear. Women always manage these things better than men. I confess my way would be to send for the boy, give him a sound lecture, and pack him off to Oxford, without letting him get a glimpse of the young hussey, who is likely to set us all by the ears before we have done with her."

"She will indeed do that, if you attempt any such exercise of authority," said Clara, looking very serious. "And if you sent Fred off in that way, he would be back by the very next train, and persuade her to elope with him, or some such folly. They are both quite capable of it if they are not properly managed. Now, read your paper in peace, and I will go and settle this question at once."

She gave him the *Times* again, and going into the

drawing-room, opened her elegant writing-desk, and selecting a sheet of rose-coloured paper and an envelope to match, penned a neat little missive, which she despatched, ten minutes later, by the hands of a liveried servant to Charnley Cottage. Then she went to practice a new fantasia, smiling to herself all the time as she played.

She was quite right in her suggestion as to her brother's whereabouts. He had risen with the first gleam of light, and hurried to Charnley Cottage, where, after what seemed to him an unreasonably long delay, Mrs. Marshall herself admitted him, and heard his tale. The old lady blessed herself, and looked on him with sincere admiration, as he stamped up and down the little parlour, mingling threats against Captain Grey, and outpourings of love for Aurelia, in one and the same breath.

Mrs. Marshall was intensely sentimental herself, though she was not aware of the fact. She would cry for hours together over "The Children of the Abbey," or "The Farmer of Inglewood Forest;" and the youthful attachment that was blooming and budding under her very eyes, was to her the most beautiful thing on earth. So it did not take long to persuade her that the only proper thing for her to do was to go and wake Aurelia, and send her down to her impatient lover. She did so; and as that young lady happened to be very sleepy after her long day's walk, she was as cross as two sticks at being roused, and went down into the parlour, with a face that would have sent a less ardent suitor out of the house as soon as possible.

But Frederick was too much in earnest just then to heed any one's black looks. He had taken Captain Grey's admiring compliments for far more than they were worth, and visions of that gallant officer in full regimentals had haunted him all through the long hours of the weary night. He had made his appearance at that unearthly hour, simply to "get ahead," as the Americans say, of his rival—little dreaming that if Venus herself, just risen from the sea, had been awaiting the captain's visit, he would not have stirred from his comfortable lodgings until he had eaten a hearty breakfast, smoked a good cigar, read his morning paper, and adorned his handsome person to the best advantage and his heart's content.

One cannot always be seventeen; and though men and women may be quite as susceptible to the tender passion when twenty-five or thirty years have rolled over their heads, they certainly take the disease in a much more rational form, and do not forget to see that they have a good dinner in the height of their most violent paroxysms of devotion.

Frederick had come armed with a thousand reproaches and complaints: but one glance at his lady love silenced him. Perhaps it was because she

looked most undeniably cross and sulky that his tongue was tied. At all events he could only falter out, "Oh, Reley, how could you use me so—how could you be so unkind."

His very gentleness disarmed her—made her ashamed of herself, and drove the sulky glance from her beautiful eyes.

"Well, it *was* a shame!" she said, apologetically; "and you may beat me if you like, dear Fred, and I will promise never to do so any more. But in the meantime as you have brought me down stairs so early, just get my breakfast for me!"

They both laughed, and good fellowship was restored instantly. Mrs. Marshall laid the cloth, and Aurelia got the tea-things out, and Frederick found himself where he had fancied the captain would be—kneeling at Aurelia's feet—but it was only to toast some thin slices of bacon for breakfast, before the fire.

Never was a meal made ready with more good will. They laughed all the time they were preparing, and all the time they were eating it; and as Frederick told the agony he had suffered during the previous night, and ate toast and bacon the while, they all laughed again. Aurelia's misdemeanours were most certainly forgiven and forgotten, for that time at least.

Soon after the servant had cleared the breakfast-things away, she brought in the note from the Hall. Frederick took it, and very unceremoniously opened it. The next moment he uttered a shout of joy.

"Read! Look!" he said, thrusting the paper into Aurelia's hand. "It is to you—from Clara, my sister. Isn't she a trump?"

Somewhat bewildered, Aurelia read out the invitation:—

"DEAR MISS GRESHAM:

"I have said so much to my father about your beautiful voice, that he is very anxious to hear it. Will you join our dinner-party on Friday? Your friend Mrs. Walters will be here, and we will all do our best (*Frederick included*) to make you happy and comfortable;

"Your sincere friend,

"CLARA LANDELL"

Yes, Clara *was* "a trump." There could be but one opinion about that among them all.

CHAPTER VII.

"I kissed his eyelids into rest,
His ruddy cheek upon my breast.
The wind is raging in turret and tree,
I hated him with the hate of hell,
But I loved his beauty passing well;
O, the Earl was fair to see!"

TENNYSON.

It seemed to Aurelia that Friday would never come. But at last, after an infinite deal of wishing, hoping, and fearing, the eventful hour arrived, and she set off for the Hall, under the care of Mrs. Marshall, who was almost as much elated at the thought of the visit, as was her youthful charge.

Frederick was waiting at the door to receive them. Aurelia had never seen him in dinner dress before, and she was enraptured with the effect his best jacket and fawn-colored vest produced.

"I never saw anything so pretty as that blue tie of yours, Fred," she remarked, as she came down the stairs again, after Mrs. Marshall had removed her cloak, and smoothed her long curls.

"Don't talk about blue ties, you angel!" he replied, seizing her hand. "Come and let me show you to my father, and ask him if ever he saw any one half so pretty before."

He led her into the drawing-room. The Squire sat there alone, reading, while he awaited the arrival of his company and his daughter. He frowned when he saw the young couple enter arm-in-arm, but luckily no one was there, and Aurelia's sweet face and timid, wistful look, found the way to his heart at once.

"What a shame that she is not a lady by birth, so that Fred could please himself," was the only thought that he had when he greeted her. And, in consequence, his welcome was so kind, that Aurelia found herself at home with him at once.

In a few minutes Miss Landell entered, looking lovely, in a pale blue silk, with blonde falls. Pearls were on her neck and arms—a single white rose in the abundant braids of her hair. She gave Aurelia one sharp, searching glance, that took in every article of her apparel from head to foot.

The girl had never looked so well in her life before. She wore a full white lace skirt, looped up at either side with a cluster of forget-me-nots—a wreath of the same blossoms crowned her yellow curls; and a slender gold chain and turquoise heart around her neck, harmonized well with the color of the flowers.

"Wild Arab though she is, she knows well how to dress, and therefore the more dangerous, and the sooner to be got rid of," thought Miss Landell, as she shook hands with her most graciously, and

then resigned her to Frederick, with a meaning smile.

Aurelia felt uncomfortable, she knew not why.

Miss Landell had the peculiar gift of making her feel herself clownish, awkward, and out of place, even when she was most kind.

The dinner party was rather a solemn affair, and Aurelia could not feel quite at ease, with one footman at her side to change her plates, and another exactly opposite, whose unmoved stare seemed to take special cognizance of every mouthful she swallowed. She was heartily glad when the meal was at an end, and the ladies rose to go. Frederick followed them at once. His presence discomposed his sister a little. It had been her purpose during that lazy time, before the gentlemen came up, to cross-question Aurelia so thoroughly about her early life, that there would be no need of further information from any other source.

When Frederick appeared, that scheme was at once frustrated.

In the housekeeper's room, her own maid was sitting with Mrs. Marshall, and the good cheer of the servants' hall would assuredly loosen that lady's tongue, so it mattered but little, after all.

None of the ladies cared to play during the absence of the gentlemen, but Aurelia sat down to the piano gladly, at the request of her hostess, and began to sing a little German pastoral, while Frederick hung over her, enraptured, and turned the leaves of the book. Her voice reached the party in the dining-room. They glanced at each other in surprise, and then with one accord deserted the wine that they might hear it better.

When Aurelia rose from the piano, she was a little astonished at the increase in her audience—the more so, that in one corner of the room stood Captain Grey, hat in hand, talking to Miss Landell, who, in spite of her attempts to look pleased, had the faintest possible smile upon her lips, and the plainest possible cloud upon her brow.

It was certainly very provoking. She had arranged this dinner party with an express view to the Captain's absence. Understanding from him that he was about to attend a sale of horses in London, she had invited Aurelia to the house, that her father might see her without any fear of unconscious rivalry on her part. But the sale of horses had been put off—so the Captain assured her in his sweetest voice; and having no other engagement that evening, he had taken the liberty of calling and bringing some new songs to try. Would she forgive him for intruding, and uninvited, perhaps unwelcome guest, upon her and her friends? And was he to go, a banished man—or would she, of her own gracious clemency, allow him to remain? So prayed the Captain, with the smile which

had won many a fair lady's heart playing round his lips, and his pleading eyes fixed earnestly on her own. She felt that he was not honest with her. She fancied that his accidental call was a premeditated one, and that in some way or another he had ascertained Aurelia was there.

Then the music.

When had he ever brought songs for her to try before? He did not like to hear her sing, although he feigned raptures now and then, when she appealed to his judgment, after executing one of his favorite songs. Why should he be bitten with a mania for hearing her now, and, above all things, when a voice like Aurelia's was within six feet of him?

"Pray make no excuses for joining us in this unceremonious way," she said she, suavely. "We are only too happy to secure you by any good fortune."

"Then why didn't you invite me?" thought the Captain; but he only bowed low, and said that she did him far too much honour.

"But have you dined?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, an hour ago, at the mess."

"Then you are just in time for a cup of tea; and when you have taken it, Miss Gresham, I dare say, will be kind enough to try the new songs with you. I have a bad cold, and cannot sing. Pic-nic parties do not agree with me, I fear."

Thus encouraged, the Captain ventured, after his fair hostess had left him, to hand Aurelia a cup of tea, and eventually to seat himself by her side.

The young lady was rather shy at first, remembering Frederick's fit of heroics; but when the new songs were mentioned, the artiste's instinct awoke within her, and she was all eagerness at once.

Frederick, entering the room at that moment, stopped suddenly and stared aghast. But his sister was beside him, and drew him behind a friendly curtain, to undergo a short catechism.

"Fred have you seen Captain Grey since Tuesday?"

"Yes, confound him!" was the sulky reply.

"Well, don't be cross. I will put an end to that sort of amusement in a little while. Tell me when you saw him?"

"On Wednesday morning."

"Was he going to town to buy a horse?"

"Not that I know of."

"Where was he?"

"At Charnley?"

"Who was he with?"

"Lieutenant Howard. They were riding, and they stopped to speak to me."

"Did you say anything about this dinner party?"

Fred considered a moment.

"No, I did not. But George Walters was with

me, and I heard him telling Howard he could not join him on Friday, because he was engaged here, to hear an angel sing. They were both laughing at the idea."

"Then Captain Grey overheard them too?"

"Of course."

"Well, you have only George Walters to thank for all the pain you may feel this evening. She sings well, Fred, but she is an arrant flirt."

"Nonsense!"

"Look at her now!"

Frederick looked and ground his teeth. The Captain was leading Aurelia to the piano, and she smiling and blushing at something he had whispered in her ear.

"Confound him! I wish I was a man, and I would call him out! What business has he to behave like that? It is neither treating you or me well, and I'll be shot if I stand it!"

"Never mind me, Fred; I can take care of myself," said Miss Landell, with a slight smile. "But let me give you one caution. Aurelia is very pretty and very graceful, and she sings magnificently; but don't set your heart upon her too much. She is very young to be so greatly pleased with attention. If she is a flirt, Fred, she will make your heart ache worse before you have done with her. Watch her well before you love her too dearly. You will forgive your sister for saying so much when you know that it is only for your own good and happiness that she speaks."

She raised the curtain and went smiling out among her guests as she spoke. But the work she had chosen to do was well begun.

If Captain Grey had ridden over from Charnley purposely to hear Miss Landell's voice, he certainly showed great forbearance in not pressing her too much to oblige him. He did say to her once, "Will you not join Miss Gresham in this?" holding up at the same a sonata which she could no more have sung at sight than she could have flown; but when she declined he said no more and busied himself during the remainder of the evening with hanging over Aurelia's chair, and trying first this piece and then that, at first to the amusement, but at last to the disgust, of the rest of the company.

People who have hobbies, like people who have beloved professions, are generally great bores to their neighbours.

Writers herd in groups, and criticise the last new novels; actors discuss the management of theatres, and the good and bad qualities of their brothers and sisters by the score; and people who neither hold pews nor go behind the scenes, listen yawningly, and think within their own hearts what intolerable nuisances they are. But, at least one can dimly guess their meaning. They have no particular professional

jargon by which to puzzle the uninitiated. On the contrary, when artists or musicians begin to talk of what concerns them most, those who know nothing of "tones" or "movements" must remain for ever in the dark.

The artists, however, only talk, but the musicians play and sing.

Things which to most people are mere senseless and often discordant assemblages of sound, without tune, or time, or rhyme, or reason to recommend them to the ear,—they are musical to those who understand them; but who can wonder that the masses, hearing only a crash, a jingle, a scattering of high notes, and a growling of low ones, get tired at last, and wish devoutly that there was no such thing as a science of melody in the world?

On this occasion, the Squire fretted, and his elder guests fumed; and Frederick glared at every one from the corner to which he had betaken himself; and Miss Landell smiled.

The offending pair sang on.

Aurelia was quite unconscious of the breach in good manners she was committing, nor could the Captain remember it till, looking up in his search after another song, the perfect silence of the room struck him. A wicked smile came into his eyes.

By Jove! we have done it now!" he murmured to himself; and breaking up the little musical party, within the next ten minutes he took George Walters by the arm, and sauntered over to where Miss Landell was sitting. She received him very quietly, but very graciously, and he fancied that his peace was made. From that time the conversation grew general, and the guests enjoyed the latter much more than they had done the earlier part of the visit.

By twelve o'clock every one had gone, for they kept early hours at Charnley.

Frederick did not offer to see Aurelia safely home.

He only watched to see that the Captain was not with her, and then rushed away to his own room, without even saying "good night" to her. She went home quite contentedly, however, telling Mrs. Marshall about the songs—(she did not say a word about the Captain)—and slept as soundly as if a second set of upbraiding despaing reproaches were not awaiting her on the morrow.

Miss Landell also went to her own room, looking somewhat more tired and somewhat less beautiful than usual. Her maid was waiting there, and evidently bursting with some important piece of news.

Not one word, however, did her young mistress speak—not one encouraging glance did she give her.

Martin brushed away at the brown hair in silence, and thought what a contrary and provoking head it covered.

Not till all her work was done did Miss Landell

vouchsafe to open her lips. Then just as Martin was curtseying a good night, she said sharply, "Did you see that woman from the cottage to-night?"

"Yes, miss. I spent the whole evening with her in Mrs. Hewitt's room."

"Did she talk?"

"All the time, Miss."

"About the girl?"

"Not at first. She seemed very cautious when she came. But when we had supper, and I got out the bottle of wine you gave me it seemed to loosen her tongue."

"Yes. It all came out then, I suppose?"

"Every bit, miss."

"And who is the girl?"

"Not Mr. Leroy's daughter, miss—nor any relation to him."

"What then?" asked her mistress, looking interested.

"Only a girl that he brought from London one cold winter night, just about Christmas time. He found her singing ballads in the street, with nothing to eat, and hardly a rag to her back, and no home to go to. So, because she had such a beautiful voice, he adopted her, and has kept her ever since. Mrs. Marshall says she was such an object when she came down here—and only look at her to-night!"

"Yes—a beautiful voice will work wonders sometimes," said Miss Landell, musingly.

"She was from Whitechapel, miss."

"Indeed! Well, I want nothing more now, and you may go. Good night, and thank you, Martin."

The girl left the room. But long after the small hours began to strike, Miss Landell was tossing restlessly to and fro upon her pillow. "From Whitechapel!" she said aloud, as the day began to break. "I think her native air would be best for her. I'll see if I cannot get her back there."

And then she fell into a sound, sweet sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

"My heart is wasted with my woe,

Oriana,

There is no rest for me below,

Oriana.

When the dun wolds are ribbed with snow,

And loud the Northland whirlwinds blow,

Alone I wander to and fro,

Oriana."

TENNYSON.

Frederick's vigils were not much shorter than his sister's, but they brought about a more immediate,

and, apparently, a more important result. He came down to breakfast, looking pale and ill; and when the meal was over, requested a private interview with his father. The Squire expected to hear some tale of youthful debts or youthful follies; but, to his great surprise, Frederick asked his permission to leave home—to go to college, and that at once.

The Squire could hardly believe his ears. They had been scheming artfully to get the lad out of the way, and there he was, proposing of his own accord to go and eager to turn his back upon his enchantress and his home. What could it all mean? He gave him an uncertain answer, and bolted off to find his daughter, who was quietly breakfasting in her own room, over coffee, French rolls, and a French novel.

She did not seem so much surprised at his news as he had expected she would be.

"I see it all," she observed. "He is hit much harder than we thought, and he is impatient of the pain. He does not know how to bear it. Let him go, by all means. Have his trunks packed, and get him off before he has time to change his mind, as he will if he gets but one small glimpse of her."

"You think it is safe, then—best—to send him away?"

"Of course. Take my word for it, if he goes in this frame of mind we shall have no more trouble with him. He will get over this folly by himself, and very speedily, I fancy."

"Well, I suppose you know best," said the squire, looking sorely perplexed and puzzled, as he returned to the study, where Frederick was pacing up and down like a caged lion.

So it was settled without any more words, and the Hall was a scene of bustle and confusion during the remainder of the day.

There were a thousand things to see to, a thousand messages and orders to give; and Frederick hurried to and fro, congratulating himself on having no time to bother his head about "that girl at the Cottage."

No doubt the Captain was there with her, making fierce love, and hearing her sing his favourite songs. Well, let him.

But at least they should not make a fool of him, and then laugh at his folly together. He would show Aurelia that he was not quite so tightly bound to her chariot wheels as she fancied; that if she stretched the chain too far, or drew it too close, he could and would break away, and find his liberty again. He was young, and vain, and foolish,—a mere good-tempered, good looking puppy of a college boy: and he had no idea what a cruel thing he was doing with such unconcern. He did not mean to stay away from Aurelia very long. He had to go to college—and it might as well be sooner or later

but his hurried departure was only meant as a punishment for her flirtation with Captain Grey; and all the while (though he vowed to himself, as he packed up his books, that he never wanted to see her face again), he knew very well that the least word, or sign, or look from her would bring him to her feet again, a pleased and willing captive. In the meantime, till she said that word, or made that sign, he would play a little at being indifferent, and see how that suited her.

When people go deliberately to work to do cruel and unkind things, they forget that they have not the ordering of events in their own hands. They may make the wound, but how can they be sure that they will be allowed to heal it again?—they may shoot the poisoned arrow, but how do they know if theirs is to be the hand to draw it out? For fear of these untoward events, it is better for every one to be as kind as they can towards those with whom their lot is cast. For a kindness done they need never ask forgiveness—need never make amends; and a kindness is the one thing they need never regret when they stand beside a new made grave.

It so happened that Aurelia, on that day, forsook her usual out-door haunts. She was lying on the sofa, with a violent headache, all the afternoon; and Mrs. Marshall was fully employed in waiting on her.

Consequently, neither of them had any opportunity of learning the movements at the Hall.

At four p. m. Frederick relented a very little from his severe determination, and strolled down towards the Cottage, thinking that, by chance, he might see Aurelia, and watch her face when he told her that he was going away. By the changes of that most expressive countenance he would shape his future course.

But his good resolutions were in vain.

No Aurelia appeared; and after waiting and watching for the better part of an hour, he flung back to the house in a worse temper than ever, and finding the carriage waiting to take him to the station, made his adieux hastily, and was off and away.

The Squire accompanied him, grumbling about the night-journey all the way,

But long before midnight, his inarticulate growlings ceased, and they were both sleeping comfortably in a West-end hotel.

The next day, Frederick's name was entered upon the books of Morton College, and he was a school-boy no longer.

So Aurelia had lost her lover without being aware of it.

During the day after his departure, she still kept her room, but on the third morning, as she was looking at the fading flowers in her garden, and wondering why Frederick did not come down to see her,

Captain Gray rode by on his beautiful black horse, and, seeing her, very naturally stopped for a little chat.

He had just been calling on Miss Landell, and some observations of hers, joined to his own suspicions, had made him pretty well aware of the state of the case.

But as the lady love was still ignorant of the true knight's flight it became his duty to break the news to her.

He did so, as gently as possible, and was rewarded for his pains by seeing every vestige of color forsake her cheeks, and her eyes turn to him with a wild, unbelieving look.

"Gone, Frederick gone—it is impossible!" she cried.

"Nevertheless, it is true!" re-affirmed the Captain.

"But he never told me—never came to say good-bye!"

"Perhaps he may have written?" suggested the Captain.

She flew into the house, but returned in a minute, crestfallen and unhappy.

No letter or message had been sent to her, nor did any one within doors know that Frederick had gone!

"What does it mean, Captain Gray?" she asked, pitifully.

He might have said that he was equally at a loss with her, but he was a good-natured sort of a fellow, and her pale, scared face made his heart ache for her. So he said, in a simple, brotherly kind of a way:—

"My dear Miss Gresham, I can only think of one reason, and perhaps you will accuse me of vanity if I tell you."

"Oh, no, I will not!" exclaimed Aurelia, on the instant.

"I will tell you, then. I fancy the young gentleman did me the honor to be jealous of me, because you were kind enough to sing and talk to me when I had the pleasure of meeting you the other evening."

"Oh, yes!" cried Aurelia, very candidly.—"Frederick was jealous of you from the day of the picnic party. He was so cross and angry about that!"

"Exactly. And he has gone off in a fresh huff, because you gave me half an hour's pleasure the other evening."

"Oh!"

"I got a note from him this morning, dated from London, in which he relieves his mind a little by giving me his opinion of my conduct. One would think I had taken you off to Gretna Green, to read

that letter. Do you remember Byron's poem about the waltz?"

"Yes."

"He quotes that by way of ending the precious epistle—"

"Sir, she's yours. From the rose you have brushed the soft dew,

From the grape you have shaken the delicate blue; What you've touched, you may take—

Pretty waltzer, adieu!"

"I don't know that I have quoted correctly. It is a long time since I had Byron at my finger's ends, as he has now. But that will give you something of an idea of the state of the young gentleman's mind."

"What a shame!" exclaimed Aurelia, impulsively.

Her cheek burnt hotly.

"Yes. But he will get over that, and do both you and me justice further on. Where are you going now?"

"To see Miss Landell—she may have a message for me."

The demon of mischief prompted him to encourage this scheme.

"Go, by all means. I dare say she can tell you all about it more than I can. But don't get disheartened, whatever happens. We shall have many a pleasant song, yet, when this little trouble is well over."

"Good bye," said Aurelia.

She scarcely heeded what he said, in her eagerness to be gone.

The black horse galloped away, and she put on her hat and cloak and went up to the Hall.

The Squire had not returned from London.

Miss Landell was sitting in the drawing-room alone, writing a letter.

She looked up with a cold stare, as Aurelia was ushered in by a servant, and neither rose to receive her nor asked her to sit down.

"I beg your pardon for intruding," stammered the poor girl, "but I have just heard that Frederick has gone to college. Is it true?"

"Perfectly true," said Miss Landell, with severe composure.

"When?"

"My brother left home on the day before yesterday."

"And he never came to say good-bye to me. It was not kind."

Miss Landell pushed back her letter, folded her hands over it, and gazed at Aurelia with a peculiar smile.

"At least it was wise."

"Why?"

"My brother and you can never be friends, Mias Gresham."

"But we are friends."

"Not now, I fancy."

"It is only a slight misunderstanding, I assure you," said Aurelia, eagerly. "Two words from me would explain it."

"Then those two words must never be spoken," said Miss Landell.

"What do you mean?"

"You force me to speak more plainly than I could wish to do. Ask yourself if a Whitechapel ballad-singer is a fit associate for Mr. Frederick Landell—the representative of an ancient family—heir of a large estate?"

Aurelia turned very pale.

"A Whitechapel ballad-singer! You know that, then?"

"I do."

"Who told you?"

"That is my secret."

"It matters little, though."

"Very true."

"Does he know it?"

"Of course."

"And he despises me?"

"On the contrary, he pities you."

"I don't want his pity, nor yours," cried Aurelia, stung into a sudden rage by the mocking glance of the cold, blue eyes. "Keep it yourself, you'll want it yet!"

"Thank you, and now I think you had better go."

"You need not tell me that!"

The next instant the door was shut heavily, and Aurelia was flying like a mad creature down the lawn.

Miss Landell looked after her till she reached the iron gates, and ran out into the high road. And then she folded and sealed her letter with a happy heart.

CHAPTER IX.

"Flow down, cold rivulet to the sea,
Thy tribute wave deliver;
No more by thee my steps shall be,
For ever and for ever."

"Flow, softly flow, by lawn and lea,
A rivulet, then a river;
Nowhere by thee my steps shall be,
For ever and forever."

TENNYSON.

"A WHITECHAPEL ballad singer! A Whitechapel ballad singer!"

These words were ringing in Aurelia's ears, all the way, as she ran with frantic speed towards her home.

In vain the sun shone and the fresh wind blew; in vain the birds sang, and the late roses clustered along the path; in vain old Tender came to meet her at the gate, to tell her, with an honest bark and wag of his tail, that she was welcome!

The sights and sounds of nature, to which she was, in general, so feelingly alive—the faithful love of her dumb companion, which always received a rich return—all was lost upon her now.

Worse than useless was everything to the "Whitechapel ballad singer."

Cruel words; yet they were true, and she could not forget them.

What should she do? Where should she go? It would be impossible to live on calmly in her old home, now that Frederick was gone, and his haughty sister had taunted her to her very face with the shame of her early life. Somewhere she must go—some new home she must seek, and that speedily. She leaned a moment on the cottage gate, and looked wistfully out beyond the open fields. At she stood there, two school-boys, out for a holiday walk, went by, and one said to the other as they passed—

"When I am six years older, John, I shall have a clerkship in the India House, and live in London!"

There was an instant eager reply, and they went towards Charnley, talking about the hopeful future all the way. Aurelia looked after them with a kindling smile. The electric chord had been touched, and the school-boy, unconscious of the listener as he planned his own future life, had given her the key to her own. She too would go to London.

She went into the house. Mrs. Marshall was awaiting her, full of reproaches for having overstaid the dinner hour. But Aurelia could not eat. She said she had a headache, and would lie down in her own room a little while.

Having thus secured a quiet hour, she locked the door of her room, and sat down to think. One thing was certain. If she went to London, she must go at once, and alone. She must go secretly too—for Mrs. Marshall was quite capable of locking her up till the return of her guardian, if she thought there was a possibility, however remote, of her coming to any harm.

Some preparations for her flight it was also necessary to make. She was romantic enough, in all conscience; but she did not think of setting off in white muslin, to seek her fortune, as Miss Edgeworth's heroine did, to find her "unknown friend." Aurelia's first proceeding was a most sensible one. She dressed herself from top to toe in the warmest clothing she possessed—put on a pair of woollen stockings, and some strong double-soled kid boots. Then she took her winter cloak of seal-skin from the wardrobe, laid it with her best straw bonnet and gloves upon the bed, and went up into the loft over her room, in search of a small carpet bag, which she could carry in her hand.

She was supposed to be asleep, and looking from the window of the loft, she saw Mrs. Marshall making the best of her way across the fields towards a large farm house that stood about half a mile away. The mistress of the "Parched Farm" was a first cousin of Mrs. Marshall's; moreover, she was famed throughout the country for a delicious teacake, with which she was in the habit of regulating her guests. Now, Aurelia had often been one of those guests, and her mouth watered at the recollection of the edibles, as she watched the house-keeper across the fields. It was a point of honor with the farmer's wife to let neither friend nor foe leave her hospitable roof without first partaking of a cheerful meal, and Aurelia went about her preparations very leisurely, now that she knew Mrs. Marshall was quite safe.

She went down and rang for the servant, who said that her mistress would not be in for two or three hours, but that she had left word that Aurelia was to have a strong cup of tea the minute she awoke, and anything she fancied to eat with it.

"Very well," said Aurelia, who began to feel romantically hungry. "Go and get the tea at once, and toast me some muffins, Jane—I know there are some in the house. And I will have some potted lobster with it, and some raspberry jam."

Jane licked her lips as she departed in anticipation of the fragments of that delectable feast, which would surely fall to her share. She did not get such a treat every afternoon; neither, for the matter of that, did Aurelia. Mrs. Marshall would soon have put a veto on such a proceeding, but for once in a way it could do no harm. It is a merci-

ful dispensation that we are all gifted in our youth with stomachs like ostriches. Muffins, and potted lobsters, and raspberry jam, at one fell meal, washed down with cups of hot, strong, sweet tea! It makes one shiver, in one's old age, to think of such a repast; but at sixteen the most withered and decrepid of us all could have eaten it with as much appetite as Aurelia and Jane.

Having settled this little refection, Aurelia went back to her work. First, she wrote a letter, looking very sorrowful as she did so. Then she sealed and left it on the table in Mrs. Marshall's room, and brightening up with an effort, went again to the loft. All kinds of lumber were stowed away there. Disused tables, broken lamps, dingy curtains, rickety chairs, and mouldering sofas. In one corner near the window stood a pile of trunks and boxes. Among them, Aurelia sought for what she wanted.

Presently she found it. With some exertion, she dragged it out to the light. An old-fashioned leather travelling bag, with brass ornaments and handles. The key was in the lock. She turned it, and saw inside a silver mounted dressing-case, whose fittings were as perfect as on the day when they had first been made. There was room in the bag for two or three dresses, some changes of linen, and any quantity of small parcels and packages. And the bag was so light that she could easily carry it in her hand as far as the station; so Jane need know nothing of her departure.

She carried it down into her own room, and filled it from her drawers and wardrobe. Looking into her little brown purse, she found that she had a ten pound note, two golden guineas, and a quantity of small change. The ten-pound note was a gift from her guardian, sent from abroad one birthday, and religiously preserved by her. Mrs. Marshall had given her one guinea, and the cook the other, the day she was fifteen years old. And the silver was an accumulation of her shilling-a-week pocket money, which she had been saving up for a long time, in order to buy old Tender a beautiful silver-gilt collar, which she had seen one day at a shop in Charnley.

Poor Tender must go without his collar now—at least, till she came back again—say in a year's time—so rich and famous that she could afford him one of diamonds!

Twelve pounds in all!

It was a little fortune in itself, even without the silver. She had read of many a poor boy who, going to London barefooted, and with a solitary sixpence in his pocket, had died in his bed, in a stately mansion, a millionaire!

What should hinder her from doing as much, or

even more, since she had twelve pounds to begin with, while the boy had only sixpence!

She hid her purse safely in her bosom, keeping the silver in her pocket for the expenses of the journey.

Then, from a drawer in her writing-desk, she took a packet of letters which Frederick had written to her, and stowed them carefully away in the travelling bag.

As she did so, she pressed heavily upon the dressing case, and the top flew back with a violence that startled her.

She had touched the spring of a false lid, and in a velvet-lined cavity were other letters, not neatly tied up like hers, but flung in carelessly—apparently forgotten.

Of course, Aurelia immediately began to read them.

Who could resist the witchery of time-stained letters, when discovered unexpectedly in some out-of-the-way place?

Aurelia, at least, could not.

But, like the heroine of Northanger Abbey, "she was grievously disappointed," for the letters all referred to dry business details, about which she knew nothing and cared less.

There was a small, gilt-clasped, red book among the papers.

Aurelia pounced upon it eagerly, thinking it must be a diary.

But it was only a record of private expenses, written in an unformed school-girlish hand; and treating only of new bonnets, dresses, aprons, and kid slippers.

Disgusted and provoked, Aurelia was about to close the lid again, when a half-open note caught her eye.

It was written in a strong, masculine hand, and ran thus:

"For the last time I appeal to you, Helen—for the last time I ask you to pause and reflect, before taking this mad step! By the love you have for me, I beg, or rather, I command you, to stay here! If that love is as great as I think it is, you will not fail to obey me!"

"RICHARD."

On the back of this note was written, by the same hand that had penned the accounts in the red-covered book:

"Command?—command? And you talk always of my love for you—never of yours for me! I shall go!"

"HELEN."

Beneath these lines was traced the first words of the old song—

"O, Richard—O, Mon Roi!"

as if, at the last, the writer repented of her determination, and would have rejoiced at being asked to stay.

But Aurelia could not find any answer to that fond appeal.

A strip of paper just beneath the note contained a few stanzas, evidently translations from some Eastern poet:

"Thine eyes are like two twin brilliant stars.

"They rest beneath thy dusky brows, like light, content to dwell in shadow, that its lustre may be softened!"

"When I look within thy face, I blush and steal away.

"When I hear thee speak, I tremble

"But when thy hand touches mine—when I meet the full glance of thy dark eyes—I am ready to die.

"Can the nightingale love the rose more than I have loved thee?"

"Yet she sings a sweeter song.

"She sets her breast against a thorn, and wins a rose at last.

"The thorn is against my breast also, but Leila is far away, and will not hear me!"

"My heart burns—my blood beats whenever thy light step comes nigh!"

"I watch for thy footprints among the lillies, and kiss the flowers thy hand has touched!"

"I say often in the dusk of night, 'To-morrow I will watch for her and tell her all!'"

"But when I see thee at thy lattice, I grow faint and pale, and speech departeth from me!"

"Once I touched thy hand!"

"I saw the wind blow back thy veil, and press against thy softly-swelling bosom!"

"O, that I were the summer wind!"

"So would I also press against thy breast, and die!"

"My blood burns—my heart bounds—my soul dies within me when I think of thee!"

"And if thy mouth were pressed to mine—if thy head laid upon my breast—I could not live!"

Aurelia glanced over the lines, scarcely comprehending them.

Then she put the papers all back again, and closed the lid of the dressing-case.

She went down stairs. The tea, by no means an "aesthetic" one, was ready, and she and Jane partook of it together with great appetite. While the tray was being removed, Aurelia ran up to her room

put on her bonnet, and came down again with the bag concealed beneath her heavy cloak.

"I'm going for a walk, Jane," she said, looking in at the kitchen door. "Don't leave the house. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, miss!" said Jane, cheerfully, from her dishes.

Then the front door closed, and, with one glance at her childhood's home, the wanderer was free!

CHAPTER X.

"* * * here will sigh thine alder tree,

And here thine aspen shiver,

And here, by thee, will hum the bee,
For ever and for ever.

"A thousand suns will stream on thee,

A thousand moons will quiver;

But not by thee my steps shall be,

For ever and for ever.

TENNYSON.

YEARS and years ago, the names of Norwood and of Beulah Spa were almost as well known to pleasure seekers as those of Vauxhall or Cremorne are at the present day. To go to the "Spa" for a holiday was a treat, indeed; and from the Spa to the residence of a famous gipsy, whose house still at Gipsy Hill, was by no means too long a distance for light hearts and eager feet to travel. Our grandfathers and grandmothers thought it was fine fun to drink tea in the little cottages, to wander in the shrubberies, to look at the booths, the shows, and the fire-works, for which Beulah Spa was so famous; and to wind up, it may be, by having their fortunes told by an old woman in a red cloak, who knew no more about those fortunes than you or I at this present time.

The tea-gardens are deserted now—the shrubberies are overgrown—the little cottages are torn down—the Spa is a lonely, dreary place, full of trees and bushes, and only fit for building purposes; and the old woman in the red cloak died long ago, and is buried I believe, in Croydon or Bromley churchyard. But the house where Jane Gray was born is the same as ever.

Jennie Gray was a Norwood girl, whose father's house stood at the end of one of those pretty green lanes for which Norwood is so justly celebrated. There are plenty of houses around it now, but when it was first built it stood quite alone, with its flower garden in front and its kitchen garden at the side—almost a little farm of itself. John Gray was only a gentleman's coachman, it is true; but he was a careful and industrious man, and all his leisure time

was devoted to his little plots of ground, so that, in the course of years, he became quite noted for his beans, and potatoes, and radishes, as well as for his roses, and lilies, and dahlias. His wife, who had also been in service, was as steady and industrious as himself; and their little daughter, Jennie, was taught to make herself useful in a hundred ways. Before she could talk or walk, she would try to imitate her mother's industry in the kitchen by rubbing stoutly away with a bit of flannel at her playthings; and the first steps she made were in the direction of the garden, where she dropped some seeds into the ground, much to her father's delight and her own.

By the time she was six years old she was one of the most helpful creatures imaginable. She used to clear away the breakfast things and sweep the kitchen floor as neatly as a grown up servant could have done; and the older she grew, the steadier and more industrious she became, so that between her mother's labours and her own, the whole cottage was a perfect palace of neatness and good order. The steel fender and the window panes almost made the eyes ache with their brightness; the shelves and the woodwork were as white as snow; and the blue chintz covers upon the two easy chairs before the fire, looked as fresh as they did the day they were put on. There was not such another place in Norwood, and no one wondered when one day, a lady, who had alighted from her carriage to beg a glass of water at the cottage door, was so struck with the aspect of the place, that she never rested till Jennie came to her house as her own maid.

It was a new life for the simple cottage girl. In the place of rising early and polishing steel fenders, and scrubbing floors, she had to put her lady's room in order, take up her breakfast, and afterwards dress her for the day. She had a great deal to do, it is true, but the work was light, and she had many an hour to herself, when she sat sewing in her mistress' dressing room, and thinking of her own dear home. The fine house where she lived, the nice dresses she wore, and the company in the servants' hall, were all powerless to make her forget the Norwood cottage and the parents, who, in plain homespun dresses, still lived and laboured there.

After six years of faithful service, Jennie lost her place through the death of her mistress. Habits of independence once formed, can rarely be given up, and though her parents were as dear as ever to her heart, still she felt that she would rather be working for herself, than living a mere burden upon them at home. Accordingly, with a little money in her purse, a nice box of new clothes, and the very best "character" that any servant could have, or any mistress reasonably expect, she set off to try her fortunes in the city of fortune hunters—London.

When the train which bore her to her destination stopped for a moment at Charnley, and a young girl entered and took a seat beside her, Jennie felt no mysterious thrill of sympathy which warned her that a friend was near. She glanced at the new comer, helped her to put her carpet-bag under the seat, thought what a sweet voice it was that said "Thank you;" and then went back to her own thoughts, like that "young lady from Sweden," who, we are told, in "The Book of Nonsense," went "by the slow train to Weedon," and

"When she got to the station,

She made no observation,

But thought she would go back to Sweden."

Aurelia also sat silent, looking first out of the window, and then at her companion. There was no one but Jane in her side of the carriage, but in the other compartment sat a stout ruddy-faced woman, handsomely dressed, and a tall slender lady with bright, eager, blue eyes, and dark brown hair, who was talking most energetically to her neighbour, a thin-faced lawyer, who listened to her with a shrewd smile, and now and then took a pinch of snuff. The lady's face pleased Aurelia, more from its mobility and great power of expression than from its beauty, and she also began to listen. So did Jane after a time, and the stout woman in the corner pursed up her lips and shook her head scornfully now and then, as a word or two of the discussion fell upon her ear. Aurelia gathered enough to understand that the lady was an American, and a Northerner—who was a thorough abolitionist, and a still more thorough advocate of total abstinence. Slavery and temperance were her two hobbies undoubtedly—yet she rode them well. Her legal friend was apparently half amused at her earnestness, and wholly unconvinced by her arguments. They dropped slavery at last, and proceeded to discuss total abstinence, at which the rosy English-woman in the corner coughed derisively. The lawyer glanced that way and smiled.

"My dear lady, he said, "it is a Utopian idea. How can people exist without any stronger beverage than water?"

"Oh, but they do!" she replied earnestly, at the same time taking a roll of paper from her pocket. "Look here; I have been getting up a digest of facts for a friend of mine who is going to give a temperance lecture in London. Every one of these statements are true—I'll swear to them if you like."

The lawyer laughed.

"I will take your word for it. But if it is not asking too much, will you let me hear what they are?"

She looked exceedingly pleased, sat down be-

side him, and began to read, in so distinct a voice that Aurelia and her companion, who had also changed their seats, could hear every word with perfect ease. "In the New England States, drunkenness is, if not unknown, at least a remarkable and an uncommon thing. The great body of the people are farmers, whose strict temperance is worthy of record. They are fine, tall, healthy men and women, who will rise at six in the morning, breakfast off coffee, bread and butter, potatoes, and a little ham or bacon, work till twelve, in the field or the house, dine frugally, drinking nothing but water, and work again till the six o'clock meal, bread and butter, and nice home preserves. They take no supper, and go to bed regularly before ten o'clock. In the autumn, when the new cider is made, every one drinks freely of it; but after it has been put down in the cellar to ferment, no one thinks of touching it, unless the farmer, on some leisure winter evening, may drink a glass with a neighbour, over a dish of apples, before the fire. Perhaps he may taste the cider twenty times during the course of the winter, then it is left in the cellar to form vinegar, and the farmer turns to his purer beverage, water, once more.

"I think very few people in this country have any idea of the strict 'teetotalism' of most New Englanders. From one year to another these men go on, working hard and living temperately; and I think that they would show to advantage beside any English laborer, who drinks his mug of beer, and his glass of spirits now and then. Cold water is our natural beverage, and the New Englanders know it well. None knew it better than Woodworth, the author of the great temperance song, 'The Moss-covered Bucket.' Many a time, no doubt, had he gone, dusty and tired, from his father's hay-f- and turning the windlass of the old stone watched the mowers far away, while he drank fully from

"The old oaken bucket, the moss-covered bucket,
The iron-bound bucket that hung in the well."

He went back to his work, I think, far more refreshed than if his draught had been brought from a public house, in a pewter-pot, and christened beer."

The old lady in the corner sniffed disdainfully at hearing this. But the lawyer only took a pinch of snuff, and said drily, "Hum! a wonderful people truly. But how happens it that all our most curious, and I may add, most palatable beverages, are only known by the name of American drinks, 'brandy smashes,' 'ring-tailed roasters,' 'Timbuctoos,' 'eye openers,' 'stone fences,' 'General Jacksons,' &c. It seems to me that they have all a Transatlantic reputation, my dear lady."

"Oh, yes! I knew that would come next," was the cheerful reply, "and here I have answered that very objection."

She turned to another page of the MSS., and began to read again:—

"But people often say to me, 'If the Americans are so temperate, how is it that all our new drinks come from their country?' To this I answer, that in large cities drunkenness will *always* find a place. And if you go through the New England towns, even, you will always find a 'tavern' licensed to sell spirits—not beer or ale, because they are not made there. In that town, also, you will always find people who 'drink;' but if you discover a regular 'drunkard,' a man who gets 'tipsy,' you will also discover that he is a marked, and also a shunned man."

"Hum—ha!" said the lawyer, taking snuff again.

"You don't believe it!" said his lady friend. "Very well; go over there and see. If you find that I have not told the truth I'll eat my head!"

Both laughed, and then she went on again more seriously:—

"I was brought up from my infancy in New Hampshire and Vermont. I spent every summer upon some farm, for the sake of my health; and I relate only what I have seen with my own eyes, and heard with my own ears. My own home was in a very large town—the 'shire town,' where courts were held, and all the business of the county done. The only beverages used in my guardian's house were tea, coffee, milk, and water. I never saw a glass of wine till I dined at a hotel table, when I was fourteen years old, and then I mistook it for vinegar, much to the amusement of my companions. During those fourteen years I once saw a bottle of rum, which was used for a dying person. The smell of the spirit made me ill—I could not enter the room while it was about. I never saw gin, brandy or any other spirit, till after I had left that home. Those early lessons, which caused me no pain, have never been forgotten. From my own experience, I can testify that a human being, born with perfectly pure and simple tastes—that is, inheriting no depraved tastes from others—needs no stimulants, except in cases of illness. The taste of wine is so disagreeable to me, that I cannot take it even as a medicine; a dose of ardent spirits taken medicinally can hardly be kept upon the stomach long enough to do any good; and a glass of beer taken at one o'clock will effectually prevent any literary effort on my part for the remainder of the day and evening. Setting aside their effects, the mere taste of these beverages is offensive to my palate. I have never signed the pledge. I am a teetotaller from natural inclination, rather than from any fixed principle; but I believe in temperance with all my heart—the more earnestly, mind you, since I have resided in England."

"There goes a shot at the mother country, of course," said the lawyer.

"Ah!" she said, sighing, "I have seen so much—so much intemperance here, I am getting used to it now! But I remember how it terrified me once! I remember, when I was a little child of five years old, hearing my aunt and her daughters talk of a young lawyer who had been born in that town who had been a classmate of Daniel Webster, and the most promising, talented man imaginable. They added that he had once been engaged to my own mother, and that her marriage nearly drove him wild. At this I naturally pricked up my ears.

"Why did not my mother marry him?" I asked, indignantly,

"My dear," said my aunt, "he took to drinking. He is a common drunkard now. I saw him only this morning rolling about the streets."

"I said no more. A mysterious horror seized upon me. I had never seen a common drunkard. I was determined to find out what the thing was like. Accordingly, without a word to any one, I donned my bonnet and shawl, and ran out of the back door, and up the village street. Before I had gone far, I met a noisy shouting crowd of boys, and in their midst, with a flushed face and disordered hair, stumbled a handsome man of forty-five, laughing when they laughed, stammering silly speeches, and hiccuping and reeling about all the while. That was the man who had loved my mother—that was a common drunkard! The shame—the misery—the horror of the sight were too much for me. With all my childish strength, I burst through the rabble, and seized the wretched man by the hands. He yielded stupidly, stumbling after me with a silly laugh, till I dragged him into my guardian's kitchen, and shut the door upon his jeering followers. Then I flung myself upon my knees before him, in an agony of tears and sobs.

"Oh, Mr. Carr, don't drink—don't be a common drunkard—don't let those boys hoot at you!" I cried out. It seemed to me that my heart was broken. I scarcely knew why I was so grieved, but I sobbed and cried myself into hysterics, which brought the whole house around us, and effectually sobered him for that time.

It was long before he forgot that strange and sudden appeal. Of course I was taught that I must not run into the streets and bring drunkards into the house by main strength—but I never forgot my charge, nor did he ever forget me. Even when he relapsed into his old ways, he used to sit and cry about the child, as if conscious of his degradation.

"And what became of this precious friend of yours my dear lady?" asked the lawyer, looking somewhat interested in the story.

"Ah," she said, "you can guess. My influence was weak, and old habits very strong. He went on from bad to worse, and at last a fatal attack of de-

lirium tremens seized upon him. Four men were obliged to hold him down in his bed, but in his lucid intervals he begged so earnestly to see me, that at last they granted the request. I was taken to his house—he was lying on a sofa in the corner of the room—a door at the foot of the sofa stood half open to admit the air. Wasted, haggard, and unshaven, he looked a terrible object indeed. His four keepers sat beside him. Just as I entered the room, they all started up together. Another paroxysm had seized him. He fancied the sofa was covered with snakes; twisting about to escape them, his blood-shot eyes fell upon me. He gave a wild yell, and at one spring, clung to the top of the door, shrieking horribly. I burst out crying, for I was terribly frightened, and just then he fell back heavily. All was over, and they hurried me away. But the shame of that wasted life, and the horror of that miserable death, stamped a lesson upon my childish brain which I shall never forget to my dying day."

She wiped a few tears from her eyes, as she finished speaking. The lawyer looked thoughtful; the two girls exchanged glances of dismay.

The train stopped suddenly. "Vauxhall Station!" sang out the guard, and the lady rose to go. The lawyer handed her out and saw her to a cab, then returned for his carpet bag, and walked away whistling. The stout woman in the corner got up and shook herself, placed one ponderous foot on the step, and by the combined exertions of two guards and a porter, reached terra firma in safety. Looking in at the window as she passed, she nodded a cheerful good-bye to her fellow passengers.

"Well, they may say what they please; but for my part, I like my beer!" she said, in a rich, mellow voice, and waddled down the platform towards the door.

The girls looked at each other, and burst out laughing.

"What a droll woman!" said Aurelia.

"Yes."

"But I like the lady, don't you?"

"She talks very well," said Jennie. "I felt as if I could have cried too, when she told about that poor man."

"So did I."

"It was very horrible. But at the same time I think it was great nonsense about people never drinking anything—don't you?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I think that way myself."

"Indeed! Well, for my part, I am like the fat woman, I like my beer!" said Jennie, with so successful an imitation of the woman's voice and look, that they both laughed all the way to the Waterloo Station.

Nothing breaks the ice between two strangers

more effectually than a hearty laugh. The two girls felt as if they had been acquainted for years by the time they left the train. As they stood upon the platform together, waiting for their luggage, Jennie asked Aurelia which way she was going.

"I don't know. To some good hotel," said Aurelia, colouring. "Do you know of one?"

"Don't you?"

"No!"

"Is any one coming to meet you?"

"No!"

"Do you know any one in London?"

"Not a soul!"

"Bless me! Then why did you come?"

"To seek my fortune!" said Aurelia, with perfect simplicity.

Jennie glanced at her fair face and flowing hair, and shook her head.

"That will never do. You had much better come with me to night, and then we will see what can be done to-morrow."

"Very well. I should be glad to stay with you—you are so kind."

"Now, what on earth could have sent that pretty child to London by herself?" thought the wise Jennie, as she put her into a cab and saw that all her luggage was safe. She asked her no questions then; but as they sat that evening over the comfortable tea-table, in one of the neat rooms of the Spread Eagle, the story all came out; only the names of Aurelia's home and friends were suppressed.

Jennie went to bed that night somewhat ill at ease. That Aurelia had a "bee in her bonnet" was the most sensible explanation she could give of her wild goose chase.

CHAPTER XI.

"I now remember thee,
In darkness and in dread,
As in those days of revelry
Which mirth and music sped.

"Though smile and sigh alike are vain
When severed hearts repine,
My spirit flies o'er mount and main,
And mourns in search of thine."

BYRON.

THE next morning, as they sat down together over their breakfast of coffee, ham, and toast, Jennie took it upon herself to instruct her more inexperienced companion in some of the ways of that world upon which they had both entered.

"I shall get a place at once," she observed. "I

was born, and brought up, and educated, expressly to be a servant, and a servant I shall remain to the end of the chapter, unless I am lucky enough to find some one who will marry me, and give me a home of my own. But your case is quite different. You have been brought up like a lady. What upon earth can you ever find to do in this great, wicked city?"

"Go and be a servant with you, my dear," was the reply.

But to this proposition of Aurelia's, Jennie shook her head.

"You are too young—too delicate—too pretty by far—No, no, no, that would never, never do! I do wish—"

She stopped short, and eyed Aurelia very wistfully.

"Well, what do you wish?" asked Aurelia, at length.

"I do wish, with all my heart, that you would behave like a good, sensible girl, and go back home again."

Aurelia laughed.

"Just think how anxious they must be about you!"

"I wrote a note to them, you know, before I came away."

"What's a note?"

"Ah, no, it's no use! I can't go back! I am glad I came away. My home was a very pleasant one, but so dull! Now this is life! There is real life here!"

And she looked out with amused interest upon the stream of humanity that was continually passing to and fro beneath the windows of the room in which they sat.

"Yes, you are right, but the life at your home would have been far better and safer for you," said Jennie.

"There!—don't preach, my dear, but get on your bonnet, and let us go out. What are you going to do first?"

"I must go to Bayswater. I have a letter to a lady there. I think perhaps she may take me for her maid."

"Can I go with you?"

"Certainly."

"Be quick, then."

Aurelia had on her bonnet and cloak in about three minutes, and waited for her friend on the wooden bridge that spans the court-yard of the hotel.

"I wonder what this was used for," she said, aloud.

She felt the thickness of the woodwork, gazing thoughtfully down below.

"Used to have plays down below, miss, and the gentlefolks used to sit here to see them," said a brisk voice.

It was the coffee-room waiter, who, passing at the moment she spoke, thought that Aurelia had addressed him.

She thanked him, and took Jennie's arm, who came out upon the bridge at that moment, looking as fresh as a daisy in her neat straw bonnet and plaid shawl.

Bayswater was soon reached by the aid of an omnibus, and Jennie, having delivered her letter of introduction, was speedily engaged by the lady at a salary which seemed to her innocent mind like the wealth of Golconda.

She came out into the street beaming with happiness to communicate the good news to her young friend.

But Aurelia was not there.

Jennie hurried up one street, and down another—looked through squares and into alleys—consulted policemen, butcher boys and apple women, but all in vain.

Some had never seen the young lady.

Others facetiously suggested that she might have gone to Bath to get her head shaved.

One little blue-frocked imp declared that he had just met her in front of Lord Palmerston's "a-eatin' a penny ice."

This information was, of course, too ridiculous to be tolerated, and at last Jennie took her way to the Spread Eagle with a heavy heart.

She hoped to find her there, upon her arrival, yet fearing all the while that she would never see her again.

Aurelia, meanwhile, was almost as anxious about Jennie.

As she walked up and down the squares, awaiting her, she took a wrong turning, and so bewildered herself, that she had entirely lost sight of the street where they parted and where they were to have met again.

Not knowing its name, she was ashamed to ask any person to set her right, but walked up and down in a state of the greatest perplexity and alarm.

A lady coming slowly down the street, looked her full in the face as she passed, then paused, and glanced after her in a hesitating and undecided manner. Then she turned back, and coming up beside the girl, she said to her, in a very soft, sweet tone of voice:—

"Young lady, can I be of any use to you, in any way?"

Aurelia was startled, and looked up at the questioner suddenly. She was "fat, fair, and forty."

wrapped in a splendid Cashmere shawl, and wearing a black velvet bonnet, whose plumes swept down over her shoulder. A most magnificently-attired lady indeed, with a face that had once been very handsome, but now looked worn and faded, and, it seemed to Aurelia, almost haggard. Her fair hair fell in loose, soft ringlets on either side of her tinted cheeks. Her smile displayed a beautiful set of teeth. But her large blue eyes looked anxious, and there was something in her whole appearance that Aurelia distrusted. But still she could not have told what it was, nor why. Yet the lady spoke kindly and seemed ready to serve her, if she could. So Aurelia answered her readily.

"I came with a friend to one of these streets, and I have forgotten which one it is. The houses look all alike to me, and she will be waiting, and I don't know which way to go to find her."

The lady smiled very sweetly.

"Oh, don't make yourself unhappy, my dear child. We will soon find your friend again. Who is she?"

"She is going to be a lady's maid in one of these houses. At least she came to-day to see about the place."

"And do you think she will get it?" asked the lady.

"I am sure she will."

The lady looked a little thoughtful for a few moments.

Then she began her catechism again.

"And you—what are you?"

"Nothing, yet."

"Do you think of taking a place, too?"

"If I can get one."

"Where are you from?"

"Essex."

"Have you any friends in London?"

"Only Jennie Gray."

"Jennie Gray!" repeated the lady, making a mental note of the name. "And when did you come to London?"

"Last night."

"Where are you staying?"

"At the Spread Eagle."

"In Gracechurch street?"

"Yes."

"A very good place. Do you know I think your friend will at once go back there and wait for you? She must know that you will think of that place of refuge before any other in London. Don't you see?"

"Yes," said Aurelia.

But she spoke rather doubtfully.

"I am sure of it. At all events, she must have

gone from Bayswater already if she is searching after you. Now, I will tell you what to do. If you like to go back with me to my own house, which is only a few steps away, I will give you some luncheon, and then send you to Gracechurch street in my carriage."

A pause ensued. Aurelia hesitated.

"Will you come?" asked the lady, in the sweetest way.

The subtle instinct which had already made Aurelia distrust her new friend, made her also disinclined to accept this apparently kind and well-meant offer.

But while Aurelia hesitated, the lady went on to say:

"The fact is, I am very rich and very lonely. I want a young companion who can amuse and interest me, and I fancy you would do both. If you like to tell me more of your own history, and I find that you are perfectly respectable, (I am sure, my dear, you look so), I dare say I shall be able to offer you a much better and much easier place than your friend will get."

That settled the business. Aurelia gladly accepted her invitation, and they walked up the street.

Aurelia fancied the policeman at the corner looked queerly at her as they passed. The next moment he came tramping leisurely after them.

But her companion ran up the steps of a handsome house, opened the door with a latch-key, and had her young charge safely within before she could discover whether the man was following them or not.

The house was handsome and sober enough without, and the hall differed little from halls in other residences. But when they passed up the thickly-carpeted stairs, and entered the drawing-room, Aurelia could not help uttering a cry of astonishment and glad delight. It was a large long room, fitted up with hangings of the palest rose-colored silk, and curtains of filmy lace. The windows came to the floor, but were hidden by rose-colored blinds. The walls were panelled with garlands of fruit and flowers and lovely landscapes, and still more lovely female heads. A chandelier, like a shower of diamond drops, hung from the ceiling, and an oval mirror was let into the wall above each of the four doors that let out of the room. The tables were of rose-veined marble and burnished gold. The chairs and sofas were of a polished wood like ebony, covered with rose-colored satin. Above the chimney-piece hung a splendid portrait, almost life-size, of an elderly gentleman in an undress uniform, with a hat in his hand. Aurelia glanced at it carelessly, and thought no more of it, till she saw the face again, and in a place how different!

"I always sit here when I am at home. Do you sing?"

"A little."

"And play?"

"Yes."

"I am passionately fond of music. Will you favor me with a song?"

A beautiful pianoforte stood in a recess beyond the windows.

Aurelia sat down, ran her fingers over the keys, and sang a German air.

When she had finished, the lady grasped her by both hands, and said warmly:

"I never heard such a voice in my life! Why, you are a prodigy, my dear! You ought to go on the stage!"

Aurelia shook her head, and smiled a little sadly, as she said:

"I am poor and unknown. How ever could I get there?"

"Walk on your voice, my dear. It would be the easiest thing in the world. However, I am not going to urge it, for I am so selfish I want you all to myself. If you will stay here and be my companion, I will give you board, lodging, and beautiful clothes, and, in addition, a salary of a hundred pounds a year."

Aurelia fairly gasped for breath.

Here was the fortune coming, and with no seeking on her part.

"I will stay; I will do my best to please you," she cried.

"Very well. I am quite sure that we shall get on nicely together," said the lady, looking greatly pleased.

Aurelia smiled.

"And now, if you will excuse me for a quarter of an hour, I will go and take off my bonnet, order our luncheon, and see that the carriage is got ready directly afterwards to take you back to your young friend."

She left the room. And Aurelia still sat before the piano like one in a dream. What extraordinary piece of good fortune was this that had befallen her? Were friends like this to be picked up by every young woman from the country, who trod the streets of London—those streets, which in her case at least, had most decidedly been 'paved with gold'?

It was wonderful! It was like a fairy tale! It was like—

Her musings ended abruptly. Some one was calling her from the other end of the room. She rose, crossed the room, and looked at a half-open door.

"Come in here!" said a sweet voice, and she obeyed.

From one realm of enchantment she had certainly stepped into another.

The splendor of the drawing-room paled before the beauty of this little boudoir. Its walls looked like delicate erections of frosted and fretted silver, relieved at certain intervals by large oval mirrors of polished steel. The carpet was of the palest sea green hue. So was the velvet divan that ran around the sides of the room. The door was of mother of pearl, with ornaments of frosted silver. The ceiling was domed, and painted to represent the sky. A lambent moon, and countless twinkling stars, shone there, and lit the room with a mellow yet brilliant light. There were no windows—there was no fire-place, no hangings, no curtains of any kind. The place looked like a cave in the depths of the sea. Yet, by some concealed mechanism, the air was kept at a warm and pleasant temperature, and perfumed deliciously, as if pastilles were burning there.

In this room there was no portrait. Only a young girl, so beautiful, so magnificently dressed that Aurelia held her breath as she looked at her. She was apparently about nineteen years of age, tall and graceful, with features as perfect as those of a statue, a complexion of roses and lilies, and large, mournful blue eyes, that seemed to speak without the aid of words. She wore a morning dress of pale, blue silk, fastened at the throat, and waist, and wrists with clasps of seed pearls, and her small feet were cased in blue velvet slippers, embroidered in the same costly way.

She had risen from the divan, where she had been lying reading. She held her book in her hand as she looked with those beautiful sad eyes at Aurelia.

"Who are you?" she asked! Tell me as quickly as possible! You have no time to lose! There is more at stake, much more, than you think!"

Thus adjured, Aurelia told her little story in as few words as possible.

"Do you read French?" the young lady asked, when she had finished.

"Yes."

"Look at that book!"

She gave her the one she was reading.

Aurelia took it, glanced over the pages, coloured high, and flung it from her.

The lady laughed.

"I read that book—I like it. And this is my home. Do you understand?"

"No," said Aurelia, looking perplexed and frightened.

"Did you see the portrait of a gentleman in the parlor?"

"Yes."

"He is old enough to be my father—my grandfather—for the matter of that. He is a married man; he has children twice my age. He is rich—oh, so rich! He has everything the world can give—wealth, honours, an ancient name, a faithful wife, loving children, troops of friends, a happy home! And yet this house is his! And I am his—though I hate him!"

Aurelia stood looking at her with a horrified glance.

"Yes, you may well look shocked. My mother sold me to him when I was a mere child; and he has not tired of me yet—perhaps, because I hate him! When he is in town, I live here; when he goes to his country seats with his wife, I travel half a day later to the same place with my own establishment; when he visits the Continent I follow, and in my own way. There is not a luxury of the earth, the air, or the sea, that he does not lay at my feet. His wife is fond of, and true to him, and he neglects her! I am neither fond nor faithful to him, and yet—"

She broke off suddenly, as a street organ halted outside, and began to play an Italian air. The colour faded from her cheeks—her face looked white and drawn.

"That song again! Oh, why do they come here to play it—here of all places in the world!"

She wrung her hands in agony.

"I used to hear it long, long ago, when I was young and happy, when I loved and was loved again. He used to sing it to me in Italy. And now he sings it night after night to a crowd of gaping fools upon the stage! And they come and play it before my windows till it seems as if I should go mad! But that is nothing to you. Do you want to stay in this house?"

"Oh, no!" said Aurelia. "Will you help me to get away?"

"Yes, I will. I know why my mother brought you here. Partly because she thought I needed a companion, and partly as a decoy to another old reprobate almost as bad as the gentleman yonder. But I can't stand by and see it done. Where has she gone?"

"To order luncheon and the carriage."

The young girl laughed.

"To drug some wine you are to drink, more likely. She thinks you are safe enough here—she does not know that I have left my bedroom yet. Do you say your prayers at night?"

"Always."

"Then add a special thanksgiving when you get home for the whim of early rising that seized upon me to-day. If it had not been for that, I should

have known nothing of your being here till it was too late to save you. Come with me."

She listened at the drawing-room door a moment, and then turned with a warning gesture to Aurelia.

"Not a word when we leave this room, or I shall never be able to get you out of the house."

"Stay—stop one moment!" said Aurelia, catching her by the hand. "These terrible things have confused me so that I hardly know what I want to say. You will not stay here, surely, when you hate your life—when you hate this man. Go with me now to Jennie—she and I will both work to help you. Oh, don't stay here!"

The girl looked thunderstruck; then she smiled bitterly.

"You are very kind, but I couldn't go with you."

"We would take care of you—we would work so hard."

"My dear! if you toiled night and day, you could not keep me in boot-laces! I am the most extravagant woman in London, and it is through my extravagance that they keep me here. They encourage it. See!"

She put out her little pearl-embroidered shoes.

"Every one of them real. I hate sham pearls—as I do shams of every kind!"

"But surely," said Aurelia, "you can give up pearl-embroidered slippers, for the sake of leading a good and a happy life?"

"No!" said the bright fairy, pouting her beautiful lip. "I would not give a penny for a life of self-denial, I should hate to be poor! Ugh! I could not endure existence without plenty of pretty things to make it endurable. And here I have them. You should see my suite of rooms up-stairs, and my beautiful dresses. Many a lady who goes to Court and wears a coronet would give her eyes for them. I have a coronet, too, for the matter of that—and it is of diamonds. You never saw anything so magnificent in your life—they are brighter than my eyes, and that is saying everything, you know! And I have such a dear, beautiful saddle-horse. He lays his head on my shoulder, and eats sugar out of my hand, and nibbles at my pockets. I think I love my horse better than anything, except my singer and that song!"

Aurelia was fairly puzzled. What could she say to this beautiful capricious creature, who seemed to have no moral sense of wrong? And yet how could she leave her there? She would make one effort more to win her away.

"Diamonds and horses are very pleasant things to own," she said. "But there may come a time when even these things may cease to please you. What are you going to do then?"

CHAPTER XII.

"When I heard you sing that burden
In my vernal days and bowers,
Other praises disregarding,
I but harkened that of yours.
Only saying,
In heart playing,
Blessed eyes mine eyes have been,
If the sweetest his have seen.

E. B. BROWNING.

THE honest policeman, who was just going off duty, felt no little surprise when Aurelia, pale and out of breath ran up to him and told her story. He relieved his mind by a few remarks about the lady who had inveigled her into such deadly peril, and then patted her on the shoulder with an encouraging smile.

"Never mind, my girl! I'll see that you get to the Spread Eagle all right. Come home and get a bit of dinner with me, and my wife shall go with you herself, and tell your friend all about it!"

Gladly did Aurelia accept this kind offer. She accompanied her protector to a pretty little cottage in one of the Brompton lanes, where a mild-faced little woman was awaiting her husband's arrival with a pleasant smile. A few words put her in possession of the young stranger's history, and she instantly welcomed her with a courtesy as cordial and a kindness as delicate as if she had been a princess, instead of a lonely wanderer without friends—almost without a name or home.

There never was a neater home. It consisted only of three rooms upon the ground floor—a parlour, kitchen, and a bedroom—for Mrs. Rowe could not afford to occupy the whole of her house herself. But she was a perfect spirit of order and good taste, and her three apartments were so clean, and bright, and pleasant, that any one would have been glad to remain in them.

Aurelia was first taken into the bedroom, where her country tastes were gratified by the spotless purity of the window curtains, and the pots of flowers that stood on the ledge outside. Two or three pretty engravings hung on the wall; the chairs, the washstand, and the chest of drawers, were all of light wood; and the bed, which stood in one corner, was covered with a beautiful counterpane, manufactured from small squares of gaily coloured calico. It was quite a work of art in its way, since a group of flowers was formed quite tastefully and naturally in the centre, while a running wreath of honeysuckle and woodbine fringed the edges, and terminated in a knot of violets at the head and foot of the bed. This counterpane was evidently the pride

"Die," said the strange girl, with a merry flash of her blue eyes.

Aurelia felt shocked.

"Don't, pray don't talk of dying in that way!" she said earnestly. "How can you? Think what would become of you if you should die as you are now?"

For one moment the bright face clouded over; the next it was clear again.

"My dear creature your powder and shot are entirely wasted on me. There is not one solitary atom of goodness in my nature; and if you stay preaching here till nightfall, only one thing will happen in consequence—and that is, you will fall into my respected mother's clutches. With all due deference to her, let me hint that you would escape almost as easily from those of a potentate who is never mentioned in polite society."

She was not joking. There was no time to be lost if Aurelia herself wished to escape from that den of iniquity.

"Well, I will go," she said with a heavy sigh, "but it makes my heart ache to leave you here. At least tell me your name."

"I am called the Peri. If you ever hear of me it will be by that name. But I was baptized—I was good once, you see—as Louisa Pearl. Lo Pearl, my little schoolmates used to call me."

Tears came slowly into her eyes as she pronounced the childish pet name.

A door shut heavily on the landing above.

"Heavens—it is my mother!" she exclaimed. Follow me, and don't turn back, whatever may happen."

She ran swiftly down the stairs. Aurelia followed, and the woman who had enticed her into that horrible place caught sight of them as they gained the hall.

"Louisa!" she shrieked, leaning over the banisters. "What are you doing? Are you mad?"

The girl made no reply, but snatched the key of the hall door from its nail.

"John! Henry! Matilda! Cook! Where are you all? Stop her—hold her!" screamed the mistress of the mansion, running down into the hall as fast as she could.

The bewildered servants hurried up from the lower regions, but before any of them could reach the door, Louisa had forced it open, and pushed Aurelia out upon the steps.

"Run to the policeman: he will take care of you and see that you get safely home. Good-bye!" she said; and, closing the door, turned round bravely to face and to defy her infuriated mother, and the scared and trembling servants of the house.

of good Mrs. Howe's heart, and her eyes sparkled as Aurelia began to praise it.

"Yes, it really is very pretty," she said, with a gratified smile; "and it saves the white things so. You know they will never look white in London, if you try ever so hard to keep them clean. Now this always looks bright and fresh; and then the pattern is so pretty, and the flowers so bright, that sometimes I almost fancy I can see them grow. It is like sleeping in the country, to sleep under that counterpane, miss."

Aurelia smiled, and asked who made it.

"I did it all—every stitch of it. You see, we had an American lady lodging here for a long time, and she showed me how to cut out the pieces, and put them together again. She used to come in and look at it, almost with tears in her eyes, because she said it reminded her of home. Poor lady! She was very kind to us, though she never could bear to see us touch a drop of beer. She was always blowing me up at dinner time, and I used to choke myself half to death sometimes, trying to swallow it before she got down stairs."

"And where is she now?" asked Aurelia, remembering her fellow passenger in the train.

"I don't know, I am sure. She went to Germany from here, and I have never set eyes on her since. But we will go out and get a bit of dinner now, miss, if you are ready. My John will have to be off again directly."

They went into the sun-lit kitchen, where a dinner of boiled greens and carrots, an apple-pie, cheese, and the objectionable beer, was awaiting them. As Aurelia drank her glass, she related the adventure in the railway carriage, and the good-natured policeman began to smile.

"That's her! That's Miss Ginevra to a dead certainty. How the gentleman up-stairs would laugh if he heard it! He's her cousin, miss, and one of the greatest composers in England, but he vows she is cracked, and ought to go to Bedlam; because she is always talking about wine. Why, when she was here, she got at all his decanters, and put an emetic in them to cure him of drinking, and the poor gentleman nearly died! What a row there was, to be sure! She went away in a huff, and I don't think he has forgiven her to this day."

"A composer did you say?" asked Aurelia, eagerly. "Oh, how I should like to see him."

"He's a very good looking man of his age, my dear, and he certainly does play most beautiful things on that piano up stairs—all his own composing too, I'm told. He writes operas, you know, and all that sort of thing. But are you fond of music?"

"Oh, very!"

"And can you sing?"

"A little."

"Then do strike up a bit after dinner. I'm so precious fond of a good song; and my missis, here, she used to sing like a blackbird once, but she had a fever, and lost her voice all of a sudden, like."

With this request, Aurelia was only too ready to comply; and when dinner was over, and honest John lit his pipe, and sat down to enjoy himself before the fire, she began to sing "Ca' the yowes to the knowes" in a style that made him drop his pipe, and sit with his mouth and eyes wide open, gazing at her with the most unqualified astonishment. Before she had finished the second verse, a heavy step came hurriedly down the stairs, the door was thrown open, and a handsome grey-headed old gentleman looked in.

"Who is singing like that in this house?" he asked, excitedly.

"This young lady."

"It's her, sure enough, sir," said the policeman, rising, and offering him a chair. "A regular nightingale, and no mistake!"

"Pshaw! Never mind chairs, dame. Go on, young lady—go on."

Aurelia obeyed. When the song was finished he took a pinch of snuff, and looked at her fixedly.

"Who are you?" he asked.

She told him.

"Good!" he said, when he had heard all. "A home, which you have run away from, and which, of course, is closed against you. No friends—no parents—no one to interfere. Very good! Would you like to go on the stage?"

"Oh, sir!" she said, with sparkling eyes.

"Good! I will adopt you, educate you, bring you out in a few years, and let you win fame and fortune, if you can. But you will have to work like a negro all the while, mind that!"

What did she care for hard work, as she eagerly grasped at the offer he made? The honest policeman and his wife looked somewhat astonished at the hasty proceeding; but that mattered little, and, before nightfall, she had written a farewell letter to Mrs. Marshall, bade a temporary adieu to her friend Jennie, and was ready to follow her adopted father, wherever he might see fit to lead the way.

CHAPTER XIII.

"If I were thou who sing'st this song,
Most wise for others, and most strong
In seeing right while doing wrong."

"I would not let my pulse beat high,
As thou towards fame's regality,
Nor yet in love's great jeopardy."

E. B. BROWNING.

A NEW life now began for Aurelia. She, who had heretofore studied only to please herself, was now obliged to regulate her taste and caprices to those of another. In the place of lounging away an hour or two over a pleasant novel, and then playing a few fantasies by way of amusing herself, she was forced to give up every spare moment of her time to the study of her profession. Her guardian thought every life wasted which was not devoted to the science of sweet sounds—in fact, he was simply music mad. To prepare Aurelia for the stage as speedily as possible, so that she might sing his music to an enraptured audience, was his cherished dream; and he would see, hear, or think of nothing that did not lead directly to that cherished end. It was another version of Sinbad and the Old Man of the Sea; and though, at first, the girl rebelled at the yoke, her own enthusiasm and ambition woke at last, and he found her a pupil as apt, and eager, and ready as he could possibly desire.

They went abroad at once, and spent three years in Italy—the birthplace and home of music. These years were spent by both in study, so that Aurelia saw little or nothing of her countrymen, who, nevertheless, over-ran every place of note in shoals; of her early friends, she had entirely lost all trace. Mrs. Marshall had been so shocked and offended by her strange flight, that she would never answer the letters which the repentant fugitive afterwards sent her. Miss Landell was married, and residing in London; Frederick had also entered the army. So much Aurelia gleaned from the public prints, but they gave very unsatisfactory intelligence of Mr. Leroy's movements.

A mania for traveling seemed to have seized suddenly upon him; for, after visiting every nook and corner of the Continent, he had started off to explore the Holy Land; and, at last, had ventured into Abyssinia, which was to her much as if he had been drowned in the Styx. All hopes of ever seeing him again had well-nigh vanished; yet, if he could but come back and find his poor little protegee at the very head of her profession—the idol of every musical circle—how beautiful it would be! At that thought, she studied away again harder than ever.

At last, they went back to England. The eventful period had arrived; she was to be presented to the public, and under the most favorable auspices which a singer could desire. The boards of the Opera House were to witness her triumph or her failure. She had chosen her own role, and was to appear as *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and the hero of the piece was the greatest singer of the day, who seemed, from the first moment of her introduction to him to be inclined to encourage her by every means in his power.

Still, even with his praises ringing in her ears, and with the kind words of her adopted father, and the unqualified approval of the manager, to inspire her with confidence, it must be confessed that she was horribly frightened whenever she thought of the ordeal she was about to undergo.

The dreaded night came at last, and the Opera House was crammed from pit to gallery with fashionable people, who had come to pronounce upon the merits of the new prima donna. All was anxious expectation until she appeared, and then one might have heard a pin fall, while eyes and opera glasses in every direction were fixed steadily upon her. For one instant it seemed to her that she must turn and fly; but the next she made the agreeable discovery that she was near-sighted. Never was there such a mental rejoicing over an undeniable defect. She had often made dreadful mistakes in defining objects at a short distance, and felt angry at herself in consequence. But now this misfortune proved an actual blessing, since out of that sea of faces turned towards her she could not distinguish a single face or feature. It was like singing to the walls—why need she be afraid?

"Courage!"

There was no mistaking the rich, sweet voice that pronounced the word. It was the Italian singer who had won and worn his own laurels so triumphantly, that he could well afford to be generous to a humble beginner like her. She gave him a grateful look and began to sing.

At the very first note, her audience looked delighted. When she had finished singing, they loaded her with applause, and recalled her again and again to mark their approval still more strongly. She went off the stage, flushed and delighted, to receive the congratulations of her friends. But, to her surprise, her guardian withheld his, looking anxious and fearful.

"Sing carefully, for heaven's sake!" was all he said; and, somewhat alarmed by his manner, she took such pains with her execution in the following scenes as to render her success unequivocal and complete. She was recalled no less than three times after the curtain fell. The handsome tenor-

led her on twice, but at the third call he laughed and shook his head.

"Too much for me, but you are fresh and young," he said, and placed her hand in her guardian's, while the manager followed, in obedience to the loud call for him which was just making itself heard. When the old composer, to whom the public owed this new pleasure, made his appearance, the audience rose to their feet, and the three received an ovation that nearly smothered them with flowers.

"Such a success has never been witnessed since the days of the great Queen of Song herself," said the manager, rapturously, when they were behind the curtain once more. But the old composer sat down in a property chair of crimson velvet, and burst into tears.

CHAPTER XIV.

"You'll find us all changed since you vanished—

"We've set up a national school,
And waltzing is utterly banished,
And Ellen has married a fool.

The Major is going to travel—

Miss Hyacinth threatens a rout—

The walk is laid down with fresh gravel;
Papa is laid up with the gout."

PRAED.

It must be a very magnificent thing to go to bed a mere unit in the world, or in society, about whose existence no one cares a rush, and wake next morning to find that existence become a matter of notoriety, about which every one feels curious. Some people affect to sneer at this species of fame—in fact, at any fame at all. 'Tis because they were never famous. Of course every one knows that the greatest success may be outlived—that the most brilliant reputation cannot last long beyond the grave. But what of that? "It will all be the same a hundred years hence" is very true. But a hundred years hence the heart that beats so now precise will be but a handful of quiet dust, and the brow longs for laurels will have strengthened the growth, it may be of a laurel itself. It is not with that after state that we have to do,—it is with the real and actual present, where rewards are possible, and where they often give a pleasure purer and keener than any thing else on earth can bestow. To be in love and to be loved again, is triumph enough for the early days of youth; but after one has got well on in the twenties, it seems to me, that to become famous and to grow rich are the best things to do, so far, at least, as this world is concerned.

But one sometimes feels impatient of a certain kind of fame, which seems to be bestowed without an equivalent return. People know, for instance, that an actor, to act well, must go through a long and laborious course of training, and fight his way up from the ranks by main force of talent, energy and perseverance. So must a successful barrister and a popular clergyman toil in good earnest for the reputation they achieve. While as to writers, the brother and sisterhood of the quill are by no means disposed to pass over their peculiar grievances in silence, and the public know well enough all about the aching heads, the weary fingers, the dim eyes, and worn out imaginations, that go so far to make up their books. They read smoothly and well, it is true; but how many times has that wretched MSS. been pitched frantically across the room, in the process of composition; how many times has the bewildered writer vowed, in the bitterness of his or her heart, to break stones upon the road, or to take in washing for a living, rather than be chained to the pen, like a galley slave to the oar, any longer for the sake of bread and butter?

Take the other professions. The labour of the ballet dancer is shown in the very grace of her movements, because it is evident that human beings were not originally intended to spin about like teetotums in muslin saucers" (as Mr. Carlyle has it), or to point their toes towards the ceiling in an exact line with the parting of their back hair. One's bones ache at the thought of the practice that has produced such results, and the most hard to be pleased spectator must feel that the Cerito of the day has fully earned, so far as actual hard work goes, the shower of bouquets and the shower of gold which, in some happy cases, is lavished so fully upon her. Again, when we see the piano, made ductile and harmonious by the human hand, or some brass monster taught to discourse sweet music by the human breath, we understand at once what hours and days of hard labour have been spent before our ears could be so delighted.

In fact, there is not an art or science in which people do not recognise and appreciate the labour and trouble of its votaries—save one. When a singer steps upon the stage and warbles like a nightingale, every one applauds most rapturously; yet, who remembers the hours of toil that have been endured, in order that our hearts may be thrilled by that perfect combination of melodious sounds.

"So much money just for opening their mouths!" said an old lady in my hearing one day at one of the famous Crystal Palace Concerts of 1862. She was gazing with an awe-struck, yet half dissatisfied look at a group of stars upon the stage, consisting of Grist, Tietjens, and Giuglini.

"So much money just for opening their mouths!"

All the arguments of the old lady's informant failed to convince her that the magnificent trio were well worth their price. Their beautiful voices she could understand, but she would not believe that it had taken time, and pains, and labour, such as she would have shuddered at, to make these voices what they were. She held fast to the general idea, that a singer, like a poet, is born and not made; and to this day, I suppose she fancies that those human nightingales sang just as well at the moment they were fledged as they do now. I am not sure that hers is not the best way of looking at the matter. Who cared to know, as the magical bullfinch trilled out his little song in aid of the starving operatives last summer (thus becoming in our minds a living, feathered benefactor, with a kindly heart, rather than a mere machine), who cared to think how often that song must have been tried, note after note, with many a break and failure, before it brought light, and warmth, and comfort to many a desolate home?

In Aurelia's case, this popular delusion was unusually prevalent; her success was certain, and yet many envious people felt disposed to carp at it.—She sang so much like nature, that they could not believe it was art, and so they grumbled at the fame and the gold she won.

But their grumbling did not take away the laurels or lighten her purse. Her portrait in every window, her name on every lip. She was young—she was pretty—and she was good. She lived with her adopted father in the simplest style. She made no visits, and trusted to her own dignity and his quiet protection to keep the rude and insolent at bay. To sing well and to make the old composer's life a proud and happy one, was all she seemed to care for. In these two objects she succeeded well; and, perhaps, no time in her whole life was she so happy as this—when she had youth, health, beauty, wealth, a kind friend, a happy home, and the world in general at her feet. As she sat one morning in her beautiful boudoir, thinking of all these things, the servant announced a lady, who would not give her name, but who most earnestly requested five minutes' conversation with Mademoiselle Aurelia.

The singer's fancy instantly turned to the image the pretty "Peri," for whose fate she felt so strong an interest, and she ordered the lady to be admitted at once.

"But it was not the Peri—it was some one who would have been terribly shocked at the mere mention of her name." A most fashionably-attired lady, who ran up to Aurelia, and held out a pair of primrose-gloved hands, crying, in a high affected tone of voice, "At last—at last we meet again!"

Aurelia elevated her eyebrows, and bowed haughtily, but did not rise or take the proffered hand.

"Oh you are still angry, and won't be friends!" said the lady, seizing upon an easy chair, and making herself very comfortable in its cushioned depths. "That is wrong, I think, and something unchristian-like. Don't you?"

"It may be, Miss Landell," said Aurelia, freezing.

"Oh, I have changed my name? I am Mrs. Grant Thornton now," was the hasty reply.

"Allow me to congratulate you," said Aurelia, stiffly. "When a lady like you has attained to the height of her wildest dreams of happiness, namely, marriage—one can do no less."

Far from looking annoyed or vexed at this speech, Mrs. Grant Thornton laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

"My dear creature, one must marry of course, if one can't be clever, or a famous singer, or anything of that sort. How else is one to get one's living, and all the pretty things that make life worth the having?"

"How, indeed?"

"Papa is very well off, as you know, but ours is such an expensive family; and you can't keep up a country seat and a house in town, for nothing. And then, at his death, everything goes to Frederick—that is, everything worth speaking off. So, of course my only plan was to get married."

"I see!"

"I won't say much about my husband, except to tell you, in confidence, that he is the stupidest and most disagreeable man in existence, and that I don't care a button for him."

Aurelia could not help laughing.

"But then that does not matter much, you know, my dear. Women now-a-days are not supposed to love their husbands very warmly."

"Has the marriage service been altered, then?"

"No, you sly thing! But who pays any attention to that now? It is a great stuff, but it serves its purpose, I suppose. However, let that go. You will not sneer at my marriage when you see the advantages I have gained by it."

"What are they?"

"Such a beautiful house in Hill Street, and a country place in Berkshire; and such a love of a carriage, all lined with blue, and drawn by a pair of ducks—"

"Ducks?"

"Ducks of horses, you know."

"Oh, well—go on."

"Then I have my own saddle horse, and my pony chaise for the country, and my toy dog, and my opera-box, and my tickets for every fashionable place of amusement in town."

"Well!"

"The best comes last, of course! Such numbers of new dresses and bonnets—and oh, such diamonds, Aurelia! I declare when I first saw them, I quite held my breath! I think I would have married Mokauna himself, to get these beautiful diamonds."

"I don't doubt it in the least."

"How you are laughing at me?"

"Not at all."

"At least you are shocked."

"Why should I be? 'Tis a mere matter of taste. I would rather break stones on the road than sell myself for these things—but it seems to agree with you."

Mrs. Thornton pouted.

"It is very well of you to talk, Aurelia. You have a profession, and you stand at the head of it. You can coin every note of your voice into gold, and make your hundred a night by merely opening your lips. I have no such resources, yet my tastes are far more expensive than yours. I hate poverty—and I like luxury. You can't have luxury without paying for it—and you can't get money unless you inherit it, without making some return. I had no talents—nothing but a little beauty. Mr. Thornton had money, and so we made the exchange."

"You are certainly growing sensible in your old age. You talk like a lawyer, or like a book," said Aurelia, looking at her with a smile. "And what sort of a man is this fortunate husband of yours?"

"Oh, a good natured, middle-aged practical banker. We get on very well together, though I must confess he bores me terribly at times. But then I never let him know it, and I contrive to have as few *tele-a-tates* as possible; so he is not so great a nuisance as he might be, if he was encouraged too much."

"Well," said Aurelia, "you are certainly the most honest woman I ever met in my life."

"Am I? It is only to you that I am so very candid!"

"And why to me?"

"Because you were keen and quick when a child. You saw through me then, and you did not like me, and neither did I like you. I might have come here to-day and tried to pass myself off as your best friend—as the most devoted of wives, and the most discreet of women; but what good would that have done? You hate shams, and you hate hypocrites. I found that out long ago. So I make my appearance in my own character, and you can let me stay, or turn me out as you like!"

"I won't turn you out just yet, because you amuse me!" said Aurelia. "But since you are in so honest a mood, pray tell me why you came at all to see me?"

"I knew you would ask that question, and I am

going to tell you the exact truth. I did not like you as a child!"

"I know that."

"In fact, I detested you!"

"Yes; but why?"

"Have you never guessed?"

"I did you no harm."

"I am by no means sure of that. But you ought to feel highly honored; for the truth of the matter is, that I was jealous of you!"

"Indeed!"

"Oh, so jealous! At that time I was in love with Captain Grey."

"That is over now, of course?" said Aurelia, quietly.

"Oh, ages ago!" she answered, with a light laugh. "I am an old married woman now—a woman of the world into the bargain, and my heart is as dry as a chip. But I had a little feeling left then, and it was all wasted upon him. So when I saw how you had taken him captive——"

"But I was a mere child!"

"Never mind that. You were pretty, and you sang like an angel. That was quite enough for him; and for me, too. I determined to get you out of his way. I sent Frederick off, in the first place."

"Poor Fred!" said Aurelia, sighing, smiling, and blushing at the same time. "How fond I was of him then!"

"And so was he of you. For the matter of that, he is in raptures about you again, now that he has seen you upon the stage."

"Indeed!"

"How coolly you say that! Is it all quite forgotten, then?"

"We lose our first loves, but we don't forget them," said Aurelia, gravely.

"Good! I will tell Master Freddy of that, and he'll be wilder than ever. But to return to our muttons. After I had packed him off, my next step was to get rid of you. Do you remember our interview on that eventful morning?"

"That is another event of my life which I shall never forget, Mrs. Thornton."

"Or forgive. Well, never mind. If you will be so revengeful, I can't help it. I called you a White-chapel ballad singer, you know!"

"I remember it too well."

"And you ran away, to the despair of Mrs. Marshall, the horror of my father, and the astonishment of the neighborhood in general. I held my tongue about the part I had acted in the matter, for I confess I felt some compunctious visitings, till I heard, through a musical friend of mine, of a wonderful singer who had been picked up in some mysterious way by Mr. Moore, the composer. I instantly made further inquiries, and, finding it was really you,

troubled my head no more about you, till, to my great surprise, I recognised you on the stage that night of your *debut*. Since then Frederick has worried my life out to pay this call; and so I have come——"

"To worship the rising star," said Aurelia composedly.

"Well, why not?" was the instant reply. "I am only following the general example; and if you had remained plain Aurelia Gresham, a good singer, not one of all these people would have besieged your door as they do now."

"It is true."

"I should never have sought you out myself, if it had not been for your success."

"I like your candor, Mrs. Thornton. It almost does away with the old grudge that has existed between us."

"Then prove it," said Mrs. Thornton, eagerly.

"By coming to my house."

Aurelia shook her head.

"I never pay visits."

"I know. And what nonsense that is! Do you know what people say about it already?"

"No."

"That Mademoiselle Aurelia is so absorbed in the study of her parts—with the hero at her side—that she has no time to waste on ordinary mortals, who have not, like the handsome tenor, a nest of nightingales in their throats."

Aurelia frowned, and turned crimson.

"I wish people would mind their own business," she said, petulantly.

"Ah, but they won't in any case, and how much yours! Come, Aurelia, let us enter into an alliance, offensive and defensive."

"On what terms?"

"I give large parties, which, of course, I wish make as attractive as possible. If you could only come to them, it would make my success complete. On the other hand, my avowed friendship for you might do you good some day. No lion knows when the help of the humble mouse may stand him in good stead."

"It is true!"

"Then will you come?"

"For the sake of Frederick and the old times, I may. I should like to see that boy again!"

"Boy! He is an elegant young Guardsman now—and far more your slave than ever! He will go mad with joy when he hears you are coming—although, between ourselves, he is engaged to his cousin. Shall I say next Thursday—I have a party then?"

"Yes, if you like."

"Thanks—a thousand times!"

"Shall I see Captain Grey?" asked Aurelia, with a smile.

"Oh, yes! He is my right hand man at these parties. Will Signor Paolo come?"

"If I ask him."

"Then do; and I will write him a note."

She rose to go, and held out her hand. This time Aurelia took it, and held it a moment in both hers.

"Mind—we are not friends!" she said; "but we will help each other, if we can—shall we?"

"With all my heart!"

"In any way?"

"In any way."

"Remember that promise—and remember, also, that you are always to be as honest with me as you have been to day. Now, good-bye!"

So ended this queer interview. It seemed to Aurelia more like a scene in a play than a stern and actual reality.

CHAPTER XV

We parted. Months and years rolled by;

We met again, four summers after;

Our parting was all sob and sigh,

Our meeting was all mirth and laughter.

For in my heart's most secret cell

There had been many other lodgers;

And she was not the ball-room belle,

But only Mrs.—Something—Rogers!

PRAED.

THERE were three reasons which influenced Aurelia when she accepted her old enemy's invitation. In the first place, though a successful singer, she was but a girl, with all a girl's love for gay scenes, fine clothes, and plenty of people to tell her how much she graced them. In the second place, she was a little anxious to see Frederick again. And, in the third, Mrs. Thornton's remark about the Italian singer had startled her a little more than she was willing to own.

Was the world already beginning to couple her name with his? It was true that between rehearsals, and acting, and private practices, the greater part of their time was spent together. But at the rehearsals there were always plenty of people around them. At night an applauding public watched their every look and movement; and if he came to her own house to practice their duets, the old composer never left the room. They had never been alone together for an instant, and till those unlucky words were spoken, the girl never dreamed that he was anything more to her than a brother.

Now, however, her eyes were opened. Her early fondness for Frederick had taught her something of her own heart; the feeling for the Italian, which was growing stronger day by day, was to teach her yet more.

He was certainly one of the most dangerous companions she could have selected. He was beautiful in every sense of the word, if regular features, clustering hair, a pure olive complexion, dark flashing eyes, and the most graceful of figures, could make him so. But his regular features and elegant figure were not his greatest charms. To the Southern fire and vivacity which belonged to him of right, he added a sort of nameless witchery—a kind of impatient, yet beguiling haughtiness—a careless, yet enticing pettishness of manner, that took an impressionable imagination by storm. His health was sufficiently delicate to render him an object of interest and care, to begin with; and before they had known each other long, Aurelia would wrap him up as if he had been a child, and scold him roundly when, through negligence, he exposed himself to the danger of taking cold. Then, with what heedless sweetness he received her reproofs—how mischievous were his pretences of penitence—all generally ending in a burst of laughter, as musical as the ringing of silver bells! As wilful, as provoking, as incorrigible as a sprite, she found him; and yet so gay, so playfully fond, so innocent of all intention to offend, that it was the keenest of pains to be angry with, and the most delicious of pleasures to forgive him. He liked ease, luxury, and splendour—he hated everything that was harsh and unlovely; he was a thorough Sybarite, and therefore, of course, thoroughly selfish—yet who could blame him? He had that fatal gift of fascination which blinds every eye to faults and imperfections, and Aurelia could see nothing in him that was not to be admired, loved—almost adored!

Yes, it had come to that, and Mrs. Thornton was the first to teach her the real nature of her feelings towards him.

Aurelia was of the order of natural queens, and those who loved or sought her were forced to do their wooing humbly, and on their bended knees.

But now the tables were turned, and she was the one to love—perhaps the one to woo. When a proud, imperious woman finds that this is the case, when her whole nature is for the moment enslaved, by that little scantily-clad tyrant, who makes more mischief in this world than he or any one else can ever set right again, it seems that she cannot abuse herself sufficiently before her idol.

She is content, nay, proud, to serve where she was served before; and down into the dust goes that stately head that was crowned with a coronet of scorn, down into the dust, and the lower the better.

Happily, these infatuations do not last very long. From their very nature, and the nature of the being at whose feet they are poured out, they cannot

But they cast a shadow, even in their memory, over a woman's existence, a shadow which is never lifted, it may be, till the daisies are growing over her, and the weary farce of life is at an end.

Aurelia had to sing on the evening of the party, and Paolo was engaged elsewhere, so she was obliged to keep her appointment alone. Mrs. Thornton looked disappointed at this, for she admired the tenor singer exceedingly, and would have given her ears to have established him as a frequenter of her drawing-rooms. However, it was something to have Aurelia there, and she led her forward with an air of affectionate intimacy, that made the singer laugh wickedly in her sleeve.

She was introduced to Mr. Thornton, a clumsy, shy-looking man, who seemed utterly extinguished by his fashionable wife. One or two ladies were next presented, and then Aurelia found her hand seized by a tall, handsome young man, who exclaimed, "Have you forgotten me?" in the most meaning of tones.

"Why, it is Frederick!" she cried, and greeted him with the greatest cordiality. He felt inexpressibly vexed at the open warmth of her manner. She did not blush or sigh, but shook hands with him, as if he had been her grandfather, and told him how handsome he had grown! Not a bit of sentiment in her! And he had told Ellen Manning, to whom he was engaged, so much of Aurelia's early love for him, that that young lady had been watching for her appearance in a state of the most intense jealousy, greatly to his delight.

Ellen was a woman, and therefore a natural freemason. He glanced across the room, and saw her talking to one of his brother officers, with an air of the most placid unconcern. She had seen that sisterly greeting. He could never make her jealous of Aurelia any more, and the young coxcomb felt as if he could knock his head against the wall, simply because a famous and petted singer had forgotten her early penchant for him, and did not faint when she first caught sight of his altered face once more.

If he could have looked into Aurelia's heart, he might have been a little better satisfied. True, her girlish attachment to him had died out for want of aliment, and was utterly eclipsed now by the stronger presence of the woman's love. But, at sight of him, all the old memories of the early days came back, and in the place of glaring foot-lights and applauding crowds, there was the simple cottage, the garden full of roses and violets, the lonely moor, and the singing of the birds! A cool

wind seemed to freshen her cheeks, at the first tone of his voice, and flowers bloomed, and blue skies beamed, whenever she looked into his eyes.

A feeling of unutterable sadness stole over her. Why could they not always have remained children? How much better was that simple, innocent existence than this whirl of fashionable excitement in which they were now moving! How much better, even, that innocent child's love than the more feverish passion which consumed her heart, and might never, after all, bring her happiness in the place of that peace which it had taken away forever!

Still, she gave utterance to none of these thoughts but smiled graciously on Frederick, and was introduced to Miss Manning, who was charmed by her unaffected demeanor, and playful reminiscences of her rambles with Frederick, upon the moors and through the lanes, in her childish days; those rambles that had been sighed over by the young Guardsman as if they were sacred things—how simple and harmless they became as Aurelia's laughing voice described them.

Miss Manning was no longer jealous. It may be that Aurelia, conscious of the engagement, and knowing something of Master Frederick's disposition, had sought her out on purpose to set her heart at ease.

As she left the young lady's side, a gentleman came up and held out his hand with a friendly smile. His face was familiar to her, and yet she could not recall his name. He watched her evident confusion for a moment; he laughed, and then she knew him.

"Mr. Aubrey!"

"The same! How little we dreamed when I had the honor of assisting Leroy to convey his little waif to Charnley, that I should meet you in a place like this!"

"Oh! where is Mr. Leroy?" asked Aurelia, eagerly.

"In the Holy Land once more," answered Mr. Aubrey.

"Is he never coming back?"

"That I cannot say. He likes the East very much. Perhaps he is going to settle out there and be a Turk."

"Oh, you always liked laughing at me!" she exclaimed.

"I know I did, Miss Gresham, but I am in earnest this time."

"Do you know—has he heard of my leaving Charnley?"

"Of course! A letter from Mrs. Marshall, nearly three miles long, relating the fact of your disappearance, reached him in China. I was with him when it came."

"What did he say?"

"I would rather not tell you," he answered, roguishly.

"Pray do."

"He said you were an ungrateful little monkey, and that it served him right for bothering his head against about anything of the female sex," said he, laughing.

"Does he hate women?"

"A little."

"Why?"

"The usual reason."

"Well?"

"His cousin Helen jilted him when he was quite a young man. Don't you remember, Miss Gresham, how angry he was when they put her clothes on you?"

"Yes."

"He has never got over it, in all these years. He hates her very name, and for her sake, all women!"

"Indeed!"

"She did serve him shabbily, and though they were engaged, the very night before the wedding she ran away with an actor, and left poor Leroy in the lurch. I was a mere boy at the time, but I have heard the whole story since I went abroad with him."

"And what became of her?"

"She went on the stage."

"Well?"

"I don't know any more, because I never knew the name of the man she married. I heard afterwards that Leroy knew of him at the time, and that the last words he ever spoke to his cousin were a warning against the fellow."

"Wrote!" said Aurelia.

But the next moment she remembered how and where she got her information and, blushing scarlet, was silent.

"Perhaps so," said Aubrey, indifferently. "At all events, he never forgave her. But I think he will forgive you when he hears all I can say about you. I will write to him to-morrow," he added, pleasantly.

"Do."

"And may I call and tell you what answer I receive?"

"Certainly."

"We were not very good friends once, I think. You did not like me very much when you were a child."

"Because you did not like me," she answered, frankly.

"At least you will not have that reproach to make now."

She bent her head with a gracious smile of adieu. Mr. Aubrey paying compliments to her! What next?

The next came in the shape of a musical, reproachful voice at her elbow.

"A greeting for all your old friends except me!" it said.

Turning round, she saw Captain Grey, looking exactly as he did when he rode away from the gate of Charnley, on that morning so long—so very long ago!

She was really glad to see him, and to receive his congratulations on the proud position she had attained. But she was unprepared to find him monopolizing her during the remainder of the evening, as he endeavored to do.

He gave her to understand, by looks, and tones, and whispers, that earth had been a desert to him from the time she had disappeared so mysteriously from Charnley, till she had risen, a glorious star, upon the operatic stage.

True, she laughed in his face at this rhapsody, and told him that pining away had certainly made him grow stout and ruddy; but her ridicule was lost upon him. It was his end and aim to prove to her that she had been the star of his existence; and at last, tired of uttering disbelieving exclamations, she listened to him in silence, and let her thoughts wander to the beautiful Paolo, whose pictured face, in a golden and jewelled case, rested at that moment on her heart.

The evening passed very pleasantly.

People who had watched Aurelia upon the stage, as if she had been a goddess, were charmed to find her so accessible and unaffected in her manners.

Of course, no one ventured to ask her to sing. Yet as they were breaking up, she sat down of her own accord to the piano, and gave them "Good-night, good-night, my dearest" as simply as if she had been some young lady on her promotion, instead of the finest prima donna the good city of London had ever known.

The song ended, she shook hands with her hostess, bowed to the admiring guests, and taking Frederick's proffered arm, glided gracefully from the room. Captain Grey made his escape at the same time, and was waiting, ready to hand her into her carriage.

"Do you sing to-morrow night!" he inquired of her.

"Yes."

"Then there will be no chance of seeing you during the day?"

"I think not. I have to attend rehearsal, you know."

"When may I come?"

"I am going to have a little party to-morrow evening, after the opera is over—a supper party," she said.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Captain Grey, in the most delighted of tones.

"Will you both join it, and bring Mr. Aubrey with you?"

"Yes."

"Tell Mr. Aubrey I said he was to come: Good night!"

Aurelia drove away.

The old rivals fell back a pace or two, and glared angrily at each other.

But this time the captain certainly had the advantage. He was a free, unfettered man, and he registered a vow at that moment in his heart which he fully intended to keep.

CHAPTER XVI.

. . . I blended in my wreath

The violet, and the blue harebell,

And one frail rose in its earliest bloom;

Alas! I meant it for thy hair,

And now I fling it on thy tomb,

To weep and wither there!

Fare ye well—fare ye well!"

PRAED.

THE few weeks that succeeded this re-union with old friends were perhaps the happiest of Aurelia's life. Worshipped in public, and adored at home, she reigned the queen of a brilliant circle, to every member of which her word was law. No sooner had she emerged from her seclusion than invitations by the score poured in upon her. She was the welcome and honoured guest of the highest in the land, and her own evenings were made brilliant by an assemblage of wit, beauty, wealth, and rank, such as has seldom been seen in London since the days of the beautiful Lady Blessington. Many a noble matron rejoiced to call Aurelia friend—many a noble matron's son or brother would gladly have called her wife. If she was unspoiled by this sudden storm of flattery and attention, it was owing to one thing alone. She was in love for the first time.—And a real, sincere passion will make the proudest woman on earth feel humble and afraid.

Two women divided, at this time, the attention of London. The one was Aurelia—the other a beautiful adventuress, whose very existence was a scandal and a shame, according to the matrons of Belgravia. Aurelia, hearing this, ventured to ask timidly, which was worst—the sinner, or those who aided and abetted, and countenanced the sin—but

was met with such an outbreak of virtuous indignation, that she never ventured to open her lips upon the subject again. Yet how her heart yearned towards the poor, brilliant, beautiful "Peri," who was setting all London by the ears, and who, in the days of her poverty and distress, had been so very kind to her. More serious thoughts came, ere long, to distract her attention from the thousand and one vagaries and escapades of the "Lady of Rotten Row."

The health of her benefactor, which had been delicate for some time, suddenly began to fail in a startling and unexpected manner. At first he was confined to the house; then to his room; and, lastly, to his bed. The doctors recommended that last resource—"a warm climate;" but he refused to leave England. Nor would he allow Aurelia to resign her engagement for the purpose of nursing him. She spent the greater part of each day at his bedside, and, during the hours of her necessary absence, a faithful and experienced nurse supplied her place.

Yet all the while the old man was going slowly to the grave! She knew it—she felt it; and only the love which she dared to acknowledge at last, because it was sought, and openly returned, could have supported her in that trial. Paolo was hers! Whatever of ruin and death might fall upon her, nothing could alter that one glorious truth, since he had sealed it with his kisses, as he had sworn it with his tears!

One box—or, rather, the inmate of one box—was evidently the centre of attraction on a particular evening of Aurelia's engagement. When Aurelia was not on the stage, nearly every glass was turned that way; and many a whisper circled round the house, as the lady who sat there gazed composedly back upon the people in return. Ladies agreed together that it was shameful—that such persons really ought not to be tolerated—that a box should not have been given to her. Gentlemen smiled at each other, winked, and looked knowing, as if they were more privileged than their fellows in having the honor of the bright stranger's acquaintance.

She was very young to cause an excitement so intense, so universal, and so profound. A fair young girl, of apparently about twenty years of age, who sat alone in the box with as much apparent ease as if she had been surrounded by a host of aristocratic friends. Her dress was of pale blue silk, and she wore a coronet of diamonds, and a diamond bracelet, that of themselves were well-nigh worth a prince's ransom. She looked so fair, so delicate, so refined, with her fresh complexion, her bright blue

eyes, and soft, gold colored hair, that strangers who saw her for the first time could scarcely believe that she was the woman whose mad pranks and sinful extravagance were making the polite circles of London stand aghast with horror and astonishment.

Yet so it was; young and beautiful though she might be, she bore a name whose sad significance told a tale of itself. "The Peri." Everybody knew who the Peri was, and to whom she belonged. When she drove in the Park, people thronged the iron railings to gaze at her and her ponies; when she rode, the Ladies' Mile was crowded in the same inconvenient and indecent manner. The young noblemen who had the privilege of touching their hats to, or perhaps of exchanging a word with, this goddess of the hour, were looked upon as the most fortunate of their sex. Her picture in the shop windows jostled that of the virtuous and matronly Queen—nay, was often put beside that of a fair young princess, or the daughter of some lordly house.

Wives and mothers, abhorring her presence, were yet obliged, in public, to tolerate it; and there was one proud home, on which the sin and shame of her existence rested with a double shadow, a double significance.

Two members of that home were present at the Opera on this particular night. One, a gentle lady, whose pale face bore marks of patient care, and lonely self-sacrifice; the other a proud young beauty, with flashing eyes and raven hair, who scarcely attended for an instant to the business of the stage, but sat apart, leaning her head upon her hand, and looking moody and irritated to the last degree. Both ladies were aware of the presence of the Peri—both knew, only too well, the relationship in which she stood to one whom they loved, and would have been glad to honor, if they could have done so. It was one of those bitter cups which, I think, are held ofttest to the lips of those who are highest in the land—one of those deadly outrages for which nothing short of a coronet, an opera box, and princely settlements can possibly compensate.

Just as the curtain was about to rise for the last time, the door of the Peri's box opened, and a handsome young nobleman looked in. She turned towards him with an air of freezing courtesy, and asked what he wanted.

"Aw—only to say how lovely you are looking, and—"

What else, he had no time to explain, for the lady, though she knew him well, was in no mood for jesting just then. She drew a little silver-mounted pistol from her bosom, and, turning her back to the house, said, in a low voice, "My lord, you are an insolent puppy, and if you don't shut that door, and take yourself off in just two seconds, I shall offer you my compliments through this tube."

The young man vanished with commendable celerity, and she heard his friends laughing at him in the lobby, for his want of success.

"Brainless idiots!" she muttered, as she turned with flushed cheeks towards the stage. But the look of annoyance vanished an instant after, when the curtain rose, and the favourite tenor came on to sing his great song.

She listened with clasped hands—with tears in her eyes. How often—oh, how often had she heard that song in Venice—how often had that same angelic voice sung it, and to her—to her alone—as their gondola glided slowly over the still lagoon. And now those breathless people were hanging on his lips as well as she—the Peri, who stood no longer at the gate of Eden, but rather on the brink of Hades!

As the last notes died away, the Italian glanced up at the box where she was sitting. She knew that he would do so; she knew how that song must remind him of her, and the happy days gone by. She had a knot of flowers in her breast, and, as the storm of bouquets began to fall, she threw hers down among them. He picked it up and hid it in his vest before he secured the others. Quick as the action had been, it was noticed by some whose eyes were upon them both, and a slight but distinct hiss resounded through the theatre. Nevertheless, the Peri did not shrink away, nor did the singer throw her flowers down again. Thinking, apparently, that so long as he sung his best, the public had no possible excuse for meddling with his private attachments or friendships, he marched off in triumph, laden with his floral spoils, and the heart that was so loving, if so guilty, beat happily again.

So far, so good. But in the next scene Aurelia appeared, and after the first glance at her, the "Lady of the Camellias" sat back in her box, breathless with astonishment. She had many a whim, and her latest one had been an almost total avoidance of the places of public amusements, of which, in general, she was so fond. Consequently, she had never seen the new *prima donna*. But she recognised her at once. There she was—the poor, unknown girl whom she had saved from a fate like her own. Years had passed, and they met again—the one the cynosure of every eye; the other—ah! what was she? The pale fugitive of that sunny morning was now the brilliant queen of the stage—her preserver was a by-word and reproach to every honest man and woman alike!

The poor girl hung her head sadly, and watched the scene through her tears. They dried at last, however, and her blue eyes began to flash. Paolo—her Paolo—was singing! But how was he looking at this woman whom she had saved? What glances—what smiles were those—what embrace

was that? She had seen him on the stage a hundred times before, and had felt horribly jealous of the actresses with whom he played; but now the strange sinking at her heart, so new and so oppressive, warned her that a far more dangerous rival was before her. Was it likely that Paolo, thrown into constant and familiar companionship with that handsome woman, associated with her in all the brilliancy of her triumphs, and dependent on her, in a measure, for his own—was it likely that he could turn from this queen of song, in her fresh and glowing loveliness, and remain constant to that pale shadow of the past, to which she herself, in spite of all her sins, was, at heart, so faithful!

She felt that it could not be. She felt that she had lost him, and that Aurelia occupied her place. In that moment, the pale lady opposite, in her ducal box, was amply revenged, could she but have known it. For every pang she had inflicted upon that gentle soul, a hundred, nay, a thousand, tore the heart of the poor Peri. In the wreck of her life, she had clung fast to one jewel of great price—her only love, and the memory of its pure endearments, which seemed like a green oasis in the waste and barren desert where she was wandering now. And it was gone! At least, its beauty was tarnished, and it could never be a spell and talisman against the lowest depths of evil to her any more, Paolo was false—Paolo loved another. It mattered little what the future brought, after that one fatal truth was known.

He did not look up as he went off the stage for the last time. She had scarcely expected it, and yet he wore her flowers! She would not wait to see him lead Aurelia out before the curtain, but wrapping her cloak closely around her, and taking the diamonds from her hair, she stole softly out, under cover of the applause, and gliding down a private staircase where she had often been before, waited patiently in the darkest corner of the narrow hall.

A door opened and shut upon the landing above; then she heard voices and steps.

"Take care!" said those musical tones which she knew so well. "The stairs are steep, and I think they have turned off the gas, purposely that we may break our necks."

"Oh, we are too precious for that," said the lady, laughing. "So long as we draw houses like that of to-night, they will not make away with us. But you are right, they might give us a little more light, considering all things."

"What have you done with your flowers?" asked the Italian, as they gained the hall.

"My maid takes charge of them. They are her perquisites, after the rings and bracelets are taken out. Do you know, I fancy she sells them?"

"Very likely!"

"Because sometimes they look so very familiar. I wonder if the same people buy them to fling at me each night?"

Paolo laughed.

A dark figure glided out of the shadow, and stood before them.

"What is that?" asked Aurelia, shrinking closer to her companion.

"Some supernumerary I suppose. Who is there?"

"A friend," said a soft sweet voice, and the heavy cloak fell aside, and revealed the graceful form of the wearer.

Both started back with surprise. But while Aurelia fixed a glance of astonished recognition on the stranger, the Italian turned very pale, and muttered something between his clenched teeth.

"Louisa!" said Aurelia, "Can it be you?"

"It is me!" said the girl, quietly.

"Do you wish to speak to me?"

"Yes."

"I am going home. Will you come with me in the carriage?"

At this the Italian interposed.

"Impossible, Aurelia! Do you know who she is?"

The girl shrank back as if he had struck her.

"Paolo! Paolo! You to say that!" she wailed. She had had many a bitter moment in her life, but never one like that. But he never even heard her, he was so busy expostulating with Aurelia.

"Think what people will say if you take her home with you."

"She was my friend when I needed one," said Aurelia, steadily.

"And I will be your friend again!" said the girl, in a tone that made Signor Paolo wince.

"Come then, with me."

Aurelia seated herself in the carriage. The girl followed.

Signor Paolo shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"Paolo," said Aurelia, softly, "what else can I do? She was kind to me, and she wishes to see me. Surely there is no great crime in my granting her request. My dear father is so much worse that I dare not stay here any longer to listen to her. Don't be angry, Paolo, but just shake hands and say good night."

"You disregard my wishes, and slight my counsel!" he said, coldly. "Very well! Go your own way, and see if you are any the happier for it. For my part, I shall go back and take a look at the ballet."

He walked away, humming the serenade he so often sung, and, with a sigh, Aurelia gave the order

to drive home. Neither she nor her companion spoke till they reached her home at Brompton.

The patient was sinking rapidly. The doctor, meeting her on the stairs, told her frankly how much she had to fear.

"He is unconscious now," he said, "and he may never speak again. But I fear he will not see another day."

Tears were in Aurelia's eyes as she entered the drawing-room, where the Peri was wandering restlessly up and down, looking at the books and pictures.

"I cannot stay with you long," she said. "My dear guardian—the kindest friend I have in all the world—is dying, and I must be beside him at the last."

The girl looked greatly shocked.

"If I had known that, I would not have come. You will have trouble enough to bear without my telling you—and yet you ought to know!"

"Ought to know what?"

"Will you answer me one question frankly and truly?"

"Yes."

"Do you love Signor Paolo?"

Aurelia had not expected that, and she blushed violently.

"Pray tell me? I have a motive for asking!"

"Yes, I do love him!" said Aurelia, bravely.

"And so do I. He was the young lover of whom I told you when we met before. I worship the very ground he walks on. I shall always do it till I die."

"Have you any claim upon him? Is he your lover still?" asked Aurelia, sternly, feeling herself wronged and outraged by the mere suspicion.

"I have no claim upon him. But another has."

"What do you mean?"

"Paolo is married."

Aurelia sank into a chair. For an instant the whole room whirled round her. Then she rallied a little.

"Are you sure of this?" she asked.

"I swear that it is true! I have seen his wife a hundred times. She is an Italian; but they separated years ago. I came to tell you this out of pure kindness—without knowing who you were. I heard you were fond of each other—that it was thought you would marry him at the end of the season. It matters nothing to me now. He has cast me off—he cares for me no longer; and I am going to Australia to-morrow with some one who is foolish enough to risk his heart, his fortune, and his honor in my keeping. But, before I sailed, I came to see you upon the stage. I knew you at once, and was all the more determined to save you. Hate me, if you

like, but beware of him. I have told you nothing but the truth."

Aurelia sat in silence for a long time, her face shaded by her hand. Then she remembered the death-bed of her friend, and started up.

"I must go," she said. "As for you, poor child! is there nothing I can do for you? I have heard of you so often, and my heart has ached!"

The girl smiled.

"Yes, I am pretty well known—one of the lions of London, in fact."

"Why will you not give up this life? I will be your friend; I will find a happy home for you among good people, if you will but stay here a little while."

"Good people! They would be the death of me!" said the Peri, with a musical laugh. "No; I must go on as I have begun, so long as I can find fools in the world to dance down the broad road with me."

"It is a pity. So young, so beautiful, and so kind as you are," said Aurelia, with a sigh.

"Don't trouble your head about me; I am not worth it. And now I will go. Will you keep these in memory of a wretch whose only good quality was, that she loved you, and would have died to serve you?"

She laid a brace of miniature pistols, elegantly wrought and mounted with silver, on the table.

"They may be of use to you some day," she said. "And now good-bye for ever."

She caught Aurelia in her arms—kissed her—cried "Forgive me!" and ran sobbing from the room. They never met in life again.

Aurelia went up to her guardian's room, sad and troubled about many things. He died that night, so quietly that those who watched beside him thought at first that he was sleeping. And Aurelia, sobbing upon his silent heart, prayed wildly that she might follow him—and yet lived on!

CHAPTER XVII.

"His eyes grew cold, his voice grew strange,
They only grew more dear;
She served him meekly, anxiously,
With love, half faith—half fear.

"And can a fond and faithful heart
Be worthless in those eyes?
For ah! it beats—ah, woe to those
Who such a heart despise!"

L. E. L.

On the evening after the funeral, Aurelia sat

alone in her drawing-room, her head bent upon her hands, her eyes full of tears. She looked pale, haggard, and wretchedly ill. Her beauty was dimmed rather than enhanced by the deep mourning she wore. She needed bright colours and pleasant smiles to make her lovely, and without them she looked almost plain. But for that she cared very little just then. She felt wretched and thoroughly alone. Her best and truest friend had gone from her forever, and she missed and mourned for him as if he had been a real, rather than an adopted, father. There had been many inquiries made at her door during her seclusion; there had been letters by every post offering advice, aid, comfort, and counsel; but half of them had been read idly and thrown aside, while the rest were still unopened. She felt sick of the world and all its people. She wanted nothing more to do with them in any way.

She fancied this new feeling proceeded solely from grief at her loss. But there she was mistaken. Underlying all that sorrow, was a lingering thrill of distrust and alarm which she would not as yet acknowledge to herself. The story of the Peri still haunted her; and though the illness and death of her benefactor had prevented her from ascertaining if it was really true, she felt in her own heart that it must be. Whatever the faults of the poor Peri might have been where others were concerned, she had acted the part of a friend towards her in her direst need. Might she not be acting that part again, and stretching forth an ever-willing hand to save Aurelia from a far greater danger than had threatened her before?

As she mused, and sighed, and wondered over this question, the door opened softly, and some one entered. She looked up. By the fading twilight she recognized Paolo himself, and held out her hand. He took it with a fervent pressure. They had not been alone together till then, since the evening they had parted at the Opera House—parted unkindly, and now they were friends once more.

"I will ask him to-night. It cannot be true," thought Aurelia, as he took a seat by her side, and began to say a few words of condolence.

"Do you miss me at the Opera?" she asked, looking up suddenly.

"Horribly!"

"And the people?"

"If they did not know, and feel for the cause of your absence, they would get up a riot, I believe. As it is, they listen to your successor with a placid, bored look, such as you never see except on an English face. When shall you come back to us, Aurelia?"

"That depends. I want first to talk with you Paolo."

He began to fidget about in his chair, and look annoyed.

"It is best that we understand each other thoroughly."

"Most certainly."

"We have been very happy during this season, singing together."

"Happy?" he said, clasping his hands, while his beautiful face looked positively radiant. "It has been the sweetest, the dearest, the most golden time of my whole life!"

"And I, Paolo," she said, looking at him with the most undisguised tenderness and admiration, for his beauty and grace might well have turned a cooler head than hers—"I can also say that, till now, I never knew what real happiness was!"

"Carissima!" he murmured, bending over her, and gazing into her face, with his dark eyes full of melting love.

"Stop!" she said, struggling against the flood of idolatry that filled her heart at that look and tone.

"Beautiful as you are, Paola, much as I love you, something stands between us still."

"What is it, my angel?"

"The Peri."

He bit his lip and frowned.

"What is she to me, now?"

"Ah!" said Aurelia, tenderly and sadly. "I wonder if, in years to come, you will say that of me?"

"Impossible!"

"I don't know. If anything should part us, you may yet say to another woman, 'Aurelia!—surely you are not jealous of her? What is she to me—now?' Will you ever say that, Paolo?"

"My love, the stars may fall from heaven, but I shall never change to you."

"Did you tell her so?"

"Never."

"And yet you loved her?"

"Yes, but not as I love you. She was a mere child, you must remember. Why should that early love stand between us, now that it is quite over and gone?"

"You saw her,—you visited her until she went away?"

"At times."

Paolo's face flushed scarlet as he spoke these words.

But Aurelia was looking thoughtfully at a ring she wore, and did not notice it.

Holding up that ring before his eyes, she said, softly:

"Do you remember when you gave that to me, Paolo?"

"Do you think that I could forget? It was on

the evening when I first dared to tell you that I loved you."

"And you told me something else at the same time."

"Yes."

"That I was to wear it as a pledge of your love till you could replace it by another, a plain gold one."

"I remember."

"But the Peri told me that that time would never come," she exclaimed, looking suddenly up in his face.

Again the scarlet color tinged his cheeks and mounted to his brow.

"What do you mean, Aurelia?" he inquired, quickly.

"She told me that you had a wife already," she replied.

There was a long silence.

His eyes fell; he could not meet her eager, questioning look.

Her heart sank heavily.

Was it, indeed, true?

No, she could not believe it!

It was too horrible a thought to be credited for an instant.

"Why don't you speak, Paolo?" she asked, at length, sharply.

"What shall I say?"

"Have you a wife?"

He hung his head sadly.

"What did she tell you that for? What good could it do her to make us both unhappy?" he exclaimed.

"Is it true, Paolo?"

"Yes."

"You have a wife?"

"Yes."

"She is living?"

"Yes."

There was another long silence.

Aurelia looked stunned.

At last she drew off the ring that she had kissed so often before she sunk to sleep.

"Why did you give me this, then?" she asked.

"Why did you lead me to believe that I was to be your wife?"

He flung himself at her feet, clasped his arms around her, laid his head in her lap, and burst into tears.

At that, she forgave him all, even before he had asked for forgiveness. She loved him so dearly, that to see him suffering was positive pain and torture to her. She was ready to do anything, to bear anything, rather than any sorrow should so bow his proud, beautiful head in the dust.

"Hush, Paolo!" she said, bending over him with all the tenderness of a mother. "I did not mean to pain you so. Never mind; tell me how it happened. Come, that bright face ought never to be stained by a tear."

He looked up at her almost with a glance of adoration.

"You are a forgiving angel, Aurelia, I swear I never thought of wronging you. Do you believe that?"

"If you tell me so."

"Upon my honor, upon my soul, I never did!" he exclaimed.

"Well, tell me more about it. When were you married?"

"Years ago."

"In Italy?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I was a mere boy at the time."

"And your wife?"

"She was of humble birth, a beautiful peasant girl. But, you know, Aurelia, that I am a peasant's son."

"I never knew it before, but, my bright Paolo, you are the son of Apollo as well, and who can have higher parentage than that? Where did you meet her first?"

"We lived near each other as children. We were always together on the holidays, and when I was eighteen and she was sixteen, we were married!"

"Poor boy!" murmured Aurelia, softly. "Did you love her?"

"Yes, as a boy loves."

"Go on."

"She was very beautiful, nay, she is beautiful still."

"Did she love you?"

"Not a whit?"

"Why, then, did she marry you?" asked Aurelia, in astonishment

"To get away from her home, and from her old grandmother, who worried her life out with rosaries and the penitential psalms," answered Paolo, almost laughing.

"Well, go on."

"We went to Florence. It was my most earnest wish to study music, but I was too poor. I was too poor."

"Well, Paolo, what next?"

"I was lucky enough to fall in with an American gentleman with more money than he well knew what to do with, and no relations to give him advice as to its disposal. He took a fancy to me, said that I was sure to have a fine voice, and defray-

ed the expenses of my education himself. I owe all my success, such as it has been, to that kind man who is now dead."

"Did your wife sing?"

"No, she was a danseuse, one of the most famous of her day."

"And where is she now?"

"In Paris."

"Do you never see her?"

"Aurelia, she left me of her own accord. She is living there with an English nobleman."

There was no more to tell after that. And certainly there was some excuse for Paolo's conduct towards her.

"I loved you with all my heart and soul!" he said, sadly. "But I know if this miserable story reached your ears, you would not listen to me. I wish that girl had had the sense to hold her tongue."

"So do not I," said Aurelia, gravely. "She has saved us, perhaps, from a greater sorrow than we feel now."

"What shall you do, Aurelia? You will not give me up?"

"Alas! I must!"

"But why?"

"We love each other. We have confessed it, and it can never be forgotten. I had hoped to be your wife—but you are already the husband of another. Paolo, we must meet no more."

He pleaded—he prayed—he wept—but she was firm. To lose him was to let the light, the sunshine, and the happiness go out from her life for ever. And yet to lose him was safety, honor, happiness.

It was a hard struggle; but in the end she knew that a good life must be the most happy one, and she turned a deaf ear to the passionate adjurations of her lover, and only promised to write to him once more, when she should have had time to weigh the matter more thoroughly in her own mind. She felt that her answer would still be the same.

He trusted to the love which she could not disguise and hoped that she would relent.

Like Jamie and Jeannie, in the old ballad, the hopeless lovers "took but one kiss, and tore themselves away," and then the romance, the passion, and the beauty faded out from Aurelia's life for ever.

Late that night, when Paolo was singing the songs she loved to a crowded and enthusiastic house, she still sat as he had left her—crushed—miserable; but stern in her resolution to sacrifice love, honor, happiness to right.

She roused herself at last, and began to look over the neglected letters which laid upon her desk. The last one which she opened was startling enough. It was a proposal of marriage, and from Captain Grey.

If one half the world does not know how the other half lives, certainly it does not know how it marries.

How many matches nowadays are made from true love?

Some marry for money—some for beauty—some for rank—some from pique. Aurelia was doomed to marry from mere fear of a painful memory.

She was not a woman to sit down in the dust, and spend her life in moaning for a lost love. She was not romantic enough to long for a blighted or broken heart. She did not want to think she possessed one. She loved Paolo with her whole heart, it is true, but he was the husband of another, and she must learn to unlove him as fast as she possibly could. If she married herself, would not the new life, the new ties, distract her thoughts from the old one, and make it possible for her to meet Paolo again, no longer as a lover, but a dear and valued friend?

The experiment was worth trying.

As for Captain Grey—there was nothing positively disagreeable about him; he was handsome and gentlemanly, fond of music and evidently very much in love with her. That argument had its weight just then in her mind—for although she had forgiven Paolo freely and fully, a feeling of humiliation still lingered almost unconsciously in her mind. It was as if some one had struck her a blow; and the Captain, with his professions of admiration, his vows of love, seemed to heal and soften the stinging pain.

If she was to remain upon the stage, and meet Paolo there, some safeguard was surely necessary for them both. If she was a wife—if she had one heart devoted and faithful to rest upon—the fidelity she would owe in return would surely keep her pure; and though Paolo might bitterly resent her marriage at first, surely he must come in the end to see the wisdom of the step.

And since she had decided upon taking it, it might better be Captain Grey than another of whose attachment she could not be so sure. She took up her pen and wrote to him. She told him frankly that she did not love him, but that for many reasons she thought it best to marry.

If he could be satisfied with affection, fidelity, and regard, rather than a first and a passionate love, he might come and see her, and then she would be his wife.

Certainly nothing colder in the shape of a letter of acceptance was ever written. The Captain swore over it, ground his teeth, and pulled his moustaches, and finally lit his cigar with the delicate perfumed sheet. He was not in love with her, though he had said so; but she was beautiful, and her splendid

voice bewitched him. Then, too, if he won her, he would be envied by every man in London. He would have liked her to be devoted to him it was true, but it was something that she gave him the preference over noblemen. He knew that two, at least, had laid their coronets at her feet, and been obliged to take them up again for their pains.

So, swallowing his wrath at the cavalier answer to his proposal, he called upon her, placed a splendid diamond ring upon her finger, and had the felicity of hearing her name a very early day for her marriage.

She stipulated for only one thing, and that was absolute secrecy. He was obliged to consent; and they had been in Paris some four-and-twenty hours, when London was startled out of its propriety by the announcement of the marriage in the *Times*.

A little note came on the same morning, from Folkestone, to Signor Paolo. Only two lines.

"All is over now. I am married. It is for the best. We shall meet again one day."

"AURELIA."

That night the habitual Opera goers were deprived of a treat.

Signor Paolo did not sing, owing to a "sudden indisposition;" so said the bills which were scattered all over the house; and for more than a week he was invisible, so serious did that sudden illness prove!

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Two years have passed. How much two years have taken in their flight!

They've taken from the lip its smile,
And from the eye its light."

L. E. L.

WHAT could be expected from a union like this? A true marriage means love, and confidence, and respect, and most weddings mean the two latter things, even though the first, and most indispensable one, may be wanting. But this one was barren of everything. The bride was throwing herself away in a paroxysm of wounded pride, caring little who put the ring upon her finger, so that it glittered there; and the bridegroom, though fascinated for a time with her beauty, and keenly alive to the *eclat* of bearing off a prize for which so many more worthy had striven in vain, had in reality no heart to bestow upon her.

Possibly he had possessed such an article in his younger days, but a long life spent in garrison towns

and foreign stations had reduced it to a battered condition, or rather to the plight of a withered kernel in a hollow shell.

Aurelia cared little for this, just then. She did not want him to love, she only wished him to marry her.

Her only thought, as she turned from the altar, was that Paolo must now feel a pang for her akin to those she had felt over and over again for him. And in that thought she triumphed.

But in her haste to wound and pain him, she had not reckoned upon the discomfort that must inevitably ensue to herself.

She had not thought of the distasteful companionship of a man whom, in her secret heart, she despised.

She had forgotten that by day and by night he must be always by her side.

There is no need for the novelist to cry out against marriages made without love.

They carry their own punishment with them, and few who have felt it will ever err in that particular way a second time.

Aurelia was well educated, and, in spite of her Whitechapel birth and breeding, singularly refined.

People and things often jarred upon her too sensitive nature, in a way which a coarser mind could scarcely comprehend.

So it happened, that before she had been a wife three days she took a strong dislike to her husband, which grew stronger day by day.

It was one thing to meet him in society, amiable, well-dressed, entertaining, and always eager to please.

It was quite another to see him in the familiar-dishabille of married life.

To see him in dressing-gown and slippers, unkempt and unshorn—to see him lounging for hours over a cigar and a *Bell's Life*—to feel that anything higher was certainly beyond his comprehension—to know that his love for music was the only thing that redeemed him from being a fool and a brute—to hear him use the coarsest language—to probe to the very depths the vileness of his nature;—all this was a task from which Aurelia shrank, yet which she had thoroughly to learn.

He was not worse than a thousand other men. He was simply a handsome, idle, conceited, selfish, and unprincipled man, who considered it was his highest duty, as well as pleasure, to take as much care of himself as his means would allow.

She knew all this before she married him.

But these amiable qualities stood out in quite a different light, when she saw them developing beside her own hearthstone.

Captain Grey might be what he liked; but her husband, whether loved or unloved, could not go down into the depths without dragging her after him. She felt insulted, lowered, debased, and hated him as the cause of these feelings which were so new to her.

She fretted and pined from morning till night in secret, while the Captain smoked, ate, and drank, in the most serene unconscionness of the tempest that was raging in her heart. His ignorance was almost ludicrous. He was like a man sitting unconsciously upon the very edge of a powder mine smoking a cigar, and gazing placidly into the summer sky.

Happily, in his case the mine did not explode, for Aurelia found a safety valve in time.

Their honeymoon had been spent in Paris; but when they returned to London, the gallant Captain blushed, much to her surprise, that she should announce her intention of going upon the stage again.

At first she hesitated. But he insisted, and so she went back to her old life once more.

The public were only too glad to welcome her again, and the manager almost wept tears of joy as she signed the contract which bound her exclusively to him for another season.

He had tried to fill her place, but in vain.

The ears that had been accustomed to her full rich tones, refused to be satisfied with anything less pleasing; and there had been such a falling off in the receipts in consequence, that the poor man had been actually thinking of giving up the house, and retiring into the disappointed ease of private life.

"But now that you have come back, all will go well once more!" he said, rubbing his hands with rapturous delight.

Would all indeed go well? It might with the manager and the play, but Aurelia had the strongest doubts as to herself, when she stood upon the stage again, face to face with that dangerous singer, whose exquisite voice seemed to take a tenderer tone that night—whose beautiful dark eyes had a new meaning in their depths, whenever they were turned upon her.

They had not spoken at rehearsals—they had only met that evening upon the stage.

When the curtain fell for the first time, and Aurelia was led out to receive her well earned welcome, Paolo uttered some words of congratulation in a low voice, and then said, as they regained the wings, "Are we never to be friends again? You don't know what I have suffered; your marriage has half killed me."

"Hush!" said Aurelia, hurriedly; there is my husband."

That gentleman was indeed making his way leisurely towards her, stopping to glance at a remarkably pretty ballet-dancer whom he passed.

Aurelia's lip curled, and she sighed involuntarily as she met the Italian's eyes.

"Good evening, signor," said the Captain, carelessly, as he came up to them. "Well, Reley, you have made a great hit again. It would have been a shame to shut up such a voice in one's house; wouldn't it, signor?"

"A great pity, and a great loss," said the signor, bowing.

"They are all telling me what a lucky fellow I am, Reley," he went on.

"Who are they?"

"Oh, Halleck, and Hazletine, and Grant, of ours."

"Are they here?"

"Of course. Didn't you see us?"

"I was busy with my part," said Aurelia, evasively, not willing to confess she had never thought of him.

"Well, we're in the omnibus-box, mind you look that way when you go on again. They've all got a bouquet for you."

"I am infinitely obliged."

"I'll tell them so. Now, ta, ta; and I say, signor, when that embracing scene comes on, draw it mild, will you?"

The signor bowed again, and the Captain strutted away. Aurelia blushed. If her husband knew with what mingled feelings she thought of that embrace, what would he say?

It came—and for one moment she was in Paolo's arms.

"Oh, Aurelia!" he sighed, with his lips on her cheek. And then she was free again, but giddy and confused. It was only a stage embrace, and the captain, who was watching it rather jealously, saw nothing to offend him.

"They kiss as if they were icebergs, which is very proper," he thought. And all the while the lights were whirling round and round in Aurelia's dazzled eyes, and Paolo's voice quivered, as he sang his serenade with a feeling he had never before exhibited.

But if the Captain's eyes were shut, that embrace had effectually opened Aurelia's. She knew that her marriage had made no difference as regarded Paolo, that one hair of his head was more precious to her than her husband's whole body would ever be!

It was wrong, of course. From her own observation, and from some things that had leaked out since the departure of the Peri, she knew pretty well in what relation she had stood to him. Their intimacy had by no means ceased in Italy. It had

been carried on in England, even while she was living openly under the protection of another, up to the time when Paolo first saw Aurelia. One smile from him had more effect than all the luxury of the ducal lover, and up to the last, the poor child would have thrown that wealth to the wind, if he had said the word. But he did not. He grew cold to her and devoted to Aurelia, and in a jealous passion, she eloped with a rich young lover, and left the Duke to console himself as best he might for her unexpected loss.

"All this Aurelia knew, and with sad yearnings over the poor Peri's fate, came deep misgivings about her own. If she would save herself from the Peri's doom, she must follow her example, and fly from the fatal influence which could only work her harm.

She sat in the green room waiting for her turn to go on the stage. Paolo approached her, unusually sombre and silent.

"I have a favor to ask of you," she said, with a trembling voice.

"What is it?"

"Paolo, you must never kiss me again, at any time."

"Not when the scenes demand it?" he asked, with a forced laugh.

"You understand me."

His eyes fell.

"I'm afraid this miserable marriage has made a brute of you."

She was silent.

"And I hate prudes!"

"Well, hate me, then!"

"I wish I could! It would be better for both of us."

"Ah, you see the danger as well as I do, though you try to turn everything off with a laugh," she said, with a sigh.

"Why did you marry?"

"What else could I do?"

He said something about a divorce, but she shook her head.

"Do you think me a baby? I know you are a Catholic, and there can be no divorce for you except by death."

"That is true."

"And I was very fond of you, Paolo—very fond, indeed!"

"You have forgotten all that now," he said, jealously.

"Surely, you do not expect me to make profession of love to you now that I am married," she said, smiling.

"I don't know, I am sure," he said, sitting down dejectedly, and leaning his head upon his hand. "I only know I am very miserable, and if the sword, in

the next act, should happen to slip by mistake, and stab me, it would be about the best thing that could happen to me."

The strong, passionate desire which she felt to take that beautiful, drooping head on her bosom—the very intenseness of her anxiety to comfort him, made Aurelia feel her danger even more keenly than before.

"Come, let us understand one another," she said, frankly. "I am quite sure that you still love me well enough to wish me peace and happiness. Do you not?"

"You know that you are dearer to me than any thing on earth!"

"Prove it to me by helping me to do right. I am married, and owe a duty to my husband. And our familiar intercourse must end here to-night. Do you understand me?"

"Yes."

"And you will help me?"

"I will try."

She took his hand in both her own.

"I thank you more than words can say. And I trust you!"

They stood gazing on each other in silence. Both were faithful in their hearts to the covenant they had made.

The prompter called them, and they went on the stage to play a mimic tragedy. But the real tragedy had been played in the green room, without an audience.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Long, lonely days she passed,
With nothing to recall,
But bitter taunts, and careless words,
And looks more cold than all."

L. E. L.

CERTAINLY, Captain Gray could never have dreamed of the good resolutions his wife had formed, or his conduct towards her would have been far different.

The romance of his marriage had died. He was not one of those faithful-hearted men whose honeymoon lasts through a life. Carried away by the excitement of winning the woman for whom so many had sighed in vain, he had fancied himself in love. When he became accustomed to her beauty, he became indifferent to her, and when he saw she did not permit the attentions of other men, he troubled his head no more about her. She was his wife—his property, like the horse he drove and the cigar he smoked. She did credit to his taste—looked well

at the head of his table—was magnificent upon the stage, and he was content. But as for wasting a thought on her, now that she was his own—pshaw! His heart and his fancy were both on the wing once more.

It was as well that he did not love her too much, since she had none to give him in return. But he might have observed that strict fidelity to her which it was her pride to observe to him. He did not, yet she did not suspect him. She was so refined that she could not understand a want of good faith where it was deserved. This blindness could not last always. One of those officious friends, whose chief delight is to carry bad news, enlightened her as to the Captain's proceedings. She was shocked, disgusted. She thought of her own great sacrifice. To what good had it been? Since, all the while, this wretched man, whom she neither loved nor even respected had made her name a mockery and a reproach!

She looked so pale that her informant repented having told her.

"After all, my dear, you are not the only one who has been served so shabbily," she said. "Every one sympathizes with you and blames him, and I suppose if you take no notice, he will grow ashamed of it in time."

"Take no notice!" cried Aurelia, springing to her feet. "Do you think I will submit to such an insult?"

"Many women have to."

"I shall not! He has dishonored me!—we part to-night!"

"But, my dear—"

"Words are wasted in a case like this. Who is this woman?"

"That's the worst. She is in good society. I can't imagine what possessed her to throw herself away in this absurd manner. Well, it is Mrs. Trelawney."

Aurelia was dumb. She knew her well. A woman, young, beautiful, beloved and wealthy, the wife of one of the kindest and most indulgent men, the leader of fashion, and a particular "friend" of Aurelia.

"Is she mad?" she asked.

"It would seem so. It has only just been found out. She is living at a hotel, and her husband is going to sue for a divorce."

"How disgraceful!"

"Yes. But I came here to-day to tell you because I heard a rumor. It's too bad, but you have a party to-night."

"Yes."

"My dear, I have heard that he means to bring her here. I could not rest without letting you know."

Aurelia flushed.

"Here! to insult me and my guests! Here! Let him if he dares, and you shall all see what I will do!"

They parted soon after.

* * * * *

The guests assembled early. Dancing and singing went on with divided interest. Every one was wondering if that wretched woman would really appear, and if so, what the fair hostess would do or say.

Aurelia, dressed magnificently, moved like an empress through the rooms—not a dethroned one, by any means. Yet she was a little nervous, and watched the door furtively.

The hall clock struck ten, and there was an arrival at the same moment. Aurelia was talking to some one in an inner room, and did not hear it. Presently Mr. Aubrey came and whispered something to her. She flushed, rose, drawing a long, deep breath.

"Where is she?"

"In the music-room. Captain Gray came with her."

"Give me your arm, then, if you please."

"A hundred hearts and hands are at your service, here," whispered Mr. Aubrey, eagerly, in her ear. "Let me deal with this matter. It is not proper for you!"

"Is it not?" said Aurelia, haughtily, and her color rose high, and her eyes flushed. "I am mistress here!"

She passed into the music-room, the dancers followed—the ladies looking pale, yet delighted—the gentlemen uneasy, as if they expected a pulling of caps. The piano stopped, and there was a short silence which made the Captain look up for the cause. Aurelia stood before his lady-love. She looked most beautiful and dangerous, and the Captain shook in his shoes. He saw that she knew.

She took no notice of him, but she spoke to Mrs. Trelawney in a tone that was not to be mistaken, in spite of its perfect courtesy.

"It appears to me that you have made all the mistake, madam. Among the invitations which I despatched for this evening, I cannot remember that I had the honor of sending one to you."

Mrs. Trelawney smiled flippantly. She was no great adept in the rules of physiognomy.

In the serenely beautiful face and regal figure before her, she saw nothing more than a rival in a "bit of a tantrum;" in the polished ease of manner and the suave voice, she thought she detected an evidence of the "white feather." Because Aurelia did not box her ears, or take her by the shoulders and turn her out of the room, she fancied that she

was afraid to "show fight," and that a little brazen assurance would carry her safely through the dilemma. So all the answer she made was:—

"No mistake at all, I assure you, my dear madam; the Captain was kind enough to invite me as one of his friends. As Paul Pry says, 'I hope I don't intrude,' for really this is a very pleasant party."

A murmur of impatient disgust ran round the circle of listeners, and the Captain knawed his moustache, and wished he was at the bottom of the Red Sea; anywhere out of the reach of those scornful eyes.

"Captain Grey probably forgot that it was my duty, as mistress of this house, to invite my own guests," said Aurelia, as politely as before. "And since you were not included in those invitations, I must request you to be good enough to withdraw."

Mrs. Trelawney laughed incredulously. She was a woman of good birth—she had a jointure of 500*l*. a year—she had moved in the best society all her life. Was a wretched creature who had been upon the stage—who would sing there the next evening—to turn her out of her house, merely because she took it into her stupid head to be jealous of her superior attractions?

The idea!

She expressed this opinion aloud, but made no move from her seat, and Aurelia quietly stepped back and rang the bell.

A footman instantly appeared, to know her pleasure.

"Show this lady down stairs, and call her carriage," said Aurelia, stepping back with a bow, in order to allow Mrs. Trelawney to pass her.

There was no help for it. The lady was foiled with her own weapons, and slunk away discomfited behind the servant.

Captain Grey vanished ten minutes later to his own room, where he fortified himself with strong potations of brandy and water, and countless cigars, for the "jolly row" he intended to have with Aurelia as soon as her guests had gone.

The *fracas* over, Aurelia summoned her maid, gave her a few orders in an undertone, and then turned to her guests with a pleasant smile.

"You will pardon this unpleasant scene. I know, since it was not of my seeking," she added. "Let us forget it, and enjoy ourselves again."

It was easier said than done.

Public opinion was divided as to the propriety of Aurelia's behaviour. Some of the party thought she had done well; others, and these were mostly ladies of the milk-and-water temperament, fancied that her proceeding had been somewhat unfeminine and abrupt. One or two dawdlers—who belonged

to the old school, (which advocates the absolute extinction and absorption of a wife's individual existence) and who, like spaniels, had been beaten and bullied into thinking such doctrines perfectly right—made their adieux, and scuttled off to their respective carriages as soon as possible.

It was all very wrong (they agreed among themselves) for a man to introduce such a person into the society of respectable women; but yet Mrs. Grey should not have resented the insult so publicly. It was the wife's duty to screen her husband from blame and reproach—not to drag him out before all his friends and acquaintances, and expose his faults and follies with such a merciless scorn.

Poor old souls! as they twaddled on in this manner, I fancy they actually believed that doctrine which Englishmen enforce (tacitly at least) and Englishwomen mostly accept as gospel—viz: that for offences like Mrs. Trelawney's, two laws are recognised by the great Lawgiver himself. In a woman, this is the unpardonable sin—when it is found out; in a man, nothing worse than a venial error. Yet, at the great day when the secrets of all hearts are laid bare, I wonder if the sex of a sinner will prove of any avail!

Will Magdalen be for ever condemned, while, guilty of the same, Dives escapes? Who shall say? But, at last, does it seem reasonable to suppose that this shall be the case?

Aurelia had her own notions on this subject. She required, as she gave, full fidelity, full faith, in the marriage relation. She did not love the handsome, selfish, brainless creature she called her husband—in fact, in her own heart she despised him. But at least she had been true. True, through struggles of which he could know nothing, because they were struggles with a passionate, unselfish love, which he could never feel. She had given her heart away once, and for ever. The mere fact of her marriage did not annul that other and more important fact. If marriage is a sacrament, then Aurelia had committed a great crime in marrying Captain Grey. But she viewed it rather in the light of a civil contract, instituted for the benefit and preservation of society. As such, she knew to what it bound her, and was faithful to the letter, at least, of that bond. When her husband insisted upon her going upon the stage again, perhaps she yielded too readily. It was joy unspeakable to be near Paolo once more—to leave her hated home, and tread the boards by his side—he, the emperor, and she the empress, of an enchanted land. But beyond this, she would not allow her heart to go. She bore, as she thought an honest man's name—and she swore to herself on her wedding-day that he should never be wronged by her. After that one rapturous kiss, she had set a stern guard upon her feelings when upon the stage

with Paolo. Their embraces were now indeed, of "the stage;" and if, during the play, he touched her hand, or knelt at her feet, or sang some melting love-song, whose meaning his beautiful dark eyes translated all too well, she was like stone—like iron—like adamant to it all.

What was her reward? Her husband deserted her—insulted her publicly by his preference for another—brought that other into her own house among her own invited guests.

She felt herself dishonored—degraded—even as a man might have done. But strange to say, her anger was for her husband alone, not for her rival. This, of itself, showed how little place he had in her heart. It was her self-love, but not her love that was wounded. It was her pride, and not her affection, that cried aloud for revenge.

She stood in her dressing-room alone, after all her guests had gone. She took the jewels from her neck and head, and placed them carefully in a casket which she took under her arm. Then, putting on a heavy cloak and a Spanish hat with a drooping feather, she took something from the drawer of her dressing-table, thrust it in her bosom, and turned to go.

Her husband stood at the door, flushed, insolent, and more than three parts tipsy. Aurelia had the greatest horror of drunkenness, even in its most fashionable forms. The Captain could not have hit upon a better way of disgusting her still further, if he had tried.

"Brute!" she muttered, as she attempted to pass him.

His dull ear caught the word, and he made an unsteady grasp at her cloak.

"Brute—eh? What do you mean by that? And what do you mean by insulting my friends and making me look like a fool before everybody—you cat?"

"You always look like a fool, if that is all," she said haughtily. "Stand out of my way, if you please."

"Eh? who set you up to crow, Madam Impudence? I tell you what it is, my dear! I've been bullied by you quite long enough. Now I'll have my turn. Where are you going at this time of night?"

"What is that to you?"

"A great deal."

"Find out, then."

"Don't you answer me like that, you white-faced monkey, or I'll strangle you where you stand!"

"Try it!" she said, contemptuously.

"The most aggravating, cold-blooded, insolent woman on earth, and he hanged to you! What do you mean by your conduct to-night? I'll bring Mrs.

Trelawney here to-morrow, and you shall go down on your knees before all the servants in the hall, and ask her pardon, you shameless hussy! I'll see who is master here!"

Aurelia's color rose high, and then faded, and left her ghastly white; with eyes that, from their dilated pupils looked black as death.

"Don't speak to me like that!" she cried. "I will not bear it. Get into that room, and hold your tongue."

"That's a good one!"

He caught her by the arm, and tried to force her back from the door.

"You had better not touch me!" she gasped between her teeth—and she made a snatch at the bosom of her dress. There was a short sharp struggle—he was too much intoxicated to harm her—and the next moment she forced him down into a chair, and held him there, with one of the Peri's elegant little pistols held at the distance of half an inch from his left temple.

"I am not going to be struck!" she said, passionately. "No man shall strike me alive! If you attempt it again you must take the consequences!"

He sat looking at her and the pistol—thoroughly cowed and frightened. Without another word, she locked the door behind her, and gave the key to the footman, who was waiting anxiously in the hall.

"Has the cab come?" she asked.

"It is at the door."

"Then take this key, and in half an hour go up to my dressing-room, and see to your master. I rely upon you, James: you will keep my secret?"

"As faithfully as possible!"

"Thank you. My maid will see you again, and let you know if I require anything. Good-bye, James."

"Good-bye, ma'am, and God bless you!"

He saw her safely into the cab, and watched, with a suspicious moisture in his eyes, as she drove away. Like all the other servants, he adored his beautiful and famous mistress; and she had left that house for ever!

CHAPTER XX.

"Who calleth thee, Heart? World's Strife,
With a golden left to his knife;
World's Mirth, with a finger fine,
That draws on a board in wine
Her blood-red plans of life;
World's Gain, with a brow knit down;
World's Fame, with a laurel crown,—
Which rustles most as the leaves turn brown.
Heart, wilt thou go;
No, no!
Calm hearts are wiser so."

E. B. BROWNING.

There are some acts in a person's life, of which

the world at large is by necessity a spectator.—Aurelia's separation from her husband was one of them. The story of the interrupted soiree was in everybody's mouth, and when to that was added the elopement, public excitement knew no bounds.

Fashionable London was split into two parties—one of which sided with the husband, the other with the wife.

Captain Grey's friends declared that it was all nonsense about Mrs. Trelawney—that though she was a little gay and flighty in her manner, she was as respectable a woman as any in London.

Her husband had separated from her in a sudden fit of frantic jealousy, for which he had not the slightest cause; and Captain Grey, happening by the merest chance in the world, to find her crying her eyes out in the hotel where she had taken refuge, kindly asked her to join the party, whereupon Aurelia had instantly flown at her like a tigress, boxed her ears, pulled her hair down and scratched her face, and finally turned her by the shoulders out of the room and the house.

Not content with this, the lovely virago had watched her husband into his dressing-room after the party was over, had insulted and abused him to the last degree, and finally locked him in, leaving him unable to escape from "durance vile" for many hours.

So far, so good. But, on the other hand, Aurelia's defenders gave the true version of the Trelawney affair, and enlightened the public as to the dressing-room escapade, so that every one was roaring with laughter at the Captain's awkward predicament, before forty-eight hours had elapsed.

There were sly allusions in the morning papers, rich jokes at the clubs, daily *bon-mots* in fair ladies' boudoirs and dressing-rooms, of all of which he was the unwilling hero. It nearly drove him wild. And when an actual caricature was said to be in process of publication, which in due time would adorn the shop windows, and set all London on the grin, his rage and mortification knew no bounds.—He threatened every one, friends and foes alike, with castigation and judicial proceedings, till they had thought him either mad or idiotic, and "as cracked as Grey" became the by-word of the fashionable circles in which he moved.

Meanwhile where was Aurelia?

Safe with her faithful maid, and among her most faithful friends.

Her earliest acquaintance in London, Jennie Grey, had advanced many steps in life since their first meeting. From ladies-maid she had become the wife of a butler, had left service altogether, and through Aurelia's interest was established in a little cottage in the Brompton lanes, close to the friendly policeman and his wife, who were never tired of

telling how they had introduced the famous singer of the day to the notice of her kind protector, and how, in return for their services, she came again and again to their humble home, and sang as if she were upon the stage.

Jennie Grey, or rather Jennie Kent (if we must call her by her husband's name) listened to these stories as if she had been reading them out of a book of fairy tales. When she went to the Opera, and sat grandly in one of the upper boxes, to see her friend upon the stage, it seemed like a dream that the magnificent woman in splendid robes and flashing diamonds could ever have sat over a homely breakfast in the parlour of the Spread Eagle, and consulted with her as to the best means of seeking that fortune which had come, after all, in such an unexpected way. And when she talked to her little daughter of her early days, and told her how her beautiful godmother Aurelia was then also poor and alone in the world, the child would then open her round blue eyes wonderingly, as if she could not believe the tale.

To this house, which had known her as a welcome visitant in the days of her prosperity, Aurelia came late on the night of the party. Her maid had gone before with her boxes to tell the shameful tale; so that when the cab drew up, she found Jennie waiting with the door wide open, and the worthy butler standing, sympathetic, in the background.

No empress could have been welcomed with greater faith and royalty than she; and her bruised and aching heart found consolation unspeakable in the stubborn partisanship of these humble but faithful friends.

Here she remained quietly during the week that followed her departure from her own house. Captain Grey made no attempt to see her. He contented himself with writing abusive letters and threatening her with proceedings in the Divorce Court.

Aurelia only laughed, and threw the letters in the fire, and took no further notice of them.

Although many of her stanch friends found out the place of her retreat, she would see no one.—She pleaded fatigue and indisposition as an excuse for her retirement. It was no fib, as she laughingly said, for she was certainly tired of the people, and indisposed to see them.

She passed her days in reading, writing, practising her songs for the ensuing week, and riding and driving about the green roads of Brompton, Fulham, Putney, and Wandsworth.

On the third day after her arrival, Mrs. Kent made her appearance, with a great look of perplexity on her face and an open letter in her hand.

"Well, Jennie, what is it?" asked Aurelia, looking up from her book.

"Such a bewildering thing. I'm sure I hardly

know what to say. Our friends next door have just had a letter from an old lodger of theirs—an American lady who wants to come back again for a few days. The worst of it is, that she will follow her letter directly, and be here to night. And all their carpets are up and the drawing-room floor let, and that young baby down stairs. You see, they can't have her."

"Well?"

"They want me to take her—to give her the two parlors."

Aurelia's eyes began to sparkle.

"My dear creature, it is just the very thing I should like. Do you know who she is?"

"No."

"In the first place, the nearest living relative of my dear adopted father."

"Oh, in that case, the whole house and its contents, and everybody in it, are at her service," said the warm-hearted Jennie.

"But that is not all. Do you remember our going up to town together?"

"Of course."

"And have you forgotten the lady who advocated the cause of temperance so strongly, and told so many anecdotes of the New England States?"

"It cannot be her, Aurelia."

Indeed it is!"

"How oddly things turn out in this world, to be sure! Who would have thought, then, that the time would ever come when you and she would be together under my roof, and you so famous, too!"

Aurelia sighed.

"I think it quite possible that we should be astonished even yet, Jennie, if we could look forward and see what our future lives are to be."

"Well, I'm sure I don't want to do that, do you?"

"On no account. Things are quite bad enough, or good enough, when they come. I have no wish to anticipate them."

"Well," said Jennie, folding up her letter, "I suppose I must go and see about the rooms."

"Let me help you," said Aurelia, throwing down her book. "I am tired of this stupid novel, and should like to do some sweeping and dusting by way of a change. I wonder, Jennie, where that good lady who 'likes her beer' is now."

"Miss Moore would tell you in the work-house, where her depraved tastes had gradually led her," said Jennie, as they went laughing up-stairs like two school-girls bent on a frolic.

At seven that evening Miss Moore came. Aurelia waited till she had refreshed herself with tea after her journey, and then went to pay her respects to the relative of her benefactor. The lady was much moved at the sight of her and her black dress.

"Poor child!" she said, taking her hand and

pressing it kindly. "You have had a sad loss—the more sad, since I understand that your private life has not been a happy one. But you must make a friend of me, and I will fill his place, as far as I can."

Thus encouraged, Aurelia opened her heart in good earnest, to her abrupt but faithful friend. She told her the history of her life—of her unhappy marriage. She did not even hide the episode of her love for Paolo, which she had never breathed to mortal ear before. Miss Moore listened earnestly, and shook her head.

"My dear, you did quite right to leave your husband," she said, when the story was finished. "I have no patience with women who endure such insults meekly. Talk about children, and family ties, and all that nonsense as reasons for submitting to such outrages! Bah! it is disgusting! If I had nineteen children, I would take them and beg in the streets, or go to the workhouse, rather than endure it. I am going to be married—old fool that I am!—to the very lawyer you saw me with on that day. He has managed all my affairs for me since I have been in England; and now, I suppose, thinks he had better wind up the business, by undertaking to manage me. *Undertaking*, mind you!" she added with an odd twinkle in her keen blue eyes. "I don't mean to say he *will* do it! However, I shall not read the declaration of independence, or flourish the stars and stripes too often, so long as he behaves himself properly; but, if he begins any 'Captain Gray' vagaries, I shall gently remind him of Bunker Hill with a strong horsewhip, and then take myself off, as you have done!"

"But I did not horsewhip Captain Gray, my dear Miss Moore."

"More shame for you, then. You ought to have done it. If half the women in England would add a double thong or a cat-o'-nine-tails to their *trousseaus*, and use it with moderation on their husbands, the state of society would be much healthier and better than it is now."

Aurelia burst out laughing. The novelty of the theory tickled her fancy wonderfully—the more when she thought of the looks and whispers of consternation that would follow, if Miss Moore should take it into her head to promulgate it openly some evening in a fashionable drawing-room. There was no certainty that she would not do so, since she said everything that came into her head, no matter in whose presence she might happen to be.

However, she took Aurelia's quiet quizzing in very good part, and they grew to be the best of friends. If Miss Moore advocated the horsewhipping of husbands, she certainly did not approve of the favouring of lovers; and after she had once seen Paolo, and heard him sing, she was continually urg-

ing Aurelia to leave the stage, at least until he was out of the country.

Was there, then, so great a danger? Aurelia's heart failed her, as she asked herself the question. But she was deaf, both to her friend's entreaties, and to the certain and honest reply.

Chance, however, brought about what common sense and Miss Moore could not achieve. The night of Aurelia's re-appearance came, and she took care to furnish Jennie and Miss Moore with a box, from which they could witness at their ease, what she had good reason to expect would be a perfect ovation.

The curtain rose that evening—the house was crammed to overflowing, and all went smoothly till the heroine appeared. As she came slowly on the stage, dressed in white and looking very pale, there was an unmistakable hiss from the boxes. She stopped short, so did Paolo, who knit his brows and looked as if he should like to murder some one. The hiss increased—it was drowned by a round of applause. Again it made itself heard. There was a general tumult. Hundreds rose in their seats; there were cries of "Off, off!" mingled with "Aurelia for ever!" cat-calls, whistles, shrieks, loud applause, waving of handkerchiefs, &c., till the manager on the stage, and the police in the house, came to the rescue, and managed to restore something like order between them. During this scene of confusion Aurelia stood at the back of the stage, pale and silent as a statue. When order was at last restored Paolo led her forward, and without taking the slightest notice of those who applauded, as if to encourage her, she began to sing. Never had her voice been so magnificent—never had she thrown such energy and spirit into her part as now. The house was electrified. In the last scene there was a stillness like the death they witnessed, among the spectators. But when the curtain fell the spell was broken, and then the whole house rang with the loudest applause. They called Aurelia. Contrary to the expectation of her intimate friends, she came. Paolo led her on as usual; but he looked pale, uneasy and embarrassed. Aurelia, on the contrary, was smiling; her cheeks burned, and her eyes flashed with the excitement of the moment.

The house rose to receive her, and every one who could beg, borrow, or steal a bouquet, flung it at her feet. She stood smiling still as the floral tempest rained around her. When it ceased, she advanced to the footlights, and lifted her hand as if about to speak. In an instant all was quiet.

"I cannot pass over the occurrence of the night without notice," she said, in a clear, unfaltering voice. "There are some among you who have forgotten that I have a private life as well as a public one: some who have taken a mean advantage of

an occurrence so painful that it should have been held sacred, at least, in this place: and who have testified their disapproval of my own conduct in a most unmistakable way;—in a most unkind and ungentlemanly way, let me add: for I take it for granted that no lady joined in that hiss of reprobation."

An instant waving of handkerchiefs all over the house confirmed this assertion. Whatever the ladies might have thought of her conduct previously, her spirited appeal touched all their hearts, and they were not ashamed to own it. Her face brightened as she saw that token of womanly sympathy with outraged womanly feelings, and she went on again:—"I do not come forward to-night to justify myself or to condemn another. But the insult has been public and must be publicly rebuked by me. In this place you are not the judges of my private actions. You come here to hear me sing; if I sing badly, hiss me, and I shall feel that you do well. But so long as I try honestly to please you, and succeed, you have no right to taunt me publicly upon the stage with a misfortune that has made my private life more wretched than you can ever know."

A tempest of applause broke out.

"I should not have spoken at all," she said smilingly, "if I had been going to remain upon the stage. You have been kind enough to call me the Queen of Song. Well, you must find another and a better Queen. I have been insulted—wantonly, grossly insulted! I resent it, even while I thank my kind friends in this house for their warm support throughout the outrage. Never again shall any one hiss Aurelia here! I lay aside my crown—I throw down my sceptre—the throne is vacant! Fill it—for you will never listen to my voice in public any more. Farewell to all, for ever!"

She was gone in an instant, while they still sat dumb with astonishment. Paolo followed.

They called her back in vain. She would not come; and after half an hour of uproar, the manager appeared once more upon the stage, and begged them to disperse quietly. Aurelia was at her own house by that time, and his entreaties, as well as theirs, had been utterly thrown away. She would not return. Hearing this, the crowd went home sulkily. The next day the humble house in the Brompton lanes was besieged from one o'clock till nightfall by coronetted carriages and mounted cavaliers. But to each and all the faithful Jennie gave the same answer—"Aurelia had left town at six o'clock that morning, and she could not say in what direction she had gone." With that scanty bit of information, the clubs, and green-rooms, and salons were forced to be content.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Tell him I love him yet,
As in that joyous time;
Tell him I ne'er forget,
Though memory now be crime

"Tell him when fades the light
Upon the earth and sea,
I dream of him by night—
He must not dream of me!"

PRAED.

OUR old friend Jennie, in disposing so unceremoniously of her aristocratic visitors, forgot to tell them one thing, which would have rejoiced their troubled hearts—namely, that, although Aurelia had left town without informing her of her destination, it was only for two days.

At the end of that time she returned as quietly as she had gone, and, according to promise, made one of the party at Miss Moore's wedding. The breakfast was given at a fashionable hotel; but, though every delicacy of the season was upon the table, not a drop of wine was to be had for love or money, and the health of the bride was drank in pure cold water, much to the disgust of the waiters who supplied the wants of the guests. Nor was it in other ways a festive occasion, to be chronicled in the *Morning Post*, since Miss Moore carried out her ideas of perfect equality to the end, and Jennie Kent and the policeman's wife sat amicably side by side at her table, just as they had stood among the group before the altar. Mr. Alton, the bridegroom, looked indeed as if he thought their presence was somewhat unnecessary; but, of course, at that time, his lady love's will was law, so he only relieved his mind by taking huge pinches of snuff, and said nothing.

At last the final speech was made, the final good-byes exchanged, and the happy pair set off for Paris, where they were to spend their honeymoon. Aurelia drove from the hotel to the house of Mrs. Grant Thornton. Although she did not class that lady among her intimate friends, still the charm of early associations—of childhood's days—lingers round her, and made the prima donna anxious to exchange that farewell with her, which she so persistently denied to all the rest of London.

She found her on the *qui vive* about the important news. Aurelia's separation from her husband and retirement from the stage were events of such overwhelming interest in her eyes, that they quite eclipsed the minor case of Frederick's marriage, which was to take place that week.

"It was very spirited, very grand!" she said. "But surely Aurelia could not be in earnest. She might perhaps intend to punish the public for that unlucky hiss, but surely she was never going to give up the stage!"

Aurelia assured her that no public should ever insult her again.

"How foolish!" sighed Mrs. Thornton, arranging her bracelets. "Because every one admires you for the stand you took—by the way, have you heard the news about Captain Gray?"

"That he is living publicly with Mrs. Trelawney?" said Aurelia, quietly. "Oh, yes, I heard of that."

"How coolly you take it!"

Aurelia shrugged her shoulders.

"He has pleased himself, and if Mrs. Trelawney is satisfied, I cannot see that I have anything to say about it."

"Are you not jealous?"

"Not the least."

"You don't care for him?"

"Not a whit."

"So much the better. What are going to do, now?"

"I thought of going to Charnley."

Mrs. Thornton clapped her hands.

"To the Cottage?"

"Yes."

"That will be splendid. We shall go down next month, and Frederick and his bride will be with us."

"That is settled, then!" said Aurelia, rising and offering her hand. "Give this to Frederick's bride, with my love."

Mrs. Thornton tore open the parcel, almost as soon as Aurelia left the house. It was a splendid ring of diamonds and pearls, which the bride wore, with the greatest pride and pleasure on her wedding day.

One more parting remained for Aurelia. When she reached home, Paolo was there, looking ill and haggard, but his face brightened as she entered the room.

"Thank God you have come! I began to think that you must have gone away without bidding me farewell!"

"No, I told you I would not, but you must stay only a few moments, for I leave town in an hour's time."

"You are really going, then?"

"Yes."

"You give up all your splendid triumphs, wealth and love you might yet win?"

"I have wealth enough to live comfortably, the love I dare not accept, and the fame ends, after all, in a hiss."

"Is it possible you take so serious that silly hiss, a mere manifestation of party feeling? I've been hissed a dozen times. Every one is hissed now and then."

"Once is quite enough for me," said Aurelia, bitterly.

"Will you ever think of me?" he asked, in his softest voice.

"You need not be cruel now, when we are parting forever."

She pressed her hand to her brow.

"Cruel!" he cried, throwing himself at her feet. "Can you call me cruel when I dream always of you? It is you who are cruel. Think how you have treated me. You have forbidden my visits, cut off all communication, even on the stage you have been ice! Yet you knew all the while I would have died for you!"

She did not speak.

"Do you love me, Aurelia, in the least," he cried, excitedly.

"For heaven's sake, stop—you must go, indeed you must!"

"I will never leave you. You love me, Aurelia! I see it in your face, I feel it in your trembling form!"

He clasped her in his arms, and pressed his lips to hers.

"Go, you forget yourself," she cried, pushing him violently away.

"My wife is faithless, and your husband makes an open boast of his profligacy among those who know you best! Why should we give a thought to them?"

"Not to them, perhaps—but to what is right!"

"My love—"

"Oh, hush!" she said, despairingly. "Paolo, you have my heart, and you know it well. I never loved any one as I love you; and if ever I was in danger of forgetting that there is a right and a wrong, it is now. Now that I have been so candid, will you leave me?"

"Can you think it? If, indeed, you feel this for me, then you are mine. Human laws are nothing. Human or divine, I care not, so that I have your heart. Aurelia, let me decide for you."

There was but one way of escape. To stand there, looking into that beautiful face, meeting those pleading eyes, hearing that exquisite voice, was not the way. Her head whirled, her heart rapidly, every emotion of her nature was arrayed upon the side of the tempter, and only the one stern, barren principle of right, upon her own. It was a desperate struggle, and but for the one thought—a thought of the poor Peri—she might have yielded. But that sweet, sad face seemed to rise superior to the tumult of her soul, and say "Farewarned by me!" She turned.

ed around, and looked at Paolo with her tear-dimmed eyes.

"I can never be your wife," she said, sadly; "I will never be more to you than a friend. Farewell, Paolo! you will never find another heart to love you as mine has done."

She raised his hand to her lips, a tear fell on it, too, and then she was gone.

In vain he waited, and sent message after message, hoping that she would return, if only for one last word. She would not come, but sat with her door locked, and her face buried in her hands, waiting till he left the house.

When he had really gone, the carriage was ordered round, and half an hour later, Aurelia was on her way to Charnley Cottage, quite alone.

It was nearly dusk when she approached the Cottage gates. She had left all her luggage at the station, and walked across the common unattended. The heather was in bloom, the air was calm and mild, and the breath of the garden flowers came out to meet her as she walked up the little footpath to the house. There were no lights in the front windows, but as she unfastened the latch of the gate, she heard a low growl and a great black dog came round from the garden, and stood menacingly before her.

"Tender, my dear old boy!" she said, and the brave fellow uttered a cry of joy almost human in its intensity, and leaping up, nearly stifled her with his rough caresses.

"Be quiet, you dear old idiot," she said, clasping her hands over his muzzle, as he began to bark loudly. "I don't want any one to know I am here. Don't you understand, goose? There's a good dog; and now see what I have brought you!"

She had brought a small parcel in her hand all the way from the station; and now, unfastening it, she took out a magnificent collar of wrought silver, fastened with a clasp of gold. She put it upon the dog's neck, and kissed his broad forehead; but her tears fell fast all the while, for she remembered the time when she had left those gates to "seek her fortune," and when her childish vow had been that Tender should have a collar of diamonds one day, if he would but wear it. She was back again at last, and Tender had his collar, though not exactly of precious stones. But ah! what kind of a "fortune" had rewarded her seeking?

The dog looked up in her face with mute sympathy, and then snuffed suspiciously at his magnificent decoration.

"If you dare!" said Aurelia, smiling through her tears, when she saw him preparing to scratch it off. "Go in there, sir, and show yourself. You ought to be proud now, if ever a dog was."

Looking as if he quite understood what she was saying, Tender marched off by the garden path which led to the back of the house. Aurelia followed him. The windows of the great kitchen were all alight, and in the room she could see the familiar figure of Mrs. Marshall, who looked more stout and comfortable than ever, while she gave an awkward servant girl some instructions in the art of making preserves. A great kettle of fruit was upon the fire, and Mrs. Marshall was just bending over it, candle in hand, and spectacles on nose, when Tender stalked in.

"So you see, Elizabeth, you never ought to let it go without skimming longer than—What on earth are you staring at, child?"

"At the dog."

"Drat the dog! What has he got to do with raspberry jam, I wonder?"

"But look at the thing he has got on his neck, missis."

Mrs. Marshall turned round. Tender was sitting bolt upright in the middle of the floor, with his tongue hanging out of his mouth, sighing, winking, and blinking, in the most extraordinary manner; while about his strong neck shone and glittered the splendid token of his old friend's love.

"Good gracious! Where on earth did he get that?" exclaimed Mrs. Marshall, bending over him, candle in hand.

"Perhaps he met a fairy out on the common," suggested the small servant, who was just undergoing a course of "The White Cat," and "Riquet with the Golden Tuft."

"Yes, that is very likely," said her mistress, sharply. "But look how it shines. I declare it is solid silver, and the clasp is real gold! Oh, gracious! It must be Aurelia that gave it to him! I feel quite ill!"

"And if it was Aurelia, would she be welcome?" asked a deep, sweet voice.

Elizabeth turned, and saw a tall, beautiful lady, with golden hair and a pleasant smile. The next moment the candle went into the kettle of preserves, and Mrs. Marshall was in the arms of the elegant stranger, while Tender executed a *pas seul* around the group, and barked till he was as hoarse as a raven.

As Elizabeth said afterwards, "it beat all the fairy tales out and out."

Every one in Charnley had felt a strange interest in Aurelia's fate. There was not a simple cottage-girl playing upon the moor who did not know that the great singer in London had played and romped there before her, and Elizabeth especially, had dreamed of her by night and by day, and had taken service at Charnley, simply that she might listen to Mrs. Marshall's tales of the beauty, grace, and goodness of her young *protege*. And now, to have

her walk in upon them in that romantic way—to see her hug Mrs. Marshall, and kiss old Tender, and shake hands kindly with Elizabeth herself—was it any wonder, after such an event, that they never went to bed till the clock struck two, and that the preserves burned themselves away unheeded, in company with the tallow candle, till the fire went out, and the bottom of the kettle "was not."

Certainly, if ever there was an occasion for killing the fatted calf, this was one; and Mrs. Marshall, I assure you, did not fail to take advantage of it; but kept high festival and rejoicing over the return of the wanderer, for many days.

CHAPTER XXII.

"And I must go! I cannot choose

But love thee, and thy love refuse!

And if thy brow grows pale while young,

And youth fly cheated from my cheek,

'Tis that there lies below my tongue

A word I will not speak;

For I would rather die than deem

Thou'rt not the glory thou did'st seem!"

PHILIP BAILEY

AURELIA, tired out with the arduous life she had led—disgusted with the first sign of disapproval from the public, who had been used to idolize her, galled by the faithlessness of her husband more than she could say, and pierced to the heart by the arrows of a love which she could not subdue, it must be confessed she had not been lying on a bed of roses. But when she had fled from all annoyances, resigned all the honors, her situation was still worse. She was not formed for solitude, and she found in a week's time that she was horribly bored. So when Mrs. Thornton came down to the Hall, Aurelia was very glad. There were riding, walking and boating parties without end, in all of which Aurelia joined, and the excitement seemed to dispel her melancholy.

Among the guests she was very popular. The town was ringing with her strange disappearance, from public life, and to be able to date letters from the house where Aurelia was staying, and to boast of having been her companions and cavaliers were great privileges to the fashionables assembled. But still they could not understand why, being gay and free, and friendly with all, she preferred none in particular, and never once spoke of her former career. If any one mentioned the Opera, she was silent, but listened eagerly. What could it mean?

Mrs. Thornton was as mystified as her guests, but

determined to watch Aurelia till she could make her out, and at last she was convinced, from one or two sighs, absent looks, etc., that there was a gentleman in the case. Who was it? Was it Captain Gray? Absurd? Who ever heard of a woman falling in love with her own husband? It was not Frederick. True, he and his pretty wife had slightly tired of each other, and he was at Aurelia's feet, while she flirted with a tall, handsome dragoon officer, invited to the Hall at her special request. But Aurelia did not care to rank a married man among her admirers and her gentle dignity kept him at a proper distance. Then, by any chance, could the Squire be the happy man? He was now a widower, portly fresh-looking and devoted to Aurelia. That very day, she had seen in a glass on his toilet table, a flower which had graced Aurelia's hair the evening previous. But Captain Gray was in the way, and Mrs. Thornton puzzled over the problem for a week, when by accident she solved it.

There was a young Guardsman invited to the Hall, who, as the ladies were remarking in the half-hour after dinner, on the day of his arrival, bore a remarkable resemblance to Paolo, the great tenor. Aurelia, who had been in her room all day and had not seen him, said nothing, but Mrs. Thornton noted her eager attention. When the gentlemen entered, she saw that Aurelia turned pale as death.

Now, though this little lady was married and comfortably settled in the world, she had not forgotten her old grudge against Aurelia. Here was a chance to pay it off, and she took a seat beside Aurelia.

"How very like Lieutenant Horton is to Signor Paolo," she said, going straight to the point at once.

Aurelia said she thought there was a slight resemblance.

"Slight, my dear? They might be brothers. I hope, though, the resemblance is only external, for the Lieutenant's sake."

"Why?"

"I am afraid Signor Paolo's morals are none of the best."

"Is he any worse than those who condemn him?" snapped Aurelia.

"Ha, ha! Perhaps not, only he is more noticed, my dear. And really, this last affair is too scandalous."

"What affair, pray?"

"Why, the beautiful opera dancer who always dances on the nights he sings, or else he throws up his engagement. They say he is devoted to her, a perfect slave. But though she is so lovely, I must say he ought not to make it so public. Don't you think so?"

"That is Signor Paolo's business," she said, stiffly, shrugging her shoulders and biting her lip.

No more was said. Aurelia pleaded a headache soon after and left the room.

"I think I have paid you now for what you made me feel a long time ago," thought Mrs. Thornton, triumphantly.

CHAPTER XXIII

"I charm thee from the agony
Which others feel or feign;
From anger and from jealousy,
From doubt and from disdain.
I bid thee wear the scorn of years
Upon the brow of youth;
To curl the lip at passion's tears,
And shake the head at truth."

HEMANS.

A STORM of jealousy shook Aurelia's soul. She was not angry with her rival, but with her recreant lover. Another woman might be more beautiful, more fascinating than herself—that was easily granted! But, oh! why should Paolo have eyes to see that fatal beauty?—why should he have a heart that could feel that fatal fascination?

It was a bitter cup.

Perhaps it was cruel to undeceive her, since it destroyed her faith forever in any constant love; but, at least, it did her this service—it enabled her, through the stirrings and searchings of wounded pride and misplaced devotion, to check, in a measure, those sickening yearnings after a forbidden presence, that had intruded upon her gayest moments like a spectre at a feast. The charm was broken.

She never wished to meet Paolo again, since he could forget and atone for her loss so speedily. When he proved faithless, her thoughts, which had followed him, true as the needle to the pole, broke free, and asserted their right to independence again.

For a time she suffered horribly. Then came the dead calm of indifference, and the memory of him took a softened, saddened tone, which chastened, without subduing her soul. As she turned over the daily papers, the triumphs of her rival, which she had read at first with thrills of jealous anger, only woke a passing pang within her heart. She had lost the power of feeling too acutely to disturb her own peace of mind; and for this gift, which she would once have considered a very doubtful good, she was most deeply thankful.

The beautiful pictured face of Paolo, that seemed to smile, with mocking sweetness, upon her troubles and her tears, disappeared from the walls of her private room, and the books, the pictures, the orna-

ments he had given her were also banished from her sight. Deep in her heart she buried his memory and went back into the gay world once more.

But her manner was so different that every one noticed the strange and sudden change, though only shrewd Mrs. Thornton guessed the reason. She held her tongue discreetly while every one else wondered what ailed Aurelia. So gay, so sprightly—yet so bitter at times, so sarcastic, and oh, so utterly indifferent to the homage still paid to her—so politely bored by the expressions of love, sympathy, good-will or friendship to which she was obliged to listen.

Days went on, and the riddle was not solved. At last a startling event happened which put all conjectures and questionings to flight. There was an unusually gay party at the Hall one evening, which ended in a full dress ball, and Aurelia was waltzing with the enamored Frederick, and listening, with a little scornful smile to the nonsensical rhapsodies he was murmuring in her ear, when the Squire, looking pale and frightened, made his appearance at the door, passed the groups of dancers, and signed to the musicians to stop playing. In an instant, all was confusion, regardless of which he made his way to Aurelia's side.

"My dear, don't waltz any more," he said, gravely. "We have just received some bad news from London."

"From London? What has happened? Is any one dead?"

Her heart stood still at the thought of Paolo.

"No, but he is dying."

"He? Who?" she cried, turning deathly pale, and clinging to his arm.

"Don't agitate yourself, my child. Captain Gray has met with a serious accident, while out with the Pytchley hounds. They have taken him to London and telegraphed for you. He longs to see you—will you go?"

"Yes," she said quietly.

But oh, that look of infinite relief—though tempered with a sorrowful gravity befitting the occasion—what could it mean?

CHAPTER XXIV.

"When the viols played their best—

Lamps above and lamps below—

Love me sounded like a jest,

Fit for yes, or fit for no.

Call me false or call me free—

Vow, whatever light may shine,

No man on your face shall see

Any grief for change on mine."

E. B. BROWNING.

THE hardest heart is moved by suffering which must soon end in death. Aurelia's pride had been terribly wounded by the infidelity of her husband, and in her anger she had vowed that nothing should ever induce her to forgive him. But when she received that fatal piece of news, something seemed to drive that pride far away. He had wronged her, it was true, but he was dying, and how could she refuse his prayer?

Attended by the Squire, and accompanied by his daughter, she went to town, and straight from the station to what had once been her happy home. She looked anxiously out as they neared the house. The street was strewn with straw; but the blinds were not drawn—he was still alive!

James her own footman, opened the door, and burst into tears at seeing her.

"Thank heaven!" he exclaimed. "Master is dying, and they have just telegraphed again to Charnley, for fear you would not come."

Aurelia grasped his hand. She felt so faint that she would have fallen, but for his quick assistance.

"Dying!" she said, in a low voice. "Take me to him at once, before it is too late!"

Leaning on James's arm, she went up the stairs, while the Squire and Mrs. Morton were shown into the drawing-room, to wait better tidings from the sick room, or to hear that all was over.

The doctor was bending over his patient as Aurelia entered. He rose and shook his head, but at sight of the young wife his face brightened.

"Come here, my poor child!" he said very kindly. "I want to see if your voice will rouse him."

Aurelia went up beside him, and looked at her husband. Could that be the gay, handsome, light-hearted "man about town,"—that wasted, feeble figure, with its ghastly face and attenuated hands? She flattered as she looked, and burst into tears.

"Don't cry, there's a dear!" said the old physician, who, like every one else, was well informed as to her very peculiar position in that house. "Speak to him; if that will not rouse him, he will never know you or any one again!"

With difficulty, Aurelia obeyed. At last, she bent down with her mouth close to the dying man's face, and said aloud, "Arthur, you sent for me! I am here! It is Aurelia—will you speak to her?"

A smile played round his lips—a slight color suffused his face.

"Aurelia," he said, faintly. Then, opening his eyes widely, he looked up at her, and tried to take her hand. His own fell heavily back, the jaw dropped, and all was over!

All her resentment was gone! She could feel nothing but passionate regret in the presence of that poor pale corpse. Her husband's sins were all forgiven by her, though he had not been able to ask for that forgiveness. That they might find a pardon as free, before the tribunal where his shrinking spirit stood, was her most earnest prayer when she knelt in her own room that night—a widow, and alone.

If ever Aurelia had wronged her husband, in thought, or word, or deed—by ill-concealed contempt or open anger, during that short, unhappy period of her marriage, he was amply avenged during the week which she spent in seclusion, with all the melancholy preparations for his funeral going on around her. She had a dread of death which was almost childish in its intensity; and the thought of that one room, where something lay ready for the grave, thrilled her with inexpressible terror. She was afraid to pass by the door—she dared not even enter the apartment where her husband had died. She could not go out—she could not read—she could not sleep or eat. By day and night, she sat a melancholy prisoner in her dressing-room, starting nervously at every sound, and brooding, hour after hour, with her head resting upon her hands, till Mrs. Thornton feared, and with some reason, that her health or her brains must eventually give way.

At last the day of the funeral came, and with all the mocking show of nodding plumes, and velvet palls, and mourning coaches and sad-faced mutes, the poor Captain was borne to his long home in Kensal Green. Numbers of his old friends and associates stood around that grave with serious faces and saddened hearts. His death had been so sudden and unexpected, that the most careless among them could not help being shocked and sobered by the event. It was whispered round polite circles afterwards, that a brougham, which stood at the cemetery gates during the ceremony at the grave, contained the notorious Mrs. Trelawney. But no one ever knew if the report was true or false, since she departed for the Continent the very next week, and was afterwards reconciled to her husband, who resigned his country for ever, for the sake of dwell-

ing with her once more, in her beautiful villa, beside the Lake of Como.

Aurelia returned to Charnley with her friends. The remainder of that year, and the greater part of the next, were spent by her in seclusion, so far as the world was concerned. By her husband's will, she inherited the whole of his property, which, added to her own income, made her, in reality, what every one had long supposed her to be, not only "well off," but positively rich. She might have had her carriage, her opera box, and her house in town, if she had liked. But she preferred to remain at Charnley Cottage, with Mrs. Marshall for her friend, and Tender for her body-guard. Rest!—rest! She had learned at last to know that it was all she wanted—and she had it there! In simple amusements and pleasures, in kindly charities to the poor, the sick and the aged, who learned to look upon her beautiful face, as if it had been the face of an angel—in an interchange of friendly visits with the family at the Hall, the time passed happily away. She grew younger, prettier, and rosier day by day. The wearied haggard look left her face—a placid quiet contentment took its place. Never was a life more uneventful, and yet more redolent of peace and comfort than hers at that time. But this was one of the beatitudes which Mrs. Thornton could not possibly understand, and which she determined should be brought to a close as soon as possible. She wished Aurelia to marry again and to be happy—which meant, in her vocabulary, to be a woman of fashion. While casting about in her own mind for a hero worthy of her heroine, he presented himself before her most unexpectedly one afternoon, and pouring all his troubles into her ready ear, led her to espouse his cause as warmly as if he had really been the candidate proposed by her for Aurelia's selection.

The very next morning after the important interview, she drove over to the Cottage (for she never walked anywhere if she could help it), and asked to see Aurelia. She was in the garden, Mrs. Marshall said; and proceeding there, the daintily dressed lady found her future Queen of Fashion down on her knees on the garden path, with a hammer in one hand, and a mouth full of tenpenny nails, with which she was mending the door of Tender's kennel. The dog sat beside her gravely regarding the operation, as if it had been something got up for his especial gratification. Mrs. Thornton uttered unaffected little shrieks, and dropped her delicate, silver-grey parasol, which Tender immediately took up in his mouth, and presented it to her, with as near an approach to a stately bow as a dog could be supposed to make.

"Well, he is a gentlemanly brute, which is more than can be said of some of my two-footed friends,"

said the mollified visitor, patting his broad head with her dainty gloves. "But, my dear Aurelia, what on earth are you about?"

"Can't you see?" asked Aurelia, taking the nails out of her mouth, as she rose and shook hands with her visitor. "Old Tender would not stay in that kennel five minutes if any one else mended it."

"How you do pet that dog!"

"So I ought," answered Aurelia, pinching his ears. "He is the best friend I have on earth."

"You say so, but I don't think you mean it—just look at your hands."

"Never mind; they will wash, thank goodness; and there is no one now to care whether they are white or black, which is a great comfort."

Mrs. Thornton looked at her silver-grey kids. Then she opened her errand, which was to get Aurelia to dine at the Hall on the ensuing day, and in the place of stealing away in the early evening, as she always had insisted upon doing since her husband's death, to stay later and sing.

Aurelia shook her head.

"I don't like to exhibit myself in public again, Clara, I am getting too old, and also too lazy."

"I assure you there will not be a soul there, except ourselves, Fred and his wife, and a friend from London."

Aurelia pricked up her ears.

"And who may that be?"

"A friend of yours, I should have said."

"I have no friends in London."

"Oh, what a fib! Have you forgotten Gerald Aubrey?"

Aurelia looked pleased, and answered, "Is he here? I remember him well. He wrote me such a kind letter when Captain Grey died."

"He is at the Hall now."

"When did he come?"

"Yesterday."

"How long is he to stay?"

"I know no more about it than the man in the moon."

"Who has he come to see?"

"Me, of course. How very inquisitive you are to-day!"

"I never knew you were very intimate with him in London."

"My dear, I suppose we both had a long list of friends there. But I never knew half the names of yours—nor you of mine."

"True. So I am to conclude that Mr. Aubrey belongs to the list of the great unknown."

"Yes."

"Did he ask after me?"

"What a question! Of course he did. And he is so anxious to see you again."

"He is very kind."

"He says he never goes to the Opera now—but he would give his ears to hear you sing once more."

"I don't happen to want his ears."

"Now you are never going to be so barbarous as to refuse?"

"No; if it will give any one any pleasure to hear my cracked voice, they will not be disappointed. Mind you tell him it is cracked, though!"

"What nonsense you talk! Come early, will you?"

"Will half-an-hour before dinner do?"

"Admirably."

"And what about Tender?"

"He has a special invitation, of course, and shall dine like a prince in the housekeeper's room. Now are you satisfied?"

"Quite. And I will be there punctually at the time you name."

Mrs. Thornton hurried home as fast as her horses could take her, to report progress to the expectant lover. One thing augured well for his cause. Aurelia had never sang since her husband's death; she was about to break this established rule to gratify an expressed wish of his. With a very hopeful, happy heart he went up that day to dress for dinner; and made his appearance in the drawing-room half-an-hour before that meal, in order to profit by the *tete-a-tete* which Mrs. Thornton had so kindly plotted to procure for him.

But, greatly to his disappointment, and his fairly's secret amusement, Aurelia did not enter the drawing-room at all. If she suspected the existence of their plot, she never hinted at the knowledge, but went straight to Mrs. Thornton's dressing-room, where she remained till the dinner-bell rang, and where she never once mentioned the name of Mr. Aubrey.

So their first meeting was, after all, at table; and one cannot look very sentimental in the presence of soup and fish. Mr. Aubrey glanced at Mrs. Thornton, with an unmistakable look of annoyance, as Aurelia shook hands with him, and then sat down to eat her dinner with the utmost composure. But he rallied in time, and was able to bear sufficient part in the conversation to prevent her from thinking him either a bore or a bear. The evening ended as it had begun—all wrong—at least for him. The rest of the party seemed to enjoy it well enough; and if to hear Aurelia's splendid voice had been, as he augured, the one thing wanting in his life, he certainly had that want well supplied. She sang for more than an hour, but alas! she sang as readily at the request of the old Squire as at his, and so the songs were spoiled.

Nor was it better when the clock struck eleven, and she rose to go. Here, at least, he thought him-

self secure of a *tete-a-tete*; but, to his infinite disgust, Mrs. Marshall, cloaked and hooded, was waiting in the Hall, with Tender by her side. Aurelia kindly declined his offer of an escort, and marched away with them, laughing in the avenue at something the old lady was saying and never giving a thought to him she had left behind.

"Courage, *mon ami*!" said a voice behind him, as he stood still in the hall-door, gazing after them. "Better luck, let us hope, to-morrow. And now, good-night, and pleasant dreams."

It was Mrs. Thornton who spoke. And after one or two inaudible growls of dissatisfaction, he took her well-meant consolation, and a candlestick, and went to bed.

CHAPTER XXV.

"The sin is on us both!

Time to dance is not to woo;
Wooing light make fickle truth;
Scorn of me recoils on you."

"Learn to win a lady's faith
Nobly, as the thing is high;
Bravely, as for life and death,
With a loyal gravity."

E. B. BROWNING.

EARLY the next morning—so early that the breakfast things were hardly removed from the table—a visitor from the Hall was announced at the Cottage. Mrs. Marshall was in no trim to receive callers. Aurelia went into the little parlour, expecting to see Mrs. Thornton, full of some expedition into which she was to be tempted by the beauty of the day.

What was her surprise at seeing Mr. Aubrey comfortably ensconced in the easy chair, instead of the gay little lady, whose presence would not have been amiss.

She could not exactly ask him, in so many words, what he wanted, but if eyes ever looked the interrogation to an unwelcome guest, hers did then. He did not seem to notice it, however, but, after greeting her respectfully, looked round the room with a thoughtful, almost a sad, glance.

"How familiar, and yet how strange, does this place seem to me!" he said, at last. "I used to come here often with my friend Leroy before we met you. I have passed more evenings quietly and happily here than I ever passed in any other house except my mother's. I wish Leroy would come back."

"So do I," said Aurelia, with an involuntary sigh.

He looked at her with a smile.

"You were very fond of him as a child, I think?"

"Had I not reason?"

"Of course. And yet you only saw him for one evening."

"One evening was long enough to show me what a kind, good heart he had."

"Yes; he was a good fellow. Poor Leroy, how wild he was when he got Mrs. Marshall's letter saying that you had run away."

"I fear he will never forget it, said Aurelia.

"Do you?"

"It was setting him and his authority at defiance, you know."

"Oh, quite."

"And he must have thought me the most ungrateful of mortals."

"I told you once before that he did; yet, knowing all this, do you regret the step you took?"

"No."

"I knew you could not. To have been 'Aurelia' even for a day, is enough to cancel the deepest sin of imprudence or ingratitude."

"I wish Mr. Leroy would think so," she said, smiling.

"Perhaps he may."

"What do you mean?"

"When I first had the honor of seeing you in town, I said that I would write to him."

"Well?"

"I did so at once."

"And has he received the letter? What does he say about it?"

"Certainly. The post-offices are very well arranged out there in Abyssinia," said Mr. Aubrey, meditatively.

"Post-offices in Abyssinia, indeed! Have you heard from Mr. Leroy?"

"My letter followed him, though slowly, almost into the bowels of the earth."

"And he answered?"

"I should judge from the envelope of his letter that it had seen service under every civilized and uncivilized nation on the face of the globe;" and he held up a dirty, creased, extraordinary-looking document, just out of her reach.

"Oh, how provoking you are," she cried. "Is it really from him?"

"It is."

"May I read it?"

"You shall have the postscript, if that will content you."

"Give it to me."

He drew a small slip of paper from within the envelope, and placed it in her hands. It ran thus:—"What you tell me of Aurelia has done my heart good. In all my wanderings, the fate of that poor

impetuous child has troubled me beyond measure. I have blamed myself continually, first for adopting, and then for leaving her; and to hear that she has found other friends, and worked out for herself a destiny so splendid, is indeed a relief. But the stage! oh, how I hate it—and how, for her, I dread it! You tell me that she is beautiful and fascinating, and that the world is at her feet! How long, under such circumstances, can she remain innocent and unspoiled? I shall come at once, to see if my earnest entreaties can prevail upon her to relinquish so dangerous a mode of life."

"You see," said Mr. Aubrey, gaily, when she had finished reading, "it is England, home, and beauty with him as with everybody else. Deaf, for years to every question of expediency or common sense he is aroused at last by the knowledge of your peril and is rushing to the rescue like a knight of old."

"He knows nothing of my marriage—my separation—my departure from the stage—or Captain Gray's death?" said Aurelia looking very grave.

"Nothing at all. You see, events march quicker than letters now-a-days. I wrote to him as soon as I met you, but the letter never reached him for months. In the meantime, you had married, and left the stage. And the other—that is to say—He stopped short, quite confused. He did not know how to say that the separation, and the death of the Captain, had followed the other events so closely, that within a very short space of time Aurelia had been a bride, a deserted wife, and a widow—the Queen of the English stage, and the humble tenant of the cottage on Charnley Moor.

"I understand," she said. "It seems so very long ago—and yet, two years has covered all! It is hard to believe!"

"Hard for you, who have been the actor in these scenes. Harder still for me—a mere spectator!" replied Mr. Aubrey, with real feeling.

"We will not think of those things," said Aurelia, trying to shake off the sadness that always crept over her at the thought of bygone days. "Tell me more of Mr. Leroy."

"What do you want to know?"

"When he is coming to England."

"This letter was mailed last at Canton, you see."

"Yes."

"It had been coming from heaven knows where, and was so long on its way, that Leroy actually sailed in the same steamer with it."

Aurelia clasped her hands.

"Is he in England?"

"He is."

"And have you seen him?"

"The letter was delivered at my lodgings the day before yesterday by the postman, at nine a.m. By the time I had finished it and my breakfast, and

was wondering what I should do with myself all day, Leroy walked in. I leave you to guess my surprise."

"How does he look? Is he not well? Has he altered? Has he grown old? Does he look sad? Did he ask about me?"

As Aurelia poured out these rapid incoherent questions, one after another, Mr. Aubrey elevated his eyebrows, and sat looking at her with comical astonishment.

"Which of the hundred am I to answer first?" he asked.

"I beg your pardon!" she said, laughing and blushing. "But I am so well pleased to hear that he has come, and that I shall have an opportunity of thanking him for all he has done for me. Why, you horrible man!" she added, suddenly, "you must have known of this last night!"

"Of course I did. Have I not already told you that I saw him in the morning?"

"And you positively spent the evening with me, and never said a word about it?"

"I plead guilty. A very delightful evening it was too!"

"I have a great mind never to speak to you again!"

"You will forgive me, I am sure, when I tell you that I was acting under Mr. Leroy's express instructions!"

"What do you mean?"

"Of course, his first inquiry was after you. In fact, he came back to England expressly to claim you, to assert his authority as a guardian, if you would allow it, and withdraw you from the stage,—which, between you and me, he looks upon as the entrance and the gateway to that naughty place where we hope all our enemies, and none of our friends and acquaintances, will go!"

"Perhaps he is right; but pray go on with your story."

"How flattered he would be to see your impatience!" said Mr. Aubrey, with a slight air of annoyance. "Well, I only live to obey you, and so I will proceed with my tale. You must know, that he had pictured you in the jaws of a hundred dragons. I cannot tell to what his fears did not point. It seems that his first love went upon the stage; but I think I told you that story before. He got a ward then, I fancy, and his horror of the theatre is something ludicrous. When he heard, however, what I was glad and proud to be able to tell him—with strictest truth—that the honor and fair fame of Aurelia had never for one instant been called in question, he cooled down wonderfully."

"It was kind of you to speak a good word of me," said Aurelia, holding out her hand. Mr. Au-

brey raised it respectfully to his lips, and went on with his story.

"I told him also of your marriage, and—and the other things. When he heard of your retirement to Charnley, I never saw any one so pleased in my life. And then he sent me down as a kind of ambassador, to say he was in town, and to ask when he could have the honor and pleasure of kissing the fan hand, as I have done to-day."

Aurelia looked puzzled and annoyed at hearing this explanation.

"Charnley is Mr. Leroy's house—not mine," she said stiffly. "Has he forgotten that?"

"No—not exactly. But, under all the circumstances, he thought it would be better if I came first."

"Does he fancy I shall not be glad and proud to meet my first benefactor?"

"No, not that!" said Mr. Aubrey, beginning to nestle uneasily about.

"What then?"

"Well, you know, to begin with, you are not exactly the 'girl he left behind him.'"

"He can scarcely expect that."

"You are a famous singer, now. And, besides that, a widow; don't you see?"

"I confess that I do not."

"He cannot run down here without any ceremony, now, as he might have done if you had still been in frocks and pianofortes."

"Very well. If ceremony was needful, which I am inclined to doubt, why could he not write, and say that he was coming? Where was the need of employing an ambassador?"

"And that ambassador Gerald Aubrey, I suppose you would say, if you spoke your thoughts out freely?" he answered, looking half offended.

She was silent.

"There are a hundred things he must do, before he leaves London, you know," he continued, with a faint smile. "He has to see his tailor, to begin with. To my certain knowledge, he has not a civilized coat to his back. And his beard—you should just see his beard, and then you would ask no more questions!"

Aurelia shrugged her shoulders.

"And the Royal Geographical Society—bless me, I nearly forgot that!" exclaimed Mr. Aubrey, going off at a fresh score.

"What of that, pray?"

"Oh, he must present himself there, you know; every one who has crossed the 'briny ocean' must appear at Burlington House; and it is my firm belief that Leroy intends to present himself in the full costume of an Abyssinian chief, with a gorilla on one arm, and a princess from the mountains of the moon on the other. What a lion he will be! I only

hope he may not bring his fair companions down to Charnley. Fancy him taking a morning walk with them upon the common, to the edification of the villagers, and your own intense delight!"

Aurelia rose from her seat impatiently

"Mr. Aubrey, you must excuse me for telling you that you are talking the greatest nonsense in world, and that is a privilege which, as a woman, I reserve exclusively to myself. Now, I am going to send you back to the Hall at once."

"One moment," he said, growing perfectly serious. "I am here expressly to say something to you."

"And remarkably well you have said it!"

"I did not know how to begin. I have been, as you say, talking great nonsense, simply because I was afraid to say anything else."

"Humph! what does that mean, I wonder?" said Aurelia, giving him a sharp glance, and beginning to have a pretty tolerable idea of the cause of this confusion.

"It means this," he said, frankly; "I love you, and I have come here to-day to ask you to be my wife."

The murder was out at last. Aurelia bit her lips and frowned. An offer which she had no intention of accepting, was a nuisance from which she always tried to escape. In this case it came so unexpectedly, that she was more than half inclined to be angry with the individual who had presumed to make such a blunder.

"Mr. Aubrey, you must acquit me of all unkindness in what I am going to say," she observed. "I am really pained by what you have just told me."

"Why?"

"Because I thought I had a kind friend in you, and not a lover."

"I have been devoted enough to you, if that is all!"

She raised her eyebrows.

"When, and where?"

"I mean that I have been devoted—for me!"

"Oh!"

"I never was a marrying man, Aurelia; but I have a handsome fortune, and you have seen enough of English society to know how English girls angle for husbands in every direction. I have been pursued from pillar to post."

"Poor fellow!"

"Oh, you need not be ironical—it is the truth! I have been hunted in all directions, and if I had ventured to pay any particular attention to any young lady, I should have been snapped up long ago. So I never flirted—it was the only safe way."

"What vanity these men have!" said Aurelia, in a stage whisper.

"Will you be serious for five minutes?"

"Not if you are going to romance about your irresistibility in that absurd style!"

"I am not—I am going to talk about yours. Of course you will be all attention now!"

"Most certainly!"

"When I first knew you—when you were a little child here in this very room, I confess I did not like you."

"And I detested you!"

"I know it."

"I used to make faces at you."

"For which I longed to box your ears."

"You did pull them once. I remember it well."

"Never mind old injuries. At that time I thought Leroy almost mad for adopting you, and prophesied to him as we journeyed up to town together again, that the first thing you would do would be to run away with the spoons."

"Thank you."

"You did run away."

"But I left the spoons behind me."

"Yes, I did you that justice, even when Mrs. Marshall's indignant letter arrived," he said, smiling. "But I imagined you had gone back to White-chapel. Don't be angry with me."

"I am not. It was a most natural supposition."

"When I met you again, beautiful, elegant, and bewitching—the queen of the stage, and the star of the best private society—I fell in love with you, as every one else did."

"Well?"

"If you had not accepted Captain Gray's offer you would have had one from me."

"And if I had I should now have been your wife," said Aurelia, dreamily thinking what a mere act of desperation that wretched marriage had been.

His startled "Eh? what?" recalled her to consciousness.

"I beg your pardon—it was a foolish remark. Go on with what you were saying."

"Only this. That after you were married, I, of course, classed myself only among your friends. But you surely remember how I stood by you on that unfortunate night, when Mrs. Trelawney made her appearance?"

"Yes, I remember."

"The moment you were free, I hastened to place my services at your disposal. You did not accept them, but my intention was the same. I have only waited for a proper length of time to elapse before I addressed you formally; and now I ask you the question, which I never asked any woman before in my life, will you marry me?"

"Does my guardian know of this?" asked Aurelia.

"He does. I spoke to him at once about it."

"And he approves?"

"He will give his consent—his blessing—anything you like—"

"That was why he sent you down first?"

"It was. What answer am I to have?"

"I cannot give you the one you wish."

"You will not marry me?"

She shook her head.

"Do you mean to marry again?"

"Is that a question you ought to ask?" she said, blushing deeply. "Never mind; I will answer it. I do mean to marry again, but not at present."

"In time then, may I hope?"

"Hope nothing, Mr. Aubrey. I shall never marry you!"

"May I ask why?" he said, looking intensely huffed.

"Because, although you are my very good friend, I do not love you well enough to make you my husband."

"Pshaw! a girl's romantic folly," he said hotly. "I thought you had more sense. I love you, but I don't rave and protest as I might if I was eighteen. And for my own part, so you give me a reasonable and faithful affection, I shall be very well satisfied."

"Precisely what I mean, and what I cannot give to you!" she said, quietly. "The romance has been pretty well knocked out of me, I think; but a reasonable, faithful affection, even a heart like mine may offer to the man it chooses, and you are not that man!"

Mr. Aubrey sat in silence for some time, digesting his mortification as best he might. At length he took up his hat.

"This is your final answer?"

"It is."

"I am to repeat it to Mr. Leroy?"

"If you choose."

"Then I had better take myself off as soon as possible, and try to find some other lady who will be able to look upon me without that repugnance which you seem to feel."

"Nonsense, Mr. Aubrey!" said Aurelia, holding out her hand, with a frank smile. "I like you very well, and hope to keep you for my friend for many a day to come. Surely you are not going to be unforgiving because you made a little mistake, and I have set you right! It is my bad taste that is at fault. I have no doubt you will find that"

"There are maidens in Scotland more lovely by far, Who will gladly be bride to the young Lochinvar."

And when you have made your selection, let me know, and I will come and dance at your wedding."

Now, shake hands, and forget, as I will do, that we have ever spoken upon this subject at all!"

Only half-pacified by her friendly-railing, he shook hands somewhat sulkily, and left the house. He was as good as his word—he sought out another lady at once, and before three weeks had elapsed, Aurelia received his wedding cards. She only smiled as she read them, and wished him joy with all her heart.

In the meantime, her time was taken up in preparing for Mr. Leroy, who, hearing in due time of the unsuccessful result of his friend's mission, had written to announce his own speedy arrival. The days were fair and sunny, the nights full of moonlight; the flowers were in bloom, the trees in leaf; everything was beautiful around Charnley, and before the beauty of that freshness faded, he would be here to admire it too.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"How shall I woo her? I will try

The charms of olden time;

And swear by earth, and sea, and sky,

And rave in prose and rhyme.

And she will think that he who bent

His knee in other years,

Was not one half so eloquent—

He could not speak for tears!"

PRAED.

THE morning post was often late at Charnley. Not that it mattered much to Aurelia, for, since her retirement into private life, she neither wrote nor received many letters. But one day, as she walked out upon the moor, with old Tender by her side, the postman met her, and touching his hat, handed her a small package, with the post-mark "New York" upon it. Wondering greatly who it could be from—for she had no correspondents in the "Empire City"—she stood still, and broke the seal.

A letter, and a small oval case of blue velvet, embroidered with seed pearls fell to the ground. She picked them up with a sickening pang of memory and fear, touched the spring of the case, and as she had expected, the beautiful face of "The Peri" looked out upon her. She turned to the letter. It had a black seal!

She tore it open. It was written in a faint and feeble hand, and ran thus:—

"I am dying—alone and in a strange land. I have been ill for many months, and during that time I have tried hard to be good. I send you my picture, for I think you liked me once, and you may be will-

ing to keep it, in memory of the poor butterfly, whose wings were soiled and broken so early. When you look at it, pray for me. I am dying a Catholic, and I think I shall know when you are praying.

"Don't quite forget me; and when you see Paolo, tell him I loved him—only him—to the last."

"LOUISA."

Oh, voice from the distant grave—how it spoke to her aching heart! "Tell him I loved him—him only—to the last!"

She sat down among the heather, and covered her eyes with her hand. It was long since she had wept; but now the tears fell one by one upon the smiling face and the last letter, till they were blurred and hidden from her straining sight. Oh, wasted life! Oh, lingering love, that sent that one pathetic appeal far over the wide blue sea—to be read long after the hand that penned it was mouldering in the dust!

As she sat there upon the lonely common, with the sunshine brightening the heather, and the birds singing sweetly over her head, how far away it all seemed—that tumultuous fever of life, in which she had known the Peri, won the applause of the fashionable world, and loved Paolo!

Paolo!

What ailed her? What had become of all the passionate fervour that once filled her heart at the memory of that name? Sorrow she could not but feel—but it was a tender sorrow now. Her thoughts and dreams blossomed no longer into rich red roses—they were but the pale forget-me-nots upon a lonely grave.

She leaned her head upon old Tender's strong shoulder, and looked wistfully up into the deep blue sky. She was no longer unhappy. Her laugh was as sweet, her song as joyous as ever. Yet she was changed. A sort of quiet weariness had fallen upon her. She was getting averse to all trouble. She cared nothing for society; she liked her book before the fire, or her stroll upon the common with Tender by her side, better than any other pleasure which could be offered to her. Anything which involved the slightest amount of exertion invariably bored her and she would look with a kind of placid wonder upon those people who, having never possessed a first enthusiasm to lose, could go on tranquilly to the end of life, happy in the things which had made the happiness of their youth.

She knew, perhaps better than any one, the reason of this change. A certain portion of happiness is meted out to every individual on earth. Some, of calm and unimpassioned natures spread out that happiness over their whole lives, as a gold-beater refines, and thins, and lengthens the precious metal which he works. Others to whom existence is to be a

brief and bright glory, treat their dower as Cleopatra treated her pearl—they dissolve it in a "cup of sparkling wine," and quaff it at one splendid never-to-be-forgotten draught.

Aurelia had done this. No more such rapturous moments awaited her, and yet she was content. Although a veil of tender melancholy hung over her whole life, it could not sour her naturally sunny spirit, or make her feel one pang of discontent. Friendship, love, happiness, she had lost her faith in them all. But honest Tender was at her side, and not far away, a quiet home. And quiet is a great gift, for which those who have been nearest to take shipwreck in the waste ocean of life, can feel most deeply thankful. Aurelia appreciated it thoroughly. For the rest, what mattered it? What if even over sea, sky, and moon, trees, flowers, and plants, hung something of her soul's sadness, like a cloud that prevented her from seeing its beauties as plainly as she once had done? Lying there among the heather, with her arms around old Tender's honest neck, she began to repeat the words in which the poet of Nature so well depicted the feelings of Nature's worshippers, when the world has come between them and the beautiful face of the goddess they adore:—

"Then sing ye birds—sing, sing a joyous song,

And let the young lambs bound

As to the tabor's sound!

We in thought will join your throng—

Ye that pipe and ye that play,

Ye that through your hearts to-day

Feel the gladness of the May;

What though the radiance that was once so bright

Be now for ever taken from my sight?

Though nothing can bring back the hour

Of splendour in the grass, or glory in the flower,

We will grieve not—rather find

Strength in what remains behind—

In the primal sympathy

Which, having been, must ever be!"

"Tender, my Tender," she said to the dog, who was lifting his head and growling in a strangled key. "Wordsworth is quite in the right, so you need not make those heathenish noises."

"Tender is not expressing his disapproval of Wordsworth, but of me," said a voice behind her, and the next instant the dog bounded upon the new comer with a noisy welcome, and Aurelia started to her feet.

She knew the face as soon as she looked at it. She held out her hand with a warm, frank smile.

"Mr. Leroy!"

"The same!"

"Welcome back to England and to home. For I suppose you are going there?"

"Yes. I walked over from the station as the day was so fine, little thinking that I should find a night ingale among the heather on the way."

He stood holding her hand and looking into her downcast face. At last he said softly, "how strange it all seems. I left you a little child in pinafores and short frocks, and now I come back to find you a stately and beautiful woman, and the queen of the lyric stage. A wife too, and a widow—"

The colour rose to her forehead, and he broke off abruptly.

"The less said about that the better, perhaps. Did you like your life upon the stage, Aurelia?"

"At first it was exciting, charming, magnificent! But at the last, I think I got tired;" and she sighed.

Mr. Leroy observed it.

"You are young to grow tired of anything, much less flattery and applause," he said.

"I don't know. There are some things in life that don't depend upon one's age, I think."

"True."

"And that is one."

"But you have found it out earlier than most women do."

"Possibly."

She looked out towards the distant hills with an absent weary gaze. His eyes wandered from her face to the little jet miniature lying at her feet.

"The old story, I presume!" he thought, while a scornful smile curled his lip. "However, as she will certainly step upon the darling's face in a minute or two, I may as well pick him up and restore him to her."

He suited the action to the word.

"I think you have dropped something," he said, and he laid the tear-stained letter in her hand, and removed a dry leaf or two which had clung to the face of the miniature, with his handkerchief. As he did so, he caught sight of the face, and his own turned white.

"For heaven's sake, tell me where you got this?" he exclaimed.

Aurelia glanced up sharply and suspiciously. She could not tell why she disliked to see him so much moved at the sight of another woman's pictured face—she would not have told if she could.

"Where did you get this?" he asked again trembling with excitement.

"It was sent to me from America," she answered coldly.

"But where could you have known her?" he asked, more calmly.

"I met her in London."

"On the stage?"

"No; she was never on the stage."

"You are mistaken. She passed the best part of her life there. The best? I ought, rather, to say the worst part, for it was a shameful existence! I must tell you all about it, some day."

Aurelia looked thoroughly puzzled. Evidently they were talking of two very different people. She ventured to hint as much, but he laughed aloud at idea.

"You will tell me next that I do not know my own name," he said. "That is Helen's face, Helen's smile, those are Helen's eyes and Helen's curls, just as I saw them last. Who would think that a face so fair could be so false?"

"But, Mr. Leroy," she said, earnestly, "her name was not Helen. It was Louisa."

"Louisa what?" he asked, with a sudden start.

"Louisa Pearl."

"Her child! Can it be possible?"

"Oh, never!" cried Aurelia, thinking of the false woman, who had so cunningly lured her into the den of infamy, where the poor Peri was kept an unwilling prisoner.

He gave one hasty glance at the miniature, and shut the case.

"Here, take it—keep it out of my sight for the present. Some day I will tell you the whole story, if you would like to hear it; but I don't like to spoil my first coming home by memories like that!"

She put the picture and letter in her pocket, and he looked immensely relieved when they were fairly out of sight. Then they walked quietly home together, old Tender stalking in front as guard of honour, with his tail and eyebrows elevated with importance, to an angle of forty-five degrees.

After the first outburst of joy on the part of Mrs. Marshall, and the first exchange of civilities with the family at the Hall, and one or two of the other country magnates, the party at the Cottage settled down into a calm and pleasant routine, which Aurelia fancied at first would content her for ever. They breakfasted early, in the morning parlour, Mrs. Marshall taking the head of the table, Mr. Leroy the foot, and Aurelia the side. After the post was in, and all letters read and answered, it was time for a little music. Then came a long and pleasant walk upon the moor, then luncheon, and an afternoon spent in reading, music, or riding and driving, as the case might be. They dined at six, and after coffee, Mrs. Marshall invariably dozed in an easy chair over her knitting, while Aurelia sang to Mr. Leroy. One evening in each week was spent at the Hall. That was the extent of the dissipation in which they indulged.

I once saw two very old pictures, in a country inn, which told their own story without the aid of words. The first was a cottage interior, where a cat slept

cosily upon the hearth, and an old dame slumbered placidly in a high-backed chair. The latticed window was open, and a dark girl in pink and a fair girl in blue were very busy there, pulling in a little winged urchin, with curly flaxen hair, remarkably short petticoats, and a bow and quiver. The old lady snored tranquilly through it all. But in the companion picture the scene is changed from the interior to the exterior of the cottage. The girl in pink and the girl in blue were sobbing by the door-post, and young love pouting and sulky, was being marched off the premises at the end of a stout birch-broom, wielded by the old lady who looked as fierce as a grenadier, with her high cap, and her steel spectacles all askew over her aged nose.

Here, in Charnley Cottage was the same thing over again, only that the urchin flew in without any assistance, and the old lady never woke at all.

Aurelia, tired of the storm of passion in which she had lived so long, abjured the very name and thought of love, and fancied that she could never feel anything beyond the mildest friendship for any man again. Imagining herself so very safe, she never suspected the arrows that were beginning to fly so fast around her. When she loved Paolo she could neither eat, drink nor sleep for thinking of him. He troubled her dreams by night, and her rest by day. Now her appetite never failed, and her slumbers were profound. It never occurred to her that there might be a milder form of the disease, as well as of the measles. She did not know that, even after a heart has burned itself into ashes, you may still put a brazier within the charred and empty walls, and light some semblance to a fire there.

Mr. Leroy was the first to open his eyes to the danger. He sat thinking about it one morning in the breakfast-parlour, when Aurelia came running down, in the greatest spirits to get a cup of tea.

"Why do you look so serious?" was her first question. "Have I offended you?"

"What an idea!"

"Are you in trouble, then? Can I do anything to help you?"

"No. There are some things in this world, strange as it may seem, which you cannot do."

"I wonder what."

It was on his tongue's end to tell her all, but he refrained. He feared that it would affront her, and seeking for an evasive answer his eye happened to fall upon a book of navigation, which he had been consulting the day before. It suggested an idea.

"A number of things," he said, smiling; "and one is this. You cannot box the compass, Aurelia!"

"Can't I, though?" she said, laughing: "you don't know half my accomplishments yet. Now, just listen. North—north and by east—nor—nor—nor—east—and by north—nor—east—nor—east and by

east—east—nor—east—east and by north—east—east and by south—sou—sou—east—sou—east and by east—south. What do you think of that?" she added, saucily.

"Who on earth taught you?"

"An old sailor carpenter we had at the theatre. Such a dear old Jack tar, with a quid for ever in his mouth. He said I was the prettiest woman he 'ever seed in his life,' and I assure you I valued the compliment. I always used to 'box the compass' to a waltzing tune while I practised my dances. You have no idea how it regulates the steps."

"I certainly have not."

"Look, then."

She caught up the long, full skirt of her dress displaying a very beautiful foot and ankle as she did so, and glided gracefully round the room singing a waltzing tune.

"But you are not boxing the compass," he cried, playfully.

"Oh! you want the rest of it, do you? Very well:—South and by west—sou—sou—west—sou—west and by south—sou—west—sou—west and by west—west—sou—west—west and by south—west—west and by north—west—nor—west—nor—west and by west—nor—west—nor—west and by north—nor—nor—west—north and by west—north."

She paused laughing and out of breath. She was right; it made a very good waltzing tune, as she sang it, but he was not thinking of that, just then. He was thinking of her, once the idol of the stage, and now content to dance and sing in the breakfast-parlour of a country cottage for his amusement. He was thinking of the freshness, the sparkling piquant simplicity, the childlike gaiety of spirit, which had survived that stage life—her fashionable and her married life alike. She was bewitching, fascinating, bonnie; yes, that was the word—"a bonnie lassie"—and the light of his eyes and the desire of his heart. Should he ever dare to tell her so? Something of this was written in his face, for as he looked up at her when she finished her dance, the merry speech she was about to utter died upon her lips. For a moment, there was an awkward silence. Then Mr. Leroy said, "You dance beautifully."

"Do you think so?"

He rose and took her hand. She began to blush vividly; so did he. There they stood silent and stupid. In spite of her agitation, the ludicrous side of the situation, struck Aurelia so forcibly, that she was almost bursting with suppressed laughter.

"Aurelia!" said Mr. Leroy, in his deepest tone.

She looked up in his face, turned crimson again, twitched her hand away and ran out of the room.

Few words were really needed after that. But I question much if two people ever found out that they

cared for each other, by "boxing the compass" to a waltzing tune.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Green, green upon her brow
The laurel wreath shall be,
Although that laurel now
Must not be shared with me?"

"Tell her that day by day
Life looks to me more dim;
I falter when I pray,
* * * * *

"And bid her, when I die,
Come to our fav'rite tree—
I shall not hear her sigh,
Nor let her sigh for me!"

PRAED.

For the rest of that day Aurelia was not visible, and Mr. Leroy had to walk, ride, and dine alone. After dinner, however, he caught a glimpse of her straw hat in the garden, and joined her there. She was bending over a double red rose, which filled the evening air with its rich perfume. She looked up as she heard his step, and held out her hand with a smile of welcome.

"Truant!" he said. "Where have you been all day long?"

"In my own room."

"What have you been doing?"

"Reading and writing letters. I never write letters except on one day in the week, and this happened to be the appointed time. I hope you have enjoyed your solitude."

"Remarkably."

"How sweet this evening air smells. How calm and quiet the twilight is!"

"Will you walk?"

"If you like."

"Come, then."

He gave her his arm, whistled to Tender, and they strolled out upon the common together. The fine silence of the twilight hour was around them; the sky in the west burned with a hundred different dyes. Aurelia did not speak. She seemed out of spirits. At last Mr. Leroy told her so.

"I may be," she said, looking away from him. "Mr. Leroy, I am going to leave Charnley very soon."

"What do you mean?" he asked, stopping short.

She repeated what she had said, and he looked greatly vexed.

"Are you tired of this quiet home—of this quiet life?"

A yearning, wistful look was in Aurelia's eyes; but still she answered, "Yes, I think I am. And I must go away."

"Is it your intention to go upon the stage again?" he asked, stiffly.

"I cannot tell."

At that moment Mrs. Marshall, who had gone to the Hall on an errand, appeared in sight. At the end of the little path they were traversing, Aurelia watched her nervously. The instant she saw them she shook her head, and when she reached the place where they stood waiting for her, she instantly attacked her master.

"It will not do, Mr. Leroy. I tell you it will never do!"

"What will not do?"

"Mind, I don't think you mean any harm by it, neither does Reley, for she is as innocent as a newborn babe; but I told her this very morning that I should speak to you about it, and so I will."

"It does not matter—it is of no consequence. I will tell Mr. Leroy myself," said Aurelia, who looked terribly annoyed.

"You? Not a bit of it! Didn't you almost go down on your knees to-day to beg me not to tell him?"

"Pray what is it?" asked Mr. Leroy, whose curiosity began to grow rampant. "Why don't you tell me at once, Mrs. Marshall?"

"So I will, sir. You see this is just the long and short of it—people are talking!"

"Talking! They always do that, so far as I know, Mrs. Marshall."

"Yes, sir; but now they are talking about you and Miss Aurelia."

"Indeed! That makes a difference. Pray what do they say?"

"They say, sir, that you are far too young and too good-looking to be guardian to a beautiful young widow like her; they say you ought not to live in the same house, nor to walk or ride together; in fact, sir, I can't tell you what they don't say. You know what people's tongues are."

"That I do, to my cost," said Mr. Leroy, looking rather grave.

"And what are you going to do about it, sir?"

"Finish his walk, I hope, and pay no attention to such nonsense," said Aurelia, gaily. "I wonder how you can repeat it, Mrs. Marshall."

"Aurelia is quite right," said Mr. Leroy, rousing out of a profound reverie. "We will take our walk, and then come back to the Cottage, and talk the matter over with you, dear friend."

Mrs. Marshall went off, grumbling and shaking

her head. Aurelia and Tender walked on; Mr. Leroy followed.

"So this is why you are going to leave me?" he asked, after a little while.

"I have no patience with them!" she said, turning round wrathfully. "We do not meddle with their affairs; why cannot they let ours alone?"

"So this is why you are going to leave me?" he repeated.

"Well—yes! It is not pleasant to feel that my every word, and action, and look is watched and commented upon. I would rather go!"

"Do you remember the American poem, about the little shepherd and shepherdess? How the shepherd grew tired of his simple life, and longed to leave the valley where he was born? How he says—

"Ah, the world is very wide,
And I weary of my flocks?"

Are you like 'Ulna' in that poem, Aurelia?"

"Scarcely. I don't know that I have any particular desire to see the world. I have seen enough—uh, yes!—too much of it! And I could stay here very happily all my life long, if they would but let me alone!"

"Could you?" he cried, seizing her hand. "Then stay!"

She bit her lip and blushed.

"I should not have dared to ask you two hours ago. But if these people decide that I am still young and handsome enough to be dangerous—"

Aurelia burst out laughing.

"Oh, vanity!—thy name is man!"

"Well, anything to make you smile. Now, tell me honestly, could you, indeed, be content here with me? And will you stay as my wife?"

He drew a long breath as he asked the question. To him it was something terrific—an event to be remembered during the remainder of his life. But Aurelia had heard too many such queries to be greatly startled by a fresh one. She felt awkward and nervous, and at the same moment a thought of Paolo crossed her mind. Upon that hint she spoke.

"You have done me a great honor," she said, quietly, "and I suppose I ought to feel greatly obliged to you. But I doubt the wisdom of the step you propose."

"Why?"

"Do you think we should be happy?"

"I know that I should. With you for my wife—my very own—I should feel that I was spending each day in Paradise."

"Humph! How long would that last, I wonder?" she said, wickedly. "No, Mr. Leroy, I think, to quote from Mrs. Marshall, it will never do."

"At least, give your reasons," he said, looking greatly mortified.

"In the first place, you are a gentleman. You can trace your family back for hundreds of years—to Adam himself, for aught I know."

"Well?"

"I can do nothing of the kind. My mother was but a poor woman, who died in a hospital—I was reared in Whitechapel, and I do not even know my father's name."

"The name of Aurelia is enough," said Mr. Leroy, proudly.

"You are very kind to say so; but, if I should marry you, would you always think so?"

"Always."

"Then, again, I have been on the stage—and I know you hate the stage."

"I have good cause. But let that pass. Stage or no stage, I love you, and I ask you to be my wife."

"And now for the last and most important reason," she said, turning crimson. "I have the greatest regard and esteem for you—I am fond of you, in a word—but I don't love you."

"That will come in time."

"Don't be too sure. I am not going to be romantic, and rave about extinguished volcanoes, or anything of that kind. But I must tell you the truth—I have loved once with my whole soul, and in vain!"

"Well," he said, after a slight pause, "I am not one of those men who expect a woman to remain untouched in heart till they come upon the scene. You have loved, and you married; well and good. Let me hope that you will marry and love again."

"I did not marry the man I loved," she said, in a low tone.

Mr. Leroy started.

"Who was it, then?"

"Never mind his name. He is married now!"

"Is he still living?"

"Yes."

"And you love him still?"

"I cannot say that. But, at least, I remember him, and I could never love any one like that again."

"I am willing to trust to time," said Mr. Leroy, gently.

"Not for that! If I thought I was ever to go through with that more than mortal agony again, I think I should quietly take a strong dose of laudanum before the time came!"

She spoke lightly—she even smiled as she looked in his face. But if she had sought the world over for words which should express the depth of her feeling for Paolo, she could not have found better ones. Calmly as they were uttered, they carried weight; and Mr. Leroy, looking at her, felt that his wife might love, and respect, and pet, and caress

him; but that the golden time of perfect, passionate love could never come to her again.

However, we grow philosophical as we grow old; and if we cannot get the thing we want, we take the thing which is next best to it. At one time, Mr. Leroy would have scorned the thought of accepting a heart that was not all his own; but now, even the friendship of the woman he adored seemed a gift to be desired and won at any price. He told her so; and then she smiled, and placed her hand in his.

"If, knowing all, you can still wish for it, it is yours," she said, gently; and he pressed her to his heart, and kissed her for the first time since she stood at his knee, a little innocent child.

There never was a quieter, a more unromantic betrothal. Mrs. Marshall seemed much more elated at hearing the news than the bride elect, who went about her preparations in the most unconcerned manner, and talked about her wedding very much as if it had been a trip to Brighton. The good Squire, hearing the news, came over to congratulate Aurelia, and brought with him a beautiful pearl necklace, which had once belonged to his wife. Aurelia promised faithfully to wear it on her wedding-day, and he galloped off towards home with positive tears in his eyes. Certainly it was not the Squire's fault that she was not reigning, at that very moment, lady of the manor and mistress at the Hall.

On the night before the wedding Mr. Leroy told Aurelia the whole history of his attachment to the fair "Helen," and its results. As she listened, the conviction grew upon her still more strongly, that this was indeed the mother of the beautiful "Peri." But she said nothing of her own first strange introduction to the pair. Mr. Leroy supposed that she had met the Peri in some of her charitable visits to the sick and poor in London. She never deceived him, and to this day he does not know to what depths of degradation and infamy his first love fell. Aurelia told him, however, of her discovery of the dressing-case and letters, in her search through the old lumber-room, and he grew pettish at the mere hearing of the tale.

"It was one of my bridal gifts to her," he said, hastily. "I hope to heaven I shall never set eyes on it again! I declare, when I think of her treachery—of what she made me suffer—I am angry with myself for having been such a fool. It is mortifying to look back and see what a puppet I was in the hands of a woman without one good feeling in her heart, or an ounce of brains in her head. But, thank God, I have found you at last—the very type of all that I love and worship in your sex, if you would but like me a little better. However, that will come in time. It shall come for I have sworn it!"

"You see, it was one of my bright dreams as a child that I was to marry you," said Aurelia, roguishly; "and now it has come true!"

"Yes, it has come true! May I be worthy of such happiness, by being grateful for it!" he answered, in a tone so fervent, that it checked the jest still hovering on her lip.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THEY were married next morning in the parish church, and all the world was there to see. Aurelia had an earl's daughter for her bridesmaid. Mr. Leroy had a baronet for his "best man." The road across the common was strewed with flowers, and the bells rang as if they were going mad with joy, when the bridal party walked back to the Cottage, with old Tender, wearing his silver collar, marching gravely in front. Troops of villagers lined the road, to see the bride, whose goodness had endeared her to them even more than her beauty or her fame.

Within the rooms were crowded with the rank and beauty of the neighborhood. To be an invited guest at Aurelia's wedding, was a distinction for even the proudest there; and the breakfast went off far more merrily than if it had been given in a ducal hall.

At last the carriage was at the door. Tender, who was to accompany the happy pair, took his place beside the coachman on the box, much to the delight of the village urchins, in whose eyes the great black dog was a being far removed above his race, and only second, perhaps, in importance to his beautiful mistress. The noble guests came crowding to the door, to see the bride away. There were handshakings, kisses, blessings, and some tears. Then the handkerchiefs were waved—there was a chorus of good-byes—a shower of old shoes; the bells rang out, and they were off, over the wide common, and into the wide world together!

"Well, love, do you think we can be happy?" asked the fond husband, as he drew the bright head down upon his breast.

"At least, we will try," she said, with a smile, and let her hand lie quietly in his.

"How did the marriage turn out?" I think I hear some fair young lady reader say.

To which I answer, far better than most marriages do. The husband idolized his wife—the wife liked and respected her husband—and their home, whether in Belgrave Square or at the humble "Charnley Cottage," was a very peaceful and happy one.

Only once again did Aurelia see the hero of her early dreams. Paolo was about to leave the stage,

on account of his failing health, and Mr. Leroy was anxious to hear him for the last time. Aurelia did not object, and most unsuspectingly her husband led her into the very danger which he would have most scrupulously avoided, had he but known of its existence.

They went early to the Opera—on her way to some ball or party—and Aurelia was in full dress, with diamonds on her neck and arms, and in her hair. On the very boards where she herself used to sing, Paolo stood, with another prima donna by his side. Did the old times come back to his mind, as to hers—as to the minds of every one in the house? Few knew of the attachment which had really existed between them, and it had been forgotten in the lapse of years, or confounded with one of those many idle rumours that coupled their names together during their two seasons of triumph. But to have Paolo singing on the stage, while Aurelia sat in her box beside her husband, to listen, was at least a novelty, and many an opera-glass was turned that way during the intervals between the acts.

Mr. Leroy bore the general scrutiny very well. Handsome, dignified, and unconcerned, he studied the play-bill or listened to the music, little dreaming what it said to Aurelia's heart, as she sat so silent, looking at the stage.

Only once did she lose her tranquil self-possession. They were singing the "Miserere" in the "Trova-tore," and through the solemn chanting of the chor-

us, Paolo's perfect voice rang out,

"Non ti scordar di me!"

A pause—and then again the sweet, sad prayer of passionate love and grief—

"Non ti scordar di me!"

Leonora, addio!"

Her box was very near the stage, and Paolo looked up at her as he pronounced those words. She felt, by the sinking of her heart, that he was uttering a last adieu! What did it mean? Where was he going? Why did he look so pale and ill? Above all, why did he gaze so mournfully at her?

She never saw him again after that night. The papers announced his departure to a "warmer climate," on account of his failing health; and, within three months, the music-loving world of London was shocked with the tidings of his death. Like the swan, his dying notes had been his sweetest ones. And THEN Aurelia knew the meaning of that strange farewell—knew that he had loved her best of all—and that his last thoughts had been, as the poor Peri said, "of her—her only."

She never breathes his name, and the secret of her life is buried in that grave at Florence. To this day Mr. Leroy never dreams that she loved Paolo. Yet surely he might forgive that temporary infidelity of her heart, since its whole study seems only how to make him as happy as man was ever intended to be—this side of Paradise!

THE END.