

SHORT STORIES
FOR
SPARE MOMENTS.

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not a first

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SHORT STORIES

FOR

SPARE MOMENTS.

THE RECORD OF DORCAS BENTLY.

THERE was the farm and the shop. If Dorcas decided to carry on both, she might do as she pleased about it. For his part, he (Hosea) had decided on what should be done. He stood, a young man not yet thirty years of age, in his shop door—it was a blacksmith's shop in the shade of old apple trees, by the road-side—waiting till the stage should pass that would take him down to Charlotte—Charlotte, not a woman, but a steamboat landing. When it came in sight, the old red wagon, with its oil-cloth curtains flapping in the wind, he beckoned to the driver, who stopped. What had Hosea Bently to say? He said—

“Room there for a passenger?”

“I reckon,” was the answer. The stage was empty: the blacksmith took his seat, and the driver drove on.

The act was momentous, for Manchester, this man had decided, should not see his face again. He was going to blot out the last dozen years of his life, and begin again. He had come to the conclusion that a person of his years and abilities could do vastly better than plod on as he had been plodding in that slow old farming town. He was mortally tired of those level fields, and the sight of the old farm-houses and the

barns was enough to make a Rip Van Winkle of a man. He had been a long time thinking that if he could swing out into the world perfectly free of all incumbrances, he should get rid of this lethargy and make his mark. Dorcas would thrive as well without him, and he was as tired of her as he was of the fields. Children were always a nuisance: like millstones around a man's neck, they kept him down.

So Mr. Hosea had gone off in his best clothes and left the shop door wide open, while the song-sparrow sang and little Joe played around the heap of old iron. If a customer came by and by, Joe would run and tell his mother when he saw that his father was nowhere about, and sooner or later she would understand that he had gone off because he wished to go, and, like the sensible woman she was—for Dorcas had sense enough—she would adjust herself to circumstances.

It was the very best way, to go and leave her in doubt for a while: of this he felt satisfied as he reflected in the corner of the old stage during the pauses in the talk of the driver. (Dan afterward reported that he never saw Hosea in better spirits or in a more talking mood than on that morning as he went down

to Charlotte.) It was the best way, because in the uncertainty Dorcas would be sure to keep the farm and the shop going, and make money. She would take pride in that, he supposed, for more than once she had offended him by saying that she would make as much out of either as he could. Now let her try it! He almost laughed aloud to think what a capital opportunity for making the trial she was going to have.

Dorcas did try it. For one month she continued to look every moment for the return of Hosea and to be startled by every sound she heard. Her eyes acquired a habit of watching painful to see. They were always wandering toward door, window, gate and road. When the stage came rattling down the turnpike, her heart beat as if it would burst.

But only once she went out to ask the driver about her husband. That was the evening of the day on which Hosea departed. She was standing at the gate when he came down the road with his tin horn at his lips. He drew up in beautiful style when he saw her, for he reckoned there was something to be learned about Bently's going.

"Did you carry my man off with you, Dan?" said she.

"I did," he answered,

"That beats all! Whereabouts?"

"Well, it does beat all if you don't know," he said. "I asked him where he was going when I put him down to the steamboat landing, and he said he was going on a voyage of discovery. I asked him if he meant a-whaling, and he said, 'Maybe.'"

Dorcas grew red, then pale:

"Was that all he said, Dan Rogers?"

"Every darned word, Miss Bently."

Dorcas lingered a moment or two, and then turned away without another word. And on no subsequent occasion did she ask Dan any other question in regard to that drive. Whether Hosea would ever come back again remained to be seen. His wife did not believe that he would. He had an unsettled, dissatisfied disposition. He had married her because it was a difficult thing to do

and so long seemed impossible. It was peculiar to him to covet a thing until he possessed it; then it lost charm and value. She recalled now—in the light of her failure recalled with indignation—her vain efforts to soothe his unrest and lessen his dissatisfactions; and she thought of his conduct toward the children: he had never been a tender, loving father. Then she remembered the boast she had made that she could prove that the old farm was not worn-out, exhausted, if she once had it under her management; and she felt in honor bound to make good her words. But as she recalled all this, the courage of the woman seemed to forsake her, and it was a long time before she rallied so far as to be able to undertake the performance of any duties.

It was in the fall that Hosea Bently rode out of Manchester by the morning light, in the old stage, bound for Charlotte and the steamboat Ontario.

The winter passed slowly away. Neighbors were kind to the deserted family, showing their sympathy in friendly acts rather than in words. It was difficult to talk with Mrs. Bently on a subject about which she had so little to say, about which so little was to be said. There was nothing for her to conceal. The suspicion that she knew whither Hosea had gone and his reason for going was not sustained by any failure on her part to pay the few debts he was owing. When need arose for more ready money than she had, she rented the blacksmith's shop, and finally she sold it with all that it contained.

In the spring, when all things are created new, her impulse was to take her boy and girl and depart from the old place. She felt that her children must not grow up in the region where their father had dishonored them. If she should take them to some large town or city—like New York, for instance—they would be in no danger of ever hearing of this disgraceful tale. She would instruct them that their father was dead. Dead he was—to them. In time, Joe would connect his death immediately with the recollection he retained of his

departure in the stage-coach that morning. But this impulse Dorcas conquered. She conquered it as she did the care and fret which were transforming her young face into the face of age, and care and fret withdrew the tokens of their triumphs. The face regained its composure: it became calm as that of a marble image. The countenance that had been pleasing became impressive, and the form of the woman, as if inspired by a new spirit, commanding.

Seven years she stayed on the farm, and she justified her boast that she could make a fruitful and productive place of it. The seasons as they passed away saw the fields one after another increasing in value, the fences "looked up" all over the farm: every indication was given of watchfulness and thrift. No wonder the woman occasionally felt almost a pang of desire that Hosea should return and see what she had done. But that he should cross her threshold for her own sake ceased, almost with his departure, to be her wish. Yet had he come for her children's sake, she could have welcomed him and spared her reproaches. Clearly, the marriage had not been of Heaven's willing. And yet, in spite of her reluctance before the persistence of the suitor who finally conquered her will, she had begun to believe that it was. If Hosea had wooed Dorcas for any other reason than because she was the best match in the region, and was herself not favorably disposed toward him—with any tenderness, with any faithfulness of spirit—he could have proved it to have been verily a match of Heaven's making.

At the end of those seven years, Joseph being twelve years old, and Julia nearly eight, Mrs. Bently determined that the time had come for her to act upon the impulse which she had before repressed, and go where the best advantages might be secured for her children. But she could not bring herself to sell the farm; accordingly, she rented it to good advantage. In making this change in her place of residence her object was no secret. She spoke freely about it to her old friends and neighbors. The people

who rented the place could, at any time, give to any one who desired it information as to where she was to be found. Dorcas Bently went away from Manchester, feeling that she had nothing to conceal from her old companions. If Hosea should ever come, there should be no difficulty in his way to squaring their reckoning.

So she went to New York, hired two rooms in a decent quarter, and promised herself that she would toil for her children until the great object of her life should be accomplished, and Joseph's name be known as one of the ornaments of the legal profession. The boy shared his mother's ambition: he had her spirit—he was a noble fellow. Perhaps it was the knowledge that the law had taken cognizance of such wrongs as hers that induced her to dedicate her son to the profession. Thus she would pay her debt of gratitude.

A woman watchful of her children's growth, their varying wants and needs, is happily unconscious of the flight of time. In the great city how fast these young things grew, and in every direction! Dorcas had a busy time following them and answering to their needs.

When Joseph was about to enter college, she was tempted to sell the farm, and she made a journey to Manchester with this intent, but she went alone. On that unhallowed ground neither of these young lives should ever tread again. She stayed at the old place but a single day, and in that time had decided to relet the farm to its tenant. Railroads had shortened the distance between her old home and the great city since she started, full of apprehensions, with her children, for the world. It had taken her a week to perform that journey—a day and a night now restored her to her family.

She returned with a softened heart to her boy and girl, to tell them that somehow they would get on, but the old place must not be sold. Did she still think of a domestic life renewed there?—of Hosea returned? Was it possible that for him she would keep those doors opened?

The rent of the farm had by no means paid their way in town. Joseph and Julia worked with their own hands to help defray the expenses of their education, and these were constantly increasing. They must work more diligently then, their mother decided when she had resolved to keep the farm.

Mr. Troll, the engraver, who had rooms on the floor above them, had instructed Julia in etching, and secured for her many a profitable job. Joseph usually spent his evenings copying law-papers or in posting books for the firm with which Mr. Troll was associated. Dorcas herself was not idle, and she knew there was no end to the employment given to women in the ready-made clothing establishments, in one of which she had already proved her skill. So she might well go back to Cottage Place with her mind unclouded by a doubt of their ability to go through college triumphantly.

She had made no mistake in these calculations. In her twentieth year Julia was looking forward to the diploma which was to crown it. Joseph in the Law School anticipated the chancellor's commendation; and both were of course making friends, as well as plans for life.

Mrs. Bently was beginning to be somewhat concerned about Mr. Enos, who was in Mr. Mann's office, where Joe spent so much time; and indeed watchful all round. For Julia was not a girl who would escape or avoid observation. At present she was absorbed by school duties, and much taken up by school companions; but who could tell what an hour might bring forth?

Already the stout nerves of the mother had been shaken by the romantic attachment Julia had formed at Mrs. Burnham's school with a young girl of her own name, Miss Clara Bently, the daughter of rich parents, who had a country-seat somewhere up the river. "We have had enough of that name already," she thought, and she regretted that she had taken Julia from the Twelfth Street school merely that she might graduate from Mrs. Burnham's fashionable establishment. Joe was astonished

that she did it, and she would not have liked to own why the transfer was made. But the fact was, that Mrs. Dorcas was as ambitious for her daughter as she was for her son. Julia, too, had her way in the world to make, and polish of manner and grace of accomplishment any woman, not a mother even, could see would greatly help her in doing it.

When Julia would sometimes speak about this child Clara, so rich, beautiful, bewitching, her mother would look about her and think: "That girl seems to have had her own way pretty much. I wish she would insist upon coming into this house. I would give a great deal just to look at her."

This wish was answered in a remarkable manner—not at first literally, but thus: Julia one day informed her mother, "Clara's father is an iron merchant. He has iron mines, and supplies half the railroads in the country with iron: he must be very rich. And, mother, his name is Hosea."

Now, was it likely that there was more than *one* Hosea Bently in the world? Dorcas Bently thought not. And if she thought correctly, should she attempt to defeat Providence by taking her daughter from Mrs. Burnham's school while her hand was stretched out for the diploma? Dorcas thought her way through a jungle of hissing serpents, and swam through a sea of fire: at last she landed on a lonely rock, on whose bald pinnacle never a spear of grass grew, or even a shell was tossed from the dark deep, and there she sat and waited. From that height she could scan the horizon round: not a sail could spread, not a cloud could gather, but she, the watcher, would know.

Miss Clara Bently had been entrusted to Mrs. Burnham's care, when her parents went abroad, with many injunctions. Looking about her with intelligent eyes, the young lady, who had begun to find the isolation to which these injunctions condemned her intolerable, discovered that Julia Bently was the best scholar in the school, the brightest girl too, and exceedingly "well-behaved." She had

found her selected companions, Judge Shankland's daughters, dull and cold, the Mulfords coarse, the Peytons antagonistic. The allotted friendships she declined. Acquaintance with Julia Bently, who had almost nothing to do with any of the girls, she determined to seek, though there was a distance of several years between them. It had almost the charm of an adventure, for she had to go out of her way, not to say out of her sphere, in the seeking.

The girls had gone so far as to exchange many a secret thought and cherished hope, and to confess the conviction that some mysterious attraction drew them together, when Miss Clara obtained permission of Mrs. Burnham to go to Beech Grove, forty miles up the Hudson, in company with Miss Austin, the governess, on a Friday afternoon. Her parents had written that they would return by the next steamer, and she must see that the place was in perfect readiness for them. They had not requested it, but Mrs. Burnham perceived that the wish was a reasonable one, and the reasonable wishes were those she was to grant. Forthwith, then, Clara conceived the wish that Julia should be of the little party.

That was why Julia went home on Thursday looking as bright as if she had been illuminated. If her mother gave consent, then to-morrow about this time they would be riding to the depôt, or perhaps already on the train, whizzing up the river. On the stair she met Joe and shared her pleasant anticipation with him, and he thought so well of the plan that he expressed his hope that their mother would see nothing objectionable in it. But the mother saw so much more than she could express that was objectionable that Julia was obliged to go back to Clara the next morning and say, "No Beech Grove for me."

That was not the termination which was usually given to Miss Clara's plans, and she promptly said,

"I shall put off my trip until next week, then, and go see your mother about it. Mrs. Burnham will have to let me out this very afternoon."

"It will do no good," Julia answered. She had never invited Clara into the rooms they occupied, and did not intend to do so now. "Mother is not to be persuaded when she has made up her mind. And she will not like being teased. I shall not go any sooner for your teasing. I warn you, let that alone."

"She will not refuse to see me, I suppose," said Clara, a little proudly. "She—I beg your pardon, Julia, but I am going to be just as rude as possible—and you need not put on airs with me as if I were an infant: I am as old as you are, every day; and I shall go home with you, unless you run away and leave me lost in the streets. Oh, Jule, you don't know me yet!"

"I shall not run away from you, you may depend, Clara; and I hope Mrs. Burnham will give you permission." Julia answered with dignity: *she* was a little touched by Clara's last words, and it now occurred to her that if Mrs. Burnham *did* give consent, perhaps Joe would be about, and much she wanted Clara should see that splendid brother of hers. *He* was somebody to be proud of.

"You may just imagine, if you can, what my condition would have been by this time, shut up in this great prison, without you. I hate it, and everything about it. You have kept me alive. I want to tell your mother that. She don't half appreciate you, or she would have been glad enough to send you out of town for a breath of fresh air, when you know how much you need it." So Clara went on.

The bell rang—the young ladies took their places. When they next saw each other, Clara nodded gayly at Julia, in a way that made the owner of every desk intervening smile, and Julia knew that she had gained her point and would go home with her in the afternoon. It was positively not to be helped. The visit was decreed.

Clara went home with Julia, and found herself in the home of decent poverty which respected itself. Perceiving this, she quietly attempted to ignore the facts. She would have walked into

Mrs. Bently's arms had they but opened to receive her. It seemed a strange thing to her, who had all her life found doors opening to her even in the most unexpected places, that she made so little progress here.* It was as if a door had been shut in her face, instead of opened, as she followed Julia up the stairs into the room occupied by her mother. The look of surprise with which Dorcas turned from her daughter to the youthful stranger was not lost on Clara, for whom it was perhaps intended, but she, undaunted, felt that she could make her way. At Beech Grove she never met with opposition, and the training had prepared her to advance through the world by any path she was pleased to take.

"I came to beg you not to teach me how to take 'no' for an answer, Mrs. Bently," she said, when a few words not easily chosen had passed between them. "Is it because we are strangers—our families, I mean—that you do not like to have Julia go with me? That fault can be remedied. We need not be strangers any longer, need we?"

She sat down beside Mrs. Bently. She was the most beautiful girl in the world, Julia had said: she had the most winning voice. Dorcas, looking at Clara, was not disposed to question it. She had her wish now. The girl was under her roof, and grave and stern were the questioning eyes she fixed upon her. What was there in the gaze to terrify? As Clara met it, she turned quickly toward Julia, for she felt in her secret heart frightened; but Julia had gone across the room, and was drawing the blinds together. With nervous trepidation she went on, waiting only an instant for the answer, which in that instant was not given.

"I brought some photographs with me," she said, "of mother and the place—Beech Grove, you know. I thought you would like to see just where I was going to take Julia; and this is my mother. And here is father, but it is not in the least like him. He is ever so much better-looking. And younger. I think him very handsome. But, you

see, he looks like quite an old man here."

Miss Clara in her haste drew Mrs. Bently's work-table toward her, and in that haste there was quite as much desire to cover the strange confusion she felt as determination to gain her cause. Whether Mrs. Bently cared to, see the pictures or not, was not her question. She spread them out, and Julia, painfully excited by the reception Clara had met, hovered around smiling. And now all at once the atmosphere of the room seemed to change. Mrs. Bently betrayed a kindly interest and sympathy, of which the moment before she had seemed incapable. This was Beech Grove—was it?—the place about which her daughter had dreamed and talked so much? And these were Miss Clara's parents—were they?—her father and her mother?

Beech Grove had indeed abundant representation. There were views of the house taken from east, west, north and south. Lawn, garden, grove, rustic arbors, rustic fences, fountains, croquet-ground, statuary, every attraction the place presented had been reflected by the sun—each picture enlivened by family groups and favorite animals. Hosea was everywhere, the owner of all this beauty. Yes, there was but one Hosea in the world: the heart of Dorcas had instructed her aright. Mrs. Bently studied all these as if she would hereafter demand of Memory every point of each, while Clara chatted on. "And that is where you have always lived? You were born there?" said she as she gathered the photographs together, leaving none upon the table except those of Clara's father and mother.

"Yes, I was born there. How long ago, do you think? Nearly thirteen years. It was only rough country when father bought the place," Clara answered with sweet filial satisfaction. "Papa made Beech Grove, all except the site."

"And this is your mother?"

"Yes, and don't you love her?"

"She has a most lovable face." Then Dorcas studied, feature by feature,

line by line, the portrait of Hosea. Her study was interrupted, but how long it had continued Dorcas could never have told. It was interrupted by Clara saying, "Julia is like a sister, I am sure. You know I have none—none but her. She makes me studious and keeps me humble. Now you *will* let her go to my home with me? You see it is a pretty place."

"Some time—not yet. Do not urge it: it is simply impossible." That was the answer Miss Clara was to have after all her pains. It was spoken not unkindly, and yet the verdict was one that did not admit of argument.

"Your mother is very strange about it," she said to Julia, who escorted her to the avenue where she was to take the car which passed the street in which Mrs. Burnham's school was located.

"It can't be helped. I knew there was no use in teasing her," answered Julia. Clara, displeased for a moment, at that turned and kissed her friend.

"I'll not go myself, then!" said she. "I am not going all that way merely to show Miss Austin. So, you see, we will all be disappointed together." And then all was as before.

All as before! Yes, with the young girls in their ignorance.

But what was Dorcas to do?

She was not by nature vindictive, revengeful; but with these facts before her should she not, ought she not, to await the arrival of Hosea as a judge the judgment-day? That she had never really loved the man, that her heart did not now break in the certainty of knowledge, was nothing to the point. He had wronged her and her children. And here was this other wife and mother, and this other child! Wealth, station and luxury on one hand—privation and labor on the other. What must she do? Acquaint her children? Acquaint Mr. Troll? She thought she could see the blaze of light which would leap from that good man's eyes at such a tale.

Clara did not repeat her invitation. Her parents came home in the early spring: in due time the school closed. Julia received her diploma, and immedi-

ately set to work on the etchings for the set of "juveniles" about which good Mr. Troll had talked for a year past. The publication had been delayed solely that Julia might prepare the designs.

At Beech Grove the daughter of the house found quite other occupation for her time. The days flew: the house was always full of company. There was early horseback riding and late driving—croquet, dancing and billiards filled up the intervals.

"But you have told me hardly anything about Mrs. Burnham and the school," Clara's father said to her one evening after dinner. He was on the piazza, apparently very much absorbed in the evening newspaper, but he had noticed that for some time his daughter had been flitting around as if she would like to attract his attention; and this could never happen without his feeling it, so sensitive was he to her delicate presence. She drew a chair toward him and sat down. "I never told you the best thing of all, papa," she said. "There was the dearest girl at school, a day scholar, and her name was Bently. And what was so strange, her father's name was Hosea. He died before she was two years old."

"Ah!" said Mr. Bently; "what did you think of that?"

It was as if a blow he had been seeking to evade for years had suddenly been delivered and had hit him in the face. The light hand of his darling had dealt it! what other hand so heavily? He spoke quietly, with wonderful self-control; but perhaps it was well for him to be enveloped as he was in the newspaper at that moment: he would not have chosen to meet just then his daughter's eye.

"I thought it was delightful," she answered. "I wanted to share you with her."

"Me! myself?" he asked with a tone almost savage in his voice, "or something else? Money, for instance? Was it that?"

"Papa and money are not the same to me," said Clara in a low voice, full of emotion.

"My dear little girl, I am quite sure of that?"

"But it does seem such a shame that such a girl should be poor!"

"Eh! Poor is she?"

"Poor enough. They live in rooms, but neat as a bandbox. You wouldn't believe that people could be packed in that way so close, yet so nice and comfortable, papa. She must work for her living. She seems to like it well enough, though. She is going to be an artist: she has talent. Once, toward the end of the year, she got so run down that I invited her to come up here with me to see that the house was all ready for you and mamma. She could not come, and so I didn't."

This was actually a confession. It had been on Clara's mind for some time, and now she had made it. Her father knew that she had extended her school acquaintance beyond the prescribed limit—out of her sphere. But, she had acknowledged it: now she was happy again.

"Did she come here?" he asked.

"Her mother would not let her," answered his daughter.

"Sensible woman. I would not wish my daughter to accept an invitation given by an irresponsible young person, as—I beg your pardon!—you *were* at that time, Clara."

"Then, papa, I do wish you and mamma would invite her!"

"I have been thinking of doing a very different thing, pet. In the first place, it would really be no kindness to the young lady. All her associations are with a different class of persons, and she is accustomed to an entirely different life. If you had her here, take my word for it, you would not know what to do with her. As I was going to say, there is a fine opportunity for you to go abroad just presented, Clara: Judge Shankland is going with his family in the Scotia, and they will be very glad to have you join the party. You had better let alone school-books for a while."

"Thank you, dear papa, but oh if you knew those girls as I do! I really think

a year of that kind of enjoyment would kill me."

"Don't you know, my child, that you may carry your fastidiousness to an absurd and inhuman pitch?"

"Papa, I accepted just one invitation to Judge Shankland's house while I was in town. You tell me I should mortify my pride. It would not be any mortification of it at all to associate with such good, sensible people as Julia's family, but it would be to be seen abroad with the Shanklands."

"Is Julia a confectioner?"

"Julia is my Julia, the daughter of Dorcas and Hosea. And there is a famous brother, Joseph. I am so glad her name is Julia. She is the only friend I have of that name."

"Bring me a cigar, Clara, please."

While she went and came, Mr. Bently folded the newspaper, which he need not attempt to read any longer. Suppose this girl of his had talked as freely with those people, with Dorcas, as she had talked with him? He would like to ask about Dorcas—to know what time had done for her. What wave had borne her from that quiet nook in which he left her into the great sea of life? What had she attempted? What had she done?

This Julia was a girl his Clara could love! And she was poor, working for her living, yet had graduated from Mrs. Burnham's school—one of the very best schools for the education of young ladies in the city! What did *that* mean? That, he finally concluded, was Dorcas all over.

"Did you bring that young school-mate of yours up here with you?" he asked, as if he had missed the point of Clara's simple story.

"Why no, papa: her mother would not consent to it. I showed her the photographs of the place, and yours and mamma's, to convince her that I was not inviting Julia into savage Africa, but she would not consent; so Julia never came. She isn't so very young, papa."

Mr. Bently puffed his cigar a few minutes in silence.

"Don't fret about that," he said: "she will come some time, no doubt"

The house was gay with company, and there was now a call for music. Clara went in—she was "always so obliging"—and, finding the dancers in their places, sat down at the piano. With march, galop and waltz she helped the guests through the hours, herself thinking of her Julia.

But what music could charm out of Mr. Bently's path the spectre which had risen in it? It was not the spectre of Remorse, but Fear. Yet he had been conscious of pain when he heard his daughter commiserating the poverty of the dear girl for making whose acquaintance she had actually seemed to apologize to him. Would it be possible, through his daughter Clara, to alleviate that poverty?

He was reflecting on this question when his wife came and sat in Clara's place.

"How happy I shall be when this shocking business of yours will leave you alone, through the summer-time at least!" said she. "I see you as little as if you were the husband of some other woman, Hosea. You no sooner come than you are gone again. *Must* you go to-morrow?"

To hear such words from such lips was almost enough to make Mr. Bently forget the words which had preceded them.

"These journeys will soon cease to be so important," he answered. "It is actually necessary just now that I should look sharply after all the irons I have in the fire. Besides, you shouldn't call anything shocking that is turning out so splendidly."

Then he talked knowingly of shares and of stock, and filled her ears with difficult problems, to whose ready solution she listened with such pleased attention that he was satisfied. To whatever he could have chosen to tell her she would have listened with equal attention. And it was always so. Since the day when he, her father's clerk, surprised him by his daring and his success in speculations, and turned his steady, thoughtful gaze upon her, she had been under some enchantment concerning him.

He was her hero—anything was possible with him.

Hosea commanded his wife's admiration mainly by the reticence which excited so much her imagination. All that he revealed of himself was so fair, what might not be dreamed of the possibilities in the undiscovered depths of his nature? She did not understand, she had never understood him; and she loved him now as she had loved him in the enthusiasm of youth. The frequent and sometimes long absences which his business required were filled up with memories of his wishes and plans, his words and his acts. She attributed so much to him that he neither assumed, nor knew how to assume, that it would have been difficult for others, had they been so disposed, to regard him with less than perfect respect. Any man beloved as he was by his wife must, of course, be worthy of the love.

When they left the piazza together for the drawing-room, it would have been difficult to tell which of the two, man or wife, felt the greater pride in the other.

Hosea Bently had the esteem of the best business-men in the country—the verdicts of his judgment had an unequaled value in the market. His wife reflected that this power had been gained by his ability: he had made his own way, and her praise was his best reward. To have won her love, to be the honored parent of a girl like Clara, had been his great, his inexpressible satisfaction—the crown, the seal of success. Other rewards which he won in the world he prized, but these were the most beautiful, the most precious. They had glorified his life until this evil hour. Suppose—suppose it were possible that in the eyes of these women, Clara the wife and Clara the child, he should be dishonored? And what right had he to expect anything except dishonor? The long hours of night did not instruct him.

He was to leave Beech Grove at an early hour, and, always an early riser, he had gone over the grounds before breakfast, and was walking in the garden when he saw Clara there with two or three of her guests. He called her to him.

"I am going away in an early train," he said. "What shall I do for your little friend Julia, as you call her, before I go? Isn't there something you would like to have done for her?"

His child, his dear, sweet daughter, looked up in his face more delighted even than she was surprised.

"Oh, papa, so many things!" she said.

"We must begin moderately, though," he answered. "But if you cannot at once think of anything you would like to buy, here is a little sum. Put it in your purse, and use your own judgment how you shall spend it. When I come back I shall inquire into your stewardship. Of course you will not want to talk about it. Somehow or other, it would be certain to come to her ears if you did."

"Oh thank you, papa!"

"Very well. I am never so happy as when I give you a pleasure. The happiest day of my whole life was the day when I saw your mother, for all this has followed. Remember that, Clara. Now go to your company. If you think Julia would not like a costly present, why make a study of the case, and bring all the powers of your mind to bear upon it, for it is a curious business, this of making presents."

The "little sum" which Mr. Bently had given his daughter that she might bestow on Julia some evidence of her love was a five-hundred-dollar banknote. He would very gladly have made it five thousand, had he not feared to provoke surprise, which might provoke suspicion.

Joseph Bently returned home earlier than usual one afternoon.

"The Park is looking splendidly, by all accounts," said he. "I came to see if we should all go up. There will be music to-day."

"By all means," answered his mother, so promptly as to surprise him.

Julia would have declined the invitation but for this. Her mother's consent to share in the excursion was a fact in itself so remarkable as to compel consideration. Mrs. Bently had said "By all means," for two reasons. Firstly, for her children's sake, and, secondly,

for her own. Julia, it was to be observed, had lost much of her cheerfulness since school closed and Clara went away. Joseph was working so hard that he actually needed the recreation. She herself—she, Dorcas—had, since Clara Bently's visit, felt drawn by irresistible curiosity toward that great, gay world so remote from that in which she had her being—the world of pomp and fashion, the world of wealth and power, to which Hosea Bently's family belonged.

"You might go to the Park every afternoon, and still have time for all the work good for you to do," said Joseph, addressing his sister. "You see every variety of people, and would be sure to meet a friend now and then. You know we never went up there that we did not."

Julia felt slightly disgusted that Joe should talk in this way, and perceiving that her mother was talking with Mr. Troll, who, to their surprise, had invited himself into their party when they left the house, she answered, as if to punish him for his pretence,

"Yes; how many times have we been there, Joe, if you please?"

Joe felt that he was like a fox caught in a trap, but he answered good-humoredly,

"Do you remember, Julia?"

"Exactly twice. Once we met Mr. Mann, and the other time, Miss Fyfe."

"You are difficult to please, my little sister."

"To sit on benches and listen to the music, able to do it because it costs nothing, may be delightful to you, but it is no enjoyment to me. As to meeting acquaintances, there is no chance for it, for I have none."

"My sister!" exclaimed Joe, in a very different tone from that in which he had just now claimed the relationship. He had, in fact, never been more surprised than to hear such words from Julia's lips. This came of associating with persons whose worldly fortunes made them conspicuous—like Miss Clara Bently, for instance. It was a great mistake—Joe had thought so at the time it was done—to take Julia from the Twelfth Street school and send her to

Mrs. Burnham's for a diploma. No wonder his wise mother had nipped that friendship in the bud.

It would have been difficult for Julia to maintain this mood long. Had she been ever so much inclined, she would have felt ashamed to do it with Joe and her mother for witness. To present so shabby a figure before this grand brother of hers, this Nature's nobleman whom no difficulty could daunt and no degree of poverty abase, she could not.

"I will sit here a while and listen to the music while you and mother stroll about. I don't want to walk," she said, after they had proceeded some distance past the Armory. "I had much rather be alone. I don't want to talk." Looking up, she saw Mr. Troll gazing at her, half surprised and half amused. She appealed to him: "Need I?"

"If you will let me sit on the opposite bench, I will show you how good a mute I can be," said he, choosing these words for the reason that he would have preferred greatly to offer Mrs. Bently his arm and stroll along the walks with her, anything but deaf and dumb. For Mr. Troll's imagination had been instructing him, and he had learned the story so that it would have passed all your power to convince him to the contrary—instructing him that Mrs. Bently, as a woman, had not her equal in this world.

"You can sit here beside me, if you please," said Julia, making room for him on the bench, as blind as a bat—that is, as blind as Joseph, or as Dorcas even—to the true state of things. The old bachelor had kept his secret as only an old bachelor can.

Joseph and his mother therefore walked down the path, and were soon lost to sight. They went to take note of the stream of gayly-dressed people, the stream of carriages, the horsemen and the horsewomen, the grass, the sheep, the swans, the rocks, and flowers and vines, and to see, indeed, that this was quite another world from that of which the rooms in Cottage Place were the centre.

When she found herself so nearly

alone as to have only Mr. Troll beside her, and he a determined deaf-mute, Julia brushed a tear from her eyes, she was so offended at herself to think of the things she had been saying.

After a silence of a few moments she said to her companion:

"If you look down the path to the right, you will see somebody I wish I could avoid seeing to-day; but I know he is coming to speak with me."

"Salmon kids?" asked Mr. Troll. "Shall I keep him off? What of him?"

"Nothing—I don't know him quite. No—I think you had better just keep on deaf and dumb."

Directly in front of the bench on which Mr. Troll and Miss Bently sat, Mr. Enos paused and flourished his switch in the air while he said the simple things which came easily enough to his lips, and which sounded foolish enough as he spoke them, because he was conscious that always in the observation of Joseph's sister he occupied a false, a wrong position.

It was a bright day. Yes, she had come to hear the music. It was delightful. Delightful enough to keep them there for some time together, as long as the musicians stayed, probably. And then there were the promenaders to look at, and the equestrians, and the endless procession of carriages. They agreed that a finer sight could not be seen than the Park afforded on Saturday while Dodworth's band was playing. Mr. Troll wished himself invisible, as well as deaf and dumb; especially when Julia asked, "Are you alone, Mr. Enos?" for he, as well as Mr. Enos, took that question as an invitation to join her party.

"I wandered away from my friends," Mr. Enos answered, looking very well pleased, "and I lost them without knowing it—a very easy thing to do. I am not distressed about it."

"Will you sit here a while?" asked Miss Julia in the same tone. She knew what she was doing perfectly well. Joseph might have frowned had he stood there, and even might have rendered it impossible for her to speak in this way,

but he was not there. And Mr. Enos, bad as he might be, was better than nobody.

Joseph and this Mr. Enos, who looked like the wreck of himself, were both in Mr. Mann's office; and her brother had told her what a waste of time and talent that young man was making. Though he had been so long in the office, he could not now pass an examination to save his life. He had said, besides, that he should not be surprised any day to hear that Enos had gone off, and that if he did, it might as well be to Botany Bay as to any other place, for he would be sure to disgrace himself and turn up, finally, a wreck. As Julia looked at Mr. Enos, she hoped in the earnestness of her pity that Mr. Troll would search deep enough into the dissipated, worn and most melancholy face before them to feel a little moved by it. If he would only see that she regarded him as a friend, and on that account take an interest in Mr. Enos, she for her part would feel everlastingly grateful. Wouldn't he please to forget that he was deaf and dumb?

"This is as good country as we can expect to get in the city," said Mr. Enos, looking across the green at the sheep browsing on the green slopes, and from these to the swans sailing on the pond below.

Mr. Troll seemed to have understood the longing desire of Miss Julia: it was a call to which he could not well be insensible.

"But," he said with enthusiasm, "no more like the country than a fine picture is like the scene it is supposed to stand for. Everything has its peculiar atmosphere, you know, and country is country. You take these city fellows after their gymnastics have done all they can for them, and put them at work by the side of men brought up on farms, if you want to see the difference."

"You're right about it," said Mr. Enos, twirling his cane.

"Excuse me, one moment," said Julia. She had recognized a friend. But, just as she sprang forward, a party of equestrians dashed around the bend, and the

next moment Mr. Troll and Mr. Enos ran forward; and it was Mr. Enos, he being the younger of the two, and therefore perhaps the more swift in his movements, who drew the girl from beneath the feet of the foremost rider.

It was a theme of excited comment all over the Park that afternoon, that a riding party, missing the way, had galloped round a curve into a path reserved for promenaders, and that the hoof of the foremost animal had struck down a young lady who was crossing to speak to a friend.

There was a rustic arbor near the pond on which the white swans were sailing. To this sheltered place Julia was carried by Troll and Enos: then the latter ran for a carriage. On his way he met Mrs. Bently and Joseph.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, throwing up his arms, and then he came to a dead stand.

"What is it?" exclaimed Joseph, seizing his hands as if to steady Enos, alarmed at his ghastly face and unsteady step. What was Mr. Enos thinking of? He was thinking, What if that prancing horse had sent *her* out of the world, and left him sound and whole as he was then (though, alas! worse than wild beasts had torn him!) to tell this brother of her fate? She had looked so kindly upon him, had spoken so kindly! How harsh was every other voice, how cold every other eye, in comparison with hers! He made himself at last intelligible to Mrs. Bently and Joseph, and, while they hastened toward the arbor, he ran on to the gates.

To Miss Julia's great surprise, Mr. Enos came to see her when she was recovering from the accident. Before that, she had asked Joe about him, and had learned that he was now constantly in the office, and much more steady than he had been.

"Why don't you invite him to come home with you some time?" she ventured one day.

"Because I don't want him here. I am obliged to put up with a good many things not agreeable in the office. When I come home, I want to feel that I am

at home. You don't know what a home is to a man."

"Don't bring him, then," said Julia. "I only thought it might be an act of mercy."

It was not long after this that Mr. Enos called. He had hesitated about it a good while. Joe did not ask him, but considering how the accident had shocked him, and how great his interest was in Miss Julia, who was kept a prisoner in the house so many days, he finally decided that he would venture.

It had been an exciting day for Miss Julia. She had received a letter from Clara, which contained rather remarkable contents; and while she was hesitating whether to share them with her mother, who, she feared, would be so surprised and so displeased, Mr. Enos came.

The letter, which was delivered to Julia by an express carrier, read as follows:

"MY OWN DEAREST, DEAR JULIA:

"I am off to-day for the Mountains, to be gone a month. Our party consists of nineteen, and if you could only make the twentieth, I should be perfectly happy. You would have declined going, though, I know, even if we had not decided on the trip at too late an hour to communicate with you. I have made my will, and you are my heir; but meantime, because I want to send you something, and don't know exactly what you like best, I enclose a little banknote, with which, dear sister Jule, you are to do what you please. I *wish* you would take yourself and your family out of town on some beautiful excursion. If I knew where we should stop on our trip for a day or a night, I would ask you to address a letter to me; but our plans are at loose ends. So, dear, I'll only beg you to love me; not *because* I love you so much—that would look as if I were asking a reward for doing what I cannot help.

"Always your loving

"CLARA."

Before the letter was received, Mr. Troll had come and so arranged a table for Julia that she could manage to work a little. That act of consideration had

moved her to tears, for she was a little bit weak, and very tired of herself and very lonely; but when the letter came, it was read amid floods of weeping, and it was useless to attempt to hide the traces of a storm so recent from Mr. Enos. She hastened to show him what Mr. Troll had done for her, to divert his attention from herself; and he, not a little agitated by seeing the state she was in, rushed out into fervid speech:

"The Lord knows I wish I had a fellow like Troll at my elbow for a good angel!" he exclaimed, his eyes glistening and fixed on Miss Julia's face.

"Oh," she answered; calmed considerably by the vehemence of his exclamation, "you are a man! You don't need to be helped along in that kind of way. Somehow it isn't expected of us, as it is of you, that we should march up to our duties without ever looking back. If we fail, it's only we. But if you fail, why it's *you*."

"Don't you know that the time for talking that way has passed? Women, now-a-days, are having things pretty much as they please."

"That is all nonsense. They are getting employment because their services are wanted. When you get into a large practice, I suppose you will employ women-clerks as well as men-clerks, if there happens to be a need."

Julia's remarks, implying that she supposed that of course he, being a student of law, would some time be a practitioner in the high courts of the land, made Mr. Enos blush. It was the expectation of all these simple-hearted, industrious folks that of course, being a college-bred youth and the son of a rich man, who had known all sorts of advantages, he would go on from one position to another, that humbled him. He felt a desire that she should know from himself the bitter worst of all this—that he had fooled his time away, and that his father in the end would probably bid him go about his business.

"I have made a poor use of my time, Miss Bently," said he. "If I could get a job as a wood-cutter or a coal-heaver, I believe I'd take it. I was going to

leave the city that afternoon when I saw you in the Park and the accident happened. But afterward it seemed to me as if I had been taken up there against my will, just so as to show me that I had one more chance."

"Joseph is going to apply for admission to the bar next month. The court will be in session," she said.

"So soon? I had forgotten. Miss Bently, I was in the office before your brother went there."

"Why do you not apply for admission at the same time, Mr. Enos? Do!"

He reflected, "I could not pass;" but he could not bring his lips to own that truth. She, however, probed him:

"Wouldn't three months bring you on?"

"No, nor six."

"Would a year, Mr. Enos?"

"It might be. Yes, a year might, I think; but habits of study lost—"

"Then for a year, Mr. Enos, don't disappoint everybody," broke in Julia.

He was silent for more than a moment, then said:

"Miss Bently, it is easy to say that I will not. But what you have thought I could do, I will do."

"I shall go to work myself with a lighter spirit for your saying that," said Julia. "Your friends have a right to expect quite as much of you as I do of Joe; and I expect everything of Joe."

Not so much a bold as a brave speech. Mr. Enos heard it as the one thing he had needed to hear. But habit is so mighty! Would a girl's words avail, as once a few smooth stones availed, for the slaying of a giant?

When she was again alone, Julia thought: "Clara will not be at home in a month. If I should send that note back to her, it would take away all her summer pleasure. I can't use it, though. We will take no journey; it would be idle to propose it. Mother would be offended should she know what Clara has done. 'We are not so poor as all that,' she would say. It is an honest pride that has made her so strong and kept us together. It was a great thing, her

bringing Joe and me to New York just for an education."

And she pondered on, until at last she enclosed the banknote, "From a friend—a loan," and addressed it to Mr. Enos. He certainly would never suspect whence it came.

It was a foolish thing to do, perhaps, but Joseph, she remembered, had dropped a remark once, intended for his mother and herself, that Frank Enos was up to his eyes in debt. Perhaps if he had now, just now, a little help of this kind, it would prove the greatest of all aids to his retrieval.

Those five hundred dollars did prove a godsend to Mr. Enos. They awakened solemn reflections, they made him repeat on his knees the promise he had made himself when he had talked with Miss Julia. He returned to his desk in Mr. Mann's office, and worked for the interest of the firm as he had never in his life worked in his own behalf. Joe said that when he went into court, as happened now quite frequently, to make a motion or transact business of minor importance, Enos made an appearance much more than merely respectable.

One day, Mrs. Bently, who had long been considering a step, took it. She said to Mr. Enos:

"I shall put a lawsuit into your hands, some time, that will make your fortune."

Then he perceived, what he had indeed perceived before, but now more clearly, that Mrs. Bently was a resolute woman, capable of forming purposes and of adhering to them.

"I choose you in preference to my son," she said. "You will manage it better." It was evident from her reply to the question he asked that she did not intend to communicate the business then, and he dropped the subject until she should herself allude to it again.

The month of Clara's anticipated absence from home had passed, and Julia had despatched a letter to Beech Grove, in which she told her that she had used the money sent her as a loan to a friend who stood in what looked like vital need of help of that kind.

The same day she received a letter

from Clara in mourning. It was little more than a line long: her father was dead. He had died away from home. His dead body had been brought back for burial. His mourners were inconsolable. These weighty matters were told in the brief despatch.

Good Mr. Troll had been endeavoring to induce Mrs. Bently to believe that the wounds inflicted by death were not incapable of healing. Could he have seen her when Julia opened anew, as it were, her mother's wound of widowhood, he would have felt less confident of his ability to finally convince her.

"She has borne that sorrow seventeen years, my own dear mother," thought Julia. "We have always thought her so strong, but she has only kept her tears to herself, and given us all her smiles." The instant sympathy her mother had given these mourners suggested these thoughts.

Late in the afternoon of the same day, Mr. Enos called. He came to invite Miss Julia to drive in the Park with him, but he saw Julia's mother instead, and received from her this unexpected and extraordinary answer:

"I will go with you, if you please. Julia is occupied. I wish some conversation with you without disturbance. If you are a safe driver, we can have it, but if you are not, you will endanger your lawsuit, remember, if you endanger my life."

Mr. Enos was only too happy to be allowed to drive Mrs. Bently in whatever direction she would be pleased to go. He expressed no surprise, only pleasure. Miss Julia's words that day when she enjoined upon him that he must not disappoint his father and his friends, and that providential "loan," doubtless sent by one of his father's partners at the old gentleman's suggestion, were together working a change in him in which good angels must have taken a wondering interest. He was only too happy, therefore, to be allowed to drive Mrs. Bently 'n whichever direction she was pleased to go.

His client lost no time in introducing the subject she wished to discuss with

him. "Mr. Enos," she said, "I am going to speak to you as if you were my own son, yet in a way that I cannot speak to Joseph. Mr. Troll is out of the question, and I have no other friend. I have just heard, to-day, of the death of my husband and my children's father."

The only surprise Mr. Enos exhibited at this intelligence was manifested in the tightened rein he drew.

"Indeed!" he said.

"I shall tell you the story straight through. Recollect you are my lawyer: note the points. The case is mine, I know: I have read enough law to know that. Any court will decide for me in five minutes. I wish my children's inheritance to be secured to them—if possible—without the knowledge of the events which I am going to relate to you."

Then she told him, briefly, the story he needed to learn. She told it with such straightforward clearness that when she finished he had only to ask,

"Why did you not assert your rights long before this, madam?"

"Because I chose to spare. A day may be as a thousand years; I have lived through such a day. Now the night cometh."

Mr. Enos gave the horse he was driving a prodigious cut, and for five minutes drove very fast, without speaking. One of the thoughts that passed through his brain in that silence was this: "If Joe ever hears this story, he will see there have been worse scamps abroad than Enos."

"It is an infernal complication," said he at length.

"I think, on the contrary, it is a perfectly clear case."

"Clear enough—Lord, yes!—if you can bring the necessary evidence."

Then Mrs. Bently perceived that by complication the lawyer-to-be meant that it was a dreadful pity, all this.

"I can bring the town of Manchester on to the stand as my witness," said she. "You must take the necessary steps at once. And say nothing to my son or my daughter. They would suffer to think of the people at Beech Grove.

But others have suffered. Justice is all I ask, and I have waited for it." There was something in the tone of her voice that made Mr. Enos think of the click of a pistol just then. It was evident that the business must be pushed through.

"The law is in favor of our client, unquestionably," said Mr. Wise, the counsel before whom Mr. Enos laid this case on his return from Manchester, with all manner of evidence in support of Mrs. Bently's claim. A busy life he had spent among photographers and persons who were familiar with the steps of Bently's progress from the day that he arrived in New York a penniless adventurer.

Then Mr. Enos bestirred himself to communicate with the firm entrusted with the affairs of the late Hosea Bently. He communicated the facts of his case: he had testimony ready for every point that was raised. At last the senior member, gray-haired Mr. Cross, shoving his spectacles to the top of his head, said in a voice which he controlled with difficulty, "What is to be done?"

"I suppose it is clear that Mr. Bently could have had but one lawful wife and set of children under the circumstances," said Mr. Enos, with, it is probable, a little of a young man's satisfaction in the certainty of a verdict.

True: Mr. Cross pondered on that. Then there was much talk about division, settlement, compromise, the probability of it, the possibility of it. And there was much going to and fro. It was suggested that Joseph and Julia should be instructed in the case, and their pleasure learned. Uncertain what their pleasure might be, possessed of but this thought, that she had their rights to look after as their father's children, their mother decided that they should know nothing of all this until they were the declared heirs of Hosea Bently. So Mr. Enos maintained the ground on which he had stationed himself at the beginning: the lawful widow of Hosea Bently claimed for his lawful heirs their patrimony.

In consequence, Mr. Cross, the lifelong friend of the second Mrs. Bently's

father, went up to Beech Grove with the knowledge that longer delay would serve no good purpose—was neither possible nor desirable. Cursing the fate which he had but recently considered cause for self-gratulation, he went. The worst thing that had happened to him in his professional career was this—he was a party in the settlement of the Bently estate.

As he walked along the broad path which wound among fine ornamental trees, and approached the house, pausing again and again to look back on the river and the Highlands, he felt the burden and the sorrow of mortality as he had never before in his long life felt them. Down this road the long train of funeral carriages had passed so recently, bearing to the grave in honor the man whose memory perhaps to-morrow all men would execrate.

The afflicted widow must of course receive this venerable gentleman who came to talk with her about business. Whoever else failed to find admittance, the doors were open to him. It was not his first visit, and Mrs. Bently of Beech Grove received him with composure. That he should submit to the torture of lingering over the business before them was impossible. Such tidings as he had to convey, Mr. Cross knew, could but, after the utmost caution, at last be received as if lightning had fallen from heaven. He had known Mrs. Bently from her girlhood, and he called her by her own name, the name her daughter bore, when he addressed her.

"Clara," he said, "I believe—I am afraid—I should have declined to act as your lawyer when you were so partial as to select your father's old friend, if I had suspected how painful a duty I should be called upon to perform. And yet you will believe, my dear, that nobody could wish to serve you more faithfully, or strive more seriously to protect your interests or save you pain."

"You do not know the comfort I have felt, Mr. Cross, in knowing that our affairs were in your hands. It would be terrible to be obliged to think of business just now," answered the widow.

Mr. Cross was silent. He saw that, so far from suspecting his meaning, she had not even heard the note of warning in his words. She had supposed that he was merely apologizing for intruding on her solitude. As he looked at her, so fair and gracious, and still so young, and reflected, "Bently was a coward, but he loved this woman, and he had the unmerited honor of knowing that she loved him," tears trickled down his cheeks. Mrs. Bently saw the tears, and a sudden suspicion startled her. It could not be that in looking over her husband's papers anything had been discovered that could tell against his integrity? It might be that things were not turning out as well as had been expected: the suddenness with which he had been called away, his day's work unfinished, made it evident that his affairs would not be shaped as he could have wished and contemplated. She found that she must speak, Mr. Cross seemed to be so much overcome.

"If you have found affairs very much involved—he was so unexpectedly taken away—do you think so poorly of me as to fear to let me know?" she asked.

The old man rallied his powers.

"No, Clara!" he exclaimed. "If the man who allowed you to— You said just now, my dear, I must not think so poorly of you as to keep back the truth. I will not keep it back. As you say, Hosea Bently did die suddenly, but no length of time that could have been given him would have enabled him to put his affairs in the right shape. I am not speaking of money-matters. His fortune stands well enough, but it is as dust in the balance weighed against himself."

Mrs. Bently arose, her eyes, which had been dulled by weeping, flashing fire:

"Are you speaking of my husband, Mr. Cross?"

"No, Clara—not of your husband." (It was a firm, swift hand that must inflict this wound.) "I am speaking of the husband of a woman who has waited till he was in his grave before she claimed the property of her children."

"This cannot be true." Mrs. Bently sat down again. It seems hardly to the purpose to say she was "calm as death."

But what is calmer than death? The paleness of death was on her countenance: it was a poor covert she sought in such a whirlwind—the covert of unbelief.

"Think of my being here to say such words to you?"

"True. Mr. Cross, where is the woman?"

"In New York—ready to push her claim."

"She can substantiate it?"

"The evidence is fatally complete."

"She will come to Beech Grove, then?"

Was it possible that her first thought was one of alarm? Did she fear lest she should be disturbed here by the image of this claimant?

"I do not think she will," he answered, hesitating. Did she reckon that the roof which now sheltered her would continue to shelter? Alas! it would not.

"I could hardly expect it: then I must go to her."

He had hardly time to comment on that decision in this swift way—"There spoke her father. If she goes, it will be the best thing for her cause: there isn't a woman on earth but would pity her"—when Mrs. Bently, reaching forward to touch the bell upon the table, fell beside it insensible. Mr. Cross laid her upon the sofa, and it seemed rather by some sense of the strong necessity upon her, than by any effort of his, that she recovered consciousness.

"I must see her," were her first words. "My child!" Her voice touched a higher key, for she saw Clara passing through the hall. Mr. Cross turned swiftly toward the door. A step forward, and his arms folded around Clara's daughter, and he kissed her.

"My dear girl," he said, "it is a great thing to be loved as everybody loves you. Will you come in to your mother? There are some things which it is necessary to talk over together."

The gentleness of his voice, the tenderness of his manner impressed her, though she found gentleness and tenderness everywhere. After that rude storm

which had torn away her pride, her joy, her father, how balmy soft the air! Still, it was under the impression that some other and new pain or anguish might be in store for her, and that he had recalled the fact that loving hearts were as a wall around her to assure her in the fresh assault of disaster, that she allowed him to lead her into the library, where her mother awaited her.

"Mamma, what is it?" she exclaimed the instant her glance fell upon her mother, who it was evident had passed through some terrible ordeal which was yet reserved for herself.

"Be brave, my child: you have your mother still. Come here; sit down."

Awestruck and terrified, Clara obeyed.

Then Mrs. Bently looked at Mr. Cross. Was there no mistake? Need this havoc be wrought? She saw in him nothing to assure hope—only distress and anguish. And so she went on:

"I would spare you every pain a mother would spare her child, but the worst pain of all we must endure together. We must die to the past—we who have been looking to it as the beautiful sepulchre of our dearest joy."

Clara turned bewildered from her mother: Mr. Cross sat down beside her and drew her into his arms, that she might feel the shelter and protection of them.

"It is true," he said—"true, Clara. You have your mother's spirit. Die, my child—die to everything in the past except to the recollection that you have loved, with a faithful, dutiful love, the living and the dead."

"Everything! I can die, mother, to everything except to his memory."

"First of all to that, my child."

"Never to that—never." It was, then, to him they had referred in this strange speech—to her father! The vehemence of her words produced an effect.

"Mr. Cross, you must have brought the evidence with you. It is incredible. It is a monstrous charge. We ought not to credit it. My daughter, we will not believe what we have not seen proven."

Mr. Cross had been waiting for this

questioning. It was almost with a sense of relief that he produced the incontrovertible evidence which supported this charge.

"Read it," said Mrs. Bently, who it almost seemed had been inspired by a new hope since her child stood there ready to challenge the world to prove her father's dishonor.

And so he read.

Mother and child listened without a word or a cry to the reading.

"It is Julia's mother," said Clara at last.

"We must go to them," said her mother. "We will go to-day—now. You will go with us, our friend?"

"Perhaps," thought Mr. Cross, left to himself while the preparations for their departure were being made—"perhaps it will be as well for Clara to spend the rest of her days in the partial oblivion of insanity. If she were not the daughter of a man who had nerve equal to anything that could happen to a mortal, I wouldn't answer for her reason one hour. But as long as she endures there will be no flinching in her child. I would to Heaven I had Bently here to see these splendid women whom he dared—fough! Lord! is it possible the fellow killed himself?—he must have seen something was ahead that would ruin him."

How quietly affairs were moving at 135 Cottage Place! While these three approached on the swift wings of destiny, the household pursued the even tenor of its way. Julia was etching; Joseph had come home and was busy over a bundle of papers; Mrs. Bently was quietly sewing and thinking—who can guess what thoughts?—when the three appeared.

The door was open, and when they stood on the landing opposite, the occupants of the room, if they chanced to lift their eyes, could not avoid taking in the group at a glance. They did lift their eyes, and did take in the group at a glance.

"Clara! my dear, dear Clara!" exclaimed Julia, running forward: the first words that passed between them, whatever speech might follow—the first

words, all must bear witness—were words of love.

"This is a very unexpected horror," said Dorcas, apprehending in an instant the occasion of the visit, and, strong though she had been in the prosecution of this business, she felt for a moment that she was not sufficient for that now before her.

"I intended it as a mark of respect," said Clara's mother, throwing back her veil. She had hesitated for a moment, thinking, hoping that Mr. Cross would speak for her, and in his straightforward, man's way explain why they were there. And, as if under a sense of the fitness of such a manner of proceeding, Mr. Cross had attempted to do so, but for the first time in his life he found himself unable to meet an emergency.

"We are women," she continued. "Let us not turn against each other. What years you have passed through!—your hair is gray. I came here to beg you to understand that we consider your evidence sufficient—my daughter and I. We have left the house: we give up everything. We do it, not because we must, though we must: we do it in the spirit which must have actuated you all these years—for his sake, for human nature's sake. We do not question rights. We are pained to think of what you have endured. But the years have given you noble children: that is a great reward. Let us part in peace. Thank God I have been able to say this!—myself—so—you cannot doubt." She spoke these last words with less rapidity than those which had preceded, and with a fainter voice. But with a noble strength, which had the effect of a proud trumpet's half-wailing blast, she ended with—"Let us bury his name—as we have buried his body—with honor."

Joseph had sprung forward when Clara's mother began to speak as if moved by a spirit of flame. He had caught the meaning of these words, and would now have spoken had not his mother laid her hand on his shoulder, and said:

"My son, I shall say nothing you need blush to hear. Madam, if these

girls are like sisters, as they are sisters in reality, may we not be the same? I have not sought vengeance. I have had no desire to punish the innocent. I have sought for nothing but my children's rights. And I do not claim them at the fullest. I expected it of them that they would refuse any portion of what the law should give them unless you should consent to a division. It is for this reason that up to this hour they have known nothing at all of this wretched business."

It was a fortunate thing that at that instant the woman she addressed again swooned away. This time it was Joseph who supported her in his arms. When she regained consciousness it was evening, and she was lying on Julia's bed. And there for weeks she lay.

Perhaps it was that Clara might retain without question, the title of Hosea Bently's widow that Dorcas consummated so speedily her marriage with Mr. Troll.

There had been a division of the Bently estate when Clara recovered sufficiently to go into the country. There was no return to Beech Grove: the house with its entire contents passed out of Bently hands—they who had owned it as eager to be rid of it as Dorcas was now to be rid of the old farm in Manchester.

The Bently estate proved to be worth something less than was anticipated. All the irons had not been drawn from the fire when that sudden death startled so many lives. But there was still money enough to make people envy the heirs, known and unknown.

Mr. Enos never turned back from the narrow path he had entered. Julia told her sister Clara what she had done with her gift, and added, "I am going to give him myself next." When that happened—a happy event it was to all concerned—Joseph and Mr. Enos were in a fair way to obtain a large practice in the higher courts.

And so all this misery ended. Does it not seem as if "hearts prepared for any fate" were usually prepared also to prove Fate the weakest of the powers?

THE BLUE CABINET: A CHRISTMAS STORY.

"I DO not see why you object to taking the situation?"

"Because I prefer the post of governess to that of companion. The duties are more settled, and the position is better defined. Moreover, I have been a governess for some ten years now, and have been very successful and very happy. Why should I relinquish an occupation to which I am accustomed, and which suits me, to take up another and an untried one, because Edith Arlington has grown up, is about to be married, and consequently needs a governess no longer?"

"Simply because no other equally eligible situation as governess has been offered to you. Edith Arlington, spoiled heiress and only child though she be, is a very lovely and lovable girl, and your future pupils will probably not prove as charming."

I mentally assented to the truth of his remark.

"And you will not even listen to what I have to say. You are very provoking, Margaret." And Dr. Bentley took up his hat pettishly, as if about to go.

I only laughed. Dr. Bentley was an old friend and a distant relative of mine, and his quick temper and warm heart were both thoroughly well known to me.

"Sit down, dear, hasty old friend," I said, "and let us talk this matter over. Who is the lady who wishes to engage a companion, and why have you selected me as an eligible person for the post?"

The doctor put his hat down again and his brow cleared.

"Now you begin to talk a little more sensibly," he said, "and I will tell you all about it. You have often heard me talk of Abbotsmere, the splendid estate near the town of Kendon, where I reside, and of its owners, the Damerel family, whom I have attended professionally for so many years. The present owner of the estate, and the sole surviving member of the family, is a maiden

lady, now nearly sixty years of age—Miss Caroline Damerel. She is troubled with a nervous affection, which often prevents her from sleeping; and she is anxious to find a person well acquainted with the modern languages who will be willing to read with her and aid her studies at night, sometimes sitting up all night when she is seized with one of these attacks of sleeplessness. Such a post requires a person with a good constitution and strong nerves, as well as one well versed in German, French and Italian. You are the only woman I know who possesses all these qualifications: you are one of the sleepless order yourself, and you are extremely fond of foreign literature. I have not yet forgotten how you once set up all night to finish *Notre Dame de Paris*, and how you confessed to never retiring to bed till three o'clock in the morning while you were reading *Soll und Haben*. Your duties in other respects will be merely nominal, and your salary will be large." And he named a sum doubling in amount the very liberal stipend which I received from Mr. Arlington.

I pondered seriously for some moments.

"Do answer in the affirmative, Margaret," said the doctor, after a long pause. "I have a great respect and sympathy for Miss Damerel, and I am anxious to secure for her the companionship of a sensible and intelligent woman like yourself. Besides, your life will be a comparatively easy and pleasant one, and Miss Damerel is a high-minded and intellectual lady, whom you cannot fail to admire."

"Well, then, I consent," I replied at last. "And if—"

"Bravo!" interrupted Dr. Bentley, springing up with an alertness wonderful to contemplate when his sixty-five years were remembered. "I knew you would listen to reason at last. I will go at once to write Miss Damerel a line in-

forming her of my success. And now what day shall I tell her to expect you? Will you be ready to leave London next Wednesday? I must go home on that day, and will be happy to act as your escort if you can go so soon."

"Certainly I can," I answered; "and I will very thankfully accept your proffered companionship."

He drew a Bradshaw from his pocket and consulted it carefully:

"Meet me at Euston Square Station at twenty minutes past eleven, then—not a moment later. And now good-bye till Wednesday. I shall not have time to call again." And, shaking my hand warmly, he departed.

I pass over the events of the next week, the brilliant marriage of my pupil Edith, who became Viscountess Annesley two days before that fixed for my departure, and my subsequent parting with kind Mr. and Mrs. Arlington, who, though my services were no longer needed, seemed loth to let me go.

The morning that we started from London was bright and beautiful. It was early in June, and the sun shone as only the summer sun ever shines in England. We were so fortunate as to be the only occupants of the compartment in the train which we had chosen, and Dr. Bentley was completely in his element as he bustled about, attending to my wants and arranging my parcels. As soon as he had established me comfortably in a corner, had satisfied himself of the safety of my little basket of biscuits and sandwiches, and had provided me with a railway novel and the *Times*, he at once proceeded to do his best to make these supplies of literature of no use by settling himself beside me and commencing a long narration about my future home and its mistress. Finding his story more interesting than the columns of the *Times*, I laid aside both newspaper and novel, and listened as attentively and with as much interest as he could have wished. I give his recital in a connected form, unbroken by my frequent questions and comments.

"Abbotsmere is a fine old place," he began. "The main building is very old,

and was a monastery till Henry the Eighth dispersed the monks and bestowed the abbey and its broad lands on Sir Guy Damerel, his good knight and faithful servant, as a letter from the royal Bluebeard, still preserved in the family archives, styles him. The abbot, unwilling to survive the suppression of his order, drowned himself in a small deep lake which exists in the lower part of the park, and from which the estate now takes its name. It is said that his ghost haunts the west drawing-room, which was formerly the chapel of the monastery; and if so, you may chance to see it, as you come of a family renowned in Scotland for its second-sight and ghost-seeing. The Damerels have always been a wealthy family—never much inclined to dissipation or to the extravagances of a court life.

"It is now more than forty years since Ralph Damerel died, leaving two daughters: his wife, who had been a beauty and an heiress, had died some six years before. His eldest daughter, Harriet, according to the terms of the entail, inherited the estate. She was at that time a little over thirty years of age, and Caroline, the youngest daughter, was just sixteen. Caroline inherited her mother's property, which was very large; but unfortunately the terms of the settlements left the power of bequeathing it to her father, and it was left to her so tied up that in the event of her marrying without her sister's consent she would forfeit every penny of it. A very shameful *mésalliance* on the part of a distant relative of the family took place just before Mr. Damerel's death, and doubtless influenced him to make so strange and unjust a will. Besides, he had an exaggerated opinion of the good sense and strength of character of his eldest daughter, which was unfortunately unfounded. Harriet Damerel was doubtless a very intellectual woman, but her temper was contradictory and domineering to the last degree, and at the same time was extremely violent. She was a confirmed invalid, and suffered terribly from a spinal complaint caused by a fall from her pony while she was quite a

child, and doubtless her physical ailments aided to render her temper so utterly insupportable. Caroline possessed all her sister's strength of character and intellectual acquirements, and was, besides, of a far more amiable and affectionate disposition. She was extremely handsome, too, in her girlhood, and all Harriet's ambition was centred in her and in the brilliant marriage she hoped to see her make. So suitor after suitor for Caroline's hand presented himself and was rejected, without any opposition on the part of that young lady. I was a daily visitor at Abbotsmere in those days, as I was Harriet's physician, and so saw all that transpired there.

"About ten years after Mr. Damerel's death, Harriet deemed it expedient to invite her cousin Hugh, who would inherit the estate in the event of both sisters dying unmarried, to spend the Christmas season at Abbotsmere. He was then a fine, spirited boy, about sixteen years of age. He accepted the invitation, and shortly after arrived, accompanied by his tutor, Mr. Lisle. Gerald Lisle was a young man of good family, though he was poor, being that unfortunate creature, the younger son of a younger son. He was a splendid specimen of manhood, and as accomplished and intelligent as he was handsome. Before he had been a week in the house, Caroline and he were desperately in love with each other; and ere the month appointed for his pupil's stay had expired, he had declared his love and had received the assurance that he was loved in return.

"I cannot pretend to describe to you, Margaret, the rage of Harriet on finding that Gerald Lisle, the penniless tutor, had dared to love, and, worse still, to win the love of her sister and heiress. His suit was rejected with every variety of insulting language which her sarcastic and irritating disposition could suggest; and after she had had a stormy scene with her cousin, who was extremely attached to his tutor, Hugh Damerel and Mr. Lisle quitted Abbotsmere; not, however, before the lovers had contrived

to have one last interview, in which, doubtless, they exchanged vows of unflinching constancy.

"Harriet probably hoped to sway Caroline as easily to her will as she had ever before been able to do. But Caroline loved—loved for the first time—and as fervently and as enduringly as those do to whom the grand passion of their lives comes when the fervor, the fickleness and the unreason of youth have passed. To all Harriet's wrath she opposed one declaration. 'I shall marry Mr. Lisle,' she said; and nothing could induce her to swerve from this determination, simply and quietly expressed. She equalled her sister in resolution and force of character; and I have seen her bear, apparently unmoved, a torrent of sarcasm and invective from Harriet's lips that would have tried the temper and exhausted the patience of a saint. There were terrible scenes in those days, which were of course witnessed and talked about by the servants, but I never heard of any display of temper on Caroline's part. Probably her silence and self-command were more irritating to her sister than reproaches and anger would have been.

"On the 18th of February, 1833 (I have cause to remember the date), my assistant came to my study to tell me that the Damerel carriage was at the door, and that Miss Caroline would be much obliged to me if I would give her her sister's medicines, as Miss Damerel was suffering very much. The medicines in question had been ordered from London for her use, and had arrived only the day before. They comprised an opiate draught of unusual strength, and a concentrated preparation to be used in external applications, and which was a powerful poison. I took them myself out to Miss Caroline and placed the phials in her hands. She was looking very ill: she was deadly pale, and the hand she extended to greet me shook sadly. I heard afterward that Harriet had inflicted upon her that morning an unusually long and violent scene, and that she was suffering from its effects.

"Tell Miss Damerel," I said, "that

there are just two doses of the opiate in this phial, and on no account to take more than one dose before I see her again, as it is of unusual strength. And tell her, for Heaven's sake, to be careful of the other, as it is a deadly poison. Ten drops of it would kill any one.'

"Miss Caroline promised to deliver my message, and the carriage drove off. I learned afterward that she repeated my exact words to her sister, who only answered by snatching the phials rudely from her.

"'You need not tell me to be careful,' she said, sneeringly: 'I mean to live—ay, and to marry. You and your beggar lover shall never rule at Abbotsmere.' With these words she swept up stairs, and retired to her own room, double locking the door.

"She did not make her appearance the next morning, and after some hours of anxiety and suspense, the door was broken open. She was found seated in her large arm-chair, still in the dress which she had worn the day before, but dead and cold. She must have been a corpse for some hours before she was found. The bottle which had contained the opiate lay empty beside her. I suppose she took one dose and dropped asleep, was awakened by a spasm of pain, and, bewildered and stupefied by what she had already taken, had swallowed the second dose mechanically."

"What became of the other phial, the one containing the lotion?" I asked. "Could she have taken a portion of that by mistake?"

"No; that was hardly possible, warned as she had so lately been of its deadly nature. Unfortunately, however, in the confusion and flurry attendant upon the discovery of her death, a small table which stood near the door was overturned—by Caroline herself, I think, as she entered. The phial of lotion had been placed upon that table, and was broken to pieces by the fall. But the fact that the bottle containing the opiate was empty, convinced me that an overdose of that had caused her death, and that she had never meddled with the lotion at all. And such was the testi-

mony which I gave at the inquest. A post-mortem examination was not considered necessary. And so the funeral took place, matters settled down quietly, and Abbotsmere had a new mistress. 'And a new master it will have soon,' we all thought. But man proposes and God disposes. Harriet Damerel's last words came strangely true. Gerald Lisle was not fated to be master of Abbotsmere. A few days after the funeral I received a letter postmarked Rome from Hugh Damerel, begging me to break to his cousin Caroline the news of the death of Mr. Lisle. He had died of typhoid fever in Rome the day before that on which Harriet Damerel had expired.

"It was a fearful task—to seek out and tell that loving, hoping woman that hope and love and suspense were over, and that she was waiting for one who would come no more. I shall never forget that interview. When my dreadful story was told at last (I got it out somehow—Heaven knows how), she spoke no word, uttered no cry, but fell heavily at my feet in a dead faint, which was succeeded by one of the most terrible convulsions I ever witnessed. For weeks her life hung on a thread, and months elapsed before she left her room. In that illness every trace of bloom and brightness and youth departed. Caroline Damerel to-day looks but little older than she did at the age of twenty-six."

"I do not wonder now at her nervousness and her delicate health!" was my involuntary exclamation.

"You were sure to hear all this story some time or other—from the old family servants, most probably. So I thought it best to tell you the facts exactly as they occurred. Do you wonder now at my desire to procure for her the solace and comfort of your companionship? And if, sometimes, your duties are a little irksome, remember what a long tragedy her life has been: bear with her, sympathize with her, pity her. Yes, pity her, Margaret. You, Margaret Bruce, the governess, are more to be envied than Caroline Damerel, the lady of Abbotsmere."

And with these words Dr. Bentley

settled himself back in his corner and closed his eyes, fatigued probably by the length of the story he had told. And I, with my novel lying unopened on my lap, looked at the scenes that flitted past the car-window with vague, unseeing eyes, absorbed as I was in meditating about what I had just heard.

The soft twilight of the June evening was darkening into night when I bade farewell to Dr. Bentley at the Kendon station. A gray-haired, solemn-looking servant-man was waiting for me, with a wagonette for my accommodation and a car for my luggage. Abbotsmere was but four miles from Kendon, and I enjoyed greatly my drive in the warm, flower-scented air, and under the silvery light of the moon, which was just rising as we started from Kendon. We reached our destination all too soon, it seemed, and I was warmly received by a pleasant-looking elderly woman in black silk, who introduced herself to me as Mrs. Deane, the housekeeper.

"Miss Damerel is not at home," she said: "she has gone to dine with Lord and Lady de Cressingham at the castle, and will not return till late. Will you have dinner now? or would you prefer taking tea with me in my parlor?"

I expressed my preference for the latter meal.

"Then come up stairs and I will show you the room Miss Caroline wishes you to have." So saying, she led the way up the wide oak staircase, and along several passages, till she reached a door, which she unlocked and threw open, saying, "This is your room," as she did so.

I entered and surveyed it curiously. It was a spacious apartment, the walls paneled with dark, venerable-looking oak, and the low, carved ceiling formed of the same wood. The furniture was massive and handsome, though the dark-red damask with which it was covered was faded and somewhat worn. A number of antique porcelain jars, Chinese mandarins, quaint, old-fashioned boxes, etc., were scattered here and there on the mantel-shelf and the oddly-carved tables, and adorned the tops of two tall

cabinets, which were placed, one between the two large windows, and the other in a corner by the door. Altogether, it was a handsome and comfortable apartment, though somewhat antique-looking and gloomy, and was far more elegant than the quarters which are usually assigned to a governess or a companion.

"The next room to this," said Mrs. Deane, "is Miss Damerel's library, and yonder door will give you access to it. She has caused a bell to be put up in her dressing-room, which lies just beyond, so that she can summon you at any time. Would you like to see the library now?"

I assented, and she at once opened the door and preceded me, holding aloft the light she carried that I might be better enabled to inspect the room. It was not large, but was extremely elegant in all its appointments. The exquisitely carved bookcases, filled with volumes in costly and well-chosen bindings, the bronzes and busts, and the few choice paintings that filled up the vacant spaces on the walls, were all perfect in their way. A writing-table of carved oak occupied the centre of the apartment, and I took up one or two of the books with which it was covered. A volume of *Les Rayons et les Ombres* of Victor Hugo, Dante's *Vita Nuova*, and Paul Heyse's charming tale, *An der Tiber*, attested to the variety and nature of Miss Damerel's studies.

I purposely lingered as long as possible over the abundant and cheerful meal provided for me in the housekeeper's room. I was anxious to be presented to Miss Damerel before I retired, and by dint of starting the housekeeper to relating some old legends connected with the estate, I managed to attain my wish, as Miss Damerel returned earlier than usual, and at once expressed a desire to see me. She received me in her library, and I was surprised at the elegance and dignity of her appearance. Instead of the frail, sickly-looking being I had pictured to myself, I saw before me a tall, stately woman, thin and pale, indeed, but with no apparent evidences of ill

health visible in her countenance or form. Her features were fine, and her large blue eyes retained much of their lustre. Her hair was thickly sprinkled with silver; it is true, but as it had been originally very light, it presented the appearance of having been powdered, and the effect was decidedly becoming. Her mouth was the only unpleasant feature in her face. The lips were thin, and in repose were closely compressed, while decision and fixedness of purpose were visible in their every curve and line. Her teeth, however, were perfectly beautiful, and her smile was sweetness itself. She was attired in a violet satin dress, with a coiffure and collar of old Venetian guipure lace, while a mantle of the same costly and exquisite fabric was thrown over her shoulders. A brooch and ear-rings of magnificent diamonds (the Damerel diamonds were celebrated, as I afterward learned) completed her toilette, which was superb, and yet was proper and appropriate to her age. The perfect grace and courtesy with which she greeted me charmed me at once. "You will find your duties somewhat irksome, I fear," she said, kindly, "but I will do all that lies in my power to make them as easy to you as circumstances will permit."

The next few days passed as pleasantly as possible. I usually read aloud to Miss Damerel for an hour or two every morning, after which we read German or Italian together for some time. The rest of the day she generally drove, or paid visits, or received company, so that I was at liberty to wander in the park, to admire the garden or to explore the recesses of the great library, which was on the ground floor; Miss Damerel's pretty room being but a recent arrangement and sacred to her use alone. That contained only the modern and lighter authors, while Froissart's *Chronicles* and Sir Philip Sydney's *Arcadia* were the most frivolous reading which the grand old Gothic library afforded.

One night, about a week after my arrival, I was aroused shortly after midnight by the sound of the bell. I rose

at once, dressed hastily and in a few minutes entered Miss Damerel's library. I found her pacing the room with hurried steps. Her brow was knit, her hands clenched, and a strange, wild look had replaced her usually calm and serene expression. As soon as she saw me she paused in her walk, and placing a chair beside her own at the writing-table, she motioned to me to take it, seating herself at the same time. I would fain have made some inquiry respecting her evident suffering, but she imposed silence on me by a slight yet imperious gesture. Taking a volume of Goethe's works from the table, she opened it at the second scene of *Faust*. She then produced a manuscript, which proved to be an attempt of her own to translate that most untranslatable of poems in the metre and rhythm of the original. My superior knowledge of German enabled me to suggest various alterations and corrections as she read aloud, now from the manuscript and now from the original, consulting me, as she did so, respecting the more obscure and difficult passages. After some two hours passed in this manner, Miss Damerel lighted a spirit-lamp under a large silver coffee-urn which stood on a side-table, and in a few minutes she placed a cup of hot, fragrant coffee before me. I took it thankfully, but she refused to share it with me.

"I need no coffee to make me wakeful," she said with a faint smile.

After I had partaken of the coffee, she took a volume of the tragedies of Alfieri from one of the bookcases, and we were occupied with *La Congiura dei Pazzi* till the red morning sunshine streamed through the curtains, and our long night was over.

"Well," thought I, as I re-entered my own room and commenced my preparations to retire to rest, "I cannot say that I find this midnight work so very unpleasant. Many a time before have I studied all night, and then merely for my own gratification. And if only the nights do not come too close together—" But here I lost all recollection of my toils in a profound slumber, in which

Mephistophiles and Lorenzo di Medici haunted my dreams in bewildering companionship.

I found that my services were thus required sometimes as often as three times, seldom less than twice, a week. But every arrangement which kindness and consideration could suggest was made to render these duties as easy and as little wearisome as possible. My hours of daylight repose were never infringed upon, and orders were given that my meals should be prepared at any hour I chose to order them. I possessed a good constitution and an un-failing delight in literature, so that I took great pleasure in our midnight studies. And, moreover, as time passed on, I became much attached to Miss Damerel. Her brilliant intellect and her extensive acquirements filled me with admiration, and the invariable kindness and courtesy with which she treated me won my affection, while all my womanly sympathy was aroused by her evident sufferings and by my recollection of the sorrow the memory of which still overshadowed her lonely life.

And now I am coming to the most singular part of my story. I do not expect that any one will believe it: I can only vouch for the truth of what I relate. I had been some months at Abbotsmere when the following incident occurred.

One cold November evening I retired at an unusually early hour to my room. Being in expectation of a summons from Miss Damerel, I did not go to bed, but, changing my dress for the loose wrapper which I usually wore during our studies at night, I threw myself on a small sofa that stood near the fire, and fell asleep almost immediately. I suppose I had slept about an hour, when I was awakened suddenly by some one pronouncing these words:

"Look in the Blue Cabinet."

I started at once to a sitting posture and looked round. The fire was blazing brightly, and by its light I saw a woman standing at the foot of the sofa. I thought, at first, that Miss Damerel had rung for me, and finding that the sound of the bell failed to arouse me, had come

herself to waken me. But a second glance dispelled the idea. The figure before me bore no resemblance to Miss Damerel. She was not nearly so tall; and, as well as I could judge by the flickering firelight, was pale and had very black hair. She wore a gray dress, made with the short skirts and *gigot* sleeves which were fashionable some thirty years ago, and a black shawl, bordered with bright-colored flowers, hung loosely around her. I saw the figure for one moment only, for the flame suddenly sank down and left the room in almost total darkness. I sprang up instantly, seized a candle and lighted it at the glowing embers, but the woman was gone. I was alone: both doors were locked and bolted as they were when I first lay down. I searched the room thoroughly, but there was no one there.

I retired to bed, and being a woman of strong nerves, I managed to fall asleep. But what broken, uneasy slumber, what fearful dreams, haunted my pillow that night, I need not describe. Morning came at last, and I was glad to rise and seek some refreshment from a walk in the wintry morning air. During my stroll I pondered seriously over the propriety of telling any one of what I had seen, but I finally decided not to speak of it at all. "It may have been all a delusion," I argued to myself, "and Miss Damerel might think I was threatened with some disorder of the brain." And so I said nothing; but I must confess that I approached my room on the following evening with considerable apprehension. I saw nothing and heard nothing, however; and as the days passed on, I gradually came to look upon the whole affair as a dream.

About two weeks after this occurrence Miss Damerel announced to her household her intention of going to spend some days with her cousin and heir, the Hugh Damerel mentioned by Dr. Bentley, who was now a middle-aged gentleman with a numerous family. He resided on his estate, a small but beautiful place called Elm Grove, in the adjoining county. I was not to accompany her, and she kindly expressed the

hope that I would find the perfect quiet and repose of the period of her absence beneficial to me. The third night after her departure I was again awakened by the words,

"Look in the Blue Cabinet."

I started up, and by the light of the night-lamp, which I had burned every night since my former adventure, I saw the same pale, black-haired woman in gray standing beside my bed. I sprang out instantly, but the figure retired backward till it was concealed from view by the bed-curtains. I drew the curtains back: there was no one there. I tried the doors, and found the bolts undisturbed, and the windows were inaccessible. Terrified, trembling and utterly unnerved, I wrapped myself in my dressing-gown, and snatching up my night-lamp, hurried through the dark passages and up the echoing stairs till I reached the housekeeper's bed-room. I soon roused her from her slumbers, and telling her I had been troubled by a frightful dream, I prevailed upon her to let me pass the remainder of the night with her. I returned to my own room as soon as it was broad daylight, but my toilet was performed hastily and with trembling hands.

As soon as breakfast was over I went in search of Mrs. Deane, determined, if possible, to find out something respecting the identity and purpose of my mysterious and spectral visitant. I found her in the linen-room, busily engaged in examining and arranging its snowy, lavender-scented stores. I offered to assist her in some delicate needlework which was found to be necessary in the way of repairs—an offer which she gladly accepted, and we adjourned with our work to her cozy little parlor. She was a chatty, agreeable old personage, and I easily contrived to lead the conversation to the various specimens of curious and antique furniture which the house contained. After talking some time about the Venetian mirrors, the old tapestry, the carvings executed by Grinling Gibbons, etc., I asked,

"Is there not a piece of furniture in the house called the Blue Cabinet?"

"Certainly there is," was the answer: "where did you hear about it?"

"I have heard some one mention the name since my arrival here," I replied.

"Yes, it stands in your room—the tall cabinet between the windows, with the blue china panels on the doors. Miss Harriet used to keep her knick-knacks and curiosities there, but it is empty now, I believe, and has been ever since her death."

"Then the room I now occupy was formerly Miss Harriet's?"

The housekeeper looked disturbed:

"I had not meant to tell you, for fear you might feel nervous about sleeping there. But it *was* her bed-room, and she died in it. Now I've told you the whole truth, and I hope you will not feel worried about it."

I reassured the kind-hearted woman, and she went on:

"Yes, she was found dead there early one winter morning. She had not even undressed herself the night before. I was her own maid in those days, and though I was not over fond of her, still I was sorry when she was taken off so sudden. Miss Caroline gave me the dress and shawl she had on when she was found, but I've never worn them. If you like, I'll show them to you, for I've always kept them very carefully."

I eagerly assented, and, rising, Mrs. Deane selected a key from a bunch which hung at her side and unlocked an old-fashioned press which stood in one corner of the room. From one of its compartments she drew out a dress of gray gros de Naples silk, and a shawl of black Canton crape, with a border of bright-colored flowers embroidered on it—a costume the very counterpart in hue and fashion of that worn by my ghostly visitor. As she held up the dress for my inspection a small object wrapped in paper fell from its folds to the floor. I picked it up and gave it to Mrs. Deane, who laid down the dress and unfolded the paper. It contained a stick of red sealing-wax.

"I forgot that I had this," she said, wrapping it up again carefully. "This stick of sealing-wax was found clenched

in Miss Harriet's hand after her death; so I always keep it with the dress and shawl."

"Does Miss Caroline look like her sister?" I inquired, whilst aiding Mrs. Deane to fold and replace the articles.

"Not a bit. Miss Harriet was pale and sallow, and had very dark hair. Miss Caroline had a lovely color when she was young, and her hair was very light. She is a real Damerel: Miss Harriet took after her mother."

"Is there no portrait of Miss Harriet in the house?"

"There is no large picture of her, but the next time you go into the picture-gallery, look at that case of miniatures which hangs under the picture of Colonel Guy, who was killed in the American war. The centre miniature in the third row is Miss Harriet."

As soon as my share of the needle-work was finished, I proceeded to the picture-gallery, which was quite a large one, occupying the whole of the second floor of the east wing. I easily found the case of miniatures, and drew aside the green silk curtain which covered it with an eager hand. My last lingering doubts were at once dispelled. There, in red velvet, and with pearls twined among the elaborate puffs and bows of her black hair, but pale, sallow and forbidding-looking, I beheld my nocturnal visitor. I had seen the spectre of Harriet Damerel.

"Well," thought I, as I drew the curtain again before the case, "the task the ghost has imposed upon me is certainly an easy one, and I *will* look in the Blue Cabinet; that is, if I can get Miss Damerel's permission to do so." For governess though I had been, paid companion though I was, the instincts of a lady were too strong within me to permit me to pry, secretly, into the closed drawers of the article in question.

Miss Damerel returned at the appointed time, and the day after she arrived I asked her if I might be allowed to use the Blue Cabinet as a receptacle for my papers. She assented readily. "You will find it almost empty, and so quite ready for your use," she said.

"There may be some few things in it, but I removed everything of importance or of value some years ago. One of the drawers sticks fast and cannot be opened, but I trust that you will find space enough in the others for your purpose."

Miss Damerel was in no mood for reading or studying the next morning, so I went at once from the breakfast-room to my apartment to commence my investigations. As I closed the door, I glanced half fearfully around the room, in the vague expectation of seeing some ghostly, spectral form. But the room was as quiet and empty as ever. I was its only occupant; so, smiling at my own nervous fancies, I unlocked the doors of the Blue Cabinet.

The cabinet was high, but not very wide. It was made of some very dark, unpolished wood, and the doors were paneled with Chinese tiles of blue and white porcelain. The centre portion of the interior was occupied by a niche, lined with faded blue silk, in which stood a little clock of tarnished gilt, representing a female figure seated in a chariot, the wheel forming the clock-face. The rusty works emitted a feeble tick or two as I touched it, and then were silent again. On each side of the niche were rows of small drawers, six on each side, and below it were four larger drawers, extending across the entire width of the cabinet. I commenced my researches with these. There was nothing in the uppermost one but dust and some dried rose leaves. The second and third were empty. In the fourth and lowest one, I found a broken fan of carved sandalwood, and a knot of faded purple velvet ribbon, embroidered with discolored seed pearls. I then opened the top drawer of the row on the left side of the niche. It was filled with papers, which I took out with a thrill of expectation and examined carefully, but they proved to be entirely unimportant. Some receipted bills of the years 1831 and '32, a few old invitation cards, and a yellow, crumpled copy of verses, beginning "Fair Harriet with starry eyes," signed "Edward," and bearing date June 12, 1813, alone

rewarded my investigations. All the other drawers on that side were empty, as were also the two uppermost drawers of the other row. In the third there were a few rare foreign shells. The fourth drawer stuck fast and resisted all my efforts to open it. The fifth contained two small landscape drawings in pencil, and a pocket-book covered with faded red morocco, and with H. D., 1832, stamped on the side in gilt letters. This last I took out and opened. Its various pockets and compartments were empty, but it contained a few leaves covered with memoranda, written in a delicate female hand. My hopes of a discovery were again aroused, but a careful perusal elicited nothing more momentous than various lists of purchases and commissions, of which the following may serve as specimens:

"March 3d—Sent to Celestine for a bibib and a cottage bonnet. Must have my Polish willow plume exchanged for a plume frimalee.

"March 8th—Sent by Mrs. Wardour to London for

"A lemon-colored challis dress,

"A coronet comb,

"Six pairs of long white kid gloves.

"Also sent my blonde scarf to be cleaned."

I opened the sixth and last drawer. It was empty.

I was about to close the cabinet and retire, when I remembered the closed drawer. "I will fulfill the ghost's injunction to the very letter," I said to myself. "Let me see if I cannot open this refractory drawer, and then my search will be definitely at an end."

I pulled and shook the little ivory knob which served as a handle, but in vain. The drawer was fast, and would not stir. Looking narrowly at the crack between it and the ledge above, I saw that something was wedged in there, which probably prevented it from moving. Going to my work-box, I took out a penknife, and, opening the broad blade, I passed it carefully along the crack till it encountered the obstruction, I worked at it for some moments without effect, but at last it gave way, and with some

difficulty I pulled the drawer open. I found that a drop of sealing-wax had fallen on the edge of the drawer, and as the drawer had been closed while the wax was still warm, it had been thus, as it were, sealed in its place. Within it lay two objects—a small bottle and a letter.

I took out the phial first, and examined it with some curiosity. It was one of those small, thick bottles of cut glass once so much used to contain smelling salts. It was stoppered with glass, and was nearly filled with a dark, thick-looking fluid. To the neck was attached a slip of paper on which was written, "Part of my medicine. To be analyzed." The letter was folded in the style common before the introduction of envelopes, but very irregularly and as if done in haste. It lay with the seal uppermost—a large splotchy-looking seal of red wax—and several drops of wax spotted its surface. I took it up and looked at the other side, where the direction would naturally be. It bore this superscription, written in a tremulous, irregular hand: "To be opened by the finder, in case of my death. HARRIET DAMEREL. February 18, 1833."

These, then, were the articles for which I had been so strangely told to look in the Blue Cabinet. And I felt my blood run cold as I realized the weight of this evidence of the reality of the spectre I had seen. "It was then no dream, no vain delusion," I thought. I shuddered as I pictured to myself the dying woman, with the fatal lethargy already stealing away her senses, rousing herself to struggle against it and to write—what? Could it be any directions about her property, any last wishes for her successor to fulfill? Then why was not the paper directed to her sister? And if, as Dr. Bentley had surmised, she had died in consequence of taking a double dose of the opiate, what did the phial contain, and what was the meaning of the inscription it bore? Yet, as seemed probable, if the phial contained the second dose of the opiate, and she had taken but one, what had caused her death? It was all a mystery, and

though the solution probably lay before me in that sealed letter, I could not prevail upon myself to open it. My father, wise old Scotchman as he was, used always to impress upon me, in my meddling and mischievous childhood, the importance of never interfering in other people's business. And, clearly, the private affairs of the late Harriet Damerel were no concern of mine. If a crime had been committed, if the paper and the phial contained any dark evidences of poison and murder, what good would it do were I to break the seal, which, as the finder of the letter, I supposed I was entitled to do by the direction written upon it? "No," I said to myself, "I will burden my soul with no such responsibility. Miss Damerel is evidently the person in whose hands these discoveries of mine should be placed." And, stifling a fearful suspicion which began unbidden to obtrude itself, I hastily took up both bottle and letter and went in search of Miss Damerel.

I found her in her library, engaged in turning over the contents of a newly-arrived box of books from Mudie's. I laid the phial and the letter, the latter with its unbroken seal uppermost, before her. "Here, madam," I said, "is a sealed paper and a little bottle which I found in that drawer of the Blue Cabinet which has remained unopened for so long."

She was absorbed in her occupation, and without vouchsafing more than a casual glance at the articles in question, she opened a drawer in the table, laid

them in and turned the key. She then proceeded to question me respecting some of the books, and we conversed together for some minutes. I soon left her, and as I closed the door I heard her unlock the drawer.

I never slept again in the Oak Chamber, as my late apartment was called. At my request I was transferred to less elegant but more tranquil quarters. I remained with Miss Damerel till her death, which event occurred a little more than a year ago; she died of pneumonia. She never alluded in any way to the paper found by me in the Blue Cabinet. She left me five hundred pounds in her will, and also a beautiful little miniature of herself, set in pearls, and with a lock of her hair at the back. Hugh Damerel is master now of Abbotsmere. His eldest son and heir, Caroline Damerel's godson, is named Gerald Lisle. So, after all, Gerald Lisle Damerel will probably one day rule at Abbotsmere.

I have been married now for some months to Dr. Hill, the partner and probable successor of Dr. Bentley. I shall never forget my kind and beloved mistress, and I shall never cease to mourn her loss. But often and often I find myself asking mentally that now unanswerable question, "What *was* in that letter?"

And, worse still, when a suspicion as to the cause of Harriet Damerel's death crosses my mind, another question persistently occurs to me—the old legal one: "*Cui bono?*" For whose benefit?

LUCY HAMILTON HOOPER.



GOLDEN DREAMS: A CHRISTMAS STORY.

THE Kardouon, as every one knows, is the brightest, liveliest and most beautiful of all the lizards. The Kardouon's coat of purple and gold is as resplendent as that of an Eastern monarch, yet he is withal of a shy and retiring disposition, and he lives quite alone—hence his reputation for great learning. The Kardouon never hurts anybody, and therefore everybody likes him. As he comes out of the chinks of some old wall, displaying in the dazzling sunshine the glories of his marvelous raiment, if a bevy of Hindoo girls should come tripping along, waking up with laughter and song the silent and solitary path, how quickly he stretches out his sapphire neck studded with rubies, and how softly and tenderly are his sparkling eyes turned toward the merry group, whilst each one keeps saying to her neighbor: "The Kardouon has noticed me to-day: he thinks I am the prettiest, and wants me to understand I am his lady love."

The poor little harmless Kardouon, however, has no such thoughts. What he is looking for, here, there, everywhere, as if they had just leaped with ringing laughter from the stroke of the die. A king who was running away from his subjects had dropped the money there, to go faster when he found that his disloyal lieges were treading too closely upon his heels.

Wandering one day into the desert, the Kardouon found in the sand a treasure consisting of innumerable pieces of gold coin, that looked as bright and polished as if they had just leaped with ringing laughter from the stroke of the die. A king who was running away from his subjects had dropped the money there, to go faster when he found that his disloyal lieges were treading too closely upon his heels.

"My goodness gracious!" exclaimed the Kardouon: "either I am greatly mistaken, or here is a welcome addition to my winter store! Of all things in the world, they do look like sliced carrots

—a most savory and refreshing bite—only they seem to be a little dried up."

And as he spoke, the Kardouon glided toward the treasure—not straightways, for that is not his custom, but in cautious curves, like the little trembling, hesitating, palpitating, adventurous Kardouon that he was. Having got at last within reach of the treasure, he stood up on his hind feet and fell with might and main upon the first gold piece that came to his teeth, whereby he nearly broke one of them.

The Kardouon thereupon beat a sudden retreat, then returned with increased zig-zag motions, and took a more deliberate survey of the glittering heap. "They are awfully dry," he remarked to himself: "how foolish to undertake to keep sliced roots in a dry place, where they are sure to lose their nutritive properties! The Kardouon species, it must be acknowledged, has not kept pace with this progressive age! As for me, who dined only last week, and who can therefore afford to wait patiently for my next meal, I shall carry this unlooked-for provender to yonder oasis, under the protecting shade of the great tree of the desert, and leave it in the cool grass, whilst I am lulled to sleep by the sweet murmur of those springs that run along that sandy mound, which the rays of the sun will warm up for me as I get up in the morning; and when yonder bee I now see nestling into the bosom of this flower shall come out at early dawn, drunk with sweet odors, and cutting up all sorts of mad capers around me, I shall sit down to as princely a breakfast as ever Kardouon partook of."

The Kardouon who thus spoke was a Kardouon of action. What he said he would do he meant to do, and he *did*. Toward night the whole treasure, carried piece by piece, lay uselessly cooling upon the thick, dewy grass, under the giant tree, whose spreading branches and luxuriant foliage and sweet-smelling

blossoms seemed to call upon all wayfarers to come and rest under its inviting shade.

And there it was that the Kardouon fell into a gentle sleep, dreaming of fresh, savory roots.

This is the story of the Kardouon.

II.

THE next day came to the oasis the poor woodman Xylon, who was then on his way to the still distant forest, but who, as was his wont, was in no hurry to get there, and whose natural idleness was not proof against the melodious appeals of the murmuring waters and the rustling leaves of the great tree of the desert.

Xylon was one of those disinherited children of Nature whom we have all met, and who seem to glide through life without being conscious that they are more highly organized than the poor dumb creatures of the animal world. His deformed body was but a too faithful reflex of his weak, imbecile mind: a poor, helpless creature who, though physically strong, was as incapable of doing evil as he was of understanding it—an eyesore to his parents and relations, who felt ashamed of him whenever they saw him in company with strangers; and the standing butt of all the mischievous urchins of his native village. The humiliating rebuffs which Xylon was thus constantly undergoing had inspired him early with the love of a solitary life, a disposition still further enhanced by his following the occupation of a woodman—a profession well suited to the weak faculties of poor Xylon, who was known throughout the whole neighborhood as Xylon the fool. Whenever he happened to pass through the village, the children ran after him, laughing, shouting, and sometimes pelting him with stones, whilst the village crones nodded to each other, saying, "Here goes Xylon the fool to visit his wise cousin, the Kardouon, who is waiting for him in the woody glen, to talk about matters of high import. O most wise and worthy Xylon!"

And his brethren, as he passed, turned aside, blushing with shame and anger.

But poor Xylon affected not to see them, and as for the children who followed him, he laughed and screamed as loudly and as merrily as the loudest and the merriest of them.

Simpleton though he was, Xylon had become possessed with the idea that the universal scorn and the daily mocking to which he was constantly exposed were entirely owing to the poverty of his dress—for no one ever thinks meanly of his own wit; and when he gazed upon the dazzling apparel of the Kardouon as he lay basking in the garish sunshine, he bethought himself that if he was ever so lucky as to secure the friendship of that most beautiful of God's creatures, he might at some time or other become the happy possessor of his cast-off garments, and, returning thus arrayed to his native village, secure at once the good-will and admiration of all the good people who were now so ready to make fun of him.

"Besides that," he would say to himself, reflecting as deeply upon the subject as his very limited Xylon intellect would allow him to do, "the Kardouon is my cousin, so they all say; and I feel it myself in the strong sympathy that draws me toward him. Since my brethren have discarded me through contempt of my miserable appearance, he is my nearest male relative, and I would like to live with him, if he will allow me, even if I am of no other use than to make up his bed of dry leaves and moss every night, to watch over him while he is asleep and to build him a bright, crackling fire when the weather gets cold. The Kardouon may grow old before I do," Xylon added, "for he was already full grown and beautiful to look at when I was only a child; and my mother used to say to me, 'See, here is thy fair cousin, the Kardouon!' I know, thank Heaven! how to take care of the sick, and how to amuse them when they lie helpless in bed. How I would like to wait upon him, and what a pity he is too proud to associate with me!"

In truth, the Kardouon answered but

poorly the advances of Xylon. At his approach he would dart like a flash of lightning into the sand, or, prudently entrenching himself behind a mound or a stone, would cast upon him sidelong glances from his quick, sparkling eyes, whilst Xylon, with clasped hands and in the most melting accents, addressed him thus:

"Alas, dear cousin, why do you fly away from your friend and comrade? All I ask is to be allowed to follow you, to wait upon you as I would upon my brethren, for whom I would cheerfully yield up my life, but who appear to me less beautiful and less amiable than you. Do not repulse me as they do; and if, perchance, you are in want of a good servant, remember your faithful Xylon!"

But the Kardouon always went away, and Xylon would return to his mother weeping, because his cousin the Kardouon would not speak to him.

On that very morning his mother, after beating him severely, had pushed him out of doors, saying,

"Go, thou wretch!—go to thy cousin, the Kardouon, for thou art not worthy to claim any other relatives."

Xylon had meekly submitted, as he always did, and he was just looking for his cousin the Kardouon when he arrived under the widespreading tree of the desert.

"Oh! oh!" said he, "here is something new! My fair cousin has gone to sleep under the tree where all the springs meet—a very unusual thing for him to do, and a fine chance, if ever there was one, for me to talk business with him when he wakes up! But what the deuce is he keeping here, and what does he intend to do with those little, round, yellow pieces of lead? Perhaps he is going to a wedding, and wants to brighten up his coat, although I must say I would rather have one of his old suits than a thousand such pieces of useless metal. I shall wait here till he wakes up, and perhaps he may feel better disposed to talk, and then I shall hear all about it. I can sleep very comfortably here in the meanwhile, and, as I sleep very light, I am sure to wake up as soon as he does."

And Xylon was about to lie down, when he was struck with an idea.

"The nights are cool," he remarked, "and my cousin the Kardouon is not used, like myself, to sleep on the edge of the springs and under the shelter of the trees of the forest. The morning air is not good for him."

Xylon then took off his cloak and spread it softly and tenderly over the Kardouon, taking every precaution not to disturb him in his sleep. The Kardouon did not wake up.

After doing this, Xylon, stretching himself upon the grass, soon fell into a deep slumber, dreaming that he had become the sworn friend of the Kardouon.

This is the story of Xylon.

III.

THE next day came to the same spot the Fakir Abhoc, pretending to be on a pilgrimage, while in truth he was only looking for some good chance to better his condition.

As he came near the spring to cool himself, his eyes fell upon the glittering heap, and embraced its value at one single glance.

"Unlooked-for blessing," he exclaimed, "which the all-powerful and all-merciful Deity vouchsafes to me after so many years of trial, and which He has deigned to place, to render its acquisition easier to me, under the simple keeping of an innocent wall-lizard and a poor idiot!"

You must bear in mind that the Fakir Abhoc knew perfectly well Xylon and the Kardouon.

"Heaven be praised in all things!" he added, sitting down under the tree and reckoning upon his fingers the amount of the treasure. "Farewell the fakir's robe, the long fasts and the hard mortifications of the flesh! I shall begin a new life in a new country, and buy in the first kingdom that suits me a comfortable province, that will yield me a handsome revenue. Once settled in my palace, I shall have nothing else to do but to enjoy myself, and to sip the choicest wines from the largest of gold cups, surrounded with flowers and per-

fumes, and beautiful slaves performing sweet music on every kind of musical instruments. I am growing old, and good wine, they say, cheers the heart of old age. This treasure, however, must be very heavy to carry, and it would ill become me, the lord of countless acres, and possessing a multitude of servants and innumerable soldiers, to run the risk of being mistaken for a common street porter. A prince of the people should always command the respect of his subjects, and in order to do so he should begin by respecting himself. It would seem as if this boor had been sent here expressly to serve me; and as he is as strong as an ox, he can easily carry all my gold to the next town, when I shall present him with my cast-off clothes and a few pieces of copper for his trouble."

After soliloquizing thus, the Fakir Abhoc, feeling well assured that as far as the treasure was concerned, he had nothing to fear from the Kardouon or from poor Xylon (who was as incapable as the Kardouon himself of knowing its true value), yielded unresistingly to the drowsy influences of the place, and went to sleep dreaming of his province, his guards, his harem filled with the fairest beauties of the East, and his exquisite Schiraz wine foaming in gold cups ornamented with rubies and pearls.

This is the story of the Fakir Abhoc.

IV.

THE next day came to the same spot the learned Doctor Abhoc, a man deeply versed in the law, who had lost his way whilst meditating on an obscure text, of which the jurists already gave one hundred and thirty-two different interpretations. He was just on the point of grasping the one hundred and thirty-third when the discovery of the treasure made him lose sight of it altogether, and knocked it out of his head so completely and absolutely that he could not have found it again in a hundred years—a great and irreparable loss for the science of jurisprudence!

"It appeareth," said the learned Doc-

tor Abhoc, "that the Kardouon hath discovered this treasure, but as he cannot, by reason of his being a mere animal, avail himself of his rights, the said Kardouon is therefore *ipso facto* debarred from all title, claim or interest in the legal adjudication and partition of the same. As to the royalties which might be demanded on the part of the public exchequer, this spot, I hold, is waste, indeterminate, common, proper to each and to all; so that neither the state nor the individual hath any thing to allege in reference thereto, which is a happy contingency in the present occurrence—this confluence of streams marking, if I mistake not, a litigious delimitation of territory between warlike nations, whereby a possible conflict of jurisdiction might arise, leading to long and bloody wars. I shall then perform an innocent, legitimate and even providential act in carrying away this treasure, if the same can be accomplished without too great peril to myself. As for these two adventurers, of whom the first seems to be a country bumpkin, and the other a poor wretch of a fakir, and who are unquestionably mere vagrants, without name, weight or profession, they have doubtless gone to sleep here with a view of making to-morrow an amicable partition, knowing neither text nor argument of commentators, and esteeming each other of equal corporeal strength. But they shall not settle this matter without a lawsuit, I warrant them, or I shall lose my reputation as a learned doctor of jurisprudence. Only, as I feel that sleep is creeping over me in consequence of the great contention and tribulation of mind this business hath given me, I shall establish my coequal right to the matter in dispute by placing in my turban a few of these pieces of money, that the anteriority of possession may be shown in court clearly and peremptorily in my favor whenever the cause is evoked, he who hath possession by appetite of having, tradition of having had, and primary occupancy, being presumed to be the true and legitimate owner, as it is written."

And the learned Doctor Abhoc placed

so many pieces of gold in his turban that he had to take it off and lie down for the night without any covering to his head.

"I fear not to oversleep myself," said he as he rested his freshly-shaven occiput upon the swollen turban which served him as a pillow. "These two fellows will commence to quarrel the moment they wake up, and they will only be too happy to have at hand a doctor of laws to accommodate matters, which secures to me a double fee, besides the share to which I am legitimately entitled."

After which comforting reflection the learned Doctor Abhoc went decorously to sleep, dreaming of partitions, lawsuits and turbans overflowing with gold.

This is the story of the learned Doctor Abhoc.

V.

THE next day, about nightfall, came to the same spot a famous robber, whose real name history has not preserved, but who was throughout that region the terror of all the caravans, upon which he levied enormous tribute, and who was nicknamed for that reason the "King of the Desert," if we are to believe the memoirs of that remote period. He had wandered farther than usual into his dominions, this place being but little resorted to by travelers, and the sight of the spreading tree and the bubbling waters gladdened his heart and induced him, though ordinarily insensible to the beauties of Nature, to halt for a while in the inviting spot.

"Truly not a bad idea that I had," he muttered between his teeth on perceiving the treasure. "Here is the Kardouon watching, as is the immemorial custom of lizards and dragons, over this gold, which can be of no use to him; and here are three unmistakable rascals, who have come here together to divide it among themselves. If I load myself with all this booty whilst they are asleep, I shall certainly wake up the Kardouon (for he always sleeps with one eye open), and he will give the alarm, and I shall then have to contend

with the lizard, the woodman, the fakir and the lawyer, all of whom are keen after their prey and will doubtless fight stoutly for it. Prudence admonishes me that it will be safer to lie down among them and pretend to sleep until the darkness becomes deeper, when I shall take advantage of the night to kill them one after the other with my trusty kangiar. This place is so little resorted to that I fear not to be interrupted to-morrow, when I shall depart with all this money, after making a good breakfast off this Kardouon, whose flesh is very delicate, as I have often heard my father say."

And he went to sleep in his turn, dreaming of murder, carnage and kardouons broiled on the coals.

This is the story of the King of the Desert, who was a robber, and who was so called to distinguish him from the others.

VI.

THE next day came to the same spot the sage Lokman, the philosopher, the poet, the friend of mankind, the teacher of nations and the counselor of kings—Lokman, who often sought the remotest solitudes to meditate upon Nature and upon God.

And Lokman walked with slow step, for he was very weak from extreme old age, having reached on that very day the three hundredth anniversary of his birth.

Lokman paused as he arrived near the great tree of the desert, and after surveying the scene before him, he reflected a while, and then exclaimed:

"The picture which Thy divine wisdom presents to my eyes contains, O Sublime Creator of all things, ineffable teachings, and my soul, in contemplating it, is overwhelmed with admiration for the lessons which result from Thy works, and with compassion for the poor fools who do not know Thee.

"Here is a treasure, as men call it, which has perhaps cost to its owner the repose of his mind and the eternal peace of his soul.

"Here is the Kardouon, who has found these pieces of gold, and who,

guided only by the feeble instinct Thou hast bestowed upon his species, has mistaken them for roots dried up by the sun.

"Here is Xylon the fool, whose eyes were dazzled by the splendor of the Kardouon's garments, his wandering intellect being too much surrounded with darkness to rise up to Thee, and to adore, in this gorgeous apparel of a poor lizard, the all-powerful Hand which can adorn with such magnificence the humblest of His creatures.

"Here is the Fakir Abhoc, who relied upon the natural timidity of the Kardouon and upon the helplessness of Xylon to remain the sole possessor of all this great wealth, and to live in luxury for the remainder of his days.

"Here is the learned Doctor Abhac, who hoped that a debate would spring up between the several claimants for these deceitful gifts of fortune, and that he would be called upon to act as an umpire, and would thereby secure for himself the greater part of the disputed treasure.

"Here is the King of the Desert, who came last, revolving fatal ideas and murderous plans, in the usual manner of these men of death, whom Thy sovereign will abandons to their unbridled passions, and who doubtless purposed to kill the first-comers during the night, if I may judge by the desperate violence with which his hand is still grasping his kangiar.

"And all five have gone to sleep for ever under the poisonous shade of the Upas tree, the fatal seeds of which were scattered upon this spot by a breath of Thine anger from the far depths of the forests of Java!"

And having thus spoken, Lokman knelt down and adored God.

And when he rose from the ground he stroked his beard once, and thus continued:

"The respect which we owe to the dead forbids me to leave their remains as a prey for the beasts of the desert. The living judge the living, but the dead belong to God."

And he took from Xylon's belt his

woodman's axe; and with it he dug three graves.

In the first grave he placed the Fakir Abhoc.

In the second grave he placed the learned Doctor Abhac.

In the third grave he buried the King of the Desert.

"As for thee, Xylon," pursued Lokman, "I will carry thy body out of the mortal influence of the poisonous tree, in order that thy friends, if thou hast any left upon this earth, since the death of the Kardouon, may come to weep for thee, without danger to themselves, over thy last resting-place; and I will do it also, my brother, because thou didst spread thy cloak over the sleeping Kardouon to preserve him against the cold."

Then Lokman took Xylon's body a great distance from the poisonous tree, and made him a grave in a little flowery glen watered by the springs of the desert, under trees whose waving branches scattered naught around them but coolness and wholesome perfumes.

And after he had done this, Lokman stroked his beard for the second time, and after reflecting upon it he went for the Kardouon, who had died under the poisonous tree of Java.

After which Lokman made a grave for the Kardouon just below that of Xylon, on a little sandy spot well exposed to the sun, whose morning rays are always so welcome to lizards.

"God forbid," said Lokman, "that those who have loved each other in life should be parted in death!"

And after speaking thus, Lokman stroked his beard for the third time, and after deeply meditating, he returned to the spot where stood the Upas tree.

And, having paused there, he dug a very deep grave, and buried the treasure in it.

"This precaution," he said with a heavenly smile, "may yet save the life of a man or of a kardouon!"

After which Lokman grew very tired and weak by reason of the great exertions he had made, and as he retraced his steps to go and lie down by the grave of Xylon, he felt himself getting

weaker and weaker, on account of his great age.

And when Lokman at last reached the spot where he had buried Xylon, his strength failed him altogether, and he fell upon the ground, raised his soul to God, and died.

This is the story of the sage Lokman.

VII.

WHAT I have just related took place countless ages ago, and ever since that time the name of the sage Lokman has never left the memory of men.

And numberless generations have succeeded each other, and men have made war upon each other, and taken their

neighbors' lives, and destroyed their own souls for ever and ever, to become possessors of treasures like the one which caused the death of the Kardouon, of Xylon, of the Fakir Abhoc, of the learned Doctor Abhac, of the King of the Desert (so called to distinguish him from other robbers), and which the sage Lokman buried at the foot of the deadly tree of Java.

And ever since that time the Upas tree has continued to flourish luxuriantly over the spot where all the streams of the desert meet, and to spread far and wide its branches, whose shadow gives death.

And this is the story of the world!

ALBERT FABRE.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN the two men turned their horses into the solitary ravine, Squire Langley drew his rein, and glanced uneasily up at the old mill. The Doctor (Kirke) glanced uneasily up at the old mill. Then they looked at each other.

"There are some men who never seem to be dead," said Kirke, hurriedly. "Get on, Katey."

The Squire laughed dryly. "No," after a while. "It would surprise me less to see old Müller standing as usual in the mill-door, with a bit of straw in his nut-cracker jaws, and the snuff drabbed down his waistcoat, than up yonder among the hosts of the Lord. Consid-

erably less. And if Müller had his ch'ice, he'd choose the mill-door. No offence to you, Doc."

(For Müller was dead about three months ago, and Sydney Kirke was to marry his daughter to-morrow.)

"Oh, no offence to me. Bart and her father are different people."

"But, Kirke"—the old man hesitated, the corners of his flabby mouth lengthening anxiously—"I'm free to say that I have never seen any hankering after divine things in the girl."

"No," quickening his horse's pace.

"I have been the sperritoal father of most of the young people hereabouts, but the world has too strong a hold on Bart for me. I thought to find a kin-

dling in her after her father's death, but there was none. I pressed the truth hard on her in class the next Lord's day; and Brother Weymouth wrestled for her in prayer before the whole meeting. But it all falls off her, like water off a duck's back. I fear the Lord has hardened her heart. Permanently."

"Whom He hath chosen, He hath chosen," muttered the young Presbyterian to himself. But he did not echo his companion's sigh: the trouble lay too deep with him.

The old class-leader groaned aloud: "I shall recommend to her to set apart a week in which to grapple with the Lord. Peradventure she shall save her soul alive."

Doctor Kirke did not answer. It goaded him that the sensual old shoemaker had the right to take, as it were, this girl's soul in his hand and turn it over critically, as if it were a diseased potato. But he had the right, being a father in the Methodist church.

"Now, her brother Larrence," resumed Langley—"Larrence is a godly youth."

Sydney rejoined heartily: "Laurence Müller has a great genius. His prayer yesterday made my heart burn within me. His lips are touched with coals from the altar."

"Yes, glory be to God!" with unction. They were silent for a while: then, with a certain relief in both of their voices, they began to talk of the mill. "Why did old Müller never run the mill?" Kirke asked. "There's money in it."

"Müller knew better how to keep what he had than to add to it. Folks in the valley used to say that in the darkest nights he stood sentinel in the door yonder, munching his bit of straw. Mounting guard. Over his treasure," with a shrewd look at Sydney and a sharp voice, at odd discord with the holy sing-song of a moment before. "Young folks laugh at that old story of Müller's treasure. But there's something in it: it's no dream, nor fable either."

"What is there in it?" The young man's face, when he turned to listen, had

lost its ordinary frank good-humor. He waited with a stern impatience.

"He don't relish any gossip about Bart or her people," thought the old man. "But he'd relish a pot of gold for her dower, I reckon." He gave his tobacco another chew, and spat leisurely before replying. "Oh, it's oncertain enough. I doubt if what the old fellow buried in the ground'll ever come out. If the moles or mildew have spared it, all clue to it is gone."

"What did he bury?"

"There's different accounts of that. Müller was a jeweler in the old country, and he brought an odd lot of rings and broken watches here when he came. There's one story that it was rings he hid away about the mill; another that it was a sword-handle studded with diamonds; but the most likely tale is that it was an unset pearl that he had. Even in the rough as it was, it made a light like moonlight."

"That is a tale fit for a fairy-book." Kirke laughed with a touch of scorn, and arranged his sandy whiskers complacently about his face. "This ghost of a treasure is not mentioned, in that will you have in your pocket?"

"No," unwillingly. "It is not mentioned. Directly."

"I supposed not. When did you draw up that will, by the way, Squire?"

"Four years ago. You'll find no flaw in it."

"The property is so trifling," said Kirke, indifferently, "that it might have been left to the law to divide equally between Bart and her brother. Indeed, they have divided it. You were gone when Müller died, and no one knew there was a will until yesterday."

"There is a will," said the Squire, gruffly, "and the property is not equally divided by it. It should not have been if I had been Müller! I'll say it, though Bart is to be your wife, Doc. She's well enough, but a boy like Larrence is not born once in a hundred years. He should not have had to grub for his living if I had been his father."

Kirke was silent, and then began to whistle cheerfully. What did it matter

if Müller had left all to his son? He had a clear path chalked out for himself. His practice was growing with the town in Ohio where he had settled: to-morrow he would turn his back on this stupid mountain village, with Bertha. He called her Bertha, tenderly, to himself. She might be "Bart" to the village: a homely, irreligious girl, held as of a lower caste by all the belles of the village: a trifle coarse, perhaps. He granted it all. Laurence Müller was fine clay, and Bart was of the roughest potter's ware. It had shocked the village—shocked Sydney Kirke's educated self to find that he loved her.

But he could not do without her; and he had a quail of shame at the thought.

The October wind had a chill of winter in it. It drifted the crisp yellow leaves up to their horses' knees along the road, which was a cut deep between the hills. "I can see the flash of the kitchen fire," said the Squire, pointing up to the dusky nook in the mountain side where the little farm-house stood. "We will read the will first, and then to Bart's supper." They put their horses into a trot.

"I've got a present for her," Langley said presently, uncovering a basket swung to his saddle. "Rabbits. Puck-et's blind boy, Joe, brought 'em. He trapped 'em last night."

"You had better have thrown them out," said Kirke, lifting one skinny leg.

"Yes," covering them carefully. "But I couldn't disappoint Joe. He couldn't see what they were. 'They're my first game of the season,' he says, with an air, pulling up his ragged breeches. 'I hope Miss Bart'll enjoy 'em. She tried to save my eyes, Bart did, Squire,' he says, and turned off before I could answer him."

"She is 'Bart' to all the county," said Kirke, angrily.

"Yes. My girls think she's lowered herself too common. It's principally through that yarb-garden of her father's. She larned the use of them, and is perpetually stewing doses for half the country-side. It's her yarbs, and a jokin', comfortin' way she has, that makes sich

folks as Joe hang to her. She is a good girl, Sydney," with sudden earnestness and without a trace of the holy tone.

Sydney pretended not to hear, stooping to buckle a strap of the bridle. But something rose in his throat and choked him. "I'll carry the rabbits if you like," he said after a while, pleasantly. There had been a shadow of distrust between them, but it disappeared after this, for some strange reason. They had felt it behooved them to discourse in a pure religious vein on the first part of their ride, and had joined in condemning the hellish tendencies of the Unitarian preaching in the county-town, and mourned over the new organ in the Episcopalian church as a special device of the devil. But Joe's basket, and something which it carried other than the skinny rabbits, brought a sudden good-fellowship between them which had not sprung out of their religion.

"If I had the girl's recipes and the time, I'd take her garden when she's gone," said the Squire, heartily. "She's saved many a poor wretch from the doctors;" and then dismissed the subject for that of the doctors, telling stories which made Kirke laugh till the tears came.

He was in a good humor to the core of his heart. Bart was the right wife for him! There was something in her, in everything about her—her comfortable house, the very ring of her name—which made men hearty and genial, as he and Langley were now.

Sydney had thought himself in love with another woman—a beautiful woman—who discussed the books he read and exchanged copies of hymns with him. But when he tried to marry her and do without Bart, his life was like a house in which the great warm kitchen-fire has gone out.

The few barren acres about the house, he thought, had caught some of her energy and generous strength. They used to be but a dreary background for the drearier mill. The very ground had gone to ruin and decay. Since Bart was a woman there had come new life in it. There was no such corn in the country

as had been gathered from the fields whose russet, succulent slopes rose on either side of the velvet-spiked sumach hedge: in the old apple-orchard, the herb-garden, the low brick house itself, there were certain home-looks and mellow tints of color to be found nowhere else. The cows stood knee-deep in the cool shadows of the creek; the smoke from Bart's chimney made eddying shadows over her lover's road: a chippey piped a friendly call to him from the stubble through the yellow afternoon air: it was all quiet and cheerful. Now, a man who knew that no matter how cheerful and friendly were the things that met him outside, his wife's face was cheerfuller and friendlier still, was in no such bad case!

Kirke's honest nature was tough and slow to move, but the tears were not far from his eyes when he dismounted at the gate.

The Squire watched him, guessing what his thoughts were on his wedding eve, and then glanced hastily down at the mill. Bart had never touched that: it was decayed and grim and silent, its broken rafters thrust out threateningly, as though to guard the secret treasure beneath. The ghost of a treasure Sydney had called it.

"It is a ghost which will stand between you and your wedding day for ever, I fear, boy," muttered the old man, fingering the paper which he carried in his pocket as he followed him in.

There were no ghosts indoors. The air of the sitting-room was fresh and warm. Some odd, bright-colored stuffed birds were on the white walls. The old-fashioned, straight-legged piano was open, and Laurence was there.

There was a good deal of electric power in Laurence Müller. He was of that bilious yet fiery-blooded physical conformation oftenest met in brilliant, unsuccessful men of society, in actors or in drunkards. He made the day different for any man who came in contact with him. Even to dull Langley and the prosaic Kirke an hour's talk with the nervous, strange-ideal fellow had the effect of an unexpected strain of foreign

music heard in the dusty market. It wakened vague longings—queries whether if, after all, this life of the market was the best life.

Laurence was in accord with himself to-day as an exquisitely tuned instrument, the weather being fair and his digestion good. On rainy days it was different. He ran out to meet them, his small lean figure wrapped in a dark-blue dressing-gown, a crimson smoking-cap on his black hair, which served to set off his finely-cut olive face. It was a wonderful face, full of sensibility and enthusiasm.

He brought them in, cordial and eager—dragged them, mud and all, over Bart's white floor: took off the old man's wrappings himself, his hands deft and gentle as a woman's. He had enjoyed a precious spiritual refreshment this morning, he told them breathlessly, with wide-open eyes, like a child's: one of David's psalms had been the key to open the door of heaven for him; then, as supper was not ready, he ran out and brought in the cake and fruit which Bart had prepared for her wedding breakfast, and while they ate them he sat down by the piano and chanted the psalm:

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down;
Yea, we wept when we remembered Zion."

His fine eyes were full of tears, his powerful voice thrilled with a terrible pathos, as he recited the mingled lamentation and curses that followed. "It is the Lord's song sung in a strange land," he said when he had done, looking out over the hills sleeping in the autumn sunlight, as though he too were a pilgrim captive in an alien country.

The Squire and Kirke nodded gravely. But Bart, stirring the coffee inside, suddenly shut the kitchen door that she might not hear. The psalm was like enough to the lamentations of the Squire and his co-religionists. What right had they to call this great earnest, living world a "vale of tears" and a dreary place of probation? She knew nothing about Heaven. But here was a place which God was making fresh for them to work in every day, and it was so full of work,

so full of men and women, husbands and mothers and children, pressing close upon each other for help and love, that it scared her to think sometimes how her breath was slipping from her and so little done. So full of beauty too, and His goodness, that her heart ached with an awful pain at the thought of leaving it. Christ's people had no right to be pilgrims or strangers here. And as for their habit of meting out damnation to all outside of sectarian limits, it was no better than this old savage chant of imprecation which Laurence sang: "Happy shall he be who taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones." There was not one word from the Lord in it.

But Laurence's store of music was not limited to psalms. After a while he played an opera air or two, waltzes, marches, turning with a queer arch smile back to the men. "There are some of the devil's songs, that I learned when I was out in the broad road," he said. But the blood rose to his cheek, as it would to a man's who tasted delicious wine after long abstinence, and he was silent, touching the keys dreamily. Kirke looked at him anxiously. Everybody in the country-side knew Laurence Müller's story—how he had run away from home when he was a boy, to follow a traveling circus. It was a glimpse of fairy land to him: how he had come home, ploughed and drudged for a year or two, gone off again with an itinerant portrait-painter: been artist, photographer, musician by turns: had drunk hard: had lectured on temperance: had married and settled down in a neighboring town for life now, having been a hopeful convert at the last revival. The hectic flush and glitter in his eye at the sound of the devil's music alarmed both of his hearers. The Squire put his hand in his pocket and coughed.

"We came on business, Larrence," he said.

Young Müller turned hastily with a scared, comical gesture, and began some story of his old worldly experience. He was a witty fellow—wittier than either of his hearers could comprehend, but they laughed loud and long. He was a good

mimic: whether he told a story or prayed or sang, he threw his whole soul and body into it: there never was such good company. The Squire thrust back the will into his pocket. He fancied when it was read there would be an end to laughter in that house. He would wait till after supper.

The supper was delicious, and after Bart came, the others had a chance to talk, which was, after all, pleasanter. She brought out one or two of the Squire's famous stories, and he told them with great applause, and Sydney found himself appreciated and his most trifling word listened to.

Laurence had interrupted him, before, a dozen times. Laurence was not a good listener. But they all were silent when he spoke.

It did not seem strange to Bertha that even on this their wedding eve Sydney should be absorbed by her brother, and notice her only when she came in his way by an affectionate smile.

The idea of any man's complimenting or wooing Bart Müller was absurd. Other girls' love was to be conquered, but honest Bart was to her lover as she was to all that knew her, down to blind Joe—a good thing, which they already owned. Sydney Kirke married her because he could not do without her: that was all.

Bart could not quite understand this to-night. She thought, when supper was over, and the Squire, thoughtfully smoking his pipe, sat at the table, Laurence opposite him, still gulping down long draughts of bitter black coffee, that Sydney would have taken her out to walk in the orchard in the soft, warm sunset. She wanted, too, to show him the little store of linen for housekeeping which she had laid out ready to pack. She had been a long time at work on it, her heart, which had been born happy, full of a new kind of happiness, giving to it the womanly blushes and tearful smiles with which another woman would have bent over the clothes that were to make herself more fair in the eyes of him who loved her. Bart's least trunk was filled with her clothes, and they were such as she wore every day—plain cali-

coes and gingham. When she was a silly child she had learned to dress without looking in the glass, morbidly trying to forget her homely face: now, she laughed back at it with the same whole-hearted greeting which she gave to all other faces of the friendly men and women who filled the world, and thought no more about it. But her dress remained very plain.

Nobody had spoken to her for half an hour, but when she got up to go out, they all looked annoyed and said, "Where are you going, Bart?"

"I came on business," the Squire added, reluctantly. "But you are going to feed your poultry, eh?"

She nodded, tied an apron about her plump little waist (there was something snug and comfortable in all her clothes, even to the aprons), and took out a basket of shelled corn, blushing as Sydney sprang up and followed her.

The room they left, with its white walls, and brilliant dead birds, and fitful music, was the proper framing for Laurence, but the jolly farm-yard, friendly, warm, full of plenty, was the place for Bertha. She belonged there. Sydney had a vague notion of this. There was a ladder going up to the stable-loft, and he seated himself on the lower rung, watching her. The sunny orchard was on one side, and the dark hickory woods on the other, both very quiet in the westering afternoon light. But there was a general waking up when Bart came. Red-combed cocks and demure hens tumbled and scratched in from their foray under the apple-trees: the snowy pigeons fluttered down from their cotes; a gang of ducks, a fresh coat of mud on their yellow legs, came straddling and quacking up; while Spot, the sorrel cow, sauntered across from her lair in the grass on the sunny side of the woods, and looked over the lichen-covered stone wall with matronly approval of Bart and her hungry brood.

Used as Kirke was to her, he saw that it was the brown-haired woman in the midst, plump, sweet-breathed, supple, with her cordial voice and cordial eyes, that completed the bright, homely

scene, and gave it meaning as a song does its prelude.

She shook out the last grain finally, laughing, coaxing and scolding them all at once. The poor, half-souled creatures had all been born under her care, and it was the last time she would feed them. She was thinking of that all the time. "You'll let me come back often to the old place, Sydney?" she said, leaning on the wall, stroking old Spot with both nervous hands. "Laurence promises me to make no change."

"You forget this will, Bertha. It may reverse your division with your brother. The place may be left to you, after all."

"It must be Laurence's," energetically. "It is of more value than the bonds, and he has a great love for it. When we spoke of dividing the property," lowering her voice, "he said, 'Take all that is of value, Bart, but leave me my home. *My home!*' He cried out these words, turning pale, Sydney. It must belong to Laurence, whatever the will says."

"It is your home too, I fancy. But it does not matter to me if he doesn't leave you a penny," Sydney rejoined. "I have you, Bart," holding out his hands to her.

She put her own in them, her breast heaving, her whole honest little body shrinking and throbbing in an instant, now that the loving words had come which she had been waiting for all day. For it never had occurred to her to hide the wonder and gratitude with which she received Sydney Kirke's love. She knew what a commonplace woman she was—how far the inferior of other girls in person or in brain. But she had loved him so long before! It was like the good luck of all the rest of her life. Never a day began for her which in some way was not warmer and brighter than the last.

"Let us go down into the orchard," said Sydney.

So they crossed through the raspberry bushes to the warm slope where the golden russets were dropping quite mellow on the grass, and went down to the side of the mill-dam. The sheet of water

was red in the low sunlight, and beyond, a gray mist began to veil the valley: something deeper than the beauty and quiet touched Bart. Back yonder the poor dumb things watched for her, and her brother waited for her: in every one of the farm-houses she saw on the hills she had good friends: beside her, her lover held her hand close; and—she looked up to the quiet sky suddenly, and her eyes grew dim.

"What is it, Bertha?"

"I was thinking that He has given me all I asked for, Sydney."

The lover was rather lazy just now in Sydney Kirke, but the theologian was always alert. "What right have you or I to demand temporal blessings? And you—you have not even made your peace with an avenging God. Bertha, have you never any remorse or repentance—no fear of the wrath to come?"

"I know no avenging God, and I never was converted. He has been my friend since ever I can remember, Sydney. I try to do the best I can. And I'm not afraid to ask for all I want. David did." The freckled, downright face was scared but steady. Sydney grew sick at heart to hear this soul-destroying heresy from the lips of the woman who was to be his wife. But he bit his lip and was silent, and Bart, looking at the red water, speedily forgot it. Kirke, against his will, when she began to talk, forgot it too. Any bitter or acrid feeling, even to remorse or the eternal pilgrim feeling, was as hard to realize with her as the twinges of winter's cold before a great fire.

* * * * *

When they came in, Squire Langley looked from one face to the other severely. They had been dawdling—love-making, which was not even milk for babes—while he and Laurence had eaten strong meat: they had held weighty discourse upon election, foreknowledge and the Trinity; and having given shape and limit to these mysteries by their own respectable intellects, had comfortably consigned to damnation all who did not accept that shape and limit. It was comforting discourse, but drowsy to the

Squire, who knew more about leather than even ordinary logic. To Laurence it was like a terrible drama. God and Satan contending for the soul of man! It thrilled his feverish blood even more than the first hearing of Don Giovanni had done.

Bart left the door open and stirred the fire vigorously. Daylight and fresh air came in with her.

"Well! well! there's no love-story that isn't spiled sooner or later," thought the Squire. "This little fat woman must have her trouble as well as the rest of us." He had declared in favor of Laurence an hour ago. But he was like everybody else: when he was with her the little woman tugged hard at his heart-strings. "Sit down, Berthy," drawing out the will finally.

Kirke motioned her to his side with a protecting nod. Laurence walked to and fro with long, nervous strides. He was giving himself up to the occasion. "It is our father's message to us! I shall receive it as words from the dead," he said, several times over.

"Now, there's no need of all that, Laurence. It was a message from a livin' man, and a very cranky one, I'll say that. I wish you'd think of that, Berthy, my dear. Whatever this paper contains," tapping it with his spectacles, "I feel bound to say to you, child, to remember that the whims of the dead is no more bindin' on us than the whims of the livin'. You're used to think of others a good deal, I've noticed. Now, you'd oblige me—me personally, you understand—if, in this case, you'd consider yourself. There's no need of remark," as Laurence would have spoken. "I thought that advice was called for, and I've gave it. Sit down, Laurence, if you please. That will do," and putting on his spectacles he broke the seal and unfolded the paper.

It was a long document, full of just such obscure, morbid reflections as old Müller delighted in when alive; but the gist of it was this: the property was divided into two unequal parts, certain bonds of small value constituting the smaller: the farm-house, mill and "all

that pertained thereto, visible or invisible," the other. Enclosed in the will was a certain sealed letter, which was addressed to Bertha. After reading it, she was to make choice of one of these parts, the other to go to Laurence. In case of her declining to accept the conditions of the letter, it was to be given to him, and with it the liberty of choice. Whichever child took the mill and farmhouse was bound to remain in constant occupancy of the same for the number of years specified in the letter.

Squire Langley, having finished, folded the parchment slowly.

There was silence in the little room. With the reading of the words, "the mill and all that pertains thereto, visible and invisible," a singular restraint had fallen upon them all, as though some unwholesome presence, some ghost, had suddenly been summoned among them by the dead man's message. A ghost, too, not wholly unexpected.

They glanced furtively down through the darkening twilight to the shadow of the mill, with its bare rafters thrust out. There was surely no blessing hidden with the mysterious treasure, if treasure it was, so suddenly did distrust and care come with its mere name into their cheerful faces.

"Here is the letter," said the Squire.

"Hold, Bertha!" said Kirke, sternly, putting out his hand. "You can have no part in this affair. If you accept the mill and its secret (for in that lies the pith of the matter, as we all see), you pledge yourself to remain here. I cannot remain. You belong to me," smiling gently up into her face, but holding her wrist steadily. "She declines the choice, Squire Langley. Give the letter to Laurence."

Müller put out his hand sullenly: he was pouting like a child because he had been thrust into the background.

"I must read the letter." Bertha pushed away her lover's hand and went toward the Squire, looking not at Sydney's angry, astonished face, but down at the gloomy shadow of the mill. Whatever was the subtle influence of the evil secret which it held, it had affected her

more strongly than any of the others. Old Müller had been noted as penurious among his neighbors, and, seeing the strange likeness to him just then in his daughter's intent look, the Squire thought that if it were any other woman than Bart he would have suspected her of avarice.

But it *was* Bart. "There's the letter, child. God keep you from any trouble in it!" he said, hastily.

She took it and stood a full minute without moving. Then she went suddenly up to Laurence and put both her hands on his shoulders. "Whatever is in it, it will bring no trouble between us," she said. "Let us say that before I open it. Brother?"

Laurence detached her hand coldly. "Go, make your choice, Bertha," he said, dryly. "It will not grieve me, I assure you, if you leave me and my family in poverty by it. The riches I seek are not of this world. If you had sought them also, you would not be tempted by this shadow of a hidden treasure."

At that, Bart caught the breast of his dressing-gown, and drew him vehemently into the window, where the others could not hear. "Is this fair?" giving him a shake, the tears in her angry eyes. "Have you forgotten how long I've been a real chum for you, just as another boy would be? Can't you trust me, Laurence? Have you forgotten the old circus-days—did I play you false then? To think of how I've run with you all my life! Fished and trapped and gone gunning with you, because I could not bear to be without you! And now you turn on me! Oh! shame! shame!"

"I didn't turn on you, Bart," with a flushed face, taking her brown, large hand in his delicate fingers. "The money shall not come between us, go as it will. There!"

"It is something else that has come between us," with a gulp as though breaking through a long enforced silence. "It seems to me since you went into the church you look over the pale and call the whole world outside the children of

Satan—me with the others. You're going very far away from the good God in there, Bud. I wish the old times could come back."

The strong personal magnetism of the girl was beginning to tell on him. "I wish they could," he said. "Yet one cannot be saved without conversion. Go read your letter, Bart." He would have laid his hand lightly on her head—all his motions were fastidious and delicate—but she pressed it hard against her hot, tear-dabbled face, kissing it until she hurt him. "I've got you back again! I've got you back again!" vehemently. "I thought I'd lost you."

Then she went to a door which led into her own room. "I will come again soon—in a minute," she said, looking back, with her hand on the lock, smiling to them with the emphatic nod with which she usually put the seal on her sentences, and disappeared.

She did not come as she promised. An hour passed. The sunset reflections died out of the room, and the chilly moonlight shone into the window.

There was always so much warmth and light in Bart's rooms that she seemed more absent when they were gone. No one spoke. Laurence paced silently up and down. The Squire smoked his pipe in growing ill-humor. Kirke sat by the window, doggedly nursing his leg on his knee. They all looked from time to time stealthily down the darkening ravine to the mill, that stood blacker and grimmer in the moonlight. It was a natural weakness of human nature that their thoughts were busied with the secret treasure concealed under the black, threatening arms. Fantastic thoughts came to all of them: a heap of gold glittering under the fat loam; the great lustrous shining of the pearl in the mould; some faded parchment that could bring back to the family wealth and renown.

What was the secret which Bart had learned to-night?

Kirke told himself that the treasure was a delusion. Müller had been a monomaniac on the subject. He had deceived himself and wasted his own life with it.

Could he tempt this girl to do the same? Was the love of money then so deeply rooted in every heart that it needed but a breath to make it suddenly grow and bear foul fruit? Was it in hers?

"She gives up her chance of the treasure or she gives up me," he said to himself, stiffening his body, his heart growing heavy and hard as iron.

The Squire knocked the ashes out of his pipe at last. "I doubt Bertha's sore tried," he said, uneasily. "Satan tempts us all, as he did the Lord in the desert, once in our lives. By the chance of money. That's what tries a man to the marrow. I wish Bertha had some godly experience to perfect her in this her hour."

"She has a—a religion of her own," hesitated Laurence.

"Laurence! She has a happy-go-lucky way of making the best of things, and an affectionate heart. I don't know as hearty or cordial a woman alive as yer sister. But what is that but the carnal flesh? And 'the carnal flesh is at enmity against God.' Now is the hour of her temptation, and we'll see how her religion 'll sustain her."

"We will see," said Sydney Kirke, under his breath.

It grew so late, and yet she did not come, that Kirke rose and motioned toward her door. "Your sister is ill, I fear," he said to Laurence. It seemed to him that the blood in his own veins for a long time had been sluggish and cold. When Müller opened the chamber, however, it was empty.

But Langley at the moment caught sight of a dark figure going slowly down the ravine. "She is on her father's path!" he cried, and then was suddenly silent. But the other men looked at each other. The old miser's path had never been trodden in since his death.

"Go after her, lads," said the old man. "She walks as if she was dazed, or dragged along agen her will." When they were gone he turned into the room, and sat down by the hearth. He had not the heart to stir the fire. "It is the

hold of the money that is on her," he muttered to himself.

It would have been less bitter to Kirke if he had found her dying or dead. Was it the hold of the money? When he came near to her she was standing in the door of the old mill, in the very place which her father's feet had worn on the threshold. Her features had already the pinched, abstracted look of his: her eyes ranged as his used to do along the log flooring of the mill, seeking God only knew what secret beneath. Her lips moved, talking to herself: it had been a constant trick of the old man's. How strong the likeness was between them now, which had never been seen before! It was as if this secret of his gold, coming from his grave, had blighted her with the first touch in body as in soul, even contracting her wholesome, sanguine flesh into some ghastly resemblance of his own.

Looking up when they came near, she started, motioning them back with a rough gesture, so unknown to her old self that they stood amazed and silent.

"Keep back!—this is my ground, Laurence," in a whisper, as though some invisible Presence were beside her.

"You have made your choice?"

"Choice?" bewildered for a minute. She came closer to them, and said, after a pause, "Yes, the mill is mine. With all that pertains to it. Yes, I'll take it, Sydney," her voice rising almost into a cry.

She was standing in the moonlight between him and the square patch of darkness made by the open door. As she spoke she raised both her hands and held them out to him, looking behind her.

But Kirke made no reply by word or touch, only turned and walked hastily down the hill. She followed him.

When he was near the house, and they were alone, he halted and put out his hand to stop her. She looked humbly up into his face. She had only a blanket shawl over her head, and by the moonlight he could see her plainly. Why, it was the old, honest little Bart, after all! When had she ever cared for

money? He touched her and she crept quickly close to his side. She had always seemed too firm and resolute to need caresses, but womanish and weak as she was now, he held her to his breast with a strange, aching love for her, new to him.

"You have had a hard trial of it, tonight, Bertha. You are so young. Grace would teach you, my love, how poor are worldly riches."

She did not heed him, but kept her eyes fastened on the mill. "Let us go in as soon as you can," she said, under her breath.

"What are you afraid of?" impatiently. "Has the miserable self so fascinated you? Come," leading her to the house, gently, but not as tenderly as before. People like Bart are apt to make us selfish. They give out so much comfort and heat that we forget they too need to be warmed and fed. She had made such a sultan of this prig Kirke that he came off his throne down to her with difficulty. "You forget," he added as they went along, "that if you accepted this mystery, whatever it be, you gave up—me. Life will be practical with me. I have no time to go grubbing after buried treasures."

Bart stopped short. They were in the doorway now: the moon threw her short, broad figure into strong relief, the shawl fallen from about her head.

"I don't understand you, Sydney," she said. She held his arm tight when he would have drawn it away.

"I think it is plain enough." Then he hesitated. If there had been any prettinesses of pink and white cheeks or pouting, dewy lips to fan his love into life, he doubtless would not have gone on. An artist would have made a study of the strongly-cut, tragic face with its piercing, steady eyes, but it was simply homelier than usual to Kirke's ordinary sight. Bart was well enough, though most people thought he had stooped in marrying her, but this story of the buried treasure was utterly disreputable, and he would never suffer her to drag him into it. The girl was bewildered like a child by a fairy tale: it needed

only a few sensible words to bring her to her senses.

"It is plain enough," he said. "You cannot ask me, Bertha, to give up my foothold in the West, that I have worked for so long, for this visionary treasure. How long does the letter bind you to remain if you take the mill?"

"Ten years, Sydney," feebly.

"Then that decides it. You refuse it." When she did not answer he went on, more hotly: "Have you forgotten that Laurence must have the mill to keep him and his family from want? Is the treasure so dazzling that it has turned you against him as well as me? What is it? What do you say?" bending his head. "Give you time? Why! have I been such a rough fellow?" laughing cheerfully. "Poor little Bart! I'll go now, this minute, and to-morrow, when I come, you'll be ready to turn your back on the old mill and its ghosts. It is our wedding morning, remember," pushing her hair back and kissing her forehead again and again before he left her. "To-morrow, Bart," he said again, turning as he was half-way down the path.

"To-morrow." But her mouth was so parched that she did not hear herself speak. She watched him get his horse, and go through the gate down the hill. Then she lost sight of him. But there was a break in the hedge, and there she would see him again. She always watched him pass that break. How quickly he went! He did not seem to remember that she was watching him, and that it was—*was* it for the last time?

When he was gone, the last footstep died away, she turned into her room. She could hear the Squire and Laurence talking of her, and of this trial to which she had been subjected by the whim of her father. How would she bear it? they said. Would the glitter of the gold tempt her to rob Laurence of his just share? Such religion as she had, poor as the quality was, was to be put to the test now, they said. What would it do for her?

When their voices too had ceased, and all was quiet in the house, Bart still

stood by the open window, repeating their words over and over until they dulled her brain. What would her religion do for her now? What would it do?

She found herself presently on her knees before Laurence's fire, trying to blow the dying embers into life. Come what might, Laurence must be comfortable. She went through her nightly work mechanically. Then she came back to the open window, knowing that before she left it she must choose what her life must be to the end. She looked down into the quiet valley, with the wispings drifts of smoke here and there in the moonlight. In every one of those sleeping farm-houses she had friends, but to whom could she turn now? Even Sydney had been glad to hurry away from her in this her desperate strait.

For Bart had not that cool and just reasoning faculty which belongs to higher intellects. All that she knew in life were the human beings in it. She was not herself when they did not hem her in: one would have thought that the very blood in her veins had drawn its redness and strength from a thousand other hearts: none of God's creatures were so weak as she when left alone.

How it was, therefore, that, left to herself at that time, she did struggle to shore, and stood there for life, is a something which no one ever understood. Laurence said that the shadow of the mill, with its fatal secret, had oppressed and conquered her that night, as the ghost of a human being might have done. The Squire in his soul believed that it was the faith or sham of faith that she held which led her to her decision.

Whatever it may have been, she reached that decision at last. An ordinary figure enough—the short, stout young girl, in her gingham dress, standing in the window, and looking down at an old mill in the moonlight. But in the old mill was the ghost that crosses every man's path some day. On one side of her was a life of hard work, poverty, burdens which were not her own to bear: on the other, quiet and

ease—a fate to which every selfish instinct of her nature drew her as with links of steel.

When the clock struck midnight she went and sat down, looking dully into the fire. Laurence came in dripping wet with the night-damps, and going up to the hearth, looked at her.

"You have made your choice?" he said.

"I will take the mill."

He laughed loudly. "So there is the end of the precious bond between us."

"That is the end, I suppose, brother."

"The thought of this treasure has taken an awful hold on you," he said, noticing her pinched face and the black hollows about her eyes; and so left her.

When he had been gone about an hour, she rose slowly, going into the room where her trunks were, and unpacked them, one by one, putting away the little store of household linen last, without a sob or tear, the hollows sinking darker underneath her eyes.

There were square bits of paper on the trunks, on which Sydney had printed

her married name: she stooped and tore them off, but slowly, as if it were a living thing which she touched and hurt. She was a single woman now for the rest of her life.

When all was done she paused a moment, and then, blushing scarlet, and growing pale afterward, she quickly took from the bottom of one of her trunks a small package marked with her name in her mother's writing. It was a little dress, daintily worked, and a cap which she had worn when she was a baby. "I made them," her mother told her once. "If you are ever a mother, put them on your first-born child, Bertha, for love of me."

Bertha stood folding and unfolding them before the fire. She was a very human woman, and that which to other girls is but a vague, sweet dream, was to her a reality, without which her life would be vacant and but a long mistake. Presently she laid the little garments on the fire, and watched them flash and shrivel away, and then she sat down, and while the fire burned down into gray ashes, she cried bitterly.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

PART II.

CHAPTER II.

BEFORE it was daylight, Bart, wrapped in a cloak and carrying a lantern, crossed the barnyard, and disappeared down the dusky slopes of the orchard.

"She is going to the mill to dig out her treasure!" cried Laurence, his thin face growing hot with shame as he pressed it against the window-pane. He turned his back on her and threw himself on his knees by the bed. That the love of money should have so changed Bart in a single day. *Bart!*

There had been a curious tenderness

between the brother and sister under all their rough good-fellowship. Laurence forgot this morning to pray as usual that she might be saved as a brand from the burning; but the tears came once and again to his big, feverish eyes as he knelt there staring at the whitewashed wall and thinking of the old times between them.

He was right: she had gone to dig up her treasure, or, miser-like, perhaps to gloat over it. Her lantern made but a freckled ring of light about her in the pitchy darkness as she groped her way to the back of the mill, and lifting it

high over her head, exposed a low crevice under the beam, gray with cobwebs and dust. She stood quite still a moment, and then, with a heavy breath, bent over, peering closely into the dark, mildewed recess. Was this Bart's face which the single level ray of light brought into such ghastly relief? Could avarice already contract and score with lines such as these the sweet wholesomeness of yesterday?

The one or two boards flooring the crevice were damp, and covered with lichen: a musty, unclean smell hung about the corner. Whatever had been her first purpose, she was daunted by it and turned hastily away. She put down her lantern at the other side of the mill and began rolling short, heavy logs into the recess, heaping them up: selecting rotting, useless logs, which would not be likely to be removed. She was a strong woman, and dragged them with a fierce sort of energy, in which a good deal of morbid feeling probably worked itself off; for when she had done, and coming to the open door, blew out the candle in her lantern, it was almost with her old cordial, healthy face that she looked down at the cheerful daylight breaking over the hills to the east. She closed the mill door, dragging it by its one hinge, slowly, as if she shut in there all the night, and the ghosts that had filled it with whom she had struggled. Then she went down to the dam, and washed the dust from her face and hands: one would have thought, to see the loathing look and the nervousness with which she scrubbed her skin and brushed her clothes and shoes, that she had been at work among graves.

A few moments afterward, Laurence, coming to the house door, saw her crossing the road. He went down to meet her. It was a cool, bright morning. The cocks were crowing, Spot lowing out of the cow-house window, the turkeys clamorous for breakfast: the every-day routine beginning in so homely and natural a fashion that last night seemed to him like a dream. It was surely a dream that old Bart yonder had seized on the property and left him, for

the rest of his life, to want or (what was as terrible to Müller) to hard work. He hurried on, half expecting her to meet him with her usual jolly laugh and chatter about the fowls, but she was leaning over the fence, talking to old Manly, the toll-keeper—gossiping as was her wont, so eager that she only noticed Laurence by growing a shade paler as he stopped beside her.

It was of the Farrells they were talking, the people of whom old Müller had bought the farm and mill. It was a sign of the ordinary cast of her mind, Laurence thought, that now, when her life and his hung over a precipice, she could stop to ask questions about a lot of paupers whom she had never seen.

"There are but the two children, Manly, then?" she asked.

"Jest so," said Manly, unbarring his shutters. "There's the cripple, Alick, and Jane. But the old woman, she finds for both. Jane's but a half-witted woman, and Alick—well, he's a cripple, 's I told you. Bedridden since he was a boy. It was his back, I heerd: there was talk of a cure once, but after the old man died they couldn't fee the doctors. So that fell through."

"Bedridden since he was a boy?" she said to herself.

"They're miserable poor—the Farrells. The devil wouldn't pick their bones," pursued Manly. "They're a shiftless set, you see, except the old man. He was a good carpenter, and bid fair to lay by something snug for a rainy day. But since he's been gone the old woman's had too heavy weight to carry, to do her justice. They were so hard up last winter, I heerd, that she was obliged to send Jane to the poor-house. That 'ud nigh kill the old woman, I reckon; but Alick was as much as she could do for."

"Good-morning, Manly. Bertha, come; I wish to talk to you," pulling her arm.

She nodded, but did not move. Her flesh where he touched it was cold as that of a person under great nervous excitement.

"I did not know of these people, Manly," in a pleading voice.

"Tut, child! What if ye did? Are you responsible for the whole countryside? They live more'n six miles off, the Farrells. It's my old place, or I'd have known nothing about them. I'll let down the bar if you'll stand aside, Bart. Here's Lukens' cows coming."

"Bertha!"

She did not hear him, looking after the cows vaguely, and then, her chin leaning on the fence, standing silent. Once or twice she began to speak, but her voice failed her. She said at last, "The old man that you spoke of—it is a long time since he died?"

"Nigh onto twenty years, if he's dead. You've surely both on you heard the story about Farrell?" He did not wait for her to answer, or notice that she kept her face turned from him, or that Laurence had walked away impatiently, but went on, forgetting too, in his relish for the old story, the chops waiting for him in-doors:

"He was missing, Farrell was. Went from home one spring day, to collect some money due him, he said, and never come back. It wasn't the money that tempted anybody to his death, for the man that owed it paid it the next week—(yer own father was the man, by the way, Bart). Farrell had never got this far for it. They found a body they took to be his, miles down the river, long after. It was a queer story. Farrell was a good fellow, quick with his tongue, but hadn't an enemy in the world. It's odd ye never heard of it before, Bart."

"Yes, it's odd."

"Yer father didn't like to talk of it, I reckon. He had good feelin', the old man had. An' then, being the man Farrell started to meet and all, it come kind of near to him, no doubt. Come in and take a cup of coffee, child? No? Well, it's a doleful story you've drawn out of me on yer weddin' day. Hey? Good-day, good-day!" and chuckling, the old fellow limped in, looking back to nod and laugh to her over his shoulder. He wished he had not told it to her. She was a mighty tender-hearted woman. She was standing, still and colorless as a corpse, staring down into the

dusty road, he told his wife when he went in.

She turned at last and went up the hill. Through all the pain of last night there had been a lurking hope in the bottom of Bart's mind that the story which the letter told was not true. Müller had been a man eccentric to the verge of insanity. What if the letter, the confession which it held, the secret of the mill, were only one of the freaks of his morbid, melancholy mind?

She had no hope now. The vague dream had taken shape in every-day, ordinary facts more ghastly than any dream. The half-witted girl—the miserable work-house ending her miserable life—the old woman carrying the weight that was too much for her during all these years when Bart had been healthy and happy—the cripple, bedridden since he was a boy, who might have been cured.

And down yonder in the low crevice of the mill, under the lichen-covered boards, a few white bones all that was left of the man who would have made life different for them.

She put her hand in her breast and felt the letter. She knew it all, but she took it out and, sitting by the mill-race, read part of it over slowly:

"It was a hasty blow after hasty words. Farrell was insolent: I hardly know if I forgive him yet. But his wife and children have suffered: I am sorry for that. If I could have atoned to them by the loss of all I owned, I would have done it. But how to do this without drawing suspicion on myself? That is the riddle that has vexed my life. It seems to me at times that atonement should be made; and then at other times I feel that I have no right to lay this burden of shame and remorse on my innocent children."

"I wish heartily that I were not a theoretical man: it has made me vacillating in temper and purpose; it has cursed my life. I leave the matter with you, Bertha. I think you are more practical than I—possibly, although a woman, you are stronger. The mill, if worked, would yield a good income—

enough in a few years to place this unfortunate Farrell family out of want. If I could have done it without compromising myself, I would have begun the work long ago. I am sorry now that it is too late—that I did not do it. It will be necessary for you, I think, to remain upon the farm ten years or more to carry out this plan. I am assured you will succeed: you are of a more practical character than I or Laurence, and better fitted to combat with the world, and the employment will not be uncongenial. I have made your way quite easy for you by the conditions of the will: I think it is ingeniously contrived.

"I need not ask you to guard my secret, my daughter. The fear of detection has been a great weight upon me. I have watched the mill night and day. I ought to have removed the body long ago, but I put it off from time to time. There has been a vulgar rumor that I have concealed treasure there; but the only secret of the mill is this legacy of shame and disgrace, which your unhappy father asks you to take from him."

She could almost see the little old man as she read, looking at her with his weak, not unkindly, blue eyes, chewing his bit of straw nervously as he mumbled over those words, vehement and apologetic by turns. "It's so like father," she said, with a bitter, sad little laugh, as she tore up the paper bit by bit and threw the pieces in the curdling red water at her feet. Farther up the road the shadow of the mill fell immovable on the water, as the ghost that it has been said comes into every man and woman's path through life, with unreasonable, pitiless face barring them out from their wishes, bidding them Renounce, Renounce.

But Bertha knew none of these fine words about life or its losses. "There's nothing for me to do but to open the mill and make what I can out of it for them," she said; "and even Sydney must think I do it for the love of money." And then she laid down her head on a pine log near by and was quite still a while.

Laurence looked down on her as on

one in Satan's grip. "The carnal flesh is strong with her," he sighed. "What if she be one of those whom God has predestined to damnation from all eternity?" feeling that his prayers, after all, for any soul, however gentle or dear, were but puffs of wind beating against an impregnable iron door.

The carnal flesh *was* strong in Bart: the blood in her strong limbs and high-colored cheeks was healthy and young: she looked up and about her after a while. The cut pine smelled fresh and clean, the morning wind blew keen. Spot was calling to be milked. She got up and went through the wheat-field: quickly, remembering that Laurence had not had his coffee. Thinking as she went of One who had walked through the corn long ago, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.

He would know why she did it.

I do not think that Bart thought once of the temptation her soul had been in, or of her soul at all, as a martyr pilgrim in this vale of tears should do. She was too busy keeping the thought of her wedding day away, by reckoning how much lumber would be needed to repair the mill, and trying to arrange the great press of work coming upon her. As for herself—Tut! Tut! Many women never married: she would forget it in a year or two, no doubt. What was that? *She* had not been bedridden since she was a child, or been forced to send her helpless child to die in the poor-house.

By the time she reached the house, her clog-shoes rung as firm and her lips were as bright a red as ever. While Laurence drank his black coffee, cup after cup, and peppered his meat, she went out and changed her dress.

"Where are you going?" he asked, when she stopped by the table in a dress and cloak of blue flannel.

"Across the hills a few miles, to old Manly's place. There are some people there that I must see."

"Kirke is coming, Bertha."

She did not answer.

"Won't you see him, sis?" Gently, for, in spite of his anger at her, Lau-

rence was enough of a woman to understand what her loss had been. "He goes to-day. With you, or without you, as you please."

She turned away that he might not see her face.

After a long silence she said: "I'll not see him again. There is a little package there, on my bureau. It is my ring—and— You will give it to him?"

"Stay and say good-bye to him, Bart," holding her sleeve.

She did not speak or move for some minutes, then turned away in silence and went down the road, never looking back.

Kirke, coming up the hill-path on horseback, saw her, and, stopping, watched her out of sight. When he reached the gate, Laurence, who had gone out full of sympathy for him, drew back and silently made way for him to ride through. There was a look in the man's hard gray eye that frightened him. But there was excuse for Kirke. He was a manly fellow, ready to forgive, and he had come out with his big heart full of tenderness and compassion for the girl, happy and excited with the words which he had planned through the night, that were sure to bring her quickly back to him.

In this night in which he thought he had lost her he first knew how he loved her.

"She went away to avoid me?" he said, when Laurence came up to the door where he sat upon his horse.

"I am afraid she did, Kirke. She is strangely changed. She does not wish to see you again. There is a package for you," timidly stroking the mare's mane. "I'll bring it to you, unless you will dismount."

"No. I have crossed this threshold for the last time."

Laurence gave him the package, and they exchanged the briefest of good-byes. Müller, as we said, was afraid of the white heat of anger in the other man. It was a still rage which he, with his temperament of passionate ebb and flow, could not comprehend.

Late that afternoon, Kirke, rushing along to the West in a railroad train,

looked back to see the last glimpse of the purple hills among which he had played out his silly drama of love. He had seen them for the last time, he told himself: whatever changes life might bring him, that farce was over for ever. O God! to think that avarice could taint her so surely and so deep! Yet he thought he was but rightly punished in suffering himself to love one unregenerate, not yet loosed from Satan's grip.

Meanwhile, Bart was trudging homeward over those purple hills. She had seen the Farrells: her work was begun in earnest. She was not, I'm afraid, thinking of Sydney's or Laurence's soul as they of hers, having that Christian charity usually to be found outside of sects, which never thinks of classifying God's creatures as heirs or non-heirs of damnation. She was not thinking of her work or her sacrifice, but of the blue flannel cloak she wore. Sydney had called her "bonnie Bertha" in it once. It was the only time in her life that it had ever been hinted to her that she could be pretty and winning like other women. She drew the cloak close about her, with a dewy freshness in her eyes and heat through her blood. It was like Sydney's love wrapped about her—that cloak. She could not believe that dream of love was all over for ever.

"It will come back to me some time. Why, I'm only doing what must be done!" said the silly woman, hopefully, and tramped on more sturdily toward home.

CHAPTER III.

BUT it was all over. As the year passed, Kirke came no more to the misty purple hills that had grown dim in that October twilight, the genial passion and romance of his life fading with them; and the hills were not misty or purple to Bart. They were corn or wheat fields that would bring grist to her mill, or they were Scofield's or Doer's or Cashley's places: good neighbors all, who ate her Sunday suppers, and by

whose fires she warmed herself almost every day.

For Bart's mill ground both fast and exceeding sure. The whole county rejoiced in it: whether luck favored her, or whether, under her headlong, whole-hearted way, she had a safe business instinct and chose her workmen well, nobody knew, but the mill succeeded from the first day. Nobody could have told perhaps why it and Bart's kitchen gradually became the place of rendezvous for the whole neighborhood—why the women brought their knitting in the summer afternoons, or the old men their pipes; why the school-girls' walks always ended there, or the lovers invariably proposed to go up to "Bart's" by moonlight for a drink from her spring. Nobody counted Bart among the marked objects in the neighborhood, any more than they would the sunny village common, but she was as necessary to even the boys as the common, and would have been missed as much.

I'm sure I don't know how to make a heroine out of the happy little mill-woman. This tragedy of the white bones buried in the mildewed crevice was apparently quite forgotten. Neither that nor her life's renunciation had made her cheeks hollow or her eyes hungry, or filled her heart with vague longings. Yesterday was yesterday with Bart: dead and buried. She worked harder than any of the men about, and lived plainer: it might be for that reason her skin was as fresh as a child's, and her spirits as high—that she slept as light as one too, and her laugh was just as ready. Of course, nobody compared her to the pale, genteel girls who sang in the choir and read Moore's melodies, and were the village belles: even they called her coarse, standing weighing grain, with her white, strong arms bared; her careless blunders, her keen enjoyment of fun, and her anxious interest in her neighbors that gushed out in a thousand odd, affectionate ways. One would have thought her heart was big and warm enough to take all the neighborhood in, and that she had done it.

People wondered at times what she

did with her money. Was she hoarding it? What was the truth about that gold buried in the mill? Was it true that she never gave Laurence a dollar? Laurence had opened a grocery in the county town on borrowed capital, and was starving in it, he said. But when Bart heard this gossip against her she said nothing. In truth, the women even did not believe it, and the men swore when they heard it: they were tired of Laurence, both of his brilliancy and his shiftlessness, and they resented any imputation against Bart as they would one against their wives, or their sugar-beets or short-horns, or any other stable institution of the county. For Bart was the heart and mainspring of the community, though neither she nor they knew it.

Now the little black eyes set in Squire Langley's yellow, leathery face were keen: they did not watch Bart for nothing every Sunday night when he dropped in with the old woman for a chat over a pitcher of mulled cider.

"It was no treasure which she found in the mill. She's had hard measure of some sort to bear, and it's not want of feeling that keeps her up at such high-water mark," he said to his wife. "It's what she calls her religion. And she looks for Kirke to come back. She thinks that as long as she does the best she knows and trusts in the Lord, He'll give her the desire of her heart. There's a religion for you! As if He had nothing to do but to provide young wimmen with husbands! It's the god of this world she worships, I tell you. But Bart's a good girl, carnally speaking. I've nothing to say agin her," with a sudden change of tone.

He rode up earlier than usual one Sunday afternoon. He told what he saw in class in great wrath afterward. It was harvest-time, and Bart was sitting on the freshly-cut stubble, while Cashley's children piled the hay on top of her. The cripple, Alick, one of those Farrells, whom some whim had made her bring to the house when she opened the mill, sat in the sun on another haycock, enjoying the fun, while his mother, with her

half-witted daughter, in their Sunday clothes, were going about through the hedges looking for stray blackberries. The Squire, scowling, reined up his horse:

"Is this the Sabbath, my brethren, or is it not?"

"It is our day of rest. You know I don't understand your Sabbath of the churches," said Bart, shaking off the hay and coming up to him. Joe, the sickly little two-year-old Cashley, hung to her skirts. She took him up more tenderly than any mother. Eyes with a differing keenness from old Langley's might have noted how in the last year her old love of children had grown into something curiously passionate and mastering in the woman. "Joe and Alick and I must have our day in the fields, as He did long ago," stroking the boy's hair and nodding down to Alick, who nodded gayly back. The Squire meantime wondered if the Farrells had money, glancing from the cripple's pale, high-featured face down to his comfortable clothes.

Could Bart have taken such a burden in the house without a fair profit? But there was no knowing: she was a queer one.

"I've got something to tell ye, alone, Berthy," dismounting and tying his horse to the fence. "Put down that child and come along to the house." He looked down at her as they walked with as much speculation as he could compel into his soggy brain. She was sobered by his words: the ordinary laugh was gone from her face: in spite of her solid figure and the homely features, there was a certain sweet, compelling power about her—a wholesome, healing, genial influence. Whether it lay in her steady eyes, or low, cordial voice, he did not know; but it was there. Even he felt it.

"You're a woman now, Bart, and I reckon you've made out your road pretty clear to the end, criss-cross or straight as you pleased, and you think God is going to humor you in it."

"I think it will end right for me."

"There's one change I've come to tell you of to-day, then, and maybe

there's another not far behind. Larrence has been down to the village to-day. We've consecrated him to a great work. He's in the house now." Before he had done speaking, Laurence came to the door, and hurried to them. A full suit of clerical black had taken the place of the high-colored, artistic blouse and cap in which he was used to frame the wonderful beauty of his sensitive face.

"Now stop, Berthy," laying his hand on her arm. "Larrence kin tell his own tale. But I've a word to say to you," hurrying the words out before Laurence should take them from him. Like most people of his caste, he dearly relished a bit of ill news, and he wanted to see how Bart would meet this immovable bar in her projected path, which would prove her religion a lie. She trusted the Lord to give her every good thing: just as he fed the robins. He was going to leave her now nothing but sackcloth and ashes in which to repent of her sins.

"There's news come from Kirke, Berthy," he said.

"Kirke?" She turned with her hand on the gate, a flush of color and light in her face. How suddenly young and fresh she was! The Squire almost relented, taking in the whole figure before him—even to the Sunday dress of white muslin dotted with rosebuds. Wimmen were wimmen, even if they ran a flouring-mill, he thought.

But Laurence had no mind that the old man should experiment on his sister.

"Go in, Brother Langley; go in. My wife is waiting for you," he said, as he came up. "I will follow with Bertha." And then, after he had talked of indifferent matters as they walked up the path, he told her that, by the way, Kirke was married, stopping to pat old Pluto as he said it, and keeping his back turned toward her. "Go in sis, dear," he went on, hastily. "You have your supper to look after. Don't bother yourself with Sarah. I'll come presently. I have some affairs of my own to talk to you about." Laurence Müller was a hard, penurious husband, his wife said, and a testy, unjust father; yet the tears

would rush to his eyes at a strain of music or a line of true poetry. For the same reason he was tender with Bart to-day. If something died out of her life that afternoon which never could come again, he was watchful that no one saw the sign. He would not look for it himself.

So that no one but God ever knew what was in the heart of the quiet woman who waited on them at table that evening, feeding little Joe, and propping the cushions behind the cripple with steadier hand and more scrupulous care than usual. I do not know her secrets to give them to you. I only knew the outside of the mill-woman, as others did.

When her work was done, she found a chair in a corner of the crowded room and took Joe on her knee, holding him very close as she rocked him to sleep. When his mother came for him, "I wish you could leave the little fellow with me to-night, Mrs. Cashley," she said. "No? he'd cry for mother. Well, well! it's likely he would. Good-night, Joe," and kissed him and let him go.

The room was crowded, because Laurence had brought his wife and children with him. Sarah (the wife) sat in a rocking-chair near the fire, wrapped in a shawl, her lean, fallow face contracting into its ready frown when any of her four boys made an onslaught upon her. They were such children as must be born of such a father and mother—yellow-skinned, stooped-shouldered, peevish. Yet they were enough like other children to hang about Bart and be fond of her.

When Mrs. Cashley was gone, the Squire said, "You have not told Berthy of your intentions, Larrence."

"No. She knew I was going to take up the work of the gospel."

"Yes, I knew that, brother." She brought her thoughts from a long way off back to Laurence, reproaching herself that they had been far off. What ought to be nearer to her than Laurence or his wife and children? Yet it had come to be a hard duty for Bart lately to go to the dirty little shop where the molasses and oil-barrels were wasting over the

floor and the ledger was never opened, while Laurence sat poring over doctrinal books among the fly-blown vegetables; or into the back room, where Mrs. Müller lay on the lounge while the boys played in the gutter.

"What are you going to do, Laurence? Where are you going to preach?"

"It is not my lot to be borne to heaven on flowery beds of ease. You must have seen that, Bertha," was the evasive answer.

"No." And to her credit be it told that her eyes did not glance to the dirty dyspeptic on the rocking-chair. "But we've all some load to carry on the road, Bud," cheerfully.

"I will not be content with any ordinary burden," rising and speaking with a strained, discordant twang, while his fine eyes surveyed the distant hill-tops as though he saw a vision. "I will gird on the armor of the Lord and go out to meet His foes: I will count all things lost for Him. Behold, I have offered my life as the sacrifice, and no man shall say me nay."

With the first sound of the peculiar tone Bart began to tremble: she had heard it before. "What is he going to do, Sarah?" But Sarah gloomily shook her head and did not answer.

"He is to be consecrated as a missionary to Burmah, in August," said the Squire, closing his eyes and twirling his thumbs in a sort of exaltation.

"And Sarah? and the children?" cried Bart. "Why, she can do nothing for herself!"

"He that hateth not wife and children for the Lord's sake is none of His," said Laurence, not heeding his wife when she began to cry and say that it was the first time she had been thought of or spoken of in the matter.

"The Lord will provide," he continued with the same lofty enthusiasm. "Besides," a good deal of worldly asperity coming into his tone, "I have taken thought for them. Their helpless situation will compel justice, perhaps, from those who have wronged them and me," with a keen look at Bertha.

"You mean me, Laurence?" slowly.
 "You mean to leave them with me?"

"I intend them to remain in my old home, which by right should be theirs," sharply. "No-doubt they will earn their living here."

Now Bart was no angel: only a woman. And she came as near to hating her cold-blooded sister-in-law as anything living. She looked at her from head to foot, then at the children. Her life, then, was to be spent in making them happy in a home out of which they felt she had cheated them?

Instead of—

She gulped down a choking lump in her throat once or twice before she could speak. Then she said, "I will do what you wish, Laurence," and then, never doing anything by halves, she went over to Sarah and kissed her.

Mrs. Müller looked keenly into her face, and stopped her hysteric sobbing. "I hope we'll get along together, Bart," she said. "I wouldn't be such a poor creature if it wasn't for my back;" and real, genuine tears came to her eyes.

"I'm sure we will," said Bart, heartily. The lamp was lighted, and they all gathered about it. Bart was very silent that evening. But Laurence talked with fervor: his eyes dilated, and his thin cheeks were on flame. He was describing Burmah to them: the burning dyes of the skies, the splendor of the forests filled with the strangest secrets of Nature, the unreal human beings with their mysterious rites and incantations—all forming but the background to his own great deed of moral heroism.

"I take up the burden which He has laid upon me," he cried again and again. He had forgotten the burden of the grocery business which would have brought bread and butter for the sickly wife and children which God had given him.

Bart listened till her own eyes began to kindle. Even to her practical brain Laurence's talk of this far-off country was like

"A magic casement,
 Opening into perilous seas of fairy lands forlorn."

And into this land of enchantment the

call of the Lord summoned him, a knight of highest emprise. What wonder that they both forgot the dirty shop and the boys left to their obscene companions of the gutter? Her heart glowed within her as she went up to arrange Sarah's bed. "He is going out like one of the apostles of old," she thought.

She put Mrs. Müller and the boys into her own large room. "They may as well keep it," she thought. "Poor Sarah! she will be a different woman with country air and feeding. And I will have the children to care for. I won't need—anything else." She stood for a long while at the window where she had gone to fasten the shutters, looking out into the quiet moonlight. Then she closed them, and with the closing her face is shut in away from us for many years.

CHAPTER IV.

A TOTAL blank of years so far as Bart is concerned. She herself even could not have made a history out of crops of wheat which failed, and of crops that rotted, or of the jobs of corn or buckwheat entered on the mill-books.

But Laurence Müller's life was a drama in itself, at which the Christian world of his own sect looked on with wondering eyes. Its scenery was strange and unreal: the man unveiled himself a poet in it, his sensuous nature being fed now from a brimming cup. The curtain was never down between him and the public: the applause never failed him. In all his ecstatic or depressed spasms of religious feeling, in his struggles for the two or three souls whom he had fair reason to think he had converted, the far-off multitude of witnesses he knew were always ready to encourage and to cheer him.

In Burmah he became that hero, even to his wife, which he had never been behind the counter: he wrote letters to her which were published in all the newspapers of his sect: the children were known through them to all the Church. He prayed them by name to seek that treasure which is beyond all

others, that Pearl of great price for which the history of his life abroad was in truth the history of his own restless, desperate search.

When Sarah lay in her last illness, she used to cry very bitterly over these terrible exhortations in his letters. "Have I a saving evidence?" she would say. "How shall I know if I am one of God's elect?" She used to listen like a sick child to Bart's cheery talks with the boys about One who took His followers to the weed by the side of the path or to the harvest-field when He would teach them. But Bart understood and could explain nothing of the great mysteries of the Trinity and fore-ordination, which one must accept or be lost. Like Zaccheus, she went into the every-day road-side to find her Lord and Master.

It was while listening to one of these pleasant afternoon talks that Sarah fell asleep out of her feverish life at last; literally, fell asleep, with a quiet content on her face that they never had seen there before.

Bart was lonelier after that. The boys, too, were anxious to be gone. They had sprung up in the country air into sturdy, energetic, clean-blooded fellows, and wanted to go early to work. Everybody was ready to lend them a helping hand into trades or professions for Bart's sake. They were not boys of much natural power (excepting Jem, who had a turn for mechanics), but they all had a genial, hearty way which took the world by storm. People wondered where Laurence Müller's sons got their oddly sincere, simple nature, their habit of meeting even a thief as a friend until he proved himself an enemy.

It was not hereditary, they said.

It was about this time that Squire Langley made his Western tour, that one great event of his life. He went through Ohio, and out as far as Little Rock, going out of his way to hunt up any old citizens of the Indian Creek Valley, wherever he heard of them. Among the rest he went to Dubuque, and found Sydney Kirke. The story had come back to the Valley that Kirke had been

obliged to leave his home in Ohio on account of his wife's health, and giving up his practice had gone to speculating in Western lands. Langley went into his office unannounced, to give him a surprise. But he was not prepared for the warmth of his welcome. It was the first face from the old Valley that Kirke had seen since he left it, and though it was the vulgar, snuff-drabbed old shoemaker's, it brought the old times before him, sudden and real. The jaded-looking man in his suit of solemn black stood in the middle of the office floor wringing Langley's hand, and wringing it, laughing with a hoarse choke in his throat. After the first excitement was over, however, and he had dragged him over to his dingy boarding-house for dinner, and brought him back, heaping up the desk beside him with wine and cigars, he fell into an absent, lethargic silence, which Langley soon guessed was his natural habit.

"I'm sorry to see this!" he said, touching the crape on Kirke's hat.

"Yes. Mrs. Kirke has been dead for two years now," quietly.

"Children, Sydney?"

"None."

"Business brisk here?" after a painful pause.

"Brisk enough. But I have no ambition to amass a large fortune. The truth is, Langley, when a man has not made himself a name, and has no children to come after him, the latter part of his life is a blank, after all, to look forward to. I don't care to fill it up with anxieties, which, after all, are sheer avarice. It does not happen to chime with my natural character."

"There are the things of the other world?" with difficulty. For with this business man, and in a strange office, the old holy tone seemed out of place.

"Oh, of course: I have made my calling sure, I hope. I hold a responsible position in Doctor Broadhurst's church. But religious matters have not that zest for me they had when I was a younger man. Naturally." He turned the conversation on to politics, but even there he was indifferent; his gray

eye melancholy, and listless as he talked. Was it grief for his wife, the Squire thought, or for that first love lost long ago?

Now the truth was, it was grief for neither: it was sheer lack of any grief or pleasure. Kirke had but little taste for books or art. Nature had meant him for a domestic man. Through some mischance, he thought, he had failed to find a leading object in life, as other men did. In middle age his hands were empty.

The Squire stayed with him a day or two. Kirke asked for all of his old friends, but it was not until the last evening that he spoke of Bart:

"The ten years are not nearly over. Has she found her treasure yet?" with a bitter laugh.

"I don't know what she found in the mill. Bart is poor enough," gravely. "She has had plenty of mouths to feed, enough to use all."

Kirke made no reply, but became more sombre than ever before. After an hour or two of conversation on other subjects, he said, suddenly, "Is the old house just as it used to be, Langley? I often think of it and wonder if there is such a cheery place yet in the world."

"It's the warmest place in the countryside—Bart's. We all go there, when we're in trouble, to be heartened up," eagerly. "She's always cheery and light-hearted—Bart Müller."

"Oh! she is light-hearted, is she?" said Kirke, with a chagrined frown.

"You'll come this fall and see the old Valley for yourself," said Langley the next morning, when he was going. "You'll come back to us, old fellow?"

"I'll never see the Valley again," he answered, sharply. "My old friends have grown as strange and distasteful to me, no doubt, as I to them. Our accounts are closed."

CHAPTER V.

THE Squire continued his journey. More than a month passed before he returned home. He found the Valley alive with reports about the Müllers. Laurence had returned on six months'

leave of absence. He was alone with Bart at the farm-house. The Farrells had gone to live in a house of their own, near the Cross-roads. The Squire's wife said they had fallen heirs to a comfortable property, but another report he heard was that an old debt, long owing to their father, had been paid by creditors in New Orleans. However that might be, they were comfortably disposed of for life.

"I al'ays judged they had money, or Bart'd not have been worried so long with them. 'Twan't in human natur', even in hers," said the Squire, when he heard it. After supper that evening he rode up to the farm-house. He could not breathe till he had unburdened himself of some of his weight of news, and he was sure of an audience there: especially he wanted to tell Bertha about Sydney Kirke. He found some of the neighbors there, as he expected. Bart's famous fire was bigger and hotter than ever, fairly heaped up with logs: on the hearth stood the great pitcher of simmering cider. They had supper beside. There was an undefined air of comfort and generous plenty in the house, which was new to it, for Bart had heretofore lived poorly. But this suited her, the Squire thought, looking at her glowing eyes as she sat at the head of the table. Bart ought to deal out hospitality to half the country-side.

They kept the Squire busy with questions, for he was like a spy whom they had sent out into foreign countries. But he was but a feeble light and burned dimly beside Laurence, who sat at the end of the table as close to Bart as he could, and talked upon the slightest hint, like an instrument ready to play any tune with a breath of wind. The good old neighbors were distantly respectful to him: he was like some foreign beautiful animal among a herd of oxen, with his bilious, nervous face and rapt, flashing eyes and unknown language. Müller's carnal nature (as he would have called it), both bodily and æsthetic senses, had been prodigally fed during the last few years. Outside of his religion he had grown into a genial, liberal,

large-natured man. Outside of his religion. His creed remained, a thing apart from himself, a genuine Procrustes' bed, on which he measured and guillotined for hell all individuals or nations who did not worship his own unjust, vindictive God. But, fortunately, his religion was in abeyance to-night, and he had leave to be cordial and happy with the others.

The neighbors all dropped off, one by one, with the exception of a friend of Laurence's, who had arrived that evening—a shy, glum man, who sat in a dark corner poring over some papers, meditating a sermon, the Squire fancied.

"You fellow has a sinister way with him that I don't like," he whispered to Müller, when they had drawn up to the fire and lighted their pipes. "What does he look so stealthily at Berthy for, eh?"

"He has heard me speak of her," said Laurence, glancing quickly from the stranger to Bart, with a sudden significance in his eyes. "He has heard me speak of her a great deal."

"Onmarried, eh?"

"Yes, unmarried."

"You had your plans in bringing him here, perhaps, Larrence?" jealously, for Sydney Kirke was an old favorite of his, and he thought if only he could bring him back this winter—

"I may have had my plans when he came," said Laurence, smiling lazily, and looking at the fire through the amber stem of his pipe. "It is possible. My sister is worthy of any man's love: I believe that now, Langley."

Now Laurence's friend in the corner was looking speculatively at Bart. He saw her with a stranger's eyes, differing from those of the people of the Valley. He had heard of her from Laurence; but he had fancied her a coarse, uncouth, jolly woman, keeping open house for her neighbors. Years, or pain, perhaps, had surely changed her since Laurence knew her. The man's life had been lonely and wandering, and it gave his eyes an electric keenness of insight when a home came before them. This home of Bart's was full to him of quiet and beauty and good cheer. A man could come here either for rest or strength, and it would

never fail him. In all the world he never had seen anything like it.

The woman belonged to it as the heart to the body. A small, softly-moulded, plump woman in a fawn-colored woolen dress sitting by the window, sewing: her hair pushed back from her clear-tinted face and sincere, cordial eyes; a young woman, about whom one would have always the odd thought that one would like to see the children of so earnest and tender a mother. He could not help but think of her as a mother: he fancied that she had always greatly loved those younger and weaker than herself; and that, in spite of her ready laugh and eager, friendly voice, she had been quite alone all of her life. Quite alone.

He got up and went out, presently. Squire Langley hardly waited for the door to close behind him when he stood up with his back to the fire, his face red and his coat-tails under his arms. "It's downright onrighteous, Larrence, in you to interfere with the girl in this way. There's been outsiders meddling in her life enough."

But Laurence replied by an imperturbable smile and a calm puff of smoke, regardless of his sister's look of inquiry.

"Berthy," said the Squire, wheeling round, "do you know this man was brought here to be your husband?"

She laughed, folding up her work. But Laurence watched her keenly. "I did not bring him," he said. "But I would be glad if that would be the result of his coming. Surely I, if any one, have the right to interfere in Bart's fate."

She tried to laugh again, but failed.

"Marriages arranged by others are usually the happiest," pursued Müller, in a sententious tone. "Two of our corps at Borloona Station married wives selected and sent out by the church at home. This is a godly man, who would make you a happy woman. He is an old friend of mine. When I saw him last week in New York, and he advised me that he was coming, I thought of you."

"I'm very willing to do anything you will, brother," said Bart, "but not

this." She had put down her work and was standing behind him, her hands on his shoulders. The old Squire stood on the other side of the fire. He had never seen her so shaken by any trouble as by these few words about her marriage: she tried to turn it into a jest, but she trembled as she spoke and lost her voice. "I must be Bart Müller to the end," she said, stroking Laurence's black hair gently.

"You used to think the Lord hed these matters in His care, if I'm not mistaken. And accordin' to yer faith it 'ud be unto you, Berthy."

"I did think so. We'll not talk of this any more. There's one thing I have waited for you to come to say, Squire Langley," her face brightening into its usual look. "The ten years are not yet over. But the letter has no hold on me now. I have fulfilled all its requirements. I would like to give you the mill, Bud, now."

Laurence turned and looked at her steadily. A long time ago he had accepted the facts of the case and regarded himself as a servant of the Lord whom Bart for the love of greed had wronged. The facts were all against her.

But facts nor the world will long wrong any one who keeps as honest a face turned toward her Lord as Bart.

"I know how natural it is you should think me miserly and greedy," she said, hurriedly. "I wish I could clear myself." She stopped for a moment, unnaturally pale. Then she leaned over his shoulder, and in a lower tone, "You'll take the mill now?"

"I'll not take it all. I'll divide with you for my boys' sake. And whatever division you think is just, I'll abide by, Bertha," said Laurence, raising his voice impressively. "There's no other human being I'd believe in, in spite of proofs, as I do in you."

"Why, Bud!" She came in front of him and put her hands on his breast to steady her trembling body. "You believe in me? *Me?*"

"I never knew any one's life like yours, sis," he said quietly. And he stooped and kissed her.

"That's the truth, by George! God forgive me for swearing! But now that Larrence has said that much, Berthy, can't you tell us what was the treasure? You've kept the secret a long time."

"It *is* a long time. I'd like to clear myself." She looked breathlessly at Laurence's sensitive face. The story of his father's crime would cling to him a lasting disgrace, as she had never felt it. "No. You must trust me to the end, brother. I never can tell you."

"I trust you, Bertha—altogether," gravely.

She was still pale, though the joyful tears flashed in her eyes. "I'm glad you have done it—I never thought this time would come. I'll go out now, if you please," she said, after a moment. They heard her sob once or twice like a child, after she had left the door. She went down into the barnyard unconsciously. The sun shone redly over the quiet farm-place, the dusky hickory woods on one side and the apple-orchard on the other. The whole world was at peace and quiet in the evening light. They all trusted her, in spite of the hard circumstance that had so long fought her down. It seemed to her that the recompense of her whole life had come to her to-night. She drew long breaths of the keen, gusty wind. How bright the sunset lay on the bare hill-peaks yonder! Spot looked at her wistfully; the dogs came and rubbed their cold nozzles quietly in her hands. So loving a God was hers—so loving a world! She had sometimes grown almost tired of waiting for the long-deferred word.

But, though after long waiting, there always comes an hour in the faithful, unselfish life when God will seem to look upon it and see that it is good, and the world becomes pleasant and friendly as the hills of Beulah. Laurence, in such a supreme hour, would have chanted a hymn—sent it with the lark, laden with music, to sing at Heaven's gate; but Bart, with her heart throbbing and her lip trembling, went to stroke old Spot and throw down fresh litter for her bed, the dogs at her heels; and shut the door.

of the chicken-house, to keep out the keen wind. They were all in some sort her children, and knew, she thought, by some subtle instinct, that the chill had gone out of her life for ever.

Suddenly she stopped and turned hastily to the house. The stranger had come into the barnyard. She remembered Laurence's hints with a sharp pain. Laurence should not have forgotten!—he should have known that those words ought never to be spoken to her again! Never. She hurried in with the look of one who has unwittingly trodden upon a grave where the dearest friend of life was long ago buried. To gain the path she had to pass the man, who had seated himself on the lowest rung of a ladder, the very place where Sydney Kirke had sat to watch her on that long-ago evening. When she came up one of the dogs was sniffing about him. He pushed back his cap and grizzly hair.

"Why, Pluto! you've not forgotten me, old fellow?"

Then she stopped, leaning against the wall, and wrung her hands.

"Bertha!"

"Yes, Sydney."

"I have come back to you."

She did not answer. He stood up and took her hand. "Is it too late to say that I wronged you?"

"I have not proved myself innocent." Their voices were hoarse and subdued. They were both people who held their emotions down and out of sight.

"No. But my eyes are keener now to read the soul in the face. And I have read yours. I am a very lonely man," he continued after a moment's silence: "I have needed you all my life."

Behind him in the soft light she saw the heavy shadow of the mill. But for the first time in her life it had ceased to threaten her. The ghost was laid. Between her and the shadow came this one dear face.

"Will you come to me, Bertha?"

"No, Sydney. Not until you know my secret." He drew her closer. "I have a long story to tell," she said, resolutely. But the next moment her head fell on

his breast and rested there like an overtired child's.

CHAPTER VI

AFTER Sydney had married Bertha, he paid her brother for his half of the mill-property. "Bart must have her old home," they both said; and for Kirke's own part, he was only too glad of the pretext to come back again, and begin life afresh in the happy Valley. Laurence took the money. But the longer he remained with Bart the more convinced he was that he had wronged her by his old suspicions. One could not be near the woman without trusting her and all other human beings more. But he never knew the truth.

He came back once afterward, when they had been married ten or fifteen years. He had grown to be a veteran in the missionary corps, noted for his fervid eloquence in pressing at home the claims of the doomed millions between whom and an offended God he and his coadjutors stood. He had grown bilious, dyspeptic, more acrid in argument. But there was one weak spot where his heart-strings always tugged him sorely—Bart. A hunger that mastered him sometimes yonder in the midst of his struggles between his passionate, carnal nature, and his ascetic creed, to see her dear, commonplace face and hear the familiar, cordial voice. It belonged to his unconverted days, but he had never heard music so sweet.

"What is the hold you have on people, Bart?" he asked her, half angrily, the day after he came, looking at the plain-featured woman, whose hair was streaked with gray, surrounded by her children and a crowd of the neighbors. "I doubt if it is a right work to make men friends together, good and ill alike. But *how* do you do it?" forcing a smile. "Was it a magic treasure which you found in the mill?"

Her husband turned quickly, with the curiously gentle smile with which he always looked at her. "It *was* a treasure which she found in those years

when she was alone, Laurence," he said gravely.

Laurence Müller was silent a moment, and then went out, restlessly looking back at the busy, laughing group about the fire. Doubts came to him in this unselfish, cheerful home which did not vex him elsewhere. Could Bart have found here the pearl which he had sought so far? Had the spirit fallen to her share, and but the chaff of words to his?

Bart is dead, long ago. Because human souls, no matter how coarse or rare or tender, like the trees and animals or any other part of this inexplicable machinery about us, must soon run through their appointed task in the world, and one day—be missed out of it.

When Bart was missing, there was but little to say of her—less than of most women. She had helped in no reform, left nothing beautiful in song or picture behind her, to hint at what she was: had kindled no man's blood to high, courageous work, full as the world is of noble schemes.

She was a miller all her life: a woman of far inferior culture to her hus-

band and children. It is true that her kitchen hearth to the end was a warm place where all the country-side struck hands and were friends; and when her children's children were grown, her name, even yet, was so pleasant a memory that it brought a sudden smile and a warmth at the heart when spoken: one thinks of even her grave as green and cheerful among the hills all the year round.

But there are so many noble ships in this great sea of time, stately in honor or usefulness, opening new lands for us in God's great world: what was this poor little, plain-decked trading vessel that we should take such account of her? Was her humble work—to bring men nearer together—indeed rarer and of more import than theirs? However that may be, some freight she surely had on board different from the others, which perfumed her voyage and made it memorable—a secret something, pleasant as spices from far-off Indian seas.

What was her happy secret? Has she taken it with her into that cheerful heaven yonder where she is gone? Or is it yet here—and ours?

REBECCA HARDING DAVIS.

NOR DEAD, NOR LIVING.

"HOW charming! And we seem to have it all to ourselves! You have no other guests, have you?" asked Mrs. Hamilton, turning her sweet smile upon the landlord of the little mountain inn, who stood surveying her, her husband, Trump their dog, and the pile of luggage he was guarding, with the leisurely scrutiny of one making himself

acquainted with his new but incontestable property.

"There's one more. That's her name, and there she is;" and with an ingenious compound gesture the landlord pointed at once to the record-book upon the table, and to the rocks beyond the open window, where stood the tall figure of a lady dressed in black.

"Mrs. Myra Burtonshaw," read Mrs. Hamilton, aloud. "Is she all alone here?"

"Yes. She came up with a party from the River House at the foot of the mountain, and they didn't want to stop up here, and she did; so she stopped," replied the landlord, adding, as he dipped a stumpy pen into the dusty ink-bottle: "Ain't you going to put down your names?"

"Mark, will you enter our names?" asked the lady, carelessly; and without a word her companion turned from the open window, took the pen and wrote, "Mark Hamilton and wife," in a bold hand, stood for a moment looking at his own inscription, as if reading a new significance in the names, and then turning to his wife, said, kindly,

"Alix, you had better lie down and rest for a while before dinner. I will sit with you, if you like."

"Very well, dear;" and while Mr. Hamilton gathered the wraps, umbrellas and hand-bags with which the independent landlord never dreamed of concerning himself, Mrs. Hamilton rose wearily to her feet, displaying a slight and somewhat crooked figure, harmonizing well with her thin and pallid face and the pathetic outlook of her large brown eyes. Against these evidences of defective organization, Alix Hamilton possessed a rare sweetness of expression and certain physical beauties, such as a wealth of soft, silky hair, a shade darker than the large eyes already mentioned, beautiful teeth, and the most perfect hands and feet imaginable. Those who best knew her loved her devotedly: those who glanced at her casually described her as "That splendid Mr. Hamilton's poor little sickly wife;" and one woman hated her cordially.

As she lay now upon the rudely-appointed bed of the mountain inn, her delicate face contrasting forcibly with the coarse pillow beneath it and the gaudy patchwork bed-quilt drawn over her, Mark Hamilton, looking down, felt that her very fragility and helplessness bound him to her with bands that time, or circumstance, or subtlest memories

could never sunder. He feared nothing, no one.

Sitting down beside her, he took in his the pretty toy of a hand lying outside the counterpane, spread it upon his palm, and, while minutely examining its dainty texture, said, softly,

"Alix, do you believe that I love you?"

"Mark! Do I believe the sun warms me?"

"And, darling, if I make a confession of something long past, will you hold your faith unshaken?"

"Try me, Mark;" and a little color crept into the white cheek, and a soft light into the brown eyes that Alix Hamilton fixed so confidently upon her husband's face.

"It was eight—no, nine—years ago, Alix, before ever I had seen you, that I loved another woman. Her name was Myra Labranche, and she lived at the South, where my business had at that time taken me. She loved me in return, and we were engaged for several months. She had a daring, reckless temper, and had never yielded her will or her opinions to any living creature. I, as you know, dear, am strict in my notions and somewhat peremptory in my manner at times."

"Never unjustly so," murmured Alix, jealously, and Hamilton thanked her with a kiss upon the little hand he held.

"She did not think so," pursued he, "and we quarreled more than once. The last time I came home, and had scarcely reached there when she pursued me with a letter, saying that she was married, and never desired to communicate with or hear from me again. I made no reply and no inquiries, and I never heard her married name."

"Years after, when I felt that the wound had healed, and I could offer a healthy love to a pure-minded woman, I met you, loved you and won you for my wife. I never told you this story, because I thought it a matter that never need come near your life or cloud your sweet content in me; but to-day I fear that I have done wrong. The lady whom we saw upon the rocks just now

is, as I believe, the Myra Labranche of whom I speak, and I presume that Burtonshaw is her married name. Alix, what shall I do? I leave my course entirely in your hands."

"Do you, really?" asked Alix, smiling brightly, and clinging to the hand that would have dropped hers, as scorning to influence her by any fondness. "Well, then, I decree that you shall go straight out to Mrs. Burtonshaw, introduce yourself, if she has forgotten you, do a little bit of sentiment or a little bit of fun, just as your mutual mood suggests, about old times; and when I have had my rest, I will join you, and we shall all be comfortable together."

"And do you really take it so lightly, dear? Have you no fear at all of the result? Speak seriously."

"Speak seriously upon the question of your deceiving me! Gravely consider the probability of your turning traitor and knave, or rather fool!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamilton, a little indignantly. "Why, Mark, do you know yourself and me so little as that?"

"I should indeed be traitor, knave and fool in one if I could betray such trust. Alix, I am not worthy of you, but, God helping me, I will not disappoint you in this matter."

"Foolish boy! And I will try not to mortify you by stealing Mrs. Burtonshaw's watch if I have the chance. Now run away, for I want to go to sleep."

So Mark Hamilton darkened the room, arranged various little matters with the tender consideration for his invalid's comfort that always sits so well upon a masculine man, and then went slowly down stairs and through the combined parlor and hall of the cottage to the front door. The figure he had seen standing upon the rocks was gone, but he strolled in that direction, half fearing, half hoping to somewhere find his old love, and get over the first awkward meeting.

Straying on with no definite purpose, he found himself at last quite out of sight of the house, and standing upon

the brow of a precipice frowning over a ravine crowded with a dark evergreen forest. Throwing himself upon the ground, Hamilton looked over, measuring the fall with his eye. It was at least two hundred feet, and the careful husband's first thought was that Alix, with her unsteady gait and nervous tremor in any danger, must be warned against coming near the spot alone.

"It would kill her inevitably," murmured he; and just then his eye caught the flutter of black draperies upon a shelf some fifty feet below him, where, rooted in a cleft of the rock, a clump of birches grew stoutly up, flaunting their brilliant green in the gray face of the precipice behind them.

"What! Can it be some one fallen?" muttered Hamilton, leaning still farther over the brow of the crag, and shading his eyes from the glow of the setting sun. Nothing was to be distinguished, however, but a mass of black drapery fluttering in the light breeze, and the young man looked about him for the means of descent to the point where it lay. A break in the crag some distance beyond him left a zig-zag path practicable to a daring foot and steady brain; and without hesitation Mark Hamilton resolved to essay it. As in many other enterprises, the peril diminished when closely approached, and it was almost without a sense of danger that in a few moments he achieved the descent, and landed in the clump of birches upon a little plateau some six feet in length by three or four in depth.

A woman's figure, apparently insensible, and dressed entirely in black, lay among the shrubs; and with a sudden horror at his heart, Hamilton stooped and turned the face toward the light. As he did so, the eyes opened, and Myra Burtonshaw looked with instant recognition into the face of her sometime lover.

"Mark! Am not I dead, then?" moaned she.

"No, Myra—fortunately not. Are you much injured?" asked Hamilton, not without emotion.

"How came you here?" demanded

Mrs. Burtonshaw, unheeding his anxious question.

"I came out to meet you, and quite by accident strolled to this spot, and looking over the precipice saw you. How did you fall?"

"That is not an important point to be settled just now. You had better go for help to get me up," said the lady haughtily.

The suggestion was wise, even if a little ungracious; and Hamilton was on the point of adopting it, but paused in the act of going to place the head of the sufferer in a more comfortable position. In so doing he was struck by the ghastly expression of her face.

"Myra, you are suffering very much," exclaimed he. "Are you conscious of severe injuries? Can you tell whether your limbs are broken?"

"No, no, nothing is the matter; only go away and leave me as fast as you can," replied Myra, turning away her head. Something in the tone of her voice, in the look of her face, struck chill to the heart that once had loved this proud, passionate creature so well and learned her so thoroughly. Hamilton knelt beside her, and smoothed her disordered hair as he said,

"Myra, I cannot leave you while you speak and look so wildly. I am afraid to. Surely you did not wish to throw yourself over the crag? You are not meaning to—to—"

"To finish my undertaking in your absence?" asked Mrs. Burtonshaw with a bitter smile. "Well, you are not responsible if I do. Your plain duty is to go for help to raise me."

"Promise me, then, that you will not stir until my return. Promise me, Myra."

"I will not promise you anything, Mark Hamilton."

"Oh, Myra, why should you do this thing? Why should you wish to die so desperately?"

"Why should I wish to live?" muttered the unhappy woman, turning away her face, down which quiet tears were slowly trickling in spite of every effort.

"I do not know the circumstances of

your life, Myra, but surely you have ties—a husband, children perhaps—"

"My husband is dead: I have no children—no friends—no home—no hope. Go, Mark Hamilton! go and leave me. Go for help."

Hamilton stood perplexed. If he left her, he felt morally certain that her first act would be to roll over the edge of the little plateau and dash herself to pieces on the rocks beneath. If he remained, it was impossible for him alone to help her, and nothing could be more uncertain than the discovery of their situation. Meantime, also, Alix would be growing dreadfully uneasy, and might herself run into some terrible danger in looking for him. Mrs. Burtonshaw was the first to speak.

"I hoped you would never know how I died, Mark," said she, softly.

"Then you knew that I was here, Myra?"

"Yes, I read your name, and knew your handwriting, and—after your name came 'and wife.' Then I came out here."

"Not on that account, Myra? That did not drive you to such a terrible act?" asked Hamilton, kneeling beside her in great emotion.

"Oh, Mark, how could I help it? It killed my soul, and why should not my poor body follow. Mark, I did not know that you were married, and I came here to the North, thinking we might meet and I could tell you how sorry I was, how bitterly I repented, when it was too late, how I made shipwreck of all my life in one mad moment of passion; and I thought perhaps— And then I found you with your wife, and I could not bear it. Oh, Mark, do not hinder me, for I must die—indeed, indeed I must; there is no place left for me on earth."

And the desperate creature, all wounded as she was, would have writhed herself over the edge of the precipice, even before his eyes, had he not held her tight.

"Myra! Myra! you shall not do it!" cried he. "Rash, wicked woman! you shall not murder yourself while I can prevent it. Myra, you say that you love

me: show it by obeying me. I bid you live, or I will never believe that you loved me."

"You bid me live," slowly repeated Myra, abandoning her efforts and looking up in his face. "Do you then care for me?"

"I loved you once very dearly, Myra, and I will not suffer you to die or to be wretched if I can help it. Live, and be my dear friend and sister."

She wound her arms about his neck, and pressed her face to his, crying wildly,

"Oh, Mark, for that one kind word I will live, and even endure to see you the husband of another. I shall be your 'dear friend and sister.' You have said it, and you never lie."

But it was no sister's kiss her feverish lips pressed upon his—no look of friendship that burned in her dark eyes as he softly laid her down upon the rocks, saying,

"And you will rest here quietly while I go for help?"

"Yes. I wish to live now. And, Mark, promise me that you will not tell her of what I said. You would not betray one woman to another, even though the latter were your wife? Promise me."

"I promise, Myra," said Hamilton, with some little hesitation. "Although you need fear no harsh judgment from Alix. She has the tenderest and largest sympathies, the purest of hearts and the discreetest of tongues."

"There, that will do. I am growing faint: hurry!" and Mrs. Burtonshaw languidly closed her eyes and turned away her face.

"Keep up, Myra! I will be back as soon as possible. Make an effort, dear. I know that you can do anything you choose," said Hamilton, anxiously; and only waiting for a faint smile in reply, he hastened away, and soon returned with men and ropes and a procession of every human being about the place, except Alix, who still lay sleeping profoundly upon her bed.

When she awoke, Hamilton sat beside her, looking down upon her placid face with a feeling of unworthiness busy at his heart. He would have given much

at that moment had his lips been clear of his new-found sister's kiss, or had he been at liberty to tell the whole of what had passed to Alix. But Myra had said, "You would not betray one woman to another?" And Hamilton felt himself bound in honor to obey the dictum so conveyed. So he did not speak until Alix, turning her face, flushed and dewy with sleep like that of a little child, upon him, said,

"Why darling, have you been here all the time? I thought you went out: yes, I remember now, you went to find your old friend, Mrs. — Mrs. —"

"Mrs. Burtonshaw, dear."

"Oh yes! Well, did you find her?" asked Alix, rising with a pretty little gape.

"Yes, dear."

"And what did she say? Did she know you?" pursued the wife; and Hamilton, feeling that longer silence would be suspicious, told the story of Mrs. Burtonshaw's accident, as he phrased it, of his fortunately finding her, and of the rescue.

To all this Mrs. Hamilton listened with intensest interest, and when it was finished, exclaimed,

"How fortunate, Mark, that we happened to be here! You found her, and I shall take care of her. I am going this moment to see what I can do for her."

And, with hands that trembled so nervously that she could hardly use them, Alix arranged her dress, restored her hair to its usual perfect neatness, and was leaving the room before Hamilton found words to reply to her. Then he said,

"But, love, you are not strong, yourself: she has the women of the house with her: had not you better wait a little? They have sent down the mountain for a doctor: won't you wait until he has seen her?"

"Why should I, Mark?" asked his wife, in some surprise. "She will need a friend with her during the doctor's visit, and I am going to carry her some cologne and aromatic vinegar, and cheer her up a little in advance."

"Well, well, dear: do as you think

best. I do not know. It—never mind: go if you will."

And Alix, more and more surprised, slowly left the room, looking back at her husband as she went.

"What harm?" muttered Mark Hamilton when he was alone. "Alix will do Myra nothing but good, and I shall watch that Myra does Alix no evil."

Two weeks later, Mrs. Burtonshaw was carried down the mountain on a litter, and Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton followed in their carriage to the hotel where the invalid was to remain for yet some days, to recover strength for the journey Southward. But before she should return to her own home, it had been arranged, principally by Alix, that Mrs. Burtonshaw should make her a long visit—remaining, in fact, until the beginning of winter made it more desirable for an invalid to seek a milder climate.

To this arrangement, made in his presence, Mark Hamilton listened without a word, until, in answer to his wife's looks of surprise, and finally direct appeal, he forced himself to utter some words of courteous entreaty, and immediately left the room.

"Am I the knave and fool she said I could never be?" asked he of himself in solitude; and then, with man's arrogant self-confidence, he added, "But no. Forewarned is forearmed, and I will so guard myself and her that no harm shall come of it."

When Mrs. Burtonshaw next saw Hamilton alone she said, reproachfully,

"You do not want me to come to your house, Mark?"

"I do if it will make Alix happy. She is my first thought," said he, resolutely.

"Always?" murmured Myra, raising her lustrous eyes to his with a long, lingering look.

"Should not she be?"

"Yes. But it is so sad to be always reminded that no one cares first for me. I wish, Mark—"

"What do you wish, Myra?"

"No matter. Let it go unsaid." And Mrs. Burtonshaw suddenly turned aside her head.

"Tell me, Myra," persisted Hamilton: "I wish to know."

"Why will you force me to say what will displease you? I wish that you had not found me on the rocks."

"You said rightly that such a wish would displease me, Myra. Why should you utter it?"

"I will not again," replied Myra, submissively. "But it is so dreary to know that no one loves you best."

"Poor child!" and he touched her bent head with a caressing hand; then started as if it had stung him, and left the room. Myra looked steadfastly after him with burning eyes and outstretched hands.

"Man, man, though I move heaven and earth to gain you, you shall yet be mine!" whispered she.

And so it befell that when, in a golden September evening, Alix Hamilton crossed the threshold of her home after three months of absence, Myra Burtonshaw's black-clad figure followed her like the shadow of approaching night.

"Welcome, friend," said the young wife, turning to grasp the hand of her guest—"welcome to our home, and yours as long as you will have it."

"Thanks, Alix; but happy homes and I have little in common," said the other, sadly; and then, as Mrs. Hamilton, full of a childish delight in her return, hurried forward, her guest lingered to say,

"And you, Mark, have you no word of welcome?"

"Welcome, Myra! Welcome to all I have—to all I have a right to offer you," stammered Hamilton, comprehending the glowing beauty of Myra and the delicate loveliness of Alix in one troubled glance.

A few days later, the three, now quietly settled into family relations and occupations, were sitting in Hamilton's study, he reading, and the women sewing and discussing Swinburne's last poem, which Myra admired and Alix detested, when Mark, who was engaged with a work upon Peruvian antiquities, rose and opened a cabinet containing

some specimens of the relics described by his author.

"Oh, Mark, show Myra some of those curiosities—those funny little silver gods, and the drinking-vessel in shape of a stag," said Alix, glad at heart to change the conversation from a subject growing painful to her.

"Yes, let me see what they called gods in the Inca days. Perhaps I shall be converted," said Myra, lightly laughing as she rose and followed Mark to the other end of the room, while Alix took up the book he had laid down and soon became engrossed in it.

The silver gods were examined and discussed, and then Myra took up a curious heart-shaped cup, with a pebble covered with cabalistic figures fastened in the bottom of it.

"What is this?" asked she.

"A love-philtre," replied Hamilton, smiling. "That is to say, the characters engraven upon the pebble are a charm, and the cup itself possesses certain magical properties, so that any one drinking from it imbibes with the draught a passion for whoever offers it to him. Will you try it?"

"If you have an antidote for love, I will swallow that," murmured Myra, flashing one look into his eyes, then dropping her own.

"No, I would not give it you," replied Mark in the same tone, ardently pressing the hand she had, as it were, unconsciously laid beside his own.

"You would not cure me if you could?" asked she, raising her eyes in glad surprise.

"No; I am too selfish," whispered Hamilton; and a sweet voice from the other end of the room cried,

"Oh, Mark, what horrible things they used to do! Such tortures as they inflicted on their enemies, and such treachery toward their friends! I am glad we are not Incas, aren't you, Myra?"

And throwing down the book, Alix resumed her needlework, humming a blithe tune.

"Yes, I am glad we are not traitors and torturers," said Mark slowly, and fixing upon the gorgeous beauty at his

side a look half loathing, half longing—all bitterness.

She, not to meet his eyes, busied herself still with the cabinet.

"What are these?" asked she, pointing to a shelf specially guarded by an inner glass door. Upon it were arranged several arrow and spear heads, and two or three gourds and small coarse earthen pots, filled with a dark, resinous-looking substance.

"Those?" repeated Hamilton, rousing himself and mechanically opening the inner door by means of a little key upon the same ring with that of the cabinet. "Those are poisons."

"What, the arrows and all?"

"Yes. Both arrow and spear heads are dipped in woorara, the deadliest of South American poisons, and these gourds contain woorara in a solidified form."

"And the little vases?"

"They contain corroval, another arrow-poison, manufactured by the natives of the Isthmus of Darien," said Hamilton, forcing himself to reply intelligently.

"And how are they different?" persisted Myra, examining the contents of gourd and pipkin by the light of the gas-burner above their heads, and determined not to allow Mark to leave her until the shock inflicted by Alix's chance words had passed away.

"The difference?" repeated Hamilton, absently. "Why, woorara kills from without inward, and corroval from the centre outward. Corroval attacks the heart at once, and destroys the principle of life before it does the manifestations; while woorara merely renders the nerves and muscles incapable of motion, without disturbing the brain and spinal centres, or affecting the action of the heart; so that the victim suffers everything, knows that he suffers, is capable both of memory and apprehension, and yet can stir neither hand nor foot, eye nor tongue, the muscles being completely paralyzed. In a few moments, however, the heart ceases to beat, in consequence of the inaction of the lungs, and the subject dies, as I said before, from with-

out inward, the great life-centres perishing last."

"How horrible! And is there no remedy?" asked Mrs. Burtonshaw, turning ghastly white as she examined the gourd in her hand.

"None. Nor is it possible to detect by autopsy the presence of these poisons in the system. They are hardly understood at all, even by professed toxicologists. Now, I believe I have shown you all the wonders of this cabinet, and I will read aloud the poem Alix requested just now."

"Mark, are you displeased with me?" murmured Mrs. Burtonshaw, lingering while Hamilton locked the cabinet and threw the keys into a drawer of the lower compartment.

"Not with you, but myself," replied he, briefly; and leaving her, he crossed the room to lean over Alix, tenderly smoothing her hair and make some careful inquiry into her health, which had been for the last week more than usually delicate. In especial, she had been troubled with a nervous trembling and twitching of the muscles, which annoyed and distressed her beyond measure, not so much from the ill consequences to herself, as from a fear lest it should repulse and disgust Mark, who had always been specially fastidious in matters touching upon physical infirmity or imperfection; so that ever since the hour, soon after her marriage, when Alix discovered this trait, she had suffered hidden torments from the fear that some day his love should yield to disgust at the feeble and imperfect conditions of her organization.

So now, when Mark, leaning over her, fondly asked if she were feeling well, and she, glancing brightly up, was about to answer, but was prevented by a sudden spasm of trembling which distorted for a moment every muscle in face and body, not all her usual self-control prevented a sudden burst of frightened sobs and tears, as, tottering to a sofa, she threw herself upon it, gasping.

"Oh do not look at me, do not look at me, Mark! Why, why am I such a monster?"

Hamilton, who had in fact started back with an exclamation of dismay from the first sight of that distorted face, recovered himself at this piteous cry, and hastening to his wife's side, overwhelmed her with caresses and pretestations of pity and affection.

Mrs. Burtonshaw looked on with a quiet sneer for a few moments; then approached the sofa, asking, with anxious sympathy,

"What is it? Is Alix ill?"

"No, it is nothing; it will pass in a moment," replied Hamilton, hurriedly, a delicate impulse moving him to shield the infirmity of the one woman from the eyes of the other.

"Take me up stairs, Mark," whispered Alix, clinging about his neck, and Hamilton, raising her in his strong arms, carried her from the room.

Left alone, Mrs. Burtonshaw stood for several minutes, her hands locked together, her head bent down, and her eyes raised toward the door in an attitude of deep meditation. Then she went to the bookcases, searched first one and then another, until she found a pamphlet she had some days previously noticed in Hamilton's hand. It was a modern treatise upon toxicology, embracing some of the latest discoveries in that ghastly science. Glancing through a few of its pages to make sure that it was what she wanted, Mrs. Burtonshaw slipped the pamphlet into her pocket and resumed her seat and her needlework.

An hour later, Hamilton returned to the library, and finding Myra still seated there, hesitated about entering.

"I have been waiting to see you to inquire after Alix," said she, looking up apologetically.

"She is better, thank you—asleep at last," replied Hamilton in a constrained voice, but entering the room and sinking into his accustomed chair, placed, as it chanced, close beside that occupied by Myra.

"Poor Alix! And poor Mark!" murmured Mrs. Burtonshaw without looking up.

"Why poor Mark?" exclaimed Hamilton, quickly.

"It is so sad to be in such close bonds with suffering and—"

"And—what?"

"Do not speak so fiercely. You know how I pity her, and how gladly I would give my own miserable life to make hers perfect. Indeed and indeed I would, Mark."

"Well—perhaps. Yet not one-half so gladly as I would give mine for almost any purpose," groaned Mark, hiding his face in his two hands.

"Mark, why do you say so?" and her hand lay upon his knee like a caress.

"I will not tell you, Myra; nor need I, for you already know."

Her face brightened triumphantly.

"Because the past which you thought dead proves itself stronger than the present? Because a vital passion is not to be quenched by an affection compounded of pity and gratitude?" asked she, in a voice full-fraught with passion.

"Myra, have pity, and do not force the knowledge of my crime upon me."

"Which crime? The one sinned against me and against your own heart? That holds the first place," suggested Myra, and the hand crept up until it lay about his neck and the superb head sank upon his breast.

One moment, and he started up, thrusting her from him, and crying, "She would not believe that I could play traitor, and you would force me to it. Which loves me best?" rushed from the room.

A few moments later, Mrs. Burtonshaw went to her own chamber, and, after locking the door, drew a thin pamphlet from her pocket and settled herself to read it. When she extinguished her light the east was red with the dawn.

Mrs. Hamilton kept her room for several days, and during the necessary absence of her husband in the day-time, Myra was her indefatigable nurse; and by her sedulous attentions, no less than by a certain shrinking sadness in her manner toward himself, and an avoidance of all private interviews with him, gained a deeper hold than she had yet possessed upon Hamilton's feelings and thoughts. He reproached himself with

harshness and an undue assumption of superior virtue in their last interview; and one evening, when Alix had sunk into a profound slumber, and Myra was about to retire to her own chamber, he detained her with the request,

"Will you come down to the library for a moment, Myra? I want to speak to you."

"Certainly," was the meek response, and she presently followed him down.

"I did not mean to hurt you by my violence the other night, Myra," said Mark, so soon as they were alone.

"No, I dare say not."

"Then why do you avoid me so, and why are you so sad? Smile upon me, Myra, as you used."

"I am going away to-morrow, if Alix is well enough."

"No, Myra, why should you go?"

"Why should I stay? Is it not hard enough and miserable enough for me to stand like an outcast, looking on while another enjoys what once was all mine own, and which now I may not approach? Is not this enough, without your scorn and blame because I cannot always hide my anguish?"

"Myra! Myra! Oh, my poor, poor darling, not so! Do not grieve so terribly."

For she had cast herself upon the floor at his feet, her face hidden upon a low stool, and her whole form shaken with the passion of her emotion.

"If I might die! if only I might die!" moaned she, and he—alas! he raised her in his arms, and soothed her with his kisses, and called her by the fond, sweet names of their youthful love, and forgot all that had come between them since.

She was smiling into his face, and he wiping away her tears and kissing their stormy traces, when a knock at the library door disturbed them.

"The doctor, sir," said the servant, and Hamilton, passing his hand across his brow like one bewildered, turned to Myra.

"Good-night," said he. "I shall not return here."

"You shall return, and go yet farther,

whispered Myra Burtonshaw when she was alone; and with cheeks and eyes aflame with some strange emotion she paced the long room up and down, up and down, with the elastic, stealthy tread of a tiger seeking for his prey.

At last she paused before the cabinet, looked at it for a moment with a curious smile, and then, opening a lower drawer, found the key, unlocked it, opened the inner case and stood for a moment hesitating. Finally she selected one of the gourds

"It must be droll to appear dead, and yet know yourself alive," muttered she, with an evil smile.

Five minutes later everything was restored to its usual order and Mrs. Burtonshaw was locked in her own room. The bright color of cheek and lip had faded to a ghastly pallor, and her dilated eyes looked like those of a creature hunted to its death.

Mrs. Hamilton was not so well the next day. An access of nervous excitement had terribly reduced her strength, and the spasmodic movement of the muscles with which the attack commenced nearly amounted to convulsions. Hamilton, who was a lawyer in extensive practice, was obliged to leave her for the entire day, and Mrs. Burtonshaw remained the chief attendant in the sick room. Toward night, Alix fell into a deep slumber, the result of many wakeful and painful hours, and Myra, bidding the nurse take the opportunity for the rest she so sorely needed, seated herself beside the sleeper, promising to ring so soon as she should need assistance.

Out of that dreamless slumber Alix awoke with a shiver and a suppressed cry. She had dreamed that some cruel foe stabbed her to the heart, and even while she knew that it was a dream the pain of the wound remained.

"What is it, dear?" asked Myra, leaning over her and pressing one hand firmly upon her bosom.

"Just there—under your hand—what is it that hurts me so?" panted the sick woman, feebly struggling to remove that strong, relentless hand.

"Ay, to be sure, what is it hurts you

so, Alix Hamilton? A heartache, perhaps? Oh no; the heart and the brain die last. What can it be that hurts you so, Mark Hamilton's petted wife?"

The great brown eyes of the sufferer stared up into the mocking face above them, their pupils dilating with a slow horror, a gathering consciousness of evil.

"You have killed me—you hate me—" gasped she; and the organs of speech refused obedience to the brain; and although the horror and the sudden certainty of an awful doom grew and glittered in those dilated eyes, every instant more vividly, no other expression was possible, not even the lifting of a finger to point to her murderess, had all the witnesses on earth stood around Alix Hamilton's dying bed.

Mrs. Burtonshaw stood looking down upon her work with a coldly appreciative eye.

"Yes, he was right," said she at last. "You see your muscles are to all intents and purposes dead, because you have lost the power of using them, but you can feel quite as vividly as you ever did. There! did not you feel that pinch? And yet it was a very slight one. And you can hear, and see, and think as well as ever you could. Indeed, you see too well, or at least your eyes are too expressive, and I shall close them—softly, gently—so. Now you look entirely dead—you cannot imagine how entirely. And there, punctual to his hour, comes your husband. I calculated upon his return just now, for I want you to hear his promise above your lifeless body to love me when you are gone. It is my revenge."

The door opened hurriedly yet cautiously, and Mark Hamilton entered.

He found his wife lifeless upon her bed, and beside it Myra Burtonshaw, her face buried in the clothes. At his approach she started up and ran to meet him:

"Oh, Mark, Mark, she is gone! My heart is breaking with grief and remorse. Oh, Mark, how dare I tell you her dying words?"

"Her dying words!" repeated Mark,

staring aghast at the pale form upon the bed.

"Yes, dearest. She bade me say to you that in death her eyes were opened to your real need, and that she charged it solemnly upon you—nay, she said upon you and me both—to join our hands above her senseless clay and promise to be to each other all that she had tried to be to you. She solemnly forbade me to allow any other to approach this bed or to look upon her dead face until you had made this vow, for she said her spirit would linger near until we thus should comfort it, and then depart in peace. Mark, dare we disobey her?"

He plucked her from his breast, where she wildly clung, and, holding her at arm's length, looked sternly in her face, while he said,

"Is this a time to speak of love or plighting vows? Even if that angel in her self-sacrificing devotion did give you such a message, it was not well for you to heed it, instead of summoning help or making some effort— How do you know that she is dead even now? False friend to her, as once you were false love to me, if she indeed lies dead, I do not hold you guiltless."

He thrust her aside, and leaning over the pale form upon the bed, laid his hand upon the brow and heart. A vital warmth lingered about the latter, and even, as Hamilton fancied, a slight pulsation. Excited with a sudden hope, he tore away the night-dress to search more closely for this faint indication of lingering life, and would have laid his cheek over the region of the heart, when the appearance of a slight wound arrested his attention. He examined it closely. A little puncture, as of the blade of a penknife, and around it some crumbs of a dark-colored, resinous substance.

"What is this?" exclaimed Hamilton, looking up at Myra, who, pale as death, stood watching him.

"I do not know," faltered she, all her courage forsaking her in this cruel downfall of her schemes.

"You do! I read it in your guilty face! Quick, woman! tell me all the

truth, or I will not answer for your own life!"

And, desperate with haste and vengeance, Hamilton seized the trembling woman by the arm and fixed a terrible look upon her face.

"It is the Indian poison—the woorara!" gasped she, falling upon her knees and endeavoring to clasp his, but Hamilton spurned her from him, crying,

"O wretch! worse than the savages who made it, for she was your friend!"

And then he rushed to the bedside, and placing his mouth to the cold, pale lips of the murdered woman, he sent a long full breath between them; then, gently pressing with his hand upon her chest, expelled it, thus simulating the natural action of the lungs; and this operation he repeated without intermission for fifteen minutes. At the end of that time a decided movement of the heart was perceptible, and a slight warmth had diffused itself over the rigid body.

"God help me—help me to keep her!" whispered Hamilton, resuming his efforts.

At the end of another fifteen minutes the symptoms of life were undeniable, and Hamilton snatched at the bell-rope, and when the summons was answered, despatched a peremptory message for the doctor, who replied to it in person.

A dozen words explained the state of the case, and in uttering them Hamilton for the first time glanced at the spot where he had left Myra crouching. She was gone—gone from the room, and from the house, and from the life of him she had so madly striven to win; nor did he ever see or hear from her again. He spared her in his recital to the physician—he spared her from all, but he never named her name save once again, and that was when he told his wife to mention her no more.

Hours after this, when Alix, pale, exhausted but smiling, lay upon her pillows, looking at her husband with eyes that said what her coy tongue would never say, the old doctor muttered to Hamilton,

"It was her nervous disorder that saved her, and I believe she never will

suffer from that again. This woorara acted upon the very nerves and muscles that have all along been over-active in Mrs. Hamilton's case, and operated more as a powerful medicine than as a poison. Ninety-nine women out of a hundred would have died, and nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand. Her disease saved her at its own expense, for I believe it is killed. Nor must we for-

get your efforts. It is well you are something of a toxicologist and knew the nature of woorara. Mrs. Hamilton, were you conscious all the time?"

"Every moment, from first to last," said Alix, with her eyes still beaming love into her husband's face.

"My poor, poor darling!" murmured he; and that was all.

JANE G. AUSTIN.



DR. AAR.

THE gossip of the exclusive town of Ernsford held a morning-session in Mrs. Lockhart's parlor, and entered at once upon the discussion of that momentous question—"a new doctor among us." Argument ran high, and debate waxed loud and warm; Mrs. Claquet, whose erratic and versatile genius enabled her to enact every selected rôle *con amore*, gesticulated strangely after the manner of her kind; Mrs. Cavendish Green, who cultivated the fancy that she and the Dukes of Devonshire were blue-blooded alike, forswore her calm of long descent, and talked excitedly of strangers, and charlatans, and nobodies; and Miss Nancy Leger, a maiden lady of wealth

unquestioned and summers unrecorded, launched madly forth upon a sea of perverse moods and tenses and divers Legerisms. These were the leaders in the august council. At times, Mrs. Lockhart, or some other presumptuous feminine, would feebly essay a word or two, but quite in vain: the trio aforesaid, although not Turks, "could bear no other near the throne."

"He has been here five days," said Mrs. Claquet, "and no one has seen him. Why should there be all this mystery?"

Mrs. Claquet affected the melo-dramatic upon this occasion, deeming it especially becoming in the case.

"I saw him," a modest voice replied, negating the serious charge.

"But when?" was the contemptuous question. "At night, making his way over the fields where— Who knows where?" And the questioner looked defiantly round, as if threatening instant annihilation to any one who presumed to know where.

"To 'Black Ben's' cottage," was the astonishing answer.

"To 'Black Ben's' cottage!" ejaculated the dame, flinging up a pair of fat hands to give full expression to her horror. "Black Ben is an infidel and a thief. What takes any one to his cottage?"

"His child is sick."

"Well, what of that? Dr. Mayland never put his foot inside the place: that I know," said Mrs. Cavendish Green, emphatically.

"Black Ben would not let him," said the timid little woman who had, unwittingly, submitted herself to cross-examination at the hands of the ruling three.

"How do you know?" Miss Nancy Leger asked sharply, turning her face—that charmingly youthful face—full upon the offender.

"Dr. Mayland told me that Ben permitted no licensed poisoners within his doors: so Ben said to the doctor one day."

"How did *this* man succeed in storming the castle?" said Mrs. Cavendish Green, with a sneering smile. "Probably Ben is a friend of his—probably: these adventurers, you know." The "high-born lady" languished into silence at thought of the terrible probability.

"I can tell you all about it," said Mrs. Lockhart, coming bravely to the rescue of her timid little friend. "As this strange doctor was coming up the street, the night of his arrival in Ernsford, he heard a woman's voice crying out wildly, and at the same moment a man, bare-headed and evidently intoxicated, ran across his path: the doctor stood still, wondering what it all meant, and unable to see a yard before him, so dark and stormy was the night. Again the wo-

man's voice shrieked out some unintelligible words, and the doctor leaped the fence that divided him from the fields upon his left, and started in the direction from which that cry of agony had come. A dim light in the distance was his only guide, and in a few minutes he was able to discern the miserable dwelling in the hollow. The door stood wide open, just as the man, who so suddenly confronted the doctor, had left it: the wind whistled and moaned unceasingly, and the rain beat through the open door of the wretched hut. The doctor walked boldly in, and saw a woman, ragged and pinched with want, holding a child in her arms and sobbing piteously."

"Black Ben's mother, I suppose," Mrs. Claquet interrupted: the lady lacked one perfection—she was not a good listener.

"Yes," Mrs. Lockhart replied, "it was Ben's mother, and the child in her arms was Ben's little girl."

"What a merciful dispensation the death of that child would be!" said Mrs. Cavendish Green, kindly suggesting improvements upon the Providence that guards so jealously the gates of life and death.

"I would not say so," Mrs. Lockhart gravely replied: "that little child has strange influence over Ben, fierce and wicked as he is; and I believe that this influence will be all for the best: it will keep Ben back from his dreadful life, unless there be no such thing as keeping a sinner of his stamp from the error of his ways."

"You are an optimist, Mrs. Lockhart," Mrs. Cavendish Green mockingly commented.

"Yes, yes, you are an optimist, Mrs. Lockhart—a little old-fashioned in your notions," chimed in the lipping Miss Nancy Leger, who evidently entertained the idea that an "optimist" was a fossiliferous formation, bearing traces of those primitive ages in which the sons of men were weak enough to confess themselves *not* omniscient and omnipotent. Miss Nancy was not eminent as a philologist: indeed both sound and sense were frequently immolated upon the shrine

of conversation according to my lady's pleasure.

Mrs. Lockhart smiled at the doubtful compliment, and resumed her story: "The woman looked up at the doctor's entrance, fixing upon him her strange, wild eyes, and sobbing all the while with that heart-broken wail of one from whom hope is passing away. 'What can I do for you?' said the doctor, coming closer, and endeavoring to get a look at the face of the child. 'Is the child sick?' he went on, bending low and laying his hand upon the little head pressed to the woman's breast. 'She is dying,' the woman answered. 'Did you meet *him* on the road?' she asked, still with that fixed and stony look in her eyes. 'He could not bear to see her die, and he went out, leaving me alone with her.' Here the child stirred uneasily, and moaned some broken words. 'Perhaps I can do something for her,' the doctor said: 'let me look at her.' The woman obeyed mechanically, letting the stranger take the child from her arms and lay it upon its little bed in the corner of the room. Miserable as the place was, that little bed was clean and white, betokening the loving care lavished upon the little one."

"Who can believe all this? The new doctor is an adept in the line of fiction, if this narration be a sample," said Mrs. Cavendish Green, who, in her diluted Pyrrhonism, regarded universal doubt of good as the only true wisdom.

"Ben's mother told the story to Dr. Mayland," said Mrs. Lockhart, warmly entering upon the defence of the absent; "and Ben himself gave it as I am giving it to you."

"Go on, Mrs. Lockhart," said Miss Nancy Leger: "I am dying to hear the rest of it."

"That you may not die, then, I will finish," Mrs. Lockhart returned, unconsciously giving a sarcastic inflection to the remark. "The child was in a high fever: that the doctor saw at a glance. He bathed the hot face and hands, cut away the tangled hair that lay in heavy masses upon the child's head, and, taking from his pocket a small vial,

administered some prescribed remedy to induce sleep and quiet. The woman watched him eagerly, submissive to all his orders, going hither and thither to close this door or open that window, to move the light away or bring cool water, according to the commands so quietly spoken. The child lay with her head upon the doctor's arm: she moaned pitifully if he attempted to withdraw her from that resting-place. At length the moaning and tossing ceased: the powerful medicine, given, as it had been, just in the nick of time, did its work well; and when Ben came back to his hut not many minutes after, the child was sleeping quietly, her head still upon the doctor's arm. You may imagine how Ben stared at the strange scene: he had returned in expectation of finding death already within those miserable walls; and how widely different was the realization! There lay his little girl, with that ominous scarlet flush faded almost to a natural color, the eyes that he had last seen wide and burning with fever were peacefully closed, and the childish moaning voice was still. 'Is she dead?' he asked, advancing with uncertain step to the bedside. 'No,' the doctor replied: 'please God, she will soon be herself again.' 'How did you come here?' Ben whispered hoarsely. 'We will not talk now,' the doctor answered, 'lest we wake the little one. Some other time I will tell you.' 'Tell me this now,' Ben persisted—'will she live? Do not deceive me.' 'So far as my judgment goes,' replied the doctor, 'I answer you truly—she will live.' Ben sat down and covered his face with his hands, evidently desiring to conceal the emotion that manifested itself in every lineament. After a long silence, Ben looked up and said, rapidly and fiercely: 'They call me an infidel, yet last Sunday I went in where a preacher talked of God, and I begin to believe in him. Are you come from God? I tell you that that child was the only thing upon earth that loved me and was not afraid of me. God could not let her die!' The doctor made no answer to the passionate words, and again Ben buried his face in his hands, sitting

there before the fire silent and motionless as the dead. The doctor remained with the child until long after midnight, and then he came to Dr. Mayland's in strange company: Black Ben was his escort."

"What did Dr. Mayland say to such late hours?" Miss Nancy Leger inquired, unable to frame a question of higher import.

"Oh! doctors are used to late hours: a 'sick call,' you know, is at all hours a reasonable excuse."

"It is not possible," said Mrs. Cavendish Green, "that the higher families will patronize this new-comer."

"No, not the higher families," echoed Miss Nancy, erecting her head, and compressing her thin lips until you might have looked in vain for the "line of beauty." Now Miss Nancy belonged to the "higher families" of Ernsford—to the very highest, in fact: not that her father had attained to eminence in any particular line, but her grandfather had: he had been a coachman in his time, and if you rate rank atmospherically, the defunct coachman had been "high" enough, in all reason.

"Mr. Gray will not have him," Mrs. Cavendish Green further remarked: "he will send to Philadelphia for Dr. Archdale, should there be occasion for medical advice at Grayswood. I will do the same."

Mrs. Lockhart smiled dubiously: Mrs. Cavendish Green lived extensively upon credit, and it mattered little to any physician whether she patronized him or not: hence Mrs. Lockhart's smile at the remark, "I will do the same."

"Perhaps Mr. Winchester will employ him," suggested Mrs. Clauquet.

That remark was laughed at, as being quite a delicate stroke of wit, Mr. Winchester's poverty rendering *his* favor of very little account.

"How long was Dr. Mayland in Ernsford?" Miss Nancy asked.

"All his life," Mrs. Lockhart replied. "He practiced for thirty years and more in this town; so that you cannot wonder at the aversion our good people have to a strange doctor."

After a running fire of remarks, directed chiefly against the "strange doctor," the feminine conclave adjourned, agreeing to meet again when further information upon the subject could be given.

Despite all their threats and forebodings, the new doctor gained ground rapidly among the people of Ernsford. Dr. Mayland, who had been the chief medical practitioner in the town for many years, had gone abroad with his niece, a young girl whose failing health demanded change of climate. Before his departure he consulted an old friend in Philadelphia, Dr. Archdale, in reference to a successor in his practice, and the result of the conference was, that a stranger came to Ernsford one bleak night in March, and laid his credentials before Dr. Mayland. The old doctor took a strange fancy to the new-comer, and welcomed him cordially, wishing him fame and fortune in his new field of labor; and thus Dr. Aar came to fill Dr. Mayland's place in Ernsford. From the beginning his poor patients kept him busy: down among the hollows and by the river fever and sickness of various kinds made the wretched homes even more wretched, and the faithful physician found his labors almost too much for him; yet there never was cause for complaint of neglect or indifference: what Dr. Aar did, he did willingly and well. He lived plainly and unassumingly: it was hard to tell whether he was rich or poor. The house which he occupied was comfortable, yet by no means suggestive of extravagance. A stout country-woman presided over his ménage and looked after his interests generally, while a melancholy-faced man came occasionally to see that the well-kept garden in front of the house did credit to the owner.

As the doctor was coming in at his gate one evening, not many weeks after his arrival in Ernsford, a light touch upon his arm suddenly checked his footsteps. He turned to see who detained him, and found it to be the old negro who lived opposite—a white-haired old man, with little, if any, Caucasian blood in his veins.

"Does yer want an office-boy, Massa Doctor?" said the old man, with a courtesy profound enough for the presence of a king.

"I've been thinking about it," said the doctor, pleasantly. "Do you know of one?"

"Must he make de fires, and 'tend to de door, and take de names ob de poor folk who can't put der own name on de slate?"

"Yes, I believe that is the usual work for him."

"Won't he hab to mind nobody but you?" was the anxious question.

"I think not. Why do you ask that?"

"Not Missus Dabbs?" Mrs. Dabbs was the doctor's housekeeper, a very worthy woman, but a very peculiar specimen of worthiness.

Dr. Aar laughed as he answered, "There need be no fear of Mrs. Dabbs. She will let the boy alone."

"Den I's de boy, Massa Doctor!" said the old man, triumphantly, executing again that model of courtesies.

"You!" the doctor exclaimed, with difficulty repressing a smile.

"Yes, Massa Doctor, I's de boy!" returned the old man. "I used to be wid Massa Mayland before de rheumatis' sot in. Den I was too ole to work and I went home to Massa Gray's, and dey nussed me well again. Eberybody know me, I 'spect—old Uncle Mem. I's strong, Massa Doctor, and berry well now: dey spell de rheumatis', I 'spect. Dese old bones is good as new again. I can sit in de office and do de work, and I's better dan a boy. Dese boys, Massa Doctor, is drefful: dere ain't no bein' up to dem. Dey pussecutes de cat, and pulls de v'lets, and eats 'nuff for de great el'phant hisself." The old man paused in his oration to wipe his shining face with a gorgeous bandana of the dimensions of an ordinary table-cover.

Dr. Aar was laughing heartily at the well-drawn picture of "desé boys," and Uncle Mem gathered encouragement therefrom.

"Is I de boy, Massa Doctor?"

"If you think it will not be too hard

for you. Come in, until I have a talk with you," said the doctor, leading the way to the house.

"No, I's bery 'tankful, massa; but yer's terrible tired, and I'll go 'long home now."

"No, no," the doctor returned, impatiently. "I want to talk to you about your duties and yourself. Come in."

Old Uncle Mem followed the doctor into the office at a very dignified pace, so proud was he of the honor conferred on him.

"What is your name?" said the doctor, when they were seated.

"Agamemnon," the old man answered, delighted that he possessed so high-sounding a name, "but dey call me Uncle Mem. I 'spect de oder name's too hard for de little folks to say."

"Can you read and write?"

"Yes, massa: I learn dat eber so long ago," was the prompt reply. "My young massa, he say, when de teacher come to him, 'You learn, Mem, den I'll learn too;' den I laugh and say, 'Neber mind, massa, I's only a poor ole nigger.' Den he cry and beg bery hard, and ole massa he say, 'Mem, you'll hab to do it, I 'spect, or de boy'll neber learn nuffin.' Den I learn my A, B, C, and all de oder beginnin'ments, and bery soon dey gib me a book, and I spell, and I so bery slow my young massa he often say, 'Mem, you's dumber dan I is,' and I laugh and hurry up; but it was drefful hard, massa, drefful hard, and on'y for lub of my young massa I gib up ebery day."

"Were you a slave then?"

"Yes, massa, down in ole Virginny. Yer see, massa, my ole massa he marry my missus, Miss Lubly A'bufnot: den I go 'long wid *her*, and Massa Gray he my massa den, and young massa he Miss Lubly's son—young Massa A'bufnot Gray. Dey bring me Norf many a time, but I go back again to ole Virginny, I lub my missus and young massa so. Den when my missus, good Miss Lubly, die, she say to Massa Gray, 'Mem neber to be sold: I leab Mem to my son.' Bymeby, young massa he grow up to be a man, and he say to Mem, 'Uncle Mem, I gib

you your freedom, and your ole woman's too—my moder said so.' Den I cry out, 'I neber leab you, Massa A'bufnot! I don't want no freedom;' and my young massa he take my hand and say, 'Uncle Mem, you can lib wid me for eber'n'ever, but I gib you your freedom: my moder make me promise dat, you know.' Den dey all go 'way to France and oder places, and I go 'long wid dem, to 'tend to my young massa. Den, byme-by, de great trouble come. Massa Gray, he say drefful things to my young massa, and my young missus, Miss Lubly's oder chile, she get bery sick, and dey bring her home; but Massa A'bufnot, he neber come home no more, no more."

Tears were in the old man's eyes as he repeated the sadly-spoken "no more," and he fixed his gaze so earnestly upon Dr. Aar that the latter half averted his face from that keen scrutiny.

"What became of him?" the doctor asked.

"I neber know. He go 'way one night, and ole massa he say, 'Nebor say his name in dis house—he no son of mine;' and I come home 'long wid dem, and byme-by de news come dat Massa A'bufnot die eber so fur 'way. Den I keep quiet till my ole heart break, and I cry out, 'Leab me speak, Massa Gray! leab me say something 'bout young massa, on'y to gib my ole heart peace!' And Massa Gray turn 'round to me and say, 'Mem, *you* lub him better dan all. God bress you, Mem!' And my ole massa he cry like a baby, because he lub young massa all along. I 'spect, massa," said the old man, rising as he concluded, "you's tired list'nin' to my old talk, but you so bery kind, massa, I 'mos' fo'get. Good-night, massa; I's on hand to-morrow." And Uncle Mem passed out of the office, followed closely by the doctor.

"Good-night, Uncle Mem," said the doctor, from the hall door, watching the old man as he passed down the garden walk.

Mem turned, and seemed for a moment on the point of returning: then he called out, in a husky voice, "Good-night, and God lub you, Massa Aar!"

The old man walked slowly out of the gate and across the road to his home, pausing a while before he entered, and saying to himself, half aloud, "I wonder if he know?" And Dr. Aar, standing there upon his own threshold, with his eyes vacantly gazing into the silent night, spoke the selfsame words, "I wonder if he knows?" Knows what? and who is the "he" so strangely remembered under the solemn stars?

Uncle Mem proved himself a very model of "office-boys," winning golden words of commendation even from Mrs. Dabbs, whose rigid views of human frailty impelled her to regard praise, in the abstract, as a ministration to the Evil One. The school-boys, who were the good housekeeper's especial abominations, owing to their thousand-and-one offences in the way of ringing the office-bell, chasing the cat, etc., made an informal truce upon the accession of Mem to his circumscribed sovereignty. They would gather in little groups about the gate, and ply the old man with questions. "Did you find out where he came from?" "Does he never shave?" "Is his beard more than a yard long?" "Is he a Dutchman?" "What's his first name?" and a host of like interrogatories were stock always on hand among the boisterous crew. Old Mem would laugh at the inquisitiveness of the boys, and shake his head in answer to all questions regarding Dr. Aar: he liked the boys very well, but he could not or would not tell them anything about his master. "Tell us the time, then, Uncle Mem: I guess dinner's ready." Then Mem would draw out his watch, a ponderous contrivance—"present from young massa, eber so long 'go"—and, after careful calculation, would announce the exact time by his means of reckoning: if, perchance, some unbeliever might say, teasingly, "Look at the sun, Mem; the sun's ahead of you—your watch is slow," the old man had the same oracular answer always at command: "De sun may vary and de-vary, but my watch he neber do." Then came the boyish shouts and cheers for "Uncle Mem and his stunnin' old watch!"

One morning, as Uncle Mem was closing the door upon a departing visitor, he espied an old gentleman riding down the street toward Dr. Aar's office. Mem flung the door wide open, and in a moment had reached the gate and was standing upon the path outside. The rider, a powerfully-built, vigorous old man, upon whom the years sat lightly, save that the luxuriant hair was thickly sown with white, checked his horse and leaned down to shake hands with Mem:

"What are you doing here, Mem?"

"I's de office-boy, Massa Gray—Massa Aar's office-boy."

"Massa what, Mem?" was the hasty question, and Mr. Gray—for the horseman was Mem's old master—set his sharp gaze upon Mem's face. "What did you say? Ah!" he continued, recollecting himself in a flash, "I know now: you are Dr. Aar's office-boy. That's quite a joke!"

"No, Massa Gray, de bressed trufe: I's bery busy now," Mem replied, with an air of dignity.

"You need not be, Mem: come home and live with us—Addie will take good care of you."

"Yes, massa, you bery good to poor ole Mem, and Miss Ad'laide she one o' de bery angels; but de old times, massa, de ole times—dey neber come back."

Mr. Gray's handsome face clouded over at the words, and for a while there was silence: then Mem asked,

"When you come home, Massa Gray?"

"This morning, Mem—about an hour ago. I am going to Mr. Winchester's now: they say he has not been well lately. Has your wonderful doctor been down there yet?"

"Massa Winch'ster neber send for no doctor."

Again that strange cloud settled upon Mr. Gray's face, as if some memory, dark and sorrowful, had risen like a shadow before him. It was well known in Ernsford why Mr. Winchester never called in a doctor: he was too poor to venture upon such luxuries as professional advisers in any line, and too proud to take more than his money's worth even from those he loved best. He

lived in a curious old house, picturesque enough in the summer-time, with its mantling vines and its wealth of roses, but gloomy and unattractive in the dreary winter days. The gossiping community speculated upon his manner and means of living, but had little chance of ascertaining whether their speculations were well or ill founded. Few visitors crossed the threshold of that lonely home: the master was not inhospitable, but he lacked the means of displaying still the princely hospitality which had reigned supreme in a statelier home and an unforgettable time, when the Winchesters had owned their broad lands and their dusky bondmen, and had, by right of long descent and honorable bearing, been kings among their fellows. The stately home was ashes now, and the time, not so long past, a memory only: the broad lands had other owners, and the dusky bondmen called no man master; and they that had ruled right royally were scattered from their kingdom. Times had changed, and Stephen Winchester sat by his lonely hearth and grew strangely old with thinking—thinking by night and by day—of the storm of war that had swept his possessions away, and of the harvest of death which had gathered from him his best beloved. His pride kept his anguish from the open gaze of the world; yet he sorrowed unceasingly—not for himself, but for the sake of his daughter, the last left to him of all his children. His own days of life were well-nigh spent, and in the grave would come forgetfulness and rest; but then for *her*, so carefully reared, so tenderly beloved, what remained but a dark, uncertain future of poverty and care?

"Mem," said Mr. Gray, as he rode away from Dr. Aar's, "if you grow tired here, come home. Good-bye, and do not forget—come home whenever they begin to treat you badly."

Mem was profuse in his thanks, but Mr. Gray heard little of the old man's words: the spirited horse was already some distance down the road, and his master spurred him on, impatient to reach Mr. Winchester's. Not an hour

had passed when the noise of clattering hoofs again brought Mem to the garden gate: Mr. Gray was riding up the road at a furious pace, clouds of dust marking the rapid progress that the faithful horse was making. So terrified was Mem at the paleness of Mr. Gray's face that he could not at first find words to ask what the trouble was. Reining in his horse so suddenly as to force the noble animal back with the violence of the strain, the rider called out, "Mem, is the doctor at home?"

"Yes, massa. Nobody sick at home, Massa Gray?" The old servant's face betrayed how anxiously the question was asked.

"No, Mem, but Mr. Winchester is very bad. Tell the doctor to go at once: I think Mr. Winchester is dying. I cannot wait a moment—I promised to return as soon as possible." And again the horse was spurred on his journey.

When Dr. Aar reached Mr. Winchester's, he found Mr. Gray impatiently waiting for him.

"Mr. Winchester has been failing for some time, and to-day I brought him news that did no good, yet he compelled me to be candid with him and withhold nothing," Mr. Gray explained, upon the doctor's arrival.

Standing together in a darkened room, neither gentleman could rightly distinguish the features of the other, and all that Mr. Gray saw was a tall, lithe-limbed man, with fair hair and a foreign-looking beard: as he was not at all curious regarding the new doctor's personal appearance, he did not scan him closely.

Mr. Winchester had suffered a severe shock, yet was in no immediate danger of dying. "His face has grown twenty years older," said Mr. Gray, in a low voice, and the doctor nodded his head gravely: evidently he was a man of few words. Then Mr. Gray went down stairs, leaving the doctor with Mr. Winchester and his daughter, who had not left her father for a moment since that sudden faint had come upon him. Dr. Aar looked at the patient earnestly, marking the worn face and the snow-white hair, that told their tale of sorrow

as well as of years: then he glanced at the daughter, with her dark eyes and pale, clear-cut features, and thought of the sad story of pride and poverty that all Ernsford knew so well. When Dr. Aar rose to leave, Mary Winchester followed him out of the room, and, half closing the door, said, in the voice of one who would not be quieted by mere evasion or professional expressions of fallacious hope, "Dr. Aar, will my father live?"

"There is reason to hope that he will be almost himself again in a very few days."

"You would not deceive me?" she returned, laying her hand upon the doctor's arm, in her eagerness to induce perfect candor upon his part.

"Believe me, Miss Winchester," Dr. Aar answered, fixing his eyes upon the pale face that looked up so pleadingly, "I will not deceive you: a sudden change may come—your father is broken down in health—but there is no immediate danger under the present circumstances."

She thanked him for his candor, and suddenly extending her hand to him—she scarce knew what impulse prompted the action—said, while her shining eyes filled with tears, "My father will wonder why I delay. Good-morning." Then she withdrew her hand from his, and stole back to the quiet of the darkened room.

The days passed on, and the summer sun was waning: still, Stephen Winchester was a prisoner in his lonely home. Too weak to "go out under the open sky," he sat within, and grew sick at heart with very dread of his own danger.

"Why do I continue so feeble?" he asked, impatiently, one day. "I am not a very old man—Gray is older than I—yet here I am, chained to this spot day after day. Will it never end?"

"Mr. Winchester," replied Dr. Aar, to whom the remarks had been addressed, "your mind wears upon your body—you think too much."

"How can I help it?" was the fierce question. "Think too much! God

pity me! Thought is not so pleasant that I would not banish it for ever if I could." A long silence followed; then Mr. Winchester continued: "Do not think, Dr. Aar, that it is the mere physical shrinking from death that makes me a coward: it is not in our blood to fear death." In his glittering eyes came a gleam that told of the warrior-blood in his veins, and the shaken voice had in its tones a ring of warrior-pride. "I will tell you why I pray to live," the old man went on, leaning forward and clutching eagerly at Dr. Aar's hand, that lay upon the arm of Mr. Winchester's chair: "I want *her* to die first! I *will* not leave her: she has suffered enough, and she shall not struggle through the world alone. Surely God will be thus merciful to me, and take *her* first. *This* keeps me thinking: this and memory are wearing my soul away—wearing my soul away!"

Dr. Aar sat still, watching Mr. Winchester, and nervously moving the hand that the old man had grasped so fiercely in his excitement. Mary Winchester came into the room at this moment, saying, in her low, sweet voice, "Father, Mr. Gray will come home to Ernsford this afternoon."

"Will he, Mary? How do you know?"

"Ben came down with the message."

"Ben is one of your converts," said Mr. Winchester, turning with a smile to Dr. Aar. "Yes, and I think Mary also can put in a claim that way."

Mary Winchester colored and turned away from the earnest eyes of the doctor, while Mr. Winchester continued: "Addie Gray and my daughter were the only women in Ernsford who would set foot in Black Ben's cottage when that little child of his was in such need of care; and they tell me, Dr. Aar, that *you* saved the life of the little one. Ben is one of the best men in Gray's 'Works'—thanks to you for obtaining him an honest man's means of earning a living. Were you not afraid to recommend him?"

"They took him on probation: he is a superior workman, but his habits and his evil fame were a barrier in his way.

His very name—Black Ben—was given to him in derision, because the people around half fancied him in league with the Prince of Darkness. Whatever faults Ben has, ingratitude is not one of them, let them talk as they will."

"He would go through fire and blood for you," said Mary Winchester, addressing the doctor, while the crimson cheek and the flashing eyes gave her words strange significance.

"And he has made Mary's garden a very wonder of beauty: he came down in the evenings after his work, and spent hours in the garden, sparing neither time nor toil. There is some good even in the worst of men, but it takes no ordinary hand to draw it out. Mary tells me that on the first night of my sickness Ben came down as usual, and did not go home until morning, watching outside all night, lest you, Dr. Aar, might be needed here again, and no one at hand to summon you. He would not come in—he was obstinate on that point—and there he kept guard faithfully. Think of it! Black Ben, whom Ernsford righteousness looks upon as little better than an untamed animal!" Mr. Winchester concluded with a bitter smile at the thought of the so-called "righteousness" that lacked one thing in all its vaunted perfection; that one thing, the crown and glory of all righteousness—"Christian charity." "And Gray's coming home this afternoon?" the old man added, changing the subject with the question. "He has been here, and there, and everywhere, doing what he could to gather up my scattered fortunes, and without success. There's not a truer friend in all the world than Frederick Gray. We grew up together, studied together and traveled together, until marriage settled us down apart from each other—he in Virginia and I in Louisiana. We are Northern men by birth, but his parents and mine were Southerners, who lived part of the year in Philadelphia and part in Richmond. His father owned valuable mines in Pennsylvania, but all the possessions of my family were in the South; and when the war made havoc in the land—I was

in Philadelphia then, with Mary—I was left without home and fortune. Gray had been living in Ernsford for two or three years before that time: he had freed many of his slaves, and had come North for a purpose at first unknown to me. Afterward he told me that it was in the endeavor to retrieve his fortunes: an extravagant son had, in a European tour, done his best to bring the family to ruin. Poor Arbuthnot Gray! Like my boy Harry, he tried his father's heart many a time, yet how dearly that father loved him! Both are dead, both wayward sons, and here I am, an old man, where my boy Harry should be."

"Father!" said Mary Winchester, appealingly, going to her father's side and laying her hand upon his bowed head as if to calm him.

"Yes, Mary: I know what you mean, but I must talk about it now. I have been quiet for a long, long time. Let me talk of my boys, or I must think of them without a word, and that will fret me more. Let Dr. Aar see what my sons were like," Mr. Winchester said, pointing to heavy black drapery that hung in folds against the wall opposite to the window.

Mary Winchester drew the folds aside, and Dr. Aar saw two pictured faces—handsome, dark faces—startling one with their strange beauty. Upon the frame of each portrait was twined a wreath of evergreen, and pistol and sabre were crossed above, telling that a soldier's name and a soldier's fame kept these dark-faced Winchesters in undying memory. Dr. Aar looked at the portraits with a face so ghastly that Mary Winchester, noticing it, said, "Doctor, you look tired. Have you been so busy lately?"

"Very busy," he said, glad of an excuse for his strange agitation. "I came down to rest a while, and to talk to your father if I found him well enough to let me talk to him." He sat down again, and laid his hand, as it had before been laid, upon the arm of Mr. Winchester's chair.

"Were they not sons to be proud of?" the old man asked. "The Win-

chesters have had handsome men among them, but none like my boy Harry or baby Fred, as we called the younger. When the news came that poor Harry would trouble me no more, the night fell upon me for ever, and then—"

Mr. Winchester left his sentence unfinished: the hand that had been resting on his chair dropped like lead, and Dr. Aar fell heavily back with a hoarse cry, as of one dying. He heard the sad words that closed the old man's lament: then he forgot the singing birds and the summer sun, and again he was amid the blaze of lamps and the tumult of angry voices in a group of desperate men: he saw the face of Harry Winchester, the man he had murdered years before in that dreadful gambling-house in Baden. His pulses were on fire, and his heart seemed girt about with flame, and then he remembered nothing more until a woman's voice aroused him. A woman's hand was upon his brow, and dark eyes—were they Harry Winchester's splendid eyes again mocking him?—were anxiously bent upon his face. What did it all mean? He looked up, and saw the face of the picture—that soldier's face so strangely beautiful—and then he closed his eyes wearily, scarce dreading the death that seemed even then to be stealing his senses. He soon recovered consciousness: strong with extraordinary strength, the struggle was fierce, and in a few minutes he was almost himself again. He tried to rise, but he could not, and he said, with a ghastly attempt at a smile, "The physician has turned patient. Pardon me for forgetting my part."

"You have been overworking yourself," said Mr. Winchester, anxiously.

"Yes, and now the crisis has past," said the doctor, looking vacantly around.

Intervals of silence and fragmentary conversation followed, and then Dr. Aar asked, returning to the subject so unceremoniously interrupted, "Were both your sons soldiers? You did not tell me that, I believe."

"Yes, both were soldiers, trained to the profession of arms from their boyhood. Fred remained in the army, but

Harry resigned soon after his graduation, and went abroad. The navy would have suited him better; yet he made his choice of his own free will, because he did not wish to be separated from Fred, who thought West Point the *ultima thule* of a boy's ambitious longings. Until Harry went abroad, the two brothers were seldom seen apart; and time proved that this rare union had kept each from forming intimacies less worthy. While Harry was in Europe, his generous, uncalculating disposition drew around him hosts of men who called themselves friends, but few of them honored the title. At one time, Fred thought it best to follow Harry and bring him home; but the war broke out and the soldier could not desert his post: then Harry, without having given us any intimation of his return, came one day to say good-bye, and he too had resolved upon taking up arms. When the time came to part, Harry said, turning to Fred last of all, and kissing, with tenderness almost womanly, the face so like his own: "Good-bye, baby Fred: we are parted now for ever;" and then only was the dark truth made manifest to us—brother against brother! Was not my cup of bitterness full?"

Dr. Aar sat like one transfixed. Did he hear aright, or was it all a dream whose awakening would be the agony of death itself? Mr. Winchester went on abstractedly, not perceiving the strange look upon the doctor's face:

"They fell upon the same day, in the same battle—one on one side, and one on the other; and they came home, after all, together, my brave boys whom I loved so well! One—baby Fred—was buried with all the honors of war, amid the rattle of musketry, and floating flags, and mourning voices, with the stars and stripes that he had died for folded above his coffin; and the other—my boy Harry—we laid in his quiet grave, with the blood-stained rebel flag upon his breast, just as his comrades had left him. 'For Fred's sake, father,' Mary says, when she twines the evergreen upon *that* picture, but her heart says, 'For Harry's sake, whom we loved

so well!' Now, Mary," Mr. Winchester concluded, "I will talk no more: is that what your entreating eyes mean, my darling? Do they mean that Dr. Aar is tired and I am tired, and quiet is needed for both of us? Bring me the paper, then, and I will do your bidding dutifully."

"What could I do without her, after all?" he said, when she had left the room. "And yet—and yet—" He broke off abruptly, relapsing into the dreamy state peculiar to him.

"Mr. Winchester," said Dr. Aar, rising and looking straight at Mr. Winchester with the look of one nerved to desperate action, "what I am going to say has been in my heart for many a day, yet I never dared to say it until now. I have loved your daughter since that day upon which I first set foot in your house." Here he hesitated, the face that had been so pale was crimson, while the low deep voice betrayed the intensity of a strong man's passionate emotion.

"Well?" said Mr. Winchester, looking up wonderingly, as if he scarce understood what the doctor was saying.

"If I can win her for my wife, what will you say to me?" Finding that the old man made no reply, the doctor continued: "I am a gentleman by birth and education, as society rates such things—"

"I believe you *are* a gentleman," Mr. Winchester interrupted, "and no man but a gentleman shall come to me to ask consent to marry *my* daughter. Though she has no fortune at command, she is a lady," was the proud reflection. "Give me time to think—this is so new to me."

Mary Winchester's entrance put a stop to the conversation and prompted the sudden withdrawal of Dr. Aar. Mr. Winchester said nothing to induce him to remain, yet gave this word of hope as they shook hands at parting: "You ask me what I would say to you. I say it now, Dr. Aar: let *her* answer be mine. Good-bye."

Mary Winchester came down stairs with the doctor: she detained him a mo-

ment to say, "Are you not afraid that walking in the hot sun will affect you again?"

"I will drive home: Mrs. Lockhart's sister is sick, and I must pay a visit there on my way, or I would stay longer. May I come again this evening?" He bent his earnest eyes upon her, and caught both her trembling hands in his. "Did you hear what your father said: 'Let her answer be mine'? Yes? but you did not understand. Do you now? Will you be my wife, or will you send me from you for ever? Tell me. I thought myself patient, but I am not now." The trembling hands were closely clasped in his, and the shining eyes—those dark eyes so like dead Harry Winchester's—looked up a moment, wide and wondering: then the great tears fell, and Mary Winchester bent her face over the clasped hands and sobbed aloud—only for a moment, one brief moment, in which not a word was spoken—and again she raised her head and said, in her low, sweet tones, "I have answered you: let me go now." He said, "Good-bye" reluctantly. Looking back as he drove off, he saw her standing in the doorway, still watching him: he nodded gayly, and then gave the word to his impatient horse. Ten minutes later he was in Mrs. Lockhart's parlor. He listened to the chatter of the ladies assembled there—Mrs. Lockhart's sister had reached that stage of convalescence justifying the infliction of gossiping visitors—he submitted to Miss Nancy Leger's insipidity, smiled at Mrs. Claquet's questionings, and was deference itself to the nobly-connected Mrs. Cavendish Green, until forbearance ceased to be a virtue. They rallied him upon his constant attendance at Mr. Winchester's, and criticised freely the "ridiculous pride of a poor, old, broken-down gentleman!" This was a sore point with Mrs. Claquet, as the "ridiculous pride" aforesaid had scorned the son of Madame Claquet when he had pompously presented his proposals for the hand of the "broken-down gentleman's" daughter.

"I thought of asking her to give singing-lessons to my children," said

Mrs. Cavendish Green, "but I have hesitated, as her conduct does not altogether please me."

"Poor creature!" Miss Nancy ejaculated, endeavoring to smuggle a tear aboard her waterproof and weather-warped eyes; but the "eyes" had it this time, and Miss Nancy's endeavor was a signal failure.

Dr. Aar's face darkened ominously, and his fingers twitched nervously at the moustache shading his firm lip.

"She must give up her walks in the garden and her visits to Black Ben's cottage if she wishes to retain her friends; unless, perchance," insinuated the venomous dame, "you are the friend she cares most to retain."

"I hope so," was the quiet answer, and Dr. Aar bowed himself out without another word, smiling to himself at the consternation which he had created.

"A penniless doctor!" exclaimed Mrs. Cavendish Green, in dismay. Then the Babel of voices and the charming reflections upon "an adventurer who might have been a felon for all that was known of him!" Might have been, indeed, Mrs. Cavendish Green, but who was not, thank God! since Harry Winchester had not died on that dreadful night in Baden, and the weight of murder was thus lifted from a penitent soul.

When Dr. Aar reached Mr. Winchester's that evening, he found Mr. Gray standing at the window of the lower room, talking to Mary of his journey.

"Good-evening, doctor. I believe I knew your step, although I heard it but once before. It has a familiar ring to me."

"Good-evening," the doctor briefly returned, passing in at once and going up to Mr. Winchester's room.

"What an alarmingly silent man!" Mr. Gray commented, turning to look after the doctor. "He'll give you time to talk, child: you need not fear that. What! blushing again? I thought you blushed yourself out while your father was telling this new story to me. Never mind, my little one," he fondly added, kissing the crimson cheek: "you know I am an old friend—I am privileged to

tease you. I like this Dr. Aar, yet I have not exchanged a dozen sentences with him: indeed, I have never seen his face distinctly. I have been away from home so often that I had little chance of making his acquaintance. After the lights are lit, I'll take a good look at him."

"Enjoying the moonlight?" said Mr. Gray, when he and Mary entered Mr. Winchester's room. "It is far more pleasant to me to sit in this mellowed glow than to endure the glare of gas on a warm night."

"Gas is a luxury in Ernsford; therefore it must be preferable to the moon, in the estimation of some of our people," Mary Winchester replied.

"What do you say, Doctor Aar?" asked Mr. Gray, anxious to draw the "alarmingly silent man" into conversation. "Are you superstitious upon any point?"

"I think not: perhaps I am, however. The day of fairies may not yet be past."

"The day of giants is not," Mr. Gray returned, with a smile, "when this little town of Ernsford holds two men of our build. Do you want to rob me of the palm? I was the tallest man in Ernsford, but I think you overtop me an inch or so." Mr. Gray walked over toward the doctor, as if desirous of proving what he had said.

"If I overtop you an inch or so," said the doctor, rising and standing where the moonlight fell upon him, "I have gained it since we last measured heights: you were the taller then."

"Then!" Mr. Gray repeated, in bewilderment. Mr. Winchester, forgetting his feebleness, rose suddenly to his feet, while Mary, at her father's side, held his arm closely, dreading the excitement for him. Mr. Gray saw the doctor's face, fairly and clearly outlined in the moonlight, caught the well-remembered look in the earnest eyes, and then called out, hoarsely and passionately: "Tell me who you are!" at the same time laying his hand heavily upon the doctor's shoulder.

"I am Arbuthnot Gray." And the two men stood—father and son, so long

parted, so strangely reunited—silently confronting each other in the moonlight. Mr. Winchester moved forward a pace and then stood still, and Mary stole out of the room, unable to control her tears because of this Arbuthnot Gray, who had come back, as it were, from the dead! She soon returned to say that Mem had come with a message for the doctor.

"Tell him to come up," said Mr. Gray, half glad of the interruption. "But before you go, child, say one word to this son of mine."

Woman-like, she could not say "one word" to him: a painful, choking sensation made the low, sweet voice a recreant in that moment, and all that Mary Winchester could do was to look up, with eyes shining in tears, and lay her hand in the doctor's: then, quickly withdrawing from his close grasp, she passed out of the room and summoned old Mem. By this time the lights were lit, and when the old servant came in he saw Mr. Gray and the doctor standing side by side.

"Mem," said Mr. Gray, "do you know who this is?"

"Oh, massa, I know'd it all along!" And old Mem broke down ingloriously.

"Knew it all along! I've a mind to thrash you, you black rascal! But I cannot do that, I suppose: though you are black, you're free," returned Mr. Gray, laughingly teasing the faithful old man.

"Yes, massa, do' I's black, I's free. De trufe make me free—young massa's trufe. Young massa t'rash me if he like, but nobody else neber t'rash ole Mem."

"And you knew me all along?" asked the doctor, shaking old Mem's trembling hand.

"Yes, Massa Aar. De name tell me little, and de face tell me more. Den I say to ole Mem, 'Massa Aar say nuffin' to ole Mem, Mem say nuffin' to him;' and I keep bery quiet, and byme-by, bress de Lord! de trufe fin' hisself out." Here Mem suddenly recollected that he had a message to deliver. "A note from Missus Cabendish Green, fust cousin or some'hin' to de Duke o' Dehillsheer,

whereber dat is," said Mem, with a broad grin at his own humor.

The doctor read the note, and then held it over the flame of the lamp until little remained of the dainty sheet with its monogram and pretentious crest—the crest of the "younger branch of the Cavendishes!" This covert insult was all that the note contained: "It may be well for you to know that a friend of Miss Leger's, just arrived in Ernsford, knew you when you were *not* Dr. Aar." The doctor guessed at once who the "friend" was—tormenting Tom Archdale, Dr. Archdale's son, who had come home from California not twenty-four hours before, and who had, during the course of a visit to "Dr. Aar," threatened "to raise a row among the old women in the town" before the day would be over, by hinting that "Dr. Aar" was merely an assumed name.

"Where are you going, Mem?" said Mr. Gray, when the lateness of the hour warned the visitors that it was time to leave.

"Whereber young massa go: de ole times, Massa Gray, dey come back now, you know," said old Mem with a grave face. "If Massa Ar go wid you, den I go—for eber'n'ever, young massa say eber so long 'go."

"When I left you," said the doctor, as they walked home in the moonlight, and old Mem trotted after, singing low snatches of unearthly melody, "on that night in which I shot Harry Winchester, I thought we had parted for ever. Your words, 'No murderer shall call himself my son,' rang in my ears night and day, and I wandered over the world, outcast and disowned, remorse my closest companion. Until to-day I did not know the truth about Harry Winchester: I thought he had died that night in Baden. I met Tom Archdale in California, and he knew me at once: you remember we took our degrees in medicine at the same German universities. Then I came to Philadelphia with a letter of introduction to Tom's father, and a strange chance brought me to Ernsford. At the time I did not know that you had taken up your residence here permanently."

Before they reached Grayswood, the doctor had given many of the details of his wanderings. Addie Gray was waiting for her father, and was surprised to see him enter with the man whom she had seen once or twice as "Dr. Aar." "Tell her yourself, boy," said Mr. Gray, urging the doctor forward, and the story was soon told, while Addie Gray wept and laughed by turns, and all the while clung to the brother whom she had so idolized and had never learned to forget.

By noon of the next day, Ernsford rang with the news. With Tom Archdale as herald-in-chief, and old Mem his faithful ally, it would have been more than wonderful had there remained in the town one person yet unadvised or unbelieving.

"If you do not take care," said reckless Tom to the doctor, "Miss Nancy Leger will marry you. They tell me she had a hankering after your father, and that hankering may devolve upon your father's son."

When Mr. Gray drove down to the "Iron Works" that evening, he took his son with him. They found the workmen assembled in an open field adjoining, and checked their horses, wondering what the crowd meant: they were soon enlightened. Black Ben, who had got up the "demonstration," stepped forward and, in a brief, well-worded address, congratulated the master and welcomed "the master's son:" then the brawny-armed multitude flung their caps in the air, and cheered and shouted like madmen for "Mr. Gray and the doctor!" Tradition runs that Dr. Arbuthnot Gray made a speech on the occasion: perhaps he did, but he told his dark-eyed wife, many a day afterward, that the "lump in his throat" rendered his voice very unmanageable on that memorable day.

Before the autumn passed there was a wedding in Ernsford church—a double wedding, such as one does not see every day. Mrs. Cavendish Green was "indisposed," and could not attend, but Mrs. Claquet occupied a conspicuous seat, and Miss Nancy Leger's charming face, porcelain-finished, beamed from a post

of honor. Mr. Winchester, erect and almost strong again, gave his daughter away; and from a front pew, looking on at the ceremony, a broad-brimmed old gentleman saw his son Tom "walk out of meeting" virtually and for ever with one of the "world's people," that one of the "world's people" being Addie Gray.

There is a "new doctor" in Ernsford, and his name is Tom Archdale, and the people have no reason to complain of him; but then you must understand these are not a progressive people, and they are given to strange fondnesses and fancies: such, for instance, as believing that the poor and the afflicted in all Ernsford can find no friend like "Dr.

Aar." Perhaps they are right: his dark-eyed wife thinks so; and the "broken-down gentleman" who sits by Arbuthnot Gray's fireside and talks of "my boy Harry, whom I loved so well," is happy in the selfsame thought. Black Ben, now Mr. Benjamin Harris, foreman in the "Works," does not say much, but thinks all the more, and lets his honesty and fidelity to the trust imposed in him supply the place of mere words of grateful esteem. If you want to know old Mem's opinion, he will give it for the asking; and, furthermore, he will supplement his answer by a long account of "de ole time, and my fust missus, young massa's moder, good Miss Lubly, who am now a saint in heben!"

THE MANNERINGS.

THE Mannerings, of Mannering Manor, Mannerington, are an aristocratic American family, claiming descent from, and kinship with, a noble English family of the same name. In fact, we are directly or indirectly, allied with several peers of the realm—I mean the English realm—among whom his Grace the Duke of Fluffington holds pre-eminence. Without further parley, it will, I hope, be seen that we are people of some consequence.

Mannerington, it may be said in passing, is an inland town in one of the more populous of the Eastern States.

It is not quite a city, though its aspirations are charterward, and will perhaps be realized at no distant day. The Manor is far enough outside the busy heart of the town to allow ample breadth of grounds and overarching sky, and is, in truth, a goodly place. It was built late in life by my grandfather, Theophilus Mannering, who, having from some cause fallen under the ban of the head of the family in his time, came to this country when a young man, and became afterward the founder of a town, of his own fortunes, and, later, of the family seat.

Two years ago, while leading the nomadic life dear to a bachelor in easy circumstances, I was recalled home by the, to me, startling intelligence that my brother, Robert Fluffington Mannering, had become involved pecuniarily, and was in danger of compromising the family dignity by sacrificing the Manor and its belongings to the rapacity of his creditors. The letter conveying this intelligence was from my niece, Madeline Mannering. It was a straightforward statement of facts, without any branching off into sensationalism, such as most women would have indulged in under the circumstances. From it I conceived a high respect for my niece, whom I remembered a dozen years back as a ten-year-old child, quiet and sensible, but not otherwise remarkable. With the family honor at stake, I of course lost no time in returning home, being the more impelled to haste that the letter had been several weeks awaiting my return from a yachting cruise.

It was on a fine morning in June that I reached Mannerington. The sun was shining brightly I remember, as it often does of a June morning. A vocal concert was also in progress, to which everybody had free tickets, the principal performer being a M^{lle} Robin, of the family, it is believed, of the illustrious Cock Robin, whose tragical end is rather widely known. Mademoiselle was well sustained by other performers, all of whom were singers of note.

Having cleaned myself from railway dust and partaken of a cup of coffee, I proceeded at once to the Manor. My brother's greeting was glad almost to boyishness. For a moment I think we both forgot the years which had made him the father of a family and me a—well, a waif—and were back again in the old days of boyhood, when I, though the younger, had always been the champion and defender of my more flighty but light-hearted and most winsome brother.

"Ah, Raffy," cried Robert, facing me with both hands upon my shoulders, "don't you feel like telling me how much I have grown? I am sure you are a head taller than when I saw you last.

But come in, come in! The girls will be glad indeed of this."

"But about your affairs, Robbie?" I hastened to interpose. "I have come to help you, you know."

"Oh, it is all right now," he returned, with a shade of embarrassment, as I thought, in his manner. "We have pulled through."

He thereupon picked up a pebble, and, after balancing it upon his thumb and forefinger, spun it away quite out of sight. It was an old trick of his boyhood, which brought my heart to my mouth. At that moment I was feeling something of the sad pathos there is in "the days that are no more." Robert may have had similar feelings, for his face was unusually grave, but he repeated the exercise I have mentioned as we walked on to the house, and seemed to spin off all serious emotions with the pebbles which whizzed from his hand.

"You have come to stay, Raffy?" he said at length. "We are going to keep you, now that we have you back again."

I reflected that emergencies might arise in which my help would be invaluable, though it seemed not to be needed now. Accordingly, I promised that, for the present at least, I would remain in Mannerington. In keeping with this promise, I settled quietly down, ostensibly occupying bachelor's lodgings, but living a good deal at the Manor. The Misses Mannering came, I believe, to regard me as a model for bachelor uncles. I attended them upon frequent shopping forays, rode, sailed or sung with them, and was, in fact, always at their command.

Miss Mannering was the beauty of the family. She had the orthodox allowance of pink-and-white complexion, pearly teeth, well-cut features, and crimped, golden hair. She appropriated her opinions from those with whom she was intimate, laughed most musically at whatever was said, done or worn not quite *à la mode*; and was, in truth, a pretty, charming creature, besides being the very pink of propriety, and indeed a prize carnation. I dare say she never originated an idea in her life. Being, how-

ever, well read, and having been used from infancy to the discourse of cultivated people, she could talk fluently enough, and passed in society for a person of considerable intellectual discrimination.

Madeline was a girl of less beauty and more strength of character. Without seeming to put herself forward unduly, she had nevertheless considerable authority in the house. The servants feared while they also respected her; her sisters were constantly appealing to her judgment; and even papa and mamma showed a good deal of deference to her opinions.

Beatrice was the youngest and the gladdest-hearted of the sisters. Much of her father's old winsome grace was reproduced in her, with many an added charm of her own. She was just out of school when I returned to Mannerington, and with her bright girl's face and her arch, beguiling ways she speedily became my favorite. Before she had been two weeks at home she had ridden every horse in the Mannering stables, explored Mannerington in its wildest recesses, and sprained her ankle by falling from the top of a steep bluff, down which she attempted to scramble for some wonderful mosses lying below. She was brought home in a clumsy farm-wagon by a tallish farmer's son, who had been hoeing corn near the scene of her misadventure. This young man, finding the girl unable to walk, at first proposed carrying her home in his arms—a proceeding to which she laughingly objected. He then bethought himself of the farm-wagon, and gave her leave to choose between riding home in that or waiting at the farm-house, which was hard by, until he could go up to the Manor and have the carriage sent for her. Beatrice chose to go at once, much to the annoyance of Mrs. and Miss Mannering, who, in their mortification that a Mannering should have been seen riding in a cart, quite forgot the attention due to a swollen Mannering limb. Madeline, however, bathed and bandaged the sprain, and otherwise provided for her sister's comfort. Beatrice meanwhile made merry

over the mortification of her family, and, more from a spirit of perversity than any other, I think, extolled the comfort of the farmer's wagon and the courtesy of the farmer's son. When Robert came home at night, she reproduced the scene for his diversion, imitating mamma's high-bred consternation and Theo's shocked demeanor with a great deal of spirit. Robert, who had looked a little careworn when he came in, was soon as buoyant in appearance as his youngest child. One might have fancied that the accident of the afternoon was the finest joke in the world to each of them. Even mamma and Theo could not help laughing at the burlesque upon themselves which Beatrice improvised, and all were soon as gay as possible—all except Madeline, that is. She watched her father's face anxiously until the careworn look had disappeared. Then with a faint sigh she took a seat a little apart, and seemed closely occupied with some trifle of work. By and by she went to Beatrice and laid her hand upon her sister's forehead.

"You are tiring yourself, dear," she said. "I think Uncle Raphael will be willing to carry you up stairs."

"It ought to be the farmer's son," laughed Beatrice. "Uncle Raffy isn't half muscular enough for such a feat."

Whereupon I lifted her up and carried her off, eager to show that yachting and similar exercises had not left me wanting in muscular force. Theo led the way with a light, and Mrs. Mannering followed, carrying some liniments, so that we made quite a procession of it. When I returned to the parlor, I noticed that Madeline and her father were holding a whispered conversation, which was interrupted by my entrance. The careworn look had returned to Robert's face, and Madeline's had a strange, undefinable expression. But Robert seemed to have tossed off the thought of care even while I was becoming aware of its presence, and Madeline's features settled more slowly into their ordinary quiet.

"It is probably some trifling domestic annoyance," I thought, and dismissed all

uneasiness upon the subject from my mind.

Somewhere about this time I received a call at my lodgings from a lawyer of the name of Julius Stone. This gentleman's personal appearance was by no means prepossessing. His features were ill-assorted: his little, beady black eyes had an evil look; his hair and eyebrows, which should have been dark to correspond with his general complexion, were the color of tarnished brass; his whiskers were not worth mentioning, though there certainly was a straggling, yellowish growth about his chin and upper lip. He came about a legacy of five thousand dollars left me by my aunt, Mrs. Margaret Stephenson, lately deceased—he, as it appeared, having been her lawyer.

"An inconsiderable sum to a Mannering, sir. Yes, sir," said Julius Stone. "We know something of the Mannering greatness about here, and of the Mannering pride, begging your pardon for mentioning it. Not a bad thing, neither, pride isn't; that is, for your sort of people. Of course it would be ridiculous in a poor devil like me. Of course, sir. Yes, sir. Know Allan Stephenson?"

"No," I answered, curtly enough, not liking the fellow's style of address overmuch.

"Mrs. Stephenson's nephew, you know—or, rather, her husband's nephew. He's not about here now, I believe. Gone off to earn his living, probably. He's another of the proud sort, sir. Yes, sir. Quite a coming down for him to get only five thousand dollars out of the estate, instead of fifty thousand, as he'd been counting upon. 'To him that hath shall be given.' That's Scripture, ain't it? And a mighty fine arrangement it is for the him that hath. Well, life has its ups and downs, but there are some people who are always coming in for the ups. Lucky fellow, your brother! Always was, sir. Yes, sir. That's because he's a Mannering, I suppose you think. Nice girl, Madeline Mannering."

"Who?" I questioned with indignant emphasis.

"Your niece. Number Two, I call her. Not so pretty as Number One, but

a nice girl. A sensible one, too, sir. Yes, sir. Glad to have the honor of knowing her uncle. Good-day, sir."

I don't know what kept me from following the fellow down stairs and shaking him out of his boots. I was certainly angry enough to do it. But I choked down my wrath, and Julius Stone went his way unmolested, though I had a feeling that I was considerably greater than the general by whom Vicksburg was taken, unless Solomon was guilty of hyperbole when he made his famous comparison between that sort of man and him that ruleth his spirit.

When I went up to the Manor that afternoon, I told Madeline about my morning visitor, commenting jestingly upon the extent to which her fame for good sense must have spread abroad, since it had reached the ears of a person like Julius Stone. Instead of laughing with me over my jest, as I had naturally expected her to do, Madeline flung her head down upon her hands and burst into a storm of tears.

"Why, Madeline," I cried, beginning to feel particularly uncomfortable, as a man will when he has made a woman cry, "I did not think you would be so much annoyed, or I would not have mentioned it. It really is not worth caring about."

Presently the storm calmed, as suddenly as it had burst forth. Madeline resumed the sewing which had dropped upon her lap, and was soon talking in her old, sensible way.

It was not long before I discovered that Julius Stone was often back and forth at the Manor. Once I met him walking in the garden with Madeline. Her face had the inscrutable look it had worn the evening I interrupted her whispered consultation with her father.

"So that is her business look," I thought. "I wonder if she looked like that when she wrote for me to come home. It is intolerable, the way my brother shifts off his affairs upon that girl. I must really speak to Robert about it."

Beatrice, in the mean time, had recovered from her sprain. Her old ac-

tivity had been in no wise impaired by the temporary restraint, but here, there and everywhere her bright face appeared, and was always as full of sunshine as is a cloudless sky in spring. I believe I have forgotten to mention that, on the morning following her accident, Caleb Armstrong, the farmer's son, brought her a graceful little willow basket, in which some beautiful mosses were tastefully arranged. If the gift had fallen into the hands of Mrs. Mannering or Theo, I doubt if it would ever have reached the person for whom it was designed. But Madeline carried the basket up stairs to her sister, whose delight was twittered out in a succession of little bird-like laughs.

"See, Uncle Raffy!" she cried; "was ever any thing so pretty? It is fit for Titania's boudoir, is it not? I am sure Caleb Armstrong must have the tastes of a gentleman, rustic though he be."

"Undoubtedly the rustic and the gentleman have some tastes in common," I returned, lifting my niece to carry her down to the parlor. The basket and the mosses went with us, and were exhibited there with pleased exultation.

"My dear," said mamma, "the collection is quite pretty; and since it seems to give you pleasure, I shall allow you to retain it, overlooking for once the young farmer's boldness in bringing it here. But I hope it will be a warning to you not to fall in the way of such people again."

"My dear mamma," returned Beatrice, with gay mockery, "when I fall from the top of Acorn Bluff again, it shall certainly be at the feet of a President in chrysalis, at the very least. There is no use in speaking for a sprig of royalty, because that sort of exotic is not cultivated in our country."

"I wish we had, now and then, a prince of the blood here," said Theo, with a little sigh.

"Try foreign travel," Beatrice suggested. "You would probably only have to come, be seen and overcome."

"Theo, at least, will never forget that she is a Mannering," said mamma, looking complacently upon her first-born.

I do not wish to do my brother's wife the injustice of representing her only as an embodiment of aristocratic pride. Undoubtedly her character bore an incrustation composed mainly of that element, but beneath the surface she may have been an affectionate wife and mother and an obliging friend and neighbor. I have thought it necessary to make this explanation, because I am conscious of having loved her less than most others of his family, and am therefore likely to set off her character with less tenderness of touch. Certain it is that not one of her children would have pained her willingly—the saucy, fun-loving Beatrice least of all.

The summer waned imperceptibly, and its incidents, except now and then one bolder in outline than the rest, have receded into the hazy dimness of the past. One of these exceptional instances I now recall.

It was on a morning late in August, I think, that I started out from my lodging, intending to go up to the Manor. Then recollecting that I had promised Theo some water-lilies, which flowers were getting rare, as it was late in the season for them, I proceeded first to the shore of the pond, where I expected to find my sail-boat. To my surprise, however, it was gone. But out upon the water I could descry its white sail shooting briskly off before a stiff breeze.

"Who—"

But no matter for the exact form of inquiry I made use of. It received no immediate answer, not even from the traditional echo, said to be so given to responses on such occasions. In default of other ways of getting the information demanded by my question—of which I may say, perhaps, that it was rather emphatic—I determined to wait under shelter of some trees until the boat should be brought back. I had a book in my pocket: in fact, I was seldom without that resource against ennui. Moreover, some friendly squirrels improvised an entertainment for my diversion, which was given in their very best style; and a good-natured woodchuck popped his head out of a hole, on similar thoughts

intent, I have no doubt. But being naturally of a retiring disposition, he lost his self-possession on facing his spectator, and was unable to come out particularly strong in the character of a mountebank. With such resources as I have mentioned the waiting was relieved of its tedium. In fact, I had nearly forgotten with what purpose I was there, when, from the water, I heard the flapping of a sail, and presently the grating of a boat upon the pebbly beach. Then a young man sprang to the ground, and, having made the craft secure, turned to help out his companion. The pair were Beatrice Mannerling and Caleb Armstrong.

"They say stolen fruit is sweetest, and I suppose that is why our sail has been so nice," laughed Beatrice, shaking out the crumpled folds of her white morning dress. "I wonder—What, sir!"

The transition from a laughing tone to one resentful and haughty was as marked as it was sudden. There was reason enough, too, for the girl's resentment, as I thought, for the insolent fellow had kissed her on her cheek!

"Stolen fruit," retorted Caleb Armstrong. "I have proved that what they say of it is true."

"I have been to blame," said Beatrice, in a grieved tone. "You would never have dared to do that if I had not given you some cause to misinterpret me. Go now. I am not so angry with you as with myself, but I cannot bear the sight of you."

I thought it quite time now for me to interpose.

"Perhaps I ought to thank you," I said, stepping out from my covert, "for bringing this young lady to a sense of her imprudence; but she will not need to have the lesson repeated. Come, Beatrice."

She did not stir immediately, but stood quite silent, with downcast eyes and varying color. By and by she stepped toward the young man with extended hand.

"My uncle is right," she said: "I shall not need to have the lesson repeated. Good-bye."

"Do you mean," he asked, grinding

his heel in among the sand and pebbles on the shore, "that this is to end our acquaintance?"

"I mean, at least, that it is to end our stolen interviews. If the time should ever come that we can meet without concealment, I shall be willing to continue the acquaintance."

"If that means," said the other, bitterly, "that we may meet again when it can be done with the consent of all the Mannerings, our acquaintance may indeed be said to have ended."

"In that you are probably quite right," I interposed; and again I said, "Come, Beatrice."

She no longer hesitated, but came to my side, and we walked away together, leaving Caleb Armstrong still grinding prints of his boot-heel into the pebbly soil of the beach. We had scarcely gone a dozen rods, however, when we found him in the path before us.

"Not in anger, Beatrice!" he cried. "Say that you forgive me."

"I am sure," said Beatrice, with a quiet dignity of which, until to-day, I should scarcely have thought my laughter-loving niece capable, "that you did not mean to pain me, and I forgive you."

"God bless you for that!" said the young man, and disappeared as suddenly as he had come in our way.

"How long has this been going on?" I asked.

"This what?" questioned my niece, rather sharply, detecting I suppose, somewhat of distaste in my tone, and which, truth to tell, I was at no great pains to disguise.

"This highly suitable—acquaintance," I replied, hesitating a little for the last word.

Beatrice flashed a searching look at me out of her beautiful eyes: then walked proudly on, taking no more notice of me than if I had been an overgrown insect, whose affairs happened to require him to travel in the same direction as herself.

"Nonsense, Beatrice! There is no need of our making a quarrel of it. The fellow has had his lesson, and will trouble you no more, I hope. I am glad you had the good sense to retrieve so promptly

what your thoughtlessness might have made a grave indiscretion. Now you have only to forget the fellow and his impertinence."

She turned her eyes full upon me now.

"Are you sure that is all?" she asked.

"I see no reason why it is not."

"But what if I love this fellow, Uncle Raphael?" with a rush of carmine to cheek and brow.

"I sincerely hope you do not," I returned, beginning to feel considerable uneasiness.

"Is it because he is a farmer's son?"

This was close questioning. One does not like to own to a want of magnanimity, such as an affirmative answer would have implied. Yet I knew nothing against Caleb Armstrong, except his inferior social position.

"Is he worthy of you in other respects?" I asked, at length.

"I think he is. But it does not matter now. If you and I were the only Mannerings, I could convert you to my way of thinking in a half hour. But there are mamma and Theo: they would make a drawn battle of it. Neither, I suppose, would papa and Madeline approve. Perhaps I could even carry the point against them all, but at such a cost of unhappiness to them and to myself that I shall not attempt the struggle. And, after all, what does it matter? Only a few rays of brightness lost from my life. I have but to make the most of the light remaining, in order not to miss that which has been snuffed out."

"Beatrice, you are a woman not only to be admired, but honored."

"*Merci!* But methinks I like the admiration better. I fancy it may be rather fatiguing 'to pluck bright Honor from the pale-faced moon'—at least for anybody but a Hotspur."

We had now come to the end of our walk, and of our conversation as well. Beatrice tossed me a little bow, accompanied by a smile that was half arch and half defiant, seeming to say, "Don't think me a lovelorn maiden because of what you have heard to-day," and ran off to her room, leaving me to go on to the parlor alone.

Of course I held what had passed at our interview as a sacred confidence. But it had given me a wish to know more of Caleb Armstrong. The thought of my favorite niece putting away so resolutely what she believed would secure the happiness of her life, gave me an uncomfortable feeling, and I had a mind to discover what there was about the fellow to inspire her with such a sentiment. Accordingly, on leaving the Manor, I made my way to the Armstrong farm-house. It was a tidy-looking cottage, painted a grayish-drab, with a rude piazza at one end. Here, on a wooden bench, two young men were sitting, one of whom I immediately recognized as the person I was seeking. He started up in some confusion on seeing me, but his face soon cleared. It was a good, honest face, and had, moreover, a fair share of manly beauty.

"I come to invite you to a sail with me this afternoon. But perhaps you are otherwise engaged," I said, with a glance toward the second young man.

"Mr. Stephenson—Mr. Mannerling," said young Armstrong, thus concisely introducing his companion.

I have never seen a finer man's face than that of the gentleman who now advanced to greet me. The features were finely cut. The facial angle was rather large, the forehead massive, the whole countenance individualized by a look of inbred refinement.

"I am glad to know Mr. Stephenson," I said, with a heartiness which was thoroughly sincere. Somehow, too, I felt an increasing respect for the young farmer, owing, I suppose, to the company in which I found him. "Are you both at liberty to try some boating?" I inquired.

"I think Armstrong is," said Mr. Stephenson. "I have to meet a friend, and must therefore decline."

After a few courteous words he went away, having laughingly admonished us not to try any sub-aquatic explorations in emulation of Schiller's Diver. When he reached the street I noticed that he was joined by Julius Stone, who was

walking in the same direction Stephenson had taken.

"An eagle and a vulture," I said, or rather thought aloud—a way of thinking to which I am sometimes addicted.

"By the nobler bird I suppose you mean Julius Stone," said Armstrong, sardonically.

"No. Such was not my meaning."

"Take care! It is the fashion with the Mannerings to prefer him to Allan Stephenson."

"With whom of the Mannerings?"

"Madeline, for instance."

"What reason have you for saying that?"

"It is well known in Mannerington that Allan was formerly her lover, and that he was discarded for Stone."

"I don't believe, it," I was on the point of saying, but then I recollected Julius Stone's frequent calls at the Manor; his familiar way of speaking to me of Madeline; her emotion when I repeated what I considered as his insolence; their walking out together on at least one occasion that had come to my knowledge; and the indignant denial was stayed upon my lips.

"That is worse than—" Here I stopped abruptly, for I had again detected myself in thinking aloud.

"Worse than Beatrice and Caleb Armstrong, you were on the point of saying, perhaps," said the young man.

"Yes," I admitted. "But it does not follow that either is to be tolerated."

"Perhaps not, from your point of view. It is undoubtedly true that I do not 'derive my birth from loins enthroned, nor rulers of the earth,' but I have a brain, and a will to use it. I believe, too, that I shall win my way to success."

"I suppose scarcely a young man has ever started in life who did not promise himself some grand success as the result of his individual efforts. But how many of these have redeemed that promise? How many in comparison with the whole, I mean?"

"Perhaps one in a hundred: I don't know the ratio. But, if you please, we will assume that it is that, provided I

may also assume that the last ninety-nine have failed, and that I am to be the hundredth."

"Well," I returned, pleased in spite of myself with his hopeful spirit, "I sincerely hope you may be. More than that, if I can help you in any way, I shall be glad to do so."

He grasped my hand in a fervor of gratitude. Of course I set down a sufficient amount of his emotion to the account of my niece; but I did not like him the less for the grateful temper he evinced. In course of the afternoon he told me something of his plans, and when we returned from the pond, he showed me the model of an invention which struck me as being highly ingenious as well as of practical utility.

"Tell Beatrice that I leave Mannerington to-morrow, but she will hear from me when my success is won," he said at parting.

Wishing to see my niece and give her a hint of how I had spent the afternoon, I strolled on toward the Manor, shortening the walk by taking a path across the fields. Just at the outer verge of the grounds, sheltered by a clump of sturdy pines, there was a little rocky cavern, formed probably by the action of water at some remote epoch. I knew well that this was a favorite resort with Beatrice. Therefore, on coming near, and seeing a bit of white drapery fluttering outside the entrance, I doubted not that she was within.

"Now I'll give her a surprise," I thought.

It was a boyish freak, I confess, but there are some people whose own youth is infectious, and Beatrice was one of these. I believe "Old Parr" himself would have been led to revive some of the tricks of his boyhood if he had associated intimately with her. What I did was this: I climbed into one of the old pines, intending to reserve my surprise until my niece came out. Scarcely, however, had I gained a seat upon a stout limb overhanging the cave when I heard not Beatrice, but Madeline speaking.

"Do not urge me to give you a reason,

Allan," she said, her voice harsh almost to shrillness in her efforts to render it steady. "Say that I am fickle. That will cover the whole ground, and save you the trouble of seeking an underlying cause."

"But you are not fickle, Madeline. I could say it of many women, but not of you. The love which was mine a year ago is mine to-day. You dare not deny it, Madeline."

Thus much I heard unavoidably while retreating from my undesirable position of eavesdropper. In it I found abundant matter for reflection. I doubted not that Allan Stephenson had asserted truth in avowing that Madeline loved him still. Then came the questions, Why had she given him up? How had such a sacrifice become necessary? What motive could be brought to bear upon a high-minded girl, like Madeline Mannering, powerful enough to induce her to discard Allan Stephenson, whom she loved, for Julius Stone, whom—judging by my own sentiment—I thought it highly probable that she detested? The more I studied upon it the more intricate the problem became. But I had a feeling that it was connected, in some way, with my brother's frequent careworn look and the embarrassment I had once or twice noticed in his manner when I made some inquiry into his affairs. Robert was so volatile that I knew I had not much chance of getting a serious explanation from him. I could question Madeline, but would she be disposed to break through her ordinary habit of reticence and confide in me? I would try it, at all events.

The chance of speaking for which I waited patiently was long in coming. I could perhaps have made myself an opportunity, but I preferred that it should come in the natural course of events. At last there came a day, when the rest of the family all went to a pic-nic gotten up by Julius Stone, in grounds attached to a place he had lately purchased. Madeline remained at home, and I, not caring for Mr. Julius Stone's entertainment, *recherché* though it was expected to be, remained with her.

"I fear," I remarked as we watched

the carriage driving off, "that Mr. Julius Stone will be a disappointed man to-day when he sees whom the Mannering carriage does not contain."

"If you wish to spare him disappointment, it is not yet too late for you to go," returned Madeline, pointedly.

"I shall not pretend to have a great deal of solicitude on his account, but, Madeline, I have on yours. How has it become necessary that you should marry this man?"

"In the course of human events," she retorted with assumed levity of manner. But her set face and ashen lips rather injured the effect.

"Now, Madeline," I pursued, "you need not try to put me off with such a sorry pretence of indifference. I am determined to know all about it: if not from you, then from your father; if not from him, from Julius Stone himself. It is plain to me that you are being sacrificed, and I want to know whether the end is as desperate as the means."

"It is," said Madeline, in a low, despairing tone.

"Tell me," I urged, entreatingly.

She had covered her face with her hands. For a little time she sat thus in stony stillness: then she sat up erect, her mien resolute, almost defiant.

"There is nothing to tell," she said, decisively.

"Is there no hope, then, for Allan Stephenson?"

"None."

"Perhaps he has deserved his fate. You have probably discovered that he is a worthless fellow, unworthy of a woman's constancy."

"His peer for nobleness does not breathe," she retorted with a warmth that surprised me, though I had counted upon a flaming up of her womanly spirit.

"What! Not Julius Stone?"

I believe I was cruel to torture her so, but her inflexibility vexed me beyond measure. She pressed her hand to her forehead, like one whom a sudden whirl has made giddy. In another moment she was mistress of herself.

"Look at yonder cumuli," she said, pointing to a pile of clouds lying below

the zenith. "What an accumulation of drifting fleeciness! One might easily fancy the Fates setting their spinners to work upon just such a cottony mass."

"It would be an intangible warp spun of such material," I affirmed.

"And drop off into the mist of dreams, as do the filmy threads of our lives. What seems most real and tangible to-day, to-morrow will have receded into the dreaminess of the past. It is a pity that you and I are not poets, Uncle Raphael. We might perhaps make out that life is of no more account than yonder ephemeral cloud-mass."

"Life is real, Life is earnest," is a nobler sentiment," I returned.

And so our conversation drifted off upon poets and their sayings, and there was no chance of its reaching back to the point from which Madeline had so determinedly changed its course. But not the less was I resolved to discover why my niece was bent upon sacrificing herself, and, if possible, to prevent the immolation.

When the family returned from the picnic at nightfall, they were accompanied by Julius Stone. Hitherto I had usually managed to avoid this gentleman in his rather frequent calls at the Manor, but I now resolved to overcome my distaste for his society so far as to remain a portion of the evening. In consequence of the avoidance I have mentioned, I had never seen him and Robert together. Now I could not fail to observe that the lawyer's presence was like an incubus to my brother's lightsome buoyancy.

Madeline treated the visitor with grave courtesy, but two or three times I saw her shiver and set her lips firmly together when he came near her. Once, when her hand lay upon the table near which she sat, Julius Stone covered it with his own ill-shapen palm and held it thus for a moment. I have never seen the expression of endurance more positively marked than it was in her face at that time.

The conversation was chiefly about the picnic. They gave a delighted description of the house and grounds, and

Beatrice quoted the opinions of at least half a dozen people as to the undoubted elegance of their decoration for the occasion.

"I did not know you lawyers had such good taste, Mr. Stone," she declared. "Everybody said the arrangements were perfect."

"That's a way I have of doing things. Yes, miss. I have generally found that half-way measures don't pay."

"It is a very agreeable way, at all events."

"Much obliged, I'm sure. Yes, miss. And, as I was saying, half-way measures don't pay. Madeline, what do you think?"

"I dare say you are right," was the careless answer.

"Do you? That's the good of a woman's having sense. Now half the women I'm acquainted with would have wanted to know what I mean by half-way measures, and why they don't pay, and all that sort of thing. Mr. Mannerings," addressing himself to Robert, "a sensible woman our Number Two here, sir. Yes, sir."

"She has need to be," muttered Robert in an undertone.

"Robert," I said, starting suddenly to my feet, "will you walk down to my lodgings with me? I believe I have never shown you the collection of insects I made in South America. I think you will find it rather interesting."

"Oh, may I go too?" cried Beatrice.

"Not to-night," I returned. "I want your father's advice about arranging my specimens. When I get the collection in proper order you shall see it."

Robert had eagerly assented to my proposal, his spirits seeming to recover their elasticity at a bound. But just as we were starting out Julius Stone interposed with—

"Just wait a minute, won't you? We are all Mannerings, together here; so there is no use in making any bones of it. Madeline and I have concluded to be married in a week from now. That's all, sir. Yes, sir. Hope the arrangement will suit all around. What do you think, Mr. Mannerings?"

"If you and Madeline have arranged

it so, I suppose it will do," said Robert feebly, with the old, careworn look in full force upon his face.

"That's all right then—all right, sir. Yes, sir."

I glanced at Madeline. Her face was absolutely colorless. She had started up as if the announcement had taken her by surprise, and stood grasping the back of a chair. Beatrice had stolen to her side, looking almost as pale as her sister, around whom she had thrown one arm, as if for protection. Thus they were standing when we left the room. As soon as we were fairly out of doors, Robert took my arm, saying lightly, that "it would make our walk seem more like those of the old Robbie-and-Raffy times." But I knew by the way his hand trembled upon my arm that this was a mere pretence, and that he really needed to lean upon me for support.

"Robbie," I said, laying my hand upon his, "we used to have no secrets from each other in those old times. Don't you remember?"

"Yes, I remember."

Then there fell a silence, broken only by the continuous thud of our foot-soles against the pavement.

"Is there no way of saving Madeline from this revolting marriage?" I broke out at last, hardly knowing how to make the attack, but thinking it might be as well to plunge into the midst of the matter at once.

"If there were, do you think I would permit it to go on?" he turned upon me, rather sharply.

"You used to think I had a good head for difficulties. Many a scrape have you and I pulled through together, Robbie. Perhaps this one may not be so desperate as it seems."

No answer from Robert.

"If it were any ordinary perplexity, I am certain you would not hesitate. I may assume, then, that this is an extraordinary one. Let me try my skill at guessing. Say that it is something connected with Aunt Margaret's legacies."

"Raphael, Julius Stone has been blabbing."

"No. But I have been putting this

and that together for some little time, and I could make nothing else of it. How did it happen?"

By this time we had reached the hotel where I had lodgings. Robert followed me up stairs to my parlor, and when we were within locked the door.

"I am almost glad you have found it out," he said, rumpling his hair by running his long fingers through and through it. "I could never have told you, but I have always known it was fated to be found out some time. Crime always is. And you will not be very harsh in judging me, Raffy?" with an appealing humility which reminded me of the boyish contrition with which he had once confessed to having destroyed my kite in a fit of resentment that it flew higher than his own.

"No, Robert. You know better than to expect a harsh judgment from me," I replied, quietly enough, but I felt that my heart was performing its duties clumsily, and was hardly to be trusted with the work it had in hand.

"It was all on the impulse of the moment. I was very much pressed for money, and the time when Madeline hoped to hear from you had gone over by two weeks or more. I thought you were tired of helping me out of my straits, and meant to leave me to go to the dogs as fast as I pleased. Then Aunt Margaret fell suddenly ill, and when I went to see her they told me she was making her will and I could not go in. But just then Julius Stone was called out suddenly, and I went on to her room. The doctor and the nurse went out at one door just as I went in at another. Aunt Margaret spoke to me, but soon fell off into a doze, from which I foresaw that she would never waken to consciousness; and there lay the will on a table by her bedside. I looked it over, and found that there were legacies of five thousand dollars to each of us, Raphael, and the rest was given without conditions to Allan Stephenson. Five thousand dollars would not half free me from my difficulties. So, seeing how easily it could be done, I changed the five before my own thousands into fifty, and then

placed the paper on the bed and the pen as if it had fallen from Aunt Margaret's hand, intending to make it appear as if the correction was her own work, and then leave the room without being seen. But Julius Stone came back before I could get away, and—and—that is how I came to be in his power. There has never been a day since that I would not have undone the deed by making myself a beggar, so help me God! But I could not proclaim myself a felon, and I a Mannerer too!"

The sweat ran from his face in drops as he ceased speaking, and his hair, which he continued to comb with his restless fingers, lay in damp wisps upon his forehead, as if it had lately been immersed in water.

Perhaps I ought to have shrunk in horror from this man, whose weakness had led him into the commission of a grave crime. But he was my brother, and I loved him. Besides, I reproached myself for having ever left him alone. His flighty nature, all winsome as it was, had always needed the support of one stronger than itself. This support his wife might have given, perhaps, if she had been less proud and cold. But a thousand things might have been that never are.

"I suppose Madeline knows," I said when I had grasped his hand in silent assurance of unchanged affection.

"She knows that Stone holds my honor in his power, but she does not know how Allan Stephenson has been wronged. If she did, I think her heart would break," Robert replied, gloomily.

"Allan Stephenson must have his rights," I declared, unhesitatingly. "I can easily spare the sum you owe him; but if it required my last dollar, he should have it still."

"Must he know, then?"

"I think he must: I am sure he may be trusted. Besides, he will be Madeline's husband; so that the secret which I would not hesitate to confide to his honor will be doubly guarded by his becoming one of the family."

"But Julius Stone—" cried Robert, pale with terror.

"I know, sir. Yes, sir," I returned, mimicking that worthy lawyer's intonation and phraseology, and bringing a smile to Robert's face in spite of his terrors. "But Julius Stone has probably heard that the law recognizes such an offence as compounding a felony. I do not anticipate any trouble from him."

"I never thought of that. Raffy, you are a trump!" said my brother, his glad relief finding vent in a rain of tears.

Who shall aver that they were not for purification, and that the stain of Robert Mannerer's sin was not washed from his soul in their gushing tide?

It was already late in the evening, and I proposed waiting until the next day before taking any steps regarding the matter in hand. But Robert entreated that there might be no delay.

"Allan Stephenson might die in the night," he said with a shiver, "and then restitution would be beyond our power."

This consideration, so urged, was all-powerful with me. I sent Robert home, bidding him drop some crumbs of comfort for Madeline, and went myself to find Allan Stephenson. To him I made a full disclosure of the circumstances, treating my brother's fault as tenderly as I could.

"I have suspected something of this sort," said Allan, "and have been pondering how I might best turn my suspicion to account to save Madeline from Julius Stone. I hoped, however, that he was the cardinal offender. I know he has long held a grudge against me."

"That probably explains why Madeline was his choice, rather than either of her sisters."

"Perhaps so, though it never occurred to me that that needed explanation. As for your brother, he would have been safe from me in any event. After the confidence of to-night he will be doubly so."

"And trebly so, perhaps," I answered, jestingly, "when you are one of the family."

"My poor Madeline! My dear, brave girl! How much she must have suffered!"

And often during the interview he

kept repeating, "My dear, brave girl!" lingering with a loving tenderness upon the words. He was undoubtedly glad to get back the money that was his by right, but he seemed to think much less of that than that Madeline would be saved from Julius Stone and saved for him.

On leaving him I went to Julius Stone's office, through which he entered to his lodgings. He had not yet returned from the Manor, but I took the liberty of waiting for him there. His evil eyes wore a look of satisfaction when he entered, and I heard him chuckling to himself before he became aware of my presence:

"Aha! my lofty one! You had to come to it, didn't you? That last kiss was a dainty one. You're beginning to learn, I fancy, that half-way measures don't go down with a certain gentleman. Judas! how she looked when I announced that we had agreed upon this day week for our marriage!"

He seemed to find this recollection vastly amusing, and broke out into noisy laughter.

"You seem to be merrily inclined," I remarked, stepping out of the shadow in which I had remained until now.

"The ———! Why, so I am. Care killed a cat, and a cat is said to have nine lives. I have but one, so I can't afford to give Care house-room."

"Does your boy sleep here?" I asked, glancing toward a small lad who was snoring in a corner.

"No," shaking him roughly. "Be-gone, you young vagabond! and mind you are here betimes in the morning. Drat him! he has left the door open. There, we are all right now, sir. Yes, sir. I can see that your look means business; proceed."

"You asked me once, I remember, if I knew Allan Stephenson. I did not then, but have since formed his acquaintance. It was undoubtedly in pure pleasure, and not in any wise to gratify an old grudge of your own, that so merry a gentleman as yourself compounded with another to prevent his gaining possession of the amount given him by Mrs. Stephen-

son's will. But the jest, choice as it is, has gone quite far enough. Are you ready to undo your part in the proceeding?"

"Judas! what does this mean?"

"It means that the biter is in danger of being bitten," I retorted, severely; "that Julius Stone should have known better than to become a compounder of felony; that my brother is no more in your power than you are in Allan Stephenson's, to whom all the circumstances are known."

He glared upon me with a malignant look in his evil eyes, but I faced him steadily.

"It means, too," I went on, "that you are to relinquish all pursuit of Madeline Mannerer, or you have nothing to hope from Allan Stephenson's clemency."

"Now, look here, sir! Maybe you think I was born yesterday. Yes, sir. Robert Mannerer's brother to pretend to threaten me! I wonder who has most need of Allan Stephenson's clemency."

"It is sufficient for you that you may have serious need of it yourself," I replied, with cool contempt. "Besides, a legal inquiry into your proceedings may bring to light more peccadilloes than you called to mind at first. We shall see, at all events."

This was a random shot, but I could see that it struck home.

"How much will you give to buy me off?" he inquired, after gnawing his lip a while, and looking helplessly ferocious.

"You will get no more than you have already received."

"It won't do; I was to have pieced that out with Madeline's fortune."

"Feloniously obtained, and by your connivance. I think you will have to dispense with that method of piecing out your gains."

It is useless to record the remainder of our discourse. Enough that in all that followed, as in what I have related, the man's spirit showed mean and dastardly, without a redeeming feature. But he was brought to bay, and at the end gave the pledge I sought—that Madeline should be free from him, and that he would leave my brother in peace.

I may as well make an end of Julius Stone, now that I have my hand in. He presently discovered that the air of Mannerington was uncongenial to his health—or spirits, I have forgotten which—and removed not long afterward to the West. I have lately seen his name in a list of persons lost by a steamboat explosion on one of the great lakes. He was, at the time, a fugitive from justice, whose officers were in hot pursuit of him. Hence an exciting race, and a tragedy dealing death to many homes.

That Madeline is now Mrs. Allan Stephenson it is perhaps unnecessary to record. I dare say that you may already have hastened to that conclusion. It would be difficult to find a better-ordered household than that over which she presides, or a home where truer happiness dwells. Her face—upon which the inscrutable look that so often puzzled me never appears now—is in general a perfect doxology, seeming to "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow."

With reverence be this spoken, as I have often heard the words reverently from her lips, and never more so than on the morning when I assured her that she was free from Julius Stone.

Beatrice—my glad-hearted Beatrice—is still the life of the Manor, though generally aided in that capacity either by sunshine or gaslight. How long we shall be able to retain her as our own especial illuminating agent it is, however, im-

possible to say. Yesterday, as I was strolling about the grounds—I have given up my lodgings, and live wholly at the Manor now—she came dancing down an intersecting walk, caught me by the arm, and made a great parade of standing upon tiptoe to whisper in my ear. I know no reason why she might not have spoken aloud, for there was no one near to listen, but this is what she said:

"At last, Caleb's invention is proved to be a grand success—and it is going to make him a rich man—and a great man too—and papa has consented—and mamma has said perhaps—and—and—I'm the happiest niece you have got in all the world, you dear, old, darling Uncle Raffy!"

And Theo? does any one suggest?

Well Theo is the grand lady of the family. His Grace the Duke of Fluffington, when traveling in the United States a year ago, saw fit to form the acquaintance of the American branch of the family. His visit was a short one, but it was long enough to enable him to appreciate the captivating graces of his pretty relative, Theo Mannering. Before leaving he was led to propose a more intimate connection between the two branches of the family. To be sure, it was in some sort a December-and-May arrangement. I doubt, however, if a coronet was ever worn by any woman with greater satisfaction than by my niece, the Duchess of Fluffington.



MAHALA'S DRIVE.

HARNESSING UP.

"I WISH," said the Widow Bruce, fretfully, "that Will wasn't so headstrong and careless."

"What has he done now?" said her daughter Mahala, looking quickly up from the zephyr hood she was knitting.

"It isn't what he does, but what he don't do, that's the matter."

"And what hasn't he done, then?"

"I told him last night that I was cutting my last loaf of bread, and that there wasn't a dust of flour in the barrel; and now he has gone to the 'raising,' and taken Mike with him (as if we hired men to go off a whole day frolicking), and not a thought has he given to the flour barrel."

"Well, he is only a boy—scarcely twenty, you know. It would have been better if you had spoken of it again this morning."

"I can't say a thing a thousand times over, Mahala; and, besides, hearing this morning of Sallie Peyton's being engaged to be married put the flour out of my head."

Mahala knew that her brother Will was consuming with a hopeless passion for Sallie Peyton (six years his senior), and was not surprised at his forgetfulness.

"But all that don't put flour in the barrel," said Mrs. Bruce, peevishly; "and they won't be back till dark, and I know folks will come here from the 'raising,' and only corn-meal cakes to give them."

"I'll tell you what, mother," said Mahala, starting up from her seat; "I'll go to Howell's mill myself, and get a bag of flour for you."

"And what will you go in, I'd like to know?" said Mrs. Bruce, in an injured tone. "Will has got the carriage and the little sorrel."

"I will harness old Blackey to the wagon."

"Goodness gracious, Mahala! you must be as crazy as the wagon, and that is just ready to fall to pieces."

"Nonsense, mother! It is used every day, and is sound enough."

"And what a splendid turn-out you will have, to be sure! And the Howells and the Sparkeses live on the Harmony road; and then there's Mr. Carey boards at Sparkeses'! And Bessie Jones is for ever driving her bay pony and basket-carriage on that road."

"What do I care for all those people, mother? They know we have a better horse and carriage; so, if you don't forbid me, I will go."

"Oh I don't forbid you, if you ain't too proud," said Mrs. Bruce, very much relieved on the subject of the supper, but looking injured nevertheless.

Mahala ran quickly to the carriage-house, and, giving one regretful look to the empty space usually occupied by the little light carriage she was in the habit of driving, seized the shafts of the old wagon and pushed it out into the yard, where she surveyed it with great disdain. No rheumatic rag-man could be more knock-kneed, loose-jointed and lopsided than was this vehicle. The colors with which it had anciently been picked out had run together in the most distracted manner. A board was laid across it for a seat, with an old, half-worn cushion on it.

"When I have made up my mind to do a thing, I do it," was the result of Mahala's meditations, and she walked quickly to the stable, where old Blackey had at that moment finished his measure of oats, and was dreamily thinking what a nice thing it was to have a holiday. He attempted a feeble neigh when Mahala entered the stable, but stopped suddenly, for he read in her eyes, "You have got to work;" and he immediately planted himself firmly and squarely, so that it was utterly impossible for any one to get into his stall.

"Stand back, old fellow!" said Mahala, cheerily, and giving him a light slap.

Blackey did not mean to do it at all, but such creatures of habit are we—beasts and men—that he moved without thinking anything about it, and thus Mahala got the better of him in the first encounter, and unfastened the halter. Blackey was a tall, powerful creature, who was gradually retiring from public life on account of his age. He could have crushed Mahala with a slight push, but, like a good many old gentlemen we have known, he was very amiable, although as obstinate as a pig. He rubbed his nose over the hands that had fed him many a time.

"You need not be trying any of your coaxing ways with me," said Mahala: "you and I have business on hand."

She led him to the door of the carriage-

house, just inside of which the harness was hanging, and she reached it down and dragged it forth very unceremoniously, and eyed it with no more pride than she had the wagon.

"Hold down your head!" she said, giving Blackey a smart tap on the neck with the collar. Down went the head, and Mahala proceeded to slip the collar over it, but no sooner had it touched him than Blackey suddenly remembered that he was not making much of a stand for his rights, and threw up his head so high that it seemed to Mahala, as she looked hopelessly up at it, that it was about to be promoted to the position of weathercock on a church-steeple. Blackey, looking furtively down to see how she took it, spied a tuft of luscious-looking grass. Down came the head in a twinkling, and over it went the collar, Mahala chuckling gleefully as she dexterously twisted it over on his neck, while Blackey chewed his grass and pretended he did not care. She laughed aloud as her bright young eyes looked into his old, dim ones.

"What a woe-begone look you have got up, to be sure! If you had your way, we should eat corn-bread for supper, you ungrateful creature! But you just won't have your way."

She picked up the harness, but it was heavy, and Blackey had got his back up for the occasion, and it was high enough at any time. She came near falling head-foremost under his heels; but she was resolute, and setting her white teeth firmly on her rosy under lip, she gave the harness such a mighty throw that it went flying clear over the horse's back and fell clattering to the ground on the other side of him. If Blackey could have laughed, he would have done it then, as he turned his head to critically examine the harness, which he hoped was broken into a thousand pieces.

"Where there's a will there's a way," said Mahala, spying the milking-stool. She put this down by the side of the horse with an emphatic bang, and, standing on it, was able to land the harness safely in its place. Greatly elated with this, she led Blackey to the wagon, and

gave him to understand that he must walk backward into the shafts. To show that he comprehended what was expected of him, he first kicked against the left shaft, and then, by an ingenious twist, planted both hind feet on the outside of it.

"What a stupid!" cried Mahala as she led him out. "Now stand over!"

So he did—over the right shaft. Mahala remembered that on such occasions the hired man swore at the horse and her brother kicked him, but, not choosing to adopt either of these methods, she rolled her dimpled hand into the roundest of fists and beat a tattoo on Blackey's fat sides, while with her left hand she jerked the bridle rather viciously. Thus admonished, Blackey put himself into the right position, and Mahala triumphantly drew up the wagon a little and fastened the traces. She then buckled the quilters, after cogitating for some time upon the best method of wrapping the straps around the shafts. Then she carefully examined the swingle-tree.

"I am sure Will said it was weak," she thought, "but to me it looks sound enough."

Then she passed the lines through the rings, and her deft fingers looped them up quickly. Now her task was accomplished to her satisfaction, and she led Blackey to the post and fastened him securely with the hitching-rein.

She went into the house through the kitchen to get a look at the clock. "Five minutes of ten," she said. "I will certainly be back by three—in plenty of time to have hot biscuits for supper."

She ascended the stairs into the second story to her bed-room, where she proceeded to spread her long, soft, brown hair over a great, ugly waterfall. Her front hair, already as crimped and fuzzy as a tangled skein of floss silk, she threw back from her face, and giving the ends a mysterious twirl, they disappeared in the innermost recesses of her waterfall. Then she arrayed herself in a light gray poplin suit, put on linen cuffs, fastened her linen collar with a turquoise pin, and hung ear-rings of the same in her ears,

and perching a large straw hat on the top of the mass of floss silk, and putting on a pair of stout, cotton gloves, she gave a satisfied glance at the looking-glass and skipped down stairs.

"Give me a piece of gingerbread for my lunch, mother, and now I am off. Tell Susan there will be biscuits to bake for supper."

THE START.

Old Blackey surveyed Mahala from her hat to her boots while she was untying him, but whether the snort he gave betokened approbation or otherwise, has never transpired. Mahala quickly untwisted the lines, took them gracefully in her left hand, and made a flying leap into the wagon, greatly to the diversion of Susan, "the girl," who was holding the gate open. Mahala clicked encouragingly to the horse, whereupon he pricked up his ears, whisked his tail and trotted through the gate in fine style, and went gayly up the road.

"There's an old shoe," said Susan: "I'll throw it after her for good luck. Here goes!"

WHAT WAS SAID AT THE STAR TAVERN.

Blackey soon moderated his pace, but, as the road was level, he trotted along with some attempt at briskness until he came to the first hill, which was two miles from his home. On the top of this hill stood an ancient stone house, long and low. From a tall pole in front swung a blue board with a great, staring yellow star in its centre, thus announcing to all travelers the whereabouts of the Star Tavern. Mahala cast an evil eye upon this luminary, now brightly reflecting the rays of the sun, for she had her own reasons for disliking it. But her thoughts were recalled from this beautiful emblem by an ominous creaking, which made her start from her seat and look anxiously over at the swingle-tree. It was as she feared: there was a gaping crack in it. Much as she disliked it, she was forced to stop at the Star Tavern.

"I hope Anthony has gone to the raising," she thought as she reined up her horse under the sign.

A dirty, frowzy old woman appeared in the doorway.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Murray. You don't seem to know me?"

"Why, Mahala, is that you? I didn't know you in the old wagon. I'm used to seeing you in your smart turn-out. Ain't you coming in?"

"No, I thank you. I am going to Harmony to the mill, as Will and Mike are both away. Are any of the men-folks about? My swingle-tree needs mending."

"I believe Anthony is somewhere on the place. There he is, coming out of the barn. Anthony! Anthony! this way!"

Anthony was a tall, lumbering young man, with his head and the lower part of his face covered with a thick crop of black hair. If he would only have looked people in the face when he spoke, and trimmed his hair and beard, he would have been a very presentable person, but, as it was, he was as ill-looking a fellow as one would care to meet on the open highway.

Mahala gave a little toss of her head when Anthony's name was called, and he saw it. He came up to the wagon in a half-bashful, half-sulky manner, and replied in a surly tone to Mahala's greeting. However, when he found what was wanted of him, his face brightened a little, and he returned to the barn for a rope. While he was gone, Mrs. Murray entertained Mahala by asking questions, but when he made his second appearance, she excused herself to return to her baking.

For a few minutes there was silence. Mahala was thinking what she could say to him that would be pleasant and would not lead to topics she did not wish touched upon, when suddenly Anthony lifted his eyes from the rope he was winding.

"I wonder you ain't afraid to trust me to mend your swingle-tree," he said, "when you treat me so bad."

"I do not treat you badly," said Ma-

hala, the color rushing into her face, for here was Anthony broaching the very subject she wished to avoid.

"Yes, you do. There ain't a slight you can put upon me that you don't do it."

"If I do, it is your own fault—you force me to it. If anybody slighted me, I would not speak to him again."

"I know you wish I wouldn't, but I ain't going to give up when everybody knows you are the girl I've had my eye on ever since we went to school together. And I'm not the man to be laughed at twice because he can't get the girl he wants."

"A great, strong man like you should not mind being laughed at. Can't you bear as much as Sam Peck? He courted Lu Miles for two years, and she refused him at last. And there is Will Price, who has asked every pretty girl in the neighborhood. Nearly all the young men around here have had the mitten from somebody. They don't mind it, but try their luck elsewhere. That is what you should do, for many a nice girl would jump at the chance of marrying Anthony Murray."

I am sorry to-day that Mahala did not believe this, but she was afraid of the man, and she was conscious that she had sometimes treated him with rudeness when provoked at his obtrusive attentions. Perhaps now he might revenge himself by tying the rope in such a cunning manner as to break her neck on Long Hill.

"Umph!" growled Anthony, feeling that he was being stroked into good humor, and determined not to submit to coaxing. "They will have to jump to a tune of another man's playing, then. But I know who will have to jump to a tune of my playing if he don't mend his manners;" and he passed the end of the rope through a loop, drew it fast and knotted it securely with angry force, as if the individual referred to were under it.

Mahala turned pale. "Do you know," she said, quickly, "that Mr. Carey is going to marry Bessie Jones?"

"No, I don't, and you don't, either," said Anthony, doggedly. Here he caught

THE RACE.

As soon as Mahala was out of sight of the tavern she got out and examined the swingle-tree. It appeared to have been tied firmly.

"He had some idea of going with me," she thought, "and did not want his own precious neck broken."

A mile farther on she came to Long Hill, and old Blackey made so much ado going up, that, when arrived at the top, she was fain to let him rest a minute while she surveyed the prospect. At the foot of Long Hill lay a narrow valley, and right through it, to the distant hills, ran the turnpike on which Mahala now was. To the right of the valley was a long strip of forest, and through this was the road to Harmony, while some distance beyond the turning into this road, coming into the turnpike on the left, was a broad, open road winding up and down the hills from the town of Pineville. The first object Mahala saw was a man walking rapidly on the turnpike. He was too far for her to see him distinctly, but she knew by the way he lightly swung his cane, and by the elasticity of his walk, so different from the shuffling, loping gait of the country-people, that it was Mr. Carey.

"He is coming this way," she thought, "and will no doubt turn into the Harmony road on his way home. I will overtake him and offer him a seat. I wish now I had the carriage."

Just then another object caught her eye. It was a vehicle on the Pineville road, moving rapidly toward the turnpike. The next instant she had recognized Bessie Jones in her pretty little basket-carriage, and driving her fast-trotting bay pony. Mahala calculated the chances: "If she reaches the Harmony road first, good-bye to Mr. Carey. She has the fastest horse and lightest carriage, but I have the best road and shortest distance."

So thinking, and utterly regardless of the swingle-tree, she put Blackey at his fastest pace down the hill. By this time Bessie too had comprehended the situation, and the bay pony flew along the road. Mr. Carey, busily revolving some-

hold of the bridle: "I am not to be turned from a purpose by any such thing as that. You don't often give me a chance to speak to you, and now I will have my say out. And I want you to tell Mr. Carey from me that Anthony Murray ain't going to see a man walk into the place that is his by right, and preachers had better keep out of it: that's all! Don't you think, yourself, Mahala," he said, altering his tone and manner as he left the horse and leaned upon the wagon, "it is too bad when a fellow who has loved a girl ever since she was a little mite, and seen her grow up so pretty for him, has to stand aside for a whipper-snapper of a parson, who hasn't known her a year? I put it to you, Mahala, if it is not too bad?"

"You have no right to talk to me this way, Anthony," said Mahala, now really angry (and besides the swingle-tree was mended). "I have never given you the least encouragement, and told you from the first it could never be. And it is very impertinent in you to send messages by me to Mr. Carey. He is nothing to me. Everybody says he is going to marry Bessie Jones, and I have no doubt it is true; and, if she is your girl, go and talk to her about it;" and she gathered up the lines and looked for her whip.

"Is that true?" said Anthony, his face brightening. "I beg your pardon, but I have felt sure about you and Carey ever since the pic-nic, and it has put me beside myself. But if it's Bessie Jones! I don't care that" (snapping his fingers) "for Bessie Jones! I wish you would let me go to Harmony with you. Mother wants me to go, but I told her I couldn't, for there is not a horse on the place."

"That would never do, Anthony, after all you have just said. Thank you for mending my swingle-tree;" and she thoughtlessly gave Blackey such a cut with the whip as made him spring forward, shaking Anthony off the wagon with such violence that he staggered.

He watched her with a scowling face until she was out of sight, and then he struck across the fields toward the Harmony road.

thing in his mind, was not aware of the approach of the two rival charioteers.

For some weeks all the neighborhood had been wondering which one he would marry. Sometimes it was Mahala beyond a doubt, and then just as certainly it was Bessie. The truth was, that Mr. Carey himself had never thought of marrying either. Of all the young ladies in the county who were dying for the popular young minister, he visited only these two with any constancy, which was not at all remarkable, as they were both pretty and attractive, and could talk pleasantly and intelligently, and play accompaniments and sing songs very sweetly. But the two girls knew, if he did not, that his heart was in a very critical condition, being all prepared for combustion, and that any accidental puff of circumstance might kindle the smouldering sparks into an ardent flame. Who, then, would have the good luck to give this gentle puff? Ah, who?

"If I reach the bottom of the hill before she gets to the milestone, I shall win," thought Mahala. "I may as well give up. She is almost there. Good! she is out of the carriage; something is the matter with the harness. Now I am all right."

But, alas! just here Blackey bethought himself that he was taught in his youth not to go down hill at such headlong speed, and therefore he subsided into a solemn walk, and neither whipping nor coaxing would turn him from the path of rectitude, greatly to the delight of Bessie, who had one eye on her pony and the other on Mahala.

On the level Blackey moved his stiff legs as fast as he could, to conciliate his mistress, but it was then too late; for, just as Mr. Carey was about to turn into the Harmony road, and had lifted his hat to salute Mahala, now only a short distance from him, Bessie drew rein by his side. She gave a merry little laugh at his look of astonishment, and Mahala alone detected the malicious note of triumph in its ring.

"Are you going to Harmony, Mr. Carey?" said Bessie, very innocently and demurely.

Yes, Mr. Carey was going to Harmony. "Then I shall be happy to give you a seat in my carriage, for I am on my way to Harmony to my aunt Ellis'."

Mr. Carey did not wait to be urged, but sprang at once into the little carriage, and Bessie turned into the wood, followed closely by Mahala, who, while chatting pleasantly with the two in front, was thinking with mortification of the guy she must look in that old, shackling wagon, and with deeper mortification of her defeat; and was wondering, too, how she could get the better of Bessie yet.

WHAT WAS DONE IN THE WOOD.

It was no part of Bessie's plan to walk her pony through this pleasant wood in her rival's company; so after a few minutes she nodded good-bye, and signified to the pony that he was to put on his best pace. But before the fast trotter could take them out of sight of Mahala, a sharp scream from that young lady caused both Bessie and Mr. Carey to look back. Blackey was standing still in the road and Mahala was springing out of the wagon. Bessie, having little doubt that this was some ruse, was disposed to let the pony go on, muttering something about being in a hurry to get to her aunt's; but Mr. Carey laid his hands upon the reins and checked the pony.

"Excuse me," he said, "but perhaps I can be of some assistance to Miss Bruce. But I won't detain you."

"Oh, I can wait a few minutes," said Bessie. "I won't go away and leave Mahala in trouble."

Before she had finished speaking, Mr. Carey was examining the broken swingle-tree. "I think this could be mended with a piece of rope," he said, "but I suppose you have nothing of the kind in your wagon."

"It was tied for me at the Star Tavern, and the rope cannot have been off very long," said Mahala, very much confused.

She had good reason for this belief, inasmuch as she had unwound it with

her own hands not two minutes before, and had thrown it as far back in the road as she could send it.

"I will look for it," said Mr. Carey, "for you could not travel a dozen yards with your swingle-tree in that condition. But do not wait for me, Miss Jones, as you are in a hurry to get to your aunt's. Miss Bruce will give me a seat in her wagon, I know, and in truth I am perfectly willing to walk."

"Oh yes," said Mahala, carelessly, although not well pleased at the conclusion of Mr. Carey's speech, not regarding it as particularly flattering; "there is plenty of room in the wagon; but it is a shame to make you ride in such a crazy, uncomfortable old concern. I think I can fix the swingle-tree myself."

Of course Mr. Carey protested that this was impossible, and of course Bessie, having no excuse for staying after she had said she was in a hurry, drove off in solitary state. Mr. Carey went up the road to look for the rope, and Mahala, being better able to guess where it might be, followed to assist in the search, leaving Blackey sound asleep in the middle of the road. Mr. Carey had passed the rope, which Mahala spied in a tuft of furze by the roadside. As she stooped to pick it up she was startled by a pair of eyes glaring out of a little thicket near by. They were as ferocious as those of a wild beast, but Mahala knew very well to whom they belonged. They did not seem to be aware of her vicinity, but were steadfastly regarding Mr. Carey with a look Mahala never forgot. Should she speak to Anthony? What could she say that would pacify him? It was clear that he had followed her, had witnessed the race, had seen her untie the rope. If she could only put Mr. Carey on his guard! But she could not do this without Anthony's knowledge, and that would only precipitate the catastrophe. And what was that catastrophe to be? It was not likely Anthony had any fixed purpose, and perhaps if she carried herself carelessly and got Mr. Carey away without loss of time, nothing would happen.

"See how much sharper my eyes are

than yours," she said, playfully, to Mr. Carey, holding up the rope. "And now we must be expeditious, for I ought to be in Harmony this minute. You must tie it very securely," she said as he took the rope, "for if anything happens to you, Bessie will never forgive me."

This was said for Anthony's benefit, and to remind him of what she had told him at the tavern. All this time Mahala was talking to Mr. Carey, and standing beside him impatiently watching his movements. She never for an instant turned her back upon the little thicket, but kept out of the corners of her eyes a keen if furtive glance upon the spot where she now distinctly saw a part of Anthony's head.

Mr. Carey looked at her in amazement when she made the remark about Bessie, but made no reply. He had loosened Blackey from the wagon, so that he could get in between the shafts, and was now tying up the old swingle-tree in a provokingly scientific manner. Blackey had taken a few steps forward and gone sound asleep again; and Mahala was wrought up to a pitch of nervous excitement by Mr. Carey's slowness, who, with his head bent down over the swingle-tree, was so tryingly unconscious of the danger near. But not for an instant did her glance wander from the thicket.

All was still as death in the forest; the very leaves had stilled their rustling. There! they are moving now, on that bush, the twigs: there is a gleam of something! It is the thing she has tried not to believe in, and yet has been watching for. With no thought now for anything but the dear life by her side, she stretched out her arm, and quicker than the speeding of the bullet she had pushed down Mr. Carey's head, and he fell into the road in a heap. Blackey took to his heels and was out of sight in a twinkling. A man's form was flitting among the distant trees. The bullet had cut off a little sapling and buried itself in the ground, but it had hit Mahala's arm in passing, and the sharp pain and the sight of her bloody sleeve, together with the mental agony she had suffered, suddenly took all the breath

out of her body. All this passed in the minute Mr. Carey lay on the ground, not having time to feel astonished at Mahala's treatment before the report of the pistol explained it. When he stood upon his feet again, he found her stretched upon the ground insensible.

He tore open her sleeve, but could not judge how badly her arm was hurt: he knew she was not dead, and he did not think her dying. So, instead of going into heroics, he bound his handkerchief and hers around her arm, and lifted her out of the road upon the grass, and ran to the brook to fill his hat with water, which he sprinkled over her face. As this did not seem to revive her, he chafed her hands, and, as she was very cold, he took her in his arms. Of course he drew her close to him, thinking how she had saved his life at the almost certain risk of losing her own; and at the same time there were running through his mind certain bewildering thoughts that he had never known until now how beautiful she was. Sadly bewildered he must have been, for not a sound did he hear, and yet Mrs. Putnam's covered wagon had made no little noise jolting over the road.

To his great joy, Mahala opened her eyes, but neither of them spoke a word.

"My gracious! what has happened here? I declare if it ain't Mr. Carey and Mahala Bruce! Did I ever?"

And now the two culprits (for such they suddenly felt themselves to be) beheld the covered wagon, and Mrs. Putnam seated therein and looking down upon them with a severe countenance; for Mrs. Putnam was not of Mr. Carey's religious persuasion, and held him in slight esteem. That gentleman knew he ought to be glad to see her for Mahala's sake, as the old wagon without a horse was certainly not a very eligible conveyance; but nevertheless he wished Mrs. Putnam a thousand miles away. He was covered with confusion, and if Mahala had not withdrawn from his arms, he most certainly would have dropped her. He told what had happened in as few words as possible. Mrs. Putnam listened in grim silence until he had fin-

ished, when she turned to the blushing girl, now seated on the grass:

"You don't seem to be dead, Mahaly. You look real peert."

"I think my arm is broken," said Mahala.

"Can you get into my wagon, with Mr. Carey and me to help you?"

"I will lift her in," said Mr. Carey, taking her up in his arms without more ado, and carrying her gently to the wagon, to Mrs. Putnam's astonishment and admiration.

"Mahaly weighs a hundred and twenty-five, if it's a pound," she muttered to herself. "And he such a sapling-like fellow too! while I weigh a hundred and eighty, and can't so much as lift the wash-boiler!"

Meantime, Mr. Carey was arranging Mahala comfortably in the wagon, and took occasion to whisper his gratitude, while she, looking sorrowfully at him, wondered what he would think if he could know all.

"Don't you think you had better take Miss Bruce to Mrs. Sparkeses'?" said Mr. Carey, as Mrs. Putnam was tenderly laying Mahala's arm in a position where it would be least likely to be moved by the jolting of the wagon. "It is the nearest house."

"I shall take her home, to her mother's—that's where she's going," said Mrs. Putnam, with significant accents on some of her words. "And you had better go right through the woods here, a short cut to Dr. Strobe's, and tell him to come to Widow Bruce's and set Mahaly's arm. I guess the man with the pistol is fur enough off by this time. And thank the Lord 'tain't no worse, for she might have been cut off unrepentant."

"I am giving you both a great deal of trouble," said Mahala, remorsefully.

"It will put me out a little," said Mrs. Putnam, "for I can't do my shopping now, and I don't get the horse every day; but I ain't going to leave you in the woods with a broken arm; and I'll tell you what, I ain't a-going to take you to Sparkeses'."

Throwing this last remark at Mr. Carey's head, she drove off.

WHAT CAME OF IT.

1. There were no hot biscuits for supper.

2. Blackey arrived at his stable-door at dusk, and as he showed no symptoms of exhaustion, it was conjectured that he did not run far after hearing the pistol-shot, but had proceeded homeward at a leisurely pace, stopping now and then to eat the choice bits of grass that came in his way.

3. Anthony Murray was missing from his home, and returned no more, which led everybody to the conclusion that he was the man who had attempted Mr. Carey's life, as it was remembered that he had dropped some threats against the minister. It was believed from Mahala's silence on this point that she had not seen the face of the man who fired the pistol. Not even to Mr. Carey, when they talked of the affair together, which she was always loth to do, did she ever mention the fact of having seen Anthony in the thicket.

4. The hurt on Mahala's arm proved to be only a flesh wound, which would have been well in a few days if she had not worried herself into a fever. She tormented herself day and night with reproaches. She pictured Anthony in some dark den of crime, hardened into a wretch to be shunned of men, and made such a one by her. He had always been violent-tempered, but it was probable that he might have led a respectable life at his own home if he had not loved her. He had loved her earnestly in his rough, uncouth way; and if she had shown him that she understood this love, though she could not return it, if she had been more forbearing, she might have wrought in him a better state of mind. Of all that she had said and done on that eventful drive she thought with shame and remorse. And nothing that she could say or do now would undo the mischief. So she held her peace, and worried herself into a low fever, which lasted several weeks.

5. Mr. Carey suddenly discovered, to his great surprise, that he had loved Mahala for a long time: he really could

not remember when he did not love her during the twelve months he had known her; and this he told her as soon as she got well. But she, having a better idea how things had been with him, knew pretty well when he stepped over the line between admiration and love. She feared, too, that some alloy of gratitude prompted this declaration; and how little cause he had for gratitude she only knew. Besides, if she married Mr. Carey, where would be her penance? for she was fully resolved not to take any of the good things her evil conduct might bring her. And then, too, there was Bessie Jones. She owed her atonement for having stolen an unlawful move in that little game they were playing. So she told Mr. Carey that he must say nothing on that subject, for she could not hear of it, and thought, but did not say, that now he would go to Bessie Jones.

6. Susan lost all faith in signs, and thereby missed seeing her lover at Christmas by going away, when she was distinctly warned of his coming by the scissors sticking straight up in the floor. "I don't believe in 'em," she said. "There was the old shoe ready in the road, as if put there a-purpose, and I threw it after Miss Mahaly for good luck; and of all the drives I ever hear tell on that was the most unluckiest."

HOT BISCUITS.

"I smell biscuits baking. Do shut the door, Will: it is intolerable."

"Why, Mahaly, what has come over you?" exclaimed Mrs. Bruce. "You used to like biscuits; and we haven't had any for so long, and you look so down-hearted, that I told Susan maybe they'd cheer you up a bit."

"I used to like them, I know," said Mahala, gently, touched by her mother's thoughtful care, "but now I hate them. They remind me of that dreadful drive three months ago (it seems like three years); and now the very smell of them makes me sick."

"Well, if Susan hadn't got them in the oven—"

"Oh never mind, mother: I must

learn to bear it. I can't go through my whole life without ever encountering hot biscuits;" and she gave a profound sigh, as if she feared that life was going to be uncomfortably long.

"There is Mr. Carey riding up to the gate," said Will. "I wonder when he got back from New York? Of course he has come to see you, Mahala."

Mahala went into the parlor to receive him, although she thought she would rather not. There was no doubt of his pleasure in seeing her after a month's absence. He told Mahala that he had a letter for her from a friend in the city of New York. Mahala declared she knew no one there, but the letter, being produced, certainly bore her name on the back, written in a great, straggling hand. And these were its contents:

"MAHALA—Dear Miss: When I Fired that dredfull shot and see Mister Carey falle, I diddnt Care-ecksept to git away as Fast as Ever I coulde—But whenne I heerd afterwurds it wuz You I Killed noboddy can Never kno how owfullye I Felt. I cum to this Plaice becauze it wuz so Big, and I tried to Hide, and sumtimes I did think of drowneing—But thanke heaven I diddent—And then Mister Carey cum hear, and Trakked Me out, and told Me you was alive, which wuz Like raiseinge Me from the Ded—And this is to let you kno that Ime going to Stay hear, having gotten a Good Plaice, and will live respektayble. I write this Because Mister Carey sed it woulde be a cumfurt To You. If I coulde see you I woulde tell you howe sorry I am for enny Trouble I've been to you, and that you never did anuthing Wrong, but a little thoughtless like, but I ainte Used To writinge—

"Yours trewley,

"ANTHONY MURRAY."

"Did you go to New York on purpose to find Anthony?" said Mahala, looking up from the note with tears of gratitude in her eyes.

"For no other purpose. I knew you would be miserable until you knew that he was doing well, and so I determined that he should do well," answered Mr. Carey.

"You must have guessed," said Mahala, blushing and hesitating.

"I have guessed a great deal," said Mr. Carey, quickly and with a merry smile; "and perhaps somebody helped me a little. You know Bessie Jones is engaged to Mr. Emmet, and so—"

"Don't put them biscuits right down in front of Mahala, Will," said Mrs. Bruce as they were seated at supper. "You know she can't abide them."

"Oh, I have changed my mind, mother," said Mahala, with a little sly look at Mr. Carey. "My liking for them has returned."

Mr. Carey was so undignified as to throw back his head and laugh as if Mahala had said the funniest thing ever heard, and this made Mahala blush and Will play a tune on the floor with his boot-heels; all of which caused Mrs. Bruce to look sharply at them over her spectacles. Just then Susan entered with a fresh supply of hot biscuits, and seeing the group before her, she exclaimed: "La! sakes! did I ever?" and in her astonishment and pleasure she turned the plate in her hand upside-down, whereupon the mischievous biscuits danced a merry jig over the floor, and then, as if ashamed of themselves, ran into all the corners and hid under the furniture.

"Well," said Susan, as she ran scrambling after them, "if I don't believe there's luck in old shoes, after all!"



THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S STORY.

I HAVE long promised you, my friends, to tell you the story of my strange sitter. I do not think that I will ever have a better opportunity of doing so than to-night—Christmas night—especially as it has a slight flavor of the supernatural about it. So hand me the light, please—for my cigar, I see, has gone out—and draw your chairs a little closer.

Five years ago—that is to say, in the Christmas season of 1862—I was not as prosperous as I am now, though I must say I had every promise of the success which I have since achieved. I had commenced business only a few months before, and my establishment was a small one, but it was in a good neighborhood, No. — Twenty-sixth street, and I had fitted it up as prettily and tastefully as my limited means would allow. There was a large and fashionable boarding-house next door, kept by a Mrs. Hyde, a lady who belonged to the "upper ten" by right of birth, but who, having lost her wealth in some one of the great financial crises, had undertaken to support herself in that manner. Her venture proved eminently successful: her house was always crowded, and I obtained many sitters from among her boarders. I did not take up my quar-

ters there, however, convenient as it would have been, for her terms were too high, so I contented myself with a more economical and less pretentious lodging.

In past days I had studied the art of painting in water colors, and though my performances in that line had proved artistic failures, I found that this knowledge would be very useful to me: I could color my pictures myself, and in a style very superior to that usually attempted in photographic establishments of the cheaper order. I soon had as much work as I could execute, and my customers were of a far better class than I had at first hoped to attract. As the Christmas holidays approached, orders of course multiplied, and I was kept very busy, for the resources of my little place were but limited. About ten days before Christmas, a gentleman, who gave his name as "Captain Charles Conway, U. S. A.," called upon me for the purpose of having his picture taken as a Christmas present to his wife. He was one of the handsomest men I had ever seen. He was tall and finely formed, with features and complexion of almost feminine perfection, large, pensive, violet eyes, and a moustache and whiskers soft and golden in their silky luxuriance, as were also the clustering curls that waved

around his well-shaped head. He wished to have two likenesses of himself taken—one, a life-sized head finished in India ink, and the other, a small ivorytype vignette, colored and finished as a miniature. He was intensely vain, as very handsome men usually are, and he worried me unspeakably about the pose of his head, the proper arrangement of the light, the accurate adjustment of his cravat, etc., till I felt like giving the whole matter up in despair. At last, he managed to satisfy himself respecting these important points, and the sittings took place. I succeeded admirably: even my captious sitter professed himself satisfied after a long inspection of the negatives, from which, however, he could have learned but little. He then made an agreement with me to have both pictures finished on Christmas eve, when he purposed calling for them, and then, much to my delight, departed.

The twentieth of December was a fearfully stormy day. A heavy snow-storm prevailed all day, accompanied with violent gusts of wind, which tore and howled along the streets, blew down signs, turned umbrellas inside out, drove snow into the eyes of worried and bewildered pedestrians, and put a stop generally to much out-door travel. I was rather glad of the storm, for it kept visitors away, and gave me time to finish some of my holiday orders, which had fallen a little behindhand. I worked hard, therefore, all morning; and about two o'clock I was in the act of putting the last touches to Captain Conway's miniature, when a low, monotonous voice behind me said:

"I wish to sit for a carte de visite."

I started and looked round. I was rather startled by the sudden and unexpected interruption, and the appearance of the speaker was not calculated to reassure me. There stood just behind my chair a young girl, seemingly about seventeen years of age, and in dress and general appearance one of the most singular-looking beings I had ever beheld. Providence had apparently intended her to be pretty, for she had large, clear blue eyes, small, regular features, and a

profusion of very fair hair. But her paleness was something perfectly extraordinary. Her face was as white as marble: there was not a tinge of color even in her lips, which were slightly parted, so as to show the glistening teeth beneath. What rendered her pallor still more ghastly was a peculiar bluish tint which pervaded her complexion, and robbed it of every trace of vitality. Nothing about her face seemed alive except her great, ghastly blue eyes. Her dress was as singular as her face. She wore neither bonnet nor shawl, and was attired in a long plaited robe of white cashmere, confined around her waist by a broad white ribbon. She had on white kid gloves, and held loosely between her fingers two or three half-opened tea-rose buds and a single white camellia. Altogether, her appearance was sufficiently startling to half terrify and wholly astound me.

"I am afraid your dress will not take well," I stammered out at last: "white seldom does."

"It is my only one," was her brief answer.

I had nothing more to say; so I went to work at once to prepare a plate. When it was ready, I found my sitter already seated in the necessary attitude. Never had photographer a more motionless subject: the sitting was perfectly successful, and as I was carrying the plate into my inner room she spoke:

"When this picture is finished, give it to Captain Conway."

I bowed hurriedly and said, "Certainly," being in haste. When I returned, my sitter was gone, and I might have fancied that the whole affair was a dream, had it not been for a crumpled greenback which lay upon the table.

I set to work the next day and printed off the photograph. It came out much better than I had anticipated, and was literally a startling likeness. But it had a most unpleasant effect, looking exactly as if it were the picture of a corpse, taken propped up in a chair with the eyes open. It was a horrid idea, and to get rid of it I colored one of the pictures as carefully as possible, but without suc-

cess. I could not banish the death-like look and the fixed stare of the eyes.

The day before Christmas, Captain Conway called for his portraits. He was much pleased with them, and displayed them with great satisfaction to a gentleman who accompanied him—a Mr. Wyse, whom I knew slightly, and who appeared to listen with considerable impatience to his companion's self-complacent speeches. While they were still examining the miniature, I put the cartes de visite ordered by my strange sitter into an envelope, and offered them to Captain Conway.

"What may this be?" he asked, turning the little package over carelessly in his hand.

"A lady ordered these for you a few days ago."

"A lady? Indeed!" he said, laughing, while he proceeded to draw the photographs from the envelope. The moment he looked at them his laughter ceased suddenly: he turned deadly pale, and dashed the pictures violently to the ground.

"Who has dared to play me such a trick?" he shrieked, in a voice hoarse and almost inarticulate with rage. "Who told you to give me those cursed photographs?"

"I really do not know, sir. The lady who sat for them did not leave her name."

He staggered back a pace or two, and grew still paler, if that were possible.

"You do not mean to say that she sat for this picture a few days ago?"

"I do mean to say so. Four days ago—on the twentieth of December."

He gasped out some inarticulate words and fell heavily to the floor, in a fainting fit.

"For Heaven's sake, sir," I said to Mr. Wyse, as we bent together over the prostrate man, "explain this mystery. Who is this lady?"

The answer stunned me:

"Her name was Grace Marshall: she died nearly a year ago!"

Some months later, while I was spending my summer vacation with a friend

who lived on Staten Island, I met with a distant relative of Miss Marshall, from whom I learned the following particulars:

Charles Conway was a member of one of the oldest families in New York—a family of English origin, of infinite pretension and of unquestionable aristocratic descent, but lacking the wealth wherewith to support their dignity in appropriate style. When the war of the rebellion first broke out, young Conway joined the army, and, by virtue of some political influence exercised by his family, was made a captain at once. But the hardships and dangers of a soldier's life were not much to his taste, and as the struggle seemed destined to be a protracted one, he took advantage of a slight wound, received in his first skirmish, to quit the service. Shortly after his return to New York he was introduced to Miss Harwell, the only child and heiress of a wealthy New York merchant, whose already colossal fortune was rapidly expanding under the favorable influences of the war. Clara Harwell was young and inexperienced: the handsome captain, with his blue, dreamy eyes, soft voice and winning manner, appeared to her to be the very perfection of manhood, while, on the other hand, he found her golden attractions quite irresistible and wooed her with unfeigned fervor. Her heart was easily won: not so the consent of her father to their marriage. The handsome *vaurien* was not the style of son-in-law which the sturdy old merchant coveted, and he followed up his rejection of Captain Conway's suit by the very decided and sensible step of taking his daughter abroad, to reside there till she should be freed from her infatuation. "Out of sight, out of mind," argued the shrewd father. But, unfortunately for the success of his scheme, Charles Conway was fully aware also of the influence exercised by absence and distance; and the next week after the Harwells sailed in the *Persia* for Liverpool he followed them in the *City of London*. He succeeded in obtaining an interview with Clara in London, and, learning that Mr. Harwell intended to pass the coming

winter in Florence, he shaped his plans accordingly.

The Harwells arrived in Florence: he followed them and took up his abode in a small hotel near their lodgings. Here he devoted himself to his pursuit of Clara; and she, fascinated by the romance, the difficulties, the mystery that lent so much charm to their courtship, was, or fancied herself to be, more in love than ever. But the stolen interviews and the interchange of letters, which made up the sum-total of their intercourse, absorbed but a small portion of each day, and Captain Conway found time hang exceedingly heavy on his hands. He had no artistic tastes, and a day spent in the galleries of the Pitti and the Uffizi Palaces had amply sufficed to exhaust their attractions. But "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do," and the mischief was not slow in being provided.

At the hotel where he had taken up his quarters there was staying an American family—a Mr. and Mrs. Marshall, with their eldest daughter, Grace, a lovely, fragile-looking girl, about seventeen years of age. They were spending the winter in Italy in the vain hope that its warm climate and sunny skies might restore the health of their child, impaired as it was by the sharp winds and piercing cold of Maine, for their home was in Portland. But the malady which had fastened itself upon the poor girl had taken its worst form, and was hopeless from its very commencement, as the physicians who had recommended the European journey well knew. Save to the deluded eyes of her loving and hopeful parents, her days were numbered, so swift and fatal had been the ravages of consumption upon her delicate frame.

When she first met Captain Conway, however, one of the delusive improvements characteristic of that most deceptive disease had taken place, and she was brilliant with hope and happiness and that hectic bloom which looks so like the flush of returning health. Beautiful, lively and intelligent, she was just the companion that Charles Conway

needed to fill up the intervals of time which his courtship of Clara Harwell left vacant. He soon contrived to establish himself on an intimate footing with the Marshalls. He brought Mr. Marshall the American papers and the current magazines; he acted as interpreter for Mrs. Marshall when she sallied forth on some shopping expedition in search of Florentine mosaics, alabaster statuettes and old guipure lace; and he rode with Grace, read to her, sang to her, and talked to her on indifferent subjects, while his large blue eyes were eloquent of love. And she, poor girl! was radiantly happy, and dreamed of a future of restored health and wedded bliss, while her parents smiled approval, and were charmed to see her so well and joyous.

One morning, late in the month of February, he came to the apartments occupied by the Marshalls to announce to them his intention of going to Rome for a short time. He expected to be away about two weeks, he said—left some of Chopin's waltzes, which he wished Grace to learn before his return, and a volume of selections from the modern Italian poets for her perusal. Ten days later, Mrs. Marshall received a letter from him, informing them that he was on the eve of departing for America. He hoped that he might soon see them in New York, and trusted that they might be there at the time of his wedding, which was to take place in May. "Probably," he wrote, "you have not yet heard of my engagement to Miss Harwell. Parental opposition separated us for a time, but Mr. Harwell, finding that his daughter's affections were not to be coerced, has at last given his consent to our union, and I am the happiest of men. I know that my charming friend, Miss Grace, will rejoice to hear of my good fortune. Pray present my compliments to her, and tell her that I long to make her acquainted with my Clara. I know that they are destined to be very intimate friends some day. We sail next Saturday from Liverpool in the Scotia, and I will gladly take charge of any letters or parcels you may wish to

send home, provided you forward them at once."

Such was the letter which dealt Grace Marshall her *coup de grace*. At the best, she could not have lived long: the deadly malady had fastened itself with too cruel a certainty upon her delicate frame. But she might have been spared for some months longer to her doting parents—might have passed away calmly, peacefully and resigned, had Charles Conway never crossed her path. As it was, a wild desire possessed her to see his face once more. Amid the fever and weakness, and violent attacks of coughing which marked this final and fatal relapse of her illness, she made but one request, uttered but one cry: "Let us go home: let me only see him once, just once again, before I die." • The physicians shook their heads, and predicted the worst effects from a sea voyage undertaken at that season of the year; but they all knew that the poor girl's condition was hopeless, and they finally united in counseling the unhappy parents to accede to her wishes.

They traveled by short stages to Germany, and then to Hamburg, where they embarked on one of the German steamships for America. Grace rallied so much during the first part of the voyage that there was every hope of her living to reach her native shores. But when the vessel was within twelve hours' sail of New York, a storm arose: the violent rolling of the ship was too severe for the enfeebled frame of the invalid, and brought on a fearful spasm of coughing, in which a blood-vessel was ruptured, and Grace Marshall expired within sight of the lights of Sandy Hook. She was quiet and resigned at the last, and only mentioned Charles Conway's name to make one request concerning him. "I want him to come to my funeral," she whispered, almost with her dying breath. "He will forget me; I know he will, but I think he will remember me a little longer if he sees me in my coffin." And Mr. Marshall, with clenched hands and scowling brow, swore that he should come—that he would *make* him come, did he dare to refuse.

But Captain Conway had no idea of refusing. He was too much of a gentleman, too fond of having everything go smoothly and pleasantly, to do anything which might lead to a disagreeable state of affairs. He answered the curt, cold note in which Mr. Marshall acquainted him with Grace's last request and the wish of her family that it might be granted, by a charming letter of condolence, addressed to Mrs. Marshall, wherein he spoke so feelingly of his lovely little friend, of the pleasant hours he had passed in her society, and of the grief he felt for her loss, that the sorrowing parents would have felt half inclined to forgive him had they not looked upon him as the immediate cause of her death. And so the day of the funeral arrived, and Grace Marshall's last wish was realized: Charles Conway came and looked on her as she lay in her coffin, attired in a loose plaited robe of white cashmere, and with rosebuds and camellias in her waxen hands. He, not being wholly marble, was really somewhat moved by the pitiful sight, and the face of the dead girl, whose last hours of life he had wantonly embittered, probably haunted him as the memory of her days of comparative health and beauty had never done. And this was the face which looked on him with such startling effect from the photograph that I had given him.

Now I might end my story here, and leave you all under the impression that a spectre had really sat to me for its photograph. But my story has a sequel, and I prefer the more real, but less startling, dénouement.

One day in the following autumn, one of Mrs. Hyde's boarders, a young physician named Dr. Hale, came to my establishment for the purpose of having some old daguerreotypes copied. After settling price, size and other necessary preliminaries, he took up the book of specimens which lay upon the table and commenced to turn over the leaves. At last he came to the photograph of my mysterious sitter.

"Why, this is Miss Marshall!" he exclaimed, in surprise. "I did not know

that she had ever had her photograph taken."

"Did you know her?" I asked.

"Certainly I did," was the reply. "She boarded with Mrs. Hyde all last winter, and I was called in to attend her in two of her attacks, by the maiden aunt who has charge of her."

"I thought she was dead!" was my involuntary exclamation.

"Her twin-sister, Grace, died about a year ago, but Julia Marshall, the original of this picture, is alive at present, and as well as she ever will be in this world. She boarded at Mrs. Hyde's all last winter to be under medical treatment, but no physician ever has cured, or ever will cure, epilepsy. When she left New York last March to return home, she was not one particle better than when she came."

Thus simply and naturally was the mystery explained.

During a subsequent conversation with Dr. Hale, I learned the following particulars:

Julia and Grace Marshall were, as he had before stated, twin-sisters, and resembled each other during their childhood as closely as twins usually do. When Julia was about six years of age, she was seized with convulsive attacks, which proved to be epilepsy in its worst form. All that medical skill could effect was tried, but without avail. The malady remained unchecked, and the paroxysms soon became so frequent and so violent as to necessitate the entire seclusion of the invalid from the world. She was placed under the care of a maiden aunt, Mrs. Marshall's sister, who resided in Gorham, Maine, and thus, though she was within easy reach of her family, she was entirely withdrawn from observation; so that few save the most intimate friends of the Marshall family were aware of the existence of this sorely-afflicted daughter. As years rolled on, Julia grew in stature and in intellect, but the fearful disease with which she was

afflicted affected her brain, and so warped without destroying her mind that, without being actually insane, she exhibited many of the peculiar traits of insanity. Prominent amongst these was a taste for malicious mischief, joined to a great degree of cunning. She had loved her sister very dearly, had seen and wept over her lifeless form as she lay arrayed for the grave, and had overheard her parents' bitter comments on the conduct of Charles Conway, and the last request made by her sister concerning him. She frequently announced her intention of giving him a lesson some day, and certainly she had chosen an effectual method of doing so. But why she had chosen that particular method of course it was impossible to say. Probably from the window of her boarding-house she had seen Captain Conway enter my establishment, and had then conceived the idea which she afterward so cleverly carried into execution. Her ghastly appearance and the bluish, corpse-like hue of her complexion, which had so astounded me, and so aided in carrying out the delusion, were due partly to her disease, and partly to a medicine used in its treatment—a preparation of nitrate of silver, which lodges in the tissues of the skin and imparts to it a permanent bluish tint.

I do not know if Captain Conway ever learned the truth respecting my ghostly sitter. I certainly took no trouble whatever to inform him of it. "Let him," I thought, "imagine that the ghost of Grace Marshall did really thus come back to terrify him. It may do him good: it may teach him a lesson." But I do not think it did, for I hear that Captain Conway is at present one of the most notorious male flirts in the city of New York.

And now, friends, my story is finished; and if any of you will take the trouble to come to my new gallery, No. — Broadway, any day before dark, I will show you the portrait of my mysterious sitter.



WHO SHALL SEPARATE US?

IT was a dreary November night.

Around old Judge Edwards' mansion-house the wind howled a wild Ban-shee wail; the darkness was thick and murky; and the rain smote the window-panes in blinding sheets, gusty drops every now and then falling clear down the wide chimney and hissing upon the hickory fire which leaped and crackled behind the old-fashioned fire-dogs of polished brass.

A candle, set in a tall silver candle-stick on the claw-footed mahogany table, flickered with uncertain light, casting wavy shadows over the antique furniture, the rows of crowded book-shelves, the lofty, corniced ceiling, the white bust of old dead-and-gone Judge Edwards upon its bracket over the paneled door, and, last of all, over Priscilla Edwards, sitting alone in the great oaken chair beside the fendered hearth.

Time had been when the life-tide eddied warm into a maiden's rounded cheek and rushed like crimson waves from neck to brow; but that was in Priscilla's lost girlhood; and now, at thirty-five, she was what she had been growing into during the years that lay between—a pale, self-centred woman, with brown hair folded plainly above a calm brow, a reticent mouth, and eyes that told no secrets of all these years that had dropped away into the great silent reservoir of the Past.

It was a quiet life Miss Edwards lived there in the old mansion-house among the cedars; and year by year its monot-

ony was less disturbed, as fewer visitors came over the broad threshold, while from even these she shrank away. In her father's day all had been so different. Then the house was always full of guests, particularly at times of court sittings, when grave and well-known lawyers, with commanding persons and dome-like foreheads, consulted with the Judge in his library or dined at his hospitable table; and, now and then some courtly Senator-colleague from the distant capital unbent from talk of Washington, the elder Adams and weighty national affairs, to address gallant remarks to his dark-eyed, handsome hostess, who sat behind the tall silver urn with stately grace, conversed with vivacity and wit, and afterward sang lively airs to the music of the harpsichord in the long drawing-room. And then there was a dark-eyed, black-haired lad—his mother's copy in grace, *aplomb* and suave mien—who often attracted his share of notice, being occasionally permitted to sit at dinner and drink a toast with the guests, and have his little turn at repartee.

Such the memories of Priscilla's girlhood and early maidenhood. Yet this brilliant lady and her handsome son were not the real mother and brother of her blood. A mound in the grave-yard over on Wood Hill covered the dust of the gentle, quiet, but warm-hearted and practical first Mrs. Judge Edwards, who, after sharing the struggles and privations of the young lawyer's early days, cheer-

ing him by her sympathy, inciting him to his first professional triumphs, and bringing him several sons, who died in infancy, at length laid a little blue-eyed girl in his arms and died, to have her place filled by and by with the attractive widow of a foreign ambassador who had died suddenly at Washington, and who, within the twelvemonth, bestowed her hand upon the dignified New England Senator then serving his first term in the National Congress.

And so Judge Edwards—very much fascinated with and very proud of his new lady-wife—brought her back with him to his New England home, and made her mother of his little five-year old daughter; and madame's son—a bright, *piquant*, handsome lad, with winning foreign ways—no less than herself, was received into his step-father's ample heart, to share every privilege of his stately home and rapidly-increasing income.

Thus ten years of social, affluent life went by, varied by winters in Washington or nearer cities, and a yearly term at the capital of his own State, to which the Judge was called in office of governor; while the dark-eyed, handsome lad, grown into a polished, manly youth, was being educated at college, and the shy Priscilla, inheriting her mother's looks and ways, was blooming into a lovely maiden at home. Then suddenly Madame Edwards' health failed—slowly at first, but afterward rapidly—till, from being held prisoner in the mansion-house six months of the year with Consumption's fires blazing on her thin cheeks, the hectic went out in the pale snows of Death, and the once gay, brilliant woman was laid to sleep under colder and harsher skies than those of her native France.

Nor was the old Judge, broken by his labors and his sorrow, long in following. He, too, went to his rest, and was laid between her who had been the mother of his children and the sharer of his early struggles, and her who had borne no conjugal burden, but had, instead, exacted tribute by her *piquant* wit and beauty; and the three slept together

very quietly—Priscilla Gilbert, Madame Louise Solero and Joseph Edwards.

And only two were left to share the ample fortune and estate—the adopted step-son and the orphaned daughter.

But all that, as I said, happened many years ago in Priscilla Edwards' girlhood; and now she lived a secluded, almost unsocial life, there in the paternal mansion among the cedars.

Not that she was ever idle, for Priscilla held oversight more than nominal over the farm, which was "carried on" by Abner Gregory, who had been hired man in the Judge's day. She corrected his accounts, and gave orders to Abner's wife, Deborah, who churned and baked and kept things with a true thrifty housewife's pride, sighing now and then for the old days, when, as madame's maid, she had helped churn and bake and wait upon the grand company that used to come in the Judge's time, now gone for ever. And then Priscilla—who inherited her father's clear, logical mind with her mother's quiet but practical woman-temperament—gained knowledge from the books in the library, and sewed there a great deal on garments for the poor, dispensing her charities through Deborah, who went and came and knew all the wants in the town; and on Sundays she attended service regularly in the plain wooden meeting-house, sitting in her father's pew, and then drove home by herself in the high, old-fashioned chaise to the stately, old-fashioned mansion-house among the cedars.

But to come back to the November night when we left her alone by the library fire, the work fallen from her folded hands, her eyes bent upon the embers crackling behind the bright fender, and the storm making its eerie music without in the darkness.

The evening wore on; and when the old clock on the broad staircase had struck nine, and Abner Gregory was raking the ashes over a gloomy bed of coals in the kitchen fireplace, there suddenly came a fall of the brass knocker on the front door, sounding clear and sharp throughout the house.

"Mercy on us, husband! who can it

be at *this* time o' night? Some o' the neighbors must be sick; but no: *they'd* come round to the side door. You go quick, Abner," said Mrs. Gregory, putting her head out of the little bed-room off the long kitchen she had just left.

"Yes, Debby!" and the man dropped the fire-shovel, took up the candle and hurried from the kitchen, through a couple of intervening closed rooms, into the hall that led to the great front door.

"Some *stranger*, I guess!" he said to himself as he went along; then, slipping back the large iron bar, he opened the door, shading the candle with one hand, lest it should be extinguished by the gusty wind.

A man muffled in a voluminous cloak stood on the broad stone steps—a tall, slender man, with a slight stoop in his shoulders, the lower part of his face hidden in a luxuriant black beard, and a pair of gleaming black eyes looking out from beneath the brim of a soft traveling-hat worn low over his forehead. And behind the man were seen, through the darkness, the glancing lights of a carriage rolling away down the winding avenue leading to the highway.

While Mr. Gregory stood with a look of inquiry on his face, the stranger stepped up over the threshold, and, closing the door, lifted his hat with a polished air: then said, in a voice whose tones held a slightly foreign accent, while a smile played round his mouth:

"You don't remember me, Monsieur Abner Gregorie?"

Abner Gregory started like one out of a dream, for it was a dream of doubt and inquiry in which he had stood mazed. Years before, a bright, playful lad had dubbed him by the only title the plain "hired man" had ever worn, and the broad grin with which the honor had always been received then, overspread the man's rough, good-humored face now.

"*Mister Victor!* Is it indeed *you?* And come back to the old place ag'in?" he asked, holding the candle closer.

"Yes, Abner, it's me—Victor Solero. No wonder you looked surprised, my friend, for I've changed more than you

in all these years since I went away. I knew *you* in a moment. Is any one else here? Mam'selle Priscilla?" and he paused, but his restless, black eyes peered beyond the man into the gloom of the great hall and up the wide winding staircase.

"Abner, show Mr. Solero into the library," came in clear tones from the direction of a door that was opened in the farther extremity of the hall; for Priscilla Edwards had recognized a voice she would have known anywhere upon the wide earth, although it had not fallen on her ears for many a long, long year.

And in a few moments more the newcomer stood where he had been summoned, while Abner returned to the kitchen to impart the great news to his wife, rake open the fire anew; and Deborah commenced a series of wondering questions and awaited the orders she felt would soon come from her mistress. But a full half hour went by ere there came a call from the library, which the dame employed in getting on the tea-kettle, spreading the supper-table in the dining-room, and, lastly, in bringing out the large brass warming-pan, in readiness to "take off the chill" from the long unoccupied bed in the guest-chamber.

"It's best to be gittin' things ready, Abner, for I s'pose Miss Priscilla is too flustered at Mister Victor's comin' back to think he may be hungry or tired," she said, as she bustled about. "And to think you should a' knowed him as soon as he *mounseered* you, Abner!" she added, laughing.

"Sartinly, Debby. It came over me dreadful nateral-like. I dunno's I should a' ever thought o' *him* ef he hadn't spoke up jest as he used to when he was a youngster. And, bless me! I was a young man *myself* then, Debby; and *you* too, wife, hadn't got so many years, by a dozen or more, onto your head."

"*Fifteen*, Abner," replied Mrs. Gregory. "It's sixteen years, come February, since the Judge died; and 'twas the next year *after* that that young Mister Victor went off. Lemme see—Miss Priscilla, she was about nineteen then;

and the madame used to say her son was nigh five year older. Mercy on us, husband! Mister Victor must be a man goin' on to *forty* now; and I've allers been thinkin' of him jest as he was when he went away. He *must* be altered, Abner!"

"Sartinly—a little, Debby. But then, you know, gentlefolks hold their own better'n hard-workin' ones like you and me. Now, Miss Priscilla. Wall, I can't say but *she* seems older'n I *can* remember her; but, arter all, it's in her *ways* more'n her *looks*—kinder settled like. They say her own mother's folks—the Gilberts—were a quiet race, livin' a good deal by theirselves; and she takes arter 'em."

"Miss Priscilla is one o' the salt of the earth; though I can't help wishin' sometimes she'd have more company, and make the house more as 'twas in her father's day. But then she's never had any kith or kin to encourage her in it. If some of her own folks had lived, a brother or sister—P'raps, now Mister Victor has come, things'll be different.

"P'raps so, Debby," echoed Abner.

Meantime, after the new-comer had crossed the library threshold, the woman there stood quietly beside her chair near the hearth—so quiet and unmoved that one would have thought she was receiving one who was no stranger to her.

That calm, self-possessed manner surprised and agitated the visitor; and, in a quick, nettled tone, and with a flash of his glittering eyes, he said reproachfully,

"It is *fifteen years* since we parted, Priscilla."

"I know it. Will you be seated, Victor Solero?" she said; and yet she did not extend her hand or advance a step toward him, though this man was once more than foster-brother to her, and the width of the ocean had severed them during the long period to which he had alluded.

Perhaps Victor Solero had thought to startle her into a display of emotion by his return, thus unannounced, to the home of his boyhood and youth: this was the mental gauge Priscilla Edwards

put upon him, remembering his native vanity; but she misjudged him.

"You do not give me welcome," he next said, in a slightly deprecating manner—not as though he was imputing a lack of courtesy to her, but as if some doubt had arisen in his own mind whether a welcome were indeed deserved by him.

"In my father's day his doors always stood open to his step-son, and they will never be closed by his daughter."

It was a well-spoken reply, in that same calm, unmoved tone with which she had first received him—just such a reply as came up from a heart long schooled to crush down every emotion of tenderness.

"Is that all? And yet we were once very near to each other!"

He said this sadly, and with a dull pain at his heart and a feeling of self-reproach; for he knew that if he was now suffering loss, his own hands had stricken what he mourned away from him.

And Priscilla Edwards heard his words and looked upon his drooping figure with no pity in her breast. She did not make allowances for the change that might have come to him with the years since they had parted. She saw him still the man she had once known—older, it is true, but handsomer, and with the air of travel and culture about him; but some instinct seemed to tell her that he still was heart-free from all other women; and his last-uttered sentence seemed like craving a return of her old affection.

More than ever was she confirmed in the course she had taken.

"Victor Solero, when I recognized your voice to-night, I said to myself, 'My foster-brother has come back.' As such you are welcome, and I give you sisterly greeting;" and she extended her hand. But when he would have pressed it to his lips, she drew it away, adding, a little sarcastically, "You forget that I am only a humble countrywoman, long unused to gallantries, Monsieur Solero."

For a moment the man grew flushed: then he said, calmly, "I know you do

not mean to be unkind, Priscilla. You never were unkind in those early days, and it is foreign to your nature now as then."

"Victor, do not refer to the past any farther than our former relation as brother and sister by adoption will warrant. All else is a sealed book to me. If you come back thinking to rake up the old flame on the hearthstone of my heart, you mistake, for every spark died out there years ago, and even the ashes are scattered;" and she confronted him with a face clear and white as though cut in marble.

The man's head drooped lower upon his breast, for the sight of her pale face, confirming her words, cut him to the quick. "My poor Priscilla! You, as well as I, have suffered," he said, softly.

The response came sharply: "Don't pity me! I tell you I don't want it! What right have you to say I have suffered? Nobody ever thought so of you, or me either. They said you went away because you preferred your fatherland and kinsfolk; and they say, too, that I have lived here alone because I am a strong-minded, unsocial woman, preferring this life I have chosen. And so I have—so I do. Now, Victor Solero, I don't ask you what you have crossed the sea for: I don't want to know; but, as I said, you are welcome—to the homestead, to the farm, to the library, and my own company, if you should desire it—to everything but your old employment of tampering with my religious faith or endeavoring to win such a poor, withered heart as you once left behind you. You see we are man and woman now—middle-aged and plain-spoken—and understand each other. Now let me ring for Mrs. Gregory," and she turned to reach the bell-rope.

"One moment, Priscilla. No tarrying for me under this roof unless you first listen to me," said Mr. Solero, earnestly, arresting her movement. "I have come back purposely to see you—to speak with you; and if you deny me, I shall never come again to ask it." He spoke with impressive energy.

"You said, when we parted, that we

should never meet again, and yet you are here," returned the woman, in such sarcastic tones as showed she did not yet relent toward him.

"I know it, Priscilla. A man smarting under the mortification of rejection is not apt to be choice in his expressions; and, as many another has done, I was fain to make it appear that you were most to blame, even while I knew better. But, Priscilla, time and reflection have softened me long since; and yet I never should have come back to you had not a recent consciousness come upon me that a heavier Hand than Disappointment is eating away my life. *That* has subdued my pride, and brought me here before it is too late;" and his tones grew strangely sad as he ceased speaking.

"What do you mean?" asked his companion, a little startled look breaking up the stony calm of her face.

"*This*, Priscilla;" and even as he spoke, a short, husky cough was smothered back: "I have come home to you a dying man; and I could not go until I had first seen you."

"Victor!"

The tone in which that single word was spoken expressed surprise, unbelief and pain blended together; and the woman's eyes rapidly scanned his face and figure.

"It is true, Priscilla," he went on, speaking in a low voice, like one who talks of unwelcome themes, for it was, indeed, unwelcome to this once gay, brilliant man of the world. "I don't dare conceal it from you. You don't see it in this first hour of excitement—one would not; but the honest light of day will tell you that it is a false sparkle in my eye, while all here is slowly consuming;" and he laid a shapely but transparent hand upon his hollow chest. "For years it has been creeping on—my mother's disease; and Provençal skies and Mediterranean airs, though they have held it in check, will not save me. I am a doomed man; but I come back to America to talk with you, to explain some things, and beg your forgiveness before I sleep beside *ma chère mère*

yonder;" and he pointed westward, in the direction of pine-crowned Wood Hill.

Then Victor Solero sank into the family arm-chair near where he stood. His chest heaved with labored breathings, his whole attitude betokened weariness, but his gleaming eyes were fixed beseechingly on his companion.

"Say all you wish, Victor," said the woman in a softened voice.

"You have suffered. I see that in your face. I think you may have suffered as much as I, Priscilla."

"More, Victor: women always do. Men have a hundred things to turn their thoughts from any trouble that may come to them—business, change, excitement, intercourse with the outside world. And you had the range of the gay capital of the European continent. But I was here, left in the spot where I was stricken, with only my blighted life and my increasing loneliness."

It seemed as if this reply had been forced from her—not to cause him pain, but as the just acknowledgment of her own sorrow.

"It was very sad that we parted," said Mr. Solero.

"It was sad that we were forced to part, Victor. I could not unlearn to love you easily, but I loved my own soul more; and I have never repented my decision. The faith of my New England ancestry was too firmly a part of my own moral life to pale before the sophisms of the skeptic and free-thinker; and, left alone as I was, with no father to guide me, I see now that God took me up and led me into the safe path;" and she spoke with dignified frankness.

"But, Priscilla, did I not tell you I would never control your religious creed—that you should continue to worship as you pleased, even under the strictest code of the ancient Puritan régime, if you desired? You remember, mignon?"

"I remember all you promised, Victor," answered the woman, and no thrill of delight quivered through her frame as the old pet name fell on her ears. "I never have forgotten anything. But I was clear-sighted, even through my love.

I suppose it was because of my cooler New England blood. Women of your nation give themselves up more to their feelings, but the blaze goes out quicker than the steady fire, Victor. As I said, I was clear-sighted even then, and I saw my danger. I had loved you wholly after my father died. There was nobody else to be kind to me; and when you came home here, it seemed only natural that we should be all to each other. I don't think you ever knew the strength of my love during that year, Victor. But when you laughed at my quiet life, and spoke of your gay friends and their 'wider views,' as you called them, I began to tremble. I saw my danger. You were talented, brilliant in conversation and fascinating. Already you had a power over me. In time I should have seen with your eyes, breathed with your breath and thought with your mind. French philosophy would have overturned the faith of my mother's and father's God if I had longer listened. Victor Solero, I should have been a miserable woman if I had ruined my soul for the sake of your love," she said, solemnly.

Her companion drew a sigh of relief as her words ceased:

"I understand you better than I did, Priscilla; and you must read my heart too. When I went away I was very angry with you, and mortified with myself that I had failed to win you, for I had thought the task would be an easy one. But I admired you more the day you rejected me than I should had I been accepted, for you were consistent with your convictions of right and duty, and few at your age would have thought of anything beyond their need of affection. It was a strange love I had felt for you, Priscilla. We had grown up side by side as brother and sister. When I was in college, I never cared for you but as my adopted father's daughter. And at Washington, that year when I was private secretary to Senator Antrim, our father's friend, I thought of you only as my quiet little sister at home. But when our father's death recalled me here, I found that you were no longer

child, but woman. Then I loved you. Not with the passion of the senses, though you were fair to look upon; but it was your clear mind, your keen intellect, and your shy but firm heart and faith I wanted to subdue to my own control. True, I said I would never attempt to influence your religious belief; but all the time I despised and hated the orthodox creed of your people, and endeavored to infuse instead the subtle poisons I had imbibed from a lax college set and the infidel books I had read. I loved to talk with you upon those themes—to see your face light with excitement and your eye kindle with thought—and mark how, sometimes, despite the faith that never yielded, my sophistry would bewilder and confuse you. Like the wrecker, luring to destruction the vessel that sails the wild Biscayan Bay, I was watching for your soul. May the God you always worshiped pardon me! And will you, too, forgive me, Priscilla, and pray that a happier future may await one who only wrought desolation and suffering here?"

And, with that confession of his own soul-needs, the once proud skeptic reached forth his blue-veined, transparent hand toward his companion.

Priscilla clasped the thin palm within her own, and bowed her face upon it for a few moments to conceal her emotion. Then she lifted her head and said, with an effort at cheerfulness:

"Victor, don't think of the past any more! If I have uttered a sharp word to-night, I pray you forgive me. Let all that go by now. God has indeed been very good, if He has brought even a thought of Himself to you. It is to me the compensation after the pain; and to you I feel that 'twill be peace and life. Now, we must commence a new existence. Let us talk no more. You are tired and travel-worn, and need rest. And about your health. You must cheer up out of these gloomy thoughts, and I shall nurse you well again. I am glad you have come home. Now let me call Mrs. Gregory, and a supper and glass of mulled wine will bring you refreshment."

An hour later, while the storm rose higher, and the homeless November wind sobbed and wailed about the gables of the old mansion-house, the returned wanderer slept calmly, with an almost childlike smile upon his lips.

But Priscilla Edwards still lingered in the old library below, among the shadows that crept higher on the paneled wall, while the fire smouldered low, the candle died out in its socket, and the white bust of the dead Judge looked down like a living figure through the dusk.

The long, cold New England winter had come.

Snows deep and white draped the brown earth, and muffled with ermine the cedars around the house and the towering pines on Wood Hill. The Frost Sprite—more cunning than human artists—traced his most fantastic pencilings upon the window-panes, and congealed the breath of living creatures into foamy wreaths like smoke. The days grew shorter in their span, and the early gloamings brought in the long, cold nights, with steel-blue skies and countless glittering stars, and sometimes pale auroral fires, that shot in lanced flames athwart the northern sky.

And by and by the worn old Year, very wan and weary, groped feebly to his grave, glad to escape ere the young and lusty new was ushered in.

Into the old Judge Edwards' mansion-house, into the chambers and library, warmed with the roaring wood-fires, thick crimson carpets and heavy shutters, penetrated the winter's chill breath, bringing blight to the weakening lungs of the invalid, who lingered in his arm-chair or lounged upon the sofa drawn up before the fendered hearth. It was surprising how rapidly Victor Solero had gone down in the short time that had elapsed since he came back to the old place. Each day his tall form grew more emaciated, his chest more hollow and his voice more husky; while his slender hands, transparent as porcelain, seemed hardly able to lift the book or pen with which he whiled away the hours. And one bright January morning—when Abner

Gregory had brought round the sleigh, urging that the air, soft and mild enough for "a thaw," should tempt "Mister Victor" over to the village—the answer came in a sudden hæmorrhage, which sent the frightened hired man over to town for old Doctor Burroughs at his fastest speed.

Following the skillful physician's visit, the invalid grew calmer than before, and, though he seldom left his sofa save for the bed in the room adjoining at night, he made no complaint and spoke but little of himself.

Priscilla, still hoping against hope, became the most faithful of nurses to the failing man—reading to him, writing for him, playing tunes on his mother's old-fashioned harpsichord, which she had caused to be moved from the closed drawing-room, and tempting his capricious appetite with little delicacies her own hands prepared. And Abner and Deborah Gregory were unfailing in their attentions, for he, who had ever been a favorite in his bright, active boyhood, was "young Mister Victor" to them still.

But neither skillful medical art nor tenderest care could arrest the march of the royal conqueror, whose avant-courier had, erewhile, hung his crimson banner on the victim's cheek, mirrored the glitter of his armor in the flashing eye, and heard his trumpet-call re-echoed in the hollow cough.

One day the sick man said, "Will you read to me, Priscilla? No, not that," as she took up a volume of essays which he used to like, "but your Book of Consolation, for I, too, would find the Comforter who is *your* Friend. You look surprised, dear sister; but surely he who can never be cured in body should seek the healing of his sin-sick soul; and from one so deceived as I perhaps the Great Physician will not turn away. Do you understand, Priscilla? The faith you have always cherished must be mine."

Priscilla Edwards did understand, and with a great joy at her heart; and as the weeks lapsed, in the deceitful pauses of the disease, when fitful strength animated his mind and frame, the former disciple

of Voltaire and Rousseau passed hours in listening to the inspired revelations of Sacred Writ, till the clear teachings of the God-Man had fully dissipated from his mind the poisons of a delusive sophistry, even as the deadly miasma is scattered before the full rays of the revivifying morning sun.

Down, down, like a plummet in a clear sea, sank infidel tenet and the free-thinker's boast; and over the placid waters hovered the fair, white-winged angel, Faith, waiting such time as the newly-washed soul should be released, then borne aloft to the Christian's heaven.

April came, and still Victor Solero lingered; and one day of violet blooms and fitful cloud-shadows, as he lay upon his sofa near the window, his eyes bent upon Priscilla, who had been reading to him, but now sat with the closed book in her lap, he said, in a low but earnest tone—

"Mignon, I have a little wish that lies close to my heart. Be my wife before I am called. Are you willing to make the sacrifice?"

Priscilla flushed, then turned pale.

"It will be no sacrifice, dear Victor; I have always loved you," she answered.

"We were not fitted for each other once, dear Priscilla. But now, soul answers to soul, and will, through all the ages of that eternity into which I so soon shall pass. *You* will not be called yet, my sister and my beloved. Your work is not done; but you will be happier here to know I shall wait you on the other side," he said, as he clasped the hand she extended him.

They were married—he with Consumption's paling fires on his hollow cheeks; Priscilla with her brown hair banded smoothly over her calm, full brow, and both with the holy light of love and faith within their eyes.

And in the June time—when the full flush of the Summer was upon the land and her deepest azure in the sky—the hectic faded wholly, the brilliant sparkle of the eye grew dim, and Victor Solero's grave was hollowed beside the spot where his mother's lettered headstone rose near by.

Priscilla did not loose her hold on life when they buried her husband. She had lived under a cloud too long, and sorrow is long in slaying; for the tender fingers of the Consoler bind up rent heart-strings, and steady our feet over deep chasms wherein our dear ones have fallen out of sight. Thirty-five more years were marked out for her ere the Widow Solero—known henceforth as such by the mourning garb she always wore—was also taken. The full "threescore and ten" were allotted her; and those in Aphorpe who had grown up with her from the cradle, and grown old with her for the tomb, said that the last half of her life was the best.

Had her sorrow caused her to become more selfish, then it would have failed of its mission; but it did not. The lonely woman went out of self and her seclusion with gentle ministrations to the poor, the suffering, the unfortunate, and

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Christian charity for the erring and sinful. Wherever grief or want was known, her pure, calm face, sweet voice and tender white hand brought the needed relief and sympathy.

The last half of a life bereft of the sweet ties that bound other women's hearts to kindred in their homes was not bereft of happiness to her who dedicated it to the work of her Master—in the performance of good deeds no earthly pen ever numbered, but which were written by the recording angel on the white tablets kept in heaven.

And then, with snowy hair folded under her widow's cap, but the smile of eternal truth on lips no man had ever kissed save the one love of her life and the father of her birth, "Priscilla—daughter of the Hon. Joseph Edwards, and relict of the late Victor Solero"—went home to her heavenly rest and reward.





THE YOUNG PRIEST.

I.

ON an early day in Lent, 1865, just after morning mass in his little Acadian chapel, in the parish of St. Landry, the Rev. Isidore Joseph Gauthier was starting homeward. His face wore a calm and happy expression, and he was in a pleasant mood. The weather was remarkably fine, there had been a large attendance at mass, an unusually large number had partaken of communion, and he had felt more than his ordinary fervor and devotion. It was easy to see that his own elevated feelings had been shared by those around him: indeed, there was a general regret when the post-communion was reached, and when he sung out in his rich, musical voice, the *Benedicamus Domino*. Many an eye seemed sparkling with moisture as he read the last Gospel—many a face seemed to wear a holier expression as the choir sang *O Salutaris hostia* and the congregation moved down the aisles. Removing his robes, the young priest followed his little flock, but paused a moment on the steps to offer a prayer in his own behalf—a prayer of thanksgiving. God had been very good to him. For four years he had been praying for the safety of his only brother, exposed to the perils of war, and a few days before he had seen that beloved brother safe and well. The young priest—he was not yet four-and-twenty, but still in holy orders and appointed to his native chapel—felt at peace with all mankind, and thanked his heavenly Father for life and the good he was permitted to do

with it, as he stood there with uncovered head and eyes turned to the sky. His was a handsome face indeed. Very fair and spiritual, eyes shining with a holy light, the lines of his mouth showing goodness in every curve, he seemed, at that moment like a young apostle of old—very like the well-known pictures of the youthful St. John. From his youth this resemblance had been remarked, and he had been called St. John by the neighbors, who applauded his intention of entering the priesthood.

He stepped lightly down the walk, crossed the road, hesitated a moment there, then entered a narrow footpath leading across the prairie. He walked slowly along, enjoying the fine morning air and in pleasant meditation, running over in his mind the various stages of his life, thinking of the friends of his youth, now scattered he knew not where. Reflecting thus, he had half crossed the prairie when his eyes fell upon an object by the path, and his steps were suddenly arrested. A mere bundle of clothing it seemed at first, but, drawing nearer, he perceived the form of a little girl, apparently sleeping, with her face half concealed in the shadow of a wild pomegranate bush. As he looked at the thin, pinched features, the well-darned dress and coarse, worn shoes, he read a tale of poverty and suffering which strongly appealed to his heart; but he started as he looked more closely into the little face, for there was something there which seemed familiar.

"Wonderfully like!" he said aloud, his mind reverting to some former reflections.

"She has their very look, yet it must be casual. I may have seen her at the chapel," he thought, as he laid his hand gently upon the child's shoulder. Two great eyes opened wearily at the touch and looked up into his.

"What is the matter, my child?" he asked kindly. "Why are you lying here?"

"Oh, Father Joseph, I'm so tired! I've been to fetch the doctor—maman is so sick. I ran until I had to stop and rest." She was too weary to move, and spoke to him as she was lying.

"She knows who I am," he thought as she called his name: "I must have seen her at the chapel." This thought flew through his mind while she was speaking.

"Have you seen the doctor?"

"I have been to his house: I was going home, but had to stop and rest."

"Where do you live, my child?—is it far?"

"Oh no—just over there: you can just see a bit of the house through the trees."

She had risen to point with her finger, but her wearied legs tottered and she fell heavily against him. He caught her in his arms and looked in the direction indicated.

"There!" he exclaimed in surprise. "Why, child, I did not think any one could live there. How long has your mamma been in that house?"

"I believe more than two months," was the childish answer.

"Let me carry you," he said, raising her in his arms: "what is your name?"

"Estelle: that is mamma's name too."

"A pretty name, my child. But get on my back: I can carry you easier so. I want to see your mother, and will go home with you."

"Oh, Father Joseph, if you'll be so good!" was all that she could say, as, clasping her arms about his neck and laying her head upon his shoulders, she burst into tears. The child's heart was deeply touched by this unexpected kindness, but he thought that her tears came from fatigue, and permitted her to weep

while he walked on in silence for some moments.

At length Father Joseph—as the young priest was called in the parish—seemed to wake from some reverie that had carried him far away, and he spoke to her in a cheerful, kindly tone, attracting her attention at once. It took but a moment to quiet her sobbings and to dry her tears, but he had no time to question her farther before they reached the door of the miserable cabin. He lowered the little girl gently upon the step and prepared to follow her in. A single glance betrayed the poverty of the place. He followed his guide across the threshold, and his steps were suddenly arrested as he watched her running across the room to a low bed in one corner. Upon the pallet lay a sick woman, whose emaciated face, flushed with fever, and burning eyes now turned toward him; while kneeling by the couch a maiden of twenty, perhaps, was gently fanning the sufferer. The latter turned slowly and wearily as her attendant rose and stood full before his face. Their eyes met, and with one startled look the girl threw up her arms, her eyes opened, her lips parted, and, swaying to and fro for a moment, she gently let herself down upon the floor. She did not faint, but the surprise was too much for her, and her limbs refused to bear her weight.

"Honore!" exclaimed Father Joseph, also transfixed by surprise. "Thank God that I have found you at last!" He sprang to the bedside and extended his hand to the sick woman. A look of recognition came over the wan face, and, seizing his hand in both her own, she carried it to her lips; but the hold quickly relaxed, and just whispering, "My children! oh, my children!" her eyes closed upon the first happy scene that had greeted them for months.

Meantime, Honore had not once removed her eyes from his face, but sat staring at him with the dazed look of the somnambulist. She was weak, very weak—this poor girl with whom fate had dealt so hardly; and when memory came she bowed her head upon her knees and

sobbed convulsively. With tear-dimmed eyes Father Joseph looked upon this affecting sight, gently chafed the thin hand in his own until consciousness returned, then knelt by the bedside in prayer. Presently he drew a stool close beside them.

"Tell me, Honore—pray tell me how long you have been here. We have searched for you in every direction: every one supposed you were in New Orleans."

"So we were until mamma got sick," Honore answered, without thinking who were meant by the pronoun "we:" "until then we stayed on in the city, but at last crawled back here, hoping—hoping that a—a change of air might do her good." She wept no longer, but the heavy sobs that almost choked her utterance were infinitely more painful.

"Why did you not let me know of it?"

"We did not know you were here: we had no idea where you were. When the children spoke so much of Father Joseph, I did not dream it could be you: we had not heard from you for years."

"True, true; and I've been trying to find you all the time."

As well as she could, Honore told him their story of the past four years, and he listened to it with renewed thanksgiving to God. Why he had chosen to cross the prairie on that particular day, instead of taking the main road as usual, he could not tell; but in his own heart he felt that God had directed his steps. The story ended in these sad words: "Until we read of Louis' death," Honore said, "we had some hope in life; but now the future has not one bright spot for us."

"Do not, do not say that, Honore," Father Joseph remonstrated. "We all have sorrows to bear in this life. God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb; and He will surely care for you. Believe me, Honore, the future is not as dark as you think it now."

"I wish I could feel it—oh, I wish I could! I am wicked, I know; but so much suffering has made me doubt that even God can care for us. Two old

and hardened criminals—men who have done wicked deeds all their lives—could not have been punished more than those two innocent little girls, my poor sisters. Forgive me, oh forgive me for it, but I cannot even hope." Again she buried her face in her hands, and tears came freely now.

"Honore, never despair of God's mercy. We do not know His ways, but we must trust in Him. I have much to say to you, but I must go now: I will come later. Believe me, Honore, when I tell you that you all have happy days in store."

A loud rap announced the arrival of the physician, and Father Joseph stepped forward to meet him. For a few moments they conversed aside, and from the doctor's looks and the few words that she could catch, Honore felt that they had found friends at last.

The poor girl rejoiced inwardly at the very idea of friends, but it was not for herself. To her it was humiliation that they should need friends, but for the sake of those who were dear to her, and who were dependent on her, she rejoiced. If only her sick mother could be cared for, she would ask no more: she could teach or sew, and at least make enough for herself and sisters; and, still crouching there by the bedside, she ran over various plans for getting employment the moment that she could see her mother cared for. For a short time blissful forgetfulness came, but a glance at her worn and faded calico dress recalled all the miseries of the past, and she sank still lower upon the floor. She dared not trust her strength again, and so remained there when the good doctor came to examine her mother. It was a sad thought to this sensitive, delicate girl that they were obliged to accept charity from any; but want and suffering had made her weak, very weak, both in body and mind, and for the sake of those she loved she must forget her own humiliation. Promising to call again that evening, Father Joseph turned toward the door, but paused upon the threshold.

"By the by, Honore," he said, as if the thought had just occurred to him, "I

came very near going without telling you that I have good reason for thinking that that report about Louis' death was a mistake. There is a strong probability that it was Louis Gautier of Pointe Coupée who died in prison. This is enough to give us hope."

He dared not tell her the whole truth when her mind was already so much excited, and giving one glance at her face he hurried away. "What an angelic expression!" he said to himself as he hastened across the fields. "I do not think that I ever saw a sweeter, sadder expression in my life." The same thought came to him again and again as he walked homeward, and more than once he found himself saying aloud, "She's a good girl—a good girl, indeed." Musing over the strange vicissitudes of human life, the young priest soon arrived at his own door. Two hours later a negro entered the cabin with a basket well stocked with wine, jellies and other delicacies grateful to the sick—with something more substantial in the shape of flour, eggs, chickens and ham. It was a gift from Father Joseph.

Sitting by his open window that afternoon, the young priest thought much of his youth, and dreamily went over the story of the poor people he had that day met. He had known them in better days. When a boy they were his nearest neighbors, and at that time there could not have been found, in all the parish of St. Landry, a happier home than that of the Courets. He now recalled the time when he had been every day with Honore Couret, his favorite playmate, and he remembered the attachment that, for all their youth, had then sprung up between them. He was a boy of ten—she, a curly-haired little girl of six. Even in those early days it was understood that he was intended for the Church; and, favoring the plan himself, it pleased him to be called by the friends and neighbors of his family, "the young priest" or "the youthful St. John." In English these expressions may sound like levity, or even savor of ridicule, but in the phrases of the Acadians they conveyed an encouraging compliment.

The boy loved to hear M. Couret, Honore's father, praise his intention; and it was by such kindly words and compliments that his resolution was strengthened until finally matured. But there was one who did not applaud his intention, although she uttered not a word against it; and that one was little Honore Couret, a wee thing then, who seemed too young to know the meaning of love. Yet when does love begin, and when does it end? When is a woman too old to feel the sacred passion? When is the girl too young to feel the flames of love firing her heart? The coquettish wiles of your two-year old household fairy almost startle us at times, and we pause to wonder how and when she learned them. Musing upon the delicate subject, we are unconsciously led to confess that love must be a natural gift to womankind, just as the songs of tiny birdlings or the perfume of fresh young flowers are natural gifts from God.

However it came about, it was certain that the little Honore Couret loved her bright young playmate, four years older than herself, with the face of the youthful St. John. To her the praise bestowed upon him brought positive pain. Yet she was often obliged to listen to it, and did so, struggling to conceal her feelings, until the struggle became too hard for her, and forced her to run away to hide her tears. More than once Madame Couret had observed these passionate outbreaks, and had tried in vain to discover what had vexed her little girl; but, watching closely and tenderly, she waited until the secret was revealed. One evening the parish priest had called, and, drawing Isidore Gauthier to him, warmly applauded his intentions: M. Couret joined in praising the lad. Honore listened to them with flushed face and eager eyes, until she could hold back the tears no longer, and, impulsively springing up without a word, she ran away to her own chamber. Madame Couret followed immediately, to find her grieving upon the bed. Gently petting and caressing her, to win her confidence if possible, and talking kindly to her, Madame Couret undressed her daughter,

and tucking the sheets in about her, stooped to give a good-night kiss. Before she could rise, Honore's arms were clasped around her mother's neck. Laying her head lightly upon the tender bosom, Madame Couret was startled by the rapid beating of the little heart within and by the gasping sobs that came in quick succession. She endeavored to look into her daughter's face, but the white arms held her closely; and yielding to them, she rested upon the pillow and drew the sobbing child upon her arm. For a few moments Honore could not speak, and tenderly caressing the curly head upon her arm, the anxious mother waited for quiet and confidence. Presently Honore whispered:

"Maman—I want to—to ask—to ask you something?"

"What is it, chérie? Tell maman what it is that grieves you—tell me, pet."

"Maman, can a priest ever marry? Can he ever have a little wife to love him? Marie says not."

Madame Couret began to understand the matter now, but she thought best to encourage the confidence, so there would be nothing left unsaid to worry over:

"No, darling: Marie was right. He gives himself entirely to the Church and to doing good. But what puts such an idea into your little head?"

"Maman—don't be angry with me for telling you," and she clung convulsively to her mother's neck, "but I love Isi—Isi—Isi—" and the trembling voice went sobbing away over the name that she could not utter.

Greatly surprised by this evidence of precocity, Madame Couret attempted to soothe her child by telling her that Isidore might never be a priest; that the time was too far ahead to grieve over now; and that she would see about it when they grew older. The promise to "see about it" was a great relief, for Honore had all confidence in her mamma, and her sobbing soon ceased. Madame Couret knew that this little heart was not too young to suffer, and that it was even now aching over imaginary sorrows; so she pressed her cheek close to Honore's, and remained until sleep

came to close the little eyes. She kissed away two or three pearly tear-drops that still clung to their lashes, and stole quietly from the room.

Thenceforth she was careful not to mention Isidore's intention before her daughter, but the gentlemen often did so, causing no little uneasiness. How could she stop them without telling them a secret too sacred to be repeated? And besides, would they understand it, and treat it as delicately as it should be treated? As young as this little child then was, her woman's heart told her that it was not "all nonsense," as M. Couret would probably call it; and so she could only keep the secret, doing the best she could to prevent much talk about Isidore. But for all her own strong feeling upon the subject, Honore did not offer a word of objection or opposition to the plan. The two were much together in those days, frequently wandering hand in hand across the prairie, or sitting for hours on the banks of the Teche; but she had heard her father say that it was wrong for any one to discourage him; and so she stifled her feelings and made a heroine of herself even at that tender age.

Two years later, Isidore Gauthier was twelve, and had to begin his studies with the "Fathers." It was a sad parting to Honore, but childish impressions are soon effaced, and in a few weeks she had ceased to long for him. Besides, she had found a new playmate in Isidore's brother, two years older than herself, and he was very soon raised to the dignity of sweetheart. Louis Gauthier was like his brother in many respects, and though his temper was not always so equable, and though his spirits were higher, his general amiability was as strongly marked. He grew into a fine, manly, dashing fellow, just the kind of a man to win the heart of a young girl. They loved each other: love grew with years, and when old enough they were regularly betrothed, according to the custom of the Acadians of Louisiana and Nova Scotia. This occurred in the year 1860, when Honore was sixteen and Louis eighteen years of age.

The war came soon after, and Louis Gauthier went out, with the young men of his parish, to join General Beauregard. Isidore was at Georgetown College. Honore and Louis renewed their vows before his departure, and she gave him her own medal and the scapula that she had worn from childhood. He promised to return to her soon: she promised to be his wife as soon as the war should end.

II.

At this time Madame Couret was a widow, but had been left in comfortable circumstances—with enough, at least, for the support of herself and her three daughters, Honore and two children, Augustine and Estelle. They had a beautiful cottage home, with a fair farm adjoining, which they were enabled to let for a sum sufficient to give them a good income—an income that proved ample for their moderate wants. But the war soon stopped all planting, and they were reduced to the mere comforts of home. Yet they had a good home, and wanted none of the necessities of life. A year rolled by, during which they heard nothing from Louis, when one day Fate dealt hardly with this little family.

A gunboat came up the river, and, coming to anchor opposite their cottage, sent a boat's crew on shore. The officer in command, with two or three men, had gone to the next house, and the rest of the party presented themselves on Madame Couret's porch and demanded the papers of "that rebel member of Congress." In vain she assured them that she was a defenceless widow—that no member of Congress lived there or near them—that she had no money or papers: they would not believe her. She tremblingly answered their demand for liquor by giving them some brandy that had been in the house for years; but this made matters far worse. They soon drank themselves into a state of intoxication, and gave her five minutes' time to produce the papers and money, failing which they would fire the house. On

her knees, for the sake of her children, she implored them to spare her home, their all. They were now too drunk to heed her prayers, and one, more reckless than the rest, threw a firebrand into the bedding and scattered live coals about the floor. Nearly dead from terror and agony, Madame Couret clasped her children in her arms and sank in one corner; but the smoke soon drove them from the room, and they were obliged to fly. Honore ran to the next house with all the speed that fright could give her; and seeing the officer there, she fell at his feet and begged him to have mercy on them. He spoke kindly and gently to her, but it was some time before he could comprehend her incoherent words and learn from them that her house had been fired. With a fierce oath he sprang to his feet and ran down the road, but he arrived too late, for the house was already wrapped in flames, and there was no hope of stopping them. For some time he cursed and stormed among the men who had committed this outrage without orders, and threatened to have the last one of them punished for it.

On the road he had met poor Madame Couret with her two little girls, and now went back to see them. The regrets of this gentleman gave poor comfort to them, now that they had been made beggars upon the world; but, very calm and very pale, she listened to him, knowing that he was sincere. The young officer had taken little Estelle upon his knee, and unbeknown to her had pushed some bank-bills into her pocket. Not long could he bear this trying scene. Although he alone shed tears, he saw that the grief of the others was too deep for such relief: a kind of dumb apathy had seized them—a sense of despair that left them bewildered and half crazed. Again he tried to express his regrets, but the scene was too much for him: stopping in the middle of a word, he hastily broke away. At night fifty dollars were found in Estelle's pocket, and Madame Couret understood the gift. She would have returned the money to this gentleman—who in all probability was not himself overburdened with cash

—could she have done so; but the gunboat was already moving down the river.

Mother and daughters were now destitute upon the world. The neighbors offered them a home, but could do little beside. It was a gloomy prospect. Two days later she received a package by the post, and on opening it found three hundred dollars, with a note stating that the sum had been collected for her on board the gunboat; and again the young officer conveyed to her his heartfelt regrets for the injury done her, and blaming himself severely for permitting his men to stray away from him. Madame Couret was touched by the feeling displayed by this young man. With the sum they now had she took her children to New Orleans, where she obtained employment as a teacher in a private school for young ladies. The salary barely sufficed to keep them in the cheapest lodgings. Honore was housekeeper, seamstress and maid-of-all-work, devoting her spare moments to the education of her sisters. A cheap guitar had to take the place of their piano; and after a time the little family got very comfortably settled. Two years rolled away, and yet they heard nothing from Louis, nor could they communicate with Isidore. So they struggled on until the end of the war. Their one hope in life was centred in Louis Gauthier, and they did not know that he was alive. Honore loved him better and better as time rolled on, until her devotion became almost painful to herself; and she grew heartsick and ill as the young men returned, one after another, and she heard not of him.

The burden of sorrow grew still more heavy when Madame Couret's health gave way, so that she was obliged to resign her position in the school. Yet they managed to struggle on, they themselves scarcely knew how, depending mainly upon the small sums which Honore could earn by sewing and by giving music-lessons to one little girl. Every morning she read the newspaper carefully, hoping to find his name; and at last she found it.

They were sitting at the breakfast-

table, Madame Couret, still feeble, pouring out the coffee, when the newspaper came in. Honore seized it and eagerly ran her eyes along the columns, finally halting at a list of prisoners at Johnson's Island. Glancing down the line, she read a few names aloud, gradually sinking her voice into a mere humming as she hastily ran over the names that were strange to her. Madame Couret was gazing intently upon her daughter's face, her heart aching as she saw the paper shaking in the trembling hand, feeling that another disappointment was to be the only result, when she saw Honore sway in her chair and without a word fall heavily upon the floor. The dreadful fall, the one startled look, the gush of blood that came from the pallid lips, unnerved her completely, and it was some time before she could help the girls raise their unconscious sister upon the couch. She seized the paper and found in the list the name of "Louis Gauthier, of Louisiana," and opposite: "Died in prison, January 27."

Some months passed, during which the young men were returning to their homes, but they were months of despair to Honore Couret. For weeks she lingered between life and death. The arrivals no longer drew her attention: indeed, she seldom read the newspapers now, for each name there gave her a fresh pang, and the brave girl saw that hereafter she must be the sole reliance of that little family. Her mother's health was failing: Madame Couret had given up all hope of life, and longed to go back to her old home—to die there, she said; and Honore, thinking that a change of air might prove beneficial, determined to leave the city. They went back to St. Landry. On the verge of their plantation, far back from the road and in a secluded spot, there was a small hut or hovel, almost too poor for occupants, but which Honore determined to make habitable with her own hands. To this poor cabin they came with all that they possessed.

Here they had been living for more than two months when Father Joseph found them. Honore had patched up

he place as well as she could; had made it neat within; had planned a little garden and fenced it in; and with all had attended to the wants of her mother. The one room was made serviceable at least, but at best it was a miserable place. Here the poor girl worked with an aching heart, but always with a cheerful word for those depending on her; and here she kept her sisters at their studies, here she sewed for them, worked for them, planned for them, hoping to fit them for some position by which they could honestly support themselves in the future. There was not a thought of herself. But often when alone she would stroll down to the river, where Louis had walked with her—centuries ago, it seemed—or walk to a little knoll on the prairie from which she could see the dear old chapel, and sit there musing upon the day she made her first communion, and upon the happy times that she should never know again. In her poor dress she could not go to the chapel, even if she had dared to leave her mother. The younger girls, for whom Honore had cut over all of her own dresses, were sent at times, and they were called upon to repeat the service over and over on their return, and to relate all that they saw or heard. Poor Honore! her heart was there, if she could not go in person. When the girls praised the good looks and kindness of Father Joseph, she was ever deeply touched, and tears dimmed her eyes as she listened hungrily to every word. More than once she had half made up her mind to go to him for the purpose of inquiring for Isidore Gauthier.

Lent had come, and the weather was unusually fine, but Madame Couret's health did not improve. Indeed, she seemed to grow worse and worse, and Honore saw that she was fast failing. One night the little household was alarmed, and they thought that the end had come. Early in the morning Estelle was sent for the doctor, who lived two miles away, but also with a message telling him that they had no money to pay him for the trouble, but that it would be paid some time, and he would now

perform an act of charity by coming to them. The little girl ran the entire distance and delivered her message; then started to return. But she had overtasked her strength. Half-way across the prairie her head grew giddy, her legs tottered beneath her, and she fell. Crawling into the shadow of the pomegranate bush, she remained half unconscious, half dreaming, until she felt a touch upon her shoulder, and opened her eyes upon Father Joseph's face.

It was late that evening when Father Joseph returned to find the little household looking much brighter. Again he prayed with them and read to them, and this time he gave Honore still more cause for hope.

"Honore, I must tell you," he said to her as he was leaving—"I must tell you that I have heard from my brother, in a way that leaves no room for mistake, since the date of his reported death."

Standing two or three paces from her, he saw the convulsive heavings of her bosom, her quick gasps for breath, and fancied that he could even hear the throbings of her heart. She pressed her hands hard upon it, as if to still its beatings, and very pale she grew as she turned her eager eyes upon his face. She could barely speak:

"You—*you*, at least—would not, could not, be so cruel as to give me false hope. It would crush me to endure all this again—it would kill me."

"No, no, Honore; I would not give you reason to hope unless I felt justified in doing so. By God's mercy, I believe my brother to be alive, and think that we shall soon see him here."

"Thank you! oh thank you!" was all that she could say, as she took his hand and bowed her head upon it.

The next morning Father Joseph sent a boy to Opelousas with the following despatch:

"TO LOUIS GAUTHIER

"(Care of Dufour & Limet),

"New Orleans:

"Come back immediately: I have found them.

"JOSEPH."

The next train brought Louis to Ope-

lousas, and he hastened on to his brother's house. It was late in the night when he arrived.

"I have been sitting up for you, Louis," Father Joseph said to his brother after their first warm greeting; "I knew you would come if you got my telegram in time."

"I did not stop a moment—did not go to my room, even. Where are they, Joseph?"

"I dread to tell you: they are in that wreck of a cabin where poor old Gajac used to live."

"No, oh no! it cannot be!"

"Indeed, Louis, I was as much surprised as you are: I found them by chance. It is an out-of-the-way place, you know, and but for my stumbling on little Estelle—she was the baby, you remember—I had not found them. God must have directed my steps across the prairie, for I seldom go that way."

"It is very strange," said Louis in a slow and thoughtful manner, and keeping his eyes fast upon the candle, "very strange indeed: I cannot understand it."

"Brother, they have suffered much—God only knows how much: I can see it in each face, in every line; but, Louis, she is as pure as a lily: she's as good as a girl can be."

"I know she is—I'm sure she is, Joseph: I must see them the first thing in the morning."

"I will go with you, Louis: it is better that we should go together. You must be patient, and wait for me until after service."

Showing his brother to the chamber prepared for him, the young priest went through his own devotions, thanking God for His exceeding goodness and manifold mercies. Long and fervently he prayed, and at length sought his couch.

The next day was *Mi-Carême*. The Society of St. Joseph had its annual celebration, and the young priest had to say mass early in the morning and also at ten o'clock. But the poor friends at the cabin were not forgotten, for a large hamper had been sent them, Louis adding to the gifts a sum of money, sent in the name of his brother. At midday

Louis was impatiently waiting at the chapel-gate, where Father Joseph joined him, and they walked on in silence, each revolving the same thoughts, until the cabin was in sight.

Louis covered his eyes.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed, "that *they* should have come to this!"

Father Joseph laid both hands upon his brother's shoulders and gazed tenderly into his face: "Listen to me, Louis: there is a great change in them."

"I know it—I expect it," Louis almost groaned out in reply.

"They have changed sadly, but she is still beautiful. It is a calmer, holier beauty than that of old. God tries us in various ways, my brother, and always for our good. Honore will make you a better wife than she would have done before this great trial."

"But she was always good, Joseph."

"As good a girl as I ever saw; yet we now know that her heart has been tried, as if by fire, and found pure gold. You must expect to find her changed, Louis: remember that they have been very poor."

"I do expect it, brother. Nothing could change me now: do not fear my disappointment. I have loved her through all these years."

Again they walked on in silence, and soon came to the cabin. Louis was greatly agitated. Father Joseph pressed his brother's hand and rapped on the door, which almost immediately opened to admit them, and the two passed into the one little room containing the possessions of this fallen family. Honore was partially behind the door when they entered, and so earnestly studying Father Joseph's face, to see if there was fresh hope there, that she scarcely observed the sunburnt, bearded man by his side; but in a moment a voice that could belong to one only thrilled through and through her:

"Honore!"

She started quickly and stood trembling before him, with both hands pressed hard upon her bosom; but two strong arms were stretched out toward her, and with one indescribable look to heaven,

she impulsively threw herself upon his breast.

It took not long to tell them his story: how he had lived in prison for over two years—of his escape into Canada on the ice—of that dreary trip in the dead of winter from *Rivière du Loup* to *Halifax*—of his voyage to *Bermuda*—of the weeks spent in a coasting schooner, and his wreck on the *Florida keys*—of his subsequent arrival in *New Orleans*, to find that the war was over and his companions-in-arms returned to their homes. He had sought his brother at once, and had learned from him that the *Courets* had gone to the city, since which time nothing had been heard of them by any in *St. Landry*. He told them of his heavy heart as he went back again, and of those weeks that had been spent in searching for them, ending but the day before, when his brother's despatch had arrived.

It is impossible to describe the joy of that humble household. Louis promptly assumed command, and would listen to no appeals from his decisions. "You all belong to me now," he told them, "and I must be obeyed;" and with tears in their eyes they gratefully listened to him, happy to feel that there was one stronger than they who wished to relieve them of the burdens that had been so crushing. Honore could have died for him at that moment.

"And you, Honore," he said playfully, "attend to orders: you will be ready early to-morrow morning to go with me to *Opelousas* to get such things as we may need. You shall buy some for me too. But—mind now!—every dime that Joseph sent must be expended on yourself: I'll see to the rest."

She tried to remonstrate, but he stopped her mouth with a kiss and compelled her to submit. And the poor girl looked at him so wistfully and so fondly as he moved about that Father Joseph's heart was touched. "My whole life cannot pay him for this one hour," Honore said to herself as she gazed upon his happy face.

"This shall be a happy *Mi-Carême* for us all," Louis said, presently; "and

had I come a few days earlier, this very *St. Joseph's day* should have been our wedding day. The indulgence should have benefited one couple, at least, despite the fashion. But not later than *Easter, Honore*—not a day later—remember."

How she loved him for those words!

"This is the happiest *St. Joseph's day* that I ever knew," she said, barely above a whisper, as she stole to his side and timidly took his hand.

"And you must come to mass in the morning, sure," Father Joseph said: "we must give thanks to the Author of this happiness."

"Not to-morrow, Father Joseph: oh, I couldn't go to-morrow."

"And why can you not, pray? Louis shall fetch you."

"Must I confess it? I have not a dress in the world but this I have on. All the others that I had have been cut over for *Augustine and Estelle*."

"And that is the reason you have not been before, is it? Then I must read you a sermon on the folly of dress. See how you have been punished for not coming two months ago."

"I could not bear that they should see me so."

Both knew that "they" meant her own uncharitable sisters, and saw by the quivering lip and the deep flush on her face how hard the struggle had been between duty and sensitive pride. Louis interfered just as the young priest was himself framing an excuse for her.

"Not to-morrow morning, Joseph: we have to be off by light, or soon after; but next day we will come."

"And you will be regular hereafter? Then I'll let you off for this once," he said kindly.

"Come now, come!" said Louis, clapping his hands; "begin your packing." (Honore stared at him in wonder.) "*Ma mère*, an easy carriage will come for you in an hour. You all leave here to-day. I have quarters for you at *M. Leon Dufilho's* for the present. Begin now, and no words about it. We will get out of your way until the wagons come; then return to assist you."

Honore again tried to remonstrate, but she could not utter a word. His strong will overpowered her completely, subdued as she was by suffering and sorrow. And at another word from him she sprang up for the work, as if some severe taskmaster was ordering her about; yet she was bewildered, and scarcely knew what she was doing or wanted to do. Louis laughed at her excitement, which flattered and charmed him, and kissed his hand to them all as he went out with his brother. But no sooner had the door closed behind them than Honore threw herself upon her mother's breast and cried for very joy: "Mamma, I would die for him this minute," she said, almost fiercely, the tears trickling in little streamlets down her flushed cheeks.

"Make him a good wife, my daughter, and you may repay him."

"I can never repay him, mamma, but I *will* be that. I will devote my whole life to his happiness. Oh, mamma, my heart is just bursting!"

Again Madame Couret stroked and patted her daughter's hair, as she had done on that other night many years before, and again kissed the tears from her eyelashes. It took not long to gather up the few worldly goods that belonged to them, and when the wagons came they were ready. That night they were all installed in comfortable apartments.

Two days later, Honore, in new but sober clothing, went to the chapel and took communion. And during the rest of Lent she was regular in her devotions. By frequent visits to Opelousas she got her trousseau prepared, and on Easter day they were married by Father Joseph.

By the death of an uncle, Isidore and Louis Gauthier had inherited a small sum of money, and after the wedding ceremony, Father Joseph astonished the bride by putting a sealed packet in her hand. "It is my wedding gift, Honore," he said to her—"the gift of a brother."

This packet contained the transfer of his share in the property left by their uncle, bestowed upon her as a wedding portion. It was a small sum—scarcely seven thousand dollars in all—yet it was enough to rebuild the cottage and to put the farm in tolerable repair. Like a sensible man, Louis turned farmer himself, and went at the work with a cheerful heart and a determined will. Though he could not plant cotton to advantage, he found a large profit in other products, and the first year made much more than he had expected.

Madame Couret's health greatly improved immediately after the removal—indeed; she was dying from want and trouble solely; but she had many years added to her life on that St. Joseph's day. She was now very happy. Her daughter married to so good a man, her two younger girls at school in the Convent of the Sacred Heart, and her dear old home rebuilt,—she had to confess that God had been very good to her.

Three years have passed since that happy Mi-Carême, and the Gauthiers are still happy and prosperous. A paragraph in the last Opelousas paper speaks of the good work now being done by Father Joseph, and of his kindness to the poor. On Sunday more than one hundred came to the altar for communion; many of whom had been away for years.

Louis Gauthier has made a comfortable living: from the farm, despite the hard times, and has greatly improved the place. His pleasure has been to restore a garden as he knew it years ago, when belonging to a young girl he loved.

And Honore? On the last St. Joseph's day she sat upon the veranda of her new home, looking over to the little cabin across the fields, thinking it just the dearest spot on this earth; and beside her rolled a little girl who will soon be vexing her heart with the troubles of love.

RICCARDO IL FALCONE, THE BANDIT OF THE ABRUZZI.

THE tourist who has journeyed between Rome and Naples by the old post-road—that which was used by all public conveyances before the one across the Pontine Marshes came in vogue—will remember the wild and picturesque group of mountains known as the Abruzzi, near the foot of which the road winds for many a mile. It was among these mountains that the scenes I am now about to narrate occurred.

Perched high up, on what appeared to the observer from below to be inaccessible crags, are two little antique towns, called, respectively, Collipardo and Vico. They are both surrounded by walls of considerable height, and were once the strongholds of feudal lords, whose lives were spent in warring upon each other and plundering such unfortunate travelers as were obliged to pass near their eyries. But it is not to their times that my story appertains, but to a much later period, long after the feudal nobles had succumbed to the established government, and their trade of violence and rapine had been transferred to the lower orders, who organized themselves into bands of *banditti*, and from the mountain fastnesses to which they retreated after a successful foray bid defiance to the powers of the law.

The favorite place of resort for one of these companies, whose captain was known among the peasantry by the name of *Riccardo il Falcone*, or Richard the Falcon, was a huge flat rock, which, overlooking the beautiful valley below, afforded them fair opportunity of observing all parties of travelers who might be approaching, and estimating their numbers and powers of resistance.

This rock was almost inaccessible from the front, and the only feasible route by which it could be approached was from the rear through a narrow gorge, easily defended by a few resolute men stationed upon the overhanging cliffs, the sheer, perpendicular walls of

which defied all storming parties, and were even impossible to climb when there was no enemy in front. There many a bloody skirmish had been fought between the government troops and the banditti, and invariably to the discomfiture of the former, who had never been able to discover the way by which their opponents gained the summit of the height, for it was remarked that they always took refuge on one side of the gorge, and whenever the soldiery succeeded in surmounting the opposite cliff, which they could do by a difficult route on the other side, immediately disappeared, and were heard of no more until some new act of violence notified the ministers of the law that they were still in existence.

Our story opens on the top of the rock before mentioned. The surface of this great boulder, as we may call it, was about fifty yards in diameter, and having been converted into a deep hollow or basin by the waters which descended from the mountains when the snows melted, those who took refuge there were at liberty to kindle their camp-fires without the slightest danger of the light betraying their presence to the inhabitants of the towns and valley below.

It was a beautiful moonlight night, and *Riccardo il Falcone*, with his followers around him, was reclining on a knoll of soft grass while the evening meal was being prepared, which mystery was presided over by an old crone—one of those hags whom we find only in Italy, and who come as near in personal appearance to the ideal Hecate as the artist who wishes to represent that termagant could desire.

"*Presto, Aga!*" said the chief. "Isn't that meat cooked yet?"

"No," replied the woman. "Do you think I'm the *regina del inferno*, and can cook meat in the twirl of a spindle?"

"*Via strega!*" said Riccardo: "you've

been long enough over that pot to have cooked a dinner for the king of Naples. Pile on more wood."

"If you want more wood put on, you may send one of your slaves to fetch it."

The captain made a sign to one of his men, who went in search of the fuel, and then turning to another, who seemed, from his dress, to be a sort of lieutenant, said,

"We ought to have made a more profitable thing of that affair yesterday, Giacomo."

"And so we would have done," said Giacomo, "had it not been for those two *maledetti* Inglesi. I had the *ragazza* in my arms, and would have brought her off, had they not struck me to the ground; and they would have killed me, too, but that Lillo and Giovanni came to my assistance. Poor Lillo! he lost his life in saving mine."

"Are you sure he was killed?" asked the other.

"As sure as I am that I was not. I heard his skull crushed by the blow the Englishman gave him with the butt of his pistol, as if it had been a walnut between two stones."

"I never like to attack these English," said the chief, musingly: "they are as obstinate as jackasses, and never seem to understand that it is better to give up what little pelf they may have about them than to risk their lives in defending it. But we will be avenged of them for Lillo's death. They will probably return this way, unless they take it into their dull heads to go to the *Oriente*, as those *porcone* sometimes do. Why they should wish to leave a Christian land, and go among a parcel of thieving, heathen Turks, I never could understand. But what has become of Andrea?"

"Andrea!" said the lieutenant, contemptuously. "The cowardly *ladro* stood by and saw me nearly murdered without moving a finger to help me, pretending to hold the horses' heads after the animals had been cut loose, and there was not the slightest need to touch them. I have not seen him since the affair, and he told Giovanni he was going to visit

his innamorata, Maria Alani. The fiend seize the *poltrone*!"

"I'm not much pleased with the way Andrea has acted of late," said the chief, "and we must keep our eyes on him. He has seemed to be discontented ever since I refused to let him have the trinket I took from the French woman, and which he wanted for this Maria. But there is a signal: perhaps it is he."

This exclamation was called forth by what appeared to be the hooting of an owl at no great distance from the camp. Every voice was hushed in an instant and each brigand seized his arms—a precautionary movement to prevent surprise in case of treachery on the part of any of their confederates. In a few moments a large white dog, such as are used by the shepherds in that region, came bounding toward them, and after bestowing upon the men a mark of friendly recognition by a wag of his tail, retired to a position near the pot over the fire, where he stood licking his chops and eyeing the savory mess of meat and vegetables which the old woman was dipping out into large wooden platters.

"It is Berta," said Riccardo; and in another instant Berta made her appearance. The girl walked up to the chief, and, respectfully taking his hand, kissed it, as a subject might that of a sovereign. She was a tall, finely-formed young woman, straight and erect in her carriage. Her face was a pure oval, the features perfectly regular, the eyes large and black, while the nut-brown complexion, enriched by the crimson tints of health, was made more striking by the white linen bonnet, or snood, worn after the fashion usual to the Italian peasant women, in whose picturesque costume she was dressed, from the linen covering on her head to the goat-skin sandals on her feet.

"Berta," said the chief, "what do you hear here? I thought you were to remain in Vico until this last affair had blown over and been forgotten?"

"Berta could not be quiet and in safety when Riccardo was in danger," was the answer.

"Danger! What mean you, *ragazza*?"

"I am come to warn you," said the girl: "you have been betrayed—sold by a traitor."

"A traitor!" exclaimed the chief, eagerly, while his eyes flashed and his hand sought the haft of his stiletto. "Who is he? Tell me, girl, and my stiletto shall find its way to his cowardly heart."

"Andrea Storti is the man," replied Berta.

"Ha!" said Riccardo, looking at his lieutenant: "then I was right in my suspicions, Giacomo. But how do you know this, Berta?"

"I heard him make the bargain with the officer of the troops at Vico. They came beneath the window of the house in which I lived—it is an old, deserted-looking place—and little did they think they were listened to by one who would go to the verge of *l'inferno* itself to save the man whose life they were plotting against."

"*Cara mia*!" said the brigand, in a soft and loving tone, as he drew the girl to him and kissed her cheek. "But go on: what is their purpose?"

"He told the officer where you were, and offered, for a hundred scudi, to bring him and his soldiers upon you this very night: you know they could never find their way up here at night without a guide, and in the day-time it would be impossible to surprise you. But they may be near at hand even now, and I will be brief. Andrea is to come into the camp alone, while the soldiers are to remain stationed at a little distance until he is ready, when he will sing a stanza of the little ballad, '*Io te voglio bene*;' on hearing which signal a part of them are to rush in through the gorge, the rest being posted below there"—pointing down the slope of the mountain—"to prevent your escape. So up, up and away, Riccardo, while there is yet time!"

"And leave the traitor alive?" exclaimed the man. "Never! No, not if there were ten thousand devils at his back! But there he is now;" and the

same signal was heard which had heralded the approach of Berta. "Go you behind yonder rock, *ragazza*—but first call your dog—and when he has passed through the gorge, you will be able to retire unseen to the grotto, where you can await our arrival. But stay: did he betray the secret passage to them?"

"No; I think not. I suppose he expected to catch you here, and thought it unnecessary to betray a secret that might be useful to him at some future time."

With these words she disappeared, followed by the dog, to which she called in a low tone. The brute, however, had not been able to resist the temptation offered by old Aga's back being turned at the moment of his departure, and had carried off a large piece of meat in his mouth.

In a little while a man was seen approaching from the same direction that Berta had come. He was low of stature, with a very broad, deep chest, and heavy, almost uncouth limbs, denoting great strength. He wore his hat cocked jauntily on one side of his head, and walked with an exaggerated swagger, which seemed to be partially assumed for the occasion, while he whistled a love-ditty in a low tone.

"Buona sera, Andrea," said Riccardo. "You seem to be in a pleasant humor: where have you been these two days? After the *ragazze*, I'll be sworn."

"After one of them, at any rate, *signor capitano*," replied Andrea.

"And how did you find the cara?"

"Oh, I found her well enough," said the unsuspecting Andrea, "though she was besieged by a rascal who, with the aid of the *padre*, has been trying to persuade her to be married to him. *Corpo di Bacco*! he'll make no more such propositions to her—or any other woman;" and he drew his stiletto, which appeared to be still covered with the blood of his rival, flourishing it with the air of a man who thought he had done some heroic deed.

"Bravo, Andrea!" said the captain; but the sneer on his lips showed that he was applauding the excellent acting of his follower, and not the supposed act.

Just here the conversation was interrupted by the harsh voice of Aga.

"*Diavolo piglia il brutto cane!*" she screamed: "he has carried off the captain's supper!"

"What dog?" said Andrea, quickly, raising himself into a sitting posture; for he had thrown himself on the ground, as if greatly fatigued. "I see no dog."

"Nor does any one else," said Riccardo, carelessly. "The old witch is raving, and I expect we'll have to knock her in the head soon, to be rid of her. Never mind, Aga," addressing the woman: "we'll not stay to supper to-night. You can just bundle the victuals into a sack, in case we should need it later."

"What!" said Andrea: "you surely are not going to leave this safe hiding-place now, when the *shirri* are looking everywhere for you?"

"It is no longer safe, good Andrea: traitors are more to be feared than *shirri*."

"Traitors!" exclaimed the man, losing a little of his confident tone: "who speaks of traitors?"

"It matters not," said the chief. "You have just come in good time to flit with us, my faithful friend."

"But stay, *capitano*: there can certainly be no immediate danger. We may safely remain here until dawn, and then I will willingly follow you wheresoever you choose to lead, but now I am completely broken down with fatigue."

"The danger is immediate," said the captain, sternly. "Even at this moment the enemy surround us."

"Eh!" said Andrea, springing to his feet, "what do you say? Surrounded! But perhaps there is some mistake—you have been misinformed. Let me make a scout. I will risk the danger of being captured, rather than you should leave this safe asylum without sufficient reason. If I am taken, a long, loud whistle will warn you, and then make good your retreat."

He was about to be off, but at a sign from the chief was seized, bound and gagged by the other bandits ere he could make a show of resistance, which he might have done with some effect, being

a very powerful man, had he not been taken so completely by surprise.

"Nay, nay, good Andrea," said Riccardo, "I would not lose so brave and faithful a follower just at this time. I will have need for you soon—very soon. '*Io te voglio bene assai*,' Andrea, and would not part with you for worlds."

The captive traitor listened to this mocking speech with the air of a sullen dog, and did not even reply by signs; for he knew now that he had, in his turn, been betrayed, and that all show of remonstrance would be in vain.

"Come," continued Riccardo to the rest of his men: "be silent and quick."

Moving warily, they entered the gorge, now partially illumined by the light of the moon, and, keeping in the shadow of the cliff, stole quietly along until they came to a place where the rock seemed to have been reft asunder by some convulsion of nature, the fragment thus torn away from the original mass having toppled forward and sunk ten feet lower than the rest. Here they carefully removed the thick branches of a small tree, and entered a fissure wide enough to admit of the passage of one man at a time, dragging Andrea, whose feet had been left unshackled to facilitate their retreat, along with them.

On first entering the place, one would have thought it was the entrance to some dark cavern in the bosom of the rock, but it was simply a winding passage, the many turns in which prevented the light from penetrating from the farther end. Once out on the other side, the adventurous traveler would be surprised to find himself in a deep hollow, left by the huge mass that had slipped forward, as it were, from its original moorings, and from which a tolerably easy pathway led up to the summit.

Ascending this pathway, Riccardo ordered his followers to lie down on the verge of the cliff, and telling Aga to follow the footsteps of Berta, took his stand with Giacomo—between whom and himself he placed his prisoner—at a point whence he could command a view of the entire gorge and the deserted camp, where they had left the fire still burning

to avoid arousing the suspicions of the troops.

These latter waited long and anxiously for Andrea's expected signal, and then the officer in command, suspecting that something had gone wrong and fearful of losing his prey, determined to advance. He gave his orders to that effect in a low tone, and the soldiers moved cautiously and slowly through the narrow defile. They were distinctly visible, however, to those who were stationed above; and when they became inextricably involved, Giacomo whispered to his superior,

"Shall I tell the men to fire upon them, *capitano*?"

"No, no," said the Falcon, who had some sparks of humanity left in his heart; "it would be murderous. We are safe from them here, unless this villain has betrayed our secret;" and he looked at Andrea, who vehemently shook his head. "And, after all, they are only following their trade, as we do ours."

The soldiers, having safely traversed the dangerous passage, rushed immediately to the fire, and finding no one there, commenced a rigid search among the rocks and stunted trees that might have afforded concealment to those they sought. During this search the commanding officer, with about a dozen of his men, came to a spot which was directly beneath the point on which Riccardo and his lieutenant stood watching them.

"Now, Giacomo," said the former, "remove the gag from the traitor's mouth: he may sing his song, if he likes."

The gag was removed, and as soon as Andrea found himself at liberty to speak he began to plead for his life.

"Cease these useless clamors," said the chief; "and if you must pray, pray to *Iddio*, for He alone can help you. As for me, I have but one question to ask you, and when you answer it remember that you are about to die: if you choose to die with a lie on your lips, it is no fault of mine."

"I will speak the truth, noble Riccardo; but only spare me, and I will be

your faithful slave through life." The unfortunate man, strong as he was, trembled like an aspen.

"Hush!" said the Falcon. "Would you have spared me and those brave men yonder? You had no mercy, and no mercy shall you have: you would have given us over to death, and death now waits on you."

"Oh, most noble *capitano*!" he began again.

But the captain interrupted him: "Peace, I say, and answer me this. Have you disclosed aught regarding the secret passage to these men?"

"No, no, I have not; and for that you might show mercy."

"Mercy!" sneered the other. "Listen to this dog! He claims a right to our mercy for not doing that which he thought would be of no service to our enemies; for he expected us to be taken before we could retreat. But let us have no more of this: you did not betray that secret, at least?"

"No, no, I did not."

"Swear it!"

"By the holy name of *Jesu* and His Virgin Mother, I did not!" said Andrea, still clinging to a hope of pardon.

"Enough," said Riccardo: "I don't think you would willingly die with a sworn lie in your mouth. Giacomo!" and he made a sign to his lieutenant.

The two then seized their victim, each by a leg and an arm, and being men of uncommon strength, after one or two vigorous swings, launched him into the air fully ten feet from the edge of the cliff.

"*Via il traditore!*" shouted the chief as he loosened his grasp on the shrieking wretch; and the soldiers, who had been attracted by the sound of voices and were looking up in a vain effort to descry the speakers, shrunk away when they saw a black object, which they supposed to be a large rock, coming down in their midst.

"Now," said Riccardo to Giacomo, "vengeance is satisfied, and you can let the men fire one round among the troops—that will send them to shelter—and then off to our hiding-place."

In a few moments the carbines of the brigands awakened the echoes among the surrounding crags, and, as the chief had predicted, after some ineffectual shots in return and the loss of two or three men, the soldiers retreated behind the rocks, which afforded them shelter from the fire of their unseen enemies.

Leaving one of their number behind to watch the movements of the troops, the brigands proceeded about a mile in an easterly direction, when they came to the verge of another precipice, overlooking a mountain torrent, whose constant roar, as it dashed along toward the peaceful valley, reminded one of warring men, who, through the dreadful tumults and dangers of battle, hope, in the end, to attain a life of quiet and peace.

To an inexperienced traveler this would have seemed to be the abrupt termination of his journey, but these men, accustomed to the locality, as well by night as by day, immediately began to descend the steep declivity by a path rugged and dangerous at all times, and which, to have been attempted by any one less sure-footed and strong-nerved than these hardy mountaineers, would have led to certain destruction.

A tree thrown across the stream at the foot of the crag afforded them a passage to the opposite side, and there taking a path which barely allowed one man to pass between the wall of rock—that towered to even a greater height than the one they had just descended—and the rushing torrent, they soon arrived at the entrance of the grotto to which Riccardo had previously sent Berta and the old woman.

This grotto, to which there is now a rough road leading down from Colli-pardo, is about a hundred feet below that town, and situated almost directly under its walls; but at the time I speak of its existence was unknown save to the banditti and such of their confederates as they chose to entrust with the secret. The little mountain river takes a leap of some twenty or thirty feet immediately in front of the entrance, and the many sounds of bacchanalian mirth with which it frequently resounded were

effectually drowned by the noise of the cataract. Often, when the officers of the government, sitting in solemn conclave at their headquarters in Colli-pardo, had been trying to mature some plan to put a stop to the depredations of the banditti, had these lawless sons of the mountain held high revel over their ill-gotten plunder within a stone's throw of them.

On the night in question, however, fatigue inclined the Falcon and his followers more to rest than jollity, and after partaking of the supper that old Aga had brought with her, and a draught of wine, of which there were several casks in the grotto, they laid down on pallets of straw, and were soon fast asleep, the women betaking themselves to a separate recess of the cave, which had been fitted up with some degree of comfort for their accommodation.

Riccardo was the last to retire, and before doing so he stepped out to the front of the grotto, where he stood for a few moments gazing thoughtfully up at the moon.

"Ah, Luna!" he said, with a sigh, "hadst thou not proved false to me once, what a different life had been mine! *Cara Beatrice*, thou hast seen to what straits I have been driven by the relentless cruelty of thy father and brothers, and knowest the cause of all. Though thou canst not but condemn me, as an angel in heaven must condemn all wickedness, thou still canst pity and forgive."

Riccardo Balfi was the son of an Italian count, who was possessed of nothing in the world but his title, which was worse than nothing under such circumstances; for a title without wealth to support it is like a heavy load that a man is doomed to carry through life, and which profits him nothing in the end. This patent of nobility, it is true, admitted him into the society of the higher classes of Italians, but the exercise of that very privilege had been the immediate cause of his son's ruin.

Riccardo had met on several occasions the daughter of the *Principe di*—, and not long was the young lady in read-

ing in the handsome cavaliere's eyes those declarations of admiration which ladies delight to elicit from the other sex. And now comes an old story. An elopement was arranged, for they knew the proud *Principe* would never consent to their union, and they proposed to seek in England or America that happiness which is denied to the sons and daughters of princes in Italy. The maiden's *governatrice* had, after much finesse and difficulty, been won over: at least, they thought so. A dark night, when the moon was obscured by heavy clouds, was chosen for the escapade. The reader will wonder why they did not choose a night when there was no moon; but he or she, as the case may be, probably knows something about the impatience of lovers. Unfortunately for our lovers' expedition, the father and brothers had been informed of the whole affair by the faithless *governatrice*, and were on the alert.

The anxious pair soon discovered that the different roads of egress from the villa were guarded, but, thanks to the darkness of the night, they succeeded in avoiding observation, and had nearly made their escape, when, alas! just as their hearts had begun to beat more lightly, the moon—generally considered so friendly to lovers—showed her broad face through a rift in the clouds, and discovery became inevitable. The two were immediately surrounded by the infuriated *Principe* and his three no less infuriated sons. One of the brothers seized his sister and dragged her from the arms of her lover, while the others attacked him with the evident intention of killing him. He defended himself as well as he could without injuring them—which he was loth to do—until he saw the young man who was trying to prevent the frantic *Beatrice* from rushing in between him and his assailants, deliberately drive his stiletto to her heart; and then, as he saw the unfortunate girl sink to the ground with a quiver that showed too plainly she was dead, he drew his pistol, shot the wretch who had done the murderous deed, and fled.

There was no peace for him now in

the valley, and he partook himself to the mountains, where we found him the captain of a band of banditti.

His connection with Berta was of a peculiar nature, and I will explain it in as few words as possible.

Wandering in one of the wildest mountain districts on one occasion, accompanied by several of his followers, his attention was attracted by the stifled moans of some one in distress; and entering a hut, from which the sounds issued, he found a half-famished girl sitting beside the corpse of a man—one of those miserable peasants who, passing through life in hopeless, abject poverty, die, we may almost say, unregretted. The corpse was that of the child's father, and she was the only being whom he had left to mourn his loss. And well might she mourn, poor thing! for, of however little importance his death might be to the rest of mankind, it was everything to her, who had lost in him the only friend she had ever known.

Riccardo, whose human sympathies, as we have seen, had not been entirely obliterated by the wild, lawless life he had led, was touched by the forlorn situation of this unfortunate young creature, and after sending for a priest and giving the dead decent burial, according to the rites of the Church, he took her away with him, and she was thenceforward known as his *adottata*, or the child of his adoption.

Berta, while yet a child, regarded him as a second father, and, revering him as such, submitted to his will with the most implicit obedience; but as she grew older, and learned to admire his handsome person, while she heard the gallant acts, by which his desperate adventures were sometimes made to assume the appearance of heroic deeds, extolled, a warmer sentiment sprung up in her bosom, which fact Riccardo was not long in discovering. So the whilom father and his adopted daughter became *promessi sposi*.

But now our narrative must return to the soldiers, whom we left seeking shelter among the rocks from the bullets of their hidden foes.

These governmental man-hunters, remaining concealed for some time after the firing had ceased, rightly concluded that the brigands had retreated, and came forth to look after the dead and wounded. They found one of their comrades dead, and two badly wounded, and were about to retire with them when they stumbled over the body of Andrea.

"Ha!" said one, looking at him closely, "this is he who was our guide. The *bricconi* must have discovered his treachery, and they have taken a terrible revenge."

"Ay," said another; "it was he who came down upon us so suddenly, when we all thought it was a big rock with which the rascals intended to pound us into the other world. I heard his shrieks, too, but thought they were the yells of exultation and defiance with which that old witch who follows the Falcon and his men is sometimes wont to mock us from up yonder."

The dead and wounded were removed and placed near the fire, which had been replenished and was now blazing brightly, when it was soon discovered that life was not yet extinct in Andrea, and the soldiers at once set to work to try and resuscitate him, hoping, through his means, to find out the secret mode of ascent to the cliff. With much difficulty they succeeded in restoring him to consciousness, and, though still unable to speak, by the use of that pantomimic language in which the Italians are such adepts, he gave them enough information to answer their purpose. Having done this, a diabolical smile of triumph lit up his countenance, and gritting his teeth he roused himself sufficiently to mutter the word "*Vendetta*," and expired.

At break of day the officer in command, who had, after establishing a proper guard, given his men permission to take a few hours' rest, roused them from their slumbers and ordered them to prepare for a hazardous expedition; for he had determined to follow the brigands with promptitude, thinking he would, in all likelihood, take them by surprise, as, feeling secure in the belief that the secret of their retreat was unknown,

they would probably neglect those precautions so necessary to safety.

Leaving a few of the soldiers around the fire, to avoid arousing the suspicions of any one who might be posted as a lookout on the cliffs, he led the rest cautiously, by routes that seemed securest from observation, to the foot of the height, where, keeping as close to the rock as possible and creeping along in single file, they soon arrived, as they judged, near about the place indicated by Andrea. They did not, however, hit upon the exact spot at first, as there were many low, thick trees growing at the base of the precipice; but after considerable search, they at last discovered the secret passage, and in a few minutes the bandit sentinel above was surprised to find himself surrounded by foes, for, unsuspecting of danger and his duty being to watch the soldiers, he had sat down with his face in the direction he supposed them to be, and his back toward the path by which they came upon him. He was disarmed ere he had time to rise, and then gagged, for the officer was well aware that, with few exceptions, these desperate men would risk their own lives in order to give a signal to their comrades when danger menaced them. And this man proved to be one of that very sort, for no inducement—not even the promise of his own life—could prevail upon him to act as a guide to his captors, and the officer had to trust to the sagacity of his soldiers: the most of them having been mountaineers themselves, they were not long in discovering the route to the grotto.

The brigands had not deemed it necessary to adopt any further means of precaution after leaving the sentinel on the cliff, and the first intimation they had of the approach of an enemy was from Beppo, Berta's dog, who, raising his head and uttering a low growl, rushed from the apartment of his mistress to the front of the grotto, where he commenced a furious barking.

In a moment all was commotion within. Riccardo and his men, being aroused at the same instant, seized their carbines, and were about to sally

forth when the dog, turning with seeming reluctance, returned to the side of his mistress, who was looking out to see what had created the confusion; and the entrance to the cavern was immediately filled with soldiers.

Both parties raised their weapons at one and the same instant, but the officer, desiring, if possible, to avoid bloodshed, demanded a parley, which being granted, he called upon the men whose situation seemed so desperate to surrender and trust to the magnanimity of the government whose laws they set at defiance.

"Surrender!" shouted Riccardo. "Does the falcon surrender to the dunghill cock? Never. Will ye surrender, bold men of the mountains, to those who will spare your lives now only to make your deaths a public spectacle for the amusement of the base herd that calls them masters? Fire upon the slaves of the tyrants! If ye must die, die like heroes!" and he set them an example by making an unsuccessful attempt to shoot the officer himself.

After the first round, from the effects of which many fell on both sides, the soldiers did not give their adversaries time to reload, but rushed in upon them. And now a terrible hand-to-hand fight ensued, the soldiers using their bayonets, and the bandits their clubbed guns and deadly stilettos.

Berta, after hearing a bullet whistle close by her head and seeing several men fall, had withdrawn into the recess where she had slept, and now lay cowering and trembling in a corner, while she listened to the shouts, execrations and groans, which, mingling with the roar of the cataract, seemed to have turned the place into a pandemonium. Her wonderful faith in Riccardo was such that she never doubted for an instant the issue of the contest; and as to his being killed by the *soldati*, she had been so accustomed to seeing him come off unharmed from all encounters with them that the possibility of such a thing never entered her thoughts.

Her companion, old Aga, however, was very differently affected. As soon as the conflict began she rushed out, and

seizing the weapon of a fallen brigand, joined in the fray, the natural ferocity of her disposition inclining her to take a special delight in such scenes. The soldiers were inclined to spare her at first, but she proved such a formidable antagonist that one of them, just as she was about to bring her carbine down upon his head in a manner that would have effectually silenced him, ran his bayonet through her body, and she fell among the rest of the slain.

The fight had lasted not more than fifteen minutes when Riccardo found himself left almost alone, all of his followers except four being either killed or wounded. He had received several wounds himself, but they were not of such a nature as to incapacitate him, and throwing aside the carbine with which he had been doing terrible execution around him, he grasped his stiletto. With one bound he reached the exit to the cave, and driving his weapon to the heart of the only soldier who opposed him there, found himself in the open air. Here, however, his further progress was stopped, for in the path by which alone he could have retreated, were half a dozen soldiers who had just reached the scene of combat, they having in charge the captured brigand, who had stayed their advance as much as possible on the road, hoping that his friends would succeed in beating off their assailants before this reinforcement could arrive.

The cliff behind the daring robber was impossible of ascent, and there was but one chance of escape—by leaping the stream. It was fully fifteen feet wide, but there was a shelving rock on the opposite side, from which he might clamber up; that was, provided he escaped the bullets of his foes, whose carbines were already leveled at him. It was his only chance, however, and he did not hesitate. Collecting all his remaining strength, he essayed the leap just as the foremost soldier fired. The ball missed him, but that did not alter his inevitable fate; for, what with the loss of blood and the fatigue occasioned by the exertions he had made in

defence of his own and his followers' lives, he was unequal to the task, and, falling short in his leap, was carried down by the torrent and never more seen.

The four brigands who were yet able to make some show of resistance endeavored to follow their leader when they saw him, as they supposed, effect his escape, but were overpowered and made prisoners, when the soldiers, having accomplished their object, prepared to leave the place.

The bodies of the dead robbers were consigned to the waves without ceremony, while those of the soldiers were arranged in decent order and left in the grotto until they could more conveniently be transported to Vico. The wounded of both parties were with difficulty conveyed to that town, where such of the banditti as were not mortally hurt were cured, only to be afterward killed, being executed along with those of their band who had been captured.

Berta was also forced to go with the troops, but upon her release, which took place soon after the trial of her friends, she returned, with Beppo, to the grotto, where she spent the rest of her days in bewailing the loss of her lover. While

the dog lived she seldom went far from this her lonely habitation, he acting as commissary, going and coming between her and such of her friends as furnished her with the necessary means of existence; and when he died and she grew old, she never suffered for lack of food; for, being looked upon by the superstitious peasantry as a maga, or sorceress, they were only too glad to be able to propitiate her by leaving offerings of fruit and wine where she would be likely to find them.

She was often seen at night on the height opposite Collipardo, her tall form swaying to and fro against the moonlit sky, while, wildly waving her arms and clasping her hands over her head, she seemed to be invoking the powers of the air; and when she disappeared, which she did eventually, the lower classes said she had flown away on the whirlwind; but those who were happily gifted with better reasoning capacities, supposed that in one of her fits of insanity—for her mind had become weakened by old age and continued melancholy—she had precipitated herself into the torrent where her lover had perished so many years before.

