

N E M E S I S .

NEMESIS.

"THE MILLS OF THE GODS GRIND SLOWLY."

BY MARION HARLAND,

AUTHOR OF "ALONE," "HIDDEN PATH," "MOSS-SIDE," ETC.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE household critic, to whom the following story was submitted in its chrysalis state—*i. e.* in manuscript—has left here and there in the margin bold pencillings to the effect that such and such passages are “Improbable.” Now it strikes me as a singular circumstance that this objection is brought only against those scenes, incidents and characters, in which I have copied with most fidelity events and persons in real life. And I aver, furthermore, that in most of these cases, had I dared to set down the exact truth, the verdict rendered would have been “Impossible,” instead of the milder form of doubt given above.

Many years since, the germ of this narrative was committed to my keeping by a dear friend, who has since gone to the far, changeless Land. Much that I have written I have gathered from MSS.—family papers, yellow with time; for several items of information, I am indebted to persons still living, whose memories age has not clouded. I do not pretend to say that my tale is a literal transcript of the lives of the various personages introduced, or that I have not interpolated characters and events—taken an author's liberty

with dates and *dénouements*; but that I had a broad basis of fact for the foundation, and in my superstructure, have drawn less upon the imagination than is the fashion of some so-called biographers, in their veracious memoirs of modern celebrities, I may, with truth, affirm. In some scenes, the very words of the original actors have been employed, and even in the minute details of dress, equipage, etc., I have taken great pains and pleasure in portraying things precisely as they were in the places and times described in my book.

MARION HARLAND.

NEWARK, July 1860.

N E M E S I S.

CHAPTER I.

THE fogs of a November afternoon were thickening with the chill of approaching evening. There were ominous murmurs among the pines, and the almost naked boughs of the oak and hickory shivered and sighed, as they let down, now and then, a stray leaf, to decay peacefully with the companions of its summer revels, or be trampled into the deep mire of the public road, which formed scarcely a break in the forest. The wheel-ruts had cut into the roots, and vehicles had grazed the trunks of the giant trees that locked arms across the highway. Yet it was no newly-opened track. The upper stratum of earth, black with richness from the deposits of a thousand autumns, was worn down to a more durable bed of stiff red clay, of a granite-like smoothness and polish in dry weather—now, tenacious as wax to wheel and hoof.

A shallow creek, widening into a pond where it crossed the road, was cloaked by underbrush up to either edge of the woods. A flock of wild turkeys, headed by a portly gobbler, bearded like a despotic Turk, as he was, picked their dainty way through the stream—each pausing to wet his bill. Then, the bushes parted

to afford egress to a deer—a full-grown, antlered buck, who also stooped to slake his thirst. His lip had barely touched the water, when the graceful head was suddenly raised again. For an instant, he listened, his dark eye bright, and his limbs quivering with excitement—and a bound carried him out of sight and danger. Now, the sound that had put him to flight became audible to duller hearing. It was the measured tinkle of bells, wondrously musical in this lonely spot. Nearer and nearer it came; drowning the sullen gurgle of the creek and the hoarse whispers in the tree-tops, until, on the rising ground, beyond the pond, appeared a wagon, long of body and heavy-wheeled; covered with an arched awning of white cloth, and drawn by six horses. Strong and trained to labor as these evidently were, it was no easy task to drag along the ponderous vehicle. The broad breasts of the leaders were flecked with foam, and their legs stained above the knees with the red mud. At the pool, they checked their steady tramp, from instinct or habit. There was one prolonged thrilling peal from the bells attached to their collars, and they awaited patiently their master's pleasure. It seldom pleased him to move rapidly, if one might judge from the very deliberate style in which the rotund figure swung itself into the road from the sheepskin, strapped upon one of the wheel-horses, and the length of time that was consumed in stretching and rubbing the dumpy legs.

"Can I help you, Mr. Paxton?" inquired a cheerful voice from the interior of the wagon.

Without waiting for a reply to his question, a young man vaulted over the saddle just vacated, and stood at the side of the fat teamster. He was an athletic, well-proportioned youth, of perhaps five-and-twenty, with a ruddy cheek, and a frank, intelligent countenance. His accent at once betrayed his New England nativity, as did that of the wagoner the provincial Virginian.

"I'm obleeged to you, Mr. Hale. If you'll be so good as to unhitch that bucket"—pointing to a bespattered pail swinging between the hinder wheels—"while I take this 'ere one, why, we'll git through in half the time. 'Many hands make light work,' as I've heered my ole woman say. You have got no objection to hurryin' on things a little, I reckon?"

"None, I assure you! I am beginning to fear that night will overtake us before we get to our journey's end; the roads are so heavy."

"Don't skeer yourself about that! But *ain't* I stiff in the joints!" groaned the teamster, lifting his bucket to the leader's mouth. "I camp to-night better'n a mile t'other side of your house, and I'm bound to be thar by dark. We ain't more'n two miles from Mr. Argyle's, now."

"Do you hear that, Bessy?" said the young man, nearing the front of the wagon.

A face appeared in the semi-circular gap of the canvas cover. It was a female head—girlish and pretty.

"Did you call me, Mark?"

"Yes. We have not quite two miles further to go, little woman. That is good news, isn't it?"

"Indeed it is!" she responded, joyfully. "It is getting chilly, and I am uneasy lest Kitty should catch cold." She bent anxiously over a bundle wrapped in a shawl, that lay across her lap. "I hope she will sleep soundly the rest of the way."

"She'll be mighty apt to. The bells are as good as hop-tea for puttin' the children to sleep, my ole woman says," remarked the driver, climbing back to his place. "Many's the trip to town and back she's been with me, with a young one on her knees, and two or three more, bigger ones, tumblin' about over the boxes and barrels, in back thar—and she never lost a day's work. It was sewin', or knittin', or cardin' wool, or somethin' of the sort, all the time. I tell her, she'll take her loom along,

some day. A powerful worker, she is—if I say it, as shouldn't say it. Ain't you goin' to get in, sir?"

"I believe not. I will walk on a little way. My legs are cramped with sitting so long."

The bells jingled; the massive wheels creaked, and the weary, patient animals, with bent heads and strained sinews, began the ascent of another hill.

Mark Hale sprung nimbly past them; reached the summit and ran down the further and steeper side, to find still another and a more formidable eminence before him. Upon the top of this he stopped, to watch for the reappearance of the, to him, richly-laden vehicle, for it contained his earthly all. A summary review of the circumstances which had brought him thus far from the home of his forefathers, will be all we need relate of his previous history. He was the son of a revolutionary soldier, who, at the close of the war, had returned to his native village and former trade—that of a shoemaker. In this humble calling he had labored until his death, leaving to his son very little beside an unsullied name; a plain English education, which the boy's inherent love of study had made unusually thorough for one in his station, and an experimental knowledge of his father's handicraft. Nothing daunted at his unflattering worldly prospects, Mark married, before he was twenty-one, a girl as poor as himself, to whom he had been attached from childhood. Bessy Bryan brought to his cottage a loving heart, a pair of willing and skillful hands, and a blind mother, for whom the young couple cared tenderly during the three years that remained to her upon earth after her removal to their home. Besides Bessy, she had one other child, a son, considerably older than the faithful daughter. But "poor Jacob Bryan," as his best friends called him, was an easy, good-natured fellow; energetic without judgment, active without acuteness—just the man to work himself into difficulties, and trust to luck to help him out of them. By choice

he became a peddler, and in this capacity travelled through several of the southern States. On his first trip home, after his mother's decease, he found his brother-in-law feebly convalescent from a spell of rheumatic fever, and persuaded him to accompany him on a tour through a more genial clime.

Mark came back to his native place, well and strong, and fired by ambitious visions of the advantages to be gained by emigration. Without a complaint, and, so far as her husband saw, without a tear, Bessy packed up the limited number of movables she could take such a distance, and bidding farewell to the friends of her childhood and to her parents' graves, said in spirit, if not in words, to him who was now her only stay in life, "Whither thou goest, I will go." Her husband's observation and inquiries during his former journey enabled him to fix without delay upon a location. When his plans of removal were definitively made, he wrote to a fellow-northerner, a resident now of the neighborhood he had chosen as the Canaan of his exodus, whose acquaintance he had made while at the South, and requested him to procure a house for him. As good fortune ordered, this person had on hand a "commodious cottage" to rent out, he acting as agent for its owner, a gentleman now travelling abroad. A bargain was concluded by letter, and this spot our young couple were approaching on this murky afternoon.

Mark's adventurous and sanguine spirit did not flag under the discouraging aspect of the weather and the change in the country he remembered as so beautiful in the flush and glory of the spring-time. He acknowledged indeed, to himself, that he would not have been so easily fascinated by the situation he had selected, had he beheld it first in circumstances similar to the present; but since the irrevocable step was taken, his choice made with a full conviction that he was acting wisely, in reference to his own future, and that of those dearest to him, he gallantly resolved to abide by it, cheerfully. There was but one shade of solicitude

upon his heart, and this, although banished from his face, as the lumbering wagon rocked and groaned up the hill, lent a softer tenderness to his voice, as he addressed his wife :

"This is not just the country you expected to see, from my description—is it, Bessy ?"

The troubled look in her eyes accorded illy with the smile she forced to her lips.

"It will look better in the spring and summer, I dare say. But, Mark, dear, where do the people live ? I have seen but one house in the last ten miles."

"They *don't* live near the main road," said the driver ; "it's too public. We all down South belongs to the modest sort."

A laughing gleam from Mark's eye brought a real smile to his wife's countenance. He knew that she was thinking with him, that they had met but two teams and three foot-passengers, during six hours' travel upon the route, objected to as "too public."

"There are by-roads leading to the plantations, crossing this in all directions, you see, Bessy. We shall be at no loss for neighbors, even if they are a little further off than those we have been accustomed to at our old home. Very kind people you will find them to be, too," he added.

Bessy bowed her head at the mention of their old neighborhood. She seemed intent upon drawing the wrappings about Kitty's curly head ; but his own memory was too truthful for him to doubt the cause of the dimness, he was sure was over her eyes. Resuming his seat beside her, he put his arm around her waist, and both were quiet and thoughtful for a while.

And for that while, neither beheld the unfamiliar and actual scene in their sight. They gazed fondly instead, upon a little white cottage, a story and a half in front, sloping down in the rear until a tall man could hardly stand beneath the eaves ; and the great apple-tree shading the kitchen window ; upon the

broad door-step, where they had played at housekeeping when children, themselves ; where the bride had sat in the summer twilight to watch for her husband's coming ; where the youthful mother had dandled her babe, and the young father sustained its tottering trial-steps. There, on pleasant days, was set the grandmother's arm-chair, and the sunshine fell warmly through the elm boughs overhead, a welcome bath to the trembling limbs and form, although her eyes could not perceive its brightness ; and over it, in a tearful silence, unbroken, except by the tread of bearers and mourners, neighbors and friends—synonyms among that simple people—bore to her final rest the mortal remains of the aged pilgrim—thank Heaven, sightless no longer ! The light of love, the baptism of tears had made that worn, grey stone a sacred spot to the wanderers. In the yard, they never dreamed was not "modest," because it lay along the village street, were flowers and trees of their own planting. Henceforth strangers were to enjoy their fragrance and shade. The bees tenanted the row of hives, in the possession of which Bessy had esteemed herself passing rich, would hum and store honey just as busily, now that she would not profit by their hordes.

The church green was a convenient and inviting picture to one seated in the cottage door ; with the weeping elms trailing over the roof and latticing the windows of the ancient building, whose heavy frame and brown oaken pews had been brought from England—the villagers were fond of relating. On either side, and behind it, lay its founders and the majority of the congregations that had gathered within it prior to the present generation ; the memory of their names and worthy deeds kept alive, less by the quaint stones that marked their pillows, than through the traditions treasured and told with love and pride, by their descendants.

It was a dangerous indulgence of fancy on Mark's part, and he felt the ill effects of his indiscretion in the dreariness that fell

upon him, like the November fog, and the struggle it cost him to maintain a show of composure, much less of gaiety, when the teamster, pointing with his long whip, remarked, "Yonder's your house, Mrs. Hale!"

Bessy leaned forward eagerly, as did Mark.

"Where?" asked both.

"Just 'cross that field, in that clump of trees."

"That?" said Bessy, incredulous. "Mark! can it be?"

"It must be, dear. Mr. Paxton told me that he knew the place, and had heard through Mr. Sancroft, that we had rented it."

"It ain't so sniptious as you expected, I reckon," said the wagoner. "It's pretty 'nough situation, but it may be, you'll find the house sort o' out of order. Mr. Argyle, he built it for his overseer, and the man lived in it six months, or so. Then Mr. Argyle took it into his head that it was too far off from his place, and Mr. Frisbie's old mother, who kept house for him died, so he'd no reason to stay there any longer, and was willin' to do what his employer wanted, which was, to have everything under his own eye. Let him alone for 'making every edge cut,' as my ole woman says. And Mr. Sancroft—his agent—he's just as sharp and close. Maybe, as you are a Yankee, he'll favor you. He came from Connecticut—where they make clocks, you know."

"I hope I shall need no favoring at his hands!" returned Mark, with some stiffness. Then ashamed of his boastful pride, he continued, pleasantly, "I guess we shall not quarrel, if I pay my rent, and don't worry him for too many repairs."

"Oh! you'll get on!" But the honest face "reckoned" there might be other causes of dissatisfaction.

"The old gentleman—Mr. Argyle is mighty well off," he said, sheering away from the agent. "He owns nigh upon two thousand acres of land, and niggers more'n enough to work it, and has money a plenty besides, they say. But for all that, a shillin' piece looks as big to him as it does to you or me. His wife was

a different kind—free-handed as he'd let her be; good to poor folks, and one of the religiourest ladies you ever seen. Her darters don't take after her, I've heered tell. Master Malcolm—he looks like her, and behaves like her, too—much as a wild boy can like a perfect lady, as she was. But deary me! as my ole woman says, 'It takes many sorts of people to make a world,' and 'boys will be boys.'"

"I thought the family were not at home," said Mark, more to cover Bessy's silence, and to prevent any attempts at consolation from Mr. Paxton, should he notice her, than from interest in his landlord's domestic affairs.

"So they aint! The old gentleman, he's in Scotland, whar his father came from, and he, too, for that matter, when he was a child. The two darters, they're at the North, somewhar, at school. Thar warnt no schools in Virginny fine enough for them. They're highflyers, I tell you! Master Malcolm's at college in Williamsburg."

"The house is shut up, then?"

"All but the housekeeper's rooms. Whoa! gee! what are you about thar? You see"—to Mark—"they aint used to goin' in here."

The elephantine wagon slowly and painfully, as it were, turned into a side road, better than that which they had heretofore travelled, inasmuch as it was a gravelly soil, and its ruts were less deep. A few hundred yards brought them to the house they had seen across the field. It was built of hewn logs; one story in height, with a door and a window in front. There was no inclosed yard or garden, and the half dozen fine oaks that embowered it in summer, were now no improvement to its desolate appearance.

"Here we are, Bessy, dear!"

Mark held up his strong arms with a look that was pitying in its affection, when he meant it should be joyous. "Welcome to our hut in the backwoods!" as he lifted her to the ground.

Bessy had alighted ankle-deep in the dead leaves, and for a moment, their rustle was his only reply. Then, she took her child from the wagoner's arms, and presented it for its father's kiss.

"Mamma and Kitty are very glad to get home at last!" she said, smiling bravely.

Dead leaves everywhere! but in the corners of the zigzag fence that bounded the road on one side, and against the walls of the house, they were heaped highest, while, in the road itself, there whirled along, ever and anon, a twittering shower of them, before the wind, like a flock of frightened birds.

"The door is open, I see," said Mark, pushing it wider.

"Never had no lock on it, I reckon!" was the reply of the wagoner. "If you're ready, we'll tumble out your things. I wish I could stay and help you get to rights, but I must be travelling."

Bessy bestowed a glance upon the dismal interior of the dwelling; then turned away, and gathering a pile of the dry leaves at the leeward end of the house, she deposited her child upon the soft cushion, tucked a blanket snugly about her, tied her hood more tightly under the little chin, and gave her aid in removing the lighter articles of their luggage. There were not many parcels, and the work was soon done.

After infinite trouble, whoa-ing and gee-ing, and backing in the clearing around the cabin, the horses, and the moving mountain attached to them, faced the main road once more.

"I wish you luck!" said the driver, heartily, when he had received his fare, and the thanks of his late passengers.

Even his dull imagination recognized the forlorn expression of the picture before him; the heap of household goods that could furnish but scantily the rude hut that made the background; the group standing among the withered leaves; the child, blue with cold, and terrified by the strangeness of its surroundings, clinging to its mother's neck; the wife, pale and wistful, her lips closed

firmly, to repress the emotion that might seem to reproach him who had brought her hither; the sturdy husband, perplexed and serious, under the weight of the responsibility he had assumed, but never before felt so heavily as at this moment; and over all, the darkening grey of the low clouds.

"I'll call in when I pass this way agen," ventured the teamster, by way of alleviation to their discomfort. "Don't get homesick—no more'n you can help, I mean, of course. 'Put the best foot foremost,' as my ole woman says. 'What's done can't be helped!' as I've heered her say a hundred times, I reckon. Wish she was here! She'd tell you just what to do—get you all straight in less than no time."

That night, as he slept in his four-wheeled tent, his horses tethered about it, and his bull-dog at his feet, doing double duty as guard and foot-stove, he was awakened by the roar of the rain on the canvas cover.

"I'm afeered they're having a hard time of it!" he muttered, rolling his huge body over for another nap. "Better have stayed where they come from, if 'twas Yankee-land!"

CHAPTER II.

"Now, then, Bessy, for work!"

Mark ended the mournful pause, during which both had listened to the last dying tinkle of the distant bell that sounded like a farewell message from the civilized world. With a deep inspiration, he cast off despondency and homesickness.

"We will not be down-hearted, dear, while we are left to one another, and Kitty is spared to comfort us both. Suppose we examine the inside of what, forlorn as it looks, we will make a home of by and by."

It was a heavy draught upon Bessy's loving faith in her husband's word to credit the possibility of this latter clause, as she stood in the centre of the principal room, and gazed around her. The walls were tolerably sound—that is, there were not many fissures that admitted the outer air and light, but the inner plastering had crumbled and fallen in a number of places, displaying the shingles and sticks with which the edifice was "chinked." The bare beams, black with dirt and smoke, as was also the floor, were overlaid by loose planks, forming a loft, gained from below, by a rough ladder from which half the rounds were missing. The fire-place nearly filled up one end of the apartment, and the daylight glimmered down its capacious mouth upon ashes and charred pieces of firewood, extinct months before. A row of shelves, to the left of the chimney, constituted all the furniture and culinary conveniences of the establishment, and these were only undressed planks, supported by pegs driven into the logs.

"This is the kitchen, I guess," said Bessy, opening a door leading to a back room.

But it had neither fireplace nor stove. A small, unglazed window allowed unobstructed passage to the wind, and the gaping cracks above, below, and at the sides of another door, completed the process of ventilation. This, too, Bessy unclosed, and beheld about an acre of ground that seemed to have known tillage and inclosure at some remote date. Not far from the house, and, each at the foot of a tree, were the remains of a hen-coop and pig-sty.

"What dirty people they must have been!" said our New England girl, with a curl of her pretty mouth. "I don't wonder that Mr. Argyle wanted to have them under his own eye!"

"We will show them a different style of living," returned Mark. "Next summer, we will have a fence and a garden, and chickens, and a pig. You have enough Irish blood in you to make the porker a necessary appendage to your family; but we need not have his sty directly under our chamber window. Instead of that, we will plant roses and morning-glories."

Bessy was passionately fond of flowers, and she looked brighter at the mere imagination.

Mark followed up his advantage. "And we have all the winter for getting things straight within-doors. The first step is to make a fire. There are dry sticks in plenty for the kindling. Fuel is not scarce hereabouts, however pressed we may be for other comforts."

The hearth was speedily cleared, and a fire crept brightly among the crackling twigs, then caught the larger logs Mark had picked up about the premises. While her father and mother were bringing in their boxes and bundles, Miss Kitty sat upon a roll of bedding, laid against the wall, for her accommodation, still muffled in the shawls that concealed her entirely, excepting a pair of cherry lips and neat little nose, straight and sensible,

and two black eyes, that saw and wondered at everything ; especially were they attracted by the merry leaping blaze that grew redder and stronger as the evening became darker. She would have liked to be nearer to it, but "mamma" had bade her sit still, and babies thought it no hardship to obey their parents in those days of primitive ignorance, when the hint that Solomon and Paul were "old fogies," would have been regarded as irreverently presumptuous.

Thus, it was not until the last package was brought in, and the rickety door excluded some of the unwholesome dampness, that Kitty was promoted to "mamma's" knee, and her wrappings removed, with a kiss and word of praise to the "best little girl in the country." If the mother had added, "and one of the prettiest," it must have been a critical taste indeed that found fault with her partial judgment. Short, sunny-brown ringlets covered a head, formed with the elegance of outline and proportion that gave her mother, although but a shoemaker's wife, the air of aristocratic breeding. The father's smile rarely left the black eyes, and the fervid Irish blood, of which he had spoken, colored the round cheek.

"Mamma !" said the little three-year-old, "where is this ?"

"This is home, my daughter," replied Bessy, steadily.

Another dubious look at floor and ceiling, and the confused mass of articles that busied her father ; and the lip curled just as the tidy housewife's had done, at the proximity of the pig-pen to the back door.

"I don't like it, mamma ! 'Tisn't clean !"

"Her mother all over ! the particular little minx !" laughed Mark.

Bessy answered more seriously. "But when it is clean, you will find it a nice place, Kitty. Mamma will fix a seat for you, and give you a piece of bread and butter. Then you will sit still, and let me help papa—will you not ?"

"Yes, ma'am," sighed she, meekly ; and while the work of unpacking went on, she remained quietly perched upon a chest, munching the hard biscuit that was to be her supper.

"Papa," she said, at length, "may I please have a drink of water ?"

"Certainly, my darling."

"But where is the well ?" exclaimed Bessy. "I have not thought of it once ! How singular that I should have forgotten it !"

"The spring is at the bottom of the hill, behind the house," answered Mark. "I will step out and get a pailful of water."

"I thought perhaps the overseer's family managed to live without it," said Bessy, mischievously. "I am sure the supply must be very small."

"I will find enough for Kitty, and for our cup of tea," replied Mark, lighting one of the pitchpine torches, with which he had supplied himself, in conformity with a suggestion of his friend, the wagoner.

Bessy stooped again over the box of housekeeping utensils and crockery. The next thing that came to hand was drawn forth with the utmost care. Kitty's eyes flashed recognition.

"Grandmamma's clock !" she cried. "Where did it come from ? Oh, mamma, *do* make it strike !"

As much to gratify herself as her child, Bessy set it up on one of the shelves, and applied the key. The works were all in order. The lively pendulum commenced its "tickety-tick !" and as Mark entered, the shrill bell rang out seven o'clock, for Bessy could only guess at the hour.

"That is a welcome sound !" was his exclamation, and for a time the three stood, looking at the well-remembered face and listening to the familiar music, with equal and childish delight.

"The place is not half so lonesome now, as it was !" said

Bessy, going back to her work. "It reminds me so much of the dear old kitchen at home!"

Hands and feet moved to the rapid beatings of the blithe monitor on the shelf, and Kitty, in default of more interesting amusement, watched it, until her eyelids fell together.

"Papa's blessing!" murmured Mark, taking the yielding form into his arms.

"She has had hard travel and hard fare to-day. Loosen her clothes very gently, Bessy dear. I am glad that we can make her comfortable for the night."

This was not an unfounded congratulation; although the little one's bed was made within one of the packing-boxes, instead of the roomy crib of polished wood, which had held her from the hour of her birth until the day they quitted the homestead. It cost Bessy a severe pang to part with that; but it was really less necessary to them than many other portions of their furniture; and "something must be given up," she reminded herself again and again, when her desires threatened to get the better of prudence and expediency. They had brought but one bedstead, and when this was set up in one corner of the room, a well-used, but white and clean table in another, three wooden chairs and a stuffed easy one, disposed here and there, a chest, a trunk, and Mark's bench and box of tools arranged against the further wall; and, upon the shelves, the clock, a churn, and a few vessels for cookery and table use, the house was furnished. There were still unpacked a small lot of books, a picture or two, and some bits of carpeting; but these, it was resolved, after a second and closer survey of walls and floor, should remain in their hiding-places, until certain necessary processes of purification were accomplished.

"Eben Dwight could not have made me a more useful present than that set of carpenter's tools," said Mark, as they drank their creamless tea, and ate the bread and cheese, delicious in

relish, after their day's labor. "I shall have to wait a bit for business to come to me, and this will give us a fine chance to right up our establishment. Not very stylish now, it must be confessed;" and he smiled. "But 'everything must have a beginning,' as my ole woman says, and 'a bad beginning makes a good ending.'"

Bessy's merry laugh chimed in with his, at the successful mimicry of their late travelling-companion. And just at this moment, there pattered upon the roof the heavy rain, that, as we have seen, disturbed the slumbers of Mrs. Paxton's exemplary husband, two miles further on the way to his often-quoted spouse.

"That same 'ole woman' must be a second Book of Proverbs," continued Mark.

"I guess she is a pattern wife and mother," said Bessy, "and a good neighbor. I wish she were not twelve miles off. And Mr. Paxton himself was as kind as kind could be to us. I was sorry to part with him. We need the advice of somebody used to the customs of this country. I wonder, for instance, where we are to get milk. You and I can live without it; but Kitty ought to have a little."

"By and by, we will have a cow," said Mark.

"By and by is not now," objected the practical and less hopeful wife. "Meanwhile the little creature will suffer."

"She shall not—never fear. I will see Mr. Sancroft about the milk. As our temporary landlord, he must feel some interest in us; although I can't say that I agree with him in calling this a 'commodious cottage.' He lives only a couple of miles from this, and Ben Lomond, Mr. Argyle's house—is hardly half a mile up the road. We shan't starve, depend upon it. Work is plenty, provisions are cheap, and fuel is to be had for the picking up. In these immense woods back of us, thousands of trees rot yearly, and the ground at this season is covered thickly with

kindling-wood. You and Kitty can gather enough fagots in one morning to last us a fortnight; and in the same time, my axe and I can provide heavy logs to burn for a month—and without ever felling a tree. This is the compact between Mr. Sancroft and myself. I am at liberty to use whatever I find already fallen. It was my notion, and he raised no objection. Then, he ensures me the entire custom of Mr. Argyle's plantation, where there are nearly a hundred persons, white and colored, and promises to speak a good word for me in the neighborhood. He is getting rich, they say; yet he left Connecticut fourteen years ago with just seven shillings in his pocket over and above the cost of his passage and that of his wife and child. This is a great country!"

"I hope he got his money honestly," remarked Bessy, drily.

"It is very likely that he did. A man who understands his business, and is not afraid to work, cannot help getting along. By the time our little beauty is grown, Bessy, you and she will ride past this hovel, in your coach and four, and forget that you ever lived in it."

Bessy shook her head, in smiling doubt; but the pictures drawn by his ardent, buoyant spirit were always pleasant to her mental vision, and too probable as well as too attractive to be altogether disbelieved.

The weather continued lowering, with frequent showers, all through the three following days. The work of "righting the establishment" went on bravely, notwithstanding the state of the atmosphere was unpropitious for house-cleaning. The cottage had one architectural excellence—a chimney with a good draught; and its ample jaws were kept constantly supplied, for the fire had much to do. A large kettle of boiling water hissed and bubbled there, all of three days, and was replaced on the fourth by a pot of whitewash, compounded according to Mark's peculiar recipe. A small glue-kettle was often upon the embers; their frugal

meals were prepared there, and a strong, steady heat was required to dry the room after its repeated scourings.

They were tenants of their new house nearly a week, without seeing a white neighbor, excepting a quiet, stupid bachelor farmer, whom Mark recollected having met on his former visit to the South. He lived in a house, scarcely superior to theirs, a mile distant, on a small farm owned by himself, and in the tillage of which he was aided by two or three negroes. He rode by the Hales' door about sundown of the day succeeding their arrival, and Mark made bold to answer his stare and bob of the head by stopping him, and inquiring whether he could supply them with milk from his dairy.

A prodigious deal of explanation had to be employed to convey to the interior of his thick skull the idea that the strangers kept no cow; did not intend purchasing one for the present, and therefore desired to *buy* milk, and to pay for it in money—pence and shillings. The case was unprecedented in his not extensive experience. Finally, the clear tones and explicit terms of the New Englander established the point in his mind, and a bargain was struck, that was satisfactory to both parties.

"I am afraid he will not sleep a wink to-night," laughed Mark, as the rider of the scrubby pony moved off, shaking his head from side to side, and turning his body in the saddle every other minute, to look back at the man who had just named and closed such an arrangement.

"He is half-witted, I think," said Bessy, who had been at once an amused and vexed spectator of the scene. "I don't believe we will ever see a drop of milk from his cows."

But, the next morning, Kitty ran screaming from her look-out at the door, and hid behind her mother, who was getting breakfast. Bessy could not chide her cowardice, when she saw its cause—the ugliest, blackest, most ragged negro urchin she had ever beheld, grinning in the doorway, holding out a wooden pail.

"Here's yer milk!" he said. "Want de piggin 'gin!"

"What!" ejaculated Mrs. Hale. "Mark, do come here!"

Mark entered from the inner room, and after questioning the boy, interpreted his remark to mean that the pail—"piggin," in Virginia parlance—was to be returned by the bearer. It was a clean cedar vessel, covered with a white cloth; the milk was fresh and rich. Bessy almost forgave the stupidity of the farmer and the apish appearance of his Ganymede, in her enjoyment of the nectar. The boy was a good-natured fellow, and so far from bearing Kitty any grudge for her impolite reception of him, brought her an apple that evening, and the ensuing day, a small bag of what he called "goober peas"—alias peanuts—volunteering the information that she was "a mighty pretty little gal;" that his name was "'Pollo," and he "wasn't gwine to hurt her."

"That child makes friends everywhere," said the loving parents.

They did not disdain this ray of sunshine, albeit the reflector was of doubtful quality. As cleanliness was restored (it seemed rather that it was created) Bessy's spirits reached their accustomed pitch. In her old home, she was often likened to her pet bees. People said she had watched and tended them, and studied their ways of life and work, until she had learned their motions and their music. The brisk pendulum, ticking with all its little might, upon the shelf; the spark of light caught on its bright face, lengthened into an arc by its swift swing, was the only thing in her household that vied with her in lightness and speed.

As we said, just now, they had been a week in their log domicile. It was a mild morning in balmy Indian summer, that witching, lovely twilight of the year. Doors and windows were open, for the fire could not be allowed to go down upon ironing-day. The smoky rafters, and the broken walls had been white-washed; the floor, by dint of countless scrubbings, was almost as

clean as the table and chairs, and bore upon its sanded surface the regular and graceful waves it was the pride of skillful housewives to trace with the broom, when its commoner offices were done. The bed was nowhere to be seen, and in its stead was another row of shelves; the lower honored by holding the set of real china, which had descended to Bessy from her mother; the upper, being occupied by their library, neither very select nor very new, but by no means contemptible, in an age when good books brought almost their weight in silver. The old shelves had been taken down; the rough splinters and dirt removed by Mark's plane, and then readjusted into their places, in a more workmanlike manner. The window-panes, four in number, which they found opaque with dust, were now transparent and shining, and over them parted a snowy curtain. Two black profiles of Mark's parents graced one wall; a print of Christ blessing little children another. The bench and tool were still in the back part of the room, biding the time for their use. Their merry whistle sounded from the back yard, where the cutting wood. Kitty nursed a wooden doll with excessive tenderness; seated on a stool in the sunshine, that fell broad on the door, and her mother flitted back and forth between her ironing-board and the fire. Upon a rude clothes-horse of Mark's construction, hung an array of garments, warm from the rapid touch that had smoothed their damp creases, and their numbers were continually increased.

She was a well-built figure, this shoemaker's wife; rather above the medium height of woman, with a round, pliant form, coquettishly displayed by the checked short gown, girdled at the waist. Her sleeves did not reach the elbow, and the arms they left uncovered, were marvellously reserved touching the wash-tub and the fire, so soft and white were they, in their plumpness. The abundant dark hair was combed quite away from the rosy cheeks and slightly flushed forehead; her profile was marked, yet deli-

cately cut; and, as she stopped to and fro, her blue skirt permitted a critical view of two small feet, arched in the instep, and incased in neat high-heeled shoes. Mark was very fastidious in the matter of his wife's shoes. In short, but for her dress and occupation, she might have been mistaken for a titled dame, who, having lost her way and her retinue, had chanced upon a peasant's cot.

For aught we can say to the contrary, Bessy Hale may have come down in a direct line, from the magnificent, but somewhat apocryphal race of Irish kings. To appease the prejudices of those who scout at Nature's letters patent of nobility, unless the same have been ratified by the signet of man-appointed royalty, we admit our ignorance of our heroine's pedigree, further back than the sturdy Celtic father, who fought the tyrants of his native and of his adopted country at Lexington and Bunker Hill. The stickler for blood and breeding, who can trace patrician descent to the lobe of an ear; descry the lees of a plebeian stock in a ~~man~~ give Bessy the benefit of the uncertainty; so frank as to put one thing we do stoutly maintain; whatever might be the quality of the blood stirring so warmly in her veins, it suffered no degradation by her alliance with the manly fellow, whose axe was flashing over his head, with every second; the ringing notes sounding back sharply from the hills. It drowned the noise of approaching footsteps, and the knock against the door-post.

"Mamma!" said Kitty, plucking her dress.

Bessy turned and saw a gentleman standing upon the threshold. Hastily setting down her iron, she advanced, blushing, to meet him.

"Mrs. Hale?" said he, inquiringly.

"Yes, sir."

"My name is Sancroft, Mrs. Hale. I hope you are well, this fine morning, madam. Is your husband at home?"

Bessy offered him a chair, and summoned Mark.

"How *do* you do, Mr. Hale? *how* do you do, my dear sir?" cried the visitor, shaking hands. "Happy to welcome you *to* the neighborhood! And how did you bear *the* journey? And you, madam, did you not find it fatiguing *at* this season of the year? And this is your little girl! Shake hands with papa's friend, sissy. What is your name? Hard at work, *I* see, Mr. Hale, Yankee energy *in* full blast—hey?"

"I find plenty to do, certainly, sir," replied Mark.

"I should think so, indeed, Mr. Hale," casting his eyes around the homely dwelling. "I would not *have* believed; if I ~~had~~ not seen it with my own eyes, *that* a place could have undergone such a transformation in so short a time. Mrs. Hale, you are a necromancer. It is not every woman *who* wields such a wand as yours. Mr. Hale, are you sure that her broomstick *is* not enchanted? And it is really all your own work? I should hardly know the *old* house. We are not used to these reformatations in this *part* of the world, Mr. Hale. *Indeed*, we are not, sir! You must not make your neighbors envious. I shall *have* ~~the~~ *style's* other tenants upon my back, for all this, unless I take pains to trumpet it *abroad* that it is your matter and not mine; I wash my hands of it. How did *you* do it? when did you do it? I should have been *over* before, but have been away from home, ever since your arrival. You came last Wednesday—hey?"

"Yes, sir," Mark contrived to say, not daring to look at Bessy, who was the picture of puzzled wonder.

"And this is Tuesday! Why, yes, *of* course—Tuesday! Don't let me hinder your work, Mrs. Hale! I perceive that you *are* an accomplished laundress. So *is* my wife, I am a family man myself, my dear madam, and have *a* realizing sense of the importance of house-work. A very *fine* child, Mr. Hale. What is her age, did you say, sir? I have six children—the poor *man's* blessing, you know, sir. I *dare* say, now, you found as much, if not

more—'though that does not appear possible—to do *in* the other room—hey?"

"You can judge for yourself, sir," returned Mark, leading the way, with pardonable pride, into the smaller apartment.

The whitewash brush had done its duty here, also. The window-frame was supplied with glass, which the provident Mark had foreseen would be of use to him "in the backwoods." There was the bed, with its thick blankets, gay patchwork coverlet and irreproachable pillow; and at its foot, Kitty's packing-case, raised by blocks of wood several inches above the floor; a chintz valance tacked around the top, and concealing the inelegant nature of the contrivance. Another box, set up on end, and similarly attired, was the wash-stand; the curtain concealing the convenient depository of shoes, etc., thereby formed. The rest of the floor was hidden, with its inequalities and cracks, by mats made of many colored bits of cloth, first tacked together in long strings, which were braided and then sewed into circular, oval or square rugs. It was a cheap, unique, and anything but unsightly carpet, ~~and~~ to the foot, and exceedingly durable. The cracks at the edges of the door and casement were closed by strips of coarse list.

Mr. Sancroft raised his hands and eyes in amazement, that might well have been unfeigned.

"You will do, *sir*! you will succeed in life, Mr. Hale! Never give yourself one particle of uneasiness on that score. I am proud of you *as* a fellow Yankee—indeed *I* am! And how about the wood, Mr. Hale? I heard your axe, as I rode *up* to the door. Quite a pile already, I see, sir," his gaze darting at each stick with a keenness that ought to have saved the axe further trouble that day.

"*And* actually a pile of fagots! A sight I have not seen before in seven—no, in seventeen years! Let me handle one *for* old acquaintance' sake. And well tied *up* they are too—quite

scientifically. You are no novice at the trade, *Mr. Hale*. Ah, me! how it reminds me of the *times* when my brother and I used to take our lucheon with *us*, and spend the day in the woods."

He put the bundle of sticks back, with a profound sigh. "Pretty spot here for *a* garden, Mr. Hale. Rich earth, good exposure, well-drained, not too dry. You'll *make* it smile next summer, *I'll* be bound, sir, blossom like the rose—hey?"

"If I can get it inclosed, meanwhile," said Mark. "That is one thing about which I wished to speak"——

"Of course! *of* course! it must be fenced in. There was a noble fence, an eight-railer about it *not* three months ago. What am *I* saying? Less than two months since. I remember the circumstance distinctly, *having* examined the premises thoroughly during our correspondence concerning the rent. The thievish negroes have *been* preying upon your property already, it seems. As the nights *grow* cold, they lay hands upon every rail and plank *they* find loose. You must be *on* your guard, Mr. Hale. When you put up another fence, procure a *dog*—a *savage* fellow. I have a pup that *will* suit you to a T—sharp as a meat-axe. But where *are* the outhouses? The rascals have not spared them either. I am surprised *they* left the chimney or the roof. You will form a bad idea of our neighborhood, Mr. Hale. I am sorry *for* all this—indeed I am, sir. Let me send *you* the dog forth-with."

"I think, sir," Mark would say, "if you will repair the mischief to some extent—say, build me a fence, I care not how rough, and one or two sheds, I will not trouble you to put up the dog-kennel. All minor repairs, as you have seen, I am willing to make at my own expense."

"I see, *sir*, I see! I honor your independence, Mr. Hale. It is worthy of the land of your birth and breeding, sir. Rest assured *that*, in my next report to Mr. Argyle, all these things

shall be properly set forth, and no appeal of mine be wanting to ensure the success of *your* application. Mr. Argyle is now abroad, *you* are aware, sir."

"Yes, sir, and I had supposed that in such trifles as these, you might be empowered to act according to your own discretion."

The agent raised his shoulders and eyebrows. "Mistaken, my dear sir, mistaken! Mr. Argyle is a wonderfully punctilious man. Mint, anise *and* cummin! You are a Bible scholar, *like* myself, Mr. Hale, and understand the allusion. I shall make it *my* business to write to him immediately. May I ask the favor of a drink of water, *Mrs.* Hale?"

They were now back again in the front and larger room, and remarking upon the heat of the day, Mr. Sancroft unbuttoned and threw open his great-coat, seating himself, as he did so, in the easy-chair. He was a tall, spare man, apparently from forty to forty-five years of age, with lantern jaws, very closely shaven, as was likewise his chin; a mouth, that whether speaking or shut, was always smiling, and a narrow, steep forehead peaked very far up over the temples. His hair was bushy and prematurely grey; so hoary, that it contrasted curiously with a pair of black eyebrows, which were, by far, the most expressive and remarkable feature of his face. Rapidly as the tongue moved, sudden and frequently ludicrously abrupt as were its transitions from one topic to another, the eyebrows were never caught tripping. They admired, wondered, regretted, argued in exact time with the words that streamed forth so glibly beneath them. They were not still one instant while he was speaking, and their incessant play would have driven a nervous man to distraction. In very animated periods, not content with moving themselves, they lifted the scalp with them, and then Mr. Sancroft's iron-grey forelock seemed to retreat to the crown of his head. He was an endless talker—would ask a dozen questions in a breath, without appear-

ing to expect an answer to any one of them, and just when the listener was not looking for him to pause, would bring up "all standing," as the phrase is, with his "Hey?"—eyebrows and tongue at a dead lock, until the startled mind of the questioned person recovered itself sufficiently to make reply. This habit, combined with his incessant and marked repetition of the names of those whom he addressed—a practice, then, as now, affected by the underbred and pompous; and an original style of emphasis, referable to no law of sense or elocution, and which, having given a specimen of it, we shall, to spare the printer's italics and the reader's patience, leave to the imagination for the future, all together, sent Bessy out of the room and out of the house. Calling Kitty to accompany her, she went down the hill to the spring, and did not return until the ring of Mark's axe advised her that the coast was clear.

Husband and wife exchanged a look of amused intelligence as their eyes met, and, flinging his axe aside, Mark followed Bessy into the kitchen. In their honest souls, they never thought of calling it a sitting-room, although they had no other.

"Well, Bess?"

"Well, Mark!"

She was holding a dipper of water to Kitty's lips, roguishly unconscious that he was awaiting a further reply.

"What do you think of our landlord?" Mark was obliged to ask outright.

"Mr. Argyle! I never saw him," was the demure rejoinder, as she restored the dipper to its nail.

"Nonsense, you tease! How do you like Mr. Sancroft?"

"Not at all!"

Mark's face sobered. He had expected her to make sport of their queer visitor, but had not anticipated the dislike expressed in her words and look. He knew and respected his sensible, spirited wife; valued her sound intelligence and warm heart, but

he had had to deal, ere this, with her prejudices, and the experience had taught him to dread the thought of her forming others. Not that he, himself, had any especial fancy for Mr. Sancroft; that, at the bottom of his thoughts, there was not an irritating sense that he had been egregiously duped by his representations, with regard to the hovel rented to him under such a specious title, but since it was too late to repair the mischief, no good could arise from entertaining unfriendly feelings toward the agent.

"He is odd in looks and manners," he said, "but these are things we may laugh at, without blaming him for what he cannot help. He means well, perhaps."

"I suppose he does—for himself!" answered Bessy, re-sprinkling the clothes, which had become dry during the ill-timed call. "He has a flinty face and his heart is harder."

"Little woman!" said Mark, in mild reproach. "That is not quite charitable. You judge harshly of a man, with whom you have but an hour's acquaintance."

"I wish it were all I am likely to have!" Bessy retorted, willfully.

"But why?"

Bessy put her iron down, deliberately, and confronted her husband.

"I will tell you," she began, folding her arms, and beating a tattoo upon the lower with the fingers of the upper hand. "In the first place, he has 'kissed the Blarney-stone,' as my father used to say of such talkers. I always distrust a flatterer. Give me an honest tongue—I don't care how blunt it may be. Then he took too much pains to convince you that he did not feel above us. He was proud of you as a brother Yankee—and all that flummery—a sure proof that he believed himself to be your superior, 'though why he should do so, I am sure I cannot tell'—the little princess digressed to remark, standing considerably higher

in her trim shoes. "He has scraped together a few pounds more than you have, it is true, but I'll warrant, he had no more money when he was your age, than you have now, and in everything else, you are worth five hundred of him. Didn't you notice what he said about the fence and outhouses? Don't you see that his aim was to prove that the premises were in good order, when you rented the place—the wonderfully commodious cottage, of him?"

"But what signifies that, if the repairs were needed when I took possession?"

"He would make it out that you took—or, that he gave possession at once; that the premises passed out of his care into yours, the day the terms were settled. And who can contradict this? We found the house all open, you remember. It may have been unlocked for three months. Mark my words! When that garden is fenced in, you will do it yourself. Those sheds will never be built, unless you put them up. His talk about writing to Mr. Argyle was a poor trick, to shift the weight from his own shoulders."

She fell to ironing with a bustling show of diligence, but in a minute faced about again.

"Then, couldn't a child see through all that stuff about the fagots and his brother and their luncheon and old times?"

"I didn't—and I am hardly a baby."

"Didn't you engage to cut and gather *dry* wood and sticks? If there had been ten drops of sap in that pile of logs, his hawk eyes would have counted them. His only reason, in coming here to-day was to see what kind of tenants we were likely to be. He is sure of one quarter's rent, since it was paid in advance, but he keeps a long look a-head. Now, that he is convinced that we are decent and industrious, and not disposed to ruin Mr. Argyle, by cutting down his timber, I hope he will be remarkably scarce of his eyebrows here. And what a way he has of jerking out some words and running all the rest together! Ugh! I never

could bear a man whose scalp worked backward and forward, in that disgusting manner!"

In true womanly style of argument, Bessy's harangue, pertinent and forcible in the main, wound up with the weakest point. Mark forgot, in his burst of laughter at her last absurd clause, that much of what she had been saying, had struck him as true as she brought out the various heads. It was not in his nature to take trouble on interest, and kissing the burning cheek of the disconcerted orator, he dismissed Mr. Sancroft by putting forward a more pleasing subject. The odd jobs about the premises were disposed of sufficiently to allow of his return to his legitimate calling. He now solicited his wife's aid in putting up his sign, which had, up to this time, lain undisturbed in the bottom of a chest.

After a good deal of serious consultation, it was decided at length, to place it between the window and the door, at an equal distance from the roof and from the ground. Mark and Bessy went out to the road to enjoy the effect and to be certain that it was conspicuous enough to catch the eye of a careless passer by. It was a complete success. Even from the highway, across the field, a tolerably keen sight could distinguish the black letters upon their white ground—

"MARK HALE.

SHOEMAKER."

CHAPTER III.

BEN LOMOND, Mr. Argyle's mansion, although neither the oldest nor largest house in the neighborhood, was yet invested with pretensions that enabled it to hold up its peaked roof and round chimneys with the grandest in the country. The centre building was of hard, dark-red brick, which had been transported to this inland region from across the ocean, by the founder, the elder of the emigrant Argyles.

The causes assigned for his expatriation were divers, and not altogether reconcilable. The speculation most favored by the family and their friends, was of political and ecclesiastical persecutions, from which he barely escaped with his life and liberty, and his small household. In the early and inconsiderate days of the son, the present proprietor, he had ventured to give this shadowy persecution a form and date; dilating to round-eyed, wide-mouthed listeners, upon the baseness of royal oppression; the tyranny of the perfidious house of Stuart; the deaths on the scaffold of two peers of the realm—father and son—descendants of the grand, rugged old chieftain, MacCallum More; and how, driven from the land of his birth by the same relentless enmity, one of the race and name had fled over the Atlantic to escape a like fate. The Argyle name was not disgraced by the causeless taint of "treason;" the blood of the noblest of Scotland's peerages was none the poorer because it ran in the veins of a handful of untitled exiles.

Amid the winks and whispered jeers of the minority, who

appreciated the tale as a joke, and the sympathy and reverence of the many, who swallowed it as a verity, without thinking of subsequent digestion, the ambitious "laird," as his college-mates dubbed him, was suffered to proceed, until one day, the hour and the man having come, a certain waggish fellow stood forth, and made proclamation of a most surprising instance of longevity as exemplified in Argyle, senior. "He had been driven from his native Highlands, according to the son's showing, by the remorseless hatred of an ungrateful dynasty, and found an honored asylum in the wilds of America. There he had raised a family and a fortune, and notwithstanding his perils, hardships, and labors, was now enjoying the evening of a well-spent life—in fact, renewing his prime if not his youth. He might easily be mistaken for a man of fifty, when, as the date of the battle of Sedgemoor—the disastrous day that saw the downfall of his illustrious kinsman—proved he was in reality nearly a hundred years old, he having been a man grown and married at the time of his flight!"

The luckless butt of this unmerciful sport never forgot nor forgave its author and endorsers. Throughout his life, the imprudent tongue that let slip in his presence the sobriquet, "MacCal-lum More," which still perpetuated the remembrance of his boyish mortification, was sure to incur the weight of his deep displeasure.

The unpopular and unromantic opinion of those who had the best opportunities of knowing the first Argyle who honored the western continent by making it his home, was that his removal to the new world was strictly a business investment. His steady devotion to Mammon, his near pinching and his overreaching, his grinding and his grasping, were to their minds indubitable testimony that money-getting and money-saving were inbred and paramount to all nobler passions. His son, with a more liberal education, was almost as narrow and selfish in his views and

aims. His life was a ceaseless toil to maintain the family honor by means of a show of luxury and abundance, without draining the family coffers. In pursuance of this policy, he was now spending a year abroad; the place and style of his retirement a secret to all his neighbors excepting Mr. Sancroft, who, every quarter, dispatched a bulky missive to an obscure town in Scotland. Mrs. Argyle, a lady of rare excellence and personal beauty, had been long dead. The two daughters were being polished in Madame Finissez's fashionable seminary, New York city, and Malcolm, the second child and sole male heir, was studying Greek and politics at William and Mary college. The future man of the people would be more acceptable in his native State if his Alma Mater were a domestic institution.

During the absence of the chief rulers of the household, the negroes worked the plantation; the overseer, a shrewd Scotchman, brought up by Mr. Argyle for this post, worked the negroes, and Mr. Sancroft's fingers and eyebrows were everywhere. Meanwhile, the house was shut against all outsiders, with the exception of one wing, remote from the principal building. The place looked well, in spite of an indescribable air of desolation, the effect of the closed windows and smokeless chimneys. The site was commanding; a ridge, sloping to the west and south, in cultivated lands, watered by a winding stream, that imparted, moreover, variety and beauty to the landscape; and sheltered from the cold winds of the north and east by the grand forest, which overspread with a solemn sea of verdure two-thirds of the estate.

The original building was two stories high, and the high roof was pierced with semicircular openings to light a roomy attic. The eaves frowned darkly over the upper row of chamber windows, and a porch, also peaked in roof, and covered with rounded shingles, overlapping one another after the manner and appearance of fish-scales, jutted out boldly in front, like a mailed sentinel watching over the valley. At the right, left and rear, had been

added wooden wings, of architecture almost as solid and grave in its character, as was the brick house. The sun and storm had been the painters, and these had produced a mellow brown hue, that harmonized not indifferently with the color of the rest of the pile. One tall, spreading cedar shadowed the porch, and on either side of the gate stood, hale and green, a box-tree, fifty years old. The front lawn was separated from the kitchen yard, by a hedge of broom, of the laird's planting, and which was at once his delight, and the cordial detestation of the little negroes, whose associations with the flexile twigs were of the most lively and pungent nature. Following the path, which, at one corner of the house, made a gap in this evergreen fence, one came upon the back building and entered the housekeeper's jurisdiction.

And here, on a frosty Monday morning, early in December, Miss Barbara Brook busied herself and her myrmidons in the momentous work of "getting the week started."

"Let me once get fair holt of it, a Monday morning!" said the enterprising female, clutching at an invisible hebdomadal adversary, with a gesture akin to one which we remember to have seen "bring down the house," at a college exhibition, when a graceful Freshman essayed to "pluck up drowned Honor by the locks." "Let me get fair holt of it, and start it right; set it on its legs, myself, and happen what may, I am sure of coming out straight and square on Saturday night!"

A mischievous observer would have said that there was little danger of any other result to her, individually. Straight and square, Nature had made her, and she had sought out no invention wherewith to alter or improve the model. Straight as to limbs, spine, neck and sandy hair; square as to shoulders, elbows, brow, chin—even toes. She was not over five feet in height, and was attired in a homespun woollen garment, in whose plaids red and yellow were the prevailing tints, and whose cut and fit are best described by saying that her rule of "straight and square,"

had not been departed from. The room was spacious and comfortable. At one end of it was a loom, and nearer the fire-place a spinning-wheel, each presided over by a sable handmaiden. A third was carding wool, and still a fourth, a mere child, was sitting flat in the middle of the apartment, picking cotton, assisted or hindered, by a boy of about the same size, and of as lustrous an ebony as herself. This couple were, on this particular occasion, Miss Barbara's most grievous obstacle to setting the week upon its legs.

"Tony! what are you about thar?"

"Nuthin', Miss Barbary."

"So it seems!" stopping behind him, to rap his head with the huge brass thimble that never left her finger.

"Turrible tough cotton!" said the boy. "You ever seen tougher, Suke?"

"Dat I ain't!" responded his co-worker. "'Pears like de seeds warn't 'tended to come out!"

"'Pears like you warn't 'tended to work, you mean," was the contemptuous retort of the taskmistress. "I reckon if the seed was good to eat, they'd slip out like they was greased. Chloe Ann! I *should* think that a girl who went to roost last night with the chickens, and couldn't be got off of it, till after milking-time this morning, might keep her eyes open long enough to card half a dozen rolls. I'll put you to bed some day, and not let you git up for a week."

The carder rolled her eyes, and showed her teeth in a way that betrayed little dread of the prescription. The weaver was a dark mulatto, tall and powerfully made, with features that betokened no common character. Her task went forward diligently, and Miss Barbara's glance over her shoulder was one of approval, not distrust.

"You never wove a smoother piece of linen than that, Sarah," she remarked, knitting away at the stocking that never had her

eye for an instant. "I think we will bleach it, and lay it by for your Miss Eleanor's wedding outfit."

The woman smiled without speaking, but she looked neither indifferent to the beauty of the work, nor to the praise bestowed upon it.

"Dar!" ejaculated Tony, pricking up his ears, like a pointer puppy. "Somebody comin'!"

"How do you know?" demanded Miss Barbara.

"I hear 'um clean he foot 'pon de mat in de porch. Dar! what I tell you?" and tumbling heels over head in his haste to answer the summons, he unclosed the door before Bessy Hale had withdrawn her hand after her hesitating knock.

"Can I see Miss Brook?" she asked of the boy.

"Certainly," said Miss Barbara, shoving him aside. "Get to your work, sir. Be pleased to walk in, ma'am. Take a seat by the fire. Tony, bring in some wood—no! you do it, Chloe Ann. If he gets out of this room we won't see him again till night. A cold day," she continued to Bessy, catching up a broom and plying it fussily upon a hearth already as clean as hands could make it.

"Yes, ma'am, very cold," responded Bessy. The bustle of her reception had given her time to collect her ideas and words.

"Take off your bonnet," pursued the hospitable housekeeper.

"No, I thank you, ma'am; I have only a few minutes to stay." Her color mounted higher, but she went on in the same quiet, firm tone. "We have moved to this part of the country, lately. My husband is a shoemaker, and has rented a house not far from here, belonging to Mr. Argyle."

"I know," nodded Miss Barbara; "the old overseer's house."

"Yes, ma'am. He hopes to get work enough to support his family after a while; but of course, we cannot expect to have it come in all at once, before he is known. We have but one child, now more than three years old, and I have a great deal of spare time. And, so I thought it would be a help to us if I could get

some plain sewing to do, and—and—knowing that your family was very large, I guessed you might wish to employ a seamstress, now and then. I can cut and fit tolerably well, and stitch very fast."

During this speech Miss Barbara's eyes were as busy as her clicking needles, and before its termination, concise as it was, she had arrived at several irreversible conclusions. Firstly, and chiefly, that she had taken a fancy to Bessy. She said to herself that she had never, in all her born days, seen a prettier picture than the girlish-looking wife and mother, as she sat, with her clasped fingers upon her knee, looking modestly into the fire, the hood of her red cloak pushed back from her face, but not so far that it did not shed a deeper rose upon the blooming cheek. "She was pretty spoken, too," she added. Her northern accent lent a charm to her language. It was so unlike Mr. Sancroft's nasal twang! Next, being no drone herself, she was pleased that the woman wanted work; that she did not fold her arms idly and let her husband maintain her. Then, as a clinching consideration, the application was made to her, as the rightful head of the household, in the master's absence, and not to that odious Sancroft, who, if he had his way, would measure every quart of meal, and count every potatoe that went out of her store-room and cellar.

And, with a toss of the head, meant for him and not for the applicant, Miss Barbara made up her mind, as Bessy uttered the last word.

"I am behindhand with my sewing," she proceeded, directly to the point. "Such a thing hasn't happened in this house before, for ages. But my best hand—her that helps most about making the negroes' clothes—has a run-around on her finger, and can't set a stitch."

The feminine pronoun helped Bessy to understand that the afflicted digit was not Miss Brook's own personal member;

but of what "a run-around" was, she had a very imperfect notion.

"It's pretty heavy work!" said Miss Barbara. "Look here!"

She lifted the lid of a chest, and drew out divers bundles of homespun, men's coats, women's frocks, and boys' trousers.

"Aint it a sight fit to break a woman's heart?" said Miss Brook, pathetically. "'Specially, when I don't get a minute to set down to it, from sunrise to sundown. Trot! trot! trot! the whole enduring time, after folks"—an ireful look at spinner, carder and cotton-pickers—"who wouldn't earn the salt to their bread, if I weren't everlastingly at their heels."

"I don't mind it's being heavy," answered Bessy, whose eyes had sparkled at sight of the unmade clothing. "And I know something about tailoring. My mother made me learn the trade partly before I was married. I make all my husband's clothes."

"Very well!" The nod said more than the tongue. "Now, about the price of your work. Would you like your pay in money, or will it be as convenient to take it out in produce—meat, eggs, and so forth?"

Bessy stammered—"I cannot say yet; I did not tell my husband that I was coming here, or that I intended to take in sewing. I was afraid he might think that I would have too much to do with it, and washing and cooking, and my own work besides. I must talk with him, before I can decide which kind of payment would suit us best."

"Don't you keep no servants?"

"No, ma'am!" surprisedly.

Miss Barbara dropped the roll of cloth.

"Hear that, now! And you as nice-looking and genteel as any lady! That beats all independence ever I heard of. Catch a Virginny girl doing that! Every overseer's wife must have a

negro to wait upon her, if she hasn't a decent coat to her own or her children's backs. You're made of the right stuff! None of your slazy goods that go to pieces in the washing—like half of the women that git married these days. Pick out what you think you can do, and I'll send it down to your house. It will be too big a bundle for you to tote (carry)."

Habitual prudence mastered her enthusiasm sufficiently to induce her to propound some inquiries as to Bessy's estimate of the value of her labors, and finding it moderate, she readily agreed to give it, or its equivalent, when the job should be completed.

A proud and a happy heart Bessy Hale carried back to her humble home. She was, as every wife should be, her husband's confidante in business affairs, and could not be deluded by his sanguine predictions of the better, because busier days coming, into forgetfulness of their present condition. Their slender stock of money was running low, and the stores they had brought with them could not, by the utmost frugality, be made to last much longer. Fresh meat, butter, and green vegetables were luxuries that rarely appeared upon their table, and even the small sum disbursed for the milk, so indispensable to Kitty's health and comfort, was beginning to be felt as a serious outlay. All this while—nearly four weeks—Mark had had but one customer, Mr. Slocum, the bachelor-farmer, who called to get a shoe mended, and "'sposed they'd take it out in milk."

Bessy danced rather than walked down the long hill, near the foot of which stood their cottage. Arrived within a dozen yards of it, she saw Mark, also approaching by a wood-path. A fagoting expedition of his, with Kitty as attendant, had furnished his wife with a chance to carry her secretly-matured plan into execution. She had intended to be home in advance of him, but the success of her scheme made her careless how soon it was disclosed. Therefore she stood still, and watched him through the

naked branches of brushwood. He walked wearily; a load of fagots strapped on his shoulders, and his axe in the hollow of his arm. It was not fatigue alone that shaded his countenance and clogged his feet. She felt sure of that. The drooping muscles of the mouth and the contracted brow were indices of inward disquiet, which she could understand—and relieve! As her heart leaped lightly with the last thought, Kitty, who was scampering along before her father, espied the red cloak, and cried out, "Mamma!"

Mark looked up instantly, but not so quickly that the affectionate creature regarding him did not detect the short, hard struggle with which he manned himself to meet her cheerfully.

"Halloo, Little Red Riding Hood!" he exclaimed, as she ran forward to meet him. "Where have you been, decked out in your holiday rig?"

"To see my grandmother, and she didn't eat me up either!"

Then followed a recital of her adventure and its result. Mark said truly that he would have forbidden the undertaking, if she had solicited his counsel; and there was a temporary uprising of manly and generous pride at the idea of her supporting *him*! which required an infinity of coaxing and some tears from Bessy to overrule. But he called her "a noble, good, true wife," and our busy bee was triumphant.

Miss Barbara's first payment was in *produce*, and the basket having been packed by herself, our cottage friends conceived a happy, if not a very just impression of the cheapness of provisions in that region. Mark's wounded pride had a salvo the same day, in the shape of an order from Mr. Selden, a neighboring planter, for half a dozen pairs of children's shoes, his shoemaker being confined to his bed by sickness.

Mr. Sancroft had not concealed from Mark, when making the representations that lured him to this new settlement, that it was

the custom on every farm to educate certain of the more intelligent negroes in the different mechanical arts, which were most frequently called into requisition in an agricultural district. There was no plantation without its blacksmith and carpenter. The shoemaker and wheelwright were generally more public institutions, receiving the custom of several families. The Argyle Crispin was defunct before Mark's removal, but all the hands were already shod for the winter, when he came, and so far as he was informed, the leather was indestructible, for not a stitch had he been requested to take toward repairs, or a second supply.

Thus matters were on Christmas Eve, when Bessy carried home the last parcel of sewing the great chest had for her.

"I was intending to run down to see you some time, to-day," said Miss Barbara, squarely as usual.

Bessy looked surprised, but pleased. She had no neighbors, no visitors. She seemed out of place in the community, whereas, in the dear old times, social calls and tea-drinkings were every afternoon occurrences. She was not lonely or dispirited. How could she be, with Mark and Kitty? but she was young and lively, and had a natural fondness for company.

"Since you are here, I will save my visit for another time," went on Miss Barbara. "I wanted to invite you and your husband and your baby, to eat my Christmas turkey with me, to-morrow. Will you come?"

"With great pleasure, ma'am; that is, if Mark can. He has been right busy lately," she added, with evident pride.

"I'm glad to hear it!" She did not hint that Mr. Selden had acted upon her recommendation. "But tell him from me, that nobody in these parts does a stroke of work on Christmas-day. He must come, and don't forget the baby. I never know how to entertain children, but I'll give her enough to eat, and a dozen black picaninnies to divert her, if she wants 'em."

"She will not need them, I guess. She has never been much

used to the company of other children, and is satisfied to play around, quietly, while grown people are talking."

"She's a wonder then!—a live miracle! I have sometimes thought there must be comfort in having a good child—but, law me! where did you ever see one that didn't pester the life out of everybody that had anything to do with it?"

"Mine doesn't!" remarked the mother, smilingly.

She was learning what Miss Barbara's ways meant, and privately questioned the genuineness of her professed repugnance to little folks.

Kitty's curly head could hardly lie still upon the pillow that night, through excess of excitement. That memorable Christmas Eve, her stocking was hung in the chimney corner for the first time! While her father held her on his knee, and told her of the kind Santa Claus, who was to come down the wide chimney, while she was asleep, with a pocket full of nice things for the little girl who minded her parents, and had entirely given up the bad habit of crying for what she was told she could not have; her mother pinned a loop to one of a pair of striped stockings and fastened it to a nail by the fire-place, where no saint, with half an eye, or half his wits about him, could overlook it. Besides this brilliant prospect for the morrow, she was "going visiting." Her clean clothes were spread on a chair, in the kitchen, before she went to bed, that they might be aired and ready against the morning. There they lay—the crimson worsted frock; the white pinafore; the red and white stockings; the black shoes with red rosettes.

Father and mother cast many looks at the simple array after the destined wearer was in bed.

"I have been told that I dressed her too fine for the child of poor parents," remarked Bessy; "but the materials of her clothes are not more expensive than those which other people, no better off than we are, put on their children. It is the bright

colors, and the way they are made, I suppose, that sets tongues going about her."

"It is because the mother has the taste to see what becomes her child; for my part, I like to see her look her prettiest, the little beauty! She will be almost as handsome as her mother, by the time she is grown. If I live a dozen years longer, you shall have the means to dress her as you please, and nobody will find fault with your extravagance."

With the earliest sunbeam that peeped in at the window, Kitty was astir. Her parents had stolen out noiselessly, while she prolonged her morning's nap, the more profound, on account of her excited wakefulness during the early part of the night. There was a great fire in the outer room—a Christmas blaze, that stained redly the log walls and the beams overhead, and found laughing reflections of itself in the pewter basins and platters on the shelves. Mark was winding up the clock, and Bessy laying the cloth for breakfast, when the chamber-door creaked, and a diminutive white figure entered, holding her night-dress across her bosom with one hand, while the other pushed back the curls that were falling over her forehead and eyes. The bare, plump feet made directly for the treasure by the mantel-shelf, and her father took it down from its high nail and gave it to her, with a kiss. Not a syllable did she utter then, but sitting down on her stool in the glare of the blazing logs, she emptied the contents into her lap, speechless and breathless with expectancy and delight.

Uppermost was a suit of clothes for her doll, manufactured by the mother, in the evenings, when the day's labor was over. It was a thorough outfit, not forgetting a pair of blue satin shoes that just fitted the feet of the clumsy pet, whose mistress considered her a faultless model of the human form divine. The next parcel was wedged in the ankle of the stocking, and Kitty's fingers trembled with cold and impatience before she extricated

it. Here was an important addition to her household, a second, and smaller dolly, carved like its senior, out of soft wood, and painted—but wonder of wonders! with joints at its knees and elbows!

“Mamma! Papa!” screamed the agitated child, strewing everything else upon the floor, as she ran to them; “see what a beautiful”—tears of ecstasy choked her.

The rude wooden image, which was, however, fully as graceful in figure and artistic in finish, as the pattern after which it was fashioned, was Mark’s handiwork. With a deal of pains he had whittled, and polished, and colored it, for toy-shops were rarities then and there; and had they been abundant, Mark’s shillings were scarce. What mattered a deficiency that was never felt? Little Kitty was enraptured beyond expression, and bon-bons and playthings, elegant in conception and workmanship could not have added a drop to the overflowing cup. Even the recollection of the promised visit was dim in comparison with the possession of her treasure, and the only cloud that crossed her face that morning, was when she asked, anxiously hugging her baby to her heart:

“Please, mamma, may I take dolly, too? I guess she’s afraid to stay at home, without me.”

This consideration was disregarded in the case of the elder doll, who was comfortably ensconced in bed, with many injunctions to be “a good girl, and not cry until her Kitty came back.”

Bessy was mistress of a silk robe, inherited from her mother, not purchased in her lifetime; but extraordinary indeed must have been the occasion that warranted her in putting it on. For a Christmas dinner, even at the “great house,” she wisely selected her best winter dress. It was of green stuff, trimmed with black, and the color, so trying to most complexions, made the pure white and red of her skin seem fairer and fresher. Beneath the short sleeve was an exquisitely crimped ruffle of worked linen,

descending below the elbow. Rich ladies wore these of lace, and paltry imitations could be procured from every packman and peddler, but our Bessy’s taste was too just to suffer her to avail herself of the cheap substitute. Her inside kerchief was also of linen, less fine, but as neatly gotten up; to protect her arms, she drew on linen gloves of her own fitting and stitching, and the fairy foot, of which Mark had nearly made her vain, looked smaller than ever, in a pair of green morocco shoes, with enormous black rosettes, to match her dress.

Mark was not far wrong when he said, what he believed—that the Christmas sun shone on no more beautiful mother and daughter, in all the broad land. And certainly he did not look an unfit gallant for the twain, as he stepped up to offer his arm to his wife—attired in a suit of dark blue, with a white neckcloth, and a frilled shirt-front, plaited with Bessy’s inimitable skill. In this style, they set out, punctually at ten o’clock, Kitty carrying her doll, carefully enveloped in flannel, to shield its tender form from the biting outer air.

CHAPTER IV.

"GLAD to see you; walk in!" said Miss Barbara, meeting the Hale family at the door. "How dy'e, Pussy? That's what they call you, ain't it?"

"My name is Kitty," answered the child, wonderingly.

"And don't Kitty and Pussy mean the same thing? Let me take off your cloak and hood. Well, you are pretty as a picture, and no mistake about it! Where did you steal your roses from?"

Won by the innocent beauty of the little face she held up to the light, she stooped to kiss it, forgetful of her professed dislike of "babies." Bessy remarked the stolen caress, with a sly smile at Mark, and both felt more at home because of it.

They were received in Miss Brook's own apartment, the same in which Bessy had first been introduced to her notice. The furniture was very plain; rush-bottomed chairs and deal tables, and cupboards, some with glass doors, some without, in every corner. The floor was covered with a rag carpet, woven in the loom, that was a fixture in the back part of the room; but the spinning-wheel had been removed; the cleanest of always clean white curtains put up at the four windows, and the chairs arranged cozily around the fire.

Miss Barbara still wore her thimble—it was affirmed that she slept in it—but all else about her had the true holiday look. On working-days, her hair, which was profusely streaked with grey, was uncovered and "done up" in the tightest possible knot at

the top of her head. To-day, a neat cap, trimmed with purple ribbons, concealed this fantastic mode of coiffure, and softened the angular outlines of her square forehead and chin. Her bombazet frock was snuff-colored and less outré in fashion than her ordinary home dress.

"Your wife tells me you're a member," she broke out, after scrutinizing Mark through her spectacles for some minutes in profound silence.

"Yes, madam," he replied, unable to resist the inclination to smile at the unlooked-for observation.

"Religion's a great thing, sir!"

"I think so, madam."

"You'll find but few of your way of thinking about here. You know there isn't a church within ten miles, except old Deep Run meetin'-house, where nobody preaches twice a-year, and when they do, it's a circus rider, as they call 'em, or some of the ministers, on their way home from Presbytery. I'm a Presbyterian myself. I was brought up in Hanover, and jined the old church—where Samuel Davis used to preach—before I was twenty. He was a lion in the strength of the Lord. My mother knew him well. Maybe you've heard tell of him?"

"Yes, madam. I have a volume of his sermons."

"You don't say so! Now—isn't that wonderful? Well, as I was saying—I come to this heathen country with Mrs. Argyle, when she was married. A saint upon earth she was, and I'm sure she's now an angel in heaven. She never rested until she got Deep Run built, and for a while Presbyterians and Episcopalians preached in it, turn about, once a month; but she died, and there was the end of that! She took a heap of pains teachin' the negroes, and I can see some signs of her work left; but there's a mighty back-slidin' among 'em. I read to 'em Sundays, and hear the catechism regular, but 'tisn't the mistress' doings, and they feel the difference."

"Mr. Argyle is not a professor, then?"

"Not he!" She checked herself, and went on in a different tone. "He doesn't interfere, and he likes to talk about the 'Established Church of Scotland,' and his forefathers sticking so fast to the Protestant faith, with the ministers that stop here overnight. You see, they got into the habit of it when Mrs. Argyle was alive, and I'm sure they're always more than welcome. But it's easier to do like your neighbors, and let things take their course, than to make a stand against iniquity, and try to turn people out of the broad, into the narrow way."

"Mr. Sancroft had religious training, I suppose," said Mark. "The Connecticut people are great church-goers."

"More shame to him for being such a reprobate!" cried Miss Barbara, warmly. "A more godless, money-worshipping fox you won't find this side of the place he came from. Beg your pardon if you're affronted! but you *do* send some plagued poor sticks down South, and he isn't one of the best kind."

"We did not come from the same State," said Mark, good-humoredly. "I am a native of Massachusetts."

"Bunker Hill is in that, ain't it?"

"Yes, madam."

"I've heard tell of it often. I had a brother badly wounded at the battle of Monmouth."

She spoke as though they were adjacent townships, and Mark did not feel it incumbent upon him to set her right.

"I ought not to feel, nor to talk about Mr. Sancroft as I do," she said, presently. "The fact is, I can't bear the man, and so I suspicion everything he says and does. If I am wrong, and sometimes don't give him his due, I hope the Lord will forgive me." Her penitent tone was suddenly dropped. "Mr. Argyle thinks that he is the salvation of the plantation, when he is away, and poor Frisbie, a smart, managing, workin' fellow as ever lived, gits not a mite of praise along with his overseer's

wages. I promise you, Sancroft hears a piece of my mind—some pretty plain conversation—when he pokes his meddlin' eyebrows into *my* part of the house. If 'twasn't for the children—I promised their mother on her death-bed I'd never leave—Mr. Argyle would have had to look out for another housekeeper the day after he engaged that slab-sided Yankee to stand master for us all. The fire burns your face there, honey! Let me set your cheer in the corner."

She picked up Kitty, chair, doll and all, to remove her to a more sheltered position, and in a moment seemed to have forgotten that Mr. Sancroft was in existence.

Dinner was served at twelve o'clock. Miss Barbara made no pretensions to "quality" hours or fashions. An independent, free-born woman, she respected herself and the station allotted to her by Providence too truly, to degrade either by servile imitations of those, who, in the same providence, were appointed to a higher rank, as far as outward appearances went. There were stores of china, silver and damask in the house, and she had the keys to every room and chest. Three thousand miles intervened between Ben Lomond and its proprietor, and there were no spies in the camp; yet the table was spread with home-made linen, coarse but glossy; pewter spoons and crockery, blue and white, of the everlasting Chinese willow pattern.

That old willow pattern! Who that thinks of it fails to recall, its stiff plume-like trees, its bridges and summer-houses, its boats in the air, its hump-backed human (?) figures—and to whom, with the sight of these, come not visions of country dining-rooms; the smell of clover-hay floating in at the windows, and mingling with the enchanting fragrance of a rural repast? Who does not remember the yellow butter, dewy and cool from the ice or spring-house—the tumbler of cream, almost as rich—the flaky biscuit—the amber honey—the batter-cakes and the fried chicken—the shade-trees, locusts and aspens—joining their whis-

pers to the reverent tones, that asked a blessing upon bounties received; the cordial, hearty voices that pressed the guest to eat, until "tired nature could no more?"

The unfortunate reader, who knows nothing experimentally of this, who has felt no sympathetic watering of the mouth, or eyes, in perusing the above, is hereby assured, for his comfort, that he may enjoy the luxury of a new sensation by travelling in a stage or private carriage, *not* by rail, forty miles back into the country.

Miss Barbara's Christmas turkey had half an inch of fat upon its breast, and a necklace of sausages, and was kept in countenance at the other end of the table by the most crisp of roast pigs that was ever replete with sage stuffing and dripped with gravy. Between these was a double line of communication, composed of potatoes, Irish and sweet, parsnips, turnips, bacon and cabbage, sausage, spare rib, souse, bread, butter, and pickles, yellow, green and sweet.

"Oh!" ejaculated Kitty, as she was lifted into her chair.

Her mother's hand was laid warningly upon her head, but Miss Barbara smiled complacently at the artless and involuntary compliment to her culinary exploits, and requested "Mr. Hale" to "ask a blessing."

Tony and Suke, in whole aprons and shining faces, waited upon the table, an honor altogether unusual to our northern friends, but they were too well bred to let this appear. Kitty's plate was nearest to the head of the board, and was consequently piled until the prudent mother ventured to remonstrate.

"It's plain, wholesome food!" said Miss Barbara. "When the dessert comes on, you can give her what you please; but bread and meat never hurt anything or anybody."

Tony's longing eyes and smacking mouth were, just then, eloquent of noble ambition to offer himself a sacrifice to establish the truth of this principle. The current of his desires was

diverted by a tread in the porch without, and, as he had done at Bessy's first call, he let fall everything in his hands, which happened, fortunately, to be nothing but a japanned waiter; and with his "somebody comin'!" sprang at the door-latch. It was raised from without as he touched it, and the door flew open with an impetus that knocked him back against Suke, who, also losing her balance, rolled with him, clutching and shrieking, on the floor.

A hearty, boyish "ha! ha! ha!" mounted high above their screeches and Miss Barbara's exclamation. Mark and Bessy arose to their feet, as she started forward, upsetting her chair and plate.

"Malcolm Argyle! Is it you, or your ghost?"

"That is like flesh and blood, is it not?" was the reply, as he kissed her cheek, and gave her ribs a hug, that nearly drove from her body the scanty breath astonishment had spared to her. "What do you say now, Aunt Bab?" continued the intruder, laughing at her contortions, as he released her.

"I say you are no better than you used to be—the worst boy that ever went unflogged!" Miss Barbara sobbed betwixt laughing, crying and want of wind. "Where did you come from, and what brought you here?"

"I came straight from college, to eat my Christmas dinner with you. I am glad to see that you have not waited for me, however. Just let me step into your room and wash my hands, and I am ready—that is, when you have made me acquainted with the rest of your company"—bowing with frank grace to the Hales.

Miss Barbara introduced them formally, and then bidding them "Be seated and excuse all this rumpus!" she followed Malcolm into the adjoining chamber, "to see that he had soap and water," and to supply further information concerning her new acquaintances. The communication was short; for she was back in her seat before her visitors had begun to feel awkward, and by this

time, was so far restored to her senses as to scold vigorously at Tony and Suke, for their "want of manners."

"Why, anybody would think you never saw a white man before, let alone your Master Malcolm! A fine notion he will get of your raising!"

"Most broke my head!" muttered the ingenious Tony, rubbing the assaulted part, as his young master reëntered.

"Bah! Tony, my boy! if your head was struck, there is no damage done. Say your shin, now, and there is a plaster to heal the bruise;" dropping a coin into his hand.

"*Meant* to say shin, marster!" grinned the saucy boy. "Thanky for Christmas gift!"

The heir apparent of Ben Lomond was a handsome youth of about seventeen, agile and tall in figure, manly and engaging in demeanor. To-day, he appeared to enjoy but one thing more than the abundance of edibles, set in array before him, and that was teasing Miss Barbara, whom he invariably addressed as "Aunt Bab." Her curiosity was wound up to the highest pitch to ascertain the cause of his unexpected visit home, during the college term, and while his father and sisters were absent; but her questionings were plied with no other effect than to incite him to evasions and ridiculous fabrications, until the plum-pudding and mince-pie disappeared from his plate. Then he declared himself vanquished by a liberal draught of domestic liqueur that accompanied the dessert, and which he protested would open the mouth and heart of an oyster.

"*In vino veritas*, Aunt Bab," he said, leaning forward upon the table, and affecting to look through his glass with one eye. "That means, when wine goes in, truth pops out! Father is coming home!"

"You don't say so! When?"

"If you *will* interrupt me, you must take the consequences," was the provoking rejoinder. "I must have another bumper to

do away with the effect of that obstruction to my communicative mood."

He sipped it very slowly.

"Yes! he writes that he will stop in New York, to pick up his lovely and accomplished daughters, and proceed leisurely to his patrimonial and baronial castle of Ben Lomond"—

Another and a prolonged sip, with his eyes fixed meditatively upon the angle formed by the opposite wall and the ceiling.

"But when—for goodness, sake!" Miss Barbara bounced up, as if her chair were set with needles.

"There! you've done it again! If I get drunk, it will be your fault, mind that! I *must* wet the thread of my discourse every time it has to be joined, you know. That bottle, if you please, Mr. Hale," in a tone of resigned melancholy.

Miss Barbara snatched at it; but he was too quick for her, and securing likewise a flask of cherry cordial, he held one in the embrace of each arm.

"Now am I doubly armed! As it is you, Aunt Bab, and your discretion is as famous as your want of curiosity, I don't mind telling you that the orders of my revered paternal progenitor are, that all shall be in readiness to receive him and his fair daughters twain, by the middle or latter part of March; which orders I thought best to deliver in person. And as I had to pass directly by Mr. Sancroft's, on my way home—Mrs. Hale, allow me the pleasure of replenishing your glass—Miss Brook is celebrated for the excellence of her beverages."

"Of course you stopped and told him?" said Miss Barbara, with forced composure. "Ah, well! who had a better right to hear the news first, than your father's agent?"

"Why, yourself, to be sure! At least, so it seemed to me; so I did not even look that way, as I rode by the gate."

Miss Barbara smiled, in spite of herself. "I wonder if you'll ever sow your wild oats! Mighty little chance of it, that I

see. I s'pose you'd like to hear how the neighbors are getting on?"

"I have been dying for the last hour, for want of the information."

"More likely, dyin' for the want of your dinner. Well, there's the Seldens—they're all well."

"That is very gratifying," interposed Malcolm, gravely.

"And Marcia is growin' prettier every day," pursued Miss Barbara, with a meaning look, that had its effect in the boy's heightened color. "I am s'prised you could get by *that* gate."

"When you were this side of it! Fie, Aunt Bab! You don't give me credit for natural affection."

"Natural affection ain't worth much, when there's another sort of love in the way," returned she, unsparingly. "What else hindered you from going in? I don't understand it."

"Why, to be honest with you, I met them all—a carriage-load—three miles further on, going out to dinner at Mr. Armistead's, and, as I had no invitation, and had on my travelling-gear, I concluded to continue my journey."

Laughing heartily at the manifest discomfiture of his opponent at this reply, he arose from the table, and invited Mark to visit the stables and negro quarters with him. The request was couched in courteous terms, and his bearing was precisely that of one gentleman toward another. The Chief Magistrate of the Union could not have been treated with more civility than was displayed by this son of a haughty stock, to the mechanic, whose acquaintance he had made at his housekeeper's table.

"What a charming young gentleman!" exclaimed Bessy, as the two left the room.

"The flower of the flock!" assented Miss Barbara. "He's always just so; I've held him on my knee, a thousand times, when he was a baby, and he's never in his life, to my knowin', done an unkind or a mean thing."

"He is very handsome," said Bessy.

"He's the image of his mother. You couldn't say more for him. Run around the room, Mousey, and jolt your dinner down. 'Tain't healthy to sit still directly after eating."

"I'm not a Mousey; I be a Kitty," chuckled the child, whose shyness had worn off.

"Then, here's a cousin for you to play with," said the housekeeper, returning from the inner room, with a pretty tortoise-shell kitten. "You can bundle it up in the blanket with your dolly, and take it home, when you go. I've no use for it, if I am an old maid. There's but one thing in nature more troublesome than a cat, and that's a baby. What would I do with a husband, always under-foot, and a dozen squalling brats beside? I'm obliged to you!" continued the contented spinster, nodding to a visionary would-be donor of said commodities, whom she appeared to see in the curls of blue smoke ascending from the pipe she was lighting. "I'm obliged to you, but I'd as lief not!"

The two Kitties were in the height of a game of romps, which Miss Barbara prohibited Bessy from interrupting, when Mark and young Argyle came in. And now the latter perfected his conquest of both parents, by joining in the frolic, with as much zest as was exhibited by the child and her four-footed playmate. He leaped tables and chairs; turned corners, and doubled on his track, in a style that excited Kitty's intense admiration. Her gleeful laugh kept time to the patter of her feet in the chase, and when at last, Malcolm seized her and swung her up to his shoulder, she forgot that he was a stranger, and a grown man, and clapped her hands in an outburst of delight. At that instant, his knock having been drowned by the noise within, Mr. Sancroft walked in. Miss Barbara grew straight and stiff as her own pipe-stem. Bessy looked embarrassed, and Mark surprised; but the unabashed stripling stepped forward, without lowering Kitty from her elevated seat:

"How do you do, Mr. Sancroft? This is an unexpected pleasure; but I beg you to consider yourself as welcome as if you had been particularly invited."

The parchment cheek of the agent showed a faint glow of confusion or displeasure; but his manner was unaltered by the equivocal nature of his "welcome."

"How are you, Mr. Argyle? I hope you find yourself well, sir. I made so bold as to present myself here, this afternoon, quite uninvited, as you remark, my dear sir, in consequence of a rumor of your arrival which reached me."

"Are you acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Hale?" interrupted Malcolm, ceremoniously.

"I am, sir. Very happy to see you both under such favorable auspices. Business and health good, I trust, Mr. Hale? You and Miss Brook are bosom friends by this time, I presume, Mrs. Hale? You have a very select and agreeable family gathering here, to-day—Miss Barbara—hey?"

"We had!" said Miss Barbara, shortly and significantly.

Malcolm still walked the room, carrying Kitty with as much ease as though she had been a tame squirrel.

"Miss Hale is highly honored!" remarked Mr. Sancroft. "Rather a tall sweetheart, is he not, Missy? When did you hear from your respected father, Mr. Argyle? My latest advices report him well and happy amid the scenes of his childhood's sports. I fancy he will not be in haste to return to this country—hey?"

"On the contrary, he writes to me that we may expect him in March. Are you growing dizzy up there, my little lady?"

"She is quite too heavy for you, Mr. Argyle," said Mark, advancing. "Let me relieve you."

"She is as light as a feather, sir, but she is getting uneasy. I think she will feel more comfortable, and, at any rate, safer, on the floor. She is your only child?"

"Yes, sir."

"What a dear gipsy it is!" said Malcolm, smiling at her gambols with the kitten, that sprang upon her, as soon as she was released. "I love children—particularly little girls. What were you saying, Mr. Sancroft?"

"I had no intention of interrupting your conversation, Mr. Argyle. I ask your pardon, Mr. Hale, for my apparent rudeness; but you will own that it is natural for my interest to be excited by the news Mr. Argyle has communicated. Your father will return in March, my dear young gentleman? Did I hear you aright? What has induced this sudden resolution? I am really amazed. Nothing of an unpleasant nature has transpired, I trust, Mr. Argyle? And he was positive—explicit—emphatic in the declaration of this design? It was not a hint merely—not stated as a probability—hey?"

"I think it was, sir. All future events must be considered as probabilities, not certainties. But why not be seated, Mr. Sancroft? Let me insist that you make yourself at home. Allow me to order a glass of wine—that is, with Miss Barbara's permission."

The cool condescension of the lad was so great a contrast to his ordinary manner, and so remarkable, when exercised by one of his years, toward a man of more than double his age, that the Hales looked on in silent amazement. Miss Barbara's visage had a grim satisfaction in its square lines, that proved her relish of the scene. To Malcolm's deferential appeal, she only said:

"Help yourself!" and puffed away at her pipe

The agent waved his hand, in deprecation of the civility, or the delay of his employer's son.

"I thank you, Mr. Argyle! I thank you, sir! I have not time to accept of your hospitalities. And now, that I have had the pleasure of seeing you so well, Mr. Argyle, and in the enjoyment of such congenial society"—the eyebrows severely ironical,

then settling into placidity—"I will not intrude further, will no longer debar you from your sports. With regard to your respected father's movements, I presume I shall shortly be honored with his commands, as I am in daily expectation of a letter. We have all abundant cause for congratulation in the prospect—however uncertain—of his speedy return. With due humility, I may say that I experience nothing but agreeable emotion at the thought of accounting for, and resigning the responsible stewardship he honored me by committing to my charge. Let him come in the first, or third, or fourth watch, he will find me ready to render my reckoning—hey, Miss Brook?"

Miss Barbara's jaws unclosed for a reply, but Malcolm interposed.

"I am glad to find that you have added a knowledge of scripture to your other and varied acquirements, since we parted," he said. "I hope your studies have been attended with profit—a wish, that, I am sure, will be echoed by the rest of your acquaintance. What do you think of the prospect for a continuance of this fine weather, sir? Cannot you be prevailed upon to grace our company for a little while longer?"

"I must be going, Mr. Argyle," answered the agent, with some stiffness. "A merry Christmas and a happy New Year to you all!"

Malcolm attended him to the porch.

"May I burden you with my compliments to Mrs. Sancroft and the young ladies?" he begged, with the stately courtesy he had preserved throughout the interview. "I have but a couple of days to spare for this neighborhood, or I might do myself the pleasure of waiting upon them in person. Good day, sir. A pleasant ride to you!"

He shut the door after him, and throwing himself upon a settee, laughed until the tears hung upon his eyelashes. Miss Barbara responded with a dry chuckle, and Mark and Bessy could not resist the contagion.

"Wish you was here to deal with him always!" grumbled Miss Barbara. "A sneaking hypocrite, with his Bible-quoting, through his nose! I'd have set him up with it, if you hadn't have spoken up so quick."

"I set him down, Aunt Bab, which was far better," said the youth. "I love him as dearly as you do, and can manage him a hundred times better. But we will not slander our neighbors. It is hard to tear myself away from so much of real home-comfort; yet, if you will let me go to my room, I will get ready to go out for a visit. I promised Mr. Selden that I would stay with him to-night."

In gratitude for his defeat of her enemy, Miss Barbara refrained from offering comment or insinuation at this confession, and they saw no more of him, except when he looked in to kiss Kitty "good by," and say "good evening" to the rest.

The Hales had one more glimpse of him during his hasty visit. On the morning of his departure, he reined up his horse at their door, and expressed, with his adieux, a friendly wish for Mark's success in his enterprise. It was said sincerely, with no suggestion of patronage which he might, some day, render, and this delicacy was appreciated by the man, whose leathern apron was buckled above a heart as generous, a soul as incapable of false pride or sycophancy as was his own.

CHAPTER V.

EARLY in March, Miss Barbara enlisted Bessy in her service, for the purpose of "setting the house to rights," preparatory to the arrival of its owners. The long silent and darkened rooms were cleaned and flung open, and the scrubbing and whitewash brushes were ubiquitous. Our New England housewife went through the engagement with flying colors. Miss Barbara complimented her by conferring with her respecting every change and movement, and the not more decided verbal testimony, that she "had never known before half of what was in her."

The odd old maid had become extremely fond of her protégés, and although she occupied a subordinate place in the social sphere, she was universally respected, and her opinion held in esteem among the wealthy families around about Ben Lomond. It was often in her power to speak a word for Mark and his wife, and she was equally careful not to omit an opportunity of doing this, and to guard against any allusion to the good deed in their hearing. Mr. Sancroft, on the other hand, was lavish of patronizing promises and intimations of what he had done, whenever he chanced to meet his tenant, until Mark believed much of the gratitude he felt for the steady supply of work that began to flow into his shop, belonged, of right, to the man he was so frequently tempted to distrust. Even Bessy was inwardly dubious occasionally, in consequence of the circumstantial evidence that disproved the justice of her early impression concerning the eyebrows and scalp; but her cogitations invariably concluded

with a wise shake of the head, implying a resolve to adhere to her opinion, and still suffer Mark to think as well as he could of one who might help him, and who could, assuredly, injure him if he had the will. Every now and then a trifle aided her to nail fast this determination. Such was the fulfilment of her prophecy in the agent's refusal to fence in their garden, until his employer's return.

"He could not act without orders," he represented, "and strange to say—in consequence, doubtless, of the multitude of cares attendant upon his leaving Scotland, Mr. Argyle had omitted to instruct him on this point—when he had written so urgently, with regard to it, too! It was too bad—it really was! Mr. Argyle was a very particular, methodical man, who examined into the minutiae of his moneyed interests as closely as if he counted his pounds by tens, instead of thousands. But he will not be unreasonable, Mr. Hale; and I shall take occasion, when I state your case, to set forth your merits as a tenant, Mr. Hale, and the manifest advantage of retaining you."

Mark yielded the point, without further pressing, and went home, to advise with his wife. The season was advancing, and they were depending for their summer, and part of their winter provisions upon the vegetables, whose seeds were not yet in the ground. By dint of rigid economy, they had been able to lay aside a small sum of money, with a prudential eye to a "rainy day." They knew but too well the exact amount, yet it was counted over and over again, before they decided to devote it to the exigencies of this juncture.

In compliance with Bessy's sagacious counsel, Mark applied to Mr. Selden—with whose reputation, as a kind-hearted gentleman, Miss Barbara had made them familiar—to sell and deliver to him a certain number of rails. The good-natured planter readily furnished them at a price that barely covered the expense of hewing them. Struck with the modest and manly bearing of the

mechanic, he entered into conversation with him, and presented to him, along with some valuable instruction as to Virginia soils and their cultivation, a package of seeds—enough, with those Miss Barbara had already given, to stock their garden.

The fence arose, as if by magic, for the single laborer toiled in the might of two willing hearts. It was a substantial inclosure, very different from the neat paling that bounded the garden "at home;" but Mark and Bessy asked nothing better, and when, out of the refuse rails, there was constructed the wished-for hen-house, a couple of fine hens and a rooster installed therein, Bessy felt that they were now really getting along. It was an act of genuine benevolence on Mr. Slocum's part, Mark said to him, and in his own heart, when he hailed him over the fence, the very day it was finished, and "reckoned" he would send "a team and a hand down the next day, to plough up that 'ere piece of land." The hearty thanks returned for the neighborly act, produced in him a species of pleased shamefacedness, that did not improve the natural awkwardness of his behavior and carriage. With a grin that aroused Bessy's keen sense of the ridiculous—grateful as she was—he struck his heels into the sides of his ragged pony, and passed off in the direction of Ben Lomond.

"He and Mr. Frisbie have a deal of business together," said Bessy. "Yet I should never suppose they would be intimate. There is such a difference in the two men!"

"They are not much alike," replied Mark, mentally contrasting the sharp Scotchman with his slow, shiftless neighbor. "Mr. Slocum is disposed to be friendly with us, I believe, and in that they resemble one another. If Mr. Frisbie had the ability, he would do us many a kind turn. We have every reason to be encouraged, Bessy dear. We are gaining friends, and are both young, and strong, and healthy. Did you ever see more lovely weather? Bring that bag of seeds out here to the door, and let us sort them. As there is a prospect of getting our

ground ready soon, we may as well determine what to plant, and where."

They sat down on the log that formed the step to their front door, and Bessie emptied the bag in her lap. There were queer-looking packages, pinned and sewed up by Miss Barbara, the pencilled names of which would have been unintelligible, had not Bessy taken the precaution to get a translation of each, when the seeds were given. Mr. Selden's contributions were distinctly labelled by Mark himself. A rude plan of the garden was drawn upon a bit of paper, and imaginary squares and rows of thrifty vegetables grew rapidly to maturity, as they talked over the sketch. Even Kitty had her offering—an ear of popcorn, purple and white, which 'Pollo had brought her, one day on his way to pasture with the cows. Their milk now came from Mr. Argyle's dairy. Miss Barbara would have rejected any compensation for it, alleging that Bessy had "paid for it twice over," but Mark was obstinate, and she consoled herself by sending, for the same money, double the quantity they had obtained from "that goosey Slocum," as she termed him.

"He's a good enough cretur'," she said, "but he don't know and he can't do!"

Cardinal sins in her sight, who saw everything that went on about her, and was always "up and doing."

It was a mild March afternoon. The air had that softness peculiar to southern latitudes, which comes caressingly to the brow, and produces in the lungs a luxurious delight, as if one had just awakened to the glory and blessedness of living and breathing; the effect of harmonious union between the sun and air; such an atmosphere of warmth, combined with freshness, as is never known in colder, bleaker climates, where if one is tempted by the delusive spring sunshine to throw aside his cloak, he refolds it over his breast with a shiver, as he turns into the shade at the next corner. Kitty ran races with her kitten in the

cleared space before the house, and her merriment was the only sound that stirred the slumbering air. None of the happy, busy party perceived a movement upon the high road beyond the adjacent field, and the child's joyous shouts overpowered the noise of approaching wheels. The cross road leading to Ben Lomond lay directly past the cottage, and Bessy presently raised her head to behold the uncommon spectacle of a coach and four, driven by a negro, in whom she recognized one of the Argyle servants.

"Mark!" she said, hurriedly. "It must be Mr. Argyle and his daughters. They are expected every day."

The side-curtains of the chariot were rolled up to admit the balmy air, and the cottagers had a view of the interior. On the front seat was a gentleman, of exceedingly stiff carriage, and features somewhat harsh in form and expression. His hair was powdered, tied in a queue at the back of his neck, and surmounted by a cocked hat. He rested both hands on the top of his cane, planted between his knees, and faced his daughters, until they were opposite the Hales' door, when a remark from one of the young ladies caused him to turn his head. The lady herself indulged in a broad stare, and the superciliousness she blended with her curiosity was exceedingly unbecoming to a face already too haughty in its beauty. She was dark-haired and dark-browed, and sat a full head higher than her sister, whose blue eyes and yellow locks testified to her Celtic origin.

Our friends arose as the equipage neared them. Mark bowed and Bessy courtesied respectfully to their landlord, who acknowledged the salutation by a slight bend of his majestic head, without the least variation of countenance. The dark lady tossed her ringlets up, instead of down, and her lip obeyed a like impulse. Her sister laughed—not at the occupants of the house, but—as Bessy was convinced by her eye and gesture—at something above and behind them. And what should that be but

Mark's sign, token of the lowly calling that made them to be but as the dust beneath the feet of the rich aristocrats?

"A proud-looking set!" she said, bitterly, when they had passed. "They are not ashamed to grind the faces of the poor, although it would demean them in their own eyes to speak civilly to us."

"Bessy!" exclaimed the astonished husband. "What are you talking about? Discontented and envious, my dear girl! This is not like you!"

She felt that it *was*, and with the passing of the anger-fit, came a burst of contrite tears.

"I am a weak, foolish child!" she sobbed, her head on Mark's shoulder. "But indeed it is not for myself that I get vexed. I know my spirit is too high, my temper too quick, but I cannot bear to see you despised!"

He was reproachful no longer. His tone was affectionate and lively.

"Who despises me? No honest man cares for the approbation or contempt of people who cannot see cause for respect in virtuous industry. I am as respectable in my place as Mr. Argyle is in his. My parents were as honorable in the sight of the Maker of us all, as his were, and my children may yet take rank with his, even in this community. Pooh! pooh! little one! you are spending fire and water for nothing. I venture to say we are happier, day in and day out, than father and daughters in their grand house."

"How scornfully those girls looked at your sign!" said Bessy, ashamed, yet unwilling to accept his dissipation of her fancies.

"Did they?" Mark glanced over his shoulder at the painted board. "I see nothing amiss about it. It is a very decent sign, in my opinion. Perhaps the fashion of lettering has changed since it was painted. They are just from New York, and know all about these things. I tell you what! we can't afford to hide

the sign, and wouldn't, if we could, but it would be an improvement, if these weather-beaten logs were covered. Our lime has all given out, and it would be extravagant to buy more, if we had money, which we have not. Miss Barbara says that I am welcome to as many hop vines from her garden, as I can dig up. They grow very fast, and, to my mind, there is no prettier creeper in the world. How would it look to have a row of them, all along the front of the house? They and the morning-glories will make a gay bower for us by midsummer."

Bessy's love for the beautiful was a passion; and Mark's diversion of her thoughts adroit and effectual. The various processes of gardening, digging, raking, and planting filled up brain, hands and time for the next month. Bessy hardly ever bethought herself of the important change at the great house, except when her attention was attracted to the gay cavalcades of visitors passing up and down the road, as the family coach whirled by, leaving a cloud of dust after its wheels; or Mr. Argyle drove out in a very high gig, drawn by a horse, almost as pompous as his owner, and followed by an outrider, the laborious aim of whose existence it was to uphold his own and his master's dignity. Miss Barbara, Bessy rightly guessed, was too busy to come down to the cottage herself; but they had several kindly messages, and Kitty more than one present from her. The choicest of these last consisted of some foreign sweetmeats and a dress of Scotch plaid, which, although the recipients did not suspect it, at the time, was clipped from the not over abundant pattern she had commissioned Mr. Argyle to procure abroad for herself. Bessy missed the visits and the useful counsels of her eccentric friend; but she said to herself that each was in the path of duty, and that these lay too far apart for them to be as intimate associates as formerly.

The tallest shoots of the hop-vines were as long as a man's arm, and were beginning to cling emulously to the strings depending from the eaves, to direct and encourage their upward aspira-

tions; the borders and squares in the garden were dotted and streaked and carpeted with pale-green leaves and blades; the two hens sat, in solemn perseverance, upon a dozen eggs each, and the rooster stalked and crowed in the conscious pride of prospective paternity. Peace and comfort reigned in-doors as well. The ring of the hammer upon the lapstone resounded there, as regularly, if not with as much rapidity, as did the bustling, brazen tongue of the clock. Those were pleasant spring days. The morning duties dispatched, the fire was covered over a smouldering back-log, to abide its resurrection at dinner-time, and Bessy sat down in her low chair at her husband's side, to her task of binding shoes. The clinking hammer was no hindrance to their talk, and the mother's hands and eyes were never so busy that Kitty's wants and questions did not meet a ready and patient response.

Unless prevented by a press of work, Mark devoted an hour of early morning, and two of the afternoon to the garden or the forest. He was equipped for an excursion to the latter, after their noon-day dinner, one sultry Saturday afternoon, when the rumble of distant thunder drew his notice to the rising of a black cloud in the west. His tender plants were beginning to stand in need of rain, and he was well satisfied to return his axe and fagot-strap to their places, and watch the coming shower. The dark masses of vapor rolled swiftly onward, and there were few peals and flashes, short as were the intervals of calm, before the spring rain swept in mist and torrents over field and wood. Mark shut the door to keep out the spray, and was standing at the window, when a horseman rode up at half speed, tore the saddle-bags and saddle from his steed, and ran toward the house. Mark hastened to admit him.

"Walk in, sir," he said, anxiously; "I am afraid you are very wet."

He hazarded nothing by the conjecture, for rivulets of rain-water

were pouring from the stranger's figure, all over the nicely-sanded floor. The first use he made of his breath, when he recovered it, was to apologize for this damage, so unintentionally committed.

"I am sorry that I am not the only sufferer," he said, with a pleasant smile and bow to Bessy, that would have consoled her for a far more serious derangement in her household economy.

"That is of no consequence, sir," rejoined Mark, "provided you receive no injury beside the inconvenience you feel in your damp clothes. Fortunately, the fire has not gone down entirely. Be seated, if you please."

He stirred the embers, and threw on some dry sticks to raise a blaze. Bessy slipped into the rear chamber; was gone a minute or two, and returning, said something aside to her husband.

"Let me beg of you to change your clothing, sir," entreated Mark; "my wife has laid out some of mine in the other room, which you will oblige me by accepting, until she can dry yours at the fire."

"It would be both unwise and unkind in me not to accept an offer so frankly made," said the stranger, gratefully. "I have been a grievous sufferer, in days past, from rheumatism, and the wetting which would, to most men in my apparent health, be a mere nothing, may prove a serious matter to me, without the caution you advise."

In ten minutes after, he was sitting at his ease, in the arm-chair, arrayed in Mark's Sunday suit, that fitted him moderately well, and chatting with his host, while the careful Bessy hung the damp garments over a couple of chairs, placed upon the hearth. The guest was a man already past the meridian of life, a circumstance indicated by his frosted hair, and Time's unmistakable pencil-strokes in the region of the eyes and mouth. He was still erect, and, as he said, seemingly robust in health; his step was firm, his gaze clear and penetrating, and his voice had a sweetness and volume, a rich quality of tone that charmed the listener, like

the full chords of a musical instrument. His manner was natural and easy, evincing an eminently social temperament.

"I do not complain of the rain," he said, glancing at the dim and streaming window. "Even while exposed to it, I was forced to acknowledge that the risk of possible illness to myself was of trifling consequence in comparison with the benefit others would derive from the timely shower. I am enough of a farmer to appreciate the ruinous consequences of a drought in spring."

It was a common-place remark, but it threw down the barriers of reserve, and Mark was led on until he found himself using a freedom of speech he had not enjoyed before, save with his wife, in this land of strangers. The eye of his guest dwelt on him with more interest each moment; he was evidently surprised at the correct language, and intelligent views expressed by a man in so lowly a station, and curiosity prompted him to push his inquiries, as far as delicacy would sanction investigation, into his previous history. One happy discovery facilitated the progress of their acquaintance. It was Mark's avowal of his religious sentiments and church membership. The stranger's face kindled with a glow of affectionate emotion.

"In Christ Jesus all are brethren," he said; "I am more than thankful for the storm that pelted me to this shelter. I am thoroughly familiar with this section of our State, and regard the residence of every evangelical Christian here as a 'light shining in a dark place.' The people of this vicinity are intelligent, refined, and hospitable; but there is a lamentable dearth of church privileges, and a consequent apathy—a sort of fashionable indifference to religion, that is more discouraging than pagan ignorance. You may do great good here."

"The way may be opened to me," replied Mark. "But to speak honestly, if I had not been misinformed—I hope undesignedly—with regard to the opportunities for attending public worship, nothing would have tempted me to choose this spot as a

home. It is so different in my native place, and I was so unprepared for the state of things I have since found here, that I took too much for granted. It is a fearful responsibility for a man to turn his back upon the sanctuary and the means of grace God has appointed and blessed—particularly, when there are those connected with him, who might also be profited by the preaching of the word, and intercourse with the Lord's people."

"Yet Providence may have—but, why do I say *may* have? God *has* sent you hither, for purposes of his own. 'His ways are not as our ways,' and He often makes life's darkest day seem the brightest, when we look back over our lives at their close. Some secrets he leaves for eternity to explain, and to many he graciously grants us the key, while we are still in the flesh. Do you see this?"

He held up his arm, and Mark discovered what Bessy's quick eye had perceived at his entrance—that he had lost a hand, its place being supplied by a silver plate.

"Your countenances tell me that you are shocked, and that you pity my unhappy plight," continued the visitor. "The misfortune, as it was then styled, overtook me when I was a boy, and was the means, in the Almighty's wisdom, of altering the whole purpose of my life. It made me a student—the student became a minister of the everlasting Gospel. Dare I regret it now?"

"You have learned the use of afflictions," said Mark, with increased respect. "Many study them, perhaps quite as carefully as you have done, without seeing the end from the way."

"Their duty is none the less plain on that account. It is to wait on the Lord and be of good courage, believing that 'He *will* strengthen their hearts.' Every step from the cradle to the grave is numbered, and so is every affliction; and had we no other support, when trouble is sent upon us, there is some comfort in reflecting that when we have suffered one, there are fewer

to suffer. Here, on earth, we need leading about and instructing, and we are such dunces that, many times, we refuse to receive instruction, except by painful discipline. The rain is over, and I promised to meet some friends at dinner-time. My clothing is dry, I think, madam—thanks to your goodness!

"I wish I could say how much obliged I am to you both," he said, when he was ready to go.

"Say nothing on that score, sir," interrupted Mark. "The pleasure and advantage have been on our side. May I make so free as to ask a favor of you, before you leave us?"

"Assuredly!" with an expression that showed he anticipated and approved its nature.

"It has been a weary time since our home was honored by the presence of a minister, sir. Will you pray with us, that the blessing of God may follow this visit?"

The modest grace and fervor of the request went to the heart of the guest. Without further reply than was given by his kindling eye, he took the Bible Mark presented, and read the psalm, from which he had quoted:

"The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"

The opening sentence of his prayer was the key-note to the rest, and Mark could have believed it the utterance of an angel, who had lingered near, during the preceding conversation: "We bless thee, O Father, that none of thy children need ever faint in heart, for who of us has not seen the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living?"

There were tears on Bessy's cheek, when she arose from her knees, and Mark's spirit bounded in the hope that the desired blessing might be already near at hand. A holy calm abode in the twilight of that Saturday evening, kept by them, with the strictness of puritanical usage. And, in conformity with the general tendency of blessings to gather into groups, there came,

at bed-time, a messenger from Miss Barbara, with a note. It was scrawled in haste, and original in spelling and punctuation; but Mark made out that several ministers had stopped over Sabbath, at Ben Lomond, and that there would be two sermons at Deep Run the next day; furthermore, that Miss Barbara would call for them—"and Kitty" was underscored—on her way to church.

They were ready in the morning long before she came by. The Ben Lomond coach had gone on to church, and four or five gentlemen on horseback; among them, their late visitor, who bowed and waved his hand in passing. Then, the rumbling of other wheels revived Kitty's flagging spirits. There was no mistake this time. Miss Barbara's vehicle was a blue-bodied, springless wagon, without a top; her coursers were four stout mules, employed on week-days in the drudgery of the plantation. The bottom of the wagon was lined with straw, and split-bottomed chairs were prepared for her companions—a low one for Kitty amongst them.

"All right!" said the housekeeper, squaring herself to sustain the expected joltings. "Drive on, Reuben! and don't shake all the life out of us—you hear! We'd as lief hear one more Gospel sermon, as not."

Deep Run was but two and a half miles distant, and this space was accomplished with shaking frames and chattering teeth, but whole bones. Postboys had been sent in various directions, the afternoon before, to apprise the neighbors of the intended services, and the news had travelled, by its own weight, as it were, from one plantation to another. Of this the Hales were ignorant, and the large gathering in and around the church was an incomprehensible enigma to them. Miss Barbara and Bessy had difficulty in securing seats within the building, and Mark stood the whole while. His situation afforded him a view of the congregation, which he would not have exchanged for the most comfortable bench there.

It was a motley gathering as to sex, age and condition. His mental description of his emotions at the contemplation, was in the words of the Book in which he was best read:

"The rich and the poor meet together. The Lord is the maker of them all."

"I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise; with a multitude that kept holy day."

The pulpit, a narrow box, without drapery or cushion, was, according to the laws then governing church architecture, elevated above the heads of the audience, and resembled an honorable pillory. It was empty, and our hero soon identified the ministers in half a dozen gentlemen, sitting on a form, to the left of the uninviting rostrum.

They were men who bore the title of "Reverend," like those who had won it hardly, and carried with it a load of responsibility, that, but for help from a higher Power, would have crushed body and soul. There were giants in those days; instruments, welded and tempered for the age; Jehus, who drove furiously over the corpses of superstition, and the brutal opposition of ignorant depravity; Isaiahs, mighty in the Lord, who reasoned and menaced and prophesied in his name; Jeremiahs, who mourned from the wrung depths of brothers' hearts, because "the hurt of the daughter of their people was not healed;" Johns, austere in life and demeanor; indifferent whether they strode upon flowers or thorns, if only they might make His paths straight; and Pauls, calm of front and courteous in bearing, yet ready, with the double-edged Damascus blade of logic and eloquence, to combat the sophistry of the schools, and penetrate the thick bosses of hardened unbelief. They were not rose-water philanthropists; not bombastic praters about the Real, the Mystic, the Esthetic; not popular caterers to the morbid taste for the novel, the doubtful, the fantastic. Instead of eulogizing Earnestness,

they lived and died heroes, each with his harness on ; instead of, in words, deifying humanity, their deeds proved how sublime a thing it could be made, when the Spirit of the Lord made its dwelling-place in the creatures formed after His image.

"The prophets—do they live for ever ? and the fathers—where are they ?" Gone with the generation that entertained them un-awares, or with a feeble glimmering of their character and aims. They rest from their labors—and their works ! who can deny that they follow them ? Is not their imperishable record to be read in the hill-side and grove churches ; the stately spires of the fair land they loved with true patriots' pride ? the voice of prayer and praise from thousands of family altars, whose foundations they laid ; the noble band of working Christians, to whom they bequeathed the legacy of pastoral instruction and fatherly blessings ?

Mark had been accustomed to witness and practise the utmost gravity and decorum in the sanctuary, and the buzzing, heaving crowd that now thronged the edifice, was, to him, shocking in its novelty.

"Will they ever remember in whose presence they are ?" he wondered, in grief and annoyance.

From among the band of ministers was uplifted a voice so sweet, so powerful, that every ear lent instant attention. The words were known to Mark, and, as was presently apparent, to many others also :

"There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins ;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains."

"The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain, in his day ;
And there may I, 'though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away."

"Dear, dying Lamb ! thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
'Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved, to sin no more.

"Ere since by Faith, I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming Love has been my theme,
And shall be—'till I die.

"Then, in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing Thy power to save,
When this poor, lisping, stamm'ring-tongue
Lies silent in the grave."

The melody, wild and plaintive, was raised by hundreds of voices ; the negroes, who surrounded the building, and packed doors and windows, joining in, with the might of their strong lungs ; yet, audible above all, strengthening and directing the rolling volume of song without one strained or false note, was that wonderful voice.

The music had calmed and harmonized the incongruous crowd, and three ministers ascended the pulpit stairs. The preliminary exercises were conducted by strangers ; the preacher was the chorister, who had led the hymn, and likewise the Hales' providential acquaintance.

"Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life," pronounced in his sonorous, musical accents, with a mournful emphasis, fixed the interest of his auditors, and he did not lose it to the end of his discourse. To the furthest verge of the assemblage, in-doors and out, rang tones like a silver trumpet, stirring all pulses and quickening many hearts. Persuasive, urgent, alarming, always earnest—he set forth the oft-told, ever-new story of redemption ; threw wide the doors of mercy, and pointing alternately to Calvary and to Sinai, implored and warned his hearers

to enter. It was a sermon long remembered in the community; the precious date to some, of the beginning of the better life.

There was a recess, and a second sermon, sound and able, but less impressive than that of the forenoon, concluded the day's exercises.

"That last preacher is a Doctor of Divinity," remarked Miss Barbara, as she climbed into her wagon. "He's a mighty smart man, they say—one of the pillars of the church; but for my part, I would not give Mr. Laidley for two of him. *He's* the people's man, and a blessedder never lived on this sinful earth."

"A poor conclusion, Miss Barbara!" said a voice behind her, that made her start. "Do not be deluding my friends—who, I am pleased to see are yours also,—with such heretical ideas. I stepped up to bid you 'farewell,'" continued Mr. Laidley to the Hales, who were still standing upon the ground.

"Let me thank you for your sermon, sir," said Mark. "I shall never forget it."

"You will have something to remember me by, then. It is well, for I am loath to think of my passing entirely from your minds. We may never meet again this side of our everlasting home. I hope to see and know you there. The Lord bless and keep you and yours!"

He shook hands with both; raised Kitty for a kiss, and they parted—to meet again?—and where?

CHAPTER VI.

WITH the march of summer, the sun of prosperity beamed constantly upon our emigrants. The simile of the bee-hive, when applied to their habitation, was more pertinent than ever. The homely, cheerful creepers screened the sides of the house and partially thatched the roof; while within, the life of busy seclusion went on patiently and brightly. Ben Lomond was alive with company all the season; but the foaming cataract of gaiety cast scarcely a drop into the limpid spring of domestic peace. Bunyan's shepherd-boy wore not more of the "herb called Hearts-ease in his bosom," than did the artisan and his faithful wife. The tug of life's battle was over, they ventured to believe, and, so far as mortal vision could pierce the cloudy Future, everything promised well for the fulfillment of their hopes.

In July there were renewed rejoicings in the Argyle connection over the return of the collegian son. He, like his sisters, was a great deal from home. Twice a day the Hales saw him gallop along the lane, on his fiery young horse—rumor said, bound to and from Mr. Selden's, for his attachment to that gentleman's eldest daughter was talked of seriously, as each neared the age of discretion. Kitty learned to know his swift tramp, and would dart to the door to drop her pretty courtesy, in response to the bow and hail, that never failed her. Two or three times he checked his speed at the fence which now shut in the front yard, and chatted with Mark about his garden and his prospects; his mien and language bespeaking him the thorough gentleman,

who feared no contamination from intercourse with an honest man, however despised his calling might be in the public esteem.

"He has none of the family pride about him," said Bessy, one day, as he cantered away, after one of these calls.

"None of the family haughtiness, you mean," answered Mark. "I am mistaken if he has not more pride and strength of will than any of the rest; and he would show it out, if he were placed in circumstances that tried him. He is a noble boy! What a pity he should be spoiled by the world!"

"Why must he?"

"It is not certain, but there is a reasonable probability that he will be. He is hemmed in by temptations, from which a poor man's son would be saved by his poverty. Do you not see and hear how he is courted and flattered by high and low?"

"He deserves it, I am sure."

"I don't deny that, either. He is rich, handsome, spirited, clever—everything that goes to make up a desirable companion over the bottle and in the ball-room. I wish that he remembered his mother. It might be a safe-guard."

"He does. He was six years old when she died."

"Pictures of persons and things seen at that age, would be very indistinct by the time ten years had passed, unless great pains were taken to keep them before the child's mind. If it were not that Mr. Argyle has heard frequent descriptions of his mother's appearance and sayings, I question whether the fact of his ever having known her would not seem like a dream to him."

"How you talk, Mark! There is Kitty, who was four years old last week. Do you suppose, if I were taken away, she would not recollect me when she is grown up?"

"I will suppose nothing upon such an unlikely 'if,'" answered Mark, playfully. "You are to live to dandle your grandchildren, and sit in the chimney corner with your pipe in your mouth, as Miss Barbara does, much as you dislike tobacco now!"

Kitty and her kitten took a stroll by themselves that afternoon up to the bend in the road, beyond which they were forbidden ever to go, without the protection of some person older than herself. At the extreme limit of her promenade, the child sat down under a chinquapin bush, full of green burrs that would be brown in the autumn, and strained her eyes longingly toward the distant gate of Ben Lomond. A day with "Aunt Barbara" was a more common luxury to her than to her parents; but these pleasures were very far apart, indeed, to her imagination. She dearly loved their benefactress—for such she was, to the extreme of her ability—and she was, child-like, fond of variety, even in her happy life. The beautiful dresses and flashing jewels, the flowers, feathers and furbelows of the Misses Argyle and their associates, as they flitted through the porches and halls, and occasionally paused in the housekeeper's room, to consult or interrogate that functionary, were like glimpses of Fairyland to Kitty. They paid no heed to her, after they had once inquired of Miss Barbara who she was, and she had come not to expect their notice.

Old Mr. Argyle was there several times each day; cross and fidgety, she considered him, and always crept into Miss Barbara's bedchamber when she heard his step and cane approaching. She betook herself to no such retreat when Malcolm's free tread and cheery whistle drew near. He, too, sought "Aunt Bab," in every strait, but it was as a friend and foster-mother. Did he have one of his bad headaches—he lay down upon her settee; his head in her lap, and Kitty was permitted to hold the smelling-bottle, or the saucer of vinegar and water to wet the brown paper bound about his forehead. "Aunt Bab" always knew where to find the missing whip or powder-flask; her needle was always at hand to replace a lost button, or to take the timely stitch that saves nine. And for recreation, there was the exhaustless fun of teasing his attached nurse, who scolded while she petted, and a lively romp with his little favorite. He never overlooked her, or

forgot to speak to her ; and baby as she was, she regarded him with an ardent and admiring devotion, whose depth even her mother did not fathom, although the child's prattle was continually of " Mr. Malcolm," and the kind and funny things he did and said. Brains as immature as hers are capable of devising schemes, and of concealing them. Bessy had not a suspicion why Kitty's afternoon ramble was so often " up the road—just to the turning—please, mamma !"

Still more would the mother have been puzzled by the eager glances, cast in the direction of the cottage, as the reddening sky and stretching shadows announced the usual hour of Malcolm's return. The black eyes were larger and more wistful, each moment, and, seen under the green leaves, might have been mistaken for those of a startled fawn, crouching to escape her pursuers.

He was very late ! Mamma would be waiting supper for her, and papa maybe come to look for her, and then she should not see him at all to-night ! and her lip trembled at the thought. A cloud of dust in the distance drew her once from her covert. Her heart beat fast and loud, and her tiny hands clasped each other nervously. But it was only 'Pollo, driving his cows home, with a great ado of yelping from himself, and barking from his dog. She was so glad he did not have to pass this way ! Her throat ached so badly that she would be sure to cry if she tried to speak. It was amusing, yet pitiful, to see the disappointment in the little creature's face, as she sunk again to her seat in the long grass, and laid her head on her knees. Hark ! that was certainly the tramp of a horse's feet on the gravelly road, and nobody else rode so fast ! He was coming ! She must stand up, or he might not see her. She did not aspire to speaking with him. Her modest ambition was to catch his eye and a smile—perhaps a " Good evening, Kitty !" if he were not in too much of a hurry.

The unconscious object of all this innocent idolatry ; the sub-

ject of these guileless manoeuvres, rode right onward and toward his worshipper. Kitty's taste was not to be cavilled at. Many a maiden, whose age quadrupled hers, would have sat as willingly and longer by the roadside, for the mere chance of getting a look or a word from him. His fair hair was blown back by his rapid motion through the evening air ; his cheeks glowing, and his lips parted in a smile, that told of zestful enjoyment in his glorious present, and all a youth's sanguine reachings toward brighter days beyond. His dark-blue eyes looked straight ahead, and their level rays were so far above Kitty's stature, that she involuntarily advanced a pace into the road. The mettled steed sprang madly aside, and the unguarded rider was hurled to the ground. With a frightened neigh, the horse sped back over the route he had come, leaving the harmless cause of his panic alone with his master.

Mark was busy in the garden as the animal dashed past, and dropping his hoe, and calling to his wife to follow him, he ran in search of the unfortunate boy. He was stretched senseless upon the stony soil, and from his temple, a stream of blood welled slowly through Kitty's fingers, which were pressed passionately upon the wound. With the utmost care, and with difficulty, the husband and wife bore the lifeless form to their cottage. Mark got him upon the bed, and, after instructing Bessy to staunch the blood, and use what restoratives they had in the house, he set off to give the alarm at Ben Lomond.

Miss Barbara was the earliest of Malcolm's household on the spot. She wasted no time in lamentations, but, aided by Bessy, went diligently about the fearfully uncertain task of recalling life to a form it seemed to have deserted for ever. A gasp, changing to a groan, broke from the wounded lad, as his father entered the room. The haughty man stood aghast at the unearthly sound, and endeavored vainly to speak.

" He is reviving, sir," said Mark, answering the agonized look

that appealed to him. "He has not moved or spoken, until this instant. I hope that his injury is less serious than we feared."

"Where is he? how is he?" cried Miss Argyle, rushing into the room. "Good Heavens! is he killed?" she screamed, as she beheld the pale and bloody lineaments of her brother.

"Back!" Miss Barbara pushed her away from the bed. "He is not dead, but he will be, soon, if you keep up that racket. There are enough of you in here to smother him. Mr. Hale, take her into the other room, and everybody else, except your wife; she's of some use."

"I think we had better go, indeed, sir," said Mark, very respectfully, to Mr. Argyle. "The place is small, and we crowd it; he needs all the air he can get, and Miss Brook will attend to everything that can be done, until the doctor comes."

The father assented by a nod, and turned to go; but another hollow groan sent a shudder through his frame, and he staggered. Mark caught him—almost carried him into the outer apartment and placed him in a chair. A glass of water dispelled the faintness, but he was completely unnerved. He grasped the toil-hardened hand of the man whose shoulder supported him, and burst into tears. Mark's own heart was ready to break. He could only return the pressure, and stood, looking down upon the afflicted parent, with an expression of sincere and tender sympathy. Eleanor wandered about the room, weeping and wringing her hands, watching at window and door, and wishing aloud that the doctor would come. He arrived sooner than they had any reason to expect him; one of the dozen messengers dispatched in search of him, having overtaken him but two miles away.

His report did not quiet the terrible suspense that oppressed the waiting hearts, hanging upon his verdict. It was impossible, at present, to ascertain the nature and extent of his injuries, he said, guardedly. Miss Brook and himself would watch with him, during the night, and no one else must enter the room.

"You'd better go home!" said Miss Barbara to Eleanor.

Bessy was grieved and surprised at her sharp tone. It was cruel to scold the poor sister, in the height of her distress.

"It is a pity to send her away," she whispered.

She might as well have held her peace.

"You are of no earthly account here," continued the inexorable housekeeper. "If you want to help, send Sarah to me. There are fifty things she must look after." In a gentler manner, she addressed Mr. Argyle. "There's no danger just now, sir, and I will let you know if there's the least change in the night. Better go home and rest, if you can. There is no accommodations here for you, you see, and if there was, you couldn't do any good by staying. There's the carriage now, sir. Keep up a brave heart. The Lord may bring him through, safe and sound, yet."

Mr. Argyle submitted with surprising meekness, and Eleanor, too, obeyed the order so peremptorily delivered. They felt, instinctively, that the authority was not to be disputed, and anxiety, for the time, swallowed up pride.

"Barbara," said the shaking voice of the old man, from the carriage.

"All right, sir! Here I am."

"Take care of my boy—for—his—mother's—sake!"

"Never fear, sir! He's my child, too!" with an answering tremor in the words.

Not until they had driven away, and Dr. Chase was closeted with Miss Barbara in the sick-chamber, did Bessy have opportunity to see after her child. She had been overlooked in the universal excitement, and the mother's search for her in the lower rooms and the loft, whither she fancied she might have crept, was fruitless. Mark had gone to Ben Lomond on an errand for Miss Barbara, and Bessy, now really alarmed for the safety of her darling, must yet be noiseless in her quest. It was starlight;

but she groped, rather than saw her way, in the dense shade of trees, calling softly for the lost one, when at a little distance from the house. A mew and a purr saluted her as she stole by the back door, leading from Malcolm's chamber, and she perceived some object lying near the steps. A touch informed her that it was what she sought. The child was extended on the ground, face downward, and so still, that but for the signal of her dumb friend, the mother's solicitous eyes would not have discovered her. She struggled feebly, as she was taken up, but a word of caution stilled her.

Bessy carried her into the kitchen, and set her upon her lap. The light revealed the rounded contour of a child's face, with the anguish of womanhood fixed in each feature. The contracted forehead, the wild eye and drawn mouth were terrible for the mother to look upon. Her fond kiss could not alter their expression, or elicit a word of response to her inquiries. The small hands were streaked with dark-red stains and soiled with mould, and her dress bore similar marks of her late adventure. Bessy's instinct of neatness was never dormant. Fetching a basin of water, she washed off the dirt, and brushed out the matted curls, talking all the while in soft, soothing tones.

"There is nothing to frighten my little girl now. Poor Mr. Malcolm has gone to sleep, and will be better to-morrow, we hope. Mamma will give Kitty some supper, and presently, papa will bring a bed from Mr. Argyle's for us to sleep on in here. We cannot go into our chamber to-night, for the doctor says everything must be very quiet, or Mr. Malcolm may get worse."

Kitty appeared to drink in every syllable; but her eye wandered constantly to the closed door of the other room, and her silence awoke her mother's most fearful apprehensions. Had the shock struck her dumb—or worse—deprived her of reason? She caught her to her heart convulsively, at the suggestion; then put

her down, and unlatching the middle door, beckoned hastily to the doctor. He obeyed on the instant; but looked fretted when he saw that the kitchen had but two occupants.

"What?" asked he, abruptly; "I can't stay a minute!"

Mastering herself as well as she could, Bessy represented the case according to her comprehension of it.

"Humph! she's either frightened or sulky; or, more likely than either, pretending to be unable to speak," he said, drawing Kitty to him. "What ails you, young one? I reckon your mother could find a way to make you speak, if she chose. You've heard of such things as switches—haven't you?"

"Don't be cross with her. She is not used to it!" interposed Bessy, reddening with suppressed anger at this rough treatment. "She is frightened almost to death now."

"Very well! If you can manage the case better than I can, you do not need me any longer," returned Dr. Chase, coolly. And, without another word, he walked back to his former post, by the pillow of his slumbering patient.

Bessy was holding the speechless, shivering child in her arms, her own fast-dropping tears bedewing the rigid face, when Miss Barbara appeared. A very few sentences of explanation sufficed for her.

"Jest like him! The unfeeling brute!" she ejaculated. "I'll be bound I can get something out of him, or out of his saddle-bags, that will do her good. Jest wait here two seconds."

Her mode of dealing with the "brute" was probably as summary as she had threatened; for she was out again presently with a phial in her hand.

"The money-worshipping hypocrite!" she continued to berate him, as she dropped the anodyne. "He was afraid to snub me, because I might tell tales to those that can pay him well. Between him and Sancroft, there'd be no poor people left in the land if they had their way. Thank goodness they haven't!

When it comes to that, jest let me know, and I'll leave, without being invited out—I'm obliged to you!"

Bessy heard these mutterings, not knowing that she did so, until they were recollected some months later.

With an unnecessary parting shake of the bottle, Miss Barbara clutched the spoon savagely, and came toward Kitty.

"Now, Mousey"—assuming the most coaxing air and modulations, of which countenance and voice were susceptible—"you will take this, like a sweet baby, and go to sleep in mamma's arms—or in your own pretty little crib. You'd rather have that, hadn't you?"

The child did not offer to open her mouth, and answered by a vacant stare.

"Kitty will be sick, if she does not swallow the medicine," argued Bessy, tremulously. "Oh! if Mark would only come home! She always minds him."

"She will do it to please Aunt Barbara—won't you, Mousey? Why, what will I do, if you don't get a nice long nap, and ain't well enough by morning, to help me nurse Mr. Malcolm? There, I told you so! It is gone—every drop! That's the best child in the land—and I've always stuck to it! Now, Mrs. Hale, slip on her night-gown, and I'll lift in her crib. I can do it without a mite of noise."

She accomplished the feat in defiance of the doctor's whispered remonstrances.

"I will not be answerable for the consequences," he said, when she motioned to him to let her pass.

"Nobody wants you to be!" puffed she, pushing on with her burden.

Kitty was laid, unresisting, in her bed. Miss Barbara tucked the coverlet around her, and kissed her. The child's arms were about her neck, when she would have arisen. The poor little face worked painfully.

"What is it, my baby?" asked the pitying spinster.

"I made his horse throw him!" broke forth in an hysterical shriek, that caused Dr. Chase to intrude his head and a caustic reprimand.

"You wasn't called" snapped Miss Barbara; and at this shot he retreated.

"What does she mean?" wondered Bessy.

"Never mind, now! There! there! don't cry loud, dear, or you'll disturb Mr. Malcolm." You wouldn't do that for anything, you know."

"No, ma'am."

Kitty smothered her sobs, and the tears streamed, healthfully.

"I s'pose the horse jumped to one side, and threw Mr. Malcolm, when he saw you in the road. That was the way of it—wasn't it, Mousey?"

"Yes, ma'am. But I didn't mean to scare him! O, dear," she sobbed.

"Yes! yes! we know that, baby. It was all the horse's fault—not a bit of it yours. He would have behaved just as badly if you had been a stump or a rock. I've seen him do it, time and time again. He's an ugly, vicious creatur', that no man in his senses would ride, without he was one of your dare-everything, afraid-of-nothing sort—like the dear fellow in there."

She sighed, but covered it with a smile, seeing that Kitty's eye was upon her.

"So, you see, it couldn't be helped, dear. Now, pray to God that he may get well, and when you wake up, maybe he'll be able to tell you that he knows you were not to blame, and that he loves his little 'Kitty Puss,' as much as ever he did."

CHAPTER VII.

It was a trying season of waiting and watching that elapsed before the wounded youth could give the assurance of forgiveness and affection to the heart that ached so remorsefully. For ten days, there existed a strong probability that the male succession of the honorable house of Argyle would cease with him who was now owner of the name and estate. For ten days and nights, Miss Barbara stood guard above her boy, refusing all relief, except that of an hour's sleep, when he was comparatively composed, and then she would resign in favor of no one but Bessy. They two watched sadly and eagerly on one side of his bed—Death, hungrily upon the other. For ten days, the laird's restless wanderings over house and plantation, were with an uncertain step and haggard face, and an unwonted abstinence from fault-finding. It mattered little—so said his aspect—a few pounds more or less, when he, who he had intended should inherit all his hoards, might never again set foot upon the broad acres or handle the bright gold. For ten days, the sisters Eleanor and Jessie rode twice daily to the shoemaker's cottage, and returned in tears and terror, from the bedside of their late robust and merry brother, to mope away the hours in vain endeavors to forget or disbelieve the danger that had scared the gay birds from Ben Lomond, and put a stop to their schemes and thoughts of pleasure. For ten days, Marcia Selden gazed, with heart-beats thick and fast, for the messenger whose regular duty it was to bring intelligence from the sick-room, and hated, as fervently as it was in her nature to

hate anything, the stern law of propriety, that banished her from her boy-lover's side.

Then there was a change—it might be for better, it might be for worse ; and in the hour of agonized suspense, the father knelt by the pillow of his unconscious son, and prayed aloud to the mother's God, that this cup might not be given him to drink. And, when removed from the apartment, he besought Mark, the "low-born mechanic," to pray with him and for him, that the boon might not be denied. It was granted. To Nature, and to her unwearied assistants, the Lord of life gave the victory.

But the work was not done with the rescue of the sick one from present and apparent danger. He was still to lie for tedious hours and days in that humble room, watching, with a convalescent's listless amusement, the light sifting through the lattice of morning-glories ; the hollyhocks, thrusting their heads between the leaves, like bold, curious women, with flaunting hoods and shameless faces ; the stray flies, that, having no fear of Miss Barbara's peacock plumes before their eyes, crawled busily, and gossipped sociably upon the beams and boards that supplied the place of a ceiling ; the slow, gentle oscillations of the green and blue feathers, and the form and face of her who waved them. Until noon, Miss Barbara usually presided as chief nurse ; but household concerns at Ben Lomond required her supervision, and were not neglected after she could reconcile it with conscience and feeling, to leave her charge for a part of each day. Thus, it came to pass, that when he awoke from the noon-day nap, now as habitual with him as it had been in infancy, he found in the stead of the homely, yet beloved visage that had met his closing eye, the younger and more comely countenance of his hostess. In his weakness, he learned to love her gentle ministrations and affectionate demeanor. Every hour's observation enhanced his heart-felt respect for the interesting pair into whose care he had been thrown. All that he had heard and read of virtue in the homes

of the lowly ; of gems, that shone the purer for the poverty of their setting ; of the honor belonging, by conquest, to the self-made man, here had its exemplification, and, heightened by the romantic coloring of youthful fancy, was a source of liveliest pleasure.

He was forbidden to converse, in his extreme weakness, but his eye and smile were ready and eloquent interpreters of thought. It was an era in Kitty's history—the day she was admitted to his chamber. Her mother had cautioned her to be very still and to remain only a minute. Malcolm's blue eyes danced when she entered, trembling all over with excitement, delight and bashfulness.

"Kitty !" he said, feebly.

Miss Barbara's finger was up, and he was mute, but motioned to her to hold the child down to him, that he might kiss her. Then he passed his long thin fingers over her curls, and smiled sadly, as he laid his wasted hand beside her pink and dimpled one.

After that, he would have her pay him a visit, both morning and afternoon, and stay longer each time, until she was promoted to the dignity of fanning him and keeping the flies away. It was a joy to both, when leave was granted for him to amuse himself with her prattle, a recreation which the prudent sub-nurse was watchful should never grow wearisome in length. Kitty was a vivacious and loving creature, and Malcolm must have become fond of her, had he been rich in other objects of affection, which was far from being the case. Nothing with relation to their landlord's family impressed Bessy more disagreeably than the evident lack of concord ; the absence of all bonds of mutual sympathy. She saw clearly that the attentions his sisters would have rendered Malcolm, if only for the sake of appearances, were distasteful to him. He was even peevish, if they were persistent in their offers of service, and at length, having, one day, fretted through a call of extraordinary duration from the two, he told

Miss Barbara flatly, in Bessy's hearing, that they "teazed him almost out of his senses and quite out of all patience ;" that the rustle of starch and silk offended his nerves of hearing ; their French perfumes and pomatum nauseated him, and their ringed fingers hurt his head, when they bathed it.

With commendable gravity, Miss Barbara hearkened to this list of grievances, and engaged that none of them should torment him oftener than a show of decent respect for his relatives required it ; and what she promised, she performed.

But the elements of pride and contempt for whatever was socially inferior to themselves, which had been quelled in the Argyle circle by the shadow of Death, the leveller, reviving with the retirement of the Terror, secretly, but surely plotted the destruction of the peace in which Malcolm revelled. Their first ebullition was in the regrets expressed by Miss Argyle to her father, that Malcolm had not been brought home immediately upon the occurrence of the accident. It was not much further, she said, and the least sense of propriety would have sufficed to dictate this course. Perhaps "those people" had not thought of this. It was unreasonable to expect delicacy of thought or behavior from them. It was natural, and therefore the more pardonable in them, to seize upon this providential opportunity of intercourse with those above them. It reflected a sort of honor upon them ; no doubt secured them distinction in their class, to have Mr. Argyle's son under their roof, for such a long time—and then the remuneration they were expecting—in plain terms, their pay for boarding and tending him, was a consideration to persons in their circumstances.

Her last hit told, if the rest had fallen short of the mark. A stab in the region of her father's pocket-nerve, would quicken his sensibilities, when nothing else would.

"The choice of a hospital was none of mine," he said, stiffly, "and they have no right to make out any bill whatever. I have

endured more inconvenience in consequence of his being there, than they can possibly have experienced. And, as to nursing—what are you thinking of, Eleanor? Has not Barbara been there, from the hour of his accident? Have not I supplied a bed, in place of the one Malcolm occupies; and do you suppose that a sick man can devour one-third of the provisions Sarah carries down, every morning, by Barbara's orders? No! if the truth were known, *I* have supported the whole family, and had nothing in return, except anxiety and fatigue. I will offer them a—ahem! something by way of a present, when Malcolm comes away; but if a regular account is presented, I shall hand it over to Saneroff, and order him to dispute it as sure as my name is Argyle!"

This affirmation had, with him, all the sense of an oath.

Miss Jessie giggled. "Isn't it funny that Malcolm, *our* brother, should be sick in such a place? A log-house, with two rooms, and no ceiling, and a shoemaker's sign over the door! I declare, I have killed myself twenty times, laughing at the idea."

Her father was red to the roots of his powdered hair. As was his custom, if the expression of his feelings would betray him into intemperate speech, and thereby endanger his dignity, he pursed his mouth tightly, and, grasping his cane, stalked out of the apartment. Miss Eleanor nodded satisfiedly at her sister, who laughed, as she lay back upon the sofa.

She was a blonde, with a wide, low brow, so smooth and white, it seemed, as if care and anger would never find there a resting-place; light-blue eyes, alternately laughing and indolent; pouting coral lips, and within them a set of even teeth, she liked to display. Her head was a mop of yellow curls, golden, as her admirers declared, and they lauded them on the stage, as heartily as her maid, behind the scenes, hated them. Well she might—poor girl! for Jessie's characteristic was laziness. She had been a delicate infant and child, and although now in perfect health,

would not, or could not, relinquish the habits then formed. At school, she was a dunce; in her family, a nonentity; in society, a belle. To maintain the reputation of the latter, she was willing to make others work, if not to exert herself. Ursula, the ill-fated maid, who, for unknown ancestral iniquities, had been appropriated, from her birth to Miss Jessie's service, glowered at all gentlemen visitors to the house, as abettors, with malice prepense, of her torture and toils. She would have parted with half of her own prospects of a husband (and she loved adulation no less than did her mistress), if by so doing she could win assurance that Miss Jessie would never hear another compliment to her figure, feature, complexion—above all, to her hair. The sole excitement of Jessie's private hours—always excepting the pleasurable duty of surveying herself in the mirror—was novel-reading; and this draught was sipped with such moderation, that a three volume octavo was entertainment for the same number of months. The much-tried Abigail detested the well-thumbed book as cordially as she did the tangled curls, since its appearance was the invariable prelude to a summons to the toilet-table. And while Miss Jessie dreamed over "*Pamela*," or "*Clarissa*," or that new and fascinating romance, "*The Children of the Abbey*,"—the "*moral tales*," recommended as safe and instructive by our grand mothers, for the perusal of their young daughters—the luckless hair-dresser plied the comb and brush upon the tresses dishevelled by the wind, or tumbled and matted by lying—reclining, Miss Jessie had it—in an easy chair, when there was no company by to stimulate her to a sitting posture. The operation was difficult and hazardous, moreover, for the amiable victim could not bear the twitching of a hair. A refractory ringlet, resisting all the influences of soap, water and pomatum, to wheedle it into the right shape and tier, would bring on a fit of sulks, which lasted until—a beau alighted at the gate.

Such was the appearance, and like unto these, were the ways of

Miss Jessie Argyle as she sank into her accustomed place and attitude, upon the withdrawal of her father. Her sister's signal informed her that things boded success to their harmless plan for estranging one of their noble line from the presumptuous vulgar-ians, whose growing influence over him they detected and resented as it deserved to be treated.

Eleanor sat by the window that looked down the road. She was watching the gig, which, at that hour, every morning, was brought to the gate for Mr. Argyle's visit to his son. She was in her nineteenth year; of a proud order of beauty; in disposition, recklessly selfish; in temper, arrogant and daring. As her brother once bitterly described her to herself, her "heart was a witches' caldron, in which the quintessence of the family pride and craftiness, with a spice of lesser vices—meanesses and the like—was boiled down, until nothing on earth or in heaven could endure the fumes."

The lad was addicted to hasty and indiscriminating reprobation of whatever irked him; and Eleanor could afford to smile disdainfully at this philippic, remembering that there were scores of worldlings, who contended for the honor of her approval, and shrunk from the frowns she was more chary of in public, than in her home. She was virtual mistress of Argyle; or she would have been, but for two stumbling-blocks, that warned her triumphal car to take another route, when she would have ridden them down with the rest of her slaves. These were Miss Barbara, the faithful nurse and stewardess, whom years of efficient service had made indispensable in the establishment; and the young brother, the future lord of the homestead and soil, who neither feared her wrath nor succumbed to her arts, and over whom she was never able to gain one atom more of influence than was possessed by the sister whose inertness of mind and body she despised.

The captious critic, who, in his dissection of certain *dramatis*

personæ sketched by us in other days and other books, clearly proved our creations *sui generis*—monsters of wickedness, so unlike real men and women, that the pretentious portraiture could only be accepted as just by children, who believe in ogres and vampires; or sneered at others, where we essayed to use the lighter colors—as angelic hybrids; even this dreaded arbiter of our fate, as a limner, will suspend his scalpel, in its swift descent upon the character we have just depicted, when he hears our excuse for its infidelity to nature.

Our plea is the progress of the human race. We know—(not quite as well, indeed, as does the above-deprecated critic—but what *do* we understand as thoroughly?) but we are partially conscious of the fact that there are no women like Eleanor Argyle, in these millennial days, upon which we have fallen. A girl of our generation, if deprived of her mother when eight years old, intrusted to the guardianship of a father weak in everything except vanity of personal consequence and love of gain; her early education intrusted to a woman who, however good in intention, wanted the prestige of equal birth and station to enforce her rule; surrounded by hordes of servile dependents, who cajoled and flattered to avoid her displeasure, and ingratiate themselves in her favor; who should be sent in the third year of her orphanage, to school, and passed from one instructor to another, until Madame Finissez's lubrication consummated her polish—would "turn out" quite differently from the personage we have described. We surrender, without the struggle of an opinion to the contrary, to the assertion that she would have many redeeming traits to offset the undeniable defects in her rearing; that she might be high-spirited—admitting this to be the natural turn of her disposition, but frank, generous and loving. We do not insinuate that the latest date of demoniacal possession was not ages ago; before our memory, and that of our reviewer; and we trust that our good-breeding, if not our reason, would prevent the

remotest hint—the faintest breath of a suspicion—that the present tense, which asserts the heart to be “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,” can have any application to “society,” and this, our Anno Domini.

But we are writing of old times ; the “former days,” which, whatever Solomon meant when he dissuaded inquiry on that head, our philanthropic students of their race’s history agree in pronouncing, unqualifiedly, were *not* “better than these.” To silence all cavils, we may as well state here, that in that far Long Ago, depraved men and heartless, unprincipled women did exist ; and that we have this fact set down in the handwriting, and under the seal of those who were the respectable contemporaries of a class of beings, happily now extinct.

“There is Mr. Selden’s carriage coming in at our gate !” suddenly exclaimed Eleanor.

Mr. Selden had no grown sons, and Jessie yawned in making the inquiry—“Who is in it ?”

“Don’t be a fool, Jessie ! How can I tell, a quarter of a mile off ?”

“Oh !” and she prepared to rest contentedly, with drooping lids, until the carriage should be within easy reach of Eleanor’s optics.

“I hope it is Marcia,” resumed the elder sister, still scanning the equipage.

“Do you ?” asked Jessie, sleepily. She aroused herself to add, “she is here pretty often, considering Malcolm is not at home. It’s funny, isn’t it ?”

“It would be strange, or ‘funny,’ as you say, if she were to visit here much, when he is at home. It is reported everywhere that they are either engaged, or that they will be soon, and it would be said directly that she is courting him.”

“I wonder if they will ever be married,” speculated Jessie.

“It is generally supposed that engaged people have some such

intention. Malcolm could not do better, in this county, at least. Mr. Selden will leave all his children wealthy.”

“And at pa’s death Ben Lomond goes to Malcolm. They are very young, and may change their minds. It would be a shame, when they suit so well, and would have enough to live upon,” mused Jessie.

She was prone to the delivery of commonplaces, in the trance-like state that wrapped her now, her azure orbs misty, and her utterance muffled and drawling.

“If you ever get a tenth as much, you will have to be more brisk and less silly than I have ever seen you,” said Eleanor, angrily ; “your affectation is insufferable, Jessie.”

Jessie laughed, without stirring. “Is not that carriage almost here ? I think your friend, Marcia, would enjoy our conversation. I don’t believe she knows what pleasant sisters-in-law we will be. How do you keep on the right side of her, Nelly ? And Malcolm is tolerably well acquainted with you, too ! Isn’t it funny that he doesn’t tell tales out of school !”

“I am so glad to see you !” cried Eleanor, running down the steps to meet her friend. “My dear Marcia ! what a delightful surprise this is. This day seems destined to bring pleasures. We have the most encouraging news from Malcolm, this morning. The doctor says he may be removed home next week. Now, you have come to spend the day with me, haven’t you ? and I am the happiest girl living.”

“How is Jessie ?” asked Marcia, her happy face indicative of her emotion at the receipt of Eleanor’s apparently inadvertent communication touching her brother.

“Jessie, here she is ! in the drawing-room. She has been asleep, I think. The poor, dear girl is worn out with anxiety and loss of rest. But that will soon be over, now.”

Marcia’s kiss was so affectionate that Jessie expanded her eyes in amazement. *She* never saluted anybody in that fashion, she

thought; but after ruminating upon the circumstances, she slowly concluded that if any of the young ladies of her acquaintance had rich, handsome brothers, she might be hurried into the same extravagance.

"Absolutely her work-bag!" uttered Eleanor, as her visitor, having given her bonnet to a servant, and arranged her hair anew, settled herself for the forenoon.

"I am never exactly easy without it," said Marcia, producing a strip of linen, with the threads drawn ready for stitching. "It is against ma's rules to waste anything—especially time."

This was spoken in perfect innocence of any personal reflection; but Eleanor's eye stole, unseen by the speaker, to her sister, who had vacated the sofa in favor of a stuffed chair, and sat with her milk-white hands folded, as usual. The sly arrow might have enlightened the sister-in-law expectant as to the hidden reefs beneath the current, that ran so smoothly on the surface, but she was too intent upon her work to see it.

She was a very pretty girl—the prettiness of regular features and color. In this respect, she had the advantage over Eleanor, queenly though she was when she willed it. Marcia was, however, of a domestic, yet lively turn; less showily educated than her friends, yet ladylike and agreeable enough in conversation; never brilliant, like Eleanor, and never nonsensical, like Jessie. Seen without the glamour of Malcolm's love and fancy, she was a comely, practical, amiable damsel, with no particular strength of will or steadiness of purpose, and a dutiful daughter, if one might judge from her constant references to "ma's" wishes and sentiments.

"Your brother is decidedly better, then?" she observed, trying to seem politely careless, as she stroked out the two or three inches of stitches she had set.

"So the doctor assures us; you cannot imagine how anxious we are to have him home again. He cannot be comfortable where he is, much as we try to make him so."

"Such a funny place!" put in Jessie. "Sand on the floor, and just two windows in the whole house, and a ladder in the largest room!"

"But pa says that everything looks neat, and that they are altogether different from most people in their circumstances," said Marcia. "He was quite struck with Mr. Hale, when he called at our house, to buy some timber or rails, or something of that sort. He told ma that he was the finest specimen of an intelligent mechanic he ever saw, and that if the country were stocked with such, the distinctions of rank would be at an end."

"I am thankful that it is not, then," rejoined Eleanor; "I do not relish the vision of a houseful of cobblers and cobblers' wives. I must say that this Hale woman seems to consider herself fit for any society. Fancy her at your table, and your father inviting her to take wine, in his fine, courtly style. 'Wall, I rather guess I will—thank ye!'"

Marcia joined in Jessie's laugh. "Oh, we must polish them, before we admit them to terms of equality. Not that I, myself, do not agree with you. It will be some centuries before men arrive at this state of society. This Mrs. Hale is quite a lady in appearance, I have noticed her as we were riding by. They have improved their house surprisingly. It is really a romantic cottage—like those we read of in novels."

"Hop-vines and holyhocks! They are hardly evidences of a refined taste. But the house is good enough for them. Pa has taken pains that it shall not be an unsightly object. It is so conspicuous from the road."

"I thought that man did all that himself. Pa gathered from what he said that it was his own work."

"A probable story! Where was he to get the money to do it with? I have no doubt that he tried to create the impression that it was the fruit of his industry, for he is a fellow who makes great pretensions."

"But Eleanor, some of the improvements were his," said Jessie. "Who else would ever have put up that horrid sign?"

"That is your eyesore," responded her sister. "The shoemaker's wife is mine, and a more intolerable one. She takes upon herself the greatest airs you can conceive of, Marcia; carries her head, and steps as if she were the wife of a lord. She speaks to us with such provoking condescension, that you would imagine us to be her younger sisters; and herself and her husband are dear Malcolm's patrons. Poor old Barbara was blinded by them, months ago, and so they have unbounded swing, down there, Jessie and I have to march, when 'Mrs. Hale' winks at Barbara, and have the honor and felicity of being bowed out of the front kitchen, by 'Mr. Hale,' with his leathern apron on, and his hammer in his hand. That pert minx of a child has the run of the premises, all day; lolls on Malcolm's bed; fans him, entertains him, and for aught I know, gives him his medicine."

Marcia had let fall her work, and was looking at Eleanor, with a countenance full of disgust and pity.

"Is it not shameful?" she said, warmly. "Why don't you teach them their proper place? I should not think any one, no matter how audacious, would attempt to impose upon you, Eleanor. Why, you could keep anybody at a distance. It would be kindness to these people, to check their forwardness."

"When my brother is under their roof! No, no, Marcia! you thoughtless aristocrat!"

No saintly plebeian could have rebuked with more gentle humility.

"They have been very attentive to him," she continued, with generous candor. "There is no disputing that; and in virtue of this, we are inclined to overlook our personal grievances. Their being trebly paid for their services, does not alter the fact of our obligation. True, we regard them as pushing and officious, but I would hope that they mean well toward Malcolm."

"He likes them, and that funny little girl most of all!" giggled Jessie.

"Yes! the darling fellow is infatuated. For pity's sake, never breathe one word of what we have been saying, to him. He is so impulsive and affectionate, so easily deceived by plausible looks and stories—by anything that appeals to his feelings, that he runs wild about these people. Pa regrets it more than we do; but, as he says, there is but one course for us to pursue, and that is to wait, as quietly as we can, until the scales drop from his eyes."

"If that little child were grown, I think he would marry her," said Jessie. "That would be the funniest part of all—wouldn't it?"

"Mercy, Jessy, you make my flesh crawl!" and Eleanor's grimace partook of aversion and ridicule. "That could never happen! If Malcolm could forget whose blood runs in his veins, the dead and buried Argyles would start from their graves to prevent the monstrous sacrilege!"

Marcia was an interested listener, and she carried home, at night, a faithful report of what she had learned of Malcolm's situation and the manoeuvres of his wily hosts. Mrs. Selden thought it "a shame that a gentleman's son should be forced to submit to dictation from those so much beneath him," and marvelled with her daughter at the forbearance of the Argyles.

Mr. Selden looked grave at the unfavorable account of Mark's presumption, too near akin to impertinence, to suit his patrician taste.

He "had taken a liking to the fellow," he confessed, for he "believed him to be honest and industrious, and that, while he had more intelligence than was common in his class, he was not above his trade. He was sorry to hear otherwise."

"I am not surprised," said his wife, satisfiedly.

"And I ought not to be," was Mr. Selden's reply; "for that

is uniformly the way with that style of people. A little notice from those of better standing turns their heads; deceives them with the impression that they are rising in the world; spoils them for the sphere in which they were born, and renders them obnoxious to those whom they would imitate. There are upstarts, in abundance, popping up their heads like mushrooms, all around us. It is the duty of every substantial old resident of the county, to keep these in their proper place; to teach them that there, and there alone, can they be respectable and respected."

"You said, the other day, that if all working-men were as intelligent as this Mr. Hale, there would be no more difference of rank, pa; and you spoke as if it would be a great thing for the country," said the matter-of-fact Marcia.

Mr. Selden's smile was slightly embarrassed.

"That was my democratic theory, my daughter. Practice is quite another affair."

CHAPTER VIII.

"It is a pleasant day, my son. Are you well enough to drive out a short distance? The carriage is at your service."

Malcolm was lying upon the settee in Miss Barbara's room, dressed, but very weak and emaciated. There was altogether too much of the invalid still about him to please his father, who, unaccustomed to the sight of disease, and having enjoyed sound health during most of his life, could not be convinced that this debility did not portend further, and possibly fatal, results of his accident. His incessant watchfulness and minute inquiries were often irritating to the convalescent, yet could not help being touched by these evidences of an attachment, that never found vent in words. He rallied, now, to reply gratefully.

"It is kind in you to propose it, sir. I should enjoy an airing, provided it is prudent to attempt it. What do you say, Aunt Bab?"

"'Twon't hurt!"

It was one of Miss Barbara's "pie-crust days," as Malcolm named the turns of exceeding brevity in language, and a peculiar snapping—not snappishness—of articulation and motion, that overtook her, now and then, when fashionable ladies would have called themselves "nervous," and been called by others cross.

"Then, you may order the carriage, if you please, sir. How far may I go, Aunt Bab?" with an imploring eagerness, that moved his nurse to a very gentle denial of what she felt was his wish.

"Not more'n a mile. It's the first time, remember."

"Please, dear Aunt Bab!" The boy caught her dry, stiff hand, as she beat up his pillows.

She shook her head. "Be patient! If you don't throw yourself back by being too smart, you can go to see her next week."

"Why don't you say next year, and be done with it?" he rejoined, pettishly, flinging himself over to the other side of the couch.

Miss Barbara said nothing more then, only went on preparing the savory broth he loved, and craved with the avidity of returning appetite. He would have it made by no one but her, and when it was ready, she served it upon a stand beside his couch. He stayed her hand in the spreading of a napkin over this, and looked up penitently into her face.

"I don't mind it. You can't help it!" was all her reply, and peace was restored.

"Is Malcolm going out?" inquired Eleanor, coming in.

Her father reëntered at the moment, and replied in the affirmative.

"So Sarah said, but I thought she was mistaken. It is too bad! I wanted the carriage to-day, and you must all have known it. Jessie and I are engaged to dine at Mr. Logan's, and as it is ten miles off, if we don't start early, we shall not get there in time. Cannot you put off your drive, Malcolm?"

"Certainly!" he said, contemptuously.

Mr. Argyle seldom disputed the will of his imperious daughter, save when she pulled too strongly upon his purse-strings; but her selfish disregard of her sick brother's comfort was too flagrant an offence to be passed over in silence.

"Eleanor!" he remonstrated, sternly. "You are not serious in asking your brother to deny himself what will conduce to his

recovery—and this, after his tedious confinement to the house! I am astonished!"

"There it is! I expected nothing else!" cried Eleanor, stormily. "Nobody on this plantation is of the least consequence excepting Malcolm—always Malcolm! Here we have been cooped up for seven weeks; going nowhere, and seeing no company; moping and sighing over him, because he was too awkward a rider to keep his seat on a horse; associating with all manner of vulgar people, and seeing them eternally preferred to ourselves! Much natural affection he has shown for his sisters, that we should make any more sacrifices for him! I've had a surfeit of cobblers and cobblers' wives, and a taste of better society will be a luxury."

Malcolm's face was ashy white with wrath, and his eyes glowed in it, like burning coals.

"The girl has gone mad at last!" he said, in a tone that was frightfully suppressed. "I always prophesied that her temper would get the upper hand of her senses in the end. Indulge her, sir, by all means. My proposed excursion was not of my seeking, but your own kind offer. With many thanks for your good intentions, I shall stay where I am. Let Miss Argyle go, but send a keeper and a strait waistcoat with her."

"Hush!" said Miss Barbara, in his ear, and she would have forced him back to the pillow, from which he had started. He did not heed her, except by resisting her pressure upon his shoulder. In the subdued accents of concentrated rage, he went on:

"It is absurd to reason with a crazy thing, I have heard; but I will say a word or two—yes! and take care that you shall recollect them for the future! This is not the first, nor the second, nor the hundreth time that I have listened to your gratuitous sneers and abuse of those friends of mine, who saved my life. 'A small service!' you will say. I do not deny it; but

on their part, the merit of the deed was the same, as if Miss Eleanor Argyle's existence were endangered, instead of her brother's. I do not expect you to rise superior to the prejudices of those who have only the accidents of fortune and rank to depend upon, for distinction in this world; still less do I suppose you capable of appreciating the rare combination of virtues that shine out in the characters of Mr. Hale and his wife. I do not wish you to associate with them. I have too much regard for their comfort, for they would be the sufferers—not you. But you shall be silent concerning them, in my hearing! And, furthermore, if it ever comes to my ears that you have slandered them to others, I will find means to make you repent it to the latest day of your life. Be sure of that! They are among the best friends I have in the world. I wish this to be understood, and that I will defend them to the last. Now, go to your 'better society,' and play the amiable for the remainder of the day!"

If Eleanor had been a man, she would have felled her brother to the floor, feeble and ill as he was. Miss Barbara, who knew her temper of old, involuntarily stepped in between her and the settee, as she bent forward to speak. Eleanor noticed the motion, and laughed bitterly.

"Your baby does not require your protection," she said. "He is too weak to do more than to talk, or I should be the one in danger. The tongue that insults a woman, has generally a hand to match it, in unmanly violence. Let me congratulate you, my dear brother, upon your improvement in the art of abuse. Your instructors deserve credit for their diligence, and their pupil for his. I am free to confess myself unequal to you, in this respect, not having been thrown in the way of hearing and acquiring this sort of practice. It will be advisable for the rest of the family to study with the shoemaker's wife for awhile, since this style of conversation is to be introduced into our household. Is it in this way, that I would reap benefit from association with them?"

And they 'would be the sufferers' by unconscious imitation of my manners?"

"This is extremely unbecoming conduct and language," Mr. Argyle found breath to say.

Malcolm raised himself to his feet, and strove to speak; but the crimson that had rushed to his brow with the effort, faded as suddenly, and he fell back upon his pillows. Miss Barbara caught Eleanor's arm, whirled her to the door, and slammed it after her, then darted back to the fainting lad.

Mr. Argyle, confounded and paralyzed, did not stir—hardly breathed till the swoon was averted; the deathly hue of the face, and the hysterical gasping of the exhausted lungs passed away. He had an indefinite consciousness that both of his unruly children were in fault, and that his duty was to censure them. Eleanor, he was literally afraid to seek, in her present state; but he took courage from Malcolm's prostration. Another consideration propelled him to the prompt chastisement of his son. He had espoused the wrong side of the question. His laudations of, and professions of attachment for the Hales, were as unpalatable to father as to daughter. He had, hitherto, tried to check the unsuitable intimacy by innuendoes and disapproving looks, which, he had the satisfaction of seeing, were not thrown away upon Malcolm's recent hosts, however he might choose to slight them. The time for decisive action had arrived; the issue was raised, and he must assert his authority as chieftain of the clan, and set the matter at rest. These bickerings and vulgar outbreaks could not be tolerated where he was master. Seeing Malcolm again silent, and outwardly calm, he opened his argument.

"I had hoped, Malcolm, that you and your sister had outgrown these childish and irrational exhibitions of temper. I am particularly grieved at your intemperate expressions and the singular views you have adopted of late. Eleanor is to be blamed for her attack; but you must admit that her charges are

not groundless. Your—ahem! alienation from your kindred and intercourse with those occupying a lower grade of society, have occasioned me more solicitude than I can express. Ahem!”

He paused to note the effect of his preamble, for under his doughty mien and big words, he was an arrant coward at heart, and a flash of the fire Malcolm had just displayed, would have put him to flight. The boy lay motionless; his deep eyes fixed, mournfully, in a sort of sad reverie, upon his father.

Emboldened by this submission, Mr. Argyle resumed: “I have hesitated about broaching this subject; but my conscience will not justify me in omitting to speak, now that the question is—ahem!—up for discussion. Yours is no ordinary position in the world, my son. In this community, you will have no superior, if you remain just to your ancestors and to yourself. I look forward to your career with exalted hopes; with fervent wishes that the family name and—ahem!—the family fortune will sustain no detriment, when yours shall be the lot to maintain both. Do I render my meaning intelligible?”

“Yes, sir,” answered the son.

“It would be a work of—ahem!—supererogation to remind you that you are the last male scion of a line of distinguished men; that your forefathers were”——

“Mercy on us!” said Miss Barbara, stumbling over Malcolm’s pointer and accidentally(!) treading on his foot.

The animal set up a deafening howl, and ran under his master’s lounge.

“There, Ponto, poor fellow! Never mind, Aunt Bab,” said Malcolm, appreciating the intention of this diversion. “I wish to hear all that my father has to say.”

“It’s no use!” groaned Miss Barbara, inwardly. “He is set in his own way. Can’t the old man see that? Because iron is at a white heat, is that any reason it shouldn’t burn his finger?”

The thread of Mr. Argyle’s discourse was not easily joined.

He resorted to his snuff-box, his most valuable prompter; but it could suggest nothing better than a dive into the midst of the subject he was trying to bring around gradually.

“Your unfortunate accident is rendered doubly painful to us by the development in you of traits and tendencies—ahem! which are without a parallel in our history. I dread nothing for you more than debasing associations—intimacies which may depreciate you in the estimation of your equals in fortune and blood.”

“And such, you intimate, that I have formed?” inquired Malcolm, without any token of emotion.

“I fear it—very much I fear it, my son.”

“I am very tired, sir, and too feeble to converse much longer. Will you oblige me by stating your commands briefly?”

“I do not command positively. You are not far from man’s estate, and I would rather counsel—ahem—direct.”

“Your directions then, sir,” said the lad, patiently.

“My recommendation, then, is, that you discontinue your visits at the house of a man, whose social standing is second to that of your father’s overseer, and that you repel with dignity whatever advances he or his wife may feel encouraged, by your past condescensions, to make. I offered—ahem—a liberal pecuniary recompense to him when you were brought home, and I must say, that his manner of declinature was extremely offensive to me. It savored too much of pride—an unpardonable failing in an underling.”

“Underling!” A sneer rushed over Malcolm’s face, and he repeated the term through his shut teeth. He was patiently listening again, before his father could determine whether or not he had seen his expression vary.

“Thus, our consciences are clear of obligation to him,” the old gentleman prosed on.

“Give him his house rent-free for life, if he wants it so long,

and fit it up comfortably for him," suggested Malcolm, as shortly as Miss Barbara could have done; "I will engage that he does not reject the proposal. If you deny me in this, I shall, from my allowance, remit to him, yearly and anonymously, a sum equal to the exorbitant rent, which, I learn from Sancroft, you charge him for the miserable shanty it was when he hired it, and which it would have remained until now, but for his ingenuity and industry. You can disinherit me, if you like. What I have said, is said."

"And a sight too much of it for your good," interposed Miss Barbara.

"If there's any more quarrelling with him and by him, to-day, he will not worry you and Miss Eleanor a week from this time. He is not fit for such work, sir. You might knock him down with a straw, and yet he is so fierce in spirit, that he will fight while there's breath in his body. If you'll let him alone for four or five days, I'll get him ready for a pitched battle."

Mr. Argyle and his cane retreated alike stiffly at the hint of future contest. The laird was inconveniently ruffled in mind. Malcolm's unforeseen change of tactics had upset him more effectually than anything less serious than a bad bargain, or actual loss of money, had done in many a year. The boy's degrading tastes were incorrigible, he feared. This bugbear had gained reality rapidly since Eleanor first pointed it out. He felt, now, that the mischief was done, how artfully and easily the estrangement might have been effected. But Malcolm's blood and obstinacy were up, and in his quivering soul the father knew how much braver than himself was the stripling son, whom he had never succeeded in controlling. A troubled hour of cogitation resulted in a summons to Mr. Sancroft, and a lengthened confabulation between the employer and his agent.

The next news that stirred the still plantation-life, was that "Master Malcolm was going abroad—across the big water," the servants said; "to the auld country," said the overseer, wist-

fully; and Eleanor comforted Marcia for the separation, by expatiating upon "the superior advantages he would have at a foreign university, in Edinburgh especially." Malcolm experienced a thrill of intense delight, succeeded by pain almost as lively, when the plan was unfolded to him. The physician prescribed sea-air for his health, and a visit to Europe—a Scottish university—were the bright realizations of many a boyish dream and student-longing. His preparations were hurried, the propitious season for making the voyage being already far advanced.

He looked still unfit for travel, when he dismounted at the Hale's door, the evening before he was to set off. His calls to them had been regular, but short, since he quitted their hospitable abode; his conduct was unaltered from the frank friendliness of yore. This afternoon, he was pale and depressed. Mark and Bessy did not remark audibly upon this, for they had seen him pass, at mid-day, on his way to Mr. Selden's, and respected, while they pitied the sorrow that bore, with cruel weight, upon his young, loving heart. They understood, better than he, the impulse that caused him to hold Kitty so closely to him, as she sat on his knee, to press his lips repeatedly to her soft curls—so like those that clustered upon another head! Their sympathies wanted no educational polish to teach them the mysteries of affection, the voiceless yearning of the lonely spirit, which clasped its tendrils around whatever was near and invited it to cling.

The setting sun poured a golden stream over the figures of the youth and the child, her eyes brimming with wonder and sorrow, because in his she read a melancholy meaning that passed her comprehension.

"And Kitty will forget me," he said, by and by, ceasing the conversation relative to his journey and designs, for the ensuing year, which he was forcing himself to carry on with her parents.

"No, no!" she said, earnestly, throwing an arm about his neck. "I can remember ever so long—forever and a day!"

"You caught that saying from Aunt Bab," he answered, smiling. "I shall be gone a whole year and a half, Kitty—maybe more. A great many things may happen in that time. I shall find you here, when I return?" he subjoined to Mark, more in assertion, than inquiry.

"Perhaps so," was the grave reply. "We have feared, sometimes, that we have not judged for the best, in choosing this home, but it is the only one we have, at present, or can have, for a twelvemonth, at least. You know the old proverb—'A rolling stone gathers no moss.' I would not desert a location that promised anything like a support, under a two years' trial."

"Your prospects are fair, are they not?" asked Malcolm, quickly.

"They are not dark," answered Mark, evasively.

Malcolm looked uneasy, "I wish I could do away with any unpleasant feeling that the conduct of others may have engendered in your mind, could persuade you how idle are any forebodings, on that account; yet, perhaps, these are best dismissed by a prudent silence. Believe me in one thing, however. My father is your friend, and you will shortly have a token of his good-will, which I beg you to accept, if you desire to make me happy. Recollect, that were all that I ever expect to own, yours, and myself your bondsman, I would still be your debtor. And, promise me faithfully and solemnly, that should anything occur in my absence, that would, if I were here, afford me a chance that I dearly covet—that of serving you—you will apply to me by letter. Here is my address."

They promised. His earnestness left no room for denial.

Hands were pressed; kind wishes said for his prosperous journeyings and safe return, he tried to articulate again his gratitude for their many benefits—and little Kitty, standing on the doorstep, watched him, through her tears, ride slowly away in the yellow sunset.

CHAPTER IX.

As his son had promised, Mr. Argyle soon dispatched a special communication to his tenant. Mr. Sancroft was its bearer.

"Don't let me disturb you, Mrs. Hale!" he said to Bessy, who would have left the room to him and Mark. "What I have to say concerns you, madam. The luck of one's husband must interest the wife. It is queer, how in this world of ours, one man's bane is another man's meat—to quote a venerable saw, Mr. Hale. Who could have guessed that what everybody else reckoned a calamity—namely—Mr. Malcolm Argyle's fall from his horse, close to your door, injuring him for life, it maybe, would yet be a stroke of good fortune to you, my dear sir? I dare say, now, that the idea of such an event never entered your mind, Mr. Hale—hey?"

"It certainly never did," said Mark, with dignified composure. "Mr. Argyle's misfortune distressed none of his friends more than it did us."

The eyebrows were incredulous; then, mockingly respectful.

The feeling does you honor, Mr. Hale. I shall report it, truthfully, at head-quarters, sir."

Mark bit his lip in vexation at the construction put upon his reply; but to resent it would be a recognition of the agent's meaning he was not disposed to give.

"A creditable sentiment, sir, and nothing more than I should have expected of you. I am pressed for time, to-day, Mr. Hale, so, if you please, we will now proceed directly to business."

"You could not please me better," Mark was so incautious as to say.

The eyebrows caught at the unfortunate phrase.

"You may well say that, Mr. Hale, and I honor your frankness in not feigning unconsciousness that there is agreeable intelligence in store for you. I perceive that your acuteness has anticipated the nature of my errand. Indeed, for obvious reasons, I supposed that you would think me a tardy messenger. You must have endured an uncomfortable degree of suspense, since receiving the hint which escaped Mr. Malcolm Argyle, when he was last here. It was indiscreet in him to refer, in explicit terms, to a matter that was then so uncertain; but he is hasty, sometimes, both in forming attachments and engagements, as you may have observed, Mr. Hale. I see that you are all impatience to learn the whole of your glad tidings. Mr. Argyle, Senior, has understood from his son that you think the rent of your place extortionate"——

"Sir!" ejaculated Mark, astounded.

"Have patience, *my* dear sir! I am coming to the point"——

"Before you proceed one word further," said Mark, collecting his senses, "I desire to state distinctly, that I never expressed or implied any discontent with this house or the rent, in Mr. Malcolm Argyle's hearing."

"Is it possible? Here is an important misunderstanding, Mr. Hale."

The eyebrows weighed the testimony on both sides, and found Mark's wanting. The mouth said the same, but more guardedly.

"Is not your memory treacherous in this respect, sir? Else, how should Mr. Malcolm Argyle have ascertained the amount of your house-hire, and the sum you have expended in improvements?"

"I do not know, indeed, Mr. Sancroft, unless from yourself," returned Mark..

"Or from Mrs. Hale"—wheeling suddenly toward her. "So great a favorite as was your handsome guest may, naturally and properly, have talked over family affairs with you, my dear madam—hey?"

"If you call my husband's word in question, you will hardly believe me when I say that Mr. Argyle never did any such thing," Bessy said, spiritedly.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Hale! Do not, my good lady, be offended with one who wishes you well, and who is the bearer of pleasant news. To skip this point, or to take for granted that the young gentleman was mistaken in giving you as his authority in his altercation—I should have said, discussion—with his father; Mr. Argyle, Senior, having learned of your impression that he was dealing hardly by you, in this compact, although he could wish that the complaint had been made more directly to himself, is willing to overlook this, in remembrance of your gratuitous attentions to his sick son, and commissions me to inform you of his generous intentions in your behalf. He cannot conscientiously charge a lower rent for your commodious residence. It would create dissatisfaction among his other tenants. He has the right, however, to confer whatever benefaction he wishes. *Therefore*, without tedious formalities, Mr. Hale, he requests me to apprise you that this house is at your service—rent-free—for so long a time as you may choose to occupy it. And he trusts that the debt of obligation, which you may justly have considered as binding upon him, through the accidental circumstance of his son's having been brought in here, after his fall, and been unable to leave for several weeks—he hopes, I say, that this, with him, involuntary indebtedness, may be cancelled by his gift. A noble offer—isn't it, Mr. Hale? It is entirely in consonance with the character of your patron. Exact to the splitting of a hair in monetary affairs—hard, as some call his prompt procedures—he is yet princely in his liberality, when he chooses to exercise it.

This latest instance will make a fine noise in the neighborhood, I'll be bound, and cannot but serve as an advertisement for yourself, Mr. Hale. Would it not be well for you to mention it, and add your thanks, in your next letter to Scotland? It will please Mr. Malcolm Argyle to learn that you are aware of his instrumentality in procuring your excellent fortune. I take it for granted that you correspond with the affectionate young gentleman—hey?"

"You take altogether too much for granted to-day, sir—are going ahead entirely too fast," said Mark's firm, decided tones. "If Mr. Malcolm Argyle made the representations to his father which you have repeated, I do not care to thank him for a favor obtained by such means. If he did not—and allow me to say, that this is the most reasonable supposition, in my opinion—the less said the better. To *your* 'patron,' you may reply that I regret extremely the sense of obligation under which he lies. As I told him myself, when his son was carried home, we did all that lay in our power for the poor young gentleman, and did it cheerfully, without ever one thought of any compensation, except the pleasure of seeing him well again. Thus, he will see, that it would be downright dishonesty in me to receive the 'gift' he offers, as payment for our services. He is not in debt to us, and please Heaven."—Mark drew up his stalwart figure and looked the independent man he was—"please Heaven, we will never be in his!"

"This is an extraordinary message, Mr. Hale. Had you not better take time and reconsider this decision? Favors like these are not as plenty as blackberries. Do not throw away a golden chance of bettering your fortune. Mrs. Hale, will you not use your influence with him?"

"If he will not repeat the answer you have just had without it," said Bessy, scornfully.

"My dear friends!" reasoned eyebrows and lips, in measured time and perfect unison, "you are young and inconsiderate;

unsophisticated, Mr. Hale—a trifle too precipitate, Mrs. Hale. You have played your cards admirably, thus far—if you will not take umbrage at the expression. Now, that you are on the point of winning, do not lose all by a single wrong move. Great friends are an invaluable auxiliary to those who have to make their way in the world. Such a help you have contrived to secure in the younger Argyle. His father is an older hand in the world's ways; therefore, a less easy conquest. Still, you have a hold on him in his love for his only boy. My disinterested counsel to you is not to let him slip through your fingers, and to pump him whenever you can. This sounds coarse, but it is the way other people climb to the top of the hill. We understand one another. Why attempt deception by using fine words, and making a flourish of moral scruples?"

Mark did not try to conceal his disgust.

"If your sense of duty to your employer does not withhold you from giving this advice, Mr. Sancroft, my consciousness of what is right toward my fellow-man forbids me to follow it. I am neither simpleton nor knave. I am at a loss to determine which you mistake me for, judging from the language you hold. You know, in your secret soul, that you never intended me to accept Mr. Argyle's offer. Whether he made it in good faith or not, I do not undertake to say. I could have closed with it only at the sacrifice of independence and honor. You have tried your best to convict me of double-dealing, of selfish motives and feigned kindness; of truckling to the wealthy to advance my interests. I have never borne such insinuations from mortal man, nor do I intend to submit to them now. You call yourself a gentleman, and stoop to notice me—a poor mechanic. I forbid you, now, ever to hold further communication with me, except upon strictly business matters. These are hard things to say to a man in my own house. Your conscience is my witness whether you have not deserved them all—and more!"

"Good day, Mrs. Hale!" said the agent, bowing himself out, with a serenity truly edifying to behold.

"Oh, Mark! what have you done?" cried Bessy, clasping her hands in fright—more at the unwonted excitement of her husband, than any definite fear of consequences from his high-handed measure.

"Ordered off a villain who insulted me by questioning my word and imputing despicable motives to me," replied he, gloomily. "There is something at the bottom of all this, which we do not see. That hound never yelped in that style, without being set on by his master. Yet why should he persecute me?"

"It sounds very foolish—the idea that Mr. Argyle should go out of his way to annoy you, without any cause for hating you," said Bessy, trying to reason away his fancies and quiet her own misgivings. "As to Mr. Sancroft, he has never liked us, since last Christmas, when Mr. Malcolm made game of him before us. Somehow, people never can forgive those who have seen them appear ridiculous. Then he and Miss Barbara are always at swords' points, and her liking for us would cause him to slight us. He is just the man to treasure up a small, mean spite, and get his revenge in whatever manner he can. You have not courted him either, and never submitted to his patronizing ways, as he expected you would. Don't mind him! that is, unless you find that he has set Mr. Argyle against you, and I cannot see, even then, how they can hurt you."

"But after what has passed, can I, ought I to stay here? Bessy! will you break up again and go with me, to seek for a home?"

"To-morrow, if you wish it, dear Mark!"

He paused in his walk up and down the floor, and gazed at her with a saddened tenderness.

"I believe you, darling! You are the truest wife man ever had. We have been here, now, a year next month. It is

hard to tear up the roots, just as they are getting hold in the earth!"

"You told young Mr. Argyle that you would give the place a two years' trial," ventured Bessy, whose woman's heart had learned to love this home, if only for the pains it had cost her to make it comfortable.

"I did, and I will! I will stay here until I am driven away. And after all, what a fuss we are making over what may be a trifle! I lost my temper, and Sancroft kept his. Mr. Argyle has saved his credit for generosity, and his rent besides, and Mr. Malcolm will think me perversely proud and ungrateful for his kind intentions. There is the extent of the mischief done! I am, too insignificant a mote to offend the laird's eye, now that his son is out of the reach of my influence; that there is no risk of his going into the shoe business, or eloping with you, or marrying Kitty. And the young ladies' minds are similarly relieved. Mr. Argyle's pleasure at my refusal to lessen his income by the amount of my rent, will prevent his kicking me out of the house, because I invited his agent to leave. Hurrah, Bessy! while I can work, and custom lasts, we will stand fast, and live down pride and hatred. The winter's trade will be coming in, soon. It ought to be double what the summer brought, and if it is no more, we can live, and more than live."

Confidential as were Mr. Argyle's conferences with his able tool, they were suspected and watched by one of the enemy's allies. Miss Barbara, by virtue of a secret warrant from Malcolm, took the liberty of interrogating the Hales concerning the proposal lately submitted to them. They were proof against her curiosity at first; but finally surrendered to the extent of acquainting her with Mr. Sancroft's behavior and Mark's resentment. She said little; but that little was strong, even for her, and she thought a deal more. That very night she addressed herself to the arduous composition of a letter to her

"boy." By dint of scrupulously devoting every spare minute she had in a whole week to the undertaking, she accomplished a minute and energetic history of the mysterious occurrence. This was directed to Malcolm, and committed to the post and to Providence.

"He will scorch 'em!" was the lullaby with which her imagination rocked her to sleep, for several nights after the important transaction.

Many weeks must roll by, ere the fiery castigation, so confidently expected, could reach the offenders, and busied with preparations for the fall and winter, Miss Barbara had scanty seasons of leisure to bestow upon her young friends, "down the road." She was glad that Bessy did not apply to her for sewing, this fall, there being now no reason why the seamstresses at home should not perform their lawful share of work. The household expenditures underwent inspection weekly from the master. The account-books of housekeeper and overseer, were carried on Monday morning to his room and scanned as closely as if millions of pounds, and not dozens of pence were at stake.

Mr. Argyle had a genius for petty accumulation. He knew, to an ounce, how much butter should be made from a certain number of gallons of milk; to a day, how long a barrel of flour and a hundred weight of bacon ought to last. This foible, as is always the case, increased with age, and this winter it had sundry aggravations, that rendered him absolutely miserly. What with the necessity of dressing his daughters, as other ladies of corresponding rank were bedecked, and maintaining abroad a son, who would not live as his father had done, among strangers, there was not a man in three counties who felt poorer, or more miserable in his poverty, than did the proprietor of the splendid estate of Ben Lomond. Hitherto, he had seldom interfered openly in Miss Barbara's province. Distrustful he was, as avarice alone can make one; but he found it hard to doubt her economy and thrift, her fidelity to him and to his.

Latterly, he prowled about her premises, peeped surreptitiously into her barrels and jars, overlooked wool-bags and cotton-baskets, stole like a thief to her bins of choice vegetables—in short, as she said, "carried on in such a despiseable, low-lived way, that she was ashamed to look him in the face—she felt so mean for him!" From time immemorial, she had had her perquisites: eggs, and fowls of her own raising; pet pigs, and the proceeds from the sale of their bacon; fruits and vegetables, she had planted and tended herself, and a variety of other things, that eked out a salary merely nominal in value. She took no thought for the morrow. While "the children" lived, she would have a home and a support. Upon her hoard of odds and ends, Mr. Argyle now began to cast, what she felt, with astonishment, was a jealous eye, and her ire exceeded all former bounds. Too blind to see that he was detected in the meanness, he approached the topic, as he flattered himself, very cunningly.

"Why, Barbara," he said, jocosely, "you will be a fortune, before you die. Are you saving for Slocum, after all? I hear that he is courting you yet."

"I aint a fool, and Slocum is! That's all of that!" snapped Miss Barbara, in her most brittle pie-crust mood.

"But so large a property ought not to be without an heir," Mr. Argyle persisted. "Who are to be the fortunate legatees?"

"My grandchildren!" she retorted, and left him to meditate upon his unsuccessful ruse.

Alone in her chamber, the little woman indulged herself in a hearty cry.

"To come, spying and sneaking about me, as if I had not served him faithfully for twenty years! I've a good mind to give him warning on the spot. If it wasn't for her that's gone, and them that's left, I would do it, as sure as you are born!" shaking her fist in the air. "Jest as if I didn't know what he's up to! He's afraid of his life, lest I should spend his riches upon

them poor, dear Hales, that Eleanor and Sancroft has taught him to hate so! The harmless creatures! what they've ever done to make enemies of any of our folks, it beats me to find out! 'Pears like people never can abide them they've tried to injure. But if you think I'm going to fall in with such ungrateful devices and stinginess, you are vastly mistaken!" She shook her fist again. "I'm obliged to you, but my heart ain't quite as hard as the nether millstone, and won't be before next week."

The sequence of this soliloquy was a visit to Mark's cottage, after supper, that evening. As she walked down the lane in the moonlight, she reproached herself for having seen so little of these friends, since the cold weather had set in.

"But I've been so busy, and the rheumatism begins to plague me so, that I couldn't come oftener," she concluded, truthfully; "and they don't need me so much as they did last winter, when they knew nobody and had no work."

The kitchen was bright with the flame of a lightwood torch, fixed on the inside of the fireplace, and Bessy sat beneath it with her needlework. Kitty had gone to bed, and Mark was in the great chair, directly opposite the fire. His attitude and countenance struck Miss Barbara instantly, and her solicitude prevented her from observing that Bessy gathered up her sewing and threw it behind the dresser.

"What ails you?" asked the visitor, of Mark, disdaining irrelevant preliminaries. "Sit still," for his effort to rise was evidently painful.

"A touch of my old enemy—the rheumatism," he said, trying to smile.

"A touch! I should say it was a smart crack! When was you taken?"

"A fortnight ago; but I am worse within the last week."

"Why didn't you send for me?"

"It seemed too bad to trouble you in the hurry of your

winter's work," said Bessie. "We have hoped every day that he would get better. He had one long spell of rheumatic fever the year before we left home;" poor child! the word slipped naturally from her tongue, now that she was in sorrow—"so I knew pretty well what to do for him. I suppose that in a warmer climate there is less fear of a tedious sickness. He will soon be about again."

Miss Barbara was wisely and kindly dumb with regard to a four "months' bout" of hers, to which she was fond of referring when cases of protracted sickness were upon the carpet.

"How did you get it?" she inquired.

"I was caught in the rain on my way home from Mr. Armistead's, where I had been to carry some work."

"Haven't been able to do a stroke since, I reckon?"

"Not a stitch."

Mark colored in pronouncing the last word, and glanced from his crippled hands to his wife's. There was melancholy, though unconscious significance in the look, and Miss Barbara would have interpreted it rightly had she noticed Bessy's occupation at her entrance. To end the awkward pause, she opened the basket she had brought.

"You are an angel, Miss Barbara!" exclaimed Bessy, with starting tears. Elijah never greeted the ravens with a more grateful heart.

Miss Barbara laughed—a dry, hoarse chuckle, that seemed to rattle her bones.

"An odd-looking angel, dear! Pair of chickens—sausage—eggs"—setting them upon the table. "Honey for the baby—bless her heart! I'm sorry she's asleep. Sugar—tea—I sent to Minor's store for that to-day, so I know it's fresh. Pot of jam—blackberry, and mighty wholesome for Mousey. Pot of currant jelly; stir a spoonful in a glass of water and there's nothing tastes nicer, if you are feverish, Mr. Hale. A dozen apples—and

them you can roast if you like, sir ; they're downright nourishing eaten that way—and that's all. Wish it was twice as much."

"How could you bring that load all the way from Ben Lomond?" asked Bessy.

"Pooh, child ! I am as strong as an elephant. When one arm got tired, I took the basket on the other. There's a lesson for you to remember, while your husband is complaining. You must pick up spirit, and take all the weight you can off of him."

She sat down with her knitting, and Bessy reluctantly resumed her needle. She selected the least remarkable portion of the garment she was putting together ; but Miss Barbara was quick to note that it could belong to none of the household.

"Taking in sewing again, I see."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Where from?"

"It is for one of Mr. Slocum's men."

"Wish he had fifty, instead of two !

"That sounds mercenary from you," said Mark, rallying his spirits. "I never suspected you of fortune-hunting before."

"Nonsense !"

But the faded lips achieved something like a pout, and she tossed her head as coquettishly as Jessie would have done in her place. No woman likes to be set outside of Love's lists, unless by her own choice, and then, the practicability of her reëntrance, at will, is ever a pleasing theme.

"It's a mighty slim market a fortin-hunter would find in him and his farm, with his five no-account negroes ! But the fellow's heart is nigher the right place than that of many a man who thinks himself his better. I'll say that for him !"

She stayed with them until her early bed-time, and took her leave with many an injunction of cheer and caution ; promising to happen in, every chance she could get, and see how they were getting on.

And, as she trudged the half mile that lay between them and Ben Lomond, haunted by the memory of the anxious eyes and toiling fingers of the young wife, she wondered if she were not more happy, in her singlehood and isolation, than were they, each bearing the burden of the other's care.

"Our Heavenly Father sent her, darling !" said Mark, thankfully, drawing his wife's weary head to his bosom. "It may be the forerunner of other and greater blessings. It certainly reminds us that those who trust in Him shall never be utterly cast down."

CHAPTER X.

THE New Year found Mark confined to his bed, and in charge of the doctor. He was loath to call him in; but Miss Barbara and Bessy insisted that it would be the wisest economy to use every means of recovery that he could employ. Dr. Chase grumbled that the delay in summoning him might prove a formidable obstacle in the way of his success, and then, after a private hint from Miss Barbara, to the effect, that he "needn't stint in medicine and visits, for fear that he wouldn't be paid," he went to work almost as earnestly as if his case had been a gentleman and not a common "person."

The Hales had expended their summer's savings in the payment of the last quarter's rent, ending in November, and in procuring the actual necessities of life, during the earlier stages of Mark's sickness. For bread for herself and child, and the modicum of more delicate food, demanded by her husband's situation, Bessy now toiled assiduously. Their honest pride would not permit them to divulge the extremity of their need, even to the staunch friend Miss Barbara was constantly showing herself to be. They had never begged directly or by implication, and they agreed, in this disastrous day, that they would undergo starvation rather than subsist upon charity thus obtained. Miss Barbara took care that they should never be without something to eat in the house; but her resources were far from being abundant, and, with increasing uneasiness, she began to foresee the time when she should have done her all for them. She might, indeed, have eluded Mr.

Argyle's lynx eyes, by false entries, and secret appropriations, had her integrity been less rigid; but this was never thought of—no! not as a last resource. Once in a while, she succeeded in procuring more work for Bessy, from quarters inaccessible to the seamstress, although as she herself seldom went from home, her sphere of this kind of action was circumscribed. She imagined, besides, that the ladies to whom she applied were careless or unwilling to grant her request, and it was too palpable that what she got was given to her as a personal favor, and not to the needy woman.

This was not an idle fancy. The Hales *were* unpopular in their neighborhood, and, singular enough, rich and poor avoided them for the same reason. "They were above their station; vulgar, pushing people, who ought to be taught where their level was." Scarcely one of those who held and promulgated this theory, could have stated his or her authority for its belief; only that "everybody said so," and "it was reported that they had behaved with shameful impertinence and ingratitude toward Mr. Argyle's family and Mr. Saneroft." And forthwith the strangers, orderly and industrious as they had appeared in times past, to unprejudiced sight, became smoke in plebeian eyes, an offence to patrician nostrils. In palliation of the prevailing neglect of a suffering neighbor—disliked though he might be—we must remark that destitution was then, as it is now, so unusual in southern rural districts, that its existence was never supposed, until thrust upon the attention of the wondering inhabitants by glaring facts. Then, too, the country was sparsely settled, and the secluded habits of the northern family, joined to their want of any means of conveyance from place to place, had prevented their peculiar circumstances from being generally understood. If the small farmer, near by, heard that the shoemaker at "Argyle's cross roads" was sick, he gave his custom to the nearest colored man who plied the trade, and took no further thought about the

matter. When *he* had the rheumatism, he lay around the house, and enjoyed what ease the disease left him at liberty to take. The cattle were cared for; ditto the negroes; ditto the winter's supply of wood, corn, and bacon. That any man in a Christian land should want any, much less all of these, was a problem as unknown, not to say unsolved by him, as was the famine amongst the canaille, to the French princess, who "would be willing to eat bread instead of cake, sooner than starve."

There was one partial exception to this rule in Mr. Slocum. But for his thoughtful kindness, our emigrants must have frozen, if not starved, in that hard winter. He knew less of their condition than did Miss Barbara; yet, having an indistinct idea that sick men could not work, and that women were weaker than well men, he sent weekly a load of wood, which his man had orders to cut, split, and pile, wherever it would be most convenient for Mrs. Hale to have it. So far from cherishing any grudge against them for their former preference for the Ben Lomond dairy above his, he put 'Pollo again upon his old beat, and, in all weathers, the boy trotted every day, over the mile of muddy or frozen ground, with a pail of milk for Kitty. Whether or not, these acts of unostentatious beneficence induced Miss Barbara to look more benignantly upon her suitor, surely, One who could read the heart incased in that ungainly shell, saw the merciful deed, and remembered him for good. These were the only gleams of light from without. Love divine, and the human affection of the parents and child, supplied whatever else of brightness there was in the shadowed household. It is trying to the most resigned to lie useless and helpless upon his couch of languishing, set carefully without the thronged path of busy life; yet with its din penetrating his ears; its rush and whirl jarring his nerves; even if he can be spared from the battle-field. But to know that with every minute of inaction, are passing returnless opportunities of acquiring comfort and honor; to be tended through

sleepless vigils and days of pain, by Penury and Disgrace—gaunt, inexorable handmaids, ready to pounce upon all that he held precious—this was poor Hale's fate.

And so one sad day was added to another, and the toilsome weeks grew into the months that were bringing, all too fast, the dreaded pay-day, for which there was no provision made. It appears strange that this, the most threatening cloud that brooded upon the spirits of her friends, never once crossed Miss Barbara's mind. If she ever reflected upon the subject, it was in the supposition that Mark had, in conformity with the custom of that country, hired the cottage by the year. The bit of sharp practice on the part of Mr. Sancroft, which prevented unsafe arrears, by demanding quarterly instalments, was a novel arrangement in the vicinity, a fact, of which, as may be supposed, Mark was ignorant when the bargain was made. The benevolent spinster had her own distractions, too, just then. Her letter to Malcolm remained unanswered, and tired of inventing excuses to herself for this delay, she had determined to write again to jog his memory, when her thoughts were called off in another direction.

She had but one near relative in the world; an older sister, who had married thirty years before, and removed to the western part of the State, then a wilderness, filled with fabulous dangers to the imaginations of dwellers in the east. Ten years of silence between the sisters had begotten in Miss Barbara's mind a conviction of the other's death. It was like a voice from the spirit-land when she received a letter, penned in a trembling and unpractised hand, from the long-lost relation, representing herself as being in a hopeless decline, surrounded by few outward comforts and fewer friends, and pining to see and bless her sister once more, before closing her eyes upon earth.

Miss Barbara commenced packing, without stopping to refold the letter; crammed the small trunk she judged to be sufficiently commodious for her wants; snapped to the hasp and pocketed

the key; counted her not large hoard of money into a stout buckskin purse, and pocketed that, before she said a word to a living soul of her contemplated journey. Then she went in search of Mr. Argyle. He was at the sheep-pen with the overseer; and leaning on the top rail, his jaw hanging as usual, was Mr. Slocum, quite at his ease. True, Mr. Argyle regarded him less than he did the most indifferent woolly coat in the flock, and Frisbie, although kindly disposed toward his inoffensive associate, often barely concealed his impatience at having him "hanging around, when he'd better be at hamè, spiering after his ain gear." In her excitement, Miss Barbara did not observe him, or indeed anything else, beside the person whom she had come to seek. In her terse style, she communicated the news of the summons she had had, and her resolution with regard to it.

She was not disappointed, still less was she shaken by the laird's attempted dissuasion. The distance, the roads, the dearth of public conveyances, the weather, the fatigue, and risk to a person of her age and inexperience in travelling, the improbability that she would find her sister alive when she reached the place of her residence; these objections Miss Barbara spurned, like so many pebbles, from her path. He took a higher tone, and declaring flatly that she could not be spared from home, informed her that if she persevered in her crazy scheme, she must seek out the ways and means for its accomplishment herself. No horse or servant of his should render her any assistance.

"I'll go, for all that!" she said, stamping her foot, à la Galileo, and turning to leave him.

She had gone about twenty yards, when she heard a shuffling tread in pursuit; then, a husky cough, that solicited her notice. She faced right about, so squarely, that her admirer, puffing already with the swift gait at which he had been compelled to move to overtake her, could only stand and pant; his eyes rolling and his jaw swinging more loosely than ever.

"Well!" said Miss Barbara, bluntly, "speak out!"

"I've got a gig—and a horse—and—and—I was meaning fur to—I was intending all along—to go over the mountains, myself, about this week or next. It's cold travelling, I know, and the gig is open—but shawls and blankets and hot bricks"——

Here the engine gave out, and Miss Barbara stood and looked at him.

"Anything in the shape of a decent man, that can hold the reins and his own tongue!" Such were her deliberations. "I don't know but he will suit better for being such a ninny. I can manage *him*.—He's a good-hearted goose, anyway. I'll go!" she said aloud, "and much obliged to you, too!"

"When?"

"To-morrow morning—if you can be ready so soon."

"To be sure I can!" he said, with surprising alacrity, and they walked away in opposite directions, his heart so jubilant with the joy of anticipation, that it drowned the voice of conscience, accusing him of the only downright lie he had told, within his recollection, for as the intelligent reader has surmised, he had no more idea, an hour previous, of visiting the Blue Ridge, than of undertaking an expedition to the lunar mountains.

"Mr. Slocum!"

She was retracing her steps. Had she reconsidered the matter? A cold sweat broke out all over him, and his great feet overlapped each other, more awkwardly than was customary even with them, as he tried to meet her.

"I was thinking"——

"I was afraid so! It's always the way with me!" groaned poor Slocum, inwardly.

"I was thinking," said Miss Barbara, looking troubled, "that those good folks, the Hales, may not get on so well, for our being away. 'Spose we do what we can to make them comfortable, before we go. A couple of loads of wood, and leave orders

that the milk shall be sent regular. You understand? And I'll make up a basket of things for 'em to-day."

"Um, hum!" he nodded, too happy in this relief of his fears to speak plainly.

That night, Bessy wrote a letter at her husband's dictation, to Malcolm Argyle. He was the only plank between them and ruin. Pay-day would be upon them before he could possibly get, much less answer the call they had promised to make, in the event of any strait which he could enlarge. How little had they then anticipated an emergency like this! Their hope was that Mr. Sancroft would not esteem it worth while to eject them at the expiration of the term; that past punctuality would be some security for future payment. It showed their just appreciation of the man, that neither of them once suggested an appeal to his humanity. He had never been near them since Mark had declared non-intercourse. His November collection was made through his son, a lad of sixteen, already the confidential book-keeper in a neighboring store, and a promising follower in his father's footsteps, so far as unblushing assurance and devotion to gain went.

Bessy wrote silently all that Mark wished to say. It was a calm statement of their impoverished condition, ending with a reference to the pledge Malcolm had asked and received at parting, and an engagement that whatever aid he might extend to them, in their need, would be considered as a sacred loan, to be repaid with the return of health and custom. It was directed and sealed, and Bessy laid it aside, to take, on the morrow, to "the store," where the post-office was also kept. Mark's bed had been removed into the larger and warmer room, and he had not left it now for some weeks. The masses of his brown hair were very dark, by contrast with the face they shaded, and the eyes, once so full of hope and life, were sunken and dimmed. Instead of the frank, buoyant expression that used to impress the

beholder with an instinctive perception of the energy and sanguine temperament of the man, there was now a patient sweetness that told of resignation to trials, that were yet eating into his soul.

Bessy took up her needle again. It was their sole dependence, and in its slenderness and brittleness was a fit type of the precarious nature of that support. The drooping head must bend over it, for hours to come, ere its needed rest was sought. Mark's regards were fastened upon his wife, yearningly. The sharpest thorn in his pillow was the sight of her privations and drudgery, and the recollection that it was endured for him. She did not repine aloud. Her voice was gentle to Kitty; yet more tender to him. The playful humor that had made more merry their prosperous days, was not wanting now to beguile him from thoughts of pain and weariness, and as she went about the house, busied in domestic duties, she sang, as she had ever done—no one but himself could dream, with what an aching heart. He could not ask her to forbear this hardest effort of loving deceit; but, sometimes, he turned his face to the wall, and fairly wept, as the blithe carol was borne to his ears from the adjoining room. She believed that he had fallen asleep now, for his face was in shadow, and the gloom she fought with, when it would enfold him with her, under its wings, brooded over her features. There were lines in the brow, and a sullen malignity in the eye that made Mark shudder. The pressure that, in crushing his heart, filled the moral atmosphere with fragrance, was extracting poison from hers. If she would speak, and tell him the desperate thoughts that assailed her spirit—its temptations to hatred of man, and blasphemous murmurs against her God!

"Bessy," he said, softly, "what are you thinking of?"

The question took her by surprise.

"Of you, Mark."

"And what else?"

She dashed down her work, and, throwing herself upon his bed, broke into a flood of stormy sorrow, the current so long and painfully confined to her own breast.

"What have you done, my good, precious husband, to be despised and deserted in this way?—to be left without a single friend except your wife and child? You, who never did an unkind or a dishonest thing; who have always tried to make others happy! No man can point his finger to one sin you ever committed; yet if you were the worst criminal that ever lived, you could not be made to suffer more. Oh! is it strange that my heart breaks when I think of it?—that I am ready to curse the ungrateful, unfeeling wretches that are chasing you down, like a hunted wild beast? I hate them! Oh! *how* I hate them!"

"Dear, dear Bessy! poor little wife!" Mark passed his trembling hand over her head. "You do love me! I cannot be unhappy when I remember this, and it is never forgotten. My darling is worn out with working and nursing, and this makes her see things differently from what she will to-morrow morning. It is not man, but the Lord, who has laid me and kept me here, Bessy. Think of dear Miss Barbara, and of Mr. Slocum's goodness. No one else knows how badly off we are. And who can tell what may happen in our behalf in six days? We certainly shall not starve before that time, for the stock of provisions our friend left with us this afternoon will last so long—if we get no more. Then comes the crisis—pay-day. Don't tremble so, dear wife! It is better to look the monster in the eyes, and see if he is not less terrible than we have thought. If we have no money, we cannot pay the rent. There is no disputing that. Now, Mr. Sancroft knows that the law hands over my furniture to my landlord, in case I fail to satisfy him in any other way. The furniture is here, and there is no danger of my absconding with it at present"—smiling at the melancholy jest.

"What can he gain by pressing matters, except the reputation of having cruelly turned out a helpless, sick tenant, who never tried to shirk a just debt; but only asked, like the servant we read of in the Gospel—'Have patience with me, and I will pay thee-all?' He dislikes me, it is true; but he likes popularity, and so sure as he carries out the letter of the law against me, just so certainly will his reputation suffer. All men feel pity for the oppressed."

"And on the side of their oppressors, there was *power*!" said Bessy, impressively.

Mark started at the quotation, and his brow contracted; then, recovering himself, he proceeded as if she had not interrupted him:

"So you see, as he may lose something, and can make nothing by severity, he will, very likely, wait a month or more—perhaps another quarter, and by that time we will have heard from young Mr. Argyle. Should we not, and no other alternative should appear, I think Mr. Slocum will be my security, although I would not ask it of him. At any rate, he will offer bail to keep me out of prison."

"Prison!" almost screamed Bessy. "Mark, Mark! I will die before they shall take you there? Oh! is the law so cruel as that?"

"Be quiet, dearest. Better men than I have spent years in jail, and their children have gloried in it. But you will please understand, Mrs. Hale, that we are not going there at all—at least not for this offence. Have not I made out as plain a case as Mr. Sancroft's eyebrows could have done?"

"But, Mark, it is dreadful to think of your being at the mercy of that man!"

"I am not, Bessy; I, with my dear ones, am in the hands of the merciful Father." He looked reverently and peacefully upward.

Bessy's evil spirit goaded her on.

"Is it merciful in Him to rob you of one comfort after another; to leave you in the power of your enemies—the only enemies you have in the world—and call away the friends who might have helped you, at the very time when you most needed them? I feel as if our troubles were hedging us in on every side; as if we were forgotten by the God whom you have served so well. I deserve nothing better from Him, and if I might bear His judgments alone, I could see some justice in it all. But no; the heaviest burden rests upon you. I cannot endure it! It cannot be right; it is *not* merciful!"

"Have you forgotten so soon, Bessy? 'Wait on the Lord and be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.' If we could see the meaning of His dealings as he sends them, why should we be told to 'wait?'"

"Twixt hope and fear six days went by—seven—and the Hales were beginning to wonder if Mr. Sancroft's memory had not played him false for once, where lucre was involved, when the eighth brought his smart heir and factotum.

More laconically than his sire would have done, he presented his claim, and awaited its payment. Mark was prepared for him, and as concisely laid before him the existing state of his affairs and his proposed compromise.

"Couldn't think of it," replied the lad, briskly; "It's a ticklish business—this credit system. Don't believe in it myself; neither does pa; neither does Mr. Argyle. Pay, or be sold out and tramp. Them's my orders."

Mark's wan cheek burned at the impertinence; but he restrained himself and expostulated, pointing out the advantage that his landlord might find in waiting, and the impossibility that he could gain anything by immediate seizure of his effects and ejectment.

"There's where you're mistaken," returned the clerk, still more

rudely. "We are not scared about the quarter that's gone. Your 'duds' here will cover that." He walked to the middle door and glanced into the other room. "Not good for much; but we'll take them and say nothing about the deficiency. But you will please recollect, my fine fellow, that you are bound for the next three months, not having given notice that you intended to leave, and having already overrun your time by a couple of days. And that reminds me of another bit of a document I have for you. I'm collector-general for this region."

He tossed a folded slip of paper on the bed. Mark read it calmly. "Dr. Chase's bill," he said to his wife, who watched him in speechless terror. "I did not expect this until the close of my illness," continued he to young Sancroft. "I have no funds with which to meet it."

"So I told him," grinned the collector; "I reckon you would not have been blessed with a sight of it yet awhile, if it hadn't have been that he agreed with me. He cut his eye-teeth about the same time that pa did his; I was born with mine; I reckon, for I never saw the chap yet that could get the blind side of me in a bargain. Heard from Malcolm Argyle, lately? Maybe he would help you out of this scrape."

There was a sinister leer in his face that both husband and wife noted; but neither had the steadiness of brain to ascribe it to any other cause than the malicious triumph of a bad-hearted boy, to whose coarse handling their case had been committed, without reservation.

"The law must take its course," said Mark, his native dignity rising to sustain him, in the utterance of his sentence.

"D'ye know what that is?" queried the imp, facetiously.

"Imprisonment, I suppose."

"Pre-zactly! I say! you don't seem to mind it much. Been there before, maybe? When will you be ready to start?"

"Not before to-morrow noon. What is the distance to the jail?"

"Twelve miles—long measure—and the mud up to the hubs. But everything is very comfortable after you get there. Old Mammy Paxton keeps the tavern at the court-house, and the jail, of course. You'll get first-rate fodder and lodgings, at the expense of the county."

"My wife, and child can go with me—I suppose?"

"Why yes! I don't see why they shouldn't. You will have to pay "Mammy" for their feed, I reckon, but you've plenty of money, so you won't mind that. The cart will hold you all. The law leaves you your bed and your tools. You can put the bed in the bottom of the cart, and go quite stylish-like—you understand. Your tools will help to amuse you, until you can hear from your *brother* Malcolm. Won't he cuss, until all's blue, when he knows what a turn I'm serving him, in locking you up—his bosom friend? I am in his debt, to the tune of a licking, he gave me, at school, three years ago. I reckon this will pay him off, tolerable handsome."

"If you have finished your business with me, you can go!" said Mark, pointing to the door.

The lad roared with wicked merriment.

"Like father—like son!" you think, hey? You ordered him out, and don't want to be backward in the politeness to me? And our turn will come, to-morrow. At 'noon' you said, that's Massachusetts Yankee for twelve o'clock, I believe. The carriage will be at your door, punctual!"

CHAPTER XI.

BESSY's latest supply of needlework was from Mrs. Blankenship, a widow, whose farm, of some fifty acres, adjoined that of Mr. Slocum. There was no one by whom the bundle could be sent that day, and in view of the morrow's changes, it was necessary that the finished garment should be returned without delay.

Leaving Mark in charge of the obedient and devoted Kitty, the wife set out, that afternoon, for the walk.

The widow examined the sewing, critically, found fault with a button-hole, and reckoned that she had so much work, she thought she could afford to slight all, except what the 'quality' gave her.

Bessy made no reply.

"That ain't my way!" continued Mrs. Blankenship, fumbling in her bosom for her purse. "I heerd that you got your livin' by sewin', and 'sposed you'd like to keep a customer, so long as she was willin' and able fur to pay you. 'Twont do for poor folks to take on airs, as I told Miss Barbary, when I promised, to please her, that you should have that 'ere pair of breeches to make. You'll find it up-hill work, settin' up for a grandee. And another piece of advice, I've got for you, is this. B'ar in mind, that a man's book-larnin' and his wife's face and ladyfied ways, won't put bread in their young one's mouth. Thar's your pay! Goodness me! You needn't snatch my hand off to git it, woman! And, look here, I don't think I'll ever have no more work for you!"

The latter sentence was spoken in a raised voice, to reach the

ears of the retreating Bessy. Mrs. Blankenship went to the window to watch her, as she walked down the lane.

"A forward, flighty hussey!" she said to her daughter, who had sat by during the interview. "It did me good to take her down a peg. Did you see how fierce she stared at me, while I was talkin'? Deliver me from poor white folks! Niggers is twice as respectable."

Bessy's wrath at the unprovoked insult offered her, carried her on very rapidly until she lost sight of the house by entering the woods. There was no beaten path, and every footstep disturbed the rotting masses of dead leaves, several inches deep. There were still heaps of dry ones in hollows, and entangled in the bushes, and their rustling brought the recollection of the gloomy November afternoon, when the strong man, so feeble now, had set her down amongst them and welcomed her to the home from which they were to be ignominiously driven. All day, she had imprisoned her lamentations in her heart; and in Mark's presence she must continue to perform the difficult task. She had no tears; but she sobbed until she was exhausted, instead of relieved, as she sat upon the mossy roots of a tree, and held her aching temples tightly between her palms. The wind sighed past her, and the branches rocked and groaned above her head. She recognized no sympathetic chord in the mourning of Nature over its dead Summer. It was all too gay and joyous for her; for breeze, and the pale winter sunlight, and leafless boughs were *free*, and he—their Maker's noblest work—was not—perhaps might never be again!

"A pleasant day for the season, Mrs. Hale!"

She knew the intruder, after a second of alarm at his proximity and address. She had seen him repeatedly in close attendance upon Miss Argyle, walking and riding by the cottage, and learned, from Miss Barbara, that he was a Mr. Moreau, and supposed to be Eleanor's most favored admirer. He was equipped

for hunting, and perhaps thought it incumbent upon him to pass the compliments of the day with a tenant of his host when he happened to meet her. The disproportionate rank of the two excused his not waiting for other introduction. Her angry impulse to resent the freedom checked by these reflections, she courted silently, in reply to his civility, and walked on.

"How is your husband to-day?" he said, joining her.

"About the same, sir," she replied, with extreme coldness.

"He is a great sufferer, is he not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And your own health—is it injured by your labors of love in his service?" he pursued, with more familiarity, but maintaining his respectful manner.

"No, sir."

Bessy walked faster, and he kept pace with her.

"You have a lovely child, Mrs. Hale—about six years old, I should imagine; is she not?"

"She is not yet five."

"Is it possible? She is large of her age. Yet she is more graceful than the generality of fast-growing children. She must be a comfort to you both, in her father's illness. How mild the air is! It is just the weather for an invalid to venture out for the first time."

Bessy glanced up at him quickly. In her sensitive pride, she fancied that their crowning misfortune was public, and that this chance remark was a wantonly cruel allusion to it. She encountered a gaze of unequivocal admiration, that brought the modest blood in torrents to her face, and caused her to hurry toward the road, now in sight, through the thinning forest.

"It is a pity that your brilliant complexion should be faded by the confinement of a sick-room! You are a very beautiful woman, my dear madam."

"You have no right to tell me so, sir!"

"My exalted admiration for such charms; the warmth of my regard for their owner, gives me the right"—But they were at the road.

A fence divided it from the woods, and the gentleman, vaulting over, offered to assist his companion. She refused, by a negative gesture, but in her haste and confusion her foot slipped, and he caught her arm to save her from falling.

At this unlucky moment, Sarah, the principal housemaid at Ben Lomond, trotted by on horseback. She stared broadly and suspiciously at the pair—a scrutiny under which Bessy felt herself blush yet more deeply, and her officious cavalier looked foolish and guilty. The interruption, however, relieved her of his further attentions.

With a "Good evening, madam," he whistled to his dog, and struck off into the forest on the other side of the road.

Sarah's appearance suggested a train of thought to Bessy that banished the tumultuous emotions aroused by Mr. Moreau's gallantries and the woman's peculiar look. Desperate as was the exigency, it cost her a severe and prolonged struggle before she could trample personal feeling and pride under foot, and resolve to brave her husband's disapprobation, and further contumely from the family whose debt of gratitude to Mark and herself had been repaid so basely.

Miss Barbara's absence from Ben Lomond would have been inconvenient, in any circumstances; but, at this time, it seemed an irremediable misfortune. Preparations for a large party had been commenced before her departure, and the invitations sent out. Jessie had cried and Eleanor stormed at the preposterous idea of allowing a dying sister's request to outweigh their will and pleasure, yet—as we have seen, Miss Barbara went on her way, without wavering. She represented to the disconsolate maidens, that Miss Nancy Wilkinson, a poor and distant relation of the Seldens, who was a proficient in nice cookery, was willing and

competent to supply her place, and that she would find an able coadjutor in Sarah, for whose tutelage in this, and similar branches of the fine arts, Miss Barbara took all the credit. Finding that she had really left them in the lurch, Eleanor decided that she could not do better than to follow her advice, and Miss Nancy was installed housekeeper, *pro tempore*.

The festive eve had arrived, and with it, a number of guests from a distance, who were to dress at Ben Lomond. Eleanor had issued her last energetic orders below, and, in the hands of a maid as prompt as herself, had nearly completed her evening toilet, while Ursula, jaded already, was plodding through the top-most row of Jessie's curls. The elder sister was in an unamiable mood. This was not an occurrence worthy of note for its singularity; yet that must have been an obstinate fit of ill-humor that could resist the pleasing effect of the reflection in her mirror, corroborated by the flattering comments of her assistant. Miss Argyle's robe was of gold-colored brocade, with raised figures of black; her stomacher of point lace, and her raven hair adorned—not hidden, by a turban of yellow crape, flashing with spangles.

"Jest like an angel, wid hur crown of glory on hur head?" said the maid, clasping her hands, in pretended ecstasy. "Dar won't be nothin' else like dat, here, dis night!"

Jessie's blue satin gown was spread on the bed, where she could feast her eyes, during the hair-dressing, and she smiled, in sly confidence, as she saw, with her inner vision, her own far different picture of angelic beauty. A ray of gratified vanity trembled over Eleanor's dark face while she surveyed her image.

"What do you want, Sarah?" she asked, in a more pacific tone than any she had used in hours previous.

The woman had just come in, her countenance said, upon business of importance. Approaching her young mistress, she whispered, guardedly, "She's down stairs. Wants to see you."

"Whom do you mean?" inquired Eleanor, drawing back, an ominous frown wrinkling her forehead.

"The shoemaker Hale's wife," Sarah whispered again. "She looks wild-like, and wants to see one of the young ladies—you, if she can. Says she won't keep you but a minute. I thought maybe you didn't want her up here."

"I do not."

The woman judged correctly that her mistress did not care to have her sister acquainted with the supposed flirtation of her admirer with the cottager; her conjecture corresponding with her young lady's, viz., that Bessy's unseasonable visit had some reference to Sarah's discovery of the forest adventure of the afternoon.

"Show her into the study, and shut the door. I will be down directly," concluded Eleanor, after a moment's pause.

The most artful praise could not have expelled the baleful demon that now took possession of her soul, and made threatening her glances. Her compressed lips and lowering brow hastened and silenced her maid. She could not draw a free breath, while the lightning bolt might be hanging over her head. As she was leaving her chamber, Eleanor spoke sharply to her sister:

"Jessie! you will not be dressed before midnight, at that rate. You and Ursula are lazy and worthless alike."

Then she drew to the door violently, and went downstairs, and through a long passage to the study.

This was Malcolm's favorite retreat; his especial sanctum, when he was at home. There were his desk and reading-chair, and upon the shelves that filled up one end of the apartment, was his collection of books—comprising the library of the mansion, leaving out Jessie's novels. The room was seldom used in his absence; but to-night, Eleanor foresaw a possibility that it would be required as a dormitory, if many of the guests should remain until morning; therefore fire and candles were already provided.

Against the oaken wainscot, above the mantel, was suspended a portrait, and Bessie stood upon the rug, looking up at it. It represented a lovely woman; still young, but with a matronly gravity in her features; a soft thoughtfulness in her eyes, that seemed to bespeak the experience of a wife and mother. The resemblance to Malcolm, and, except in expression, to Eleanor, told Bessy who had been the original of the picture. If she were living, and here, with what different emotions would she present her petition! Yet the mild, chastened face encouraged her to meet the daughter, with less shrinking than she had felt a minute ago.

Eleanor entered with a slow, stately step, drawing on the long white gloves that veiled the faultless hand and part of the arm.

"Did you ask to see me?" she inquired, not looking in the direction of her auditor.

"Yes, madam."

There was a sobbing gasp, as Bessy summoned her sinking resolution, expiring under the influence of the icy accents.

"What you have to say—say quickly; I am in a hurry."

"My husband is very sick, Miss Argyle;" and at thought of Mark—ill, persecuted and patient, Bessy grew bolder. "He has not been able to do a day's work this winter. I have tried hard to make up for this; but all that I have done has just kept us from starving, and bought his medicines. Our quarter's rent is due. We have furniture which would cover this, but Mr. Sancroft sent us word, this morning, that we were bound for the next three months' hire besides. I cannot believe that your father will allow us to go to jail because we are not able to pay this. The law may bear out Mr. Sancroft's threat; but it is not right or merciful to bring ruin upon an innocent man, in this way. He cannot leave his bed, and it may kill him—that long, rough ride to prison. We must go to-morrow, unless you will help us."

"I am not my father's man-of-business." Was it a woman or

a beautiful fiend that spoke? "I never interfere in such matters. Mr. Sancroft understands what he is about, I presume. You must go to him with your complaints."

"You must know him, Miss Argyle; must know that he is a hard, cold-hearted man, who shows no pity to anything. He has taken a great dislike to us."

"Indeed!" sarcastically. "That is remarkable. I thought that you inspired gentlemen with another feeling. Perhaps it is jealousy that shuts his heart against you."

"Jealousy!" echoed Bessy, innocently. "Why should he be jealous of me?"

"I cannot undertake to say, unless because Mr. Moreau has supplanted him in your favor. He is your latest conquest, I believe."

Her look was more offensive than her language. The fire leaped to the wife's eyes.

"It is a slander! a vile falsehood! a wicked story, made up by your servant, and which you ought to have been ashamed to believe!" she cried, passionately. "My character is as dear to me as yours is to you, Miss Argyle! Ask your Mr. Moreau how he happened to meet me, and where. If he speaks the truth, he will tell you what I do now—that he overtook me on my way home, and would walk by my side; that the worst of his conduct was to pay me nonsensical compliments, which meant nothing, and that I only answered him when he obliged me to do so. Oh, Miss Argyle! your family have injured us enough already. If you have the feeling of a woman, do not try to put more shame upon those who never did you a single wrong!"

Eleanor was obliged to believe this explanation of the encounter that had roused her jealous rage; but the burden of the blame, if blame there was in the affair, was, by this version, thrown wholly upon her admirer, and the "creature's" impertinence was too heinous an offence to be atoned for by her manifest innocence of other crimes.

"What do you suppose I care whether the story be true or not?" she said, in angry scorn. "Your love-affairs and all your other concerns are of no consequence to me, except that they are detaining me from more agreeable company than I can hope to find in you. I repeat, I never interfere in my father's business. Nor does Mr. Sancroft act without orders. His conduct, in this instance, appears to me to have been most commendable. His only fault in the whole matter was letting you have the house at first. It has produced nothing but trouble to us, and I rejoice that we are likely to be well rid of you. With these sentiments, it is very unlikely that I would raise a finger to keep you there."

She departed as she had come—sweeping on, with negligent, yet haughty grace, and fitting the other glove on her superbly moulded arm. As Bessy passed the lighted porch, a group of revellers alighted from their carriages, and just within the entrance-hall, appeared the radiant face and figure of the youthful hostess, eager to welcome each with a profusion of honeyed phrases and dazzling smiles.

CHAPTER XII.

THE cart, containing the law-officer and his prisoner, reached the Court House at sunset. The vehicle had not been punctual, as was promised, and the deep mire of the road obliged the miserable animal, attached to the load, to walk every step of the way. The Court House village was a collection of dingy buildings, the principal being the store, the tavern, the court house, and in portentous proximity to this, the jail. Mark was not able to lift his head to look at it, as the cart stopped; but Bessy saw a frame-building, by no means spacious, and devoid of any sign of its character, except the bars across the windows. The aspect of the place was less forbidding than she had pictured it; yet her heart relinquished its last hold on hope, as she arose to assist in her husband's removal. Their driver, although an illiterate constable, and accustomed to such tasks, was humane in his bearing and tone, and had done his best to mitigate the hardships of the journey to the sick man. Mark noticed this, and was thankful for it, while Bessy's apathetic misery blinded her to everything except the fact that he was Mr. Sancroft's emissary. Without looking toward him, or the knot of curious bystanders, that gathered about the jail-door, she folded the blankets over Mark, and asked, in a whisper, how they should lift him out.

"If ever I was so beat out, in my life!"

The exclamation proceeded from a man, who hustled across the road, from the tavern, with a ponderous bunch of keys in his hand.

"Mrs. Hale! and is that your husband in there, or his shadow? Good Fathers!"

"It is what is left of me, Mr. Paxton," replied Mark, extending his hand.

The worthy wagoner seized it in a vice-like grasp.

"I *can't* say that I am glad to see you!" he said—a husky edge to the voice, usually so round and unctuous. "As my ole woman says, 'Wonders will never cease!' Well! well! well! Easy, Mr. Jones!" to the constable. "Let me get a firm hold on the other side of him. And the little gal, too! Bless my soul! Sam, my boy; run and tell your mammy to come here—quick as she can! Say there's somebody sick, and she'll hurry."

Accordingly, they were hardly in the room destined for their reception, when there hurried in a short, plump woman; ruddy as her husband, and far better-looking. He took her into a corner, and whispered the sad story, or so much as he had gathered from the officer. There were drops on her face, like dew on a full-blown rose, when she shook hands with Bessy.

"I've heard my man tell of you," she said. "He took a mighty fancy to you, when you come on with him, and he's stopped to see you, three or four times—ain't he?"

Bessy answered that he had; but not lately.

"No; because he's left the road and gone to tavern-keepin'. And this is the baby he talks about? Why! she's a smart girl!"

Kitty, whose wonderment and grief at the events of the day had rendered her shy of strangers, could not shrink from the kind voice and hand.

"I will send my little girls over to play with you, honey. You shan't be lonesome. Mrs. Hale, let me help you! Tom, deary, won't you have a fire built? There's no place so poor that a fire won't make it lively, 'cordin' to my notion."

"Is it not against your regulations?" inquired Mark.

She laughed—a bubbling, jolly sound, that suited her well.

"I don't care overmuch about reg'lations. My business is to see that all's right in-doors, and nobody out, and if they want to pin me down to reg'lations, they may find somebody else to keep the keys. It's against my feelin's to have you perish in this chilly hole, and I reckon nobody will find fault."

There were sound sleepers in the jail that night; the slumbers that succeed intense and continuous excitement of mind or body. And, although they could not analyze the feeling, both Mark and Bessy were calmer, less depressed by the waking thoughts of next morning, than they had been in months past. The crisis was over, and calamitous as was the culmination of their winter's trials, it was a positive relief to cease watching for succor that never came; to say to one another, that the storm had broken in all its fury, and left them alive and together. Bessy was not hopeful. She had been bowed too low for that; yet neither was she fiercely despairing, as upon the preceding day. The morning was spent in setting the room in order, and disposing the few effects they had dared to bring with them, so as to confer something, like a snug air upon the large desolate-looking apartment.

The Paxtons, from the oldest to the youngest, seemed to have adopted them into their family. The burly form of the ex-teamster rolled in and out, every hour or so, "to see that the fire was goin'"; or, "if Mrs. Hale wanted anything"; or, "how Mr. Hale was feelin'"; and he had each time, some consolatory and philosophic adage of his "ole woman," that assuredly relieved his spirit, whether it had any healing for theirs or not. It was a singular fact, that he was the solitary and favored recipient of these nut-shells of wisdom from his buxom help-meet. No other mortal ever heard her utter one of the thousand and one proverbs, for which he continually credited her; yet, as his veracity was above question, nobody doubted his implicit belief in their reputed authorship. Mrs. Paxton was less noisy; but as

sincere in her sympathy and desire to alleviate, by every means in her power, the distressing situation of her interesting prisoners. The children, healthy, good-humored animals, went wild with delight about Kitty, and succeeded, by the afternoon, in coaxing her over to their house. Bessy forwarded their suit, for she dreaded the effect of quiet confinement upon the susceptible child; the premature pensiveness that began to mark her manner and speech.

Mark dropped asleep when the boisterous crowd had borne off their prize, and Bessy sewed quietly beside his bed, until the day, dying into a drizzling evening, denied her light for her work. Mark slept still, and she crossed the hands, so seldom idle of late, and mused over the red-hot embers.

She realized what she had never thought of before—how old she had grown since the active, merry summer. All the years she had numbered, up to that fatal November of her husband's sickness, had not marked and changed her, as had the months that had dragged by since. With the bending of the strong staff, she knew how entire had been her dependence upon it. She remembered him, as he was in their courtship—the life and pride of the circle that was then her world—a prodigy of learning to the simple villagers; recalled the predictions that were rife among them, of his future eminence in the young republic of self-made men, where he was to be a second Sherman, to reflect glory upon his birth-place; dwelt longer and more fondly upon the traits and acts that had made every day of their wedded life to be an era, signaling the discovery of newer and sweeter happiness. Not a shaft of misfortune had reached her bosom, until he, her shield, was dashed to the earth. Yet she loved him better this hour—helpless and ghastly as he was—a very infant, to be fed and cared for by the labor of her hands—better, a hundred-fold more dearly, than when she pledged him her maiden troth; when she joined her hand with his, in the marriage-tie; or, when she

turned her back upon the homestead and the graves of her parents, and prepared to follow him into the unknown country, that lay outside the boundary of her own Blue Hills. She knew herself to be unworthy of his love and companionship; for in the furnace of their affections, he was becoming like the refined gold, she like the dross, that changes fast in the heat, to ashes, yet more earthy. But for the fetters of that pure love for him; but for his controlling influence over her impassioned nature, she was ready to rush into the wildest extremes of folly and madness. The wife's devotion and the mother's instinct were all that preserved the mind's balance. If she put her treasures out of sight for one instant, she felt like a tigress, thirsting for prey.

Gentle and fond as were most of her meditations, there was an occasional sparkle in the eye, like the glitter of a sword in the sunshine; the red lips were set, and the teeth gnashed in impotent menace.

The rain dripped drearily from the roof, and the fire droned its sleepy song. A lonely cricket chirped under the hearth, and a death-watch ticked in the wall. Perhaps it was the combined effect of these sounds and the hour and weather, or it may have been a lurking superstition that rendered Bessy uneasy at this last noise. Try, as she might, not to listen, the monotonous "tick! tick!" vibrated upon her ear more and more distinctly, until the pained nerves conveyed no other sensation than the beating of the sharp strokes upon the drum. At the risk of awaking the sleeper, she struck smartly upon the wall, where the mysterious insect appeared to be located; but the ticking went on as steadily. She stirred the fire and walked about the room. Still "tick! tick! tick!" as if there were twenty watches in the echoing chamber, rivalling, each, the others, in speed and loudness.

If Mark had not, of his own accord, moved and opened his eyes, she would have awakened him, that a human voice might

deliver her from the annoyance, which had now grown to be insupportable. He murmured, as he awoke—something inarticulate—and she leaned over him to catch it.

"What do you want, dear Mark?"

"The elms are in leaf early this year," he said, dreamily.

"Have you noticed them, Bessy?"

"Mark! Darling!" she called, shaking his shoulder. "You are not awake. What are you dreaming about?"

"The bees are humming over the buttercups in the garden, and the strawberry-bed is in bloom. I have been clearing away the dead grass, and tying up the rose-bushes on your mother's grave."

"Dear Mark!" repeated the wife, tearfully. "Don't you know me—your own Bessy?"

He smiled up in her face.

"What a question! I cannot remember the time when I did not know and love Bessy Bryan—'Bonnie Bessie,' as the old Scotch piper used to call her. Weren't we married two years ago, last September? You'll find it in the Family Bible—'Mark Hale and Margaret Elizabeth Bryan.'"

His hands were burning, and his sunken cheeks red with fever. These tokens of an unfavorable change, Bessy could see by the firelight, and to her great joy, she now heard Mrs. Paxton's voice outside.

"Open the door for me, Tom. My hands are brimful."

She deposited her basket of eatables upon the table, and proceeded to light a candle.

"I reckon you thought we meant to starve you to-night, Mrs. Hale; but there happened two or three travellers in, jest at supper-time"—

She stopped, at seeing Bessy beckon her to the bed. Mark had his eyes shut, and his wife pointed to the flush on his face; then touched her own forehead. The landlady's countenance

expressed her concern and surprise. A doctress in her way, she felt his pulse, and looked graver still at its uncountable beats. At the touch of the cool fingers, he spoke again.

"I have been giving Baby Kitty her walking-lesson. How tightly the little thing held my hand! She will trot all over the yard, soon."

For the first time in her life, Kitty slept away from her mother, that night. Mrs. Paxton shared the wife's vigil, for Mark tossed and raved until the dawn. Then came a physician, for whom Mr. Paxton had sent, unknown to Bessy. He was not a Dr. Chase, and his friendliness reassured Bessy, while he inquired into the symptoms and examined the state of the patient. She would have read his face, when this was over; but it was impenetrable.

He merely said, "Treat him thus, and thus," and "I will call again this evening," which he did, and slept that night at the tavern.

Mark was rational by the following morning; "better every way," as Bessy told the doctor, at his early call, and he did not gainsay it. In the course of the forenoon, as Bessy was reclining upon her husband's bed, one of Mr. Paxton's sons entered with a letter, which had been handed him at the Post-office for Mrs. Hale.

Mark's languid eye kindled, and not to keep him in suspense, she read it aloud:

PINEVILLE, — COUNTY, N. CAROLINA, Jan. 10th, 1799.

MY DEAR SISTER: I guess you and Mark has often wondered the reason why no Letters came from Me to tell whether I was alive or Ded or doing wel or (What seems to you as likely, maybe) doing nothing at All, the Truth is, I have not maid Money peddling so rapid as I hopped and thout I shoud; when Me and your Husband travilled south together. And so, considring that it is Harder to Starve Two than one (which is a Strange thing to say at furst site,) and hapening to get acquainted with a Likely Widder woman, with considerable property, a Store and a Tavern, and a

smart managing woman whose house, I stopped at pretty considerable Often, mostly over Sundays, for I never can feel rite travilling on that Holy day, and I made up my mind to sell out my Stock and settle down decent and Respectable, and take a Wife, which providence permitting, I shall do To-morrow. Me and Mrs. Smith (which is her name at Present) have talked About you and Mark a many times, and I told Her how you was the Only sister I had in the world, and how Clever and sensible and working Mark was, and how good you both was to me, when I was a lazy Feller, with no money and no Home, and Mark lent me money to buy my Furst lode of goods and lots of advice besides, and I would never have got on At all, without him, and you maid and mended my Cloaths and did My washing and so on, and she said right out, that I must send her Best love, and invite you to come to our House, you and Little kitty and Mark and any other Famly you has, and stay long as you choose, and if theres anything we can do for you, you must let us know Right away, and we will be Glad and happy to surve you. And she is a Plainspoken woman, and what she says she means you may depend On it, and hoping this will fined you in the enjoyment of the same Blessing, I am very Well, and remane always your affectionate brother,

JACOB BRYAN.

"What is the date?" inquired Mark.

"January 10th," answered Bessy. "It has taken a long while to come."

"The place, I mean."

"Pineville, — County, North Carolina," read Bessy.

"It is in the eastern part of the State, not far from the sea-board," said he, thoughtfully. "You would not have much trouble in getting there, if you had the money. The Lord will provide a way and the means."

Bessy regarded him with unaffected wonder.

"It will be some weeks before you are strong enough to take such a journey, even if we are released from this place," she said, "Do you think it would be a good settlement for you?"

He did not reply immediately. He appeared to be seeking words, or summoning strength to convey what he would impart.

"Has it not occurred to you, Bessy, that I may not get well of this sickness?"

"I have never trusted myself to suppose such a thing," she returned, growing very pale.

"Then, dear wife, it is time for me to speak. You must go to your brother after I leave you. You have no other near blood-relation living, and his house will be the best shelter for you and your child. You see how kindly he invites you, and how grateful he is for what we have done for him. Are you listening, Bessy? I cannot speak louder."

"I hear you," issued, in a whisper, from the white lips.

"While I have my senses I will tell you how to act, for my time is too short to waste. This bed and my clothing will bring a trifle, and should the rest of the sum you will need come from no other quarter, write to Jacob how you are situated, and stay here with Mrs. Paxton until he sends you money, or you can earn it by your needle. Friends will be raised up to you in your hour of need. I have His promise for that. The seed of the righteous shall never beg bread. I am the chief of sinners, yet accepted as righteous in the Father's sight, for the Son's sake."

He paused. Bessy could not move or speak. Like a marble statue of desolation, she gazed at her idolized husband, her awakened fears gathering terrible certainty from the signs of failing strength and breath, she perceived in him.

"You will miss me, darling. We have been very happy together." A pang unsettled the tranquil features. "But remember that I have entered into rest; that all pain and sorrow and weariness are at an end; for 'so He giveth His beloved sleep.' Will you meet me there, dear wife, and bring our precious little one with you? I do not ask your promise now. You are ready to say and do anything that would please me. But think of it; never forget that this is my last earthly hope, my latest prayer for

those I leave behind me. Let my child—*our* child—be taught to know her father's God.

"I am wonderfully supported," he said by and by. "I should have said, before the trial came, that the thought of your destitution and the probable hardships in store for you and dear Kitty would press, like a mountain, upon my spirit; yet, I have no fears for your temporal welfare; ~~not~~ one! This is dying grace."

They had no private interview after that. The doctor came again later in the day, and went through a form of inquiry and prescription. As he retired he motioned to Mrs. Paxton to follow.

"Do you know that he is dying?" he said to her, when they were alone, outside of the door.

"I mistrusted so," replied the kind creature, wiping her eyes.

"He will hardly last through the night. They are very poor, I think you said?"

"Yes, sir, or they wouldn't have been here. You see, for yourself, what uncommon sort of people they are. Oh, doctor! Law is a dreadful, wicked thing! I told 'em I'd take charge of the jail for twelve months; but after the sight I've seen, and what Tom and I has underwent, this one week, we'd neither of us keep the keys another year; not if you was to pack the old house with gold and silver for us. To see a blessed Christian like that brought here a-dyin', as you may say, and for what? Jest because the Almighty tied his hands so as he couldn't make money for a man as is rollin' in wealth a'ready! Ah! depend on it, there's a day of reckonin' comin' for such as sent them poor cre'turs here!"

The doctor did not rebuke her vehemence. Perhaps he appreciated the justice of her reprobation.

"They have no friends in this State, I think Mr. Paxton told me."

"No kith or kin, sir. The Lord only knows what will become

of the mother and her child ! If they will stay with us they shall never want a seat in the chimney corner, and enough to eat, while Tom and I live."

"I believe you, madam, and the offer is what all who know you would expect. Still, would it not be more kind to send them back to their home and relations ? I am sure that, with a very slight effort, I can raise among my acquaintances a subscription, that will cover the travelling expenses of the two to Massachusetts. Please ascertain for me, as soon as it is proper to inquire, after all is over, what are Mrs. Hale's wishes in this respect, and rely upon me for the means of carrying them out."

Turning a deaf ear to her reiterated thanks and blessings, this nobleman of Nature's creation mounted his horse, and set out upon his benevolent errand.

More travellers halted at the inn, at sundown ; but the landlord alone received them. "Mother Paxton" was scrupulous in her personal attention to the table and chambers of her customers ; but this evening, "Tom" and her eldest son were her representatives. She did not stir from the chamber of death. The truth was acknowledged by all who saw the sufferer, and recognized by none, with more composure, than by him, whom it most nearly concerned. He retained his consciousness and the ability to speak. The ripples of the cold river were breaking over his feet, yet his faith quailed not ; his peaceful eye already saw the brightness of the farther shore. Several charitable neighbors of the Paxtons had come in, to tender their services, and while Bessy remained seemingly unaware of their presence ; Mark thanked each one with a grateful glance or word.

About eight o'clock, Mr. Paxton entered as softly as he could.

"How is he, now ?" he whispered to his wife.

Mark heard him, and answered. "Thank you ; I do not suffer. I am waiting as patiently as I can."

"That's what I told him !" said the landlord, chokingly. "I said you was all ready and willin' to go."

"Told who ?" Mrs. Paxton anticipated the inquiry Mark would have made.

"A minister, who is stoppin' at the tavern to-night. He was mightily int'rested in what I told him about you, Mr. Hale, and he sent me to know, would you like to have him come in and pray with you."

"Indeed, I would be most happy !" was the earnest response.

There was stillness in the room, until Mr. Paxton returned with the clergyman. Mark was evidently husbanding his remaining strength for the interview. The silence of the rest was that of awe and expectation. Mark's gaze was upon the door, and his face brightened, as his visitor advanced. Bessy, too, started at the unlooked-for sight of Mr. Laidley's remembered countenance.

His mute pressure of her hand revealed his respect for, and sympathy with her woe ; yet his voice, as he accosted Mark, was almost cheerful.

"Ought I to be grieved at finding you so ill, Mr. Hale ?"

The bystanders looked curiously at him. The question was, to them, inexplicable. The dying man's reply was prompt.

"No, sir ! Do you recollect telling me that dark days often seemed bright, when seen from the shore of Eternity ? I feel now, that for my own sake, I would not have had one cloud the less."

His accents were clear, but faint, and his breathing short. In a tone yet more low, although audible, he added, as in soliloquy ; "There shall be no night there !"

"And there shall be no more death ; neither sorrow, nor crying—neither shall there be any more pain," repeated the minister's sweet, fervent tones : "Blessed are they which are called into the 'marriage-supper of the Lamb !' That this may be the portion of all here present—let us pray."

There was a change in the face of the dying, when the others arose from their knees—not in expression, for the light that irradiated it was never more to flicker or fade; but in hue and features. The greyish pallor could not be misunderstood. Informed of this by the countenances of those about him, or warned by the unerring instinct of Nature, his eye went meaningly around the circle—a kindly farewell in it, to each one; then, raising one arm, he drew Bessy's head upon his pillow, her cheek resting against his. There were whispers of blessing and endearment, unheard by other ears than hers; a message for the sleeping child, who had, that evening, received the last "good-night" kiss she could ever know from a father; and at his request, the wife pressed her lips to his—one long, clinging caress—and again laid her cheek to one cold with the damps of death. He slumbered thus for a moment, and all supposed that consciousness would never return—when he awoke and addressed Mr. Laidley:

"Please, sing the hymn I heard at church: 'There is a fountain.'"

The minister did not hesitate a second. Affected and surprised though he was at the request, he sang softly, and with wondrous melody, the words that have upborne many a soul in its passage through the swelling flood.

The thread of life was parting very gradually. There was still a slender strand left, when the music ceased. The smile of ineffable peace yet shone through the lineaments of the living, and even while Mrs. Paxton held her hand to the lips to discover whether the breath had not departed, the pulse leaped suddenly; the filmy eyes shot forth a ray, and an exclamation, like a cry of triumph burst from him—"DEAR, DYING LAMB!"

His hand fell away from his wife's neck. The "stammering tongue" was silent in death; the ransomed spirit sang the "nobler, sweeter song" in heaven.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWELVE years had wrought no material alteration in the physical aspect of the "Deep Run neighborhood," an area of country, about six miles in extent, near the centre of which was situated Ben Lomond. There was more cleared and more tilled land, for trees were burned faster than they grew, and when one field was drained of fertility, virgin soil must supply its place. Guano and super-phosphate were unknown, and would have been an unprofitable speculation to their vender, had they been offered to the contented planter, who complained of being crowded, if, from his house-door, he could in any direction, espy the smoke of a neighbor's chimney. If his negroes were numerous, so were his acres; his hogs fattened on the mast under the oaks that called for no cultivation; corn grew almost spontaneously, and the meat and bread of his thriftless dependents was sure. It was a wealthy community, made up mainly of hospitable free-livers, on social terms with one another, and every man upholding the rest in the comfortable conviction, that nowhere else in the commonwealth were more intelligence, fortune and blood collected in a like limited space.

The descendants—in some instances, the degenerate scions of a noble old stock—have so beridden this hobby of family pride, that it passes—and no wonder! in this fast age—for the leanest and lamest of hacks. The man of the people, lusty in limb and daring in soul, who has hewn out, step by step, a path to greatness, laughs with an amusement too downright to be tinctured

with contempt, at the weak-bodied, and weaker-headed pigmy, the offspring of intermarriage No. 50, burdened by a name bigger than himself, who yet struts at an easy gait, through the jostling masses of common clay ; thumbs in his arm-holes, nose in the air, and pipes shrilly of his "illustrious parentage," and the "gallant old times."

We say it is contemptible, a humiliating spectacle—but let us not despise the fountain, because its stream, by reason of many diversions, has grown thin and feeble. The Old Dominion was a royal State, and her sons among the princes, in gentle breeding as in valor ; men of pith and sinew and brains, who, could they revisit the earth, would scout as an insult, the claims to ancestry, so flauntingly borne by certain of their grandchildren.

At the period on which we have settled, after the leap in our history, there was an unusual religious interest astir in the region. The leaven of wholesome doctrine sedulously and faithfully distributed, was working out its legitimate result. Here, the material was unpromising. French infidelity, fashionable carelessness, and, in the menial classes, benighted superstition, the remnants of Fetish worship and Obi incantations, were compounded into a mixture that would have daunted hearts less stout, and faith less vigorous than those of the devoted band, who were, emphatically, *home* missionaries. It was an event, pregnant with interest to those conversant with the religious, or irreligious history of the neighborhood, when a session of Presbytery was convened to ordain and install a pastor, over the whilome deserted church of Deep Run. There was to be a meeting of several days' duration ; and those who acknowledged no special personal concern in such things, were yet ready to accept of the novel entertainment, promised by the arrangements going forward.

The services commenced on Saturday. Farm-work was suspended, and all classes, in their gala attire, thronged the road to the sanctuary. It was the same small wooden building that had

been erected in the late Mr. Argyle's time ; but it had recently undergone thorough repairs, and—a bold innovation upon the usages of the day—it was painted within and without. Nay more ; upon the desk, heretofore a brown, naked board, was a crimson damask cushion, supporting a new Bible ! The like had not been witnessed in the county by the oldest man there. Booths, thatched with green boughs, surrounded the house, and the crowd that filled them, proved the wisdom of this provident contrivance for church extension. The ceremonies of the occasion, solemn in their simplicity, were performed amidst a stillness profound, and apparently respectful, and the sermon heard as attentively.

The congregation broke up for intermission, and a lively scene ensued. By a sort of natural gravitation, the divided members of each household sought a common centre, and groups of relatives and friends were presently scattered through the woods, inclosing the church, dispensing and receiving the bountiful luncheons they had brought from home. Tables of primitive construction—rough boards, supported by forked stakes, were erected in a few minutes, and their imperfections concealed by snowy cloths. The edibles were set in array by the zealous and practised servants, and, behold a meal that an epicure might have envied, and a dining-hall, unsurpassed by kingly saloon.

"I ordered that our table should be joined to Malcolm's," said a lady, conspicuous, even in the large crowd, for her fine bearing and elegant attire. She spoke to an elderly woman, low in stature and plainly dressed, with an enormous black bonnet on, who was superintending the unpacking of some hampers.

"Very well !" was the curt reply.

"I wish the dinner to be arranged as neatly as possible," continued the lady, "for we have some friends with us—a friend, rather—who is accustomed to the best of everything."

A sniff from the cavernous recesses of the bonnet, and a con-

temptuous heave of the article itself, replied. The little woman's face was invisible.

"Malcolm! Malcolm! step this way, one moment, if you please!" cried the lady, excitedly, as Mr. Argyle approached with several other gentlemen.

With an apology, he left them at the board, and withdrew some paces with his sister.

"Miss Rashleigh and her governess are to dine with us to-day, and I thought you would oblige Mr. Moreau and myself so far, as to pay them some attention. Being strangers in the county, they will appreciate a kindness of that sort. Here they come, with Mr. Moreau. My dear!" stepping forward to meet him—"where have you been? I began to fear that you had lost these ladies."

Mr. Argyle resisted the impulse to refuse his sister's request, and awaited, with outward equanimity, her return and the threatened introduction. Meanwhile, his eye discerned nothing especially attractive in the strangers. They were a young girl, rosy-cheeked and black-eyed, with an arch expression on a pretty little mouth, and a lady, much older, dressed in black, with features that were certainly not handsome, although indicative of amiability and intelligence.

"Miss Rashleigh, let me make you acquainted with my brother, Mr. Argyle. Mrs. Holt—Mr. Argyle," said Mrs. Moreau, with infinite suavity, and, polished woman of the world though she was, betraying her anxiety that the introduction should be mutually agreeable.

The prospect of its improvement upon the mere introduction was poor. Mr. Argyle bowed, without unclosing his firm lips, and the ladies, courtesying, looked at the ground, not at him.

"I hope your friends will be well attended to, Eleanor. Please regard the whole of this table as your own."

And, having thus eased his conscience, and fulfilled the dictates

of politeness, Mr. Argyle bowed again, and rejoined the company he himself had brought hither. Mrs. Moreau's brunette complexion took a warmer tinge from vexation, and her husband shrugged his shoulders, in comical despair, as he met her eye. Then, they devoted themselves to the comfort of their guests, as if to compensate for the neglect of him who should have been master of ceremonies. Miss Rashleigh nor her governess appeared in the least mindful of, or discomposed by, his want of gallantry. The latter discussed her luncheon and talked quietly, at intervals, with her hosts; the former gazed upon the scene with the pleased curiosity of one to whom it was new and striking.

"It appears quite barbarous to you, I dare say," remarked Mrs. Moreau, noticing the wonder that deprived her of appetite. "You never saw anything like it before?"

"Never. But I like it!" emphatically.

"Such gatherings are infrequent here. In fact, they are usually confined to the lower classes; but there are two or three influential gentlemen in this immediate neighborhood, who have taken up the cause of the Dissenters" —

"I thought there was no Established Church in the United States," interrupted Miss Rashleigh.

Eleanor colored at this rebuff of her delicate design to employ a term that would best convey her meaning, and, likewise, her sympathy with what she imagined were her companion's prejudices.

"There is not, strictly speaking. The word slipped out unawares. The best families in Virginia are descended, for the most part, from those who were in Communion with the Establishments of England and Scotland. Other denominations are comparatively a new thing. Recently, however, as I was saying, they have grown into popular favor, and the sect represented here to-day is really becoming respectable in the quality and in the quantity of its members. And it is well enough! The masses need a religion that they can understand, to elevate them,

and if their betters take the lead, they are the more apt to follow. There is my brother, for example—who, acting upon this belief, has exerted himself in repairing the old church, and settling a regular clergyman. Yet he is not a ‘professor of religion,’ as their phrase is. Sanguine as the enthusiasts are of ‘bringing him over,’ we, who understand him, see that he is actuated only by a desire for the moral improvement of the people.”

“A commendable instance of public spirit!” smiled the young lady.

Mrs. Moreau was at a loss to know whether there was, or was not a spice of sarcasm in her tone. A second’s meditation showed her the improbability of the suspicion, and she went on:

“Moreover, he is one of the most affectionate men alive, distant as he seems in general society; and his old housekeeper—the nurse of us all—is greatly attached to her church. He spares no trouble or expense to humor her whims, and I must say, she is fond of him, poor creature! in her odd way, and manages his household wonderfully well. That is she! the queer, dwarfish figure, pouring out a glass of water for him. Would you not think, from his smile and bow, that she was a countess?”

“Queen Mab, perhaps, somewhat advanced in years,” returned Miss Rashleigh; and if she remarked how becoming was that smile to the proud, grave features of the lauded “brother,” his sister was none the wiser for it.

“Mr. Laidley wishes to pay his respects to you, Eleanor,” said Mr. Argyle, coming up to the Moreaus’ end of the table.

“And, fearing lest I might not be recognized, I solicited your brother’s good offices to make me known,” subjoined that gentleman. “It has been many years since I had the pleasure of meeting you, madam. May I ask you to present me to Mr. Moreau?”

His benevolent countenance and pleasant voice were an instant recommendation to Miss Rashleigh’s favor. Her expressive eyes

said this so plainly, that Eleanor did not hesitate to introduce him to her also. He looked earnestly at her, as if he wished to engage her in conversation; but the bustle of another approach and recognition separated them.

“Why, there is Marcia Carrington!” exclaimed Eleanor, as a gaily-dressed lady came eagerly toward her.

Mr. Argyle stood accidentally next to Miss Rashleigh, and she felt him start and move, as if to go away. He changed his purpose, however, and stood his ground.

“My dear Eleanor!” cried the new-comer, kissing Mrs. Moreau affectionately; “I am glad to see you looking so young and well! How are you, Mr. Moreau? Mr. Argyle”—blushing, as he bowed instead of shaking hands, as she evidently expected him to do.

“How natural everything and everybody seems! and I have not been home before for five years! How are your children, Eleanor? I have three of mine here with me, to-day; I never stir without them.”

Eleanor took advantage of her pause, to name her stranger-guests. Miss Rashleigh touched her governess’s arm, when the dialogue between the friends was resumed; and, Mr. Moreau, being also engaged in talk with other acquaintances, the two left the group unperceived. A footman, English in face and dress, obeyed a motion from the younger lady, and followed them.

“Why, Mr. Moreau!” said his wife, presently, breaking off in the flow of inquiries and answers, “where are Miss Rashleigh and Mrs. Holt?”

“I don’t know, I am sure, my dear,” replied he, looking about him, as Bopeep might have done, when her sheep “were all a-fleeing.”

“Do go, and look for them! I should never forgive myself, if they were to feel slighted, or if anything were to happen to them. They know nobody here, except ourselves.”

"Who are they?" asked Mrs. Carrington, as Mr. Moreau went meekly on his hunt.

"Haven't you heard of them? Mr. Moreau's English relatives, who have bought Briarwood?"

"Oh, yes! Ma was telling me about them, and of Cousin Nancy's ingratitude in accepting the place of housekeeper—stewardess, she calls it—after all that ma has done for her—and only because this Mr."——

"Colonel Rashleigh," corrected Eleanor.

"Colonel, then, offered such a high salary for a competent manager! Mrs. Rashleigh is too fine a lady, I hear, to attend to domestic affairs."

"Colonel Rashleigh is Mr. Moreau's uncle!" said Eleanor, so dignifiedly, that her insensitive friend could not but take the hint.

"Is he? I beg your pardon for speaking so freely. After all, there is no dependence to be put in reports. I often tell Mr. Carrington that I do not believe one half of what I hear. I have my hands so full of my own business—servants and babies, and all that, that I have precious little time for scandal"——

"As I was saying," continued Mrs. Moreau, in the old Eleanor Argyle manner, "one of the principal reasons which Colonel Rashleigh had for settling in Virginia—in America, indeed—was, that he might be near his nephew. Mr. Moreau is the son of the colonel's sister, whose marriage with a Frenchman and subsequent emigration so displeased her family, that, for many years, they refused to hold any communication with her. About three years ago, Mr. Moreau, as her only surviving son, received a letter from his uncle, asking information respecting himself and family, and since then, they have kept up a constant correspondence. We have often entreated the old gentleman to come out to this country, for having no son of his own, he appears to feel that his nephew is the stay of his house. So, last fall, he commissioned Mr. Moreau to purchase Briarwood—we having written

to him a description of the place, and that it was for sale—and they took possession, this spring."

"He is very wealthy, I suppose," said Marcia.

Matrimony had not tended to alter the prosaic turn of her character. She was still literal and material as ever.

"So it is believed," answered Eleanor, with cautious significance. "His establishment is extremely handsome, and his expenditures lavish. Then his wife and daughter have the air of people who have always moved in the highest circles."

"That was Mrs. Rashleigh here, just now—was it not?"

Eleanor looked provoked. "No, indeed! only the governess—a nice sort of person, but a mere nobody. Mrs. Rashleigh must have been very beautiful in her youth. She is tall and dignified—almost too stately; pale, and rather reserved in manner. Her health has not been good for a long while. Colonel Rashleigh hopes that the change of climate may be beneficial to her. He is her senior by twenty years or more, and seems devotedly attached to her."

"Certainly—of course!" Mrs. Carrington assented, abstractedly. She was looking quite away from the speaker, whose discourse was more entertaining to herself than to any one else, outside the pale of family interests. "Your brother has changed a great deal since I last saw him," she observed, casually, not at all like one who had any special concern in him or his looks.

"In what respect?" asked Eleanor, coolly.

"He has grown older and has a grave—I was about to say, a stern air."

"The natural consequence of increase of years and responsibility," Mrs. Moreau replied, yet more frigidly. "He is contented, happy and useful. His warmest friends could ask for nothing better for him. We—his relations—beg him to marry for the sake of the name and estate; but he laughs at the idea of resigning the liberty that he loves."

And having, as she flattered herself, inflicted a wound in the self-love of her dear friend, she proposed a return to the church.

Miss Rashleigh's ramble with her governess soon led them out of the temporary encampment. Beyond the wooded hill, that formed the site of the church, was another—higher, and crowned with luxuriant pines. On its summit, protected by a rampart of these sturdy evergreens, was a circular clearing, and in its centre was a small inclosure, bounded by a white paling.

"It is a grave!" said Miss Rashleigh, in a whisper of intense awe, checking herself within a few feet of the spot. Her large eyes were raised mournfully to her companion, and her blooming cheek faded.

"So I suppose, my dear," returned Mrs. Holt, soothingly. "There is nothing in the circumstance to alarm or astonish you. It is near the church, and is a lovely situation for 'the house appointed to all the living.' Is there a headstone?"

The girl approached with her, and read aloud the inscription:

"MARK HALE,
OBIT. FEB'Y XI., MDCCXCIX.
ÆTAT. XXVII.
'There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God.'"

There was a hush of some minutes. Both ladies remained gazing, spell-bound by some indefinable attraction, upon the mound and its simple memorial-stone. Was it the wish of the sleeper to be buried here? Did his young head lie more softly upon the pillow, with the lulling pines for sentinels, and the dew and sunshine falling freely upon his green coverlet? Whose loving hand had laid out the mystic circle for his last chamber?—had, for twelve years, renewed the earth and turf, and the railing that for-

bade the intrusion of a stranger foot? What heart, crushed by his untimely death, had sought solace in the pious offices? "Twenty-seven!" In that short life, had sorrow or toil taught him the value of eternal "rest?"

"It was very solemn—very sad!" thought Miss Rashleigh, with a pained heart. Had she been alone, she could have wept. No cemetery, crowded with the insignia of mortality, had ever made her feel the nothingness of life—the certainty of death—as did this forest grave.

"He was a son—or a brother—a husband—perhaps even a father!" she mused aloud. "It is a beautiful world!" Her gaze sought the rich, blue sky, and she drew a long inspiration of the fresh air, aromatic with the scent of the pines. "A beautiful world—but there are broken hearts and graves everywhere!—everywhere!"

"Some mute, inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood,"

quoted Mrs. Holt.

Something of her accustomed archness came back to Miss Rashleigh's countenance.

"This is Saturday—not Sunday, Mrs. Holt, and, as I am not a Jewess, I shall not return to the synagogue over there; I mean to sit me down upon the grass here, in Nature's temple, and let her preach to me until it is time to go home."

"My dear! you are not in earnest!"

"Indeed I am, ma'am! Listen to the song of the pines! They speak of solemn and beautiful things to me. Stay with me and hear them, and look up to this blue canopy above us, and the white clouds sailing over it, like angel-fleets! It will do you more good than a sermon of man's devising."

The governess was seriously perplexed. Her pupil was capable of carrying out her freak, if only through sheer willfulness.

Remonstrance might confirm her in the notion, and it was not Mrs. Holt's way to command, if persuasion could avail to gain her purpose. What would the Moreaus feel and think and say? And Colonel Rashleigh—the pink of propriety—what his judgment would be, if this infringement of established custom reached his ears, she could imagine, but not brave.

“Surely, my love”——

She had advanced these three words in the delicate piece of diplomacy she meditated, when help arrived from another quarter. The crackling of dry sticks, under footsteps ascending the hill, startled Miss. Rashleigh from the seat she had chosen.

“Our sanctuary is invaded!” she said, hurriedly. “We will go!”

Casting a parting glance of pity and curiosity on the grave, she turned away; but not until two gentlemen stepped within the circle.

They were Mr. Argyle and Mr. Laidley. The elder gentleman leaned upon the arm of the other, and stopped on the edge of the clearing to regain breath, after the steep ascent. Both raised their hats to the ladies, without speaking, and received as silent acknowledgments of the courtesy. Mr. Laidley spoke, in a subdued voice, yet one that was heard distinctly by the retiring visitors:

“And you buried him here! I could say, ‘God bless you for it!’”

CHAPTER XIV.

COLONEL RASHLEIGH read English news, of a month before, that evening; two silver candlesticks at one elbow; his gold snuff-box open upon the shelf attached to the other arm of his great chair. The Briarwood establishment was but a couple of weeks old, and all went on, as if two years ago, or twenty, had beheld its organization. Acting, unconsciously, upon the principle gardeners regard in transplantation, the master of the household had brought along as much of England, as he could, to the new world. His own man, Mrs. Rashleigh's maid and Miss Rashleigh's governess, a coachman and a footman were imported, with much of the furniture belonging to his former home. How the exotic system, he aimed to ingraft upon American and Southern society, would work, was yet to be proved.

He certainly looked comfortable enough now. The room was fitted up with library furniture, oaken and massive, and darkened by time; high-backed chairs, with seats of leather or tapestry; heavy curtains, summer though it was; and book-cases filled with many venerable, and some modern volumes. The colonel himself was a portly figure, with a florid complexion and white hair, sitting and standing very uprightly, and marked in every lineament and motion, as a man used to his peculiar way of thinking and doing, and whose confident expectation was that the insignificant remainder of mankind should think and act like him.

Eleanor's description of Mrs. Rashleigh's *personelle* did credit to her powers as a limner. She occupied a chair on the other side

of the table, and a book lay in her lap, which had not been opened during the half-hour she had sat there. Her small, slight hands were crossed in listlessness or langour—so still, that the lace ruffles bordering her wrists did not quiver. She wore her natural hair—abundant still, its many silver threads showing brightly amidst its original blackness. Color and flesh would have been to her the gift of beauty, by obliterating the lines that commemorated the ravages of ill-health or scathing griefs. Her paleness was unnatural, we had almost said unearthly; and the dusky eye reminded the observer of an extinct volcano.

"Margaret! where is Katherine?" inquired the Colonel, lowering his paper.

"She went to her room after tea. Shall I send for her?"

Her motion toward a hand-bell, that stood between them, was arrested by a gliding step in the passage, and the appearance of the daughter. She entered quickly and lightly, without bustle or stiffness, and the dim, stately room seemed brightened by her presence. Mrs. Holt followed, netting in hand, and seated herself at a respectful distance from the light. Not so the petted child of the household. She had also her netting-box, and establishing herself on her father's wide footstool, she plied the tiny ivory shuttle diligently, for the space of fully three minutes and a half.

"Mrs. Holt," she said then, softly, as desiring not to disturb the august reader, "does not this very fine lace-work hurt your eyes by candlelight? It does mine."

"You look at it more fixedly than is necessary, perhaps," said the governess.

"What did you say about your eyes?" demanded Colonel Rashleigh. "That is very improper work for the evening, Katherine. Are you pressed for time? You had better put it aside for daylight. It displeases me to see you trifle with your sight in that absurd manner."

"I am making lace for my wedding-dress, papa," and the fin-

gers went faster than before. "That thought, if not the work, keeps me awake while you are reading that endless newspaper. I felt as if my evil genius had chased me across the water, when I saw you tear off the cover this afternoon. The grim, finely-printed columns looked so frightfully familiar."

"You are an unreasonable child!" But his accent and involuntary smile overcame any impression of rebuke conveyed by the words. There was a whole page still untravelled by his spectacles; yet he deliberately folded the sheet and laid it away under a heavy book upon the table.

With an alacrity that cast a shade of doubt upon the reality of her recent industrious fit, Katherine shut up her work-box and placed it beside her ancient enemy.

"Now!" she said, looking up at the Colonel, whose air was marvellously benignant, considering the mighty sacrifice he had just made.

"And now!" he echoed, making an effort to appear grave. "Have you nothing to say for my amusement? Will the history of your day's entertainment console me for the loss of my paper?"

"Doubtful!" She shook her head in assumed anxiety. "I will do my best, however. You heard me telling mamma at the tea-table about the religious services—the ordination?"

"Yes; but you said then that the events between the sermons were of a remarkable character. I understood you to make an observation to that effect."

"You are right, sir. We had a veritable gipsy encampment under the trees; only gipsies do not have a superabundance of exquisitely-cooked viands, spread upon damask by attendant Africans; nor do they sip wine from cut-glass, and eat roast chicken from china plates. Mrs. Moreau, whose attentions were unceasing, invited us to dine with her, and, when we were expecting to be handed to our carriage, to accompany her home, Mr. Moreau escorted us up to one of these fairy-like banquets."

"I doubt, my dear, if your simile is altogether just," interposed Mrs. Holt. "The food you have described would be more unsuitable upon Titania's board than in a gipsy camp. You remember the dainties she enumerates to Bottom :

'Apricocks and dewberries;
With purple grapes, green figs and mulberries.'

"Modern elves are more substantial in taste," replied Katherine, merrily. "Did not I enjoy the fare I have eulogized, and did not Mr. Moreau—my 'cousin Robert,' as he insists I shall call him—tell me that I was a wood-fairy?"

"What!" said Colonel Rashleigh, frowning slightly; for his ideas upon certain points were strict. "He is disposed to be complimentary upon a short acquaintance."

"He meant to be polite, I suppose, papa; but he looked almost vexed when, after an ineffectual hunt of half an hour for us, we emerged from the forest, directly across his path."

"The forest! Were you unattended?"

"O no, sir! Thomas was with us."

"Very proper, I should be displeased to learn that you went without him. Go on with your narrative."

"Where was I? I recollect! at the table. The first dish was an introduction to his grace, the Duke."

"Whom?" Mrs. Rashleigh had not spoken until now.

"To Malcolm Argyle, Lord of Ben Lomond and the adjacent territory, who graciously consented that we should be presented then and there, the occasion warranting a deviation from the ordinary rules of court etiquette; and vouchsafed the additional honor of an invitation through his sister, to dine at the royal board."

"My dear Miss Rashleigh," said the conscientious governess, "you are disposed to be severe to-night. Mr. Argyle appeared

to me to be a handsome gentleman, of courtly presence it is true, rather taciturn, perhaps, but I must confess that I detected nothing offensive in his deportment. On the contrary, I thought his conduct, and the two sentences I heard him utter, graceful and proper."

Like Colonel Rashleigh, Mrs. Holt considered the concluding epithet the acme of praise when applied to behavior.

"I do not dispute his comeliness," said Katherine. "His features were cast in a regular mould. He evidently considers that nature, having done her work thoroughly, can dispense with any aid from him. Yet, there are degrees of perfection, and a smile heightens the beauty of this Adonis; such a gleam as I saw him bestow upon his familiar—a species of 'Brownie,' who presides over his household, and ministers to his physical wants—in other words, an elfish little woman, protected from sun, rain, and general observation by a hat, that I venture to declare, is the identical pattern of that worn by Virginia Dare's mother."

"Virginia Dare! I do not remember such a person," said the Colonel.

"The first white infant born in these American colonies," exclaimed Katherine, blushing for her foolish speech. "To return to the Earl Malcolm—I am positive that I did not see him smile or unbend his gravity, except in this one instance. You must have noticed, Mrs. Holt, how haughtily he received Mrs. —, I forget her name—the lady whom Mrs. Moreau addressed as Marcia, and was so glad to meet. She was an old friend, I gathered from what she said, an early playmate, who had married and removed to a distance. She said that she had not been 'home' before, in five years. Yet Mr. Argyle did not shake hands with her, when hers was partly extended to meet his. No iceberg could have been more cold and repellant."

"He deserves our compassion," said Mrs. Rashleigh, drily.

"Why?" asked her daughter.

"Because of his failure to gain your good will."

It was seldom that a sentence savoring of irony escaped the lady's lips, and Katherine felt the merited reproof keenly. For an instant, she struggled with the rising temper or shame that suffused her eyes; then, in a victory, that did honor to her nature or teaching, replied ingenuously:

"I beg your pardon, mamma, and thank you for checking me. My strictures were ill-natured, and probably unjust. My spirits run away with my sense of right entirely too often. But"—the cloud passing as suddenly as it had fallen—"to atone for my thoughtless fault, I will praise everything and everybody else, until my story is over—an easy task, where there is nothing to blame. Mrs. Holt, I have a bad memory for names. How did Mrs. Moreau call the minister who preached the second sermon? She recognized an old acquaintance in him, and introduced him to us at luncheon."

"Mr. Laidley," prompted the governess.

"O yes! I really fell in love with him, and I liked his discourse too. There was an irresistible sweetness and sincerity in his look and manner. Did you not think his voice very melodious for one of his age? It did not break or quaver, all the while he was preaching, and in singing, it was yet more wonderful. You must have distinguished it—we sat so near the pulpit. I was sorry to hear Mrs. Moreau say that he resided some distance away. He seldom visits this part of the country now, she told me; but this being an extraordinary occasion, some of his admirers—her brother among them—wrote him an urgent request for his attendance."

"You considered him an eloquent orator—did you, Mrs. Holt?" said the Colonel, more formally than he had spoken with his daughter.

"His sermon was good, sir; unexceptionable, as to its logic and morals. It was more hortatory in its character than I have

been used to hear, and his manner, while it did not offend a refined taste, was warmer than a clergyman of the church would have adopted on such an occasion. Nevertheless, Miss Rashleigh's picture is a true one. He reminded me vividly of Cowper's model divine:

'His theme divine;
His office sacred, his credentials clear,
By him, the violated law speaks out
Its thunders, and by him, in strains as sweet
As angels use, the Gospel whispers peace.'

With all her respect for her instructress, Katherine had a nervous dread of her mania for quotations. Foreseeing a companion portrait to the above, from some other esteemed author, she addressed herself hastily to her mother.

"Mamma, we had an adventure—made a discovery this noon, that saddened and interested us. As I have said, we tired of the crowd, and rambled off into the wild, beautiful woods that surrounded the church. There is a group of tall grand pines, quite away from the house—a quarter of a mile, I should say. Is it not, Mrs. Holt?"

"Scarcely half so far, my dear Miss Rashleigh. Yet it is difficult to judge of distance, where the ground is so uneven. We climbed a hill, you remember."

"Yes, ma'am. And on the top, mamma, there was a circle where no trees grew, and there we found a solitary grave; not neglected and overgrown, as if a forgotten stranger were buried there, but neatly railed in, and the turf was clipped carefully. I meant to have inquired of Mrs. Moreau concerning its history, but the bustle after church drove it out of my mind."

"That it was cared for at all is remarkable," observed the Colonel. "The general neglect of burying-grounds in this country displeases me exceedingly. There are duties to the dead, as well

as to the living. I was absolutely shocked at the condition of the graveyard attached to this plantation. Not a tombstone in the whole of it !”

“There was a headstone to the one I speak of,” said Katherine, “and although an unpretending, by no means a rude affair. The inscription was in keeping with it.” Her voice sank as she repeated it. “‘Mark Hale. Died February 11, 1799. Aged 27. There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God.’”

The governess chanced to cast her eye toward Mrs. Rashleigh, and she alone noticed the sudden clasp of the taper fingers ; the sallow, greenish hue, that overspread the always pallid cheek. The eyes closed, and the brows met in a spasm, deadly in its agony, yet so brief that when the astounded looker-on recovered from the paralysis of faculties, never rash in their impulses, the lady sat, as she had done, throughout the rest of their conversation—impassive, indifferent—the impersonation of languor.

Colonel Rashleigh yawned behind his hand, and stole a look at the unfinished newspaper, which said as openly as words could have done, that the topic was becoming dull to him. He was not romantic himself. His mental and physical conformations resembled each other in heaviness. He condescended to be amused by his daughter, because she was his, and possessed a larger proportion of his genuine affection than any other creature alive, excepting his wife.

Mrs. Holt was not backward to take the hint. “The day had been a fatiguing one,” she soon discovered, “and the nights were growing shorter. With Mrs. Rashleigh’s permission, she would retire. And, if she might take the liberty, in her parents’ presence, she would recommend a similar course to Miss Rashleigh.”

Mrs. Rashleigh consented to her withdrawal, and ratified her counsel to her pupil by a bend of the head. The Colonel invariably sat up late ; why, no one knew, except that it had been his habit from his youth, and he abhorred any departure from ancient

customs. So, when Katherine saw him unfold the neglected periodical, and repolish his spectacles, she arose, with an inaudible sigh, and kissed her parents “Good night.”

“You are pale, mamma !” she said, surprised at the chill touch of her lips. “Do you feel unwell ?”

“No. The warm weather tries my strength. I shall soon become accustomed to it.”

Colonel Rashleigh rang the bell, and when her maid appeared, gave Mrs. Rashleigh his arm to her chamber door. There he left her, and returning to the library, summoned his man, and sent him up to his mistress with a glass of old wine, which he selected and poured out with his own hands. If he was sparing of verbal expressions of fondness, his scrupulous attention to her wants and extreme respect for her person and opinions, bore out Eleanor’s assertion of his attachment to his wife.

It was too early for Katherine to sleep, and the loveliness of the May night lured her to the window. It was very calm and bright—a still, fragrant hour. The young girl crossed her arms on the window-seat and leaned out—her face sadly changed from the joyous air she had worn below stairs. She was very lonely-hearted—this favorite of fortune—desolate, with the yearning desolation that wails unceasingly through the empty “Innermost” of the soul, for love ! fullness of love !

It was a coarse, cruel sneer—unworthy of one of England’s greatest artists—when he said, that “a woman had rather be courted and jilted, than never to be courted at all.” Another, whom the alchemy of sorrow had tested and purified, has brought out from this rough stone the lustre of a truth, as universal as beautiful :

“Better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all.”

It is easy, or it would not be so common, for those who have

learned by years of enforced abstemiousness, a negative content with the crusts and crumbs of affection that fall to their share, to speak contemptuously of the "mawkish fancies," the "puling sentimentality" of their earlier days. Such hearts may clap their lean hands in mirthless laughter, or point witheringly, as at children, chasing painted bubbles, when the young press and strive hotly for the prize that hangs "highest and most dazzlingly upon the horizon" of each. There are even those—sorrowfully we write it—whose agonized prayer in their own spirit-need, the loving Father heard and answered bountifully, who, now, accustomed to the luxury of full hearts and happy homes, forget former privations, and chide with wonderment, instead of pitying the expression of like necessities in others. There is a heartless—we would fain deem it a thoughtless—otherwise, it is a base, unworthy cant on this subject, affected by people in middle life, which is either softened by the approach of second childhood, or embittered into malignity by old age. "Old people know young people to be fools." "They go through love-fits along with the measles and whooping-cough." "Young hearts are none the worse for fifty fractures." "It is only a turn of puppy-love, which he will outgrow."

Such are the elegant and humane adages, that epitomize the wisdom of the sect. O, woe! woe! to the mother, who, serene in a happiness, strengthened, while it is tempered by Time, fails to sympathize with the crimsoned cheek, the fluttering heart, the silent tear, that betray a daughter's initiation into the lore, which was once the food of *her* thoughts through anxious nights and days of deep, yet troubled joy. Why not teach our children that the friendships and loves, seen rich and warm, with the early summer glow upon them, are but the foretaste of the divine, all-pervading sentiment, which God would have His immortal creatures know? Have you ever thought—you, who hold that a fit preparation for "Life's realities" (a term hateful as trite!) is

a mastery of the judgment over the heart; a thorough subjugation of impetuosity to common sense; an unroofing and undermining and explosion and pulverization, to the last atom, of the castles, which children and youths will erect, with only air for foundation and superstructure; you, who would drug into insensibility, the generous impulse and ardent devotion of hearts, whose veins run red, fast, *young* blood, as the Creator wills they shall; have you ever thought, we ask, of the meaning of that text, "If a man love not his brother, whom he hath seen, how *can* he love God, whom he hath not seen?"

How shall we, in the Heaven of love, practise what we are making it the study of our lives to unlearn?

Katherine Rashleigh was essentially healthy in mind and body. Hers was a brave, buoyant spirit, that would have laughed to scorn sickly fancies and imaginary woes. And, precisely because it was sound and strong, it craved its natural food and rightful companionship. The lark remembers, at its highest flight, its nest in the grass, and the eagle, proud voyager of the empyrean, is never, from choice, a mateless bird. Circumstances, not her inclination, had ordained that this girl, with a large, warm heart, sympathies ready and keen—should never, within her recollection, have had a bosom friend; that there should not be, for her, in the world, a breast upon which she could cast herself in sudden joy or sorrow; not a being to whom she could say, in the frank heartiness of affection—"I love you!"

She had indistinct memories, like floating dreams, of a time when their household atmosphere was different from what it now was; heard, in the Past, faint echoes of fond names and endearing phrases bestowed upon herself; but these were visions that dissolved into mist, when she would have examined them more nearly. She loved the father, whose sole amusement she was. She could not but perceive his partiality for, and pride in her, and he seldom, if ever, denied her expressed wishes if their objects were

procurable by his means. But he was painfully formal, and as regarded feeling, absolutely undemonstrative. Like a leaden Saturn, he revolved slowly, bearing his satellites along in his grey, sunless orbit. Mrs. Holt was kind-hearted, and faithful in the performance of her duty to her pupil, to whom years of association had made her society and advice indispensable; but there was no inherent congeniality, not one symptom of elective affinity between their dispositions. The one was pedantic, cautious, and a devotee to rule and custom on all points; the other, a genuine democrat, claiming liberty of thought, language and act. Many zealous and fruitless attempts had Mrs. Holt made to reform, according to rectilinear principles, the free curves of a character that gained her affection, while to manage it baffled her skill. Mrs. Rashleigh had been an invalid from her daughter's sixth year; never very ill; never complaining, yet always pale and feeble, and the cause of solicitude to her friends and compassion among her acquaintances. Not a compassion that implied a failure of respect toward its object. The dignity, approaching to severity, that characterized the lady's countenance and deportment, the sound judgment and strict observation manifest in whatever she said, inspired a feeling akin to awe, even in her admirers.

The society chosen and attracted by such a nucleus, could not be extensive or brilliant. To the young daughter it was stupid beyond comparison, and she gladly welcomed the proposed removal to another continent, as a promise of a more eventful and less hackneyed life. For a while, the novelty and excitement incident to the change of country, had, by keeping her fancy in play, silenced the old, homesick yearning, but to-night it found her off her guard, and resumed possession.

"Everybody besides me has some one to love, and by whom he is loved," she said, in her repining heart. "That haughty man I saw to-day has a faithful follower, who adores him, and nobody ever looks at me as he did at her. She is called old and homely

and poor; I, young, pretty and wealthy; yet she is the richer of the two. And that lonely sleeper under the pines! Through the heat of a dozen summers and the cold of a dozen winters, the hand of love has tended his burial-place. Who, that lives, would weep a dozen days for me? Is this to last always?" In a petulant despair, she struck her bosom with her clenched hand. "Why cannot I kill my heart and seem—yes! *be* like those around me!"

The tree-tops scarcely moved in the still air; yet a sound, like the distant breath of the wind through the hall, caught her ear. It was repeated, and, with a tremor she could not explain, she approached the door and listened. It came once more—a moan—a shuddering sigh, that was human in its tone and anguish. Lest another repetition should deprive her of the courage to seek out its origin, she stepped noiselessly into the long corridor, dark, but for a glimmer of moonbeams at the further end, and a streak of light under the door next her own. It was her mother's dressing-room, and when after a second's waiting, she traced the unusual sound to this, filial apprehension supplanted the superstitious dread that had begun to take hold of her. Her hesitating tap was unanswered, and she opened the door.

It was a small apartment, adjoining Mrs. Rashleigh's chamber, and plainly, almost meanly fitted up, as she had directed. It contained a toilet-table, a couple of chairs and a large, blue chest, bound with iron, and bearing the marks of long and rough usage. The top of this was raised, and Mrs. Rashleigh knelt before it, her back to the outer entrance. She wore her night-dress, and her loosened hair rolled in gloomy volumes on her shoulders. Katherine could neither see her face nor the contents of the trunk; only that the crouching figure clasped something—some article of apparel, it seemed—to her bosom, and wept over it; the plaintive, heart-piercing moan that had reached her chamber. All this was the observation of an instant. No mortal intrusion was per-

missible in such a scene. Katherine had stepped back into the passage, and was drawing the door softly after her, when the moaning became brokenly articulate.

"My husband! My husband!"

This was what the involuntary listener believed that she heard, as she left the weeper alone with her midnight grief.

CHAPTER XV.

BEN LOMOND had its quota of clerical guests, that Saturday night. It was near the church, and had been the wayside resting-place of their profession for a generation back. Miss Barbara's notable housewifery secured their outward comfort, and the society of the present master was more to the taste of men of their intellectual and moral stamp than his father's had ever proved. The hospitable host at table; the social companion, as they sat over their pipes in the evening; the profound thinker and erudite scholar in their graver conversation, he had an honorable place in the estimation of each.

Mr. Laidley, as the oldest minister present, led in evening worship, and failed not to commend to the God of the sainted mother, the son, who was now the head of the family, and to whom the church she loved, looked, with eager concern, to fulfill her wishes in behalf of this portion of the Lord's vineyard.

Malcolm had seen the last of the company to his chamber, and was moodily pacing the great drawing-room, when a dry cough announced Miss Barbara.

"What is it?" said he, checking his march.

"Thought, maybe, you wanted somethin'."

"Nothing, I thank you."

He recommenced his walk.

Miss Barbara snuffed the candles; collected the pipes into the tobacco-box; brushed the ashes from the table, and pushed the chairs into order against the wainscot.

"That will do, I think," said Malcolm, finally, as impatiently, as he ever addressed her.

"Ain't you tired? Do sit down!" replied she, wheeling around an easy chair.

"I am tired—and that is why I prefer walking."

"Jest like a man! the more he needs comfort, the more he won't take it!"

"That matters little, provided he does not interfere with the comfort of others," rejoined Malcolm, smiling sadly. "Do I trouble you, Aunt Bab?"

"You do that! the livelong time!" she broke forth, dropping into a chair, and heaving a deep breath. "Night and day! night and day! and all my prayer is, 'Lord! how long! how long!'"

Malcolm stopped short, and gazed at her, dumb with astonishment.

"And to-night, when that blessed man prayed that 'peace and prosperity might abide beneath this roof,' I could hardly keep from cryin' out, 'Let alone the prosperity, if so be the Lord will send the master peace in his soul and rest to his heart!'"

"I am grateful for your prayers, Aunt Bab," said Malcolm, gently. "If they do not avail much in my behalf, they will bring down blessings upon your head, I trust."

Miss Barbara made a gesture of despair. "Jest to hear him! when the greatest blessin' I ask upon earth is to have my child back again. Oh, my boy! my boy!" the tears raining down her withered cheeks; "I know you have had trials and troubles, hard to be borne. Your best friends, and your own flesh and blood have turned against you. The wicked have fou't with you, and prevailed; but it don't excuse you in the sight of God, for rejectin' His love, and hatin' your fellow-men. Let me say my say! It's been a-gatherin' in my mind for years. I loved you when you was laid in my arms—a teeny baby. So proud and glad

we was, that a son was born. If I could ha' looked for'ard, and seen you what you are this day, I would ha' begged the Lord to take your little life then—yes! and thanked Him, if He had a-done it. Not that you ain't a comfort to me—not that you haven't done everythin' that a master, without religion can do, for your servants. It's your duty to yourself that ain't attended to. Oh! when I remember the pretty laughin' boy—the merry, handsome, kind young man, that had a word and a smile for everybody, and that everybody loved—and then see you now, old before your time—cold and hard, and offish to your old friends, and not carin' to make new ones; unforgivin' to them as has wronged you, and never askin' the Almighty to forgive you and grant you another and a softer heart—is it a wonder that my faith a'most dies out?"

She rocked to and fro, her head between her hands, her elbows on her knees. Malcolm's features underwent a variety of changes during this unprecedented outflow of feeling. Surprise and displeasure at her boldness subsided into pitying affection, as he drew near and leaned on the back of her chair.

"You have surprised me, Aunt Bab. It is years since the matters, to which you refer, were mentioned between us. It was my wish that they should be forgotten, at any rate, by you."

"Why not by you?" asked she, raising her head.

"That is impossible."

"'Forgive and forget' is the right rule."

"I profess to do neither!"

His blood was rising. He strode rapidly through the room twice, and returned to her.

"I confess that I am the harsh, unlovable being you have described. I shun the company of both men and women whom I have known from my youth up. I make no distinctions between them and strangers. And why? I left home, the trusting, happy boy; at peace with the world and those of my own blood,

willing to believe all uncharitable thoughts I had ever indulged, unjust ; ready to forgive the seeming wrong I could not explain away. Two years later, I came home to find that father and sister had leagued with the basest of tools, to destroy an innocent man, to whom my obligations were boundless ; a pure, noble spirit, whose only crime was that he and his had saved my life, and that I loved them for it ; to learn that your letters, which would have apprised me of the villainous plot, had been intercepted. My father declared, on his death-bed, that this was done without his connivance. Heaven only knows the truth ; but there were spies upon you, and who could they have been, if not the inmates of this very house ! Was this the lesson which was to teach me to exercise faith in my fellow-man ?

"You cannot have forgotten the events that followed upon this discovery ; my alienation from Eleanor ; my defiance of my father ; the prolonged and useless search for the wife and child of the murdered man. But I never told you that when I resigned the hope of discovering their retreat ; when I accepted sullenly, the conviction that the poor compensation I might have made them, was denied me—I swore a solemn oath—'The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ever I forget or forgive one of the accomplices in this evil deed !' In one instance, and one alone, I have broken this vow. My father implored my pardon with his dying breath, and I could not withhold it. His was the lesser crime of avarice. I wished to believe his assertion that he was urged to the cruelty that stained his name, by the false statements and crafty management of the creature who had become his master. For the rest—I have said it !"

"'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord,' " uttered Miss Barbara, solemnly. "Who gave you the right to interfere in His affairs ?"

He retorted by another quotation, said to himself, rather than to her. "'The mills of the gods grind slowly.' I could not

wait. You have not mistaken my reputation in this neighborhood, where, according to your showing, I had once hosts of friends. Because I would not blazon abroad the shame of my kindred ; because I shrank from explanations that would cover them with odium ; men who knew me, and who ought to have known him, preferred to take a knave's version of the injurious suspicions that moved me to seek his ruin. Honorable men reasoned with me, when I ceased all pecuniary and friendly dealings with Sancroft, and when I resented their meddling and exposed him, they gave him double the business I had withdrawn. They went further. When the lying son of an unscrupulous father—the wretch who should, this day, be serving out his time in the penitentiary, for robbing the mail—when this plausible rascal grew ambitious, and applied for a licence to teach the laws he had violated ; did not the Seldens, the Logans—did not my own brother-in-law encourage his presumption ? Is he not rising fast in his profession, and a guest at the tables where, ten years before, he would not have dared to show his face ? This is their friendship for me ! This is their sense of right and honesty !"

"But they didn't know what you did about the Sancrofts !" argued Miss Barbara, who was becoming alarmed by the storm she had raised.

"And why did they not ? I never concealed my reasons for my conduct. Was Sancroft's needless cruelty to poor Hale a thing done in a corner ? My father publicly declared, again and again, that his agent had gone beyond his orders ; that he was ignorant of Hale's arrest, until he heard of his death. Whose work then—and whose only—was the miserable outrage that caused a stir throughout the country ?"

Miss Barbara shook her head mysteriously. "Sancroft has a glib tongue, and if Mr. Argyle talked, he and his son talked too. I know that !"

"And my father's equals and associates received the low-bred dog's story, before they would the word of a gentleman! Just what I said, a while ago! And, by so doing, they have arrayed themselves against me. I have not set myself against them!"

"They're willin' to be friendly, I am sure. I've heard it said, often, how much influence you have with them."

"How much influence my money has, you mean. It is easy for them to overlook my lack of courtesy, while I have the best plantation and most money out on interest of all the farmers for ten miles around. A poor man's plain speaking would be recollected and punished, where mine is, passed by, as 'that trifling difference of opinion,' or, 'little eccentricity.' Yes! you were right! where I once counted friends by the score, I cannot, to-night, point to one!"

His proud mouth twitched, and he turned away to conceal the weakness he had disclaimed.

Miss Barbara still rocked herself on her chair, and groaned. "Taint right, my dear boy! It's wrong! it's awful sinful to feel and act as you do, no matter how badly they've served you."

"You against me, too! I had not expected this, Aunt Bab!"

His accent of mild reproach struck like a knife upon the faithful creature's heart.

"You know better!" she cried, vehemently. "I would lay down my life for you. I have nothin' else to love and take care of. Why should I find fault with you, if not for your good? You can't say I aint a friend!"

She planted herself in his path, and would not let him pass.

"You are only too good—too true, for such an unworthy fellow!" he said, taking her hand, and smiling. "Yours is the only love I have, as I am your earthly all. We will not quarrel."

Miss Barbara was herself again. "I tell you what, Malcolm Argyle, you ought to get married! You may laugh at the notion

much as you like—but a sensible, lovin' wife would make a man of you."

"Thank you!" he interrupted. "What she would make of *you* is a subject of more interest to me. Suppose she were to get jealous, and try to set you aside. Don't you see that I would have to get a divorce, forthwith? I can't live without you."

He could not beguile her into a jest. "I am gittin' old; but I would sarve her so well that she couldn't send me away. Then, the woman you ought to have would love me because I set so much store by you. I saw you talkin' to Marcia Selden, that was, to-day—didn't I?"

He was so used to her square ways that the question did not startle him.

"You saw me bow to her, and listen to a little of her talk with Eleanor. Why do you ask?"

"You've never seen her before since she married Mr. Carrington—have you?"

"No."

Miss Barbara groaned again. Malcolm laughed outright.

"What is the matter?"

"I was thinkin' how much she had to answer for. *She* was the main mischief-maker."

"Will you believe what I am about to tell you, Aunt Bab?"

His hand was pressed upon her shoulder, and looking up, she saw a careless, good-humored light in his blue eyes, that reminded her of other days.

"I am most grateful for the apparent chance that has forced upon me the meeting I have long and foolishly avoided. For four years—an age in a boy's life, Aunt Bab—I carried Marcia Selden in my heart. I thought of her; dreamed of her; studied for her while I was abroad; and in return for this nonsensical devotion to a very common-place girl, who liked me moderately well, and was flattered by my preference, without appreciating one millionth

part of a fraction of my feeling for her, I got a cool 'No, I thank you! Ma and I think I had better marry Stanhope Carrington,' when the man renewed the proposals she had encouraged in the boy. It almost killed me!" He shuddered at the recollection. "But worse than the first stab and shock, was the period of longing and suffering that racked me into insensibility."

He was soliloquizing—looking over her head into vacancy, and his grip upon her shoulder was tighter.

"What I endured in obstinate silence, I cannot relate. It is over! Long ago, I learned to thank her for having taught me the worth of woman, as Sancroft and his crew had given me the average measure of manhood."

"I don't understand more'n half of what you say!" objected Miss Barbara, making a wry face, and rubbing her shoulder. "Do you mean that you judge all women by Marcia Selden, and are obliged to her for not marrying of you?"

"You have hit it—exactly!"

"And don't feel any grudge against her for jiltin' of you?"

"Not one iota—that is—not a mite! You don't believe it?"

"I don't!" said she, positively. "Why didn't you shake hands with her this mornin'?"

"Because I have no respect for her, and wanted her to understand this. Now, that she has had her instruction, I have no objection to meeting her in a friendly manner."

"What made you stand by, while she was talkin' to Eleanor? Honor bright, Malcolm! Didn't the sound of her voice make you feel all-overish-like?"

"No!" laughing heartily. "The only quahn I had was at the thought that I had ever been such a fool as to worship the ordinary-looking, bedizened woman, who was deluging Eleanor with that wishy-washy stream of twaddle about her babies and Mr. Carrington and the servants, and 'Ma.' When did you study the symptoms of the tender passion? You catechize like

a professor of the science. Has old Slocum been up this way again lately? I thought you sent him off with a flea in his ear, ages since."

"Poor Slocum! He never was overly smart; but he's a good soul!" sighed Miss Barbara. "I for one, shall always remember him for his kindness to the Hales. They say he cried right out like a baby, when we got back from over the mountains, and he heard how poor dear Mark had died while we was away. And that reminds me"—she spoke quickly to avert the cloud gathering over Malcolm's face—"Did you ever see a better likeness of Bessy Hale, than that ere English girl that was with your sister at church to-day?"

"I did not notice the resemblance."

"I don't see where your eyes was, I couldn't keep mine off of her, all the time we was at the table. Maybe, she's some kin. Bessy came of Irish stock. England and Ireland's j'inin'—aint they?"

Malcolm suppressed his amusement at the far-fetched supposition.

"Not quite adjoining. There is a sea between them. Moreover, Miss Rashleigh belongs to a wealthy old English family, and our poor Bessy was a Yankee shoemaker's wife. Good night, Aunt Bab. Don't fret your righteous soul over my shortcomings. If I am an iceberg to other people, it is because I cannot help it, and neither can I help loving and trusting in you."

He would not have owned it, yet this strange exchange of confidences was beneficial to him. It drained his mind of certain pestilential pools—black with the refuse of the past, that contributed liberally of their noxious gases to poison the air, in which he thought and felt. The encounter with his boyish flame conduced to a like result. Miss Barbara's homely wisdom was a relief to mental optics that were ever scanning and criticising the warped and crooked ideas and practices of his fellows; and her

honest affection cheered a heart as dry as dust, for want of the dew and rain he perversely excluded. The companionship of his present visitors was not likely to lessen the humanizing effect of these influences ; nor were the services of the two succeeding days.

Certain it was, that when on Tuesday morning, having shaken hands with his venerable friend Mr. Laidley, who had lingered latest of the brethren, he saw from his front porch, Eleanor's husband ride into the lower gate, he neither frowned nor exclaimed at the anticipated visit, and actually walked part of the way down the yard to meet him.

Now, neither of these gentlemen was quite carried away by his admiration of the other, and their interviews were as few and as brief as was consistent with the desire of the Moreaus to maintain outwardly amicable relations with their wealthy and childless brother. Malcolm entertained a sincere, if unavowed contempt for his sister's choice, and although distant to all his connections, whether by consanguinity or marriage, showed a decided preference for Jessie's husband—a rollicking, well-meaning, well-to-do squire, in an adjacent county. Mr. Moreau was a dashing young fellow when Eleanor fell in love with him ; an accomplished sportsman, rider, and dancer ; plentifully gifted with gallantry of the French school, and, as might have been expected, the petted toast of the fair sex. Eleanor Argyle's beauty and perhaps her prospective length of purse, had won him for her, amidst the envious sighs of her compeers, and very exultant was the air with which she bore off her prize. If she discovered, upon closer and calmer inspection, that she had wedded a man inferior to herself in mental endowments, and less refined in taste ; that the splendid physique was a specious blind to the interior poverty, she had too high a spirit to admit outsiders to the secret of her discomfiture. She ruled him as she would have done any one she had married, whose love of her or of peace restrained him from declared warfare with his female Hotspur. They made an edifying

show of conjugal felicity abroad, and there is reason to believe that she was really extremely fond of him—the more so, that he granted her what she loved yet more dearly—her own way. He was undeniably attached to her ; lauded her attainments and person as freely as propriety allowed, and with all his penchant for flirtation and fine girls, never waited on a pretty or sprightly woman without his wife's permission ; *i. e.*, when there was any danger that she would hear of it.

The chief reason which Mr. Moreau had for shunning Malcolm, was a rankling grudge he owed him, because of the feud between the brother and sister, which, at one time, immediately after Malcolm's return from Europe and the developments incident thereupon, had arisen to a deadly pitch, appearing likely to sever them for a lifetime. The hollow truce concluded at their father's grave, ten years before, was well understood on both sides, as a mere form. It was designed by Malcolm, as a tribute of respect to the departed ; a sacrifice of fierce passions to his memory ; by Eleanor, as a mask for the world to look upon, and the first plank toward bridging the chasm, dividing herself and probable heirs from the bulk of the father's property, which was willed to the son. With the children, came more definite and intense covetousness of the rich domain. She tutored all her subjects, including her husband, even her own haughty neck, to bow before him who was to make or mar their fortunes. The frequent prophecies of his marriage she scouted disdainfully. She had sufficient perception of his far nobler nature, to enter into the mystery of his misanthropical seclusion, his cold cynicism to her sex, and was not rashly confident in her persuasion that he would die, as he had lived—a bachelor. One of her darling objects was gained when people began to think and speak of the little Malcolm Moreau as the heir presumptive of Ben Lomond, and her personal, as well as her maternal pride was gratified at the increased court paid her in consequence.

Malcolm had no acquaintance who would venture upon a hint of this to him; but Miss Barbara heard of it, and a great many other things of a like kind, that galled her sorely. She was conscientiously opposed to adding a breath toward rekindling the smouldering brands of family discord. With all Eleanor's faults, she was her mother's child; the first-born babe—and had opened her eyes to the light in the old nurse's arms—a memory, that well nigh blotted out the most shameful passages of her after-life. Still, Miss Barbara was not willing that the sister's offspring should rule in the stead of "her boy," when he should sleep with his fathers. If not a model of a perfect man in her esteem, she loved him for his very imperfections, and believed him entitled to the best lady in the land, and she could not blind herself to the fact, that if Ben Lomond did not need a mistress, a wife of the right sort would be its master's temporal salvation. Hence, her bold declaration to this effect on Saturday night, which, had Eleanor heard, her rage would scarcely have stopped short of private assassination.

Yet the marriage, at once so desired and so deprecated, would have seemed a most proper and probable event to one who watched Malcolm, as he strode down the walk to salute the coming guest. His curls, embrowned by the passing years, were uncovered and stirred in the morning air. His eye had the clear blue of his boyhood, with a steadier and more penetrating look, and his broad shoulders, deep chest and athletic limbs made up a picture of true manliness, strength and grace, that might secure him favor in the eyes of women, were he fifty, instead of thirty years old.

"You are looking very well!" said Mr. Moreau, assuming an ease he was far from feeling; as children whistle in the dark to prevent themselves from hearing goblin footsteps behind them. "How do you manage to keep so young? There can't be much difference in our ages."

"I am thirty," said Malcolm, gravely.

"And I thirty-five. A stranger would declare that I was ten years the older of the two. D'ye see the grey hairs?" raising the locks above his ears.

"I see some, certainly," rejoined the other.

It occurred to him then, that Moreau *had* grown old within a twelvemonth past. It was all of that time since he had taken the pains to notice him particularly. There were incipient crows'-feet and hollowing of cheeks and eyes, that bore out the testimony of the white hairs. Malcolm had never thought him a man who was likely to take trouble heavily; yet he could have been sure that he had known cares, and grievous ones, lately; that he could not shake them off now.

"And what marvel?" he thought. "Nothing but india-rubber, and a French article at that, would have retained any elasticity after eleven years with Eleanor. What ails you, Moreau?" he asked, unthinkingly, and almost kindly.

Mr. Moreau changed color, perhaps with surprise.

"Nothing! Nothing!" answered he, flurriedly. "Time and responsibility, I suppose. You must not forget that we married men have more on our hands and brains and hearts, too, than you happy dogs of bachelors."

They had reached the dining-room, and Malcolm invited his brother-in-law to the sideboard. Mr. Moreau selected brandy and water. In handing him the decanter, Malcolm detected the odor of prior and copious potations, and observed that he could not pour out the liquor steadily. He mixed it strong and sweet, and swallowed it, thirstily.

"You don't drink yourself!" he said, as his host turned from the beaufet with him.

"Sometimes I do; not very often."

"It is a sin for a man to keep such liquors and not enjoy them," continued Mr. Moreau, glancing regretfully at the empty

glass. "I wish I could afford to do it. What terrible times these are! I'll be hanged if I am not tempted to believe that old King George—tyrant and fool 'though he was—was a better master than the mob that is king over us now. The government is like a hound—puppy—barking 'War, war!' with all its might, and backing as fast as it barks. The country is on the brink of bankruptcy."

"The darkest hour is just before the day," said Malcolm, carelessly. "But I am no politician."

"Nor I; but how can a man, with one grain of patriotism, repress his indignation at the unnecessary ruin that impends above his native land? The proclamation that declares war with Great Britain, seals the doom of the United States as a nation. Don't you think so?"

The query was put doubtfully, for the sarcastic curl of Malcolm's lip slightly damped the fire of patriotism and brandy.

"I think that you have been to hear one of Jack Randolph's blood-and-fury speeches, and that he has converted you to the peace principles he would maintain by force of arms if he had his will. A novel style of preventing aggressive warfare upon foreign powers, is this fomenting civil dissensions! Fie, man! where is your love for the land of your fathers? How do you stomach the red-hot abuse of France and everything French, with which Randolph pelts the crowd? What do you do with your affection for the home of your forefathers?"

Mr. Moreau tumbled off his stilts.

"Oh, well!" he said, looking foolish. "I am half English, you recollect, and American by birth and residence. By the way, have you met my uncle, Colonel Rashleigh?"

"I was introduced to him on court-day."

"He is a first-rate specimen of the fine old English gentleman, and has a lovely family. You will call, I hope."

"Thank you. I rarely pay visits, unless on business."

"Eleanor intends giving a party next week to introduce them to the neighbors. You have received your invitation, I suppose?"

"I have."

Mr. Moreau was nervous in nearing the point.

"She asked me to ride by, this morning, and press you to come. They are my relations, and she is anxious to have them on terms of social intercourse with hers. Jessie and Hunter will be over, if Jessie's baby can bear the jaunt. It will be a pleasant family gathering, you see."

Malcolm was silent; the expression of his countenance unequivocal as to his opinion concerning the delights of the aforesaid re-union.

"You will be charmed with the Colonel," floundered poor Moreau.

His brother-in-law's resemblance to his queen-wife was alarmingly apparent, when he "put on his high looks," and he had cause to dread the sign. The cowed aspect of the man nearly provoked Malcolm's risibles; but excited his compassion also.

"After all," he reasoned, "It is a trifle, and my going will please Bab. It is a bore, though," said second or third thought; "and I will guard my acceptance. I have not been to a party this great while, Moreau," he said, aloud. And as he realized what he was about to do, he swallowed in advance, a yawn of desperate weariness. "But, as Jessie is to be there, and it is my duty to do the hospitable thing, by your relatives, I'll think the matter over, and let you know my decision before the eventful evening."

Mr. Moreau was entranced. A polite, stiff negative, it was his expectation to bear back to his empress. In the excitement of the moment, he arose, and poured out another bumper.

"The fellow has a stronger head than I thought, if he can stand that, added to what has gone before," thought Malcolm, in uneasy disgust.

Mr. Moreau lost no time in disproving the transient suspicion that he had a stable brain. Owing to circumstances we will not pause to narrate just here, he had been impelled to resort to an extraordinary quantity of stimulus that morning. Drink deeply, he could and did, with impunity, daily ; but, as we have hinted, the interior of his cranium was not proof against a very heavy assault of any description of spirits.

"Suppose we sit in the porch?" suggested Malcolm, rising. "The house feels close on this breezy morning."

Moreau's eye said, "adieu," to the decanter, and he followed.

"The tobacco-box and pipes, Tony!" ordered Mr. Argyle, to his body-servant. "A pitcher of cool water and glasses!"

The porch was a charming summer parlor, festooned by vines, and supplied with comfortable benches. Tony, grown into a smart, intelligent young "gentleman of color," brought out a stand from the hall, and disposed the required articles upon it, with a dexterity that told how familiar the office was.

Mr. Moreau nodded to his respectful bow.

"A likely boy!" he remarked, when he was beyond hearing. "Hang it, Argyle! you don't begin to feel what a lucky star yours is! Everything that calls you 'master,' thrives. Your crops never fail; your cattle never have the distemper, or any other ailing that I hear of, and your servants fly if you look at them. Yet you have the name of being a kind manager. Do you keep an overseer this year?"

"I have not had one since Frisbie went West, five years since. My colored man, William, is the overlooker in the field. I do not approve of sub-masters on a plantation."

"They are a pest! but I cannot get along without one. There is that fellow, Snead, cheating me out of my eye-teeth, and getting rich himself—the rascal! Yet, what can I do? I am ready sometimes to blow my brains out. 'Pon my soul, I am!"

"Better discharge the overseer," said Malcolm, composedly.

"And hire another as bad, or worse! The truth is, Argyle, it is a riddle to me how I am to make both ends meet this year. We have studied economy till we are absolutely pinching ourselves."

"And giving large parties," thought the cooler head of his listener.

"Only last week, I sold a horse that his weight in gold would not have induced me to part with, six months ago, and Eleanor has not bought a new dress for I don't know when."

"I dare say *you* do not!" commented the uncharitable brother, to himself.

"But it is no use! I shall be only another victim to the times, and the stupidity, or something worse, of the precious rulers of this glorious and prosperous Republic. If it were not for my wife and babies, I would not care how soon I went by the board."

A real tear trickled down his cheek, hidden the next instant by a cloud of smoke.

"Melancholy drunk!" decided Malcolm, knocking out the ashes from his pipe over the porch railing.

The impatient action bruised and snapped a tender spray of the hop-vine that formed part of the verdant curtain. The powerful odor—mingled sweet and bitter—floated past Malcolm, on the warm air, and bore his fancy back to other days and pictures. The early and humble friends, whose tragic fate had cast such a shadow over his existence; the vine-draped cottage; Mark's cheery face and tone; Bessie's lithe form and pleasant smile, as she hovered around his couch; little Kitty's touch on his hands and brow; her sunny curls brushing his, as she prattled from the fullness of her loving heart—dear, dear little Kitty! where was she now? His mouth relaxed; his eyes were no longer cold and bright, as these memories rolled over him. It was a willful freak of imagination, and took his heart unawares. There was, for

the time, no intermixture or afterthought of revenge against those who had wrought the ruin of the happy home, so truly remembered. Instead, ensued a disposition to pity and succor the sorrowing, from whatever cause the affliction might proceed. He was subject to these fits of softening, although no one, except Miss Barbara, knew it.

At this auspicious conjuncture of memory and feeling, Mr. Moreau's plaining again reached his senses.

"I abominate debt, and I have chafed under this until I am worn out. If I cannot raise the money, I cannot. In these times, everything sells at a ruinous sacrifice; but honor is dearer than money, and sell I will—if it takes everything I have to cover the claim."

"How much is it?"

Malcolm's accent was propitious. Mr. Moreau congratulated himself upon his eloquence. He had an indistinct idea of having read at school of a man whose oratory by the sea-side brought the fish in enraptured crowds to the beach. In his tipsy meditations, he pronounced himself a greater magician, in that he had dispelled the oyster-like reserve of the man who kept the rest of the world at bay.

Oh, Eleanor Moreau! if you could have seen the presumptuous germs sprouting in the soil of a mind whose tillage you claimed as your monopoly; could have known of his temerity in risking your childrens' hoped-for inheritance upon a die of his own casting!

She was not at hand to avert consequences, good or bad—and Mr. Moreau, having conceived the idea of perverting his powers as his wife's plenipotentiary, to his personal and private advantage, pushed on to the issue.

"If I could get reliable security," he said, quite artlessly. "Capital tobacco this! I would recognize it for yours, anywhere. Such a name as Logan's or yours, for instance—but, bless you! Logan is as close as wax, and you might not consi-

der a deed of trust upon any part of my property you choose to select, sufficient to warrant you in"—

Malcolm seemed to awake from a dream.

"I never go security for any one!" he said, so brusquely, that Mr. Moreau leaped from his chair, and the pipe slipped from his fingers, "What sum do you want?"

"Well—but indeed, I had no intentions—I did not design a hint"—

"What is the amount of this debt?"

Mr. Moreau had wit enough left to name a sum exceeding his real need. "If he is disposed to be liberal, a figure or two more won't stop him!" whispered low cunning.

"So much!" exclaimed Malcolm, with a searching gaze, that frightened the blood to the liar's heart. "You have been unfortunate indeed—very unlucky!" laying a stress upon the last word, that, coupled with his keen eye, made Mr. Moreau fidget in deadly trepidation, lest he had spoiled all, or that the hermitage of his brother-in-law had not been proof against certain reports of busybodies, touching the manner of his losses. Malcolm was buried in thought for some minutes, his compressed lips and knit brows, replete with evil augury to the quaking petitioner.

"And this, you wish me to lend you?"

"My dear Argyle! did I say that?"

"You meant it! Your property will be sacrificed unless you receive immediate assistance?"

Mr. Moreau sighed dolorously, "Even so."

"You will give your bond in return?"

"Assuredly! most certainly!" recovering spirit. "It is a temporary embarrassment, the fault of the times, altogether, you see. Blame Madison, and all his backers, I say!"

Malcolm went into the house, and presently returned with a paper, yet wet from the pen.

"The money is in bank. Send to Richmond and get it!"

"My dearest brother!" cried Moreau, jumping up and grasping his hand, fairly beside himself with delighted astonishment.

"Your bond, if you please!" interposed the creditor.

It was illegibly made out, owing to liquor or the flutter of pleasure he was in, and then Mr. Moreau broke forth again with his ecstatic gratitude. Malcolm brought him up this time, at the second word.

"I can dispense with thanks," said he, every syllable a pellet of ice, falling slowly and severely upon the appalled auditor. "Your wife is cognizant of your distressed circumstances, and your appeal to my generosity, I presume."

"Yes! yes!" chattered Mr. Moreau's teeth.

He hardly knew what he said or thought further than the overwhelming impression that his wife's brother was a most uncomfortable man, and that the worst was still ahead of him. He was not deceived.

"I am glad of it! She is a woman to feel keenly a strait of this sort."

"She does, sir! she does! She cried all last night about it, and was nearly distracted when I left her this morning."

"I am very glad to hear it!" said Malcolm, in the same incomprehensible tone, "I have a message to send her. Please say—or no! I will write it. Excuse me a moment!"

He handed him a sealed note, when he came out again.

"With my respects and sympathies," he said, smiling sardonically.

"And you will be over to the party?"

"Not unless I change my mind!" was the unexpected response.

But as he looked neither angry nor scornful, Mr. Moreau's scanty residue of sense concluded that he was "only joking," and he laughed in saying, "Good morning."

Malcolm saw him ride down the lane, with bitter contempt in eye and heart.

"What brought *that* here?" snapped Miss Barbara, whose curiosity had been crucifying her from the instant of Mr. Moreau's arrival.

Instead of answering her question, Malcolm laughed harshly through his shut teeth.

"You told me once, Aunt Bab, by way of reconciling me to the beauties of human nature, that all men were not Sancrofts. You were right; but I believe I had rather deal with a snake than a toad!"

Mr. Moreau was within the bounds of his own plantation before the brilliant thought occurred to him that the note he carried might refer to the private transaction between himself and Malcolm, and not to Eleanor's invitation. The cold sweat oozed through his pores at the frightful probability. Instinctively, he checked his horse behind a clump of trees, that would screen him from the house, and took the letter from his pocket-book. He could see through the paper that it was short, and strained his eyes to decipher something of its contents.

We commend this incident, as the first of a series of like sort, to the serious consideration of managing wives, whose spouses have no secrets from the partners of their souls. Never was husband better drilled than Mr. Moreau; never had Benedict a more thorough sense of his wife's superior abilities, as contrasted with his own; never did one profess more cheerful and implicit reliance upon her counsel, or appear to make a more ample confession of all intentions and transgressions—yet his polar star, at that hour, beamed radiantly in her firmament, without the least fear of approaching tempest. In other words, Eleanor was as profoundly ignorant of her husband's pecuniary difficulty as of his bold and dishonorably secret designs upon her brother's pocket.

Mr. Moreau's conscience accommodated itself with dexterous facility to falsehoods of any dimensions; but, such is the restraining effects of human law! he hesitated to break the damp wafer.

of the missive he held. He turned the letter over and over, held it up to the light, and, at length, peeped in at one end. This act revealed his own name at the top of the page, and he was inserting his finger to see what came next, when the wafer split, and the note came open in his hands. It was brief, indeed.

ELEANOR: Mr. Moreau has confided to me the embarrassed state of his affairs—represented the necessity of leaving you and your children homeless unless relief is speedily afforded. I have supplied the means to avert the catastrophe, for a while, at least. I have rejected his thanks. I will not receive yours. I wish you both to understand that mercy for you and yours has not been my motive in this act. I have performed it in memory of your contrary course toward my friends, the Hales. Consider, in accepting this relief, that Providence has humbled you to circumstances precisely similar to what were theirs when you refused them aid, and feel—if you have a spark of feeling left—that the hand of the dead is heaping coals of fire upon your head.

"The mills of the gods grind slowly;" but the turn of every criminal is sure. I hope and believe that yours is near at hand.

MALCOLM ARGYLE.

Mr. Moreau sat his horse like a petrification. Deliver the letter he could not. He was afraid to destroy it or to pretend that he had lost it. Malcolm had seen him deposit it carefully in his pocket-book. What business—it would be asked—had he to take it out before reaching home? Even if Eleanor had known of, and authorized the loan he had effected, it would be as much as his life was worth to give her this crazy effusion—for such it seemed to him—the composition of a vengeful monomaniac. For the thousandth time, he rained maledictions upon the Hales, without reflecting that the Providence he ignored, and the writer of the letter recognized, had ordered that he should read it within ten steps of the spot where he had, in unthinking and impertinent gallantry, shut the last door of hope against Bessy, by arousing Eleanor's vindictive jealousy. "Our pleasant vices are made

whips of, to scourge us for our sins;" and this long lash, stretching across the gulf of years, stung none the less that the castigation had been delayed. His troubled irresolution ended in his resealing and replacing the epistle in his wallet.

"If Malcolm refers to it, which it is not likely he will do, he is so close-mouthed, and Eleanor attacks me about it, I will say that I forgot it. It will be prudent to keep it for some days; then I can burn it, and suppose that I must have thrown it away, with a lot of old papers that were littering up my pocket-book. I was always better at fibbing than fighting."

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE are some days whose exceeding beauty makes them to be events, rather than divisions of time, in our lives ; whose fascinations steal irresistibly to whatever sense of loveliness there may be in us ; win their way to the heart as to the fancy, and beguile the most practical into love with life and the world that furnishes a pleasure so exquisite.

Such was one forenoon, when Malcolm Argyle threw himself into the saddle for a long ride.

"Coquette or not, May is a bewitching month," he said, as his horse galloped down the turfy lane and into the forest-bordered road. "June is too passionate, too hot and dazzling. I like this play of childlike smiles better."

There were truly smiles everywhere. To some eyes, sunshine is ever the same, unless obscured or subdued by clouds ; whereas, to the student lover of Nature, its characters are as various and distinct as the landscapes it blesses. There is, as Malcolm said, the rich, red glare of June, ripening the berries and darkening the spring verdure, while it whitens the harvest fields ;—filling the noon-tide with the odors it has rifled from flowers that droop beneath the radiance they yet worship ; and robing the evening heavens with a purple twilight that flushes the zenith far into the night-watches. Then comes the intense white heat of August ; and next, and perhaps most beautiful, the soft yellow glow that lends to September and October an illusory charm—a dreamy magic, that floods our souls with delicious, yet languorous fancies ;

the atmosphere of all others, in which poets oftenest learn what they were created to be and to do, and under whose spell men listen most willingly to their strains.

November sunlight is a pained and joyless gleam, more like a frown than a smile, except when Indian Summer, with the breath of departed flowers and the warmth of solstitial airs, lulls the dreary mourner into sweet dreams of the pleasures she appears to lament through the chill days and gusty midnights.

There is no softness, no coloring in the sun's rays in winter-time—only a frosty glitter, that never dallies with shadows, or dances on the water. Old Sol shines away bravely, but it is evidently from a conviction of duty. Since he has engaged to light this dismantled ball of earth, he will adhere to his compact, but it is a loveless office—well performed, yet not *con amore*. April is gay and pensive on alternate hours, and ere we tire of her caprices, May skies are over us, and upon the earth, light, that seems to quiver with gladness. The leaves glisten and dance from morn to eve ; shadows chase and glide and disappear on the plain ; the violets, far down in the dell, unclothe their blue eyes in pleased surprise at the touch that awakens them ; and tempted by the pure, frolicksome kisses of the never-still rays, white lilies and moss-roses and timid anemones and shrinking acacias—the shy and fragile darlings of the garden—take their places in the vernal fête.

Malcolm yielded to the spell of the day and season. His choice of a route was a sequestered by-way, leading by many a devious pass, through the heart of the grand old forest. He forgot the winters of the man ; their frosts of grief and disappointment, and felt himself again the boy, whose life was to be one unending May. He talked to himself and to his horse ; repeated poetical descriptions of sylvan beauties and lyrical praises of "Merrie Maie ;"—he even sang a stanza of a hunting-song he had trolled lustily with his college-mates.

"Gently, Sprightly !" he said, coaxingly, to the spirited mare,

as she arched her neck, curvetted and neighed in sympathy with the weather and his sunny mood. "She is a mischievous kitten, yet an affectionate one!" he continued, for she inclined her small, pointed ears to his caressing hand, and glanced backward at him, her brilliant eye bespeaking intelligent attachment to the master, who, however stern and unsparing he might be to his own kind, was humane as the most pitiful woman to dumb and helpless things.

"She is thirsty, poor creature!" said he, again, marking her wistful look at a pool on the roadside. "No! no! my dainty lady! You would not touch that stagnant water. The creek is not far ahead!"

Another mile's canter brought them in sight of it. It was a sluggish stream in this part of its course; broad and shallow, and lined on the bottom with a thick stratum of decaying leaves. The road was not much used by the inhabitants of the vicinity; but it had been travelled sufficiently to wear the bed of the creek at the intersection of the two. And here, where the water was deeper and clearer than further up or down the channel, a lady equestrian had stopped to let her horse drink. Her attendant, whom Malcolm knew directly for Colonel Rashleigh's English groom, rode along the shelving bank, to a spot some distance below his young mistress, and then into the creek. Malcolm saw his peril, and galloping down the hill, shouted to the unwary stranger:

"There is a quagmire just before you! Take care!"

Miss Rashleigh, conceiving the caution to be meant for her, wheeled her steed to the bank from which she had come, alarmed by the suddenness and the purport of the warning, yet retaining her presence of mind. The groom struck his spurs into his horse's sides and rushed into the thick of the danger—a narrow morass, cloaked by green slime and moss—but which an acute eye would have detected and avoided. The poor beast's legs were out of sight at the second plunge.

"Off with you!" called Malcolm. "Don't you see that you are sinking him deeper?"

The fellow fell, rather than slipped off, so helpless was his terror. Malcolm had dismounted, and advancing as near as he dared to the treacherous quagmire, seized, with one hand, a stout branch that overhung the water, and held out the other to the servant. It required an exertion of his herculean strength to drag the bulky frame from the mire, and to firmer footing; but it was the work of an instant. Then by the help of the invariable fence-rail, to which the Virginian first looks for succor in wayside casualties, and by the combined efforts of the two, the horse was extricated; and the task was done in less time than it has taken us to relate the accident.

"Thank you, Mr. Argyle!" said Miss Rashleigh, gratefully.

She, too, had crossed the creek, and remained a mute, but excited spectator of the rescue, without distracting the attention of the actors in it by audible expressions of her feelings or fears. Malcolm had hardly seen her before, and he observed now, that she had picked up Sprightly's bridle, which he had flung upon her neck, and held it with her own.

She extended her hand, and there was a tremulous sparkle in her eye.

"You are very kind!" she said, frankly. "I tremble to think what might have happened but for your arrival."

Malcolm could not abash her by appearing to overlook her grateful action. He took the proffered hand and pressed it slightly, disclaiming his right to her thanks.

"Perhaps I was in fault," he said, "for my hasty alarm, which confused your groom. But he was too close to the miry bank for me to hesitate."

"You were perfectly right, I am sure. Thomas! do you understand that this gentleman saved your life?"

"Do not, I beg of you, Miss Rashleigh, magnify my trifling

service in that proportion!" said Malcolm, smiling. "He would probably have lost his horse, but I think he would have contrived to reach the shore himself."

"Contrived!" Katherine shook her head, with a mischievous laugh. "I have no precedent that warrants me in believing that he will ever learn the meaning of the word. Are you ready, Thomas?" she inquired, raising her voice.

He had withdrawn a decent space, and was shaking himself, like a huge water-dog, to dislodge the heavier portions of the mud that enveloped the lower part of his figure and bespattered him to the crown of his hat.

"That is a hopeless business," said Malcolm to him. "My advice is—with your permission, Miss Rashleigh—that you mount your horse at once, Thomas, and ride home as fast as possible. Exercise is the best prescription for you after your bath, until you can get to a fire and a change of clothing. He is not a fit escort for you in that plight, Miss Rashleigh," he remarked, aside. "If you will allow me, I will see you safely to your father's door."

The groom, in sullen mortification, thrust the mud from his stirrups with a stick, and muttered something about his "orders being never to lose sight of Miss Rashleigh."

Katherine flushed scarlet at his impertinence. Provoked as he himself was, Malcolm remarked the leaping fire, and how quickly it was controlled.

"You will ride on!" she commanded, with quiet dignity. "Say to your master that I am safe, and that Mr. Argyle has politely offered to attend me home."

The man's ludicrous figure, as he trotted briskly before them, was to Malcolm and Katherine an apology for his reluctance to precede them. The slimy mire dripped from him and his horse in clots and puddles, that marked their track in the middle of the road. Departed was the glory of his yellow leather breeches and

fair top-boots. From his waist downward he was black as tar could have made him, and the red coat which he had sported with such swellings of national pride, was so besmirched and spotted that there was little hope of its restoration to its pristine hue. His crest-fallen air and unmistakable consciousness of their inspection, completed the sordidness of the picture.

"I can go no further!" exclaimed Katherine, reining up.

Laughter strangled her accents, and restraining herself by superhuman efforts, until the luckless lackey disappeared behind a bend in the road, she gave way to her emotion in a peal of the liveliest merriment that ever echoed in forest dingle. Malcolm joined in with all his heart. Respect for her had controlled his inclination thus long.

Talk of the sympathy of the graver and sadder sentiments of our nature, the friendship that springs into being from the unforeseen recognition of kindred tastes, or that blooms upon the grave of a common sorrow! Our observation—aye, and our experience, go to prove that nothing so thaws the ice of mutual reserve, levels the barriers of previous strangerhood so instantaneously as a hearty laugh, participated in, and enjoyed alike by both of the predestined acquaintances.

The bright eyes, whose glances met through mirthful tears, said to each other that apologies for the simultaneous violation of propriety's laws were neither expected nor desirable. When they were so far recovered as to pursue their ride, there were continual lapses into similar evidences of amusement, as they recalled the grotesque apparition, in whose steps they were following.

"Were the Mays of 'Merrie England' more beautiful to you than this?" asked Malcolm, in response to her remark upon the loveliness of the morning.

"No! I never saw such sunshine before." Her face was honest and happy. "I have always heard that the people in your Southern States lived out of doors. If nature often holds out

temptations like to-day, I shall easily learn your habits. Walls and roofs of any description are a prison in this weather."

"Excepting these!" answered Malcolm, pointing to the pillared aisle they were traversing, formed by the trees that spread their green canopy overhead.

Before he thought of what he did, he found himself repeating from his favorite poet:

"How airy and how light the graceful arch!
Yet awful as the consecrated roof,
Reëchoing pious anthems."

She looked up at him with a smile, as of one who hears his native tongue in a foreign land.

"Ah! you know Cowper, then?"

"I read him!" he replied, with a slight emphasis.

She blushed at the peculiarity of her phrase, then rallied to defend it.

"And do you not find that he has grown as familiar to you as any friend who visits your house in person? When you read, which is his talking to you, do you not feel as if you were likewise talking *with* him?"

"I have experienced something of the kind, I must confess. I need not inquire what poet *you* admire most."

"Which one I love most, you need not, assuredly. I have a good governess, who, in the excess of her approbation of Cowper's sentiments and style, caused me to transcribe the whole of his 'Task,' and to commit to memory an incredible number of his shorter poems. I learned thus to write mechanically while my head was full of other things, and my faithless memory lost the larger part of what was formally given into her keeping; but all this did not eradicate my veneration and affection for the only poet I ever entirely understood."

She paused, and with a smile, whose archness might have

seemed too free, had it been less natural and girlish, added, "You see, Mr. Argyle, you may finish your quotation, secure of an attentive listener."

"I did finish it—did I not?"

"No, sir. You stopped on recollecting that you were not alone."

It was the truth. The following lines were too just a description of what their eyes feasted upon that moment, not to present themselves, unbidden, to the thoughts of any one who had ever read them. Malcolm recited them; partly because Miss Rashleigh requested it; mainly because they arose so spontaneously to his lips, that an effort would have been required to keep them back:

"The checkered earth seems restless as a flood,
Brushed by the wind. So sportive is the light
Shot through the boughs, it dances as they dance,—
Shadows and sunshine intermingling quick,
And darkening and enlight'ning—as the leaves
Play wanton—ev'ry moment, every spot."

"Thank you!" said the young lady, simply and earnestly.

The dimples still lingered in her cheek; but the sweeping fringes of the lids veiled her downcast eyes, and she rode on for some time without speaking. Her riding-habit and the cap, with its falling plume, became her well, and in any attire, common or picturesque, she must have been handsome; but it was not the isolated fact of her beauty that drew and riveted the regards of her escort. It was a vague, thrilling impression of familiarity with the features which it was impossible to believe he had ever seen before, save in the brief instant of their introduction at church.

Yet that half-smile, meditative and sweet; the short upper lip—the thought of pride in its curve, modified by the ripe fullness of the lower; the cleft chin, that imparted piquancy to the

countenance ; the shapely head and its regal poise upon the white neck ; these he had seen—not once or twice, in a passing glimpse—but had beheld, and studied, and loved. Like a flash of light, recurred to him Miss Barbara's comment upon the "English girl's" resemblance to Bessy Hale. He called himself stupid and blind not to have perceived it at a glance. This it was—the accidental likeness to his early protégé—that had moved him to an interest in this young creature—this child, in comparison with his matured manhood—such as he had not felt for aught in the form of woman, since the dream of his youth was broken. At this stage in the revolution of his thoughts, their subject raised her eyes and dropped them again, beneath a scrutiny, whose blent interest and inquiry she could not fail to read, and certainly did not understand.

Malcolm spoke promptly, to end the awkward pause.

"That is a noble animal, Miss Rashleigh. He is imported, I suppose?"

"He was one of my fellow-voyagers," said she, threading the flowing mane with her fingers. "No place would be quite home without him. He has owned me as mistress since his coltish days."

"You enjoy riding, I perceive. You will not find such horsewomen here, as you have been used to see in your own land. American ladies are seldom equestrian from love of the exercise. In many parts of the country, it is the only practicable mode of conveyance to church, to the neighbors' houses and to town. What is performed as a necessity, soon ceases to become a pleasure."

"Your sister, Mrs. Moreau, is an exception to your rule, it would seem. I called at her house this morning to deliver a message from my father to Mr. Moreau. As I was in my habit, the conversation ran principally upon horses and riding. She made eager and minute inquiries about certain English customs,

that afforded opportunity for the display of this accomplishment ; hunting, steeple-chases, and the like. There are still ladies, who ride to see the hounds throw off, and are not only frequenters of the turf—but I am ashamed to say—risk and lose their money, upon the race, as freely as do their husbands and brothers. I have heard such stories, and my information in these matters is only gained from hearsay."

"Many ladies in our highest circles maintain and exercise their right to witness such sports," replied Malcolm.

"I am perhaps inclined to be Amazonian in my liking for fine horses," said Katherine, "and education might have made me as zealous a patron of the race-course as Diana was of the chase, had it not been for my father's insuperable dislike—prejudice, if you choose to consider it such—to games of hazard in any form."

"He shows sound judgment there ! I rejoice that his principles are so strict"—then catching her surprised gaze at his warmth, he bit his lip and changed the subject.

Colonel Rashleigh walked down the porch-steps and lawn to receive his daughter and her cavalier. He had seen Malcolm once before on the Court-house green—the monthly rendezvous of all the male denizens of the county, and now greeted him with as cordial a welcome as was compatible with present agitation and general stiffness.

"You have earned our sincere gratitude, sir?" he said, in solemn pomp. "I was never more displeased with any one in my life, sir, than I am with that stupid blockhead of a servant. I shall appoint you some other groom, Katherine, my daughter. A fellow, who cannot take care of himself and his horse, must not be intrusted with a lady's safety."

"Indeed, you are too hard upon him, papa !" said Katherine. "He has been sorely punished for his negligence. It was nothing but an oversight that any of us might have committed. Ask

Mr. Argyle if it was not a deceptive quagmire. I, myself, would have mistaken it for solid ground."

Thus referred to, Malcolm was obliged to sustain her generous appeal in behalf of the ungrateful Thomas.

"Others have met with the same misfortune there," he answered. "One of my neighbors lost a colored boy at that identical spot last winter. He was suffocated before help arrived."

"Oh!" Katherine grew pale and clasped her hands, at this thoughtless admission of the peril he had hitherto affected to treat lightly.

Colonel Rashleigh moved his head up and down, in magisterial condemnation of the public authorities, that left unguarded a pitfall, whose danger was thus proclaimed; but courtesy wrought upon his justice to induce him to withhold this opinion.

They were at the house-door, and he invited Mr. Argyle in, with formal but sincere hospitality. Malcolm declined, and what was harder, he held out against the reiteration of the request by Katherine's involuntary look. But though he risked offending them in this respect, he was too much the gentleman to forget that he ought to ask permission to call, the following day, and inquire whether Miss Rashleigh's health had sustained any shock from her fright. The petition was readily granted, and he took leave.

With spirits changed from the buoyancy of the early morning, he set his face homeward. He—Malcolm Argyle—the misogynist and Timon of the region—had ridden four miles in company with a woman—young and handsome—without satiety or disgust; had talked of the weather—a theme he despised, as the staple of discourse among fools and fashionables—and, more absurd! had quoted poetry, like a sentimental Sophomore. Worst of all! was he not committed to a call—a visit in cold blood and broad daylight, at her father's house! and he foresaw manifold obstacles in the way of civilly dropping an acquaintance

thus commenced. He railed at himself for inconsistency, because he was not more annoyed—angry, in fact—at the advantage secured over him by the fate adverse to the uneventful routine of his secluded life. Almost a stranger as he was to those who had known him since his birth, why should he allow circumstances to force these foreign comers upon his acquaintanceship? He succeeded in deceiving himself into an inclement humor by the time he dismounted at Ben Lomond, and, for the rest of the day, Miss Barbara wore (spiritual and invisible) sackcloth and ashes for the palpable failure of her recent attempt at amelioration of his moods.

It was a relief to see him set off upon his accustomed ride next morning.

"He's bilious, I think," she said, "and maybe the shakin' and the air will do him good."

The remedies doubtless proved efficacious, for when he presented himself in Colonel Rashleigh's drawing-room, his fresh complexion and clear eye betokened excellent digestion and a healthy state of the blood.

The apartment was not adapted to the purpose for which it was now used, except in size. The wainscot was painted dark-green, and the furniture having been selected to correspond, and the narrow windows being placed very high up, the lugubrious effect was gloomily unpleasing. Malcolm reverted to Katherine's declaration that roofs and walls were a prison at this season, and believed that he had discovered the secret of her partiality for out-of-door life. Colonel Rashleigh had met him in the hall and ushered him into this room, in a state that prepared the visitor for an introduction to a large company, whereas there was not a soul there beside themselves.

"Be seated, if you please, Mr. Argyle!"

The colonel drew forward an immense chair, shrouded in green drapery. Malcolm thought of the pillory, as the perpendicular

back straightened his spinal column to a right line, and he dispensed with the use of a footstool that was considered as a part of the throne.

"You are not afflicted with the gout, then, sir?" said the host, seeing this action.

Malcolm could not prevent a smile, and a glance at his young, strong limbs.

"No, sir."

"Ah, indeed! Is it an hereditary complaint in your family, sir?"

"Not that I ever heard. It does not prevail in this country to any great extent, and is becoming a more rare complaint yearly."

"Is it possible? To what cause do you attribute this remarkable circumstance, sir?"

"I really am unable to explain it," answered the visitor, beginning to feel bored. "Perhaps the climate" —

He was interrupted by the opening of a door opposite to him, which let in a stream of light from an outer room. It was a fleeting illumination, for the person entering closed the door as she stepped within the parlor. Both gentlemen arose.

"Mr. Argyle—allow me to present Mrs. Rashleigh. My dear, we are, as you know, greatly indebted to Mr. Argyle for his valuable service to our daughter yesterday."

The lady's white face and hands were all that Malcolm's eyes, blinded by the late passing light, could immediately distinguish. She was tall, and arrayed in dark or black robes, and this was the extent of his discoveries concerning her until she had been seated some moments.

"We were engaged in an interesting conversation, my dear," said Colonel Rashleigh, in his pompous, deliberate voice. "Mr. Argyle encourages me to hope that my troublesome inheritance, the gout, may not be a perpetual enemy in this salubrious climate.

It would be a singular coincidence, sir, if the emigration from the land of my fathers, resolved upon by the advice of Mrs. Rashleigh's physician, Sir Humphrey Asbury—you may have heard of him, sir?"

Malcolm owned his ignorance in this respect.

"Sir Humphrey Asbury—a skillful and popular practitioner, sir—should, I say, eventuate in my own recovery from a painful and tedious disorder. But I am detaining you, Mr. Argyle"—with a Grandisonian bow and wave of the hand. "I detain you from the conclusion of your observations upon the causes of the decline of this ancient disease among the citizens of these United States."

"Not at all, sir!" rejoined Malcolm, growing more and more restive for liberty and silence. "I merely suggested that the climate might have something to do with it. I know very little of the gout or its treatment."

"It was Sir Humphrey Asbury's opinion, in which he was supported by the celebrated Dr. Arbuthnot—You have some acquaintance with his fame, perhaps, Mr. Argyle?"

Fortunately, Mr. Argyle was able to reply in the affirmative.

"An eminent man, sir, he was!—a re-mar-ka-ble man! It was the belief, sir, of both these distinguished physicians" —

Again that blessed ray of brightness beyond, and a rush of cool air with it. This time, the door was left open.

"Good morning, Mr. Argyle!" said Katherine, walking up to him with a modest, frank grace, that was inexpressibly charming.

Without consulting Colonel Rashleigh's dull, grey eyes, or his own previous determination of distant politeness, Malcolm shook hands with her.

"Have I the pleasure of seeing you quite well to-day?" he inquired. "Have you suffered any inconvenience from your adventure of yesterday?"

"No—how could I? It is I who should make inquiries of

you. Are you sure that you did not strain your arm in drawing poor Thomas from his 'Slough of Despond?' I described the exploit, in detail, to papa, last night, and he was much concerned lest you should have over-exerted yourself."

"It was an unnecessary fear. I am none the worse for what you pertinaciously dignify into an exploit. And, in reciprocating civilities, we are forgetting the only damaged individual of the trio. How is your groom, in mind and body?"

"Happily convalescent." Katherine laughed as joyously as if the room were not hung with dark green, and her stately father and silent mother were not within hearing. "Gay feathers make gay birds; and his spirits have recovered their usual pitch at the assurance of the laundress that his livery is not utterly beyond hope."

She had remained standing while addressing and replying to Malcolm, and now turned to her mother.

"Mamma! did you deliver my message—my petition to the gentlemen?"

"I did not. It escaped my memory."

"We await your ladyship's commands," said Colonel Rashleigh, with heavy gallantry.

Katherine courtesied in mock gratitude. Malcolm's inward simile was of a fawn sporting with an elephant.

"Then, will it please your worships to walk into the other parlor? It is lighter and cooler than this"—throwing an impatient look around it—"less like a funeral state-chamber, if you will pardon my candor, papa."

He would have frowned at her depreciation of his pet apartment, but her witching smile mollified his displeasure. The "other parlor" was the ladies' sitting-room. India matting was spread upon the floor; white dimity curtains, with wide fringes, shaded the windows; there were three work-tables, with gay covers, and upon each a glass containing wild flowers; low chairs

and foot-cushions stood about, in convenient confusion, and in one window was a linnet's cage. Mrs. Holt, in her dove-colored dress, was waiting to pay her respects to the visitor—very mild and very prim. She was no more the presiding genius of this cheerful and tasteful home-bower, than was the cold, stern-featured woman who waved Malcolm to a chair, in a line with that which she selected for herself, as if the use of her tongue would compromise her habitual haughtiness. Owing to the situation assigned him, inadvertently, as he imagined, he could not get a fair view of her, except by wheeling around half-way in his seat; nor was the temptation very powerful while Katherine was facing him.

The more effectually to break up the stiffness of a group whose component members were so uncongenial, she had resumed her work, the netting-box, with its ivory shuttle and threads of spider-like fineness. And, as her fingers flew, eyes, tongue and smiles were weaving a pretty tissue of quaint fancies and sprightly wit, that, hanging about her father's harangues and her governess' "elegant extracts," relieved the dullness of one and the pedantry of the other.

"She is an original, and a pleasing variety in the dead-level silliness and affectation of her sex," reflected the ungallant listener. "The miracle is how she has resisted the influences of society like this. I should as soon have expected to find a sweet-brier growing in a vault. She never got that soul from the father," surveying the John Bull visage, with its double chin and flabby eyelids; its master-trait being solemn self-conceit. "Was the ethereal spark the mother's gift?"

He was inspired by a curiosity to pry into the mystery. Pushing his chair back, that he might see her, he accosted Mrs. Rashleigh:

"You have hardly had time to give our climate a thorough test, yet, madam!"

The faintest tint of rose suffused the lady's wan cheek. It might be of displeasure at the unceremonious address, for she averted her eyes in replying.

"I presume not."

"Have you ever visited our continent before?"

"Yes"—she seemed to steady her voice. "I was in America once—many years since—in my youth."

"You never told me that, mamma!" cried the impulsive Katherine.

"Did I not?"

It was all she said, and her daughter understood that for some reason she was not to prosecute her inquiries.

Malcolm too desisted. The reserve he had cultivated in his own demeanor did not dispose him to sympathy with kindred qualities in others. If this unsocial dame fancied the part of the "proud ladye" in the ballad, he was not the man to interfere with her masquerade. He considered that his overtures had been frank and gentlemanly. She saw fit to repel them, and in their succeeding interviews, should any such be set down in the book of their future, she must lead off in conversation—not he.

Again, a thoughtful ride and a slow, along the forest road. Again, reason demonstrated his discomfort, martyr as he was, to the irrational conventionalities of the society to which he was a professed outlaw; victimized by pride and prosiness and untimely displays of learning—and again, feeling gave the lie to every representation; refuted every argument.

"The cause is plain enough," he uttered, so emphatically that Sprightly pricked up her ears. "It must be the likeness to poor lost Bessy that makes me notice and think of the girl."

And he got down from his horse to pluck a spray of sweet-brier waving beside the path. It was fastened in his bosom, and transferred thence to a glass of water in his room that night.

He did not inquire of Reason or Feeling why he did this.

CHAPTER XVII.

THAT his whimsical brother-in-law *had* changed his mind, Mr. Moreau was informed by his appearance on the night of the party. The room was a third full of company when he arrived. Marcia Carrington was gossiping with Jessie Hunter in a corner, when a buzz went around from group to group, and directed the eyes of the early friends to the entrance-door.

"A resurrection!" commented one lady to another.

"More likely a reconciliation!" replied a gentleman who overheard the remark. "They say that, lately, Moreau has spent half his time at Ben Lomond."

"He might do worse!" said a bystander, significantly; and both gentlemen laughed a little, at which the ladies looked puzzled.

"Why! there's Malcolm, I declare!" exclaimed Jessie. "What is going to happen? Eleanor told me that she did not believe he would come. Isn't it funny? He hates parties awfully!"

Marcia's cheeks tingled with conflicting emotions. It so happened that the next person with whom Malcolm met, after paying his respects to the host and hostess, was the burly planter who had been the guiltless Paris to his Helen. In the benevolent pity of his heart, the worthy husband threw as much cordiality as his kind, red face was capable of expressing, into his salutation, and his hearty tones swelled above the murmur of other voices.

"Happy to meet you, at last, Mr. Argyle! Upon my word,

I have despaired of ever getting better acquainted with you. My wife will be glad to renew the friendship that once existed between you, I am sure. Come and speak to her—won't you?"

Marcia was not sensitive; yet she was ashamed, as she noted how general was the attention and ill-concealed amusement which this movement excited. When Mr. Carrington puffingly presented "an old friend, my dear Marshy" (we spell as he pronounced), "whom you will be glad to meet again," her voice was cold and constrained, while her face was on fire with confusion.

"I met Mr. Argyle two weeks ago, at church," she said, and stooped to pick up her fan.

Malcolm bent for it before she could touch it, and returned it with a politeness as easy as hers was embarrassed.

"How are you, Jessie?" he said, shaking hands with the sister he had not seen before in months.

"As weak and sick as I can be, to keep on my feet," she rejoined, plaintively. "I ought not to be here to-night. I shall pay for it, and dearly too."

"I hope not!" Her brother took a seat beside her. "And the latest Nimrod! how is his Littleness?"

The play upon her married name was not new to Jessie, or she would not have comprehended the allusion.

"He is very well!" she answered, animatedly. "If he were not asleep, I would take you up to see him—and you too, Marcia. He is a monstrous child of his age. A perfect beauty—like the Argyles, too! My other children are all Hunters."

"Fond of children, Mr. Argyle?" asked Mr. Carrington, agreeably.

"You would not believe me if I were to say 'No,' Mr. Carrington."

"Upon my word, you came near the truth there, sir!" returned the bluff planter. "I have no respect for a man—indeed I can-

not conceive of a man who has any soul, not loving the dear little things—bless their hearts!"

"You are still delicate then, Jessie?" said Malcolm.

"Delicate! yes, and always shall be!" she sighed.

A sadder wreck of a fair and fresh beauty could hardly have been imagined. Her comeliness had never had the appearance of fast colors, in her best days. It was too dependent upon the gloss and curl of her abundant locks; her eyes were too pale in their blue; her skin too ready to betray the rise and fall of the blood. She resembled now a picture that had faded out. Her hair was thin, and lifeless as tow; the blue irids were so light as to be scarcely distinguishable from the white surrounding them; and in the sunken cheeks there were sallow spots where once the blush-rose had flourished. She had suffered certainly from bodily ailments; but more from what was the aggravation, if not the chief cause of these—a hypochondria, as sedulously nursed, and paraded with as much pride as were the children, multiplying discouragingly about her knees.

Her brother's unwonted interest in her, and in the late arrival, gratified her exceedingly. The Providence that helps the lame and the lazy had helped her to a man far higher in the scale of probity, and in easier worldly circumstances than Eleanor's activity had secured for herself. Under his influence, Jessie had grown more amiable, if not more disinterested. Silly and vain she was by nature, but the gentle loves of home had softened the ill-temper she had mostly acquired from, and exercised upon, her sister. Weak in action and vapid in conversation she must ever remain, and since she had claimed a place on the invalid list, she was particularly tiresome, as Malcolm was made to feel, without waste of time on her part. She was desirous to entertain her brother. As Mr. Hunter said, "they had enough bread and butter of their own to fill the babies' mouths, without playing boot-licks to a relation who was so unfortunate as to have no

family to spend his money. Let Eleanor have it, and welcome, Jess! It would be a pity to have all her work thrown away."

Jessie submitted outwardly—inasmuch as she refrained from allusions to her sister's schemes and conjectures about Malcolm's wealth, in the hearing of her husband, and did not gainsay Eleanor's insinuations as to the legitimate destination of the patrimonial estate; but sometimes she waxed malcontent at this cool surrender of her rights. Malcolm's flattering notice of her on this occasion, reanimated slumbering ambition. What was more reasonable than that she should be his favorite sister? She had never thwarted him, injured his friends and quarrelled outright with him, as Eleanor had done. The baby was not named. She would beg Mr. Hunter—she would insist, as the mother had a right to do—that the cherub should be called Malcolm Argyle. People said that Malcolm would never marry, since Marcia had treated him so badly, and it *did* seem improbable. What if he were to adopt his namesake nephew? Eleanor had dreamed of the same thing in naming her second child; but there were no signs yet that her wishes were true prophets.

These thoughts swam in her soft brain, while she was endeavoring to relate the leading symptoms of her infirm health; and Malcolm, seemingly lent an attentive ear, his eye resting meanwhile, as by accident, upon the door.

The Rashleighs were to remain all night at Montrouge—the Moreaus' residence. This was Eleanor's arrangement, in order to secure the attendance of Mrs. Rashleigh, who was fearful of the night air. They had been detained on the road by an accident to the harness of their carriage, and having to dress at Montrouge, were therefore rather late in appearing below stairs. Eleanor had circulated, industriously, tales of their social distinction in England, and the paternal affection felt by the uncle for Mr. Moreau, of Mrs. Rashleigh's elegance and the daughter's beauty and accomplishments. These things, working in the

imagination of the other guests, together with the fact that they were collected here to do them honor, created a sensation, when Eleanor advanced eagerly to salute the distinguished strangers. Colonel Rashleigh, in white silk stockings, knee-buckles, lace upon his ruffled shirt-bosom, and a streamer of broad black ribbon flowing down his back, from his powdered queue, was as imposing as he intended to be. Mrs. Rashleigh was dressed in grey silk, silvery in lustre and rich in fabric. The laces of her cap, neck-dress and sleeves were exquisite as the production of fairy looms; and a brilliant diamond star pinned the transparent folds at her throat. She was the Cynosura of every eye; but pale, tranquil in her gravity, she appeared utterly disregarding of the curiosity respect and admiration that she kindled. Katherine came in with her governess. Her dress of white gauze over pink silk, was pretty and girlish, while it befitted the daughter of a man of Colonel Rashleigh's reputed wealth. Among her dark tresses, was woven a wreath of sweet-brier—leaves and blossoms. Malcolm marvelled at the coincidence of his fancy and her taste.

"How very odd!" he thought, smilingly. "I will ask her, some time, how she happened to select that flower."

"Those are Mr. Moreau's rich relations—are they not?" asked Jessie, "I am dying to see them!"

"Be so good as to move aside a little, Mr. Carrington, if you please," said Malcolm. "Now, Jessie, look and live!"

"What superb laces!" ejaculated Mrs. Carrington, in the subdued tone of intense awe. "There is a small fortune in that dress of Mrs. Rashleigh's! And those magnificent diamonds! See how they shine, Stanhope!"

"The daughter's eyes please me better than the diamonds do, my dear," replied her husband. "Ah, Mr. Argyle! there is a prize worth a hard race. What a chance for you young men!"

"Who are fortunate in not having Mr. Carrington for a com-

petitor," was the pleasant rejoinder. "One whose appreciation of beauty is so lively, could not but be a formidable rival."

Mrs. Carrington's vanity would have been more pleased, had her jilted suitor remained silent at the—considering all things—malapropos remark of her spouse; or had he replied in any other style than the jest, with which he moved away. It testified with mortifying clearness, that he was no longer haunted by tender memories of her.

The genuine spirit of English reserve with regard to household concerns, prevailed at Briarwood. Hence, Malcolm's rescue of Katherine's groom and his subsequent call were unknown, as yet, beyond the limits of the estate. Eleanor watched her brother, as he gradually approached the young heiress; saw his bow and her smile, and construed this, as well as the conversation that ensued, into an exhibition of his desire to strengthen the restored family peace, by amity with its more remote members, and Katherine's friendly disposition toward her cousin's connections. She had a passion for diplomacy, and no sooner was the idea lodged in her mind that her gentlemanly and wealthy brother might be an efficient ally in obtaining for her a footing with her husband's high-born relatives—might, by exalting the Argyles in the sight of the aristocratic Colonel, dispose him to generosity to the nephew, who had nobly maintained the family dignity in his marriage; no sooner had this tempting bubble caught her eye, than her thoughts darted after it, with an ardor that ought to have brought success. Amid the distractions incident to her hostessship, she kept vigilant guard over her intended engine, dreading every instant to see him retire from the field and relapse into his habitual unsocial ways.

He was more merciful—as she told her husband, in one of their hurried conferences:

"Malcolm is really behaving beautifully. Was it your visit to

him, the other day, that has worked this miracle in him? You are getting into favor at last, my dear."

She swept on, not staying to witness the effect of this choice sugar-plum upon her liege lord. Possibly, the grimace he executed when her back was turned would have taught her, had she seen it, that there are secrets, as well as accidents, in the best-regulated households.

Malcolm finally resigned his place by Miss Rashleigh's side to a gentleman who had solicited her hand for the dance, then forming. He was standing near one of the deep windows—a looker-on of the merry mazes—when his sister sailed up to him.

"Malcolm, have you forgotten how to dance a Scotch reel?"

"I do not know. I suppose that I have," he returned, gazing at her more intently than was needful or comfortable to her, conscious, as she was, of a double purpose in the proposal she had on her tongue.

But she had a bold face always at her command—"matchless effrontery," as Malcolm denominated it. He had not believed that even those fearless eyes could sustain his meaning look, after the humiliation she had lately undergone at his hands. A side glance showed him Mr. Moreau, not far off, trying to carry on a gay conversation, while his eyes were upon the brother and sister, in an agonized suspense Malcolm understood but partially, and Eleanor did not see. In blissful ignorance of the letter burning in her husband's pocket, seeming to throb against his guilty heart, her mask was less elaborate than Malcolm supposed.

"I have been making inquiries among our friends, and am disappointed that so many declare themselves unable to go through the figure. Colonel Rashleigh requested me to get up the set, and I promised. It is Katherine's—Miss Rashleigh's—favorite dance, too. What a pity!"

Malcolm did not reply, although she paused to afford him the opportunity. She resumed:

"I thought that you would perhaps lead her out—just this once—rather than the plan should be spoiled. You used to excel in this dance."

The artful compliment doubtless conquered his scruples, for his features relaxed.

"Very well," he said. "If you only need me to complete your number, and Miss Rashleigh will accept me as a partner, I will break through my rules and oblige you."

"Thank you!—thank you!" in raptures with herself and him.

"Shall I be the bearer of your compliments to dear Katherine?"

"No. I will prefer my suit in person."

"Who of us has not a weak side?" said Eleanor, secretly. "I never yet saw a man whose head could not be made to whirl by a judicious touch of flattery—nor one whom I could not manage."

The obliging brother kept his word, and his request meeting with a favorable response, he stood up in the next dance with Katherine Rashleigh. He performed his part with spirit, having stipulated beforehand that his partner should correct the mistakes that would inevitably arise from his want of practice. He designed making one or two accidental blunders, to bear out his assertion of awkwardness, but forgot the premeditated deceit before he had been once across the floor. Katherine danced as she talked—gaily and unaffectedly, and her airy motions, joined to the lively badinage she exchanged with her companion, were the cause of his remissness in not carrying out his laudable scheme. She charged him with the cheat, as he offered his arm at the close of the set, and received, for vindication, the assurance that he had mistaken the direction wherein his deficiency lay. He was certain that the intricacies of a country dance would baffle him.

"If you would have evidence of my veracity, and are not timid about being laughed at for the stupidity of your partner, try the next with me. I engage that you shall be convinced."

"Not the next. Your sister's guests will have cause to complain of my monopolizing your attentions. Let me see! I am free for the sixth set. Will you have that, instead?"

He took her tablet and wrote down his name.

"Now," she said, "I will go and sit down by Mrs. Holt and rest, during this dance. Mamma does not like me to keep the floor too long at a time, so I always reserve 'rests' in my list of engagements."

"You do not seem to be fatigued."

"I am not. Mamma says that it is hardly kind or civil, in a large company, for the same person to dance every consecutive set, while there are others excluded from the amusement by want of room."

"Select a partner for me—will you not?" asked Mr. Argyle.

It had just occurred to him that she might be the subject of invidious remark if he danced with no one else, and what her plea for his sister's guests could not effect was done through consideration for her. She refused, laughingly, supposing him to be in jest, until convinced, by his positive manner, of his indifference to the various representatives of the gentler sex present. As many married, as single ladies danced, and the same rule applied to gentlemen. Mr. Moreau was the most active Terpsichorean on the floor; Mr. Carrington's adipose tendency warned him not to attempt the brisk Scotch reel; but he omitted no other chance of enjoying himself in this manner, and displayed excellent taste in his choice of pretty partners. His wife was in full dress—rather juvenile for her matronly pretensions, but she had been invited to leave her seat only once, in the four dances which had already been performed. She appeared dull—low-spirited—thought Katherine's kind heart, and she pointed out to Malcolm, where she sat, by Jessie, whose eyes and thoughts were all for the participants in the exercise from which her ill-health debarred her.

"Most of the younger ladies appear to be provided with part-

ners ; but perhaps Mrs. Carrington would like to dance. She seemed fond of the pastime, I thought. She stood next to me in one set."

Malcolm started, and bent a searching look upon her ; then, assured by her ingenuous countenance, that there was no covert significance in her selection, he obeyed her hint. Marcia crimsoned painfully at his invitation, and arising, gave him her hand without a word. Untrammelled by one remaining fetter of the chains he had once worn, he pitied her, in the calmer, happier mood, whose dawning was, to him, like the commencement of another life, and he endeavored to dispel her discomfort. Conscious, all the while, that he was doing a thing he would ridicule on the morrow, and even while he did it, quarrelling with the motives that put him to this useless trouble, he chatted fluently and pleasantly of mutual acquaintances ; items of neighborhood news, and other topics likely to interest her. His charitable labor ended by the close of the set, he re-conducted Mrs. Carrington to her chair ; talked a little to her and to his sister, and committed himself to the crowd, that in due season, cast him at Miss Rashleigh's feet.

Mrs. Rashleigh had traversed the rooms once ; submitted to countless introductions ; been gazed at by everybody—while her proud, still face gave no sign that she took particular heed of any person or thing there.

"Are you not weary, my dear madam?" interrogated the anxious hostess.

"I am slightly fatigued!" she rejoined.

"Then, let me entreat you to take this chair. I hid it in the recess on purpose that you might not want for a resting-place."

"You are very thoughtful, madam!" said the gratified Colonel.

"Mrs. Rashleigh is greatly obliged to you."

Mrs. Rashleigh confirmed his statement by a bow, and took the designated seat. The two windows, at this end of the room, were in deep embrasures, formed on one side, by the jutting fireplace,

and by the wall, on the other. Both recesses were profusely ornamented, as were the rest of the doors and windows, with green boughs and flowers, so that when Mrs. Rashleigh entered the retreat prepared for her, she was in a leafy alcove, whose hangings screened her from the notice of the throng, without obstructing her view of the revellers. The Colonel, satisfied that she was established in the ease and seclusion she loved, willingly acceded to her proposition that he should mingle, and make acquaintance with his neighbors. And, conspicuous amidst the moving forms, the lady descried frequently, his portly figure, like a royal seventy-four, with the king's colors flying at the mast-head, cleaving the vari-colored billows that heaved against him on every side, without altering his steady course.

Two gentlemen separated themselves from the denser mass of the crowd, and drew near the shaded window. They were Mr. Moreau and a younger man, not more than eight-and-twenty, pert in physiognomy, consequential in bearing and foppish in dress. He smiled incessantly and talked rapidly.

"And just as fortune is beaming upon you, at last, you turn saint!" were the first words Mrs. Rashleigh overheard.

"You have sharper sight than mine, if you can see any light," rejoined Mr. Moreau, discontentedly. "The sky is as black as ink to me."

"Nonsense, man. What more would you have? A rich uncle drops down out of the clouds at your door, with more money than he can possibly dispose of, and recognizes you as the male heir of his line. A rich brother-in-law opens his heart and purse, in the hour of need, and pays up to the last farthing, the debt that you swore would ruin you, and neither wife nor the world is any the wiser for your temporary difficulty. You are unreasonable! With a brace of such backers, you may dive in more boldly than before."

Mr. Moreau shrugged his shoulders.

"I tell you, Sancroft, I have had a fright that will last me a life-time, I hope. I only pray that I may be safely over it."

"Oh, if you have taken to praying, I have done! 'The de'il gat sick, and he a saint wad be!' I shall represent your case at our next club meeting."

In common with most other men of weak minds and principles, Moreau was nervously sensitive to ridicule. He laughed, in a silly way: "It behooves every prudent man to look to the future," he said, confidentially. "You set a right estimate upon the value of my uncle's purse and countenance. Let me whisper to you, my boy, that if he had an inkling of the proceedings in your office-loft, on court-days and between times, he would put me out of his house and will forever. He is crazy on this subject. It would appear that this little weakness of mine is a legacy from some dead and gone uncle, who blew his brains out, after a night of unlucky play. His brother detests the sight of a card. You must have observed, that there are no whist-tables here, to-night. The old Israelites never swept the house of leaven more anxiously than did my wife our premises of cards, the day she was instructed with regard to this foible of our venerated relative. I *must* be circumspect. As to Argyle—that door is barred, bolted, locked and the key thrown away! I stretched my conscience to the utmost in the manufacture of the story that got me that cheque, and, I am afraid, his credulity into the bargain. Then, he holds my bond"——

"Pshaw! he won't press you for payment."

"Maybe not; but the thought that I am in his power, nettles me. He has a keen eye of his own, that goes through a fellow like a knife. Good gracious!" Another shrug. "No, no! I can squeeze no more blood out of that turnip!"

"Very well. You are the best judge of your affairs, and what is the safest course for you to pursue. Only, the fellows will be disappointed when we come up minus a hand.

I must look about for a substitute. What a lovely girl your cousin is!"

A restless movement of the unseen listener would have betrayed her proximity, but for the music, which struck up a lively strain at the moment. The conclusion of the remark and Mr. Moreau's reply were rendered inaudible by the same cause. Mrs. Rashleigh judged them to have been a request for an introduction to her daughter, and an acquiescence on the part of the host, since they proceeded directly toward Katherine.

Thus, it came to pass, that when Malcolm sought the spot where he had left Katherine, in the chaperonage of Mrs. Holt, he beheld Sancroft, jr., playing the fascinating at her other ear. A dark flush crossed the face, until now open and genial. For one second, he was rooted to the floor with indignation; for two more, he meditated forfeiting his engagement and retiring from the house that afforded shelter to one he loathed as the basest of noxious things; then he went forward and reminded Miss Rashleigh of her promise for the following set.

A lady passed in between them, as he was about to take her out.

"Mamma!" said Katherine, in surprise. "Are you alone? Will you have a seat? Here is mine!" springing up.

Her mother took it. "Thank you! Before you dance, let Mrs. Holt loop up your sleeve. You have lost a knot of ribbon, I see."

The gentlemen instinctively looked about under their feet for the missing article, and as Mrs. Holt adjusted the gauze puffings, Mrs. Rashleigh said, in an impressive undertone—"If Mr. Sancroft asks you to dance, refer him to me."

The order was just uttered, when the anticipated formula was conveyed in Mr. Sancroft's blandest tones and choicest phraseology. Katherine blushed with bewilderment and fear of giving offence to the "friend" of her cousin, for such were the terms of his presentation.

"Mamma," she stammered, imploringly.

"I object to her taking the floor again, sir, except to fulfill engagements already formed."

There was no appeal from a sentence so coldly and firmly spoken. Mr. Sancroft bowed profoundly, to hide his vexation; Mr. Argyle, respectfully, with an unconscious show of satisfaction, and they went their different ways.

"Was her refusal a whim or over-prudence for her daughter's health, or can she suspect Sancroft's real character?" wondered Malcolm. "I did not suppose that she could dissipate my unfavorable judgment of herself with so brief a remark. The presumptuous rascal!" He ground his teeth. "Not if I can help it!" was the exclamation they hindered from the hearing of those about him.

Katherine caught the ireful gleam, and engaged herself in speculations as to her mother's prohibition, she imagined that he must be pondering upon the same.

"You must not think mamma unreasonably strict," she said, timidly. "She means everything for my good. And, if she does seem too particular about the health that never varies from its original sound state, she may be pardoned, for she has only me to care for."

"She is judicious. Do not fancy that I question the wisdom of her restriction just now. No *gentleman* would."

"Do you imply that Mr. Sancroft may feel slighted?" inquired Katherine, quickly.

"I imply nothing. Rest assured that he has no right to take umbrage at the conduct of your mother or yourself, and dismiss the subject. You are an only child, then?"

"Yes. I have never had either sister or brother!" she sighed.

"And you long for them, do you?"

"Certainly. How can I help it? When I was a child I

often wept enviously at the happiness of my playfellows, who were gathered into families, while I was all alone."

"Had you been situated like them your lot might have been less happy than it is now. Be content with the isolation that excludes bickerings and jealousies and feuds, the most deadly that rage upon earth."

"You shock me. Can you mean that these spring up between brother and brother?"

"And between sisters and brothers. If there be unquenchable fire in this life, it is the flame of family dissension; the fierce scorplings of love changed to hatred. There are no outward proprieties to be overleaped; no forms of ceremonious approach to tear away, before members of the same household can grapple in combat; and if these are compelled afterward to abide together, the continual friction of angry passions, the frequent clashings of interests and opinions, perpetuate the warfare."

"Your picture is a dark one! If I had a sister I should not quarrel with her. That terrible 'if!' How grievously it interfered with my childish dreams of how my twin-sister and I would talk, play, study and love together! No one suspected my folly; yet half of my wardrobe was allotted to her; our baby-house was common property, and three of the six shelves in the nursery book-case belonged to her. I actually almost deluded myself into the belief that she was a living personage. 'Bessie is out walking!' I would say to myself, when I was alone in the play-room. And, as the time wore on, I amused myself and fed my heart by thinking how she would dance into the room, dressed in such and such a manner, and shout gaily as I ran up to kiss her. The shout and the kiss have never come! and I have out-grown such vivid day-dreams; yet I am neither too old nor too wise to cease wishing that Bessie were with me in every pleasure or sorrow."

"Why did you call her Bessy?"

"I liked the name. I picked it up somewhere in my infancy.

Mrs. Holt says that I probably had a nurse who was called so, and who abbreviated Katherine into 'Kitty,' which neither papa nor mamma will allow now. I am much attached to both names. What is the matter, Mr. Argyle?"

"Were you born in England?" demanded he, controlling himself.

"I was—in Devonshire. Why do you ask?"

"I am a fitful, fanciful creature," he answered, hiding his chagrin by a laugh. "I once knew a Bessy and a Kitty, whom I loved very dearly, but whom I lost years ago. I was struck by the similarity of our taste for names. I have visited Devonshire."

"Which I have never done since I was a babe, at which time papa removed from the country."

"I was there in 1800."

"We were in Paris then, I imagine, for we spent several years abroad about that time. I have still the French primer in which I studied, with an inscription of my composition scrawled in great letters on the fly-leaf: '*Katherine Rashleigh, Anglaise, Paris, Mai dixième, 1802.*' You perceive that I vaunted my nationality at that tender age."

"Yet your patriotism should be of the most liberal kind. Born in England, partly educated in France, and now a resident of America! For your years you are the most thorough cosmopolitan I ever saw."

"Young trees bear trasplanting best," she replied, in as light a strain. "Is not that Mr. Sancroft talking with papa?"

"It is."

"He is not mortally offended, then."

Her partner was not very far from this point, however. The Colonel, like a peaceably-disposed bull-dog, eyed, over his double chin, the sleek puppy that barked for his entertainment; how fawningly, Malcolm well knew, and would, at that moment, have

relinquished a quarter of his estate for the privilege of lifting him, by the nape of the neck, to the nearest window, and dropping him out.

And, embosoming these varied and momentous emotions; these plots and counterplots; these memories and hopes, the laughing, talking crowd rolled back and forth, as rocks the summer sea, with its treasures of beauty and secrets of woe and terror, hidden under the sportsome wave.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"WHERE are you going so early, mamma?" inquired Katherine, one morning at the breakfast-table. "I saw them getting the carriage out before I came downstairs."

"Your father intends using it, not I," replied Mrs. Rashleigh.

"It is court-day," said the Colonel.

"That tiresome court-day!" uttered Katherine, impatiently. "It seems to me that it comes round every week instead of once a month. What do they do there, papa? Is it anything like the assizes in England? And do the proceedings really interest you?"

"My dear! one question at a time!" gently rebuked Mrs. Holt.

"Well, then, papa, why does every man and boy in the county attend court *every* month?"

"These 'court-days' are to me a re-mar-ka-ble and interesting feature in the society and government of this State," said Colonel Rashleigh, addressing himself to the round of cold beef in front of him, and suspending the business of breakfast, that he might properly elucidate the subject. "A large concourse of people of all grades of social distinction, wealth and professions—as you, my daughter, well observe, old and young; the middle-aged and the child repair thither, with a regularity and promptness that show how they prize these occasions. Not only the court-house itself—an insignificant building, allow me to remark." The beef making no objection, he resumed, after a pause: "I am daily

more and more displeased with the crude and low state of architecture prevalent among this population. The building is incommensurable—positively mean!" pausing again, with his condemnatory nod. "Entirely unsuitable for the purpose to which it is dedicated. It is crowded to excess, and upon the inclosed green surrounding it, the press is equally great. It is a phenomenon in social and civil life—a re-mar-ka-ble thing!"

"But what do all these people go there for, sir?" persisted the laughing Katherine, seeing that he believed that he had disposed of her query. "There must be a vast amount of litigation in this free and happy Union, if legal business is the great attraction."

The Colonel looked surprised at the reiteration. He could not chide her; yet he would have been "displeased" with such slowness of apprehension in any other person.

"I thought I had explained to you, my child, that there were trasactions of many kinds carried on in these assemblages. They assume different phases at different times; political, commercial, litigious and friendly. In Great Britain they have no popular gatherings that correspond with these in frequency and enthusiasm. My dear, my coffee is cold! May I trouble you for another cup? The carriage is ready, did you say, Thomas? Very well, Thomas!"

Not even the indulged child was to interrogate him further. He buttoned up his surtout, hot as was the day; grasped his thick, gold-headed cane, and marched off to the coach-and-four in waiting for him.

"Mrs. Holt!" said Katherine, with a mixture of archness and perplexity. "Have *you* any idea what these court-days are?"

"My impression is, my dear Miss Rashleigh—derived from Colonel Rashleigh's graphic description—that they are a species of minor Assizes."

"Combining the several characters of the English hustings, the Irish fairs and the Scottish family trysts!" subjoined her pupil.

She would have been incredulous had she been told how true to the life, was the picture she meant to be a caricature.

The small village was but little larger than it had been twelve years before, and to-day was swallowed up by the crowd of men, vehicles and cattle. Drove of sheep, oxen and mules rent the air with discord, and wandered blindly, in their fright, into by-lanes and house-yards—everywhere except in the appointed way, which was to make for themselves a passage through the living sea, surging in the crooked road, yclept, by courtesy, a street. For a quarter of a mile along each approach to the village, horses were picketed in the corners of the fences or tied to the trees, many of them with a basket or a loose heap of provender placed before them, that they might consult their own convenience as to dinner-time. Vehicles of every pattern under the sun, from the two-wheeled "tumbler cart," with its shake down of straw in the bottom, to the massive, handsome chariot from Briarwood, jolted and rolled over the highway.

Colonel Rashleigh never designed to make an offensive show of personal importance. The idea, that, by following out the dictates of a pompous taste, and continuing in his present location, the state and circumstance he had been accustomed to practise at home, he might offend, instead of render respectful his republican neighbors, would have appeared preposterous to him. He had been the great man of a retired country district in England, and without debating the case, either with himself or with others, who might have bestowed a salutary caution, he counted confidently upon taking the like stand here. So, as his blooded leaders tossed their heads and champed the bit, that restrained their high step to a slow walk, through the blocked-up thoroughfare, he sat, serene in self-consequence, surveying, with the interest of a philosopher, the "social phenomenon," that had constituted the theme of his breakfast-harangue—feeling the angry and jealous glances shot at him, from time to time, about as much as a

rhinoceros would arrows from a child's bow, as they rattled against his hide.

Alighting, with the assistance of his footman, upon the wooden steps of the tavern, he was met by his nephew, and the younger Sancroft.

"I have been on the watch for you, this hour," said the former. "Both speakers are here, and as you perceive, so are the hearers."

"A remarkable spectacle, indeed!" observed the Colonel, helping himself to a pinch of snuff, as he overlooked the agitated human stream rushing and roaring toward the court-green. "This is a very demonstrative—I should say, a remarkably excitable population, Mr. Sancroft. One would imagine that there was some unusual event in prospect."

"Why, my dear sir!" exclaimed Mr. Moreau. "Have you forgotten that we are to be addressed to-day by the candidates for this congressional district?"

"I remember perfectly," answered the Colonel, tapping the gold lid with a coolness that irritated the heated spirit of his nephew almost beyond control. "But I had supposed that elections were very orderly scenes in the United Colonies—I would say, States."

"They may be generally, but there are immense issues at stake now, sir," replied the smiling Sancroft. "If you will trust yourself to my guidance, I will endeavor to place you in a position where you can form your own judgment as to our native orators. I do not promise you the finished eloquence of your British parliament—neither a Chatham nor a Fox—but you will bear in mind, if you please, that we are yet in our infancy."

He fastened himself to one arm of the Colonel; and Moreau took the other, and by pushing and sidling, undertook to tow him through the breakers. Very unaccommodating breakers they were! In spite of his protectors' efforts, more than one democratic elbow was jerked into the Colonel's back and chest, with a

concussion that made him gasp and gurgle, and deepened his florid complexion to purple ; more than one hob-nailed heel left its imprint upon his gouty foot. Finally, he was intrenched from such assaults, in an angle, formed by the court-house steps with the wall, and his pilots, perspiring and breathless, took off their hats to wipe their streaming brows.

"How do you feel, uncle?" inquired Mr. Moreau.

"As well as I can feel, after the ordeal I have sustained," replied the Colonel, in offended dignity.

He would have added some strictures upon his initiative experience in republican usage ; but was prevented by a vociferous cheer, that arose from the throng as from the throat of one man. Obeying the direction of all eyes, Colonel Rashleigh shifted his position to gain a view of the upper step against which he had been leaning, and beheld, almost within arm's length of him, one of the rival speakers of the day.

He was a man in the prime of life, with a steady, far-seeing eye, and a countenance as resolute as his mien was courteous. The distinguished leader of the party he represented, and rendered fearless by past successes, he was yet to fight to-day, upon an untried field ; to couch lance against an adversary, than whom the country held none more formidable ; one who, dashing like a comet into the political firmament, had caused congresses and administrations to quail at his terrific splendor ; who swayed the hearts and opinions of audiences with a single sweep of his finger ; the hitherto invincible conqueror of every opponent who had the daring or presumption to meet him in the district he arrogated as his peculiar dominion. Whatever, at this remote period, may be thought of the justice of his cause, the courage of the man who now stood gallantly forth to battle with the Achilles, deserves our honorable mention.

His exordium was studiously dispassionate. He sketched, with a free, bold touch, the main outlines of the history of colonial

wrongs under foreign oppression ; the revolt ; the declaration of independence, and the struggle that secured it ; the treacherous peace on the side of the mother-country, and the confiding trust of the emancipated daughter ; the tricks, the subterfuges, the overt and unatoned-for outrages of which the stronger nation stood convicted ; the stagnation of commerce ; the stint in money and the very necessities of life, to which the people of the still feeble republic had been subjected by the odious policy of her ancient enemy. He painted her a crafty, bloated spider, watching her unwary prey ; weaving here a line—casting there a noose—biding, with gloating eyes, the season when, exhausted and paralyzed, the victim should be hers, without a hope of release.

He was warming with his theme, and his audience heard him with tightening breath and clenching fists. By a skillful transition, he brought before them, in glowing contrast, the different course of another government ; the France, which had lighted the torch of liberty at the altar of the western world ; the blood of whose nobles had dyed the battle-fields of our own land ; the nation whose hail of "God speed !" had not, from the moment she heard the cry of our fainting armies, ceased to sound across the waters that separated her shores from ours. He reminded them that the wonderful man, who now held the balance of her power, bore the same emblem upon his imperial standard as that which guarded our national ensign, and, as if he recognized a bond of relationship in this coincidence, his friendly feelings for the States had ever been unequivocally manifested. The banners of France had been draped in mourning for the death of America's deliverer, and his character was cherished in holy esteem by that people. Coming down to the present day ; taking up the immediate question at issue, he showed how France had, at the appeal of America—impoverished and distressed by the edicts and orders in council of the belligerent powers—generously revoked those decrees of her enactment, whereby the neutral commerce of the

innocent sufferer was violated ; then, indignantly opposed to this, the stubbornness, the greed, the malignity of Great Britain, in withholding the concession for which many thousands of her own subjects were petitioning. This was the virtual point at stake, he said—an ignominious and ruinous peace, or courageous warfare with the despot, whose milder yoke their fathers had torn from the necks of freemen. Politicians might mystify voters with words without meaning ; electrify by flights of stirring eloquence ; quiet with false assurances of peace and safety, and mislead their minds to dwell upon subordinate themes ; but *here* lay the truth—and in truth and soberness, in the sight of Heaven, he had dragged it to the light and spread it before them.

He ceased ; and from the heart of the throng went up a mad roar, like the bellow of an angry Vesuvius.

“Free trade and sailors’ rights ! Free trade and sailors’ rights !”

“Eppes forever !”

“Down with the aristocrats !”

“Destruction to the British everywhere !”

“Robert, what did that fellow say ?” called Colonel Rashleigh, into his nephew’s ear, and pointing with a cane shaking in his displeasure, at a man who was pealing this last cry.

“Never mind him, uncle ! He is crazy or drunk.”

“I am displeased by his behavior, Robert. It is highly disrespectful and unbecoming !”

“For Heaven’s sake ! shut his mouth, or he will be mobbed !” said Sancroft, apart to his friend. “These creatures are ready for anything. They will never hear Randolph, I am afraid.”

The statesman had a juster appreciation of his influence over his former constituents. He had been their glory too long to be slighted even in the hour when passion was lashing patriotism into fury.

The roar became a murmur—the murmur died hoarsely away

into stillness, when he mounted the rude rostrum, and stretched his long right arm toward Heaven—it might be to enjoin silence—it seemed an appeal to the Supreme Judge to prove the sincerity of his address, the purity of his intentions. Tall, and thin to attenuation ; his beardless face cadaverous as that of a corpse ; an age of carking care and anguish stamped upon features, over which forty years of real life had not passed—he stood thus for a moment, waiting to be heard—the supernatural glow in his deep, dark eye alone evincing the ardor with which his mettled spirit flung itself into the arena of conflict. His voice, when he parted the livid lips to speak, sounded hardly louder than the sighing of the summer air through the trees shading the multitude ; yet every syllable was distinctly audible upon the outskirts of the throng. Soft, sweet, susceptible to the slightest variation of emotion as a woman’s—it rose and swelled into clarion strength and resonance as he proceeded. Some of his earlier periods, the caustic and inimitable irony with which he assailed his opponent ; his allusion to past services as a guaranty of future fidelity, were cheered by his adherents ; but as he entered upon the discussion of the main subject, the interest was too rapt for noisy demonstration. Men lost all sense of individuality ; knew not whether they stood or breathed—only that they saw and heard, and no one looked at his neighbor to note the effect of the torrent that carried him along withersoever the magician listed.

Personal enemies he had many, in the assemblage. No man of his day had more, and their virulence was commensurate with the insults he had heaped upon them. Venomous, unscrupulous and irreconcilable—these were traits whose possession he never denied, and which his eulogists vainly strove to cloak under the convenient names of eccentricity and morbid irritability. But however obnoxious he might be in private life, the most bitter foe there dared not cast a stone at his political honesty. Mistaken he might be ; impetuous and headstrong he was—spurning inter-

ference and resenting censure; but, before deceiving others, he must be thoroughly deceived himself. No glittering pledge of preferment, no threats of public disgrace or popular defeat, could allure or intimidate him to barter or compromise his principles. On this occasion, he knew full well that his was the unpopular side of the question then agitating the country to its foundations. He saw before him a populace, smarting under private losses and privations, as well as national indignities. In the breasts of the young burned the desire for vengeance and conquest; the veins of the old were scarcely cooled after the hot struggle of the Revolution; while men of deliberative middle age looked to the suggested war as a preferable alternative to the paralysis of trade and impure fermentings of the mass, in which such dangerous elements were working.

Yet he controlled all; and the mastery gained—while he spoke, his thoughts were theirs; his declarations the proclamation of one inspired with more than mortal wisdom. The lungs that had raised the cry—"Destruction to the British!" heaved with answering animation to his vindication of the slandered motherland. The fiery youth who beheld in the French conqueror the apotheosis of human greatness—the sublime realization of his dream of the self-made man—felt his lip curl sympathetically at the withering denunciation of his hero.

"Why this unnatural hatred of England? Strange! that we should have no objection to any other people or government, in civilized or savage countries—in the whole world! The great autocrat of all the Russias receives the homage of our high consideration; the Dey of Algiers and his divan of pirates are very civil, good sort of people, with whom we find no difficulty in maintaining the relations of peace and amity; 'Turks, Jews and infidels,' barbarians and savages of every clime and color, are welcome to our arms; with chiefs of banditti, negro or mulatto, we can treat and we can trade. Name, however, but England,

and all our antipathies are up in arms against her. Against whom? Against those whose blood runs in our own veins; in common with whom we can claim Shakspeare and Newton and Chatham for our countrymen; whose form of government is the freest on earth, our own only excepted; from whom every valuable principle of our own institutions has been borrowed; our whole civil and criminal jurisprudence; against our *fellow Protestants!* identified in blood, in language, in religion, with ourselves. In what school did the worthies of our land—the Washingtons, Henrys, Hancocks, Franklins, the Rutledges of America, learn those principles of civil liberty which were so nobly asserted by their wisdom and valor? And American resistance to British usurpation had not been more warmly cherished by these good men and their compatriots; not more by Washington, Hancock and Henry, than by Chatham and his illustrious associates in the British Parliament. And let it be remembered that the heart of the British people was with us. . . .

"But the 'outrages and injuries' of England! Bred up in the principles of the Revolution, *I* can never palliate, much less defend them. I well remember flying with my mother and her new-born child, from Arnold and Phillips; and they had been driven by Tarleton and other British Pandoors, from pillar to post, while her husband was fighting the battles of his country. The impression is indelible on my memory, and yet (like my worthy old neighbor, who added seven buckshot to every cartridge, at the battle of Guilford, and drew a fine sight at his man), I must be content to be called a tory by a patriot of the latest importation! Let us not get rid of one evil, supposing it possible, at the expense of a greater. Suppose France in possession of the British naval power, and to her the trident must pass, should England be unable wield it—what would be your condition? What would be the situation of your sea-ports, and their seafaring inhabitants? Ask Hamburg, ask Lubec, ask *Savannah!*

When their privateers are pent up in our harbors by the British bull-dogs, when they receive at our hands every rite of hospitality, from which their enemy is excluded ; when they capture, within our waters, interdicted to British armed ships, American vessels ; when such is their deportment to you, under such circumstances, what could you expect if they were the uncontrolled lords of the ocean ? Had those privateers at Savannah borne British commissions, or had American shipments of cotton, tobacco, ashes, and what not, to London and Liverpool, been confiscated and the proceeds poured into the English exchequer, my life upon it ! you would never have listened to any miserable wire-drawn distinctions between 'orders and decrees affecting our neutral rights' and 'municipal decrees' confiscating in mass your whole property ! You would have had instant war ! The whole land would have blazed in war !

"And shall Republicans become the instruments of him who has effaced the title of Attila to the 'SCOURGE OF GOD?' Yet, even Attila, in the falling fortunes of civilization, had, no doubt, his advocates, his tools, his minions, his parasites, in the very countries that he overran—sons of that soil whereon his horse had trod—where grass could never afterward grow. Would that I could give utterance to the strong detestation which I feel toward (above all other works of the Creation) such characters as Zingis, Tamerlane, Kouli Khan, or BONAPARTE ! My instincts involuntarily revolt at their bare idea—malefactors of the human race, who ground down man to a mere machine of their impious and bloody ambition. Yet, under the accumulated wrongs and insults and robberies of the last of these chieftains, are we not, in point of fact, striving to become a party to his views—a partner in his wars ? Is it so, then, that the last Republic of the earth must enlist under the banners of the tyrant ? Must the blood of American freemen flow to cement his power—to aid in stifling the last struggles of afflicted and persecuted man—to deliver up into

his hands the patriots of Spain and Portugal—to establish his empire over the ocean, and over the land that gave our fathers birth—to forge our own chains !

"And yet, my friends, we are told, as we were told, in the days of Mr. Adams, '*the finger of Heaven points to war*' ? Yes ! the finger of Heaven *does* point to war ! It points to war, as it points to the mansions of eternal misery and torture ; as a flaming beacon, warning us of that vortex which we may not approach, but with certain destruction. It points to desolated Europe, and warns us of the chastisement of those nations who have offended against the justice, and almost beyond the mercy of Heaven. It announces the wrath to come upon those, who, ungrateful for the bounty of Providence, not satisfied with the peace, security and plenty at home, fly, as it were, into the face of the Most High, and tempt His forbearance !"

For two hours, not a man stirred from his place, or raised hand or voice to interrupt the fiery torrent that broke over the multitude, with the might and fury of a mountain flood. The thrilling tones ceased to be heard ; the weird-like visage no longer flashed its lightnings among them ; the shadowy form swayed no more in their sight, at the will of the potent spirit within it, and instead of the clamorous outburst that had marked the close of his opponent's peroration, there was a deep-drawn sigh, from a thousand bosoms, such as men heave when the rumble, the shaking and the crash of the earthquake have passed, and they wonder at the life it has spared to them.

"A remarkable speaker !" said Colonel Rashleigh, regaining his breath with a stertorous effort. "I should like to make his acquaintance. A man of sound views and re-mar-ka-ble endowments ! If perfectly agreeable to him and to yourself, Robert, I shall be pleased, if you can introduce me, in the course of the day. As a Briton, I desire to express my approval of his senti-

ments with regard to that country, likewise of the masterly style in which he exposed and condemned the intrigues and outrages of that low-born upstart, who calls himself the French Emperor."

The idea of the Colonel's contemplated patronage of the haughty and sarcastic Randolph was too much for Sancroft's risibles. He fell into the rear to indulge his merriment, while Moreau could not refrain from smiling.

"If it can be brought about, I will certainly comply with your request, sir; I think, however, that Mr. Randolph will not remain in the place to dinner. He detests public tables."

The words were not off his tongue, when the crowds wending their way to the principal house of entertainment, parted to the sides of the road, and between the divided ranks, drove a light phaeton, drawn by a pair of magnificent blood-horses, groomed with a nicety, that made their coats shine with silken lustre, and stepping like cats, their dainty hoofs hardly touching the earth. The master had the reins and was the sole occupant of the carriage. Pale, joyless, alone—his dark eye held no ray of triumph, his sallow cheek bore no trace of the emotions that had so lately stirred mightily in his soul. Neither in his sardonic, yet mournful physiognomy, nor in his bearing, that had even something of defiance mixed with its hauteur, was there discernible a trait of the popular leader. What other politicians sought to gain by urbanity and flatteries, he demanded from men as the tribute they owed to the right of his cause. Petty arts he disdained, and trampled under foot the amenities and courtesies that are commonly esteemed powerful engines with the masses.

"This was the man, who, with the exception of one brief interregnum—and that caused by the very elements that were now at work throughout the country—remained, for upward of thirty years, the representative of an intelligent constituency—"such as no other man ever had;" received the highest honors from his

own government and distinguished favors abroad, the anomaly of his age and of our country; the statesman, whom men caressed and upheld, while they hated and dreaded the private citizen, at once the most gifted and the most bereaved, the most fortunate and the most unhappy actor in the exciting drama of the times. Peace, say we, to the lone sleeper in the shades of Roanoke! Now that the stung and stinging spirit has passed from the earth he found so wintry an asylum, in his desolate misanthropy; that his faults, many and inexplicable—the virtues, that, to a few chosen intimates, redeemed and glorified his character, have met with their reward from his Judge and ours, let a grateful posterity remember his honest and earnest labors in his country's behalf, and cast the mantle of charity over a nature, which in his own plaintive words, "no one except the mother," early lost and always regretted—"ever understood!"

Colonel Rashleigh replaced the hat he had raised in stately punctilio, as the carriage passed. The crowd sent a cheer after the departing orator, and dispersed to other business.

"Paxton" was still upon the sign that swung before the village inn. The house had been enlarged, and a row of thrifty poplars planted in front of it. A long, low portico, stretching the length of the building, was supplied with benches, and served as a reception-room until dinner was ready. This event was announced by the ringing of a bell in the hand of an ebony butler, who stalked up and down the piazza, deafening those who were near, and summoning many who were afar off. "Mother Paxton," now in her sixty-fifth year, officiated as mistress of table ceremonies. She wore her court-day livery—a black dress, white apron and neckerchief, and a cap, whose starched crown was half a yard high, and whose ample frill rested lovingly against a face as rosy, and but a trifle more wrinkled than when we last beheld it. At the head of the room, enthroned in his easy-chair, his rheumatic limbs laid carefully upon a cushioned stool, was the

nominal Boniface, replete with good humor and wise saws, and willing, as ever, to credit his "ole woman" with the same.

"How are you to-day, Mr. Paxton?" said Malcolm Argyle, pausing beside him on his way from the table.

"Middlin' fine, Master Malcolm; nothin' to complain of, and everythin' to be thankful for. As my ole woman says to me, no longer ago than this identickle mornin'—says she, 'You might be better, but you might be worse,' and it's as true as Gospel, sir. You're lookin' mighty well, Mr. Argyle. I don't remember seein' you in sech looks in years. What have you been doin' of, to freshen you up so sudden?"

"Eating one of your wife's good dinners. She outdid herself to-day. Tell her that I said so—will you?"

The old man rocked with his hearty laughter.

"I will, sir—I will! She will vally the praise now, because it's been so long sence you've went out of your way to say sech a thing. And you enjy'd your vittles? Well, though I say it, as shouldn't say it, my ole woman is hard to beat at a roast, a stew or a barbecue, and our Susy's comin' on jest sech another."

"Where is she? I have not seen her in a great while."

"That's because you are never here only court days. You see, sir"—sinking his voice to a wheezing whisper—"she's gettin' to be a tall slip of a gal—nigh 'pon sixteen—and the ole woman doesn't think it fit for her to be in the big room o' public days. 'Taint our intention fur to make a fine lady of her, though we'll leave all our children somethin', please the Lord! That 'ere 'nonyous present we had ten years ago, come Christmas, gave us a lift, and we've kept up. You've no idee yet who sent it, I s'pose?"

"None whatever."

He had answered the same question in substantially the same terms at least fifty times before.

"About Susy, as I was sayin'. My ole woman has her notions

about modesty, and what's right and proper for gals. Not that the ginerality of our company aint well-behaved gentlemen, but, says my ole woman, 'Gals' faces shouldn't be too common;' and she keeps her in the background like, you understand."

"I understand; and shows herself to be a prudent mother."

"Jest my sentiments, Mr. Argyle! They tell me Mr. Randolph made a grand speech to-day, sir," he added, as Malcolm was about to move on. "A reg'lar out-and-outer, I've heerd say!"

"If he does not take care, such speeches will be 'out-and-outers' in good earnest to himself. The people are getting unruly with the embargoes, non-importation bills, and the like abominations, that are killing home and foreign trade."

"You don't s'pose that Jack Randolph will ever be beaten in this district!" exclaimed the old man. "Whar will they ever find sech another man?"

"Nowhere; but principles are worth something as well as men—particularly where so much is at stake."

"You are for war, then, sir?"

"I would fight, rather than submit to robbery, and so would you, Mr. Paxton!"

"Talking politics, Argyle!" said Mr. Hunter, coming up, as the last sentence was spoken.

"How could we speak or think of anything else here and now?" returned his brother-in-law.

"True enough! This is the most excited meeting of the campaign. Between Jack Randolph and apple-jack, those fellows outside have not a sober brain amongst them. Hear them—will you? What a plausible fellow Randolph is! I thanked my stars when he was through, that I had not a vote in this district. It would be cast for him, to a dead certainty, much against my conscience as it would be."

"Yet it is clear to me that Eppes had right on his side,"

replied Malcolm. "And autocrat though Randolph is in this community, there is an under-current beginning to turn against his views, however eloquently he may set them forth. Another year like the last, of foreign injustice and home distress, and the people will think for themselves—aye! and vote as they feel!"

The tumult without increased. Oaths and yells and angry voices, in fierce dispute arose higher and louder. The gentlemen worked their way slowly to the door.

"And that is the way they feel—is it?" said Mr. Hunter, as the rallying-cry of the war-party split the air.

"Free trade and sailors' rights!"

"Down with the British aristocrat!" roared a pair of tremendous lungs in the heart of the press, that filled up the porch.

To Mr. Hunter's amazement, his calm, cool brother-in-law uttered an ejaculation, more like an imprecation, than anything he had ever heard from him before, and dashed into the *mélée*.

For an explanation of this movement, we must refer the reader to another chapter.

CHAPTER XIX.

COLONEL RASHLEIGH did hearty justice to Mrs. Paxton's bountiful cheer, although he ate it from plates of coarse white earthenware, edged with blue or green; carved his meat with a bone-handled knife, and helped himself to vegetables with a pewter spoon. In his own house, he was fastidious, but he had travelled enough to learn how to accommodate himself to traveller's fare. His nephew sat on his right hand, and Sancroft on the left. Just across the narrow board were two other gentlemen, the one middle-aged, the other young, who were saluted with great cordiality by the Colonel's companions, and introduced to him as Mr. Woodson and Mr. Blanton.

A constant flow of talk was kept up between the two parties. The strangers were profuse of civilities; versed in the leading topics of the day, and expressed themselves like educated, intelligent men. Of course, politics was the principal theme. The Colonel was deeply gratified at ascertaining that all of the four were Randolph's disciples, scouting at the platform of the war-party, as a visionary contrivance of demagogues for the destruction of the simple and the credulous; ridiculing the vacillations of the administration, its truckling to, and temporizing with the French government, and each trying to outdo the other, in lauding Great Britain; her steady policy and straightforward measures.

"Rely upon it, Colonel Rashleigh, if the rest of the States are so mad as to engage in an unnatural contest with the Mother, so

recently reconciled, Virginia planters will never lend themselves to the iniquitous proceeding!" said Mr. Woodson, impressively. "Even in the War of the Revolution, there were many of our first families, who could not forget from what stock they had sprung. Many a good sword rusted in its scabbard, rather than its owner should bathe it in a brother's blood. And that was a strife for Liberty! How many more will remain inactive, when the fight is to strengthen the hands of an alien and unrighteous power—we shall see!"

"I trust we shall *not* see!" answered Mr. Blanton, gravely. "The storm has not burst yet. Madison has not the courage to declare war. Mark my words! The mountain will bring forth a mouse, direful as its pangs appear."

Mr. Woodson gave an order to his colored servant, who waited behind his chair. He vanished, and shortly reappeared, bringing a bottle of wine.

"From my humble cellar, Colonel Rashleigh," said Mr. Woodson, as he inserted a corkscrew. "Will you honor me by partaking of it?"

The Colonel bowed, and declared that he would be most happy to do so.

"Fill your glasses, gentlemen," continued the owner of the beverage. "With your leave, I will propose a toast. Our excellent neighbor, Colonel Rashleigh! May the land of his adoption never give him cause to sigh for fair Albion's shores!"

The Colonel was tickled in a vulnerable part—his propensity to combine, or, going further, to make identical each with the other, his *amour propre* and *amor patriæ*. In a very set, very deliberate and very pompous speech, he thanked Mr. Woodson for his toast, and the rest for their kind reception of the same; and when they arose from the table, "hoped to reciprocate the politeness very soon, in some choice old port he had brought with

him from the 'fair Albion,' so flatteringly mentioned by the worthy gentleman."

There was a little hasty by-play between the quartette, and Mr. Woodson was again spokesman.

"You will not thank me for robbing you of your nephew's society for a short time, I am afraid, sir. But I have an appointment with him at the clerk's office, at this hour. We have in prospect a tiresome, yet a necessary task—a search, through musty records for an old title-deed to some property I design purchasing. In such investigations, Mr. Moreau's quick eye and clear head are often in request. He kindly offered them to me, some weeks ago, and I engaged the clerk to assist us to-day."

It did not occur to the Colonel's honorable imagination that this statement was needlessly prolix; nor, that the clerk's rightful place during the sessions of the court was in the court-room. How, then, should he discern anything suspicious in Mr. Sancroft's apology of a business engagement in *his* office, and Mr. Blanton's recollection of what he had nearly forgotten in the delights of the society *he* must quit, viz., that he had given a note six months previous, whose payment fell upon this day, and that he made it a point of conscience to pay up his debts punctually to the hour, to the minute, if possible, that they were due. Nor need these gentlemen have taken the pains to walk off in directions diametrically opposite to one another. The honest old officer would have scorned to watch or dog them, had he mistrusted them never so grievously.

Like a large-sized Sir Roger de Coverley, he stood near the centre of the piazza, erect against the wall, snuff-box in hand, contemplating the heterogeneous assembly, as the placid Knight of the "Spectator" might have overlooked a game of cricket among his peasantry.

The formal debate of the candidates, exciting as it was, was by no means the warmest battle of the day. The Randolph men were

sanguine to exultation of their victory. Their leader had never experienced a defeat, and imminent as was this crisis, he had shown himself equal to its emergency. Whatever shakings of spirit their opponents may have suffered, they maintained a bold front, and some affected a braggadocio, bullying style, unwise, not to say presumptuous, in view of the uncertainty of the sequel to their canvass. From time immemorial, the bottle has been the efficient ally of the doubting, desperate, or defeated politician—a curious circumstance in national physiology—by which the sagacious party-leaders now-a-days, have profited to an incalculable degree, and the morality of their voters suffered detriment in exact proportion. Real apple-brandy does not feed the flame of devotion to one's country so rapidly as do vitriol and log-wood; old rye whisky will not metamorphose a clodhopper into a Curtius so readily as does strychnine; but pure liquor answered the desired purpose pretty well in the slow old times, when invention was in its cradle. Men began to stagger as they talked, and those who had been cautious in declaration, now became declaimers. Conspicuous among these, was a fellow of Titanic build, and a brutal, scowling face, in whom Colonel Rashleigh recognized the man, whose shout of "Destruction to the British everywhere!" had stirred up the British lion in his pacific breast. An involuntary frown crossed his features at the remembrance. The man stopped short before him.

"What are you makin' faces at?" he growled, with an oath. "What brought you here, I want to know? Why didn't you stay where you belonged? Maybe somebody wanted you there! Nobody does here, I can tell you. If I had my way, I would rid the country of the likes of you. Come here to ride over our heads in your coach and four, and your white niggers, you proud old Tory tyrant!"

"Are you speaking to me, fellow?" demanded the Colonel, his dignity and choler rising together, until, but for the stiff comfort

within, his assailant must have withered down into nothing at his tone and aspect.

"To be sure I am a-speaking to you, old 'fellow!'" mimicking his accent. "And I say, you ain't wanted about here. We ain't got enough to live on ourselves—and all along of your 'orders in council,' and your 'non-importation,' and such foolery. You never heerd of such a ship as the Chesapeake, have you?"

"That has nothing to do with the subject in hand, which is your unprovoked impertinence to a stranger, and a gentleman!" retorted the Colonel. "I wish you to understand distinctly that your language and manner displease me, and that I command you to desist."

The bully broke out with a storm of imprecation and abuse. There was a rush and a crowding toward them, and every man, according to his apprehension or misapprehension of the case, contributed his share to the uproar. The watchwords of both parties were exchanged; taunting epithets heaped upon English, French, and Madison, until it was an impossibility for the truculent boor, with whom the wordy affray had originated, to distinguish himself longer by words alone. In his drunken malice, he strutted close up to Colonel Rashleigh, and swearing a great, sounding oath, shook his fist in his face. The Colonel retaliated by a blow from his stout oaken cane, that would have upset the brute, in his unsteady condition, had he not avoided its full weight by a lurch to one side. Before the bystanders could interfere, he fell forward upon his antagonist, and clutched him by the cravat. He had barely seized it, when he felt a mighty blow behind his ear, and went down like an ox under the butcher's club.

"Are you hurt, Colonel Rashleigh?" inquired Malcolm, anxiously.

The Colonel had not wind to waste in talking, so he signified by a negative gesture, that he was uninjured.

"And this is Virginian hospitality!" said Malcolm, facing the crowd, his eyes flashing like blue steel. "This is the welcome you give the peaceable stranger, who would make his home in your midst? A brave and courteous set you are! to stand tamely by and see a ruffian like that"—touching the reviving Goliath with his foot—"attack an unoffending gentleman, whose grey hairs would have been his protection anywhere, except from a monster and among barbarians! And these are the men who run mad about liberty of speech and freedom of thought—who would direct the government of a nation! when there is not one of you who had the presence of mind, or courage to hinder a drunkard's senseless violence! I am ashamed of my State and of my county!"

Goliath was upon his feet again, and, cowed and bewildered, would have slunk away but for the interference of Mr. Logan, a neighboring magistrate, who, drawn by the noise of the fray, had reached the spot while Malcolm was speaking. He commanded a constable to take the aggressor into custody as a disturber of the peace.

"Tother one hit fust!" called out a lover of fair play in the crowd.

Malcolm could not help smiling. But, ludicrous as it appeared, since one arrest had been made, justice required that both Colonel Rashleigh and Malcolm should be summoned to answer for their share in the affair. Mr. Hunter made an effort to seem grave as he offered himself as bail that they should be forthcoming when the matter was investigated, and the gentlemen were left at large. Goliath was not so lucky in his friends, and was marched off to jail. The gathering, that had nearly been a mob, dispersed rapidly, its members abashed by the severe rebuke they had received and the resolute proceedings that followed, and most of them heartily mortified at their irrational excitement and lack of courtesy toward the elderly stranger, whose only offence was his birth-place.

"This is your property, I believe, Colonel Rashleigh?" said Mr. Hunter, picking up the end of the cambric cravat, which Goliath had torn off in his fall. "That rent was of your making, Argyle."

"I beg your pardon for the damage to your dress, sir," said Malcolm, jestingly, to the Colonel. "I should have made the fellow let go before I knocked him down."

"I thank you sincerely, Mr. Argyle, for your timely interference," said the Colonel, holding out his hand.

"What a capital bruiser you would be!" continued Mr. Hunter. "You have given Bully Bob the ear-ache, for one while, I will warrant."

Malcolm stopped the congratulations which annoyed, instead of pleasing him, by inquiring when the Colonel designed returning home.

"Immediately, sir!—immediately! I have had a surfeit of popular assemblies."

Mr. Logan endeavored to apologize for the rudeness that had been offered his person, by representing the extraordinary state of the times, and the wild, lawless spirit that had taken hold upon men in all classes of society.

The Colonel heard him through with visible impatience.

"It is my opinion, sir, that a country and a society containing such disorderly elements; where quiet citizens are molested in the open day by ruffians; where the higher ranks and lawful authorities of this and other and as respectable governments are animadverted upon, in the shameless manner I have observed here, on this occasion—it is my opinion, sir, that that country and that society are in a remarkable condition, sir—a truly re-mar-ka-ble condition!"

And, bowing with an air of not-to-be-appealed majesty, he entered the carriage which stood ready.

"Do you go now, Mr. Argyle?" he asked, seeing that Malcolm's horse had also been brought around.

"Yes, sir. It is a long ride, and my only business here was to hear the speaking."

"Oblige me by accepting a seat in my chariot," said the Colonel, throwing open the door. "I would like to talk with you. My footman will ride your horse."

To refuse a request so flatteringly earnest would have been discourteous; yet Malcolm could not allow the bulky Thomas to bestride his pretty Sprightly for a ride of fifteen miles.

"I will, with pleasure, take a seat with you, sir," he rejoined; "but there is no need that my mare should be ridden by any one. She will follow like a dog."

"If it is not an impertinent question, where did you procure that animal, Mr. Argyle?" said the Colonel, removing to the front seat, the better to observe the graceful creature that trotted behind the carriage.

"She was born upon my plantation, and is, I suppose, of as pure English stock as was ever raised in this country."

He added her pedigree, to which the other gave the diligent heed of a gentleman jockey.

"I have, within the past week, discovered a great defect in the horse which my daughter rides," he said. "He is going blind."

"Indeed! I am sorry to hear it."

"Katherine does not know of it yet," pursued the Colonel. "She is tender-hearted, and the horse was trained expressly for her. If I could procure another, as valuable for her purpose, as handsome and gentle, she might be reconciled to the parting with her pet."

To the Colonel, there was nothing to wonder at, in the interest evinced by his hearer in this, or any other subject that engaged his mind. *His* daughter's horse ought to be an object of importance in the eyes of any one whom he honored by consultation respecting it.

"It would be a pity if Miss Rashleigh were compelled to discontinue her rides," remarked Malcolm. "She appears to be very partial to the exercise."

"It is my wish that she should practise it daily, whenever the weather permits. I should be exceedingly displeased to see her grow languid and pale, as many American women do, by confinement to the house and sedentary employments."

Malcolm could have replied to this slur upon his countrywomen, that English air and customs had produced as perfect a specimen of the inert fine lady in Mrs. Rashleigh, as the enervating climate of America, and the self-indulgent fashions, that were creeping in among her richer classes could manufacture; but he forbore.

"Mr. Hunter—my younger sister's husband, has a thoroughly broken lady's horse—the brother to Sprightly, there," he said. "He bought him of me, in the hope of inducing his wife to accompany him, in his horseback excursions, but he has not succeeded; and, as he told me, the other day, he is willing to dispose of the nag. I will speak to Hunter, if you wish it, and have the animal brought over for your inspection."

"You are very kind, sir; I accept your offer, with many thanks. My nephew, Moreau, is likewise seeking a purchaser for his wife's saddle-horse. But I should not entertain for a moment the thought of buying him for my daughter, since Mr. Moreau's reason for selling him is that he is unsafe for a lady's use."

"Unsafe! that is something new!"

"That such is the case, he nevertheless assures me. Either his servants are bad managers of horses, or he has been unfortunate in his selection of this kind of stock. I understand that he has sacrificed several costly ones within a year because they did not suit him."

Malcolm examined the speaker's countenance for tokens of double meaning or suspicion; but in vain. Stifling the expression of his doubts as to the truthfulness of Moreau's representa-

tions, he answered carelessly, that very good horses were easily ruined by improper management, and the matter dropped.

They rode together to the outer gate of Briarwood, where Malcolm got out of the carriage and remounted his steed, sorely against the Colonel's will. He had liked Mr. Argyle from the day in which he rendered his daughter a signal service, and the brave act of to-day had sunk deeper into his heart than Malcolm supposed it possible for any one to go. In this, he misjudged the Englishman's character. He was very grateful for his kind interposition, and inspired with profound admiration by Malcolm's spirited address to the mob. Ever since the occurrence, he had studied within his own mind, as to the most feasible and judicious method of testifying his conviction of the favor done to him, and of repaying the debt. His urgent request for Malcolm's company in his chariot, construed by the younger gentleman into a desire for society that might relieve the loneliness of the journey, was, with the elder, equivalent to the Arab's invitation to partake of his bread and salt, and cleverly intended as the preliminary to a more familiar and friendly style of intercourse. So, also, his conversation during the ride—most of which Malcolm considered the prosiest of long-drawn-out commonplaces—was a labored attempt to fascinate his fellow-traveller by the depth and variety of his information and the excellence of his colloquial powers, hoping thereby, to implant a longing for further acquaintanceship. He determined, especially, that Mr. Argyle should be his guest for that evening; should receive the thanks of the ladies for his gallant deliverance of the husband and father, and Malcolm's surmise of this intention was one reason why he remained steadfast in his refusal to go in.

The Colonel was not to be balked by the modesty of his benefactor. After waiting a couple of days for a call from him, he ordered his gig and drove over to Ben Lomond to renew his thanks, and to be the bearer of an invitation to a

dinner-party, which was arranged for the Tuesday of the week following.

"I am going to make you happy again, Aunt Bab," said Malcolm, entering her apartments, when the Colonel had gone.

"And how's that?"

"By going to party No. 2. The sacrifice is greater this time, too, for it is that most intolerable of civilized institutions—a dinner—a 'dining-day,' as you call it."

"Where at?" interrogated Miss Barbara, contemptuous, as usual, of grammar, provided she made herself understood.

"At Colonel Rashleigh's."

"Them Englishers agen? You like 'em, don't you?"

"I have no cause to dislike them."

"Nancy Wilkinson says they're queer; but mighty liberal and just to her, if they *are* stiff. All except the young lady. She's the merriest, affectionatest cretur that ever walked, instead of flewed."

"Getting poetical, are you, Aunt Bab?" but there was a gleam of pleasure, more heart-felt than fun ever was, in his smile.

The dining-day arrived, and a little before the hour designated by Mrs. Rashleigh's notes of invitation, Malcolm threw the reins upon Sprightly's neck, at the door of the Briarwood mansion. The double doors of the hall stood wide open, and Thomas, in the butterfly splendor of his renovated livery, took the hats and whips of the gentlemen, and conducted them into a side room, where they might remove the dust of their ride, and add the last touch to their toilets. From this, Malcolm crossed the waxed and polished floor of the entry, to the great drawing-room. There were about fifty guests, but, in spite of a number large enough to have prevented formality, and the gay dresses and cheerful voices of the ladies, the "state funeral chamber" held its own grimly. There were no warm colors in the furniture to enliven the eye, and, on the wall, no flickering shadows and tinted lights. All

was dark green, except where the high windows showed parallelograms of the bright white noon without.

Colonel Rashleigh greeted his neighbor with distinguished affability; Mrs. Rashleigh gave him the tips of her gloved fingers and Katherine actually colored with pleasure as she put her plump hand in his.

"I am glad you have come," she said. "It was unkind in you to stay away during all the days we have been wanting to see and thank you"——

"Hush!" said Malcolm, releasing the little hand he felt a strange delight in holding. "What if thoughts of those unmerited thanks had kept me away?"

"You reject our gratitude! and why?" asked Katherine, her blush a shade deeper with mortified pride.

"I do not reject it. If the service I had rendered were at all commensurate with the reward, I could not be so generous as to deny myself the pleasure of being thanked by you."

Here he caught sight of Mrs. Holt, standing apart, waiting to speak to him, and passed on to her.

"Your heroism is the praise of all tongues, Mr. Argyle," said the governess.

"If you allude to the fracas on court-day, it is not worth the mention of *one* tongue, madam."

He would have made a comment on the weather, but she prevented him.

"Your mission seems to be to succor the distressed, in whatever condition of life they may chance to be."

"Whether in peril from mire or mob," concluded Malcolm, glancing mischievously at Katherine, who was listening to them.

A jest that required payment in like coin was ever a "poser" to Mrs. Holt, and Malcolm gained his end in accomplishing her silence.

"But you deserve the quotation you checked, for having so

ruthlessly shocked dear, proper Mrs. Holt," said Katherine, afterward. "You are ungrateful for her good opinion of you, or you would not have thwarted her propensity, in that unceremonious style."

"She has a good opinion of me, then? How could she have gained it?"

"As if such things were not to be had for the asking!" retorted Katherine. "I am tempted to do violence to your modest estimate of yourself, by repeating a line which she recited on the evening of court-day, after papa had finished his account of your prowess in his cause—versus Republicanism and Bacchus. 'My dear,' said she to me—'does not Mr. Argyle remind you of that fine line in the "Fairy Queen"?"

'Wise, warlike, personable, courteous and kind?'"

Malcolm bowed low to the compliment. A misgiving that her spirits had run away with her tongue visited Katherine, and she tried to amend her fancied breach of propriety.

"You must understand that Mrs. Holt's life has flowed on very tranquilly. Since the death of her husband, which event took place not long after their marriage, there have been no landmarks, worthy of the name, in her quiet existence. She has lived in her books and study, and a trivial interruption in the routine of everyday occurrences is an epoch of magnitude to her. I question if she ever had an adventure in the whole course of her life."

"And have you?" inquired Malcolm.

Her girlish rattle was like a strain of lively music to him, awakening feelings that made him young again.

She made a gesture of feigned vexation. "Why force me to a confession of the unromantic monotony to which I have been doomed? Since you will have the truth—never! A personal adventure—one labelled, 'Katherine Rashleigh—her property, and flung directly at my head by the Fates—is a boon with

which I have never yet been blessed. I have had sundry narrow escapes from, or misses of godsend of this sort. Witness the quagmire drama, where Thomas defrauded me of the chance of playing heroine, by enacting the hero in the part that should have been mine."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Malcolm. "I, for one, am content that we had a farce, instead of a tragedy."

"Are you fond of theatrical performances, Miss Rashleigh?" asked young Sancroft, catching the words "farce" and "tragedy."

"Yes, sir; although I have never seen above half-a-dozen plays. We were talking of the drama of real life, in this instance, however. "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women in it merely players"—she repeated; her peculiarly arch smile at Malcolm reminding him whose pupil she was, while Mr. Sancroft thought it all right that a young lady, who had read Shakspeare, should quote him when she pleased.

"I was lamenting that I had never had an adventure," she went on. "My horses are the safest and surest of that proverbially uncertain race of quadrupeds, and my passage in any conveyance whatever, by land or sea, is as reliable a security against mishap, as is my presence a protection to the building that covers me, against fire or tempest."

"Happy indeed will be the mariner, in whose vessel you deign to embark," said Mr. Sancroft, gallantly. "Fortune does not smile so constantly upon many of her votaries. I have had some hair-breadth escapes from loss of life or limb, and you, Mr. Argyle, have been even nearer the land of shades. You recollect that terrible fall from your horse some ten years ago?"

"I have an indistinct memory of having been the spectator of a similar accident," began Katherine.

She paused, in dismay, at the unaccountable cloud that seemed literally to blacken Malcolm's countenance. He made no reply to Mr. Sancroft's query; only looked him in the eye for an instant;

then, bowing slightly to herself, turned away and mingled with the company.

The girl hardly knew whether to be hurt or offended—and with one or both gentlemen. She was helped to self-possession by perceiving that her mother stood so near as to have overheard the conversation, and she was sure that it would have been arrested by some act or look of hers, had its matter or tone been offensive to the rules of good-breeding. Avoiding, with delicate tact, any reference to Malcolm's abruptness, she quitted the theme they had been discussing, for one more general in its application, Mr. Sancroft obeyed this intimation of her pleasure, with seeming alacrity, and exerted his utmost arts to render his companionship acceptable. He was a man of great shrewdness, and some native talent; was ambitious and cunning, and, scandal-mongers said, a fortune hunter.

In this last capacity, he had deliberately meditated an attack upon the citadel of Miss Rashleigh's affections, and this, his first invitation to her father's house, was to afford opportunity for the bombardment that was to begin the siege. His impudent ruse had driven off the only opponent he feared as a rival. He had counted upon Malcolm's aversion to him as an auxiliary in getting rid of him, should he be, what report affirmed—merely a friend of the family, and his unwonted attentions to the young lady be paid at his sister's solicitation. This instant abandonment of his post was a welcome corroboration of Dame Rumor's story, and as for black looks, he cared not a rush for them, nor for actual insult, when they proceeded, as in this case, from a quarter in which he had nothing to lose. He was polite and rather amusing, Katherine decided; but her instinct detected the want of the refinement which early education may supply, in some degree, where Nature has not bestowed it, and the manner he thought vivacious, she objected to as pert. She wished that Mr. Argyle had not looked so fierce, had not left her to be entertained by a

man so much his inferior in every respect. She wondered why he had changed countenance so suddenly. Probably, there was some feud between the two, yet surely, it was neither kind nor gentlemanly to display this dislike so plainly, when they were both her father's guests.

This train of speculation and unpleasant feeling, imparted to her face a more serious cast than it was accustomed to wear, and as she was too true a lady to appear abstracted, Mr. Sancroft drew conclusions of his own, from the quiet grace, the tempered liveliness, with which she attended to his discourse. He devoted himself to her, with a burr-like pertinacity, despite her well-bred manœuvres to shake him off, or to drop him, in her course from group to group of visitors, and finally succeeded in his project of handing her into dinner. Katherine seated herself very composedly, and allowed him to take the next chair; but, while he was rubbing his hands under the table—a boyish demonstration of glee the would-be fine gentleman had not overcome—his fair one arose, with a brief "excuse me," and tripped off to the remote end of the board.

"Mrs. Hunter!" she said, in persuasive accents. "I cannot let you sit in this draught. Please exchange seats with me, I shall not have the spirits to talk, or the appetite to eat, unless you oblige me in this."

Up got Jessie, in terror at the discovery of the draught, and pleasure at the marked consideration for her health, shown by the host's daughter. Poor Jessie! such attentions were rare now, except from her husband! And while Mr. Hunter, who had escorted his own wife to the table, conducted her to the place vacated for her, Katherine slipped into her chair, with the benign expression of one fortified by the consciousness of having performed a worthy deed, against the most murderous draught that ever stole in through a window, on a summer day.

Mr. Sancroft was not out-generalled without protest.

"You would prefer a seat by your wife, I know, Mr. Hunter!" he said, jumping up.

The merry planter laid his hands upon his shoulders, and he sunk, it seemed, under their weight alone.

"Sit still, Mr. Sancroft! My wife was the belle of the county when I married her, and she has not forgotten how to chat with the beaux. So, go ahead, and do your best small talk for her edification! I will console myself with Miss Rashleigh, and try not to be jealous."

This episode in the feast, transpiring, as it did, in the awkward pause that succeeds the bustle of seating a large party, was observed by all in the room, and the husband's speech provoked a general smile.

"I do not promise to say as many pretty things as Sancroft does, but I will grant you more liberty to talk to other people than he would have done," remarked Mr. Hunter to Katherine, as he resumed his seat.

"Painted sugar-plums are well enough in their season, but if I am to have but one of the two, I like substantial edibles better," responded she, aside.

The meal passed off handsomely, as regarded the various courses of dishes; tolerably, as to conversation and sociability. Brilliant it could not have been, with Mrs. Rashleigh at the head of one table, and the Colonel at the foot of the other. Mr. Moreau was the vis-à-vis of the former, and Eleanor presided, with lofty grace, opposite to the master of the mansion. The dinner itself was a triumph of Miss Nancy Wilkinson's culinary skill, and those whose current of thought and words was congealed by the un-American stateliness of the preceedings, found abundant consolation in the unexceptionable material fare presented to them.

The Colonel's wines were one of his hobbies, and his gentlemen guests were unanimous in their approval of his taste. It is

to be hoped that these were not the only attraction that detained them in the dining-hall after the ladies left them, for it was nearly dark when they again sought the drawing-room. There were lights in the silver sconces over the mantel, and in the tall candlesticks disposed on stands around the apartment. Katherine was at the piano, and a bevy of girls were dancing in the middle of the floor; the elder ladies sitting by as spectators, and chatting over their own and their neighbors' concerns. For once, the dismal barn of a place was cheerful; the spell of its gloomy formality broken. The gentlemen selected partners, without delay, and the ring of dancers was doubled in circumference.

Katherine's piano was the marvel of the county, and her playing decidedly surpassed that of any other lady in her circle of associates. Very many houses, belonging to the wealthy and refined, in that section of country, boasted no musical instrument other than the spinning-wheel. In others, lutes and spinnets furnished practice for the accomplished daughters and music-loving wives. Some of the girls, whose feet kept faultless time to the inspiring reel, had never heard a piano-forte before, and were not ashamed to confess it. Katherine evidently enjoyed her music, and the sight of the dance, and her happy face was pleasant to behold. Malcolm drew near, and stood, without addressing her, watching her busy fingers.

"Why are you not on the floor, Mr. Argyle?" she inquired, looking up at him.

He had hoped that his petulance—his downright rudeness—was forgiven or forgotten, but he was not prepared for the frank sweetness of her manner, which said that he had lost nothing in her esteem by his behavior.

"I am hoping to obtain you as a partner," he replied.

"I am sorry that your patient waiting cannot have the reward you ask. But I shall not dance at all to-night. It is mamma's request that I should devote my time to the amusement of our

friends. There are very few who like to play while others dance. I do—and what would be an act of self-denial in another, is a pleasurable duty to me. Shall I select a partner for you again?"

"No, I thank you—unless you forbid me to stand here, and participate in your more quiet enjoyment of seeing and hearing. I will not interrupt you."

"You cannot—by talking! Hornpipes and reels slip of their own accord from my fingers. If you are inclined to be companionable, say on!"

Malcolm had to bend slightly toward her to make himself heard. "Before I can have either inclination or right to be 'companionable,' I must be certain that you forgive the unpardonable manifestation of temper of which you were the witness before dinner."

"Why apologize to me? I was not the object of your displeasure."

"Mr. Sancroft expects and needs no explanation. Of his deserts we will not speak. My only regret is that I forgot, in a moment of anger, the courtesy due to yourself in your own house. That I *do* regret it and feel humbled in the recollection of my ungentlemanly conduct toward you, is all that I can say to palliate the offence."

"What more could I desire? Never give the trifle another thought, for I shall not. If you wish to make an enemy of me, your sins must surpass this in enormity and directness of application. A little faster, did you say, Mr. Hunter? Thank you for the hint. If my tune or time does not suit you, do not hesitate to let me know. Remember that I am playing for you, not you dancing for me."

The nimble fingers swept on, and Malcolm gazed down upon them, with a strange, sweet happiness rising in his heart. In that atmosphere of music and light and mirth, was born to him, the consciousness of his manhood's love. He could no longer

delude himself as to the nature of the sentiment he felt for Katherine Rashleigh. He had called her a child, and prated soberly to himself of paternal affection, when his heart warmed toward her ; had sought in her resemblance to his lowly and lamented friend, the solution of his yearning for the sight of her countenance, the sound of her voice. The veil was torn away, and he knew himself to be the slave of feelings whose empire he had, for ten years, laughed to scorn.

It is a moment fraught with solemn delight—with rapture, approximating to pain, when a man, who has outlived the quick-growing, shallow-rooted love of the boy, first acknowledges to his own soul, that the peace, the comfort, the joy of his whole being depends upon another ; when the woman, hitherto only a valued acquaintance, it may be, a comparative stranger—is elevated to the throne of his heart ; sanctified into the priestess of its most holy mysteries. Malcolm Argyle experienced more than this. It was, as if, by a miracle of mercy, the rocky cell of a hermit who had died to the world, when, for him, the torch of love went out, were suddenly enlarged and beautified into the loveliest of earthly abodes ; peopled with the hopes and the loves that made the dream-land of his youth a fairy realm ; but now as real, as present and as perfect as were those visions chimerical, distant and vague. How it had come to pass, and how it was to end, he did not question, in the tremulous joy of the new self-revelation. He but realized that the lonely, blighted life derived solace and refreshment from the young, warm heart of this peerless girl ; that the stern, cynical second nature he had made for himself was as the sculptor's clay in her hands, and that henceforward, under Providence, it must be with him as she willed.

CHAPTER XX.

MRS. CARRINGTON spent two months at her father's, and in visiting her relatives and friends in that vicinity. When she returned to her home, Eleanor Moreau accompanied her. Mr. Selden's plantation was contiguous to Mr. Moreau's, and the intimacy of the early play fellows was renewed with a fervor that was hardly in keeping with Marcia's quiet temper, or the indignation which Eleanor had expressed, and was supposed to have felt at Miss Selden's culpable treatment of her brother. But by-gones were by-gones with them. The two ladies met frequently ; compared notes as to establishments, husbands and children ; exchanged fashions, and complained of their servants. Marcia remembered her girlhood with fondness, if not with regret, and was thankful to be reinstated in Eleanor's regard, and Mrs. Moreau being somewhat jaded by household cares, and wasted in flesh from the same cause, and the nurture of a stout baby, was on the look-out for an economical and commodious visiting-place, wherein to recruit her strength and good looks. She took her youngest along with her, leaving the other children, three in number, to the general superintendence of their father and the particular care of Sarah, who had been promoted to the dignity of "Mammy" to the promising brood. The change of air and scene was beneficial to Mrs. Moreau's health, and that of her infant, and the six weeks of her stay sped by very pleasantly. Mr. Moreau was a poor correspondent. Eleanor had insisted upon one epistle per week, to inform her of the children's welfare and

give an abstract of the doings at home, and he was obedient to the letter of her order, without troubling himself to write jeremiads over his loneliness, or narrate neighborhood news.

He had been lonely, however, he assured her on the afternoon of her return. She had performed the homeward journey in the company of an old gentleman and his wife, who were coming in their own carriage from the Carrington's neighborhood, to see a daughter settled near the court-house of Mrs. Moreau's native county. The weather was hot; the roads dusty; the child peppered with prickly heat, and as cross as—its mother! Her neat, cool house, swept and garnished to do honor to its mistress' coming; her children's noisy greetings, and her husband's repeated declarations of his joy at having her back, were inadequate to allay her irritable humor. Mr. Moreau took his baby-daughter from the weary nurse, and sat him down with it, like any woman, to essay the soothing process which had been ineffectual with his wife. He was an indulgent parent, and the little ones loved him better than they did the variable and capacious mother. He bathed Baby Nelly's inflamed face, neck and arms with milk-and-water, powdered her gently, and called on Sarah for a clean frock.

"Sarah is busy, waiting on me, Mr. Moreau. If you will make a fool of yourself with that child, there is the trunk! Get a frock, if you want one, and cannot wait."

Mr. Moreau did as he was bid. The servants were too used to see him perform such offices to think of superseding him in the self-imposed task. He stripped off the soiled, creased slip, and arrayed his darling in one of white linen, spotless and smooth. Then, he brushed her matted hair, and telling her that she was "her papa's ownty, townty daughter," fanned her, while he rehearsed the wonderful story, on her pink toes, of the "little pig that went to market." He was the very "moral"—as the Irish say—of a patient husband; a pattern of amiability his better

half might have copied, with signal advantage to herself and family. He might have thought—as any other man would have done in his place—her temper unconscionably bad, when she must see that every effort had been made to secure her ease and happiness, and that she ought to have pretended, if she did not feel it, some gratification at rejoining her home-circle after so long a separation. But he said nothing, except to Nelly, until supper was announced.

It was a delicious repast. Eleanor reflected, with pride, that she had seen nothing finer of its kind, during her absence, and that Marcia—let Mr. Carrington boast as he might, of her house-keeping—could not prepare anything to equal it, if the Queen were to sup with her. This was a drop of oil upon the ruffled waters, and their subsidence, thereafter, was marked, although not too rapid.

"What nice peaches these are!" she remarked, graciously, as her husband heaped her plate and poured the thick, yellow cream over the fruit.

"They are from Briarwood," responded Mr. Moreau. "Uncle sent over a basket-full to-day as a present to you."

"Ah! that was thoughtful in him—very kind!" The peaches melted lusciously in her mouth. "How are they all at Briarwood?"

"Very well."

The cadence was not that of one who concludes a sentence; but Mr. Moreau, after a perusal of his wife's clearing countenance, apparently deemed it best to rest there for the present. He discreetly barred his still open mouth with a spoonful of peaches, and awaited an altogether convenient season for the communication thus stopped midway.

The sun had just disappeared behind the woods when the early meal was concluded. The air was dry, and there was, as yet, no dew to dampen the grass, so the children romped and rolled in

the yard, and Mr. Moreau brought a couple of chairs from the house and set them against the trunk of a gigantic walnut-tree, that formed the principal feature of the place. Then, he filled the bowl of his pipe; pressed down the fragrant weed with the handle of his penknife; summoned a diminutive Eboe to bring him a coal of fire, and was ready for a matrimonial tête-à-tête.

"Carrington has a first-rate plantation, I suppose?" he said, by way of impetus to his wife's tongue.

It was called a fine one, Eleanor admitted, and went into a detailed description of it—the number of acres; the proportion of arable land; the facilities for irrigation, and other items of information that bespoke the farmer's wife.

"They have had workmen in the house all summer," she said, "pulling down and building up; and it will, in the end, be quite handsome and convenient. Yet I do not think that Marcia has bettered her fortunes so much as she believed she was doing, when she jilted Malcolm for Mr. Carrington. I had almost as lief have Ben Lomond as his place; and there is no comparison between the two men."

"Indeed!" Mr. Moreau withdrew his pipe from his lips and hemmed vigorously; but the premonitory signs of speech ended in smoke and a sigh.

"I have a notion," continued Eleanor, complacently, "that Marcia has repented her bargain many a time. And it is not surprising that she should, for she was certainly extremely partial to Malcolm while they were engaged. It was all Mrs. Selden's work—breaking off the match. She was afraid, she said, that Malcolm was 'flighty,' and would not keep the estate together after pa's death. I despise a mercenary, manoeuvring woman! Marcia could not avoid contrasting her two suitors, when she was here. I saw it in her manner, whenever she was in company with Malcolm, and I have no doubt but that he noticed it, too, and took a malicious pleasure in meeting her. You recollect, it

was just then that he went abroad so much, and set everybody to guessing what had transformed him, all at once, into a ladies' man. All you men are alike. You cannot deny yourselves the glory of a triumph. Malcolm is eccentric in some respects, but he has the foibles of his sex."

Now was Mr. Moreau's time. But again, resolution exhaled in a puff of smoke, so dense and strong that it curled up into the lower boughs of the walnut-tree.

"Have you heard any talk of hard times in H——?" he asked.

"They talk of nothing else, and the people are crazy for the war, which is to make a change, one way or the other."

"So they say here. If the election were to go over again, Eppes would stand a fair chance of being elected. Men are getting rabid under the money pressure. How we are to live, if this state of things continues, I do not see."

"Are you more straitened than you have been before?" interrogated his wife, in an anxious tone.

"Straitened! I am cramped—crushed—screwed down!" grinding his heel into the sod to illustrate his meaning.

"I do not understand why you should be. You have no heavy outlays at this season, and provisions are cheap, when our own plantation furnishes them."

"We don't raise sugar, nor coffee, nor tea."

"I am aware of that, Mr. Moreau!"

The raised key in which she interposed this remark, recalled to the forgetful spouse's mind the propriety of discontinuing the habits of language and deportment he had indulged himself in, by way of variety, in his six weeks' holiday.

"I mean, my love, that there are incidental expenses all the time, each insignificant in itself, but swelling the total into a formidable sum."

"Name some of them," said the unrelenting Eleanor.

"Groceries," recommenced Mr. Moreau.

"You had enough in the store-room to last until I got back. You and Sarah have been too extravagant! I knew just how it would be. What groceries have you bought?"

"None, my dear. Sarah is a very prudent woman. I was speaking of expenses that would yet have to be met. The winter's clothing must be provided, pretty soon, too."

"When cool weather comes, we will think of that," said Eleanor, philosophically. "I do not comprehend how debts that you may be obliged to contract three months hence, can embarrass you now. What special use have you had for ready money, of late?"

"None, whatever, my love. Only"—growing pathetic—"it humbles me to imagine the probability of your being compelled to deny yourself and the children, in dress and such articles of luxury as you have been accustomed to enjoy. I do not mind hardship for myself."

"Oh, well!" his wife condescended to comfort him. "There is no telling what may happen to help us along. There is Uncle Rashleigh, with a strong box full of British gold, who will perhaps give or lend you any small amounts you may require, and cannot raise elsewhere. And Malcolm has grown more friendly of late. I don't believe he would refuse to get you out of a difficulty, if he were approached in the right way. What he does with his money I cannot imagine, unless he is hoarding it up. If we can ingratiate ourselves with him, our children will be provided for, and the prospects are promising for this at present."

"He may have a family of his own," said Mr. Moreau, watching a cloud sailing in the zenith, and speaking very indifferently.

"Yes, and the sky may fall. A confirmed old bachelor is the hardest being in creation to cure of his own notions, and

Malcolm's disposition is as stubborn as stubborn can be. His love affair with Marcia has soured him to such an extent, that no amount of sweet words and smiles will ever win his heart. He told me once, that he would cut his throat sooner than risk his happiness, the second time, in a woman's keeping."

"He may change his mind," observed Mr. Moreau, stretching his body to one side, that his eyes might follow the progress of the fleecy vapor floating toward the west.

"And you *will* upset your chair, if you tilt it in that ridiculous manner!" said Eleanor, tartly. "You might pay me the compliment of seeming to listen, while I am talking. My tongue has not annoyed you much lately."

"Your tongue never annoys me, my dear. You were speaking of your brother, and the likelihood of his marriage."

"The certainty of his singlehood, you mean. You are dull this evening, Mr. Moreau. I am exerting myself to entertain you, after my fatiguing journey, and you have not said a word, except to croak about hard times, by way of raising my spirits. Is there no news in the county? Do wake up, and tell me something to keep me alive!"

"I have heard but one piece of news, my love." Mr. Moreau's fingers shook, as he refilled his pipe. "That has created quite a stir in the community. They say that your brother is going to be married."

"They do! And you call that news! This is certainly the hundredth time I have heard it. Who is the happy woman in this latest edition?"

"Our cousin, Katherine Rashleigh."

"Because he danced with her twice at our party, and out of civility to Colonel Rashleigh, accepted an invitation to the dinner at Briarwood! A smaller spark has kindled a hotter fire than this, before now. Why, she is a chit of a girl, hardly out of the school-room—and he old enough to be her father!"

"So I told Sancroft"—

"Sancroft! what business is it of his?"

"He would like to get her himself, I fancy; but is by no means so confident of success as he would be, were it not that her mind is divided by two suits at the same time."

"Colonel Rashleigh will hardly bestow his only child upon a lawyer who has a reputation and a fortune to make for himself. He will look higher."

"That is Sancroft's fear; but if he can get on the blind side of the old folks, he will make Malcolm tug for his prize, I can tell you. He has the cunning and the daring of the Old Serpent—Sancroft has!"

"You are complimentary to your boon companion. But upon what evidence do you and he ground the belief that Malcolm thinks enough of the prize, to 'tug' for it, as you elegantly express it?"

"He is over at Briarwood twice or three times a week; goes and comes when he likes, quite like one of the family. That, of itself, looks suspicious in a man who visits nowhere else. Then, Katharine's horse went stone-blind about the time you left us, and Malcolm crossed the river himself to see Hunter, and persuade him to sell uncle that fine bay of his, Omar, which he bought from Malcolm last summer. And as Katherine's groom is not thought altogether trustworthy, Malcolm offered his services as her attendant, until she should have tested her new horse, and he have become acquainted with her touch and voice. They ride out together, nearly every day. But *I* don't say they are going to be married—mind you! Only people will talk, you know."

"This is a singular story," said Eleanor, thoughtfully. "Malcolm's conduct is really extraordinary, and ought to be inquired into."

She had coveted his property so hopefully and so long, for

herself and heirs, had argued so plausibly for the perpetuity of his celibacy, that she had become a firm believer in her theory, and resented anything that threatened its stability, as an infringement of her ownership. Seen in this light, the reported conduct of Malcolm and Katherine was reprehensible in the highest degree—a wanton tampering with the sacred rights of another, and that other an absent person. This was not the purport, in words, of her reasoning, but it was its virtual substance.

"Perhaps," she added, reluctant, doubtless, to convict her brother and her husband's cousin of such base want of principle, "perhaps Malcolm pays court to the daughter for the father's sake."

For the first—and we are credibly informed—the last and only time in his life, Mr. Moreau laughed in his lady-wife's face.

"Why should he court the Colonel? They are as unlike as black and white; have not two ideas or feelings in common, and Malcolm cannot hope to wheedle the old gentleman into making him his heir, if he cared for money—which he doesn't. The way to get the estate is to take the daughter along with it, for she will have most, if not the whole of it. As to being neighborly, Malcolm is as independent as a king toward everybody else about here; asks no favors, and wastes no civilities. I don't see why he should single out *my* uncle, to spend his politeness upon. I am sure it is not through love for us; for *me*, at any rate. But I don't say they are going to be married!"

"You say they are together every day?"

"Almost every day, my dear!" corrected the husband, gently.

"Is this hearsay, or have you seen it for yourself?" questioned Eleanor, waxing sharper with each interrogatory.

"I have seen them several times, but heard of them oftener. Sancroft says"—

"Never mind Sancroft! Where and when did you see them in company?—what were they doing? and how did they look?"

Mr. Moreau replied promptly, but weighed each syllable, as he went along.

"I met them in the road through the Ben Lomond woods, yesterday afternoon, at half-past six o'clock. They were pacing their horses at an easy gait; the groom was a hundred yards behind them. Katherine looked very pretty; Malcolm looked very attentive, and they both looked as contented as—two kittens!" concluded he, helped to the simile by the opportune scamper of a young grimalkin across the lawn, in chase of the children.

"Robert Moreau! have you no affection for your children! no respect for your wife?"

"Good gracious, my love! what has happened?"

"You may see a deal of wit in answering my questions in that flippant style, sir; but the day may come when you will wish you had viewed the subject with my eyes. I tell you, if Malcolm, at his age, is meditating the outrageous folly of marrying a child—a baby-faced creature, like Katherine Rashleigh, a girl, without one atom of dignity—who is always saying and doing odd things—it will be no laughing matter to us!"

"I *don't* say they are to be married, my dear!" reiterated poor Moreau, the joints of his knees loosening, as her wrath heightened.

"You intimated your belief in the tale! I had hoped that years had taught Malcolm wisdom!" Eleanor fumed on.

"My precious! may you not be mistaken about his age?" said the unlucky Benedict. "Men often marry at forty, or even at fifty—and your brother told me with his own lips, that he was just thirty. And that makes him my junior by five years—and yours, by two!"

It is needless to repeat the tirade that attended upon this ill-timed, and to the lady's notion—indelicate computation. It may be that it would likewise be impolitic; lest, in so doing, we might

betray our familiarity with the species of domestic oratory, attributed to high-spirited wedded women, from the time when the distracted Thane of Cawdor rushed to regicide and to ruin, to escape his wife's tongue, to our generation, when the most brilliant wit of his day courted immortality in the hearts of afflicted husbands, in his and all future ages, by writing "Candle lectures."

We merely recount, to gratify the lovers of the "heroic in common life," that the extinguished Moreau stuck to his text to the bitter end—his last articulate observation that night being a feeble and spiritless disclaimer—"I don't say they *are* to be married, my dear."

While this lively matrimonial conference was in progress, Malcolm and Katherine were returning from their afternoon ride through the wooded road. Let them set off from home in whatever direction they might, they were apt, in the course of the excursion, to turn into this beautiful and secluded route. Neither avowed any reason for the choice, other than the attractive features of the way—lying as it did, through the magnificent forest whose trees were coeval with races dead centuries ago; leading over hills and through many a romantic glade, with its thickets of wild flowers and silver streamlet. But it was impossible that each should not be aware of his or her ulterior motive for frequenting the scene of their early acquaintance; of the awkward adventure that was the unlikely prelude to so much of beauty and happiness; and that feeling this, and divining the other's sympathetic thought, the eye should be more soft, the voice more low and mellow, the heart beat full and fast in the reverie that bewitched them into silence that was not stillness, or into long, confidential talks—how confidential neither knew then. It was communion such as heart can hold with heart, only when both forget, while using it, that the tongue is the medium of converse.

As usual, common report had outstripped the truth in proclaim

ing the betrothment of these two. The vain-glorious confidence and rashness of puerile passion would not have been in harmony with the earnest devotion that had its foundation in the very depths of Malcolm's soul. His was the love that enriches its object beyond any other earthly treasure ; the undivided gift of a true, manly heart ; the tenderness of a nature, as strong as tender. But the might of this love taught him humility and caution. While he sought her society openly, and would have scorned the suggestion that his attentions were committing him beyond recall—as intimating the possibility that he might change his purpose, he guarded scrupulously against the temptation to a premature declaration of feelings she might not be prepared to reciprocate. Would she ever be ? was the inquiry that occasioned him most disquiet. He rated his years nearly according to his sister's calculation, and when he remembered that the period, foreshortened by a backward glance, lengthens into an indefinite, because untried futurity, when anticipated, his fears multiplied. A less modest man would have believed the mirror and friends, whose verdict upon his appearance coincided with his own knowledge of unimpaired vigor and health ; a timid lover would have shrunk appalled at the dozen years' difference in age, and abandoned the field to a more youthful suitor. Malcolm determined that the success which proverbially attends the resolute and the wary should be his. As the reward of his delicate forbearance, he saw the evident ripening of the girl into the woman ; the rivulet, with its dancing ripples, deepen and expand into the river ; saw thought taking precedence of impulse ; feelings and anticipations, unknown before, lending sweet and holy gravity to her demeanor in their interviews.

From one point of their ride, near the entrance to the woods, they had a view of the Ben Lomond house, framed in a vista of trees. By tacit consent, they paused to look at it. The windows were like burnished gold in the sun's rays ; the dark pile of

buildings had an air of peaceful repose, and the environing cottages and green fields sloping down from it, made up a picture of rural beauty that called forth an admiring exclamation from Katherine.

"The situation is well chosen, and the sunshine invests the landscape with its own charms," said Malcolm, in reply. "Still, I think with you that it is a fine old homestead, and my attachment to it is great."

"You were born there—were you not ?"

"Yes, and passed there a happy boyhood. I have explored every nook on the place ; know every tree in the woods—I was about to say, every fish in the creek. My grandparents and my parents lie in the burying-ground, under that grove of cedars to the right, and there I hope to rest, when my appointed day comes."

Katherine gazed with moistened eye at the quiet old house on the hill, seeming to keep watch over the surrounding country, and thought what a serene asylum it looked for helpless infancy and declining age.

"I believe that my local attachments are naturally tenacious," she said ; "but I have never lived in any one home long enough to learn to love it very dearly. I have been a waif, all my life. Mamma's health has compelled us to make many changes of residence. You must have remarked papa's extreme fondness for her. His soul is bound up in her welfare ; and radically English as are his predilections of heart and taste, he has never murmured at any proposed removal, that could be of the slightest possible benefit to her. Several times, within my recollection, his friends have strenuously opposed his acting upon the advice of the various physicians who declared that she could not live in England, and advised travelling as the most likely means of her restoration, but he held on his way. At last, like many other migratory birds, we found our way across the Atlantic. Most

sincerely do I trust, that this is our last move. I am sad at heart, sometimes, when I reflect that this constant shifting of the scenes of my childhood, has robbed me of the memories that appear to be so dear to most people. I have the most tantalizing recollections of my infancy, up to the time which we spent in Paris. It may amuse you, but I could weep when I tell you that in the two years we passed there, I forgot my mother-tongue—all except some half-a-dozen pet-names, which the traditional 'Bessy' must have taught me."

"And cannot your mother or Mrs. Holt assist you, in giving form to your floating visions?"

"Mamma has never encouraged me to speak of old times. Indeed, she seems averse to answering my questions, and Mrs. Holt entered our family after our return to England, when I was eight years old.

"One circumstance of my early life made a powerful impression on my mind, and yet, I recall it by snatches, with dark gaps between the fragments—such leaps as one's imagination makes in dreams. It is of a severe illness which papa had, at some strange place, while we were travelling. Mamma was with him a great deal, I suppose, and it seems to me that I ran about barefooted and bareheaded, with four or five other children, who did not treat me well, and that their mother was a harsh, cross woman, with a loud voice, of whom I stood in deadly terror. Then came another gap—and one happy morning, when mamma told me that papa wished to see me. I was frantic with joy, for some mischievous or cruel persons had made me believe that he was dead. Mamma arrayed me in a pretty dress, which she said he had given me, and led me downstairs, and there I saw the 'papa,' whom I recollected as a handsome man, with dark curls, and thin and pale, from long confinement to his bed—now so altered that I did not know him. I pulled away from the old gentleman with grey hair, who wanted to kiss me, and screamed

that he was not my father. Mamma scolded and he coaxed, and at length, I was induced to listen to reason. Then I awoke from sleep to find myself rolling and pitching in a ship upon the ocean, and a fit of sea-sickness effaced every other reminiscence of the voyage."

"Which was, no doubt, only the trip across the Channel on your way to France," said Malcolm. "Children have the most unreliable notions of time and space. You must have had rather a lonely life," he resumed, when they had ridden on a little further.

There was something forlorn in her disjointed childish reminiscences. Nor could he understand the neglect which had subjected the child of wealthy parents to the low associations and petty tyranny she sketched, even by supposing that her father's illness had occurred, as she stated, while they were travelling. However exemplary Mrs. Rashleigh might have been, as a wife and nurse, her tender, sensitive daughter was slighted, and suffered in consequence.

"Lonely!" Katherine clasped her hands passionately, and raised to him a look so intensely sad, that it pierced his heart. "You cannot enter into the meaning of the word, for you have always 'dwelt among your own people.' I, in whose ears it has knelled, since my babyhood; who have sobbed myself to sleep repeating it, and felt it fall upon my spirit—a load of ice! with the earliest waking thought—I can tell you how that little word makes a desert of a crowded city; a feast of death of the gayest party; how it converts wealth into a cruel mockery; the tones of flattery into hateful discords! It is not always that I feel thus, for I was endowed by Providence, with an elasticity of temperament that resists care—and when forced to bow, retains the power to rise when the pressure is removed. But I often, often smile and sing, when I am ready to throw myself in the dust and weep my life away—when my wild cry to heaven is—'Why hast Thou made a worm to suffer torture like this!'"

The great tears dropped fast and thickly upon Omar's mane, as she bent her head upon her breast. Had she looked up, at that moment, the tenor of much of her after-life might have been different. Malcolm's yearning, fervent soul was in his eyes and face, and before he bethought himself of expediency or aught else besides the impulse to fold the wanderer to his heart, and bid her rest there forever, his hand was upon her bridle. With all the power of man's resolve, he quelled the rising emotion, ere she recovered self-command.

"Do not think me rebellious or weak, Mr. Argyle!" she said, pleadingly. "You listen too patiently to my discursive talk—invite my confidence to persuasively—and if I forget myself sometimes, you must share the blame with my impetuous disposition. It needs curbing and pruning woefully. But please remember that I never had a friend before—one of my own, such as you have kindly offered to be, and I have not learned yet how to make a right use of him, without imposing upon his indulgence."

"He hopes to teach you, some day, what use he would have you make of him, Katherine," was the reply.

No interpretation was solicited and none offered. In the silent twilight of the forest aisle, it seemed as if the fast heart-beats must be audible and intelligible to one another. Vows more definite and more binding might be hereafter exchanged; but in the spirit-history of each, the solemn, beautiful sanctuary of Nature was recorded as the place of their plighting.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SADDLE-HORSE was being led away to the stables as Malcolm and Katherine approached the door of Briarwood; a fat, slow steed, which Malcolm identified as belonging to the elder Sancroft.

"I cannot come in this evening," he said, in reply to Katherine's modest invitation. "But I will see you again very soon."

"Colonel Rashleigh will be disappointed, Mr. Argyle. He promised himself the pleasure of your company at supper."

It was Mrs. Rashleigh's voice, and she came forward to the porch from the gathering gloom of the hall. Her manner was formal, yet it was an icy approach to cordiality, that Malcolm had never seen in her before, and which took him now by surprise.

"I thank you, madam, but will you be so good as to present my excuse to him? He has another visitor, I perceive, and he will probably be engaged with business matters throughout this evening. I shall do myself the honor of waiting upon him some time when he is more at leisure."

"That tiresome Mr. Sancroft here again!" muttered Katherine, on her way upstairs to change her dress.

"You do not like him, then?" said her mother, close behind her.

Katherine laughed. "I did not know you were there, mamma! If my soliloquy was disrespectful to the knight of the eyebrows, you must excuse me on the score of unaccountable antipathy. I

suppose it is wrong since papa knows and trusts him, but I cannot bear the man's looks !"

They were at her chamber, and Mrs. Rashleigh went in with her

"It *does* seem unreasonable to distrust a man because you do not admire his eyebrows," she said, seating herself as if wearied by the ascent of the stairs.

"Oh, that is not all !" exclaimed Katherine, confusedly. "I am not quite so childish as that. His black eyes are so cunning, and his endless talks such a conglomeration of nauseous compliments and business items and inquisitiveness, that he impresses me most disagreeably. You have never met him, I believe, mamma ?"

"He has been here but twice at meal-times, and on both occasions I was confined to my room. I intend going down to supper to-night."

"You will not like him !" said Katherine, in a confident tone, and proceeding with her toilet. "His eyebrows will give you a nervous turn. They have St. Vitus's dance in its worst type."

"Does the son share in the antipathy you profess to feel against the father ?" inquired Mrs. Rashleigh.

"I can assign better reasons for my want of appreciation of his fascinating qualities, yet I can better endure his conversation."

"So Mrs. Holt thinks !"

"Madam !" said Katherine, wheeling around from the mirror.

Mrs. Rashleigh smiled ; a gleam that had a faint touch of her daughter's archness.

"Mrs. Holt has confided to-me, in the discharge of her official duties, her impression that Mr. Sancroft contemplates becoming a suitor for Miss Rashleigh's hand, and that Miss Rashleigh is not insensible to Mr. Sancroft's merits."

Katherine colored almost angrily, and then, detecting the lurking smile about her mother's mouth, burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"How ridiculous ! Who could have thrust such a fancy into the poor, dear lady's brain ! It never crept there of itself !"

"She sees nothing absurd in the fancy, or in the mutual preference it asserts," answered her mother.

"And do not you ? I admire Mr. Sancroft ! I permit the addresses of a man whom I neither like nor respect ! a pert, consequential, selfish attorney !"

"You forget that there is no profession in this country more honorable than that of the law ; none that leads more directly to fame, and frequently to wealth."

"A lawyer is a different creature from a pettifogger !" returned Katherine, curling her pretty lip.

"We will not quarrel about terms. Only, do not confound the profession with the practitioner. I may assure Mrs. Holt, then, that she need not trouble herself to be circumspect in conversing of our gentleman visitors—Mr. Sancroft, particularly—that you are heart-free ?"

Katherine drew back from the window that let in the glow of the crimson West, as she replied : "Refer Mrs. Holt to me. I think that I can speedily convince her of the baseless nature of her surmises—whether borrowed, or of her own manufacture."

It may have been the lingering effects of this conversation that painted Katherine's cheeks, when she joined the family and Mr. Sancroft at the table. Mr. Sancroft's hair was snow-white, but bushy still ; his smile was as constant, his eye as sharp and his eyebrows were as indefatigable as they had been in his prime.

"Most happy to *have* the pleasure of meeting you, madam !" he said, cringingly to Mrs. Rashleigh. "Colonel Rashleigh informs me that your valuable health is improving *in* our salubrious climate. Health is a boon which none of us rightly value until we are deprived of it, Mrs. Rashleigh. My lamented partner was delicate for some years before her decease, and this cir-

cumstance renders me more sympathizing toward others, who are similarly afflicted, Colonel Rashleigh."

Mrs. Rashleigh listened with an unmoved countenance, that did not resent, as did Katherine's tell-tale features, the analogy drawn between the dear departed and the lady of the house. Before she could compose her contemptuous muscles, Mr. Sancroft faced about upon her.

"Your blooming cheeks bespeak your immunity from 'all the ills that flesh is heir to,' Miss Rashleigh. You enjoy unbroken sanity of body and quiet of mind, I conclude. You set a commendable example of wholesome exercise to the other young people of our community, one which I hope will be extensively followed. Your splendid horsemanship must have been learned in a riding-school, Miss Rashleigh? And, how are you pleased, my dear young lady, with the physical and social structure of your adopted home? I presume that you have made the acquaintance of most of our neighbors. I think that my daughters have called upon you—hey?"

"They have, sir. I returned the visit, but they were not at home."

She did not append her subsequent resolution not to cultivate their acquaintance.

"Mr. Sancroft and myself will be busied, most of the evening, in balancing our accounts, my dear," remarked Colonel Rashleigh, to the statue at the head of the board. "Therefore, we must deny ourselves the pleasure of your society, ladies," including Mrs. Holt and his daughter in his ceremonious bow.

"The loss indeed is a heavy one!" Mr. Sancroft said, with a monkey-like imitation of his host's precise gallantry. "I hope, however, that when these necessary, although, at times, irksome affairs are disposed of, we may enjoy many occasions of friendly intercourse," and he ducked his head to a level with his tea-cup.

The meal was not protracted by superfluous conversation,

except on his part. Unabashed by the frigidity of the hostess, Katherine's barely civil rejoinders to his questions, and Mrs. Holt's prudent reserve, he brought forth his best stores, his longest words and most fawning flatteries, and left the table, in the blissful consciousness of having played to perfection the fine gentleman—a rôle he had studied to acquire, as his accumulating wealth enabled him to rank with his neighbors in outward show.

Katherine sat for a while in the family parlor, where her mother and Mrs. Holt were at work.

"Mamma," she said, presently, "what business is it that brings Mr. Sancroft here so often?"

"He is a kind of general agent—a collector," replied Mrs. Rashleigh, "and in this capacity, was employed by Mr. Moreau, to negotiate for this plantation, with its former owner. He purchased the stock; the farming implements, the servants—everything that we did not bring over with us."

"But why was he selected? Surely my cousin Robert was competent to the task."

"It was your father's wish. He does not like to have moneyed transactions with his relations."

"And is not the estate paid for?"

"A portion of the purchase-money was paid down at the transfer of the property; upon the remainder, the terms of the sale allowed a credit of some length."

"And Mr. Sancroft has kept the accounts! Mrs. Holt, do you believe that a man of his physiognomy and—eyebrows—can be worthy of this unlimited confidence?"

"My dear Miss Rashleigh!" said the shocked governess. "That Mr. Sancroft is an honorable man, I cannot disbelieve"—

"And so were Brutus and Cassius—Mark Antony for authority," interrupted Katherine, in affectionate raillery that could not be mistaken for disrespect. "Do you remember the doggerel stanza the schoolboys used to sing?"

"I do not like you, Doctor Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But this I do know very well
I do not like you, Doctor Fell."

For Doctor Fell, read Ichabod Sancroft."

She went singing out of the room, and the next minute the music of the piano came from the adjoining parlor, where she was alone in the dark.

The two ladies sat upright in the straight-backed chairs, and sewed without speaking—one, grave and severe of visage, the other grave and mild—while the plaintive airs Katherine loved best, floated down the long room, to their ears, like strains from the spirit-land. During an hour they remained thus, and Colonel Rashleigh made his appearance.

"I stepped in for a moment, Margaret, to consult you as to the propriety of inviting Mr. Sancroft to remain with us over night. It will not be practicable for us to finish our comparison of accounts this evening, and it has occurred to me that if he were on the spot, we could accomplish all that we desire early in the morning. What do you think?"

"It is a moonlight night, and Mr. Sancroft's family probably expect him home," said Mrs. Rashleigh's measured accents. "It will not be altogether convenient to me to have a room prepared for him, and the distance is so short that he will not regard the ride over here again to-morrow or next day. You will oblige me by appointing the day after to-morrow."

A side-glance at Mrs. Holt intimated to him that she would, by-and-by, impart to his private ear her reasons for this request.

Accordingly, when the obsequious agent had departed, Katherine and Mrs. Holt having sought their respective chambers, Mrs. Rashleigh folded her sewing; shut it up in the drawer of her work-table; extinguished the lights in the sitting-room, and repaired to the library. The Colonel was there, newspaper and

snuff-box in hand. Mrs. Rashleigh accepted the chair and foot-cushion he arranged for her, and broached the subject without preamble.

"I wish to speak to you about this Mr. Sancroft."

There was no decided stress upon the demonstrative pronoun, yet the Colonel's esteem of "*this* Mr. Sancroft" fell half a degree.

"Has he the confidence of the leading men in this community?" pursued his wife. "In these times, we cannot be too cautious whom we trust. If I understand aright, you have known none of the other parties concerned in your purchases. To save them and your trouble, he is empowered to receive and disburse the sums due for the plantation and appurtenances."

She spoke quietly, but without the languor that generally marked her style.

"Such seemed the fittest arrangement," replied the Colonel. "I am a stranger to the people, their currency and laws of purchase and sale. Robert Moreau recommended this man as a trusty agent, conversant with all such matters. He keeps his books, and I keep mine. Thus far, they agree."

"I have heard that this Sancroft was once the steward, or agent, if you will, of Mr. Argyle's father. Have you ever inquired his character from him?"

"I never have. It has not appeared expedient, according to my judgment."

"Excuse a very direct question. If this man were disposed to defraud you, is it in his power to do so?"

"Assuredly!" replied the Colonel, restlessly. "It is always in the power of a dishonest man to defraud whomsoever he may deal with. It is a defect in commercial institutions, but one for which no remedy has as yet been devised."

"You accept Sancroft's statement without any evidence beyond his word—do you not? For example—if he presents a

bill, setting forth that a certain sum was demanded for a certain number of cattle, you discharge the debt without further inquiry into the matter?"

"I do. You are aware, my dear, that the stock and the farm-tools were bought of many different parties, scattered throughout the State. With those at a distance, Mr. Sancroft communicated, by letter, my order that all accounts should be forwarded to me through him. You perceive that this arrangement spares me a great deal of trouble."

"I perceive"—she was calmly energetic—"that you are honest, the soul of a rectitude that thinks no evil of other men, and that Mr. Sancroft's profits in this transaction may exceed his lawful percentage by almost any amount he may deem it safe to extort!"

"Margaret! are you not severe in your suspicion of a man whom you have no reason to distrust? Think! would my nephew advise me to place my interests in his power, had he not tried and proved his integrity? Could he have borne an unblemished name in the county, for twenty years, if he had ever been convicted of dealings like these?"

"I tell you," said his wife, calmly still, but her slight hand quivered as she lifted it, "that you are not safe! You have often said that my judgment was good, my perception of character correct. Believe me now, when I declare to you that your agent is unprincipled, and that you cannot be too much on your guard."

"Why never tell me this until now?"

The Colonel was not an astute man, but he could not overlook this inconsistency.

"I had what seemed to me sufficient reasons for the delay." She smiled drearily. "I never intended that you should lose by him."

"How can I help it, if he chooses to play the villain?"

"Represent to him that your inexperience in American financial concerns renders it expedient that his accounts and yours should be inspected and tested by a third party. Let that person be a lawyer, sound and sagacious—Mr. Hammond, if you please. Ride over to see him to-morrow, and make an appointment with him for the day following. Deliver Sancroft and his books into his hands, without warning to your clever man of business. Require that every bill be examined by the one in whose name it is drawn, if the number of such be legion, and they be scattered to the four quarters of the globe. It will take time, and be an expensive procedure," she continued, dropping her emphatic tone, and returning to her ordinary listlessness. "You can consider the plan, and act as your judgment dictates. You have not read your paper yet, I observe. I ask your pardon for engrossing so much of your time. Good night."

Great was Malcolm Argyle's amazement, when Colonel Rashleigh introduced the subject of the errand that took him to Ben Lomond the next morning, namely, a minute inquiry into Mr. Sancroft's antecedents and character.

"You cannot comprehend how delicate and difficult is the position in which you would place me, Colonel Rashleigh," he said, truthfully. "Personally, I am Mr. Sancroft's enemy. Such is my dislike of him, that if I could, without compromising my veracity and honor, thwart his purposes, I would do so, not only willingly, but gladly. I entertain feelings toward him and his son, such as I have for no other persons living. This honest statement will perhaps show you that I am scarcely the proper man to consult on this point."

"I have too just a knowledge of Mr. Argyle's integrity and honor, to believe that his private animosity would bias his judgment in so grave a decision as the question of another man's honesty," replied the Colonel, in stately courtesy. "As a friend, I persist in asking your candid opinion of the agent selected for

me by my nephew. I shall make no unfair use of the information thus obtained. My object is to save myself—not to injure Mr. Sancroft."

Still, Malcolm demurred. "Allow me to make an inquiry or two, sir, before I satisfy you. Have you had any especial cause for suspecting fraudulent dealings on the part of your agent?"

"None, sir, or none that would have weight with any one, save myself."

"Have you been warned against him?"

"I have, sir."

"By any one in this county, may I inquire?"

It was the Colonel's turn to hesitate. A purple tinge suffused his forehead, and he looked down for an instant. Then, like a proud husband, who was not ashamed to be influenced by such a wife, he spoke out his mind.

"Mrs. Rashleigh, Mr. Argyle, is a woman of extraordinary penetration, of remarkable discernment! She says little, but she is always watchful and thoughtful. She advised this application to you, and insinuated her belief that its result would confirm her unfavorable opinion of my nephew's choice. I have never known her judgment to err, and after mature reflection, I have adopted the course she recommended. Of course, I am not blind to the fact that her suggestion, had it proceeded from any other lady, would not have been entitled to receive the weight I have given it, but you, sir, are too accurate a judge of character not to have perceived that Mrs. Rashleigh is, as I previously stated, a most re-mar-ka-ble person!"

Malcolm bowed. "I am honored by Mrs. Rashleigh's confidence, ignorant as I am of the causes that instigated her reference to me," replied he, sincerely. "I will not be backward in frankness, sir. I believe Sancroft to be entirely undeserving of your trust; as regardless of honesty as of truth; if you will hear the plain language of my sentiments—he is a knave and a

liar! Still, you will find him an efficient eye-servant. No man in the State understands his line of business better than he does. He is keen, quick, and thorough in the execution of commissions, and if he knows that he is watched, he displays a hair-splitting exactness that is calculated to beguile his employer into the belief of his extreme conscientiousness."

"I have remarked that myself in a number of instances," returned the Colonel. "I thank you, sir, for having been thus unreserved and explicit in your reply to my queries. May I trespass yet further upon your patience and your friendship by a disclosure of my plan for future action?"

Malcolm heard and approved, adding his to Mrs. Rashleigh's recommendation of Mr. Hammond. He consented, also, at the Colonel's request, to give him a note of introduction to the lawyer, who was a personal friend of his own, and after renewing his expressions of grateful regard, the Colonel left the master of Ben Lomond to ponder upon the apparent chance which had placed the reputation of his old enemy in his power.

Colonel Rashleigh's ready and full confidence in a stranger, although the character of that one was indorsed by his nephew, had excited the wondering remarks of many who, while they did not hesitate to use Sancroft to press a delinquent or tardy debtor of their own, examined his reports very narrowly, lest he might have placed a figure on the wrong side for them, and the right for himself. Mr. Hammond was not surprised, therefore, at Colonel Rashleigh's call and request that he would meet Mr. Sancroft at Briarwood, the next day, to assist in the winding up of their affairs.

It was a curious, and to the lawyer, a diverting study, to watch the evolutions of the famous eyebrows, when the object of Mr. Hammond's appearance in the Colonel's library, at the appointed hour, was explained to their owner. Colonel Rashleigh's demeanor was gentlemanly and dignified, formal, but not

discourteous, and his quiet assumption of his right to call in whatever assistance he needed in the conclusion of a transaction so important, could not be gainsaid by any man in his senses. Moreover, Mr. Hammond was too skillful a practitioner not to mistrust an attempted evasion or counterfeit of wounded innocence, and the business proceeded with regularity and dispatch.

Within a couple of hours after he had alighted at his patron's gate, comfortable in reputed respectability and the anticipation of certain benefits to accrue to him from the job in hand, Mr. San-croft—having declined the dinner Mr. Hammond remained to enjoy—rode pensively out of the Briarwood domain ; his saddlebags lighter by the weight of the bills and other documents consigned to the legal gentleman, and his heart heavier for the wish that many others, as clever as himself, have heaved with the boy who slew the goose of the golden egg—that he had contented himself with sure and equitable profits, instead of upsetting a really promising scheme by overreaching and speculation.

CHAPTER XXII.

ELEANOR had been four days at home, when she drove over to Briarwood, to prefer a "daring request," as she styled it, to Mrs. Rashleigh. It was for a week's loan of her daughter. Elizabeth Hunter, a sister of Jessie's husband, was to pay Mrs. Moreau a visit of that length, and she was hospitably solicitous that she should pass the time pleasantly.

"I thought, too, that our dear Katherine would enjoy herself in her company," said Eleanor. "Our neighborhood is lamentably deficient in young people, and she will be pleased with Lizzy. She is a charming girl, my dear ;" to Katherine. "More refined and less boisterous than her brother."

"I liked Mr. Hunter, extremely," rejoined Katherine.

"I am glad that you did. Strangers are not apt to admire his manners. They are too free-and-easy. But we, who are acquainted with his intrinsic worth, forget his oddities. Lizzie is quite a belle at home, and it is my intention to have several little social gatherings while she is with us. We will take excellent care of your daughter, Mrs. Rashleigh. May she go?"

"Katherine can consult her own inclination," replied Mrs. Rashleigh, coldly—so coldly, that the flush of expectation faded from her daughter's face.

Colonel Rashleigh could not endure to have his darling disappointed in any wish, however trivial. He saw, in Eleanor's proposition, a harmless and praiseworthy plan for enlivening the retired life of her young cousin. All girls liked gay society, and

music and dancing. He had seen Katherine's eye brighten at the idea, and he took the responsibility of deciding the question.

"Your invitation is indeed an attractive one, Eleanor," he said. "I presume that Mrs. Rashleigh will not object to so kind a device for our daughter's amusement, unless she has some weighty reason for denying you and her. If you are willing, Margaret, I say, by all means, let Katherine go to her cousin's to-morrow."

"If it is your desire, she can go, certainly," replied Mrs. Rashleigh.

Katherine's changing color and expression had told how greatly she longed for the visit. To her, it promised more than the mere mingling with young and lively associates. Montrouge was the adjoining plantation to Ben Lomond, and although she knew that Malcolm was not a frequent visitor at his sister's, she was confident that he must come while she was there. The "social gatherings" would include him, and she could not fail of having a merrymaking, however dull the rest of the company might be. Besides this main motive, she was light-hearted and sportive, and dearly loved a frolic.

"Thank you, papa! Mamma, you are very kind!" she exclaimed, as the consent was given. "I know that I shall be happy!" and, turning to Mrs. Moreau, she began a string of questions about her destined companion, Miss Hunter, with the lively curiosity of a child.

Mr. Moreau's haggard looks were apparent even to his unobservant uncle. He sat apart, while his wife talked with her accustomed gaiety, and, seeming to fall into a brown study, he picked up a pen that lay upon a writing-table near by, with which he scribbled incessantly upon a sheet of paper, until the Colonel's voice awoke him.

"Robert, you have lost flesh this summer. A vacation would do you no harm, and I would prescribe a tonic. A glass of bitters before each meal would strengthen you."

Mr. Moreau hitched his chair back, with an uneasy motion, and laughed.

"I am getting old, sir, and my mind runs too much upon the troubles of the country."

"These are indeed lawless times," said the Colonel, reverting mentally to the rough usage he had received in a political assemblage. "Is there any later and more gloomy intelligence by to-day's mail?" turning over the "Enquirer," which had been brought in a short time previous.

"No, sir; the same old thing! But the depression of the money-market is tremendous."

"Fortunately for us, it is comparatively light in the agricultural districts," returned his uncle, while Katherine remarked, laughingly—"Cousin Robert, you are a monomaniac upon the evil of the 'hard times.' One would say that you were being worn away by friction against them."

"Perhaps he is!" said Mrs. Rashleigh, catching his embarrassed look, and fixing it by her own—cool and clear.

"Oh, no, madam! not so bad as that!" he answered, with a desperate effort at levity; and jumping up, he reminded his wife that she had ordered an early tea.

"Are you losing all the wit you were born with?" asked Eleanor, when they were again on the road.

Her manner said that she was irritated beyond measure; but her husband replied, doggedly, almost savagely, that she "had never given him credit for having any to lose."

"It is enough to provoke one to death"—Eleanor went on—"to see what a miserable dissembler you are! I do not believe you could keep a secret to save your life. You blushed and stammered like a school-boy, while Mrs. Rashleigh's eye was reading you through, if a mortal eye can read thoughts. She seems too proud to notice what is passing around her; yet nothing escapes her. I am morally certain she suspects something—

what, I cannot say—only, she would have kept Katherine away from Montrouge if your uncle had not expressed his approval so decidedly. You are not fit to take care of yourself. What need is there to croak eternally over the 'money pressure,' until that saucy minx laughs at you about it?"

"A man that is on the rack cannot help groaning!" said Mr. Moreau, sulkily.

"And these groans are the thanks I get for my sacrifices in your behalf! Did not you sell my horse last week to relieve your immediate need of money? Woodson gave you a good price for him, and I hoped that I should hear no more complaints for a fortnight, at least. There! Did I not charge you to sound your uncle privately, as to his reasons for putting his business into Mr. Hammond's care? You never thought of it while you were there!"

"Where was the use? It was your brother's work. Will Sancroft saw uncle come out from Argyle's gate last Thursday morning, and dogged him to Hammond's door. It's as plain as daylight can make it—the way they are playing into one another's hands. Old Sancroft is as mad as a March hare, and yet dare not say a word for fear ugly stories may get abroad. If he has tried to turn an extra penny for himself, while handling the old gentleman's money, he will smart for it when Hammond ferrets it out, if Argyle is his backer. I never saw a fellow in such a passion as Will was, when he talked to me about it yesterday. He swore that he would be avenged on Argyle, and marry his sweetheart into the bargain."

"He may have her as soon as he can get her," responded Eleanor. "The game will be his for a week, and if he cannot secure a footing in the circumstances we propose for his accommodation, he deserves to lose her. Here is Malcolm, now! and on his way to see her! Stop and speak to him, and do as I bid you!"

Malcolm would have passed on with a nod and a "good day!"

but as his brother-in-law drew up his horse, he could not avoid doing the same.

"Are you on your way to Briarwood?" asked Eleanor, when the salutations were over.

"I am!" and his look added: "What business is that of yours?"

"We are just from there," said his sister. "I forgot an important inquiry I wished to make of Mrs. Rashleigh. Will you take a message from me to her?"

Malcolm bowed his acquiescence.

"Please say to her, then—or, no! I will not trouble you! Mr. Moreau, suppose we ride back with him? It will not take us long. I had best see Mrs. Rashleigh myself."

"Here are Robert and Eleanor back again, and Mr. Argyle with them!" observed Colonel Rashleigh, who was standing at the window.

"They have forgotten something, probably," said Katherine, going into the hall to meet them.

"Returned like a bad penny!" cried Mrs. Moreau. "Just as we met Malcolm, I recollected a little domestic matter about which I wanted to consult your mother, and as I had hardly seen brother since my return, we resolved to drive back with him."

"Now that you are here, you had as well remain to supper," said Colonel Rashleigh, hospitably. "It will be quite a family party."

Eleanor looked delighted, as she really was. "It is a temptation! But what of the babies at home?"

Mr. Moreau's wits were freshened by his recent lecture, and he answered readily enough: "Oh! Sarah can be trusted with the children, if that is the only stumbling-block to your enjoyment."

"Then you will stay!" said Katherine.

She reproached herself for the effort it cost her to utter the words that concluded the discussion. Her cousins had come over expressly to ask her to their house, and were contriving all manner

of amusements for her, and she could grudge them the share of her attention which they would, for this one evening, divert from the other visitor! What would he think of her if he could read the selfish regret? What ought she to think of herself?

But for Eleanor, Katherine would have had a difficult task to produce a semblance of sociability in the little company. Mrs. Rashleigh was always taciturn, and this evening said absolutely nothing beyond the formulas of the tea-table, unless when a direct question was put to her. Colonel Rashleigh perceived shortly that he had not contributed to his own pleasure or that of his family, in inviting his nephew and niece to remain, and his annoyance was showed in his gravity under his daughter's sallies and Eleanor's industrious efforts to extract his sentiments upon subjects which she fancied would be congenial to his taste. Mrs. Holt's thoughts were in a package of books yet unread, received the preceding day, and she seemed to be ignorant that the conversation was in danger of sinking. Malcolm's vexation at his sister's manœuvre was augmented by the discovery that Katherine was to spend a week at her house. His chagrin was the more pardonable when we learn that he had meditated the performance of great things upon this evening; had decreed that it should end his suspense, one way or the other. The interviews he had meant to secure—first with the Colonel—afterward with Katherine; the bright visions that swam in an atmosphere of glory before him, when he dwelt upon the evident favor of the parent, and the tones, words and looks of the daughter, from which he seemed to draw his life itself, since they encouraged a hope that was dearer than life; the fruition of all these desires was delayed by the senseless whim of a woman! Patience was not his forte, and if it had been, he might have pleaded his exercise of the cardinal grace during the months that had elapsed since he awoke to a knowledge of his love.

Katherine had never seen him so unapproachable, and grieved

secretly over the change. At length, he made an opportunity to request some music, and she consented with joyful readiness. The rest of the party were clustered, by chance, near the centre of the apartment, and this movement put a space between them and the two who went to the piano that was propitious for private conversation. The warming and lighting of Malcolm's face did not pass Eleanor's notice, as he turned toward her, to get a chair for himself; after Katherine was seated. Ere the middle of the first piece was reached, Mr. Moreau sauntered up to the other side of the musician, and remained there, a fixture, the more hopeless because of the lazy negligence of his attitude—through every march, sonata and song.

Content that her sentinel's position barred all danger of surprise from that quarter, Eleanor crossed the room, and sat down by Mrs. Holt. From praises of the elaborate needle-work, that occupied the governess' fingers, she glided to Katherine's proficiency in that line; thence, to her accomplishments in other branches of young ladies' education, sugaring each compliment to the pupil, with insinuated flatteries of the instructress. Single-minded Mrs. Holt was captivated by the sound sense and affectionate disposition of one, whom she had previously mistaken for a frivolous, worldly woman. Katherine was dear to her as if she were her own child, and Mrs. Moreau's undisguised complacency at the nearness of the existing relation between this paragon of beauty, goodness and intelligence, and her family, did honor to her heart and head. Then, Eleanor achieved the most cautious and graceful hint of stronger bonds, that events, now transpiring, were weaving. It was perhaps unbecoming in her to say it—and still, Katherine's friends might be gratified by the testimony of such a competent witness, to the excellence, the nobility of soul, the amiable temper of him, who was likely to become one of themselves. He had his peculiarities; but they were rather excesses of virtue, than failings.

"Despite the disparity of their ages, Katherine's influence over him will mould my brother"—

Here Mrs. Holt's bewilderment found words in the exclamation—"Your brother, Mrs. Moreau! I confess that I do not in the least understand you!"

"Surely, Mrs. Holt, you cannot imagine that the state of my brother's affections is unknown to me. Your reserve is commendable; but there can be nothing imprudent in our conversing about a matter that interests us mutually. The reciprocal attachment of two persons, so dear to us both, should be a common ground of confidence. Yet, if your sense of honor leads you to preserve Katherine's secret so jealously, I respect the scruple, and am silent."

"Miss Rashleigh has not confided any secret to me," said the poor lady, perplexed. "You ought to be best-informed with regard to your brother's intentions, but I must believe that you have misunderstood him. His visits to Briarwood are for Colonel Rashleigh. I do not think that Miss Rashleigh has the least suspicion that they are meant for her. I know that she is not betrothed to him, or indeed, to any one. She told me so, seriously, only yesterday—but our conversation had no reference to Mr. Argyle. It related to—another person."

"Young ladies are not confined to the strict truth in these affairs," smiled Eleanor.

"Katherine Rashleigh is incapable of an equivocation—however trivial!" rejoined Mrs. Holt, mildly indignant.

Eleanor drew back, so disconcerted, so mortified at her mistake, that the soft heart of the governess melted.

"Perhaps it will be well, Mrs. Moreau, not to let the substance of this conversation go beyond ourselves. It was an embarrassing error on your side; but you were not in fault in the mention of it. Who knows," she said more lightly, "but the wish may be father to the fact? It is most likely that the report

resembles most of its fellow-rumors in being 'neither wholly false nor wholly true,' and since Mr. Argyle's friends, and it is to be presumed, himself, regard the event it shadows, as a 'consummation devoutly to be desired,' you may, in the end, prove to be nearer right than I am."

"You are kind, dear Madam, thus to palliate my unfortunate indiscretion. I accept your proposal of secrecy, thankfully. Not for the universe, would I have Colonel, or Mrs. Rashleigh, much less Katherine, hear of my seeming indelicacy, my premature allusion to what I was led to believe was a settled matter."

Malcolm so seldom passed a night away from home, that he knew how agonizing would be Miss Barbara's uneasiness, should he deviate from his custom on this occasion. But for this consideration, he would have availed himself of the habits of the neighborhood in this respect, and accepted the Colonel's offer of a lodging. Heretofore, his evening visits had terminated by ten o'clock, and when the hours had fretted themselves away to this time, and his sister was smilingly immovable, he reluctantly ordered his horse.

Our hero will, we fear, lose caste with the youthful adorers of such impassioned suitors as recognize no claims as paramount to those of the love that has stolen brains as well as heart. It sounds hum-drum and wretchedly unromantic to say that he made up his mind to return home—his love untold; no hint of it given, and with the prospect of a week's separation before him—rather than rob an old housekeeper of a comfortable night's rest. Katherine, herself, who was ignorant of the cause of his rigid adherence to his rule, thought it rather singular that he could not, for once, break through it. For one instant, in the bustle of leave-taking, he eluded Eleanor's vigilance, and bent to Katherine's ear.

"Do not accuse me of forgetfulness or neglect, because I cannot come to Mr. Moreau's, while you are there. When the

right season arrives, I will tell you why I stayed away. This will be a dreary week to me."

Katherine's heart sank, with a painful beat, which felt as if the life had throbbed out with it; a pang, that wrung the color from her lips, as they motioned the "good-bye" she had no voice to utter. It was the chill and shadow of the first cloud that crossed the heaven of love. She had taken the "second step that finds the thorn" in the rose-strewn path.

"Mr. Moreau was miserably drowsy and stupid on the way home, and his guardian angel stirred him up sharply with her wand, for his obtuseness to the fine points of her strategy.

"I declare, Mr. Moreau, you are getting as cross as a bear, or as any other woman's husband. You used to be tolerably good-tempered, and to show some gratitude for what was done for you. You say that you 'cannot see what I gained by going back with Malcolm, except a dull evening and his ill-will.' I have learned all that I wanted to know, in order to proceed without fear with my plans. They are not engaged, and however disposed he may have been to hasten a declaration, when he heard that she was to pay us a visit, he had no chance to say a word to-night."

"Why cannot he come to see her, while she is with us? or write to her?" said the awakening husband.

"Does he *ever* come to our house? Has he crossed the threshold since he met Sancroft there, in May? If nothing else hindered him, he is too proud to make a convenience of us, that he may visit her. As to writing, it is my belief that matters are not far enough advanced for that, and if they are—does it follow necessarily that the billet-doux will reach her? Accidents have happened to letters, before this, that prevented them from reaching those to whom they were directed."

This significant piece of information was the cud of bitter fancies that lasted Mr. Moreau the rest of the way.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE Moreaus entertained handsomely. Both were fond of gay society, and never better pleased than when their house was filled with young people. Besides Elizabeth Hunter and Katherine Rashleigh, there were several others invited to pass some days at Montrouge. Mr. Sancroft, Mr. Blanton and Mr. Armistead—the latter a pleasant, gentlemanly fellow, whom Katherine liked better than she did any other beau of her acquaintance (with a mental reservation in favor of one whom nobody called a beau), were the stated gallants of a quartette of girls, composed of the two above-named, Miss Armistead and Miss Selden, a sister of Mrs. Carrington. It required little time for a party formed of these materials, and managed by Eleanor and the good-humored host, to become merrily social. Even Katherine, whose show of spirits, in the beginning, was feigned, soon found the sharp edge of her disappointment wearing away, and herself resolving to look on the sunny side of a painful matter. "While I am here, the wisest plan is to get what pleasure I can, and to contribute as liberally as lies in my power to the happiness of others," she reasoned. "A week is soon gone."

As to Malcolm's motives for absenting himself from her presence during that period, she had faith in him to believe that they were good and sufficient. The popular voice declared him a recluse, and he had not concealed from her his dislike to general company, promiscuous parties and the like. And, as is the fashion with women, she valued his preference for herself the more, that she stood alone in this respect. Toward Mrs. Moreau

her heart opened every hour. The warmth and grace of manner that made her guests feel themselves to be welcome and privileged inmates of her home; her lively conversation, and, perhaps more than aught beside, her personal resemblance to her brother, seemed to bring her very near to her young cousin. The hearty "Good night" kiss and smile of affection which Katherine bestowed upon her hostess the first evening of her stay were the spontaneous expression of feeling, and Eleanor's quick perception understood the fullness of their meaning.

The next morning was intensely sultry. As the party sat around the breakfast-table one and another compared dates and opinions upon other warm days—each as if he sought, by contrast, to mitigate the discomfort he then endured, striving to paint his story in more fervid colors than his predecessor, until the ladies declared that the burdens laid upon their credulity were, together with the weather, too much to be borne.

At each corner of the table was stationed a little negro, who swung his brush of peacock's plumes so lazily that the heated brows of the company received scarcely a breath of cooler air than that which slumbered, hot and heavy, within and without doors. The flies buzzed shrilly above the sweep of these inventions of the enemy for their disturbance—so continuous and sleepy a song, that the annoyed ear hailed, with savage satisfaction, the fiercer and faster hum consequent upon the occasional foray of a hungry hornet into their mazes. The girls were pretty and interesting, with their white dresses and flushed cheeks; the gentlemen, too inured to the climate to suffer lassitude or depression of spirits from the high temperature, and the flow of chit-chat and gallant nothings went swimmingly on.

Mrs. Moreau alone did not display the animation of the preceding day. She had a headache, and although too amiably polite to cast a shade over the rest, by cross or grave looks, was not successful in hiding the fact that she was in severe pain.

"What can I do for you, my dear cousin?" inquired Katherine, sympathizingly. "A headache, in this weather, must be intolerable. Is there no remedy for it except sleep and quiet?"

"I never sleep while the pain continues," answered Eleanor. "Oftentimes, the best medicine is cheerful conversation. At others, Mr. Moreau reads aloud to charm away the evil."

"As I do to mamma! She, too, is a victim to this terrible malady. Let me come to your room when you lie down, as you must do very soon after breakfast, to bathe your head, and read or talk to you."

"You are a dear, sweet girl!" said Mrs. Moreau, gratefully. "But it would be selfish in me to rob your companions of you, or you of them."

Katherine's place was next hers, and this fragment of the breakfast talk was by-play.

"I forgive you the theft," was the response, "and pledge myself that they will not enter a complaint."

Here Sarah brought in a letter and laid it at the side of her mistress' plate.

"From Master Malcolm," she said.

Eleanor broke the seal and perused it, with a countenance of increasing seriousness. There was a pained, troubled expression in her eyes, as she folded it up, that impressed Katherine with the idea of a foiled hope and discontent tinged with impatience.

"Well, Mrs. Moreau," said Mr. Sancroft, "shall we have the happiness of seeing your brother in our midst to-day?"

"He says not."

"What is the matter?" asked Mr. Moreau.

"He is otherwise occupied, I suppose," returned his wife, after a pause.

"I had hoped that his domestic habits were growing less inveterate," observed Mr. Armistead. "The accounts I have

heard of him lately, have encouraged me to look for better things."

A well-bred, but meaning smile went the rounds of the table, unseen by Katherine, whose eyes were bent upon her plate. Eleanor only was grave, and her silence throughout the remainder of the meal, was, to Katherine's sensitive fancy, that of perturbed meditation.

Twelve o'clock and no abatement of the heat! The dogs lay panting in the porches and under the trees; the cows stood in the shade of the willows that overhung the spring stream, motionless, except when the drowsy tinkle of a bell told that its wearer stooped to the water; the very insects were still in the grass, which parched and twisted in the white blaze that was over all. The gentlemen lounged, read and talked in the hall that ran through the house, with doors at each end. The girls had fled from the propriety and full dress of the parlor, to the easy dishabille of their chamber. We use the word in the singular number, for the four lodged in one large square apartment, amply lighted by six windows, all gaping for the breeze that favored none of them.

Martha Selden and Jenny Armistead, wrapped in loose gowns, lay upon one bed, reading different volumes of the same novel; Elizabeth Hunter, similarly attired, dozed and fanned herself alternately, upon the other.

"Why don't you lie down, Katherine?" she asked, in one of her semi-waking intervals.

"Because I am not sleepy."

"Neither was I, until I lay down, and now I cannot keep my eyes open. Just put up that everlasting stitching, and try the experiment. It makes me feel uncomfortable in conscience to see you so industrious."

"I will put up my sewing willingly, for I am lazily inclined myself, but I scarcely ever sleep in the day-time. Besides, I

promised to go to Mrs. Moreau, about twelve o'clock, and I heard it strike just now."

"Tell her we hope her head is better," murmured Elizabeth, turning over for a decided siesta.

Mrs. Moreau's room was darkened, and she lay upon a settee, a bottle of scented water in her hand.

"How are you now, my dear madam?" said Katherine solicitously.

"I am suffering excessively! How good it is in you to leave pleasant company, and subject yourself to my peevish complaints!"

"Hush! 'Cheerful conversation' was the prescription—was it not? I shall not permit you to slander yourself."

She took the bottle and bathed the lady's head, then picked up her fan from the floor.

"It is hard work to play the agreeable, sometimes!" said Eleanor. "I am in a poor plight for it to-day."

"The headache affects the spirits more than any other malady," remarked Katherine.

"That is not it! Other things trouble me."

There was a short silence; Katherine doubting her right to pry into the nature of these 'other things,' and Mrs. Moreau musing, with her eyes shut.

"Ah, well!" resumed the latter, trying to smile. "We all have our disappointments, petty and great; and if my hopes deceive me sometimes as to what the future will bring, it is the common lot of humanity. Only, I feel that it would do me good to talk over my annoyances. But who would care to hear the tiresome story? Even my husband laughs and says, 'I make much ado about nothing'—the dear tease of a fellow!"

"Unless it is something which I ought not to know, you are welcome to my hearing and sympathy," replied Katherine, anticipating some housekeeper's grievance of worthless servants or spoiled preserves.

"Something which you ought not to know! I could almost wish it were! But what am I saying? My head pains me so, now and then, that I forget myself. No, dear, there is no objection to your hearing everything that I would say, unless the tale will bore you. The truth is, Katherine, I am worried almost to death, about Malcolm!"

A start and a vivid blush showed how unexpectedly his name was introduced.

"You cannot conceive," continued Mrs. Moreau, "of the transformation in him, as he now appears, from what he was in our youth. How I loved that boy! He was so handsome, so gifted, so generous, that Jessie and I absolutely worshipped him. Marcia Carrington is still my friend, and yet I have wished, a thousand times, that she had never been born, or that she had never crossed Malcolm's path. You must have heard the history of that old affair?"

"I never have!" said Katherine, in a low voice.

"Indeed! I supposed that you could not have lived in this neighborhood above four months, and not have listened to a dozen versions of it. Really, we cannot be such a gossiping community as we are reputed to be. Are you not mistaken, dear? There was a revival of talk about this love-scrape, when Marcia was here in the spring and summer, and Malcolm's attentions to her fanned the flame. You may have forgotten conversations upon a topic that did not interest you particularly, but have you never heard Jessie or myself, or Miss Nancy Wilkinson speak of this, in connection with Malcolm's odd, misanthropical ways?"

"I never have!" repeated Katherine, precisely as before.

"How very strange! Well, then, you must know that they were engaged—Marcia and Malcolm—before he went to Europe. He was absent two years, and meanwhile, she became acquainted with Stanhope Carrington. Marcia is one of the best creatures in the world, yet she has no positive character of her own. Mrs.

Selden is a woman of strong sense and a strong will; very fond of her children, and ambitious that they should marry advantageously. Malcolm had nothing except what poor papa would leave him at his death, and he was then a man in perfect health, who might live ten or fifteen years longer. Mr. Carrington was wealthy and his own master, very good-natured and desperately in love. So Mrs. Selden reasoned Marcia out of her early attachment, which, with a girl of her disposition, might well have died of itself, while Malcolm was out of sight. The dear boy came home, so happy and hopeful, that Marcia had not the heart to undeceive him immediately, and the farce of the engagement was kept up for a season. This made the blow heavier when it did fall. It nearly deprived him of reason, and from that day to this, he has been an altered being—the wreck you see him now."

"The wreck!" Where was there another, unscathed in feeling and mind, who was his peer? The whole soul of the girl going out in love and compassion for the lonely, wronged man. Without one thought of self, she longed to comfort him; to compensate to him for the bitter trial, the solitude of heart and home that had succeeded its agony.

"After the marriages of Jessie and myself, and our father's death," pursued Eleanor, "Malcolm resided at the homestead with his old nurse, and obstinately denied himself to all his former friends. His is not a common nature. The feeling that by Marcia was so easily overcome, was with him a passion such as no man can experience a second time. I knew this, for to me alone had he poured out his whole heart. When he told me that he could never love again as he had loved, I believed him, but when he declared his intention never to marry, I hoped that he might break his resolution. It seemed to me expedient and desirable that he should seek out some lovely and intelligent woman who would be a congenial companion and solace, if she could not cheer him. I felt that it was his duty to make the

attempt to transfer his affections, now that Marcia was lost to him forever. He would never hear the proposition with the least patience, and finally I ceased to urge it. Thus stood matters, when, for the first time since their sad parting, he met his early love last May. By the way, you were with me at the time. Do you recollect going to a meeting of Presbytery at Deep Run Church, soon after your coming to the county?"

"Yes, madam."

"And there meeting with my brother and Mrs. Carrington?"

"Yes, madam."

"I had flattered myself that an interview with Marcia would go far toward curing Malcolm. Ten years had wrought many alterations in the pretty girl he had loved so ardently. Mrs. Carrington is a fine looking woman yet, but so unlike the sylph-like figure whose blooming face he thought the perfection of feminine loveliness, that I dared to believe he would be thoroughly disenchanted at sight of her. I saw that he was agitated, cold and reserved as he appeared to a casual looker-on of the interview. He told me afterward, that it was like tearing open an old wound. He could not remain in her presence more than a minute, and made an excuse to hurry away. I advised him not to see her again, but he could not resist the fascination that drew him into her presence. While others rejoiced at his reappearance in our social gatherings, I mourned in secret over his infatuation, and ultimately determined upon an appeal to his better self."

Even Mrs. Moreau was obliged to pause here, choked as it appeared by her emotions, in reality by the monstrous mendaciousness of her fluent story. By the aid of the scent-bottle she recovered her speech and composure.

"I represented the suffering he was bringing on himself; the needless and cruel embarrassment under which Marcia labored whenever he approached her; the fearful consequences that must attend upon Mr. Carrington's discovery of his unconquered attach-

ment, and besought him once again to seek other associations; to enter into other relations which would in time beguile him from this dangerous dream. He was much moved, promised to reflect seriously upon my counsel, and we parted. Upon my return I met him at your house, and was relieved to see him looking well and in tolerable spirits. I had previously written to him who were to compose our party for this week, and pressed him to join us, but had received no reply. That evening, on our way home, he said that he could not come. Yesterday I ventured to dispatch another invitation, an answer to which I had this morning. Here it is!"

Katherine's hand came into contact with hers as she passed over the note. It was cold as ice, and for a second the paper quivered so that she could not read. Then, steady and plain—she saw the following:

MY DEAR ELEANOR: Your kind note was brought to me an hour ago. Since then, I have fought in vain with the multitude of sad thoughts that overwhelm me in my lonely retreat. I have tried—labored diligently, to follow the advice you gave me before you went away in July. I resolved to bury the past; to begin a new, calm life, which should by and by bring me the happiness you promised. I cannot! It is my misfortune, not a crime, that I am faithful to the memory of what you term "a dream, and a mischievous one." I am *not* like other men. Why do further violence to my nature?

Morning.

I send you the fragment I penned last night, in my excitement—in one of what Aunt Bab calls my "moods"—that you may understand what a fitful creature your brother is. To-day I am cool and resolute. The scheme I abandoned in my retrospective visions of the night-time, is promising in the day-light. Ask an explanation of these hints when you see me. But my resolution is too new—is not sufficiently seasoned, to bear me safely through the meetings I must undergo at your house. I never see Martha S— without a pang and a deadly struggle. I *cannot* meet her where I was wont in "lang syne," to see her fairer prototype. Call me cowardly if you like. I acknowledge it. But the poor wretch

who has lived through ninety-nine tortures is no more willing to endure the hundredth than he was the first.

Excuse me to your visitors as well as you can. Please say especially to Miss Rashleigh that I regret my inability to pay my respects to her at present.

Your loving, but wayward brother,

MALCOLM ARGYLE.

Katherine Rashleigh was proud as well as affectionate. The words that pierced her bosom like so many arrows, outraged a spirit that sprang to its arms. The heart that seemed bleeding its last from these wounds, was yet capable of anger so deep, indignation so stern, that its dying groans were hushed at their command.

Mrs. Moreau had looked for a scene—pathetic or stormy. She saw, instead, a composure which her years of practice had not taught her to emulate. Katherine turned the letter, and read it once more. It was no fond, silly, lingering over the familiar characters, although the first sight of them had caused a rush of sadly sweet thoughts—recollections of the treasured notes she had at home; locked away from other eyes, and strewn with sweetbrier leaves—the flower to which he had likened her, and which he confessed he loved for her sake. On the hot air, there seemed to steal to her a breath of their perfume, as her eyes fell upon the fatal letter. It haunted her no more, when she had read half-way down the page. The second perusal was a deliberate binding into sheaves of the harvest of dragon's teeth, whose seed were sown in her rash confidence in a stranger; her surrender of her heart's whole wealth at a few specious words, a few looks that promised her a recompense for her loss.

This "new, calm life," that was to bring him forgetfulness of the past; this "scheme," abandoned in his mourning over that past; re-resolved upon, in the daylight of sober, selfish reflections! Did Mrs. Moreau indeed require an explanation of these "hints,"

or were brother and sister alike skilled in deception? Had Eleanor penetrated the secret of her wasted love, and taken this method to check her blind folly? With the suspicion, came a curl of scorn to the red lip, and a fiery spark to the eye.

"I fear that I have not acted honorably in reading this note," she said, gravely. "It was meant for your eye alone."

"You read it at my request. If there is any blame, it rests with me. But tell me! can you understand it? Does it not appear to you as an incoherent, mysterious affair? To what scheme does he allude? And how could his coming hither affect it? It is an enigma to me!"

"If you have not the key, it should be a greater puzzle to me—a mere acquaintance," returned Katherine. "He promises an explanation, you observe."

"It is a dreadful thing, when a man throws his whole life-time away for a boyish fancy!" said Eleanor, sadly. "I am afraid that he is bent upon some desperate step—what I cannot divine."

"Nothing worse than matrimony probably," said Katherine, with bold carelessness. "In exchange for his weather-beaten heart, he hopes to get one, whole, uninjured and—womanly! that shall play lantern to a scene, which the sun has forsaken forever. It is the way with men. Unlike the rest of his kind, as he says he is, he yet resembles them in this."

"Do not despise him, Katherine!" Mrs. Moreau lifted her eyes, with a sudden dawn of painful consciousness in them. It was as if a startling revelation had been whispered in her ear.

"Despise him, Mrs. Moreau! Why should I not continue to respect him? I honor his fidelity, and do not wonder that he finds it impossible to transfer his affections. It is a genuine romance, that has wiled away a sultry hour, to my entire satisfaction."

"What had I better write in reply?"

"I can dictate nothing that your sense of right and your sis-

terly sympathy would not prompt you to say. Pray thank him for his message of compliments to myself, and present mine in return."

The chamber was growing closer and more gloomy; the stillness weighed upon the senses, as does the premonition of evil upon the heart.

"It is very dark!" complained Eleanor, looking up at the window.

Katherine replied by drawing aside the thick curtain. A pall of bluish grey enshrouded the heavens, tossed up, here and there, into black waves, and edged, at the horizon with a brassy tinge that reflected a lurid light over the landscape. The air had a sulphurous smell, and the lungs labored, as they inhaled it. There was a solemn pause throughout Nature, as if the mighty heart of the Earth had ceased to beat, in the anticipation of the coming shock.

"There will be a violent storm!" exclaimed Mrs. Moreau, forgetting her headache, and rising briskly, "I must have the windows closed!"

She left the room, and her call to the servants was followed by a banging to of doors and slamming down of windows, all over the house.

Katherine remained at the casement; enchained by a species of fascination in the resemblance of the wild, lowering scene without to the sullen, awful calm that brooded upon her soul. She was free to weep unobserved, if she were so disposed, but, as with the frowning clouds overhead, some of the angry electricity must be spent, before the rain could fall.

As a zigzag stream of fire tore through the bosom of the cloud, and the growling thunder replied, she descried a figure galloping along the public road, which ran but three or four hundred yards from the front of the house. It passed the gate—then, as a second flash brought the thunder nearer, it turned and entered the Montrouge plantation.

Katherine had known him at once. There was not such another rider in the county. With the speed of the wind that followed fast after him, he swept down the lane. Mr. Moreau ran out to welcome him, but he rode on to the stables, that his dumb favorite might be safely housed. This trivial instance of his care for creatures lowly and helpless, awakened a sickening pain in Katherine's breast. She left the window, to seek her room, and prepare for the inevitable interview she now dreaded unspeakably.

Mrs. Moreau met her at the door.

"Malcolm has come!" she said, in a guarded tone, lest she might be overheard. "You will not suffer what I have told you to affect your manner toward him—or your feelings—will you?"

Katherine was able to laugh—to confront the searching eyes that questioned of deeper things than did the uttered words.

"How can you ask? If Mr. Argyle were my friend, instead of papa's—my lover, and not Mrs. Carrington's rejected suitor, you might indeed feel uneasy. But set your mind at rest. Your secret, or your brother's—whichever it may be called—is safe with me."

As Malcolm entered the front hall, with his host, he saw the flutter of her white skirt at the head of the stairs, and heard, in the echoing gallery above, the roundelay she warbled to her chamber door—

"'Twas within a mile of Edinboro' town,
In the rosy time of the year;
Sweet flowers bloomed, and the grass was down
And each shepherd wooed his dear.
Bonnie Jocky, blithe and gay—"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PEAL of thunder jarred the house to its foundations, as Katherine entered her room, and a concert of screams broke forth from the young ladies all huddled together in the middle of the floor.

"Katherine Rashleigh! how can you sing?" cried Martha Selden. "Are you not afraid? I think it is almost wicked. It is like tempting Providence."

"My only dread is lest we should keep dinner waiting," said Katherine, "I expected to find you all dressed."

"Who can think of dress, in such a fearful storm?" replied Elizabeth, half crying. "I am so terribly scared—oh!"

Again the three threw their arms about each other's necks, and hid their blanched faces in each other's dishevelled hair; while Katherine, in the reaction of feeling affected by the ludicrous scene, dropped into a chair and laughed until the tears rolled down her cheeks. At another time, she would have experienced something of awe, if not of alarm, at the war of the elements; would assuredly have been superior to the affectation of presumptuous levity, with which she astonished her trembling comrades. Proceeding to the business of the toilet which the frightened trio were, in their individual cases, incapable as yet of completing, she loosened her hair and shook it out, admonishing them anew, that "the table was set for dinner, when she came up."

"How brave you are!" said Elizabeth, tremulously.

"It seems to me, that however terrified I might be, I should still,

like Cæsar, resolve to die decently," replied Katherine. "Imagine our gallant knights rushing up at our shrieks, and discovering us in our present unbecoming plight. I mean to faint away decorously—gracefully—after I am dressed, if the Storm-King will favor me with a clap sufficiently loud for an excuse."

"I don't believe that you are afraid of anything!" said Jenny Armistead. "If I were to talk as you do, I should expect to be struck dead as a judgment."

Katherine smiled—her face ghastly for a second, with the pale glare of the lightning. Her unsaid thought was that it would be a kind bolt, which should end a life so barren and aimless as hers was now.

Quieted in some degree, by her example and presence, the girls summoned the thought and strength requisite to enable them to finish their dressing, and, still clinging together, descended to the drawing-room. A pallid and interesting group, they presented themselves before the gentlemen, whose stock of gay and comforting sayings bade fair to restore the lost bloom and smiles. Katherine came in last and alone; her unaltered complexion and collected air, a striking contrast to the pretty terrors of the others.

A glance showed her, Malcolm, rising with his companions at the ladies' entrance, and the smile, that brought a glad light to his eye, as it fell upon her. Again that sick pain at her heart! Such a throb Eve may have felt, in looking back upon the Paradise which could never more be hers. He seemed about to advance; his hand was partly outstretched—but, marking the formal, set expression of her countenance, he paused and bowed instead. She returned a deep courtesy, and took a seat offered to her by Mr. Moreau. Mr. Sancroft established himself in another by her side, without the delay of a moment.

"You are a heroine, Miss Rashleigh!"

"Indeed she is!" called out Elizabeth. "She has been saying the funniest things upstairs! laughing at us and carrying on, as

if nothing were the matter. I never saw such a girl before, in my life!"

"Nor I!" said Mr. Sancroft, meaningly, and inaudibly to all excepting her to whom he spoke.

A redder flush arose to Katherine's cheek at his manner. She would have replied with a spirit that might check further, and perchance, more offensive compliments; but, happening to look at Malcolm, she saw his penetrating gaze, the slight curve of the mouth, that indicated his knowledge of the purport of the remark. Hers was too noble and pure a nature to stoop to deliberate coquetry, but, just now, she was not herself. She had but one formed design—to hide her deadly hurt; to brave his scrutiny and baffle it, as she did the prying eyes of the world. She could not talk with him, without attracting attention by her haughtiness; or, should this prove a treacherous support, an agitation still more destructive to her plan; yet a studied avoidance of him would be noticed by Mrs. Moreau, if by no one else. In these circumstances, Mr. Sancroft was, for the only time in all their intercourse, the most welcome person who could have approached her. Did the crafty suitor suspect this? Malcolm's aversion to him was better understood by him, than by the girl whose wooers they both were. His ingenuity, ever fertile, could have invented no surer method of keeping his rival aloof than his own contiguity to Katherine. In pursuance of this policy, he handed her in to dinner, and was her attentive neighbor there; while Malcolm, totally indifferent as to who his companion was, aroused himself to appear agreeable to Martha Selden, whom seeming accident placed next to him.

She resembled Mrs. Carrington in features, voice, and manner. It might have been the Marcia of his boyhood, who talked with him of courtships, abstract and practical, and related anecdotes of her home and family, where "Ma's" rule was still despotic, varied by a start and a faint exclamation, as the lightning played

near, or the thunder's reverberation drowned all other sounds. Katherine sat opposite, chatting with the enraptured Sancroft. Malcolm could no longer mistake the fact of her altered bearing toward himself; however vainly or erroneously he might speculate as to the origin of her coldness. During half the time they were at table, he wavered between the impulse to depart in the storm, immediately the meal was concluded, or to remain and ascertain, at all hazards, who or what had poisoned her mind against him. If his pride revolted at the idea of engaging, in the lists, the despised pettifogger, it bristled equally at the suggestion that he should leave him the field. A trifle sent the latter scale up to the beam.

"Elizabeth! Jenny! Katherine! do hear this naughty man!" cried Miss Selden, childishly. "He says that all women are mercenary—that he never saw one who would not sell her heart for money!"

"Shocking!" said Elizabeth.

"Abominable!" ejaculated Jenny.

"High treason!" denounced Mr. Armistead, solemnly. "Retract, Mr. Argyle! and sue for mercy to the gracious powers that be!"

"I deny the justice of the indictment," replied the accused. "Miss Martha has mistaken my meaning"——

"You said that every lady had her price!" interposed that damsel.

"Granted! but not that that price was to be told in gold or silver coin. I should never be pardoned by your sex, were I to intimate that a woman's heart is ever given unasked, unbought. Ergo, each of you has your price—like for like—heart for heart—love for love. Equitable barter is the law of Cupid's Court."

"And you think a man's heart is worth a woman's!" said Elizabeth, doubtfully.

"I do not say that, only that a woman must believe it, or she would not surrender hers."

"What do you say, Katherine? Are we cheated in such bargains? or, do we generously yield the advantage? or, is it an even exchange?" interrogated Elizabeth, playfully.

Jesting as the discussion had been, up to this appeal, Malcolm's look was eager, as he listened for the reply. How clear and sweet, and yet how destitute of its usual softness, was her tone!

"If nothing is kept back from the price for which a woman stipulates, she receives a just equivalent; or, as Mr. Argyle says, she thinks it is all right, which amounts to the same thing. I incline to the opinion, however, that Ananias and Sapphira left a large family, whose male descendants are numerous."

"I don't understand you!" said Martha Selden. "What does she mean, Mr. Argyle?"

"The question is one of sale or barter, not of charity, Miss Rashleigh," rejoined Malcolm. "Still your allusion is apt, and not difficult to be understood. You imply that while women are honest in their payment of heart-coin, and transfer the wealth of their affections to the last farthing, men sometimes—most frequently, indeed—tender half or even quarter hearts in exchange. Have I interpreted rightly?"

"You have, and I am obliged to you for your courteous explanation."

Their looks met. Hers was instantly averted; but Malcolm thought no more of speedy departure. He would stay until he found the solution of all this.

The thunder and the lightning ceased soon after dinner; but the heavy rain continued without intermission. Outwardly, it was a lively company, but to two of its members, it was a wretchedly dreary and tedious afternoon. Mrs. Moreau had sent over to Briarwood, that morning, for Katherine's lute, and as

twilight drew near, the unanimous call was for music. Katherine sang patiently and sweetly whatever was requested of her. At length, there was a pause in the demand. She sat in the fading light of a window, unconscious of the picturesque figure she presented to the view of the rest; a picture, in which her white neck, arms, and face made the brighter—her dress, and the curls, drooping from the head, bowed over the instrument, the darker portions.

Malcolm watched her, from his corner, with a pained, yearning, and how anxious a heart! What was the chill cloud between them? Did she then doubt the reality, the entireness of his love? What lurking meaning was there in her sarcastic repartee at table, unless she questioned the sincerity, the depth of an affection which he had perhaps been too backward in declaring was all hers? But should the want be in her own heart! Had he staked his last hope of earthly joy upon her, but to lose everything? And in the horror that overwhelmed him at the supposition, he had some foretaste of what this second death of love would be.

A trembling chord from the lute arose above the sound of the sweeping rain; a mournful prelude touched the lightest heart there—

"When the sheep are in the fauld, and the kye a' at hame,
When a' the weary world to sleep are gane."

These simple words, sighed forth in the weariness of a burdened spirit, thrilled the auditors to an intensity of interest the songstress did not suspect. In her pure, musical accent, she went on with the story, that has lived, for near a century, in the hearts and upon the tongues of the young and loving. The subdued pathos of the earlier stanzas swelled into passionate sorrow, as she sang the closing verse:

"Oh! sair did we greet and muckle did we say,
 We took but ae kiss, and we tore ourselves away;
 I wish I were dead! but I'm no' like to dee;
 And why do I live to say, 'wae is me!'
 I gang like a ghaist, and carena' to spin;
 I darena' think of Jamie, for that wad be a sin;
 But I'll do my best a gude wife to be,
 For Auld Robin Gray is a kind mon to me!"

The rain wept and the wind moaned at the windows, and the forms scattered through the dim room were motionless as that now faintly visible beneath the darkening casement.

Thus for one minute, then a servant came in with candles. The lute fell to the floor with a discordant ring of the tense strings, and while Mr. Sancroft darted forward to pick it up, Katherine brushed past him and left the room. Only Malcolm espied the glistening tear upon her cheek, and in a chaotic maze of wonder, pity and love, he hardly knew what he did or said until summoned to the illuminated supper-table, where Katherine, radiant and fascinating, was again his *vis-à-vis*, and Mr. Sancroft her most devoted.

The children were allowed to sit up an hour beyond their regular bed-time, at the earnest request of Jenny Armistead and Martha Selden, who proposed a romping game by way of "fun" on the "miserable blue evening." Mr. Moreau headed the frolic, which shortly became too loudly furious for Malcolm's taste. Katherine had seized a favorable moment to escape from the room, and he awaited her return with the fast-forming purpose of forcing upon her a decisive interview. He leaned against the mantel in gloomy meditation, and young Armistead, from the other side of the room, made various efforts to catch his attention, without being observed by the noisy party who were "rounding the gooseberry bush" in the centre of the apartment.

Montrouge was affluent in porches. Besides the square front one—a good sized room of itself—there were an eastern and a western at each end of the mansion, and a long piazza in the rear, extending the entire length of the house except where a jutting wing shut it up at one extremity. Mr. Armistead chanced to station himself by a window that commanded this portico, and gazing idly forth at the shimmer from the lighted parlor upon the wet leaves of the vines trained up to the roof, thought that he saw a figure pass and repass between them and himself. Looking back into the room, he perceived Katherine's absence, and doubted not that she was the lonely promenader. The generous fellow had a brief, but rather sharp struggle with inclination before he brought himself to apprise another, whose right he supposed to exceed his own, of the discovery he had made. He was slightly smitten with Katherine, just enough to make it an act of self-denial to afford Malcolm the opportunity he fancied he desired—a private conversation with her. Seeing that his signals were unheeded he crossed over to him, and said aside: "Come with me into the hall, I have something to say to you."

"Where now?" called Mr. Moreau.

"To take a comfortable smoke—be back presently!" replied Armistead. "Mr. Argyle," he continued, as the hubbub within the parlor recommenced, "if I am taking an offensive liberty you can knock me down or forgive me, whichever you choose. I am actuated by none but kind motives in imparting to you a bit of information you may or may not care to use. There is a lady walking alone in that porch; whether expectant or nonexpectant, willing or unwilling, you perhaps know—I don't! I am going to smoke in the west porch, and should like, for the sake of appearances and Mrs. Grundy, to return to the parlor with you when you are quite ready. Don't hurry on my account. It is immaterial to me whether I take one, two, or three pipes."

Time was, and not a month ago, when Malcolm would have

regarded this address as a master-piece of flippancy and impertinence. To-night—paradoxical as it may seem—he was desperate enough to be reasonable. He squeezed the kind-hearted young man's hand until the knuckles slipped from their sockets.

"I shall never forget your goodness!" he said. "You have made me your debtor for life!"

Katherine, wrapt in a large dark shawl, as much to elude observation as to protect her shoulders and chest from the dampness, paced swiftly from end to end of the portico, heart and head throbbing with the violence and number of her emotions.

And she had come to this! she, who in her airy castles had garnered a love which was to make amends for her past penury of affection; who, of late, had seen this cherished chimera grow into solidity and beauty; changed from a dream of the misty, far-off To-come, into the most glorious blessings of her Now! She gnawed her lip, as she bethought herself of her unveiled heart; the crystal well into which she had suffered him to look whenever it pleased him, and where he could not but have seen his own image, idealized into the perfection of manhood by her loving imagination!

"Deceived! deceived!" she said, with the anguished moan the words must ever wring from a soul that has trusted as fondly as blindly, and she murmured aloud:

"I wish I were dead, but I'm no' like to dee,
And why do I live to say, 'wae is me!'"

"Katherine!"

The girl turned with a start and stood upon the defensive.

Malcolm noted her attitude, dark though it was; heard the hard-drawn breath, and could picture to himself the resolute hauteur with which she prepared to hear him.

"Will you permit me to walk a little while with you?" he asked. "Are you properly shielded from the air?"

"I am."

"You are offended with me, Katherine. What have I done to forfeit your regard?"

"I have no cause to be offended with you, and you no reason to suppose that you have lost ground in my esteem. If my manner is changed, I am not responsible for this universal frailty of my sex—am I?" said she, with ill-concealed bitterness.

"You are wasting your breath if you are trying to convince me that Katherine Rashleigh is the creature of caprice, who can throw aside a friend as she would a worn glove. For four months back, you have been my constant study. If you intended to delude me as to your character, or a solitary trait of it, you should have begun the work long ago. I entreat you to be, for one moment, if no more, the frank girl from whom I parted two days since, and tell me how I have angered you."

Katherine tried to say, "I am not angry;" but she could not repeat the falsehood.

"Will you listen to me, if you do not choose to, or cannot speak?"

She bowed.

"I am not the man to sue for the favor of any mortal, Katherine. Never, since my boyish days, have I said to a woman what I am impelled now to utter to you. I love you and I love nothing upon earth beside. Katherine, will you be my wife?"

She stood still, her hands clasped over her breast, her head bowed—the obscurity prevented him from seeing more. The rain beat mournfully upon the roof, and dripped from leaf to leaf of the vines.

"Katherine!" He took one of the nerveless hands in his fervent pressure. "This is not said in audacious haste; nor do I presume to assert or to think that I can offer you anything commensurate with the value of the gem I crave. You have brought to my loveless, monotonous life the promise of a second spring,

more prodigal of blessings than was the first. You have called me 'friend,' and confessed that I could enter into your feelings with a full sympathy for your grief or joy. This recollection has been my encouragement when I reflected upon the disparity of our ages—upon your young, buoyant spirit, and mine, soured by disappointments—worn by years and care. But the spring of affection is there yet—stronger, more constant in its gushings than when the boy would have flung the world away for love and deemed it well lost. Can you learn to love me in return?"

Oh, the sorrowful dash of that heavy rain! It seemed to beat down his hopes to the earth, with the dying leaves from the summer plants—beat them into a grave from which there would be no resurrection! He could not mistake her silence for the coy trifling or the speechless modesty of a loving girl. There was no magnetic thrill in the chill, passive fingers he held, no flutter of the breath, he could hear, as he leaned toward her. She might be grieved—she could not but be compassionate for him under the consequences of his self-deception; but there was no hope—none! And, as his heart fainted beneath this terrible certainty, he leaned against the wall and covered his face with his hands.

Katherine struggled with the numb apathy that held her in its spell.

"Mr. Argyle," she began, "I regret this conversation. I would have spared you this pain if I could have foreseen"—

"For pity's sake, do not madden me by hackneyed phrases! They may soothe the wounds of some hearts. They are worse than unmeaning to one poverty-stricken as mine—that asked for everything and received nothing!"

"I am very sorry"—

But he would not hear. He strode away impatiently; then came back to her.

"I will trouble you with one question more," he said, more

calmly. "Is your decision influenced by representations made to you by others—the result of prejudice, engendered by their statements of my character or habits—or is it predicated upon what you yourself know concerning me? There is certainly one enemy of mine in this house; how many more, I do not pretend to judge. As to friends—I am not aware that I have one here—I might add—or elsewhere!"

"You are unjust to your well-wishers. They are more in number than you suppose. As to your question, I can truly say that I have not heard a word to your detriment in this, or any other house in this country. I have decided for myself."

"I thank you for being so frank with me. It is the truest kindness, severe as it may appear to me now. Farewell, Katherine!"

Mr. Armistead, his chair tilted upon its hind legs, his feet upon the railing of the sheltered porch, smoked in ease of body and mind. The combination of choice tobacco and the consciousness of having performed a meritorious action, was ineffably soothing. What were the sighing wind, the plashing rain, but so many accessories to his sense of snug comfort—provocatives to reveries, that pointed to his own participation at Cupid's appointed time, in evening strolls and sentimental confabulations with some slender-waisted, ripe-lipped houri, with eyes as bright and voice as sweet as Katherine Rashleigh's? Since he could not have this one himself, he greatly preferred that an honorable gentleman, like Malcolm Argyle, should win her than "that jackanapes of a Sancroft. The gambling cheat!" he subjoined, with a vehemence that was suspiciously like the smarting of a personal injury.

A footstep in the flooded walk that wound past his nook, diverted his ideas. It tramped furiously—some nocturnal wanderer was in headlong haste.

"Hallo! who goes there?" hailed the free and easy youth.

"Ah!" said Malcolm's voice. "I forgot you!"

"Never mind me. Where are you going?"

"Home! that is—to Ben-Lomond."

"In this flood! Are you distracted? I don't believe you can cross the creek. You will be swept away!"

"No danger!" It was as if he had said, "No such good fortune!" He came up the steps. "You meant to deal very kindly by me. Receive my thanks for your attention. Say what you like, in the parlor."

The other nodded, sagaciously, "Depend upon me to keep my own counsel and make up a plausible tale. Take my oilskin coat and umbrella—won't you? You are as wet as a drowned rat already!"

"There is the less reason for accepting your offer. Good night!" and he ran down in the direction of the stables.

"Sh-sh-sh-ew!" Mr. Armistead drew in his breath, with a hissing sound, expressive at once of sympathy and astonishment. "Poor fellow! I know how it feels. But who would have thought it? Does the girl hope to marry a live lord, or *can* she intend to throw herself away on Sancroft? I would take her myself, rather than that should happen! Well, since the deed is done, there is no need of my mounting guard any longer in this damp box. Now, to cudgel my wits for an excuse for his French leave, that shall be as far off from the truth as conscience will let me go!"

"He won't be here to-night, that's settled," said Miss Barbara, returning to her sitting-room, after the hundredth survey of the weather. "He has taken shelter somewhere—maybe at Briarwood. *She* ain't there, but young men in love have a mighty hankering after the gal's kinfolks. It's nat'ral."

She rang the bell, and Tony presently showed his head at the outer door.

"Bring in the stable keys, and lock up the house," ordered Miss

Barbara, and she began to clear away the plates and cups from a round table set before a bright, tiny fire, which had been kindled to "keep his supper warm."

"Ain't not marster pretendin' to return to-night?" inquired the body-servant. "He have not left any message of that specie with me."

"Who but a drunkard or a crazy man would ride in this rain, if he could light upon a tobacco-barn, with half a roof on, you simpleton?" demanded the housekeeper, tartly.

"Sorry to hear sech a melancholy import of my poor marster," said the pert fellow, assuming a rueful visage. "He must be mad or 'toxicated one—for that am Sprightly's hoof splashing down the road, if ever I heerd a horse gallop."

"You don't say so!"

Miss Barbara rushed to the door, then back again to the table; replaced the tea-things, and seizing a turkey-wing, fanned the fire to a lively blaze by the time Malcolm entered—drenched to the skin and pale as death.

"Don't set down! do you want to ketch your death?" cried Miss Barbara, as he threw himself upon the settee. "Walk up and down the room, as fast as ever you can, while I run for dry clothes."

These brought, she jerked out a bunch of keys from her hand-basket, and trotted off to the dining-room. While she stood at the side-board, mixing a glass of hot toddy, Tony appeared, with a request for a little brandy or whisky, to bathe Sprightly's legs.

"Are you stark staring mad?" Miss Barbara was aghast at his impertinence.

"Not that I knows on, Miss Barbara; but you was right when you said that marster was. 'Twould make the heart of a grindstone shod tears, to see that 'ere critter a-tremblin' like she'd drop, and a-perspirin' with mud and lather. And he sot so much store by her! It's my compression he seen a sperrit 'tother

side of the bridge. Thar's been many a parson sot upon by the haunts in them—*those* low-grounds."

"Go to Guinea, with your 'haunts' and your fine grammar!" snapped Miss Barbara, pouring out a tumbler of whisky. "Thar! see that it goes upon Sprightly's legs and not into your throat!"

But what she had heard excited her alarm, and prepared her for the gloomy countenance she beheld, when she returned to the room where she had left Malcolm. With a failing heart and a cheerful look, the faithful foster-mother proffered her preventive cordial.

"It's the best thing in nater for you!" she said, as he motioned it away.

"Better drink it, my dear boy!"

He took the glass and sipped it.

"And now, I'll have your hot coffee ready in a trice!" she pursued, stirring open the bed of coals.

"I have been to supper."

"Where at?"

"Montrouge."

Miss Barbara's limbs gave way, and she dropped into a chair. Malcolm saw the consternation depicted in every line and wrinkle, and knew the direction of her fears. He was not altogether friendless. So lonely of spirit—so bowed down was he then, that he would not have spurned a dog that crept to his knee with eyes of pity and of love. He knelt down before her—the homely and uncultivated woman whom others deemed a household drudge—and hid his face in her lap.

"It is all over, Aunt Bab!"

She held his head close to her bosom, and her tears rained upon his hair.

"My boy! my poor boy! what can I say to comfort you? She couldn't have been worthy of you, dear, or she'd never have led

you on so far, and then broken your heart. The time will come—if the Lord ever punishes such cruel doin's in this world—when she'll weep and pray for the love she won't have now."

"And I pray that she may never know a thousandth part of the misery she has cost me!" said Malcolm, rising. "She must not be blamed, Aunt Bab. She is innocent of intentional wrong. Her feeling for me was that of a child for an elderly friend. She would have saved me the pains of a dismissal, but like a blind fool I did not see what she was trying to do. I can tell you nothing more. I am not worth these tears—so dry them, if you love me! I have never caused any one else half the unhappiness I have you, who have done everything for me."

He kissed her cheek, and went off to his desolate chamber.

The old nurse wept alone upon the hearthstone, far into the rainy night that had brought this great sorrow upon her darling; mourned, in the singleness of her devotion, that he was only hers—that he, the joy of her life, the light of her aged eyes, had not forgotten her in the raptures of a successful love that would have assigned to her for evermore a subordinate place in his heart and home.

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. MOREAU rode over to Briarwood next day, to inquire after the welfare of his uncle, and to report Katherine's continued health and happiness. The Colonel was out on the plantation, and his nephew joined him there, relieved that he was not to sit during his call, beneath the still grave eyes of his aunt-in-law, of whom he stood in far greater awe than of her more pretentiously dignified lord.

The two gentlemen had a friendly ride and chat together; the elder, aphoristic and patronizing; the younger, humbly teachable. Every British innovation upon "crude American agriculture," projected by the Colonel, was the acme of practical wisdom, and his "remarkable" dissertations upon soils, seeds and climates proved him to be a mammoth Encyclopædia—a prodigy of erudition. Mr. Moreau had never been so nearly co-heir with his cousin as when, their round completed, they stopped inside the great gate of the domain to exchange parting remarks.

"And while I think of it," said Moreau, drawing nearer the old gentleman's ear, "you have transferred your accounts to Hammond, I hear."

"I have."

"And a very prudent measure it was!" said the nephew. "Not that I question Sancroft's integrity. The poor fellow has his enemies—as one must have who is a strict collector—the agent selected to do the disagreeable jobs which those who employ him shirk themselves; but I have no ground for branding him as slippery. Nevertheless, these are times that try men's

souls, and each one of us must save himself if he can; reversing the sense of the legal maxim, we must believe every man a rogue until he is proved to be honest. You could not have picked out a sharper watch-dog than Hammond. He is my lawyer also. And that reminds me that I have some business with him to-day. Will you go over to see him with me?"

"As I remarked, a while ago, I have an appointment at eleven o'clock with the builder, who is to put up the new wing," replied the Colonel, "or I would accompany you with pleasure."

"Ah! I had forgotten! I am very sorry to be obliged to take the ride alone, when, but for that unfortunate engagement, I might have had so delightful a companion. Have you any message for Hammond?"

"None—or, you may ask how he is progressing with my business, and whether he has detected any errors in the bills. Between ourselves, Robert, I have not the implicit confidence in Sancroft which you express."

"I may be excused for trusting an old acquaintance," said Mr. Moreau, heroically. "I should have been culpable indeed to have confided your interests, so much more precious than my own, to him, had my belief in his honesty ever wavered."

"Certainly, my boy!" The rare and kind phrase made Moreau's heart leap with joy. "You did everything for the best. Never doubt that I keep this in mind. But, as you have said, these are times that imperatively demand precautionary measures. I hope that you are right—altogether right, with regard to your agent. I am growing old, and it may be, timorous."

"Do not shame me by apologies, my dear sir! I repeat, your action was judicious—eminently judicious! I am, then, to see how Hammond is working and hurry him a little if he is dragging things along at the snail pace he chooses sometimes?"

"By all means, expedite the affair, if you can. Nothing displeases me more than dilatoriness in business."

"Hammond is apt to be surly, if interfered with. I do not care to appear to pick a quarrel. Do you object to giving me a line that shall certify to my authority to make what investigations I may think best?"

"The word of a gentleman should be enough!" returned the Colonel, loftily.

Moreau shrugged his shoulders. "Hammond boasts of knowing no castes or rank in his profession. But I can assert my rights to any one—attorney or gentleman. Good morning, sir. My respects to the ladies!"

"Stay!" The Colonel pencilled something upon a leaf of his pocket-book, and tearing it out, folded it into the form of a note. "It is unnecessary to have any words about a trifle. Give this to Mr. Hammond from me. Say to Katherine that we are well, and glad that she is enjoying herself. I shall meet her at church on the Sabbath."

The thought of her absence, although he missed her more than he would have done the sunshine, was not the drawback to his complacency, as he mounted the hill upon which his house was situated. As his head recovered from the intoxicating fumes of the flattery his nephew had administered, he awoke to the consciousness of an imprudent action, or, at best, one whose expediency his clear-sighted wife would question. Slow to receive impressions, he was exceedingly tenacious of an idea when it was adopted, and his distrust of Sancroft was ineradicable. He believed that to this prejudice was to be ascribed the doubt he felt as to the propriety of countenancing Moreau's surveillance of the business, so lately taken from the agent of his choice. In reality, the discomfort was the stirring life within a seed dropped by his home-counsellor—casually, it seemed—a little while before, a slight slur upon the stability, the moral courage and business talent of the plausible nephew.

"But," said the Colonel to himself, "what harm can arise

from this trifling indiscretion—if I am to consider it as such? Robert is strongly attached to me, and his intentions are good, however faulty his judgment may be."

And thus comforting himself, he determined to refrain from any mention of the verbal and written authority he had granted to one who did not enjoy Mrs. Rashleigh's full confidence.

"Oh!" remonstrates a wedded Phillis. "Is this the man you have heretofore held up to us, as a model of conjugal devotion? who loved and trusted his wife, and relied upon her advice more than upon that of any other person? Here is one of the 'improbabilities' spoken of in your 'Introduction!' I should die of grief if I believed that my Corydon could so insult me by a partial confidence. I thank my stars that his every thought is mine; that he throws open his heart to me, to enter as I will. There are no Bluebeard chambers there."

Dear and respected Mrs. Phillis! if all the now happy wives who are insulted in this manner, were to resolve with you, and carry out your fine resolution, not to survive their disgrace, what rapid fortunes would be realized by those benefactors to the sex masculine, who provide ready-made mourning-suits at the shortest possible notice! What belles would Anastasia, and Sappho, and Chloe immediately become! the lorn and single fair who have cast such longing, hopeless glances upon your connubial estate! In your orisons to the stars that have succeeded so well in the merciful task of blinding your eyes, forget not to mingle thanksgivings for the want of knowledge, which is bliss, with your grateful acknowledgments for blessings received and seen. If all the contented Fatimas in our land were to stumble upon their respective Bluebeards' chambers some bright morning, the "Sister Annes" upon the house-tops would rival in number the chimney-stacks.

We have seen, for example, the uxorious uncle and the hen-pecked nephew pursuing their divergent ways, each pondering upon

his scheme for hoodwinking his "second self," the "partner of his inmost thoughts," the Lady High Keeper of his soul's archives, and neither beset by misgivings about the invisibility and durability of the trap-doors that masked their secret closets. Yet, when the day of destiny arrives, and the rust-eaten bolt, or the brittle bar gives way under Phillis' fairy foot-fall, to her horror and Corydon's confusion, nobody pities either, for he ought to have foreseen it, and so ought she.

Mr. Hammond happened to be engaged in examining Colonel Rashleigh's books, and making memoranda of letters to be penned concerning the same, when Mr. Moreau was shown into his office. The lawyer deciphered the Colonel's pencilled note, and knit his brows musingly. The language was polite, and conveyed a simple request that Mr. Hammond would acquaint Mr. Moreau with the progress he had made in the settlement of Colonel Rashleigh's accounts—but the *cui bono*? directly presented itself to the legal man. After a vain attempt to ferret out something mysterious or mischievous in this selection of a coadjutor in his work, he concluded that the Colonel was odd, and moreover affectionately ignorant of his nephew's mental deficiencies, and, lastly, that it was not of the slightest consequence to him who looked over the papers with him. At this point, Mr. Moreau spoke up, in an off-hand way.

"To tell the truth, Hammond, the whole thing is a bore to me; but the old gentleman couldn't come over himself, and gave me the appointment unasked. So, I will just hear what you have to say, and tumble over the papers awhile, and make a note here and there, lest I should forget all I have learned before I get back to Briarwood. He is amazingly particular, the Colonel is! and a fellow, all odds and ends, like myself, has to be perpetually on his guard, through fear of damaging his prospects—you understand?"

Mr. Hammond thought that he must indeed be in a stupid

mood, when he could not unriddle this shallow-pate, and the two seated themselves with the books and pile of bills between them. Mr. Hammond bestowed an item or two of information, to the effect, that he was getting along as well as he had expected, and that, thus far, all was correct, and then fell to work. Mr. Moreau's style of proceeding verified his predescription. He rustled papers; glanced down and up columns of figures with a celerity incompatible with calculation, or even attentive reading, and made irregular, and seemingly cursory references to his notebook.

"By George! it is a precious farce, and I am sick of it!" he yawned, at length, stretching himself in his chair. "I reckon that I have done my duty by my revered uncle, and profited long enough by your instructions, Hammond. I had rather talk about cattle and crops all day, than about law for half an hour."

"I take some interest in those subjects myself," returned the lawyer. "If you desire proof, just cast your eye through that window upon that field of corn."

"That is your brag rare-ripe—isn't it? I have heard wonderful things of it. But what are those? Your neighbor's cows or your own are making free with it in advance of the season."

Mr. Hammond gave a look and ran to the door. A shout brought up all the little negroes on the place, and many of the women, the men being mostly absent at their farm-work. Directed by their master, a crew of Eboe juveniles and five or six dogs scampered off to execute justice upon the depredating herd, who were trampling and feasting upon the choice grain. After a deal of superfluous noise and labor, the field was cleared of invaders; the broken panel of fence, which had afforded ingress, mended, and Mr. Hammond calmed down gradually.

"I do not think they have done much damage," remarked Mr. Moreau, who had followed the owner of the crop to the seat of war. "It is lucky you discovered it when you did."

"It will be very unlucky for the rascal who pulled that fence down, if ever I catch him at his tricks!" said the other. "It is not the only time I have been served in this way, and I have my eye upon the villain."

"Who is it?" asked Mr. Moreau, switching down a mullen-stalk with his horsewhip.

"That free negro up the road, whose brother I helped to the Penitentiary last spring. He will keep him company there before long, if he is not very careful."

"And serve him right!" answered Mr. Moreau.

He stopped to unfasten his horse from the rack by the gate.

"Stay to dinner—won't you?" invited the host.

"Thank you! I would be glad to do so, only I left a household of company at home. Come over some time this week, and see us. There are several pretty girls with us, if you have not lost your taste for beauty."

"Not I! so my wife compliments me by saying," laughed Mr. Hammond. "He has a kind heart, but a very poor head-piece," he observed, as his neighbor cantered away. "However, he did not make himself."

His charitable reflections were suspended by the sight that met him in his office. Both doors had been left open, and the draught thus created, was strong enough to blow most of the papers off the table, and, for aught he knew, some of them into the yard. He was not addicted to profanity, but it was as well for his reputation as a man of decorous speech, that there were no eavesdroppers to report the ejaculations and grumblings with which he pursued the scattered documents.

The day was sunny, but not fiercely hot, like its predecessor, and when her companions betook themselves to their novels and couches, at mid-day, Katherine donned her sun-bonnet and stole out of the house, through the garden, and across a strip of meadow into the forest. There, freed from the scrutiny of curious eyes

she sat down upon a fragment of rock at the foot of a pine, and wept in utter wretchedness of spirit.

She felt like a lonely child, in the dark, reaching vainly on all sides for something that might comfort or tell her where she was. However rudely the tempests of life may buffet the bark of the young voyager; however blackly the skies of Fate may lower—if but the anchor of faith in the thing beloved hold firm, it rides the storm with hopeful courage within. Tear this anchor away, and earth has not a more reckless and pitiable waif than that once trustful heart. With Katherine, the heat of anger was gone. The reflection that she was the intended victim Malcolm would have offered to exorcise the ghost of his unhappy love; that the heart, which, in its freshness and plenitude of emotion, was worthy to be a king's ransom, was to buy for him a negative happiness—cheat him of regrets for the past—make of a restless, a "calm" existence; that this was his "scheme," in which no account was made of her wasted life and deceived affection; all this, while it made her heart the sorer, could not rekindle the flame of resentment. She had trusted and been mistaken—it was her willful mistake. She loved and was not loved again. She must bear the penalty of her indiscretion as she could, until time blunted the sense of suffering, that now appeared intolerable. She would go back home—to her old father, who loved her in his way; to the mother, whose ceaseless care she was; to the patient, indulgent governess, who never thought or spoke unkindly of her—and try to do her duty faithfully to them; to be content with the peaceful monotony of the life they led, since she was to have no other.

"But," she sobbed, in girlish abandonment, "I did so long to be loved once! to know the bliss of it, if but for one moment! I think I could have died happily then!"

An opening in the underbrush, growing thickly about her, showed her that she was near the edge of the woodland, and half

a mile beyond, arose the dark walls and peaked gables of Ben Lomond. Between it and her, was the cedar grove, shadowing the burial-ground. In the abject prostration of her disappointment, she thought of a resting-place there, as the dearest home the world had now to give to its bereaved child. Through this break in the bushes was likewise visible the high road, and her proximity to it was made known to her by the sound of a horse's feet. Her instant idea was of the last person by whom she would wish to be discovered, and she crouched to the very ground, lest the rider, from his elevated position, should look over the tops of the brushwood into her retreat. Still, between the leaves, she could catch glimpses of the passers-by, for the horseman was not solitary, as she soon learned from hearing voices in conversation. She recognized Mr. Sancroft's laugh before he came in sight. His companion was Mr. Moreau, his face as set and gloomy as Sancroft's was full of triumph, that had in it a spice of the satanic. They were walking their horses, and some phrases of their talk came to her ear, with startling distinctness, so still and clear was the air.

"I have lied and stolen for you! You will have me commit murder next!" said Mr. Moreau. "I feel as mean as a sheep-stealing dog."

"Tut, man! You ought to be vain of your clever job! I did it out of natural affection you know. Couldn't let the old fox fall into the trap he had set for himself in those documents. How Hammond stormed at the cows and the negroes!"

Another laugh that sounded fiendish in its glee, to the sorrowing girl, and they were out of hearing.

She recollected it, when an hour afterward her smirking admirer brought into play all his arts of pleasing, and complimented her upon her uniform flow of spirits—"a perennial fount," he was pleased to say, "that never required a forcing-pump."

Mr. Moreau did not appear in the drawing-room after dinner. Katherine asked where he was, and his wife replied that he was lying down. "He had a headache, brought on by riding too far in the sun."

As the girls were undressing that night, Katherine noticed a peculiar meaning in the faces of the others, when the host's name was mentioned, but did not inquire its significance. An incautiously loud whisper from the opposite bed, after they had retired, enlightened her as to the mystery.

"I met him, as they were carrying him to his room," said Jenny Armistead. "He was too drunk to walk or stand. And Mrs. Moreau was so angry!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE Sabbath dawned like a foretaste of the upper Paradise. There had been another thunder shower on Saturday, and the yellowing trees and browning fields were refreshed into almost vernal greenness. The streams were edged with the golden-rod, and the meadows gay with purple brush and white wild fennel and radiant coreopsis. The hickory's signal banner of pale yellow and the red beacons of the gum-tree and maple, still, like faithful warders, proclaimed the approaching invasion of the Frost King; but their alarms were displayed to inattentive eyes.

The Moreaus parted, to-day, with most of their visitors. Only Elizabeth Hunter was to remain with them, and her brother would come on the morrow, to take her away.

"We have had a pleasant, but an unprofitable week," said Jenny Armistead, on their way to church. "By right, we should have realized an offer apiece, and not one of us has had a chance to say, 'No!'"

"Or, Yes!" said Katherine, for she saw Mr. Armistead's eye flash quickly toward her, and understood intuitively, that he had gained some knowledge of the real state of the case with one of the quartette.

He rode by the side of the carriage, and was the only gentleman within hearing of his saucy sister.

"Nobody minds Alick!" she replied to an admonitory look from Elizabeth Hunter, whose heart had not escaped uninjured from the week's association with the handsome and sprightly brother.

"*You* do not, at all events!" he rejoined. "It is not just that I should bear all the blame, and my fellow-delinquents go unwhipped. Sancroft, Blanton! Do you hear the complaint of these defrauded maidens? A week's hunt—and they have not bagged a single bird! Who is ready to make amends to the unsuccessful—I dare not say, the unskillful Dianas? Don't all speak at once!"

"I am, for one!" replied Sancroft, "provided the act of public justice—the amende honorable—be prefaced by one of a more personal and confidential character."

"I make no reservations," said Blanton. "I am at the disposal of the ladies. They may draw straws for me, if they like. I will be a dutiful bondsman to any one of them."

"You are too accommodating," said Miss Armistead, bridling. "We do not prize what is so easily bought; do not want hearts that are offered at auction."

"They ought to be disposed of as paupers are provided with boarding-places—knocked down to the lowest bidders," added Elizabeth.

Commonplace girls can be sharp, when woman's supreme right to the sovereignty of hearts is assailed or treated lightly, and Mr Blanton, who thought he had made a gallant speech, was mortified at the double-headed bolt cast at him in reply.

"Finish me, if you please, Miss Rashleigh—and Miss Martha may bury me," he implored, with the best grace he could muster. "It would be mercy to put me out of my misery, as we crush lame grasshoppers."

"Or one-winged butterflies!" interposed Miss Armistead, smartly.

"I do not place you in either category, Mr. Blanton," said Katherine, with a gentleness she seldom exhibited in addressing him, for she was no more partial to him than were the two young ladies, from whose cruelty he appealed. "And it has always

seemed to me questionable mercy to extinguish the remaining spark of life, because the unhappy creature has already lost a portion of its vitality. To kill and to cure belongs to Nature and not to us, in such cases."

"Sound philosophy," commented Alick Armistead. "So you say to the maimed grasshopper :

'Live to kick another day.'

"I hope you are thankful to Miss Rashleigh for your reprieve, Mr. Blanton," said Elizabeth.

He was so far grateful that he inwardly awarded to Miss Rashleigh, the palm of amiability, as he had previously regarded her as the most beautiful of the four girls. For the rest of the way he was disposed to taciturnity and serious thought. He was debating the probable chances of success which he, with a small real estate and a fluctuating income of uncertain amount, would have in the race with Argyle, Sancroft, and perhaps Armistead—for the heiress.

The most popular and courted girl in the community, Katherine alighted at the church-door, and felt herself to be the most forlorn and stricken being there, as she gazed upon the gathering crowd, with its holiday faces. While the Moreau party stood upon the green, waiting for the arrival of the second carriage, containing the host, hostess and children, Colonel Rashleigh's noble equipage was driven up from another direction. It was faultless in its every appurtenance—from the burnished coats of the horses and the silver mountings of the harness, to the knee-buckles of the doughty Thomas, who, sublimely oblivious of quagmires and soiled liveries, stood, in poker-like dignity, upon the foot-board behind the coach. Such parade poor Mark may have had in his eye, when he prophesied that his wife and daughter would see the day when they should ride past their old home in their chariot and four, and forget that they had ever lived there.

Colonel Rashleigh got out slowly, his hand on the footman's shoulder, and turned to aid his wife's descent. A hum went through the assembly as she appeared. She had never attended church before, during her residence at Briarwood, although Mrs. Holt and Katherine were invariably present whenever there was service at Deep Run, and the Colonel frequently accompanied them. Mrs. Rashleigh's ill-health was supposed to be the cause why she so seldom went abroad, and but a small proportion of the surrounding population, excepting those who were on visiting terms at Briarwood, had ever had a closer view of her than was gained through her carriage windows, as she took her daily airings. She wore a veil now to protect her weak eyes, or to ward off prying gazes ; but when she drew it aside to speak with her daughter, the wan, yet beautiful face disclosed, interested all—was the subject of remark with many.

"Are you not well?" she said to Katherine, as they went up the steps together. A ruddy tint supplanted the lily in the daughter's cheek.

"Very well, madam," she answered, but her heart sank at the penetration, the unerring perception, that at a glance, discovered the falsity of her assumed demeanor.

Mrs. Holt knelt on the uncarpeted floor, as she had been used to bow upon her velvet hassock, in a curtained pew. The Colonel stood, with his hat before his face, a minute, while his lips moved in the formula his mother had instructed him to repeat before service. Mrs. Rashleigh and Katherine obeyed the dictates of no such custom. The one looked too haughty, the other too honest to feign a devotion she did not feel.

The time-honored usage of singing the congregation into quietude, and which has been superseded by the solemn chant or subduing, yet elevating organ voluntary, was then in vogue. And, as was often done—on this morning, the tune was raised in the pulpit. But it was not the pastor's voice that led the words :

"There is a fountain filled with blood,
 Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
 And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
 Lose all their guilty stains."

O, thou dear and hallowed lyric ! the alabaster-box of precious ointment, broken by the weeping "Castaway," upon the feet of the Saviour ! epitome of the sinner's refuge and the Christian's hope ! psalm of the redeemed ! do not the white-robed throng, on the shining shore, remember and sing thee still ! The wild, sweet air to which the hymn was then sung was the same which is associated with it in the minds and upon the tongues of many of the descendants of those who then united in the strain. We have searched vainly for printed or written notes of its plaintive measures ; have instituted futile inquiries as to its origin and history. "My mother sung it to me, as I lay on her knee." "It was my father's best-beloved tune." "My sister went to glory, with it upon her lips." Records like these, we have gathered—given in with smiles and tears, by those whose recollection runs back to the infancy of our Republic—but they have never known, and history has not chronicled the name of him whose holy passion here poured itself into musical utterance—a stream of fervor and melody, with a heart-throb in every tone.

Katherine was strangely moved by the rush of song. It bore her upon its wings to the summer sky, that seemed to bend and listen, through the charmed air, to the chorus of human praise, and her soul was bathed in the peace, typified by the tranquil ether. She closed her eyes—and by one of the mysteries of memory or imagination, that sometimes begets in the least ideal of mankind, a passing belief in the preëxistence of souls, she beheld, as in a dream, another scene, and yet the same. She was a child, leaning on her mother's knee—lips apart and eyes overrunning with emotions she could not understand, awakened by the very music that had wrought the maiden's

trance—a child, a happy, earnest, loving and beloved child ! Would that she had died then ! In the sharp pang of the contrast with a suffering womanhood, she awoke, as the hymn was ended, and through the open door, saw, between the tree-trunks, the white gleam of the railing that defended the grave upon the hill !

The preacher arose to offer the opening prayer, and Katherine recognized Mr. Laidley !

What a life-time of events and of feeling had been compressed into the brief months that had elapsed since their former meeting ! She remembered, wonderingly, that he then interested her more than another, who was also presented to her that day. She seemed to look and to hearken ; but the reading and singing, and the introductory divisions of the discourse were swept away from hearing and understanding by the flood of bitter emotion. It was the always selfish, often impious, mourning for the first-born love.

"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest !"

The preacher leaned forward over the closed Bible, and, to Katherine's startled senses, he addressed himself directly to her.

"From the woes which our own sins and the sins of others have brought upon us, Christ is able to deliver us. If the Father smites us sorely, it is that we may be healed by the Son !"

This was all of the sermon which Katherine retained, and this was fixed in her memory only by the speaker's eye and manner. She found a vague solace in repeating the words over and over. They were like a cool breath of wholesome air to her torn and fevered heart.

She gave one hurried look through the retiring congregation, at the conclusion of the services. Malcolm was not there, and although she would have said that she desired nothing at present more than his absence—in a perversity of contradiction she sustained an additional throb of pain that she had not seen him.

"My dear, in compliance with your wish, I have invited Mr. Laidley to remain with us to-night," said the Colonel, on the road.

Katherine looked at her mother for confirmation of this singular statement. Why should she, who habitually shunned company—who rarely proposed an invitation to any one, have deviated from her custom to honor an entire stranger, whom she had never seen, before to-day?

"Thank you!" was the response. "My wish to see him is increased by his able sermon."

"His is more the persuasive style of eloquence than I anticipated from your description of him last spring, Katherine?" continued her father.

"I do not recollect attempting to describe him, papa. I liked and admired him then, as I do now, and no doubt said as much."

"It was Mrs. Holt, then, who gave me the impression that he was too vehement—too Wesleyan in his oratory."

"I may have thought him warmer than the strict rules of clerical propriety warranted," said the governess, apologetically. "But, if such was then my judgment, I retract the criticism after the effort of this forenoon. His style is, as you observe, Colonel Rashleigh, eminently tender and persuasive, and marked by a noble candor. His introduction bordered upon the colloquial. I was reminded of Pope's proposal to Bolingbroke:

'Together let us beat this ample field,
Try what the open, what the covert yield;
The latent tracts, the giddy heights explore,
Of all who blindly creep, or sightless soar,
Chide where we must, be candid where we can,
But vindicate the ways of God to man.'

"Where does Mr. Laidley dine?" inquired Mrs. Rashleigh.

"He and Mr. Kenny were invited together to Mr. Selden's. But for Mr. Argyle's absence, he would have gone to Ben Lomond."

"Mr. Argyle has really set off upon his journey, then?" said Mrs. Holt.

Katherine turned away her head, and leaned out of the window for air. A numb sickness was creeping over her.

"He left yesterday, as he proposed to do."

"He intends spending the winter in travelling, I believe," continued the governess; neither of the other ladies appearing disposed to engage in the conversation.

"Is it not early in the season to begin the tour of the Southern States?"

"He will go West first," rejoined the Colonel. "Katherine!"

"Sir?" said the girl, showing her white, shocked face.

"I did not mean to alarm you, my child. I was merely about to remark that, of course, Mr. Argyle paid a farewell visit at his sister's while you were there."

"She is ill!" exclaimed Mrs. Rashleigh.

She untied her daughter's bonnet, and made her lean against her shoulder, while Mrs. Holt fanned her.

"I thought you were not looking well when we met you this morning," she said, brushing back the falling curls with a tender, motherly touch that brought the tears to poor Katherine's eyes. Mrs. Rashleigh's voice betrayed no emotion. "You have been keeping late hours, I am afraid."

"Nothing is more deleterious to the health of a young lady," remarked the Colonel. "I am displeased that Robert and his wife should sanction such irregularities."

Katherine could not defend her hospitable entertainers; could do nothing more than smile faintly to assure the anxious watchers of her countenance that she was reviving. She had never fainted in her life. She did not believe she would have fainted

now, but for one blind second, the day and the earth seemed to have passed away, and left her to a horror of darkness a black and chilling void.

Her father would have her take no arm but his, when they reached home, and assisted her up to her room. Her mother banished governess and maid, and aided in disrobing her, silently, and without demonstration of affection, yet, as Katherine realized, with a sort of sympathy very soothing and very strange.

"Indeed, mamma, you will fatigue yourself!" she expostulated. "I was only a little giddy and sick, and it is over now. I am quite able to wait on myself, if you persist in recommending me to lie down."

"The sun is warm to-day, and the carriage was close. These were sufficient to produce your indisposition, joined to your irregular habits at your cousin's. I am not inclined to view it as a serious matter. A couple of hours of undisturbed slumber will do you good."

Katherine put her arms around her mother's neck, as she laid a shawl over her.

"You are very kind, mamma!" Her heart was bursting to add, "you will let me love you—will you not?" but timidity restrained her.

Mrs. Rashleigh kissed her quietly, and bidding her "sleep and awake well," left her.

The sun was not an hour high, when she again entered the chamber and stooped above the bed. Katherine was very pale, and there was a worn, weary look about the brow and mouth, while the eyelids were swollen, as with passionate and long-continued weeping. The mother touched the pillow and a handkerchief that lay upon it. Both were damp, and her own forehead contracted in a spasm of displeasure or pain. She clenched her hands and gazed steadfastly upon her child, dark clouds and ominous driving over her face. It was as if she

renewed some stern resolution, before the rigid lines relaxed, and a beam of compassionate love, that was akin to angelic pity, illumined her features. She bent to kiss the brow of the sleeper. Light as was the touch, Katherine awoke with a sobbing gasp, and sat upright.

"Mamma! is it you? Am I at home?"

"Yes, my daughter."

"May I stay here always, please, mamma?"

"Until you choose to go," answered Mrs. Rashleigh, without noticing her incoherency. "Mr. Laidley is downstairs, and I thought you would like to meet him. Have you had a refreshing sleep?"

"Yes, madam!"

Katherine sighed wearily, as she arose to perform the duties of her toilet.

"I am not lazy—only tired!" she said, in excuse. "Dissipation does not suit me."

"You need have no more, unless you like to make a second experiment. I had my doubts as to the wisdom of this one, but your father and cousins were so strenuous in their desire, that I could not refuse them."

"My cousins were kind to me—so were their visitors. They treated me with great attention. It was nobody's fault but my own that I did not have a happier time."

"Are you wide awake and strong enough to answer some questions pertaining to this visit, or more properly speaking, to some of the persons whom you met at Montrouge?"

"Yes, madam." But Katherine's knees trembled, and she leaned all her weight against the dressing-table.

"My catechism does not relate to yourself, nor am I ready to tell you exactly why my inquiries are made. You have quick eyes and a thoughtful mind. Did anything transpire while you were at Mr. Moreau's to induce you to suspect that Mr. Sancroft

had an undue influence over your cousin, and that he exerted this to accomplish his own ends? Take your time, and think well, whether any circumstance, overlooked at the moment it occurred, would bear this construction."

Katherine reverted instantly to the conversation she had accidentally heard in the woods on the third day of her visit, and she narrated the incident.

A triumphant flash shot from Mrs. Rashleigh's eyes.

"This is more than I could have hoped for! You are positive that you have repeated their very words! Stay!" She took paper and pencil from a desk.

"Say them over again—very carefully—while I write."

In utter amazement, her daughter obeyed.

The few sentences were noted down, and with the paper in her hand, Mrs. Rashleigh arose.

"You are too discreet to be treated as a child, Katherine. I may say to you that I have no respect for Mr. Sancroft or his father, and that I have discovered what your father does not see, the unbounded power of the younger man over Mr. Moreau's weaker mind. This can tend only to mischief, but, while I can do nothing to avert it, if I would, it is well to be sure with whom the evil originated. This is all you need or ought to know, at present. Say nothing to any one of what you have repeated to me. I am now going down to the parlor. Shall I send your maid to you?"

Mr. Laidley sat in the stateliest of the state-chairs in the dark-green drawing-room, listening, with his open, pleasant countenance, to the Colonel's exposition of the tenets and prejudices to which he, as a staunch churchman, subscribed; his eye glancing occasionally from his host, to the fret-work of gold the declining sun cast through the trees and the windows, high upon the eastern wall of the apartment, when a slight figure appeared in the doorway, leading into the hall. So white of raiment and complexion was it—so noiseless of motion, that the good man sprang

up from his chair with more suddenness than mere gallantry required.

Colonel Rashleigh introduced his daughter; she courtesied and withdrew to a seat, but Mr. Laidley's eyes still sought her, in thoughtful inquiry. Its purport was made manifest, after a while.

"Excuse me, Miss Rashleigh! but your countenance is so familiar to me I must believe that I have seen you before—I could say in less happy circumstances than those in which I now find you."

"I had the pleasure of an introduction to you last May, at the Presbyterial meeting," replied Katherine, blushing deeply.

"Ah! I have some recollection of it. Mrs. Moreau was with you, if I mistake not."

"She was, sir."

"I knew your face for that of an acquaintance, in the congregation this forenoon, but could not name the place or period of our meeting. Can that be the only interview we have ever had?"

"I am ignorant of any other, sir."

"I am growing old—sight and memory are failing together!" said Mr. Laidley, putting his hand to his forehead. "I used to pride myself upon my accurate remembrance of features and names. Now, instead of a clear mirror, there is a blurred, treacherous surface, that confuses, more than it aids me. Whence, for instance, should I derive the impression that I have seen and talked with you in a more humble sphere than that in which you were born, had spoken words of consolation to you, in the chamber of the dying?"

"I cannot tell, indeed, sir!" replied Katherine, with a shiver. Interested, despite her engrossing sadness, she continued: "I am often troubled with like unaccountable fancies—have an incorrigible habit—an unconquerable faculty of recollecting events that never happened—that is, in my present state of existence. I am

disposed, sometimes, to believe that I have lived in this world before I entered the body I wear now—my imaginations of persons and scenes I can never have beheld with these eyes, are so vivid and consistent—far more so than any dream-pictures.”

“Such speculations are very tempting. We have all a vein of superstition which craves the marvellous. Yet, I doubt not that these fancies of ours, could, if we had the clue, be traced—if not to dreams and stories heard and read—to actual events in our experience, partly forgotten or blended with others.”

“If I may be permitted to offer so simple a solution of the mournful associations you have connected with Miss Rashleigh,” ventured Mrs. Holt, “I would remind you, Mr. Laidley, that you met her twice on the day of your introduction, and the second time, in the immediate vicinity of a grave. I allude to that on the hill in the rear of the church.”

“Is it indeed so? I had forgotten the encounter, although I remember the visit. I had never been there before. May I inquire, Miss Rashleigh, if you were drawn to that spot by any special interest in him whose remains are there entombed?”

“I was not, sir. The discovery of the grave was wholly accidental, and until I read the name upon the headstone, I had no knowledge of the deceased.”

“You have learned his history since then?”

Katherine paused, but mastering her reluctance to near a theme which could not be otherwise than excessively painful to her, she replied: “Only that he was a friend of Mr. Argyle’s.”

“From whom did you hear thus much, if it is not an impertinent question?”

“From Mr. Argyle himself. I have never questioned any one else.”

“And his modesty would not have allowed him to tell you a story that reflects such honor upon himself, if there were no other reasons why he should avoid the topic.”

“I have noted this extreme modesty in Mr. Argyle’s character. It is a remarkable trait,” said the Colonel. “Nothing displeases me more in the rising generation of young men than their inordinate self-esteem.”

“There never was an ignoble trait in Malcolm Argyle’s disposition,” returned Mr. Laidley. “I have known him from his boyhood; from his babyhood, I may say, for I baptized him as his mother held him in her arms. Many and hard things have been said concerning the unsocial habits of the man, but he is far more sinned against than sinning. Sensitive and honorable to a fault; fervent and stable in his attachments, it is no wonder that certain events in his past life have left indelible traces upon his heart and manner.”

Dusk came early in that room, and Katherine blessed the gathering shades that veiled her changing cheek and quivering frame from the sight of the other auditors. Mrs. Holt maintained her ladylike attitude of respectful attention; Mrs. Rashleigh leaned back in her chair, taciturn and statuesque. It was impossible to say whether she listened or mused or slept.

“Ah!” said the Colonel, politely, but sleepily.

The governess, reminded by his tone that it was the hour of his evening nap, came to the rescue.

“He has had trying bereavements, then, sir? Of what nature, pray?”

“With some I am acquainted only by heresay, of others I am not at liberty to speak. But since you, madam, have referred to the circumstance of meeting him and myself at that lonely grave, I may give the outlines of a story that has cast a permanent gloom over a spirit, as tender as buoyant. The ‘friend’ buried there was a poor shoemaker, who settled just without the bounds of the Argyle plantation. He possessed unusual attainments for his station; had a sound education and the manners of a thorough gentleman. Withal, he was a man of sincere piety, as I had ex-

cellent opportunities of knowing. Young Argyle conceived an ardent friendship for his lowly neighbor, even prior to an accident which made him an invalid resident of his house for many weeks. After this, he regarded him as the saviour of his life, and spared no pains to secure him a lucrative business and a competency of worldly goods. Then Argyle went abroad, and how it happened I have never rightly understood, but through a series of unfortunate misunderstandings, an estrangement grew up between the tenant, Hale, and the senior Argyle, his landlord. While this was at its height, Hale was laid low with a lingering disease, and reduced to extreme poverty. The sequel of the sad affair was that he was arrested at the suit of Mr. Argyle, or his agent, for the real creditor always denied any knowledge of the harsh measures of his deputy; his goods seized and himself imprisoned. The exposure and excitement aggravated his malady, and he died within three days after his removal."

"Such barbarity seems incredible!" exclaimed Katherine.

"As do many other things of daily occurrence among civilized men!" replied Mr. Laidley. "I chanced to stop at the Court House Tavern the night Hale died, and hearing of his case and who he was, remembered him as one who had once given me shelter in a storm, and won my respect and good will by his intelligent conversation and kind hospitality. I visited him, and finding him very near his end, remained until all was over. Such Christian courage and faith I have seldom had the privilege of beholding. He left a wife, a very pretty young woman, who was deeply attached to him, and one child, perhaps more—I remember only one. They were provided by the charitable neighbors with funds to enable them to reach their relations, and I have never heard of them since. Meanwhile Argyle was profoundly ignorant of the misfortunes of his protégés. By a cruel mischance, or more truly speaking, a mysterious Providence, he never received either of the two letters written to him on the subject by one whom he had

commissioned to watch over his friends during his absence; the old housekeeper and nurse, who yet has charge of his establishment."

"Was it never supposed that the letters were intercepted?"

The query came from Mrs. Rashleigh, but the accents were so sharp and dry that Katherine could scarcely believe them her mother's.

"There was a whisper of some such thing, I think, but it was generally treated as unfounded scandal, and soon died away. I fear that the rumor was set afloat by poor Argyle's imprudent invectives against all who had the opportunity to injure the Hales. He acted like one bereft of reason, when, on his return home, he learned the calamity that had befallen them. His impetuosity and unsparing denunciation of the agents in the sad affair, occasioned a rupture between himself and several of his old acquaintances, who sought to mollify his resentment—and, it was said, came near producing a family feud. One very natural and commendable desire was uppermost in his breast—to seek out the surviving members of the ill-fated family, and make what restitution he could; but here again the way was hedged up. Mrs. Hale had left her address with the worthy hostess of the village inn, who had cared for her husband, during his imprisonment, as if he had been her own son; but she was no letter-writer, and when Argyle called on her for the direction, she had lost or mislaid it. Notwithstanding this hindrance, he sent letters North, East, West and South, in quest of the missing woman, but without effect; nor has he ever obtained the least information concerning them. The remains of poor Hale he caused to be removed to the beautiful spot where they now rest, and has found a melancholy satisfaction in tending the grave. People sneered at him as romantic and eccentric, but he paid no heed to ridicule or argument.

"I have told you a long tale, Miss Rashleigh—a gossiping recital, you may think, better suited to a sentimental girl, than a

man who has outlived the age of romance ; but Argyle is a hobby of mine. He refreshes me, after the scores of everyday, practical beings I am in the habit of meeting. His life has been an unwritten tragedy. Stern and cynical, as he is called, I tell you there is more heart in him now—locked up though its treasures are—than in any other ten men that I know.”

“And this is the heart—these are the treasures I have flung away!” thought Katherine, while the great tears were crushed under her eyelids. “Now, I would be his slave—anything—that would give me a right to be near him always and minister to him, if by so doing I could pour one drop of sweet into a cup that others have filled with wormwood. What a weak, vain, petulant creature I have been !”

Mrs. Holt was assuredly one of the people who are put into the world to “fill up a chink.” She was not garrulous, although prosy—not obtrusive, although pedantic. When no one else would speak, she did ; when others were voluble, she personified the “mute angel of attention.” Katherine could not articulate ; Mrs. Rashleigh rarely cared to offer a voluntary remark, and the Colonel’s heavy breathing attested his inability to pronounce an opinion upon a story that had sent him forty leagues, at least, into the land of dreams, he having succumbed to Somnus before the preliminary paragraph was ended. Age and an apoplectic tendency were valiant opponents to his conscientious politeness.

“We likewise esteem Mr. Argyle very highly,” said Mrs. Holt. “And since we have heard your thrilling narrative, Mr. Laidley, our appreciation of his worth must of necessity be far more just. His trials have been numerous, and we cannot help hoping that his compensation may be ample—that ‘the winter of his discontent’ is nearly over, and he may forget it in a ‘glorious summer.’”

There can never be invented a more effectual quietus to overwrought feeling than the intensely trite speeches which your well-

bred, smooth-tongued nonentity keeps continually on hand. The “step” that makes ridiculous the sublime, is as nothing to the down-toppling of elevated sensations and exalted sentiments before his or her properly-delivered sentence. Society owes such weight-and-pulley machines much for bringing down upon the run, aspiring theorists and heated romancists. If this were Mrs. Holt’s mission, she performed it faithfully.

Katherine rang the bell, and ordered that lights should be brought in ; for there were arabesques of silver moonlight on the wall where the sunlight had played when she entered the room. Mrs. Rashleigh arose and walked down the apartment with her slow, proud step, to the door of the smaller parlor. The Colonel, awakened by the cessation of Mr. Laidley’s voice, sneezed and hemmed to rid himself of the fogs his head and throat had gathered in the Sleepy Hollow into which he had made an excursion.

“Yet the Established Church must have been, at one time, the legal religion of your commonwealth, Mr. Laidley. Of course, I favor toleration and freedom of conscience ; but I am always displeased at innovation in ecclesiastical affairs—at whatever leans toward liberalism in the church.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

ONE day, near the later part of October, the younger Sancroft made his appearance at Montrouge in a state of the utmost excitement. Luckily, Mrs. Moreau was not at home, or his tone and gesture as he met her husband in the porch, must have aroused a curiosity the two cronies would have been puzzled to evade.

"Here's a precious stew!" was Sancroft's exclamation. "All the lying and thieving I have planned and you executed have done no good. Sit down!"—pulling him to a bench—"and read what the old man received this morning, from that cunning fox—Hammond!"

It was a professional letter, stating, with as little verbiage as was compatible with technicalities, that the writer had detected several grave errors in the review of Mr. Sancroft's accounts—discrepancies between the bills he had presented as the lawful demands of various parties to whom Colonel Rashleigh was indebted, and what purported to be duplicate bills which he—Hammond—had subsequently obtained from said parties. Then followed the errata in detail—revealing the frightful fact that, in every instance, Mr. Sancroft's bill was for a larger amount than was named by each creditor, as his just claim, and that in proportion to the distance of their places of residence from Briarwood was the increase of the difference in the two sums.

"Tolerable mileage that!" said Sancroft, striking a name with his finger. "But go on! Hear him through!"

In view of this serious and remarkable conflict of testimony, Mr. Hammond said, it was the wish of his client, Colonel Rashleigh, that Mr. Sancroft should be called upon to render an explanation of a matter reflecting heavily upon his correctness as an accountant, or his fidelity as an agent, or his integrity as a man; to show forth cause why a suit should not be instituted against him for having extorted money upon false pretences. The letter begged, furthermore, that an early day might be appointed for the private investigation of the case.

The sweat broke out all over Moreau's body as he read—rolled in big globules from his forehead.

"Good gracious, Sancroft! How did this happen?"

"Don't lose your wits, man! you need the few you have, more than you ever did before, and you think you have been in some tight places. 'How did this happen?' Why, the sly rascal must have made a memoranda of all the loose bills wherein lay the danger to my honest paternal. No wonder he was so willing to intrust them to your careless handling, when he had them inventoried upon his private sheet! What a ninny you were not to think of that!"

"But he cannot show the bills in your father's handwriting!" And Mr. Moreau's crest arose. "You don't recollect that!"

"What good will that quibble do with the long head you are for pitting your numbskull against? He never would have taken this audacious step without evidence to bear him out. Ten to one, he has tracked you, and having done this, to scent out the instigator of your matchless strategy, is as easy as to add two and two together."

"Tracked me! How could he? We would have heard of it before now, if suspicion had fallen upon me or upon any one. When I left the office, both doors were wide open, and the papers flying everywhere. I dare him to charge me with purloining one of them!"

"Heroics are unbecoming in a lily-livered chap like you, Moreau. You dare him, indeed! It is as easy to see as the nose on your face, that you 'would have heard of it if suspicion had *not* fallen upon' you! Your uncle would have referred to it, or Hammond—in some of the dozen times you have seen him since. Hasn't he talked—yes! and laughed too—the scamp! about the cows getting into his corn? and have not you, with exquisite address, inquired about 'your mutual task,' and asked to be admitted as a law-student! You don't remember chuckling over that bit of smartness with me, not a week ago—hey? I distrusted then his reserve on the subject of his loss. I could knock you down when I think how he was grinning in his sleeve at your overdone folly. Distraction! why *are* some people born fools?"

"Upon my word, Sancroft, you talk as if I were the only person who had a hand in this dirty work! Didn't you force me into it? I never would have chosen the job of my own accord. It doesn't stand to reason that I would rob my own kin to benefit yours, just for the pleasure of the thing. I must say your language is anything but kind—considering the trouble and risk I have been at, to oblige you."

"Stop your whimpering! It was a legitimate bargain. Said I—'Moreau, my fine fellow, I hold your note for so much—a debt of honor between gentlemen, you had as lief should not be talked of, even in the bosom of your family. My revered patriarch, being slightly in his dotage, has been using your uncle's confidence to subserve his own personal advantage, and the proofs thereof are in the possession of Hammond. I will furnish you with a description of these mischievous papers, the examination of which Hammond had not commenced yesterday, for I overheard him say so. Get a permit from your uncle—amiable and unsophisticated greybeard that he is! which shall give you access to them. When you have identified the ones we want,

signal to me from the window, and I engage to effect a diversion of the lynx eye. Bring me the bills, and I deliver up your bond—paper for paper—that is equity!" After an immensity of instruction and drilling, you undertook the commission, and the master you serve helped you through so famously that I ought to have been on the look-out for worse mischief—but I was not. I earned the patriarchal blessing and a trifle in advance of my patrimony; you had your note back, and retained your average amount of public respect, not to mention domestic felicity."

"You are as cool as a cucumber, Sancroft! when I am going crazy! How are you going to get out of this awful scrape?"

"I am not in it, in the first place. All my solicitude is for you and my distressed parent. He cheated, or tried to; you stole; while *my* hands are clean—every whit!"

"You were at the bottom of all that I did."

"Maybe so; but you will find that a difficult thing to prove, my dear boy! Who would believe you on your oath when your share in the transaction is made known? But we are jumping at the conclusion that Hammond certainly holds trumps. My distracted senior has committed the righting of his fame to my acumen, and, as a primary move, we must pump Hammond; make him show his hand, and bully, if we cannot convince him. Come along!"

"Must I go? You will get on so much better without me!" pleaded Moreau.

The most crafty serpents do unwise things sometimes, and Sancroft tugged his trembling tool after him to the lawyer's house. A carriage was driven away from the door as they came in sight of it, and passed them in the lane. It was Colonel Rashleigh's, and within it were Mrs. Rashleigh and her English maid.

"Aha!" nodded Sancroft, sardonically, replacing the hat he had lifted, receiving a proud bow in return. "That is the blade that cuts so smoothly! I thought it did not feel like a blunt

English cleaver. Moreau ! has that woman any excuse for hating you ?”

“Me ! none that I know of ! We have had very little to do with one another.”

“Ditto for your humble servant ! Yet I have a notion that she loves us both alike, and is not enamored with either. She is just the sort of a woman to deify a spite ; to carry a stone in her pocket for seven years, turn it, and carry it seven years longer, and then dash out one’s brains with it at last. And your uncle is no better than a piece of wax in her hands. He is a solemn prig—a pompous puppet ! She works the wires.”

“He dotes on her, that’s a fact ! My wife found that out the first time she saw them together. For my part, I could as soon love a graven image—a marble tombstone ! What awful, ghostly eyes she has ! When she fixes them on me they make me, somehow, think of all the evil I ever did in my life.”

“You never lack food for reflection in her company, then ! But here we are, and there is Hammond, smiling as a May morning ! Confound his impudence ! Now, swear to all I say, and don’t venture an original observation for your life !”

Mr. Hammond’s reception of the promising pair was perfectly polite—not cordial. Even Moreau discovered that they were met as business acquaintances, not neighbors and friends.

Mr. Sancroft led off with a message from his father, who was inconceivably astounded at the intelligence contained in Mr. Hammond’s communication. During the thirty years in which he had pursued the calling of an agent and accountant, this circumstance had no precedent.

Mr. Hammond thought that more than probable. He had himself been confounded by the number of errors and the amounts involved. It was an incomprehensible affair.

Mr. Sancroft might be excused, if with all his respect for Mr. Hammond’s skill in his profession and unquestionable veracity as

a gentleman, he yet declined to believe in the extraordinary list of errata, without personal and minute examination of the original papers.

Mr. Hammond rejoined that the original papers had never been transferred to him. Mr. Sancroft, Senior, had only supplied him with bills drawn up in his own handwriting. The accounts from which these were compiled were, many of them, as he had been given to understand, informal statements, embodied in letters from illiterate men. Mr. Sancroft had had considerable difficulty in deciphering them, and to spare Colonel Rashleigh the trouble, he had taken pains to copy them out fairly and number them, besides entering their several amounts on his account-book. Said bills, when paid by Colonel Rashleigh, were to have offsets in the shape of receipts from their several authors. Mr. Sancroft had undoubtedly taken unusual, and he might add, superfluous trouble, in simplifying and arranging these papers. Superfluous, since he (Mr. Hammond) had deemed it proper to waive these considerable endeavors to elucidate matters for Colonel Rashleigh’s convenience, and returning to first principles, had applied to the debtors for duplicate bills, over their own signatures. Colonel Rashleigh, although an Englishman, was yet competent to the management of an ordinary transaction of buying and selling. The straightest course was generally the safest in the long run.

Sancroft winced at this gratuitous moral adage.

“You do not object, however, Mr. Hammond, to my seeing these bills, as made out in my father’s hand ?”

“You will find exact copies of them, here, sir.” Mr. Hammond took down an account-book.

“These are in your writing, sir ; I asked for the originals.”

“I repeat, Mr. Sancroft, that your father never surrendered the originals to my client or myself.”

“May I inquire, Mr. Hammond, why you denominate Colonel Rashleigh your ‘client’ ? You are not serious in your threat

of a suit upon such ground as is supplied by these twice-copied bills?"

"I propose, sir, in the beginning to obtain from your father the original letters, which he, with singular carelessness for a man of his exact habits, has, he declares, mislaid. The case will then rest upon a comparison of these with the bills exhibited to Colonel Rashleigh by Mr. Sancroft, Senior."

"But you cannot produce them, you know!" burst out Mr. Moreau. "You forget that they are lost. Allow me to say, Mr. Hammond, that other men are as careless as Mr. Sancroft!"

"May I ask, Mr. Moreau, from whom you gained the information of my negligence and consequent loss?" said Mr. Hammond, coolly.

Sancroft detected the transient, intense gleam of satisfaction in the lawyer's eye at this outrageous blunder of the officious confederate. For himself, he was livid with rage, and his glowering looks awoke Moreau to a sense of his indiscretion. In fright and haste, he had no thought except to mend one falsehood by another.

"I was under that impression," he stammered. "Indeed, I am sure that I have heard some such thing. Oh! I remember! It was my uncle, Colonel Rashleigh, who signified as much to me."

"That is remarkable, since Colonel Rashleigh never had any intimation to that effect from me," returned Mr. Hammond, very gravely. "How he could have conceived of such an occurrence is inexplicable."

"It was some one of the family, if it was not he." Moreau stumbled on worse than ever, for Sancroft's iron heel was upon his foot under the table, and he was too blind with folly and alarm to comprehend its injunction to silence.

"If not lost, then, Mr. Hammond," Sancroft interposed between the unequally-matched opponents, "will you have the goodness to bring them forward?"

"These are exact copies—as I have already said, sir."

"I have only your word for that!"

"And I only your father's for the authenticity of the documents with which he furnished me. Keep your temper, Mr. Sancroft. It is not very easy to provoke me to a quarrel, when there is nothing to be gained by flying into a passion, if I do 'storm at the cows and negroes' when my corn-field is invaded."

Moreau's lips took a bluish tint, and his associate turned scarlet.

"What relevance has that to this subject?" he inquired, in a bullying tone, to hide his trepidation.

"That remains to be proved. To cut short digressions—what does your father propose to do in his unpleasant dilemma, Mr. Sancroft? The creditors of Colonel Rashleigh, from whom I have received duplicate bills, are ready to attest upon oath that these are literal transcripts of those formerly sent to Mr. Sancroft. Colonel Rashleigh will testify that Mr. Sancroft assured me in his presence that his formal accounts were prepared with the utmost accuracy from those which he received. How are the palpable discrepancies in the two sets of papers to be reconciled? Mr. Moreau alleges—upon what grounds he has not yet stated distinctly—that I have lost the documents drawn up by your father. Granting this to be true, I flatter myself that my copies will go as far, upon oath of their correctness, as those of Mr. Sancroft, Senior, especially when mine are supported by copious memoranda, made on the night of the transfer, under Colonel Rashleigh's eyes. Nevertheless, I would advise, to avoid this complicated and delicate view of the matter, that he take his stand upon what I call the original documents. If they are lost, they may be traced; if mislaid, a careful search must bring them to light. If I were in his place, I would leave no stone unturned to discover manuscripts so important. The loss of a small bit of written paper is oftentimes a fruitful source of great evils, Mr. Moreau."

He wheeled his chair so as to confront the conscious thief,

whose grimace, in attempting an easy smile, was amusing, yet pitiable.

"S-s-so I suppo-o-se!" he said, shiveringly.

"You feel the draught from that window, Mr. Moreau. I will close it. Draughts are inconvenient things, particularly where there are loose papers about. And speaking of loose papers, recalls to me an incident in the legal practice of a friend of mine, that may interest you, gentlemen. My friend, Thompson, had in his possession and under examination, certain documents which, if made public, would have seriously affected the reputation of a man who stood well in the community. This man, whom we will call Jones, consulted with his nephew and a comrade of his, Smith—if you please to style him—as to ways and means for purloining said papers. This stratagem was agreed upon: at a given time, Smith, as a disinterested visitor to Thompson, entered his office and contrived a pretext to finger his papers. The younger Jones was too much of a gentleman to carry out his scheme in person—therefore, he offered a bribe of considerable amount to a trifling fellow, who was skulking along the road—such a worthless chap as Bully Bob, Mr. Moreau, who assaulted your respected uncle, last summer. He bribed this fellow—as I was saying, to pull down a panel of the fence that surrounded Thompson's wheat field, and drive in upon the choice spring grain a herd of cattle from a neighboring pasture. It was a cunning thing, for, you see, the agent was not apt to tell of his own misdeeds. The trick succeeded to a charm. Out rushed Thompson, in a fury—very much as I did, when a similar accident happened to my corn one day, when you were by, Mr. Moreau. It was a very ludicrous scene, I can assure you, Mr. Sancroft. Out rushed Thompson, then, and Smith quietly secured the desired documents, left doors and windows open, and followed Thompson so quickly, he did not observe that he had not accompanied him. The field was cleared; Smith offered his congratulations and departed

and Thompson, returning to his office, found everything pell-mell; papers cutting all manner of capers, and the leaves of books fluttering like aspens in the draught. When the truants were collected, Thompson discovered his loss, and without delay went to communicate the circumstance to the owner of the missing correspondence. He was not at home; but his wife, a woman of strong, acute intellect, was, and listened to his story with profound attention. When it was through, she said: "There is a wheel within a wheel. The wind is not the thief. Say nothing of this affair, even to my husband, at present. We shall find out the truth, in time."

"Thompson obeyed to the letter. He did not divulge his suspicions to his own wife: and, would you believe it? in less than a fortnight, they had proof of all they wanted to know. First, came to light the actor in removing the fence—quite unexpectedly—for Thompson had his eye upon a different person altogether. The next step was the evidence of bribery, which the culprit offered eagerly, to screen himself, and then—in the very nick of time, Providence, or luck, sent along an unexceptionable witness, who certified to overhearing part of a conversation between the accomplices, Smith and Jones, as they rejoiced over their booty, on their way home. In fact, it made out the prettiest case of conspiracy and robbery you ever heard of. How very ill you look, Mr. Moreau! Let me get something for you. A glass of brandy-and-water is excellent for sudden faintness."

"I would be obliged to you. I do feel *very* sick!" murmured Moreau.

"And I have been tiring you with my stupid yarn! How very inconsiderate! I will step into the house and be back directly."

He left the office, and Moreau stared helplessly at his accomplice. "Sancroft, we are ruined!"

"And you have only your meddling stupidity to thank for it!" was the gloomy rejoinder.

"But can you do nothing?" entreated Moreau, who had a childish confidence in his companion's talents for subterfuge.

"Of course I can. Nobody but a cowardly blockhead gives up a battle before it is fought. With all his cock-and-bull story, I don't believe he can prove the half of what he says. At all events, I will let him try it. Two can play at that game."

Accordingly, while Mr. Moreau sipped, and finally swallowed the entire contents of the tumbler Mr. Hammond had mixed to relieve his faintness, Mr. Sancroft stated his intention, on the part of his father, to consider further the matter in hand, and to inform him of their conclusion in the course of a week or ten days. It was his own conviction that his father would insist upon bringing the case into court. It was a novel one, and would involve a vast deal of expense and trouble, but these were not to be thought of a moment, in comparison with the good name of a man who was now, in his old age, arraigned for the first time for fraud. He asked for one favor only at the hands of his accuser—that the affair should be kept as quiet as possible, until publication was made necessary, in order to carry out the requisite legal proceedings.

Mr. Hammond attended them to the door, and as Moreau was passing out last, still pale and scared, the lawyer checked him with—"A word with you, if you please, Mr. Moreau! Mr. Sancroft will excuse us for a moment."

Reluctant though Sancroft was to leave his indiscreet victim in the power of such a master of the arts of cross-examination and spying out a guilty secret—and loath as Moreau looked and felt to endure the ordeal, neither had any objection ready. While Sancroft sullenly untied his horse and pretended to busy himself with tightening the girth and rebuckling the bridle, Mr. Hammond withdrew the downcast culprit into the office, and instead of charging home his offence upon him, as he expected, accosted him mildly.

"To you, Mr. Moreau, I would offer a little unprofessional advice. Whether or not the Messrs. Sancroft will push matters to extremity, and thereby blast their reputations irretrievably, I cannot say. My surmise is that they will make the experiment. I do not inquire if you are implicated in any manner in this attempted fraud"—

"I never knew a word of it until after the mischief was done!" was Moreau's vehement asseveration.

"I prefer that you should not answer me quite yet, if you please. This caution is meant kindly, for you are laboring under excitement and might make imprudent admissions. I was about to remark that although probable, it is not a certainty, that should the case be tried, your name will be introduced. Your uncle has no idea that you have any knowledge of the fraud or its peculiar attendant circumstances. You cannot mistake my meaning. Nor is it expedient that he should be informed of any of these unpleasant circumstances until our plans are more nearly matured. Therefore, your wisest course is to remain silent and passive. Should the worst come, it will still appear that more confidants would only have accelerated exposure."

"But Mrs. Rashleigh!—my uncle's wife! I thought you said that she knew everything!"

"Mr. Moreau! Mr. Moreau! you are forgetting my warning! Mrs. Rashleigh's name has not been mentioned in the whole conversation."

"You meant her! you know you did! Where's the use of denying it? Oh, Mr. Hammond! I am the most miserable man alive! I wish I had blown my brains out, twelve months ago. I have been living longer than that with a sword hanging over my head. I wish it would fall and cut me in two—for there would be an end of it!"

He dropped his head on the back of a chair and sobbed outright in his weak despair.

"I am sorry for you, Mr. Moreau ! upon my word I am !" said the lawyer, honestly, while he despised the wretched dupe of his own passions and another's cunning. You have listened too credulously to evil counsellors ; have obeyed them too faithfully."

"How could I help it ? They have me completely in their power—just as much as if I were chained hand and foot."

"I would break the chains and take the consequences, let them be ever so severe. You may wonder at hearing such a sentiment from one of my profession, but I am daily becoming more thoroughly convinced that an honest course is the only one that can be truly termed politic."

"Yet you advise me against it !"

"Not I ! I have not recommended equivocation, only reserve. I am detaining you, and I see that Mr. Sancroft is growing impatient. I beg your pardon for the liberty I have taken. If I could aid you in this uncomfortable affair I would do so ; but I can see no better plan of action for you to adopt than a prudent silence."

"What did he say to you ?" demanded Sancroft, peremptorily, as they put their horses in motion.

"What *you* are eternally telling me to learn—to hold my tongue !" answered the other crossly, with very similar feelings to those we may imagine a worm to experience when he turns under the careless or wanton foot.

"Was that all ?"

"He said that even if you and your father saw fit to stand the suit, and meet the disgrace that would attend it, I had better keep still."

"Which means that your uncle prefers not to damage his nephew's reputation if he can ruin us without ! Very natural ! but we will see whether that is practicable. However, you may as well follow his advice for some time to come. If there is any

sense in the maxim about the law's delays, I am determined that Hammond shall have the full benefit of the same. Don't hang yourself yet awhile ! Who knows what a couple of months may bring forth ?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

KATHERINE kept up her horseback rides throughout the autumn—partly to please her father, partly because she experienced a cruel pleasure in enduring the memories called back by these lonely excursions. Omar seemed to miss his mate as he followed, without direction from the rein, the well-known bridle-paths winding in and about the forests; but his mistress never spoke her regret at the substitution of bulky Thomas for her summer's escort. The laborer in wayside fields, and the frequent traveller along those roads, came to know and to watch for her appearance on every moderately fine day, always riding swiftly while in the highway; sitting so straight and firm in her saddle, that it would have been a keen vision indeed that detected the increasing slenderness of her figure—her eye so bright and her mouth so proud, that none remarked the hollowing and blanching cheek.

Tramp! tramp! tramp! over the gravelly road and the turfy by-way; through sand and creek and mire; through dead leaves everywhere!—for the farewell sigh of summer had died away among the hills long ago. Tramp! tramp! tramp! while the swift pulses rioted in her wrists, and her heart beat like a caged bird against its bars, and there was ever that straining, forward gaze—seeking for what or whom?

One gusty, cloudy afternoon, she dismounted, as she had often done before, at the foot of the hill back of the church, and gathering her train in her hands, ascended to the grave that was now to her a shrine. At her last visit, two days previous to this, she

had been troubled by the ragged, neglected look of so much of the turf as was visible, the inclosure being filled with fallen leaves to a level with the top of the mound. She had tried the little gate and found the lock firm, and her attempt to insert her arm between the palings to clear away leaves or grass was alike futile. To-day there were no such offences to sight and feeling. The turf had been clipped and cleaned; the dead matter all removed to a distance from the inclosure; even the circular area appeared to have been swept. It was, without doubt, done by the old housekeeper's orders. Her absent master's wishes were her law as absolutely as when he reigned in person at Ben Lomond.

Katherine leaned upon the top of the fence, and read again the inscription:

"MARK HALE,

OBIT. 1779.

ÆTAT. 27.

'There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God.'

He had died in poverty and in prison! Were his last moments embittered by doubts of the fidelity of his distant friends? That reflection would add poignancy to any grief. She wished she had known this humble favorite; this nobleman in a peasant's abode and garb. Perhaps, if he had lived, her present situation would have been different, since his death and its accompanying circumstances had wrought such alterations in Malcolm's character and conduct. How she would have been affected she did not surmise; she only wondered vaguely if this untimely end of one whom she had never seen, had not exerted some important influence upon her destiny.

A cold blast shook down the dry leaves in showers, and something white fluttered around the corner of the palings to her feet.

She picked it up. It was a handkerchief, sheer and fine, and marked in the centre—"Margaret E. Rashleigh!" Could she have taken this article of her mother's property by mistake and lost it here? It was improbable, yet she could not disprove the supposition. She was still inspecting the cambric, as if it could account for its mysterious appearance, when Thomas, having secured the horses among the trees below, came up the hill. Regardless of his young mistress' surprised, and somewhat offended look, at this intrusion upon her privacy, he commenced a diligent search within and around the inclosure; turning over sticks and dry leaves, and staring up into the naked branches of neighboring trees.

"What do you want, Thomas?"

"Mary" (Mrs. Rashleigh's maid) "telled me yesterday, that the mistress had lost a pocket handkerchief in the chariot or on the road, while she was taking her airing, and I thought mebbe she had dropped it here."

"Here!—has she ever been here?"

"Many a times; every week a'most. She sets great store upon walking in these woods. Her and Mary rests here a bit, while John drives round to the cross-roads and back, to keep the horses from taking cold standing. She comed yesterday afternoon to see how I had cleaned out the weeds and litter in the morning, and I thought, mebbe, she'd lost her handkerchief here."

The return to his starting-place awoke Katherine. During this, for him, lengthy speech, which he droned out, automaton-like, she remained gazing alternately at him and the handkerchief, as if stupefied by what she heard. Her mother had made secret and frequent pilgrimages to this spot—had tended the tomb of the obscure mechanic as carefully as Malcolm had done! Could she believe it? and, if so, to what motive should she attribute the marvel?

"I have found the handkerchief," she said, with the recollection

that she was listening to a servant's tale—even more—interrogating him with regard to what his mistress had chosen to conceal—an action her training had taught her to regard as highly dishonorable. "I will take it to Mrs. Rashleigh myself."

She preceded him to the lower ground, and was ready to remount by the time he arrived, puffing after the effort to keep up with her rapid pace. On gaining the road, where the trees did not hinder her view of the heavens, Katherine discovered that the clouds hung darker and lower, and the more penetrating humidity of the air warned her of rain close at hand. Omar responded with spirit to the shake of the rein and the energetic voice that urged him onward; but he was too late in commencing the race. The large, slow drops were beginning to come in faster streams when the reeking horses reached home.

"My child, we had become exceedingly uneasy on your account," said the Colonel, standing upon the porch-steps—his tower of observation for the past half-hour. "I should have been displeased if the shower had wetted you. You should observe the weather more attentively when abroad."

"You are very warm," remarked Mrs. Rashleigh.

"Because I rode so fast, mamma. I have been in the woods, papa. That was the cause of my not perceiving how threatening the sky had grown since I went out."

She threw off her hat, and drew out a handkerchief to wipe her forehead. Mrs. Rashleigh recognized it at a glance, and Katherine, chancing also to look at what she held, grew crimson with embarrassment.

"It is not safe for you to stand here," said her mother. "The wind is too fresh. You had better go upstairs and lay off your habit, and be careful not to get cool too suddenly."

She extended her hand for the handkerchief, which Katherine resigned as silently.

She was not so obedient to the word of command. There was

no fire in her chamber, and, after getting rid of the damp, heavy riding-dress, she stood—with bare shoulders and arms, as she had afterward reason to recollect—leaning against the window-casing and watching the drifting sheets of rain that now veiled the landscape and beat upon the panes, absorbed in perplexing thought, until her maid rapped for admittance.

Colonel Rashleigh enjoyed the wet night. He had a fire built in the library, which was insufferable to every one else, and basked, or roasted himself in its blaze, with apparent and audible expression of the home-comfort he derived from the operation. Mrs. Rashleigh was not well, and did not appear below after supper; Mrs. Holt was driven out by the heat, and Katherine shunned the apartment for the same reason. The family sitting-room was without a fire-place, and the great parlor was cold and dark. She could not bear the solitude of her chamber and the sobbing echoes that called to her in the rain without. In her purposeless wanderings through the passages and over the stairs, she happened upon the housekeeper's room.

Miss Nancy Wilkinson was tall, spare and angular; a trifle too sharp upon the servants, and with some old-maidish peculiarities of behavior and ideas, but was, withal, a very excellent manager, cook and woman. Her place suited her as well as she suited her employers; only, she had been used to more familiarity—was treated more as a companion among those who knew her history and connections, which were with one of the best families in the county. Her grandfather was a man of distinction in his neighborhood and time, and had owned more acres than his descendant did shillings. But his children spent faster than he had gathered, and found the remembrance of past grandeur an insufficient provision for present needs. Hence, the granddaughter's occupation.

Unmolested by haunting spectres of the different things which might have been, she now sat bolt-upright at a deal table, sleeves

pinned up to her shoulders, stoning raisins. Citron, spices and sugar were ranged before her, waiting for their share of attention. She looked benignly through her spectacles at Katherine's approach, for Miss Barbara had reported correctly respecting her opinion of the "Englisher's" daughter.

"What delicious compound are you at work upon to-night, Miss Nancy?" she inquired.

"A real English plum-pudding, honey. Your ma has told me exactly how to make it, as your pa loves it; and as to-morrow is his birthday, we are going to have roast beef and plum-pudding."

"Good! So to-morrow is his birthday? I am ashamed of myself for having forgotten it. I am in a busy humor, Miss Nancy. Please let me help you. Will you trust me to shred this citron? I used to sit, for hours at a time, in our housekeeper's room in England, and she taught me a smattering of all sorts of cookery."

"Why didn't she cross the seas with you?"

"Her children were married and settled, and begged her to live among them, and as she was getting old, she consented, and gave up her profession."

A sigh stirred the starched folds of Miss Nancy's neckerchief.

"Married women—widows I mean—don't often take up that line of life in this country. Indeed, there are not many regular housekeepers about here. I don't know of but two others beside me, in ten miles round. Miss Polly Saunders, she lives at Mr. Armistead's, for Mrs. Armistead is in poor health, and Barbary Brook has kept house at Ben Lomond for nigh upon forty years, I reckon. You mightn't think it, but she has learnt me a heap of things, for I am younger than Barbary by a good deal."

"She must be greatly attached to the family, to remain so long in one place," returned Katherine, mincing the translucent slips of sweetmeat.

"You may well say that! She has been a second mother to

them children. Malcolm—Mr. Argyle, I s'pose I ought to call him, but I *can't* remember that he isn't a boy, any longer—he don't know any difference between her and his real mother, who died when he was a child. She was a beautiful woman. He and Mrs. Moreau both look like her—he most, though, for she had such a lovely expression—such a sweet smile! Yes! he loves Barbary mightily, and is a great comfort to her in her old age." Another sigh. "To be sure," she resumed, "*I* helped to raise a family of children; but their mother is living, and that makes a difference. Then, again, they're not the same sort as Mr. Argyle. People can't change their naters, and all hearts are not warm alike. If they were, Marcia Selden wouldn't never have jilted Malcolm Argyle."

"Were you living at Mr. Selden's then?"

"I was, and a high time they had about it. Marcia was loath to give him up, but her mother thought 'twas best, and maybe 'twas; but it's my notion, that a girl ought to think twice before she throws away as much sure-enough love as Malcolm had for her. Dear me! I recollect as well as if it was yesterday, my meeting the poor fellow in the passage, after he got his discard. His face had no more color in it than there is in a table-cloth, and he shook all over, in a kind of ague; but for all that, his eyes were, for all the world, like live coals—terrible to see! I was real sorry for him, but I was too afraid of his looks to say a word. I'd as soon have taken hold of a lion's paw as offer to shake hands with him. He's suffered a great deal and a long time!"

The innocently artful spinster had a double object in dwelling upon this theme; one being to determine for herself the truth of certain reports that had reached her ears; hints of a second suit and another, but more honorable rejection of her hero; the other, to awaken an interest for him in Katherine's tender heart, if it had never moved for him before.

There was a profound silence. The curling shreds of citron fell regularly into the dish, until the last piece was cut, and Katherine asked what she could do next.

"The currants are to be washed, but it is dirty work, and I can't let you do it."

"I can weigh your sugar and flour. How much of each?" said Katherine, catching up the scales.

Miss Nancy gave the direction required, and, convinced that her shafts had not hit the mark, took a nearer stand and more direct aim.

"Whatever sent Mr. Argyle out West or South, or wherever 'tis he's gone—do you know, Miss Katherine?"

"The desire to travel, I imagine."

"Barbary is mightily cut up about it. She hoped to have him near her always, and now, she thinks there is no telling whether he'll ever settle down again. I heard the other day, he had written home that he had bought, or was thinking of buying, a plantation out there. That's the way with most men that go South. They never come back. 'Twill be a hard thing for Barbary to leave the old place at her age!"

Crash! came down the scales upon the table, and the two half-pound weights dashed into the bowl of eggs, breaking and spattering them in all directions. Without apology for her carelessness, or regret at its consequences, Katherine left the house-keeper to bemoan the catastrophe by herself.

Miss Rashleigh's maid was not rung up to her room, that night, and after waiting until a late hour, went of her own accord to the door, and listened. All was still, and her tap, repeated several times, received no reply. She tried the door. It was not fast and she pushed it open softly. Katherine had fallen asleep in her chair, by the side of the hearth where the fire had burned out to ashes. She was in her night-robe, and between her hands was crushed a little heap of papers—seemingly notes. Her cheek was blue and her breathing short.

"She will ketch her death of cold!" muttered the woman.
"Miss Katherine!"

"What? Lucy! is it you?" said Katherine, in nervous confusion. "I was nearly asleep!"

She gathered up the papers and thrust them hastily into a drawer, which she locked.

"How fearfully cold it is!" she added, shaking in every limb, while her lips and finger-tips were of a greyish purple.

"Let me rub your feet, or get a hot brick for them!" begged the uneasy servant.

"No, thank you! I will get into bed. Now, bury me in the blankets! I am frozen through and through!"

These were the last coherent words she uttered for many days. The next morning, she was in a high fever and delirium—just the type of illness that was likely to seize upon one of her physical and mental temperament. The two physicians, summoned by the Colonel, looked grave over her, and evaded inquiries as to the likelihood of her recovery; and for miles around, the story went like wildfire, that she was already given over by them both.

Yet, such was Miss Barbara's seclusion and indifference to current events, that the news was a couple of days old, before she heard it. It reached her at night-fall, and an hour after sunrise on the succeeding day, she presented herself at Briarwood, and asked to see Mrs. Rashleigh.

She is in Miss Rashleigh's room, and cannot see company!" replied Thomas, stoutly.

"It's likely I'm come as company—isn't it?" said Miss Barbara. "I look like a fashionable visitor—don't I? I'll wait here in the sittin' room for three minutes and a half, and jist you step upstairs, on your tiptoes—mind you! and tell Mrs. Rashleigh there's a person here wishes to see her."

The specified time was exceeded by several minutes, when Mrs. Rashleigh appeared. She had passed the night in her

daughter's chamber, and looked worn down with sleeplessness and anxiety. She stopped short on perceiving her visitor, but without waiting to see whether her surprise were pleasant or disagreeable, Miss Barbara said, straightly and squarely:

"I've heard that your daughter is sick, and come to help nurse her, if you'll let me. There's no hired nurses round here, and you ain't overly strong."

This was only the second sight she had had of the "proud English lady," and the former was restricted to a glimpse at the church, on the day of Mr. Laidley's preaching there. She had, however, heard such tales of her reserve and haughtiness, that she was immeasurably astonished when Mrs. Rashleigh held out her hand, with a smile of magical beauty, and said in a voice tremulous with emotion—"I thank you! If it will not be an imposition upon your goodness, I accept your offer—gratefully! When can you come?"

"In two minutes! I'll jist tell the man who brought me over, not to wait."

She trotted to the front door, and was back directly, to follow Mrs. Rashleigh up stairs.

"How is she this mornin'?" she asked, at the top of the steps.

"No better!" The lady spoke dejectedly.

"That's because the fever hasn't run its course. There's no reason in gettin' uneasy so soon as this."

Perhaps she altered her mind, when she stood by the sick girl, and beheld the preternaturally bright eye; the crimson cheek; the tossings from side to side on the heated couch, and heard the strained, hurried accents, that so pierced the heart of loving watchers—the utterances of the fever demon through lips that were never before parted by such tones. Katherine talked incessantly, foolishly, wildly—prattled as a child might have done to her dog, her bird, her horse. She often laughed—a hollow, senseless peal; sometimes—and that was hardest of all to bear—she

sang, still in that false, strange voice, songs that she used to warble from room to room, with the wildwood sweetness of her own linnets.

"Poor thing ! poor thing !" said Miss Barbara, when she heard this.

She had not spoken a word of compassion before. Her look and bearing had been precisely those of a professional nurse, who was conscientious in her resolve to deserve her wages. She had come hither at the bidding of duty ; but in her heart, there was no love and little charity for the woman who had ruthlessly wrecked her "boy's" happiness.

Distant and taciturn as was the mother, Miss Barbara was more attracted toward her than to the daughter. The concord between the stately lady and the unpolished housekeeper was perfect from the moment of their meeting. Hitherto, Mrs. Rashleigh had not left Katherine's sick-bed. This morning, she retired to her own chamber, and slept for two hours, Miss Barbara assuming the post of custodian in the patient's room. They attended her jointly, and by turns, never crossing each other in a single opinion, and conforming readily to one another's ways. Mrs. Holt, with every disposition to make herself useful, and suffering acute anxiety on her pupil's account, was a very tyro in nursing. Where book-learning could avail nothing, she was at sea, and Mrs. Rashleigh was so thoroughly aware of this that she would not have allowed her to administer the simplest medicine to her child. Therefore, the poor lady read consolatory works aloud to Colonel Rashleigh, when he was not too perturbed to listen, and to herself, when she had no auditor, and offered up fervent prayers from her unworldly heart, for the restoration of the drooping flower of the household.

Mrs. Moreau, who paid daily calls, came as usual on the day of Miss Barbara's arrival.

"Will *you* see her ?" said Mrs. Rashleigh, as word of her presence below was brought up to the sick-chamber.

Miss Barbara thought it an odd request, but complied.

"You here !" exclaimed Mrs. Moreau. "You are the last person in creation I should have expected to see. Did they send for you ?"

"Mrs. Rashleigh's compliments and she hopes Mrs. Moreau will excuse her from coming down, Miss Rashleigh being so ill," repeated Miss Barbara, demurely, without sitting down.

Mrs. Moreau changed her tone. "Nonsense, Miss Barbara ! Take a seat and tell me all about poor dear Katherine ! We are perfectly wretched !"

"No need of that ! She's as likely to git well as to die."

"Do you think so ! The doctors consider hers a very critical case."

"They *say* so, I know !"

"And she is really better to-day ! This is glad news !"

"She's worse, if there's any change. But she's got to be worse yet before I give her up."

"I am delighted that Mrs. Rashleigh has engaged you as nurse. I have often told her of your skill in that line, and I am pleased that she has remembered it now. You can be easily spared from home, while Malcolm is away. When did you hear from him ?"

"Yesterday."

"Where was he ?"

"In Louisiana."

"How was he ?"

"Well." Miss Barbara was growing bitingly short.

"You will stay here some time, I suppose, until the poor child's illness is terminated one way or the other."

"I shall stay till she is out of danger !"

Miss Barbara was mindful, in all this interview, of the fact that Mr. Moreau was the next heir, after Katherine, to his uncle's estate, and stubbornly set upon discouraging premature and unfounded expectations.

"You have cheered me wonderfully!" said Eleanor. "I must hasten home and carry the good tidings to Mr. Moreau. He is very much attached to his cousin. Is the poor girl sensible?"

"No."

"Still delirious?"

"Yes."

"What does she talk about?" Involuntarily Eleanor lowered her voice and glanced over her shoulder.

An idea darted into Miss Barbara's head: "What could Katherine tell that Mrs. Moreau had rather should not be revealed?" And treading swiftly after it, came the recollection that Katherine was staying at Montrouge when she rejected Malcolm.

"About all sorts of things!" she replied, reservedly.

"Trifles, no doubt. What a mistaken notion it is, yet what a general mistake, that people are apt, in delirium, to speak of what they think most of when well! As if a diseased mind could run in the same channel with a healthy one!"

No answer from Miss Barbara, but an air of mysterious prudence.

"Does it not appear absurd to you?" urged Mrs. Moreau.

"Some folks think one thing, some another!" oracularly.

"But Katherine rambles on about trivial things, you say? Does she know where she is, and who are with her?"

"Sometimes she does—sometimes she doesn't."

"Does she ever speak of us? I should suppose she would—she has spent so much time at our house."

"If she did, 'twouldn't be honorable in me to tell you. I have something else to attend to besides eavesdroppin' what she wouldn't let on, if she wasn't out of her head. Would you like to see Mrs. Holt? I'm wanted upstairs!"

"Eleanor went away uncomfortable, thus accomplishing part

of Miss Barbara's design, while, upon the mind of the volunteer nurse, the impression was fastened, that, as she phrased it to herself, "Eleanor had been at her old tricks," and "that there was underhand work somewhere."

The red fever burned on, licking up the life-blood in its fury, until it seemed as if the veins must be left dry, when its violence should be spent. The mother's face grew daily more wan, and her eye more sunken; but she resisted the ravages of weariness and care with a strength that appeared not to belong to her delicate frame. Upon Miss Barbara's whiteleather constitution, no amount of unrest or labor produced any perceptible effect. She bore up the better that her sympathies had become interested for her suffering charge. Wildly astray as Katherine's thoughts ran, she was never rebellious to the gentle authority exercised over her; invariably submitted, without demur, to the directions and restrictions of her attendants.

"She was never disobedient!" said Mrs. Rashleigh, when Miss Barbara remarked upon this docility.

The mother had just administered a nauseous potion, which was swallowed uncomplainingly, and as she replaced the cup upon the table, Miss Barbara saw the spasm that contracted brow and lip. Except in these unguarded moments, she was composed, and evinced none of the deadly apprehension that was preying upon her heart.

It was the ninth night after Katherine's attack, a stormy November evening, when the wind roared like some frantic thing, trying to force its way through the rattling casements, and the leafless boughs of the grove groaned in the anguish of their writhings. By ten o'clock the household was still. The Colonel was in the library, too sad and lonely to open book or newspaper. He could only listen for the occasional footsteps upon the floor of his daughter's room overhead, and think of the terrible change that had fallen upon that young life; wonder, in a vacant,

piteous way, why she was smitten down, and he, a grey, sapless trunk, left standing. Above-stairs, the vigil was anxious to agony—agony expressed in Mrs. Rashleigh's compressed lips and bloodless cheek, and Miss Barbara's nervous movements. Katherine's pulse raced more madly than ever, and her moans, as she threw her arms about, and moved her head uneasily on her pillow, were plaintive beyond comparison. Her voice, too, took a different key, low and mournful, and her fancies were no more gaily fantastic. Mother and nurse looked into each other's eyes inquiringly—fearfully—as the sounds fell upon their ears. Each silently asked, "What means the change?" Neither dared give language to the dread that arose in reply.

"The rain! the rain!" said the sick girl. "Oh, I cannot bear it! It fell just so mournfully that night! It says over and over, the same thing: 'Farewell, Katherine! Farewell, Katherine!' I shall never see him again. Miss Nancy says that he will never come back to Ben Lomond."

From either side of the couch, those eyes, so full of fear, yet longing to hear more, looked into each other, and mother and nurse were still as marble watchers above the dead.

"If I could have told him of the letter! But I promised his sister that I would not. It was very bitter! I think I shall never feel such pain again until I come to die. He never loved me, although he would have married me. Was not that dreadful? He said so in that letter. He never loved any one but Marcia Selden."

A start! and a ray of intelligence passed from eye to eye, and they stared fixedly upon one another again.

"That was long ago—but he feels it yet. His is a deep heart. He used to say that mine was, too. I think that greater sorrow is reserved for such. Deep as mine is, it is filled up to the brim. I am very young to suffer so much. They say the Lord is pitiful and gracious. Oh, Father! hear me, while I plead—I am so young! so young!"

"Poor little lamb!" sobbed Miss Barbara. "Oh, Mrs. Rashleigh! I mistrust there has been foul work here! The Lord forgive them as done it!"

"He never will! I never can!" She arose, like an outraged prophetess. "I have suspected this all along! Those who murdered the father, could not spare his child!"

Miss Barbara sprang to her feet in haste and fright—convinced that the girl's delirium had produced insanity in the mother.

"Mamma!" Katherine settled her large, bright eyes upon her parent's agitated features. "Do you recollect the doll papa made for me—my Christmas gift? Where is it now?"

Mrs. Rashleigh was mute.

"Where is it?" repeated Katherine, "I took good care of it, I am sure. When I find it, maybe you will call me 'Kitty' again. It would do your poor child good, mamma, I ache so—here!" She caught her mother's hand and pressed it upon her heart.

"My Kitty! my precious darling! my own little Kitty!" cried the lady, pride and self-control breaking down before the rush of maternal emotion. Falling upon the bed, she clasped her arms around her daughter and drew her to her bosom. Forgetful of prudence, she showered kisses upon her forehead, cheeks and lips, with passionate murmurings of the long-repressed love.

"Gently! gently! you will excite her too much!" cautioned Miss Barbara—but her voice shook, and her countenance wore an affrighted look, as of one who had seen a vision from the other world.

She pressed a glass of wine upon the mother, and persuaded her to lie down upon the other bed, which had been placed in the room for the watchers. While the lady's unwonted excitement passed off in hysterical sobs, the considerate nurse busied herself about the patient; bathing her head and hands, smoothing the covers and turning the pillows.

At length, Mrs. Rashleigh got up, and approached her, as she still stood at the bedside.

One glance was exchanged, and Miss Barbara said: "You are Bessy Hale!"

"I was!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

DAYS passed, ere another syllable was said with regard to the communication made on the night when the fever reached its crisis. There was no place in Miss Barbara's soul for curiosity or wonderment, for Katherine's life hung on a hair. At last, the physicians lost all hope, and the household gathered in the room to see her breathe away the poor remnant of a life, lately so full and strong. Then did Miss Barbara arise in her might, and after informing the pair of Galens that she held them to be pests in any family which was so foolish or unfortunate as to employ them, she cleared the chamber of all intruders, commencing with the indignant professors of the healing art, and not stopping even at Colonel Rashleigh, whom she assured, as she shut him out, that she "would show him yet how much more a live daughter was worth than a dead one."

After this *coup d'etat*, she took the case into her own hands, and her semi-conscious patient soon acknowledged the efficacy of her nursing. In one week more, she was pronounced out of danger, and Miss Barbara began to think of going home.

One evening she left Katherine sleeping quietly, with Mrs. Holt to watch her, and knocked for admittance at Mrs. Rashleigh's door. That lady had put on the double wrapper she wore by night in her daughter's chamber, and her thick hair was brushed back from her face, leaving exposed its sharpened, rigid outlines. Miss Barbara did not marvel that she had not recognized her at an earlier date of their intercourse. But for her

confession of her identity with the blooming, smiling wife of Mark Hale, her old friend would have questioned now the reality of her discovery. Not a feature, not a motion was Bessy's. Only an occasional intonation struck a responsive chord in the memory of the listener, as she made minute inquiries as to her judgment of the sick girl's condition.

All was going on well, Miss Barbara said. She wasn't likely to get well very fast. She had been too ill for that. But "slow and sure" was the safest, and therefore the best rule after fevers. Then, she broached the subject of her own departure. The servants at Ben Lomond were trustworthy, yet it was her place, and her work at Briarwood seemed to be drawing to a close.

"First—tell me why you came at all," said Mrs. Rashleigh. Miss Barbara's answer was as directly to the point.

"You love your child, and I love mine. When he went away—broken-spirited, because she had turned him off—he charged me if I could ever be of any use to her, to serve her as I would do him, if he were in her place. That's why I'm here!"

"Who told you that she rejected him?"

"He did."

"While she was at Montrouge?"

"Yes."

"Did she assign any cause for not accepting him?"

"No."

"What do you believe was her reason?"

"Think she was put up to it by other people—meddlers!"

"Enough! Why have you not asked me further about what my history has been since you parted from me, twelve years since?"

"Supposed you would tell me what you chose, when the right time came."

Without other introduction, and as composedly as if she were relating the story of another's life, she told the tale—which, as

we shall learn its leading events from another source, we need not repeat in this place.

"And this poor child, Kitty—Katherine! you believe that she has forgotten all about her living here—her father and Malcolm and me! And she used to be a smart, bright little creature, too!"

"She has recollections of some events of her infancy. Names of places and persons she has lost. I considered it best that she should do so. There was no one to keep alive the memory of these things except myself, and I have done all that I could to help her to forget them. A contrary course would only have made her curious and unhappy, without doing any good."

"Maybe so; but it's sad to think on. Poor Mark!"

Again that deep, but momentary furrow of pain in the forehead—that tightening of the mouth. Mrs. Rashleigh said nothing for a moment—then replied:

"Colonel Rashleigh has been a most kind parent to Katherine. She owes him a daughter's affectionate duty. Why should I divide her love for him by recalling a Past that would only make her wretched? Moreover, I am bound by a promise to Colonel Rashleigh not to divulge her real parentage to her while he lives. He has never had a child of his own, and he is extremely—jealously attached to her."

"That's easy to see. She is the apple of his eye. But how did you happen to come back here? I should ha' thought you would have been afraid that somebody would know you."

"Know me!" She smiled contemptuously at her image in the mirror opposite. "Would Adam have known the Garden of Eden after the Deluge had passed over it? People that have lived through experiences like mine are never themselves again, outwardly or inwardly. Did Mr. Argyle or Mrs. Moreau—did you remember me?"

"You *are* mightily altered! Your daughter is like what you

used to be. I noticed it the first time I seen her, and Malcolm has often spoken of it to me."

"Yet Mrs. Moreau pronounces her 'a noble type of high-born beauty!'"

Her sarcastic tone suggested the repetition of a former question.

"Why did you come back here? You must dislike to be on friendly, sociable terms with Eleanor and the Sancrofts."

"Friendly terms!" Her brow lowered and her eyes glowed. "The Future may tell another story. I did not choose to come to America—still less to Virginia—still less to this neighborhood. Destiny willed it. When I married Colonel Rashleigh I was ignorant of his relationship to Robert Moreau. He had disowned his sister at her marriage, and it was not until within three years back that accident made him acquainted with the existence and residence of her only surviving child. The discovery revealed to me a coincidence so remarkable that I encouraged his disposition to write to his nephew and propose a reconciliation. A correspondence grew out of this, which I read without taking part in it. In process of time, this same Destiny made another significant move. The physicians advised our removal from England, declaring that I could not live longer in so humid an atmosphere, and Colonel Rashleigh, of his own free will, proposed that we should join his nephew in Virginia. Mark me! I was passive—was careful to say nothing against—nothing in favor of the scheme. Yet I knew that we would come. I saw the Hand, invisible to others, that drew me hither—that has armed me for my work!"

"It is the Lord's doings!" said Miss Barbara, shocked at the effects of the suppressed excitement that shook her from head to foot. "It is marvellous in our eyes."

"You call it Providence. I bow to it as Destiny. It is all the same thing—the One Certain Power, that avenges the weak and the wronged by human instrumentality; to whom the blood

of the innocent cries from the ground; the Judge who appoints a day of reckoning and retribution even in this world. This is the Deity I adore; for His chariot-wheels I have waited—I am persuaded, not in vain!"

She strove to master the rising passion—fought with it until the veins stood out, blue and swollen within the sunken temples. A casket was near her upon the table, and unclasping it with uncertain fingers, she took out a phial, and hastily swallowed a portion of its contents. It was rapid in its workings upon the convulsed frame. A languor—a heavy listlessness stole over her—weighed upon her voice.

"Your just sense of expediency will show you the necessity of secrecy with respect to this conversation," she said. "Colonel Rashleigh does not suspect my early connection with his relatives. He married me without inquiry into my antecedents. I was a respectable woman—a widow with one child—poor and comparatively uneducated. He gave me his name and wealth; adopted my daughter, and granted me every facility for acquiring the knowledge I needed to fit me for my new station. He does not even know that I have ever lived in Virginia before. It was more than generous—it was a grand and noble confidence which he reposed in me. Until Fate ordains that he shall be disturbed, let him rest!"

"If you will excuse me, I will sleep for an hour now. When I rejoin you in Katherine's room we can speak of your going home. I hope, however, that you will not insist upon it for some days to come."

"I don't feel like myself!" soliloquized Miss Barbara, walking up and down the passage to compose features and nerves. "That woman is not in her right mind! That's clear as daylight to me, and some of these days she'll do mischief! But who can wonder at her? She has had trouble enough to drive any one crazy, let alone her having been whirled around the world—now at the

bottom, now at the top of the wheel. There's not a bit of Bessy Hale left! 'Twould have been a mercy to have covered her up in her husband's grave, when he was buried. Poor Mark! It's a blessed thought that there is One who can see the end from the beginning; who can bring order out of confusion and light out of darkness, for we silly, blind mortals git mightily bewildered in the crooked ways of this life."

And, as was the custom of this earnest, single-hearted woman when overcome by perplexity about things beyond her ken, she prayed inwardly that the afflicted might be comforted and the erring reclaimed—not punished.

Katherine awoke after a refreshing sleep, and found the kind, homely nurse at her side. She had recognized her so gradually in her weakness, that she was spared the confusion she would have felt at a sudden knowledge of her presence and attendance. Without inquiring why or when she had come, she resigned herself to her care with the trust of a child; and as she regained her strength, testified her gratitude by many a look and word.

"I have had a fine nap; I feel better," she said, smiling. "How late is it?"

"Just ten o'clock."

"I was in hopes that it was near morning. Do you think that I will sleep again before day?"

"Oh, yes! You'll sleep more and more every night now, until you do just as you used to, when you were well—never turn over from the time you lay down until you git up."

"I have not slept so soundly as that for many weeks!" sighed Katherine. "Probably the fever was coming on and made me restless."

"Very likely. Let me beat up your pillows. Would you like to sit up awhile?"

"Can I? Am I strong enough?"

"We will see."

She seated herself behind Katherine, with a pillow upon her arm, thus forming a sort of chair, in which the patient reclined with an expression of great satisfaction.

"I have had a pleasant dream!" she said, in the faint voice in which debility obliged her to speak. "It was very distinct, too. You remember Mr. Laidley, the minister who preached for Mr. Kenny, one Sabbath last summer?"

"Yes."

"I dreamed that he had come to see me. He stood just there"—pointing to the side of the bed—"and said—you recollect his sweet tones—'From the woes which our own sins and the sins of others have brought upon us, Christ is able to deliver us. If the Father smites us sorely, it is that we may be healed by the Son!'"

Astonished and thrilled, Miss Barbara was speechless. Katherine lay, with closed eyes and smiling mouth, as if dwelling upon some delightful theme. At length, she asked:

"Miss Barbara, are you a Christian?"

"I hope so, dear."

"I wish I were! Mrs. Holt is very pious, but although my head understands what she says, when I question her about religion, my heart is as dull and cold as clay."

Miss Barbara, charitable as she was, thought this a natural result of Mrs. Holt's strict adherence to forms and creeds—her correct, but formal manner of speaking upon "serious subjects."

"I have always said my prayers regularly and attended church. Papa and Mrs. Holt wished to have me confirmed, but mamma objected. She said some radical change of heart was necessary."

"She was right. Our Saviour says, 'Ye must be born again.'"

"I am too weak now to talk or to hear, but when I am stronger will you tell me more about these things? I have read of the 'Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.' I never had

either brother or sister, I am very lonely in the world"—her lips quivered, and a tear escaped from beneath the long, black lashes. "I think that I should like to have this 'Friend' for my own."

Miss Barbara gave a hearty assent to her request, and replaced her on the bed, lest she should become wearied by sitting up too long. Then, while the girl fell into a doze, the nurse laid her head upon the bedside, and besought the God of the covenant to remember this child, consecrated in infancy to His service. Miss Barbara was steadfast in her belief—if not of hereditary piety—in the efficacy of parental prayers, the power of parental faith. She had heard all the circumstances of Mark's last hours—how he had commended his family to the Father's care, and prayed that he might meet them in heaven. She was not a fatalist, as was Mrs. Rashleigh, but she believed and rejoiced that she saw the workings of a mighty and merciful Being, who, through devious and unlikely paths, was bringing this lamb into the fold. What the mother had overlooked in her disordered perception of duty to the living and justice to the dead, the God of the sainted father would yet perform in His own good time and way.

CHAPTER XXX.

Two weeks later than the time occupied by the events narrated in the foregoing chapter, Malcolm Argyle was overtaken by nightfall in the midst of a Southern forest. He had performed the day's journey alone, and perceiving that he was not yet in sight of the house he had expected to reach at sunset, he began to fear that he had lost his way. This idea gained strength, as the end of another mile showed him still the seemingly interminable stretch of woods on either side of the narrow road. The shadows under the trees were growing blacker and broader, and dusk was creeping across the path a little way ahead of him. The dense banners of moss pendant from the boughs were like sable draperies in the vast colonnade of Nature's building, as, with the cool of the evening, there fell upon the solitude a stillness so intense as to be painful.

Putting spurs to his horse, Malcolm rode sharply on, as his best chance of getting other shelter for the night than the mossy branches, with a heap of withered leaves for his couch. Behind him, he knew, were many miles unmarked by human habitation. The darkness increased with every step, until but for the gap in the branches above, that showed him the stars, he would have had great difficulty in keeping the road, such as it was. Mud-holes of inconvenient width and problematical depth; stumps from one to two feet high, left to be worn down by wheels and hoofs—and more than once a fallen tree, lying partly across the route, were some of the obstacles besides the gloom that hindered

his advance. Just as hope and courage were despairing of their final reward, the welcome tinkle of a cow-bell was borne to his ears. His horse pricked up his at the sound, and having some knowledge of the creature's sagacity, Malcolm dropped the reins upon his neck and let him choose his own course. He observed, by referring to the stars, that they were bearing to the right, and from the frequent flapping, on either side of his face, of the hanging moss, he judged that they were in a byway, yet more narrow than the one they had left. The barking of dogs was further confirmation of their approach to a house of some description, and reining up, he shouted until the woods returned a deafening echo.

"Halloo!" came back with so weak a sound that he imagined himself mistaken as to his distance from the clearing, and was surprised a minute after, to see the gleam of a lighted door, not a hundred yards ahead of him. This was obscured by a figure that emerged from it, and advanced toward him slowly, and evidently intent upon the kindling of a pitchpine torch in its hand. As this flared out into the still air, the traveller beheld the form and face of a boy, clad roughly and gazing curiously up at him.

"I have lost my way in the woods. Can I stay here until morning?" asked Malcolm.

"I reckon so. I'll ask mother," and off darted the little fellow into the cabin—for it seemed nothing more as beheld imperfectly through the darkness.

The child returned, breathless with running and excitement.

"Mother says you must 'light and walk in. I'll take your horse."

The hostess met him on the threshold. She was a woman in middle life—forty-five, or thereabouts; plain, but kindly of visage, and attired, like her son, in coarse homespun.

"You are welcome, sir, if you can put up with our poor way of living."

"Thank you, madam. I am the one to apologize for intruding myself into your home, at such an unseasonable hour. I missed my road several miles back, and did not discover my mistake until night overtook me. I was forced to choose between remaining in the outer air until morning, and throwing myself upon your kindness."

"I am glad you stopped, sir. Please to take a chair. These are my two daughters!" she said, as Malcolm bowed to two shy, blushing girls of fourteen and sixteen, who retired from the fire at his approach.

The house had but one room on the ground-floor, with a loft above. The furniture was mean and scanty, but scrupulously clean; plates and cups were set out upon a pine table in the middle of the floor, and an appetizing odor of fried bacon saluted the traveller's olfactories. While the hostess dished this, one of her daughters raked out some sweet potatoes from their bed of hot ashes, and after brushing them off, placed them upon a pewter platter. Another of smoking hominy was added; a pitcher of milk, and a plate of butter, and the guest was invited to partake of the evening meal.

"It is all we can give you, sir," said the good woman, coloring. "I wish we had something better."

Malcolm declared, with an emphasis that carried with it conviction of his sincerity, that he desired nothing more delicious. Insisting that the hostess should retain the seat of honor—the only chair that had a back—which she offered to him, he drew up one of the rude stools, such as the children used, and fell to work upon the eatables with the relishful hunger of a man who had been in the saddle and fasting since noon.

The tact innate to a true gentleman soon made them all feel at ease, and so won upon the good graces of the head of the house, that she indulged, without restraint, in the rare pleasure of conversation with a stranger from the world beyond the

woods, and which she had not seen for so long. Her husband had removed to this wilderness ten years before, when there was not another house or clearing within a day's journey. Now—and she stated it with the satisfaction of one who was proud of being the inhabitant of a thriving community—there were two other families, not more than six miles off. She had been a widow for four years. When her husband died and left her with three children to provide for—the youngest, the boy, whom she called “Mal,” but seven years old—she felt as if nothing but starvation awaited them; but the Lord had helped them through all their “tough times.” The neighbors (?) were very kind. They did the spring and fall ploughing of the small farm; the planting and hoeing and weeding was performed by her daughters and herself. They had an old horse, which was still able to carry corn to the mill, and to jog back and forth upon the little errands she had abroad; and a cow, without whose milk they could not live; a calf that would be a cow next year, and always as many pigs as they wanted, that fattened in the woods.

To these artless details, Malcolm listened sympathizingly, and with secret admiration of the contentment and courage of the faithful mother, who found so many blessings in a lot that to most people would have been one of unmitigated hardship. The supper over, both mother and girls sat down at the fire with their knitting. The boy established himself upon a block in the corner, with a piece of board and a bit of charred stick, to which he applied himself as diligently as though work and not play were his object.

“Are you learning to draw?” inquired Malcolm of him.

The boy looked up, and his fine, intelligent face was dyed with bashful blushes.

“No, sir,” he replied.

“He is trying to write,” said his mother, betwixt a smile and a sigh. “There’s no schools near us, and if there was, I can’t

afford to send him just now. I’ve taught my children to read and write as far as I could; but paper and ink are too dear to be wasted, and Mal hasn’t any slate. The other day, he came running in, in great spirits, to tell me that he had seen a lot of ends of smooth board over at Mr. Humphrey’s, who is building a frame house, and Mr. Humphrey had told him he might have ‘em. And he brought ‘em home and r’ally they answer pretty well. He’s improved smartly since he got ‘em. Show the gentleman your writin’, Mal.”

With a deeper blush, the boy handed him the primitive tablet, on which he had scrawled—“Malcum Argile Foster.”

“Malcolm Argyle! where did you get that name, my little man?”

“He got it in a queer sort of way, sir,” responded the mother.

“It was given to him by a little girl not more than five years old—Kitty Hale was her name.”

Malcolm started violently.

“I once knew a person of that name,” he said, huskily. “Where did she live at the time you speak of. Do you know where she is now?”

“Indeed I don’t, sir, no more than the dead! ’Twas when we lived in North Carolina, in a place called Pineville. There wasn’t anything of a town there, for all they called it ‘ville,’ hoping, I s’pose, that it would grow bigger sometime. There was the tavern and store, all in one house, and the blacksmith’s shop, and we lived on our farm, a matter of a quarter of a mile from the tavern. It was kept by a widow woman; a Mrs. Smith, who married for her second husband a peddler named Bryan, a likely-looking, good-natured fellow, but law me! with no more sperrit in him than there is in milk-and-water; just one of the sort that’s always a-doing odd jobs for other people and never earning the salt to his own bread. Well, the widow took up with him, and about six weeks afterward here came his sister, whose husband had just died in Virginny, and her child, the little Kitty I was

telling you of. It seems that Bryan had wrote to her when he was married, and sent a message from his wife, begging her to pay 'em a visit, for, according to his account, they were doing wonderful well, and Mrs. Bryan, she thought they'd do credit to her fam'ly. She was a cute, managing woman, and fairly mad after getting rich. My husband was down at the store when the wagon drove up with Mrs. Hale, and I've heered him tell how she dropped in a dead faint at her brother's feet, who was mightily shocked, seeing he hadn't got the news of his brother-in-law's death. Well, they brought her to, and by and by got the story from her, and then there was a high quarrel between Bryan and his wife. *She* was for bundling the poor thing out of doors to take care of herself, and he showed some temper for once, and vowed that as long as he had a loaf of bread his sister and her child should have a slice of it. I've heered that the poor woman appeared to be in a stupor-like while the fuss was going on, but the next day she told her brother how she would not stay where she wasn't welcome ; she'd beg along the road first ! By this time Mrs Bryan had cooled down, and afraid of what people would say if she refused her husband's sister a place to lay her head, she proposed that Mrs. Hale should pay her board and her child's by sewing and helping about the store and tavern. What could she do but agree to this ? She was a stranger in a strange country, and could not get any other work if she had tried.

"But 'twas a hard life she had of it, sir ! Mrs. Bryan hated her, and while she made all the use of her she could, she worked her harder than she did her negroes. She was always saying spiteful things about her and to her. Bryan himself called his sister 'Bessy' for awhile, but his wife could not stand this, for her name was Betsey, and she give him no peace till he called her by her first name, 'Margaret,' instead, and Mrs. Bryan, to be aggravating, and disrespect her in every way, altered this to 'Peggy,' when she spoke to her. This was one of the least ways she had

of worrying her. She'd fling it in her teeth, how she had been throwed on her brother's hands—was eating her children's bread—she and little Kitty, and then dare her to leave her brother's house. *She'd* see that she had a name sent after her that would shut the door of all honest people in her face. Yet, they say that Mrs. Hale never answered her back one word except once, when Mrs. Bryan was going to beat Kitty for what she called 'sarce' to her oldest boy. Then Mrs. Hale seized her child and threatened to kill her sister-in-law if she ever laid the weight of her finger on her. I've heered that she was like a tiger, and Mrs. Bryan was desperately scared. She never struck Kitty, but she found plenty of opportunities of spiting 'em both.

"When I first saw Kitty, Mal there was just a week old, and this little girl came over to our house, with one of the young Bryans to borrow a rising of yeast. Mrs. Bryan's had got sour. Well, I was struck with the child the minute I clapped eyes on her. She was no more like Mrs. Bryan's red-haired brat, than snow is like red clay. She spoke so modest and pretty, and had such red cheeks and bright black eyes, I couldn't help but stare at her all the while she was there. I was a-sitting by the fire, with the baby in my lap, and thinking 'twould please her, I turned down the blanket and showed him to her. Mal, my son, get another lightwood knot."

Malcolm did not stir during the pause that ensued, while the torch was adjusted to Mrs. Foster's fancy. Then, she dropped one of her knitting needles, and a general hunt was instituted before she could resume the thread of her narrative. The nails of Malcolm's clinched hand cut into the flesh ; there was a stricture, like the clutch of an iron hand upon his throat, and a ringing and roaring in his brain, like the beat of a hundred iron hammers, but he did not offer comment by word or gesture. Tantalizing as was her verbose lengthening of the tale, he could not speak to hasten the sequel for which he longed.

"Well! as I was saying, I showed her the baby, and she was mightily pleased.

"What's his name?" says she.

"He hasn't got any yet," said I.

"For you see, sir, he was my third boy, and as I had called one after my father and another after my husband, I wasn't particular about this one. He's the only one that's left now!"

She was silent for a moment.

"Says I—'What must I name him, Kitty?' never thinking, you know, sir, that she'd take what I said in earnest. But she looked up at me so wistful—so kind o' sorrowful-like, and says she—'I wish you would call him Malcum Argile'"

Malcolm knocked over his stool and walked to the door; opened it, and stood gasping for breath. The picture was too painfully vivid. He seemed to see through the outer darkness, the large mournful eyes of his lost playfellow; was pierced in the heart at this pathetic evidence of her affection for him. Again, from his soul, arose that sad and vain inquiry—"Dear little Kitty! where is she now?" He would summon strength to listen to the end.

"I beg your pardon, madam!" he said, returning to the fireplace. "I was attacked by a slight giddiness. It is gone now. Pray go on! I am exceedingly interested in your history."

"I was afeerd I might be tiring you?" said the flattered hostess. "I am apt to spin long yarns, the girls tell me.

"So, says I to her—'Malcum Argile!' says I—'honey, that sounds outlandish to me. Did you ever know anybody of that name?"

"Yes, ma'am," says she, "and he was a beautiful gentleman, but he's gone away over the water now."

"Father—that's my husband—was standing by, and he was always a soft-hearted man, and says he—'Mother,' says he, 'that shall be the boy's name, jist to please her!' and being one of your

quick-upon-the-trigger sort, he reached down the family Bible from the chimbley-piece, and wrote it right down, and little Kitty a-looking over him, while he did it, and she was delighted, you may be sure.

"A sweet child she was, and although she was nothing more than a baby, as you may say, she had sense and feeling in abundance. This ugly girl of Mrs. Bryan's—she was kind o' jealous of the notice we took of Kitty, and says she, in a rude, loud way—'Kitty Hale! you are taking on a heap of airs for a beggar, whose father died in a jail!'"

"He didn't!" says Kitty, as spunkey as could be. "Mamma says I'll see papa again some time—so he can't be dead—can he, Mrs. Foster? Mamma says he's gone away, and she don't tell stories—ever!"

"I hadn't it in my heart to tell her what her mother really meant—that she would meet him in Heaven—and so I says—'I hope you will meet him again, dear, and I've no doubt you'll be very happy together.'"

"And after that, she was as chirpy as a bird. *That's* the way my Mal came by his name, sir."

"But the girl! what became of her at last?" said Malcolm, dissembling his feverish impatience.

"That's the strangest part of the story, sir! Things got worse and worse at the tavern. Poor Mrs. Hale was slaving from morning to night, until she was worn down to skin and bone, yet she was a pretty woman in spite of it. She had a grand look and walk, and spoke like a born lady. Mrs. Bryan was forever abusing her for her 'uppish ways.' I never saw her smile, sir! I went down to see her a number of times, for my heart ached for the lone creatur', but she was backward in talking—not one bit sociable. She never was at our house but once, and that was about Christmas, the winter after she came to Pineville. It happened in this way: My husband and I had

noticed that Kitty was getting shabby. Her clothes were always whole and neat, and her face and hands clean, but her gowns were patched and faded, and her shoes fairly gone. So, when husband took our crop to town, he bought her a pair of shoes, along with our children's, and I cut off enough linsey from a piece I had just taken out of the loom, to make her a frock, and sent them down to Mrs. Hale. That evening, she came up to see me, and brought a beauty of a plaid frock, which she said had been given to Kitty more than a year before. She had outgrown it entirely, and her mother hadn't anything to alter it with, but she reckoned 'twould fit my Emmy there, and it did—nicely. She wanted me take it as a proof that she was thankful to me for the things I had sent her girl, and, though I was loath to do it, I saw she would be hurt if I didn't.

"By the time them shoes were worn out, a traveller happened to stop over night at Bryan's tavern—a rich gentleman, with his carriage and horses and two servants. He hadn't been in Ameriky long, for he was an Englishman"—

She stopped, for Malcolm's gaze seemed to go through her.

"Go on—go on!" he said, impatiently.

"This Colonel Rashleigh"—

"I thought so!"

The honest woman feared that her guest had lost his wits, and the girls clung silently to one another, as he strode up and down the room, unconscious where he was, or how he was acting.

"Go on, if you please."

He dropped upon the stool again.

"You don't seem well, sir."

"It is nothing. Go on!"

"There isn't much more to tell. Colonel Rashleigh was taken, in the night, with a spell of gout that tied him down for three weeks. Mrs. Bryan made her sister-in-law wait on him—clear

up his room and take him his meals. When he got better, he paid his bill and left, and matters went on jest the same, for all anybody else could see, and Mrs. Bryan hadn't a notion of anything between the Colonel and Mrs. Hale, until a month afterward, he drove up to the door with a minister and a magistrate, and told Bryan that he had come to marry his sister. Wasn't there a to-do then! Bryan hadn't a word to say, but nothing was too bad for his wife to heap upon Mrs. Hale. We hadn't heard a whisper of what was going on, and I was hard at work at my spinning, when there came sech a knock at the door that I a'most jumped out of my skin. When I opened it, I saw a very respectable-looking man, with a gold band around his hat and a stick in his hand.

"Says he, 'I wish to see Mrs. Foster.'

"Says I, 'This is Mrs. Foster.'

"Then he took off his hat and made me a bow, and says he, 'Mrs. Hale's compliments, and she would like to have you ride down to Mr. Bryan's. She wishes to see you upon important business.'

"I put on my best gown in a hurry, and got into the carriage, feeling like I was in a dream. When I lighted at the tavern-door, the man helped me out, and then showed me up to Mrs. Hale's room—a cuddy-hole of a place, hardly big enough to turn around in. And there she was, dressed up as elegant as could be, in a grey silk gown, and a grey hat with black feathers, and white gloves.

" 'Mrs. Foster,' says she, 'I have made so free as to send for you to be one of the witnesses of my marriage with Colonel Rashleigh. I am all ready.'

"She stooped down, and shut a trunk that I could see was full of handsome things. I've heard since that Colonel Rashleigh had had them made, and brought them with him that morning.

"Mrs. Hale wasn't a bit flustered—jest as grave and quiet

as a judge, and my senses seemed turning topsy-turvy all the time.

" 'You will stay here, Kitty,' says she to her daughter.

" 'The little creatur' sat up on the bed to be out of her mother's way, looking puzzled and scared—the pitifullest stare I ever saw.

" 'Will you come back, mamma?' says she, ready to cry.

" 'In a few minutes,' says Mrs. Hale; and she went up to her and kissed her; but 'twasn't as I, or most other women would kiss their children—and says she, a-drawing in her breath hard, like a sob—says she, 'Your papa is downstairs, and if you will be a good girl, I will take you down to see him presently. He sent you that pretty dress you have on'—for the child was decked out like a rose.

" 'We left her clapping her hands and laughing, and went downstairs.

" 'Why don't you let her see you married?' says I.

" 'I do not want her to remember how she got her father,' says she.

" 'Outside the big-room door below, she stopped and caught her breath again, and there wasn't a speck of color in her face. I thought she was going to swoon, but at that minute, Mrs. Bryan came along the passage where we were standing.

" 'Mighty fine feathers, indeed!' she began, setting her arms akimbo.

" 'Before she could say another word, Mrs. Hale pushed open the door, and Colonel Rashleigh stepped up and took her hand.

" 'Well! they were married, and we had a world of trouble to persuade Kitty that this was her 'papa'; but, at last, she wiped up her tears, and let him take her on his knee. A kind gentleman he seemed to be—about fifty-five years old, with a red face and very grey hair. They went away almost directly after the marriage was over. I heard Colonel Rashleigh say that they would sail for the old country in a week. When little Kitty

told me 'Good bye,' she slipped a purse into my hand. It was not very large, but it was brimful. We found it very useful that coming summer, for we were all down with the fever, and my two oldest boys died about the same time that Mr. Bryan did. It was a dreadful year with many other families around us. I couldn't bear to stay there any longer, and we broke up and moved out here. I've heered sence that Mrs. Bryan was dead, too; but we've lost sight of 'em, moving so far off. Pineville was always an unhealthy situation. We like this place better, lonesome as it seemed at first."

"Have you never had any further intelligence of your friends, the Rashleighs?"

"No, sir. I didn't expect it after they crossed the ocean. Kitty must be seventeen years old by this time. She was a year older than my Polly there. I hadn't thought of the story in months and months, until you reminded me of it by asking about Mal's name."

"I am extremely obliged to you for the evening's entertainment," answered Malcolm, rising. "Now, madam, if you have a spare corner anywhere for me, I will thank Mal to show me to my resting-place for the night. I am weary, and I must be stirring early in the morning."

Mrs. Foster entreated him to permit her to give up the best bed to him, and when he resolutely refused to turn her out of her room, confessed that there were tolerably comfortable lodgings "upstairs." The loft, dignified by this appellation, was accessible by a ladder and trap-door. The boards of the floor creaked under Malcolm's tread, and after he stretched himself upon the "shuck" mattress, he could catch the glimmer of the stars through the cracks in the roof.

Had his couch been made of down, and his chamber a royal saloon, he would have passed as restless a night as was now in reserve for him. It was, with him, one of the seasons when man

feels himself to be a mere bubble, carried and tossed along by the resistless tide of providential purpose. The quest of twelve years was at an end. All that mortal could do he had done to track the fugitives. It had been one great wish of his life to make what restitution lay in his gift to the widow and child of his lost friend. And what had effort and desire and resolve effected? Nothing! He had rowed his tiny skiff in every direction, but never beyond the length of the unseen cord that held him to one spot; and when search was proved to be futile, and expectation was dying out, the mighty, mysterious wave of Destiny had brought the sought-for treasures to his side—aye, and would have done the same and as surely, had he remained inactive.

They were found! and not through his instrumentality. In all efforts for this end he had been powerless—and now? How should he perform his vow of enrichment and protection of the unfortunates? They did not need him! From the memory of one his former self had passed entirely and forever. For aught he knew, the other classed him with the enemies who had hunted her partner to his death. For poor Bessy's wrongs and humiliations his heart had bled, while the homely tale was told. He understood the proud, mute anguish whose very smart endowed her with strength to bear up under the insults poured upon her; recognized the flash of the old spirit in the passionate defence of her babe; appreciated the temper in which, before her idolized husband had lain a year in his grave, she had wedded again, that her child might have a home and herself an asylum from insult and cruelty.

But they did not need him! He recalled Mrs. Rashleigh's every haughty glance—every icy tone. The mistress of wealth surpassing his own; the wife of a gentleman, whose pretensions to rank gave him the precedence above himself in aristocratic consequence, she might well ignore any former acquaintanceship with one whom the silent force of circumstantial evidence must brand

as an ingrate in her sight. And Kitty, his early darling; his sweet little playfellow; his tender, devoted nurse, whose soft lips he had often felt upon his brow in dreams of those boyish days! The glow that rushed through his heart, as in one intoxicating moment he identified her with the Katherine who had walked and ridden by his side, and talked to him of the visions of her childhood, the longings of her lonely girlhood; this blissful thrill was gone almost as soon as felt. No! she had less need of him than her stately impassive mother. To the latter he might make himself acceptable by the wand of memory; could explain away the false appearances that had caused her to misjudge his fidelity to his word; his abiding and grateful friendship for her and her beloved ones. But with Katherine, there had been no such impediment to a perfect understanding of his character and conduct. She knew him as well as she ever could, and with this knowledge she had refused his love. The thought that she was privy to the secret her mother guarded so successfully never presented itself to him. He had implicit faith in her truthfulness; believed her sincere in every statement she had made with regard to her confused impressions of her childish life, and her declarations concerning her parentage and birthplace.

A few short hours before, and had he been told that the refuge of the wanderers would be made known to him, he would have flouted the suggestion that any circumstance or combination of events could have deterred him from seeking them and making himself known. Now, what was more feasible than this oft-premeditated course? Yet he would as soon march to the stake as allude to their ancient amity; the dear and mournful associations that he had fondly imagined would be an indissoluble link between them. In the grief, wonder and despair of those hours, so crowded with memories and with thoughts, he still recurred once or twice to Eleanor's peculiar relations with her uncle's wife, who must hold her in utter abhorrence, politely indifferent as she

appeared to be ; to Mrs. Rashleigh's caution to her husband against the elder Sancroft, and her cavalier treatment of the younger upon several occasions ; but it was with the helpless feeling of one who sees others carried on with him upon the omnipotent current—straws, sticks, weeds—all worthless and insignificant things, borne steadily, inevitably wherever the wave listed.

Mrs. Foster and her daughters thought that their lodger looked older and less handsome by daylight, than when seen in the red glare of the pitch pine. He seemed "misrested" too, the widow declared, and was profuse in her apologies for his night's accommodations ; regrets and inquiries which he parried by the assertion that he had been served with everything that was necessary and comfortable.

After his departure, one of the girls going up to make his bed, found a parcel pinned fast to the pillow whereon had lain his weary head, and brought it down to her mother. It was directed to "Mrs. Foster," and as she unfolded it four or five bank-notes fell from within, wound around with a slip of paper. Upon this was written—"For 'Mal's' schooling. From Malcolm Argyle."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THERE was another solitary watcher of the stars on the December night in which Malcolm Argyle saw them through the crevices of Mrs. Foster's roof. The open country surrounding Briarwood was an expanse of snow, from whose surface trees and fences and buildings started up with ghostly distinctness, although there was no moon. Long, tremulous fingers of white light and flashes of colored lambent flame streamed up in the North, and the very air seemed spell-bound by the keen frost. There was no sound throughout the orderly English household. The broad staircase and the halls below and above, were dark and still. The eye of an observer from without would have seen the lighted windows of but two rooms. It was eleven o'clock, and the Colonel enjoyed his nap in the library, leaning back in his stuffed chair ; his gouty foot on its cushion, and a large fire in the chimney. His wife had gone upstairs an hour before, to see that her daughter needed nothing that could ensure her a good night's rest. He doubted not that both were sound asleep by this time. Women required more of this natural refreshment, than robust men did, and he would have adduced proof of this "remarkable" law of nature in his own constitution, sound and vigorous, except for the gout, which was a blustering, harmless attack upon the outposts ; yet he had not retired before midnight, in thirty years.

There was no echo or jar upon the upper flooring. Even Katherine, whose room adjoined her mother's, did not hear the slippered tread that wandered up and down—up and down—Mrs.

Rashleigh's chamber, until one would have thought the weary, fragile body must be ready to sink down in utter prostration. The noiseless step that habit had made natural to her in these nocturnal promenades, reminded one of the majestic, stealthy march of a tiger on the scent of its prey, and the eyes, while they evidently perceived none of the objects about her, were searching, inquisitive, triumphant. The latter expression prevailed when she stood by the window and looked out into the horizon, where the forest belt was drawn darkly against the brilliant sky.

Was it the dance of the northern spirits that fastened her gaze—the glitter and shiver of their serried spears—the leaping blaze of their soundless artillery? The gorgeous pageant was to her as if it had not been. Her thoughts were all of mortal forms and earthly combats. When she resumed her walk, the triumph was higher, and the thin lips were curled in a smile, that was malignant in its sneer.

The shrewd, common-sense housekeeper was correct, in one sense, when she decided that Mrs. Rashleigh was not in her right mind. One thought, one scheme, nurtured ceaselessly for twelve years, made the key-note of every meditation, the lever of every action; its fulfillment, anticipated as the culmen of earthly hopes and desires—must eventuate in the insanity or monomania of him who thus plans and broods and craves. This unquiet spirit had possessed Bessy Hale's body since her husband's murder—she never thought or spoke of it as anything less heinous. The pitiless treatment of herself and child by those who had courted her notice, when they fancied her in prosperous circumstances, had augmented this morbid resentment. With the unexpected, and to her, almost miraculous change in her position, began the growth of a fatalism that looked forward to the retribution of her enemies as a certain thing. First, she believed that she should hear of it—perhaps see it; then, as one coincidence after another was bringing her back to the stage whereon had

been enacted the earlier acts of the tragedy, the conviction stole upon her, awakening a shuddering joy, that she was to be the instrument of punishment—the ordained NEMESIS, who should hurl the decreed vengeance upon the quaking, guilty souls of her former persecutors.

As she said to Miss Barbara, she considered that she had taken no active part in the work, when, in reality, her hand had put in motion every one of the destructive engines, that were weaving iron bands about the condemned. But for her, Sancroft the elder would have plundered her husband with impunity and undamaged respectability, and have added his ill-gotten gains to his hoards. Had she encouraged, or even permitted the primary stages of the younger's addresses to her daughter, his disappointment at the last, and his hatred of his apparently equally unsuccessful rival might have been less rancorous. She had ardently desired and secretly forwarded Malcolm's suit to Katherine, and it was with a perception of this, that Eleanor withdrew her to Montrouge, and there matured the plot, to whose subtlety the mother already held the clue—a slender thread, it is true, but which her prescient eye saw growing into a cord the entrapped criminals should vainly endeavor to break. But for her the temptation to purloin the Sancroft papers would not have existed, and but for her, the theft would never have been suspected. Her husband's growing distrust of his nephew and disinclination to make him part heir of his fortune was her work, although he did not dream that this was so, and she was only partially conscious of the effect of her cautions and innuendoes. It was not in her nature to be a passive instrument, even in the grasp of the Destiny she professed to worship. Work she must—work she did—with a methodical, unflagging, unmerciful purpose, and a will that never needed to revert to past grievances for stimulus.

It was but a little longer waiting, and the personal liberty and the reputation of the marked ones would be in her power—nay,

this was virtually the case now. The Sancrofts had commenced the game proposed by the younger—of postponing the public trial of the case involving the honesty of the father, and there were easily found legal quibbles in abundance for their aid in the praiseworthy scheme. But to the avenger, it was a shallow artifice—a cowardly delay of the day which must overtake them, and why not soon, as well as late? What could they gain by this course except a torturing suspense and a prejudgment against them in the minds of the community? The Moreaus participated in the disquiet of their suspected associates; but husband and wife bore unequal portions of the burden. Eleanor was mainly solicitous lest Mr. Moreau's past intimacy with the son, and his recommendation of the father, should have compromised him with his uncle, and her useless regrets and chidings of him for errors committed and beyond recall, were irritating augmentations of the discomfort he suffered by day and night. He drank more deeply to quiet remorse and blunt anticipation; but the internal conflict—the hidden cancer—was telling upon his outward appearance. He began to look like what he was—a mean-spirited wretch, cowering beneath the menacing consequences of his evil deeds—a caitiff, who had neither the courage to confess, the fortitude to endure, nor the cunning to escape. Katherine pitied; his uncle wondered; his wife railed at and ridiculed his altered aspect and behavior. He bore all these exhibitions of feeling better than he did the cool, clear ray from eyes whose meaning he alone understood, and dreaded more than he would have done the baleful glance of the basilisk. Nor were his pecuniary trials lightened from the crushing weight beneath which he had crouched for so long. At this period, it chanced, unluckily, that Sancroft was his chief creditor—the holder of divers notes for inconvenient sums, due from Robert Moreau to William Sancroft, for value "received;" nature of said "value" not specified, as, indeed, was not to be expected in confidential debts. That the law could

not oblige him to defray these obligations, if the circumstances under which they were incurred was stated, so far from releasing him from the necessity of meeting them, was an added terror. Absurd as it may appear, the bauble to which the poor fool clung most pertinaciously—the, in his case, "shadow of a shade" he feared most to lose—was his fair name among his fellow-men. The idea of gross falsehood and downright thieving, did not appall him, much less did cheating and gaming and forgery, but the wagging of a gossiping tongue, the pointing of a censorious finger, were to him like a scorpion-lash.

All this, the unwearied watcher and thinker appreciated and reviewed in her scornful triumph on this winter night. If one had dared to urge, in compassion to this one of her intended victims, that his part in producing her humiliation and bereavement was slight in comparison with that of the others—his, the fault of thoughtless and unprincipled gallantry, while theirs was a deliberate and malicious plotting of her downfall—she would have made reply that he was eating now the fruit of other misdeeds, unconnected with her; and that, were his misery indeed the work of her machinations, he could not be spared one pang, since through, and in him, was the chastisement of his wife, the principal offender, to be accomplished.

Katherine was not yet able to join the family at the breakfast-table. She was, however, up and dressed on the following morning, when her mother entered with a request from Colonel Rashleigh for a speedy audience.

From the hour when, as her mother's newly-wedded husband, he took her upon his knee, and heard her acknowledge him as her father, his love for the child of his adoption had struck its roots into the depths of his nature. The recent danger to her life had heightened this to idolatry, and his inquietude on her account was still so great as to be a serious drawback to his peace of mind and the comfort of his household. With the pertinacity of age,

he refused to believe that she was mending as rapidly as she ought to be. It was of no avail that she wore her brightest looks during his visits to her chamber, and when she was carried downstairs, chatted cheerfully, and frequently more than was easy or safe for her to attempt. He would have it that she was at a stand-still if not already in a decline, and not even his wife's arguments could alter this conviction.

This morning, he was full of a plan concocted between himself and the family physician in the course of the preceding day's consultation. Katherine was pining for change of air and scene. So soon as she was adjudged able to travel, he would, with her, proceed by easy stages to Richmond, and from thence to Charleston, to take vessel for Cuba. She should see tropical fruits and birds, and feel tropical sunshine and breezes. Mrs. Rashleigh, whose health and inclination alike indisposed her for the tour, was to accompany them to Richmond, and, after a visit there, return to Briarwood, while Mrs. Holt continued with her pupil.

For awhile, extreme amazement hindered Katherine from expressing any other feeling with regard to the proposal. Then she inquired, with a touch of alarm, if they thought her situation so precarious that the change of climate was necessary for the preservation of her life.

"Not at all," replied the mother. "We believe that you would recover as certainly here, but more slowly. Your papa has planned this journey and voyage for this season, because it would be unsafe to take it in warmer weather. We thought, moreover, that it would please you."

"It will," said Katherine. "I shall enjoy it above all other things that could be proposed. You are too good, papa!"

Her cheek was mantled with a healthy glow; her eye had a glad, soft light, as she put her hand within his. He was gratified and complacent in the assurance that his wisdom exceeded

that of all the doctors in the country—very proud of his scheme, and very fond of the daughter, who entered into it so readily.

"But you, mamma?" continued Katherine. "I wish you were not to be left behind. You will be lonely here, I am afraid."

"I shall not."

She moved away, not willing to trust herself to say more. She knew with whom the far South was now associated in Katherine's mind and that hope sprang eagerly forward to the possibility that their projected route might cross that of another traveller. But the mother experienced a sudden pain at the momentary forgetfulness of herself, in the child whom her cares had just won from the jaws of death.

Mrs. Rashleigh's secret schemes could not be better advanced than by the temporary absence of her husband. Young Sancroft had intimated to Mr. Hammond that the witnesses they had summoned, could not, in all likelihood, be gathered together, or the needful papers be made ready before the March term of the court, and the materials for her intended explosion could be collected better when there was no one at home who had the right to inquire into her movements. She had seldom seen the Colonel so bent upon a project of his own manufacture, and, in her fatalistic spirit, she believed that this unforeseen step was pregnant with important results, bearing upon what was become the grand design of her life. Therefore, she did not interfere or amend, save in the matter of her remaining at home, which the Colonel, however reluctant to part with her, was at length convinced was indispensable for the right conduct of his affairs, domestic and legal.

He ordered the carriage, that very forenoon, and rode to Mr. Hammond's. In the lawyer's hands he deposited his will which divided his estate equally between his wife and adopted daughter, Katherine Rashleigh. An annuity to Mrs. Holt and a present to each of the English servants were the only reservations from

these bequests. Mrs. Rashleigh had been appointed executrix, but in the fresh copy which Mr. Hammond was instructed to prepare, Malcolm Argyle was made her coadjutor. A power of attorney was likewise drawn up, authorizing Mrs. Rashleigh to execute bonds and sign whatever legal instruments she deemed proper, during her husband's absence.

Mr. Hammond asked no questions. He only suspended his pen for an instant above the parchment, as he reached Katherine's name.

"*Adopted* daughter!" he repeated, as if doubtful whether he read aright.

"Those are the words, sir!" But the Colonel grew purple and coughed, before making the supplementary remark—"I wish to be explicit, sir—to leave no room for troublesome litigation, while it is also my desire that you consider this a confidential disclosure. She is Mrs. Rashleigh's daughter by a former marriage—a circumstance of which Miss Rashleigh is herself ignorant."

"I beg your pardon, sir!" and the pen went on.

"Excuse me, Colonel Rashleigh," the lawyer ventured to say, when the documents were ready and the Colonel was on his feet to depart. "But it can do no harm to come to a full and mutual understanding of these transactions. You herewith"—touching the papers—"invest Mrs. Rashleigh with unlimited authority to act in your stead, while you are away—*unlimited!*"

"Well, sir!"

The Colonel stood, tightly buttoned up in his furred surtout—very stout and very stiff.

"These are unusual powers, sir, to be granted to any one—particularly a lady," pursued the attorney.

"I do not lose sight of that fact, sir. But you must remember another, which you cannot have failed to perceive—namely, that Mrs. Rashleigh is an uncommon person, sir—a very remarkable woman!"

And with that, the old gentleman climbed into his chariot, and gave orders to drive home by way of Montrouge.

It was but courteous to Robert and his wife, whose regard for himself and family appeared to be unmixed with interested motives—that they should be apprised of the intended journey. They were both at home; both very attentive; very agreeable; very affectionate. Both concurred heartily in pronouncing his plan delightful, and judicious beyond all praise of theirs, and—the elate Colonel could not render to his wife any intelligible account of the precise manner of its happening—but he was borne or coaxed on to that pitch of benevolence, that he invited his nephew and niece to join the party in their trip to the metropolis; remain there, at his expense, for the week of Mrs. Rashleigh's stay, and then take charge of her back to Briarwood—an offer which Eleanor had considerable difficulty in accepting, without an unbecoming show of rapture. How different would have been her emotions had she known that it was a salvo to an uncomfortable sensation her rich connection sustained at receiving the overwhelming attentions of herself and spouse, while reflecting that he had just sealed an act cutting them off from all possible future benefit from his wealth!

The Colonel's high good humor at his forenoon's work was abated by Katherine's palpable chagrin, and her mother's silence, when he communicated the proposition he had made to the Moreaus, and its reception. Mrs. Rashleigh was the first to reassure him. While Katherine shrank from a renewal of intimate intercourse with her cousins, under an undefinable impression that all had not been right between them in the past, the mother's second thought was: "It is done now, and objection would be worse than useless. It may mean something—may accomplish some decreed purpose."

In this persuasion, she complimented her husband upon his liberality to his relatives, and thanked him for the con-

sideration he had shown for her comfort in providing her with an escort.

Katherine was too honest to join in this commendation of a step that promised little happiness to her. She confided to Miss Barbara, who came at her summons to hear and wonder over the news, that this was, in her eyes, the most objectionable feature in the pleasure-trip.

"The only one, I may say, if we except mamma's refusal to go with us. Not that I have any dislike for my cousin Robert and Mrs. Moreau, but you understand that it will seem less like a family party if they are along. And it is natural, since we are to leave mamma behind, that we should prefer to pass the last days of our companionship with her by ourselves, unchecked by the presence of comparative strangers."

Miss Barbara *did* understand, better than Katherine herself could, why mother and daughter should dread the entrance of these intruders into their home-circle. No mortal living was more thoroughly acquainted with Eleanor than she was, and she had a conception of her ability and influence that verged upon absurd exaggeration. She had departed from her rule of non-interference in family affairs, so far as to hint her suspicions of this arch-strategist's recent manœuvres, in a letter she had dispatched to Malcolm, and, as may be supposed, her hints were tantamount to other people's broad assertions. With Katherine, she could not be frank, and she held her tongue. The southern scheme sounded to her like sheer nonsense, and while questioning the certainty of its advantages to Katherine's health, she had her own reasons for deploring the Colonel's resolution to remove his daughter from the neighborhood, where Malcolm, on his return, would expect to find her. That he would come back, and that sooner than he had anticipated up to the moment of perusing her letter, she could not avoid hoping and believing.

But Katherine was so gay and animated in view of the next

three months, so confident of sympathy from every one to whom she unfolded her plans, that her old friend was sparing of her expressed discontent, and tried to work off her rising ill-humor by energetic assistance in the laboring department of Briarwood, just now taxed to the utmost by the preparations for the travelers. She cut out and wound up bundles of unmade garments, which she engaged should be finished by the Ben Lomond seamstress, Mrs. Rashleigh sitting by and directing how this and that was to be done, so gravely and naturally, that Miss Barbara recollected, in a dream-like mystification, the packages of homespun, unbleached muslin and linseys, which she used to prepare for Bessy Hale to take home.

By the middle of the month all was ready. Katherine had entreated that her faithful nurse should spend the last night of her stay with her at Briarwood; should sleep in her room upon the little bed where she had cast herself down for an hour of light slumber, overpowered by fatigue and drowsiness, while fever was scorching up the life of her patient. Mrs. Rashleigh seconded the motion, and the Colonel had, ere this, ceased to observe upon "the extraordinary fondness" of his daughter for this "well-disposed but remarkably eccentric person."

There was a singular, a laughable contrast between the two, as they sat over the fire that evening, for a parting talk together. Miss Barbara was in her short night-gown, without ruffle or trimming of any description; a striped petticoat, blue and white, beneath it; her grey hair tucked away under a cotton cap, with an astonishing border, starched and crimped; her skirts drawn back from the square-toed shoes and worsted hose, incasing a pair of very decided-looking extremities; and that nothing might be lacking from the grotesque yet cozy figure, a long-stemmed pipe in her mouth. Katherine's nerves were not of the kind that "cannot endure tobacco-smoke," while their delicate owner revels nightly, as in her native element, in a heated atmosphere, with

hardly enough oxygen in it to afford a full breath for one pair of healthy lungs—the happy multitude within it regaling themselves with laborious inflations of nitrogen, exquisitely flavored with Patchouli, musk, millefleurs and—vilest, most suffocating of all—Frangipanni.

Miss Barbara's nightly smoke was taken at the urgent instance of her young hostess, who now sat watching the blue rings in their slow waltz toward the fire-place, where they broke suddenly and made a flying leap up the wide mouth of the chimney. Her white wrapper was edged at the throat and wrists by dainty little frills; the lace border of her cap did not conceal the black tresses which had happily not been destroyed by the fever, and around her shoulders she wore, with negligent grace, a scarlet shawl. The fresh color had forsaken her face, and with it much of the piquant archness that once gave it its peculiar character; but languor and pensiveness endowed her with new, and perhaps greater loveliness.

"I have been restless for the arrival of to-morrow, and now, that it is so near, I would put it off if I could," she said.

"Why is this, Miss Barbara? Can it be a presentiment of evil?"

"Everybody feels so, more or less, just before settin' out on a journey. I always used to in my travellin' days."

"Did you ever travel much?"

"I came from Hanover here, and I went over the mountains once, to see my sister—stayed nigh upon two months."

She puffed very fast.

"And did you feel then as I do now? did a dread hang over you—a sinking of spirit and a clinging to home, as the one safe spot upon earth?"

"Yes, dear."

"Did sorrow come from that journey?"

"Indeed there did! My sister died while I was there, and—I lost another friend near the same time."

Katherine left a subject which she saw was saddening.

"This is the 15th. We shall be in Richmond by the 20th. I own to a little curiosity to see something of town-life in this land. Have you ever been there?"

"Once, forty years ago. Places change in that time as much as people's faces."

"It is a long time. Shall I, too, live to say, to some young girl, 'I saw such and such a thing forty years ago?'"

"I hope so. If the Lord wills, you may. None of us can tell what a day may bring forth."

"True! young as I am, I have realized, to some extent, the uncertainty of earthly things. But this is solemn talk! It depresses me. I wanted to try to tell you how grateful I am for your unbounded kindness—for saving my life? It is not worth much to me, or to any one else, but it is all the life I have."

"Don't talk that way, dear!" said Miss Barbara, as the girl tried to laugh—her glistening eye belying the pretense of mirth. "It is the most precious gift the Almighty can continue to an immortal soul that is out of Christ—the life of the poor body. For, while that lasts, there is a chance of salvation. Don't get into the habit of treating death lightly. It's worse than foolish—it's sinful!"

"I have prayed for its coming in times past," said Katherine in a low, sad voice.

"No, you haven't!"

"Miss Barbara!"

"I say you haven't! You thought you did, and that because you were unhappy, you were tired of living, but if death had seized you at that very minute, you'd have fought with him, and cried out for your sweet life. Depend upon it, dear, we ought to return thanks to the Lord, every day, that he don't answer more of our hasty prayers."

"It may be so. I wish—how I wish, you would teach me your contented faith, Miss Barbara. I meant to be your scholar this winter, and here am I whisked off to the South Pole, before I can take a single lesson. Heigho!"

"The right teacher is with you everywhere."

"But how can I know him? You will think me a heathen, I am afraid; but if you only knew how I reach and yearn for some solid resting-place, not so much for my faith as for my heart! It is a hard, cruel thought, that I have tasted all the sweetness in the cup of existence at seventeen. I am not eighteen yet—did you know that?"

"You look older than you are."

"Do I not? This sickness has added ten years to my age. I am approaching middle-life—am but a trifle on the sunny side of thirty."

Miss Barbara removed her pipe to laugh. "You are a child, nothing else, and I trust there are many bright spots in this life for you. But, honey, maybe we shall not meet again on this side the grave. I'm growin' old, and none of us can tell in what watch the Master will call. I want to say a thing or two before we part. I didn't come to you first because I loved you; but I had made a promise that I'd serve you, if you ever needed me."

The rich color rushed to Katherine's face, and her breath was quick and fluttering.

"We've never called his name, dear, and tisn't best we should. Because I had give him my promise, I came to nurse you, and because I knew he would like to have me do it, I stayed and tended you as long as I did. Now, I love you for your own sake, and"—

"And for what other reason, were you going to say?"

"Never mind!"

Miss Barbara got up briskly and laid her pipe upon the mantel.

"Better put this window up an inch or so, until the smoke is out!" she said, suiting the action to the word.

"Why did you stop so abruptly?" questioned Katherine curiously.

"No matter! Only, dear," laying her hand solemnly upon the noble young head, "wherever you go, remember that the prayers of the righteous avail much, and there's been many of the right sort sent up for you, about which you've never heard—more shame that it is so!" she muttered, aside.

"Were they yours?"

"I always name you in my poor prayers, but 'twasn't them I spoke of."

"Whose, then?"

But Miss Barbara ordered her squarely to bed, and, inflexibly unsatisfactory, betook herself to her own couch.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MRS. MOREAU enjoyed a holiday. The desire to be untrammelled during her visit to the capital, wrought with prudential considerations of the risks to children in winter travel, and induced her to leave them at Montrouge in care of Sarah. Even baby Nelly could now bear the separation without physical inconvenience, and although her father besought that she might go with them, the mother's fiat was not revoked.

This preliminary squabble-conjugal was, possibly, one cause of the vast disproportion in the elevation of their spirits on the way, and after they took possession of their quarters in town. Eleanor had never been more brilliantly careless, more sparkling in countenance and conversation. The Colonel was temporarily fascinated; Katherine forgot her vague distrust; Mrs. Rashleigh remained immovable. Mr. Moreau was miserably uneasy in the company of his step-aunt, although, from her demeanor, one would have imagined her profoundly indifferent to him. He was not the person to interest a sober, thoughtful woman, serious to severity, who seemed to have lost all taste for frivolous talk and badinage, if she had ever affected anything so trifling.

"I don't ask you to say clever things to her!" said Eleanor, in one of her wifely tirades upon a style of behavior that annoyed her excessively. "What you cannot think, you cannot say, as a matter of course. But you were bred a gentleman, and need not act like a bashful clown, even in the presence of my Lady Lofty. She carries herself as grandly with me—and what do I

care for it? The Argyles are of as good blood as any that runs in her veins. If she belonged to the royal family, you could not be more afraid of her."

Mr. Moreau heaved a mighty sigh; but dared not unclothe his lips, for fear of saying something that might compromise him. To his unspeakable relief, his uncle rapped at the door.

"Robert! I am going out to walk. Will you come with me?"

The conscience-haunted husband snatched his hat, and followed in a twinkling.

The tavern—there were no hotels in Virginia, at that day—was a very dissimilar affair from the mountainous structures of brick, granite, iron and plate-glass, that now number their shifting population by the hundred. A substantial, respectable building, it only challenged the notice of the traveller by its superior size to the surrounding houses, and its spacious entrance. The proprietor had his residence within it, and exercised unceasing supervision over every department, without betraying one symptom of the active, bustling Boniface, one is accustomed to picture to himself at mention of a public house in the olden time. He presided at one of the bountiful tables, in the dining-hall, paying especial attention to his lady guests, and in the interim of his professional duties, chatted with them in the parlor, or with their fathers, husbands, and brothers, in the passages, and on the front steps—everywhere, and to all, the courteous and intelligent gentleman. For gentlemen, by birth and education, were not ashamed to "keep tavern" then. The honorable or the ignoble nature of the profession depended upon the character of the house and its master.

Katherine, with her mother and Mrs. Holt, was in the private parlor of the party—an unusual requirement in the establishment, and one that marked the English boarders as exclusives. It overlooked the street, and the young girl sat at the window,

amusing her companions with playful remarks upon the passers-by. Her father stopped, as he went downstairs, to inquire at what hour he should order the carriage for her morning drive. The day was sunny, and not cold, and he advised that the airing should be prolonged until prudence warned them to return home.

Rejoining his nephew, he marched out into the open air, with a traveller's alertness to go everywhere and see everything noteworthy in the place. He condescended to praise the natural advantages of the town; but "feared that many years must elapse before it would attain to any eminence as a symmetrical or thriving city." Moreau spoke a word for its warehouses and water-power, but his uncle's contempt for everything that savored of pretension in the "pretty village" he patronized, was so apparent, that he yielded the point.

As they passed another tavern, made conspicuous by a swinging sign, with a bell painted thereupon, a couple of gentlemen stepped out of the door to the sidewalk, and halted, in feigned or real surprise. They were the younger Sancroft and his friend, Mr. Woodson. Salutations were exchanged; the Colonel speaking to the latter in a friendly, to the former, in a polite manner.

"This is an unlooked-for treat, sir," said Mr. Woodson, blandly. "When did you arrive?"

"The day before yesterday," was the reply.

"And Mr. Sancroft and myself last night. What have you seen that interested you in the Capitol of our Old Dominion?" pursued Mr. Woodson, walking on with the Colonel, while the narrow pavement compelled Mr. Moreau to fall into the rear with Sancroft.

The Colonel admitted that, thus far, he had not found many striking objects for observation or thought to feast upon.

"Have you been into our halls of Legislation?"

"I have not. Is there a fine display of talent there, this winter?"

"There was never more. The houses are in session at this hour. If you have no other engagement, you may derive some pleasure from a visit to them. What do you say to retracing our steps?"

"I should be pleased to hear the debates. Mr. Randolph will be there, I presume?"

"He is in our National Congress—not in the State Legislature."

"Ah! I continually confound the two—which are no more identical than our British Houses of Commons and Lords."

Mr. Woodson did not rectify this self-correction. If it satisfied its author, it did not concern him.

"Mr. Randolph made a magnificent speech in Congress last month upon the war question. You heard him during his summer's campaign, I think, Colonel Rashleigh?"

"I did. He is a re-mar-ka-ble orator, sir! I cannot suppose that this new country contains such another. Why, sir, he would shine in the British Parliament!"

They were now opposite "the Eagle," where the Rashleighs were sojourning, and the carriage and four at the door had attracted a group of loungers, whose admiring inspection of the fine horses was highly flattering to the Colonel. As Mr. Woodson passed his encomium upon the splendid leaders, Mrs. Rashleigh, Eleanor, Mrs. Holt and Katherine, emerged from the house, and were handed into the chariot by liveried Thomas on one side, and the suave landlord on the other. The Colonel lifted his hat, with the deferential gallantry belonging to his character and generation, and his heart grew bigger at the recollection of his proprietorship in the two elegant women, who shared the unspoken, yet evident applause of the beholders.

"You ought to be a proud and a happy man, Colonel Rashleigh!" said the quick-witted Woodson.

The old officer's heavy physiognomy was illuminated by a heart-beam that redeemed it from homeliness.

"I am, sir. No man living has more cause to be thankful to the Divine Giver than I have."

The visit to the legislative bodies brought the promised entertainment of good speeches, and a pleasant surprise, which the English gentleman enjoyed far more, in the form of a meeting with an old friend and fellow-countryman, whom he had not seen before in thirty years. This friend, Mr. Wickham, had emigrated to America while comparatively a young man, and settled in Virginia. Happening, on this forenoon, to be in the State Assembly, he noticed Colonel Rashleigh, and inquired who he was. The answer awakened a suspicion that it was his former acquaintance, and he forthwith introduced himself. The two had a long and deeply interesting conversation, broken off by the approach of the dinner-hour.

Mr. Moreau had excused himself with the threadbare plea of "business"—with whom or where, he was sure his uncle would not inquire. He rejoined the family party, just as the Colonel was relating the story of his fortunate rencontre with Mr. Wickham, who had walked with him to the door of the tavern, and requested permission to wait upon the ladies, with his wife, next day.

"Papa," said Katherine, thoughtlessly, "was not that Mr. Woodson with you, this morning?"

"It was, my daughter. Why do you ask?"

"I do not like him. I never did," returned the petted child.

"And, as I stood on the steps, waiting until the others got into the carriage, I heard one gentleman say to another, 'What is Colonel Rashleigh doing in that fellow's company? He was once a common gambler about town, and follows the same trade now in the country!'"

"A gambler!" cried the Colonel, in anger and dismay. "Can this be true, Robert? What do you say to this tale?"

Mr. Moreau's tongue was glued to the roof of his mouth. Eleanor put on an air of shocked virtue.

"What a consummate hypocrite he must be, if that is his real business! But no, it is ridiculous! We should surely have heard some whisper of it in all these months that he has lived near us! You have never seen anything suspicious in his conduct—have you, my dear?"

"N-n-n-o," said Mr. Moreau.

"It is a matter of small moment to us whether the story be true or false," said Mrs. Rashleigh; "Mr. Woodson has never been on intimate terms in our family. He has been invited to Briarwood but once."

"He is Robert's friend," urged the Colonel, not pacified by this dismissal of the subject. "You introduced him to me as such, sir, and I have regarded him as an honest gentleman, when I would have repudiated the acquaintance if I had known of this stigma upon his character. I have rendered myself the object of common talk by apparent intimacy with him. I have invited him to my house; he has sat down at *my* table with *my* wife and daughter. I am exceedingly displeased! This is a very remarkable occurrence, Mr. Moreau!"

His wrath stifled the words; he could only gasp and strut about the apartment, in such a state of agitation as terrified his nephew out of the scanty measure of wit conscious guilt had left him.

"But papa"—began Katherine's soft accents.

Her mother interrupted her. "You are exciting yourself upon insufficient grounds, Colonel Rashleigh." It was an order rather than an expostulation. "Would it not be well, before condemning the man, to have stronger evidence than the careless speech of a stranger—casually, and probably imperfectly overheard in a public place? Would not this be in better keeping with your usual conduct? You are not apt to be so hasty in your judgment."

She laid her hand upon his arm, as she reminded him that the

dinner-bell had rung. Ere the dining-room was reached, he had regained his self-control, and apologized handsomely to his nephew for his unwarrantable heat, before the first course was through.

"But this is a tender point with me, Robert; my youngest brother—the uncle for whom you were named—was the means of teaching me a lesson on gaming! I hate the very name of a dice-box or a card. If I were a king or a law-giver, I would make all games of chance punishable with death! Upon my soul I would!"

"Be quiet!" whispered his wife. "You attract attention."

As was to be expected, when the fall of his fist on the table made the plates dance and the glasses ring for some distance on both sides of him. Katherine repented sorely of her imprudent remark. Her cousins were wounded; Mrs. Moreau offended, for the most skillful and assiduous attention could not win a look or smile from her all dinner-time. How rude and unprovoked had been her animadversion upon one whom Mr. Moreau knew and she did not! How unkind and inhospitable in her to incite the Colonel to attack the nephew, who looked up to him as to a father!

In the sincerity of her contrition, she followed Mr. Moreau, when he quitted the parlor after dinner, and overtook him in the entry.

"Cousin Robert, I must say to you how sorry I am for my inconsiderate—my unfeeling gossip about your friend, Mr. Woodson."

"Don't call him my friend, Katherine. He is anything but that!"

"You are angry with me, and you have a right to be," continued Katherine, yet more humbly, for he was gruff to surliness. "I ought to have known papa's abhorrence of a gamester better than to have suggested the remotest possibility of his having associated with one. It was too bad that you should have borne

the brunt of the punishment I merited by my meddling tongue. You must not mind papa when he gets excited. He always speaks out in that way. You saw how ready he was to explain his language when he cooled down. He is a sensible man, and cannot but perceive the injustice of holding you responsible for the character of every one whom you introduce to him in a crowd like that in which he first met this Mr. Woodson. You will forget his hasty censure and my foolish babbling—will you not, my dear cousin?"

Her beseeching, winning look was so charming that Moreau could not withstand it.

"You are a noble girl, Katherine!" he exclaimed—"a perfect angel, to talk to me so sweetly after"—

"After what? After your unfailing kindness to me? I would be very ungrateful to forget that I have never received a cross word or a frown from you. You are the most gallant and amiable of cousins. I am not so rich in friends as to make me liable to overlook one whose good will I have never had cause to doubt."

Moreau hung his head. Glancing furtively toward the room where they had left his wife, he asked, in a half whisper:

"Katherine, did you really care for Argyle, or was it, as *she* said, nothing but a fancy?"

"Who is 'she'?" Katherine fell back a few paces, and grew paler.

"In there," pointing to the parlor. "You thought Argyle wrote that letter to her—didn't you?"

"And if he did not, who did?" demanded the girl, breathlessly.

A hand was laid upon the lock of the door near by; Mrs. Moreau's voice sounded louder, and while she paused to finish a last observation to some one within, ignorant of the dangerous parley without, Moreau darted down a side-passage, and Katherine dragged herself to her room, which was not far off.

At the social family tea in the sitting-room, she was quiet and heavy-eyed; but it seemed the quiet of absorbing thought, not unhappiness, and if her smile were less frequent, it had a gentle, spontaneous beam, the more perceptible to the mother's eye because, of late, her show of spirits had depended so much upon the auxiliary—Will. These symptoms of radical amendment were lost upon the mole-eyed Colonel; nor had Eleanor any just understanding of the change, which, from that evening, was manifest in her young cousin. When the evidences of this became apparent in her lighter, brisker step and increase of appetite, her father talked largely of the wonderful and instantaneous effects of his prescription, while Katherine's laugh and blush left him in the enjoyment of his theory.

It would be going too far to say that she was happy—although, in the delightful relief afforded by Moreau's insinuation, she was ready, for a while, to believe herself so. With the credulity and precipitancy of youth, she jumped to the conclusion that the note exhibited to her by Malcolm's sister was a successful forgery; nor was she backward in imputing the deed to William Sancroft. She had been blinded by shame and resentment, not to have detected this in reading it over. The handwriting was an exact imitation, but the style, rambling, obscure—alternately mawkish and selfish; how could she have been so egregiously duped? But the Moreaus—what was the extent of their complicity? At this hard knot she worked with growing perplexity. She recollected the circumstance of Sarah's bringing in the letter and giving it to Mrs. Moreau, with the words, "From Master Malcolm." Would the faithful servant be a party to a deception upon her mistress? Was it not more likely that since, by the husband's own admission, he was cognizant of, if not accessory to, the deception, the more intelligent wife also connived at the cunning trick? And here started up a nonplus—What was she to gain by the heartless, wicked device? That Sancroft ruled

his luckless crony with a bit of steel and rod of iron, Katherine had learned to suspect from her mother's hints and what she had herself seen and heard. But Mrs. Moreau's allegiance to her lord and master was not so absolute as to involve her, of necessity, in his schemes. She had professed a warm attachment to her cousin-guest, and, irrespective of this feeling, it appeared but reasonable, when viewed from a worldly stand-point, that she should be gratified by her brother's alliance with the heiress of her husband's wealthy uncle.

These were the pros and cons that hindered the equilibrium of Katherine's judgment—that followed her wherever she went, and visited her pillow at midnight. There was but one certain method of exorcising them, and that was by holding up between herself and the troublers the blessed conviction of Malcolm's true, disinterested love—the acquittal of her now stainless knight from the accusations his unprincipled rival had arrayed against him in her mind. The tale of his early engagement, that had enveloped her life in cloud, was now the flimsiest of distant mists—a boyish mistake, that had tended, in no degree, to depreciate the value of the man's devotion. He had loved her, and had sought in her affection for happiness—not oblivion! If the tears flowed with the memory of her cruel rejection and more cruel, although veiled, taunts of unequal bargains in the sale or exchange of hearts, the sunshine broke out again in that peace-giving thought: "She was loved, even as she loved!" Toward the Future she gazed with trembling, delicious hope of explanation and reconciliation. She could not discern clearly in what way this was to be accomplished, fettered as she was by her nice sense of the binding promise of secrecy she had given Mrs. Moreau. But come it would! Such faith was engendered by the knowledge of their reciprocal affection—such patience had her mettled spirit learned from the tedious probation of silent suffering.

This heroic submission to what was inevitable, and this cheer-

ful constancy of hope, were the father's legacy to his child. There was no sign of either in the stern satisfaction—the gloomy joy—with which the mother watched the march of the Destiny that was to make the day of doom to her foes the season of her glorious triumph.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MRS. RASHLEIGH'S chamber opened into the common sitting-room on one side ; Katherine's adjoined it on the other. Mr. and Mrs. Moreau occupied an apartment on the same floor, but in another wing of the building ; an arrangement that afforded facilities for the lady's favorite and harmless habit of hectoring her worse half. Her proficiency in the art had been acquired by diligent practice ; but never in the whole previous course of her married life had he furnished her with so many available texts as within the last week. He remembered her criticisms and injunctions no longer than it took her to bestow them upon him. He was stupid and moody and irascible ; as she summed up his perversities—"contrary as a mule !"

The Rashleighs had a Christmas dinner served in their parlor ; very English in its appointments ; and eaten two hours after the public meal of the same name was digested by republican gastric organs. It was a stately, formal repast, brightened only by Katherine's smiles and Mrs. Moreau's *bon mots*, and washed down with a solemn glass of full-bodied port. Mr. Moreau's was the most lugubrious visage at the board, and it was plain that the quiet entertainment was ill to his liking, for, when the table was removed and the family drew up around the fire, he obtained leave of absence "to smoke one cigar," Mrs. Rashleigh disliking tobacco, and did not show himself among them again that evening.

Mrs. Moreau was more than annoyed. She was exasperated

against the partner she had engaged to "love, honor and obey." He needed a thorough "going over," a regular "bringing to," both of which duties she sat up to perform that very night. A grand design may be brought to naught by a trifle, and her eloquent harangue, matured by several hours of uninterrupted thought, went out in a single exclamation, like an imperfect fusee, when, at two o'clock, A.M., Mr. Moreau was brought up to his chamber in the arms of a couple of negro waiters, dead drunk. In one respect he was exactly fitted for her purpose, inasmuch as he could not speak an intelligible word; but this qualification was of questionable value when joined to an inability to hear. With anger too hot for tears, she discharged the men, who inquired compassionately if she wished them to undress him; with her own hands tore off his outer clothing and his boots, and partly led, partly tumbled him into bed, where he snored drunkenly until late into the following morning, his wife perforce bottling her wrath against such time as he should be released from the dominion of the other fiery spirits that held sway over him.

With emotions of intense disgust, unsoftened by any charitable movings toward the lover of her youth, the father of her children, Eleanor, having completed her own toilette, began to pick up the various garments from the floor where she had flung them at night. Hours must elapse before her husband would be fit to be seen. She must excuse him at the breakfast table, and who of the party would be so simple-minded as not to connect the morning's sickness with the unexplained disappearance of Christmas evening? These irregularities would ruin his prospects of his uncle's final favor; and Mrs. Rashleigh! Eleanor fancied that she already saw the glitter of her cold eyes gloating upon their disgrace!

"And all to satisfy a drunkard's thirst!" she muttered. "A grand, a glorious thing is man! the noblest work of creation! In nothing else so strong as in appetites that would debase a soulless brute!"

The soliloquy was broken off by the falling of some object from the clothes she was hanging in a closet. It was a pocket-book—a capacious wallet, whose present state of collapse tempted Eleanor to the dishonorable act of opening it, to ascertain if it was entirely empty. In idle, wondering curiosity, she fingered one vacant pocket after another, until in the fourth, she found a packet done up in silver paper. A jealous instinct told her that it was hair, and she unwrapped it. Instead of the black, brown, or golden tress she expected would blast her sight with the opening of the last fold, there dropped into her palm a flossy ring, she recognized at once as having been clipped from the flaxen poll of baby Nelly. At another time the mother's heart would have been melted by this evidence of, at least, one pure sentiment that had survived the general wreck of right principle and feeling. Now she thrust it back contemptuously into the wallet.

"If he really loved her, he would not be in such haste to beggar her!"

In the next and last compartment, was a quarter sheet of coarse foolscap, so lately written upon that the ink was still pale. Eleanor pored over it with a scowling suspicion. It was hastily or carelessly penned, and here and there were splotches of ink, shaken from an unsteady pen. It was apparently some kind of memoranda jotted down upon the most convenient slip of paper.

"S....."	\$ 50
W.....	160
H.....	300
S.....	500
W.....	600
	<hr/>
	\$1,610."

After some minutes of unavailing scrutiny, she replaced the paper and took out another and a smaller scrap.

"Received of Robert Moreau \$760 (seven hundred and sixty dollars), by check upon the ——— Bank.

"JAMES WOODSON."

"Aha!"

The ejaculation broke harshly upon the stillness of the room. The unintelligible list of sums was again drawn forth, and when the addition of the separate amounts opposite the initial "W," resulted in a total exactly corresponding with that receipted by the check, the case was made out.

Eleanor had, ever since her marriage, been aware of her husband's propensity to the vice of gaming; but it had never occasioned her serious anxiety until about three years before, when he lost a heavy sum, and the transaction reached her ears. A stormy scene ensued—threats of separation from her, and a feeble show of independence on his side; but the contest ended in a solemn promise from him that he would never throw another card for pecuniary loss or gain, and not play at all, except in mixed companies of ladies and gentlemen, or, with a friend, at his own house. Like many other able generals, Mrs. Moreau had an exalted idea of her own influence, and the reality of her apparent victories. In other respects, she allowed that her spouse was disposed to be unstable, but that he would knowingly controvert her designs, or willfully violate a compact made with her, never entered her busy brain. So entire was her confidence in his good faith in this instance, that she was wont to inveigh, with virtuous strictness, against the prevalence of card-playing and betting in their neighborhood, much to the diversion of the initiated, whose knowledge of Mr. Moreau's proclivity and practice was founded upon evidence more conclusive than his mere word. She had bestowed many signs of approbation upon the reformed gambler, often sitting down with him herself, to a snug game, when she fancied that he felt dull, or was longing for his accustomed excitement.

Here was her reward! duplicity so deep, ingratitude so black,

infatuation so reckless, that even this bold, unscrupulous woman stood aghast. She could scarcely restrain the frantic effort to arouse him from his tipsy slumbers, and upbraid him with his crime, learn the extent of this monstrous villainy. This was the key to the mysterious depression that had hung about him for so long—a cloud, that gathered blackness daily! This was the worm that was gnawing soul and body! Who could say upon what verge of ruin and disgrace she and her children might now be standing? When she had spoken of her innocent babe's approach to beggary, it was no hyperbole of passion, although she may have deemed it such.

Mechanically she replaced the paper that had showed her this abyss of confusion and woe. There was a rip in the lining of the pocket-book, and through it protruded the corner of a note, that had, by some means, found its way to a lodgment between the inner and outer leather sides. Mrs. Moreau's prying fingers seized it and extricated this. It was soiled and crumpled, as by tossing about in the pocket or wallet. A mortal pallor overspread the dark, handsome face, as she read it—a look of affright and wonder, surpassing all powers of description. It was the scathing epistle penned to her, by her brother, eight months back, concerning the loan he had made to her husband. The insane fatuity that had led to its preservation can only be explained by subscribing to the homely axiom, so uncomplimentary to the father of lies—to wit, that, although zealous to get his followers into mischief, he always leaves them to get themselves out. Mr. Moreau had never quite persuaded himself that the safe season for destroying the intercepted missive had arrived, and after tucking it into the hiding-place, accidentally offered for its reception, he considered that it was as secure from discovery there, as it would be in the fire.

"The mills of the gods grind slowly!"

To these significant words, Eleanor's gaze returned fixedly.

And she and hers were food for these avenging engines ! Through all these years of outward prosperity and inward vain-glorying, the bloodhounds had been upon her track ! There was a brief paralysis of abject terror—of deadly despair ; then, the lion-spirit rallied, not to sustain, but to resist its sentence. What was this mummerly about retribution—this senseless analogy between her state, and that of the vulgarians, whose folly and presumption had ended in just degradation—but the ravings of a crazy man, whose fancies had made him the laughing-stock of reasonable people ? Who else could ever have espied any connection between the death of a delinquent debtor of a fever, and Mr. Moreau's humbling himself to solicit a loan of his wealthy brother-in-law ?

With a sneering laugh, she tore the billet into bits and threw them into the fire. In an hour more, she was seated at breakfast, at Mrs. Rashleigh's right hand, listening and replying with a placid countenance to the Colonel's inquiries and regrets on account of her husband's sickness.

"He will be well enough to go with us to Mr. Wickham's to dinner—will he not ?" said Katherine.

"I hope so. Still, these severe spells of sick headache shake one so fearfully that even should the pain subside, it may not be prudent for him to mingle in a gay party this evening. If he remains at home, I, as a dutiful, affectionate wife, shall stay also ; but you must not suffer our movements to affect yours. Do you think that you will feel equal to going out, my dear madam ?"

"I shall pass the evening here," rejoined Mrs. Rashleigh.

"I have an idea !" exclaimed Eleanor, seeking, by factitious gaiety, to dissemble her true feeling. "You, uncle, can escort Katherine and our good Mrs. Holt, here, to your friend's house to dinner. Mrs. Rashleigh and myself, with Mr. Moreau as our cavalier, will join you to-night at the theatre. It was a part of your plan to attend the play—was it not ?" to Katherine.

"Yes. Placide is called a fine actor. Mr. Wickham's praises

of him and his company have made me more than curious—anxious to witness their performances. You know my liking for the histrionic art. If it is an unworthy taste, Mrs. Holt is to be censured. She introduced me to Shakspeare."

"The legitimate drama is an appropriate study for the wisest of philosophers," observed Colonel Rashleigh. "It presents an ample field for the investigation of human nature. It inculcates a love for virtue and abhorrence of vice, and portrays the beneficent effects of one, and the punishment of the other in so remarkable a manner, as cannot but have a salutary influence upon the mind and heart."

"A summary of human life—an abstract of human experience !" said Katherine.

And, to her annoyance, Mrs. Holt glided off into the smooth tide of trite quotation—

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players—
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man, in his time, plays many parts."

Mr. Moreau awoke at noon, with a headache, a parched, woolly mouth, and a sense of something dreadful, past, present, or to come, sitting heavily upon his soul. His wife waited upon him with portentous calmness. She let him shave, dress and drink the coffee she had ordered for his breakfast, without a syllable of rebuke. But, when he divided the burden of his trembling limbs between his chair and the fender, and proceeded to fill his pipe for a composing smoke, she opened her battery.

Even his muddled intellect perceived the futility of denial ; the folly of any feint at excuse. His tongue was, for once, too thick for falsehood. He sat, cowed and dumb, pressing the unlighted tobacco into the bowl of his pipe ; the wet hair clinging closely to his reddened forehead ; his eyes, bloodshot and watery, cast down—

ward upon his hands, and let charge, proof, verdict and vituperation pour in upon him like fiery hail. Now and then a wince or a shiver showed that he was not altogether deadened to a sense of pain. This happened once, when she demanded where he obtained the deposit from which Woodson was to draw liquidation of his claim. He shook then, as with a tertian ague, and mumbled something—impertinently enough his wife thought—to the purport that the “least said about that was soonest mended.”

His agitation subsided, instead of increasing, when she retorted, with a savage accent, that she “supposed it was a reserve sum, set aside for such contingencies out of the money lent by her brother. It was a highly consistent use to make of gains which had been employed as a medium of wanton insult to the wife he had not the manliness to defend.” From this she glanced, as an exquisite instrument of torture, to the silvery curl she had found in his pocket-book, expatiating upon the perverted moral instinct of the unnatural father, who could lay this memento of his spotless babe by such records of evil dealing as occupied the next compartment. If these were the associations with which she was to be brought in contact, it were better that she should die before their influence polluted her pure nature. Not that *he* would regret this event! His conduct was decisive as to his sentiments toward his unhappy family. They could be nothing but an encumbrance, a hateful clog, upon the hands of a gentleman of pleasure”——

“For Heaven’s sake, Eleanor!” he interposed, imploringly—“Don’t say that! I am a scoundrel! a wretch that deserves everything else that you have said and the gallows beside. But I *do* love my children, and I never meant to wrong you! The Lord knows I never did! Wicked as I am, the thought of baby Nelly’s sweet face almost breaks my heart! I wish I had died before she was born. I should have been saved from the sin of robbing that one of my babies,”

He rubbed his hand over his eyes.

“Fine words and theatrical airs cost nothing,” Eleanor assumed. A fraction of the remorse and upright intentions he now expressed, would, if reduced to practice in season, have saved him and them from ignominious poverty. Now, the most cheering anticipation any of his household could experience with regard to him was the hope that some barrier could be erected that would prevent all future intercourse between himself and the innocent creatures he had so basely injured. For her part, she was in a frame of mind to pray that none of her poor, defrauded, disgraced children should ever see again the face of him, they were instructed to call by the holy name of “father.”

“Eleanor!” he said, hoarsely—“You do not—you cannot mean *that*! Do not drive me to desperation! Take it back!”

“Not one word of it!” She confronted him with eyes that burned luridly. “Not one word of it! I say it would have been well for them never to have seen you, and that the greatest blessing which could come to them would be never to meet or hear of you again in this world. Make what you will of it!”

He gave her a long, piteous stare; then reached down his hat from the mantel and slouched it over his brows, put on his cloak and went out unsteadily, like a sleep-walker near his awakening.

Eleanor sent a jeering laugh after him.

“Don’t forget the tragedy to-night!”

Then she was alone with her raging passions, and they ravened upon her at their mad, fierce will.

In the family circle, she maintained the hollow show of smiling decorum. Katherine had not attended party or assembly since her illness, until this evening, and the girlish pleasure of seeing herself again arrayed in gala costume was manifest in her richer bloom and sparkling eyes. Her dress was blue satin, of the shade now called “mazarine,” trimmed near the bottom of the skirt with a band of black velvet, a quarter of a yard deep; the puffs of her sleeves were caught up with loops of the same material,

and it edged the wide, flowing ends of her sash. Her hair was knotted high up at the back of her head, secured by the tall comb whose ornamented top added more than an inch to her stature. A pearl spray confined the curls upon the left temple, and she wore a necklace of larger pearls. The rarely fine lace in which Mrs. Rashleigh had the reputation of being a connoisseur, composed her stomacher and peeped out below her sleeves. Blue satin slippers and white silk stockings; a fan of carved ivory and rice paper—a fragile, curious toy—and long kid gloves supplied the finishing touches to the toilette of this favorite of beauty and fortune. The Colonel had bestowed far more thought upon his dress than Katherine's had cost her. A broad-skirted coat of dove-colored cloth, with immense buttons of mother of pearl, a waistcoat of white silk, embroidered with lavender; breeches like the coat, with silver knee-buckles, white stockings and high-heeled pumps, would excite the derision of fashionable circles now. Then, they formed an appropriate garb for the portly English gentleman; nor was the powdered hair inadmissible in the best society, although it had ceased to be the "mode."

"I wish the young gentlemen dressed as well as you do, papa!" said Katherine, saucily. "Costume, as an art, is going out of fashion, I am afraid—among the gentlemen, I mean. With ladies, it must remain a perpetual study, until the end of time—and toilettes! I am ludicrously reminded of a humming-bird when a modern dainty gent flourishes up to me on tiptoe, bedecked in a pea-green coat, a blue waistcoat, and, perhaps, light-brown pantaloons, and prays me to exhibit myself in the next dance with him. It is a call upon my moral courage to say 'Yes' to such a request. Happily, there is no dancing at a dinner-party or the theatre, and I can have the best-dressed gentleman in the company, for my beau-especial," with a mock-respectful courtesy to her father.

He tapped her cheek, laughingly. "And I see no reason why

I should not be vain of my daughter, also. What say you, mamma? Is not the little witch going to surprise us yet, by growing into a moderately fine woman?"

"I will not submit to such faint praise!" cried Katherine. "When everybody says I am the express image of what mamma was, at my age! I allow that she is handsomer now. Is she a 'moderately fine woman,' papa?"

The Colonel looked at his queenly wife with undisguised pride.

"She is always the 'fairest, discretest, best' of her sex, in my eyes."

It was seldom that his manner to her was caressing in the presence of others; but, as he said this, he stooped over and kissed her brow.

"I shall not expect certainly to meet you at the play. Much as I should enjoy your society there, I should be displeased were you to risk your valuable health by going. *That* is the first consideration."

Katherine had bidden her mother, "good evening," and was at the door, when Mrs. Moreau warned her playfully, "not to lose her heart."

"Unless I can bring home one worth twice as much—you would say, I suppose?" said she, looking back, with a bright glance her mother never forgot.

Mrs. Moreau and Mrs. Rashleigh resumed the light work that had employed their fingers, when the diners-out entered to pay their adieux. Mrs. Moreau talked volubly and sometimes unmeaningly. Mrs. Rashleigh appeared to listen, and when she could not, without direct rudeness, do otherwise, spoke a few words. The uncongenial colloquy was interrupted by a servant, who informed Mrs. Rashleigh that a gentleman wished to speak with her, as Colonel Rashleigh was from home.

"Show him up! Keep your seat!" said the lady to Eleanor,

after a glimpse of the person, who was just without the door, showed her that he was a stranger.

He was a civil young man, who introduced himself sensibly and without any affectation of diffidence.

"My name, madam, is Crump; I am a clerk in the — Bank, and I was sent here to acquaint Colonel Rashleigh with the fact that suspicions are entertained of the genuineness of a cheque bearing his signature, which was presented to day. We are not so familiar with his handwriting as to be positive of the forgery. Indeed, the cashier, being pressed with business at the time, paid over the money, without close inspection of the cheque. It was not until subsequent examination excited his doubts that it was decided to refer the matter to Colonel Rashleigh."

"Have you the cheque with you?"

"I have, madam," taking out his pocket-book. "Since Colonel Rashleigh is out, and promptitude may be necessary, if we wish to apprehend the forger, or get back the money, and you, no doubt, know Colonel Rashleigh's signature perfectly well, madam, will you have the goodness to examine this paper?"

It was worded thus—

"Pay to Robert Moreau or order the sum of seven hundred and sixty dollars (\$760).

"HENRY L. RASHLEIGH."

At a casual glance, it might readily pass for a fac-simile of the Colonel's characteristic autography. His wife detected the counterfeit on the instant, and that she did so, was seen by both the lookers on, who watched her with such diverse emotions.

The bank official respected the honest indignation at the liberty taken with her husband's name and funds, that hurried the crimson over the wife's face, until then colorless as alabaster, and the prudent self-control that compressed the mouth to shut back the unguarded speech that would have forestalled the course of justice.

Eleanor realized, as by a lightning flash, that her husband's reputation was in the hands of one upon whose leniency he had no hold. From the moment of the man's stating his errand, the truth had curdled the blood around her heart, and remembering her husband's expression at her inquiries about the check given to Woodson, she felt that her suspicions had been slow in awakening. Her inner sight read every word of the forged paper as plainly as did Mrs. Rashleigh's eyes, while her bodily vision, strained to acuteness by mental agony, recognized the endorsement upon the reverse of the note—"Robert Moreau."

Would that stern woman never speak? Why feign to scrutinize what she had condemned at sight? Did policy withhold her sentence? It was not mercy. The gentlest of divine attributes never softened such eyes as those.

"It is my impression," said Mrs. Rashleigh, slowly, "that Colonel Rashleigh did not write this. I am, however, not disposed to affirm that he did not. I prefer that you retain the paper, and call upon him early to-morrow morning; he will not be in again, until late to-night."

"Cannot you inform me where he may be found at present, madam? Delays are dangerous."

"I will take the responsibility of this one."

Awed by her dignity, he begged pardon and retreated. Mrs. Rashleigh took up her needle once more.

"It is growing colder," she said, glancing out of the window.

"Was that note a forgery?" asked Eleanor, in a discordant voice.

"It was." Mrs. Rashleigh answered as unconcerned as she had remarked upon the weather.

"Do you know who wrote it?"

"I do."

"Who?"

"Your husband!"

There was a pause. Eleanor was literally wrung with anguish. She bowed her face upon her knees and groaned—an outbreak of passionate woe, that seemed to rend the heart as it escaped. Then, she lifted herself and asked—still in that harsh key:

"What do you mean to do with him?"

A thrill of unhallowed joy ran through the frame of the Nemesis—she was acknowledged as the arbiter of her enemy's fate!

Her voice was untremulous. "It is Colonel Rashleigh's affair—not mine."

"But your influence over him is unbounded."

"I never interfere in his business."

"What do you think that he will do?"

"I presume that he will let the law take its course."

"And the penalty is"—

"The penitentiary."

"You are not in earnest?" said the half-crazed woman.

"Is it likely that I would jest on such a subject?"

Her coolness was maddening; her slight, scornful smile pitiless as death.

"For the love of mercy!" cried Eleanor, crushed to her knees by the view of the gulf at her feet. "If you have one spark of womanly feeling, think of your own child, and pity my little ones."

"They are truly unfortunate, but not more so than others have been. Mr. Moreau can blame no one except himself, for their degradation."

"I know it, but he is weak-minded, and easily led astray. He has been fearfully tempted. Represent to his uncle that this is his first offence of this kind. What is this paltry sum to a man of his wealth? If he will pass this over, and save my husband, I promise solemnly, that he shall be repaid, if we are made homeless by so doing. Will you not plead for us?"

She said all this kneeling upon the floor—humbled in the dust—her eyes lifted toward the stony features of the advocate she sought to enlist.

"His first offence of this kind! In what class of offences am I then to place the letter written in the name of his brother-in-law, which you showed to my daughter? Why do you sit there? Get up and answer, for this is but the beginning of the account between us."

The total alteration in her countenance and tone, struck Eleanor, excited as she was. She obeyed.

"The letter! the letter!" she replied, to gain time, "I do not remember it."

"I mean the epistle suggested by yourself—penned by your husband, and read by Katherine, while she was at Montrouge last fall. Were you the principal in the matter, or was he?"

"It was William Sancroft's proposal."

"And you condescended to follow where so contemptible a reptile crawled. There is a paper which you may return to Mr. Moreau. He left it upon my desk at Briarwood, the day you called to invite Katherine to your house. His head was so full of his master-piece, that he could not refrain from practising his penmanship, wherever and whenever he found paper and pen ready to his hand. That is a better imitation of your brother's signature that Mr. Moreau achieved of his uncle's in the check I examined just now. You ought to be very proud of his talents as a scribe."

The cruel taunt was unheeded; Eleanor was constrained to look at the sheet handed to her. It was scribbled over with unconnected words, among which—"Ben Lomond"—"My dear Eleanor," "Malcolm," "Malcolm Argyle," "Miss Rashleigh," occurred—all in a feigned hand, bearing so close a resemblance to Malcolm's that it was impossible to suppose it an accidental coincidence.

"Whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad," was a proverb that might well be placed, in this connection, alongside of the one which her brother's voice now seemed to reiterate in Eleanor's ear.

"You poisoned my child's mind against a true and fond lover. Is it this which I am to remember to beget in me pity for your children? He was driven from his home by her rejection, and her mental suffering produced the illness which had well-nigh made me childless. Are your 'little ones' to reap the benefit of *this* reflection? What think you? Would a mother be likely to spare the murderess of her daughter? Look at me, Eleanor Argyle! *Can* a wife spare the murderess of her husband?"

At her almost forgotten maiden-name, Eleanor did look up. She saw a form, instinct with such energy, an eye, dilate with such wrath, as metamorphosed the cold, languid invalid into a Pythoness, breathing vengeance.

"Who are you?" she said, shrinking from the apparition.

"The 'cobbler's wife,' whom you scorned! the suppliant, whose prayer for her husband's life you denied, and added insult to your denial! You may quake and stare at me! It is as I have said. Your punishment has slumbered long, but it is upon you now. The man whom you have married assailed me—an unprotected, sorrowing woman—with his infamous gallantries, and your jealousy at hearing that he had been seen with me fanned your dislike into fury. Your father's tool—as your father was yours—was that disgrace to mankind, Sancroft. Between you, you thrust an innocent, dying man into a prison, from which death, more merciful than any of your band, released him. Have I forgotten you or your accomplice? Have you heard nothing of the pending investigation of his later knaveries, which will blast his character forever, if it does not consign him to a felon's cell? Are you aware, that even had your husband never com-

mitted this forgery, he could not have escaped similar disgrace? Instigated by his evil spirit, William Sancroft, he purloined from Colonel Rashleigh's lawyer the papers that would have convicted his friend's father. And I—I—mind you! followed him up, until the evidence establishing his guilt was obtained. He has virtually confessed the deed, but it was superfluous testimony. This is the solution of his shyness in my company—the downcast eyes and sullen shamefacedness that have troubled and angered you. Are you jealous *now* of my influence over him? Your own is not greater!"

Eleanor had caught the back of a chair, and leaned her face upon it; her breath coming in sharp, loud gasps, like the suffocating sobs of one drowning.

"I have been patient—very patient! a patience that has stolen away my health and youth, made me old, while yet in my prime. But I knew that it would come—the day and hour of the avenging angel! Is it still your wish that I should be your intercessor with your uncle?"

No answer except the hysterical gasping.

"He has been the unconscious instrument in the grasp of Fate. In what he has done in providing for my child and myself, and in removing to this country, he was unmoved by any knowledge of Bessy Hale's wrongs, or her oath of vengeance. He never knew that Mark Hale died in prison, as truly by your hands as if you had stabbed him to the heart. It is not to his pity that I owe my position, nor his sense of justice that has accomplished your humiliation. No! it was Destiny, and it is victorious!"

When, after a prolonged stillness, Eleanor raised her head, the short winter's afternoon was darkening into night, and she was alone.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE theatre was a blaze of light, and crowded from pit to roof. Never had a more brilliant assemblage been gathered within its walls. It was the carnival of the volatile, pleasure-loving South, and the leaders in its gaieties, the young, the beautiful, and the opulent; the élite of the capital's fashion and intelligence were here, to offer an ovation to a favorite actor. In whatever direction the eye moved, it was greeted by gay colors, flashing jewels, and brighter smiles, and the joyous hum that arose from the throng was like the distant sound of laughing, leaping waters.

Conspicuous among the many beauties that adorned the boxes, was Katherine Rashleigh. Over an India shawl she wore an ermine tippet, and both having been thrown back, on account of the warmth of the house, the white fur circled plump shoulders, that were not shamed by its purity. Her head was covered by a white satin hat, with plumes, its wide, round brim permitting a fair view of her face, over which the dimples and blushes were coming and going in enchanting succession.

Her attire, with its warm, bright hues, all so becoming to her style of beauty, was set off by contrast with the dress of her friend, Miss Wickham, who sat by her. She was a gentle-looking girl, whose choice of tints evinced her modest taste and an appreciation of what best suited her pensive loveliness. Her hat and feathers were mouse-color, the former lined with pink satin, and tied under her chin with pink ribbons. Her cloak and furs

just matched the hat in shade, as did also her dress of delicately-fine cambric, a material much in vogue at that date. At the back of the seat, stood her betrothed lover, Lieutenant Calvert, whose low-toned conversation brought up a happy glow to her transparent skin, almost as vivid as the carmine of Miss Rashleigh's complexion.

Katherine's impulsive temperament was quickened to exhilaration by the splendor of the scene and the billowy murmur. She could have clapped her hands and screamed in childish *abandon* of delight, and since she must curb this madcap inclination, she talked fast and merrily with the admirers who pressed into Mr. Wickham's box, to crave an introduction to the new star. The Colonel was in his glory, and in the plenitude of his complacency, he made it a point of conscience and politeness to address some sonorous platitude to each fresh comer, who swelled his daughter's train.

"A gay scene, sir!" he informed one. "I was not prepared for such an array of beauty in a provincial town."

"There are some re-mar-ka-bly handsome ladies here to-night," he observed to another—while to a third, he imparted, semi-confidentially, his opinion that the governor of the commonwealth, who occupied a neighboring box, was "a man of distinguished bearing—evidently one of nature's noblemen."

While the performers were upon the stage, his attention was courteously critical—for had he not seen Garrick—"a most extraordinary man and actor!" as he enlightened every one near him, between the second and third acts.

Katherine was never ashamed of her father. She rightly regarded his faults and idiosyncrasies as trifling blemishes upon a character whose main traits were generous and admirable. From her mother and her native tact, she had learned to divert the current of his ideas when it set too decidedly in the direction of the ridiculous.

"See, papa!" she said, touching his elbow, as he stood up in the front of the box. "Is not that Cousin Robert in the upper tier—across the house?"

The Colonel looked, as she directed, and saw his nephew seated between Sancroft and Woodson, neighbors whom Katherine had not observed when she spoke.

The uncle frowned. "It is himself—certainly. Your mother decided very prudently to remain at home, I imagine. I am displeased at Robert's public appearance with a"—

Katherine's warning finger reminded him where he was, and smothering his disapprobation, he bestowed one more severe glance upon the culprit, and gave his attention anew to the stage.

Katherine scanned her cousin more particularly. She thought it strange that, when his wife had made his recovery the condition of her coming out this evening, that he should be here without her. His temporary-sickness had worsted him surprisingly; but, making allowances for this and the unfavorable effect of his disordered dress and unkempt hair, there was something about him which she could not understand. His face was red, in spite of its haggard lines, and she could see that he talked noisily, constantly interrupting himself and attracting the notice of those about him by bursts of laughter. His companions were more quiet, and from Sancroft's gesture, she imagined that he several times pointed out her father to his boisterous comrade, with injunctions to more decorous behavior. She was glad to turn from the contemplation of the trio, to the well-bred group surrounding her, and forget that there were such existing evils as wine-bibbing and bad company.

The play was heartily applauded—not merely for the merits of the various performers—still less for its intrinsic interest, but it had been translated from the French by a Richmond citizen, and there was a universal desire to encourage and reward a home

production. It was followed by two comic songs and two dances, the latter by Miss Placide, whose modest and agile performance was extravagantly admired by the gentlemen portion of the spectators.

"To which will be added (for the first time here), the favorite New Pantomime of Raymond and Agnes, or the Bleeding Nun," read Katherine from the play-bill. "Oh, delightful!"

"Do you like pantomime?" asked Lieutenant Calvert.

"Very much. You speak as if you did not."

"I like what I can understand of it; but unless the actors are superlatively good, so much of it is unintelligible that I lose the connection, and, of course, all interest in the piece."

"You cannot well lose your way here," observed Miss Wickham. "The explanatory abstract of the legend is really amusing in its exactness. Hear! 'The mother of Agnes, the late countess, portrayed in the habit of a nun. The Count enters, viewing the picture with agitation. Kneels to implore forgiveness for the murder'—"

"I think we might have been trusted to discover the 'agitation' for ourselves," returned Katherine. "The Count must be a poor actor, or we very dull observers, if we could not perceive that he was moved at sight of the picture."

"What a hypercritical set you are!" interposed Mr. Wickham, "You forget that to those who are unfamiliar with the legend upon which this dumb show is founded, the copious sketch here given will be invaluable. For myself, I confess, that with Lieutenant Calvert, I need a guide-board at every turn of a performance like this. Agitation on the stage, and off it, are two things—sometimes not even consins-german. If the Count, in entering should strike his gouty toe, or pinch his fingers in the door, his contortions, as his eye rolled accidentally toward the picture, would be comically like the workings of the remorse which he will betray at sight of the murdered woman's likeness."

Colonel Rashleigh, unable to understand the flow of spirits that led to so many words over a matter of no moment whatever, was poring through his spectacles, in search of the point of criticism in the playbill, when the curtain arose, "discovering Raymond at his studies," and the eyes of all were riveted, in perplexity or interest upon the stage.

"Well?" said Katherine, smiling inquiry at Mr. Wickham, at the close of the first act.

"Oh, I kept up pretty well, considering the celerity with which the thing was hurried through. I had hardly time to glance at my bill for a notice of one tableau, before another took its place."

"There were several marked incongruities in the scenes," objected Colonel Rashleigh, not unwilling to show that his perceptive faculties had kept pace with the speed that had baffled his friend. "I have never made a personal examination of the interior of a robber's 'hovel,' but it is my impression that they are not, as a usual thing, lighted by chandeliers."

"Was there a chandelier in Baptist's hovel?" asked Mr. Wickham, much diverted, as were the rest, by this unlooked-for descent to particulars from such a source.

"There was, sir; a sconce with two branches. The inappropriateness of the thing displeased me instantly."

"A candle-end stuck into a gin-bottle would have been in better keeping," said Lieutenant Calvert.

"Do not judge too hastily; he was a robber, and without doubt, had stolen the unsuitable article," suggested Katherine.

The young officer laughed. "Really, Miss Rashleigh, I hardly know which most to admire—your charity or your ingenuity, in setting up this plea for poor Baptist's taste in furniture."

A crash of music from the orchestra notified them that the second act had commenced. The first scene was that over which

the jesting criticism had begun—a chamber in the castle of Lindenburg, the nun's portrait hanging against the rear wall. A man, habited like an old retainer of the castle, entered from the side. He had not crossed to the front of the platform, when a fiery flake from above fell upon his head—another, and another—and a second actor—the Raymond of the dumb show, rushed forward, and tossed his arms in frenzied gesticulation toward the spectators. Simultaneously with his appearance, was heard from behind the curtain, the startling cry of "FIRE!"

The crowd arose as one man, and there was a movement in the direction of the door.

"False alarm! There is no danger!" shouted a strong voice above the confusion, and, "No danger! no danger!" was caught up and repeated by many.

Katherine's eye turned to the quarter from which the first voice came, and saw, across the house, the speaker, who continued to vociferate the assurance of safety, and, at his side, just opposite to herself, Malcolm Argyle, his eyes eagerly fixed upon the curtain, which had fallen at the alarm. In another second, he had precipitated himself over the low parapet of the boxes, into the pit; and, as a bright stream of light flashed through the painted screen, the cry of "Fire!" rang out again, echoed now by groans and shrieks, that told the mad fear which seized upon every soul at the certainty of the calamity.

Malcolm had dashed through the crowd in the pit—all, beside himself rushing to the door—and scaled a pillar into the box where stood the Rashleighs, terrified, yet willing to listen to reason, while Mr. Wickham reiterated that the best chance of safety lay in presence of mind, and a steady, yet hasty progress toward the lobby.

"The pit!" said Malcolm, imperatively. "Lower the ladies, and then leap yourselves into the pit! We can reach the outer door before the crowd from the stairs blocks it up. Now—now!"

He laid hold of Katherine's arm, and she felt in his iron grasp how awful was his sense of their peril.

"I think, sir"—began Mr. Wickham.

"It is no time to think. *I* have thought!" said Malcolm, vehemently. "Katherine, will you let me"—

A wilder cry of alarm, as the forked tongues of flame, with lightning velocity, ran along the ceiling, curled and spouted, and wrapped themselves over the light boards that pannelled the front of the boxes.

"There is but one way now!" and, throwing his arm about Katherine's waist, Malcolm plunged into the living current that surged impetuously into the narrow, tortuous stairs and lobbies.

Lieutenant Calvert caught up the fainting form of his betrothed and followed, while the two elderly gentlemen, breast to breast, fought bravely to win a path from death. Still, pressing as they thought the emergency, they miscalculated the swiftness of the triumphant element. The piercing shrieks of the hapless creatures who were in the hindmost ranks, testified that they were already in its scorching embrace, when the dazzling, furious glow grew suddenly dull, and a column of pitchy smoke rolled along the roof, filled the dome, and, extinguishing every light in its downward swoop, fell—a black-winged Death—upon the struggling mass of human beings. Screams and moans were stifled—stilled! All that was left of vital fire, within the inner walls, went out in one agonized respiration, as the victims entered the poisonous cloud—hot, reeking with oily vapors—as it were, a breath from Gehenna itself!

In the lobbies, and upon the staircases, the frantic struggle for life went on in utter darkness; behind, the roaring, surging flame; before them, an impenetrable wall and a staircase, piled higher and higher with the bodies of living and dead. Over these, rushed on the trampling, wrestling crowd. Strong men climbed upon the shoulders, and walked upon the heads of the compacted

throng that still kept their feet; women were crushed to death in the press; children trodden to pieces.

Yet, the ties of Nature were mighty. Husbands upbore wives with superhuman strength; mothers held their offspring so tightly enclasped, that the tremendous force of the outward tide could not tear them away, and fathers, with arms of stone and thews of steel, lifted their sons above the pressure of shoulders and heads.

Katherine had spoken but once in the dreadful transit:

"My father!"

"Is an able-bodied man; you, a feeble woman!"

He had no more breath to spare, even to console her. When the cloud of smoke fell, they were still some paces from the staircase, and, at the inhalation of the noisome vapor, Malcolm felt his stout heart give way. Casting his eyes up in the darkness, he descried the faint glimmer of the sky through a window. Summoning all the muscular energy that remained to him, he threw himself against the lower sash. It fell outward, and the pure air of heaven pouring in through the opening, brought back departing life and hope to many beside himself. A cry of mingled joy and anguish went up from the sufferers, and there was an instant rush in the direction of the casement.

"Trust me!" said Malcolm. "Your safety is dearer to me than my life!"

Katherine felt herself raised in his arms as he spoke; the cold wind blew more freshly over her, and, realizing with a shudder what was his desperate resort, she shut her eyes as he swung her clear of the building and let her go.

A pair of stout arms broke her fall.

"All safe, missis! Bless the Lord!" said a tall negro, whose giant frame had not staggered under her descending weight.

"Gilbert—Gilbert Hunt!" called out a voice from an upper window.

The man hallooed in reply, and hastened to obey the summons.

Katherine gazed with clasped hands and dilated eyes upon the casement from which she had been lowered. By the light of the flames now bursting through the roof, she saw Malcolm maintain his stand within against the crazed creatures swarming over him; saw him lower one and another quickly, gently, as he had done her; heard their exclamations of thanksgiving to him and to Heaven, as each reached the ground in safety. From windows, above and below, forms were falling—some headlong and shrieking—some prone and unresisting—some with clothes on fire, and within that funeral pyre were her father and her lover, while she must stand inactive—see all—hear all—and not stir to save either!

A fiercer, more agonized yell came from the imprisoned wretches—marking, as she afterward knew, the sinking of the staircase under its accumulated load; and, forgetting the self-command she had until now so rigorously preserved, she cried aloud:

“Malcolm—Malcolm! Oh, come to me!”

He heard—sent one hasty, troubled glance over the horrified faces flocking about the inside of the window, extricated himself from clinging hands and crowding forms, and—was upon the earth beside her!

“My darling! *you* are saved! Thank God!”

He asked not whether he had the right. For one rapturous instant he held her to his heart, as the fervent ejaculation passed his lips—for one second, her arm was about his neck and her head upon his breast; then she started up.

“My father! Oh, where is he?”

“I waited for him as long as I dared. I trust he has escaped by the door. It is not safe to stand here. See!”

The licking flames, now blent into one vast, quivering, swaying pyramid, arose toward the strangely serene heavens. The un-

equal conflict was at an end. There was no more sound of mortal woe within those trembling walls. The Fire-Fiend held high carousal where, one short quarter of an hour before, peace and pleasure and joy—the enjoyment that “takes no thought for the morrow”—had reigned supreme.

Eleanor Moreau still lay upon the bed in the lethargic stupor that had succeeded to the tempest of warring passions, unheeding the tumult that arose, with increasing din, without; the hoarse cries and trampling of hurrying feet; the discordant clangor of the alarm-bells or the ruddy reflection from the distant fire upon the white wall opposite her bed, although her eyes were open, and rested upon the sanguinary tinge. She scarcely heard the loud knocking at her door, until her name was called again and again.

“Mrs. Moreau! Mrs. Moreau!”

Reeling with weakness and giddiness, she drew back the bolt. A lady, a fellow boarder in the house, stood in the passage. Her blanched face and trembling articulation awoke in Eleanor, a feeling akin to impatience.

“What do you want? I do not understand you!” she said, almost rudely.

Another effort and the words came out. “The theatre is burned down! Where is your husband?”

“I do not know! Why do you ask?” replied Eleanor, putting her hand to her head.

“Because we fear that he was *there*!”

The vacant stare told her that the mind did not receive her meaning and the lady added—“Will you come to Mrs. Rashleigh’s room? We may learn some particulars of the fire, from your brother.”

Eleanor followed her to the sitting-room.

Mrs. Rashleigh was extended upon the sofa, just recovering from a swoon; Malcolm supported her, his hands swollen and blackened—his hair scorched. Eleanor noted these circumstances with dull surprise. Katherine knelt before her mother, and chafed her hands, unmindful of her own need of attention, for her dress was torn and dabbled with blood—not her own—her shoes were gone, and her hair in tangled confusion.

"What has happened? Where is Colonel Rashleigh? Where is Robert?" demanded the bewildered wife, her clouded intelligence gathering the idea of some horrible catastrophe.

Mrs. Holt tried to draw her away, but Mrs. Rashleigh had seen and heard her.

Raising herself to her feet, she put her hands together and looked upward—the reluctant homage of a foiled ambition to the Power that had dashed it to the ground—

"VENGEANCE IS MINE—I WILL REPAY, SAITH THE LORD!" and she fell forward in another and more deadly faint.

CHAPTER XXXV.

OVER quaint and dear old Ben Lomond, the home of Malcolm and Katherine, there hung for years, one cloud; there moved in the household band one figure, that was a continual reminder to the husband and wife of a dark and terrible story—a tragedy, known in all its details, only to themselves. They never spoke of it, except in their most secret conferences, yet both knew that it was never forgotten, for an instant, while that pallid, woe-stricken woman sat in her arm-chair, beside the winter fire, or, in summer, in the airy colonnade overlooking the site of the Hale's cottage. She was always habited in deep black, always taciturn and unsmiling "in a melancholy," said the neighbors, and from Mrs. Holt, the only member of the family who could be induced to converse upon the one great event of her life—the burning of the Richmond theatre, they learned enough to beget in them compassion, unmingled with wonder, for the widowed mother of Ben Lomond's mistress.

The *ci-devant* governess was never more solemnly important than when a knot of curious listeners collected in her room, and having shut the door, begged her to recount the particulars of that direful night, that plunged hundreds of families into mourning.

For fifty years, save one, have the fervent tones of prayer and the sweet melody of holy song, floated through the outer court of the monumental temple, where are inurned the ashes of the noble and the brave, the lovely, and the beloved, who fell upon that

Nox Ira in the annals of Virginia's fair Capitol. But the fatal spot is haunted yet. The stranger's foot loiters beside the simple and time-stained tomb, while he reads the record of the slain, and a troop of horrified, struggling, despairing phantoms seems to encircle him, as he lingers over the list; the bright, calm day is changed into the lurid illumination of the Death Festival, and heart-sick and shuddering, he turns away. The Commonwealth still mourns the ornaments of her high places, and in many, many homes, the date of that Christmas merrymaking is marked by a cross of blood; is never named but in whispers, with pale lips and aching hearts.

One wet August afternoon, Mrs. Holt rehearsed the dismal story, to five or six young girls, visitors at the hospitable homestead. They clustered closely about her; sitting upon stools and the floor—some in the laps of others, for the narrator's tones were mysteriously low, and with the horror inspired by the tale, came the disposition to keep near together.

"What a mercy it was that you did not go, Mrs. Holt!" said one.

"You are quite correct, my dear. Yet I am surprised in the retrospect, that I chose a quiet, intellectual conversation with Mrs. Wickham, instead of the entertainment of the play-house. I thought then, that my decision grew out of my contempt for the stamp of the performances for that evening. Of the legitimate drama, I was always an enthusiastic admirer. But I have since reflected, with reverence and gratitude, that my action was rather an illustration of the truth, so beautifully expressed by the great poet—

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends
Rough-hew them as we may."

"Was it ever known how the house took fire?"

"Never definitely. The most probable story was that it was

communicated to one of the painted scenes by the lifting of a chandelier, which by some unaccountable oversight, was not extinguished when it was raised out of the way."

"And when you and Mrs. Wickham heard the alarm, and where the fire was, you ran down to the theatre?" prompted an auditor, who had heard the recital before.

"We did—without a moment's delay, or bonnet or cloak—cold though the night was. I shall never forget Mrs. Wickham's scream, when we caught sight of the building—the fire bursting through the roof, and the wailing forms that filled the windows. The fire seemed even then, feeding upon them. The first person Mrs. Wickham recognized was a negro-man, who stood under one of the windows, catching the poor women who were dropped into his arms by a gentleman in the upper story.

"O, Gilbert!" she cried. "Have you seen my daughter?" "No, madam," he said, mournfully; and then the gentleman called—"Here is one more!" and lowered a large female, under whose fall, the man himself went to the ground."

"Was he hurt?"

"I learned, subsequently, that he was not, and that he saved the life of the gentleman also, a physician of the city, who was lamed by entangling his foot in a projecting hinge, as he leaped out. The brave black rescued him, as the walls were tottering, and bore him away in his arms. In one minute more the building fell to the ground."*

"But I saw nothing of this, for I followed the unhappy mother, as she ran into the crowd, seeking her husband and her child. She found Mr. Wickham contending violently with the humane friends who would not let him rush back into the house to look

* This incident is literally true, as indeed are all the particulars of the conflagration and the escape of the sufferers. Gilbert Hunt still (in 1880,) plies his trade, which is that of a blacksmith, in Richmond, Virginia.

for his daughter. She had been close behind him, and supported by her betrothed, near the head of the staircase, and then descended the dense suffocating smoke that killed more than the flame did, and it was supposed that they all went down together—Colonel Rashleigh, and the ill-fated lovers—to rise no more. ‘They were lovely, and pleasant in their lives, and in their deaths they were not divided.’”

“And Mr. Wickham—how did he escape?”

“He fell, providentially, against a partition, with his mouth close to a crack, and the stream of air from without, revived him so far that he was able to roll himself down the stairs. While he was striving with those who held him, there came a crash and a fearful cry, and it was announced that the staircase had broken down, thus cutting off all hope of escape except through the windows. From these, the miserable sufferers continued to fall for a few minutes more, and then all was over. Men and women, young and old were,

‘In one red burial blent.’

Their dust returned to the earth, and their spirits to God who gave them.”

After an awed silence, another spoke. “Where were Mr. and Mrs. Argyle, when you found them?”

“At the door; there was but one to pit and boxes! Hence, the terrible loss of life. Mr. Argyle had just returned from travelling in the South, and knew nothing of Miss Rashleigh’s being in the city, until he saw her across the theatre, soon after he entered the house, while she did not notice him before the alarm of ‘fire’ was raised. Then, with the courage and presence of mind for which he is distinguished, he leaped into the pit, and hurrying over to her, besought her to do the same. There was no time to explain what was afterward made but too evident;

namely, that, if those in the lower tier of boxes had jumped into the pit, they could have gained the common entrance-door in a shorter time than by the staircase, and also left more room for those whose seats were higher up. The pit was cleared very quickly, and not one of its occupants was lost. Mr. Wickham never ceased to deplore his resistance to Mr. Argyle’s proposal, which would, humanly-speaking, have saved the lives of the whole party. But Mr. Argyle was personally unknown to him, and none of them suspected the magnitude of the peril. While Colonel Rashleigh and Mr. Wickham withheld the ladies and deprecated the precipitancy of the multitude, the fire caught the drop-curtain and the boxes, and but a single chance of life remained to him. Mrs. Argyle once told me, that it seemed to her that hours were spent in their passage to the window from which Mr. Argyle let her down, yet it was scarcely ten minutes from the time the alarm was given, and the rescue of the last living creature from the burning building. So true is it, that in the midst of life we are in death.”

“How did Mr. Moreau perish?” was asked, after another pause.

“It was never known. There were two other gentlemen from this county with him. One of them, Mr. Woodson, leaped from a high window—for they sat in the third tier—and had his leg fractured by the concussion. He is still living, a hopeless cripple, in or near Richmond. Mr. Sancroft, who was a very agile man, attempted to make his way over the heads of the throng, but while so doing, was precipitated down the staircase when it fell, and finally drawn out of the mass of prostrate bodies, by a fireman. His internal bruises were so serious, that he did not survive his hurt above a week. Neither of these gentlemen had any recollection of seeing Mr. Moreau after they left the bench on which they had been sitting together. It was an hour that ‘tried men’s souls,’ and the ‘first law of Nature,’ was the one most regarded.”

"We were still looking and inquiring for Colonel Rashleigh, when Mrs. Rashleigh appeared. She was an extremely delicate woman, yet she had run every step of the way, from her boarding-house to the theatre—fully a quarter of a mile. Her cry, as her daughter spoke to her, is ringing in my ears now, and she sank senseless in her arms. We took her back to the tavern, and there remained the sad duty of telling Mrs. Moreau of her husband's probable fate. She could not, or would not believe it until days had gone by. She appeared to be completely stunned by the stroke."

"Mrs. Rashleigh's mind received a slight shock—did it not?" was the cautiously-worded query that veiled intense curiosity.

"I fear so! She was never a demonstrative or talkative person, and I had no conception of the depth of her devotion to her husband and child, prior to this lamentable event. We despaired of her reason, for weeks after we returned home. But she was adjudged capable of administering upon her husband's estate. One of the first uses she made of her restored faculties was to dismiss a suit which Colonel Rashleigh had ordered to be instituted against the father of Mr. Sancroft, the unhappy young man of whom I spoke just now. She sent for the old gentleman, and had a long, private conference with him, and then instructed her lawyer to suspend the proceedings against him. He removed from the county, shortly afterward."

It was as the literal, yet unsuspecting governess had stated. Without an effort to resume the functions of her office, the Nemesis had submitted to her dethronement, and henceforth, no cloistered nun led a life of more rigorous seclusion—more gloomy self-abnegation. The possessor of a handsome fortune, she lived as abstemiously as an anchorite. Her room in her daughter's house was furnished as simply as the master and mistress of the mansion would allow, and her dress was devoid of any appearance of ornament. Her almsgivings were liberal to extrava-

gance, and bestowed as privately as possible. She never attended public divine service, yet her daily drive, except when Malcolm prohibited it, because of very stormy weather, was to the hill behind the church, in which Mr. and Mrs. Argyle were now devout worshippers. There she would sit for hours, at the foot of the lonely grave, Mark's Bible and her thoughts for her companions. Her affectionate children could not but hope that she was slowly feeling her way to light and truth, although they dared not invade the solitude of her communings with the Past, and with Him, who had overruled the wrathful purposes of His creature, as He, in His inscrutable providence deemed best. Besides the reverse of her previous intentions in the case of Mr. Sancroft, she gave another and more signal proof of the revolution wrought in her feelings, by defraying all Mr. Moreau's just debts, and settling his estate, thus disencumbered, upon his children. Mrs. Moreau she never saw after the night that made them both widows.

Nor was the younger lady more inclined to the meeting. She, too, had undergone a great change. Montrouge ceased to be the rendezvous of the gay youth of the vicinity. Its mistress' law, despotic as ever, ruled out all species of fashionable dissipation, and the judicious expenditures and improvements of the plantation were controlled exclusively by herself. Her sons respected and obeyed the mother, whose strictness repressed any excessive outgoings of love they might otherwise have felt for their only parent, and they bade fair, under her guardianship, to grow up into upright, honorable men. One person, alone, of all who owned her sway, was ever indulged or spoiled by kindness. This was the "baby Nelly," who had been the father's darling. Did he look up through those innocent eyes into the stern mother's face? Was there, in her infantine coaxings, any tone that reminded her of his last plaintive words, as she drove him from her into his fiery grave? The Searcher of hearts only knew!

It was certain that she never uttered his name ; it was as certain that she never forgot him.

When a black-eyed daughter was given to Katherine's arms, she wished to name it "Bessy;" but her mother positively, yet quietly forbade it, and the father called it by the pet title he had restored, since their marriage, to his lost and found playmate.

Three years later, little "Kitty" was made supremely happy by the present of a baby-brother. All other rejoicings than hers were subdued by the shadow lengthening over the household—the approaching dissolution of Mrs. Rashleigh. Her decline was gradual, and seemingly peaceful as painless. The day before she died, Miss Barbara, still hale in her useful old age, brought the boy-heir in her arms to his grandmother's bedside, and presented a petition from his mother, that she would ratify the name which had been bestowed upon him.

A sweet smile lighted up the wasted features.

"Lay him here !" she said, stretching out her arm upon the pillow.

Miss Barbara complied, and the dying eyes looked steadfastly upon the infant, whose mystery of life was beginning as hers ended.

Then, laying her other hand upon his head, she said, solemnly, "The God of your grandfather bless you, Mark Hale !" and Miss Barbara added a tearful "Amen !"

They buried her, as she had desired, beside her husband, and although her epitaph did not bespeak the same certainty of a blessed rest as did his, there was in the hearts of her children and old friend, a sustaining hope that she was partaker with her beloved one, of the heavenly heritage ; that the calm ray at "evening-time," was a foretoken of light celestial and eternal.

With reverent hands and many tears, Malcolm and Katherine examined the relics she had bequeathed, with everything else, to them. Over the worn trunk that had gone with her through all

her changes of fortune and place, they lingered longest and most sadly. It contained Kitty's doll, manufactured by the father's hands, for her first Christmas-box ; a full suit of his apparel, the dark-blue cloth free from moth and dust, the linen neatly folded ; and underneath all, the sign once affixed, with such guileless pride, to the cottage wall—

<p>MARK HALE,</p> <p>SHOEMAKER.</p>

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