

RUBY DUKE.

BY

MRS. H. K. POTWIN.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
CHAPTER I.	
A JAR	5
CHAPTER II.	
ELMTON PARSONAGE	21
CHAPTER III.	
MRS. TOURNEY'S DRESSMAKER	34
CHAPTER IV.	
THE FATHER'S FUNERAL	48
CHAPTER V.	
MADAM PIXLEY'S SEMINARY	62
CHAPTER VI.	
THE FIRST SOIREE	78
CHAPTER VII.	
RUBY'S HOME	90
CHAPTER VIII.	
LIFE AT THE PARSONAGE	99
CHAPTER IX.	
SEASIDE GAYETIES	115
CHAPTER X.	
CLARENCE'S DECISION	136
CHAPTER XI.	
FARMER HOPKINS' OFFER	148
CHAPTER XII.	
THE ANGEL AT THE PARSONAGE	160
CHAPTER XIII.	
ALONE IN THE WORLD	171
CHAPTER XIV.	
INTO THE LIGHT	184
CHAPTER XV.	
REVEALINGS	196

plan

CHAPTER XVI.	
A PAGE FROM CLARENCE'S LIFE	208
CHAPTER XVII.	
EVELINE'S POWER	222
CHAPTER XVIII.	
NOT YET	236
CHAPTER XIX.	
COUNTER-CURRENTS	245
CHAPTER XX.	
THE SURPRISE	255
CHAPTER XXI.	
RUBY'S WORK OF LOVE	267
CHAPTER XXII.	
DISASTER AT THE QUARRY	278
CHAPTER XXIII.	
THE TASK-MASTER	291
CHAPTER XXIV.	
THE WEDDING	307
CHAPTER XXV.	
MABEL'S DEATH	317
CHAPTER XXVI.	
RUBY'S WORK INCREASING	327
CHAPTER XXVII.	
RUBY'S LOVE	334
CHAPTER XXVIII.	
SKIRMISHING	346
CHAPTER XXIX.	
MARRIAGE	360
CHAPTER XXX.	
AGE AND YOUTH	369
CHAPTER XXXI.	
EDITH'S RETURN	383
CHAPTER XXXII.	
FOUR YEARS AFTER	394
CHAPTER XXXIII.	
CONCLUSION	411

RUBY DUKE.

CHAPTER I.

A JAR.

"See how the world its veterans rewards!
A youth of frolics, an old-age of cards:
Fair to no purpose, artful to no end;
Young without lovers, old without a friend;
A fop their passion, but their prize a sot;
Alive, ridiculous; and dead, forgot!
And yet, believe me, good as well as ill,
Woman's at best a contradiction still."

"THEN you persist, madam, in driving the boy from home, do you?"

"You use strong language, my most amiable husband; there is no driving about the matter. I only conclude that the child will be better off in the country, with his delicate health and sensitive nature."

"What has made the boy sensitive, madam?"

"And how should I know? Indeed, Mr. Tournay, you are in a savage mood this morning."

"Not at all, Maria, not at all. I only want to give the boy a fair chance with us all; he desires to spend the summer with you and his sisters; he craves your

love and care, I suppose, poor fool that he is; and, as his mother, you are bound to give it him; I won't consent to his being driven off when he pleads to stay."

"He *shall* go!" muttered the mother, between closed teeth, as she arranged her becoming breakfast-cap before the mirror.

"Why don't you speak, Maria?" came impatiently from the husband.

"No occasion, my dear; the law is laid down, I suppose."

"Then you agree to it, my dear."

"No, I do not, Mr. Tourney. Of all times in the world, this summer I want to be free from care; and Mabel is old enough to be consulted, I should think. Must she be subjected to this mortifying trial? Have you no feeling for your eldest daughter, sir?"

"Has she no feeling for her brother? would be a question, perhaps. Clarence is sensitive, I acknowledge, — morbidly so; and, thus far, he has seemed happy away from us; but older now, more companionable, and shrinking as he does from going among strangers, he should find a refuge at home; and hearts — a *mother's* heart, Maria — to shield him."

"Gracious heaven! you are enough to drive one crazy. Do let the matter rest for to-day. I shall be more fit to drive out this morning than I am now to eat."

"Do be reasonable, Maria."

"I could ask the same of you, Mr. Tourney. Is it not reasonable to look to the best interests of my child? A city life would kill him; he needs the bracing air of the country, and a quiet home, free from excitement; he needs care, as you say, that I *cannot* give him, and sympathy that I have no time to bestow."

"And where will he find them, madam?" was asked, with bitter scorn.

"Find them? It's easy enough to get all we can pay for; and, to tell the whole story, Cousin Mary spoke of a minister's family, near their country-seat, who would gladly take charge of him, — most estimable people, — and where he could attend to his studies, and find the sympathy and love you talk so much of."

"I wish your cousin would take him into her family, — a true mother she is."

"How could you think of such a thing!" ignoring the rebuke of his last words. "Cousin has a great deal of company in the summer, and Clarence needs retirement."

"Unfortunate boy, he needs a *home*."

"And that is just the place I desire and expect to get for him. If you only would trust me, Mr. Tourney. What kind of a *home* would he find in a hotel, even with us?"

"What, indeed! Well, arrange it as you please; only help him to bear the disappointment. I don't want his sad eyes looking in my face again. And this I do insist upon, Maria: when you come home in the

fall, he shall come too. I will have my family together in the winter. Tell him so."

"Let the winter look out for itself," sung the lady, with an expression of intense satisfaction and relief. "And now, my lord," she added, mockingly bending before him, "your lecture finished, will you take a cup of coffee with me?"

As they left the room, Mabel met them on the staircase, and threw a look of inquiry upon the mother, who answered by a nod, and a whispered "all right."

"Where is Master Clarence, Rachel?" she asked, seating herself by the urn.

"He took his breakfast a half hour past, with Miss Sophia, and has gone for a short ride. Miss Edith went with him."

Breakfast despatched, Mr. Tourney hastened to his office, and soon the mother and daughter were in close conference, the subject being the same which had excited the former, earlier in the day.

"Do tell me, mother, did you manage it? Are we to go alone, or take the whole tribe?"

"Do I not always manage, Mabel? Alone, of course."

"Then the children will both be put at school?—glorious! I really thought father would overcome last night, mother; he seemed quite determined, and I had about made up my mind to stay at home all summer. But, now, this is splendid. Let's get ready at once, and be off to select our dresses before any one calls."

"Not too fast, my dear; that is not the way. I should never have carried the day, if I had not taken time, and slept over it."

"Could you sleep, and that question unsettled?"

"Certainly; I knew it could terminate no other way. And now I must take Clarence and drive down to Elmton, see that minister, and get this thing arranged; *then*, we can talk about purchases."

"If the man won't take charge of him, then what?"

"Some one else will. But I have no fear; he is settled on a small salary, as all country ministers are. I shall make him a large offer; he can't refuse."

"Does Clare know yet?"

"No, I have not seen him this morning. Is that the carriage? Yes. Well, would you mind riding down in the cars with Edy, and let her get some school dresses, and make her own selections? only advise her somewhat, of course; that will please her. I expect she will be more troublesome to manage than Clare."

"Anything, only we have the season to ourselves," gayly sung this eldest child, little dreaming, in her happy-heartedness, with what these summer months would freight her short career.

Even while they spoke, a young girl burst into the apartment, her black eyes sparkling and cheeks glowing with the morning exercise. She was slender in form, and carried her head with a natural hauteur that was not unbecoming even in one so young, while the face expressed so much cheerful good-nature as it did

at that moment. However, it was not difficult to see that the eyes might flash with rage, and, should occasion require, the lips could curl with scorn, or compress themselves into the most defiant lines.

She threw off her hat, and folded the shawl with quick precision; rolled the gloves one within another, and dropped them into the hat, talking all the while of the ride she had enjoyed so much; and as she drew a low seat near her mother, asked quickly, —

“Are you going away this morning, mother? You seem to have something on your mind.”

“Yes, dear. Where’s Clarence?”

“Coming. Where’re you going? shopping?”

Before the mother could answer, Clarence entered. Of him, she had no fear; she had always found him yielding and ready to obey, but she evidently shrank from making known to the youngest of the circle the decision of the morning.

“Come here, darling, and sit by me; I want to tell you something,” addressing the boy, who had walked slowly into the room. As his mother spoke so tenderly, he quickened his pace, and, sinking upon a low fauteuil by her side, looked into her face with so much of reverential love, that the worldly woman’s heart almost belied the words she was ready to utter.

It was a rich face that looked into hers. Indescribably beautiful were those tender eyes; and the bright rings of hair seemed to have garnered up the morning sunshine, while the mouth, exquisite in outline, wore

ever a timid, sorrowing expression, as though the world had borne heavily upon his gentle spirit. It was a glorious mind that could shed such radiance upon the perfect features of the lad, could impart so heavenly an expression to the face, that noble natures, brought in contact with him, scarce noticed his deformity.

The selfish mother could not forget her boy’s misfortune. Notwithstanding the loving spirit, the gifted mind, the gentle, affectionate manners, she never failed to see, with intense disappointment and rebellious pride, the terrible deformity that marked the youthful frame. Even while her soul was touched, as it sometimes must be, in her best moods, with pity, and she yearned to take him to her heart, and fold her motherly arms about him, the sight of his poor broken back would chill the sentiment; and the thought of all she might lose of worldly pleasure, should she devote herself to him, finally drove away every generous impulse.

In his earliest infancy, every selfish feeling had been gratified by his wonderful beauty, and attractive, winning ways. All their hopes had centred upon him; all their plans were formed with reference to him, rather than the older child. He was like to have been their idol. And, had he advanced into man’s estate, as they thought and desired, with only the home education they were competent to bestow, the childhood of Clarence Tourney would have matured into a selfish, vain, and frivolous manhood. But a higher wisdom marked out his course. An eye that was looking into the vast, eternal

future, was guiding the child; and although the path was rough and full of pain, and obstacles marked the way at every step; though there was but little of ease for the weary frame, — yet the hand that led him on was always a protecting hand; and the love that devised the way, was a holy, wise, and infinitely tender love.

The time would come, even in this life, when Clarence would sincerely acknowledge as much, and in the very depths of his nature feel the truth of it. An injury coming to him at an early age, and causing an increased deformity of the back, year by year, had transformed the once graceful figure into a sad and painful sight. None looked upon the stunted form and raised shoulders, but to pity; few could look into the glorious face, but to love.

It was a sad burden for a boy who delighted in harmony and beauty, as Clarence did. How much he needed the forgetful love of mother and sister to enable him to carry it through life! But it might not be; he must bear it alone; he must be conscious of it always; and must learn, as he is now beginning to, that, if it is a mortification to him, it is doubly so to his proud kindred. He must learn that the scanty expressions of affection are oftener forced from them by a sense of duty, than flow from any rich, spontaneous gushings of the loving heart; must learn the bitter lesson of life without the support and manly example of a father to cheer and help; and must crave a mother's presence and love and prayers with a vain, unsatisfied yearning; and

the sweet companionship of sisters with a painful, ever-abiding sense that it may not be.

Thrust upon strangers, shut out with mocking kindness from his home, and from the hearts that should have cherished him, what wonder that his naturally sensitive mind became more and more shrinking? that, at last, a nervous dread of meeting strangers should impart something of awkwardness, and much of coldness and reserve, to the manners of the boy? What wonder that as he advanced in years, he learned to look upon himself as a dark blot upon the grand page of humanity, and hide himself more and more closely in the retreat provided for him?

The parents, unable to endure the painful sight, that was a daily shock to their delicate sensibilities, found him, when but seven years old, a home in the country. Placed under the care of a kind, gentle-hearted farmer's wife, he had been not unhappy; and, loving rural life, being attracted by the many objects of interest upon the farm, he had increased in strength, and in time the pallid face changed its character. A faint flush of health dawned upon cheek and lip; and now at sixteen he was strong and well apparently, though not robust and rugged as he might have been, had he not received the cruel injury that marred the beauty of his form.

The woman died, and Clarence mourned, as a son would mourn a mother. From that time until now, about four months, he had lived under his father's roof. This new life was a revelation to the lad. He became as

familiar with the beauties of art and humanity as he had been with those of nature. And as this last satisfied the necessities of his soul, so the former answered to the demands of his taste, and awakened each day new desires. The elegance and attractiveness of this new home, brought up in contrast with his former life and its plain surroundings, caused him to shrink from returning to it; and the desire to abide within the charmed circle was so strong, that Clarence had ventured to beg his father not to send him again among strangers.

He gloried in the fresh, delicate beauty of his mother's face; he was affected sometimes almost to tears by the sweet, musical tones of her voice, particularly when moved by a pity she could not repress, as she looked into the loving, pleading eyes of her unfortunate boy.

Unobtrusive, receiving and expecting only what the impulse of the moment moved them to bestow, content and happy in that meagre supply, he asked nothing but to abide with them, to linger beneath the same roof, to watch the expression of faces he almost adored, and listen to tones that filled him with more joy than could any earthly music.

But it was not so to be; and in this first cruel denial, this first real disappointment, Clarence was made to realize, more forcibly than ever before, that he was to be one apart, shut out from all that is dearest to the human heart.

And as those sweet, penetrating eyes sought the

mother's face, and as he listened to the artful modulations of her voice, while she explained to him the necessity of his once more leaving home, it was sad to see the shadow that crept slowly over him, and clouded the bright anticipation of the moment; sad even to her worldly heart, to note the trembling lip, the swimming eyes, and, ere she had finished, the slow drooping of the golden head, until it rested in her lap.

As yet, he had not spoken a word, nor was it needed; even the youngest plainly understood the bitterness of his disappointment, of the emotion so hardly controlled, of the tears he vainly endeavored to hide. Resting her soft, jewelled hand upon his head, she added kindly, —

“You see, darling, how much for your advantage it will be in every respect, don't you? You will meet us again in the fall; meantime you will be improving in those studies for which you have so much taste, and your father is willing to purchase you a piano, and if we can find a teacher there, you can spend all the time you desire in cultivating the art you love. Now look up, dear; what could be a brighter picture? You are ready to go?”

He raised his head again, and the tender smile almost mocked the pitiful pleading of the eyes, as he answered in a voice that thrilled her heart, —

“If it must be, dear mother; but why do you leave this home, where we can all be so happy, and where everything is beautiful. Must you go?”

“Yes, Clarence. We do so every season. And not

having a summer home, as your uncle has, we board at a large hotel, which would be very unpleasant for you."

A flush of pain passed over the delicate face; but, without removing his gaze, he asked again, —

"But why go at all, mother? Is it not pleasanter here?"

"Ah, darling, you don't understand; every one goes away in summer. It would never do to live here through the heat, as we do in winter."

"Is it unhealthy, mother?"

"Yes, dear, of course."

"But my father and Aunt Sophie do not go."

"He must be in his office, you know. And Aunt Sophie must keep house for him; — and then he takes a trip to the mountains every season."

"Is he not with you, then?"

"No, no, darling; you grow inquisitive. He prefers to hunt and fish. Your father goes his way, and we ours. You too shall have a pleasant country home, and, I hope, be happy in it. Now, are you ready to ride out to auntie's with me?"

"Yes, mother. May I ask one more question, dear mother?"

"Certainly, child. I did n't mean to chide you, but you are so unlike your sisters. Try, and not be over-sensitive."

"I will, mother; but is my home to be near auntie's?"

"In the same village."

"And Cousin Ruby. Is she there?"

"No, Clarence; she is away at school, and Edith is to be with her. You see we have fine plans for all of you," said the mother, glancing warily upon the youngest daughter, who was assorting a box of small shells.

The words were scarce spoken, before the child had jumped from her chair, shells flying in every direction, eyes opening with astonishment and anger, and the explosion feared was at hand.

"Me go to school with Ruby? I won't do it! Father said I should go to the Springs with you. Mother, what do you mean?"

"There, there, you little tempest! See how calm Clarence is. Try and be like him. Your father is preposterous to put such an absurd idea into your head. A child of fourteen at the Springs! No, Miss Edith, not until your school education is finished, can you move in society. Ridiculous!"

"*Ridiculous!*" mimicked the mature miss, with tears of anger in her eyes, and a red heat burning either cheek. "Father said I should go. I'm most as tall as Mabel. I won't go to school in hot weather. I'll stay home with Aunt Sophie first, I will."

"Be quiet, Edith!" said the mother, firmly. "The plans are all made. Here is my purse; take it yourself, and go with Mabel, and select the dresses you need for school and Sabbath wear. Get anything you choose; I can trust your taste; and now be a good girl, for I have no more time to argue the subject."

Then rising, she lingered only to add, —

"I'll be ready in a half hour, Clarence; order the horses for me. You are a dear boy not to trouble me with fretting, as Edy does."

'T was thus she won her boy's heart; thus she hid from his blinded eyes the real selfishness of her nature.

As the mother and son left the room to prepare for their ride, Edith took the purse, pouting and flashing her black eyes at Mabel, who sat, the picture of innocence and unconcern, at the window; then snapped, —

"You've had the planning of this, I suppose."

"No, Edy, 'pon my word. Mother thinks it's for your best good to be at school. And you are really too young to go with us. I shall be delighted when you can. Indeed I shall."

"H'm! I arn't quite a fool. I can see a little farther than poor Clarence can, thank fortune. Soft speeches don't deceive me. But come along: if I'm going down town, I'd like to go before dinner, and it'll take you half the forenoon to dress."

"O, no," laughed Mabel, pleasantly; "I'll be ready as soon as you are. I'm sure you ought to be happy; you've got the purse, and it looks well filled."

"I'll spend every penny," was the spiteful reply.

"And then, Edy, you are to be with Ruby. I'm sure that will be pleasant."

"Pleasant enough, if I wanted to be in school, but I don't, Miss Mabel; but, thank fortune, I can believe every word Ruby speaks. She means just what she

says. It would n't hurt older people to take pattern," raising her voice, as Mabel left her and tripped over the stairs.

"Highty, tighy, Miss Edith! What's kindled the fire in your eyes? You seemed gentle as a dove at breakfast. Where's your mother?"

"In her room, I s'pose," pouted the young miss. Then, jerking herself about, and facing the lady who had just entered, she exclaimed, the tears starting afresh, —

"Aunt Sophie, did you know of this hateful plan at breakfast-time, and not tell me?"

"What plan? Plans are not strange in this house. What's up now?" And the tall, angular form went on with the self-appointed task of picking up and taking care of articles thrown down by the others, without much apparent interest in the new plan which had so affected Edith, who answered spitefully, —

"Mother's going to pack me off to school, after father said I might go with them to the Springs. It's mean! Just as though father couldn't have some control of us children. Don't you think it's mean, Aunt Sophie? Why don't you say?"

"Well, no; it's rather more sensible than I feared. What could a chit of a thing like you learn at the Springs? You'll take to folly naturally enough, after you leave school. My advice, Miss Edith, is, go off to school with as good a grace as you can muster; get a good dose of strong common-sense, — for, verily, the virtue is dreadfully scarce, since my young days."

"I don't want anybody's advice, if they can't sympathize with me"; and with a quick, impatient motion, she followed her sister up-stairs, muttering, —

"*You've* got common-sense enough for the family, — and I won't go if I can help it, any way. They're all against me, every one, just because I'm the youngest."

"Tut, tut, Miss Pepper-box! It's a mercy there are plenty of schools in the country. Why, she's worse than the backache. Springs, indeed! She's set on springs now. We never know when she'll bound, or where she'll light."

It was not until this young lady of fourteen summers stood in one of the most fashionable stores, looking over, with the eye of a critic, the elegant dress goods, that her equanimity was fully restored; and when all the selections had been made, and delicate muslins, with lovely sprays, fine cambrics, and cool thin fabrics were neatly folded and piled together, with a pretty silk upon the top, she was almost satisfied to spend the coming months at school, being convinced she would receive the admiring gaze of every pupil, which would be, on the whole, more satisfactory than being snubbed by older people.

CHAPTER II.

ELMTON PARSONAGE.

"Fly from the town, sweet child! for health
Is happiness, and strength, and wealth.
There is a lesson in each flower,
A story in each stream and bower;
On every herb on which you tread
Are written words, which, rightly read,
Will lead you from earth's fragrant sod,
To hope, and holiness, and God."

THE parsonage was an old house with many rooms upon the ground-floor, looking like several small cottages huddled together in confusion about a larger one, and showing less regard to the claims of architecture than to the conveniences of real life.

Upon one side of the front door was the cosey sitting-room of ample dimensions, with its deep bay-window, where a few house-plants revelled in the sunshine and fresh air, while upon the other side of the generous hall was the parlor, large, square, and dark, seldom used by the family alone; above them two chambers, low, but very broad. Upon the south side, and retreating a few feet from the front wall, was the dining-room, but one story high, with large windows, front and back, opening

upon a veranda, a lawn in front, and garden in the rear of the house. In winter this room was full of cheer and sunshine, while in the summer it was shaded and made cool by the tall old elms, that arched their graceful branches high above the roof.

Still beyond this was another room, in form three sides of a square, with one end half a hexagon, having windows like two eyes looking out right and left, over the same rose-embowered veranda, that, from the street, seemed to be carried round all the jogs and corners of the rambling old house.

Upon the west side, leading from the parlor, another addition had been made for sleeping-rooms, and a winter study for the pastor. In warm weather he had a little refuge at the foot of the grapery, beyond the garden, entirely hidden from the street, and distant enough from the house to be relieved from its manifold sounds, and daily confusion of work.

Back of the sitting-room was the old-fashioned kitchen, with its fireplace so large, that the stove, which now occupied the centre of it, seemed lost and out of place. In this room there were windows upon two sides, and from it, doors leading in every direction,—one into the milk-room, where bright pans gleamed on the shelves, and where the fragrance of sweet cream and new-made butter seemed to abide; another into the porch, where the rustic benches on either side were shaded by the woodbine that covered the lattice, and where the vegetable garden was in plain sight, with its neat rows and

bunches of green, freshly hoed and weeded, clusters of birch poles ready for the running beans, and frames regularly placed for the support of tomatoes. Beyond the carriage road, was the barn; unlike the house, it was new and small, although the number of sheds and out-houses gave even that portion of the premises a look of plenty and liberality.

The forenoon's work was going bravely on. Mrs. Stoughton, the pastor's wife, a large, cheery-looking woman, just past her youth, was giving the last few turns to the churn-handle; while Bridget, the neat, good-natured Irish girl was making ready for the mid-day meal, talking all the while, her voice freighted with a rich brogue,—she not caring, and scarce knowing, whether she was heard or not.

"Shoo! shoo!" exclaimed Mrs. Stoughton, as a daring chicken stepped daintily into the kitchen, attracted by the crumbs which were scattered as Bridget cut the wheaten loaf,— "shoo! shoo! drive them out, Bridget, or we shall be worried to death before summer is over."

"Dade, we shall that; and I'll find a new way to shoe the perty creturs. Will ye take heed to that hint, now?" as she snatched a boy's slipper from the nail, and sent it flying at the chicken, who was glad to put himself in motion, and escape the clumsy missile. A smile flitted over Mrs. Stoughton's face, and the work went on.

"Is the pasture good, Bridget?" asked the mistress;

"seems to me, Daisy don't give quite so much as she did. We shall hardly have as large a churning this time."

"Well, it is, ma'm, if I might be so bould, it's the milking what does all the mischief," with a wise shake of the head.

"The milking! What do you mean, Bridget?"

"Well, you see, ma'm, I can milk two cows as well as one, any time, and Mr. Stoughton ought n't to try; he's a master hand at some things, but milking's not one of 'em, shure."

"He does no harm in trying to help you, does he?"

"That he does, begging your pardon. The good man is full of his music, — and shure, ma'm, he plays a tune on the cow every night and morning. Sometimes he'll milk to a sad tune and then a gay one, and Daisy 'll not let down her milk to any such unaven jerking."

"That's to give the milk a musical taste, Bridget," said a young lad, who had entered in time to hear the grave accusation.

"Shure, Master Harry, the music may improve the taste, and it may not, but it's the quantity we complain of; and there'll be none of it soon, if the good man keeps on. Dade, I think he does much better wielding the pen than the teat!"

"I think he will be glad to give it all up to you, Bridget, if you have time."

"Shure, ma'm, I can stretch my time to take Daisy in, with her loving ways and sweet breath; but ye

needn't trouble the good man with my complaints; he's not to be blamed for his music."

It was nearly the dinner hour when Harry again burst into the kitchen, exclaiming, —

"Mother, there's a carriage at the door. I guess it's Mr. Duke's cousin, for there's a humpback boy in it, with a lady. Hurry up, mother! There goes the knocker."

"Well, well, my son, don't be so impetuous; go yourself, and wait upon them in. I will be ready at once."

"Into the parlor, mother?"

"No, Harry, the sitting-room. Bridget, the butter's come; just gather it together, and leave it in the pantry. I will attend to it. Add more plates to the table; they will take dinner with us, of course." And simply unrolling her sleeves, and divesting herself of the voluminous apron, which was a part of the morning attire, Mrs. Stoughton hastened to receive her guests.

Did the aristocratic visitor anticipate bewildering the good pastor's wife with the splendor of her costume and equipage, she was certainly mistaken; for in ease of manner, elegance of conversation, unaffected courtesy, and generous hospitality, none could excel her.

"Mrs. Tourney, I am sure. I feel acquainted already, through your cousin, Mrs. Duke; and this is Clarence, of whom she spoke so affectionately. I am very glad to see you, dear." And the soft, gentle pressure of her plump hand, the kindly glance, and rich voice won his heart on the instant.

"Let me take your hat, Mrs. Tourney; you will dine with us?"

"Oh, no, Mrs. Stoughton. The ride is not very long; we drive rapidly, and shall be home before our dinner hour, and I meant not to trouble you. Cousin has explained the object of my call, then?"

"Yes; but I cannot allow you to return without rest and refreshment. Our dinner is early. Call it lunch, if you please, and remain with us. Mr. Stoughton will be in soon; and, if this is to be the home of Clarence, you will wish to look about."

The lady yielded; and Mrs. Stoughton turned to her son, who had already commenced conversation with the deformed boy, his frank, merry eyes full of sympathy, and his usually cheery voice more softly modulated.

"Harry, show Clarence about the grounds, and speak to your father."

Clarence cast a pleading look upon his mother, who smilingly answered, —

"Run along, dear, we will stay awhile."

"Mother, will he put up the horses?" asked Harry, in an undertone.

"Certainly, Harry; show him the way first, then speak to your father. He is studying."

"Do not disturb him, Mrs. Stoughton. If we accept your kind invitation, there will be sufficient time for any arrangements that must be made." And, as the boys left the room, she resumed, —

"Is your husband willing to take charge of my poor boy? You seemed to speak favorably."

"Yes, for a time at least, if he can be happy with us. We will try to make it seem like home to him. Harry will be very glad of a companion."

"Have you no other children?"

"A little girl of three; she is at play now."

"And what a lovely home you have, — those great trees, and such a variety of shrubs and flowers. It is quite a little paradise."

"Yes, it is *Home*. And in summer the vines and bushes hide the corners and rough lines of the old house, the grounds are pleasant, and we have a fine supply of fruit."

"That is charming; and the *old house*, as you say, — really, it has a romantic look to me. One is carried back to old times. The rooms are so irregular and low, yet spacious, and have an air of quaintness about them that I like. That room beyond must be the dining-room; how cool and shady the vines make it."

"Yes, it's a pleasant room; step into it, Mrs. Tourney. I will show you the apartment we design for Clarence, should he choose to remain."

"Ah, he will stay with you gladly, if the decision rests with him. This!" she exclaimed, as the pastor's wife, preceding her, opened the door leading to the room we have described.

"Why, it is perfect; and then, between those win-

dows, is just room for his piano; nothing could be better. He'll be happy as a king here."

"If he does not pine for home and mother, Mrs. Tourney."

"Not he; why the child has not been at home but four months, in years. And this is so much better than the last boarding-place. That was a farm. He was kindly cared for, and very happy, but of course could have no social advantages."

"He will enjoy being near his aunt, though Ruby is not at home," responded Mrs. Stoughton.

"Somewhat; but he is not of a social nature, as my daughters are. He shuns the company of strangers, and I believe they are seldom alone at cousin's. No, keep him with you, Mrs. Stoughton. He is happier in seclusion; he feels his misfortune deeply, poor child; and I would not care to have him go about much. I allow him to do just as he pleases, — study, read, lounge, or play. He is fond of music; and if there is a competent teacher, I would like him to spend a little time in that way."

"There is a lady in the village who has a few pupils, and, I'm told, is a good teacher."

"I shall leave all such matters to you or your husband, Mrs. Stoughton. Arrange them as you think best. You will find Clarence very docile. That is Mr. Stoughton?" she inquired, in a lower tone, as from the window she watched a gentleman coming through the garden, his hands folded behind him, and accom-

modating his steps to the pleasure of Clarence, while his head was slightly bent towards the boy, as in conversation.

"Yes," was the low, musing answer, both ladies seeming to be absorbed in the slow approach of the trio, — one heart filled with anxious desire to have the matter finished, and to be away about the more important preparations for the summer festivities; the other gazing, with her whole pitying soul in her face, upon the short, deformed lad. At that moment her noble heart could only beat with pure sympathy and sorrowing pity; at that moment she could have opened her arms and folded him to her bosom, and bestowed equally upon him the love she lavished upon her own handsome boy.

She silently prayed that the boy's desire might be to abide with them; that she might cherish him as, evidently, his mother did not; that she could impart to him courage and strength, and so firm a reliance upon his heavenly guide, that his life would not be a dreary void through desert paths. One needed but to gaze into those tearful eyes to know that she was ready, willing, and able to substitute flowers for weeds, love warm and constant for indifference, high hopes and noble impulses for discouragements; and that she had the power to draw out all the beautiful capacities of his soul in such a way, that the deformity of the body should be no obstacle to his success, his happiness, or his influence. And as they entered, forgetting in the

impulse of the moment that her husband was a stranger to the lady, she went forward, met the diffident boy, and taking both his hands in hers, said, —

“Stay with us, Clarence, if you *must* leave home, and we will make you happy.”

Was it the words that so thrilled him, few and simple though they were? No, it was her rich voice, freighted with tearful pathos; it was the tender, pitying glance, and the strong, loving pressure of the clasp, that seemed to impart confidence to him, and scatter, as in a moment, all his fears, his nervous shrinkings, and heart tremblings.

Bending his head, he touched softly his quivering lips to her hand; then answered, in his low, sweet voice, —

“I will stay, but not this time. I must see my father once more.”

The pastor's single glance upon his wife, as he entered, revealed to him her every feeling; and with ready tact, he covered her emotion by introducing himself to the lady, and engaging her in conversation.

When Clarence joined his mother, she had no word or glance for him, so absorbed was she in concluding the terms of his stay.

She had truly said the pastor would be glad to eke out his small salary by taking charge of her boy; he had often taken a pupil in this way, and the pecuniary assistance, derived from such a source, had relieved him oftentimes from undue anxiety in the support of his

family, and in meeting the many claims upon his benevolence.

But when she ostentatiously offered him any amount for his trouble, he quietly named his moderate terms, implying that he could receive only the same from her as from others.

“But that is too little, indeed, Mr. Stoughton. Clary will be more trouble than others, on account of his health, I fear.”

“I think not, madam. Should we be at an increased expense on his account, I will make it known. Whom have we here?” he asked, in so different a tone that Mrs. Tourney looked in his face to see if it were the same person who had been talking so coolly with her.

“Me, papa, lift me in. I'm all full of flowers,” answered a voice outside the window.

“I should think so,” was the cheery reply, as Mr. Stoughton lifted a little girl through the window into the dining-room. An apron, gathered in her hands, was filled with field flowers, and spears of rank grass, while her sun-bonnet, dangling from her arm, was running over with the same. Long, tangled curls hung in a confused mass over her shoulders. Her cheeks were red as a ripe, downy peach, and the blue eyes, large and wondering, rested upon the strangers with a half-bashful, half-inquiring gaze.

“What a lovely picture!” exclaimed Mrs. Tourney, apparently enraptured. “Clare will surely delight to

call this home, if he can have this little companion in his rambles. Will you not, dear?"

A smile towards the child was his only reply, who having heard previous conversations about the matter, divined at once the meaning, and stepping lightly to where he sat upon a lounge, asked, —

"Will you stay, Clare?"

"Do you want me to?" he asked, blushing.

"If you will, you may have all my flowers;" and unhesitatingly she emptied her apron into his lap, showering him with her treasures.

"I think it's a bargain," exclaimed his mother, really interested in the grace and winning manners of the little girl.

"So happily settled, then, we will adjourn to the dinner table. This chair, if you please, Mrs. Tourney."

That night, as Clarence sat by his father's side, and gave him an account of the morning call, the worldly heart of the man was touched more than once by the description. He would gladly, then, have sacrificed something to strengthen the bonds between them. But the chains of business were too strong; he could not burst the shackles that confined him. The hour passed, the impulse died, and the father's heart would never again beat so tenderly or sympathetically for his afflicted son.

A few days, and Clarence was received into the family of the pastor of Elmton, where time sped in apparent contentment, and often in real enjoyment.

Edith was soon fitted off, her grief healed by visions

of display, and anticipation of school pleasures and triumphs, for which she had a decided taste.

Meantime the mother and Mabel, with their maid, were preparing to start for the scene of their summer plottings, failures, or conquests. Mr. Tourney was to be left to the care and companionship of his sister, who never left the house but to spend a day in summer on the farm, her childhood's home and her individual property.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. TOURNEY'S DRESSMAKER.

"Weary and thirsty—no water-brook near thee,
Press on, nor faint at the length of the way;
The God of thy life will assuredly hear thee,
He will provide thee strength for the day."

In the very heart of the city, midst its turmoil and confusion, in one of the upper rooms of a high brick building, might be seen a pale, wan face, bending over delicate and costly fabrics,—a slender form, sitting hour after hour in the same position, toiling hopelessly with the needle. Weary tasks were finished and laid aside but to be followed by others as burdensome; the days were crowded with perpetual work, carried far into the night, leaving but little repose for the exhausted frame. There was nothing in the future to cling to, nothing in the past to treasure, or in the present to smile upon.

And now, in the first flush of a new day, she was found in the same position, the same wooden chair, by the dingy dormer-window, with a little faded shawl lying over her shoulders; for the early morning was cool, and there was no fire, although the breakfast seemed to

wait on the table near, and the plates told of the coming of another to partake the simple meal with her.

In striking contrast was the robe she held, with the plain print she wore. The one called up visions of wealth and beauty, of gay scenes and brilliant assemblies, of gleams of light and sounds of revelry, snatches of music and joyous tripping of dancing feet. The other was merely suggestive of the oft-told tale of terrible, crushing, irremediable poverty. And the one who wore it might have been a very queen in presence, might have graced the highest circles in the land, and shone the brightest star in any social gathering, had wealth been at her command. Slender and stately in figure, with a countenance of noble sadness and features of delicate regularity, with eyes serenely beautiful and plaintively submissive, with coils of brown hair that art could not beautify, and hands of dazzling whiteness, that required only rest and nourishment to perfect the contour, she labored on year after year, the veriest slave in all the vast city,—a slave to uninterrupted labor, to the pettish requirements and irritable moroseness of an invalid and exacting father.

The long pointer of the dial had accomplished four weary circles since she had risen, when the door of an inner room opened, and a tall, gaunt figure, enveloped in a loose wrapper, appeared with a slow, unsteady motion that betokened long-continued illness or excessive privation; probably both had conspired to pinch the features and attenuate the form.

"Good morning, father; will you eat now?"

He looked upon the table, garnished with nothing to tempt the appetite and but little to satisfy it, shook his head despondingly, saying:—

"You are always at work, Margaret; you must earn enough to give us something more tempting, — don't you?"

"Dear father," was the half-cheerful, half-plaintive reply, "I hope to get you something nice for dinner, but I could not finish this last night, there is so much trimming. It will soon be done now, and I will take it right home."

"Have you spent all you got last week? You worked night and day."

"But the rent, father! You forget."

She did not remind him that she had furnished him fruit and wine, in stinted measure certainly, but still enough to drain her scant purse, faring coarsely herself meanwhile; she did not even speak of the eggs she had reserved for his breakfast, and which he had insisted upon consuming at his evening meal, — but simply worked steadfastly and swiftly, the deft fingers plaiting and stitching until the task was finished, and the gossamer, airy thing ready for its wearer. Then, carefully folding it, and laying it in a large paper box, she turned with forced cheerfulness to the man, saying, —

"Won't you sit up now, and eat a little with me?"

"Have you got any chocolate?"

A look of pain flitted across her face.

"No, father, we have none; so I didn't stop to make a fire. You shall have some for dinner; will that do?"

"Why not take home the dress and get your money? I can't eat the first thing; I haven't any appetite. I don't see how you can have."

"It would be useless to go before nine; I couldn't see Mrs. Tourney; and if she don't pay me when I take the dress, I shall have to wait till fall, for she goes away to-morrow."

"Well, well, have it your own way. Eat your breakfast; it don't matter about me. I'm 'most through; then you won't have to work for me."

"Don't, father! You know I love to work for you; it's all the comfort I have. You'll feel better after eating," was the gentle reply to his unreasonable peevishness.

Hastily eating her bread, and drinking a few swallows of water, she rose to prepare for her walk, when a knock at the door drew her to it. A boy handed her a note, and, reading, she said to him, —

"Tell Mrs. Drew I will be there at the hour she has appointed."

"What is it, Margaret? Who is Mrs. Drew? Does she want a dress made?"

"Yes, father, several of them. She is a friend of Mrs. Tourney, and was going with her to the Springs; but it seems her father has died, and she wants me to sew for her."

"Not to stay with her! You won't do that? I can't be left alone," was the alarmed inquiry.

"No; she knows I cannot stay, only to fit her. Then I will come right home."

"Don't forget the chocolate, Margaret."

"No, sir," with a sigh of patient endurance.

"I should like a few oysters for dinner, too, if you have money."

"I will remember, father; and you had better eat, for I may be gone some time.

The box was not heavy, but large and clumsy, and the walk was long. Should she take a car? Ah, no, she could not do that!—the few pence would supply the father with an orange. And then, Margaret Earle was proud; she would rather walk the whole weary way, bearing the box by her side, than sit ten minutes subjected to the cold, unfeeling stare of those who could better afford to ride. So on she went, with quick steps and graceful bearing, the pale, sweet face hidden by her veil.

At last, she turned into the square, near the centre of which was situated the elegant residence of Mark Tourney; and, reaching it, ascended the flight of granite steps, and rung the bell.

As the door opened, a voice from the hall above called, —

"If that's the dressmaker, Rachel, send her up."

Mounting the stairs languidly, for the long walk had exhausted her strength, she reached the door of the dressing-room in time to hear Mabel say, —

"I must try it on, mother; for if it's to be altered, she must take it back at once."

"Let her stay here and do it, Mabel."

"I don't believe she will," answered Mabel.

"But she must; we can't risk being left behind. Oh, here she is. Take it right out."

Margaret opened the box, lifted out the dress, and spread it over the table; then, sinking into a chair by the door, awaited the result.

"You've trimmed it exquisitely; I do hope it will fit; the others were perfect. Oh, mother, isn't it elegant?"

"Yes," answered the mother, anxiously adjusting the folds. "Had you seen any trimmed in this way? Where did you get the style, Miss Earle?" Then, without awaiting a reply, Mabel paraded up and down, her small head turning from side to side, as graceful in motion as a canary, throwing out little ejaculations of delight and satisfaction, until Margaret rose.

"If that is all, I will go now."

"Yes. Are you going to Mrs. Drew's? Her father is dying. She can't go with us to-morrow. She wants you to make up her mourning. Going there?"

"She has sent for me," was the quiet answer.

"I told her how beautifully you worked. Too bad she's got to dress in black! But then it will be becoming to her; and she said, not three days ago, she wished she could mourn for somebody, she looked so well in black."

"And now," answered her mother, "her desires are

met. Well, I hope you'll fit her out quick. She's grand company, and we shan't be quite satisfied till she gets to us."

"Will she go to the Springs, now that her father is dead?" asked Margaret in surprise, as she received her remuneration at the hands of the lady.

"Of course. That won't make any difference; he was very old, and had been sick for years. Ah, yes! you must hurry her off. Good morning. Remember, I shall want you in the fall," called Mrs. Tourney, as Margaret passed over the stairs.

"Are they quite heartless?" she murmured, as she closed the hall door, and turned toward the house of mourning.

Her sensitive spirit shrank from being a witness to that sorrow which she had no power to alleviate. She would gladly have gone to her wretched home, and ministered to the only being she had on earth to love and care for.

Very carefully she rung, and in a low voice inquired for Mrs. Drew.

Scarcely had the hall door closed, before another near it opened, and a fresh, young, eager face looked out. Margaret's heart grew lighter; there was no grief there, nothing that need repulse her.

"Are you Mrs. Tourney's dressmaker? Well, come right in. She told me about you. You see mine is so full of work, I can't get her to hurry on my mourning, and I must have it done as speedily as possible."

"Are you the lady I am to fit?" asked Margaret, in surprise.

"Yes, and here are some of the goods. I ordered them last night, for I knew I should need them. We thought poor father couldn't live the night out," — with an attempt at woe in tone and expression, — "but he lingers still; suffers a good deal. Doctor thinks he may go at any moment. It's impossible for me to stay in the room, — I can't endure the sight of his agony. Take your bonnet right off, and fit me now, just as well, you know, as long as you're here. When I sent the note, I thought he couldn't live a moment." For even her blunted susceptibilities understood the expression of Margaret's face, her eyes opening full with wonder, and the whole countenance expressing a mixture of astonishment and contempt.

"What are you waiting for? Come, be quick! I expect to be called every moment."

"Then your father is living still?" was asked, with a strange curl of the lip.

Mrs. Drew could not perceive all that the tone implied; and, had she done so, there would have been no change in her plans. Her dresses must be made; the heavy drapery of crape must be put on artistically, and to show to the best advantage her graceful figure, as well as exhibit to the world her depth of grief; and, since seeing the beautiful workmanship of Margaret at her friend Mabel's, she had determined to avail herself of the same skilful fingers and pure taste.

"Scarcely living. He may die any moment now, and he suffers so, the change will be a mercy to him, poor man! And I must be dressed. What difference does a few hours make? Take my measure, and the goods shall be sent to you; I must have this one in two days certainly. Do you have any one to help you?"

"I do not, Mrs. Drew;" and, with the most intense scorn upon her lip, and the fire of a holy indignation flashing from her eyes, Margaret proceeded to take the lady's measure.

Scarce was the task begun, before the door again turned upon its noiseless hinges, and a servant said briefly, —

"They think he is going, and have sent for you."

"Yes, I'll come;" and turning to Margaret, she said hastily, but without the slightest emotion, —

"You must wait. I'll be back soon now; it can't be long." And the heartless daughter, the worldly votary of fashion, tripped from the room.

Did her conscience accuse her as the dying eyes met hers? Was there one pang of sorrow, one throb of pity within her bosom, as she glanced towards the gray head of the stricken wife, who bent over the form so soon to be borne from her arms? Did the heart of the daughter go out tenderly to the mother who bore her? In this, the hour of trial, could she find solace in a daughter's love? — she, who had tenderly reared this only child; who had, with mistaken fondness, shielded her from every rough wind, and minis-

tered not only to her necessities, but to every selfish desire and weak caprice? Had the home education fitted her to be a comfort and support to those who had for years so gladly cherished her?

Let us shut out the scene. Surely the holy eyes of angels look on no sadder sight than a daughter's love and reverence, a child's most sacred mission, a woman's holiest duties, sacrificed upon the altar of worldliness and fashion.

Left alone, Margaret stood the picture of indignant and pitying scorn; her whole nature had been shocked. The terrible thought that a father's spirit was passing away unmourned; that the daughter, whose every thought should now be for him, was impatiently waiting for death to release her from the outward observance of respect, was only anxious to be arrayed in those sable garments, that her beauty might be enhanced thereby, and was longing for the day when she could join the gay throng, and be subjected no longer to the daily sight of a mother's loneliness and grief, — inspired her with emotions she had never before experienced.

The sudden stillness of the house aroused her; and gathering her worn shawl about her shoulders, she turned resolutely away, and sought her own home; glad in her heart of the poverty that, it might be, was her shield against such degradation of woman's noblest powers and influence.

The same long, tedious walk, broken, however, by the few purchases she was obliged to make, brought her

again to the room she called home. This time the contrast was not painful; her heart was filled with exceeding joy, as she looked upon the form of her father. Poverty seemed to be encircled in a halo of glory; toil and hardship, made radiant with the light of duty, love, and truth, weariness and hunger, want and privation, were not so difficult to bear as frivolity, heartlessness, and all the gaudy trappings of the worldly follower in fashion's vain footsteps.

No, her lot was a happy one in this comparison; never need she repine again; but, proud in her own integrity, upright in her own entire truthfulness, she might stand courageously and firm, to receive the burden she must bear, — knowing that when it should become too heavy, the hand which laid it upon her frail shoulders would lift it off.

"I thought you'd *never* come; where *have* you been, Margaret?"

"I am here now, dear father, and have brought you oysters and chocolate; and see, here are some fine, large oranges."

His face brightened, and well it might, not so much at the sight of the luxuries, as at the sound of her voice, cheerful and tender, full of the music of loving-kindness and dutiful affection.

"You are very thoughtful, Margaret; you deserve an easier lot, a better home. I never thought to sink so low," he said, with a long sigh.

"I ask no better home, dear father, no easier lot.

Indeed, I would accept no better, if with it I must have all the accompaniments of those I have looked upon this morning."

"It might have been different, had I not been the man I am," he murmured, as, with bent form he watched his daughter kindle the fire in the little stove.

"Thank God you are what you are, then, father. I would not have you otherwise. I am more than satisfied with my lot."

"Be still, Margaret. You know not all your words imply," was the not unkind answer.

"I know but little of the past, to be sure, father. You do not confide in me altogether; but you have been a kind parent, and my heart is satisfied to live for you and labor for you. I only mean that I would not possess wealth, if with it I must be heartless."

"All the rich are not heartless," he said, in the same subdued tone.

"I hope not, for their own sakes." Then, as though inspired with a new thought, she asked, —

"Were *you* ever rich, father?"

"Yes, and heartless, too, as the worst of them. But don't speak again; I can't talk. Let's have dinner; an empty stomach cannot well be harrowed by past follies. Tend to your work, Margaret, and stop looking at me."

"Yes, father." The work went on. Margaret could control her eyes and voice, but not her thoughts; and as the chocolate boiled, and the oysters were being pre-

pared in the way her father liked best, visions of early life floated like dreams before her. The school-days coming so early in her life, that all before them was a blank; her joyous playmates; kind teachers, abundant dresses, and occasional parcels of toys and sweetmeats; vacations, when the rules and regulations were not enforced, although she was still at school,—her playmates all scattered to their homes,—lonely, but finding a real joy in roaming the fields and woods, and taking delight in the companionship of birds and flowers, and the countless inhabitants of the out-of-door world. Then came a flying visit from the only one who seemed to claim her, or upon whom she seemed to have any claim,—a tall, morose-looking man, who kissed her because she put her lips up to him, asked a few questions, gave her money, and said good-by, until another year repeated the scene.

At last, in his stead, came a letter, bidding her gather together her effects, and come to him; he was sick, and needed her. Then the tearful farewell; the journey alone, with only bewildering and anxious thoughts; the small but pretty house at which she found her father; the slow wasting away of his strength, courage, and manliness; the rapid increase of privation; the putting forth her own energies, and gathering up her native resources for unremitting toil, to keep the wolf at bay; the changes since; and now, that strong feeling of self-reliance; that satisfying content with her outward life, that came more perhaps from a contempt

of weakness of character, than from a non-appreciation of ease and luxury. Intent upon the thorough performance of duty, and possessed of an unusual amount of self-sacrifice and devotion to others, not even her father appreciated the extent and purity of her self-denying love.

Like a moving picture, those years glided by, and from it Margaret's gaze was lifted to Him who had opened the path and led her along, endowed her with the courage to persevere, and the spirit of trust and simplicity to be happy in the way He led, desiring only to perform faithfully her duty.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FATHER'S FUNERAL.

"Half-round the globe, the tears pump'd up by death
Are spent in watering vanities of life."

MRS. DREW left the bedside of her father in half an hour; and, with flying feet, passed over the stairs to find the dressmaker gone. Her only feeling was impatient disappointment. The sombre goods were scattered about the room just as she had thrown them, and called up to her mind no vision of loss and bereavement, of vacant places and silent voices, of affection more than wasted and devotion unappreciated.

No, here was the material for a travelling dress, uncut,—her journey deferred; here was the heavy black silk, with crape trimmings; the grenadine to be so tastefully made; the white linen cambric for morning wear, all uncut;—all to be made, trimmed, and packed before she could leave the heat of the city, and the gloom of this dreary house.

Calling a servant to gather them together, and send for the carriage, she prepared herself, and drove to Mrs. Tourney's.

She found them putting the last bits of finery into the great trunks, the sight of which embittered her still more.

"Then you start in the morning?" she asked, with a clouded face.

"Yes, Nellie,—being all ready, you know. We could be of no use to you; it will take away all our pleasure, of course, not having you with us. I can't bear to think of it. But you know the first weeks are confused and unsettled, any way; and by the time we get to the real enjoyment, you will be there. Is your father alive yet?—no?—poor man! He has suffered. I'm sure it's a release to him. It seems wrong to mourn for one so happy to go."

"Yes, father did suffer terribly. I could n't endure the sight of it the last days. I shall be so lonely, Mabel, when you are gone. I don't know what I shall do,"—looking forlorn.

"I feel the disappointment just as much, Nellie. I'm sure I shan't smile until I see you again."

"Nonsense!" came gruffly from Aunt Sophie, at the other end of the room.

"O, well, sympathy's a kind of luxury, and it's all I came out for this morning; I knew I should get it here."

"Indeed, Nellie dear, you shall; we have talked of you all the morning. But what does your husband say to your trouble? He thought so much of your father," inquired Mrs. Tourney, as she gently pressed the laces into their box.

"H'm! He'd have me stay at home all summer, and mope; says mother expects it; but she don't,—she told me to go or stay without any reference to her. I'm sure no one would expect me to shut myself up. It would kill me, and Ross knows it would; but his ideas are so different from mine. He pays so much deference to public opinion. I really believe he's more conformed to the world than I ever shall be. And to think, he don't approve of mourning! I never knew it till this morning. Indeed, Mrs. Tourney, he read me quite a lecture before he went to the office; seemed to think I should exhibit just as much grief, and show just as much respect for poor father, without the mourning as with. Did you ever hear of such a thing?"

"Don't take much wisdom to see that," said the maiden sister, with an unmoved countenance.

"O, well, dear, men don't know the whys and wherefores of everything. It's best to humor them, when we can, conveniently; there's nothing like allowing them to think they rule. I always do, with Mr. Tourney; and he is not half the trouble."

"But you would n't have me give up dressing in black, would you?"

"No, indeed! You did right to be firm there; of course, he didn't think to control your sense of duty."

"O, no; he only advises. And, I must say, Ross is kind enough, if he does deal in sarcasm occasionally. For pity's sake, Mabel, never marry an old bachelor; as nurse Grey says, 'They are so sot in their ways.'"

"You sacrificed yourself too early, Nellie," answered Mabel, with a light laugh.

"Yes, ah me! I'm too young, or Ross is too old; which can it be? But what under the sun ails that dressmaker of yours? She's as pert as any one I ever met,—left me in the lurch just now, when I can't get my work done for love or money."

"Left you, Nell! Why, what does that mean? We find her quiet and docile enough."

"Well, father died while she was there, and I was called from the room; before I got back she was gone! I think she's an upstart. You should have seen her curl her lip, and look unutterables out of those eyes,—rather good-looking, is n't she? But I like to have people know their places. Now what *shall* I do?"

"Send for her again, Nellie, or go to her. I'll go with you. Auntie, will you see to these things?"

"Yes, off with you. You have n't half packed anything. I must take them all out."

"Oh, Mabel, you're a precious friend. Let's start this moment! Or,—no; I'll go home and get my patterns, and take you up on my way back. We'll get dinner down town, too."

"No; I would n't, Nellie, do that *to-day*," said Mrs. Tourney, with peculiar emphasis.

"Why not? Sure enough, it would n't look very well, would it? Well, I won't. But I can choose my jewelry and hat, can't I? I want May's taste."

"Yes, of course; Mabel can go in for you, and have

a variety brought out to the carriage. And the hats, Nellie, — have the different styles sent up to the house. You know you wouldn't care to be seen for a few days."

"O, well, any way. But I *must* go to that girl's room; she can't fit me in the carriage very well; she lives up ten flights, don't she?"

"Not quite," laughed Mabel; "I have never been there, but I think we can reach her ladyship, and it won't consume so much time as to send for her. I'll be ready when you stop, Nell."

The friends parted more gayly than they had met.

"As vain and flighty as ever! When I was young, 't was a misfortune to lose a father. But it's different now; no matter how soon he dies, if he only leaves money enough. I hope she won't make Mabel as heartless as herself. I can't abide such people."

"Well, well, Sophie, you can't expect every one to look at things just as you do. Nellie's feelings are deep enough, but she don't like to show them to everybody."

"Deep as a well, no doubt! You mark my words, Maria; she's as shallow and heartless as a woman can be, and if you don't look out, she'll run against some of your cherished plans, if it's necessary to carry out her own selfish purposes. Better not trust her, that's my advice."

Aunt Sophie pursed up her thin lips, and jerked the ribbons of her cap, in a decisive way, glad that she

had done her duty in warning her giddy sister-in-law; then turned to the trunk with the energy she was accustomed to expend on all ~~things~~ ^{tasks}, small or great; her black alpaca pinned up in front to be out of the way, and her cuffs, white as snow, turned back from the wrists to preserve their immaculate purity untarnished.

A very worthy woman was Mr. Tourney's elder sister, and the truths she daily uttered were as full of common-sense as they were unpalatable to her hearers.

The table had been cleared in the upper-story rooms of Margaret and her father, the chairs set back against the wall, all but the old wooden rocker, with its wadded covering of dark wool stuff, in which the invalid rested after his dinner. The curtains were partly drawn, to prevent the slant rays of the afternoon sun from striking his head. The cheap, well-worn work-table beneath the window was littered with Margaret's basket and sewing materials; and after the noon house-work was accomplished, so quietly that the father nodded and dozed through it all, she drew her straight-back chair to the table, and armed herself with the inevitable needle for her fate. Stitch, stitch, stitch! for although the days of machine work had begun long since, Margaret's scanty purse had not hinted at such a vast outlay to lessen her labor, and meet the demands upon her strength and time. By prudence and self-denial she had managed to be ready for rent-day, to supply her father's wants, and clothe herself with threadbare

decency. But nothing could she put by for the future; no penny had been laid aside when wages came in, that was not soon called out of its hiding-place, to answer to the present necessity.

And now, it may be, her indignant escape from the house of death; her manifest scorn of a heart harder than the fossil in the rock; her impulsive sense of duty, right, and filial love, had cut her off from the work she desired to do, — wages she sadly needed.

She had not dared explain to her father why she had returned without the work she went forth to get. He would censure, — call her sensitive, silly; and as he asked no questions, in his satisfaction at seeing the delicacies she brought, she was silent. Better so; for Margaret, although she scarce realized it, endured all she could well bear; added burden would but crush. Heavenly wisdom knew all this, and the dreaded trial was averted.

Even while her heavy heart pondered what next the busy fingers might profitably take up, the sounds of eager voices, low laughter, and rustling silk were heard without the door. Then a rap from the gloved fingers; and Margaret, erect, pale, and with a mystic light in her brown eyes, stood before the open door.

There was recognition, but no greeting; an invitation to enter in cold, formal tones, and chairs offered the panting guests, with the dignified courtesy of one nobly born.

The invalid father started from his sleep, and gazed about him as one in a maze; bowed formally, and

dropped back again upon his thin cushions; while Margaret stood near, slender and fragile, her pale, thin face betraying nothing to the two, who with flushed beauty were looking from one plain piece of furniture to another.

"Really, Miss Earle, I wonder you ever leave your room, if it is so exhausting for you to climb those steep stairs as it is for us," gasped Mrs. Drew.

There was no reply, and Mabel spoke, —

"One could become accustomed to it, I suppose, and really it must be inspiring to abide in such lofty regions. You are above the noise and confusion of the street, Miss Earle. But I don't wonder you are pale; why I could hardly get my breath, and I can hear my heart beat now, — can't you, Nell?"

"Ah, yes, like a muffled drum," affectedly. Then, in a gay tone and with a forced laugh, she said, —

"But really, Miss Earle, it was shabby of you to force us to come to *you*. I have so little time, too. But I suppose you had some excuse; so I overlook it. I'm not as particular as some."

"Shall I take your measure?" was the formal reply to this speech.

"Well — yes — I'm rested now; thought I never should be again." Rising, she threw aside her mantle with a gesture of impatient disdain.

"Nellie, just see the doves upon the roof yonder; if I lived here, I should tame them. Do you ever try, Miss Earle?" with a winning smile.

"I have no time," was the stately reply.

"Does your work consume all your time? That's a pity, I'm sure," condescendingly; and Mabel turned again to the window, to watch the doves.

The measuring went on, and, catching up her mantle, Mrs. Drew remarked impatiently, —

"The goods are all in the carriage, Miss Earle; will you send for them?"

"I have no one to send, Mrs. Drew; your coachman can bring them up."

The quiet reply brought a flush to the lady's cheek, but she merely asked, "When will they be ready to try on?"

"You can call any day next week."

"You don't expect me to climb those stairs again, do you? I can't do it. You must come to me."

"I regret the necessity, Mrs. Drew, but it will be impossible for me to carry so heavy bundles such a distance."

"What a bother!" was the unladylike rejoinder.

"I wish Madam Decker wasn't so busy. So you refuse to come to the house?"

"It will be impossible," said Margaret.

"Will you come if I send the carriage?"

"Certainly, if it will accommodate you."

"Anything will be preferable to mounting those awful stairs. When shall I send?"

"The dresses will be ready on Tuesday."

"At ten in the morning, then."

And the ladies departed, — one amused, the other angry; while Margaret closed the door with the slightest

sparkle of triumph in her eye. She was only a woman, — and misfortune, though it had subdued her spirit, had left her pride untouched.

"What airs! Did you ever see the like? The Lord deliver me from having anything more to do with her after this siege."

Mabel laughed; she was invariably sunny.

"She seemed to have rather the best of the argument, Nellie."

"I despise the low trash. Here, Peter, take these bundles up as high as you can go, and leave them where you see the dressmaker's tin-plate hung out. If she didn't work so exquisitely, I'd give her up now."

"You'll look charmingly, Nell, in black. Let that thought heal your wounds."

Mabel's cheerfulness was contagious, and the friends ensconced themselves in their separate corners, and in a moment were whirled away. Mrs. Drew's grievances were forgotten in admiring her set of mourning jewelry, the most unique and costly the city afforded; in the entire satisfaction that filled her bosom when she contemplated her new attire, so perfect in fit, so original in trimming, and the whole affair, even to the minutest article, so rich, beautiful, and becoming.

As the hour arrived for the performance of those last marks of love and respect to be paid to the departed; when the solemn words, "dust to dust," fell like leaden weights upon the heart really bereaved; while the house was being filled with friends or acquaint-

tances, some with faces of grief for him who lay silent before them, others who looked upon the melancholy pageant with eyes of curiosity, marking only the magnificent display, the draped rooms, the costly casket, and the various arrangement of flowers, in each apartment; while the man of God waited to drop into their hearts his words of heavenly comfort; and she, who now must tread the downward path of life alone, wept, without a daughter's loving hand to wipe those tears,—while all this was being enacted, in another room that daughter stood before the mirror, arranging the folds of her black dress, putting a last touch to the waves of her beautiful hair, and bringing the new ear-rings into plainer view. Near the door stood a gentleman, older by many years, it might be, but with a gaze of pitying rebuke bent upon the handsome face reflected in the mirror. A nervous impatience marked every motion, an occasional grasping of the door-handle, as though he would be detained no longer.

"Nellie, it's past the hour. The minister is below. You're prolonging your mother's suffering by this folly." He spoke bitterly.

"Folly! That's all the sympathy I get from you, Ross. Don't you suppose I respect my poor father's memory too much, to go looking like a fright,—and before all his friends, too?"

"Well, well! If you stand there much longer, his friends will get tired of waiting, and go."

"Will they? Why what time is it, Ross? I'm 'most

ready; my handkerchief,—oh, here it is. Don't these gloves fit splendidly? There, now I'll go; give me your arm."

The door was opened with a jerk; and in his contempt, for it was no less, he almost pushed her through it; when, with a little cry, she turned: "Oh, Ross! I've forgotten my veil. Mercy! Let me go back. How I should look without a veil." She flew back, unfolded the heavy square of crape, and again in her favorite position before the mirror contemplated the picture, regardless of other claims.

A heavy sigh burst from the husband's heart, as he leaned against the wall, and waited this time in silence.

Soon she reappeared, took his arm, and sought the lonely room of her mother. There, consigning his wife to the care of a relative, Roswell Drew took his mother-in-law's hand, in a firm, gentle pressure, and, passing it through his arm, led her from the room.

There were tearful eyes that watched her entrance into that lower room, where her pastor stood to minister the "Balm of Gilead"; tearful eyes that rested upon the daughter, robed in black, the heavy veil shrouding her graceful form, the slow step and drooping head testifying her affliction. But sympathy, like affection, is never wasted.

"If it enrich not the heart of another, its waters returning
Back to their springs, like the rain, shall fill them full of refreshment;
That which the fountain sends forth returns again to the fountain."

Was it remorse, or mere excitement of a nervous nature, or was it the overacting of a worldly heart, that caused Mrs. Drew's tumultuous grief as she stood by the open grave of her father?

Even those who knew her best could never tell; but so deep and fervent did it appear, so heart-rending were the sobs and moaning cries, that the widow, affrighted, encircled her with her arm, and begged Roswell to take her back to the carriage.

The good pastor silently prayed for strength and consolation to descend upon the fatherless one; friends wept with her, and acquaintances exclaimed, "How great the love! How irreparable the loss!"

Two weeks later, near the close of a warm day, a carriage drew up before the largest hotel at — Springs, laden with trunks, each bearing the same initials, "N. L. D."

A lady clothed in mourning alighted, the veil thrown back; eager eyes noted the lovely face, the perfectly moulded foot, the elegance and costliness of the apparel. And, as from an upper balcony a cry of delight descended, followed by the clapping of a pair of soft, small hands, a glance upward of pleased recognition revealed, in her smile, a row of charmingly white teeth, thus completing her captivating qualities as far as the eye could judge; for, as yet, no one had heard the sound of her voice.

Then a rustling of silk from the parlor into the hall; and as the new-comer reached the landing, she was

clasped in her friend's arms, while the mother, Mrs. Tourney, awaited her turn.

That night a new star brightened the ball-room firmament, arrayed in white crape and flowers.

That night a widowed mother found solace and sweet companionship in the presence of her son-in-law, while he, in bestowing, received, in return, peace and sympathizing strength that his wife could never give.

CHAPTER V.

MADAM PIXLEY'S SEMINARY.

"This is the bud of being, the dim dawn,
The twilight of our day, the vestibule."

At the same hour that Mabel's exuberant spirits overflowed at the coming of her friend, Madam Pixley's seminary was in a state of unusual excitement; recitation-rooms were deserted; music-rooms silent; the gymnasium hall, always full at this hour, had not an inmate; while the promenade grounds were alike unoccupied. And why?

Let us glance within: each one of the fifty girls who were members of her family — for her school was very select, and the "limited number" advertised for never exceeded a half hundred — were preparing for the first soiree of the term, appointed for that evening.

Madam was a model teacher; and when the young ladies begged the privilege of attending this or that village festivity, when one desired to accept the invitation to a ride and another to a walk, and a whole bevy pleaded to attend a picnic, Madam decidedly shook her head, and firmly refused. But the downcast looks,

the disappointed faces, the pouts and sulks, had a powerful effect upon Madam's heart, and in her happiest tones and liveliest gestures she assured them of her desire to make their school-days bright and happy; but they were intrusted to her care and oversight by their parents, and she could not countenance their mingling with a promiscuous assembly. The villagers were unknown to her, with the exception of a few families of note. How would they like a soiree? One now, and one to close the term? Madam would invite families of the highest standing to meet her young ladies, and the large, elegantly furnished rooms of the seminary would be much more to her taste than a vulgar country frolic in a grove where any one was at liberty to look on. Would that give them pleasure?

Exclamations of delight, clapping of hands, and general enthusiasm was answer enough.

"O yes! splendid! When? How soon? Let it be this week. Madam, do!"

This evening had been appointed; this the reason why all but the dressing-rooms are deserted. And now fifty young faces are radiant, fifty hearts pondering the question of dress, fifty pairs of hands busy over braids, curls, crimps, and coils; every bed with dresses spread carefully over it, and every toilet-table covered with laces, ribbons, and perfumes in gay confusion; while the sub-teachers and servants of Madam's establishment were vainly endeavoring to obey the orders issuing from fifty pairs of cherry lips.

Oh, what confusion! what chaos! Would order ever appear triumphant?

One pair of black eyes, looking out from clouds of dark hair, peer up and down the long hall, and the owner calls impatiently, —

“Eveline, Eveline Cropsy! Where are you?”

“Here I am, Miss Edith. What will you have?” And there flashed into the gloom a form of white, and stood with a shining braid in her hand, so long, so golden, and so beautiful that it seemed to brighten the dim hall where she stood.

“Have? why, I’ll have you, of course. You promised to do my hair, and here you have been all this time about your own! I shan’t be dressed to night.”

“O yes, you will; I’ll come in half a minute.” And dancing back to the mirror, this doll-like young lady wound the long braid about her head, round and round until it almost covered it; then, smoothing with a brush the shining waves from her low forehead, she turned to the door.

“Coming, Edith, coming!” she sung, as she danced through the hall and into Edith’s room, where she found her sitting before the glass, with a half pout, brush in hand, and the black tresses covering her like a cloud.

“Black as night! How lovely! I’ll color my hair some day; I won’t be ‘tow-head’ after I leave school,” said Eveline, gathering the black mass into her small hands.

“Stupid, if you do! You know it’s the only charm you have, Homely!” was the pettish reply, — for Edith was impatient at the delay.

“Yes, Edith, I’m homely enough, and friendless enough; you have no need to tell me of it. I know, and feel it too.”

“Edy don’t mean half she says, Eveline; don’t mind her.” The speaker was in a small room adjoining this larger one, and out of sight, but where every whisper could be heard.

“No, I don’t, Eva; you know you have friends. Ruby and I love you; and you’re to spend no more vacations here. I’ve written to mother to have her invite you, and you shall call my home yours, after this. So don’t look so disconsolate, out of your wee gray eyes.”

Edith bent her head back until she could see the face behind her. Eveline dropped a kiss upon the forehead, and went on with her task. Soon the elfin locks were gathered into braids, and arranged with artistic beauty upon the small head.

“Pearls?” asked Eveline, taking them up from the table, and winding them about the braids in an easy, graceful way, that told how ready and skilful were the fingers, and how exquisite the taste of this girl, who had no beauty of which to boast but her hair, and no friends but those she made at school.

“All through, Eva?”

“Look. Here’s a glass,” was the answer, giving her a hand-mirror.

"It's lovely! You darling! You'd make your fortune as hair-dresser. Come out here, Ruby, and tell me how I look."

Ruby emerged from her seclusion, radiant in white, and pronounced it perfect.

"Shall I help you dress, Edy?"

"No, Eveline; you've done enough. Go dress yourself. I'll help Edy; I'm all ready." And Ruby kindly drove her off.

There is little known of Eveline Cropsy among Madam's scholars. We will introduce her more particularly, while she prepares herself for the evening.

A poor girl, her preparations were simple and quickly performed,—only a plain, white lawn, and that given her by Madam, that she might appear respectable, and do her no discredit when strangers were by.

Sixteen years before, when the seminary was young, but in a most flourishing condition, the principal music teacher deserted her post, and became a wife, much to Madam's ill-concealed contempt. The position thus vacated remained so for so long a time, that fears were entertained by the preceptress that this branch of her project might prove a failure.

When, in answer to her advertisements, many had applied who were not considered competent, and therefore rejected, there came, one afternoon, just before twilight, a small, inferior looking woman, plainly dressed, who had walked from the station, and who carried about her a most distressing air of weariness and

sorrow, and explained to Madam that she was prepared and competent to teach music in all its branches.

"Where were her credentials?" She had none.

"Her name!" She gave it. "She was a stranger?" Yes, and needed friends; penniless, and asked for employment. "Had she no recommendation?" Only her voice; would Madam listen?

Of the past, she was silent as the grave; for the future, she only desired a home.

Madam shook her head; there was too much to risk, even though she might sing like an angel. However, she could spend the night, it was so late now; and after supper they would listen to her voice, and pronounce judgment upon her skill as a performer.

A cup of tea refreshed her, and the weariness passed; the sadness remained.

She is terribly plain, thought Madam. But that is well, I could keep her the longer; deliver me from any more beautiful teachers.

"What hair!" exclaimed the pupils; "it looks like coils of gold."

And as she glided to the instrument, and quietly seated herself, those who waited hoped she would not weary them with the length of the performance.

The figure before them was anything but inspiring; the black dress was almost rusty, and nearly brown about the skirt with the dust of the road; the linen cuffs and collar were rumpled, for she seemed not to think of personal appearance.

The young girls sneered. The assistant music teacher looked scornfully conscious of her own superiority; and only when their eyes rested upon the shining braids wound about the small head, and noticed how like a crown of massive gold it was balanced above the white slender throat, did anything like admiration beam upon her.

While they gazed, there was a sound of music; a low, bird-like prelude, plaintive and sweet, like the distant murmur of water gurgling in and out among the stones and rushes of the brook-side.

Did it come from the same keys that those girlish hands behind her hammered upon, day after day and hour by hour? Were fingers of flesh and blood like their own passing like spirits over them, and bringing forth such sounds as angels might fain linger to hear, melody such as their ears had seldom listened to, — tender and soft as human voices when they soar heavenward, inspired by holy emotions and spiritual thoughts, lofty and distant as the evening wind when it sways the topmost branches of the elm, — now flowing downward like the gushing song of bird upon the wing, twittering, warbling, filling the air with varied melody; then, with sudden change, breaking forth into the startled sound of danger, the alarm, the measured tramp of armed hosts, the breaking out into a wild battle-cry, the sound of strife, the call for life! only life, the shriek of agony, and the moan of departing consciousness. Then the low, trembling, gasping

prayer, the mingling of tears, and sighs and farewells, until the last, lingering sound of almost ravishing beauty died upon the air. And the small fingers of the player lay like inanimate marble upon the keys.

In the midst Madam had risen, and drawn nearer; had stood between performer and listeners, like one bewildered at first, then amazed, then convinced. Doubts had vanished, suspicions died away, perplexities were all dissolved, antecedents thrown to the winds, rigid rules regarding credentials were forgotten; and she, whose life had never known a mere impulse, dropped her hand gently upon the frail shoulder before her, saying decidedly, —

“You shall stay.” Had she meant to qualify the word, there was no opportunity, for immediately every pair of girlish hands were noisily clapped together, as though to seal the promise.

The woman turned; and although she spoke no word, the plain face, testifying her gratitude, was answer enough. And Madam asked, —

“You will allow us to listen to your voice?”

She replied only by singing whatever they placed before her; and, in their absorbed delight, they were like to forget the weariness that marked the singer, had not the bell sounded for the evening study hour. Then, in school-girl abandon, and disregard of the conventionalities of life, they clustered about her a moment, saying how glad they were to have her stay, and how charming, how wonderful was her voice; they hoped

she'd be rested in the morning, so they might the earlier commence their lessons with her.

She nodded, and smiled sadly as they went gayly and chatting from the room, and when alone with Madam Pixley, turned meekly, with folded hands, to be questioned.

"Had she parents?"

"They were long since dead."

"Relatives or friends?"

"Not one."

"Where had been her home?"

"The city near."

"Did she remember her parents, and what was her father's employment?"

"Perfectly. He was a musician; had been her teacher."

"What was his name?"

"Vincent Hartly."

"Then are you not Miss Hartly?" in astonishment.

"I am Mrs. Cropsy," with a downcast look.

"A widow?" casting a sharp glance upon the shrinking form still seated upon the music-stool.

"Not a widow, Madam Pixley;" and now the small gray eyes had a frightened, pleading look about them.

"What then?" The tones were sharper, and the old suspicion and doubt returned; they were easily read by the poor, trembling, friendless stranger; but, lifting her head until the braids of gold took the shape of a coronal of glory to the eyes of Madam, she replied, —

"I am a wife, — deserted, forsaken, alone, homeless and penniless. Let me stay, and I will serve you as no other can, unless like me they look upon a cloudy past, and a future of impenetrable blackness. My whole life shall be given to your service; all I ask is to be fed and clothed."

The questioning was resumed, but the voice was milder.

"But are you not a mother?"

"Not yet," she murmured. Then, in a voice of agonizing entreaty, she pleaded for a shelter. True, she was unknown; the story of her desertion she would not divulge. Such a rare opportunity might never offer again. Madam desired to retain the musician, but was at a loss how to rid herself of the mother. Being, however, a woman of some kindness of heart, and of much politic management, and possessed of an unlimited amount of determination and ambition, she decided to give her employment, until the long vacation, and care for her as opportunities might offer.

But she was to be introduced to pupils and patrons as Mrs. Hartly, a widow. Would she acquiesce?

"Gratefully." And this was the mother of Eveline Cropsy.

The long summer vacation passed. The child was born, and left with a nurse until she was old enough to become a pupil of Madam Pixley's establishment. The mother insisted that she bear the name of her father. The preceptress insisted that she be unrecognized by

the mother as long as they were members of her household.

Poor, yearning, mother heart! that might not clasp its own; might not feel the warm kisses of her child's lips, or the clinging pressure of its little arms but by stealth, or with the bitter consciousness of being regarded as a stranger.

Unhappy childhood, searching for an unknown love, that God had given so freely, and the world had unfeelingly deprived her of; ever seeking to fill the nameless void, and satisfy the half-understood craving of its young heart; peering into all eyes, with wistful earnestness, if, mayhap, it might discover that which had made the discord of its little life, and in the discovery gather the harmony of a new and better and soul-satisfying existence.

There was none to say, "Come hither, little one; I am thy mother; I will shield thee from the cold, hide thee from the frowns, and protect thee from the sin and deceit of this unhappy world. I will teach thee a new and beautiful song of life, that comes to me like the echo of my own half-forgotten youth; music that shall cause thy little beating heart to throb with joy, that shall waken impulses and desires in thy pure soul, bright and rosy as the dawn of a new day. I will cherish and love thee, child; I will, — for thou art mine, mine own."

How often did the mother still the throbbing pulse, and hush the wild beating of maternal affection,

because it might not be; how often did she refrain from the endearing clasp of a mother's arms, because she could not meet the look of cold wonder or careless indifference upon the child's face, without a burst of anguish she had not power to subdue; how many nights had she stood by the sleeping girl, and dropped tears and kisses upon her golden head, feeling only the bitterness of life and love, and longing for the swift passing of the years, that this might cease.

Would the time ever come, this side the river that rolls so darkly between the spirit land and this, when she might gather the crown of gold within her arms, and whisper, —

"I am thy mother. Give me love like that I have lavished so long, so secretly upon thee?"

Like a dim but lovely picture it stood out from the clouds of her life, — going ever before her, beckoning her ever on.

But now life was real and stern, and crowded full of work. Duty was the guide, and her reward was a home and education for her child, — a roof to cover, clothes for the body, food for the mind. The heart must wait; *its* time was not yet.

Years passed. Eveline was a kind of plaything at first, for teachers and pupils. Then, as the freshness of childhood vanished, and she learned to feel her dependency upon Madam; as menial offices were given to her that others were exempt from; as she discovered that the world contained no friend for her like those

her mates were blessed with, — her whole nature seemed to change, frankness and gayety fled, expressions of affection were never indulged in, her obedience and attention to study were systematic and unchildlike, an apathy and listlessness marked her every act, except when taking her music lesson, or practising, as she did daily, hour by hour. She grew suspicious of those about her, and indifferent to either praise or blame. The music teacher, Mrs. Hartly, was the only one she was happy with, and that was a negative kind of happiness, — a contentment, rather, in being with one who never spoke, but to commend; who had never betrayed her trust; and who, like herself, was alone and unhappy.

In the class, if not brilliant, she was thorough and correct. Her memory was wonderful, her perceptions quick, and her command of language gave her a fluency and elegance in conversation, tinged though it ever was with an undercurrent of sadness, which delighted her mother, and gave her a power over others that for years she was unconscious of.

It was certainly a natural gift. Would it be perverted to an ignoble use, as she mingled with the world? or would it become a power for truth and holiness? In music, none dreamed of excelling her. She had attained the level of her teacher, and was still pressing on as the teacher had not heart or courage to.

Cold duty urged the mother on. Pure, enthusiastic love of sweet sounds led the daughter. The mother's

highest enjoyment was in teaching her child. Eveline's purest happiness was when she could forget everything in the inspiration of the lesson, and day after day she revelled in that sea of beautiful sound that was growing deeper and deeper all the while, was taking a stronger hold upon her nature, and revealing more and more each day its wild, mystic beauty, its melancholy tenderness, its unutterable language, answering so readily and so truthfully to all the necessities of the human soul.

In all her school life she had found no friend to satisfy the requirement of her nature; none to whom she, with her strange inconsistencies, was wholly congenial. Therefore she had been without that "bosom friend" and confidential companion which the school-girl invariably takes to herself, and finds such perfect satisfaction in.

Older now, with an increasing habit of indifference and independence, she had shaken off, in some measure, the control of the assistant teachers, and flatly refused to perform for them those services which had fallen to her lot in the past, unless specially commanded by Madam Pixley; and these commands were now seldom laid upon her. Madam's regard was evidently increasing for her "ward," as she somewhat pompously designated her.

Eveline did not at first understand the change, but within the past year it had been made plain to her.

Mrs. Hartly's health was slowly wasting; her endurance was inadequate to the demands of her office; and

frequently Eveline had taken her place, with perfect success.

She was now thoroughly convinced, from words occasionally coming to her ears, that Madam intended her to fill the place, when Mrs. Hartly should be obliged to resign.

But this home had not been so happy a one, that the young girl desired always to remain in it. It was better than none, to be sure; but if, by her wits, she could provide a better, she should certainly consider herself at liberty to do so.

With this in view, it may be, she had made herself useful to Edith Tourney; winning the sympathy of the cousins who roomed together, exciting their pity by her lonely condition, and their admiration by the ever-varied charm of her conversation, and the sweetness of her voice, as she sang to them, without the accompaniment of the piano, songs she had garnered in her memory, — an unending supply, it seemed to them, — now grave, now gay; joyful, or tenderly pathetic, as the spirit of the occasion seemed to require.

Then, too, she was ever ready to assist Edith with book or pen or needle, it mattered not when or how. Her memory never failed her; her pen could dash off a composition — that horror of the school-girl — at a moment's notice; her slight fingers were skilled in accomplishing anything that fingers could form; and, as we have seen, her taste was exquisite.

Often had she contemplated her plain features in the

mirror, and bitterly asked why God had not given her a face to match the mind, when there was so much beauty in the world. But she could not improve it. The small, gray eyes were, as she gazed at them, expressionless. *She* did not see them light up in conversation, as others did. The nose was neither one thing nor another, and surely she was right in regard to that; it was neither small nor large, beautiful nor ugly; while the mouth, and here she looked sullenly upon the reflection, was large and cross looking. "Oh, what a mouth!" she exclaimed.

Had she smiled, the whiteness of the teeth would have relieved it. But no, she could never smile on such a face. She was convinced of its irretrievable plainness. The only redeeming feature was the hair, — long, shining, and beautiful; she would use it to veil her face, if she could.

With an impatient sigh she turned to her books, determined to cultivate all the faculties of her mind, and, with that powerful ally, win a position in life that would satisfy her ambition.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST SOIREE.

"Oh, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day;
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And by and by a cloud takes all away."

THE soiree passed, as such occasions do, with satisfaction to some, and heart-burnings to others.

Madam was proud of her pupils. Mrs. Hartly performed to her entire satisfaction, and Eveline to the admiration of all.

Some of the young ladies found their heads nearly turned by the adulation of the sons and condescension of the mothers; other young hearts throbbed with envy or jealousy, and surprised their mates by declaring it a very stupid gathering. These were they who had preferred the picnic, and whose friends were not included among the friends of Madam. But with these we have nothing to do, and must leave them to the fate that awaits the discontented.

The evening had nearly gone. The guests had partaken of Madam's refreshments with the relish that a social evening always gives; and while a few were con-

sidering the lateness of the hour, Eveline was charming a larger number with the bewildering sweetness of her voice, — attracting those who, earlier, had turned from the plain face to smile and chat with prettier ones.

The crowd gradually increased in the music-room, until even her morbid heart was satisfied; and having exercised her power, and received the acknowledgments she sought, she performed now with less feverish excitement, and more earnestness of feeling, — almost, at times, forgetting her audience, in the absorbing power of the art she loved.

Edith stood in the room adjoining, the centre of a group of Madam's younger guests, attracted by her wit and gayety, as well as by the dazzling beauty of her Cousin Ruby; who, although she smiled as brightly and spoke as gayly, was oftener listening to the sweet sounds that issued from the music-room.

"Your heart is with the music, Miss Duke; shall we walk that way?" asked a young man, several years older than Ruby in appearance, and who had, without making himself conspicuous at all, regarded her with the admiring attention of an old friend, all the evening.

"No, Mr. Domett," responded Ruby, in a lower tone. "I like it better here. Have you listened to her voice? You like music, of course?" she asked, as he hesitated a moment.

"Yes, who does not? And she has a voice of remarkable depth and purity, rich and sweet in tone. I have heard every sound, as well as yourself."

"Then you like her; I am glad." Her face glowed with unaffected pleasure. "Perhaps I am prejudiced, I scarcely dare venture an opinion, but it has seemed to me that Eva had a rare voice. I cannot study when she is at the piano. And as she loves to practise early in the morning, before the rising bell, I sit with her nearly always."

"You are friends, then?"

"We are schoolmates," laughed Ruby, "and friends of course. But this is my last year; and when I listen to Eveline as she plays or sings, I feel that I might as well never have taken a lesson, much as I love it. She makes us all dissatisfied with ourselves."

"Never give it up, Miss Duke; it is the charm of home, and, if I mistake not, Miss Eva will not be satisfied to delight so small a circle."

"She will be competent to charm anywhere, I think?" questioned Ruby, who was not confident of her judgment.

"You are right; competent and ambitious, or I read faces wrongly."

"But it is a gift, Mr. Domett, and should not be thrown away. If she can please the public, and make herself a home thereby, — for she is friendless, — why may she not, and still retain the same position among her associates as now?"

"An equal standing in society with them, you mean?"

"Yes, I mean all that. Why not?"

"Not with the associates of to-day. As her circumstances change, her friends will change also. Yourself, for instance, — your position in life is fixed, as far as human insight goes; hers is not. If she takes a lower social level, you remaining where your parents stand now, it will not be in your power to step down to her. Do you not see?"

"No, I do not. My friendship shall lift her to my level, if, as you say, there are grades in society."

"Of that there is no doubt. You will not stoop to a lower grade, — at least, in two years from now you will not."

"I will not now, Mr. Domett, stoop to the false, the foolish, or the wicked; but friendship, regardless of wealth, position, or education, I must always respect. I hope I shall never fall so low as to sacrifice right and duty, and all my best and truest feelings, to mere pride of social standing."

"Your position in society will govern you. You cannot help it. Your old friends have a strong claim; they will exert it." He smiled, conscious, in his pride, of the truth of his words.

"I cannot believe you. I want to be happy, and to be so I must regard my friends for what they are, not what they possess, for their wealth of heart. You doubt me, but in this I will not be governed. Fashion shall never lead me blindfold, I assure you, Mr. Domett. I don't think it does my mother; why should I be different?"

"Your mother has no friend among the people of the stage, has she?"

"No, because she has not been thrown among them."

"You will not be."

"In the future, no; but should my school friends take that course, they are still my friends. It will be an experience that my mother never had. She has friends among the lowly and the poor—and prizes them too."

"Stands in relation of benefactress to them, probably."

"Not at all; simply as a friend. As such they share equally in her regard with the wealthy and the learned."

"Well, it is to be hoped that Miss Eveline will not go upon the stage, for your sake. Don't encourage it, I beg." And he laughed again, with a curl to his lip that Ruby did not like.

"Not if she can do better. But should that seem the only path for her, I should say 'God speed,' and our relations to each other would be the same they are to-day."

"A few more such democratic spirits would revolutionize society in a trice."

"A happy revolution, it would seem to me," responded Ruby, thoughtfully; while the other gazed upon her rare face, with its glow of health deepened by the conversation, and thought her governed by a school-girl's wild enthusiasm, that would rapidly fade away as she

came in contact with the world, and free her from such absurdities.

This conversation disquieted Ruby. Her clear gaze could see no benefit, honor, or nobleness in the devious way his words and manners suggested. She would walk the way of life in a straightforward, unfaltering, open course, with nothing to conceal,—reaching after only that which should be of real worth, shunning only the unworthy and ignoble.

The family of Merle Domett had been for years familiar with the Dukes, and prized their friendship highly. It was the scarce concealed desire of his parents that their only son, the heir to their fine property and ancient name, should wed one so every way worthy as Ruby to advance the interests of their estate, and shed lustre upon their dignity.

This son had been carefully educated to cherish every iota of his natural pride, and increase the same, as his years and manly beauty increased. Gifted with a fine mind, courteous and affable manners, and a certain inborn benevolence, that yet lay dormant, he had answered in all things to their wishes. And while responding heartily to their overflowing affection, he met in the same spirit their lofty desires and proud ambition.

It was enough that Ruby was approved by them, as indeed she was by all who knew her. Their regard sanctioned his own, while his was fast merging into a soul-absorbing love. Paying a transient visit to an

acquaintance in the place, whose friendship he had more assiduously cultivated since Ruby had attended school here, he was invited with the family to be present at Madam's soiree. His appearance surprised Ruby into a warmer welcome, and more hearty greeting, in that she had anticipated meeting only strangers.

The free grace of her manner, and warmth of friendly welcome, encouraged him. And as he clasped the little hand at parting, and whispered a hope that she might soon be at Elnton, there was more real feeling thrown into his words than he intended.

But it was all the same to Ruby. She responded in her usual happy tone, and bade him good-night, without a thought of the wild commotion her girlish beauty and lovely character had stirred in his heart.

Then, with the conversation of the last hour lingering about her, she went to her room. Edith was still below; so, throwing herself upon the carpet, beneath the open window, she gave up her mind to thought.

It was one of those nights of wondrous beauty, in which a full moon brings out every tree and shrub in bold relief against earth or sky; when the night air comes in gentle sighs, moving the leaves with scarce a rustle, and light, fleecy, lustrous clouds rest motionless in the bright heavens.

No sound reached her ears save the murmur of voices below, the deadened notes of the piano through the closed doors, and now and then the stamping of an impatient horse, ready at the gate to bear home his master.

Ruby thought of home. A few more weeks and she would be at dear old Elnton, never to leave again; be in the presence of that dearest earthly friend, revered and cherished as mothers can only be, and with the beloved father and the sisters, whose voices, stirred by the touch of memory, even now were making melody in her heart.

Soon noisy feet tripped over the stairs. Many voices sounded at the door, and a troop of gay girls burst into the room.

"Here she is, — star-gazing, as I live. I say, Ruby, who is that Mr. Domett? How long have you known him? Splendid looking. Feels pretty high and mighty, I reckon."

The voices mingled so confusedly, that Ruby did not attempt to answer any of them.

"Come, girls, Madam will be up soon. Go to bed. I want my room. Good-night," exclaimed Eva, good-naturedly.

"The princess has issued her orders. We must go, I suppose. But I'm not sleepy. Hark! There's Madam coming, as I live. Good-night, girls." And the scampering along the hall was succeeded by the sound of closing doors and suppressed laughter.

Ruby dropped the curtains, and brought a light from the inner room. As she placed it on the table, a letter caught her eye. But the bright look faded as she saw it was addressed to her room-mate.

"Edith, this is for you; from Clarence, too, I think."

"Is it? So it is. Well, I'm too tired to read it to-night."

"Poor Clare! Don't treat his letter so, Edy. You will be late in the morning. Shall I read it for you?" she asked, with cousinly freedom.

"Yes, do. That's a good soul. I can't keep my eyes open, I know." And while Edith slipped into the low bed, Ruby thoughtfully opened and read aloud the note, telling of his new home, his kind friends, and sweet little playmate, and asking news of his parents,—for Clarence had not heard from them since they left the city, but hoped Edith had. He alluded to the four months past, and how he should desire to see them again in the fall. Begging Edith to write him, if only a line,—he would not expect much, because of her studies,—and sending love to Ruby, the letter closed.

"Poor Clare! The whole letter breathes of sadness, though he hardly mentions himself. You will answer at once, Edy dear?"

But the sister was asleep. She had listened to scarce half the letter; and a little flush of indignation tinged Ruby's cheek, as she refolded the missive, and prepared herself for the night.

The morning sun looked down upon sleepy faces and hasty toilets; for the rules of Madam's well-regulated establishment had entirely unfitted her family for even this slight deviation.

At breakfast, she informed them in her most gracious manner, that she should make no marks that day, in view of the limited season allowed for preparation of lessons, but she sincerely hoped her young ladies would

not take advantage of her generosity by neglecting their studies altogether. She was pleased to say that she placed confidence in their integrity and honor.

It had been a great occasion for the fifty girls, who were seldom allowed to turn aside from the daily routine of school life, and Madam was wise in not drawing the reins immediately with the usual firm tension.

The morning duties were over, the half-hour for physical exercise passed, and the cousins sought their room, one to prepare for her class, the other to do—"as she pleased."

"Don't study, Ruby. Let's talk."

"Not yet, Edy,—hush! a little while." Ruby's tapering fingers rested on the firmly pressed lips in universal school-girl fashion.

"Dear! I would n't be so particular. We're not to be marked; and I'm used up,—I shan't study. Oh, here's my letter; s'pose I shall have to answer it. I hate letter-writing."

Edith read it, muttered something about answering before the week closed, and, taking a book, threw herself upon the side of the bed for a nap. She was soon dozing. It seemed but a moment after that Ruby stood by her, and, gently waking her, said,—

"Time to go, Edy: ten o'clock."

"Oh, I don't know my lesson. What shall I do? Pooh, who cares; no marks to day! I'll be ready for the review; I could sleep all day, I believe."

Smoothing her hair back from the broad white brow,

she followed Ruby to the recitation-room, and honestly confessed before the class that she had been too tired and sleepy to study, and should have to take advantage of Madam's clemency.

She was rather a favorite with the teachers, as quick minds are wont to be; and the boldness, just bordering upon impudence, amused more than angered the preceptress.

The week passed, and Edith had not replied to her brother's letter. True, she intended to, but lessons first, of course; then her walks must not be interfered with; and the recreation hours were full of plans and chatting, or new kinds of fancy work. And really she despised letter-writing.

"I wish you'd answer for me, Ruby; it would be all the same to Clarence."

"Oh, Edith! He's your only brother; you ought to write, and at once. Poor Clare has no one but us to write to him," she said, with sweet seriousness.

"Sure enough. You are right; I'll do my duty this time. What a spur you are to noble deeds, Ruby. If Clarence were like other brothers, I should enjoy him ever so much; but he'll never be much help to me."

"For shame, Edith! Were Clarence *my* brother, I would not exchange his purity, and true nobility of mind and heart, for all the models of manly beauty the world contains. I am proud of him as my cousin."

"Ah, indeed, peerless among maidens! Can't you

see a joke?" And she threw back her head haughtily for a moment.

"Forgive me, Edith; I am hasty. But one cannot joke about Clarence. He needs love the more that he is unlike others. Let me help you write. We'll each fill a page; that will please him."

The next day the letters went. Clarence, in his retirement, read them with a joy pure as it was intense. His pleasures were few; and this, of receiving home letters, a rare one; he knew how to prize it.

CHAPTER VII.

RUBY'S HOME.

"Standing with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood fleet."

It was early June. The tender leaves were fresh, and of a delicate tint; the roses yet in bud. One day more, and many of them would burst into glorious perfection. The long, swaying arms of the elm were covered with its light, tissue-like dress. Abundant rains had thickened the grass upon meadow, lawn, and road-side. Birds flitted in and out from the newly-made nest, while the air rung with their wild merriment. The robin pecked soberly near the house; the flame-bird darted by, with its bewildering brightness intensified in the sun; the swallows circled about the neighboring barns; and the yellow-bird waited long enough to warble its sweet song in the ear of the gentle lady, of motherly look, who sat dreaming by the oriole window that overlooked the lawn.

Hours had passed since she had sought the quiet of her room. Slightly wearied with unaccustomed labor, holding a book which had not yet been opened, she

seemed to dream of scenes far distant. Was it the past, made up of happiness, or the future, enveloped in mystery, and colored with intense desires, that bound her as with a spell?

None might know; for she spoke not, moved not, until, as the sunset clouds threw their many-colored reflections over her, and bathed the room in brilliancy, she raised her eyes with such a yearning look, that it needed not the slight clasping of the hands, or the slow moving of the lips, to tell that the mother prayed.

A low tap at the door brought her back to the realities of this day. And, in answer to her invitation, it opened so quietly, that a slumbering child would not have awakened.

"Not dressed! The carriage will be here very soon. Ah, you will see Ruby *here* first?"

"Yes, Catherine, I will be ready for tea, but I must have her five minutes alone. Where are the children, sister?"

"Trimming her room with rose-buds, merry as birds. Hear them scamper through the hall. There they are." And two little girls, of about seven and ten, bounded over the lawn to the carriage gate, and back again beneath the window, shouting:—

"She's come! Mamma, she's come! She waved her handkerchief on the hill. Oh, she's come!"

The mother threw a glad smile down upon them; and, still seated, turned to her tall, benevolent-looking companion, saying,—

"Go to them, please, Catherine. Keep them within bounds, and send Ruby to me."

Once more alone, she leaned against the window, and watched the carriage laden with trunks approach the large gate, and wind along through clumps of shrubs, and beneath the bending foliage of ancient trees, until it was drawn up before the hall door. One might have said, after a casual glance, that the lady smiled. But as we look again upon the face of matronly beauty, and into the eyes of deepest black, we should not call it a mere smile that animated every feature, and made radiant the whole countenance. The tender glance, the curved lines about the calm mouth, the starting tears, as she met the upward gaze of the newcomer, now encircled within her younger sister's loving arms, all told that the mother's pulses throbbed with the purest, holiest, most satisfying love that can fill the heart of woman.

A moment more, and the young girl had glided over the staircase. The rustling of her dress upon the matting sounded within the room, the door swung quickly, and, radiant with health and life, Ruby Duke wound her arms about her mother's neck, exclaiming,—

"I knew I should find you here, mother. How sweet it is to be home again. Oh, I shall be so happy! And this is the last. No more good-byes,—no more separation to tear one's heart in pieces. *Dear mother!*" The rich voice lingered lovingly upon the cherished name, while the mother folded her in a long embrace,

and, with strong emotion, responded to the daughter's ardent love.

"Ours, once more, my precious Ruby!—never again to be separated, I trust."

"Never again! never again!" was the laughing reply. "School-days over, book life finished, accomplishments all accomplished. Now comes freedom, *ma chère mère*, and happiness."

"Has my daughter been unhappy at school?" asked the mother, stroking the brown waves of hair that rested on her lap.

"No indeed, mother; never for a moment. How could I be, when they loved me, and I loved all? But this is *home*, and a better love, and freedom from study, at least for a time. And *you* are here.

"But there's the bell, mother, and I'm half famished. Come, just as you are." The elder lady glanced at the dress, still lying over the chair, waiting to be put on. "We are alone, and what can be nicer than this pretty wrapper?" Snatching a brush from the dressing-table, she smoothed the hair back from the open brow, and, with a quick, school-girl motion, drew her happy mother from the room.

The family were already waiting them in the supper-room,—Flora, the eldest of the two little girls, just adding a spray of jasmine to the dish of flowers near Ruby's plate.

Mrs. Duke moved quickly through the room, and stood with a face of such perfect satisfaction, that the

peace and joy which enveloped her seemed to float from her own heart, and rest upon each of the others.

The low, reverential tone of her husband's thanks filled her soul with loving gratitude. And in that hour, whatever burden she had borne in the past, she realized that her cup was running over with blessings that could not be numbered.

As the joyful converse of the first repast goes on, we will introduce the reader to a bit of family history.

The friends of Mrs. Duke counted hers a happy lot, but she had borne the yoke in her youth. In one short hour she had been made an orphan, losing a father and a mother who were her joy and her idols.

And, with heart and sense benumbed by this terrible blow, she shut herself away from the world, — denied herself for a time to all but the few nearest friends who could at all minister to her necessities. In this seclusion, her whole nature bent to the rod, and she received, with the spirit of a child, the discipline she needed.

As the storm-tossed mariner anxiously searches the black and angry clouds for one guiding ray from the pole-star, so this sorrowing soul lifted her tearful face heavenward, and upon the darkness of her life, a gift from God descended. The glorious light of faith, hope, and love mingled and rested as a crown upon her brow.

It was while her heart was thus torn with grief, that she became aware of the tender and true sympathy of

one who had herself suffered more exquisite and soul-harrowing torture than even the death of friends can bring.

The sister of John Duke had returned to her home after three years of wedded life; returned, not broken-hearted, but chastened, subdued, humiliated, worse than widowed, for the grave had not hidden her affliction, — the hopes of her girlhood extinguished, the desires of her maturer years mocked, the holy affections of her young life blotted out; all the buoyancy of her youth changed to a matronly gravity and Christian energy, her ardor and enthusiasm developed into unflagging industry in the cause of others.

Never did aged father lean upon so strong, so gentle a heart; never did brother find so self-sacrificing a sister; never was one who lived so entirely outside of self as did Catherine Earle.

Even the father and brother, for whom only she now lived, knew nothing of the story of those three years, beyond the mere outline, though that filled them with the utmost indignation.

The strange mystery was withheld from the eyes of curiosity, and since the first night of her return, Catherine's lips had been closed upon the subject. But as, day after day, she walked from her own luxuriant home to the lonely mansion of this younger friend; as she listened to her words of sorrow, and gazed tearfully upon the frequent exhibitions of her grief, she opened the doors of her own heart, and told the youthful

mourner of pain more sharp, of agony more terrible, than any she had been called to bear.

The voice was calm and low; but the speaker's cheeks and lips were colorless when the tale was told. The proud head was firmly balanced, but the slender hands trembled with the effort at self-control. The burning tears of the orphan were dried; and wonder, indignation, and pity filled her heart, and spoke from her dark eyes, as she listened.

For a moment she sat like a piece of sculptured marble, the whole attitude expressing the emotions she could not utter. Then, flying to her friend's side, and throwing her arms about her, she said:—

“And you come to comfort *me*! Oh, Catherine, who can help you? None but God. But I can love you, Catherine Earle. I do, with all the strength of my poor, sorrowing heart. As long as I live, I will try to make you happy.”

It was enough. Catherine had won her from the selfish indulgence of her grief. And from that hour their paths were side by side. The villagers called them friends. They called each other sisters. And as months passed, and as the sister-love was cemented by the still stronger bond between the orphan and Catherine's brother, they found that life had still many joys for the one, and works of love and benevolence to satisfy the heart of the other.

When John Duke married, he left his father's home, and took his young wife to a new and elegant resi-

dence he had purchased in the city. There he filled up the hours of winter with literary labor, and early each spring removed to the home of his wife's childhood, which they occupied in summer.

It was during the early autumn succeeding their marriage that his father died; and Catherine, having no further duties within the homestead walls, found a refuge with them. With open arms they welcomed her, and with strong love had since protected and cherished her.

Then Ruby was born,—a tiny face, with eyes of dark hazel, and rings of thin, golden hair upon her round head; with no color on the white face, save in the lips, which wore, even then, a scornful curve, in imitation of the mother. Never were lips so brightly red as these, and when the mother looked upon them, she laughingly said,—

“We'll call her ‘Ruby,’ John; and wear her as a priceless jewel in our bosoms.”

The early life of Ruby was passed beneath the watchful love of parents, and the all-absorbing care of Aunt Catherine. Mrs. Duke found that the child had inherited all her own impulsive spirit, showing, even in the dawn of life, the eager, impetuous waywardness that had marked her own childhood.

Then the mother prayed for that spirit of self-control and inward power that comes only from early discipline; praying, as only mothers can, not so much for the child, as for herself, for her own growth in goodness, for wisdom to direct, for strength to walk care-

fully before the observing eyes of the little one, for power to curb her own spirit, for true humility, that knows not pride and arrogance of station; prayed for gentleness in discipline, for calmness under annoyance, for "the peace that floweth like a river"; and the faith and trust that reposes alone on God and his promises.

CHAPTER VIII.

LIFE AT THE PARSONAGE.

"Oh, bright occasions of dispensing good,
How seldom us'd, how little understood!"

THIS last year of Ruby's school life had sped as on rapid pinions. And now, with the praise of teachers and the satisfaction of delighted friends beaming upon her, she gladly prepared herself to carry on her studies at home.

This plan sprang from the strength of her mother's craving love, who pined for the daily presence of this her first-born, and who could bear the separation no longer.

The younger children were as dear to her mother's heart as Ruby. But this eldest had been a means of discipline to herself, so long; had called forth so much tender solicitude, and, being at a distance, had given her so many hours of anxious thought, that she had longed, more perhaps the last year than ever, to have her back, where the daily companionship might scatter fears, increase still more her faith, and bring entire peace and rest.

The younger children, Flora and little Vic, attended a private school in the village. In their childish enthusiasm, they placed their peerless sister almost on a level with their mother, lavished upon her the priceless wealth of their young hearts, and bestowed each day rich offerings of affection, varied and beautiful, such as they could gather from wood and stream, from flowery shrub and moss-grown rock, — always replying to her appreciative thanks in tones of sweetest music, or in gushing laughter that bubbled upon the air like shallow water rippling over stones.

What a world of holy and pure affection bathed this household, shining upon every individual, and reflected from every face! Even the servants sunned themselves in this invigorating element, and felt their life made richer.

Ruby's village friends flocked about her, claiming more of her time, at first, than the home circle were pleased to grant. However, after a few weeks, her duties and pleasures were so happily adjusted that there was no interference or clashing among them. The family and summer visitors received full measure of her attention; and Mrs. Stoughton, whose motherly kindness to Clarence had won her warmest regard, was almost daily visited, until at last it was arranged in the matter of her studies, that she should join her cousin, and recite with him to the pastor.

Every day now, until they returned to the city for the winter, a few hours were passed by her at the par-

sonage. At last it seemed almost like a second home; and Clarence considered anything a misfortune that prevented her daily appearance.

Farther advanced than Ruby in the studies they pursued together, being older, he lagged by the way that he might not outstrip her, and devoted less time to study, that he might not seem to be waiting for her. For, with his delicate, almost womanly perceptions, he read her ambition to excel; and, while he delighted in the ever-increasing intellectual beauty of her mind, he sympathized with his aunt in her fear that too close application would brush the peach-bloom from her cheek, and drive, as in too many cases, the buoyancy of perfect health from her life.

For Clarence had early and sadly learned, that of the many priceless gifts of the great Giver, health of body was among the chief. Though he might never wear it as a robe of beauty upon himself, though suffering was his daily portion, and mortification an ever-present guest, he could better bear this, than see his cousin's glorious complexion grow transparent, her perfect features grow delicate.

To him she was the embodiment of health and loveliness; and to watch the graceful energy of her step, and the animated play of her countenance, was his daily delight.

He had walked home with her each day of the first weeks, and soon the habit of meeting her, as she came to the parsonage, was formed, sometimes alone and

sometimes with Harry, whose gayety made his companionship always desirable.

But this was not of long continuance. Merle Domett had watched the happy trio. Too much pleasure wasted, he thought; and soon he formed one of the group. Then Clarence satisfied himself with the walk home, which Ruby urged, knowing how few were his joys, and feeling responsible to show a sister's interest in one who might as well have been sisterless, if he must depend only on those that ties of blood made such.

Instinctively, Clarence shrunk from the companionship of Merle Domett. Had he been questioned, he could have given no reason. Perchance it was the haughty bearing of the young man, or his entire disregard of the claims of others. Or it might have been his unexpressed but evident admiration of his cousin. Be that as it may, there was no sympathy between the two, and his appearance was an invariable signal for Clarence to withdraw.

"What are you doing there, Allie?" asked Ruby of the child, one sunny morning, as she stood by the parsonage gate a moment, where Merle Domett still lingered.

"Making fish-balls, cousin Ruby. You think they're nice?" answered the little one, looking up from her play in the sand, and throwing back her golden curls with a quick motion peculiar to her.

"Not very inviting, surely," was the laughing reply.

"Oh, they'll be 'vitin'er when they're cooked." And she turned again to her labor.

"Do all children enjoy sand?" questioned the young man, apparently amused, but really catching at a straw to remain the longer.

"I did once, as well as Allie, if I remember rightly. But good-morning; I must not detain Mr. Stoughton."

"Why don't you let Clary walk with you now'days, cousin Ruby?" asked the child, seriously.

"What a question. He knows, of course, I love to have him with me," said Ruby, turning away.

"O well, he's like me. He don't want too many other peoples round." Had she been older, Merle Domett might have thought the answer intended for his ears. He did not understand how rapidly and how truly children read the hearts of those they love.

Ruby passed along the garden-walk with her usual elastic step and graceful bearing, wondering what the child could have meant, and thinking that she must contrive more ways to increase poor Clarence's meagre happiness, little dreaming that all he desired was to be in her presence, to bask in her smile, to follow her in thought when absent, and live upon her looks and words when they were together.

These few months had been the happiest of his life. And yet he did not analyze his feelings, or ask why this joy, — so silent, so tender, treasured so deeply and sacredly within his soul, — why it should come to him, whose whole life had been blighted thus far, and whose future, judging from the past, must be one page of anguish, one long, sad record of lonely suffering.

Why should this young cousin be more to him than the sisters whose faces had haunted his dreams from childhood, more even than the mother who had inspired within his breast the first emotions of reverential love?

Was it the same? It might be; and yet she was not his sister. But this love was as strong, aye, far stronger, than any other that shone upon him. So pure, so unselfish was it, that, though he felt his happiness would have departed with the loss of her presence, yet he would not seek to keep her by him a moment beyond her inclination. And so sacred and holy seemed the emotion she inspired, that it would have caused him most intense pain to have betrayed it even to Mrs. Stoughton's kindly eyes.

Towards her his heart glowed with gratitude; and his expressions of it, though not frequent, were deeply sincere, and, to her motherly nature, touchingly pathetic.

Since his coming to them, she had taxed her ingenuity to make this place seem like a home to him; she had labored also with deep and anxious thoughtfulness to inspire him with faith and courage, and place before him some object for which to live, some work to which his life might be devoted; and it had not been in vain. Clarence revealed himself to her with more freedom than to his mother. He threw off, within this family circle, the chains of reserve and diffidence that had bound him from childhood, and exhibited a playfulness of character and social ease of manner, that he had never been known to possess. But this was only when

no intruding visitor was by; only when the pastor, unbending from severe study, threw off care and forgot sermons; when the mother took time from household duties to caress and fondle the pet lamb of the fold; when Harry laughed long and merrily at his own or others' lively jokes. Then, Clarence's voice forgot its pathos, his eyes their tender pleading, and the beautiful lips would archly curl into a smile that charmed all who saw it. What wonder that he so rapidly won his way to their affections, that his noble character was appreciated and admired in all its phases?

Not one beneath that roof but would have suffered pain to bring him joy, not one but would have sacrificed self to increase his happiness. And as this knowledge became evident to the youth, was it strange that he contrasted their devotion with that of his own family?

But, while we wander from Ruby, the lessons are over. The youthful trio have deserted the pastor in his rural study at the foot of the garden, and are nearing the house.

Bridget, at the kitchen door, greets them with her usual salutation, —

"Blessings on yer swate faces to day. Dade, Miss Ruby, you should stay and dine with the family; for I've wrung the necks of a few troublesome chickens, and the pie they'll make'll be worth the eating. Shure, here she is to do her own asking, I'll only hint at yer duty." And, armed with a large iron spoon,

Bridget turned away to make room for the lady of the house, who, having caught the sound of their voices, urged Ruby to make one of the circle.

"I should like to, so much; but mother will be watching for me."

"Hurrah for chicken pie!" shouted Harry, throwing up his cap. "Stay, cousin Ruby; I'll give your mother the blessed information." And before another word could be spoken, he had bounded away.

Mrs. Stoughton drew the laughing girl within, while Bridget chuckled audibly, and Clarence followed, with a happy light in his dark blue eyes.

It was a pleasant dinner party, and Bridget's broad, sunshiny face told that she enjoyed the gay good-humor equally with the others, as she waited upon the table.

It was scarcely over, when the sound of heavy boots was heard shuffling upon the veranda, and a tall, burly-looking man, in farmer's dress, appeared.

He seemed deeply moved; his mouth compressed, as though to subdue the agitation within. Heavy circles drawn about the eyes showed he had been weeping, and as he caught the pastor's surprised and anxious look, and grasped his offered hand, tears burst forth afresh.

Silently Ruby led Allie into the garden, followed by Harry and her cousin, while Mrs. Stoughton drew near to inquire into the matter with sympathetic interest.

"My wife —" was all the man could utter.

"Why, farmer Hopkins, I did not know of her illness, — this is very sudden!" replied the pastor's

wife, surmising at once the truth, from his manifest grief.

"When did she die?" she asked, in a tender voice; for Mrs. Stoughton knew that this weight of woe could not pass until the tidings were told; and as yet the pastor himself had been unable to utter a word. Perhaps his fountain of consolation was so rich and deep he could not draw hastily from it. Be that as it may, kindness of heart and manly sympathy shone from his face; and, drawing a chair near, he waited until farmer Hopkins might control his voice.

"She seemed so well when I last saw her," suggested the lady.

"She was well, up to yesterday morning," answered the man, striving to subdue his emotion; "as well as any creeter could be that enjoyed a delicate constitution as much as she did. You see, Dominie, I got up and made a fire, and put the kittle over, 'fore I did my chores, 'cause the gals had gone over to neighbor Vesay's to help on a quilt for Susan. You'll have a job there 'fore long, Dominie, I reckon. Well, it got late, and they staid all night. And after the fire got a-going pretty brisk, I went out and milked, cut a little fresh fodder, — was gone nigh an hour; and mother, she thought she'd have some snap-beans for breakfast, and went to the lot and got 'em and cooked 'em. I reckon they were too old — don't know — but shouldn't be surprised; though they were the fust we'd had, p'rhaps that was it; I told her not to eat hearty of 'em, but

s'pose they kinder relished ; and in less 'an thirty minutes she was took down ; never saw a creeter suffer so in all my life. Then we was all alone ; I jest left everything else and tried to relieve her ; gave her pepper tea, then ginger, then mustard ; but it did n't do one bit o' good. If I'd had a little o' the 'ile o' gladness to rub onto her stomach, think it might a' saved her in the fust of it, but the bottle was empty ; and I could 'nt git the doctor, till 't was too late. I saw Vesay's boy in the mowing, and hollared to him to send the gals home. He seemed to know somethin' was the matter, but it took 'em a good while. And when they got home, I told 'em their mother was good as gone. I'd harness up and go for the doctor, but did n't believe it would do any good,—and it did n't."

His head dropped upon his hands again ; and a new wave of grief passed over the man's soul. For, though ignorant and coarse, he was sincere.

"And when did she die, farmer Hopkins?" again asked the lady.

"About midnight, Miss Stoughton ; and it seemed a mercy to have her sufferin's ended. I told the gals, — says I, — don't you bring another snap-bean into this house. Let 'em all dry — every one, — says I."

"Poor girls ! They have lost their best friend. Tell them I shall get up to see them before night." And finding that he was more calm, the lady rose to leave him to arrange with the pastor for funeral services.

"Hope you will, Miss Stoughton. You can do 'em

more good 'n I can. We've *all* lost our best friend. I don't know what we shall do. She always made the butter ; never left nothin' for Huldry to do, but jest plain, easy work. And we depended on her Sundays for a warm dinner when we got home from meetin'. 'T was always ready. You know she did n't like to ride so far ; and thought the gals oughter have the benefit of Sunday, for they did n't see folks much week days. She used to say : Oh, I'll stay home. I want the gals to go. It's good for their morals, and they'll see some new fashion, or something they can fix themselves. I want my gals to look as well as anybody's. A true mother she was, Dominie ; might look the country over, and I could n't find another like her."

Very serious was the good pastor's face as he bowed acquiescence, and quietly asked what hour had been appointed for the funeral.

Mrs. Stoughton left the room, closing softly the door. And Bridget, who had heard the colloquy while she removed the dishes from the table, looked up with a half-serious, half-comic expression, and muttered : "Poor man ! well for us it's not his fine Cheshire, or we'd have him howling all over town." Then, as though fearing a rebuke, she slid into the pantry, and busied herself awhile, until the expression of her honest face could be reduced to order.

The young people, lounging upon the veranda, had caught snatches of the above conversation. And as the afflicted man took his departure, they bowed with

silent respect, then resumed the delightful task of weaving a floral crown for Allie, who had gathered great bunches of brilliant blossoms.

Soon the pastor was dozing within sound of their voices; while Mrs. Stoughton brought her sewing out beneath the vines, to listen to the chatting, and respond to the quiet gayety of the scene.

It was one of those days when scattered clouds like flying veils move swiftly through the heavens, subduing the intense heat and light, yet leaving all the charm of a bright, breezy atmosphere; when leaves whisper wonderful tales, as if every tree and shrub was instinct with mysterious life, and when birds hop from branch to branch, with gushes of song and cooing notes of blissful life; not a day of sluggish summer heat and monotony, but of motion and life, of pleasant sounds, odorous breezes, brilliant light, and softened shade.

Ruby was seated upon a low garden-chair, her lap heaped with flowers gathered by the child. The hopefulness of youth, its dreams of sunny brightness, its gay visions were all reflected from her happy, brown eyes, and gave to her rich voice a ringing joyousness which shed its influence upon the hearts of the others; Clarence upon a cushion by her side, assorting the leaves and buds, and casting, now and then, long glances of admiring pride, upon her face; Harry lying with his head upon his mother's knee, watching the clouds as they passed above the trees and vines, and Allie, like a

bird, flitting in and out among them all, made up the picture of wondrous loveliness.

The afternoon was but half gone, when an open wagon was driven to the gate, and an old lady, with quick, nervous motions, prepared to alight. Harry, starting up, exclaimed, —

"Well done, Ruby, you are to have a taste of parsonage life in good earnest to-day. Here's old Auntie Smith, one of the 'salt of the earth,' mother says."

"Go assist her, my son." With a bound Harry was off the veranda; while Mrs. Stoughton drew an easy-chair to the door, and hastened to get a large palm fan; for, despite the breeze, the old lady looked warm.

"I declare! How cool and comfortable you all look," her face increasing its smiling radiance as she advanced. And shaking hands with each in a hearty, energetic manner, she sunk into the depths of the great chair, and fanned herself vigorously. She had come laden with offerings, as the closely packed basket, which Harry labored to lift upon the veranda, testified.

"You're all well, Mrs. Stoughton? I'm sure, it's a blessing, health is. Poor farmer Hopkins and the girls! I've just heard of it, since I got to the village; very sudden, — very." She shook her head with mournful earnestness; but, brightening with a new thought, added, —

"My daughter Rachel was over yesterday. I thought you'd like to hear about her. Father had to come to mill, so I thought I'd ride over, and tell you the news.

A right good visit we had," and her face was bright as the sun. Mrs. Stoughton's countenance reflected hers as she asked,—

"Were they all well?"

"All well and hearty, but Silas, poor fellow; he came in on a crutch and cane." And the expressive countenance took on a doleful appearance at once.

"Indeed! Has he been hurt?"

Very solemn the tone, and very impressive the gestures of the old lady, replying, in a low voice,—

"Hip-ail! Terrible 'tis, too! Hasn't done a day's work for well on to a year; and Rachel, how brave that girl is! Before she was married we hardly let her milk a cow, she was so slender like. But, now! why, last winter, she tended to the fodderin' with only a boy to help. And this summer she had the overseeing of all the haying, and fairly carried on the farm. A lame husband and five children! It's no small chore, I can tell you. I'm proud o' that girl." The mother's face fairly beamed.

"And well you may be. But her husband? He will be better soon, you think?"

"Never! no cure for hip-ail!" with a doleful shake of the head. "The doctors tell him it will go off in time; but you needn't tell me nothing about hip-ail. He'll never do another day's work. Oh, he dries apples and pares potatoes, and helps a bit about house, but he don't go near the barn. He fairly worships her, though, he does indeed."

"I think he'd better," exclaimed Harry. "You almost make me worship her, Auntie Smith."

The old lady shook with laughter. It fairly bubbled over into great dimples on her smooth, fat face, as she resumed,—

"He had his horse stolen, last winter, too; taken right out of the barn. A fellow came along, and took him off. Gave him to a girl. That's how they got track of him. We heard of it through a neighbor, and father went right over. Rachel said she guessed they could afford to lose one horse. But it came back. They got the horse, but not the thief."

"I'm glad it terminated so happily."

"Yes, we were too. But I'm talking too long; I've got to go to the store to get a little thread, and father'll be there before I do, I'm afraid. Now, if you'll just empty my basket, I'll take it along. I thought you might be out of cheese by this time; and I brought a few eggs; did n't know as your hens were laying. Then, there's a jar of honey for Harry; thought he'd like it."

Harry smacked his lips with a smile towards Ruby. Bridget was called to take the basket, and Mrs. Stoughton thanked her warmly for the remembrance.

"Oh, that's nothing; I always want my minister to have as good as I do. And, if I've got anything you want, just let me know. I'm ready to share my last crust with my minister. I always said so, and I'll do it. Yes, I'd go hungry before you should leave us; I would indeed; and so I always say."

As the mournful alternative was presented to her mind, the good lady wiped the quick starting tears; and, with nervous haste, grasping the basket which Bridget had brought, shook hands again with each, and took her departure.

As the gate clanged upon the retreating figure, Ruby looked up with a laugh, asking:—

“Do you have many like her, Mrs. Stoughton?”

“No others just her style; some with equally generous impulses, though.”

“She seemed to overflow with goodness.”

“She overflows with substantial goodies. I enjoy her honey amazingly,” laughed Harry.

Allie, coming up with a new load of flowers, interrupted the conversation, and soon Ruby said good-night, and went home.

CHAPTER IX.

SEASIDE GAYETIES.

“‘Tis pride, or emptiness, applies the straw,
That tickles little minds to mirth effuse.”

ROSWELL DREW was about leaving the sunny little breakfast-room at his mother-in-law's home, when her voice recalled him.

He had acquired the habit of lingering at table, that he might drive the shades of sadness from the widow's heart, and, if it might be, leave some word of cheer to comfort her loneliness.

Very precious to this sorrowing wife, this forsaken mother, were the delicate attentions and tender words of the noble man, sympathizing as he did in her grief, and rendering to her the respect and love of an own child, far holier and purer than a child of hers had ever rendered. And now she trusted him implicitly, found courage in his strength, rest in his manly tenderness, peace and refreshment in his large heart, and calm, quiet life and habits.

“Roswell,” she said, as he turned back to the table, “we do not hear from Nellie as often as we ought. Have you written lately?”

"Twice, since her last. We shall hear to-day probably."

"I am anxious for her. I almost wish you would go to her."

"No need of anxiety, mother. If she were ill, Mrs. Tourney would advise us. And she will not expect me until the month is up."

"It is not illness I fear, Roswell," she said, with hesitation. "I hardly know what, but I dread something. I can't shake it off. Indeed I wish she were home again."

A flush passed over his face, as he leaned upon a chair; but he forced a smile, replying, —

"What is this fearful mountain, that will not be removed, mother?"

"Indeed, my son, I cannot tell. But Nellie is so free and impulsive. If she would write oftener, my courage would be stronger. And do you not think yourself she has been away long enough?"

"Yes, if she can be happy here. But don't get the blues, mother, or conjure up imaginary evils. You are in-doors too much. I shall take you out riding this afternoon, and we will plan about getting Nellie home. But you know it must be done skilfully, or the little lady will fail to welcome us with smiles."

Roswell Drew left the mother with light words and a calm face; but the serenity of his soul was troubled. The gay spirit and free manners of his wife haunted him. Her small, lithe form danced before him in all its bird-like grace and beauty. He feared the weak,

unresisting nature might be drawn within that vortex of folly and sin, that reigned triumphant in the world of fashion. And he shuddered as the thought pressed home; for, despite her frivolous, yielding nature, and the vain, selfish heartlessness of her daily life, hidden as it was oftentimes, he loved her; not perhaps as he might have loved a nobler woman; but, at least, as he had loved no other since the home-circle of his boyhood had been broken, and, one after another, the mother and sisters had passed away.

All these morning hours, amid the bustle of business, thoughts, called up by the mother's words, were mingled strangely with his work. And, before the late dinner hour, he had resolved to start the next morning for the scene of gayety, and remain there until Nellie could be persuaded to return with him. He, too, began to ask why she had not written lately. True, her letters were never satisfactory; for the whirl of exciting pleasure in which she revelled gave little time for this duty, and less thought to bestow upon those who so anxiously thought of her.

Did she realize the extent of their forbearance, or the depth of their love? Did she realize her own wilfulness, or look for one moment beyond present gratification? Ah, no! If she had, even her weak nature might have startled in affright at the danger pending. Even her imperfect sense of rectitude and morality would have taken alarm, and drawn her shuddering back from the precipitous verge upon which she so gayly stood.

And could her husband's eyes have rested upon her at the moment of which we write, his anxiety would have ripened into fear and indignation.

The party had made more than one change since leaving home.

The Springs, their first resort, had been pronounced "stupid." The mountains, next attempted, were "too dull." And now they were at the seaside. Here Roswell Drew sought his wife.

The day itself was not more bright and beautiful than this young wife, as she flitted down the lofty steps, and with the utmost abandon and unstudied grace, gave her hand to the gentleman waiting, was lifted into the basket carriage, and driven towards the beach.

Every eye followed them, as they dashed away, some with a gay laugh, a light word, a careless rejoinder, or a touch of contempt curling the lip. And even Mrs. Tourney, who lingered with Mabel upon the balcony above, looked on with more of doubt and anxious thought than one would have judged her capable of.

With her small hands encased in tiny gauntlets, she held the reins, and guided the spirited horses. Her eyes flashed with excitement as they sped along the wrinkled beach. She threw back gay answers to the voluptuous youth who lounged beside her, bearing the dainty shade, and casting bold, wicked glances upon the bright fair face, — glances she did not shrink from, though her worldly heart too well comprehended the undisguised admiration. Her daring nature played with the serpent

she might not tame, and threw boldly into the wager of gay pleasure and thoughtless indulgence her own fair fame, and the honored name she bore.

Back and forth upon the glistening sand she drove, now bathing the horses' feet in the white surf, and laughing with a child's gleefulness as the foaming waves rolled about the slender wheels; then dashing off again, the prancing horses plashing ocean drops upon the white robe she wore, her face dimpling the while with smiles and rippling laughter.

Thus passed the morning hours. And with color heightened by the fresh sea-breeze, perhaps by the bold words that followed glances of love from this daring stranger, she entered, with a slight rap, her friend's apartment.

It would almost seem that the two had exchanged natures, so bright and sunny was the wife, so quiet, subdued, and almost sorrowful the face of Mabel as she raised it to greet the intruder.

"Heavens! How doleful! Why Belle, *ma chère*, what have you you been doing? Tears, as I live! Where's the mamma? Riding, and left you alone? That's shabby. O, I've had *such* an elegant ride. I'd give all I possess if Ross would present me with a turnout to match the colonel's."

"If you flirt a little more furiously, this superb colonel may present his to your ladyship," was the reply, with a curl of scorn about the lip.

"I don't know but his infatuation is strong enough

now. And, 'pon my word, if it weren't for Ross, I'd accept it."

"For shame, Nellie. I wish you would be more careful; indeed, I'm heart-weary of all this. I long to go home."

"Nonsense, child! Pray don't fret on my account. I'll take care of myself. And it's so splendid to be able to go and come as I wish, the observed of all observers, and the envy of the house. Don't you see, Ma-Belle?"

"No, I don't see; because I'm afraid of that man. He is bold and bad. I do not trust him, Nellie."

"Nor do I, darling. There's no need to trust. But I must be gay, I must be happy. And if he didn't make love a trifle to *me*, he would to others. Don't look horrified, pet! I want an escort; surely it's an easy way to get one."

"But not safe, not honorable, Nellie. And if your husband were here —"

"I shall be demure as a kitten before he comes. But how about the poet secretary, Belle, for your sad face is not wholly attributable to my recklessness, I know. Has he gone?"

"Yes," was the low reply.

"Now you are sensible, that is, if you are not to meet again? How is it?"

"Never again." Mabel rose, and busied herself about the room, that she might not be subjected to the scrutiny of her adviser. She had tried to throw a careless tone

about the two words; but, in spite of all her efforts, they were so full of real anguish that a harder heart than Mrs. Drew's would have felt sympathy for the young girl in this her first sorrow.

"Well, dear; it's useless to regret his handsome face and lofty elegance. Pride and poverty are not desirable in this world, as we all know. And to think of the young Nameless aspiring to our peerless Mabel! Presumption! He fairly monopolized you. Thank fortune for his good sense in leaving the field to others. And now *do* have a little mercy on Ned Clarke. Why, Belle, his income is immense."

"Be still, Nellie." Mabel turned towards her a face rigid and colorless. "Be still, I say; you and mother have made me false to the purest, noblest impulses of my nature, false to a true friend and to my own heart. Now rest you quiet. I *will not* degrade myself to encourage one I may not love."

"Don't annihilate me, dear! I never supposed it absolutely necessary to love before you marry, that is, very much; and Ned Clarke is ready to lay his fortune at the feet of your ladyship any moment. I'm sure he would be devoted, if you'd allow him."

"The weak, silly stripling, with his vacant face and drawling voice! I despise him!"

At this indignant outburst, the lovely face assumed its natural hue, while Mrs. Drew sent a thrill of silvery laughter through the room.

"Well, dear, we all know who is not despised. But

pray don't expose the state of your tender heart to the public gaze, or allow the boarders a chance to laugh over love's melancholy at your expense."

Tears started in Mabel's eyes.

"You are cruel, Nellie."

"Forgive me, then, for I did not mean it. 'T was only a hint. I might have known you better than to suppose it needed. But, indeed, I must dress for dinner. And to-night, Mabel, you'll see me resplendent and dazzling in the colonel's last gift. Glorious! And to think Ross never would indulge me; and how I have longed for diamonds."

"Nellie! You *don't* accept them from *him*!" There was surprise, indignation, and entreaty in the tone.

"To be sure I do. Where's the harm, pray? I've looked weak and stupid long enough, in jet and pearls. And spotless white, Mabel, with sparkling jewels! Who *could* resist? O, I feel jubilant." Mabel grasped her hand, as she was dancing from the room, and pleaded,—

"Don't wear them, Nellie. Think of your husband! Oh, give them back. And let us prevail upon mother to go home; the season is nearly spent."

"Not I, indeed! Let me go, darling, and if you're wise, you'll wear them yourself, before the week is up. Ned Clarke longs —"

"Don't speak his name again," said Mabel, impatiently. "I wish your husband were here, Nell."

"May all the fates prevent; and, by the way, I must write a line, or he'll surely make his appearance. Fare-

well till dinner." With another laugh, that had a heartless ring to Mabel's ears, she flitted from the room.

For a moment the beautiful head dropped upon the hands; and tears, purer and holier than she may ever shed again, pressed through the slender jewelled fingers. That morning a glorious summer dream had been rudely broken. That morning a mother's influence had shattered the pure hopes of youth; scattered with ruthless hand the lovely gems that glisten about the pathway of a fresh, early, innocent love; crushed the honest aspirations of a noble manhood; and blighted the purity and loveliness of a daughter's heart.

False to herself, to the better impulses of her nature, Mabel had written the few words a worldly mother dictated, and sent them to pierce the heart and chill the love of the only one on earth to whom her own pure affections had gone out. She had denied him a last interview, even while her whole nature wildly demanded it; and now he was gone. Her own eyes, dim with tears, had watched the tall, proud form as it turned resolutely away. Hidden by the drapery of the window, she had heard his farewell words to the few who had estimated him, not by his purse and style of life, but by the true manhood, that could not be hidden; by the worth, the purity, and nobleness of character that enveloped his daily life, and permeated all his words and acts.

Life now looked like a desert waste, a strange, dreary path, cheerless, dark, forlorn. She seemed suddenly

to grow old; childhood receded very, very fast. The future held no joy for her to reach after, no brightness for her life to gather. And yet her smile must be as radiant, her brow as smooth and clear, her step as light in the dance, and the sunny gayety unchanged. The world demanded it, society would expect it, and the mother — her heart covered fathoms deep with the claims of wealth, position, and fashion — would allow no time for sad regret or tender retrospect.

Therefore, like a "sensible girl," as her friend would say, she rose, determined to cover her grief with forgetfulness, like a pall, — hiding it from the world, from friends, and, if possible, from her own heart. Hastily arraying the supple form in robes of beauty and richness, she joined her mother, who had returned, and was chatting in the parlor with a pale, limp, boyish-looking creature, dressed in the height of the prevailing style, displaying his only wealth in rich trappings and costly habits. He seemed to Mabel's eyes the most insignificant of human beings.

And her own mother would gladly condemn her to pass her life with this weak specimen; would sell her eldest born, with all her wealth of beauty and grace, her rare endowments of mind, her capacity for the loftiest joy, and her heart freighted with pure affections, high hopes, and noble impulses, — sell her for *money*. Oh, depth of degradation! Would the young girl, clad in her armor of untarnished chastity, enveloped, like the morning of a glorious day, in the roseate beams of a

first love, — would she submit to these fetters; to this life of falsehood, of shame, of living death? Is she strong to cast aside the yoke; to ignore the influences that bear upon her with their steady, unrelieved weight; to be true to her womanhood, her own sense of rectitude and duty?

Fashion is a relentless mistress. And those who bend to caste must sometimes bear grievous burdens. Would they rest on Mabel's frail shoulders with their crushing weight? Time will tell.

At last night covers the earth, and rays of trembling light descend from her starry crown upon the fair ones robed in beauty, and sauntering through the pleasure grounds. The bright evening, and gentle coolness of the summer air, call many from the crowded, heated rooms, to a purer atmosphere and more subdued gayety. Meantime the softened notes of ball-room music reach the most remote walk, and linger in the ears of the most solitary couple who may prefer moonlight to the jets of glaring gas, and their own sweet companionship to that of the gay throng.

But let us glance within. The large room blazes with light reflected from countless jewels. The band throws out its swelling notes, and drowns the whispered words of flattery, or soft speech of interested love; young men become ardent, and maidens languishing. The dance goes on with all the carelessness of a pastime, all the eagerness of business. Robes of dazzling brilliancy, and cloudy, filmy texture swing before us a

moment, and are lost. Laughing eyes glance in our faces, and disappear until the next great wave rushes towards us. Young girls flit by, so very young and beautiful that we start to see them folded in the arms of men who, upon the forehead, bear their years less marked than their vices. And age is there, if we may judge by wrinkles, manifest through various cosmetics, — age, that might have been beautiful, had the silvery locks been left to nature's kindly care, and the heart learned to bear its added life with holier grace. But diamonds add not one youthful sparkle to the eye. Rouge, however skilful the artist, cannot compete with nature's delicate blush; while a life of idleness, of selfish amusement, of folly, pride, and sordid greed, must leave unlovely marks upon the character, that polished manners, courtly graces, or costly robes fail to conceal.

But while we muse, in this most unsuitable spot for musing, Mabel walks leisurely near, and lingers by the door, to catch a breath of cooler air; so near that we note the look of indignant surprise with which she greets her friend just entering.

How radiant! The white grenadine, glistening with satin cord artistically arranged in graceful loops, falling in perfect outline from the small, delicately rounded figure; while over all, conspicuous above the simplicity of dress and dazzling beauty of face, shine the colonel's diamonds.

With alluring eyes and beguiling voice, she has

earned them; and now, with unveiled gaze and most serene satisfaction, she displays them to the world. The eager whisper, meant for Mabel's ear alone, reaches us.

"Are they not superb? Envy me if you choose, Mabel; I'll forgive in advance."

"You will not need," was the cool rejoinder; "I did not know you had laid aside mourning."

"Don't be cross," was the smiling reply, although she winced beneath Mabel's sharp rebuke. "I *am* in mourning. *White* is mourning enough now; and diamonds are white, the most elegant kind of mourning, I think. If not, who cares? It's my own affair. Ah! there's the colonel. Don't look so sour, dear. Do try and greet him with your usual charming smile. I shall think you are jealous of me."

As Mabel's smile would not come at her bidding, she turned away; and in a moment Mrs. Drew was borne by her admirer into the midst of the dance. Mabel's eyes sought them with a weary, impatient sigh; her lip curled contemptuously as she watched his assiduous attentions and passionate advances, and the scarce concealed satisfaction of the weak, vain wife.

"I wish Ross Drew would come; I long to go home," she thought. Then, seeing Ned Clarke's simpering face approaching dangerously near, she turned impulsively towards a door, to escape thereby. An upward glance, a startled exclamation; and with swift grace she had reached the entrance, and greeted the friend she desired to see. Her hand was grasped firmly by Roswell Drew;

but no smile warmed his greeting; one quick look upon her face, and his eyes were upon the dancers again.

"Are you well?" His voice was expressionless. It was evident that he scarce knew what he said, and Mabel's reply was as mechanical as his question.

"Very well. How long have you been here?" Now he bent a searching glance upon the troubled face, upturned to his.

"A half-hour, Mabel. Are you glad to see me?"

"O, yes, very glad; now we shall go home. We need not wait for father."

"Do *you* wish to go?"

"Very much, Roswell. I'm tired of all this."

"What has happened? Come with me, Mabel."

"But Nellie; let us speak with her."

"She seems absorbed in that military whiskerando. I want to talk with you first." He led her out upon the balcony. Mabel trembled at the first abrupt question.

"Tell me why you wish to go home. Is it on your own account alone?" And the piercing eyes seemed to read her thoughts, for Mabel was not a skilful dissembler.

"I am tired of it. One loves their home best, of course, and we have been here two months nearly."

"Have you wanted to leave on Nellie's account? Be true, Mabel."

"We are more together at home," was the evasive reply.

"Who was Nellie dancing with?"

"Let me see, — did he wear a mustache?"

"You are a bungler at deception, Mabel. You know him. I saw you part from Nellie as the fellow drew near, and watched your face afterwards. Do you know where the diamonds came from; or don't you wish to be communicative on that subject either?"

"It is not the best way, Roswell Drew. You should not question me. It is not like you to do so, and Nellie will tell you all there is to tell, if you are careful and wise. I don't think she wants to keep the diamonds. And — we ought to go home. We *must* go." Her voice trembled.

"I understand you, Mabel; the diamonds shall be returned, and *we will* go home."

A few more turns until Mabel's face took on a more composed expression, and the gentleman grew less stern, less perplexed. Then they sought once more the scene of gayety. And, as they entered, they were met by Mrs. Tournay and Ned Clarke, who, if he could not reach the daughter's heart, would court the mother's favor.

There was the manifestation of pleased surprise upon the lady's part; and then she would have resigned her simpering attendant, had not Mabel clung to the arm upon which she leaned more firmly. Even then the man of business might have failed to understand her tactics, but with a quick, pleading glance at his face, she declined the young fop's invitation for the next set, by saying, "I am engaged, Mr. Clarke."

"After this, you will favor me?" with a most heart-rending smirk. But Mabel was proof against even this; although she felt, rather than saw, the expression of command upon her mother's face.

"I believe I am engaged for the next also, Mr. Clarke. Really, you must excuse me," with a constrained smile.

"After this engagement, I may hope, — may I not, Miss Mabel?"

"Of course, Mr. Clarke, Mabel will dance with you then. Meantime you must be content with me," said the mother, familiarly; while the young girl, with growing bitterness, exclaimed, —

"I shall be too weary then to dance with any one."

With a sharp pinch of her slender fingers upon the arm she held, she turned away.

Roswell Drew's face had lost its sternness by this time, and with an amused expression he asked, "So you will have me dance half the evening to free yourself from that puppy, Mabel?"

"Have mercy, Roswell. Do let me escape, just for to-night," was the merry reply. "There's Nellie, she sees you, and she is not dancing; let us go to her."

Roswell Drew had not the key to his wife's heart, and the feeling that blanched her cheek as her eyes first rested on his face, filled him with a nameless dread he might not clothe in language.

Her hand was quickly imprisoned in his; and recov-

ering almost on the instant her self-control, she greeted him merrily, and introduced the colonel.

"You take us by surprise, Ross. Is mother well?"

"Yes, Nellie, we were getting lonely without you, and thought you'd be ready to return by this time."

With a cool bow to the discomfited colonel, he drew his wife's hand within his arm, and led her away. They sauntered through the rooms, and those who recognized the lady would scarce have dreamed of the tumult in her breast, so calm and smiling her face.

"Have you a parlor, Nellie? Let us go to it, and spend a quiet evening. I don't believe Mabel cares to dance."

"No, no, I do not."

"But I do, Ross. However, I'll stay a while with you; then, if Mabel wants to devote the evening to you, she may. I prefer the dance."

"Very well."

In a moment they entered the apartment they shared together as private parlor. And Mabel, excusing herself, went on to her own room, a quiet determination resting upon her brow. For once she would be free.

The gas burned dimly, and the two were alone. Drawing the lithe form within his arms, he kissed the low, broad brow, and the eager, impatient lips, saying, in a voice as sweet and low as a tender mother's, —

"We have missed you, Nellie. We cannot spare you longer. We want you to make sunshine in our darkened home."

"But I didn't expect to go home for two weeks yet. Really, Ross, I can't go."

"Well, dear, I can't come again, and I don't think I can leave you."

"How long will you stay, then, now you are here?" was the rather ungracious question.

"We must go to-morrow; I can't leave the office longer."

"Then what *did* you come for?"

"You had not written for sometime, Nellie; I was anxious."

"Pooh! you know I'm never sick."

"Well, aren't you glad to see me?" with a smile tender and sad.

"Of course, I'm glad to see you; but I want to stay longer. I'm having a glorious time." She nestled nearer him, pleadingly.

"What makes it glorious, and why can it not be so at home? We are ready to make home happy for you."

"I know it, you dear old sobersides. But everybody is here now."

"Nevertheless, I cannot leave you. You don't belong to everybody." And his arm held her lightly. Then touching the jewels upon her bosom, he asked in a careless tone, but with a searching glance, how long she had worn diamonds, and when she had purchased them.

"Not long," she answered; "only to-night."

"Where did they come from, Nellie?"

"Only a gift, *Monsieur*," glancing hastily at the eyes, that bent upon her their serious gaze.

"A gift! And who should offer my wife *such* a gift? Tell me, Nellie!"

"Colonel Meade gave them to me. Where's the harm, pray?"

"'Twas an insult."

"Don't be nonsensical, Ross. He's been very kind and friendly to me. He would have felt hurt had I refused to wear them."

"Well, but take them off. They must be returned; and we will get home as quickly as may be."

"Returned! Never, Ross Drew! And I'm going down now; I'm engaged for this hour."

"Nellie, be reasonable. You've danced enough. It's very late. Your trunks must be packed to-night. We start early in the morning."

"I won't pack one." The angry tears started.

"I'll pack them for you, Nellie."

"Very well; I'll leave you to the pleasant task." Quickly wiping her eyes, she rose from beside him.

"Don't go down, Nellie. The dancers are scattering. It won't look well for you to be there alone, now that your husband is here."

"But Colonel Meade expects me."

Fire darted from the husband's eyes. There would be no more entreaty. His words now were command. "Stay! You leave your husband's side for that villain? I know him well!" And with a rapid

motion he turned the key in the door. Her cheeks were scarlet.

"Ross Drew, I hate you!" fiercely.

"You are mistaken, Nellie," soothingly.

"I'm not a child, to obey," tears of disappointment overflowing from the flashing orbs.

"You are a woman and a wife. Have you forgotten it?"

"Will you *compel* me to go home?" she asked, with bitter scorn.

"I will protect you from insult," he answered calmly.

"Thank you; I can take care of myself," and she stamped her foot with uncontrolled rage.

"You are not caring for yourself. You cannot wear such gifts, without placing yourself in the power of a base man, and risking your fair fame before the world."

"I have no fear, nor do I care for the world."

"Then, Nellie, have a care for your husband's name. But this is all folly. Where are your trunks? Let me assist you."

Tears and entreaties were vain; she had measured her pettishness and anger against his firm will and strong determination before, and knew that he would conquer. But it should be at the risk of his peace of mind. If she *must* yield, he should be wretched; she would make him so, as she had before, times without number. And yet he rose as far above other men in her estimation as God's noblest trees tower above the

weeds of the morass. She loved him as entirely as she was capable of loving; and where his kindness and pity failed to convince of her duty, his mild forbearance and unfaltering resolution impelled her to the tardy performance of it.

With most unlovely sullenness she pointed to the door of her dressing-room, and watched him, as he drew forth the trunks, and kindly proposed filling them for her. There was a cloud upon his brow; but his words were kind, even playful, as he carefully folded each article, and stowed them away in the capacious trunks. Too intractable to appreciate his wise forbearance, she looked on in silence, until the lateness of the hour convinced her of the folly of seeking pleasure below. With a gesture of weak impatience, she flung off her finery, demanding,—

"What hour in the morning am I to start, your highness?"

"Not in the early train, dear, if you object; there will be abundant time for farewells. Try and be happy, Nellie. I've a pleasant surprise for you after we leave here. Only *this*, I must return. I will give you diamonds, and you shall select them."

He took the case of jewels from the dressing-table, put them in his pocket, and turned to the filling of another trunk, not caring to see his wife's anger, and failing to see the triumph and satisfaction that sparkled in her eyes, for diamonds she *would* possess.

CHAPTER X.

CLARENCE'S DECISION.

"But Knowledge hath a far more 'wildering tongue,
And she will stoop and lead you to the stars,
And witch you with her mysteries."

Time sped along. Within Clarence's room the last rays of the September sun lingered, tinging with its golden glory the waves of bright hair above his brow.

He sat before the piano, his fingers moving carelessly over the keys. Snatches of soft, dreamy melody were thrown upon the air. His soul seemed gazing through his eyes upon the sunset clouds. His spirit wandered far away. He was indulging in visionary dreams, such dreams as caused forgetfulness, as hid from him his pains, as covered his desolation with garlands of flowers,—beautiful for the moment, because inspired by the love of friends, but not increasing his faith, or courage, or self-dependence,—simply dreams, to fade as the twilight does into the blackness and gloom of night.

Mrs. Stoughton, with all the enthusiasm of her nature, had endeavored to inspire him with the desire

for a liberal education, and the life of a public benefactor. At first, it seemed like ridicule to make the proposition to *him*. But he loved and trusted her enough to see clearly her motive, and to understand her devotion to his best and highest interests.

Harry would enter college at the next commencement; he would be as well prepared; they would be together, chums through the whole course. His friendship would be invaluable to one so nearly misanthropic as Clarence had become. If he could possess himself of courage sufficient to study medicine,—the only profession he would choose,—might he not be a means of blessing to some, alleviate the sufferings of others, and minister to wants and woes without measure, as this good woman in her nobleness ministered to him? Did he not owe it to her to acquiesce in her plan, to regard her wishes, even though the struggle to overcome his repugnance to a public life required double exertion? He felt so, and yet the struggle continued. It might be the path of duty, but he had not courage for the first step.

Seclusion seemed the only life for him. The thought of breaking away from it was painful as death. The reverential regard he had for Mrs. Stoughton was not powerful enough to decide him; and this she knew. But she had an ally she could trust, and who, she felt, had just the needed power over Clarence. At this moment her wishes, her plans, and hopes were poured into a willing ear; and Ruby nodded acquiescence.

Her eyes sparkled with the thought of inspiring her cousin with so pure an ambition, and her cheeks took on a richer hue, as the picture of his future success and happiness was placed before her imagination.

"Now go to him, my dear. Your sympathy and influence will be worth everything to him; indeed, will give him courage for the final decision. That is all he needs."

"And will it be right, Mrs. Stoughton? You are sure? Will it make him noble and happy?"

"I feel so, Ruby. I see no other opening for him. He must be drawn from this charmed life of seclusion. He must live for others, and have less time for painful thoughts of himself."

"Yes; but, dear Mrs. Stoughton, have you thought of his health? Can he bear the pressure of persistent study?"

"I think he can. He is systematic; his habits are simple. I am convinced it is best,—so run along, and let me feel that you will conquer."

A moment after, Ruby entered quietly her cousin's apartment, and stood by his side before he was conscious of her presence, absorbed, as he was, in his world of revery.

She leaned against the instrument, smiling back into the glorious eyes he turned upon her, and asked for a song.

"Not now, Ruby, let me talk first. You have come from Mrs. Stoughton. Does she complain of me?"

Without doubt she thinks me stupid. I wish I had the fire and ambition of Harry; but I have n't. I can't call it up, can you?" looking into the fresh, fair face almost beseechingly.

"I would not wish to, Clare. We want you as you are. Harry's fiery spirit might sometimes scorch. You are light, and may shine, not burn."

"Then you, too, are against me; would send me away."

"Not that, cousin; only ambitious for you, hopeful for you."

"How can I leave my nest here, cosy and quiet as it is, and go out into the world with my frightful ruins? No, no, Ruby. Here is happiness; at least, contentment. Let me stay."

"You are contented now, Clarence; but you cannot be so always. And this is a selfish sort of happiness, is it not, Clare?—prompting you to shun society, to rid yourself of its burdens and its work. We are not created for ourselves alone, or for happiness merely."

"I know, Ruby; I have uneasy thoughts sometimes of work needed and responsibility, but what am I worth to take up burdens, to stretch out a helping hand? Even though I swell the human tide with my poor presence, who would be the better, who the wiser? In this wretched prison-house my soul is fettered; it cannot rise, it cannot soar. Ah, Ruby, I mourn my soul, my bound, helpless soul, only fit for the ignoble use of keeping its prison walls from falling! Sometimes it

swells within me, as though to burst the barrier and be free were an easy thing. But, poor soul, it flutters 'gainst the bars, and pain drives the dream away, and Clarence is himself again,—a most miserable self, Ruby."

"You berate yourself most unreasonably, Clare. We know you better than you know yourself.—The soul is stronger than you deem, a glorious, lofty soul. It *shall* soar, my cousin, and lift with it every fetter, every rude barrier. Only have courage, and when its wings are ready plumed for flight, call it not back."

"Go on, Ruby, rightly named; your words are gems. Tell me what to do,—and—I'll do it. Shall I go with Harry next week?"

"Go, Clarence, by all means. We long to see you great and famous. We shall be so proud of you."

"*You* bid me climb; then I will. But, Ruby, you remember 'heights are cold,'" and he shuddered playfully.

"They shall not be for you, Cousin Clare. Climb never so high, the pinnacle of your fame shall still be within our sight. We will climb with you. You shall never be alone."

He grasped the eager hand just touching his arm. His beautiful face flashed its radiant spirit upon her for a moment.

"*You*, Ruby,—will *you* climb with the others?" Then, without noticing the effect of his words, the impulse that prompted them died, the radiance van-

ished, the little hand was slowly dropped, and the voice took up again the burden of its minor key.

"It is asking too much. I am selfish; my friends have made me so, I fear. Their sympathy is all I ask,—and enough. They can never be proud, Ruby, as you so generously say; but they shall never feel shame when I am spoken of. If I am no source of honor to them, I will be no burden of disgrace."

"That you could never be; believe me, Clare, never. And we shall be proud of you. We are now, indeed we are. You know us not; you esteem yourself too lightly." In her enthusiasm she would have said more. Clarence felt that pity was her prompter, and the flush deepened.

"Hush, Ruby! you pain me."

"Do I? O, forgive me, Clare. I spoke the truth, every word. Some day you will overcome this morbid sensitiveness, and trust your friends more fully."

She was interrupted. Mrs. Stoughton stood in the door. Supper was waiting, and Ruby was to eat with them, as she often did now; for as the time drew near for the family to remove to the city for the winter, her parsonage friends pressed their claims more strongly.

Mrs. Stoughton, her heart looking from kindly eyes upon them, passed an arm about each, asking,—

"What has Ruby been saying to you, Clarence? Not driven the shadows quite away, has she?"

"O yes, shadows must flee at her approach. She is our sunshine, you know. Why, she says college, too,—and I—"

"What do you say?" asked the lady, earnestly.

"I say the same." With childlike grace and boyish freedom, he kissed her hand as it rested on his shoulder, and looked up smilingly into her face.

"You have decided right and wisely, Clarence. God will bless you with success and joy, I feel assured. I can ask no more. This first step towards throwing off these enfeebling shackles is the most difficult for you. But the day will yet dawn, my son, when you will smile at the effort it now costs, and thank me for pressing you to it."

"I thank you now, my mother, my more than mother. Your courage inspires me. Perhaps I may be worth something to humanity yet."

"God never formed such a heart for nothing. But come; let us carry the good news to the others."

Mr. Stoughton looked approval, and Harry swung an imaginary cap in air, shouting: "Hurrah for Clare and college!" tossed his wee sister above his head, landing her in her high chair, not yet outgrown; then quietly seated himself by Ruby, and composed his exuberant spirits until his father craved the customary blessing.

"A few more days, Ruby, and we must give you up, it seems. Is it before or after the Sabbath?" inquired the pastor.

"Aunt Catherine goes to-morrow with part of the family to open the house. Mother and I keep the children here another week. Flossy mourns so much about

leaving, that mother sometimes proposes to board her here for the winter. She loves the country with a sort of clinging enthusiasm."

"Invite her to stay with us, Ruby. - It will be charming for Allie. And when the boys go it will be dreary enough, unless we can add to our number."

"Ah, Mrs. Stoughton, with all her affection for this home, Flossy would be heart-broken at the thoughts of leaving us."

"Yes, I know her attachments are strong. But you will not forget us. We shall see you more than once through the winter?"

"I expect our drives will all be in this direction. I should be wretched to think I might not see you often."

"I hope not, Ruby." The pastor fixed his calm gaze upon her face, until, with a slight blush, she laughingly replied, —

"Well, sir. It would increase my happiness to see her often. And if you doubt me *now*, I *shall* be wretched."

"I had no doubt of your sincerity before, Ruby, but this habit of passing empty compliments is to be avoided."

"Yes, I know, you have spoken of it before, and what shall I do this winter without my teacher? Indeed, I shall fall into all sorts of mistakes. May I come to you, Mr. Stoughton, when I find myself all wrong?"

"Come to me always, Ruby, whenever the way of duty seems not clear, and you think you need my coun-

sel. At any time the parsonage is your second home, as long as you may need it. Will you remember?"

"Yes, sir," drooping her head slightly over her plate to hide her quivering lip. Next to her parents, Ruby loved the pastor and his wife. Their tenderness, affection, and lively sympathy with her young life had won her confidence, and in the depths of her pure heart she treasured a respectful and enthusiastic love for both, — a love fully returned, for they had sounded her love, studied her yet unformed character, with skilful touches here and there had given a richer coloring and firmer lines of beauty, — until, from being a lamb of their flock, as many others were, she became almost as a child to them. And as, from the quiet, village home, she was removed to the gayety of the city, their prayers, like guardian spirits, hovered continually about her, warding off selfishness and folly, and helping to keep her unspotted from the world.

The silence was broken by Clarence asking, —

"Did you know Edith's friend, Ruby, Eveline Cropsy?"

"Yes, cousin. My friend as well."

"She is to spend the winter with Edith, — is with her now."

"And have auntie and Mabel returned?"

"O, yes, long since."

"Then they have sent for you. You will be there as soon as we are. That will be splendid."

The light of joy illuminated once more Ruby's

luxuriant face, while her brown eyes beamed gladly upon him.

"Not sent for me," he answered, painfully; "I am to go or stay as I choose. Simply this, my father's doors will not be closed against me." The flush deepened upon the fair brow, while his words sent a thrill of pain to each heart at the table.

"Perhaps they think you happier here, cousin. But you will choose to go, I know, when you understand how much we all desire it. How glad I am that Eva is there. Poor girl, it will make her so happy."

"Why call her poor, Ruby? Tell us about her," asked Harry.

With growing interest, Ruby described her school-mate, — her wonderful gift, her lonely life, and the mystery of her friendlessness, — until she had clothed her with the strange charm which she had for all who knew her.

"Eva's music would delight you, Clarence; I long to have you see her. Madam Pixley was so proud of her. We thought at one time she might become a public singer. Indeed, she had the offer once to go abroad, and perfect herself; but Madam objected, on account of her youth, I believe. The girls thought she wished to keep her in her own power."

"Was she ambitious for this life?" inquired Mrs. Stoughton.

"I don't know. One could seldom tell what she thought. Perhaps she desired it only to free herself

from the school; as it was said, Madam intended her to take the place of our music teacher."

"Not a bad position for a friendless girl, I should say."

"No, Harry; and yet Eva seemed to have a perfect horror of spending her life with Madam."

"Was she unkind?" asked Clarence, whose heart throbbed with pity for the orphan.

"She never seemed to be. We could detect nothing, and wondered at Eva's strange dislike, for we knew that Madam had been her only friend. But there it was; respect and obedience, no love."

"Did you love her?" asked Harry, fixing his keen gray eyes, so like his father's, upon her face.

"I—love her? Why, not as I do Mrs. Stoughton."

Harry laughed. "Then don't wonder at the lack of it in your friend, who evidently knew the lady better than you did."

"We did not dislike her; indeed we had no cause to, — she was not unkind."

"Ah, cousin Ruby, your negatives do not deceive us. Madam was possessed of a larger share of ambition than affection."

"You are right, Harry, and Eva needed affection."

"I hope she may not again be disappointed." Clarence spoke in a low tone, but they all heard and understood the implication his hope expressed.

"Speaking of affection," said Harry, with a smothered laugh, "Farmer Hopkins says that Ruby's heart yields

as rich a harvest of sympathy, as his farm does of fruit. What an observing old gentleman the farmer is, and how appreciative."

If Harry had expected to enjoy a blush of embarrassment, he was disappointed; for Ruby instantly asked, —

"What does farmer Hopkins know of me?"

"Observation, cousin Ruby."

"Arriving at this correct conclusion, not without Harry's help, perhaps," suggested the father.

"Of course, we all speak well of Ruby. I simply answered questions, to encourage the old gentleman, who seems sadly forlorn."

Pushing back his chair, Harry left the table with a smile, and, the next moment, was heard playing snatches of tunes he had caught from Clarence, with Allie putting her own baby words to them, singing like a canary perched upon her brother's knee.

CHAPTER XI.

FARMER HOPKINS' OFFER.

"You want a helpmate, not a mistress, sir,—
 A wife to help your ends, — in her, no end!
 Your cause is noble, your ends excellent,
 But I, being most unworthy of these and that,
 Do otherwise conceive of love. Farewell."

It was a cold, frosty morning in mid-winter, clear, bright, and sunny, the snow sparkling like countless diamonds, fresh laid upon the earth.

The parsonage, shorn of its beauty, stood under the bare branches of the elms, a grim-looking edifice without, but cheery and warm within.

Suddenly a sleigh was driven into the yard. Its occupant alighted opposite the door, and vigorously sounded the old-fashioned knocker, bringing Bridget into the hall in haste, her sleeves elbow high, and flecks of flour on face and dress.

"Good morning, sir. Walk in."

"No, Bridget. Ask Mrs. Stoughton if she will ride to the city with me. I thought she might like to call on Mrs. Duke. I'm going there."

"You be! Well, I'll spake to the mistress." Turn-

ing away, she muttered, in a lower key: "Dade, sir, she'll not be caught in that scrape, with yer dashy cutter and bran-new coat."

Then, throwing open the door of the sitting-room, where the lady sat, with Allie playing at her feet, she entered, closed the door that her words might not reach other ears, and, with a broad grin, said, —

"Faith, Mrs. Stoughton, yer wanted for a new work this blessed day; whether you'll be after doing it or not, I can't say."

"Who is it, Bridget? What do they want?"

"Well, it's no other'n Farmer Hopkins, and he'd like you to go a-courting with him, I belave."

"Is he at the door, Bridget, and what did he say?" suppressing a smile.

"He'd like you to ride to the city with him, to call on Mrs. Duke again, *he says*; but it's our own Ruby *he* wants to see, with his new teeth grinning at ye, and his smart coat and cutter, and his wife not dead a half year. This is twice he's been there, and once before they moved. He may spend his money on flummery, but he'll never be wearing our jewel in his bosom. You'll save trouble to tell him so, I'm thinking. The ould hypercrite."

"There, there, Bridget, be still! I'll see him myself."

"Tell him, if you plase, that Ruby's not for the likes of him. Mr. Domett would tache him another song, I'm thinking, — a rare, proud gintleman he is, with his

perlite ways, touching his hat so purty when ye meet him; a fine couple they 'll make, shure."

"Don't shut the door, Biddy; let me go with you and make cookies," exclaimed Allie, quickly skipping toward her.

"Come along, lambie; Biddy 'll tache the little fingers to work."

Mrs. Stoughton courteously declined Farmer Hopkins' invitation, and soon he was speeding away upon his secret errand. Truly, the months since last we saw the man have wonderfully shortened his visage, and added something of the fire of youth. What the process has been, whether acting upon mind or body, it is difficult to say; but worldly ambition is not yet dead, youthful hopes have not quite faded, desire to shine, even though it be only in garments of fashionable cut and style, seems as strong, as when a young man he went to his first quilting frolic or paring bee. True, he does not enjoy the frost and sting of winter as then, and his chin sinks deeper into the new fur muffler that has of late taken the place of his old bandanna; but he drives rapidly, and long before dinner-time reaches the city, and stables his horse. Then, with anxious haste, threads his way through the winding streets until the avenue is reached where his summer friends reside, if friends they should be called, who have for several seasons sat weekly in the same church with him, and, since his affliction, extended to him the sympathy they feel for all in like misfortune.

Inquiring for the family, he was shown into the front sitting-room, where all were gathered.

The mother and Aunt Catherine rose to greet him, their fears, that he might have come with unwelcome tidings from the parsonage, scattered by his first words, uttered with unusual vigor, to hide thereby the strange tremor that on the instant possessed him.

"'T was pretty fair sleighing, so thought I'd ride up and make you a call. Is Mr. Duke at home?"

"He is not, but will be soon. Dine with us, Mr. Hopkins; my husband will be glad to see you."

"Well, I don't know but I might as well; don't feel in any hurry. How do you do, Miss Ruby?"

He crossed the room, and shook her hand with a vigorous motion and strong pressure.

"Excuse me, sir," was Ruby's hasty salutation, dismayed at the force that seemed likely to scatter her work, for she was upon a low seat, her lap filled with beads, the two young sisters kneeling one upon each side, watching her progress.

"Don't get up for me, Miss Ruby; I always like to see young people employed. Do you like this kind of work as well as any?" he asked, taking the chair offered by Mrs. Earle.

"I'm doing it for the children, sir; yes, I like it."

"Well, it strikes me it's very pretty. I've seen a good deal of it one time or another. I believe the Injins have quite a knack at it, and then if you do it to gratify the little ones, it does you credit. It's an

excellent thing to cultivate the affections. Don't you think so, madam?" addressing Mrs. Duke.

"Certainly, Mr. Hopkins, we should encourage everything that tends to make home attractive. But how are our friends at the parsonage? Have you seen them lately?"

"I called there this morning to invite Mrs. Stoughton to ride up with me, but she couldn't leave. They're all well as usual."

"And how are your daughters? Well, I hope."

"Yes, very well; but lonesome enough."

"They must be, I'm sure. You have a housekeeper, I suppose, and their care is not increased."

"Well, no, not exactly; a young gal to help about some; but they don't want no stranger comin' in, with no interest for them. I let 'em do pretty much as they please; I hope to make it pleasant for 'em some day. It's a nice farm, Mrs. Duke. A good home for somebody; but I'm particular for the sake of the gals, you know," with striking emphasis.

Mrs. Duke bowed in silent surprise; and Ruby opened her brown eyes into her aunt's face with astonishment.

Did she comprehend him? Was it only six months ago the sad scene at the parsonage was enacted? But then she had a kind of dim remembrance of having heard somewhere, at school perhaps, that widowers were generally in haste to rebind themselves with the holy ties, owing, undoubtedly, to the veneration they

have for the matrimonial state. Thus settling her doubts, she gave her undivided attention to the beadwork; and might have forgotten he was in the room, had he not persistently addressed himself to her at intervals.

Mr. Duke gave him a cordial welcome, and the cheerful gayety of the family party, the thoughtful attention of Mrs. Duke, and social charm of the host, filled our widower with an increased complacency and growing infatuation.

The unusual viands, dainty and palatable, did far more to magnify his self-respect, than the wonted huge platter of boiled beef and pork, encircled with its wreath of "garden sass," was capable of doing; and his generous portion, swallowed with the usual unseemly haste, gave him ample time to indulge in visions of the future, while the others discussed at more leisure the day's topics, and the food before them.

Yes, the old farm-house could be pulled down, and a new one rise in its place, with veranda, French roof, wonderful grounds, and any amount of new-fangled notions. His gals should go to school, and dress — in blue — like Ruby; and she, with her pink cheeks, should sit at his table — arranged like this one; she could do it herself, until the others learned how. Yes, sit at his table and pare apples for the little ones, and count the seeds just as she was doing now for her sisters. They would have a family carriage like her father's, and she should never know a want ungratified. He was able.

Had he not the finest farm in the county, on the main road too, and bank stock besides? What sense is there in hoarding treasure? He had worked hard to get it; his former wife — poor thing — had worked still harder to save it; and now she was happy, and why should he not be. Truly the Lord had been gracious and very merciful to him, and it was with impressive earnestness and condescending blandness that he took his host by the arm, as they rose from table, and desired a few moments' private conversation.

"Walk down to my office with me, Mr. Hopkins, we will talk by the way," responded the practical man of business.

"Wa-al, you see, it's only a few words, and I should have to come back here; is n't there a room we could step into just a moment?" his complacency growing somewhat confused, as he emerged more and more from dream-land.

"Certainly," answered our perplexed host, preceding his visitor into the library, and proffering an easy chair.

Farmer Hopkins seated himself upon the edge of it; and drawing forth his new cambric, purchased and hemmed for the occasion, began in rather wavering tones the speech he had diligently conned each day of the past month.

"Mr. Duke. A sufficient time has elapsed, since the death of my fust wife, I think; and it seems suitable that I should marry again. You know me, and my

respectable and high standin' in society and the church. I can offer as good a home as any man in the country to the woman I choose; my land goes clean 'way up to the mountain ridge, and clean 'way down to the river, south; and good land as any there is round, I 'spect."

"An excellent farm, sir; you are fortunate in its possession."

"That's what I think, Mr. Duke; and a good home for any one, eh?"

"As good as any sensible woman might desire. But would not it be best for you to consult your pastor? He understands these matters better than I do."

"After I git your consent 'll be time enough for that," he said, with hesitation.

"Well, sir," it being beyond his comprehension how his consent could affect the matter. "I don't quite understand you, sir."

"Wa-al, Mr. Duke," with a labored sigh and a fearful wringing of the handkerchief; "I've had my eye on your Ruby for some time. I noticed how much sympathy she felt for me, when my former wife died, and I thought as she'd finished her eddication, you'd be glad to see her at the head of a house of her own; and if she marries me, I'll pull down the old house, and put up as nice a one as can be built, right straight along."

Mr. Duke flushed, coughed; his eyes twinkled in spite of himself; but he had no answer for the widowed lover, who, now that the worst was over, had risen up on the top wave, and congratulated himself that this

silence was favorable to his heart's desire. Rising, he grasped the hand of his host, asking with trembling eagerness if he had his consent to speak with Ruby.

"Certainly, Ruby was old enough to speak for herself; he had never intended to control these matters; he would send her to the library. And with a hasty shake of the hand he escaped, his manly face expressing a kind of jocose enjoyment,—not in view of the farmer's future fall from blissful visions, but as the picture of Ruby's vexed perplexity presented itself to his mind. Opening the door of the family room where they had re-gathered, he called, —

"Ruby, come here."

"Yes, father." When she stood before him in the hall, in all her maiden innocence and charming grace, he almost regretted that his love of a joke should bring confusion and discomfort to her; but it was too late to repent, and simply saying that some one desired to see her in the library, he joined his wife.

Ruby, entering the designated apartment, was surprised to find only Farmer Hopkins there.

The mother's penetration had half unravelled the mystery; and her husband's eyes and voice told the rest, as, in answer to her inquiry, he replied that it was their guest who had desired a private interview with their daughter.

She did not approve it, but could not rebuke him before the little ones; he felt the unspoken reproof, and with a laugh of ineffable enjoyment, said, in a low tone,

"It's time she had some practice in declining offers, dear. It will do her good."

"You are mistaken; it will grieve and perplex her. Why could you not have controlled the matter, and kept it from her?"

"They will all escape from your wing some day. Better a few short flights before the final migration; a taste of real life, you know, helps the growth wonderfully. We don't want to keep her a child forever."

"Would you transplant her to his home, John?"

"Heaven forbid!" was the laughing reply.

"Then it is wrong to play with his feelings, or enjoy a joke at his expense. I would have saved her from this trial had I known it."

"Perhaps it was unwise; but don't make too grave an affair of it, my dear. I think I must make my peace with Ruby before I go."

He unfolded the daily paper, more as a means of refuge than to see what was in it. Fifteen minutes, and the shutting of the outside door preceded Ruby's re-appearance among them.

With a glance of disapproval into her father's amused face, she would have resumed at once her bead-work; but his outstretched arm, and — "Ruby, my daughter," brought her to his side.

"For shame, father. I don't love you very much;" and she dropped a kiss upon the broad, white forehead.

"Yes, you do, darling. Did the widower make himself understood?"

"I'll tell you, if you'll never treat me so again."

"Never! 'Pon my word; no matter who asks this little hand in future, I'll answer, no; firm, decided, and, if need be, ferocious. Will that do?"

"O, Ruby! Vickie's upset the beads; do come," issued from a remote corner; but her father held her tightly, and asked, with mischievous gravity,—

"Do you realize, my daughter, how much you have thrown away? It is an immense farm, goes clean 'way up to the mountain ridge, north, and clean 'way down to the river, south; and good land as any there is, I 'spect."

Ruby caught a smile upon her mother's placid face, and with a bursting laugh, answered, —

"Why, father, he said the very same to me; he must have learned it by heart. But don't laugh at me, that's a good man. You know I'm sensitive, father."

"Then tell me what drove him off so hurriedly. Did you have the heart to tell the poor lonely creature, you could not control your affections sufficiently to bestow even a shred upon him?"

"More than that, father. I think he understands that I despise one who could treat with such disrespect a dead wife." Ruby's brown eyes flashed ominously.

Her father broke into a hearty laugh, and, releasing her, rose to go to his office.

"A good lesson for him, I've no doubt; and as a reward I will not mention this enlivening episode, unless you disobey me, and need reproof some day. Good-

by, my dears." With another laugh he was off, and Ruby went back to the sisters and the bead-work.

"Has that horrid man gone, Ruby?"

"Yes, dear, but I wouldn't say that word; it is n't very pretty."

"I could n't put a nice word to him, could I, when he ate so fast, and looked so red in his face? What did he say to you, sister?"

"O, nothing particular. Give me a white bead, Flossy, for this place."

"Here's one, a beauty. I wouldn't spend time talkin' nothing particular to such a man. O, look, Vickie, the butterfly's all done. Won't it be sweet?"

"Yes, but you might help me pick up the rest. I'm tired."

"Go help her, Flossy, that's a darling." And in the labor they soon forgot the strange visitor

CHAPTER XII.

THE ANGEL AT THE PARSONAGE.

"She knows that when the mighty angels raise
 Chorus in heaven, one little silver tone
 Is hers forever, that one little praise,
 One little happy voice is all her own.
 We may not see her sacred crown of honor,
 But all the angels flitting to and fro
 Pause, smiling as they pass; they look upon her,
 As mother of an angel, whom they know."

ANOTHER Indian summer closes. The Dukes leave their country home for the city; turn away regretfully from the brilliancy of ripening foliage, from the green of the autumn grass, strewn with many colored leaves; from the broad, winding river and rural joys, to the turmoil and gayety of winter life.

Again established for the season, friends cluster about them, and invitations come faster than they choose to accept.

The little girls, Flora and Vickie, have taken their sister's place in the school-room, but not away from home. The mother will not suffer separation from her children again; and the daily influence of home, with

its ennobling virtue and pure taste, its earnest living, its tender affections and manifold joys, is fitting them for any life they may be called to.

That it will be one of outgushing goodness, there may be no doubt; for the stream must flow as the fountain has been filled. Whether in social life of high position, or in the earnestness of anxious thought and toil, their woman's part will be well sustained, — for with this true, home education, how can it be otherwise?

These years have done much for Ruby. With character more fully matured, mind and heart expanded, clearer and happier ideas of duty; with faculties penetrative and alert, with a delicate and elevating taste, and with the charm of healthy sensibility and sociability, — she was at once the beloved daughter and sister, the admired companion and friend of the home circle. Her nature was open, bright, and sunny, as free from guile as the veriest child. Being burdened with no sorrows of her own, she was ever ready to share those of others. Having no personal aches or pains to pet, she had time and heart to minister to the suffering about her, and she did it with a steady hand, a subtile, pervading cheerfulness, that did more to lighten sorrow than woful condolence or tearful sympathy could.

There was a rare charm in her frank, young face, and her erect figure, lithe and graceful as any Indian maiden. The charm of perfect health and real happiness attracted irresistibly towards her. True, she had

no particular genius. She had never written a line of poetry; she was not a remarkable musician; and the cards of colored leaves and flowers, of delicate pencilings scattered about the room, did not evince great ability in that line. She was well informed, her memory tenacious, her intellect comprehensive. But her own peculiar delight, the joy of her hours when alone, was in reading rare thoughts of others. She read much and well.

Yet, though the delight in books was intense, pure, and always grasped at as a recreation, Ruby could, when called, lay aside the pleasure without regret or impatience, and go, singing in her heart the echo of these garnered thoughts, to any faithfulness, any work, unconscious of sacrifice or lessened happiness.

The house was unusually quiet; the sisters in the school-room, Aunt Catherine busy. Ruby had bathed and caressed the aching temples of her mother until she slept; had dropped the heavy curtains, and left her in the dim twilight of her room. And now, midway of noon and sundown, she was perched upon the low, broad window-cushion of the library, with a large volume resting upon her lap, scanning with fast-growing interest its closely printed pages.

It was a pleasant picture, — the open grate sending forth a delicious heat, the drooping curtains shutting out all but a few flickers of light, the warm coloring of carpet and furniture, the heavy cases, rich in carving, and richer far in choice literature, and the single

occupant, with the few winter sunbeams pouring down upon the chestnut hair, oval cheek, dark blue dress, and the slender, white hand.

It was not strange that the intruder, coming suddenly and noiselessly, stopped to gaze; lingered a moment to revel in the scene, before he disturbed the harmonious loveliness.

Then the tall figure moved towards her, the dark eyes grew tender, and the deep, manly voice brought Ruby's eyes instantly from her book.

"Why, Merle, I didn't hear you come in. Is this the way you surprise your friends?"

"I came to read to you. I had a sort of presentiment that you were spoiling your eyes and needed me."

Drawing a lounging-chair within the deep window, he took the volume, with a lingering motion, as though he would fain have her hold it with him; and, noticing the paragraph upon which her finger rested, he began, read a few sentences, and, abruptly closing the book, looked into her face with a piercing gaze.

"What have I done that you should punish me so?" was the laughing question.

"I was thinking, Ruby, — I didn't come at this hour to read, but in truth the temptation was too strong for me. It's very comfortable sitting here. It's warmer than out-of-doors." He shrugged his shoulders suggestively.

"Then why not read on?"

"Because I can't stay. I must be down town in

half an hour; if I could live without study, I would read to you every day. I dropped in to ask if you would go with us to the concert to-night. Father has tickets for us all, and mother would like your company. Are you disengaged?"

"It will be delightful. Yes, I'll be ready."

"Then my errand is done. I must leave you to read alone."

He may have hoped Ruby would detain him, but she did not. And, opening the book again, he placed it upon her lap, pressed the slight hand with a half-laughing, half-patronizing fondness; and, quickly resuming his calm exterior, named the hour in which they would call, and left her.

Merle Domett was expecting soon to be admitted to the bar, and his ambition was fervent and unflagging to take a high position in the arena of his life's work. He was a familiar visitor at the house, welcomed by the parents, smiled upon by Aunt Catherine, and treated with sisterly freedom by Ruby and the younger girls.

Satisfied with the almost daily meetings with this family, and the devotion which, as an only son, he received at home, he desired no other intimate friends. Indeed, the large circle in which he moved knew him as little as he cared to know them; for, away from these two homes, he seldom relaxed his proud and cold reserve, — a reserve which seemed in very truth a part and parcel of himself.

And yet, a nobler heart beat not in the whole city,

a higher, purer nature might not be found, than this young man who carried himself so stately before the world.

Ruby had not been long alone, before her aunt appeared with a note just left by the postman.

"Put by the book, Ruby. I've something better for you, — a note from Mrs. Stoughton, to say she will come to us for a day, I hope."

The young girl started from her recumbent posture, with a bright smile opened the missive and began reading; but suddenly the smile faded, the quick tears dropped upon the sheet, and, turning to her aunt, she said, —

"I must go to her at once, Auntie; poor little Allie, — I fear she'll die."

"What is it, child?" And she took the note, reading hastily, while Ruby watched her face, hoping against hope. "Indeed, I fear so too. Go at once, dear; prepare yourself; dress very warmly; I will have the horses up; poor woman, she needs you now if ever; and Allie asks for you; yes, go at once. Too sweet for earth, I always felt so," murmured the lady, ringing the bell, and waiting to give her order; then following Ruby to see that she was warmly clad for the ride, which at the least must consume an hour.

The carriage was no sooner at the door than Ruby was ready. A short explanation to her mother, still suffering, although in a less degree, a hurried request for Aunt Catherine to explain her abrupt departure

to Merle, and she was within, covered with warm robes, her feet upon the foot-stove Aunt Catherine's care had provided, and whirling away as rapidly as possible over the familiar road.

The ground was frozen solid; the trees shorn of their autumnal glory; the river, as she caught glimpses of it, looked black and cold; and her heart was fast giving way to a new, strange sorrow,—for the child was dear to her as a sister; and the home over which the angel of death was even now hovering, was to her a sacred spot.

What joy could the mother's heart garner each day, if bereft of this only solace, this sunbeam of life, now that her boy was away? Where would the father find forgetfulness and refreshment when wearied with study and thought, if this child were taken, if the light of her young life went out, the music of her bird-like voice were hushed? Surely God loved his people. He would not smite them thus sorely. No, no, Allie might be ill; might be suffering almost the bitterness of death; but—she would not die. Ruby, with the tide of health bounding through her veins, could not bring death so near, so terribly near, as this. Thus it was with more hope than fear that she alighted at the door, and was welcomed by Bridget's hearty tones and ready assistance.

"Now warm yerself, darlint, before ye go to the room. Shure, ye'll be like the mornin' to their broken hearts."

"She is better, Bridget? Tell me so, can't you?"

"No, honey, not with the truth in my mouth. Ye might hear the breathin', was the door open; and since midnight it's been so. I've thought my heart would lave me all the blessed day, with the swate angel's pain, and the mother's white face. But do not grieve so sorely, Ruby, child; 't will break their hearts intirely if they see you. Shure, it's the sympathy that brings the tears quicker than the pain itself sometimes, and I carry a brave face for their sakes, tho' the lump in my throat grows the bigger for it. Wipe up; wipe up, and be strong for them. There, now you're warm, go right on, and in ten minutes I'll have a nice supper for ye. The good Lord help you ate it."

Softly closing the lower door, and crushing back the tears that would come in spite of herself, she crept slowly over the stairs, trying at each step to gather the courage that constantly evaded her efforts, and hearing more and more distinctly the loud, painful breathing of the croup-stricken child.

As she neared the door, the pastor came out, his face exhibiting intense emotion. He grasped her hand with fervent pressure, and motioned towards the room; then hastened away, without trusting himself to speak.

Ruby entered the room, and approached the couch beside which the mother knelt, and where the suffering child lay, like a flower whose crushed loveliness and purity may still pervade the atmosphere, though the petals close and droop and die. At each convulsion

the frail arms would throw themselves about the mother's neck, and the struggling voice escape in a low, plaintive moan, that caused the worn watcher a new pang of woe. Then, after an agonizing effort, the breath would pass freer for a moment, and the golden head sink with a smile of heavenly love upon the mother's breast.

There were no tears on Mrs. Stoughton's face; the lines about the firm mouth contracted painfully, as she witnessed each new pang of the pure young soul to free itself from earth. But even then, did the little sufferer turn her pleading eyes upon her mother's face, she met a smile that eased the pain, and gave her courage.

"'Tis almost over, my baby. Mamma holds her close; yes, my precious lamb; it's hard, — too hard; but Jesus loves His little one. It can't be long before He comes; there — it's better now, thank God."

Another smile of relief and joy beamed upon them from the ethereal features.

Ah, mother! strong in this hour of separation, strong with the power of God in thy soul, — yet suffering sharper pangs than when, in almost mortal agony, thou didst travail for the birth of this angel child. Oh, that her soul might enter into its higher life, without these mother-throes of anguish, without this shadow of the coming death descending so mysteriously upon thy heart. But it may not be. Thine own dying pain will easier be borne than this that so racks thy heart, so tries thy noble Christian faith.

An interval of quiet, of rest, and Ruby takes the little hand stretched out to her, fondling and kissing it. Striving to imitate the mother's self-abnegation, she smiles into the fond blue eyes that seek her own; but that child gaze, already imbued with spirit power, divines the hidden grief; and with triumphant joy and holy radiance beaming from the sweet countenance, points with baby finger to the sky, then fixes her eyes with holy rapture upon the fading gleam yet lingering in the horizon beyond the river. Her little feet press nearer and nearer to the unseen river. Her child faith sees beyond the rolling flood. In her perfect love there is no fear. The mother's arms are still about her, and will be until, with joy and faith triumphing over sorrow, she shall resign the beloved burden to the Saviour's care.

The father comes back; he will not leave again until the portal above closes, and the soul of their child is hidden from them for a time. He brings a bunch of flowers; the little one eagerly grasps them, and again points above, for the power of utterance has gone. She has heard of immortal flowers, and almost sees them now; and the father, who has renewed his strength by prayer, since he left them, can command his voice.

"Yes, Allie, the flowers are waiting for you; you shall gather them there; beautiful, more beautiful than papa can give you, dear."

The smile grew sweeter, more glorified, the breath less labored and fainter, the mortal frame was rapidly

sinking, and the white arm slipped from the mother's breast with weakness.

"O Allie, Allie, my darling one! if you might speak but once more," murmured the mother, dropping kisses upon brow and cheek.

There was a strong effort, a mighty struggling of the child's frame, and from the parted lips came "mamma—papa." The blue eyes opened wide, the look of farewell changed to one of joy, and with that look the angels bore her to the Saviour's arms. The three were left alone.

The tidings sped rapidly; and kind friends coming in would fain have led the mother from the room, while they robed the child for her dreamless rest. But with tearless eyes, and voice freighted with grief, the mother calmly answered, —

"No hands but mine have ever washed or dressed my baby, — I will do it now."

"No, no, Mrs. Stoughton, you are worn out; it will be too much," whispered a kind, motherly voice.

"I will do it now," she repeated, quietly; "leave us alone, if you please." And awed by the majesty of her grief, they turned away.

Noiselessly, Ruby laid the child's garments near the mother's hand; then closing the door behind her, she too left the room. The parents were alone with their dead.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALONE IN THE WORLD.

"O, Father, I'm weary! — Child, lean thy head
Upon my breast; it was my love that spread
Thy rugged path; hope on still, till I have said,
Rest, — rest for aye above."

Ruby thought not of leaving her friends, until the first bitterness of their grief had died away.

Harry came, upon receiving the telegram, with almost frantic haste, but too late to gaze upon aught but the lifeless form of his young sister. Folded to his mother's heart, he poured out the first great sorrow of his life. The hushed voice, the closed eyes, the marble hand still grasping its bunch of wilted flowers, would always be a holy memory to him.

The white-robed dead had been laid away. One day longer to gaze into his mother's noble face, to note the sudden anguish that would fill it to overflowing, as she glanced upon toy, or little garment, that must now lie idle, — one day longer to follow her about the cheerless house, or sit beside her with clinging hands, and strive to speak of other things than those that filled

their hearts, and he must go; not, as he had gone before, with the merry shout of Allie ringing in his ears, but carrying a burdened heart, with many a backward glance at Ruby's gentle face, his mother's tearful eyes, and his father's almost unnatural efforts to be cheerful.

"Stay with us a few days, Ruby; we must not keep you longer, I know, but we cannot spare you just yet."

And Ruby lingered day by day, until they counted weeks. Then, when her mother and aunt had come for a few hours, she returned, promising to be with them again before the winter passed.

Somewhat chastened by this first intimacy with bereavement, she could not at once find pleasure in the gayety and excitement of the city. But invitations multiplied, and might not all be put aside; friends were urgent; and the winter festivities continued without abatement.

Dropping in at her aunt's one morning, she found them all engaged in the making of evening dresses for the grand party of the season, at the residence of a mutual friend.

Mrs. Tourney, as youthful in appearance and exuberantly gay as ever, was superintending Edith's and Eva's outfit, for the nameless school-girl had made herself far too useful in the family to be allowed to leave them, and Madam Pixley's generous offers were disregarded. She would rather be a dependent than a music teacher, with at least a better chance to escape either

position in the future, than were she secluded in a boarding-school. Therefore, when Edith escaped the thralldom of the school-room to enter upon a life of fashion, Eva accepted the invitation to abide with them, — an invitation based upon her skill in dressing hair, and her taste and usefulness in other matters of dress. Reading the inner life of the family more thoroughly the longer she remained, and being determined to make this elegant refuge a stepping-stone to a more permanent home for herself, she had recourse to all her arts and blandishments in perpetuating the friendship.

Ruby found them all gathered in the sewing-room, consulting the taste of the best artiste of Madam Overdone's grand establishment, who occasionally issued orders to the pale sewing-girl, seated before a machine in the little ante-room.

Mabel was there, but apart from the others, looking on, either from curiosity, or to drive away ennui. A child of graceful beauty stood by her side, clinging to her dress, scarce venturing to unclasp her tiny hands, in fear that the unskilful feet might not perform their office.

There has come a world of change to Mabel, since last we saw her; still beautiful, still youthful, there was yet an expression of discontent about her eyes, plainly telling that the waters of her heart were troubled, that the yearning of her soul had not been met, that although a wife and mother, she was still restless, dissatisfied, and unhappy. The long-suppressed

tenderness of her nature was now lavished upon this child; and in its fond endearments and winning caresses she sought to rest the desires of her unquiet heart.

Did Mrs. Tourney, as she looked upon the face of her first-born day by day, ever ask herself if this were well, was she pleased with her work? Ah, yes. It was a fine stroke of policy in her estimation; she would like to have Mabel show more spirit, however; more ambition to shine, — to take the lead in the world of fashion. Perhaps she would, now that Pet was old enough to be left more with nurse; and, congratulating herself upon her tact in settling one daughter so advantageously, she strengthened her determination to effect the same for Edith, and to do something handsome for Eva too, by and by, when she might not be so necessary to the household economy.

"Ruby, child, just lay aside your hat. You see we are pressed with work this morning. These two girls keep me filled with care. Do I grow old, Ruby?"

"I don't see it, Auntie; Mabel looks more the matron, I believe, than you." She crossed the room to her cousin, and stooped caressingly to the child.

"Kiss cousin Ruby, Pet." The coral lips pouted in welcome, before the tottering feet ventured a step; and Ruby, catching her up, kissed and frolicked with her, until the mother's face shone with one of her old gleeful smiles.

Then, dropping upon the carpet by Mabel's feet, still

caressing the beautiful child, Ruby looked up to her cousin, her eyes sparkling and her cheeks glowing with the gentle exercise.

"I wish you would take Pet, and ride down town with me, May; Aunt Catherine's busy, and mother don't feel quite able; would n't it do you good?" beseechingly.

"Yes, I'll go, coz; anything to kill time. Pet and I are terribly blue, are n't we, Pet?" snatching the plaything from Ruby's arms, and burying her face in the fair, plump shoulders.

"Just ring the bell, Ruby, for nurse, and I'll be ready soon. Where are you going?"

"To the dressmaker's; the one you used to have. Is she in the same place?"

"Yes; I sent for her last week, but her father was sick. I always liked her work."

"Then she could n't come here? Of course I can't get her; but perhaps she will fit me there."

"What do you wear Ruby, to Mrs. Ellington's?" asked Eva.

"Mother says, pink this time; so pink it is to be, with lace overdress."

"It will be charming with your brown eyes, my dear," said her aunt. "I suppose *you* go with Merle and his mother. He really seems to have designs upon you, Ruby."

Edith turned sharply about from the window, and cast a searching glance upon her cousin's unmoved face, her small head erect, and her lip slightly scornful.

"You mistake, Auntie. I go with father, and I really do not know whether Merle intends going or not."

"He will go, of course. Mrs. Ellington is not to be slighted, even by the lofty Merle Domett."

Mabel stood at the door equipped for the ride, her velvet basque fitting the graceful figure perfectly, her riding hat, with brilliant ostrich feather, adding a fresh bloom to the face seldom smiling now.

Noticing Edith's look, and her mother's eagerness for information, she hastened her cousin, —

"Come, Ruby, I must be home in time for Pet to take her nap."

Mr. Duke's covered sleigh stood before the door, the colored coachman ready to hand them in, when, as the ladies tripped over the marble steps, a dashing cutter drew up just behind, and a young man sprang from it. Mabel now seemed turned to stone. He approached her.

"The day is so fine, Mabel, I thought you might like a ride. Were you going down town?"

"I am going down town," she answered, carelessly.

"No, no, Cousin Mabel, if your husband wishes you to ride, I'll wait until to-morrow; indeed, there is no haste about this matter."

"Then go with me, dear, if Ruby will excuse you." There was pleading pathos in the tones. Ned Clarke had forgotten his drawl and lisp; had forgotten the foppish ways that lang-syne had disgusted Mabel. He had surely improved. But Mabel had sprung into

the carriage, exclaiming, heartlessly, it seemed to Ruby: —

"Some other time, Ned. I'm going with cousin now. Get in, Ruby, — nurse, bring Pet."

Ned Clarke's face flushed, and his lip trembled with the disappointment; but without a word he took the child from the nurse, and dropping a kiss upon the cherry lips he passed it to the mother, looking eagerly into her face for one relenting word or glance; but she, absorbed in baby's wrappings, heeded him not. He placed the little one against the rich pillows and tucked the bright afghan about her. Then, as the coachman sprang to his seat and drove slowly away, Ned, with a spiritless air, turned his cutter in the opposite direction.

From the window Edith had seen and understood the whole transaction.

"Too bad!" she exclaimed; "how Mabel does act! I should think Ned —"

A warning glance from her mother checked the words; with a toss of her head, she added, in a low tone, —

"I don't care; when I have a husband, I think I'll try to gratify him."

"A noble resolve, Edy," whispered Eva, "but in my opinion you'll have to love mightily to deny your own sweet self, even for a husband."

"You don't know what I'm capable of, Eveline Cropsy," was the laughing reply as she left the room.

The clerks in the princely establishment of Clarke and Son wondered why the junior partner took so short a ride that fine day, and returned in so gloomy a frame of mind, while the father shook his head, and asked in muttered tones: "What in Heaven's name has come over Ned since his marriage?"

Meantime his wife, in gayer mood than usual, chatted with Ruby, laughed as the happy little one crowed over the wonderful sights of the city, and endeavored in various ways to forget the unpleasant episode just past.

"Look out, Ruby; there's Merle on the walk. He sees you." He had been watching the slow approach of the carriage, hoping a sight of Ruby's rich face would reward his lagging steps. A glance, a smile, and nod were enough; and he went on his way enveloped in the sunshine of loving thoughts.

A moment more, and the equipage drew up before a high brick edifice, devoted to multitudinous objects; lawyers' offices, artists' studios on the second flight, and, higher still, the unpretending rooms of the dressmaker's father.

Assuring Mabel that she could find the place, and would not detain her long, she turned, and lightly sped over the stairs. But the climbing was arduous, and Ruby panted and her cheeks flushed ere the last flight was gained.

Pausing for breath, a sound like the moan of pain or sorrow fell upon her ear; the dimness of the hall, the

loneliness, and the dreary sound startled her. Looking over the banister, the world she had left seemed far away.

Ruby was not timid; yet now she stood poised upon one foot, her hand grasping the railing, half meditating instant flight; but her better nature whispered, —

"It may be she is sick and helpless. How foolish I am." As she rapped upon the door, a sound of sobs reached her. This decided her; and, gathering up the silken skirt, to silence its rustling, she carefully turned the handle, and, pushing the door slightly ajar, caught a glimpse of something which in very deed terrified her.

Upon the bed in the corner, beneath the sloping eaves, lay a form motionless and white. It looked like death. But when Ruby turned to the figure kneeling by the bed, the terror changed to pity. Her eyes filled with tears. She crossed the low room, dropped the dainty ermine muff upon the carpetless floor, wound her arms about the slender, trembling, sobbing girl, and said, —

"You are Miss Earle, the dressmaker? — and alone. Oh, let me help you! what can I do for you? Poor thing, you are freezing!"

It was a colorless face that turned to the gentle girl, and eyes where despair seemed enshrined, that lifted at the unfamiliar sound of pity.

"It is useless; I can work no more — no more;" and snatching her hands from Ruby's clasp with a

frantic gesture, she buried her tearless face within the bedclothes, and moaned again.

"No, no, you need not work; oh, let me help you! Tell me what to do; I'm here to do you good." Ruby's voice broke into sobs; the excitement and horror of the scene were wellnigh depriving her of self-control.

Again the face turned towards her. The tearful sympathy of this young stranger moved the dressmaker; but her voice sounded hoarse and harsh, for she was chilled with cold, and stricken by fate.

"You cannot help me now; it's too late." Then, almost fiercely, she added, "Don't you see he's dead, — can you make him live again? Go back, no one can help me now. Go! go, I say!"

"Miss Earle, I *will not* leave you. I must stay — I must help you!" But the bowed head, the limp, drooping figure was the only reply; and looking anxiously from the suffering girl to the one whose sufferings were over, a new thought flashed upon her; and, with quick motion, she turned from the room and darted down the stairs again. Then, quickly telling Mabel of the scene above, she bade her drive back, and send Aunt Catherine at once, with whatever might be needed for a hungry, freezing woman.

"She will know. Now hurry, Mabel; I will stay till Auntie comes."

Mabel would have remonstrated; but without hesitating to hear the first word, Ruby sprang towards the stairs, and was soon in the upper room again.

The first need was fire and food; and, laying aside hat and kids, she opened the stove.

In the box behind the stove were a few coals. A hod near by held kindlings, and, looking about, she saw a bundle covered with newspaper. It was an unwonted task, but she was successful. The snapping coal gave evidence of coming heat. A gentle warmth soon pervaded the atmosphere, convincing the chilled girl of her need more sensibly than Ruby's words had done.

Lifting her head, she looked upon her visitor with wonder. Those white, plump hands were marred with the soft coal; the embroidered cuffs were blackened by contact with the stove; the face was flushed and anxious.

"There, I have made it burn; now you'll be warm; oh, I'm so glad. Come sit down here, and put your feet up." She drew a wooden chair for her, as heartily as though she had been doing the honors of her own house.

Margaret rose, and, simply saying, "You are very kind," in a tone that expressed more wonder at it than gratitude for it, she did as she was bidden.

She was just Ruby's height, but more slender, which gave her the appearance of one much taller. And the faces were not unlike in some respects. There was the same rich coloring of hair and eyes, the same erect carriage and delicately poised head; but while the cheeks of one glowed with health, those of the other were pale with care and grief and a lack of proper food.

Ruby looked pityingly upon her, as she dropped upon the chair, and placed her feet upon the low hearth, her hand sinking listlessly upon her lap, and the white lids drooping over the weary eyes, that bore about them a wild, frightened, hungry look.

"I must do something more for her," thought Ruby. "She will die before Auntie comes. How white she is!" And, suiting the action to the thought, she took an old tin tea-kettle from the sink, and, filling it from the faucet above, put it on the stove. Then, drawing the sheet over the dead man's face, she crouched beside the weary mourner, and took the long, slender hands in hers to warm them more speedily, rubbing and soothing them, as she sometimes did her mother's when having those terrible headaches.

Thus they sat, these two; so far apart socially, and yet brought as close together as sisters, by this grief of one and sympathy of the other.

"You are very kind; your pity comforts me."

Ruby looked up, caught the softened expression of the tearless eyes, and, with all the impulse of her ardent nature, wound her arms about Margaret, exclaiming, —

"I do pity you; I love you too! I'll do all I can for you, if you'll only let me."

"Let you! How can I refuse, when I'm *alone*, not a friend, — *not one*, — in all this world."

Her voice was calm; there was not the slightest tremor; but Ruby never had seen such desolation as

the face portrayed. In her growing sympathy she said, —

"Mother and Auntie will both be friends to you; and I — I'll be your sister."

There was a long, troubled, earnest gaze from the stricken one, a gaze that read the Christ-like heart beside her. Then tears gushed forth, the fountain was reached, and she who for weeks had borne all that human nature can bear, who had watched the flickering light of life until it was exhausted, knowing that she must soon be homeless, friendless, and alone, — now rested her tired head upon a strong young arm, and shed her first alleviating tears.

She who had, in her dread of being left, asked, in tones of anguish, "Is *this* the way, my Father?" and who, in the terrible experience of the past night, had scarce been able to lift her eyes to Him who had always been her help in sorrow, now felt that she might almost say: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

CHAPTER XIV.

INTO THE LIGHT.

"The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on.
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene, — one step enough for me."

It was nearly an hour before Aunt Catherine reached the place, although with the utmost haste she had gathered a few indispensable articles which her practical nature knew would be important.

Stepping from the carriage, she bade the coachman go to Mr. Duke, and say she wished to see him there immediately. She judged that this young girl would have no friends to call upon, else Ruby had not remained with her; and it would be necessary for something to be done speedily for the approaching burial.

Then, climbing the stairs more slowly and wearily than Ruby's young feet had done, she entered the room without knocking, and found the two together, — one, with her fresh young face flushed with tearful sympathy; the other pale, haggard, and with hopeless misery settled upon the whole countenance.

"Oh, Auntie, I'm glad you've got here!" Ruby

rose, took the basket, opened hastily the packages to find the tea she was sure would be there.

The elder lady stood a moment gazing upon the stranger with intense feeling. Then glancing towards the bed, she rested her hand softly upon the drooping head, and smoothing tenderly the shining bands of hair, said, in a low tone, —

"You must rest now; let us do all that can be done. Poor child, you have had a weary time; but it is almost over, I hope."

Margaret did not reply. Susceptible though she was to kindness, it was not an easy matter to win her confidence; and now her heart seemed enveloped in an icy crust of despair, from which there was no escape, no relief.

She only realized that the future was impenetrable blackness; there was no friend to lift the dense veil, and brighten her life with glimpses of affection. She must now be more solitary than she had ever been; for she must work for herself; she must toil and suffer alone. Doubts and fears, a mighty army, rose before her, and she shuddered as with heavy tramp they pressed nearer and nearer, shutting her away from every gleam of hope.

Who were these strangers, that they should intrude upon her now, and hurry her dead from her sight, but to make the loneliness more horrible? Why should they now speak words of such penetrating kindness to one who must suffer the more intensely by the coming

contrast? Oh, that they would leave her alone! But no, they silently went about ministering to her needs.

Through the heavy stupor of her misery, she seemed to have dim, strange visions of flitting forms, of busy hands, of steaming beverage, and a perception of increasing heat and comfort, when she was roused from the dream.

A small stand was by her side, and palatable food and fragrant tea thereon; while the motherly voice of Aunt Catherine urged her to partake, that she might be strengthened for the future.

She turned, with half-formed thanks upon her lip, her dark, hazel eyes uplifted to the lady's face, and so fraught with utter hopelessness that tears of quick response answered the mute appeal.

"This is more than sorrow for your father, I fear. Will you tell me what it is? Will you let me be a friend to you?" drawing a chair beside her.

"I don't know what it is,—I'm afraid." Then wringing the slender fingers together with wild energy, she cried, "I cannot live alone. Oh, that I might die with him!"

"No, no, my dear, you shall not live alone. In this great land, so full of homes, how could such a dreary thought haunt you? Have you no other friend!"

"Only father; none to love but him. Oh, my heart, my heart! I cannot live alone. What shall I do?" she pleaded, every quivering nerve seeking something stronger than itself to lean upon.

"You must do nothing but rest on Him who careth for you. He is leading you in a way that you know not; through the wilderness, with clouds and darkness hanging over you. But, you may trust *His* love; He will *never* leave you nor forsake you; and no one can take you out of His hand. You believe this?" gazing into the pleading eyes, and exercising a soothing power by her low voice and kindly ministrations. "He will give you friends, too, and you shall be loved with a mother-love, if that is what you need. God knows. He bids us come freely to Him, and He loves to gratify those who trust in Him."

Every word she spoke rested like oil upon the wounded heart. The warm clasp of her hand imparted hope. The tones of her voice gave courage; and Margaret's eyes turned not from her face a moment. She seemed to drink in hope and peace, with that long, penetrating gaze.

Understanding her power, the lady continued: "You shall come with us, until we find a home for you. We will be your friends, and help you carry all this bitter burden. Does this comfort you?"

"Is it true?" asked Margaret, with a long, tremulous sigh.

"Perfectly true, my dear. Now be at peace, and do as I bid you. You must eat something."

The white lip quivered a moment; the words that rose to it were unspoken; for, in the rush of her gratitude, Margaret could not trust her voice. She tried to

eat as she was bidden, sipping the tea, and struggling to swallow a few morsels of the toast, that would have been a luxury at other times; but, with all her resolution and desire to please, it was impossible to do more. Her worn-out nature needed only rest and peace.

Suddenly she was startled by a strange sound, a cry of pain or horror; and, by the bed, this same gentle lady, who had appeared to her as a ministering angel, now stood with outstretched arm, as she had lifted the sheet, gazing upon the face before her, almost paralyzed with sudden emotion.

With a feeling of awe Margaret drew near, half hoping it was all a mistake, and her father was alive again. But no; like chiselled marble he lay, and with a deep, strange meaning the lady dropped the sheet, and in a hoarse whisper asked:—

“Who is this man?”

“My father, madam. What is it?” inquired the bewildered girl. Ruby drew near to solve her aunt’s mysterious agitation.

“His name! What is his name?”

“William Earle,” simply answered the daughter.

“William Earle! Oh, my husband! my husband! Is it thus we meet?” There was a strange awe resting upon the noble countenance as the impassioned tones fell from her lips. Her whole frame shook visibly, and, as the truth pressed home, she cried:—

“Margaret! Margaret, my daughter!” With arms partly extended to enfold this new found treasure, a

sudden faintness seized her, the tottering knees gave way, and she sank unconscious to the floor. Their bewildered minds could scarcely grasp the truth.

“What did she say? Who is she?” gasped Margaret; but Ruby had no answer. Fear for her aunt was energizing her whole action; and upon the floor beside her, she bathed the temples and rubbed the lifeless hands, calling upon Margaret to help.

Thus Mr. Duke found them. He looked upon the face of the dead, and quickly comprehended all. He recalled at once his sister’s early life; her marriage; the fearful scenes preceding her flight back to her father’s house; the longings since to know the fate of the child torn from her arms; and the stern, mysterious silence which had thus far guarded the secret, only to be divulged by death, only to be revealed through the ripe benevolence of her noble life.

“Oh, father!” sighed Ruby, immeasurably relieved by his appearance; while Margaret, still erect, immovable, seeming more like a marble statue than a living soul, called back her thoughts from the distant years, from this labyrinth of the past, so tangled with memories vague and dim; and seizing Mr. Duke’s arm, she whispered, with startling fervor,—

“What is it? Tell me quick! Who is that woman?”

“Hush, hush, child! Be calm! If William Earle was your father—”

“Yes, yes, my father.”

“Then this is your mother. But you must be calm.

You see how overcome she is." He raised his sister in his strong arms. She was coming back to life. The lips quivered, the breath came in long, heavy sighs; and soon her eyes opened wearily.

Margaret had not moved, had not taken her eyes from the group, or uttered a word in answer to Mr. Duke's strange intelligence; but her whole appearance was a study. Her face was written all over with this change. Who could read that rapid conflict of emotions, — joy pressing on grief, and grief surging back upon joy?

Mr. Duke supported the new-found mother to the old rocking-chair, in which many of her husband's last hours had been spent, and Ruby joyfully exclaimed, —

"There, Auntie, you are better now; pray don't faint again. Why this is all delightful, if it is not a dream. Margaret my cousin! I can scarce believe it. Look at her, Auntie; she don't know what to call you." Ruby sent out a low, soft laugh, with tears still glittering upon her lashes.

Aunt Catherine opened her arms.

"My daughter, this — this is your rest!" And with a cry of delight Margaret sunk upon the floor, her head upon her mother's knee, murmuring happily, —

"Mother! mother! are you mine? my own mother? Oh, this is joy, — it is peace, — it is everything." Lifting her head, she gazed upon her mother, her young face aglow with love and gratitude. "Is it true?" she asked.

The mother's arms drew her again to her bosom, pressing kiss after kiss upon brow and cheek and lip.

"True, all true, my child, my long-lost child! God has brought you back to me. The wilderness is passed, the refuge gained. He has given you a mother, my own Margaret."

"A mother," repeated Margaret, with lingering tenderness, still resting on her bosom and gazing into her face.

The day was waning. Mr. Duke interrupted their blissful dreams. He had already engaged assistance, and would see that nothing was neglected; only they must now return to the house, and rest.

But Margaret could not leave her father with hirelings; a shadow crossed her face.

"I will stay with my father; I must not leave him," she said; then whispering, —

"You will come again, *mother*; I cannot lose you." The clinging arms would not unclasp; but the mother answered, —

"I shall not leave you, darling; we will stay together. Ruby, go back now. Tell your mother the whole story. She will comprehend it more readily than you can."

"I hope so, Auntie, for really I'm bewildered. I don't know as I comprehend anything very clearly. I'm glad to have a new cousin, though. I shall love you dearly, Maggie, — may I call you so?"

Margaret blushed.

"I'm not used to pet names. It will be sweet to

learn to wear them. Call me anything you choose." Rising, she whispered her gratitude, and kissed her cousin good-night.

The two were left together. Once more they stood beside the dead; and silent tears fell one after another, from eyes that could not weep until this spring of joy had tempered grief's heavy stream.

Within the wife's heart there was a struggle, a long and terrible struggle, ere she could subdue her spirit to feel that she freely forgave this man who had so injured her. And yet, in her woman's heart, it was not the personal wrongs and abuses that rose up between them, so much as the thought that he had denied their child the mother-love she yearned for; that he had enchained her to a life of toil, suffering, and privation; had lived and died knowing that a mother's heart was aching to receive her, a mother's arms longing to enfold her; knowing that he had maliciously and with fiendish delight deceived both mother and child, for each supposed the other dead; and with this lie covering his whole life, he had died, — died, and left no sign.

Could she forgive? — standing beside this bed, folding his child and hers to her heart; watching, almost counting, the fast falling tears of the daughter, who mourned him, who had loved him, — could she forget the past? God helping her, she could. If there was love within that daughter's heart, no word of hers should break the spell. If one throb of respect

mingled with that love, she would increase rather than diminish it.

At home, Ruby told her mother the strange story, begging her to send the carriage back with one of the girls, and everything to make the night comfortable for them. It seemed such a dreary place to her, contrasted with the comfort of her own home. "He will be buried to-morrow, father said; then Margaret will come here, and I shall have an older sister. She is beautiful, mother, but so pale. How happy Aunt Catherine must be."

"Yes; I can't understand how he has kept her in such ignorance of the child's existence. He was a bad man."

"Did you know him, mother?" asked Ruby.

"I never saw him; but I heard the story from her own lips, before you were born."

"How old is Margaret, mother; do you know?"

"She must be older than you, Ruby, perhaps twenty-one or two. Does she look like your aunt?"

"Somewhat, — only so white and thin, as though she had suffered. I wish I knew the story, mother; why may I not? I never cared about it before."

"You may, — that is, all that I know; this evening, after the little girls are asleep, you shall hear it."

Just as they were leaving the table, Merle Domett dropped in and sat an hour.

The party was spoken of; Merle thought he should go; certainly, if they did.

"Shall we, mother?" asked Ruby, casting a rapid glance into her mother's face.

"I don't know, dear; we can't decide to-night."

"Why? Not go! Has anything occurred to prevent?" came quickly from Merle; but seeing she did not reply at once, he resumed more carelessly, —

"If Mr. Duke is obliged to decline, you know my mother will be most happy to *chaperon* Ruby; and to tell the truth, Mrs. Duke, if you are not there, I don't wish to be."

"You are too exclusive, Merle; Mrs. Ellington will gather the beauty and intellect of the city about her. You may be sure of that."

"Not all, — unless Ruby is there too," he answered, with a defiant shake of his head.

It was not flattery. Even Ruby felt there might be a deeper meaning than the words expressed; and although she laughed lightly and carelessly, there was a sudden perplexity revealed in her eyes that the mother did not quite understand.

That Merle loved Ruby, there was no doubt; that his pride was entirely satisfied with this love was very plain.

She on the other hand had seemed happy in the friendship, but it was more like the innocent pleasure of a sister, than of the maiden loving and beloved. For the world, Mrs. Duke would not break the spell; and yet she knew it could not remain. Sooner or later her child must wake to the consciousness of a new

love; and although she would delay the hour of this awakening, she was rejoiced to think that in it her heart might go out to one so worthy of her purity and truth; for this pride of name and station, so marked in Merle Domett, had touched an answering chord in the mother's heart.

CHAPTER XV.

REVEALINGS.

"Through trials hard as these, how oft are seen
The tender sex, in fortitude serene."

"Now, mother, begin. Aunt Catherine has always been a kind of mystery to me. It is so strange for her to have lived so near her daughter, and yet so entirely unknown."

"It could not have been so, had we not thought the child dead. The last we heard from him was by letter to your father, saying the child was not living. He was in New Orleans then, where we have thought he remained."

"But why did Auntie give up her child? Why did she leave it with him? It don't seem like her."

"Nor was it like her; she would have died for it first. But I must begin the story where she did, to make it plain. And much of her sufferings are only known to herself."

"Did she ever love him, mother?"

"She thought she did. But even woman's love can-

not live without nourishment of some sort. He was a pleasing young man, a clerk in Elmtown, but entirely unknown, and we have since thought it was her father's fortune he most desired. At all events, he won her heart; and her father, an unassuming man, with a yielding nature, would have offered no objection to the marriage, but your grandmother, from the first, opposed it. She was a very proud woman, strong in her prejudices, with a will that would never yield, and a determination to bend others to that will, that never faltered.

"She loved her children, but pride was always more manifest in the mother-love than any softer quality; so finding that matters were looking serious, she sent Catherine away to school, at some distance from home. She was gone a year, and when she returned, William Earle paid her no particular attention. Then your grandmother was quite at ease; and, receiving a pressing invitation to visit friends at the West, she decided to go. It was the time of stage travel, and the journey being long, the visit must of course be of corresponding length. Her plan was to spend the winter, and have grandpa and Catherine go on after her in the spring. Your father thinks that William Earle never forgot or forgave the mother's interference, as, immediately after her departure, he renewed his attentions to Catherine, but in so cautious a manner as to attract no attention from her father or brother. At last, towards spring, he urged again his suit, begging the consent of the father, inasmuch as they loved each other, and the life-long

happiness of both was at stake. As I said, Grandpa Duke was tender-hearted, and found it impossible to oppose those who trusted him. Knowing that his wife would never consent, he took the responsibility, bade them marry, and risk the mother's anger. Had grandma won her daughter's heart as the father had, Catherine had never taken this step; but the manner of her refusal had been harsh and unyielding from the first. Your father was not satisfied, but — younger — all he could do was to beg that his sister's portion might be secured to herself, which was done, and probably was another cause of grievance to the new husband. They were quietly married, and removed to the city. For a few months Catherine was not unhappy, her only grief being that her mother refused to see her. But it was a terrible blow to your grandmother. She never rallied from it; and, soon after Margaret was born, the young mother was sent for to receive her last farewell. Grandma forgave her before she died, and Catherine thought her troubles ended, but they had only begun. Her husband, finding he could get no hold upon the property, grew desperate and cruel. From that time she lived a life of terror in his presence, and dread and grief in his absence. His freaks of temper were almost like insanity. He robbed her of every dollar of her abundant income, and squandered it at the gaming table; and at last took cherished gifts and everything of value in her possession, casting them, also, into that terrible whirlpool of vice. Her father and brother suspected

the state of affairs, but Catherine had a good share of her mother's pride, and her lips were closed. She could suffer, but not complain; could bear abuse, the recital of which would chill your blood, but she could not make it known even to her dearest friend. At times he would leave her for weeks, she not knowing where he was or when he might appear. And indeed those were her happiest days, and his return the signal of her misery.

"At last the climax was reached. Endurance was exhausted, love had died, and she threatened to go to her father. They were fatal words; for with the cool premeditation of a fiend, he quieted her fears, soothed her sudden anger, and promised well for the future. She trusted him, — waking, when the short dream was over, to find herself childless; the little one snatched from its cradle while the mother slept, and hidden; where, she never knew. She begged, pleaded, and threatened. He laughed at her threats, mocked her tears, and spurned her from him, bidding her go home if she chose; he cared not when or how she went. For one day and night she lingered, her brain on fire with this sudden anguish, hoping he might relent and restore her babe to its mother's arms, feeling that, cruel as he had been in the past, he could not persevere in so inhuman a plan as this. If it was money he wanted, she would demand of her father all she was entitled to, and place it in his hand, if only he would bring back the child. But no, — he seemed to take delight in her wild agony.

"Her already weakened nerves could scarce bear the shock, but, gathering up the remnant of her strength, she fled from his satanic laugh and mocking gibes. She sought her father's house, and fainted in his arms."

"Oh, mother! And the baby? Where was it?" asked Ruby, with almost breathless interest.

"Every exertion was made to discover it; it was useless; he suddenly disappeared, and, two years after, the letter was received, saying that the child was dead. He must have taken her away with him. We shall never know, unless Margaret can tell us."

"Did Auntie believe the baby died? I don't think I should, mother."

"She was glad to hear *anything* of it, and felt it a mercy that its Heavenly Father had taken it from a cruel earthly father. Yes, we all believed the man this time."

"O mother! mother! I did n't know men could be so wicked."

"There are not many such, I hope, dear child."

The night passed, and another day; Aunt Catherine and Margaret had buried their dead out of their sight, and the mother had brought her child to the home of her brother, where she was welcomed with mingled tears and smiles.

Little did they heed the difference of apparel, or note the threadbare garments which enveloped their new-found treasure. It was enough that she sat among them, the long lost, found; that her heart went out to

them, and received them all into its depths with a joy and gratitude that beamed from her face, and crowned her whole appearance with mysterious loveliness. Many, many times in those first days did the mother clasp her with passionate fervor to her heart, and as often meet the deep, holy, adoring love that was enshrined in her soul.

It was a rare happiness for Ruby to select for her cousin the costly robes that must be made up at once. Her own dress was forgotten; she did not care to go out, as long as she might have this new, strange companionship beneath her father's roof. And as, day by day, Merle dropped in and begged her not to disappoint him, she gave him little glimpses of Aunt Catherine's daughter, without revealing her former life, or the painful circumstances connected with the separation from her mother.

Merle was not pressing in his inquiries about the matter. The friends of the family understood that a painful mystery shrouded Mr. Duke's sister; but the first curiosity had died years ago; and if the sudden appearance of a daughter should arouse inquiry and excite remark, the commanding presence of Mrs. Earle, and the noble bearing of Margaret, would shield them from prying interference.

"And when may I meet this lovely cousin? Is she a confirmed recluse?" inquired Merle one evening, as he sat beneath the gas, looking over with Ruby some rare prints he had brought in.

"No, indeed; but her father has just died, and she is worn out with care of him. And then Auntie is so happy in having her at last, all to herself, that neither of them care to see strangers at present. We shall invite Aunt Maria's family next week to meet her; perhaps Clarence will be home for a few days too, and then I shall be happy to introduce you to her."

"Meantime, *are* you going to Mrs. Ellington's tomorrow?"

"No, Merle. Mother won't care to go, and with many thanks to you and your mother, I must decline, I think."

"Very well; as you please, of course." Merle felt rather out of humor, but hoped he was not showing it. Ruby noticed the change at once, and hastened to soften her refusal.

"You see, Merle, it will not be pleasant to be questioned just now about my cousin, and I had rather wait until her own appearance subdues the curiosity somewhat; for there must of necessity be some mystery, and inquisitive people would question me as they would not mother. Aunt Catherine does not like to have her affairs spoken of; and, though I could answer — 'don't know' — to every question three days ago, I cannot now."

"Yes, Ruby, I understand. You are too honest to pretend or evade, and too kind-hearted to plainly say, 'It does not concern you.' If it were not that I must go with mother, I would spend the evening here."

"No, no; you must go. I want to hear how it goes off; her gatherings are always so *recherché*."

Thus it was decided; and while this household were consulting together about Margaret's wardrobe,—which, regardless of her modest desires, they all agreed must be rich and elegant, as became the heiress of her mother's wealth, Margaret herself deciding against mourning garments,—while Mrs. Duke and Ruby were making purchases, and dressmaker and seamstress were doing the work Margaret's slender hands had so often wearied of, the mother and daughter were revealing to each other pictures of the past, glimpses of their own lives, joys that vanished in the grasping, harrowing doubts and fears, griefs and trials, that came often and lingered long.

With rapt attention the mother listened to her daughter's story: the early school-life, so near and yet so covered from her, for William Earle had never taken his daughter from her native State; the sudden call to come home, and care for her father; the strange silence about her mother—never broken; his peculiar life, and the mystery surrounding his business affairs; the flood of money that sometimes poured in upon them, inciting the morose man to unusual indulgence, and making him lavish, only to be more sullenly careful when a change came. This she never understood.

Too well the mother knew its meaning, but she was silent; and Margaret went on to paint other pictures,—grinding poverty, unceasing illness and inability to

labor; her own exertions, and partial success; her father's increasing kindness as want and suffering brought them into sympathy with each other; the last few days, when he lay with feeble pulse and closed eyes, sometimes breaking out into weak murmurings against himself as the cause of all this misery; and the last startled look he gave her just before his breath vanished, muttering thickly, words that she could not understand. Only "Go—find her—living—love you" were intelligible.

"And, O my beloved mother! I see now what he meant."

It was a painful story to fall upon a mother's ears, but, once told, it should never again harrow the nerves of either.

In justice to herself, the mother must make known to her child something of the terrible causes that separated her from her husband. Gently and carefully as it was done, much as she wisely covered of her husband's brutality, enough was told to rouse indignation and pity,—a bitterness that Margaret tried long to subdue, and a holy, tender love, that manifested itself constantly to the mother's craving heart.

Meantime the tidings circulated. Mrs. Earle had discovered a long-lost child, a beautiful daughter, the heiress to her fine estate; but how or when or where could not be told. All conjecture was vain; the secret was not to be revealed; and the friendly inquiries, congratulations of the devoted five hundred, after a

time became less frequent. Outsiders determined to wait patiently the appearance of this new star; and intimate friends subdued their intense desire, with the hope that, in a few weeks, the mother would be willing to sacrifice her own wishes to the claims of society, and allow the new-found and closely-guarded daughter to appear.

The Tourneys were full of wonder. Of course, *they* understood that Margaret and the dressmaker were one and the same; but, inasmuch as the mother was silent, they guarded the secret from a feeling of pride, very much at variance with Margaret's independent spirit, whose only shame was, her father's character; and whose only boast now would be, her *mother's love*.

Mabel had early called upon her, and professed unbounded admiration; therefore, when the mother carelessly said,—

"I am sorry for cousin; they will have to take her out some; and the usages of society are, of course, entirely unknown to her."

"We shall all have to patronize her, I suppose," remarked Edith, with a toss of her head.

"You *may* be glad, little sister, to have *her* patronize you; and whether the usages of society are familiar or not, I don't know, mother mine. But she is every inch a lady, and is destined to shine. At any rate, they are to have a select few, next week, to meet our cousin, and you can judge for yourself."

"They are? h'm! a party for her! And Clarence

will be home. What shall we do with him? He won't care to go," asked the mother, with heartless indifference.

"He *will* care to go!" retorted Aunt Sophie, with spirit, jerking her cap-strings half angrily.

"I happen to know that this 'little affair,' as they call it, has been delayed three days on account of your only son; and probably his invitation from Ruby's own hand will reach him before yours is left."

"Then Ruby is very foolish to drag him into society against his wishes."

"Why don't you tell the truth, and say against *your* wishes, Maria? Clarence is no longer a child. He decided for college without your advice, and he will take his place in the world in spite of your wicked pride."

Aunt Sophie's voice trembled; for Clarence was her best beloved in the household.

She had said more than she intended; but it was too late to rectify it. Her sister burst into tears; the delicate handkerchief was pressed to her eyes, as she sobbed,—

"You are very cruel, Sophia. You do not know a mother's heart. My only son is very dear to me,—so dear that I would shield him from every glance of scorn or contempt; and how can I, if he mingles in fashionable society?"

"If fashionable society is so inhuman as to scorn one like our Clarence, though he may be unfortunate, I

think *you* had better shun it too. Scorn him! I'd like to set my eyes upon the one who dare! You'll shield him more effectually by taking him to your heart, and letting him rejoice in a mother's love and pride. I know one who is proud of him now, and would cherish him as a sister, if she might."

"There, Sophie"—still sobbing—"you've said enough; you've taken all my strength away; oh, how my head throbs! Eva, my vinaigrette! You'll have to leave me to-night. I cannot go now."

"Nonsense! If your head aches, go lie down; take the smelling-bottle along with you; you'll be all right in an hour."

Still mildly weeping, Mrs. Tourney went to her room, thinking herself a much abused mother.

Aunt Sophie was correct. The headache vanished, and that evening she exerted all her powers to win Merle Domett from his allegiance to Ruby, that he might bestow upon her brilliant Edith the admiration she craved,—justifying the plan to herself, by thinking that Ruby had not seemed to respond to the manifest admiration of this most desirable young man.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PAGE FROM CLARENCE'S LIFE.

"I dive for precious pearl in sorrow's stream."

MRS. ELLINGTON'S party passed off with the usual eclat attending her gatherings. The élite of the city gladly clustered about her. The dazzle of wealth, the brilliancy of intellect, and the sparkling radiance of beauty all contributed to make it the one grand affair of the winter.

Many regretted Ruby's absence. For she was a favorite wherever she appeared, drawing a crowd of admirers by her ready wit, her sharp, keen criticisms, mingled with almost childlike playfulness; while behind all this innocent joy, and adding a new charm, was a thoughtful, gentle dignity, that was mindful of the happiness of young friends, and the deference due older ones.

Perhaps, in all that large assembly, but two rejoiced that she had not come, — Mrs. Tourney and her sparkling daughter Edith. The petite figure of the latter was arrayed in a manner to enhance every charm; her braids, shining and heavy, wound in many a coil at the

back of her small but perfectly shaped head, a single diamond emitting dazzling rays above her brow, and carried with a regal air through all the evening.

It was enough that Merle Domett stood by her side, danced with her as often as he danced at all, and, in fact, divided his attentions between his mother and herself.

She cared not that his heart was far away; that the evening had lost its charm for him. He was hers to-night; and, just for to-night, that satisfied her.

It was Eva's first appearance at Mrs. Ellington's. Her pride was aroused; she would be noticed, — more than that, she would reign, at least in the music world, and she too was satisfied; her heart received the adulation of the company greedily, while her quiet manner and indifferent air was a perpetual deception.

Hugh Ellington, the only son of the household, stood by her side, turning the music leaves. His mother had sent for him, from college, to grace her winter festival, bidding him invite a limited number of his friends. Of those who availed themselves of the pleasure, Harry Stoughton was one, more than anything perhaps for the sake of hearing again Eva's voice, and listening to the conversation that had so strange a charm to him. He too stood near, and drank in every thrilling note; for, despite the small, gray eyes and plain features of this unknown girl, Harry's sympathetic heart had enshrined within itself her image. His boyish, generous nature wondered at her loneliness, pitied the orphan, and loved

her. This love Eva had rejoiced in and encouraged. When she saw him enter with his friend Hugh, there was a peculiar glitter in the gray eyes, which the drooping lids had hidden. The subtle power of her music had swayed the whole assembly, and, gracefully releasing herself from the pleading group, and modestly acknowledging her hostess' thanks, she turned from the piano, and soon her low, plaintive voice, and humble, deprecating glances, were riveting the chains anew.

There was no charm to him in name or station alone; his great heart must sympathize and shelter, be strong to ward off the harshness, and avert the scorn of the world; and love for love's own sake.

Such a love, Eveline Cropsy felt, was all her own. She revelled in her power, and triumphed.

Clarence had not been overlooked in the invitation of Hugh Ellington; his presence had been urgently desired; but the same indifference to mixing in society that had marked him three years ago, now governed him. True, he had in some measure outgrown the diffidence of the boy,—but he was still silent, still reserved, except in those rare moments when, with the chosen few, he threw off his fetters, and, with irresistible charm, allured and delighted. The limited number to whom at such times he revealed the poetic beauty and loveliness of his soul, his secret power to attract and rivet, the flow of his delightful conversation, and the melody of his music, that could not fail to enhance the joy and

gayety of any scene; these few crowned him the king of friends, and paid him true heart homage.

It mattered not to them that the casket, containing this rare gem, was bruised and broken; that the stature of their friend was bent and stunted in its growth; that his form was painful to look upon. The perfect mind was their glory; and the face, of a most expressive beauty, their constant delight.

But was there in all the world a woman's heart strong enough to enshrine him, a form brave enough to walk by his side through life, and a love that would never falter, proud before the world to be *his* chosen? True, there might be; the world can boast of some natures capable of looking beyond the material, of aspiring after the immortal, and forgetting that which is perishable. But were there such a one, Clarence Tourney would never dare lift his eyes and crave the blessing; could never ask one he loved to be his for life.

He had reached home just as the family were dressing for the evening, and only a hasty greeting could be bestowed upon him, except by Aunt Sophie, who encircled him in her arms, and rejoiced at his coming, lavishing upon him every attention and endearment which the other members of the family could not or would not appreciate.

Mabel had been persuaded to leave Pet with nurse and Aunt Sophie. Now, arrayed in the half-forgotten glory of her girlhood, she too was of the party, much to the gratification of her husband, who could scarce

withdraw his gaze from the loveliness that had made him a willing but not a happy captive.

Thus far since her baby's birth she had confined herself to the nursery, with a determination that called forth all the censure her mother dared bestow, resisting alike her urgency and her husband's more carefully expressed desires.

Scarred hopes and a blighted life had reached her through the channel of society, and she could not again, willingly, throw herself into its current,

All her joy had come through baby May; the little life that was part of her own, she would have lived entirely with and for it; but the pressure, long continued, forced her at last to yield. Once more she was in the world; once more she exercised her youthful power, and acknowledged secretly the charm, the reviving ambition, that had swayed her so entirely before her marriage.

Henceforth the child's spell was broken; loved, it is true, but the self-sacrifice, the constant devotion, would never again be considered all-important in the mother's pleasure-blinded eyes.

Left alone, Aunt Sophie, for once disregarding the confusion of the room, drew her chair near the register for a talk with Clarence, who was now soon to graduate. He had, of course, some thoughts of the future, modest hopes of success, and desires for usefulness, that those only who really loved him could sympathize with. Aunt Sophie ardently desired his entire success in the

profession he had chosen, and almost as much to rebuke his mother's pride as for any gratification of her own; for she was a peculiar mixture of stern justice and tender indulgence; one moment ready to administer unpalatable truths and unsparing rebukes, and the next as full of kindness and caresses for the same object.

Clarence told her how much Mrs. Stoughton's kindness had influenced his plans thus far; how her ambition for him had awakened his own, and the pictures of his future, painted by her motherly interest and vivid imagination, were continual incentives to him; that life had taken on a less gloomy atmosphere since hearing and believing her words. He was not restless beneath his fetters now as he might have been, had he never known her; he hoped his aspirations did not outrun his powers, nor was he ambitious of mortal glory in any phase in which such glory envelops other and stronger natures, only; and the sensitive face flushed a little, beaming upon Aunt Sophie, —

"Careful less to serve Him much,
Than to please Him perfectly."

"Right, Clarence, right. I wish we all had the same spirit. Never lose that feeling, and your life, be it long or short, will be satisfactory in the highest, truest sense of the word."

After a time she spoke to him of Harry.

"Is he like his mother at all?"

"Altogether like her; a nobler fellow never lived."

"And yet he seems deeply interested in Eveline. I'm sorry for it," she mused.

"Why, Aunt Sophie?" with a look of surprise.

"I don't know, Clarence; I never could quite make her out, — secret and deep, and, if I am not mistaken, a deception from first to last."

"Then I hope you are mistaken. Edith loves her the same?"

"Edith enjoys her when she is not in the way, and the girl has wit enough to know it; your mother finds her a willing waiter, ready at a beck, and I endure her. That's a pretty fair statement of the case."

"Is she to stay here always?"

"If she fawns and serves sufficiently she may, but she don't deceive me. If she's homeless and friendless, I can pity her, but that she works for an object is evident."

"I wonder if she loves Harry, — but don't answer, it's not my business — I've no right to wonder or surmise; I do know that Harry loves her. God pity him if she works him ill."

Awhile longer they talked. Aunt Sophia told the story of Margaret, of Ruby's joy in the finding of this new cousin.

"Why not run round there, Clarence? They are all at home this evening, and alone; everybody is at Mrs. Ellington's. Why didn't I think of it before? — keeping you here talking to an old woman. Ruby will delight to see you, and I shall be glad to have you enjoy yourself."

"But you, auntie, — you are alone."

"So I am every night in the week. That don't matter; and I've plenty to do. Just look at their duds scattered round; they always leave me an hour's work to pick up after them. There, I've spent half the evening in idleness. Off with you, and we'll soon have order again. Chaos and confusion! Pet's boots in this corner, and brushes, frizzettes, and corset-laces on the bracket and the table! Will the marble ever show its face again? As if there weren't enough for me to wait upon before, they must bring that bag of deceit to help confusion. Freckle-wash! indeed she needs it, if the stuff can do the work; but if my skin had to be fixed up in such a way, I think I'd be a little more private about it. Girls lived and loved, and married and died, when I was young, without the help of any such flummery. There, there, don't stand laughing at me, off with you." She wound the scarf closer about his neck, and, with a caressing pat, drove him away.

Still smiling at her tirade against the small necessities of fashionable life, Clarence went from the house. It was a glorious evening; the trees of the park hung with light snow wreaths, fallen a few hours since, glistening like numberless jewels in the moonlight; while their fantastic shadows, moved by the wind, seemed to creep cautiously toward him, and laughingly bound away as his quick step drew near.

His heart was very happy. He was glad Ruby had not gone with the crowd; glad with the thought she

might be willing to devote an hour to him. He would listen to the story of the past months, and unfold to her his plans and hopes. She would not be surrounded by those who knew him not; and more, Merle Domett would be away; no chance for him to come in and break up the cousinly chat with his patronizing attentions.

Perhaps Aunt Sophie's manifest pride in him had taken effect. He wondered why the earth had seemed so cold and forlorn, and life so cheerless; surely he had been lingering beneath the clouds, when a single step would have taken him into the sunlight.

All absorbed in these jubilant feelings, he heeded not the near sound of a boy's running step, saw not the coarse, burly form swing round the corner with clumsy haste and shrill whistle. Not, until he passed so close as to touch his garments, did Clarence wake from his dream, wake to hear the rude laugh and cruel words, —

"Hallo, Hunchy!"

His air-castles were all dissolved; his aspirations vanished on the instant. The distant step of the thoughtless boy sounded like the funeral knell of all his hopes. He was nothing after all but a hunchback, feeble, visionary, impractical, unfit for life's grand work, unable to cope with its stern realities, — a morbid dreamer, a hinderance rather than help, and yet the God who created him had known from the beginning what his life was to be, and that God was infinitely wise, infinitely good. Nothing in life could shake the firm foun-

dation of that fact, so deeply rooted in his soul was its belief; for as a drowning man will cling to any tangible substance, so Clarence had from the first clung to this hope, — this faith in God's perfect love for all his creatures. It was the one only entire rest of his heart. *He* was beloved of God. He lifted a pitiful, pleading face to the cloudless heavens, and hoped that his heart might be satisfied with this eternal love.

The bright, full moon sent back generous smiles, the stars seemed to nod a kindly answer, and the deformed was comforted again, — not joyous, but content.

The four ladies were together with work, books, and chat to beguile the hours.

"Why, Clarence, my dear boy!" exclaimed his aunt, "this is an unexpected pleasure"; and she hastened towards him, grasping his hand, and kissing him with all a mother's freedom and affection.

Ruby's greeting was less demonstrative, but no less sincere and earnest. Her eyes danced with the pleasure of seeing him, and of presenting the new cousin, who had risen, and was enjoying the pleasure of the others.

"This is my daughter, Clarence; my daughter Margaret," said Aunt Catherine, with rich accents and evident pride, for the novelty of this new possession was still fresh.

"*Our cousin*, Clarence," added Ruby; and Margaret giving her hand, added, —

"I have heard often of my cousin Clarence; I am very glad to meet him."

Clarence little knew what a joy it was to gaze into his responsive face, lighted with the excitement of being so warmly welcomed; he did not dream of the deep, true love they felt for him, or the wonder and tender sympathy that rose in Margaret's breast as she gazed upon the beautiful countenance, and felt, rather than saw, the terrible deformity of the frame.

The evening passed too quickly for Clarence; he had many questions to ask, and as many to answer. Ruby must play, and Aunt Catherine would like them to sing together; last of all, Ruby pleaded for a college song, which her cousin could not refuse. Then, promising to call daily while at home, he tore himself away, unconscious of the pure happiness which thrilled his cousin's heart, unconscious that Margaret had read his secret, and would stand his friend as long and as often as he needed one.

At last the eventful day arrived. The Dukes had invited a few choice friends. Margaret was to be introduced. Almost none had seen her, and curiosity was at its utmost height. She had ridden down town enveloped in velvet and furs; had returned Mabel's call, her mother constantly by her side; had met Merle Domett and his mother. Ruby and Mabel had consulted together, and were to shield her from glance or word that might confuse or trouble her; for Mabel had always felt for the pale, silent dressmaker a degree of interest, that was now converted into love and pride. Therefore, when Margaret stood by her mother, receiv-

ing and returning with inimitable grace the salutations of those presented to her, Mabel had drawn herself aside, and was wondering at the transformation elegant apparel will make. Could it indeed be the same,—this beautiful girl, in the rich, soft silk, falling in heavy folds from her slender figure,—the same who had walked, with tired feet, all the long distance from the attic home, to her father's mansion, with dresses for her, made by those same white fingers? Were those dreamy brown eyes the very ones that had been kept open far into the night, and for her? Did Margaret know herself?

While she mused, a hand was laid upon her arm, and a familiar voice whispered,—

"For heaven's sake, Mabel, tell me who this cousin is! She's wondrously beautiful. I've seen her face before, and, for the life of me, I can't tell where."

"In visions by night, it may be, Nell."

"Be still, joking, and tell me where I've seen her; I shall be haunted till I know."

"And how should I be able to tell? Go, ask her."

"Where has Mrs. Earle kept her all this time? Do tell me,—do you know yourself?"

"At school, part of the time, I think," said Mabel, who had no desire to enlighten her gay friend.

"I believe it was only for effect. Well, we married women may subside now, for she will be the one bright star, of course. There's your mother's protégée inveigling Harry Stoughton's senses. How she manages,

I can't conceive; she's mortal homely; I wish somebody'd ask her to play; all her beauty's in her voice; that's superb. There goes Ross back to Miss Earle. She's just the style to suit him; — where have I seen those eyes?"

"You may be thinking of cousin Ruby. They're somewhat alike."

"Perhaps so." But she was still not satisfied. A little later, as Mabel stood near the piano, where Harry turned the leaves for Eva, Mrs. Drew advanced quickly, eagerly whispering, —

"A miracle! a miracle! your cousin and that dress-maker are one and the same. I knew it by her lofty manner when I talked with her a moment ago; the very same — deny it if you can."

"I have no wish to," answered Mabel, with a low laugh. "One delusion is as good for you as another."

"No delusion about it. She's the very same. I might have known she was nobly born; she carried herself like an empress then. But it's a queer mystery; won't you unravel?"

"Go, ask her, if you are curious," was the perplexing rejoinder.

"Ask her? Not I. She's bound to be the rage. I'll make a party for her, see if I don't. I'll ask Ross this very night; she shan't snub me, if I can help it," and the volatile wife flitted away.

Edith, unable to win Merle Domett from his devotion to Ruby, hid her craftiness and hovered continually

about them; rejoicing when, after the first set, Ruby declined dancing, to devote herself for a season to the cousins, who sat apart. Merle meantime rewarded Edith's patience by engaging her hand for the next dance, and really found a new charm in her bright looks, quick motions, and lively repartees.

"I'm glad, cousin Margaret, you do not waltz; I never liked to see my sisters whirled about in that style by everybody."

Overhearing those quiet words, Ruby thought, "I'll never waltz again; how I must have looked." The flush deepened on her cheek, and did not leave it entirely until the last good-night was spoken, and the last carriage had rolled away.

CHAPTER XVII.

EVELINE'S POWER.

"Oh, trifling head, and fickle heart!"

"A LETTER for you, Eva; another summons from Madam Pixley, I should think, by its looks," said Edith, dancing into the room, where Eveline was arranging her mother's hair, about three weeks after Clarence's visit home.

"I wish Madam would let me alone," was the half-laughing reply, as she slipped the letter into her pocket.

"I should think she'd been a very good friend to you, Miss Eveline; and you may be glad to avail yourself of her kindness again; hardly politic to offend her, is it?" inquired Aunt Sophie, with some asperity of tone, looking over her glasses at the young girl, who did not reply, although her face burned with quick wrath. "For my part, when *I* was young, I liked to be independent"; and the truth-telling spinster dropped the little scarlet socks she was knitting for Pet, to point her remark with a searching glance. "If I'd had *your* talent, I don't believe I'd hidden it in a napkin, and devoted myself to dressing hair."

"Sophie, you are too bad! Eveline does not hide her talent; and because she plays well, it does not follow she's to confine herself to it all the time. I'm sure I don't know what I should do without her. But don't mind her, Eva dear. You're too fond of hurting the feelings of your friends, Sophie."

"Fond of telling the truth, I am. When I was young, girls had to hear the truth, and sense it too; but nowadays truth must be covered up by fashion and folly, and common-sense must be handled with gloves on, or not at all." The socks were resumed with a very determined air.

Eva had put the last touches to her work, and, with a grieved expression, silently left the room.

"I don't see why you need hate the child so; now she's gone off crying. And she's very useful; I have needed a dressing-maid for some time; and you know very well how averse your brother is to filling up the house with servants. Eva does for me all I need, and with exquisite taste; she's a great help to you also about the sewing. I would n't have her leave us now on any account."

"Help! she never touches a needle only when you are by, and the sewing-machine would rust if it were not for nurse. I'm too old to sew by steam, and I never intend to touch the thing, as I've said before."

"More than once, too. I don't want you to use it, Sophie; no one can sew better than you, I know; and

I mean Eva to be a help to you, of course; but why can't you let the child be happy in her own way? I do like to have things run smoothly."

"Perhaps I see a trifle deeper than you do, Maria. Gadding about all the time, you can't see the actions going on before my eyes. I'm not blind yet, if I do need glasses to do fine work; and if I had a husband that was n't any too attentive to me, I don't believe I'd have strange girls fawning about him, cajoling him out of money that belongs to his children."

"Are you demented, Sophie?" Mrs. Tournay laughed loud and long.

"You may laugh, Maria Tournay, but all this combing of hair, jumping for slippers, and getting his chair and paper, singing for him every blessed evening when you and Edith are away, and talking in her low, serpent-like voice, are just as truly for some deep purpose, as that I live to wait upon you all. There, don't leave those ribbons on the chair; I can't get up till this sock is toed off. I tell you, she's artful enough, with her soft nonsense and funereal voice."

"It's her natural manner, and prompted by gratitude for the home we give her."

"Prompted by Satan himself, or I'm a blind, prejudiced old woman; but I know these men, and my brother's no better than the rest. Do you think he'd sit a whole evening and hear *me* sing, or have me comb his hair? No; the little soft hand and gentle touch you praise so much are very soothing to the tired man,

whose wife and daughters seldom take time to say good-evening to him."

"Don't, Sophie, try to rouse my jealousy; it would be too ridiculous"; and another long, silvery laugh roused the maiden aunt to renew her defence.

"I think it would, and just as much so for a woman of your age" — Mrs. Tournay winced — "not to have the wit to see what is transpiring beneath your own roof."

"If my wit is insufficient, lend me yours. What is this awful tragedy which our eyes fail to see?"

"You don't know how often your husband gives the *friendless orphan* fifty or a hundred dollars, just for the luxury of seeing her gratitude and his own benevolence, do you?" clicking her needles with renewed energy.

"Does he do that, Sophie?" with a flush of feeling at last.

"Twice, to my knowledge; and it's time you knew who and what you have in the house."

"I will know, and before I sleep, too," said the now fully aroused wife, starting up from the depths of her easy chair.

The words penetrated other ears, — and, from the hall door, a small figure drew itself away in the dim light, the face, as she entered her own room, telling of cunning and defiance. Throwing herself into a low rocker, she drew forth the letter and was just breaking the seal, as Mrs. Tournay tapped lightly and entered, with a

slight flush in either cheek, and a smile that went no higher than the lip.

"Just reading my letter — I had forgotten it," murmured Eva, carelessly.

"I won't detain you long, Eveline; I only wished to suggest, when you need money, I had rather you would come to me, than to trouble Mr. Tourney. As long as you *remain with me*, I prefer you to make your wants known to me, rather than to my husband."

The lady spoke with unusual decision, and was not prepared for the look of wonder and injured innocence lifted to her face.

"What can you mean, Mrs. Tourney? I do not understand you. I've never asked your husband for money. How *could* I do such a thing?"

The surprise was not to be doubted.

"Has he never given you money, then?" asked the perplexed lady.

"Oh! I had forgotten. You must mean the surprise for your birthday; surely he could not have told you. It's too bad. He will think I told."

"A surprise? For me? oh, that's it! Well, well, Eva, I thought you would not be so unladylike as to accept a large sum of money secretly. My birthday will soon be here. I shall be curious." This time the smile reached her eyes and shone through.

"Do not let Mr. Tourney know his secret is discovered. He said he had so little leisure, and you had confidence in my taste," with drooping lids and modest tone.

"All confidence, Eva. Forgive my doubt. Now read your letter, and tell us the news."

Going down, Mrs. Tourney found her sister surveying the finished sock with evident satisfaction, and relieved her injured feelings by saying that she understood all about the money. "Eva was as innocent of mischief as a babe unborn."

"I hope you are not still deceived; but now *my* eyes are open, I shall watch."

"As you please; but I insist that you do not hurt her feelings again. She is a great deal of company for me."

"Set some of your other company to making opera bonnets and flimsy nothings, they might prove as useful as this girl."

"It's useless to talk with you, Sophia. You are the most obstinate woman I ever saw."

The evening brought the usual excitements. Mabel, now fairly drawn within the vortex of gayety, found even Pet's sweet endearments powerless to allure her therefrom. Borne on the swift current, urged along by her mother and the flattery of friends, perchance, too, by the unquiet spirit within, she heeded not those gentle whisperings of her better nature.

It was nurse's evening out, and of course auntie must care for Pet; especially as Eveline, pleading a distressing headache, had resisted all invitations, and retired to her room. Edith, only too happy to be of Ruby's party, and share with her the attentions of Merle, had already gone; for Ruby, with a strong

friendship for Merle Domett that she knew not how to disturb, had refrained from declining his attentions, although so pointed, so tender, and lover-like had they become as to give her pain, she scarce knew why.

Had Ruby taken courage, and given her mother the confidence never withheld before, her trouble would have been lightened; but this she dared not do, and her only artifice was to beg Edith to spend an evening with her, or be one of the party to this or that concert or ride, until Merle grew perplexed, and wondered what it all meant.

When Mr. Tourney reached home, he found the house deserted, the gas burning low and dim, and his evening meal cheered only by the attention of the silent housemaid, Rachel.

How could it be otherwise? This was the rule, and he had become accustomed to it. If the early days of his married life sometimes haunted him with vain yearnings, what remained for him to do, but simply put them aside, and bury himself in the evening news?

Of late he had experienced a new sensation, it is true. His slippers had been brought him, and the dressing-gown waited on the back of his chair; once or twice, when his head seemed weary, a soft voice had offered to comb his hair, and the gentle touch had soothed him. He wished he might find the little girl, as he called her, ready, to-night, to charm his weariness away. But no; the sitting-room looked dim, the piano closed, the music leaves packed away as no one but his sister could

pack them; everything in perfect order; his slippers and gown in the usual place, and the fresh folded journal close at hand.

Auntie had bound up Eva's throbbing temples; compelled her to take a soothing draught and lie down; then darkening the room, she shut her in, saying, —

"I must stay with Pet, now, Eveline; I will look in before bed-time, and hope to find you better."

"Thank you," accompanied by a moan of pain, convinced her that she need have no fear for that night. With her anxious heart at rest she sought the nursery, dismissed the impatient servant, drew her chair near the crib, and began the humming of a monotonous lullaby.

A half hour, and the slight form rose from the bed, the bandage was flung upon the floor, the little feet were slid into soft slippers, and, without turning up the gas, deft fingers wound the shining braids anew; and, throwing on a white embroidered jacket, she crept cautiously to the door, opened it, and listened.

The rustling of paper came up from below; the subdued humming reached her from the distant nursery; "the dragon" was a fixture until Mabel returned, and the coast was clear. Swiftly gliding over the stairs, she stood in the open door an instant, closed it softly, and, speeding across the carpet, before the gentleman had discovered her presence, a white hand rested on the words he read, and a low, childlike laugh rippled through the room.

His whole face was transformed on the instant; until this moment he had not realized how much the attractions of his home had been increased by this orphan girl, who depended on his bounty.

"So my little girl did n't run away to-night. That's good!"

"Did you think I had gone?"

"Yes; but it seems this new opera had no charms for you. Well, I'm glad not to be alone; what's to be done for to-night, — read, sing, or only talk me asleep?"

"I can't sing, my head ached. Aunt Sophie has shut the music up. She was so kind to bind up my head, and drive it off."

"Then talk. What shall I give you for staying home?"

She had drawn a low seat near him, and was looking into his face with all the artless pleasure she could command.

"Would you like to give me something?" with an arch look and murmuring laugh.

"They say it's better to give than to receive," he answered, carelessly resting his hand upon her golden head.

"I want something, but not for my own self," in the bewitching freedom of a child, taking the hand and caressing it with her soft, warm fingers.

"For whom, then? Speak out, little one; you deserve it for your *own self*, for being company for an old man."

"An old man? you are not old." And again the silvery laugh thrilled the listener.

"Am I not? You must think I am, at all events; but what is it you want, that is not for yourself?"

"Now listen, papa Tour," adopting Pet's phrase, to his ill-concealed delight.

"Next week is dear Mrs. Tourney's birthday, and she wonders what her liege lord will present her. I happen to know just the thing most acceptable to her. Why may I not purchase for you? Will you give this pleasure to your little girl?"

"To be sure. That is nothing; ask something for yourself."

"No, no; your kindness is enough, more than enough, and my loving gratitude ill repays it." The voice grew plaintive, the red lips dropped a kiss upon the hand she held.

This man of the world, unused to sentiment, was deeply touched, so pure and holy a thing is gratitude.

"You have given me a child's love, Eva, darling, and it is more to my heart than a home can be to you; but you will learn to run away after a time, as the others do?"

"No, papa Tour, not if I can make you happy; shall I tell you what I'm going to get your wife?"

"Yes, I had forgotten. How many greenbacks will it take?" drawing forth his purse.

"It's a set of opal I saw the other day. Mrs. Tour-

ney admired it very much; she said she was getting tired of her old jewelry."

"Truly, she must be; it's nearly six months old."

"Shame, papa Tour, — when the lovely lady likes everything fresh and beautiful, and it was only three hundred dollars."

"That all? If you were asking for yourself, little modesty, *only* three hundred would seem a large sum. But here it is, — get what you like, and something for yourself with this," tossing another bill into her lap.

He did not see the gray eyes glitter, — the lids covered them. She quietly rolled the bills, slid them into her pocket, murmuring thanks in the same low, sweet voice that enchanted him.

She had risen from her seat, and, offering to read, had drawn a chair beneath the gas, and commenced. Mr. Tourney, his head thrown back against the cushion, listened more to the music of the voice than the words that freighted it. His eyes closed, and a delicious sensation of peace and rest was stealing over him, when the door opened, and his sister looked in.

A moment she seemed transfixed with dismay; then the quick-gathering storm burst forth.

"Eveline Cropsy! what do you mean? What you here for? I left you sick a-bed. Is there no truth in you?"

Without a blush, with the same childlike simplicity, —

"My head is better, Aunt Sophie; the drops you brought drove it away entirely."

"More like, it never ached. At any rate, you are my patient; so you may go back to bed, not to be fretting all day to-morrow."

"Nonsense, Sophie! What in thunder ails you? Let the child alone; if she's well, I want her to read to me."

"I don't believe in a raging headache cured in an hour!"

"Be still, Sophie; the child just came down, and has been telling me how kind you were to her. For heaven's sake, don't spoil a good thing. If you want to hear the reading, sit down; if not, at least let me be quiet. Go on, child."

"Child! oh, the artfulness, the deceit! Are they all stone blind?" muttered the maiden sister, as she turned away, and walked with stately steps into the dining-room, putting the chairs into their places with an emphasis that slightly expressed the tumult in her breast.

"She thinks I do not respect her advice; but I do, indeed. My head is peculiar; a little sleep often cures it entirely. It was the letter from Madam made it ache."

"What does she want, that she writes so often?"

"A music teacher. I told Mrs. Tourney; she said I must not leave her, but indeed, I don't know but I ought, for — for — I think — I'm afraid your sister does not like me to stay here."

"What if she don't? It's nothing to her! Sophie's peculiar, but good — very good. You can't go; tell

the old lady so ; write at once. If that don't hush her, I'll write. Tell her I've adopted you, and it's an insult to ask you to leave us."

Rising, he took a few turns through the room. Stopping at last, and leaning over her chair, he said, —

"Promise me you'll not be enticed away."

She looked up into his eyes, and whispered, —

"Aunt Sophie does not love me ; how can I stay?"

"The rest of us do, — promise, quick ! Will you be my daughter?"

"Best of fathers, yes." Quick as thought he pressed a kiss upon the white forehead, saying, gayly, "Signed and sealed ; now read on."

Once more Aunt Sophie passed the door on her way to the nursery, and glanced contemptuously within, catching a sound of the voice, and determined to construe every gentle inflection and winning tone into more sinister motives than might be conveyed to other ears. Eveline heeded her not, confident that her unbending will, and the artfulness nurtured by her whole life's discipline, were more than a match for Aunt Sophie's plain-spoken indignation, that generally resulted in favor of those against whom it was directed.

She read on, occasionally glancing at the little French timepiece on the bracket, and towards Mr. Tourney, who, as usual, seemed inclined to doze, but roused always as her voice ceased, until nearly the hour for the return of wife and daughters, when the measured breath-

ing betokened a deep sleep, and the reader closed her book, and silently left the room.

Eveline drew the letter she had so lately received from her pocket, and carefully re-perused it.

Madam had asked her again to become her music teacher, offering a much larger salary than she had ever given, telling her of the death of Mrs. Hartly, but not daring, at this late day, to explain the relationship between them.

There was none to tell of the last sad months passed by this forsaken wife and unrecognized mother, none to reveal the strong yearnings for her child, — the pleadings which fell unheeded from the pale lips for only one glance upon that child's face, one word of glad recognition.

It was vain, then, that Madam explained to the dying mother that Eveline's life could not be happier now for the knowledge that her father was a convict and her mother deserted ; for with persistent curiosity Madam had discovered the poor woman's secret, hidden more for the child's sake than her own. But these motives had lost their power over the mother's heart ; she longed for her child, but all in vain. The flickering flame went out, the lonely, suffering soul went home, and the grave and Madam Pixley covered her secret.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NOT YET.

"A mighty pain to love it is,
And 't is a pain that pain to miss;
But, of all pains, the greatest pain,
It is to love, but love in vain."

THE hour Ruby had so long shrunk from with a kind of nervous dread, had come; the hour she had deferred by all the arts her guileless nature could invent, now stared her in the face, and mocked her girlish fear. All the womanly dignity of her mind, and the refined delicacy of her heart, were called into action to reply to Merle Domett's passionate love, — a love that would be put aside no longer, that might not be tampered with even by the object of its idolatry; a love, too, that refused to absorb every other emotion of the man, as sometimes it does in weaker natures, but, instead, added new strength to his resolute will, increased his pride and self-confidence, so that, were he not beloved in return, the shock must be a terrible one.

But of such an alternative he had, even in his most discouraging moods, scarcely dreamed.

Ruby was his, beyond a doubt; and his gratitude for her life-long affection should be fervent and undying. He would cherish her as his own soul; this love should direct his whole life, govern all his impulses, be the moving spring of every action, his entire joy, his only sunshine.

True, she had expressed for him but the friendliness of a sister, — scarcely that; still, she returned his love, or would do so, when acknowledged. He liked the reserve, so womanly, so noble.

That she loved no other, he was confident. Therefore, when he found himself alone with her one evening, not a doubt disturbed his mind or ruffled his calm happiness; his dark eyes spoke volumes of tenderness; his manner, courteous and refined, was permeated by a new grace.

"I have waited for this hour, Ruby; my whole life has pointed to it; now, I *must* speak. You have not been the same to me of late; you have been shy and reserved, — but you love me, dearest, even as I love you?" His whole soul beamed upon her as he waited the reply.

The flush deepened on her cheek, a look of anxiety settled in the brown eyes. She responded hastily, but in tones of earnestness, —

"No, no, Merle. Oh, I am sorry, — sorry you tell me this."

"Sorry! and why? It is a joy to me, Ruby. I would make it so to you." Without waiting for the words

that trembled on her lip, he caught the hand she had partly raised to stay the confession that could bring to her only pain, and, holding it fast in both his own, he poured into her reluctant ear such a flood of eager desire, of life-long, ardent love, of hopes so tinged with rainbow hues, of promises to fill her cup of joy to the brim, as only a proud, happy, devoted husband could do, that his unwilling listener might not stay the tide, might not check this flow of sentiment, until he paused to hear the words that would seal his bliss.

In his eager, animated confession he had failed to note the suffering that marked her beautiful features, so vivid, so unmistakable, notwithstanding her calm, dignified manner; and when the sudden exclamation fell upon his heart with its chilling power, he was indeed startled.

"Merle, Merle! why do you love me? Why have you told me this? It cannot, cannot be."

"Why have I told you? Why love you? Have I not known you and watched you, dearest, from childhood to womanhood, — a womanhood glorious and lovely as none other? Could I fail to love, to worship, to claim you as my own? Ah, Ruby, noble and true as I have ever believed, known you to be, fail me not now; do not trifle with me. I tell you I love you as none other can; I would purchase your happiness with the price of my own, — ay, I would give life itself. Cannot be? It can, it must! If only you love me, Ruby, there is no obstacle I will not surmount, no hardship I will not

encounter, to add one moment of happiness to your life."

"Oh, hush, hush, Merle! Let me speak. This is all so strange, so sudden, and it brings only pain to me."

"I would not pain you, Ruby. I have been hasty; but, dearest, your father bade me 'godspeed,' and your mother gave approval, and my heart has urged me on. But, if my haste troubles you, if you may not quite yet respond to a love that crowns my whole manhood, I will be patient. I can afford to wait; then — then, my own Ruby, I will cherish you as even your mother, in her entire devotion, cannot do."

"You mistake me, Merle. It is not that. I know my own heart now, as well as I shall in years to come; — but you have been my friend, beloved and trusted. I shrink from giving pain; and yet, my friend, I do not — cannot — return *this* love."

His eyes read her soul. For the first time he understood her meaning. Still, he held the hand, — still gazed into the upturned face, expressing so much sorrow at the misery she knew she must inflict. His very lips became white, as, with gasping breath, he asked, —

"And why? Tell me, why? I did not dream of this, Ruby."

"Merle! Merle! do not look upon me so. Oh, had you loved me as a brother, this had not been. A friend, a sister, I still may be; but no more, — no dearer."

"And why?" he reiterated; "you do not love another, Ruby?"

Impulsively she drew her hand from his. The deep blush that burned her cheek, the quick tears that started, and the quivering lip, told that he had probed her heart to its inmost depths.

"Ask me not, Merle. Be generous still; believe me, I never meant to trifle with you. I never thought of this. Indeed, indeed, I did not."

"No, Ruby, I do believe you, trust you, as I never trusted other; but I was unprepared for this, — I meant to have it all my own way, you see." He struggled to assume a playful tone, — she was not to be deceived. "We can never go back to the relation of yesterday; but our friendship shall not suffer; we still are friends. The world may never know the blow this little hand has dealt my heart, or the wounds you have inflicted, Ruby."

"I would heal them, Merle, if I could," she answered, with deep feeling.

"I know you would, but you cannot. I will heal them myself. God bless you!"

One moment he gazed into her truthful eyes; his hand, still clasping hers, in a pressure tight, even to pain, were cold as marble; then, with sudden fervor, he stooped an instant, left a burning, quivering kiss upon the troubled brow, and, without a word, was gone, leaving her pale and motionless as a statue.

Thus her mother found her a moment after, and, understanding Merle's errand, had wondered somewhat at his abrupt departure; but, with all a mother's sym-

pathetic tenderness, had hastened to assure her eldest born of her own approval, and her joy in their happiness.

Misinterpreting the silent, anxious grief, she folded Ruby in her arms.

"I rejoice in your joy, my daughter. It is just as we have wished. Merle is dear as a son to us."

The daughter raised her head, and, gazing tearfully into her mother's eyes, exclaimed, —

"Oh, mother, mother, I have been blind, — wickedly, cruelly blind!"

"Ruby, my child! what mean you? Blind perhaps to his love, but never cruel, never trifling or wicked. And now you are happy in knowing what we all have seen for months?"

"And never told me, mother?" She shook her head slowly. "It was unwise; it was wrong. Happy! no, I am miserable."

"Miserable! why, Ruby, I scarcely know you. What have you been saying to Merle? *Not* refused him?" The mother, too, looked anxious.

"Ah, mother! I would it had never happened. I *cannot* love him. Don't, dear mother, look at me so. Oh, do not you fail me now; do not chide me. I have been blind, but not wilfully so."

"My dear, you are hasty. You have liked Merle?"

"Yes, mother."

"And he will make a kind, devoted husband. You have been hasty, but this decision need not be final,

Ruby; nor is it important that you decide at all for the present. Merle loves you too well to be impatient. He will wait until you understand better your own heart."

"No, mother, you mistake me. I am a child no longer; my heart does not deceive me. Much as I respect Merle Domett, much as I prize his friendship and enjoy his companionship, I could never, never be his wife, or love him as a wife should love,— as you love my father."

"My child!" exclaimed Mrs. Duke, mournfully.

"My mother!" laughed Ruby.

"But you do not know, dear. You love no other? Indeed, in our whole circle, where is the one to compare with him? Who could throw at your feet a more ancient, honored name, a loftier station, or princelier wealth? I would have my daughter established in a position where her influence would be wide, and the respect of the world insured."

"How often has my mother told me that wealth or station might not bring in its train the respect of the good?" answered Ruby, with a charming smile.

"True, my child; but Merle has other qualities that will command respect and admiration."

"But have you not said, dear mother, that a good conscience was more to be desired than the homage of the world?"

"Yes, Ruby, and the wife of such a man need not fail of an approving conscience."

"If she loved him not, mother mine?"

"But she would love him, she could not help it, unless her heart was cold as stone."

"I trust his wife, when he finds her, will look upon him with my mother's eyes," said Ruby, archly; then resumed, with assumed sadness, —

"But why so anxious to drive me from you, mother? Am I not a dutiful child?"

Mrs. Duke, seated in the same spot where Merle had told his love, folded Ruby in her arms, as she knelt upon the carpet, looking half saucily into the kind face.

"Dutiful! Never was mother so blessed as I. Nor would I drive you from me, darling. Perhaps I have thought too much of this, knowing how fondly you would be cherished, and knowing, too, so little of the future; thinking how entirely we *might* be separated, should you love one who must take you far from us."

"I never will, my own mother."

"Ah Ruby, we cannot tell, — God knoweth."

"Dear mother, drive away this sadness. It is not like you. Have you not taught me to trust; and will you be the first to bring a doubt of the future? Believe me, I will never, never leave you, unless you can rejoice to have me go where duty calls."

"No, my child, we will not doubt our Father's providence, however it may meet us. I have been weak and foolish in planning what may not be; and now the dream is past. I am proud that wealth or station was not powerful enough to lead you wrong; proud that my

daughter can be firm when she knows she is right. But, dear, I was not sure that you understood yourself."

"I do, mother, at least in respect to Merle."

"I believe you; and now we will put it all aside."

"And, mother, keep me from wounding another heart as I have his. It pains me, — oh, so much!"

"My dear, you will not need me now. I should have helped you months ago; but you are a child no longer, you know the way you walk. This will not be repeated. The next love that meets you, dear, will be responded to, shall cling to you through life. God grant it may be worthy to be enshrined in this pure heart, worthy of my precious child. But it is late, they will wonder at our long stay."

"Don't wait for me, mother; I'll be up in a moment." Ruby lingered to arrange the chairs, and turn off the gas, singing, half unconsciously, meanwhile, —

"A love for sickness and for health,
For rapture and for tears;
That will live for us and bear with us
Through all our mortal years."

CHAPTER XIX.

COUNTER-CURRENTS.

"Who scoffs these sympathies,
Makes mock of the divinity within."

It was not possible to conceal from society — Argus-eyed — the change so sudden between Merle and Ruby. More than one keen gaze scanned the two faces to detect the meaning, and found itself baffled, as his courtly attentions, far less frequent, but apparently as sincere, were directed to her; and her grave but kind acknowledgments were little different from what they had been in the past.

The shock to Merle had been a rude one. Despite his faults of pride, ambition, and a domineering spirit, fostered from childhood, and bequeathed as an inheritance from a mother, — he had much that was noble and worthy of admiration; and when he found the supreme loveliness of Ruby's life was not to be the crown and glory of his own, he could not, as a meaner nature might have done, mingle with this soul-absorbing interest a sullen contempt born of unrealized hopes and disappointed pride. He could not turn coldly from her,

readily taking another love to his heart to heal the wound; but, striving to forget the extent of his misery, in the conviction of all this friendship had done for him, and still might do, feeling the pure influence of her royal nature yet about him, and being assured that her soul might yet reflect upon his own the radiant light of a true and devoted friendship, — he still, at times, sunned himself in her presence, and found himself often unconsciously lingering within sound of the voice which had been his dearest music.

There had been, it is true, a sharp conflict with pride before his better nature triumphed; but it was over. He had conquered; and although marks of the strife were visible to eyes that could read his face, yet the world would never know how hard had been the fight, how complete the victory, that left him nobler, greater, and purer than before.

His soul had struggled grandly, his love took on the more subdued garb of friendship, with a mantle of reverence about it, and he waited for the hour when he could sincerely feel that Ruby's happiness was his own.

It was not among the least of Ruby's discomforts in society, to encounter the severe eyes of Merle Domett's mother, fixed upon her with cold disdain, as though the insult to her family might not be forgiven.

"A son of mine! a Domett scorned and rejected!" she had said, when the truth was told.

"Rejected, mother," he answered with a shrug of his

shoulders, "but not scorned. Ruby is incapable of that."

"Not scorned? Has she not received all your advances, every attention *we* as a *family* have lavished upon her? Has she not led you on with her foolish ways, until you laid your wealth, your name, your manhood at her feet, to be spurned? And still you wait her beck and call? Where is your pride, Merle Domett?"

"You are mistaken, mother. Ruby has been as innocent of wrong as a child; has loved me as a sister, dreaming of nothing else, until I broke the spell; and she now grieves as deeply as even you might desire, ~~that~~ this sisterly affection has brought me pain. She cannot give me all I ask; but if friendship, pure, bright and true, is worth aught to me, it is mine. We cannot be lovers, mother dear, but we are to be devoted, life-long friends."

"That means, you are to sacrifice your hopes, your future prospects, the long line of ancestral honor, that centres alone in you, to her caprice?"

"Probe me not with bitter words, dear mother. My heart is the sacrifice in very truth, and lies yet upon the altar, freshly wounded. I can bear no more now; have patience with me, and, for my sake, be kind to Ruby."

He left her with a half-sad, half-smiling good-morning.

That evening, at a select gathering at the house of a mutual friend, he took pains to shun altogether the room where Ruby and Margaret held sway, much to the

artfully concealed satisfaction of Edith Tourney, who lingered in his presence, suiting her conversation to his mood, and throwing over her wonted gayety the charm of a timid, tender solicitude, a softened expression in feature and tone; that unconsciously soothed the feelings of Merle, and quieted the emotions so lately stirred anew by his mother's words.

If Edith read aright the two faces, she now had the field to herself; and destitute she must confess herself of every subtle charm and bewildering influence, could she not win the love, or at least the name, of this man.

The coming months found her poised between jealous fears and brilliant hopes, between pitiable depression and an exciting, nervous happiness.

Thus the winter passed. In the midst of preparations for the summer, Mrs. Tourney was prostrated with fever. Then Eveline's work, as nurse, commenced; so acceptable were her ministrations that she was scarce allowed to leave the sufferer's room. The illness was not dangerous or exceedingly painful; but frequent exposure, entire devotion to fashionable dress and hours, had deprived the lady of power to rally. Continued debility and long confinement were telling upon the nerves and amiability of the patient so sensibly, that the sick room was not a cheerful place, and only one possessed of Eveline's self-control and coolness could long remain there.

Thus it happened, that while Mabel and Edith with

Pet and nurse at last left the convalescent for a trip to the mountains, Eva was compelled to remain, subject to the sharpness of Aunt Sophie, and the querulousness of the invalid, her only resource for happiness being Mr. Tourney's fatherly kindness and numerous gifts.

Edith was exuberantly joyful. Merle had promised to meet them, be one of their party a short time in mid-summer; in fact, this knowledge was the last inducement held before the ambitious mother, ere she could allow her daughters to go without her, while the hope of being with them before the season was spent was almost her only inducement to live.

If Edith could win where Ruby had failed to appreciate, then indeed might the servile spirit of the mother endure this lengthened sacrifice.

It was not a yearning for nature's secret haunts, — mountain acclivities, dark with fir forests, their lofty crests cloud-capped; there was no thought of rippling brooks, shaded by green hedges, where birds love to rear their young. Their low, twittering music was not for her ears; her eyes cared not to note the varying form of clouds, throwing fantastic shadows down upon mount and meadow; the thunder of the cataract awakened no reverential awe in her shallow breast; untold and ever-changing beauties touched no responsive chord within her soul. Could fleecy clouds have been converted into gossamer robes, dyed with the crimson and purple of mountain sunsets, to adorn herself, or help to win high

positions for her children, then might they be indeed admired;—but of what earthly use was sentiment or nature, unless to serve purposes?

Fashion was her god, and life was made up of devotional service to it. Therefore the letters, filled with graphic descriptions of elegant costumes, brilliant parties, magnificent turnouts, noted belles, and desirable beaux, were more than satisfying, giving food for day-dreams until the next epistle came.

She progressed but slowly; the low fever still hung about her; and when she was not building air-castles, she was indulging in fretful murmurings at her lot.

"Sophie, wheel me into the other room. I never shall get well, if I don't exert myself more."

"You've exerted yourself too much already; these senseless letters do you no good. If you'd stop fretting and lie quiet, the rest would do more than medicine for you."

"Lie quiet! For heaven's sake, what am I doing? If I had the strength of a mouse, I would n't stay here another day; you fret me so, Sophie, I never shall be well."

"There, there, Maria, don't be babyish! Here's your cordial, and here's the magazine." She wheeled the chair into the front room.

"That'll do, Sophie. I want Eveline; send her to me; she understands me better than any of you." She spoke querulously.

"She's in the parlor with Harry Stoughton, and I

hope he'll be man enough to make her decide one way or the other. This dilly-dallying is enough to spoil any girl. She's played with him long enough."

"I'm sure it's a good match for her; but one can't blame Eva for being ambitious. I'd rather she'd give him up than leave us now."

"I only censure her deceit, and hope he'll discover it before it's too late."

"Always harping on that key, Sophie. I'm pretty keen to read character, and I've discovered no alarming deception yet."

Meantime, within the curtained twilight of the parlors, Harry Stoughton was pleading his cause.

Why shrink from communicating the knowledge to friends, that she had chosen the protector of her life, the heart to rest in, and the arm to lean upon?

"But it is not important, Harry. If we are happy,—and we are,"—she said, with murmuring sweetness,—“why make it a matter of gossip? I don't like people to talk,” beseechingly.

"Not that, dear, though for my part it matters little; but our friends—my mother—you are willing now to have her know and love you. And, Eva, this has been the first secret of my life from her; I must keep it no longer, even to please the sweet modesty of your nature."

Thus the matter arranged itself; a few choice friends were to sympathize in their joy; and Eveline was to wait another year before her destiny was unalterably fixed.

Harry left her at last, feeling the captivating power of her cultivated intellect, but as blind to the way she was leading him as any child. His honest nature was incapable of suspicion; and the consciousness of his power to bless her loneliness with an entire love, a self-sacrificing devotion that would envelop her with the sunshine of life as long as life should last, increased proportionately his own satisfaction.

The next train took him back to Elmtown; and, as he was borne from the city, speeding along the river's bank, watching unconsciously its dark flow, catching rapid glimpses of sharp-cut rock or leafy bush, his thoughts seemed to undergo a change; there was nothing tangible or satisfactory in his grasp; he was not as sure of the future as he had been in her presence who was to make that future endurable or otherwise. Hopes so vivid and soul-absorbing a half hour since, now seemed vanishing with the constantly receding landscape. His dreams might never be realities; his aspirations never find their fruition. He wondered at his mood, and could scarce wait the slow approach of twilight, to leave his doubts and find peace at his mother's knee.

The story told, an early and urgent invitation was sent to Eveline to visit at the parsonage.

This it was not by any means her intention to do, at present; but a pretty little note came back through Harry, filled with grateful thanks, vague desires, and dim responses to the mother's readily outpouring sym-

pathy, brilliant excuses, and many hopes that the pleasure of meeting Harry's mother might soon be hers. In Harry's eyes the note was a gem; he did not understand the look upon his mother's face, as she read it for the second time, and laid it by without a word.

But to go back, Eveline was no sooner in the presence of Mrs. Tourney, than the lady rallied her upon her happy prospects; and, by taking the engagement for granted, won from her at last a confession that it was simply conditional, and not yet to be made public.

"Very properly so, my dear. You have a wonderful tact, Eva; you have really improved under my tuition, short as it has been. Stoughton is a fine fellow; has been of great advantage to poor Clare. It would be an excellent match in many respects, but I suppose he is poor?"

"Yes, I believe so," said Eva, hovering about the chair, arranging the folds of her elegant wrapper, and smoothing a stray curl, — for Mrs. Tourney could not lay aside frizettes even to be sick.

"And no inheritance, of course?"

"I believe not," was the low reply.

"Well, you are disinterested. I'm glad it is not quite a fixed thing, for your sake; not but that he's all right, and it's a good family, and all that; but I always like to have an opening, in case one can do better. Was that your thought, dear?"

"I could not decide any such matter, dear Mrs. Tourney, without your advice," was the submissive reply.

"Well done, Eva! very proper; I've no desire to control affairs, though, to tell the truth, I can't spare you yet. Just wait until I get Edy off; and when your turn comes, child, your trousseau shall equal your station, be sure of that."

"Thank you," was the quiet answer; although the flush deepened at the implication that her station might not equal that of the more favored child of fortune.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SURPRISE.

"Heart affluence in household talk,
From social fountains never dry."

"WHAT's the plan for to-day, Ruby?" asked her father, throwing aside the morning paper, and turning to his breakfast.

"I had n't quite decided, father. Perhaps we'll call up the ponies."

"That will do, — only remember it's going to be a hot day. Start early, or, better still, wait until sundown."

But Eva, who had come with Mrs. Tourney for a short visit, cared not to wait. There was nothing to be done out-of-doors so early; the dew was too heavy for croquet; Mrs. Tourney needed too much attention to make happiness complete in-doors, and the drive was decided upon as a relief. Just as the sun broke through the morning clouds with its scorching heat, the ponies, black, shaggy, and gay, Ruby's property, were brought up to the front entrance, harnessed into a low, broad basket affair, with room enough for two upon the seat,

and in front an additional cane chair, that might be removed at pleasure, for the driver. Very bright and happy they looked, to those who watched them as they took their seats. Ruby gathered up the lines, and, with a word, urged the ponies into a gentle trot.

"Now, girls, I'm going to take you round by the mill; will you like it?"

As neither of them had ever seen the mill, they could not venture an opinion. Ruby, chirruping to the ponies, resumed, —

"It's a lovely drive, after one gets well by the village. Did you never see a mill-pond, Maggie?"

"Never. You know my home has been the city."

"Ah, well, you'll have something new, then. A grist-mill don't sound romantic, to be sure; but when I turn that corner, and reach a curve in the road beyond, you may expect to feast your eyes upon a broad, clear lake, a mimic cataract,—not quite Niagara, but approaching it, if you have vivid imaginations,—and an old black mill, so covered with moss that it makes one cool to look at it. And all about the lake—it's a pond, I suppose, but I like the other word best—the high, dark trees reflect themselves in the water, looking twice the height they really are; and the clouds come down soft and fleecy, and rest on its bosom; and the birds fly over it, stopping to glance at themselves and dress their feathers—vain little things! Oh, it's lovely! and—here we are! I wait for the exclamations. 'The mountains and hills shall break forth be-

fore you into singing, and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands.'"

Ruby, by a firm, gentle movement, drew the ponies up beneath an immense branching elm, and waited; her own rapture at the familiar beauty of this sylvan scene finding expression in pointing out, one after another, the objects of interest to her appreciative companions, her sweet face glowing with an inborn sympathy with nature.

Their delight satisfied her; and they drove on, crossing the bridge, and coming upon a road with high-wooded acclivities upon one hand, and a swift, narrow stream upon the other, with grassy hedges either side the path. This continued some distance, the cooling shade being most refreshing. At last, emerging into a more open country, they found themselves in the midst of productive farms, and scenic beauty of another stamp,—broad, green meadows, near the river; while the uplands were teeming with waving grain, just beginning to show a ripening hue; and now and then the whiz and whirr of the mowing machine attested the enterprise of the farmer, and the early maturity of his grass.

The sun became obscured, the heat was not oppressive; and so pleasant and monotonous was the slow trotting of the ponies, so earnest and absorbing the continued chat carried on beneath the three broad, low hats, that each failed to discover the gathering clouds, until heavy drops of rain startled their composure.

"Why, Maggie! a thunder-shower!"

"Yes, Ruby."

"Seven miles from home, and no umbrella."

"That would benefit us little in a heavy shower."

"And not a house in sight. What shall we do?"

"We passed a farm-house over the brow of the hill behind us; can you turn, Ruby?"

"I must, or we shall all be drenched in five minutes," answered Ruby, guiding the ponies to the side of the somewhat narrow road.

"There! steady, steady! halt! now back, back once more; get up!" Then touching her whip to the horses, she put them to their utmost speed, which certainly could never be alarming; and, before the distant rumbling had gathered its heaviest force, they drew up to the farm-house, and in merriest mood alighted and entered, *sans cérémonie*.

A man in homespun met them at the door of an inner room, looking rather bewildered at the abrupt intrusion.

"Excuse us, sir," said Margaret. "The shower finds us some miles from home; will you be so kind —"

"Certainly, certainly; come right in, take chairs — do — I'll speak to the gals."

"If you would put the horses under cover for us, sir, — I'm sorry to trouble you."

"No trouble — not a bit — here John! John! jest you step round front, and put up the ladies' hosses. Why! bless my stars, it's Miss Ruby! How do you

do? 'Pon my word, I never 'spected to set eyes on you here"; and extending his huge arm, he gave the little hand, that timidly met his own, a strong, energetic, pump-handle shake.

It was Farmer Hopkins; and Ruby covered her embarrassment by introducing the others, and inquiring for his daughters.

"They're hearty; must a' got sight at you through the winder, and run to fix a little. Gals will be gals, you know; they sort o' run to ribbins and things. But here's my woman, I must let you see her; she's heard o' you before."

A short, plump, good-natured looking woman entered, shook hands with each, asking them to take off "their things, and have a lunch," which they politely declined, hoping their intrusion would not discommode her.

"Not a bit, — but I'll call the gals, they'll be more company for you," and going to the stairs she screamed, "Huldy! Huldy! you and Mary Jane come down; there's some young folks here." Then appearing once more, she said, —

"If you'll excuse me, you see the men'll soon be in to dinner, and it must be ready. I'd like to have you stay and eat too. It won't put me out one bit; I always have vittles enough."

"Thank you," answered Margaret, as Ruby looked pleadingly toward her. "The shower will soon be over. We are not at all hungry; you are very kind."

"Well, 't aint going to be much of a storm after all." She disappeared as Hulda and Mary Jane entered, with fresh prints stiffly starched, and ribbons hastily tied upon heads and bosoms.

The father introduced them with evident pride; and then drawing his rush-bottomed chair near the shrinking Ruby, entered into conversation with her in a confidential tone.

"You see, Miss Ruby, I'm nicely fixed after all; and far from bearing you a grudge either. I believe the Lord fixes these things in the best way for all parties concerned. *She's* a master hand at making butter; and the gals respect her more 'n they would a younger woman. You never saw my gals before?"

"No, I believe not," answered Ruby, vehemently praying for a cessation of rain.

"Good gals as ever a man had; strong made, and just fit for farm work; no cheeny-ware about them, I can tell you. I laugh a little sometimes with my woman, to think I ever supposed those little hands o' yours could take hold here, or do anything worth speaking of."

Ruby could bear no more. Eveline's gray eyes were enjoying her blushes, although at the same time endeavoring to draw the sisters into conversation.

Starting from her chair, she looked from the window, exclaiming: "The rain is nearly over, Maggie; perhaps we had better go."

"Don't hurry, don't! It'll stop altogether in less 'an

ten minutes. Putty smart shower after all; sit down, Miss Ruby, it'll hold up 'fore long."

The perplexed object of his former admiration sauntered to a table in a corner of the large, square room, and began to look at the few books, only intent upon being released from his unpleasant reminiscences.

His obtuse good-nature failed to perceive the strategy, and, following her, he asked, —

"Huldy, where's your mother's picter? Won't you git it? Miss Ruby remembers her, or rather the time she died. Yes, here it is. She had it took about a year afore she died. It's a fair likeness,—a little drawn round the mouth, kinder companyfied, I always told her; but then you can see what she was like. The gals lost their best friend, as Dominie's wife said at the time, but then this woman takes to 'em, and they to her, and she does the heft o' the work; they don't really miss her so very much after all. A pretty fair picter, — we think Huldy favors her rather the most, don't you, Miss Ruby?"

"I should think she did; but the rain is nearly over, sir. We will go now."

"Brightened up considerable, haint it? quite a streak o' blue sky yonder. Well, I'll bring round the team, or, if you've a mind to step through the kitchen, and jest take a look at the stock. I reckon the ladies from the city never see jest sech Durhams as mine. It's a pretty sight I can tell you; not an odd one in the whole concern."

"No, I think we must not wait; it's so damp, too. You will excuse us to-day, Mr. Hopkins," said Ruby, decidedly.

"Gravel walk all the way, Miss Ruby; only a step to the paster bars; and I've got some of the finest broods of Brahmas and Dorkings; I really should like to have you see," intent upon showing her how much she had lost in her refusal to share his home.

"O yes, Ruby, I should so like to see them. I delight in farm life!" exclaimed Eva, maliciously.

"Do you, now?" asked the complacent farmer. "Well, it's about the best farm on the river, and thoroughly stocked too. Git your bunnets, gals, and keep the ladies company."

The die was cast; Eveline seemed bent upon prolonging the misery, and looked wherever the eager farmer pointed, lengthening the colloquy by every device she was capable of, admiring the cattle, going into raptures over the fowls, and expatiating upon the luxury of new milk and fresh eggs; until the happy man sent Hulda in for a basket, and, visiting the various nests, filled it with eggs, begging Miss Ruby to accept them.

"How delicious they will be!" exclaimed Eva, with so much show of delight that the sisters feared she had seldom enjoyed the luxury of fresh eggs.

"We will send the basket back filled with flowers, Hulda. Are you fond of them?" smiling upon the bashful girl.

"Don't be at any trouble; any time when you

happen to be ridin' this way, jest give us a call. The gals are kinder lonesome, and will always be glad to see you; you can have eggs any time; we don't use half on 'em; got about through settin' hens too, haint you, gals? That double yolk is a Brahma, — monstrous egg, we often have 'em. The white ones are Spanish." Then, turning in another direction, —

"Jest look here. Did you ever see puttier critters?" and he leaned lovingly over the pigpen of generous dimensions.

Eveline, reaching up, glanced, in exclaiming, "Oh, Mr. Hopkins! I never could enjoy pigs. These are black, too! Why, they are not very pretty, are they?"

"Yes, beauties! Finest breed o' Suffolk pig! that's a fact! But I recon you're no judge."

"Well, I don't think I should 'look upon them with a critic's eye, or pass their imperfections by.' Could you, Ruby?"

Ruby had turned away, and, pretending not to hear, approached Margaret, who quietly waited Eveline's mood, and whispered, —

"Maggie, if you don't start, I *shall die*." And seeing a look of unfeigned discomfort upon Ruby's face, Margaret courteously expressed her thanks, and begged that the ponies might be forthcoming.

A moment, and the dainty little team was at hand. The sisters expressed delight at the delicate proportions of the ponies; the mother appeared in the doorway, with sleeves rolled up, her broad face flushed with exer-

tion, and screamed for them to "come that way agin; not wait for the rain next time."

They bowed, smiled, thanked the farmer and his daughters; and Ruby, touching the horses with her whip rather sharply, started them off at their quickest pace; his shouts for them to call again, and ask Mr. and Mrs. Duke to come too, sounding in their ears, after they had left the house behind them.

Eveline was immediately seized with suppressed laughter. "Hush, Eva, wait until we are over the hill," was Margaret's advice.

"I can't, — oh, I can't," she whispered. The little fellows exerted every muscle, and the farm-house was soon hidden.

"I'm afraid them little hands o' yourn can't hold the hosses, Ruby," said Eva, and the laughter was merry and long.

Nor was Ruby released from the pleasant raillery after reaching home. The whole affair was rehearsed at dinner, every peculiar point made the most of, every uncouth expression reiterated, until even Eveline was satisfied, — Ruby simply remarking that she was willing to contribute her share to the general amusement; but when invited to ride in that direction, with Harry and Eva a few days after, to return the basket, she declined, — she would send it by the man.

"No, indeed. We will drive that way, won't we, Harry? I would n't miss giving the farmer another call for anything. Why, I learned a great deal about farming life,

and different kinds of stock. I may be a farmer's wife yet, who knows; but then, my aspirations are not so lofty as Ruby's." The low, mellow laugh that concluded her words was a new delight to Harry, who watched her as she arranged damp cotton in the basket to hold the flowers she had promised Hulda.

At night Eveline had another story to tell, but Ruby had escaped.

The visit at Elmton was drawing to a close; the two households had met almost daily; and the acquaintance had ripened into intimacy.

Harry's mother was disposed to admire her son's affianced; and yet, in contrasting her with her favorite Ruby, she was obliged to confess herself a little disappointed.

A week later Mr. Tourney drove down from the city to take them home, and improved this opportunity of seeing Mr. Stoughton, for whose judgment he had profound respect, in regard to Clarence's settlement. He would soon take his degree, and he had confessed that a city life was distasteful to him; he would seek a village practice, if an opening could be found.

Mr. Stoughton advised that in the end, and hoped he might work into a fair practice near them. There was but one established physician in the vicinity, and he was old and indolent. But if he could first have the advantages of travel and hospital practice in some of the old cities, it would be best, — such an experience would be invaluable.

"I have proposed it, but he absolutely refuses to leave home; and I believe the boy has not yet outlived his dread of strangers."

"I'm sorry. I wish he might go. Two years abroad would do more for him than a lifetime in this place."

"I know it; I painted a great future for him, if he would make the most of the present; but he is decided; — he suffers torments, I believe, when thrown among gay young strangers."

"Yes, I know he is of an exquisitely sensitive organization, but I would not have him lose this opportunity for considerable."

Mr. Stoughton did not reveal his secret thought, that Clarence had been made to suffer thus, by knowing that those who should have cherished him most tenderly, had looked upon him with chagrin from earliest childhood; and that this sensitiveness to a chilling glance or cruel word was the result of education.

"Well," said the father, "after a few years' practice this feeling may wear off. Should he ever desire to go away, he shall do so, if I am living."

Harry magnified the loneliness of the parsonage after Eveline had taken her music and laughter away; and the time not devoted to business was spent in the society of the cousins.

CHAPTER XXI.

RUBY'S WORK OF LOVE.

"For the structure that we raise,
Time is with materials filled;
Our to-days and yesterdays
Are the blocks with which we build."

ABOUT this time an incident occurred, exerting a marked influence upon Ruby's life.

It happened on this wise: She had walked one morning with Margaret to the river, and not content to sit quietly drinking in the beauties of the scene, as her cousin habitually did, she prevailed upon her to extend their walk along the banks a half mile, until they suddenly came upon a party of children who were so absorbed in harnessing a small dog and bony cat into a clumsy affair they called a wagon, as to be unconscious of the presence of spectators until Ruby spoke.

"What are you doing to those poor creatures, children?"

"Oh, we're going to load up and take home this drift-wood," answered the eldest.

"You don't expect that kitten to draw wood, do you?"

"I bet I do; she's used to it; it's fun."

"But don't you see how weak and frightened she looks? I think it's cruel."

"Ho! I don't. She looks so a-purpose, 'cause she's lazy. If she don't go, I'll beat her."

"What's your name, sir?" asked Ruby, rather bewildered by the child's audacity.

"Tony, Miss,— Tony Collins."

"And how far have you to go in this manner?"

"How?" asked the boy, stopping to look at his interrogator.

"Where do you live?"

"O, up here a piece; we works the quarry."

"Then your parents live by the quarry. Did they tell you to bring the wood in this way?"

"They don't know nothing about it; would n't care if they did; and I haint got no parents neither."

"Total depravity," whispered Ruby to Margaret; then, hoping to benefit the kitten, she said, —

"If you need the wood, I should think it would be easier to make it into bundles, and each of you carry one, would n't it?"

"No fun in that; don't you see Tige and Spit, they make a bully team. I'm boss, and these youngsters pile up the cart, and we get the work done double-quick. I works for old Aunt Sally; she's a cross one, though."

"Well, Tony, if you're a smart boy, you like to earn something, don't you? Would you sell me that kitten?"

"H'm! you're foolin' now! She aint worth nothin', only to work," answered Tony, doubtfully.

"I will give you a quarter for her; the money would do you more good than that little starved thing, would n't it?"

"Golly, yes! You may have her, marm, and thank you, too."

While the conversation went on, Tony rapidly unharnessed the trembling kitten, and Ruby, gathering up a corner of her mantle, afforded a refuge, which the little thing seemed glad to accept.

"Work away now, fill up the cart; Tige's as good as two any day;" and Tony flourished an imaginary whip over the heads of his company.

As the ladies turned away, the boy sung out, —

"If you want any more cats, marm, I know where there's crowds of 'em. First-rate ratters, too; git as many as you like."

Ruby laughed, shook her head, bade him be gentle with the dog; and they walked towards home, musing upon the innate love of cruelty which some natures exhibit.

This incident lingered in Ruby's mind, and finally excited her sympathies to such a degree as to lead her to ask Mrs. Stoughton if something could not be done to prevent the children near the quarry growing up in such a state of degradation. The quarry was worked by both Irish and Americans, whose families lived in rough tenements scattered about the higher grounds, with an

unfenced garden spot belonging to each. It was nearly two miles from the village, apart from church or schools. The larger boys were employed about the lighter work; still, the place was teeming with children too young to be of use, fast acquiring habits of dishonesty and sin, with no counteracting influence in doors or out.

Mrs. Stoughton had often thought of it. Her husband had done all he could in the way of advice, sympathy, and encouragement.

"What they need is a systematic course of moral training by some one who has time and heart for the work."

Ruby glanced quickly into her friend's face, asking, —
"You mean me?"

You once told me that you desired an object to which your life might be devoted. I think you have time, patience, strength, and courage waiting their full development. You are not wanting in tact to manage children, and you would love the work."

"I know I should," said Ruby, with enthusiasm. "But how to begin. Why, dear Mrs. Stoughton, it seems so much to undertake. They ought to be learning; if there is indeed no one else, I might do a little, I might teach them something. I wish I could be of some use, — but it seems so great. I should n't do right; I don't know how to begin."

"There is but one way. Go to the place, find a room, and see how many will come to you. I will go with you."

"Will you?" Ruby's tones grew joyful. "You make everything so plain and easy. We will take the ponies; when shall I call for you?"

"To-morrow afternoon, Ruby, if you decide to undertake it. But first think seriously."

For a moment Ruby seemed lost in thought.

"It would take a good part of my Sundays, and would it not interfere with church hours, Mrs. Stoughton?"

"You would give up the afternoon service, of course."

"How could I? Mother won't approve of that. Is there not some other way?"

"No, Ruby. There are those not capable of acting. Let them be receivers only. There is a great deal of this Christian laziness or surfeit; you are not to indulge yourself, if you enter the Master's service. It is better to work for others on this day in part, than to be only a recipient; and when you know that a score of little ones are desecrating the day, I think you will gladly give up your afternoon service."

"It would be selfish not to, viewed in this way. I have always thought the climax of Sunday duties was to be a faithful church-goer."

"Not if you are called to action."

"I see now; but it will be hard to forego it. The sermons have been a treat to me intellectually, as well as a help."

"Then it is quite time you should use self-denial." The lady smiled fondly upon the ingenuous girl.

"I believe I am ready to,— I will try. If there should be a school, I hope Tony will come to it."

"Tony?" inquired Mrs. Stoughton.

"The boy I told you of, — Tony Collins. In spite of his cruelty and boldness, there was an air about him that interested me, a sort of energy and independence. I believe he might make a smart man, if directed right."

"We will hope and pray for great results after the work is fairly underway."

Ruby went home, sought her mother, and confided the plan to her. She had expected a hearty approval, knowing the charity of her life so well, and not understanding the tenderness with which she would envelop her child, warding off from hearing and sight all rough sounds and degrading scenes.

She had educated her with her own large views of life and duty, never dreaming that this same principle might lead Ruby to take up still more advanced ideas.

A humble Christian herself, she had not thought that Ruby might be called to work in quite another part of the same vineyard; that the Master might put into her young hands tasks he had not given to the mother; or that her own words of truth had cultivated a taste in Ruby's heart for that from which the delicacy and timidity of the mother naturally shrank. And now the first practical lesson of all this teaching was to be more difficult for the teacher than the pupil. After the first surprise, she said,—

"But it is not safe; they are so degraded; and, child, you will be disgusted with the heathenism and vulgarity."

"I dare say, dear mother; but let me try to teach them better. You have so often told me that we should not live for ourselves; that we have a work in life,— your own words, mother. Now you will not hold me back?"

"But there are other fields of usefulness, and you are fitted for a nobler work, my child."

"What can be nobler, mother, than to teach those little ignorant souls of the Saviour?"

"Perhaps; but after all I'm sorry Mrs. Stoughton has filled your enthusiastic little head with this outlandish notion. I don't know what your father will say."

"He will say I'm my mother's own pupil. Now let me go tell Maggie." Ruby danced off triumphant.

She found a hearty response from Margaret, who was more acquainted with the ways and wants of the poor than herself.

Thus, with the consent of her mother not withheld, with the hearty "godspeed" of Margaret, and her own approving conscience, Ruby the next day reined the ponies up before the parsonage gate, and, springing from the carriage, ran up the walk to meet Mrs. Stoughton just coming along the veranda.

Arriving at the quarry, their first inquiry was for Tony Collins. They were directed to Aunt Sally's hut. Tying the ponies to a stake, they entered a miserable affair on the outskirts of the settlement. A hard-faced

woman swung a dingy chair into the middle of the floor for one of the ladies, and a rickety stool for the other; then stood awaiting the result.

"Does Tony Collins live here?" asked Ruby.

"Yes, he does, Miss. Did ye want him?"

"No, I want to consult you about him. He is not your son?"

"Niver a bit, the vagabond! But little help I gits from him, with his tricks and foolery."

"I'm sorry he is not more help to you. I want to teach him to be of use to you; that is why I have called."

"Dade! I would n't shelter him a day, if it were n't for his dead mother, and we should both starve, did n't I have strength to care for my boarders."

"You have boarders?" queried Ruby, wondering where they were accommodated.

"Two, Miss; quarrymen, and sure pay they are."

Ruby expressed gratification, and unfolded her plan for Sunday afternoon; asking if she would encourage the boy to come, instead of playing about all day.

"Would ye tache him to read; and all for nothing, too?" doubtfully.

"Yes, that is what I would like to do, if he will come."

"Faith! I'll collar him, and drag him to ye every week, if ye'll learn him to read. There he is now. Tony! Tony! you lazy dog. Come in here, sir. The ladies want ye."

In a moment he stood in the doorway, with a sheep-

ish look upon his face, quite in contrast with the independent spirit he had first exhibited.

"Pull off yer hat, sir. Where's yer manners?"

"Tony, I'm going to have a school every Sunday afternoon, here at the quarry. Would you like to be one of my scholars, and learn to read and sing?" Ruby smiled radiantly upon the boy.

"Spake, sir! Tell the lady you'd be thankful for the blissed priveledge."

"Will you come, Tony?" asked Ruby again, taking hold of the grimed hand.

"Yes'm."

"And bring some of your playmates?"

"Of course he will, and thank yon too; but you need n't be going?"

Taking leave, they visited other families, and found sufficient encouragement to begin.

Ruby felt quite jubilant, on the homeward ride, over her success, and longed for the Sabbath, when her self-appointed task might be undertaken.

The days were busy ones; the younger sisters caught the mania, and begged to go with Ruby, who laughingly referred them to their mother, where a most decided negative met them.

"May we help sister Ruby, mother, if she makes them clothes?"

"Certainly; you may spend all the time you choose after lessons. But remember, Vickie, every piece of work must be finished."

"Of course, mother. It's different from making dolls' clothes. They might suffer if they had to wait, and I don't think I'd be cruel, do you?"

"No, my darling; only a little indolent."

The Sabbath came, cloudless and beautiful. The family were starting for the afternoon service, just as Ruby came out to meet the ponies, and go in the opposite direction.

Her mother lingered a moment, and dropping a kiss upon the sweet, glowing face, whispered, —

"I would rather have you with me, dear; but if this is duty, I must deny myself. Take Peter with you to sit by the horses, and watch over you a little."

"Don't look so anxious, my darling mother. I'm not going among cannibals; you'll see me back in a few hours, your same happy Ruby."

The opening scene was never to be forgotten. As Ruby entered the room, about twenty children of various ages scrambled for seats upon the three long benches, with which she had furnished the room, and answered her salutations in as many different ways.

Ruby soon found that it was to be a work of time to teach them the first principles of cleanliness and order; but once fairly started, she was not to be easily discouraged. Before the season was over, the young teacher found that some of her ideas were so strongly fixed upon their minds as to govern, in a degree, their habits.

And as the summer drew to a close, the younger members of the family were employed in planning and

making parting gifts for each scholar. The work went on as a pastime, and warm hoods, scarfs, mittens, frocks, intermingled with unused toys and carefully preserved books, were piled upon the play-room table, to be distributed by Ruby at the last meeting.

While this was going on, in the very midst of the happy tumult, who should walk quietly in one day but Clarence.

The children were tempestuous in their greetings, and when it was found that he had received his diploma, and was to be settled at Elinton, the rejoicings were boundless.

"Have you just come, Clarence? I thought there was no train at this hour," asked his aunt, when the confusion subsided.

"I came last evening from the city, and this morning from the parsonage."

"Why, cousin Clare, is that the way you treat relatives? He should have come here first, mother, should n't he?"

"You forget, Flossy, the parsonage is my home," smiling at the young girl's eagerness.

"So it is; but now you're a doctor, you can stay where you like. We won't let him go back anyway; will we, Ruby?"

He had not seen his mother or sisters. Mrs. Tourney and Eveline had joined the others on their trip, and were not expected home for several weeks. Therefore, without congratulations or encouragement from his nearest friends, Clarence began the work of life.

CHAPTER XXII.

DISASTER AT THE QUARRY.

"—and that smile like sunshine, dart
 Into many a sunless heart,
 For a smile of God thou art."

THE last parcel had been tied up, and arranged in a capacious basket ready for transportation. The lunch bell had bidden them to the dining-room, where the two elder ladies were already waiting. Margaret went on first, and Clarence, giving the younger ones each a hand, followed, while Ruby lingered to close window and door. As she passed over the stairs and through the halls, a confusion of voices met her ear; and exclamations of terror and sympathy, mingled with her own name and those of her class, arrested her springing step, and hushed the humming upon her lip.

Entering the room she saw a young girl, one of her class, who had given her more trouble than all the others, her eyes wide with excitement, her whole form rigid with nervous intensity, and blanched by the tale she told. The family were grouped about her, asking questions; Vickie had thrown herself upon the lounge,

sobbing audibly. Clarence, seeing Ruby enter, began the story in a way to quiet her fears, had not the child burst from the group about her, and, grasping the young teacher's dress with both hands, cried, —

"Oh, Miss Ruby! he's 'most dead; an' he wants you, he calls for you every minute."

"Who, Nellie? What is it?"

"It's Tony, Miss; Tony Collins, — and he's killed. His eyes are both gone clean out, an' a great piece of iron blow'd into his side, an' he can't talk any, only calling for you every minute. Oh, do come!"

"Yes, I will, dear. But what does it all mean? Maggie, do quiet the child;" and, turning to Clarence, she said, "Come, tell me."

"She says the boiler in the engine-house has burst, the tenements near are shattered, lives are lost, and many wounded. I am going, but it is no place for you."

"Yes, it is — I shall go," her face white and tearful.

"You must not. Harry will help me; Mr. Stoughton, too. Besides, I'll send for you if you can be of use."

"If you can go, I can;" and freeing her hand from his grasp, she flashed through the door and on to her room, to prepare herself.

"Clarence, take your lunch, then go quickly. Catherine is putting up linen, and whatever may be needed. She will go with you." His aunt drew him to the table and pressed him to eat. He did not sit, but ate a few

mouthfuls, and took a cup of coffee, ready to start the moment the carriage should appear.

Margaret soothed the frightened child so much that she sat quietly at the other end of the table, eating, with a relish, of luxuries hitherto unknown. Vickie had drawn near, and was piling her plate, watching the strange child's nervous enjoyment of the viands.

As the carriage came in sight, Ruby appeared, equipped for the ride.

"Ruby, my child," exclaimed the mother, with unusual emphasis, "your aunt is going; you can be of no use. *I cannot have you go.*"

"I must, mother. Come, Nellie," shaking her head, decidedly.

"She has not taken a mouthful," said the mother.

Clarence hastily wrapped a sandwich in a napkin, and followed her to the carriage, where Aunt Catherine was already stowing away numerous baskets and bottles.

"Don't let her stay long, Clarence." He nodded a reply to his aunt's anxiety, and in a moment they drove off at a rapid rate. Well for Ruby that Clarence's forethought had given her a mouthful of food, for the coming hours would require all the strength and nerve she could command.

The tale had not been exaggerated. It was a fearful scene; groans issued from almost every house. The explosion had taken place when the hands were all at work, and groups of children playing about the place had been more or less injured by the flying bits of tim-

ber, bricks, or iron; some instantly killed, and many terribly wounded. Neighboring physicians were already on the spot; and although the place had a chaotic appearance, they were fast subduing the confusion, and rendering the assistance needed.

Aunt Catherine, with her remedies and pain-soothers, was warmly welcomed, and soon found hands and heart full of work. Clarence put himself under the direction of the old resident physician, who could accomplish wonders on great occasions, and was now exerting his utmost skill to relieve and restore, glad of the young man's aid.

While on the drive, Ruby had extracted more particulars from the wayward Nellie, who, though shrinking from past reproof and counsel with wilful pertinacity, now clung to her hand with a loving, childlike trust, and answered her questioning with eager excitement or tearless sobbing.

Leaving the carriage, Nellie tightened her grasp, and guided Ruby over rough stone and scattered timber to the spot where Tony lay, conscious of every agonizing breath he drew. He had been laid upon a rude bed in one of the nearest huts, and the woman he called Aunt Sally was bending over him, trying to quiet his moans by kind words, and cool applications upon his head.

"Is she coming? Oh, why don't she come!" The piteous words reached Ruby's ear.

"I am here, Tony, my poor boy. Has nothing been done for him?" looking at the woman, and holding tightly his fevered hand.

"Not yet, miss; I sent for 'em, but they be working for the men that's worse harmed; but now he's got you, likely he'll be more patient."

A look of satisfaction had indeed settled upon the white face, although the rigid mouth and compressed brow testified his bitter pain.

"This must not be, Tony dear; let go my hand a moment,—let me get help for you. I will come back instantly. Poor Tony, think how fondly Jesus loves you; it will help to bear it," she whispered; and, stooping, dropped a kiss upon his brow, the first he had felt since his mother died. How it thrilled through every quivering nerve! Boy as he was, he could have borne anything then.

With flying step, Ruby reached the place where help was to be found. All were busy, not one ready to attend her. She sprung to her aunt's side.

"Auntie, give me a vial of ether, quick! Tony is suffering torture, and no one to help him."

It took but a moment to extract a bottle from one of the baskets; and, leaving word for a physician to follow as soon as he could be spared from this more frightful scene, she was soon by his side again, ministering this powerful alleviator, herself relieved to find him becoming oblivious to the agony he had borne so long.

Occasionally Nellie peered round the door-post to see how matters were progressing, always starting back with a new fear as her eyes rested on the still, white

face. At length venturing to creep over the threshold, she drew near to Ruby, whispering,—

"Is he dead?"

"No, Nellie; he will not die, I hope."

Just then a stranger entered. One rapid glance at Ruby; then, bending over the boy, he asked,—

"Is he hurt anywhere but in the eye?"

"His side, they tell me, though it was the eye that gave him most pain. I ministered ether—was it right? He suffered so."

"Perfectly right," and with rapid skill he proceeded to examine the side. The jacket had been partly torn away; and, lifting the covering, he found a long, ugly splinter had penetrated the flesh, making a ghastly wound filled with clotted blood above the missile, which was still imbedded in the side.

"Whew!" exclaimed the doctor. "Get me a basin of warm water." Nellie flew like a bird, glad to be of use.

"A soft cloth." Ruby instantly drew a thin handkerchief from her pocket, and gave him.

"Can you hold the basin?" he asked again, flashing a glance upon her. But, seeing her quivering lip, he said,—

"Better let the woman; she won't cringe."

"Nor will I. I came to help." Despite the words, Ruby held the bowl with both hands, as though she feared her strength might suddenly give way.

She saw him take the splinter; then closed her eyes

tightly. There was a strange, death-like feeling creeping about her heart; but she would not allow it to conquer. Still keeping her eyes shut, she heard him squeeze the water from the cloth; understood every movement as he wiped the wound carefully, and again rinsed the cloth from the bowl she was trying to grasp so tightly.

At last he looked up, saw the closed eyes and death-like pallor of the face; taking the dish from her nerveless hand, he said, —

"This is more than you are accustomed to, Miss. Step to the door, or I shall have to devote some time to you."

Smiling, as she started, —

"No, no; there is no need. I did not like to watch you, that is all."

"I see, a brave spirit enough; but we can't control all things, on all occasions. This woman will help me now, I'm nearly through." He motioned her away. Somewhat mortified, she obeyed, leaning against the door a moment, until the fresh air revived her.

Nellie constantly flitted about her; often gazing into her face with a far-searching, longing look, as though the half were not told.

Her strangeness attracted Ruby, and she asked, —

"What is it, Nellie? Were you going to speak?"

"If I dared, Miss Ruby."

"Surely, child, you don't fear me; you have no need."

Tender words and winning smiles are all-powerful. Nellie hid her face in her sunburnt hands, sobbing: —

"I've been so bad and ugly, Miss Ruby; but I loved ye all the same as Tony did, only it was the shame would n't let me tell it ye."

"Is that all, Nellie? Why I knew you loved me, dear; that's nothing to grieve about."

"How did you know it, when I never told ye?" sobbed the excited child.

"I saw it in your eyes, sometimes, Nellie; I knew it would come all right in the end. But, child, there is another you should love, more than any, for He has kept you from pain and death to-day. Don't you feel how good He has been to you?"

"And Tony never was half so hateful. I deserved it more'n him. It oughter been me."

"Then love and serve Him for his goodness, Nellie. Never forget it."

Ruby remained only as long as she could be of use. As soon as possible, Clarence urged her away, leaving Aunt Catherine on the field, — strong, self-reliant, equal to all emergencies; tranquil amid excitement, pitying all pain, and tender to all weakness.

This was one of the events which revealed the wealth of Aunt Catherine's character. In suffering, she was welcome alike in mansion or hut; ministering with equal success to the griefs of the rich or the wants of the poor. Her life was a perpetual psalm of praise; with her whole soul she loved God; with overflowing charity she loved

man; a love that enlarged her faith in humanity, and lifted her above the mean scrutiny of single acts, above biting criticism upon individual lives; a love eager to render apology or excuse; fertile in magnifying pure motives; and hopeful, ever, of a more satisfying future.

Thus Ruby, surrounded from infancy by her mother's pure love, acted upon by her aunt's Christian energy and never-wearying zeal, had received into her soul an exalted idea of life, apart from any selfish gratification.

It was this maturity of heart that had won Merle Domett's love. It was this sweet, womanly dignity, combined with innocent, girlish freedom, that caused her to be an object of devotion to the poor sufferers at the quarry. This same filled the soul of Clarence with a passion absorbing, tender, and holy, though looking for no return, anticipating no blissful result, beyond the continual joy of pouring out his heart's noblest wealth upon its object. He had no desire, for there was no hope. The present was his only certainty, and on that he floated, as one glides fearlessly and joyously in dreams, with a half anticipation of the future awakening. The awakening comes; with open eyes we find the rosy clouds which have borne us swiftly through dizzy space are but commonplace realities of life. The shock is cruel oftentimes.

That Merle loved his cousin was a fact beyond dispute; that it was returned, he had no doubt.

Being ignorant of his mother's plans and desires, not knowing that Merle was even now one of her travelling

party, he had not this slight hope to unclasp the bitterness of his grief.

But we have digressed. Days passed, many hours of each being spent by Ruby, Margaret, or Aunt Catherine at the quarry hospital.

Nellie, scrawny and ragged still, uncouth and heedless, was yet an invaluable assistant, dashing headlong upon every errand proposed to her; never failing, quick to understand, and willing to attempt miracles if such could have been required. The only change in her, and that visible only to Ruby, was a mellow, tender, loving light in her sharp, black eyes, that had erst flashed with rage, or glowered with sullenness.

As the time drew near for Ruby to leave them, Tony manifested his grief by sobs that retarded his recovery, while the girl would sit on the floor at her feet begging for song after song, until Ruby had said, "No more, Nellie"; then, with a long look of unutterable love, would dart away. She had just gone like a spirit, and Ruby was making ready to ride home with Clarence, when she saw the tears pressing from under Tony's bandage.

"Tony, you grieve me; I want you to be patient; you can't be well quickly, if you mourn so."

"You are not coming again, Miss Ruby, and I'll only have to die when once you are gone."

"Yes, Tony, I'm coming to-morrow to bring you a feast that will last a week. We are not to say good-bye now; did you think we were?"

"It's 'most as bad; I shall think of it all night; I never had anybody like you before, Miss Ruby."

"Dear Tony, do you want to please me?"

"I'd die to do it, you know I would, Miss Ruby," with quivering lip and trembling voice.

"But I don't want you to die, child; I only want you to be patient, so you'll the quicker be well. Now, Tony, I'm coming back in one week from to-day; while I am gone, my cousin will take good care of you. It is hard to lie here, I know, with the light all shut out, but it is the only way."

"Miss Ruby, I'll remember."

"That's right; now good night. Sleep all you can." Her lips rested lightly upon his own a moment, leaving a momentary flush upon the pale cheek, and a sad smile about the mouth, that lingered long after she was gone.

The summer songs were hushed; the birds, marshalling for their flight southward, hopped from branch to branch of the disrobing trees; the luxurious temperature and fragrant odors had vanished. Only the evergreens remained in full foliage; even they looked dull and gloomy, casting heavier shadows upon the autumnal grass, frost-bitten and sere, brightened only by eddies of crimson and gold from the maples. The river, in plainer view between the bare, stiff limbs, looked cold in its ceaseless flow, reflecting the pale blue of the November sky, and the dull brown of its fading banks. The horses' tramp upon the frozen ground had a cheer-

less, forbidding sound, contrasting strangely with the mellow echo from summer roads and grassy paths.

Ruby shrank from returning to the false ceremony and unwelcome etiquette of city life, to its ceaseless gayeties and hollow courtesy.

The summer freedom, its rural joys, and, above all, the new duties it had placed upon her, were all congenial, all harmonized with her whole nature. This other life was so different, so repugnant,—but in talking it over with Clarence, those last precious days, and revealing to him something of the shrinking she now felt to take it up again, he had answered,—

"What is inevitable must also be duty; and duty, though repugnant in the action, must in the result bring satisfaction." Then, looking into the depths of her clear, fathomless eyes, he asked, with a smile,—

"May it not be, cousin, that the spring will find you as reluctant to return as now you are to go?"

"No, no, Clarence; you mistake me, if you think this a passing whim. With the first breath of summer I shall escape, as jubilant as the imprisoned birds; I learn patience in the winter, but I throw it off when earth casts aside her fetters, and I long for this joyous, easy life, for grassy meadows and new-mown hay, for the elastic air of our hills and the solitary freedom of our forests."

Again he smiled, but now in sympathy with the enthusiastic girl. How beautiful to him was her pure, exalted joy, that intoxication of delight that he had

never experienced in his blighted youth, and must still forego in his shadowed manhood; that exuberance of spirit that belongs only to health joined with innocence; that tinges life with the hues of morning, and envelops existence with brightness and beauty.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TASK-MASTER.

"My dears, do better with your lives; keep your charms, and display them not at home. Encourage the beautiful; the useful encourages itself. Adorn and glitter. Tempt flatteries and live on them. Sleep till you cease to dream; dance till you die."

FAIRLY settled again for winter, Ruby could not give up her Elmtown interests; almost every week found her going back and forth in the cars alone or accompanied by Margaret.

Always welcome at the parsonage, the few hours they spent there were like beams of sunshine to Mrs. Stoughton and Clarence; while Tony and Nellie dated all events from this — to them — chief day of the seven.

The Tourneys had returned, radiant with reminiscences, eager to enlarge upon the delights of the summer, and teeming with expectations and plans for winter revelries.

Mrs. Tourney, pale and languid still, but gathering all her forces to prevent capitulation to the enemy, tinged her delicate complexion with the reflection of rose-colored ribbons, and strengthened herself for the

evening campaign by resting idly upon the couch all day, and rehearsing the joys of the past few weeks with Edith and Eva.

Mabel was suffering; Aunt Sophie saw it, knew it, but the cause was hidden. Life was a burden to her. Her voice was low and seldom heard, unless in company; her step lagging, and eyes drooping and heavy, until excitement lent a false lustre. Her only interest was her child, little May, as she was called to distinguish her from the mother, whose name she bore, — little May, who alone could bring a smile upon her mother's face, or call her back when she fell into those long, waking dreams.

Aunt Sophie's pitying eyes cast anxious, searching glances upon her. Many acts of kindness, many thoughtful attentions, were quietly pressed upon her; but no word of inquiry or sympathy must awaken a suspicion that the good woman was watching her.

Mabel had been her care from infancy; she had petted and scolded her longer than the other two; and her sunny temper through childhood had endeared her to her aunt. But these later moods were more difficult to manage; there were no childlike confidences between them. As sure of love and sympathy as ever, Mabel yet seemed to shun her care, and shut herself away from all expressions of interest and affection.

Aunt Sophie's suspicions were aroused; and when, one morning, as she was busy in the bath-room adjoining Mrs. Tourney's chamber, she heard Mabel's anxious

voice, half tearful with the secret weight that rested upon her spirits, begging her mother to tell her what she could do for relief; how she could be rid the weary burden that had sapped her life of all its joy; and as the low answer reached her ear with its indistinct murmur, its few words of fearful import, and weak, yea wicked, advice, she trembled, scarce knowing if she heard aright, or if her ears deceived her.

"I cannot live, mother, if I must stay quietly by myself; I *must* have excitement; my heart demands it. Mother, this life is a wretched farce. There's nothing true or good in it."

"Hush, Mabel. You are tired with the journey yet; this is morbid fancy and foolish. When you get to be as old as I, you will see how weak you were to think so much of trifles."

"Trifles! Is it a trifle to sleep with a sick, heavy heart; to wake more wretched and unhappy? Is it a trifle to waste your life in searching for joy, to grasp the bubble and feel it burst in your hand? Then is life itself a trifle not worth the having; and I could wish I had never lived."

"Well, do as I tell you, Mabel, — be careful for a while, and this depression and gloominess will pass away. Try to cheer up, it's only your condition; once rid of it, and you are yourself again. There, go lie down until dinner."

There was no answer. Aunt Sophie stood as one transfixed. She had not dreamed of this depth of suf-

fering in one who could throw herself so entirely into the whirlpool of pleasure. The early disappointment and its consequent unhappiness she had understood partly, and her fears for the future had been aroused; but that it might work sin and misery, the destruction of all goodness, truth, and purity, she had not thought possible.

There was a rustling sound in the chamber, wearily Mabel emerged from it, the rich, heavy robe trailing the carpet; startled she gazed into her aunt's tearful eyes, and essayed to pass along.

"Mabel, my child! my poor, stricken dove! more sinned against than sinning! turn back while yet there is time." Grasping the limp, nerveless hand, she drew the shrinking form to her bosom, and in urgent, fervent tones, continued, —

"Your mother is crazed, is foolish, wicked, to point you to any such degrading path. My child, your happiness now and hereafter rests in your own hands. Be strong and brave to accept your lot; act nobly and truthfully. Have courage to bear this burden. Be happy in the consciousness of doing right, for nothing else will bring happiness; be sure of this, Mabel. For your child's sake, do nothing unworthy your womanhood. A wife! a mother! and shrinking from these holiest responsibilities God has placed upon you! Mabel, I am ashamed of you!" And, even while the rebuke was upon her lips, she pressed a kiss upon the head resting on her shoulder.

"Oh, if I could die, Aunt Sophie!"

"You cannot! Are you fit to die, Mabel? Would you leave your little one to buffet alone with the world? If you have no courage for yourself, can you not have it for her?"

"I am so wretched," sobbed the young mother.

"Burdened you are, poor child; but there is a right way to be rid of the heaviest burdens. There is no need to be crushed by them. Others bear them, so can you; and sin will not help the matter. Shall little May, in the future, blush for the weakness of her mother? Train her to respect you, and, with your heart in the work, you will find a truer happiness than balls and parties and operas and nonsense can give. Mabel, be true to your womanhood; have respect to your maternal life; keep it sacred and pure. Think of it, Mabel, will you?"

"Yes, Aunt Sophie; let me go to bed now; I'll try, — only keep Pet from me awhile." Releasing herself from those motherly arms and that faithful heart, she went on to the solitude of her own room.

The dinner hour found her calmer than her mother was; for Aunt Sophie's indignation must have some outlet, and it had spent itself upon the weakness and sin of her who could so carelessly and heartlessly throw off maternal oversight and responsibility.

That evening the family were all at home. Clarence had come up to spend a night, and was talking with his father, while Merle Domett chatted across the room

with Edith,—Edith gay, brilliant, versatile, and ready to adapt herself to all his moods.

Eveline leaned carelessly against the piano, sometimes running her fingers lightly over the keys, or listening to the low murmurs about her, but silent herself. Clarence fancied her thoughts were in the distant parsonage.

Earlier in the evening Mabel had gone to sit by Pet, until she slept, and had not returned. Her husband waited long, watching the door, and listening to every footfall upon the stair, but she did not come.

Ned Clarke had grown old faster than the others; his carefully trimmed whiskers were sprinkled with silver, and his face looked careworn and sober.

He was glad of a quiet evening with her, and impatient for her return. He sauntered through the rooms, lounged in a dim corner, walked lazily towards Clarence, addressed a question to him without heeding the answer; then, as governed by a new impulse, sought his wife.

At the threshold of the nursery he paused. Little May slept upon the white pillows, her sweet face rosy and peaceful beneath the softened gaslight; her breathing regular and low, the yellow curls scattered about her head like a golden crown, and the chubby white hands resting upon the coverlet. A moment he contemplated the lovely picture; then his heart seemed to still its throbbings, as he saw his wife kneeling by the low bed, and heard her half-stifled sobs of wearing grief.

It was not the first time he had witnessed such a scene; he knew that words of comfort from him would be unavailing, but he had not power to tear himself from her presence.

That she suffered, he knew; but did he not suffer also? He would have died, could he have given her one moment of pure happiness then; but, alas! the few years of their married life had told him how unavailing were such hopes; had convinced him that his tenderest act would be to leave her alone with the grief she might not unveil to any. To-night he could not do that. He craved her companionship; he longed to make one more appeal for her confidence and love; and he ventured to draw near.

"Mabel, I waited for you. I wanted to talk with you to-night. I didn't think I should find you so. What can I do to make you happy?"

She started at the first word, looking wildly into his face a moment; then, crouching again by the bed, answered,—

"Nothing, Ned. You are kind to wish it."

He drew a chair near, and sat beside her exclaiming,—

"Oh, Mabel, my wife! let me comfort you; let me wait upon you. If I could drive this sorrow from you, I would; or if my going from you would make you happy, tell me so. I think I could even do that, now; this life is killing us both; do you know it, Mabel?"

"Yes, it is a false, cruel life; but *you* are not to blame, Ned. Let me say this to you, once for all: you

have been kind and patient always, and I have tried you sorely. You will forgive me some time, I know." She had turned from the bedside and dropped her tear-stained face upon his knee; she did not look at him, and the brightness of his face at hearing her words was lost upon her.

"Why, Mabel dear, I have nothing to forgive; I have never thought of myself; but I do want to make you happy. If we could take Pet, and go away together, — would you like to go abroad, Mabel? Would that help you?"

He felt her shudder; his eyes grew sad again; but he waited for the answer.

"No, let me stay here; I cannot go from home. But I have one request to make; I have thought of it before; but to-night — to-night you must grant it; I cannot be denied. Remember, it is the first I have ever asked; and I am your wife, Ned, — I am your wife, I have a right to ask. You will not refuse me?"

In her eagerness she had raised her head, and was kneeling before him, gazing into his face with an anxious wildness that startled him.

"Refuse you, Mabel? It will be my joy to grant you anything, to do anything you desire. O, my wife, ask me — ask me many things. Why have you not before?"

"But this, Ned, — this may not please you."

"I do not care for my pleasure, Mabel. It is yours I seek; what can I do — tell me?"

She reached up her arms, and encircled his neck; she pressed upon his lips the first voluntary kiss of the wife, and whispered, little heeding his bewildered happiness at her strange manner, —

"It is this, my husband. When I die, give little May to Ruby — hush, that is not all," — clinging tighter to his neck, — "I have your promise; tell her to teach her to be true, — *to be true* like herself. Do not let her stay here a week. Tell Ruby she is my gift to her, — our gift, Ned, yours and mine. That is all; now kiss me and forgive me."

"Mabel, Mabel, are you crazed? — you are not sick?" Holding her still in his arms, he looked anxiously into the haggard, weary face, once so blithe and beautiful.

"No, Ned; only I am not fit to teach *truth*, my whole life a deception, and *she* must be taught by Ruby. God will not allow me to form that immortal soul. That is all; don't worry, Ned; you know, dear, I had not learned to love you when we married; but you have been kind; and the kindness and patience are pleasant to me now. I'm tired, — I'll go lie down."

"Let me sit by you, Mabel; I'll read you to sleep. In the morning you'll feel better."

With his arm still about her, she moved towards the bell-cord and rang for nurse, then went languidly to her room, accepting quietly her husband's services.

At last, with the sound of his voice growing more and more indistinct, she fell into a restless sleep. For

a long, long time he sat near, gazing upon the white face, and fancying that the breath came weaker and more fluttering, that she looked as though the spirit might at any moment escape from its bruised tenement. In the morning he laughed at his fears, when he saw how peacefully she slept; and careful not to disturb her rest he crept silently from the room. He was happier this morning, for the last evening's talk, sad though it was, and meeting Aunt Sophie in the lower hall, he said, —

"Mabel did not seem quite well yesterday, but she is sleeping now; and if you would just look in after breakfast, tell her I had to hurry off, but will be up this afternoon to take her out riding, if she likes; don't let any of them worry her, auntie."

"I'll take good care of her," she answered, cheerily, as his unconscious sigh caught her ear.

A ripple of childish laughter floated overhead, and glancing up through the banisters he saw the long bright curls of little May wavering over them.

"Wait, papa, I'm coming." Down she came, two steps to a stair, trying to urge her young feet to keep pace with the impatient spirit, and at last spreading her arms like white wings, she jumped upon her father's bosom with mingled laughter and kisses.

"I peeped into mamma's room, but she was sound asleep, papa, so I hushed nurse, and made 'em all be still — not to 'sturb her."

"You are a precious, careful little mayflower, Pet,

and papa 'll take you out to ride this afternoon, when mamma wakes. Tell her so."

"And bring some bon-bons too? That's a dear little papa."

"Yes, Pet, bon-bons, oranges, grapes, or anything you and mamma like." He carried her into the breakfast room, and placed her in the high chair by his side. Clarence and his father were already there, waited upon by Aunt Sophie. Soon Eveline came in; the others still slept.

An hour later, Edith, with her black hair still in crimping pins, slipped over the stairs and into her mother's chamber.

"Where's Eveline?"

"I don't know; why?"

"Because I want to see you, and she's always round. Let me dress your hair this morning; I've something to tell you."

There was something already told in the tones of her voice; for her mother, looking hastily up from the coffee she was sipping, asked, —

"Then it's all right. He's spoken?"

"He calls on father to-day." There was triumph in Edith's voice.

"Well, Edy, I congratulate you; you've played your cards well. Merle is everything that is desirable, and I'm glad the suspense is over. When was it?"

"Last night; we were talking over the mountain trip. I told him long ago of Eveline's engagement. I did n't

mean to have her fret me any longer. He is so fond of music, and she charms him there; but then I believe he is too proud to marry beneath him."

"Of course, you foolish girl. He's never given her a thought. At all events, you are safe now."

"We are to be married in the spring, mother, and go abroad for the season. I verily believe it was our last summer trip that prompted it, for I did try to be agreeable, and drive away his blues."

"You were charming, I know. The man must have been a fossil not to have felt your power; and now the winter is before you to prepare. Eveline will be an invaluable assistant, and we must try to press Margaret into the service; her taste is so exquisite. Just remove this tray, dear; your news has destroyed my appetite. Now you may try your hand at hair-dressing and tell me all you wish. By the way, Clare was here last night; has he gone?"

"Yes. He took an early train, left his good-morning for you. I had half a mind to tell him this spicy bit of news, but waited till I had seen you. Only think, mother, to do the whole of Europe before I am twenty; won't the girls envy me?"

"I almost envy you myself, and you may thank me now, Edith, that I did n't let you go from home as soon as you wished. What a persevering tease you were. It's your youth and freshness that has charmed Merle. Had you gone into society sooner, it might not have happened; for he's very fastidious."

"I know it; and proud as Lucifer, into the bargain."

"Well, that's not a bad trait, and now your position is established. I only wish Mabel had half the enthusiasm and vim you have."

"What is the matter with May? She seemed happy while we were away this summer; but once settled at home, she's as dolorous as a nun, and no one could be more devoted than poor Ned."

"Oh, she'll get over it by and by; a sort of dyspeptic attack, perhaps. I wish," mused the mother, "she felt now like keeping house by herself. They'd both be happier with the responsibility; and how radiant and beautiful May could appear, doing the honors at her own table."

"She's not like me. I mean to reign over an establishment of my own. Won't it be regal?" exclaimed the young girl, with a laughing toss of her spirited head.

"You've more of my spirit, Edy, than either of the others; but this winter you must curb your ambition for conquest, and humor Merle's moods. It would not do to risk losing him now; and you can flirt desperately sometimes."

"Never fear for me, mother mine; I can be gay as a bird or demure as a kitten, in the same moment, thanks to your early lessons."

A tap at the door, and Eveline came in.

"You see I am before you, Eva. I surprised mother at her coffee, and offered myself as waiting-maid."

"And refreshed me with a bit of news, that is no secret; certainly not from Eveline?" glancing at Edith, inquiringly.

"Ah, let me hear," murmured the soft voice, as she glided into a corner and began to pick up articles of dress, in the dim light of the heavily curtained room.

"Well, Merle has offered himself at last; heart, hand, and fortune. So Edy will marry first, after all. You must devote all your energy to the work, Eva; so much to do and so little time for it. Then, my dear, we will see what we can do for you. What say you?"

"Oh, my poor services are at your disposal, of course; I am glad Edith has won the prize. I had my fears for her happiness at one time, knowing his affection for Ruby; but I suppose he will forget that in time, under the gentle reign of our queen." With a light laugh she emerged from the shadow, and drawing near Edith, who looked half angry, she kissed her, gayly adding,—

"There's nothing so soothing to a broken heart as sympathy, and you ought to be commended for trying so hard to bind up Merle's wounds. This success is commendation enough, however. Merle will be everlastingly grateful when he understands your charitable kindness, dear Edy. I wish you joy with all my heart."

"Thank you, Miss Cropsy. I had not noticed that the gentleman stood in need of sympathy; and I should not venture to waste mine upon one so apparently

satisfied with life as Merle Domett. I did hear him express sorrow a few days since that your engagement prevented your going upon the stage as musician, for such a rare voice would win you everlasting laurels. He thinks he never heard finer singing than yours, Eva; I'm sure I agree with him that the public are losers by what the minister's son gains."

"So do I," replied Mrs. Tourney, entirely unconscious of the battle going on between the two; and failing to notice the red glow on Edith's cheek, and the cold hate glittering from Eveline's eyes.

"Yes, I think Eva would soon make a fortune as opera singer; but then Harry's a good soul, and really one need not be unhappy to settle down quietly on moderate means, especially when they are not looking for great things. And our Eva is a modest little flower, content to shine for one pair of eyes; you'll have to enjoy in part the reflection of Edith's grandeur, my dear. Ha, ha, that's a good thought of mine! Now, Eva, just put the rings with my watch, and slip those ribbons away; they litter the bureau so; come, Edy, let's finish our talk in the other room." And Edith, casting a look of defiance at her tormentor, followed her mother, glad for once to have come off victorious.

For a moment Eveline stood where they left her, the picture of baffled indignation; her hateful dependence coming back upon her heart with a cold, dead weight.

This elegant home, with all its costly trappings and almost endless wealth, was to have been the stepping-

stone to her greatness, — and was the simple country home of Harry Stoughton to be the goal of her hopes? Had she accepted the degrading position only for this? Were her desires and expectations all to be baffled, and must she endure the sneers of the proud daughter, whom she despised? Never! The winter still was hers. This engagement should not bind her. She would yet see the throng of fashion-worshippers bowing at her shrine. There were men of wealth besides this Merle Domett, who dared to throw her upon the public even in thought. There were high positions yet to be occupied; places in society she could grace; and for one of these she would aim; yes, and not abate one iota of her courage and determination until she gained it. "Marry Harry Stoughton and a country drug shop? Never!" The clenched hand, and upright, rigid little figure said Never! with more emphasis than the lips had spoken.

She flashed like an angry meteor through the door into the hall, over the stairs to her own room, and sitting by the desk wrote rapidly, the flush burning deeper and deeper in her cheek, and the fitful light flashing from her small gray eyes.

Pausing at last, she read the short note, pondered a moment, and destroyed it. One more attempt was made, but it was not a success. Pushing the materials from her, she shut and locked the desk, saying, "I'll wait until I'm cooler."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WEDDING.

"Sic a wife as Willie had,
I wad na gie a button for her."

CLARENCE found a good beginning of his work for many weeks at the quarry. And his old room at the parsonage held the same charm for him as when he first occupied it. The hours spent there were divided between reading and music.

Ruby came regularly once a week until Tony was well. His side healed, but the sight of one eye was forever destroyed. It was Ruby's task to reconcile him to his lot, and make life a pleasure to him.

Of the new engagement Clarence was not aware, not having been home since the event which gave his relatives so much satisfaction; and if it was known to Ruby, she failed, from some cause, to report the tidings at Elmton.

As he was sitting with Mrs. Stoughton one evening, before the lights had been brought in, they saw Harry coming quickly up the snow-covered walk.

It was early for him; he appeared agitated, — could anything have happened?

The hall door swung, and creaked upon its old hinges, and, impetuous as when a boy, the young man flung his hat upon the table, and entered the sitting-room.

"Mother, where are you?" for, in the dim light, he had not noticed her.

"Here, my son; what is it?" her sensitive mother-love already responding to the untold agony that hastened to pour itself into her heart. Tone answered tone. There was hidden pain in Harry's question, and instinctively she threw into her voice all the love and sympathy he had expected and desired. Just as he would have done years ago, when grief or disappointment met his boyhood, he did now in his early manhood, — threw himself at her feet, and, dropping his head upon her knee, exclaimed bitterly, —

"It's all over, mother. I've come back to you. I've no one now to love and care for, but you."

At the first word Clarence rose to leave the two alone, Aunt Sophie's suspicions flashing upon him, and filling his whole nature with indignation against Eveline.

Looking round, Harry saw him; but, impulsive as ever, went on, —

"You here, Clare? Well, it's no matter; sooner told the better. It's all over. 'T was only a dream after all, and one must wake, you know." But Clarence had vanished, and his head sank again upon his mother's lap.

"My dear boy!" Full of tenderness were the words,

and very soothing to his hot brow was the cool pressure of her hand; like oil upon the troubled waters of his heart was the knowledge of one love so fully realized and trusted in, — one love that could not fail while life lasted.

"Don't pity me, mother. I've been a fool not to have seen it before. You see, mother, we are *poor*. What's the income of my little drug-store, compared with her necessities? A drop in the ocean. I might have known it. My love was nothing to her; and I have poured it out mightily, and gloried in the scant return she gave me. But now let it die. Fool that I was, to think I could make her happy."

"No, Harry, you were no fool. Your noble nature prompted this perfect trust, and you have no cause for shame. You are as noble and worthy to-day, as you were when she promised to be your wife. She will never shipwreck you, my son. I pray she may not founder her own happiness upon rocks she is hiding for herself. Poor foolish girl! I have feared this, Harry, from the first sight of her; and now it has come upon you like an icy avalanche, — but it must not overwhelm you. You must gather up your hopes and courage like a man."

"You did n't seem to me to understand her at the first; and, secretly, I blamed you, best of mothers. But your eyes were open; mine were blinded to all but the charm of being loved, and the sweet joy of cherishing one who was lonely and sad. Oh, mother, is truth nowhere to be found but in your own pure heart?"

"Think not, my son, that all lives are governed by the like ignoble principles. Be brave to bear this wrong without bitterness, — brave to go forward in your duty, and put away from your heart and life the hope of happiness with her. It could never be. She has opened your eyes to her true character. Ambitious of worldly position and selfish ease, false in word and act, she could never be happy with you, or make you so."

"Have no fear, my mother; this is no lover's quarrel, to be kissed away in twenty-four hours. She has said the word, and we are as eternally parted as though we had never met. I can bear it. I can forget it. But, mother, it was a lovely dream, and the waking does not bring joy to me." He smiled in her face; and the full moon shedding a soft light upon them as they sat there, tinged the effort with a sadness that brought tears to his mother's eyes. "Let it all go. I still have you; there's the study door; tell father, but don't let him say anything to me. I shall get used to it in a day or two."

She bent forward and kissed the high, white forehead, gleaming in the moonlight.

The surprise occasioned to Mr. Tourney's household by this turn of affairs, which Eveline took care should be no secret, was differently expressed by each member. Aunt Sophie was open and strong in her utter condemnation of the heartless proceeding. Mrs. Tourney was satisfied not to lose her young hair-dresser at

present; and the others, after querying and wondering why Eveline should so suddenly change her mind, dropped the subject, — only Edith, perhaps, understanding her secret motives. Between these two there was a constant and hardly dissembled warfare, — Mrs. Tourney acting unconsciously as Eva's champion, and Aunt Sophie as decidedly in favor of Edith.

In the midst of these conflicting elements, it was no easy matter for Eveline to drift clear of the rocks that threatened her frail bark. Careless of Aunt Sophie's opinion, she yet must appear to the heads of the household as injured innocence; and, so skilfully did she conduct affairs as invariably, when open hostility prevailed between them, to turn the current in her own favor, and throw the odium upon the angry spinster. At such times, "dear Aunt Sophie" herself was at a loss to understand the true bearings of the case, and seeing herself at a disadvantage, and marvelling much at the upsidedown turn affairs had taken, finally concluded to let matters take their own course, confident that Eveline was instigated and abetted by spirits of darkness. She would wash her hands of the whole concern, once for all, and the "once for all" was of weekly recurrence.

Mabel was herself again, pale and delicate in her loveliness, but brilliant and cheerful in conversation, giving her husband more of her time than had been her wont.

Before the winter was half spent, she was deeply

entangled in the gayeties of the season, encouraged by both mother and husband, who were relieved to have her throw off the sadness of the autumn.

Meantime Edith devoted herself exclusively to Merle's varying moods, — now grave, now gay; he now giving her full license to dance and flirt with whom she might, and again keeping her close by his side evening after evening, until her obedient spirit and exuberant gayety, which nothing could subdue, charmed him into another generous permission.

Mrs. Tournay found her strength to appear in the fashionable world unequal to her desires. Her chief business was now the ordering and oversight of Edith's trousseau, which the young lady had determined should be as well appointed and extensive as her father's wealth warranted and her taste demanded.

Mrs. Domett, to relieve her wounded pride, petted the young girl more pointedly and assiduously than she had Ruby.

It was, perhaps, at her suggestion that Merle hastened the time appointed for the wedding, and fixed it early in February, when they were to sail at once for Liverpool, thence to France and Switzerland.

Now, indeed, the bustle of preparation commenced in good earnest. Margaret and Ruby ran in, almost daily, to assist.

Of course, Clarence had learned before this of his sister's engagement and approaching marriage; had expressed satisfaction at her happiness, at the same

time that he was wondering at Ruby's unconcern and silence in regard to it.

But she offered no explanation, and he could not ask it. Indeed, he seldom saw her now alone; she had discontinued her visits to the parsonage since Tony's recovery, and his occasional visits home were short and hurried.

If Merle had treated her with the most indefinite slight, he should despise him, whatever his future relations to the family might be.

Could Ruby have refused him? The thought was not an unpleasant one.

There was a large wedding party; friends of both families invited; the evening favorable and the house thronged. Mr. and Mrs. Stoughton and Harry received early invitations. Not inclined to attend, they yet yielded to Clarence's urging, and accepted Mrs. Duke's invitation to come directly to her house, go with them, and afterwards spend the night there.

Harry, too, had not seen Eveline since the note was written, and rather desired testing his feelings, or, at least, convince his mother that her power over him was broken.

Mr. and Mrs. Drew were present, — the lady radiant in the light of the diamonds she had won from her husband in exchange for those returned to the colonel.

Ruby was to act as bridesmaid, escorted by Hugh Ellington, much to Eveline's chagrin, who gave Edith on this account the benefit of a parting stab of bitter

words, which, however, failed to pierce the armor of her joy.

Very lovely looked the bride, in her costly and elegant array, a robe spotless as the lily in its purity, the veil falling from its wreath of orange blossoms even to the carpet, and almost enveloping the slight figure.

To Clarence, his sister was wonderfully beautiful; and not less so was Ruby by her side, a trifle taller, and with a holy, spiritual look in the soft, brown eyes, that the brilliant darkness of Edith's could never hold.

The ceremony went on, and through it Clarence's eyes never left the bridesmaid's face. He saw no hidden pain, no trace of wounded feeling, no attempt to appear unconcerned and careless. It was an earnest face; an appreciative, sympathetic face, — revealing only the quiet joy of the occasion, mingled with solemnity, prompted by the minister's words and tones.

To all eyes the alcove presented a picture of rare beauty, hung as it was with garlands of hot-house flowers festooned about the rich drapery, and pendent from the chandelier; while near the officiating clergyman, upon one side, stood Vickie, with little May clinging to her hand, and looking on in childish wonder, her light curls falling to the edge of her white gauzy dress, revealing here and there the bare, plump shoulders, and, beneath a slight fall of lace, the perfectly-rounded arm.

On the other side were grouped the father and

mother, with Clarence, against whose arm Flora leaned with sisterly freedom and youthful grace. The ceremony finished, congratulations began, and Clarence was amused to hear Flora whisper, —

"You must take me up, Clare. I don't want to go with the children."

"Of course, little coz. I'm your escort for the evening, if you say so."

"Out to supper, too? you're real good, Clare. You know this is the first time we've been out in the evening, and I thought I should n't have any attention. I'm not so very small either, am I?"

"No, indeed, almost as tall as Edy," he answered, a smile playing about his mouth.

"Am I, really? I wish I was a little older."

"You will be, soon enough; don't be in a hurry; but are you ready? I believe it's our turn."

"Just tell me what to say, Clare, first. I'm all of a flutter."

"O, you need only kiss your congratulations; that's enough."

"Is it? Well." She took his arm and passed along. Clarence thought his heart must be in an equal flutter. He hated a crowd, and shrunk from parade and ceremony with a nervous repugnance not to be controlled. But they were not alone. Margaret and Harry came up at the same moment, others gathered about, and congratulations and merry speeches became general and exciting.

Thus far, Eveline found herself strangely neglected. Hugh Ellington was, of course, for this evening beyond her reach. She had watched Harry for some minutes talking contentedly with Margaret. Others who might have shown her the attention she waited for, were otherwise engaged; and an angry gleam flickered from her eyes, as she leaned against the piano, and looked upon the scene, herself forgotten and neglected.

Presently Mr. Tourney glanced that way, whispered a word to his wife, and came towards her.

"Has no one taken you up, Eveline? Come with me."

"It don't matter, there has been no time," was the quick reply, trying to hide the feeling of neglect.

"Never mind. Come now." He gave her his arm. The kiss was cold, the words false, — but the action was grace itself, and the tones were music.

The refreshment-room was another surprise. The most distinguished caterer of the city had outdone himself; the fragrance and beauty of flowers enchanted the senses; the arrangement of tables was exquisite; the whole affair gotten up and carried out regardless of cost, and with an elegant refinement in all its details that was a source of gratification to Mrs. Tourney, who prided herself upon her success at such times.

The next day, farewell blessings, wishes, and hopes were showered upon the pair, and the steamer with its precious freight departed.

CHAPTER XXV.

MABEL'S DEATH.

"Who wanders from duty, wanders from life."

THE next morning the house was in dire confusion, and Clarence, seemingly in no haste to return to books and work, wandered from room to room in search of a quiet spot, though unavailing; for Aunt Sophie was everywhere, watching and directing every servant; her head enveloped in a large handkerchief; cuffs rolled back; feather-duster in hand, and her glossy alpaca pinned up behind, looking as though chaos was far more to her mind than wedding ceremonies.

There was no one to attend to him but little May, and her sweet prattle was very beguiling, her loving, gentle ways very welcome. He frolicked with her half the forenoon, increasing her infantile admiration every moment; then started for his aunt's, ostensibly to see if Mrs. Stoughton had returned.

He found the ladies preparing for a drive about the city. Mrs. Stoughton was intending to return by a late train. Would Clarence wait and escort her, as her

husband had been obliged to leave earlier? his aunt asked as he appeared.

He was in no haste, — would await her pleasure. And, telling him where the young ladies were to be found, they drove off.

The children were at school. The large, home-like family room was empty; and, sitting before the piano, Clarence moved his fingers abstractedly over the keys, without much thought of what notes came. A slight prelude and the tones fell into a sacred melody, improvised years ago, and remembered for the sake of the pleasure it had given Mrs. Stoughton and Ruby.

Soon his thoughts came back; and, engrossed in the melodious sounds, his soul blind to all outward surroundings, indulged only in sweet aspirations.

The melody penetrated the distant room where the cousins sat. Ruby heard, and well knew the touch that sent forth the familiar sounds.

A moment after, and a white hand reached round Clarence, and, touching the keys, gave a discordant screech to his chant, bringing it to a sudden termination.

His large, soulful eyes flashed round upon the merry face by his side.

"I thought I might call you, if you were in the house," he said.

"Yes, indeed, Clare. No one plays like you. It is lonely, now Edy has really gone? What will Aunt Maria do without her, I wonder?"

"And I wonder how her departure will affect my cousin Ruby. This wedding has been a surprise to me from first to last. What does it mean, Ruby?"

She laughed a little nervously; her cheeks grew bright, as she replied, —

"It means happiness for both, I hope and believe. Is not that meaning enough?"

"Perhaps so," musingly; and then, with a sort of forced boldness, —

"Enough, if it means happiness for you also, Ruby; does it?"

"Never doubt that, Clare." And now her honesty, and her desire that no blame should attach itself to Merle, beamed from her eyes, and convinced him at once.

I'm very glad, very happy, that *they* are happy." Then, as though she might have expressed too much interest, she added again, —

"Edy will enjoy this trip; you know, she always desired to travel. It will be a fine thing for her."

"Yes. Then you are satisfied, — and so am I. Let me see, — March, April. Do you come to us in May? The house looks gloomy closed so long."

"About the middle of May, father thinks. Maggie and I are in haste to get back; and the children always find winter pretty long."

"So soon?" The knowledge thrilled him. He turned again to the piano, and played a merry, capricious fantasia, expressive of the exultant mood he so seldom indulged in.

Did Ruby understand it? Perhaps not.

The ladies returned, and Clarence stayed to lunch, only reserving time before he left the city to bid his mother and Mabel good-by, and bestow upon Pet a parting caress.

The intellectual diversions of the evening at the parsonage lost nothing in attractiveness by contrast with the brilliant scene of the previous night; and Clarence found that either the variety of pleasures, or the memory of a dear, sparkling face, added zest and satisfaction to present happiness.

A few weeks passed. March winds blew fierce and chill. Clarence buttoned his coat more closely, and walked more rapidly among his few patients, always encouraged and gratified by their simple, outspoken delight at seeing the young doctor.

To Mrs. Stoughton's surprise, he manifested no desire to extend his practice. Evidently satisfied to pore over his books, he seemed to have no ulterior object in view; none but himself to gratify, or labor for. That was not worth much trouble, therefore. As he had always done, he still lived in the present, content with intellectual effort, and the mental satisfaction such efforts brought with it.

In this state of mind, he was one day startled by a dispatch bidding him hasten home, if he would see Mabel alive. There was not a moment to lose. The train was due. Hastily snatching his hat, with coat upon his arm, he left the dispatch with Bridget for

Mrs. Stoughton, and ran to the depot. Breathless and white he reached there in time to jump upon the last car; and, sinking into the nearest seat, he dropped his head upon his hand, and endeavored to govern his disturbed feelings enough to contemplate more calmly the terrible news.

Must death follow so closely the bewildering gayety of the last visit home? Must it come so near, in all its grim, unwelcome horror? Must Mabel, the gentle sister, the fair, young mother, and idolized wife, die? her pleasant voice be hushed, the light of her loving eye dimmed, and his sister be his in life no longer? Ah, it could not be. And from the secret anguish of his soul a prayer went up to God that this cup might pass from him.

The cold river rolled on. Its eddying current had not the power to wake him from his grief. The thick firs loomed up dark, and waved angrily in the fierce blast, but he heeded them not; the white clouds moving through the blue above him were, for once, unnoticed. Borne on rapidly past all these objects that had so often absorbed his poetic mind, he only longed to be there; to be in season for one more glance or word, if this might be, or to learn — blessed hope! — that the crisis was past, and she would live.

The cars stopped. Passing through the crowd, he took the first vehicle that offered, and was driven rapidly across the city.

There was no one to meet him at the door with wel-

come tidings. The scared face of the maid only verified his fears; and with the sensation of an icy hand clutching his heart, he mounted the stairs, and entered the open door.

White and grim in her severity, Aunt Sophie watched the face of the physician, as though more than the body's life hung upon his slightest word. But there was no hope, no encouragement there. Trembling, and with half-suppressed sobs, his mother sat in the dimness, her features pinched and drawn with anguish, while the husband waited with buried face by the bed; and below, silent, and frightened by the near tread of this strange visitor, Eveline rocked little May, who wondered at her mother's seclusion, and her father's overwhelming grief; her baby voice hushed by the awful stillness of the house.

At the door, Clarence's glance took it all in, — the hopelessness of the whole scene, the silent despair of the husband, and the marble whiteness and death-like stillness of the loved form, whose closed eyes would never again look into theirs, whose colorless lips never again part in words of tenderness or merriment. He could not bear it. Turning away, his hand was grasped and wrung in a burning pressure. It was his father, traces of tears upon the face, which seemed to have added years of suffering to its expression since the wedding. Clarence could not speak. His lips had not the power to frame one comforting word. Rushing by him, he locked himself within a chamber, and, dropping

upon his knees, thought of God. Was it prayer? was it desire for God's presence and strength? He knew not. There were no words; no connected thought; only agony, only tears, only a craving for sympathy, — one helpless falling before the Mightiest.

But his face took on a new beauty; a light emanated from it, that told of hidden strength, of power to wrestle with the Most High, and prevail, — of a soul that could not long struggle with earthly weights unavailingly, but would surely cast them off, and mount with unseen wings into the purer atmosphere of faith and hope and peace.

Well was it for his sensitive spirit that the household secrets were so skilfully guarded; well for him, as, an hour later, he stood alone by the lifeless form, beautiful in death, that no envious whisper could deprive him of the holy faith he held of that sister's purity and untarnished womanhood.

Well too, for his peace of mind, that the honest, impetuous words which crushed his mother's heart, had failed to reach his ears; words, wrung from Aunt Sophie by the sudden and startling termination of weeks of anxiety and fear, weeks of distrust and suspicion, — words bitter, hard, cruel even in their truth.

"You have killed your own child, Maria," she had said. "You, a woman! mother! and bid your child destroy the germ of an immortal soul! to quench that existence soon to bear God's image, that she may spend a few fleeting months in fashionable frivolity and

sin! God forgive you, for your guilt exceeds hers. God help you, Maria, for your punishment is terrible."

The impetuous words were repented as soon as spoken, but all too late. The weak, suffering mother could bear no more. The sound seemed to strike terror to her soul. The words brought conviction of guilt home to a heart that had grown cold and callous, but was not dead. Her breath came quick and gasping; her limbs trembled in sudden weakness; the jewelled hands, outstretched to check the torrent, fell palsied to her side, and sight and hearing failed as she sunk senseless to the floor.

Then was Clarence summoned from the presence of the dead to minister to the living; and with yearning love and reverent touch, he strove to call back the suspended breath, and quicken the inactive pulse.

It was not strange to him that his mother should sink under this first grief of married life. She had not been strong, and Mabel was her idol, her friend, and companion. He understood it all, — he thought. But he did not understand the look of stony grief upon Aunt Sophie's face, the short, broken sentences of self-accusation that fell from her as she labored with him to restore consciousness; and the kind humility, the tender, conciliatory tones, as she ministered to the restored mother on the days that followed.

Honest Aunt Sophie! faithful in her rebukes, severe in her integrity, yet suffering keenly for the sins of others, bearing their burdens, sharing their griefs, and

ready to take upon her own heart, if she might, the retribution that must fall to them.

Dainty notes of stereotyped condolence were left by scores; but not one was permitted to harrow the wounds they had not power to heal. Friends called to express sympathy and gratify curiosity; Aunt Sophie accepted the one with stoic fortitude and ignored or frowned down the other. Mrs. Drew begged to see dear Mabel's mother, but was decidedly refused. Her tears were thrown away upon Aunt Sophie. Her measured grief seemed, to the stern but suffering woman, empty as the wind.

"Oh, Miss Tourney, I *can't* bear it! Mabel was my *best* friend; and to have her die so suddenly. It's dreadful! *dreadful!* and so soon after our little social gathering! She was the gayest one there, and I said at the time that one of that party would die before the year was up; for it was an *unlucky* number. I invited *thirteen*, but only *twelve* came. I made up the odd number. I never knew it to fail. I thought of it at the time, and shivered all over; but I didn't dream of its being Mabel. She was the gayest and happiest of us all! Oh, I *wish* I'd never had them. If I'd known how it would end, I never would. Thirteen is *such* an unlucky number! Why, Miss Tourney, if you'll believe me I wouldn't put thirteen buttons on a dress for the world. I should know I'd never live to wear it. Oh, dear, dear!"

How long she would have indulged in these bewail-

ings is unknown ; a bell from the sick room sounded, and Aunt Sophie excused herself.

At last Ruby came ; then Aunt Sophie's heart was touched, and she folded her in her arms, while tears dropped unchecked upon the brown head that sunk in abandonment of sorrow upon her bosom.

Silently the maiden aunt led the way, and Ruby's tear-dimmed eyes could only gaze and weep afresh.

So long she stood, lost in thought, that Aunt Sophie silently left her.

The issues of life and death are, indeed, in God's hand ; and we, the creatures of his power, are accountable to him for the carefulness or the recklessness with which we use or abuse his gifts.

We may not tamper with fixed laws ; we may not mock the wisdom of the Creator ; we may not spurn, or trample under foot, the holy responsibilities of life, without meeting in the way penalties of crushing force. And when they come, with all their mighty weight, and grind us to the dust, we may not question His love and mercy, but confess our own guilt, our own selfishly indulged or wilfully debased natures.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RUBY'S WORK INCREASING.

"And all hearts do pray, 'God love her' ;
Ay, and certes, in good sooth,
We may all be sure HE DOTH."

A NIGHT of impenetrable darkness had settled upon the household of sorrow, a depth of gloom that no power of pleasure, gayety, or fashion could dispel. The world was powerless to minister to these new and terrible necessities of natures torn and bleeding, of wounds rankling under accusations of an awakened conscience.

Unable, from excessive weakness, to attend the funeral, Mrs. Tournay lay upon her couch all through the hours of that sad day, tearful, sobbing, and terrified, startling them all by occasional wild, wandering sentences, and self-condemning words.

It required all the wisdom, tact, and soothing tenderness of friends to still the perturbed spirit ; but at last, worn out with grief, she slept, and while she slept, they buried the beautiful remains of the first-born forever from their sight.

That night the father would not be parted from his

child,—all that was left him of the past. Little May slept upon his bosom, unconscious of her angel ministrations.

Through the silent hours of the night, he had recalled those words of Mabel, uttered weeks ago, but since almost forgotten in the satisfaction of seeing her happier; and were it not for the last conscious glance from the child to him, the last anxious, pleading look from those dear dim eyes; were it not for the last whispered words, "Your promise, Ned," he might still have passed them over as occasioned by nervous fancies.

But now they came back to him with more force than ever, clothed with the beautiful raiment of a mother's holy love, encircled with the thrilling memory of clasp-
ing arms, and kisses never again to be gathered from the sweet face beneath the sod.

"It is this, my husband, — When I die, give little May to Ruby; tell her to teach her to be true,—to be true like herself. Our gift, Ned, yours and mine."

They haunted him,—those words that would take from his life all its joy; that would tear the bud from its stem, even while bleeding at the separation from the cherished flower.

He laid the matter before Aunt Sophie, and was relieved and surprised to find that Mabel had once, half laughingly, half in earnest, mentioned the plan to her.

"And, Ned, it was an inspiration that prompted her to choose Ruby to care for the child. She knew that

Ruby loved our flower; and we all know how strong she is. Nothing will ever tempt her from the truth. Yes, young as she is, she will best care for Mabel's child."

"Will she take the care? It's a great deal to ask."

"If I know her, she will hold it a precious legacy, and not a burden."

Setting his lips together, to suppress the pain, he quickly left the room. A moment after she heard the street door close behind him.

"Poor Ned! It's a bitter alternative; but best for the child. This is no place for her now."

It was with deep emotion, hardly controlled, that the young father made known his errand, and repeated his wife's request almost in the words she had used.

Ruby heard them with a sudden gush of tears, and a great thrill of sympathizing tenderness for little May. Her heart seemed to expand with pitying love. She felt herself already consecrated to the work. There was not a thought of the strangeness of the task, not a thought of her youth or unfitness for it,—only that it was Mabel's dying request, and God would give her wisdom and strength for it.

Her mother had sat speechless. This was not a work of common charity, and she was unequal to it. She did not reply, and the gentleman went on, —

"Aunt Sophie's hands are full in the care of mother, and we fear the result of this prostration. I must go away, Mrs. Duke. Then there's only Eveline; my little May must not be left with her."

"No, indeed. But, Mr. Clarke, you will not wish to give Pet up. When you return, she will be such a comfort to you. And while you are away we will care for her faithfully and tenderly. But it must not be a permanent arrangement; Ruby is a mere child for such a responsibility."

"Mother, I am not a child, only in my love and obedience to you. I can teach our Pet, and care for her, even as Mabel did. Dear mother, you will let me accept my cousin's gift?" * Tears sparkled upon her long lashes, and gleamed among the roses of her cheeks, as Ned Clarke, drinking in the spirit of her words, rose, and, grasping both hands, pressed them convulsively, exclaiming, —

"Bless you, Ruby! bless you for this ready acceptance. Mabel was right. You can do more for little May than I can. Do not let her forget me."

"I never will."

"And you, Mrs. Duke," continued the gentleman, "will not object, if Ruby does not. I know how much it is to ask, and were it not that Mabel's heart seemed set upon it, I could not urge it."

"We will care for her while you are gone, most heartily, Mr. Clarke. I only hesitate in regard to the future. You may wish to have her with you again, in the time to come."

"I wish it now, more than I can tell, but it may not be; and if I give my little May to your daughter, it will be with the desire that her whole life shall be

passed with her. Only thus can I carry out her mother's wish. And before I leave the country, all I possess shall be settled upon her. You will think of it, Mrs. Duke? You will not refuse me?"

"I will think of it, yes. We shall see you again?" She spoke with hesitation, as one but half convinced.

"I will call to-night," he said. Once more grasping the hand of each, he left them, — one, rejoicing in the sacred trust; the other, surprised and troubled by this strange turn of affairs.

"Ruby, it is too much! You don't know what you are undertaking."

"Not all, dearest mother; but the days will teach me as they go. And, mother, I cannot refuse him, — I cannot refuse Mabel's last request."

"What a strange girl you are getting to be, Ruby." With the half rebuke she drew her within her arms, and left a kiss upon the enthusiastic face.

"Don't think me wilful or regardless of your wishes, mother; but I could not turn from him in his sorrow, and I know it is only your great love for me that made you hesitate."

"No, Ruby, not wilful, far from it, but very, very enthusiastic and impulsive. And, my child, this is a task you cannot assume thoughtlessly, and, wearying, lay it down. If you really accept it, it must be as a sacred trust."

"Yes, mother; most holy, never for a moment to be neglected."

"A life-long task, my child."

"I know it, mother." Still that glance of faith and joy shone upon the mother's anxious countenance.

"You will be sadly discouraged sometimes."

"Perhaps so, but my mother has taught me where to seek help."

"People will think it a strange move," said Mrs. Duke, in a low tone.

"Never mind the people. Right is right, however it may look."

"Ah, Ruby, Ruby, you are far beyond your mother, already."

"No, mother, I am only branching out a little from your own work. And as she turned to leave the room, there flashed upon her mother's heart one of those brilliant, soulful smiles, so rare and yet so beautiful, more powerful to banish lingering doubts than any arguments she had used.

That evening, when the father appeared, even Mrs. Duke's interest in the attractive child, who had been there some hours, had got the better of her fears for Ruby, and not one of the household was willing to part with her. Mr. Duke thought it a fine arrangement. Each vied with the other to make her happy.

Climbing into her father's arms, who smiled sadly upon her, she begged to stay with cousin Ruby till mamma could come back, and would not be satisfied until the promise was given, saying, in a pleading tone, "You know, papa, it's too still at we house." "Then

searching his pockets, as her custom had been, for fruit and bon-bons, she made wonderful discoveries, and flitted like a bird from his arms, to scatter her treasures upon the lap of each.

There was a long, confidential talk between Mr. Clarke and Mrs. Duke, and matters were arranged satisfactorily at last.

Now, at night, as Ruby knelt in the quiet of her own room, another petition was added, — a prayer for wisdom and strength, that she might lead aright the young life sleeping in innocence and purity by her side, that the sunny present, shining upon this fair head, might grow brighter as the days went on, until its radiance should be merged in the glory of heaven.

CHAPTER XXVII.

RUBY'S LOVE.

"What have I done that He should bow
From heaven to choose a wife for me?
And what deserved, he should endow
My home with THEE."

MRS. TOURNEY'S constitution was broken; her strength failed daily; there was no reserve power for this emergency. And Clarence in a few days came up again to learn her condition. But, in the midst of his fear and anxiety for his mother, never dearer to her son's heart than now, he could not conceal his satisfaction that Ruby had been intrusted with the life-long care of May, sweet little May, imaging her mother's loveliness in all the purity and freshness of innocent childhood. Who so worthy to guide her young feet through life's mazes as his cousin, who yet had scarce put off her own childhood, or, rather, who, with her noble womanhood, mingled the brightness, truth, and freshness of childhood? Why did this knowledge thrill every fibre of his being with proud happiness? Was it that little May was so dear to him, or that Ruby was beloved the more for this her great love and new devotion?

Ah, he dared not read his own heart. He feared the story told, though only to himself, might bring with its certain overthrow of hope a tide of woe he would have no power to quell; rather the uncertain, unfulfilled happiness of the present,—this vague, dreamy bliss, this half contentment,—than the positive blank that must follow her knowledge of his heart's secret.

Still he must call upon her before returning; he must watch the going out of her love towards their pet, and delight himself anew with this strange intoxication.

Now, Aunt Sophie called him to come to his mother's room; and, for the time, all else was forgotten in grief that the delicate sufferer had not improved since he last saw her; so pale, so faded did she seem, that Clarence half thought she might any moment vanish from his sight. He sat by the bed, held the slender hand, almost transparent in its whiteness, and reverently kissed the dear face she turned towards him, but dared not trust his voice until she spoke.

"I'm glad to see you, darling. I wish you could stay with me."

"Do you, mother? I will stay, of course, if you desire it." Her look of pleasure affected him strangely; he struggled to throw off his emotion, asking, —

"Don't you feel stronger, mother, a little? could you sit up?" thinking that a slight physical exertion might give the right impetus to a returning tide of strength.

"Oh, no, Clare, I don't want to. Talk to me. Do you like your work? Is there much of it?"

She spoke faintly, endeavoring to interest herself in something apart from the sick room.

"Yes, mother, I like it; perhaps because there is so little. It's a small place. I like the quiet hours for study best."

"You always did. You were always a good boy, Clare; I wish you were home now," speaking as though it were a thing impossible.

"I will stay, mother, as long as you desire it."

"Yes?" The faded face grew bright a moment, and she closed her eyes, still clinging to his hand. After a while she asked, —

"We have heard from Edy; have you seen it?"

"No, mother; she is well?"

"Ask Sophie for the letter; or, Clare, look in the upper drawer."

He found it, and resumed his seat close by the bed.

"Read it to me again, darling." The whispered request was complied with. It was a lively letter, telling of the voyage, the sights, gayeties, and daily excitement of foreign travel; sending messages of affection to all, and "thousand kisses to little May."

As he read, tears pressed beneath the closed lids of the self-convicted mother, and fell upon the pillow unheeded. As he folded the letter, and laid it back, she whispered, —

"Did you write to Edy, dear?"

"Yes, mother."

"Carefully, Clare?"

"Yes, dear mother."

"Poor Edy! but *she* will only mourn the loss; that is all for her."

She closed her eyes again; the lips trembled; Clarence felt that something more than the loss pressed upon his mother's heart. What it was he dared not ask, and she could not tell. When she slept he left her in Eveline's care, with an indefinable dread of coming sorrow, — sorrow that pressed the footprints of the last, so near did it seem to him. Leaving the still darkness of the sick room, he sought the cheer of Ruby's presence.

He was not disappointed in the hope of finding her alone; the ladies were busy up-stairs; Margaret devoted to her mother, and the children in the play-room.

He told, at once, how the knowledge of her new charge had gratified him, and the gladness beaming from his eyes told more than words. It made her very happy.

"Shall I go for Pet? Do you want to see her, Clare?"

"Not now," he answered. "Tell me how Ned feels about giving up the child; for, according to Aunt Sophie, it is no half-way giving,—she is really and always to be yours. Is it so?"

"Yes. One can't tell his feelings, he says so little; only that, it being Mabel's request, nothing else was to be thought of; and he leaves home in a week or so for an indefinite time. I hope he will meet Edith and Merle abroad."

"Did you know we had heard from them?"

"No, indeed. Yesterday then, for I was over the day before. Tell me all about them, Clare. Were they happy and well, and is journeying pleasant to them?"

Her eagerness surprised him, but it need not; she was only thinking how soon so much pleasure must be marred by the sad tidings on the way to them.

He told the story; then, pausing and bending his eyes upon her face, said, —

"May I ask you one question, Ruby?"

"As many as you like, Clare," and a clear, inquiring gaze met his.

"You told me once that this marriage did not mean unhappiness for you. If not for you, then for him; for I thought — I *know*, Ruby, that Merle loved you."

She blushed, but could not deny it. There was nothing to be said. She would have thought the words impertinent from another; but Clarence had been her confidant from childhood. However, she did not reply.

"Did he not, Ruby?"

"Once he did, Clare."

"You refused him, then," he persisted.

"I had to, Clare. I did n't know it until too late. It surprised me; indeed I did not mean —" still she blushed — would he think her trifling and coquettish? She could not bear that.

"Well, there's no accounting for love's transformations. Excuse me, Ruby; it was not mere curiosity. I did n't know but Edith had — but then you were always

friends. Well, it was enveloped in mystery to me; of course, you understood it all."

He should not think wrongly of her, now that the secret was divulged; and, in a sort of desperation, she exclaimed, —

"It was a surprise to me, Clarence, altogether, and I did not love him. Shall I marry when I cannot love?"

Ruby's eyes met his with a firm, steady gaze.

"Never! never!" he answered, with passionate earnestness. Then, more calmly, —

"Not love him! I thought you did." That was all; but the light flashed over his face like the burning rays of an opal; then, dying out, left the sadness more deeply imprinted.

He could not understand it. She, so glorious in her dawning womanhood, with a nature so rare, so capable of loving, and a heart so tender to appreciate, why could she not love one worthy as Merle; but he only said, quietly, —

"I thought — and you never loved him, Ruby? He was a noble man."

The moment inspired her. "Not half as noble as the one I could love! — the one I do love!" Frightened at her boldness, Ruby's eyes drooped until the lashes swept the scarlet cheeks.

"The one you *do* love, Ruby!" He took her hand, as he sat beside her, in a quick grasp; then dropped it suddenly. His face flushed and paled alternately; for the last half-cherished possibilities of happiness

were fading from his soul, he knew not why or how. "I have no right to your confidence. What am I that I should dare advise or counsel? I have lingered too long already, but I wish you joy, great joy. Good-by, Ruby." And with quick impulse he sought the door.

The flush of maiden modesty paled before his deep, uncontrolled feeling. Ah, she read his face aright; however much he sought to conceal, it was as an open book to her, and he should not leave her suffering thus.

"Clarence! my cousin! come back. Let me tell you, though my heart, for very shame, should cease to beat. Oh, do not leave me now, dear cousin."

There was magic in each thrilling tone. He could not go when her voice called thus, nor could he sit quietly and listen to the story of her love, even though her happiness was dearer than his own. Hastily he caught the hand outstretched for his return, and, dropping a white face upon it, he said, rapidly, —

"God bless you, dearest; give you joy unspeakable; make life a perpetual glory for you,—and bless him also, whoever it may be; but indeed I must leave you now; I *must* go. You will write to me, Ruby, tell me all; and I will send congratulations that will satisfy *my cousin*. Good-by, I must go. I have not another moment."

"You cannot, Clare. Not until I tell you *who* it is I love. Then, if you will go, I'll not speak a word to keep you."

"Write it, Ruby."

"No"; and she smiled, although the blushes still burned painfully, and she could scarce frame another word.

"You must! I will not hear it."

Still she clung to his hand.

"I love *you*, Clarence, — only you — O pity me, for I have said it." The sweet face dropped its blushing beauty into her open hands. He started.

"Ruby! Ruby! *You* love! *You*, with your royal heart, *love me*, the hunchback? Be truthful. Do you know what you say?"

His tones grew deep and low. His eyes burned upon her; but the drooping head could not lift itself, although she seemed to feel his gaze.

"Speak, for this is cruel. Have you read my heart, and do you play with it as with a toy? Speak, I say."

His voice terrified her, with its cold, calm ring.

"Tis you, Clarence, only you — oh, be kind — for I die of shame." Now, her eyes were lifted; and timidly, beseechingly, sought his face; those tender eyes, — how easily now he read the sweet news in their starry depths; how the beautiful truth flashed upon him, filling his heart, even to a sense of bursting, with rapturous pain. He stood as one entranced, taking in only the one glorious idea, and, for the time being, oblivious to her fast increasing embarrassment.

At last his soul comprehended this sudden joy, and clasping both the little nervous hands in his, he exclaimed, —

"Mine, my own! for all time; aye, for all eternity! Oh, thank God."

His fervent spirit filled her eyes with tears; they met his, and read therein the love of a life, the devotion of a noble soul, thankfulness and joy too deep for utterance.

"You love me, Ruby, love *me*?" he asked in triumph.

"Yes, Clarence." He drew her nearer, and, with hands still clasped, her head resting upon his shoulder, he said, —

"Ruby, I have worshipped you always, — worshipped you, as a star shining far, far beyond my reach. But now I love you, *love* you, and will wear you as a flower upon my heart, — my life-long joy; my only treasure; my radiant Ruby. I have always loved you, Ruby."

"I know it, Clare," she answered simply.

"Ah, how beautiful is life. How beautiful is love."

"Yes, for it reaches beyond life, Clare."

"It is the brightness of eternal life," he answered.

A quick, bounding step drew near, and little May was clasped between them, her cheeks glowing and her shining curls disarranged by tumultuous play.

"Take me to my mamma, Clare," she asked.

"Don't you love to stay with Ruby, Pet?"

"'F course I do; but mamma's gone a long time. I tired waiting so long."

"The little girl is tired of play; Aunt Ruby must rock her, come." The child nestled in her arms; the blue eyes took on a far-away look; the excitement of the

play-room passed off; the murmuring voices were as a lulling melody; and while they gazed into each other's eyes, and listened to each other's words, she slept.

Ruby placed her among the pillows of the sofa, threw an afghan lightly over her, then followed Clarence to the door for a last good-by, until he came again.

Seeking her mother, she stood before her, with a face full of happiness, so radiant with its sense of bliss, that in astonishment the mother paused in her task, asking, with a sympathetic smile, —

"What is it, child? For, I'm sure, something wonderful has enveloped you in its glory."

"Yes, mother." She drew a low seat near, and hiding her face upon her mother's lap, thought to tell the story, but the words would not come.

"Don't you know what I want to say, mother? Have you not seen?" with sudden timidity.

"Seen? I have seen nothing. Speak, dear, I have not the power of divination."

"Ah, mother, you must know. He loves me, — I thought it long ago — poor Clare, to doubt me so."

"Loves you! Clarence? — your cousin! What do you mean, Ruby? Surely —"

"I mean, dear mother, we understand each other now; and, oh, I am so happy to have him know I love him; to crown his life with joy at last."

"Ruby! you cannot mean this. You *love* your cousin?"

"Yes, mother, I love him."

"Love him! He is a relative, child. It is foolish." Her face told of perplexity and disappointment.

"Only my second cousin, mother; surely that does not trouble you."

"Why, Ruby, you would never marry Clarence. You surprise and grieve me. *You*, Ruby, fitted to grace any position! I cannot, *cannot* have it so."

"But, mother, I love him; and is not Clarence, with his lofty mind and pure life, fitted to grace and ennoble any position? May he not rise to any height? Mother, I thought you loved and honored Clarence. Your words trouble me. I had thought to make you happy." The brightness of that sweet young face had faded; and, drooping it again upon her mother's knee, she wept bitterly.

Tears had seldom clouded Ruby's spirit. Hers was a hopeful, buoyant nature. This drooping attitude and saddened tone touched her mother's heart; ambitious as she was for her daughter, love could triumph even over that; and, tenderly stroking the bowed head, she said, reluctantly to be sure, but kindly, —

"Forgive me, Ruby, if in my surprise I wounded you. You were not mistaken in thinking that I loved Clarence. I do love him, I pity him, and would treat him tenderly always; but, dear, you must not blame your mother, if she hesitates to bestow upon him her choicest treasure."

"But why hesitate, mother? Is he not the one above all others you might trust?"

"Perhaps so, and yet Clarence is not ambitious to excel."

"He has had no incentive in the past, mother. He will be now, believe me."

"It may be; but, Ruby, let me be frank with you, once for all. His deformity is dreadful to me."

"Has it always been so, mother?"

"No, my child; I see it now with other eyes, I acknowledge."

"Mother, mother! if the gem be rare, what matter how the casket be formed? The glory of his face and character shall hide all minor defects from those who love him; oh, dearest mother, look upon him with my eyes, and treat him generously; for none so worthy as poor Clare."

"Did you love him, when Merle spoke to you?"

"Yes, mother."

"And knew it then?"

"I began to know it, mother."

"Your mother was not your confidant!"

"How could I speak, unless you saw it?"

"I was blind; and now, dear, you do not ask advice."

"I ask consent, mother, and approval. You will not make me unhappy?"

"No, dearest. If this is happiness for you, it must e'en be for me also. But run away and leave me awhile."

She kissed the troubled brow, and motioned her away; for this unselfish, pure-minded daughter might not see her struggle to overcome that which she could not but feel was unworthy the Christian woman.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SKIRMISHING.

"Vain are all sudden sallies of delight,
Convulsions of a weak, distempered joy."

THE eyes of Clarence Tournay, when next they met Mrs. Stoughton's, told wonderful tales.

Her joy seemed almost equal to his own, it was so full of sympathy and hope, so full of motherly interest and satisfaction; while to Clarence the entire face of nature had changed,—even his books, had he taken time for them from attendance on his mother, would have given him tenfold the comfort ever before.

He could only leave her long enough to visit a few patients who still insisted on seeing him; he sat hours by her bed, trying every incentive to bring her back to hope and life. Day by day she wasted; day by day the frail tenement grew more feeble, until, as the flickering flame at last expires, she closed her eyes and the spirit fled,—with no child near to whisper a last farewell, but the one she had all through life driven from her as a trial and mortification.

These days were a full compensation to Clarence;

his mother's clinging dependence upon him; his father's deference to his opinions, and enjoyment of his society, and Aunt Sophie's heart-felt, though seldom expressed love.

The death of his wife, though not entirely unlooked for, was a serious blow to Mr. Tournay. The man grew old very fast. The black hair of middle age took on an iron gray. The strong, upright frame began to stoop beneath this accumulation of sorrow, and the cheerfulness of his nature gave way to misanthropic silence.

As days merged into weeks, after the burial, the house would have been gloomy as the tomb, had not the music of Eveline enlivened it, and the frequent visits of little May acted like a penetrating sunbeam.

The Dukes left the city for Elmtown very soon, and although Aunt Sophie's heart craved the presence of the child, she would not ask it.

From Edith they heard often. The news of Mabel's death was responded to by a burst of passionate grief. She would gladly return at once, but Merle did not think it advisable; and she was too full of sorrow to know what was best. As yet, she had not heard of the last bereavement. But when the tidings did reach her, the impulsive girl-wife was drowning her evanescent sorrow in a tumult of preparation for a Parisian party, the gayest of the gay, the most brilliant of French butterflies; for Merle disapproved of mourning costume, and the acquiescent wife willingly yielded

Eveline would very readily have joined one of the numerous parties of pleasure, already forming among the friends of the family, had she felt it safe or politic to do so; but, confident that Aunt Sophie only waited an opportunity to lock the doors against her, she curbed her impatience, and took care to give her no cause of offence; at the same time presuming upon Mr. Tournay's often expressed interest to make herself more than usually agreeable to him, in his despondency and loneliness.

That he learned to depend more and more upon her society, was not strange. Desolate indeed would this once brilliant home have become to its master, had not the young girl devoted herself to making it attractive. And when Aunt Sophie looked upon her brother's altered countenance, and saw the ravages of grief, she could hardly wish it otherwise; although Eveline would never be more to her than she had been, — a bundle of deceit, a presuming, disagreeable vixen.

At Elmtown, the young people were rejoicing in the spring's rare, bright days.

It was not long ere Margaret was pursuing her favorite walk by the broad, blue river; not long before its reflected beauties were again speaking to her soul in language she never failed to comprehend. And as the bright days glided by on the swift wings of peace and contentment, she learned also to look for and anticipate the coming of another, to her wild, quiet haunt.

What attraction the river held for Harry Stoughton, he could hardly himself have told. Whatever it was, often during the week he found himself impelled that way, impelled to spend the brightest hour of the day in watching with Margaret its swift flow and changing hues; and listening, with her, to its low murmuring voice as it bade them each forget the bitterness of the past, and clothe the future with the more subdued but more enduring colors of faith and truth.

Clarence had witnessed upon his mother's countenance, a few days before her death, when he told her of his love for Ruby and his hopes for the future, such heartfelt joy and childlike surprise, as were not easily forgotten. It came to him often, now that he could see her face no more, as a bright memory.

All his friends intuitively felt that Clarence had reached a turning-point in his life, the day when clouds would cease to gather, when all that was dispiriting and gloomy would be scattered by the beauty of Ruby's love; and thus it proved.

He was inspired with an ambition he had never before possessed. The world was before him; the path to honor and success straightforward, and free from obstacle. There could be no impediments he had not courage, aye, and strength to surmount, no labor he would not perform, no sacrifices he would not make; and all with the hopefulness and joyfulness of youth, that was still his.

He had a new standard of success, a new measure

of effort and application; but he was girded for the race by that priceless boon, *her* love and faith. No more doubts; no more gloom or despondency; henceforth, all was the brightness of a perfect hope, a never-dying faith.

What a summer that was! How the golden days seemed to linger, grow long, and wait for them. How their hearts bounded with the exultation of life. What a pure, brilliant hue all nature wore. Never flowers bloomed so perfectly; never birds sung so sweetly, or bees hummed among the fragrance so contentedly. The winds murmured wonderful tales, the waters laughed an echo to their joy, time was filled for them from the wealth of eternity, and love took on a look divine.

Once, Aunt Sophie came for a day, just to see little May in her summer bloom; to fold the child to her heart; to drink in for a few hours the wine of happiness, and then fly back to her post, — back to minister to her brother, and with a firm hand keep Eveline in her place, if that were possible.

But when, at dusk, she reached the house, Eveline had not been home since noon, nor had she used the carriage as she sometimes did. It was seldom she was out so late alone; and while the anxious woman wondered at the cause, a night-key was heard in the lock, and a low, musical laugh and chatty tones were replied to by her brother's voice, more cheery than she had heard it of late.

It was unusual for him to return at this hour; she

would see what it meant; would sift that girl's artfulness to the dregs; and as for having the life worried out of her, she would not. It was time the house was cleared of her. Edith was expected in a few weeks, and the two could not abide beneath the same roof. She hoped that Merle and Edith would come there on their return, and bring back the old life, bustle, and brightness she missed so much.

If Eveline was away, it might be; and she had no claim upon them. She could hardly have the impudence to remain, now that no one needed her services. They would find an opening for her to support herself respectably. She would befriend her, of course; but as to having her there idle, and good for nothing, it was out of the question. Her brother must see it. It was not proper, — and — she would not endure it any longer. To-night would be as good time as any to arrange matters, particularly as Edith was coming so soon.

Therefore, entering the parlor by one door, as the two came in at another, she said, coldly, —

"Where have you been, Eveline? I'm surprised that you should leave the house to the servants when I'm away."

"I only ran down town, Aunt Sophie, to drive off a headache. I didn't think it would matter," was the answer, in dulcet tones.

"It does matter. I'm not often out, but when I leave the house in your care, I expect you to stay at

home. It's the least you can do; you have gadding enough at other times."

"I'm very sorry, indeed."

"H'm!" was the ungracious response.

"Well, well, sister Sophie! The house stands, I believe, and if the child had a headache it was a most sensible remedy."

"Child! — very well, brother; we'll go to tea, now. Won't you ring for it to be brought up, Eveline? And afterwards, brother, I have business with you alone."

"Anything special?"

"Yes, I think so, particularly as Edith will, soon be home. Can I see you after tea?"

"Oh, yes, in the library," leading the way to the dining-room.

Very demurely Eveline sipped her tea a few minutes; then, asking Aunt Sophie to excuse her, and she would get a scarf for her shoulders, as she felt a little chilly, she slipped from the room. Flying over the stairs, she entered the library, a small room adjoining the parlors, and, opening the window, she closed the outside blinds, and dropped the heavy drapery; then noiselessly opening the one nearest in the parlor, and leaving the blinds also open, she ran up another flight to her own room, and, snatching a breakfast shawl, flew swiftly back and resumed her seat with as much quiet ease as if she had but stepped into the next apartment.

Supper over, and a few general orders given to the

waiter by the careful spinster, she said, looking towards her brother, —

"Now, brother, if Eveline will wipe up the silver for me, I will consult with you a little."

"Certainly, I shall be happy to do it," was Eva's eager reply, stepping to the closet for basin and towels, which Aunt Sophie always kept on hand.

But no sooner were they fairly out of hearing, than she turned to the girl in waiting, and said, —

"Susan, if you'll wash the silver carefully, and not let her know but I did it, I'll give you my rose-colored wrapper; will you?"

"Of course, Miss Eva; I'll do it for nothing"

"I don't want you to, you shall have the dress; now, not a lisp to any one. Be sure."

With the words on her lips, she followed the two upstairs. The library door was already closed; but, creeping noiselessly through the parlors, she stepped from the open window upon the piazza, and moved in the dusk towards the library, where Aunt Sophie's sharp tones already caught her ear.

Not a word was lost; the small gray eyes twinkled maliciously; the slight fingers shut themselves tightly into the delicate palm, as, bending with her head close to the blinds, she drank in every word, her own plans rapidly forming meanwhile, — plans that she would carry out in spite of them all. Her teeth almost gleamed in the shadow as she smiled bitterly, when the worthy lady begged her brother to find her a respectable home else-

where, and provide her with the means of support until she could find employment.

"I do not need her services as Maria did, — or thought she did; and she has no claim upon you for a home. She is a constant worry and vexation to me; but I should not mind that, if it were not for Edith. We are lonely, and want her here. She will come, if Eveline is away."

"She will come any way. She don't object to Eveline. They've been friends ever since they were school-girls."

"Nonsense! They hate each other; and, for heaven's sake, brother, what do you want the girl here for? She is no earthly use, and I can't abide her."

"Tush, tush, Sophie; I have promised to befriend her, and I will."

"Of course, befriend her, find her employment, but don't let her be the means of driving your own children from you. We are getting lonely and old, brother; we want to make home pleasant for the few who are left us; and we cannot make it so, with this girl in the family, who is uncongenial and foreign to our tastes in every respect."

"Maria loved her."

"No, she did not. She only made her useful."

"I can't drive her away. Why, woman, she's an orphan."

"I know that; but she is not without resources. She can support herself handsomely with her music. I will

do all I can to help her; and if you are decided, not to be imposed upon by her tears and whining, I will find her a good home, and make room here for Merle and Edith."

"Well, well! anything for peace, only she shall not be offended. She shall be told carefully and kindly."

"I'll see to that, brother. Leave it with me, I will make all arrangements; you need not be troubled in the least. I'm sure, Maria would very soon have sent her away, — and Eveline herself ought to be ashamed to be so dependent upon strangers."

"Very well, — any way. If she goes, it is only on Edith's account, and we are bound to have it wear a friendly look; for she has really been one of the family so long, tell her she is to call on me for all the funds she needs for anything."

And he sauntered into the parlor, followed by his sister, and, throwing himself into an easy-chair, muttered that he should miss the child's music. He didn't see why women could n't live in peace with each other.

A moment or two Aunt Sophie bustled about the room, then went below to look with her usual care after the silver, and other household interests.

Quietly unclosing the blinds, Eveline entered the deserted library, shut the window without a sound, and, assuring herself that no one was near but the master of the house, she slipped along the hall, and stealing up to his chair, with a low laugh kissed his forehead.

"She's been scolding because I ran away this afternoon, I know; but there was no harm in it, was there?"

"Not a bit, you witch."

"I do try to please her, indeed I do. But she don't love me, — as you do, and as dear Mrs. Tourney did, — and how can I help it? I don't know but she will try to turn you from me."

"No, no, child; no one can do that."

Then sinking upon the carpet, and fondling his hands in hers, she said, in her lowest, saddest tones, "You will not cease to love me, papa Tour, will you? I'm all alone in the world, — not a single heart to love me but yours, no one to trust in, no one to cling to but you. Say you will never forsake me, my benefactor, my best, my only friend."

"Forsake you! No, by heaven! I'll care for you while I live."

"Thank you; oh, thank you! Now indeed I am happy; and I will try to please Aunt Sophie, and love her too. Do you think she will ever love me?" with childlike innocence.

"I don't know how she can help it."

"I hope she will sometime, — but now let me go, and I will sing you asleep," she said, as he folded her closely in his paternal enthusiasm, and kissed the lips so confidently raised to his face.

She opened the piano, and touched the keys in her own peculiar masterly manner, while he hated himself for allowing his sister to draw from him even the

reluctant consent to find this affectionate and gentle girl another home. But it was not too late; the promise should be recalled, her sensitive nature should not be harshly dealt with. Sophie should learn to love her; at least, should learn to be gentle with her, and this should be her home as long as she wanted one.

Before retiring, he took occasion to say firmly to her, that he had changed his mind, and would recall the words she had forced from him. He believed the house was his; and, while he lived, Eveline should find a home there.

"But Edith, — brother, surely you don't mean to drive your own kin from you," was the angry rejoinder.

"It was Edith's doings, her coming; and if it's disagreeable to her now, it can't be avoided. She has her husband; Eveline is alone. My duty is to protect a helpless orphan, and if you join me in the good work, well; if not —"

"If not — I suppose I may leave too. Well, well, brother, if it has come to this, thank heaven, the old place still waits for me. I can go back to it."

"Hush, Sophie. It has not come to this. You have been a faithful sister. I cannot keep house without you; that you know. Let us be at peace with each other. The time may come, Sophie, when we shall both go back to the old place; I sometimes have a longing for its rough beauty. But here, I must rule, even as you would there. And in this matter I am firm. Eveline shall stay until she finds a home elsewhere."

"The Lord send her one speedily, then; for the house will not hold us two long."

"Be her stay long or short, she is to have kind treatment. She is ready to serve you, and love you if you will let her; and, in the name of peace, let me have quiet in my home."

"Serve me! love me! Heaven defend us all from her love! You are deceived, bewitched, demented, and blind! Oh, for some power to wake him from this spell!" she muttered, as he left her for his own solitary room. Above, in the dark, leaning over the banisters, drinking in every syllable and tone, was Eveline, who, as the last word reached her, crept noiselessly away, and, closing the door of her room, smiled triumphantly and maliciously.

No such power as Aunt Sophie invoked, appeared; every day Eveline's attractions increased; every day her net was drawn more closely about the lonely, craving heart of the man; every day he found new solace in her bewildering music, her plaintive voice, her captivating but shy endearments, lavished upon him with the freedom of a daughter.

Her apparent deference to Aunt Sophie's wishes excited his admiration as strongly as it did the spinster's indignation and distrust. Beneath smiling flowers lurked the serpent.

Eveline had now no hope of winning Hugh Ellington. A southern star had risen upon his horizon. She felt herself eclipsed, but not disheartened. She formed

her plans anew, and went to work with systematic boldness to execute them.

The time was not ripe yet for the final stroke; but she could afford to be patient, until, her own position firm, she could send back taunt for taunt, and scorn for scorn,—thus, covering her malignant hate with meek looks and gentle words, concealing dangerous claws beneath velvet softness, she went about the house like a spirit of darkness clothed with light.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MARRIAGE.

"First, God's love,
And next the love of wedded souls,
Which still presents that mystery's counterpart."

THE summer passed. Merle and Edith had not returned, as was expected; indeed, they now hinted at spending the ensuing winter on the continent.

Edith wrote that Ned was with them, very gloomy, clinging closely to them; only finding pleasure in their company, in letters from home, and news of Pet.

Aunt Sophie was keenly disappointed, but the plan would suit Eveline exactly. If Edith would stay abroad until her secret work was finished, she could then defy a daughter's protestations as easily as she had counteracted the aunt's efforts.

Meantime Clarence, also, had begun to desire foreign travel and study. Ruby had always desired it for him, had urged him to it, when within his own heart was no incentive to the exertion. But now her wish was law.

He would travel, but not alone. If he went abroad

for improvement and study, he must stay so long a time, that he could not go alone. Ruby must be with him; even her mother saw there was no alternative. Henceforth her child's life was to be merged in his; the daughter must become the wife.

There was no shrinking in the fulness of Ruby's love as the day approached; no unsatisfied pride; no secret wish that the deformed might become as others. Her glory was, that his soul towered far above the meanness of his stature; and her satisfaction and happiness were complete in being found worthy to minister to so pure a spirit, so kind a heart, so noble an intellect. And quietly, without confusion and parade, preparations for the coming marriage went on.

Ruby had no desire to outshine others in bridal array, but these last works of love were very pleasant to the parents' hearts. They still clasped their first-born with clinging affection, and would have deferred the separation indefinitely, had it been possible. But, as the time was fixed, they filled up the intervening weeks with every token hearts could devise or wealth purchase, ready, when the day should come, to crown all with their prayerful benedictions. Ruby's sky had been radiant, all through life, with the sunshine of love; no darkness or shadow had thus far clouded her days; friends were the golden links that bound her happy spirit to perfect joy, and God over all.

Each vied with others to fill the measure of her cup to overflowing, and within its depths were no dregs of

bitterness. The wine of life was sweet and clear to the last drop.

Very touching in its tenderness was her mother's love, very sympathetic and benignant were Aunt Catherine's smile and words, and very often the stately Margaret revealed to her cousin some new and elegant token of her interest, some secret work, newly finished for the coming days; while Flora and Vickie had many a prolonged whispering interview with their cousin, which brought to their young faces eager looks and charming smiles.

All this time little Pet could only clasp white arms about Ruby's neck, and press warm kisses upon the dear face, as a testimony of her love. She did not understand it all, only that Clare and Ruby were going to visit a long time, and she was going too; for Ruby would not be parted from her charge, although every member of the family objected at first, even Mrs. Stoughton protesting against it. Nothing could make her see her duty and obligation in any other light.

"She is the same as my own, mother. I could not leave my own. Could you?"

"No, Ruby; but we will take care of her. She will be a serious obstacle to your journey."

"I cannot, mother, give her up, even to you. Clarence agrees with me. You know we do not go entirely for pleasure, and if I take a nurse —"

So it was finally settled. Everything prospered. Mr. Tourney was munificent in his gifts to Clarence.

Eveline offered her services so freely, that, as she was in the city, little May's preparations were given into her hands; and the child was soon ready for any emergency of weather, or change of climate.

Even Aunt Sophie could find no fault with Eveline now. She stooped low to conquer; and the maiden's suspicions were allayed. Therefore, after a few months the morning of the wedding dawned upon harmonious families.

The wedding ceremony was to take place at noon, the party to leave at once for the city, and the next day be on the steamer.

Guests were already arriving at the house.

Aunt Catherine met the Tourneys, and took them into her own apartment, where Margaret was putting a finishing touch to the simple white of the young sisters, and where little May flitted about in her new travelling suit, like a doll on exhibition, rejoicing she could go where papa was.

"Good morning, Maggie," in Eveline's mellowest tones. "Kiss me, Pet. Don't she look sweet? I declare I never saw anything more perfect. Madam Decker had the whole arrangement of this suit. I was a little afraid she'd look like a miniature old woman in it; but it's elegant, certainly," giving the child another squeeze in testimony of her appreciation of Madam's taste.

"But the drawing-rooms were not darkened, as I passed. Aren't they to be, and the gas lighted? It would be so much better taste. Do, Maggie, see to it."

"It was spoken of, but Ruby prefers the sunlight," was the quiet answer.

"Oh, dear, I don't! Gaslight throws a subdued beauty over everything; but then the drapery prevents a glare, — and the flowers were charming, Flossy's work, I guess. When I'm married, Flossy, I'll send for you to adorn my mansion."

"Thank you."

The elder ladies had retreated into an inner room; and now, emerging, Aunt Sophie desired to see Clarence. Vickie, volunteering to deliver the message, soon returned. Clare was in the library alone; would Aunt Sophie go there?

It was a short interview. And when they separated, Aunt Sophie's face showed traces of tears, while glances of grateful love beamed upon her from her nephew's eyes. Little May's nurse had been a week with them, and already won the child's confidence by her gentle, ladylike ways, and tender care. With Bridget's help, who had followed Mrs. Stoughton from the parsonage, to bestow her warm, Irish blessing upon her favorites, she was now strapping the trunks, and arranging outside garments and hats preparatory to starting.

"One more pull, Miss Mary, and we'll git this strap a bit tighter. Shure, now it's done. There's more good-will in yer heart, than strength in yer hands, though; and, faith, that last jirk gave me lockjaw in me shoulder. Is there no men about to take hold with me? You've not the power."

"Yes, Bridget, I can do it. The men are busy outside, — so many carriages, you know."

"Bless me! it's a great day. May the sun shine on them day and night, and the flowers bloom the year round in their path, the Lord love them. It's two angels you'll travel with, Miss Mary. Dade, now! the last box is finished; you're ready for the start. I'll pull down me sleeves; and would ye be so kind as to stick a pin in me collar? I must find a spot to peek at me master, when he binds the two blessed ones together, for his heart's in it. It will melt us all, I'm shure, with its solemn grandness."

"You can come with me, Bridget. I'll find you a place."

"Will ye now? Well, ye're no stuck-up leddy, if yer hands are white and powerless, like some I've seen. It don't matter where ye put me, only I git a look at their swate faces."

It was not long before her honest admiration was gratified. The hour had come. Ruby stood within her mother's room, with a face of sweet solemnity. She had been folded to the hearts of father and mother for the last time as theirs only. Henceforth, the current of another love, as pure, as deep, as fervent, should flow beside this, mingling its waters, each sanctifying the other; as that holiest love of all, the uplifting of the heart to Deity, should sanctify both. And Clarence, — already had they adopted him as a son dear and beloved, even before the word

of God's servant should unite the two. In the seclusion of their own room, with none to witness the heart's tenderest feelings, these parents called him theirs, and bestowed upon him their choicest treasure and holiest blessing.

As the young couple stood before the village pastor, in the midst of a silent crowd of witnesses, it was with fervent joy, and the tenderest emotions of a friend who had been almost a father to both, that he gazed upon them. Deep and tender was the voice that fell upon the young maiden's heart. It was freighted with peace, bringing a calm to one shaken with thoughts of the near parting.

Then there were silent clasping of hands and pressure of lips; forced smiles, as low-voiced congratulations died away in inaudible whispers; quick starting tears, hastily dried, followed by merrier words and livelier greeting from those who could more easily be cheerful, because loving less.

The peace of her pastor's words had penetrated Ruby's spirit. With gentle cheerfulness she stole from this last hour its parting sadness, and drank in its concentrated love as in reserve for the months of separation before her. The departure of guests when all was over, the bustle and commotion of getting ready for the drive to the city, looking out for little May who was all excitement, helped to fill up the time; and not until the party were in the carriage, and ready to leave the groups clustering about, did Ruby realize that her

dearest earthly friend, her mother, always idolized and revered, was to be left behind.

At that moment she had eyes for none else. The last half-sad, half-smiling gaze rested upon that dear form, and caught the expression of longing love which still inundated the face. One long, silent, loving glance, the slow withdrawal of her hand from her father's pressure, who stood at the window of the carriage, and they drove away, followed by the ringing good-byes of the children and servants, Bridget's among the rest.

They went alone, for Ruby had said,—

"I can only speak parting words at home, and let me see you all for the last time here."

The winding avenue soon hid them from those who stood by the house; and as the carriage emerged from the grounds into the turnpike, two children,—a boy and girl,—with hands full of flowers, stood by the roadside.

"Stop, Clare! tell him to stop. There're Tony and Nellie," issued eagerly from the wife's lips.

'T was but the work of a moment to rein up the horses, and open the carriage door; while the children drew near at sound of Ruby's voice, Nellie looking shy and happy as she gave her flowers, and Tony with a pale face, quivering with emotion, as he said,—

"I shall never forget you, Mr. Clarence and Miss Ruby. You've been all the friends I ever had."

He could say no more; his trembling lips forbade, and the tears rained over his face, as it was lifted to Ruby's.

"Dear Tony, we shall think of you very often; be sure of it, and do not forget that Jesus is your friend," she said, pressing his hand in hers.

"Can I forget a word you've ever said? It's all my comfort. Will you take my flowers?" trying to hide his grief.

"They shall go with me upon the ocean, Tony, and Nellie's too, the choicest gifts of all; and now good-by. When I come back, we shall be very happy. I shall not forget you, my poor Tony."

With sudden impulse she drew the children near, and kissed them both. Clarence gave the word, and they drove on, so rapidly that Ruby failed to see how passionately the boy flung himself upon the ground and wept; and how, like a statue of distressed patience, Nellie stood waiting until his grief should subside.

CHAPTER XXX.

AGE AND YOUTH.

"Gold, alas! does love beget."

THE swift-winged months sped along too rapidly for the happy and contented, only that each day brought an added joy. The fields and hills were taking on their tender green. The majestic elms were covered with an emerald gauze, waving and floating in their swinging branches gracefully as the robes of a playful child. The robins already made the early morning ring with their matins; the scarlet breast of the oriole flashed from bough to bough; and, half concealed 'mid the branches here and there, was seen many a nest, shaped of twigs, straws, and hair, with one or more tiny eggs therein, ready for the mother bird to exercise her loving patience upon; while over the upland pastures roamed the fleecy sheep, with tinkling bells upon their necks, and tiny lambs nestling lovingly by their sides or frolicking about; and almost anywhere could be heard the cool flowing of some brook, gurgling over stones and through rushes on to the river. A lovely May morning had dawned, the air sweet with the fragrant arbutus, dewy violet, and early apple-blossom.

The soul welcomes this early life, this waking up of nature ; human lives bathe in God's sunshine, and drink in the freshness of His spring atmosphere. Proud manhood feels itself a child again, and revels in this recreation of the beautiful ; old age bends lovingly to touch the grass and flowers, and puts a wasted hand behind the feeble ear to catch the song of bird ; and the little children, fresh and pure as nature, gentle and playful as the lambs, curl the stems of dandelions, and string lilac petals with gleeful laughter.

About the parsonage all was fresh, living, growing beauty. Clustering rose-bushes twining about the columns were covered with a tender verdure ; early tulips gleamed amid the grass ; the great strawberry bed was white with blossoms, giving abundant promise ; and in the midst of the garden stood Harry, resting upon his hoe, his honest face flushed with exercise, and looking into his mother's eyes, who near by had watched the progress of his work.

"Mother, more than a year ago I buried all my hopes of happiness in my own heart, just as I have hidden this seed in the earth. They are dead now, mother, and the seed will die too ; but —"

"From their death, Harry, will spring flower and fruit, more satisfying than they themselves could be."

"I know, mother ; I was thinking—" He paused and smiled into her face. An answering smile, as she replied, —

"I have been thinking too, my son, that, from the

dust of those buried hopes, may spring a truer happiness, a more lasting joy, than the dead one. Is it so?"

"May the heart, once deceived and crushed, trust again?"

"Yes, Harry ; most truly. The heart of man may be led blindfold for a time and err, may lean upon a frail support, may be deceived, may suffer agony when the awakening comes, but still not be crushed, still may revive and hope and trust again, and with a clearer vision, a stronger faith, and purer, more soul-satisfying love, endow the future with a happiness that shall be eternal."

"I believe it, mother ; I almost know it. And yet, remembering when I did walk blindfold, when I did rush on without your counsel and blessing, remembering that nearly fatal hour, I wish to ask them now, at the first step. Ah, mother, your eyes see, — you read my heart. Is it well?"

She stood by his side, her hand on his shoulder, her eyes lifted to his ; for he towered above his mother now, although as a child he still yearned for her guiding hand. Her eyes were dewy with excessive tenderness, her voice low, full, and sweet.

"With all my heart, Harry, I bid you godspeed ; and with all a mother's love I can take Margaret to my bosom as I could never have taken the other. She is dear already. I think she knows it, and the knowledge gives her pleasure. Have I said enough, Harry?"

"Yes, mother." No more was needed. The garden work went on, his soul deluged with happy hopes, his

face radiant with the sunshine of joy. The mother walked slowly towards the house, where Bridget's voice sounded in gay song amid the sharp clatter of dishes.

Entirely unlike in natural characteristics, these two had been the closer drawn together by the contrasts each afforded to the other. Margaret's retiring nature found all the social excitement she needed in his exuberant spirits and lively discourse, while he gained in her the rest and serene happiness he found not in himself. Gradually he had learned to look upon her with a love bordering upon reverence,—a love ennobling his whole character, so entirely unlike the protecting, patronizing affection he had experienced towards Eveline, that the two emotions had scarce anything in common.

It was now more than a year that Miss Tourney had kept house for her brother,—sometimes in quiet contentment, Eveline forcing herself to manifest a yielding, conciliatory disposition; at others, harassed by her suspicions, wrought up to bitter words and fitful displeasure by the girl's careless deportment and half-insolent boldness.

It was about this time, when all New-England house-keepers are revelling, not in visions, but in the realities of new paint, freshly-hung walls, and carpets free from the winter's accumulations, that the energetic woman, overflowing with her plans for making home attractive to Merle and Edith, was giving orders to subordinates with the clearness and precision of a general. Utterly discouraged in regard to another home for Eveline, and

confident that her brother would never allow her to be sent away, perplexed and troubled, her soliloquies often took a louder tone than she was aware.

"Edy never will live in the house with her," sweeping vigorously the parlor carpet, which she would allow no one else to touch. "Never! That's settled. The old lady Domett would be glad to have them there; but that won't do. I want the child home again. I'd give up the control entirely to Edith, and be glad to; but this minx, if she thinks to grow gray *here*, she mistakes. Why don't she marry? Bah! Who'd have her with open eyes?"

"Hope you don't mean me, Aunt Sophie." A low, hateful, mocking laugh sounded close behind her, and Eveline's gray, glittering eyes sparkled more with anger than fun.

The lady turned quickly.

"If you've listened, Miss, you've heard the honest truth. It's seldom such as you hear it in any other way."

"Perhaps you'll be able to furnish me a blind husband of your own choosing."

"I should like to furnish you with a more independent spirit, Miss, that would prevent your staying where your presence is hateful to all concerned."

"Be patient, Auntie. The good man of the house bids me stay; says *you* are to make me happy here. Therefore, if my right is as good as yours, it's not becoming in you to use such language."

"Impertinent hussy! Leave the room."

"My dear Auntie, I'm happier here; and you are to make me happy, you know; perhaps you will leave the room instead."

"Are you demented, girl, to address such language to me? Wait until Edith comes; we'll see then who remains and who goes."

"Certainly, my dear ancient of days; we shall see."

"This is past endurance. Brother shall know the whole story. I'll not subject myself to this trial another day. Go up-stairs, Eveline. I'll not waste anger on you."

"Yes, honored maiden, I intended to; for I don't like so much dust; my taste is more delicate; farewell." With a mocking courtesy she laughed, and left the room.

At lunch she did not appear; and, to inquiries, the girl in waiting said, "Miss Eveline ordered her lunch brought to her own room."

"Indeed!" was the sole reply.

At five o'clock the family equipage drew up before the door, and tripping over the stairs the young lady made her appearance, dressed in a sober but rich gray suit. Carelessly waving her hand to Aunt Sophie, she stepped into the carriage, and was driven away.

"Well, well! This is taking on airs in good earnest. What will come next? If brother is not a fool, or in his dotage, he must see. I will be decided. Either she goes, or I do; and it shall be settled before we

sleep. Thank heaven, I'm not dependent. The farm is my own. I have lived there, and can again. I'm harassed every hour. It's shameful, shameful! the brazen-faced hypocrite!"

With all her anger, the work still progressed. White paint gleamed, and glass glistened; the carpets looked fresh, and silver shone with new lustre; but all the wonted pleasure was marred by the tumult in her breast. Dinner waited an hour, and the master of the mansion had not made his appearance; Eveline, too, had not returned. Aunt Sophie, troubled and weary, waited in the dining-room for the sound of his latch-key; and when her patience was quite exhausted, and her fears fairly roused, wheels rolled up and stopped before the entrance. A moment after the two entered together, the gentleman appearing flushed and exhilarated, and Eveline with an added assurance and independence that was very galling to Aunt Sophie's wounded spirit.

"You are late, brother; has anything happened? Where did you pick up Eveline?"

"Not very late, Sophie, is it? Well, well, never mind. We have been attending to a little affair; and you must pardon us for keeping you out of the secret so long. But Eva is a modest child, and begged the favor so prettily."

"I don't understand you, brother; you must speak plainer. I was not aware she had even the usual share of modesty."

"Tut, tut, Sophie. Don't be sharp"; and, advanc-

ing towards his sister, he took her hand in a conciliatory manner. "She is my wife now, sister, and as such you are to regard her."

The hand was snatched from his grasp; and, with a horrified face, she gasped, —

"Your wife! She your wife! Oh, fool, fool, what has that serpent beguiled you into?"

She grew pale; with gaze fastened upon his face, she seemed incapable of another word. Amazement, grief, and indignation struggled for the mastery. There was a painful silence, until Eveline, with a fiery flash darting upon Aunt Sophie from her steel-like eyes, stepped to the gentleman's side, and insinuating her face between the two, asked, plaintively, —

"Have I not been true and faithful to you, my benefactor? And must *your wife* be called a serpent to her face?"

He passed his arm caressingly about the girlish form; she, nestling close to him, dropped her head upon it, and seemed convulsed with grief.

There had been before a half doubt in the man's mind whether he had treated the sister he loved with proper confidence, in withholding the knowledge of his plan from her, and bringing the news so suddenly and startlingly, when he understood so well her prejudices; but these softer feelings vanished in the infatuation of the moment; sternly and hastily he exclaimed, —

"Sophie! see what you have done; wounded her to the quick? She's a child no longer, but my loving wife;

I will not have her hurt. There, Eva, darling; look up; don't sob so, dear; she did not mean it; she'll take it all back. Come, dear."

"No, no, I can't be happy, and have her treat me so"; and with more violent weeping and clinging to him, she sobbed, —

"If I am your wife, you ought not to subject me to this treatment a day longer."

"No one shall ill-treat you, my precious wife. Sister Sophie, you will see the necessity of regarding her as the head of the house. Come, make your peace with her. Your words were cruel; but it was hard to surprise you so. I'm sorry, if you're wounded." Gradually Aunt Sophie's bewilderment had died away, and in its place had arisen a most intense disgust, which she could no more control than she could her breath.

"Peace with *her*. Never! Mark Tourney, you have chosen your own path; now walk you in it, and walk alone. All you have held as dear to your heart in the past, flees from you now. You have lost a sister, who has served you faithfully more than twenty years; and children, who ought to be more precious to you than this stranger, but are not. I pity you, — yes, pity you, my brother, for the day will not be a laggard that reveals this perfidy to your stricken life. She has won a position, a fortune, a home! Think you she wastes affection or admiration upon your gray hairs and failing strength? Ah, brother, I pity you, — for the awakening will be terrible. I know her! I know her!"

"Be still, Sophia Tourney. Don't you see my wife is almost convulsed? Your words are daggers to her. This terrible weeping will kill her. You are beside yourself." Interrupting him, she exclaimed, with withering scorn, —

"Mark Tourney, before night I wish to see you five minutes alone in my room; 't is the last request I shall make of you; dare not let that creature cause you to forget." With a lofty motion she stepped to the bell-cord, and rung violently; a servant appeared; pointing to her brother and Eveline, who was looking up now to see what next, she said, slowly and bitterly, —

"Mr. and Mrs. Tourney will have their dinner brought up now; you may bring mine to my room."

Without another word she left them, and slowly, painfully, mounted the staircase, to the commodious, elegant room she had occupied for so many years.

Hastily entering, she locked the door and fell into a chair, covering her face with her hands a moment, and but a moment; for, recalling her pride, she muttered, —

"I ordered dinner; 't will soon be here; and none shall know my suffering. Oh, brother! brother!"

Opening the door, she drew into the floor a small stand ready for use, and waited until the servant appeared.

"You may go, Rachel. I will ring when I am through. You need not wait, I say," as the woman lingered.

"Is it true, Miss Sophie?"

"What true?" sharply demanded the lady.

"Is Miss Eveline the mistress now?"

"She is my brother's wife. That's enough, Rachel; ask nothing more."

Quietly and soberly the woman who had been in the family almost as long as the sister, went below.

"Is it true, Rachel? are they married?" greeted her from the kitchen.

"Yes; now hold your tongues, all of ye." The younger servants ventured no more. Rachel was monarch of the lower department, as Aunt Sophie had been above; and when the lady's bell sounded, a half hour later, Rachel spoke again, —

"Come back, Susan; tend to the dining-room. I'll see to Miss Sophie;" and, lofty as her mistress, she mounted to her room, gathered up the dishes, and turned again towards the door.

"Rachel, when you are at leisure, I'd like to have you help me pack my trunks. I'm going away to-morrow."

"Yes, Miss Sophie; and if I might be so bold, are you going to the farm to stay for good?"

"Yes, Rachel; this is no place for me now. I shall go to my own home."

"Nor is it the spot for me either, Miss Sophie. We've been together many a year. If you'll take me, I'll serve you there."

"Tut, tut, Rachel. My brother needs you all the more, if I am gone; stay with him."

"Excuse me, Miss Sophie, but I shall leave the house

if you do, and go with you, if you'll take me. I'm too old to serve a young mistress."

"Well, well, Rachel, think it over. You're too old to be hasty. Stay with them, if you can; but if you must go, I'll be only too glad to have you with me."

Insignificant as this little episode appeared in Aunt Sophie's eyes, now that weightier matters burdened her heart, she was sensibly cheered by it. It was not quite like going forth alone. The ties binding her to this home were fast sundering,—only her brother left, and he indifferent to her happiness, in this false halo that encircled his own.

It would not be like going to a strange place, among a strange people. The farm had been her childhood's home; every acre of it was familiar. Every bit of woodland, every rod of meadow, each tree in the fine old orchard, and each gray moss-grown rock, by which the unwearying brook ran its course,—were old and precious friends.

The farmer, with his wife and two lusty sons, who cared for the place, had been there since she left it for her brother's home; had loved and honored her, even as they had her parents, and would welcome her back and serve her faithfully now. And, as memories and hopes pressed back upon her soul, she felt a strange desire to flee from the present unsatisfactory life, and find in the old home, perchance, the old joys, the old, almost forgotten, peace and freedom.

As she mused, a knock at the door roused her.

Rachel was there ready to assist, and very soon all Aunt Sophie's possessions were gathered into a close compass, and Rachel had left her to attend to her own packing, fully determined to leave with her.

She waited late for her brother, heard the murmuring of their voices below, the sound of the piano, and Eveline singing, she supposed,—it was anything but music to her ears; waited still longer, feeling that he would not forget her. Nor had he forgotten; but, charmed by the siren voice, bewildered by her increased attempts to keep him at her side, he delayed longer and longer, thinking the lateness of the hour might shorten the interview.

At last, with sudden resolution, he sought her; to his relief she was calmly awaiting him. Within her soul the storm had spent itself, and although he was startled and disappointed at this manifest intention to leave him, still, after the first protestation against it, he could not fail to see that it was the only way.

Reproaches were useless now; nor had she any more desire to indulge in them. She only wished to say a few last words before they finally separated, and urged him to be just to his children, settle a portion of his wealth upon them *now*, not wait until he was more entirely under the control of one who had shown herself so thoroughly a designer and dissembler. Would he do so? She asked in the name of his dead wife and first-born, so dear to them all.

Certainly, he had intended it from the first. Eveline

wished it also; she was the soul of honor and generosity; he did not understand why his sister judged her so falsely.

"I judge from what I have seen, and do know; but it is too late now. Should the time ever come, my brother, when all that you now lean upon shall fail you, if I am living, come to me; I will then be to you the true sister I have always tried to be. But now, Mark, you do not need me; and although I am disappointed and wounded, my love is the same; now good-night; you will see me off in the morning?"

"Yes, Sophie; good-night." He held out his hand to her; and, looking into his eyes kindly, tearfully, and with a sad smile trembling about her mouth, she pressed it, saying:—

"Whatever falls upon you, Mark, reaches your children. Remember that, and let no advice or manoeuvre, no allurements or tears, prevent justice to Clarence, Edith, and our motherless little May. Be just to them, and be so at once."

She turned away, and he rejoined his bride, though with a less jubilant spirit.

CHAPTER XXXI.

EDITH'S RETURN.

"We love the play-place of our early days."

THE morning papers startled the fashionable world by the announcement of a marriage in high life.

"Mark Tourney, the merchant prince, to his young and talented ward, Miss Eveline Cropsy."

Mrs. Ellington shook her head and pondered; should she give up the merchant, or patronize his unknown wife? It required time to consider so weighty a matter.

Mrs. Domett cared nothing about it; would be influenced by Edith and Merle when they arrived.

Mrs. Drew was enveloped in consternation and perplexity. Knowing Edith's contempt, and sure of her open hostility, even though its object was her father's wife, she knew not what to do.

It would be desirable to please Edith, and she would like to court Eveline also. She placed the matter before her husband, and begged his judgment.

"Do, Nellie? Why, treat every one with courtesy."

"But, Ross, society demands something of us; and I don't know."

"Don't know what society wants, that it? Well, do what is kind,—let your heart be the guide; ignore society."

"But, Ross, you don't understand. If the Ellingtons and Dometts and Thompsons recognize her, I can—but—"

"Don't ask me, then. Do as you please. Tourney is my friend; has been, and will be. If he's married outside the pale of Christianity or civilization, he has the worst of it. You'd better help him bear it. I shall."

The wife left him, muttering,—

"It's useless talking with Ross; he cares no more for the claims of society, than mother does; and she has chosen solitary confinement as her portion, since father died. Oh, dear; so much rests upon me,—I think I won't call till Edith comes. She'll be here next week, they say. Eveline might expect me to run in uncereemoniously; but if I call at all, I can excuse it well enough." And dancing before the full-length mirror, she transferred her anxiety to the frizzettes which adorned her head.

The next week, the steamer in which Merle and Edith had taken passage from Liverpool arrived; and, eager to see her father and Aunt Sophie, the wife could not rest until her husband called a carriage to take her immediately home.

Not that Edith had any intention of living, as Mabel had done, beneath her father's roof; no, she

wanted an establishment of her own, where she might reign supreme. But she had been long away, and the passage having been made quickly, no friend had arrived to meet them. She was so anxious to see them once more, especially Aunt Sophie, who would now almost take the place of mother to her; therefore, leaving Merle to look after the trunks, and have them transported to the hotel, she was driven across the city to her father's.

As eagerly as a child did she scan the faces passing, if, perchance, she might meet a familiar one. Her black eyes grew large and lustrous, as she turned into the square, and drew up before her home.

How quiet it looked; but then, there is no little May now, to be gazing from the windows, she thought.

Scarce waiting for the driver to open the door, she hurried out, ran swiftly over the steps, and rang the bell with all her old eagerness.

Susan, the same old table-girl, answered her ring; and, with a glad greeting, she pushed by her.

"Is father in? Where's Aunt Sophie?"

"No, Miss, your father's not in; and Miss Sophie—"

"Never mind; I'll find her. I remember her hiding spots. Auntie! auntie!" rang the clear, happy voice, as she sped over the stairs, swift as a bird. Darting into her mother's sitting-room, she encountered Eveline, who had risen, and stood quietly in the centre of the room.

"Oh, Eveline, how do you do? Still here? Where's

Aunt Sophie?" Impulsive as ever, she held out her hand, which Eveline, with apparent cordiality and some embarrassment, accepted.

"I am happy to see Mrs. Domett; sit down and let me take your hat."

"Nonsense, child; I can't sit down till I see Aunt Sophie, black dress, long apron, cap, and all. Where is she?"

"Your aunt has left us; she is living, I believe, upon the farm, her old home."

"Left *us*! Who? What do you mean? Left this house, — on a visit then? Are *you* keeping house for my father?" asked Edith, amazed.

"I am keeping house for myself, Edith. I am your father's wife."

"*You!* Eveline Cropsy! My father's wife!"

"Your father considers himself happy in the fact," was the independent reply.

"Then my father —" A battle of words followed, over which we draw a veil.

An hour later Merle Domett rang at the door. He had taken a moment to see his mother; and brought an invitation for Edith to come to her. He had learned the news, and divined what must be going on at the old home.

The next day they started early to visit Aunt Sophie at the farm. It was a most ancient-looking place, — a few such still remain in New England, — a large, square house, built of massive timbers, shaded by giant trees, seemingly centuries old, the whole still

maintaining an appearance of liberal expenditure and constant care.

Aunt Sophie received them, with welcome written all over her.

She told the story in plain words, though careful not to arouse an increased indignation within the breast of her niece, emphasizing her father's promise, and advising patience and forbearance. It might not turn out so fatally as they feared.

The day went too quickly. Edith made known their plans; a few weeks at the hotel, then a home of her own, when she could entertain her friends. "If Auntie would only come and live with her?"

But no, the lady would not again leave the spot that seemed to her so safe a refuge.

That night Edith received her father at her rooms; her tears and uncontrolled grief, in referring to the changes of the past eighteen months, showed her to him the same impulsive girl she had ever been. They talked of Clarence, Ruby, and little May; spoke of Margaret's engagement, of the journey home and future plans, but never a word of Eveline, the new wife, until Mr. Tourney rose to leave.

"You will come up to the house, Edy, soon?" standing by the door, hat in hand.

"Why, no, father; you are away all day. Eveline don't care to see me, nor I her, that's the truth. But I shan't give up my father for a hundred wives. You must come here, will you?"

He flushed a little, smiled, and said, —

“Yes, sometimes; but be wise, little girl; don’t be too stubborn; Eveline is anxious not to have any division in the family; and you know, Edith, I have no patience with such things. Better be friendly with — Eva, even if we may not all be together.”

“I’m friendly with my father, that’s enough.”

“Well, well,” interrupting her, half impatiently, “I think you will be generous, Edith. Be a good daughter, and let us all be happy. Good-night.”

Under the impulse of chagrin and anger, Edith had thrown out hints of a secret she never held; and Eveline, in constant and bitter dread of a crushing revelation respecting her origin, and stung by her retorts, determined to secure rights in the property which would protect her in the future.

That this could be accomplished while her husband was in his right mind, seemed doubtful, even to her; but with jealous hate burning within her breast, and a defiant spirit impelling her on, she would now work with this in view while life lasted.

She had won the father; now, either by endearments, by subtle strategy, or by tears and reproaches, she would win the fortune. And, girding herself for this new contest, assuming a meek and forgiving disposition, devoting herself entirely and solely for a time to her husband’s happiness, she hid her motive so deep that none could have dreamed of its existence.

But there it was, coiled snake-like and silent, ready

to spring, with the poison of hate in its fangs, upon the lives of those dear to the heart that cherished her so tenderly.

Little did she dream, in her arrogant enmity towards Edith, how terribly these feelings might recoil upon herself, how empty and unsatisfying life might prove, even though filled to overflowing with all she now desired. She might indeed attain the zenith of her hopes, but, looking back upon the scene, what would there be to rest her heart upon? and forward, what to reach after? Naught but one dreary, empty space, or fertile only in poisonous weeds and bitter herbs.

Mrs. Ellington decided to patronize the wife of Mark Tourney, for the reason that her wonderful ability as musician made her a desirable acquisition to the receptions of the lady.

The Thompsons drove up, stepped daintily from their superb equipage, lavished elegant congratulations, sipped a little sweet wine, touched with their gloved fingers a crumb of cake, — then, bowing and smiling their farewells, departed.

Mrs. Drew, after paying her court to Edith, and discovering only a lofty indifference, and after learning that many of her circle had paid their respects to the bride, ran in herself, one morning, quite unceremoniously, rejoicing that dear Eva was to remain so near her, and regretting that the most distressing headache had prevented her calling at once; but now they would meet often, only in the next square; there was nothing

to prevent. She was so happy in her friend's happiness ; so glad the home was not to be broken up and strangers come. Eveline had always seemed like one of the family to her, and Mr. Tourney was a most happy man. And the home was certainly most elegant, all refurnished as it had been.

Was it Eveline's taste? Of course, no one else could have designed anything so perfect, so much in harmony, — drapery, carpets, pictures, and all. Had all the rooms been changed? She would so like to see how they looked.

Very willingly Eveline conducted her from room to room, and the verdict, that one could scarce believe it the same house, seemed quite satisfactory.

Her unbounded admiration freely lavished, she too took leave, and the young bride, in the loneliness and ennui of her silent life, resumed the net of hatred and ambition, and added many beguiling meshes to charm the vision and entrap the heart of her victim.

Across the ocean, in their temporary abiding place, Clarence and Ruby had heard of the union between youth and age, but with far less bitterness of feeling than Edith indulged.

The young husband was too happy in his own choice to condemn that of his father ; and surprise was perhaps the strongest feeling that possessed him, when he read the tidings in his sister's impulsive letter.

They had taken rooms near the University, where

Clarence could attend lectures, and profit by the libraries and the society of the learned.

His letters of introduction soon brought him into notice ; and his fine face, his thoughtful manner, his rich, poetic mind, were fast winning for him the friendship of the noblest minds in Edinburgh.

This was a source of enjoyment he could not fail to appreciate. But beyond all this, apart from the satisfaction of this manifest progress, far above the thought of future fame, was the sweet domestic joy, so strange, so new, so holy, that his heart seemed not large enough to hold it all. Their few rooms, quaint and home-like, were almost heaven to him, who had never before known a home that he could call his own.

Too happy to bestow one glance upon the past, to bring one bitter memory from his lonely youth to dim the brightness of this perfect present, he simply gave himself up to the holy joy of living by the sweet breath of love.

The two lived for and in each other, and little May, a perfect sunbeam, beguiled them with the charms of her laughing presence.

Sweet household music thrilled through and through Clarence's heart many times a day. It made his step light and firm ; it made him energetic, ambitious, and hopeful, sending the fresh blood to his cheek and the glad light to his eye ; giving health and courage, and causing him to forget the darkness that had heretofore overshadowed his life.

The change, as complete as it was sudden, became more and more apparent to himself. Looking into his wife's eyes, in the gathering twilight, after a day of close study, he said, —

“I used to delight in harmony of coloring, in grace of form, and beauty of expression so much, that it was a wonder to me how I could endure life, with the knowledge that *I* was so terrible a picture in the eyes of others; but you, dearest, have made life endurable to me; much more, — glorious, and most happy. You are my harmony, my beauty, the veil that hides the past, and leaves only glory for the present and future. I can never tell you how precious you are to me, my more than oriental Ruby.”

“Rather say, my husband, that your life is made a joy to you by the harmonious mind and perfect soul that shine from this dear face, and transfigure you.”

“This is the enthusiasm of love,” he laughed, heartily.

Thus they lived, month after month; and here, after a time, weary and dispirited, Ned Clarke found them; and, with them and his little May-flower, found something of the peace and rest he had vainly sought elsewhere. The poor man had loved well; had lost all that made life endurable; never again could he gather the scattered brightness of his lost joy. He stayed with them a few weeks, cheered by Pet's tender caresses, and encouraged by Ruby's brave spirit; then, with compressed lips and gathering tears, he pressed their hands,

folded Pet tightly a moment to his heart, and left them. Travelling had not brought forgetfulness. He would go back to his work, to the only comfort left him, the increasing of Pet's inheritance. Thus, with memories of his buried love, with hopes of his little one's future, he might find content, rest, or, at least, patience.

And here, for a time, we leave them all.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FOUR YEARS AFTER.

"Love has perished, hist, hist, how they tell,
 Beating pulse of mine, his funeral knell!
 Love is dead, — ay, dead and gone!
 Why should I be living on?
 Why be in this chamber sitting,
 With but phantoms round me flitting?"

CLARENCE and Ruby have just returned from abroad. The family mansion of the Dukes is a blaze of light; merry voices, laughter, and music issue from the open windows; family friends have gathered to welcome the long expected guests. Merle Domett and Edith are there, — he quiet, reserved, regretful perhaps; the wife less girlish in form and manner, but lively, chatty, impulsive as ever. Aunt Sophie, with complacent glances ever returning to the face of her beloved Clarence, sits straight and firm, with the inevitable little sock, half finished, in her lap, — not for Pet this time, but for a new blossom, whose eyes first saw the light on British soil, and who slumbers now in Mary's care up-stairs.

Doctor Tourney wears his honors with more ease, but no less modesty, than before.

And Pet, a miss of eight years, leans quietly against her father in the bay-window, his arm about her, both wearing a most serene happiness in their faces. The May-flower is the image of her mother, and Ned Clarke rejoices in the cherished resemblance.

The parsonage is deserted; for even Bridget must come with the family to take a look at her favorites.

Harry and Margaret enter together, and Ruby greets them with joyous congratulations. Aunt Catherine is with them; for when the daughter found a new home, the mother was easily persuaded to share it with her; and the unpretending cottage between the parsonage and village drug-store is the spot where these three spend as happy days as hearts may know in this life. There are no others beside the family. Mr. Duke and his gentle wife are unchanged. The years pass lightly over them. Ruby finds the same sweet peace and holy joy upon her mother's brow, that had always been its crowning beauty. Flossy is at the piano, — a tall, beautiful girl, with a look of Ruby in the eyes. And Vickie, round as an apple, rosy as the dawn, and playful as a young kitten, has nearly choked them with hugs, and devoured them with kisses.

Mrs. Tourney had sent regrets; her husband's illness prevented her giving to Ruby the welcome home which was in her heart, but she promised herself an early call. Of that illness, his children could only know that it was paralysis; for, according to the orders of Eveline's physician, even Edith and his sister had been

repeatedly denied admittance to his room. Clarence could not hope to fare better, unless, by virtue of his profession, he might demand an examination of the case.

That his father's affairs were in so disturbed and unsettled a condition that he could do no more for his son at present, Clarence had been already informed. And although this first bit of news with which Eveline had greeted his return, was vexatious, yet the knowledge that she was determined to prevent a meeting between father and son perplexed him still more.

The financial news he had thus far kept a secret from all, save Ruby; but the illness, the seclusion of the invalid, and the high-handed authority with which Eveline had invested herself, was a topic of general conversation in the family, calling for more or less surmising, indignation, or threats.

Edith was for storming the castle at once, and taking her father to her own home, — a proposition which brought smiles upon the faces of her listeners.

Aunt Sophie was silent. Many times had she endeavored to see her brother, and as many, with cool politeness and pointed sarcasm, she had been bowed from the door by its mistress, who, with ill-concealed satisfaction, watched the indignant sorrow of the retreating form.

It was while the conversation on this point was most engrossing, that Aunt Sophie beckoned Clarence from the group, and, leading him aside, said, —

"You remember what I told you the day you left us, four years ago, Clarence?"

"Yes, Auntie."

"Well, Clare, the old lady still lives, you see."

"And will, many years, I hope."

"Let that pass; but, my dear boy, if I read the doings of your father's wife rightly, you will never have another penny from that source. The property that should rightfully come to you will be poured into the lap of her son. Have you looked this in the face, Clarence?"

"You are right. I have been informed already that in the future I am to depend on my own resources; and I have not been idle the past week, Auntie; I have an appointment as surgeon in — hospital in my pocket. I shall accept at once."

"I knew it was awaiting you, Clare; but even then you will find the salary may not meet your expenses the first years. You know so little, child, of household expenditure; and I cannot have you lean on your uncle here; I have some of the old Tournay pride left yet."

"Never, of course. Ruby knows that, but we shall get along comfortably, Auntie, — and respectably too," smiling into her face.

"Well, there's no use beating round the bush, and I *may* live to bury you all. What I want, Clare, is this, — that you simply make present use of a part of the amount you would receive at my death."

"I will not, Aunt Sophie."

"Wait. I'm not through. Don't flash, as Edith would now; but hear me, — am I not a kind of mother to you?"

"As dear as one. • Yes, and more sacrificing."

"Then treat me as one. I have a few thousands lying idle; let me have the pleasure of seeing them used by all the son I ever had to love. I ask it as a favor, Clare. Will you treat the lonely old auntie with the love and freedom of a child, and not refuse to share with her while she lives the money that will be yours alone when I am gone? Will you please me?"

"If you put it so, I must."

"Then it's settled. I may as well tell you here, that my city property was sold last month for treble the worth of it in my father's time, and the amount made over to you, — Clarence Tourney, M. D. The work is all done, and here are the checks; all you have to do is to put them in your pocket, and say nothing."

His cheek flushed. The sensitive face portrayed the emotions he might not hide. She gave him no time to speak.

"And now, are you going to see your father, or not?"

"I shall see him," he said, firmly.

"How?"

"I don't know yet; in a week you shall know."

"I would like to look upon my brother's face once more. It is two years since we met, and more than a

year since he has been hidden from his relatives by this woman."

"You shall see him, only be patient. The child must be nearly three."

"Quite that."

Clarence was to enter upon his duties at once, and the city was again to be their home. They were soon established; and upon going his rounds one morning, one face in the fever ward seemed strangely familiar; but he could not locate it, and the patient was delirious.

Days passed; the young man improved slowly; the fever subsided; delirium died out; and with returning consciousness, he looked into Clarence's eyes, with such an expression of joyful recognition, that the young doctor could but ask where they had met.

"At the quarry, sir, — I am Tony Collins."

Poor, half-blind Tony! misfortune had given him the only friendship of his life; and misfortune, again, was to be the means of bringing him into the presence of those lost but never forgotten friends.

No longer would he bewail the fever, the loss of employment, or the wasting strength, if he could once more look upon the face that had visited him so often in dreams the last four years.

Yes, she lived, — she remembered, — she would visit him, would care for him, be his friend still; and, as Clarence passed from cot to cot, the memory of that thin, white face went with him, all glowing as it was with a return of the sole joy of a life.

That night, as he passed by his father's house on the way to his own, the young, gay wife was just stepping into her carriage, in opera dress. He loitered on the opposite side, the dusk hiding him from observation; and, as the carriage was driven away, a glimmer of light in the third-story window, dim through heavy drapery, seemed to beckon him into his father's presence. It was but an impulse; the decision was made.

Crossing the street, he ran up the steps, and rang. The door was opened, and, stepping in, he said, —

"I must see my father, Susan; I know the room."

"Indeed, Mr. Clarence, I dare n't let you go up. It will lose me my place, sir, — oh, don't go."

"You'll not lose your place; have no fear; your mistress must not know of my coming. Is he alone?"

"Yes, sir. He stays alone mostly. It's the front room, sir." She spoke with a half-bewildered, half-frightened air, glancing back at the hall door, as though fearing the ghost of her young mistress might appear.

Clarence was not slow in reaching his father's door. He knocked gently, and opened it.

How the great, mournful eyes stared wonderingly as he entered. How unlike anything he had ever seen in that face before, the haggard, worn, impatient look.

He lay on the bed, a dressing-gown about his shoulders; his feet, so long useless, in slippers; and his hands lying like dead weights upon the white quilt, the gas behind him dimly burning; and absolutely nothing within reach to beguile the tedious, lonely hours.

"Eveline, is that you?" The voice was childish in its pleading tone, and tremulous with age and feebleness.

"It's I, father. It's Clarence. How do you do?"

The cheery sound was, to the man's heart, like the golden sun bursting through a rift in the dark heavens.

"Clarence! Is it? My dear boy!"

"Yes, father, and right glad to see you, too." He sat by the bed, took the wasted, bony hand, smoothed back the gray locks, and began to talk rapidly to hide the emotion he could hardly control.

"I've been long away, father. They wrote me you were ill, but I did n't think to find you so poorly off."

"Ah, my boy, it's different, — different from the old times. But where's Edith? She don't get to see me, nowadays."

"She would be glad to, father; Aunt Sophie too. They speak often of you."

"In heaven's name, why don't they come here, then? They've hardly done the right thing by me." His voice trembled again. The joyous tone had vanished.

"They've tried to see you, father, indeed they have, and been denied."

"Who'd dare deny them? That's an excuse, my boy. They're happy and well. They care nothing for a sick old man."

"No, father, you must not wrong them. I should not have got in myself, but I saw your wife ride away, and compelled Susan to let me come up."

"Well, well, Eveline has it all her own way. She thinks it would hurt me. But I'm glad to see you, Clare. You'll come again. You will, Clare, won't you?"

"Yes, father, I'll come in as often as I can. No one shall prevent my coming."

"That's right. That's a good boy. I haven't treated you just right, Clare, but we'll rectify it; we will at once, — I thought you'd all deserted me. So they do want to see me. May be so — may be so."

"I know they do, father; and this is not the first time I've tried to see you. But I'll come often now. Ruby sends love to you, and little May. You'd like to see Mabel's child, wouldn't you, father?"

"Yes, yes, — little Pet. Bring her too. She must come and play with Clinton, — our boy. Have you seen him, Clarence?"

"No, father."

"He's abed before this. So Eveline's gone off. Well, come in earlier. I'll ask her to bring him up; she's pretty careful of him; I don't see him very often myself, she thinks it troubles him. I suppose I look frightfully old, Clare."

"No, indeed, not frightful at all. I see the same father yet. But I must go; it's late."

"Not just yet, Clare, my boy; a few minutes longer. I'm alone most of the time now. Eveline's young, you know. John comes in, and puts me to bed. It's early for that; don't go, Clare."

So he sat down again, told him of his work, often interrupted by the father's lamentations that he had been unjust to his children. But it should all be rectified; it had been a mistake.

At first, Clarence did not notice the words; but, often repeated, it flashed across his mind, that his father was troubled by something he had been led into by his wife's misrepresentations; and, seeking to allay the anxiety of the invalid, he said, —

"You have done a great deal for me, father; all I expect. Now I am able to take care of myself, so don't be troubled. It's of no consequence." And, rising again, he told him that Ruby would be anxious. He must go; would assuredly come in the next evening.

"Remember, my boy, every day now I shall expect you."

"I'll not disappoint you, sir; shall consider you one of my patients. Good-night, father."

The dull eyes followed him to the door, a feeble smile playing about the mouth.

The hunchback son would now be more warmly welcomed to the desolate heart than any others could be.

Lying helpless, though the disease had not beclouded his mind essentially, he had experienced the tortures of a lonely, forsaken condition, but now found happiness in the return of this son; a joyful sensation in his deference and tenderness, that for years he had been a stranger to.

Clarence passed out, and walked rapidly to his own

home. He found Merle and Edith there for the evening. When he had communicated the cause of his detention, and spoken of his surprise at finding his father so much better than, from Eveline's account, he had been led to expect; of his delight at seeing him, and his regret that other members of his family had been denied admittance, — when all was explained, in Clarence's calm, clear manner, the indignation of Edith knew no bounds.

"So that woman has lied to us all along. The doctor has not commanded entire seclusion, and father has wanted us all the time. I'll see him myself, to-morrow, in spite of her."

"Not so fast, Edy; hear what your brother says about it. A scene might have a bad effect upon his nerves, after this long separation," remarked her husband.

"I don't care! I've been kept from my own father long enough. I won't listen to anybody."

"Why, Edy, you're nervous," said Ruby; "now that Clarence has seen him, she will not dare deny you."

"She'll dare anything. I never knew her equal, or heard of one so utterly heartless, — to keep children from a sick father just for the sake of getting his property for her own son! She has deceived him from first to last. *I'll see him to-morrow*," terminating her threat with a great sob, and wiping her eyes defiantly.

"No, Edith; if you can be patient, I'll prepare the

way, and for father's sake avoid a scene," said Clarence. "His mind is clear as yet, but a high excitement might be fatal."

Edith shook her head with wilful pertinacity. Merle smiled, and Ruby rung for Miss Mary to bring the little one to greet its father, hoping to restore the equanimity of the party.

But Edith was not one to be reasoned with, or turned easily from the course her impulse prompted. Clarence had gained admittance to his father's room, and she had the same right.

Her husband had no sooner eaten breakfast and left the house for his office the next morning, than she sent for the carriage. The distance was not great, and soon she stood upon the steps before her father's door.

Susan opened it; smiled faintly, recognizing, but not daring to greet, her former young mistress.

Edith nodded, and passed at once to the staircase.

"Walk into the drawing-room, please," said the frightened girl, fearing Clarence's visit of the night before was to be revealed.

"Attend to your work, Susan. I'll take care of myself," was the answer, in a low tone; and, with a most wilful perversity gleaming from her black eyes, and a defiant look about the compressed mouth, she sped over the stairs without a sound. Passing along the second hall, she would have ascended another flight; but Eveline was in the family sitting-room, and, catching a glimpse of the well-known figure, stepped quickly to the door,

and, with a greeting of cool courtesy, invited her to enter.

"No, thank you; I'm on the way to my father's room."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you again, but the physician still forbids him to receive callers. His commands are most peremptory. I shall have to deny you, — I'm really sorry it is so."

"I'm not at all troubled by your denial, Eveline; I have come to see my father, and no power on earth shall prevent it, — so stand aside"; for Eveline had slid between her visitor and the stairs, apparently to urge her into the sitting-room, but really because seeing in Edith's face a new determination, that would require more than her accustomed duplicity to cope with.

"You cannot go up, Mrs. Domett. Walk into the sitting-room, — I will explain his case more fully."

"I know all I wish to know, — more than you would dare reveal. Let me go to my father."

"You *shall not!*" Eveline's face was ashy pale, but Edith reddened with quick spirit, and impetuous words fell in torrents from her lips.

"Do you dare tell me so? you, whose whole life has been a lie, a degradation? Oh, hypocrite, I know you; and not I alone, — your vile arts are town's talk. You — the unknown — to force your way into our family, and with your base deceptions beguile my father to his ruin, to force a will from him in your own favor, keeping him a prisoner in his own house, and denying him to his

own children lest he sign another, and making him think we neglect and desert him. Eveline Cropsy, you have not the power to keep me from my father; I will go to him!"

"Then go, just as you are. Let him see the sweetness of your temper, after this long separation. The shock might be fatal. I am willing, if you take the responsibility, Mrs. Domett."

Her voice was cool, cutting; her face still gray with intensity of passion; but she did not move to let the daughter pass; and Edith felt at once that she was in no suitable frame of mind for a sick-room. She hesitated, turned suddenly into the sitting-room, and, dropping into a chair, burst into tears and sobs, throwing out occasional vain threats and unmeaning accusations. "The day may come when your own child shall as really turn his back upon you, as you have made my father think we have done to him; but he shall know you before he dies. He is not the drivelling idiot you have represented to us. We know his condition, and the whole city shall know your arts. Your friends shall despise you, and turn from you." Again sobs and tears choked the words.

There was a pause. Eveline had not spoken. A little child bounded in, with the same wealth of golden hair floating about his shoulders that had been his mother's sole beauty. Just over the threshold he stood, poised like a bird, in wonder at the scene.

Eveline grasped the bell-rope; the peal rang through

the house; and, as a woman appeared, she said, in a low, unnatural voice, —

“Take him to the nursery; stay there until I call you.”

The child looked grieved and disappointed, but went with the nurse.

Edith never forgot the sudden appearance of the little Clinton. She never saw him again; but months after, when the paralytic old man had been released from suffering, and his widow was looking forward to a still gayer future, death brought about the fulfilment of her passionate prophecy, and the desolate mother felt that her child had indeed turned his back upon her; while in her hopelessness the separation would be an eternal one.

There was a dreary silence in the large room, broken only by Edith's occasional sobs, as she tried to subdue her spirit sufficiently to see her father before she left the house; for this determination was still strong; nothing should overcome it.

Eveline stood near the door, rigid as a statue, cold and unfeeling as marble, doubting not her power to conquer, if unyielding determination, obstinate resistance, and unflinching endurance could overcome.

Suddenly there was another ring at the front door; and, as she waited, striving to catch every sound, expecting to be summoned below, but determined to deny herself to every call, until this case was disposed of, — as she waited, heavy steps sounded on

the stairs. Turning, she encountered Clarence and Merle Domett.

For a moment her self-possession vanished; but, speedily recalling the spirit that had governed her whole life, she bowed, motioned them to take seats, saying, —

“To whom am I indebted for this most agreeable family reunion?”

A smile played about Merle Domett's face, — he appreciated the sarcasm. Not so Clarence, — grave and mild was the benevolent face, calm and sweet the rich voice, as he replied, —

“I am sorry, Eveline, to find Edith here before me; but it may be as well. We insist now upon visiting my father daily; we know he is able and anxious to see us; and, with all deference to your power as his wife, we are not willing to allow matters to stand as they are another day.”

“Then let me tell you, Clarence Tourney, as I have told your sister, that this is my house. You have no right to force your presence upon me.”

“We have a right to see our father when he wishes it, and we shall do so, Eveline.”

“He don't wish it. He is helpless, idiotic, raving. Only John can be with him. He must not be disturbed. These are his physician's commands. I shall see them enforced.”

How full of righteous indignation were the blue eyes into which hers looked so defiantly. How the frail,

broken form seemed to rise with the majestic power of truth, as he said, —

“Woman! your words are false. I have seen my father.” A moment she appeared stunned, then rallying again, ejaculated, —

“Seen him! You! When?”

“I spent last evening with him, Eveline.” Then, seeing her quail beneath his gaze, he grew pitiful, adding, —

“If you place no more obstacles in the way, Eveline, we pledge ourselves to silence regarding the past; but if his sick-room is not open to us every day at suitable seasons, knowing your plans and motives, we shall have recourse to means that cannot fail, and you will suffer with that public you are so anxious to please.”

“You use a high hand, sir. Take your precious sister, and go to his room, — she is as crazy as he is. But mind this, if you have any designs upon his property, it will be useless. His affairs were settled when he was in health; anything he should do now would be invalid. That I know.”

The words were flung in his face with hissing venom. He answered calmly, —

“I had no such designs, Eveline. Come, Edith.” She rose, and with a triumphant glance upon the conquered wife, joined her brother and husband.

The three ascended to the father's room.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

“... A woman poor or rich,
Despised or honored, is a human soul;
And what her soul is, that she is herself,
Although she should be spit upon of men,
As is the pavement of the churches here
Still good enough to pray in.”

Of course there were no further impediments in the way of a free and constant access to Mr. Tourney by his children.

Eveline was seldom to be seen. She had been compelled to give way; the sooner he died, and her chains were broken, the better for her; and, while she waited, it should not be her fault if life did not go as merrily as ever. She had not long to wait. Death soon sundered the ties she had so eagerly taken upon herself; but her feeling of relief was speedily dissipated by another visit from the grim messenger. This time, the idolized boy was called. And now the childless widow must sit by herself in her wretchedness, a prey to her own remorseful thoughts; compelled to encounter

alone a world that despised and shunned her, — *the doom of selfishness*.

Ruby now felt that home was pre-eminently her sphere. Here were her heart's holiest joys; here must lie her most sacred duties; here, indeed, was centred the work of her life. But, with far-reaching benevolence, with unselfish love for all her kind, she could and did go forth from the dear battlements of this cherished castle, to see and feel the misery without; and, seeing, could not fail to alleviate.

Doctor Tourney had given Tony his discharge, had noticed the shade that passed over his pale face as he was bidding him live carefully for a while, and surmised with truth that the poor lad had no roof to cover him.

"Would you like to be of service to me, Tony?"

"If I could, sir. I'd care for yer horse, or anything else, only for the love of yourself and Miss Ruby," he answered, with the tremor of hope in his voice.

"Then you shall be in my employ. I was looking for a faithful lad. Go up to the house, and tell my wife she may give you something to do till I get home;" — handing him a card — "she'll be glad to see you."

How the shivering, doubting heart bounded with Ruby's smiling welcome.

More than one case of misery had Clarence already turned over to her sympathy and care, more than one

despairing convalescent had found a home, and means of living, through her influence. Few had power to resist that bright face, that earnest voice, when seeking employment and shelter for the destitute and friendless.

Returning late one afternoon from such a work, she brushed against a woman passing, and turned with an apology upon her lip, when the light from her own door flashed upon a familiar face. An exclamation of pleased surprise escaped her.

"Miss Ruby!" muttered the woman, in amazement and shame, and would have fled; but Ruby's hand was on her arm, her eyes yearning over her, her voice filling her ear.

"Stay, Nellie. Is it you?"

"Let me go, Miss Ruby."

"No, child, I must see you; come in. This is my home. I'm very glad, Nellie; I have tried to find you. Come with me."

"I can't, not with you. Let me go, Miss Ruby, please." She spoke quickly, and struggled to escape from Ruby's earnest gaze, but without success. Ruby had learned of her fallen life through Tony; had searched for her, and, failing always, was determined now to make every effort to reclaim the guilty, conscience-smitten girl.

"Nellie! Nellie! surely you will not turn away from an old friend, — one who loves you?"

"But I can't talk to you. It's the shame. I'm different. Let me go, I say."

"You remember our parting, Nellie, on the road? — the flowers you gave me? — I have them yet. I loved you then, Nellie. I love you now. I know all, poor child, but it makes no difference; we can be friends still."

"You take me, — *me*, Miss Ruby; me, who have been made vile by one viler still, and call me *friend*." She stood quiet now, gazing half doubtingly into the sweet face before her, — the pure, truthful face, never forgotten, always revered.

"Yes, Nellie, we have been friends, we are so now. You trust me as you used to, child?"

Nellie had freed herself; she stepped back quickly, looking with wild, eager hope into her face; then, with a thrilling voice, asked, —

"*You*, Miss Ruby, clean and pure as the sky above us, can you call me friend still? Can you touch me, and not feel defiled, ashamed?"

"My poor Nellie. They have used you hardly. Defiled? ashamed? Could the holy Saviour meet such as you with love and tenderness, and may not I? Could He lift a frail woman by the hand to stand beside Him, and may not I take this little one, who has listened to my prayers for her, and call her friend? Ah, Nellie, you did not use to doubt me so. I would save you, child. Come to me."

Her eyes drooped; a painful blush burned in her face; but, without hesitation now, she drew near, almost sinking at Ruby's feet with sobs and cries.

"Save me, O Miss Ruby, save me from the ruin!"

"I will, poor child. Fear not. We will trust Him together; trust and love, my poor Nellie," all the time leading the weeping, trembling girl up the steps, and within the vestibule.

"Don't cry so, Nellie. To those who sin much, much is forgiven."

"I have sinned. Oh, I have; but they told me I was lost. They spurned me and hooted me, and even Tony turned away; and my shame died in the rage that held me. There was no hope, — not a face, not a word, not a friend, — oh, are you my friend? Can you save me?"

"I can and will, Nellie. We must tell the Saviour, the dear, waiting, patient Saviour. He will help us, and give us strength and courage and hope, dear child. You shall not leave me now; my house shall be your home; and not one beneath this roof shall frown upon you. You will stay."

Her gratitude was too deep for words. The wild eyes grew melting with this new trust, the quivering mouth smiled with strange rapture; and, bending with a quick gesture, she seized a fold of Ruby's dress, and pressed her lips with reverence to it.

"Now, come with me."

"I must go back to get my things. I can't stay now, I'm not fit," she said, nervously.

"You shall go back for nothing. I'll give you all you want, Nellie."

"Put me away, then, Miss Ruby, out of sight; don't keep me in this room."

"You shall have a room all to yourself, Nellie, and your supper in it for to-night; to-morrow you will feel better. You shall help me then, and I will help you too; come."

She led the way up past the parlors, past the nursery, where Mary was singing to the baby, up into a room on the highest floor, where everything was fresh, neat, and home-like; where the darkening sky sent star-gleams through the windows, speaking of hope and love and purity. Then, talking softly all the while, she dropped the curtains, lit the gas, bade her hang her shawl and hat in the closet, and feel quite at home.

Nor was Ruby satisfied to leave her thus. Stepping into the hall, and speaking over the banisters, she called Mary to bring the baby up a moment.

"You want to see my baby, Nellie? Mary, this is one of my old scholars, — the one who gave me the flowers, you know; she is tired and unhappy, poor child. I want you to bring her up some tea, and see that she is comfortable. In the morning, Nellie, I'll find something for you to do. Good-night, dear; remember all I've told you about our Saviour. He saves us from all our sins and sorrows. The baby shook its chubby hands, and the mother smiled radiantly upon the tearful stranger, then went below.

"For pity's sake, Ruby, whom have you got here now? If you're going to take in all Clare's patients, you might as well turn your rooms into wards at once, and fill them with cots," was Edith's greeting, as she entered the parlor.

"It's Nellie; I've found her at last."

"Why, Ruby, — I thought — Tony said — you know — she was past redemption," exclaimed Edith, impulsively.

"None are past redemption, in my opinion, who have any of the image of God left upon them."

Merle looked piercingly into her face, but did not speak. How lovely she appeared, in her self-abnegation, standing before them, her face transfused with the gladness of her glorious spirit, the embodiment of charity, of truth, and purity.

"Ruby! Ruby! You've picked up that depraved creature, and brought her into your house. *You* stoop to such work? What will Clare say, I wonder?"

"If this be stooping, Edith, hinder me not; my heart yearns for her, and for all like her; I would lift them to the heights from which they have fallen, and to which they are turning such longing, despairing glances. Poor, forsaken souls! wretched, outcast hearts! we must win them to purity and virtue; we must constrain them to return to chastity of life. We must open our hearts and homes, and call them back. We will not condemn, we will not crush."

"How queer you are, Ruby."

"Christ was very queer, too, when He wrote upon the sand, and when He talked to the woman by the well," came oracularly from Aunt Sophie's lips.

"Well, I don't care; it is n't proper. It's lowering yourself; what will people say, when they know that you are not only one of the leaders of that Magdalen society, but bring the creatures into your own house. If that is n't coming down to a low level, I don't know what is."

"Then, sister Edy, I must glory in this coming down, in this bending to the lowest of my sex, even as Christ did; and when I rise from these depths may I bear up other souls, that, were it not for this stooping, might never know the glorious rising."

"Oh, pshaw!" answered Edith, turning to May and the baby, while Aunt Sophie declared that she did n't see why the world need rage more against sins of love than sins of hate; or why men should be smiled on, and women crushed.

"Ruby," said Merle, "you are an enthusiast now, even as, when a school-girl, you quarrelled with established ideas. This plan of yours may work ill for your husband's reputation; I've known the best of men to become blackened by the touch of coal; and there's always danger in these movements, to reputation and standing, if not to character itself."

Ruby was thoughtful a moment, then replied quietly: "My husband's character is upon a firm basis; and none, to look in his face, would doubt his motives. No,

that fear shall never keep me from giving free course to my convictions. Clarence will only assist. *It is essentially woman's work.* She alone holds the key to the hearts of women; and never, never will this class rise from their degradation until they see pity and love beaming upon them from sister eyes; until they may clasp the hand of the pure and chaste of their own sex; until they may feel against their own bruised and bleeding natures, the sympathetic heart-beatings of true women; until those sisters who stand before God, clad in the armor of modesty and purity, may lift them by patient love, by Christlike pity, by courageous words, to their own level, and say to them softly and tenderly, as the divine lips said, "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more."

"It's all very beautiful as you put it, Ruby, but impracticable; the money, care, trouble, and reputation are all wasted; for all, but a very small percentage, go back to their old ways and old haunts."

"You are mistaken, Merle. Many are saved, I know; and even if but one soul should be redeemed for Christ and eternity, it would be worth all the money and all the labor; and I would go on in the work. Do you know what a *soul* is worth, Merle?"

"If they were such as yours, Ruby," — he answered, laughingly, while Ruby only wondered that he sympathized with her so little.

The half-mocking spirit of the man, the indifference of his young wife in contrast with Ruby's noble conse-

eration and Aunt Sophie's perfect sympathy, made a striking picture. Even little May, with earnest eyes fixed upon her foster-mother, drank in the spirit of her words, and felt her world-wide difference from the two.

Still Ruby stood before them, half unconsciously smiling upon the baby's playful pranks, quite oblivious to Merle's unexpressed admiration, her soul leaning forward into the future, and robing itself with hope and courage as with a garment; moved in all by a Higher Power unknown and unappreciated by her worldly friends, even the Spirit of Him who said: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me."

And above, in that upper room, an invisible company were hovering; with folded wings they bent over the lowly penitent; with gladdened gaze they watched her return. Each heart-felt tear and agonizing sob was borne as incense up to Him, upon whose errand they had come.

"Forgive me, Lord," she cried; and the divine dews of pardon rested on her soul.

"Save me, O thou Saviour of men!" and each waiting spirit whispered: "Saved."

"Give me rest and peace, O Lord," she sobbed; and unseen wings fanned the breath of peace upon her. She slept; and the joyful throng sped back with the glad tidings. "For there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth."

Ruby still lives. She has reached the pinnacle of woman's true ambition and fame, the power of creating the highest earthly lot, a heaven-like home; she is called "blessed" by husband and children; is the admiration of friends and associates, and revered by all God's suffering ones, whose benedictions ever rest upon her.

THE END.