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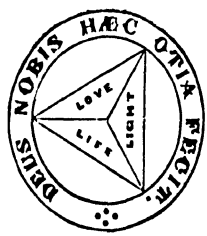
BY THE TRENT.

BY

MRS. E. S. OLDHAM.



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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Directors of the Scottish Temperance League having offered a First Prize of £250, and a Second Prize of £100, for the best and second best Temperance Tales, ninety-nine MSS. were received in reply.

The Rev. Alexander B. Grosart, Rev. George Hunter, Rev. George M'Arthur, M.A., Rev. James Stewart, M.A., Rev. Norman L. Walker, kindly consented to act as adjudicators, and the following is their decision:—

GLASGOW, *November 1st, 1864.*

Having been requested by the Directors of the Scottish Temperance League to adjudicate on their offer of a First Prize of £250, and a Second Prize of £100, for the best and second best Temperance Tales, and having attentively examined the whole manuscripts forwarded in answer to the advertisements, being ninety-nine in number, we award the First Prize to the Tale denominated

"BY THE TRENT,"

and the Second Prize to the Tale entitled

"ROUND ABOUT THE BUSH."

108 HOPE STREET,
GLASGOW, *28th November, 1864.*

CONTENTS.

PAGE

CHAPTER I.—The Walk, ... 1

CHAPTER II.—Stephen Morris, ... 13

CHAPTER III.—The "Kinder Garten," 45

CHAPTER IV.—"The Lost Sheep," 64

CHAPTER V.—The "Painting Dressmaker," 88

CHAPTER VI.—The Sermon, ... 100

CHAPTER VI.—The Champagne Breakfast; or, First Wine then Water, 123

CHAPTER VII.—Death and his Doings, ... 135

CHAPTER VIII.—Comus, ... 142

CHAPTER IX.—The Blind Father 154

CHAPTER X.—Veronica's Adventures, ... 169

CHAPTER XI.—Letitia, ... 186

CHAPTER XII.—The Minister and the Wine-cup, ... 196

CHAPTER XIII.—The Wedding Cards, ... 207

CHAPTER XIV.—Fire! Fire! 221

CHAPTER XV.—Changes and Secrets, ... 235

CHAPTER XVI.—A Letter from the Dead, ... 248

CHAPTER XVII.—The Snow-storm, ... 264

CHAPTER XVIII.—Jonas White, the Methodist Preacher, ... 274

CHAPTER XIX.—The Doctor and his Patients. 294

CHAPTER XX.—The Rescue, ... 313

CHAPTER XXI.—The Sword of Damocles, ... 329

CHAPTER XXII.—The Minister's Martyrdom, ... 346

CHAPTER XXIII.—The Children's Party, ... 360

CHAPTER XXIV.—From St. Wilfrid's to Brunswick House, ... 374

CHAPTER XXV.—Death among the Breakers, ... 399

CHAPTER XXVI.—Sunshine after Rain. The Temperance Meeting, 403

CHAPTER XXVII.—John Broadbent's Letter, ... 421

BY THE TRENT.

CHAPTER I.

THE WALK.

THE old elms by the river were putting out tender leaves, for the winds of March were past, and April had touched their heads with her magical sunshine. The morning was bright and warm, and thousands of varnished leaf-cases lay upon the ground, pushed off by impatient unfolding leaflets longing to be fully born. Upon the river the wind rode, and with playful hands turned back the ripples, and curved them curiously, and whipped their edges softly into foam. The willows by the shore were white with palm—the grass was greening beneath lately fallen showers. In the air was a fresh scent of growing vegetation, and in the pale blue sky were the most delicate cirrous clouds—feathers dropped from the wings of the great angel of spring.

John Broadbent had this morning walked bare-headed in his garden, and from under the apple-boughs had looked upon the swiftly-flowing river and the wide meadows with a longing eye, desiring to walk still further, and, like the wind that just now raised the masses of his dark hair, to move quickly and gladly over some small portion of the world. He called to his sister, who was busy within doors talking to her young

maid-servant about the dinner, "Clara, are you aware that the sun is shining?"

There was no reply, and no sound but a murmur of voices in the kitchen. Again he raised his voice.

"Clara, do you know that the sky is blue, and the wind soft and fresh?"

"And you ready for a walk? Is that what you mean?" asked a pleasant voice inside.

"Yes, indeed! Get your bonnet, and let us see what dreams the old earth had last night when she shut her eyes."

In a few minutes the brother and sister had closed behind them the small garden-gate that opened on the river bank, and were walking underneath the broad-spread arms of a long row of mighty elms that skirted the shore, a living piazza of grooved pillars and interminable boughs. It was a beautiful pictured world the two gazed upon, and their eyes brightened, and their steps became more elastic, as they proceeded. They themselves were not unworthy to have a place in the picture—John, with his tall well-moulded form and broad shoulders, his full wide brow, dark deep-set eyes, and intelligent glance; and Clara, equally tall and well made, with the difference and added softness becoming her sex; her pale, somewhat serious face and finely-cut features, expressive of a mind at once noble and refined, and her graceful motions, and the calmness of her outward attitude to the world, speaking of a soul well balanced and serene.

"The dreams have been good ones," said Clara, as her eye rested with quiet pleasure upon the sun-touched meadows and the gliding stream.

"You think so? Then, of course, it must be so, for you are a wise woman. I would put your judgment against five hundred. Clara, I do not think there is a woman like you in the three counties!"

"I hope not; it would be inconvenient. You would not know which Clara to call sister."

"Now that is an absurd reply to my compliment. You ought to have said, 'John, where is there such a brother?' in a very tender and admiring tone."

Clara smiled. "If I think it, it will be enough. You know I'm no rapturist."

"No, or else you would talk poetry by handfuls, or mouthfuls rather, to see this lovely April sky. What clouds those are! And that delicious wind! Every sweep of it sets my heart dancing."

"As for me," said Clara, stooping to gather a daisy that with delicate pink-tipped leaves looked up into her face, "here is sufficient for my delight."

"You could have gathered one like that at home. Clara, your soul is hard and dead, a walk is nothing to you! Even when you get into Paradise you will not be astonished; you will take out your knitting quite calmly, and will say to the angels, 'Those stars are very fine, but allow me, I have just dropped a stitch!'"

"Who is talking absurdity now? But tell me seriously, why should a few acres of vapour in the sky, more or less, make such a wonderful difference to you? On a cloudy morning you are generally silent and grave; a rain-storm sends you to Herbert and Thomas a Kempis; but a lovely bright morning like this brings light to your eyes, colour to your cheeks, and nonsense to your tongue. Then away with your books and your

meditations! Your hat is put on, and I your walking-stick of a sister am summoned out of my corner, my easy-chair, or my kitchen hearth, or wherever it may be, to accompany you."

"That is partly true, I cannot deny it. But to your question, why? I cannot tell why, except by going into a long speech on the doctrine of correspondences, which I daresay you would find very tiresome. So let it seize your unphilosophical mind that I have a philosophical reason for loving sunshine, and hating, or rather just enduring, acres of vapour."

"My unphilosophical mind!"

"Yes, certainly. No woman can be philosophical. That belongs to the other sex. It is one of their nobler attributes."

"Which I deny."

"Yes, I daresay. But, my sister, do not you see, poor benighted creature as you are, that being a woman, and only a woman, you are no judge? A man may say what he pleases, and judge best what is noblest and highest; a woman never. Her very sex disables her."

"In a man's eyes."

"Yes; in whose else's? No other eyes can see clearly. Man is both judge and jury in this case; what chance have you poor women?"

"We can appeal."

"From our sentence? But to what court would you bring it? Now, don't come over me with your serious face. Don't I know what you are going to say? You and your daisy want to turn the tables upon me, but I won't have it. Man is not only the judge, but the ruler. To his sentence he brings the terrors of the law

—his law, mind you—and it is a strong one. Aren't you very sorry you are a woman, Clara?"

"No, not at all. My time will come."

"Precisely. That grants my question. You'd like to have such times as we men have, so you must be sorry in the meantime that you can't, that you're not a man, but only one of the poorer sex."

"You don't understand me. I do not wish to be less a woman than I am, but more."

"That is because of your incapacity. An oyster would be always an oyster; to him a mollusc is the finest being in creation;—sea-slush is better to dwell in than pure air, and walking on two legs is a ridiculous operation."

"So it is. I am of the oyster's opinion just now. What say you to a rest on this log? With our faces to your favourite river, and with the trees behind, you can't desire a better resting-place, even you, great man as you are."

"No laughter. It is truly provoking to see how coolly you take it all. But I will grant you *have* good taste, and know a soft log when you see one. You're a very tolerable creature for a woman."

"That's rather humbler praise than you gave me just now. You spoke of my judgment as more excellent than that of five hundred."

"'Women.' And I say it still. But I see I cannot bring you to an idea of the seriousness of your position, so I may as well drop the subject. And now, look at me, and tell me who I saw last night in Trentham."

"Mary Plowden, perhaps."

"No; a greater stranger than Mary Plowden. What should you say to Stephen Morris?"

"Stephen Morris!" repeated Clara in a surprised tone.

"I assure you it was no other. You may imagine my astonishment. He is settled here as minister of an Independent church, and as I have heard since is very popular, draws a large congregation, and is very highly thought of by a number of influential people in the town. He looked much as usual, rather paler and thinner I fancied; but accosted me with the old smile. A very pleasant smile he has, Clara, as you know. We had a little talk in the street, and then he invited me to his home; but I told him I was pressed for time, and so got off with a promise to call upon him before long. I don't know, however, but he may come here first. He seemed very glad to find we lived so near."

Clara remained silent, so her brother proceeded.

"He is a very good fellow, and so wondrously clever! When we were at school together he carried away the prize in most things, and he and I had at one time quite a Damon and Pythias friendship of it. And do you remember going with me to hear his first sermon? In that queer little Welsh chapel? How he came to be invited into the pulpit there I don't know, but suppose it was because he was a Welshman. Do you remember, too, the old woman that cried, sitting in the corner close to us, and how she blessed him and pressed his hands when he came out of the pulpit? I shall never forget it, I think."

"Yes, I remember."

"That must be a long time ago, now. Seven years at least, isn't it? I remember you were just seventeen, because of those verses he wrote for your birthday, and sent up to our lodgings, with that odd little note. How shy he was then! But there's not much of that

to be seen in him now. We met a bevy of fair ladies, who smiled very graciously upon him, and whose smiles he returned with the most courtly confidence. There was such a shaking of hands, or rather of primrose-coloured gloves, and such a rustling of silks and satins, and such a wafting of perfumes! I had to stand aside, and wonder at religion in her silver slippers."

"John!"

"Well, dear, was it not so? But we'll walk on again now, if you're sufficiently rested. Hark! was that the cuckoo?"

They listened for another shout, and soon it came from the heights above them, across the trees trembling in the morning wind, the well-known, ever-welcome shout. As they listened, they turned to each other and smiled—with a smile that said, 'Yes, it is really spring-time!" And John repeated in a clear, ringing voice,

"Brave cuckoo, call again,
Loud and louder still,
From the hedge-partitioned plain,
And the wood-topped hill;
With thine unmistaken shout
Make the valley ring!"

He waited for response. But the cuckoo, not perhaps liking to be thus invoked, was silent.

They were at the entrance to the Grove, a piece of high ground by the river, planted with well-grown trees, that climbed from the water's edge to high land; where a broad grassy avenue, originally perhaps a carriage drive from the old Hall beyond, gave a beautiful walk of a mile or more in length beneath the shade of elms, and near to the river's everlasting flow.

With quick steps they addressed themselves to climb the broad gravelled path leading to this grassy avenue, and before long were at the top.

"I like this old Grove," said John, as they paused to take breath. "This broad grassy glade, with these fine trees on either hand, how beautiful, how quiet it is! And when the sun glints across those distant elms, as now it does, and lights up our pathway in advance, it gladdens me like a prophecy for good. Here, too, the river is hidden for a while; but, if we wish to see it, we have but to go to yonder firs, whose dark tops I can now just discern, and below us we shall see its white sheeny face clear and smiling. There is no river so beautiful as this, to my thinking! Every day I stay near it I gather healthful and loving thoughts."

"I, too, love the Trent," said Clara, "and have a double joy in being near it, because it is so dear to you."

"You good sister! And you do not then repent coming with me?"

"Repent!" repeated Clara, "I rejoice in it every day! Every day our cottage-home gets dearer to me, and every day I feel this calm peaceful life by the river to be the one best suited for me."

"Then we will thank God together. I did not think this time last year ever to have felt so strong again as now I do. And, perhaps, this feeling of fresh health intoxicates me at times, and makes me say, what some would call, foolish things. Yet there is a wisdom in such folly." Here a smile curved his lips again. He was silent a moment, and then said quickly, as touched by some sudden thought—

"Clara, what shall we say to Stephen when he comes?"

"What about, John?"

"About our way of life here. For it will seem strange to him to find me stranded in this way. With my prospects, such as he once knew them, come to nought, my talents rusting, and I, just thrown aside like that old boat we saw lower down among the rushes. I am speaking, mind, as it will appear to him. When he and I were at school I was the rich son of a rich father, with grand expectations, and certainly with no little ambition. I was a boaster, and let him know a hundred times what a happy fellow I was, what a great man I must perforce be. He, with all his talent, was a good deal pitied by us in private, for it was well known he was poor, and quite dependent upon strangers, with no father living, no rich relative in the wide world; his mother, it was even whispered in the school, was only a poor washerwoman; and to talk of his relations to him brought up the ready blush, poor lad! And now, see how the world goes! I am just seven and twenty, and he twenty-six, and our positions are almost reversed. A hundred a year is all I can call my own, I live in a small cottage, and am a very small unimportant individual, quite unfitted for public life. He is pastor of a large chapel, with no doubt a good income. Every Sunday hundreds of intelligent, educated people listen to what he may please to tell them, hang upon his words, idolize his face and figure no doubt, and through his teachings may learn the way to the divine life. The newspapers report his speeches and praise his sermons. The young ladies of his congrega-

tion are vieing with one another for his preference, he may choose from the fairest, and richest, and best. Every year his path promises to become brighter and brighter, his influence and popularity to increase. Think what opportunities for usefulness he has, what untold good his smallest words may produce. Every pebble he drops in the still waters of social life forms circles ever increasing, almost boundless. If he looks but at the outside of things he will see all this, and the contrast will strike him much as I say, much as it would the rest of the world; and of course he will be more than a man if he does not feel a certain pleasure in the contrast, and less than a friend, if no pain for me."

"But you will not be grieved at that!"

"No, certainly not. A year ago I should have been, it is true. I should have shrunk from such words as he may use to express his sorrow, when he comes to know my position, and proudly scorned to take his pity, to whom I once gave so liberally to drink out of the same cup. But now, dear, I have so much other happiness that I can well afford this to be lost, and I can smile from as full a heart as he. I believe it is best for me to be here at the present, quiet and poor. There is full compensation in all things; and it is not good to long after honey when God sends chamomile. Not that my lot is a bitter one. It is only a different sweet to that which I had anticipated.

"But you, Clara, shall you not feel a little the change of your position? Last time Stephen Morris saw you you were a sort of high-born lady, far from the reach of so humble a squire as he—at least, I am sure he

thought so—travelling about *à la princesse*, with many attendants and brave attire. And now, what are you, my poor sister?—the housekeeper of a very poor man, the sole brewer, and baker, and ginger-bread maker, and with but one pair of hands between you and the hard fate of being scrubber and scourer, washer and wringer, cook and scullery-maid beside? Shall you not be abashed?"

A merry light that rose up in Clara's eyes was her only answer.

"I see you are insensible to your degradation, and that is so much the worse! A modern refined young lady would be shocked immensely at your position. But, my dear girl, only think!"

"I do think, and find I am just the same Clara Broadbent as of old. I have lost nothing in reality."

"And you will be as stately with him as ever, I have no doubt. Yes, Clara, I know you. He will infallibly think there is some mine of wealth hidden somewhere, of which you have the key; and that in spite of your present apparent low estate, you will come out some day glistering with diamonds. He will never believe you poor."

"If poverty and wealth are to him what they are to the greater part of the world, he will soon believe me poor enough. But a minister should of all men put money in its true place."

"Should, dear; but how great are the temptations! However, I have no right to doubt Stephen Morris. He may be the purest, truest-sighted of men. I only looked at the natural result of being courted by, and popular with, the rich and influential. Even a minister

may insensibly be drawn in this way into the snare of thinking much of, and trusting in riches. But am I bringing you too far? Are you wanted at home? If so, speak the word, and we will return."

Clara spoke the word, and the two returned home, this time by the banks of the river the whole way. A natural water-course formed an uninterrupted though steep descent. It was dry, and with some compulsory running and some laughter, the brother and sister gained a narrow pathway formed among weeds and tree roots at the foot of the Grove—a pleasant shelf of land, delightful to active feet from the excitement of knowing that there was but a step between it and deep water. At their other side, and almost drooping on to their shoulders, were ranks of blue-bells, of the deepest tint and the freshest bloom, swinging their cool dewy bells over head, with here and there pink campion glowing among the green spathes of the arum. While Clara gathered a large nosegay, John's gaze was chiefly upon the open face of the shining river. And when they reached the entrance of the Grove, and left the shadow of the trees, his step quickened; and taking Clara's arm in his, he said, "Now we are walking with the stream seawards. Don't you feel the impetus? And to what ocean, dear one, are we going? Ah, if we could always go as gladly as does this river! How its ripples leap and dance! Do you not see? By the shore it reflects the greens and browns of earth, it cannot forget its present home, its bed. But in the centre it takes the colour of the great overhanging sky. What sky do we reflect; and what breadth of surface does its image cover?

CHAPTER II.

STEPHEN MORRIS.

A FEW days afterwards, in the afternoon, a young man was making his way across the meadows that lie between the large manufacturing town of Trentham, and the river from which it derives its name. In the days of which we write, no factories or rows of streets were built on these low-lying meadows, but when an ancient wooden bridge was crossed, stretching over the dusky waters of the canal, whose steep ascent was reached on either side by steps much worn and slippery, there remained only the green expanse of the meadows, with a few well-beaten paths across them, leading to the ferry and the village of St. Wilfrid's on the other side of the river. Our traveller was upon the broadest of these paths, a well-beaten level way, but he did not make rapid progress. Now and then, while proceeding slowly and thoughtfully, he raised his eyes from the ground to watch the ascent of the lark, and to listen to his far-off chant as he hung quivering beneath a cloud—or to gaze at the glossy backs of a family of rooks settled upon a near willow, talking solemn talk of the weather and the crops—or to address the little children that passed him with hands, and pinafores, and baskets full of pale blue crocuses, joyously burdened or bewilderingly overladen with their spring treasures, not knowing which to keep or which to throw away, and ever gathering more, till hands,

and pinafores, and baskets ran over, and the ground received the superabundance. He spoke in pleasant accents to some of these, and the wondering children replied to the kind gentleman in black with bows and curtsies and shy smiles. One little girl presented him with a full-blown bouquet of the enchanting blue flowers, that had been kept in her warm hand till he felt the heat strike through his glove on receiving them; and a little boy pulled off his cap and politely offered him the contents, a whole heap of crocuses, whose outer ones fell about his shoulders, or lay upon his wind-blown brown hair, but the traveller declined this last present, with thanks. As he passed on, treading the flowers under foot that the children had strewed so prodigally on the path, the loveliness of the budding April afternoon struck him suddenly with a great delight; all the more perhaps that he seldom allowed himself to be alone with nature. For a town life was his from choice. He loved wide streets and close-set houses, and congregations of human life, better than all the grandeurs or sweetnesses of the open sky and the green spread of fields and woods, and he seldom left the atmosphere of smoke for the purer breathings of the country. His pale face and slight figure spoke of the late riser and the sedentary student, and his slow weak gait of one who wears out the easy chair rather than the shoe, and were in striking contrast to the free movements and ruddy cheek of the man who loves to battle with wind and storm, and to greet the sun in the east. Still this calm, mild spring day, this great peace of earth and sky, filled his soul with joy. He lifted his head, and his gray eyes sparkled with pleasure. Above, he saw

a vast sea of the loveliest blue, broken here and there by cloud-islands, with rivers and peaked hills glistening in the sun, and beneath and around him a second sea of pale blue flowers, the children's crocuses, a reflection as it seemed of the blue above, while waves of the rich springing meadow-grass rolled their green glistening heads between him and the horizon. Before him the river was yet hidden between its high banks; but the first cottage at St. Wilfrid's, on its further side, stood wondrously white in the sunshine, and like the face of a friend, invited him on. His steps quickened, for he had still long spaces of grass to pass over, and unused as he was to much walking, by the time he reached the river and the broad-bottomed ferry-boat, he was weary enough to find the bench near the rudder an agreeable resting-place. There were but few passengers with him, fine as the day had been, for work was abundant at Trentham, and to-day was no holiday. Two women, two young men with cigars, a black dog with which they amused themselves by throwing it into the water, and a dark-looking, middle-aged man, with his hat pulled over his eyes, were all. While the red-faced ferryman pushed the boat leisurely from the shore, and applied his hook to the iron cable, propelling his freight across the stream, our traveller had time to pursue a favourite amusement and observe his companions. One of the women beside him on the bench had a baby in her arms, and the other a bundle, which by its size and shape he imagined to be work she was carrying home, probably lace. The young men were ordinary specimens enough —the tailor had done his duty by them, and the jeweller, perhaps rather more than was judicious; they had

plenty of whisker, and at first plenty of talk between themselves, and when that failed they "chaffed" the boatman. The dark middle-aged man was a more attractive study. With folded arms he gazed gloomily upon the face of the water; no one spoke to him or seemed to notice him, and he did not once lift his eyes from their contemplation of the river—or apparent contemplation of it—for it was more than possible that what the retina reflected, the mind did not see, till the ferryman, touching him on the shoulder, demanded his fare. He dived his hand hastily into his pocket with a peculiar smile, and as he gave the man the halfpenny, a gold ring with a large brilliant shone on his finger. He was dressed in a shabby green surtout, and a white hat of an unusual, perhaps a foreign shape. A dark shadow lay upon him, or to speak more truly, came out from him, and enveloped him so completely, that the warm spring sunshine seemed to fall impotent near him. It was not easy to get a glimpse of his face; but for one moment it was revealed to our wayfarer, and he discovered upon its sallow features the traces of an ill-spent and disappointed life. Cruel marks they were, deep, and not to be concealed, though cross-hatched with the lines of sarcasm and contempt, and varnished over with the thick varnish of pride. It was no pleasant face—repellant, and haughty, and gloomy; it asked for no sympathy, and utterly scorned pity, though suffering must have been long its near companion, and any joy it might be capable of expressing would be the joy of the avenger and the destroyer. Had it ever known true sorrow? Could it weep? It seemed not—for the eye had no latent softness, the mouth no gentle curves.

The only weak feature in the face was the lower lip, that had once been inclined to fulness, but was now dried by an inward fever, and bitten out of shape by teeth that refused to open the doors for the voice of pain and complaint.

There is a tower, we are told, in the wastes of Assyria, still to be seen, a landmark amid many desolations. The fire that burned it the sun saw blaze thousands of years ago. What it once was we can only conjecture; whether built story above story, a wondrous whole of terraces and pillars, or one vast temple, with one vast roof, springing upward like a mighty palm. Now it is but a huge slag from the furnace—a shapeless, vitrified, unyielding mass, without symmetry or design—a perpetual enigma, insoluble by man for evermore.

Not without a likeness to this burned tower stood this strange, dark man, the traces of conflict and withering but too plainly visible. What had he been? Why had he suffered? Who could tell? And he himself, perhaps, would be the last to reveal it.

Absorbed in these thoughts, the traveller did not at first perceive that the ferryman had done his duty, and that the river was crossed. The rudder was turned, the clank of the cable and the lap-lapping of the water by the boat-side had ceased, and one passenger after another took the few strides necessary over the plank to gain the dry land. The dark stranger first, the rest following his rapid strides as best they could towards the white house among the elms, now close at hand, or to the village behind. Asking his way of the women on reaching the former, our traveller left it to the right,

passed a few cottages and one or two larger houses, and found himself quickly on the village green, with its great broad-spreading sycamore in the midst, an open space of land, half grass, half gravel, that might have been made very beautiful, and was even then pleasant in no ordinary degree, its low-roofed cottages grouped around it like quiet children suddenly resting from play.

Crossing this green, he approached a small house, but little higher than its humble neighbours, opened a low gate, took a few steps up a narrow path bordered with thyme and lavender, and knocked at a door arched over by trellised roses. The door opened, and John Broadbent stood before him, tall and smiling.

After a warm shake of the hand and a cordial greeting, he was led into a small parlour to the right, where Clara sat at her knitting. She rose at his entrance, and, putting out her hand, said, "I am glad to see you, Mr. Morris;" and in a moment after, "Are you not weary? You will find this sofa pleasant." He took the offered seat, conscious of a sense of fatigue and a sudden paleness that had overspread his face, while John seated himself opposite, and, pushing back his dark hair with a gesture Stephen remembered as a familiar one in old school-days, gazed at his friend with an unmistakable look of pleasure.

"You are come sooner than even I expected," he said; "but you could not be more welcome at any time. It is, indeed, a great pleasure to see you."

"The pleasure is most of it mine," he answered. "I could not rest, after I had met you the other day, till I could talk to you more at leisure. It seemed almost

too good to be true that you should be living so near. How long have you been here?"

"Nearly three months, is it not, Clara?"

Clara assented, and Stephen remarked, "How quiet it is in this old-world village!—so near the town, and yet so far away in its stillness! The river and the meadows divide you as effectually from the bustle of Trentham as if you were twenty miles away."

"Have you never been here before, then?"

"Only once in the three years, for I am not like you in your love for the country. I seldom walk out of town."

"Still the same brick and mortar lover?"

"Yes;" and with a smile, "I fear I am likely to be. My pastoral duties lead me chiefly among my people, and but few of them live out of Trentham. But this is just the place for you. You have chosen a cosy nest, and I suppose are come from some busy scenes of dissipation, 'tired out and wearied with the riotous world,' and find this contrast pleasant enough."

"We have certainly left the riotous world," responded John, "but not from choice only; necessity has had something to do with the matter. Clara and I are quite poor people now, and are glad to live among our neighbours, the poor. A small nest is better than none at all."

The young minister looked puzzled. "It is a nest I could be very happy in, if only it were nearer, or, better still, in the town;" and he glanced round at the piano, the book-shelves, the flowers, and the two opposite windows, through one of which a yellow jasmine peeped; and last of all his gaze fell upon Clara, who sat quietly knitting in the sunshine.

"When we cannot get swan's-down lining, we must be content with hay and moss. Clara and I have tried both. I don't know which we prefer—I almost think the moss; at least we find it very wholesome and good. Not that I want you to think us miracles of adaptability, for we are not—at least, I am not; it is not fair to bring Clara in here. But we have had the hay so softly patted down and moulded for us, that as yet we hardly know the difference. The truth is, our property has gone the usual way of riches—taken to itself wings and flown away—and I suppose we ought to be duly astonished that we find ourselves after such a loss on our feet, and that we can walk at all."

"I am sorry indeed to hear it!" said Stephen; "but it can scarcely be true; it cannot all be gone, surely? And your prospects?"

"Are *nil*, of course. But you must not give more sympathy than is needful. We have not absolutely lost every shilling. We have a hundred a year; we have food and raiment, as you see, and this old basket-weaver's cottage; and we really need so little more! A walk now and then by the river, an occasional visit to your Trentham hive, to see how the honey gathers, a few books and flowers, and a little music. These don't cost much, and we get them as they're wanted, or as our purse lets us I am half afraid to tell you how content we are, lest you should think us mean-spirited, but so it is."

"You don't look very unhappy, certainly. But, my dear fellow, you do not mean at your age to shut yourself up here for life, without a vocation, to bury talents and strength, and moral influence in a napkin?

Think what you might accomplish, the good you might do!"

"No man can be without a vocation," replied John, "who is earnest, and who looks round the world—there is always plenty to be done. The difficulty is only what to do first. I have never felt the want of a vocation; and I think I never shall feel it. I work at that which is presented to me each day; that, in fact, which God sends. And is it not possible to have a true calling from God that may not be apparent to the outer world?"

"Of course it is possible! And you must forgive my plainness of speech;—I spoke to you as I would have done to myself in your place."

"You spoke from true friendship, and I thank you for your earnest words; all the more that your friendship has managed to survive for seven years without speech or sign on either side. How astonished I felt when I saw you the other day! I had noticed bills about the walls in the town, with the Rev. S. Morris's name on them, but little thought who his reverence could be!"

Stephen smiled. "So you did not know I had entered the ministry?"

"How should I? Though I might have expected it too; you were studying for that purpose when we were at school together, and I heard you preach one sermon, if you remember, in that Welsh chapel among the mountains. It was your first, a sort of trial sermon, but I did not think so soon to find you located in a large town like Trentham, the sole pastor of a chapel that will hold two thousand people."

"It does not appear soon to me. Almost a lifetime seems to have passed since I saw you last."

"A very momentous lifetime to you, no doubt. If time were measured by thoughts, instead of moments, some people would be centenarians in fact, before they were thirty in ordinary computation. And even I, who have not, perhaps, had more than the average number of thoughts, am tempted when I look back, sometimes, to feel myself ancient, and to wonder why the gray hairs are delayed."

"I can never imagine you old, John!" exclaimed Clara.

"Old in heart, I hope I shall never be," he replied gaily. "I can accept wrinkles and gray hairs, and wasted muscles, and even imagine myself taking a sort of satisfaction in them, as being honourable and belonging to advanced wisdom, and to that penultimate state before the great last that is to unfold the mystery, the flower of immortality; but old in heart, withered, affectionless, indifferent, without buoyancy, or love, that I trust I shall never be!—I have seen such too,"—

"If I am not mistaken I saw one in that state this afternoon," interrupted Stephen. "In bodily years he could not be much more than forty, but in soul, a very old man indeed, he looked. I fancied it, or it was really so, that he carried about with him a very perceivable thick shadow, though no one seemed to notice it but myself."

Clara and John looked at each other, and Clara asked,

"How was he dressed?"

"In a green surtout, the worse for wear, and a hat that had once been white."

"It is the same. We know him; he haunts our village, and more especially the Grove; yet no one here seems to be aware of his name or history; but we are convinced there is a history attached to him."

"And a strange one too, most likely! Does he live hereabouts?"

"No; but he is often wandering about very late at night; he seems to prefer darkness, or at least twilight. When the owls begin to hoot, and the bats to flit, then he may be expected. He seldom lets himself be seen in daylight, and if the children meet him in the street, they run away frightened. He is a strange melancholy being, and has known some great trouble."

"His face tells it. I should like to speak to him."

"He would but insult you," said John, "for he can be very harsh and bitter."

Presently afterwards Clara left the room, to return, however, quickly with her young servant and the tea-tray. The meal was a pleasant one, enlivened by cheerful talk. Reminiscences of the Welsh journey and their last meeting, and of John's school-days, came up plentifully. There was no fear of conversation flagging with three such friends, and seldom had tea and home-made cakes and fruit tasted so deliciously to Stephen. His solitary student meals were generally affairs to be got over as rapidly as possible—uninteresting and pretty nearly tasteless; and his "company" teas among the members of his congregation were too often grand and formal, rather than simple and genial. An unusual feeling of home possessed him, the fair calm face presiding at the table reminded him of long-hidden but most familiar dreams, where that face hovered, ever

near and dear. And it seemed to him the present happy moments had been lived through before, in a former Elysium. The tea ended, John proposed a walk in the garden, "to see the primroses." It was not an extensive garden he had to display, and at present there were few flowers; but with a gardener's pride he showed his double purple violets, his white primroses, his crocuses of every possible crocus hue, his budding lilacs, his vegetables, and the bower at the end of the centre walk, that promised in a while, when the traveller's-joy should bud and blossom and put out leaves, to be green and shady, and to be a truly respectable bower. The young minister saw nothing very wonderful or attractive; a few shelves of old divines in time-stained musty "calf" would have been much more interesting; but he smiled to hear his friend talk enthusiastically of his apple-trees, and the fruit he expected from them this year. "And now," said John merrily, "I beseech you to put on a grave face for so grave a subject! The apple is a truly ancient time-honoured tree. Was it not in the garden of Eden? It is true, my apples will not be so fatal as those Eve tasted, but I am trusting that my Ribstons and Blenheim oranges will be very tempting, and bring you many times before the year is gone, to see their beauty, and to taste their juicy ripeness. And don't think yourself too wise to be tempted by an apple!"

"I do not; for I am fond of apples."

"That is good! For in them is much fresh and inspiriting wine, pure and unintoxicating, if taken as nature prepares it. We can be merry over such wine, with a merriment that brings no headache or repentance."

"Yes—and yet you will not find many who would prefer an apple to a glass of wine."

"Almost all the children in the world, a large part of our population."

"I was thinking of adults."

"There, unhappily, I cannot contradict you. But there are some, even in these days, who have good taste, or good reason, or both, enough, to refuse the wine and take the apple—of whom I am one."

"Is wine distasteful to you?"

"Not at all! I am fond of wine, for I have had the taste cultivated for it in former years; but I have seen enough to convince me that it is perfectly unnecessary, and very injurious. I never take it now, or give it to my friends. I am a teetotaller."

"You surprise me; for you are one of the last men I should have expected to listen to narrow statements, and to my mind teetotalism is narrow enough, and carries absurdity upon its very face. There is a proper use and an abuse of all things. Wine is useful in so many cases! I myself could not well do without it. The excitement of the pulpit would often be too much for me; nay, at times, I believe I could scarcely preach without a little. And to how many others is not its administration necessary?"

"There is a medicinal use for wine, I allow; though it would be far better in every case to use a less dangerous stimulant. But in your case, my dear fellow! Do you reflect it may become a habit with you, this of wine-taking, and that a false unnatural thirst may be created, that will require more and more to satisfy it till it will be impossible to get free?"

"Now you are using the well-worn temperance argument that is grounded upon a fallacy. It takes for granted that every man or woman who occasionally or regularly takes wine must of necessity become a drunkard. The facts are quite against it. Thousands live to a good old age, whose habitual drink has been of an intoxicating quality, and who have never passed the bounds of sobriety; and many thousands more who have found nothing but benefit from occasional use. And because some are weak, why should the strong refrain?"

"Even to the so-called strong there is a serious danger. Why play with fire?"

"That is a case in point. Fire is a dangerous thing, abused. Used rightly it is most useful and indispensable. I put fire in my grate, and what an invaluable servant it is to me! comforting by its warmth, cheering by its light, cooking my food, and performing many other good offices. But it is a dangerous servant. A spark from it may set my house on fire. I may go too near it with my clothes and be burned. Every night there are fires throughout the country more or less disastrous; houses, factories, churches, and chapels are destroyed, and many lives sacrificed. But I do not therefore say I will have no fire. I am wiser than that. I increase the guards against accidents, and to keep this invaluable servant in its proper place, I surround it with iron and stone instead of wood and straw, and I gladly encourage improvements in fire-engines. So with wine. It is a valuable servant to me and many others, and none the less valuable and to be prized, though at times it may become a snare to weak, ill-

conditioned souls and bodies. Some lives are lost by its use; many, I will allow, for unhappily it is so. But the rest of the world must not be without fire, and starve with cold, because a child plays with fire and scorches its pinafore, or a lady wears muslin, and gets burned to death with the dangerous spread of her dress; and all the world must not become teetotallers, because some unhappy ones kill themselves, or ruin their worldly prospects, by drink."

"If wine were but half as needful to man as fire, your argument would be better worth. Show me that it is so, and I will be content to see it used; but I know you cannot. Chemists and physiologists are against you. Liebig, Lees, Carpenter, and hosts of other men of science, both foreign and English, will tell you that it is not only not necessary, but really injurious, and that, according to the amount of alcohol it may contain."

"And other chemists and physiologists assert the contrary."

"A rapidly decreasing number. Believe me, science is clear-headed, and a teetotaller, as she will demonstrate to your satisfaction some day."

"You have all the enthusiasm and one-sidedness of your party! I wish—you must forgive me for saying this—the enthusiasm were better employed."

"It is not without reason that I speak warmly and decidedly on this subject, for I have, in my own experience, known the ruinous bewitchment of intoxicating drinks, and, if you like, I will tell you some little of this history of mine," replied John.

"I shall be glad to hear it."

"Soon after I left school, my father sent me abroad with a tutor. I shall not give you his real name, but call him Horsley. He was about forty when I first knew him, and was well qualified for his post, as it seemed to my father, in every way. He had graduated at Cambridge, and came highly recommended for his acquirements and moral character. He had been abroad before, and spoke well several continental languages. So, as I say, I was sent out with him, and a handsome allowance, and it was expected I should return back from my tour, as my father expressed it, 'a finished gentleman.' He had no desire to make of me a profound scholar, and in truth, as you well know, my talents did not lead that way at all. I was only too glad to travel and see the world, and accepted the tutor as one of the necessary means to that end. Horsley soon found out how it was, and did not trouble me with much study. He was exceedingly amiable and indulgent, and before long I felt towards him much as I should have done to a well-loved elder brother, had I ever possessed one. We travelled through Holland, Belgium, the Rhine countries, Switzerland, and Austria, according to the route my father had laid out, like two merry boys let loose from school. I was to keep a diary, according to express parental wish. I have it somewhere in my boxes up-stairs. Such a diary! Hurried notes about Rotterdam, Brussels, St. Jean d'Acre, Ehrenbreitstein, Mont Blanc—all in a flippant, jocose style, without much thought or care. When we reached a large town or city, its theatres and places of amusement were first sought after, but I must say quite as much through my companion's wish as my

own. One thing he taught me carefully to study, however, the flavour of the different wines of the countries we passed through, and I assure you I was no unapt scholar. I liked wine, but—mind, I had no taste for drunkenness, and when I saw excess in others, made severe comments. For hitherto I had been kept from temptation to this vice by careful supervision. At home there was strict moderation; and at Dr. C——'s, if you remember, no excesses were allowed. With a feeling of virtuous indignation I inveighed against the weakness that could be overcome by such a trifle, and to hear me you might have thought me a very strong-minded man indeed, who had met with and conquered many temptations. How it was I kept tolerably sober I can scarcely tell, but am now quite inclined to think it was more through Horsley's care than my own. In some respects he was a wonder to me. I had never seen him intoxicated, and yet I knew he drank much wine. The hotel bills had enlightened me once or twice. I asked him one day how it was, but he laughed and turned off the subject.

"We were at Vienna, and I had been at an ambassador's ball. I had met and danced with a very beautiful English girl, who completely fascinated me, and who ended by stealing my heart. At least, I believed it was so, and told her as much one evening soon afterwards, and to my delight, she confessed for me a similar feeling.

"'Congratulate me,' I said next morning to Horsley, 'it is only right to tell you, I am engaged.'

"'I know it,' he replied, 'you are engaged to walk with me on the bastions.'

"He turned his laughing face to mine, but seeing me look as serious as my words, became grave also, and asked, 'Who to?'

"'To Miss D——.'

"'I hope you do but joke. You would never surely do so foolish a thing!'

"'It is quite true.'

"'And she has accepted you?'

"'Yes, certainly.'

"'Poor boy! Don't you know she's the greatest flirt in Vienna?'

"'I will not have you speak a word against her, Horsley. She is the most beautiful, the noblest of women.'

"He laughed what I thought a derisive laugh, and I turned from him with irritation, and refused to speak to him for hours.

"In the evening he and I were walking in the Belvidere gardens. He became very grave, and talked with me for some time on the impropriety of engaging myself in marriage while still so young, and told me that, standing in the place of a guardian to me, he thought it his duty to protect me from all foolish entanglements. In a while he spoke of Miss D——, and said he would convince me, if I liked, that she was neither sincere in her professed attachment to me, nor to any one. I dared him to it. I needn't go into particulars, but he did convince me, in the course of the next few days, and I was terribly indignant. I wrote at once to her a bitter letter renouncing the engagement, telling her of course the reason, and next time we met we did not know each other.

"After the first excitement and anger were spent. I

felt a corresponding dejection. To flee to wine was a relief. Here was my danger. I drank it greedily to drown care, and as I sang and jested when under this false exhilaration, I imagined I was conquering my despondency. But it returned again and again, and again and again I took the dangerous antidote, and drank to excess. Horsley remonstrated, entreated, took me away from Vienna, and into other society, but it was of no use. My melancholy was ever ready to return, and I sought, of course, for the cheerer, the drowner of sorrow. My temper suffered, and I was frequently hard and insolent in my speeches to Horsley. He resented it, and a gradual estrangement grew up between us. To his interference I secretly ascribed the source of my trouble, and he on his part found my behaviour all but intolerable. We often passed the day without speaking.

"One morning I had been even more unhappy than usual. I had taken a good deal of wine, but it had failed to exhilarate; every glass I swallowed only made me more and more sensible of my misery. Horsley proposed a ride, and we set out on horseback, but, tired of his slow paces, I left him and took a wild reckless ride alone, my conscience upbraiding me the whole way, and when I returned, my nerves were even more irritable than before. We were at an hotel of course, and I called for spirits. It was brought; the decanter was just within grasp of my hand, when Horsley entered the room. His eyes were bloodshot, but his face was pale and stern. He advanced towards me, and in the calmest and most decisive way put the spirits away, saying,

"'I forbid that.'

"'Forbid what you please,' I exclaimed with an affectation of carelessness, 'I shall have it, nevertheless,' and I put out my hand towards the bottle.

"His reply was to take it from the table, and put it on the sideboard. I arose in great anger. 'How dare you?' I asked haughtily. 'I have ordered it, and I will have it.'

"'Not to-day,' was his reply, in a cool voice, and immediately he rang the bell for the waiter. 'Fritz,' he said, 'I will thank you to remove that decanter.'

"Fritz obeyed. 'It is no matter,' was my sulky speech when the man was gone, seating myself once more in the chair. 'I can get more; it is only an affair of time.' He looked at me for a moment with mingled anger and sorrow, but with a firm determination also.

"'You and I,' he said, in a low deep voice, 'have at last come to try for the mastery, but I will prove to you which is the strongest. I will save you against your will.'

"I had never seen so much earnestness, so much of the man in him before, and I was struck by his tone. Hitherto he had contented himself with being indulgent and complying—with entreating rather than commanding; but to-day it was entirely different with him. He took the *rôle* of the master, and I felt obliged to acknowledge that it became him better than the softer character. My indignation was, however, strong within me, and I listened to the growl of the thunder much as a child would who had inherited no nervousness, and had never been taught to think of danger,—with more curiosity than fear.

"'I will save you against your will,' he repeated, 'for you do not know where you stand; but I see the precipice most clearly. From this day you will abjure both wine and spirits, for you are no longer your own master.'

"His decided words gave me no awe. I listened to his speech as an absurdity, and he saw, I daresay, the scornful curl of my lips. He was standing near the table, with one hand leaning upon it. He had been pale before, but became still paler, as he continued,

"'I have not done my duty by you hitherto. Of that I am quite aware; but the experience of these last few weeks has impressed upon me the necessity for a change. I have loved you as a younger brother, but very blindly, and have idly suffered you to contract evil habits, perhaps have led you into them. I fear indeed that I have done so. Now I wish, if it be possible, to undo what I have done, and to draw you away, while there is yet time, from the fate that pursues me!'

"As he spoke these last words, a slight spasm passed over his face, and a sudden faintness came upon him. He leaned heavily on the table, and seemed about to fall.

"Alarmed, I ran forward to support him. 'Are you ill? what is the matter?' I asked, out of breath with fear. In that moment of anxiety I felt how much I still loved him.

"'It is over,' he answered, recovering himself, but allowing me to lead him to a chair. 'There is no need for alarm; it is only a faintness that I have been subject to this last month. And—— however, I had better tell you the whole truth. The doctors here tell me I

have disease of the heart, and one of these attacks may be fatal before long. Since I have known this, I have thought more of my responsibilities, especially as they regard you, and have felt anxious to raise my voice as I have never yet raised it in warning. To do this effectually it is necessary you should know more of me than you have ever done; and to save you, I will do what is most painful to me. I will make a confession that I would fain have reserved for my death-bed; nay, have kept to myself for ever, if that might be possible. You know I am fond of wine; but you do not know that to obtain it is with me a necessity of life. I am a secret drunkard!'

"His face became flushed as he said these words. I saw the pain the confession gave him, but could not help looking both shocked and surprised.

"'I have carefully hidden this from you,' he continued, 'for I am proud, and could not bear to display my weakness; and, Broadbent, I have loved you! But night after night, when you have been sleeping soundly, I have had wine in my chamber, and enjoyed the fierce delight of intoxication. A hundred times you have been on the verge of discovering my secret, but as frequently I have managed to evade your suspicions; though, had you known more of the vice, you must have found out the truth long ago. Do you wonder why, as I am so ashamed to confess this, I do not talk of releasing myself from the temptation, and that I have not years ago broken the bad habit? I could not do so then, and I cannot do so now. It is all over with me. The slave has become the master, and, like Faust, I have sold myself to the devil. Well do I remember

the time when, like you, I resorted to intoxicating drink to stifle pain, or to pass away a weary hour, and found it a pleasant kill-time—thinking, fool that I was, that I could lay it aside at any time. It was at college that I first learned to drink, to give wine-parties, and to take it *ad libitum*. It is true, I did not do as many, get into debt and difficulty through it. I respected myself too much for that; but I was fond of it. Then when darker days came, what so bright and cheery as its ruddy glow? What so fascinating as 'the beaded bubbles winking at the brim?' Where could I find so pleasant a companion as the wine-cup? In it I drowned care, forgot my home, my country, and sought for a livelihood, not that I cared to live—for life of itself was a burden—but that I cared to drink; and I dared not think of death.

"'And now, what am I? What have I done with my life? I have had talents, attainments, friends, opportunities for winning to myself a position and a noble name, and I have thrown them all away to gratify one vice. Do you think I feel happy, or look calmly on the prospect before me?' He smiled a bitter smile. 'Do you envy me, Broadbent, or feel anxious to do as I have done? You have made a beginning. I have shuddered lately many times to see in you a reflex of myself as I was fifteen years ago. Will you go on with the resemblance, and end as I am doing? for my present disease has been brought on by drink and irregular hours. I am another victim to add to the long, long list.' He paused to recover breath, and then continued in an earnest, beseeching voice—

"'I have sin enough on my conscience, much to

answer for. Will you add to it by persisting in the fatal vice that has brought me so low? Will you not rather comfort my last days by the thought, that you at least are safe?'

"I was much affected, and assured him many times that he should not again be troubled by me. I did, too, as he said I should; I abjured wine from that day, though not against my will."

"Did he live long?" asked Stephen.

"A month or two. I nursed him for some weeks in a quiet Pyrenean valley—a place recommended by the physicians — for his lungs were then considerably affected; and afterwards, hopeless of further improvement, returned with him by slow stages to England. He died soon after."

There was silence for a little while, broken at last by Stephen—

"You could do no other than you did. You were evidently in danger, and his dying wish was sacred to you; but your case is a very peculiar one, and can be only an example to those few similarly circumstanced."

"Of course my experience is in some respects peculiar; but if you mean that only a few are tempted to excess in drink, you must almost wilfully have shut your eyes to what is going on around you in society."

"I have seen perhaps rather more than you give me credit for," he replied; "and do not imagine that only few are tempted. But to whom should the tempted flee for help? There is one Friend ever near, ever ready to succour; and there is no certain and perfect cure for intemperance like the gospel cure—'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'"

"True," said John, "I acknowledge it. But how is it that with these words ringing in their ears, with churches and chapels almost innumerable throughout the land, so many die by inches or by sudden destruction through drink? The word is preached, it may be, to them; the spirit and meaning of the word escapes their dull ears and sensualized intellect. While a man is enslaved by intemperance, it is in vain you preach: drink shuts the portals of the soul."

The young minister looked thoughtfully on the ground. "It may be so with the confirmed drunkard —though even to him God speaks at times in tones that will be heard; and it seems to me that you limit the Holy One of Israel when you speak that word, 'It is in vain.'"

"Far be it from me to overlook the power and love of God," said John. "I know that to Him nothing is impossible. But he uses human instrumentality, and it is our duty to be found co-workers with him. You acknowledge it is right and necessary to bring your hearers to the chapel, that they may hear the words of salvation. But in vain—I use the word again, you see—will you bring their bodies, while their souls are stupified, their consciences deadened, by the habitual use of intoxicants. There may be—there are exceptions, some who are shaken as by an earthquake out of their sins; but the rule is as I say."

"And you would therefore have ministers preach total abstinence to all their congregations?"

"That is exactly what I would have them do."

"A very illogical conclusion. Because one sins, all must abstain."

"There is true logic in it, which I could prove had I opportunity. But there is more than logic. There is true love in it; and here you and I cannot be at issue. For the love of souls we should, if we can, remove the cause of sin, that the effect may cease."

"I would remove it from the drunkard. I would have him abstain. If I were likely to become one, I would myself abstain. But because one man here and there is lame, you would have all use crutches."

"If I saw my neighbour hobbling, and I, by walking by his side with a crutch like his own, could cure his lameness, I would do it."

"How can the abstinence of a temperate man cure the drunkard?"

"By example, by helping him to bear the brand, for it is a brand in the eyes of society to carry 'tectotaller' on your brow, as I have found."

"You are a true enthusiast!"

"I would you were one also, in the same cause!"

The appearance of Clara put a stop to the conversation. She led the way into the house, mindful of the long walk their friend had to take on returning home.

"And now," said her brother, as they were all seated once more in the parlour, "I have been speaking quite a long time. Let us hear your voice a while, dear! will you sing to us?"

Clara went to the piano with a smile, and chose an ancient chant, a song by which the men and women of old times raised their voices in words of praise to the All-Father, a song that will ever be in divine accord with grateful and loving hearts. Beneath the beams

of the low room her voice rose and fell, in sweet and true harmony, while the setting sun sent his last rays through the jasmine window, gilding the flowers as they trembled gently between the influence of his warm touch, and the vibrations of the song. Her companions listened, outwardly very silent, but inwardly vocal; the music bore them upwards also, and three hearts ascended on the wings of love and prayer.

At eight o'clock Stephen departed, John accompanying him to the ferry. The two young men walked thoughtfully side by side. This meeting, after a long separation, was dimly felt by them to have something momentous in it. Neither said so, but to both the thought was present, as they shook hands and said adieu.

"You will come again before long?"

"Yes," was Stephen's answer as he entered the boat.

The moon was up, and though daylight lingered faintly at the west, her cool light filled the greater part of the sky, and came softly to earth through the thin misty clouds of which the heavens were full. John trod over the dewy grass on his return, with a slow quiet step. He chose the way by the river and the churchyard. Entering the inclosure of the still "God's-acre," he paused a moment "listening to silence" and noting the clear-cut shadows that fell from buttress and tower and angle of the old church, and that lay upon each grave from its upright headstone. Passing the ancient tower silently, a moving shadow among the still ones, he reached the low stone-wall to the right, and leaning his arms upon it, stood some time within sound of the ripple of the stream as it ran over the pebbly shallows of the ford. While he stood, other

noises attracted his attention; the shivering of the night-wind among the elms overhead; the leap of a fish, sending silvery dashes of light around for a moment; the rustling of the grass near his feet, as some shy creature, whom man and daylight seldom sees, took furtive wanderings; the occasional muffled baying of a deep-chested hound at the vicarage. Nor was hearing alone engaged; he watched the noiseless shifting of clouds, the march of the solemn moon, the slow gliding of shadows round each head-stone and tomb and buttress, and to-night he watched them long.

A low shuffling noise, and a sound between a sigh and a sob, not far from him, made him at length aware he was not alone. Turning round, he perceived a figure kneeling by a grave. It was a woman, but, in the transfigurement of moonlight, he might well have supposed he saw a statue, had she remained perfectly quiet. Whether she were young or old he could not at first tell, her face was shrouded by a closely-fitting bonnet or hood, and some drapery of shawl or cloak lay loosely from her shoulders, and fell about her in a few heavy folds to the ground. He thought she looked poor, sorrowful indeed she was, as her attitude and the sob he had just heard confessed, and fearing to disturb her, he remained at first quite still in the shadow of the trees. Her head was a little bowed, and her folded hands huddled beneath her chin, as though in a pause from that writhing and wringing so expressive of the deepest inward anguish. For some moments she was quiet, then a low moan escaped from her, and her body rocked to and fro. Presently her head sank lower, and giving a deep-drawn breath between a sigh and

a sob, she sank upon the grave, burying her face in the wet grass.

John approached her slowly, careful to herald his coming by premonitory sounds, lest he should startle her, and, when sufficiently near, asked gently, "What is the matter? Why are you here? Can I do anything for you, my poor woman?" She did not reply or raise her head. It was one of those small, almost round heaps of earth and grass, that we know at once to be a baby's grave, on which her face was laid. Fearing she might have swooned, he approached a step nearer, and touched her shoulder as he said, "It is not fit for you to lie here; let me help you home."

He felt that he need not have asked that foolish question, "What is the matter?" Too truly he divined her sorrow, but no other words would come at that moment. And the little grave was very green; the humble head-stone, a rough unsculptured piece from the quarry, had been placed there some time. It was no new sorrow, he thought, as he looked compassionately down.

She raised her head; she lifted a face still very young towards him, the moonlight showing distinctly her dry, hollow eyes, and her thin, pale cheeks. She was not startled at his presence, and her look seemed to go through him, as if she saw something beyond. She was one of those whom sorrow has so saturated and absorbed that nothing else in the universe is real—men, women, nature, all are shadows; very distant, very unsubstantial, very unimportant: nothing more can harm them, nothing more can give them pleasure.

"Why stay here?" he went on in a still lower, softer

tone. "It is of no use, my poor creature. There is death here,—but there is a living, loving God, and there is a better and happier world."

For a short space her eyes looked intelligent; she had caught his meaning. In a dry, untuned voice, she replied, looking round the while, "So he said. But it has never come yet. It has never come yet. It will never come." She muttered something more; then the light left her eyes, her head sank. She clasped her hands upon her breast, and began rocking monotonously as before.

As he stood absorbed in pitiful contemplation of the mourner, he did not at first notice a second figure, another woman, coming swiftly across the churchyard, dressed in a long cloak, and who now approached the grave, lifted up the unresisting kneeler, put her arm within her own, and conveyed her quickly and silently away with the manner of one accustomed to command. He watched them both go through the gate, and down the dark avenue of elms that led to the village, the black shadow of the trees concealing them, save where the moon sprinkled their pathway and their heads with drops of light falling down between the trembling boughs. Two shadows among the shadows, they might have been ghosts flitting so silently and swiftly away.

"They are not spirits," said a voice at his elbow. He started, turning, and by his side was a man in dark clothes—or they seemed such—whom at first he did not recognize.

The stranger looked up at him with a smile, half mocking but wholly sad. "They are not spirits," he con-

tinued, "but genuine flesh and blood, of a very ordinary, every-day kind, though they do haunt churchyards like you and I. Why are you here? Why am I here? We all have our secrets; that girl has hers. Why should you meddle with her? Best leave her alone. And yet it is a common enough tale she has to tell if she could tell it, but she can't."

"I do not seek to know her secret," replied John. "It is enough to me that she is unhappy."

"And yet you would like to hear it. I can tell it you if you have ears sharp enough. Some secrets are good to be told, and this is one. To begin at the beginning, she has managed to lose her inheritance, though that is nothing new, as you and I know! And —I may as well confess it—she is a sister of mine."

John had already begun to walk towards home, recognizing his companion; but the latter did not intend to lose his company so soon, and followed him closely. John felt inclined to be angry as he said, "Of yours? And you can talk thus of her to strangers?"

"You are disgusted," said the other coolly, "because I called her my sister. You ought instead to admire me for owning the relationship. For it is no such great honour, and her sisterhood goes back a good many generations, perhaps to Adam, perhaps before his time. You should know, for you are related to her also."

John Broadbent was silent. The stranger laughed an inward mocking laugh. "You don't like to own the kinship it seems, either hers or mine. Few do. And for myself I'm not surprised. Not many shake me by the hand now-a-days; but I'm used to it, and

don't mind it at all, especially as most hands have slime upon them somewhere. Clean hands! Where will you find them? Mine, I confess, haven't been clean a long time; but then I can put on gloves, and thick ones too. I haven't seen the dirt upon your hands yet, but I dare say it's there. Well, that poor girl that is your sister and mine had to wear gloves; they fitted her as comfortably as hot iron could do. What can you expect? Society makes warm gloves for such folk. And one day—it was an odd thing—she put them to her brain by mistake, and she is as you see." He ceased to speak, bowed elaborately, turned on his heel, and went back to the churchyard.

"An odd, miserable being," was John's observation to Clara, after he had told her about the meeting with him and the poor woman, "who fancies sarcasm and contempt of mankind to be both wit and wisdom. His boat, no doubt, has been shattered by some storm or accident of his own bringing, and he has nailed painted rags over the hole, and says to the newest and soundest, 'I am as good as you; but mind, gentlemen, we are all broken.'"

Clara listened with downcast eyes.

"Who is the woman? Do you know her, dear?"

"Yes, I know her; that is, I have seen her and have heard something of her history," replied Clara. "She lives not far from us, but never willingly goes out by day. At night she is restless and unhappy in-doors; and if she can, escapes from her sister, and goes to the churchyard as you saw her. There she stays moaning by one little grave. You may be sure what that cou-

tains—her child; and she is only eighteen, and is not married!"

Clara's voice lowered towards the end of her speech. John listened with bent head, close-set lips, and eyes that looked gloomily and steadily into the fire, but he said nothing.

CHAPTER III.

THE "KINDER GARTEN."

Two days in the week Clara kept school for a number of little children whose parents were too poor or too indifferent to send them regularly to the village school, which was at some distance. They were chiefly the children of neighbours; and their smiling faces, as they appeared at the door on the appointed mornings, told of the popularity of the school. I do not think they called it "school" at all; they called their teacher "Miss Clara," or "the lady," and talked to one another of "when they were going to see the lady," or "the last time they were with Miss Clara;" and these morning meetings between teacher and pupils were joyous gatherings, pleasant visits, where fresh games of wonderful interest to those little eyes and hands and brains were taught each day. Flowers and sweets were strewed so carefully and abundantly over and around the steps of knowledge—those toilsome high-stretched steps to little stumbling feet—that presently the children were astonished to find themselves mount-

ing high, while they thought they were but playing. They had only pulled an enchanting rose from a stalk, so it seemed to them, and smelt its perfume, and, lo, they had climbed one stair. They had caught hold of a lily, and another step was gained. They had danced a pleasant dance to a song, sung the while by their own tiny voices, and the mystery of the transformation of yellow wheat-grains growing in the wide corn-fields, and not larger than sugar-plums, into great soft loaves of bread for their eating, had been made known to them. They had folded a little coloured paper, and had had the great delight of cutting it with "real scissors" in a way "the lady" showed, and beautiful triangular and octangular and star-like shapes arose, their first lesson in geometry. They had heaped up a little white, damp clay, and moulded it by their fingers into leaves, acorns, berries, flowers, and fruits, even into faces like their own, and they had obtained their first instruction in plastic art.

To learn to read was not a mournful poring over strange black marks in an uninteresting dreary book, puzzling and confounding, and trying to weak and inexperienced eyes, but a playful gathering up and laying side by side of charming wooden blocks, each with its own inviting hieroglyph upon it, half letter, half picture, and spelling was taught by the same process. Clara had been abroad, and in former years had become acquainted with the system of Friedrich Froebel, in the education of the young, and gladly now she brought out her knowledge for the use of these little villagers in blue print and corduroy.

On these school mornings it was John's custom to pay

a number of morning calls, if fine; and if wet, to repair to the quiet of his bedroom, where books and a heap of manuscript attested his industry, for the parlour was needed as a school-room.

The particular morning of which we are now writing was one of these set apart times. It was fine, and as he stood brushing his hat in the passage, little feet went pattering by him, and happy faces, with bunches of wild-flowers, violets, primroses, and crocuses, for the teacher, or buds of cuckoo-pint from the Grove, and branches of palm from the osier beds, for the modelling lesson, went smiling into the parlour. Clara was already there. The piano was open, and when hats and bonnets were laid neatly away, and the out-door spoils put in water, and arranged with the tools and papers upon the table, the key-note was struck, an air played over, and the dozen childish voices began their morning's enjoyment with a song. John stood leaning at the post of the open door, listening and watching with glad eyes and well-pleased ears, and now and then, to the children's amaze, putting in a sonorous chime beneath their thin treble, and thus carrying it victoriously out of the window half across the green.

As the song ended, he went out, and taking great strides, leaped over the low garden fence by the river.

He had already arranged his visiting programme, but first for a few minutes he walked on the shore, for the river was to him a dear friend not easily passed by. The day though fine was cold; an uneasy west wind roamed fitfully across the wide-spread meadows, and like an unhappy spirit, wherever it touched, left behind something of its own discomfort. The river sped rapidly

along beneath it, for both were travelling the same way; it was a perpetual race, with the wind for victor, and the rapid current rolling downward toward the sea had something impatient in its movement—it had no wish to stay, but it asked not to be compelled to hurry forward, since it must ever be the last in the strife.

A few young lambs bleated beside their mothers; May, with settled sunshine and genial warmth, was not yet come, and they seemed to ask why it was delayed. They stared pitifully towards but not at the stranger as he passed, for they did not like this ever-returning wind, cutting cold between their noses and the grass, and the tall black-clothed apparition of a man brought them no comfort. In the churchyard elms the rooks were busy nesting, too absorbed in household matters to care for a wild wind, that was indeed but a plaything for their wide-spread wings to ride and manage. With cries and noises loud and harsh, with occasional deeper and more musical cawings from some prudent elder who gave emphasis to his speech by a short wheeling flight around the contested tree, or the seat of council; with stir and pother, and if a human listener might venture to understand with no little objurgation and vituperation, derisive cheers and ironical speeches, the bird-parliament, council, or squabble, or whatever it might be, made difficult progress. John smiled as he listened and watched, but became more grave as he remembered that even such ferment and quarrel, such screaming and noise, over the temporary possession of a particular bough or nest, was less absurd and foolish than man's costly war armaments, bloodshed, and rapine, for the gaining of a few miles of land, or the capturing of a city.

With a thoughtful eye he stood awhile by the quick-fleeting waters, and then retraced his steps to the village.

His first visit was to a small white-faced cottage with but three windows,—one of them in the roof,—and a door, to break the bareness of the front elevation. It was however much more picturesque, if not more comfortable, than such a dwelling would have been in the town. The thatched roof, broken by its dormer-window, stood out from the whitewashed walls with that pleasant slightly-waved line peculiar to such roofs when old, and was of twenty hues of green and gray and brown; and a mighty houseleek had fixed itself half-way up, like a royal personage, to be seen but not approached by the multitude. This houseleek was a picture in itself; fleshy and pointed and fat, firmly fixed, of a juicy greenness, each leaf tipped with the tenderest touch of burnt umber, and proving its likeness to royalty in another respect than elevation, or at least to the royalty of the land of the white elephant, Siam, by having no less than a hundred scions seated snugly around it, royal princes and princesses all. Mosses there were on this roof in abundance also, green prosperous clumps, that fed upon the damps of the old weather-worn straw, but the houseleek overtopped them all, and was, as we said, fat and fair and flourishing. I do not know that John Broadbent noticed this morning either mosses or houseleek; he was tall, and could easily have seen them without disturbing the horizontality of the line of his hat-brim, but I believe he was pre-occupied by pictures of Waterloo, Bunker's-hill, Austerlitz, Badajoz, and a few other such

apparitions, and it was not till his hand was upon the latch of the low door that he dismissed the dreary visions. He opened the door familiarly, without other ceremony than one slight rap, and lowering his tall head, put his foot across the threshold. An old man with thin white hair sat before a fire of smouldering sticks, on one knee he held a child of about eight months old with a hand and arm that occasionally trembled with the weakness of palsy. He lifted his eyes from their contemplation of the fire, and his voice ceased a rough broken song with which he was entertaining the baby, as he heard the entrance of the visitor.

"Well, Roberts, how are you this morning?" said the cheery voice of John, as he at once proceeded to lift the child from its grandfather's knee, and to shake it and toss it in an undignified, but apparently very agreeable way to the baby, who laughed and crowed with pleasure.

"Middlin, thank you, sir! I'd next to no pean last night; I think the rheumatiz is gone by for a bit!"

"That's right. I'm glad to hear it. Shut the door upon it, and keep well all the summer! And where's Nancy?"

"Her's gone to wash to-day at the parson's, and her won't be home till eight o'clock."

"And you've Billy to nurse all the time?"

"Aye, sir, I have. But he'll sleep a bit mayhappen, an' then I can do a bit i' the garden."

John looked at the withered palsied arm, and wondered what work it could possibly do in the garden. This garden was but a small slip of land reclaimed from the waste of the road, a corner that no man

owned; but it grew a few pecks of potatoes, and a dozen or two cabbages, and was therefore an important estate to Roberts.

"What work do you want doing?"

"Only a bit of diggin, sir. It's time I begun, an' I should ha' don't before if it hadn't been for the rheumatiz."

"Don't be in a hurry. I'll come up to-day or to-morrow, and see if I can put the spade in a bit for you. We'll have the potatoes in in famous time this year!"

"God bless you, sir!" said the old man, with something like a smile on his wintry cheeks; "but I shouldn't like to see you a diggin i' my garden!"

"You're very ill-natured then," replied John, affecting to be half offended. "Ask my sister, she'll tell you what a good digger I am! And I won't spoil your garden!"

"Oh, dear, no sir, bless your life! I didn't mean that at all! I only meant, as I shouldn't like to see a gentleman like you a tiring hisself over my taturs."

"Well, I won't tire myself. I'll have a bit of fun with the spade, that's all! And mind, you're not to do a bit. I want some exercise, and if I don't have it I shall be growing lazy, and your garden will just give it me, so don't disappoint me."

The old man laughed an inward chuckling laugh. He looked up at John with a half-admiring, half-revering look. "I can see it!" he said at last.

"What can you see?. Me or little Mat? He grows uncommonly fast, and gets heavier every time I lay hold of him."

"No, no, I didn't mean him. I mean I can see what

Nancy talks of, she says there's always a sunbeam on your face, and that it lights up the house when you come in. I never see'd it so plain afore, but there it is, sure enough, sir."

"Indeed!" said John with mock gravity, going to a piece of cracked looking-glass, hanging by the window, that did duty as a mirror, the only one in the house, and looking in it a moment. "Where is it? On my nose, or across my eyes? Ah, I see! I must tell Clara of it when I get home."

"Miss Clara knows all about it, sir, I'm sure. She's sharper eyes than my Nancy; leastways they're a good deal brighter. And how is Miss Clara this mornin'?"

"Rarely!" replied John. "Fresh as dew, and busy as the rooks I saw just now in the churchyard, but not quite so noisy."

Then he gave the baby another shake up to the ceiling, in which process a little knitted shoe dropped from one of the tiny feet. He picked it up; it was very ragged, and as he put it on again, sitting upon the ricketty table to perform the operation, three small red toes peeped out from a large hole. He looked at the torn shoe, and baby looked also, with quite as grave and knowing a face, transferring his gazes afterwards to his whiskered nurse, with evident satisfaction and admiration.

"Nancy's no time to sew much," said the grandfather in apology. "She's home late at night, an' off i' the morn early most days; an' the little 'un does wear them shoes so fast!"

"He's beginning to crawl, I suppose, the rogue! But never mind! I think I know how to mend them. When

I come again I'll show you. I know how to do it, don't I, Mat?"

Mat replied by a vigorous kick of anticipatory delight. He wanted and expected another toss. And he obtained it. It was the final one, however; the strong nurse had other calls to make, and the baby was put down once more on the knee by the fire.

As John went away, on shaking hands with the old man, a small piece of silver fell, as if by accident, from one palm to the other. Roberts put his trembling hand to his head, and attempted to pull one of the gray forelocks there, meaning the action for a bow; but, before he had concluded, the door was shut gently between him and his visitor, and he and the baby were once more left to themselves.

Three months ago four people instead of three had resided in this cottage. The one now missing was the husband of Nancy, and the father of little Mat. He was also the old man's son, a strong hearty man of thirty-five or so, and a day labourer at a farm not far off. He was well respected in the village, for he was industrious, honest, good-natured, and generally sober. One day he was driving a loaded waggon with a team of horses to Trentham. An old acquaintance met him on the London-road, and invited him to a social cup at the Plough, he went in with him; his friend in the gladness of his heart standing treat. How large the cup was that he emptied is not known, but he took enough to make him glad, for he went away whistling merrily. The carriage of Lord Ancliffe was passing by swiftly, with its pair of cream-coloured ponies. He cracked his whip, but the first horse of the team took

fright, and instead of going from, went towards his lordship's curricle. Matthew Roberts rushed forwards to prevent an accident, but his foot slipped, and the wheel of the waggon went over him. When he was taken up he was so much injured that he was unable to speak, and died in a few hours. The coroner returned a verdict of "accidental death." His fellow-servants talked much of his death, for he and his wain were certainly on the wrong side the road when he fell. Had he been on the other side the accident most likely would not have occurred. And what could possess him to be there, so careful a driver as he was? Shall we tell you, fellow-servants? It was the cup of drink at the Plough.

Nancy Roberts was then left a widow, with one child, a baby in arms, and an old father to support. Hitherto her husband had dug and planted their little slip of potato-ground, and this with his wages and her own occasional work made them comfortable. Now she was the sole bread-winner, and very long laborious hours of work were her lot. Not a harder lot on the whole than many thousands of women have to endure, and not so hard as that of many other thousands; but it was not a joyful life, not a comfortable one, and on Sundays, when she used formerly to go in decent shawl and gown beside her husband to church or chapel, she now rested, with such rest as she could get, with a baby to look after, and a house to clean, and an old father to talk to; for all these things would frequently fall upon the Sunday to be done.

John Broadbent had no more calls in the village to make this morning. His steps now went towards the

town, first across the ferry, and then by a series of quick strides over the well-beaten meadow-path. The town did not look inviting as he neared it, for clouds had arisen and threw over its face their dark shadows. Leftward, upon its rocky cone, stood the dismantled castle, appearing less a ruin than might be supposed; and still high above all the clustering shapes of factories, and churches, and houses, that rose gradually from the level plain of the meadows upon stony terraces towards its crowning summit, St. Mary's ancient and bulky tower stood out dark and heavy under the cloud-canopy. He glanced back a moment. Through a parted cloud, a ragged chasm of an opening, miles away, sunshine fell, and lay in a broad quivering beam upon the westward Trent, and made clear and golden a strip of the Grove, and lit up the heights of the Brand. While he gazed the cloudy chasm shut slowly, and covered in again by gradual inches the sunny sky, and again the landscape was gray and cold. He turned round and entered the smoke of the town.

Upon the wooden bridge, as he crossed it, were lying faded crocuses, the gatherings of former days, stamped out of shape, or already half turned to clay, and in the corners, a few that had been blown out of the way of passing feet and still kept something of the old bloom; but the wind, unwilling that even these should be preserved a few hours longer, whirled dust and wandering ashes upon their heads, and lifted up their flabby petals with rough fingers. As he proceeded he wondered, with a sigh, how many of the children who had plucked these dying flowers from their green bed would resemble them in their untimely fate. How

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many would be lifted out of their sphere for a moment's pleasure, and then be thrown away as useless and inconvenient? How many the wind would capriciously toss into corners to die only more slowly? And how many the careless iron-bound soles of society would crush ruthlessly into clay?

There are many resemblances between children and flowers, and these are some of the sad ones; he could not augur the numbers, but he could predict the fact.

About this entrance to the town lay narrow unhealthy streets, badly paved, and dark, abounding in close courts and small houses, many below the level of the drainage. Public-houses were frequent, so were pigstyes, open cess-pools, manure-tanks, productive all of plagues and poverty. Here sanitary commissioners had never trod, for they were yet unknown. Fevers, of course, kept carnival here, and attacked almost whom they would. We sow in our gardens annuals, seeds of bright flowers, and we get each year larkspurs, mignonette, convolvuli, sweet-peas, marigolds, and sun-flowers—as the seed so the flower; and each year the town of Trentham sowed here a never-failing crop of cholera, every variety of fever, and many other diseases effective for children. Lest more bodies than souls should be destroyed, the public-houses came, and brought their strong allies to the army of evil passions, and in this way the garden was filled. Fever-flowers for the body, passion-flowers for the soul.

It was not a beautiful garden, but it was a very instructive one, and many lessons John had already carried home to St. Wilfrid's from his various wander-

ings through it. Here and there he had tried to pull up a baneful plant, but all were so fast rooted it seemed almost impossible. Frequently he only sighed and passed on; to-day he was in search of a soul that had grown up in this land of henbane and aconite till it scarcely knew that there were other flowers in the world than poison-flowers.

It was not in the worst and lowest of these streets that he took his way; there were several of tolerably clean aspect, whose houses had more glass and fresher paint than the rest, while here and there amongst them a taller dwelling of two or three stories, with neat window-blinds and white door-step, showed the abode of a man raised above a hand-to-mouth poverty. Descending some steps that led out of one of these streets into a sort of paved court, he reached a low house, No. 11, built exactly like the twenty others about it, and knocked at the door. An elderly woman, with a meagre yellow face, well wrinkled, and with her hair arranged in a few cork-screw curls on each side of her narrow brow, opened the door; she smiled when she saw him, and admitted him without a word. John entered a small low room, clean and tolerably furnished: on a table at the farther end, seated cross-legged by the window, was a bald-headed man at work, sewing buttons on a coat. He was a tailor, and did not rise, for it would have been inconvenient and a waste of time, but nodding his head, and putting out his hand, he greeted John respectfully.

As he seated himself on an old-fashioned print-covered sofa, the visitor said, "You are busy as usual, I see, Miller!"

"Yes sir, pretty well. Though it's poor work too, not much pay."

"You've helped to clothe a good many people in your day. Did you ever count the number of coâts you've made?"

"Not I! I've had something else to do than that, Mr. Broadbent. A poor man hasn't much time to give to counting what he isn't obliged to."

"Well, I suppose, you seldom have too much time, and I must not stay long to interrupt you this morning."

"It's no interruption, sir," said the wife, who was again seated and busy at the same kind of work as her husband. "I'm sure we're very glad to see you, both of us, and I hope you won't hurry yourself."

"Thank you," replied John, "I'm not sorry to rest a few minutes by your warm fire, for I've had a rather cold walk this morning."

"From St. Wilfrid's, sir?"

"Yes. The wind blows keen across the meadows, and your room looks comfortable and cosy."

"It's well enough, sometimes," said the tailor, "though there's wind enough to turn a mill round if you sit against that door, when the wind's i' the north."

"Couldn't you get a screen?" suggested John.

"A screen costs money, and money's a scarce article with folks like me that has to work at tailoring by the day."

"But you might make one for next to nothing if you'd a little contrivance."

"That's a thing I hav'n't got, is contrivance."

Simon Miller was evidently not in a good temper, but this was nothing uncommon. John was not

daunted, and yet the question he was about to ask he was quite aware would not improve matters. He ventured upon it, however.

"And where's James? What's he about?"

The wife's face became full of trouble at this question, and the tailor replied with an appearance of indifference, bending his head lower over his work—

"I neither know nor care! He and I's parted, and 'good shutness,' say I."

"Then you're much to blame," said John quietly. "Who will care for him if his father does not?"

The tailor lifted up his head. He was not often spoken to so plainly, for his temper was known to be crusty by his neighbours, and few liked to contradict him.

He laid down his work, pushed his spectacles up to his brow, and looked rather sternly at his visitor as he replied, in a louder voice, "Look you here, Mr. Broadbent, it's easy to say, 'You're to blame,' but you don't know how we've been off and on with that lad! He's nearly werritted his mother and me to death with thinking of him and caring for him. We've told him what's right, we've given him a good trade, we've fended for him all these years, and it's all of no use! He lived here till I couldn't abide his ways no longer, and then I told him to start. I hav'n't seen him since, and I don't want to."

John was silent a moment, then he turned to the mother and said, "But you don't mean to say, Mrs. Miller, that you know nothing of him? The poor fellow will be ruined downright!"

The mother looked at him with an anxious expres-

sion, and her voice shook a little as she replied, "I've done what I could, sir, but he takes no notice of me. And I know no more where he is now than you do."

John mused a few moments while stroking the cat, who had jumped upon his knee. Then he shook puss off, saying, "My time is short this morning, Miller, but if you like I'll read to you a few words while you work."

"Thank you, sir," said James Miller, and his wife rose at once, took a great Bible from the side-table, dusted it with her apron, more from habit than necessity, and laying it on a round table covered with oil-cloth, placed both book and table close to him. John opened at the fifteenth chapter of Luke, and read the parable of the lost sheep that the shepherd rejoiced to find, "carrying it on his shoulders rejoicing;" and as in an impressive voice he uttered the words, "I say unto you that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance," the mother listened with a half-concealed tear, but the father's face was still stern and unyielding. He was a man loving method and law: his own habits were regular, almost severe, and his way and wishes had been the rule of the house for more than twenty years, that is to say, ever since he had been married. His broad bald brow, with the one wrinkle in the centre cut deeply in a perpendicular line from the root of the nose upwards; his stern eye, long upper jaw, with its thin close-shut lip, and his large depth of chin—all spoke him to be a man who would not give much room to other wills than his own. His will must be law—must be strictly obeyed;

not because it was good and right, but because it was *his*. His son, his only child, had broken through what the father held most dear—his laws respecting regular hours, steady industry, and sobriety. They were good excellent laws, but enforced tyrannically as they were, invited opposition and rebellion, and when the son disobeyed, the father was less offended at the immorality than at the want of obedience to him. The mother grieved, the maternal instinct was wounded, love spoke in her, law only in the father. But her intellect and courage were small; she longed to speak words of reconciliation and kind advice, but her husband forbade it; and so long had she been accustomed to obey without a scruple, that she scarcely dared to acknowledge even to herself her own wishes.

John's visit was a relief to her, and she inwardly resolved to let him know something of her feelings and longings.

As his voice proceeded in its earnest reading, and the story of the prodigal son became unfolded—no new story to her ears, only seeming new now, and in a wonderfully fresh bright light, she mentally and almost involuntarily drew the comparison between the father who saw his son "yet a great way off, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him," with the father sitting so stern and unmoved near her. Reproaching herself the next moment with the disparaging comparison, she thought, "My James has not yet said, 'I will arise and go to my father;' he is too high-spirited for that, and, thank God, as yet he is not so bad as the prodigal!"

The reading done, the book put by, John took up his hat, and standing erect, till he seemed almost to

touch the low ceiling, he approached the old tailor with outstretched hand and a smile. "Good bye, Miller; I'm glad you're so well and busy, for I know you're never happy without plenty to do. But you mustn't be too hard on James! Keep a soft corner in your heart for him, poor lad! he's perhaps more sinned against than sinning. If God were as hard with us as we are with one another, where should we be?"

The tailor made no reply, and the visitor, turning away, lowered his head once more as he went out—the mother following him outside the door with a brush in her hand, to brush some lint off his coat, "if he would please to allow her." He did allow her, for he knew she wanted to speak to him, and that the brush was an innocent subterfuge.

"Then you haven't seen him at all lately, sir?" she asked anxiously, as she brushed slowly at his sleeve.

"Not at all; I thought I should have heard of him here."

"I wish I could tell you, sir. But he keeps away quite obstinate ever since he and his father had those words, and I daren't go out to look after him, he'd be so angry if I did!" The "he" meant her husband, as John well understood.

"Well," said he, "I shall employ this morning in trying to find him; we must not let slip without a rudder so likely a young fellow, and though your husband is so stern, Mrs. Miller, he would be sorry enough that any harm should happen to him."

"Sorry, sir? I don't know! He's so hard, though I don't ought to say it of him, I don't think he'd be sorry at anything. Jim used to tell me sometimes, when he

was vexed, that he should enlist to get out of the way, and I've told his father, but he didn't care no more than this brush, at least he didn't seem to."

"Has he regular work, do you think?"

"I think not—for you see his father told them at the shop where he worked how it was with him, and they've given him nothing since. He gets work sometimes, I daresay, for he's clever; and so long as he can get a bit of bread and the ale, he doesn't care. He's pawned his best clothes and his shirts. That was the last thing I heard of him—six good calico shirts as ever were made,—I made 'em myself; and now he buttons up his waistcoat, or his coat, if his waistcoat's gone, as perhaps it is, so that folks can't see. But surely he won't be so always! surely he'll alter!"

Her face became even more wrinkled and sallow than was its wont, as she said these last words. John looked upon her compassionately, and then as cheerfully as he could, said, "Good-bye; I'll let you know any good news," and was gone.

He did not expect to hear good news. A young man who had gone the wrong way so perversely and determinedly, and had made such rapid strides already, was not likely to afford much good news for the aching ears of a mother or a friend. But he thought it his duty to find him if possible, and to let him know that at least one pair of friendly eyes was fixed upon him.

CHAPTER IV.

"THE LOST SHEEP."

On emerging from the court where the tailor lived, John Broadbent at once left the comparatively respectable streets to the right, and took his course among some of the narrowest and noisiest. Here were houses cut in the rock, merely faced with brick—close, dirty dwellings, abounding in bad drainage and bad smells; narrow alleys, with abominations of all kinds reeking in front of the houses; beer-shops in plenty, and public-houses with grand titles and brilliant signboards placed aloft. He inquired at several of these for James Miller, the shoemaker, but was for some time unsuccessful in his search. No one knew such a person, and it was probable he might have a nickname by which he was better known; but how to learn it was the difficulty.

He was coming out of one of these places, with a disappointed air; he had inquired at the bar of a young woman, with red hair, a dirty cap and pink ribbons, and her ready answer had been, "There's no such a man comes here," when a carter, who was propping up the door-post with crossed legs, hands in his pockets, and a short pipe in his mouth, looked at him rather drily, and taking his pipe out, and giving a lazy spit upon the pavement, said, "There's no James's here; we're all Jacks, and Toms, and Jims; that's what we are, mester."

"Hah!" said John, "I daresay. Do you know Jim Miller, my man?"

"I can't say as I don'. Is he a little chap?"

"No; rather tall."

"Has red whiskers?"

"None at all," replied John. "But I see you don't know him. Good morning."

"Don't be in sich a hurry. A tall chap with no whiskers? Hem!" Another spit. "Does he get lushy pretty often?"

"What do you mean?"

"Ha! ha! He doesn't know what I mean! Takes a drop too much now and then? Does your young fellow drink hardish? Because, if he does, I think you'll hear of him yon'." And he pointed with his thumb to a baker's shop in the vicinity.

John went to the shop, and asked once more after James or Jim Miller, the shoemaker.

"Who told you he lived here, sir?" asked the white-capped baker.

"I don't know that he lives here, but I am told you know something of him."

"Well, I do know him. He did live at my daughter's, two doors off; but he was such an unregular chap, she couldn't do with him, and he went away last week. He was no credit to anybody; he was a deal too fond of the Prince of Wales."

The baker did not intend any reflection upon the heir-apparent, but meant to say that some public-house of that name was a favourite haunt of his.

"And where is the Prince of Wales?"

"In the next street, round the corner, sir."

The Prince of Wales was a low pot-house, and its customers seemed equally low. In the bar several dirty-looking men were seated at "refreshment" at a deal table, before a great fire; and at the other side of the room, at another table, two or three were busy with a pack of cards, with more "refreshment" beside them. The atmosphere of this room was stifling and odious—a mixture of evil scents, rank tobacco and stale ale; boiled garbage for the landlord's pigs, which he was just now busy compounding and heating; and bad drainage, quite indescribable and almost insufferable.

The air he had lately breathed had not been of the purest; but this was so bad that the new-comer who now entered had some difficulty in refraining from raising his handkerchief to protect his nose. He gave a hasty glance round. All within seemed in perfect ignorance of the evil odour. One or two of the first-named refreshment-takers were talking with a satisfied accent, and, to judge from the expression of their faces, were as happy as perhaps their natures admitted. Their unwashed, unshorn faces were greasy in the morning light, as seen through spirals of smoke; their clothes were dirty and worn; their homes, if they had any, bare and miserable places, no doubt; their lives without dignity, nobleness, respect, or religion; in some degree without humanity; and yet they were happy! A little ale and smoke, and a companion like themselves—that is, reckless, improvident, sensuous—with nothing but slavery to vice, ill-health, and misery between them and the workhouse or the grave, this was all that an immortal soul demanded to make it content and happy! The atmosphere the bodily lungs inhaled with satis-

faction, corresponded most truly to that which the soul, depraved and sensualized, loved best to breathe. To these bodies and souls fresh air was undesirable, sweet odours indifferent, wholesome food insipid, fresh healing water hateful; they called good evil, and evil good; and heaven itself would have been to them a place of torment.

The card-players were quieter and intent on their game—an old man and two young ones. They were much too absorbed to hear or notice anything or anyone but themselves and the pieces of coloured pasteboard. One of these had his back to John Broadbent when he entered; but John went up to him at once, put his hand on his shoulder, and said in a low but distinct voice, "Miller, you're wanted outside."

The young man started, and a sudden flush came on his pale cheeks, as he saw who stood beside him. The cards fell from his hands, and with a confused face he rose from the table, to the surprise of his companions.

"Get your hat," said John; and James Miller took it from under a chair in the corner, and followed him out of doors.

"Who wants me?" he asked.

"I do," replied John. "I want you to walk out with me. I have been seeking for you a long time. You've no work, I suppose, and a walk will do you good."

The young shoemaker looked bewildered, and hesitated for a moment, but he did not like to refuse.

"Where do you want me to go to, sir?"

"I want you to go across the meadows to my house, and take dinner with me, if you will."

James glanced nervously at his dusty coat, buttoned

close to the chin, shabby trowsers, and rusty boots; but his companion only smiled assuringly. "Never mind your dress. There's only my sister and myself, and Clara will excuse your appearance this time. You look as if you wanted fresh air. You sit in those close houses till all the colour leaves your cheeks. But I want also to have a little talk with you. Why don't you go sometimes to see your mother? I have seen her this morning, and she's very anxious about you."

James Miller looked foolish, but made some answer about "nobody being glad to see him."

"They used to be glad to see you, James. I remember when I was living in Trentham, years ago, what a rejoicing there was when you came home from school at night if you brought with you a mark for good conduct. Your father sent you to a good school, I think?"

"Pretty well, sir. As good a one as he could pay for, I suppose."

"Yes, so I understood. It seems only the other night that I saw you standing in that room at No. 11 repeating some piece of poetry you'd learned during the day to your father. He used to get you to show me your copy-books, he was so proud of you and your progress. I believe he thought no one had a son so clever as his."

James was silent.

"And your mother, too. How often has she laboured, and been in pain for you, and worked for you, and kept you tidy and comfortable, and, if you were ill, nursed and tended you. You've had a good father and mother, James."

Still James was silent, as he walked on by his companion's side.

"What's the cause, then, of all this trouble between you? What have you been doing? How have you offended them? An only son like you should live with his father and mother till he's married, and be a comfort to them, instead of being tossed about from pillar to post as you seem to be. How is it?"

James had too much respect for his questioner not to reply with an appearance of good humour, though he would fain have answered in some wild, ill-tempered fashion, about "folk minding their own business." His conscience appealed to him with as earnest a voice as did that of his companion, and he was secretly irritated that he could reply to neither well. All he said was, "He didn't know."

John looked more grave than before. "I had a very pleasant memory of you when I went away as an intelligent, obedient boy; and I used to fancy I saw you the help and comfort of your parents, assisting them out of trouble and sorrow if they had any. You may, therefore, think how grieved I was, when I returned, to find you almost strangers to each other; and this morning, when I asked for James, the name brought a frown upon your father's face and a tear on your mother's. What has led you wrong, James?"

"I can't rightly tell, sir; I wish I could.—It's one thing at the top of another. Father was all very well when I was a boy, 'cause he could make me do as he liked then; but when I got a man, and wouldn't stand to be tied down, it was all different."

"Stand to be tied down! What do you mean?"

"Why, to be lectured, and snubbed, and pushed in a corner, if I didn't do everything as he did."

"What did you do different, James?"

"Well, sir, I liked a bit of pleasure, as all young folks do. I think if father and mother had had a few more children, they wouldn't ha' been so particular with me; but they watched me about like a cat watches a mouse, and I couldn't stand it."

"And where did you go to when they watched you?"

"Oh! I went a cricketing first. Father grumbled at that; but mother said she didn't mind it, because it would do me good, but I must come home exact to the minute. Well, I did that for a bit, till the lads all laughed at me for running off as if I were shot. And there was a rule we had, when the game was up, to go to the public-house and get a glass together, just to revive us and help us home; and when I left so early I missed that. So one night I stayed an hour later, and father was in an awful rage when I got home, and tried to larrup me; but I fought with him, and took the stick out of his hand, and broke it in two. He never tried to beat me after, but he never forgave me, I believe; he allers looked dark at me, and nothing I did was right. Well, in a bit we'd a regular cricket match between our fellows and another club, and our side won. The stakes was a supper; and hadn't we a jolly one at the 'Two Anglers?' There was a good bit of drinking among the men; and as our side had nothing to pay, we sucked in all we could. I stood it a good while; but at last I was as fuddled as the rest, and when they got me home father wouldn't take me in. He'd locked the door and gone to bed, and he said he

wouldn't come down to let such a bad 'un as me in. So I was took back to the 'Two Anglers,' and there I stayed the night; and the next morning I was too ill to do anything. But I wouldn't go back to father's. Was I likely? He'd turned me out once, I said, and he shouldn't do it again. I lodged at the 'Anglers' for better than a week, and then I turned soft, for mother persuaded me to go home. But I never took kindly to home after. Father and me never spoke about that night's job, but we soon did about some more, for I wasn't likely to stay at home allers. Work, work, work, from Monday morning till Saturday night, without a stop at all except for meals and sleeping—that was father's rule. I didn't see the fun of sitting to work till ten at night, so I went out now and then; and as I could dance and sing a bit, I was soon asked to a good many places, and got acquainted with a girl at a public-house—Sally Mayo—a nice-looking lass with ringlets down to her shoulders. Well, that was just what finished me. Father met us in the street one day; he said she was no good, I said she was; and we'd a grand blow-up. He pushed me out of the house that night, and—here I am."

He turned with almost a triumphant look to John, as much as to say, "I'm not a man to be trifled with; I'm an independent bold fellow, who doesn't care for anything!" and John asked,

"Then you are quite happy now?"

This simple question rather puzzled him. "Well, Mr. Broadbent, I can't quite say that! It takes such a deal to make a fellow happy."

"I am glad of that," thought John, "glad at least

that you are not content with mere ale, and liberty to prowl about public-houses."

"What would it take to make you happy, *quite* happy, mind?" he asked aloud.

"Plenty of money, and plenty of luck."

"At the cards?"

"Yes, and at everything. I would have everything and everybody just what I wanted them to be."

"What do you want them to be? Good and true?"

"No; I wasn't thinking of that! But, first and *foremost*, I must have plenty of money."

"What would you do with it?"

"I think I'd take a public-house. I would have good clothes, and a gold chain, and a watch, and a carriage, and I would just ride over to my father some fine morning, to show him how well I was off."

"And you think you would be quite happy then? Suppose your health was gone, as it most likely would be if you had plenty of money and a public-house—it is going *now*, James—I can see it by your dull eye and unsteady hand—and suppose you had lost a good conscience—what would the money do for you? No, my poor fellow, you don't know what you are saying, you don't know what happiness is."

"How can a fellow be happy that hasn't plenty of money in his pocket? I never had that, I wish I had. Poor people, like me, are obliged to do as they can, and go without so many things they want; when you found me, I was trying to get a few halfpence to make all square."

"By gambling?"

"Well, where's the harm? Rich folk gamble as well as me, only it's for pounds instead of pence."

"But why need you gamble? why not work? Is it not better to earn an honest penny, than win one by a game at cards?"

"I know which is the easiest."

"But suppose you lose?"

"Ah, there's the rub! If I could always win, I wouldn't ask for a better trade." Here he laughed.

"And you don't care for the losers?"

"Why should I? That's their look-out."

"But suppose a man were starving, and had lost his last penny to you, would you let him starve? would you take his penny?"

"Well, I don't think I should be quite as bad as that. If it really were so, you know."

"Thank God!"

"What for, sir?"

"That you are not quite lost in selfishness. But I think better of you than you seem to do of yourself. I do think you would care for the losers, even if it were not their last penny. I do not think, when you tried it, you would like to live by the 'trade,' as you call it, of gambling. It is a wicked trade, a trade in which both sides lose, one so much money, the other so much soul. Which would you like to lose best, your money or your soul?"

"Neither, sir."

"Then you will never do for a gambler, for you must lose one or the other, and most likely both, if you gamble. And is it possible that you should for a moment prefer that sort of life to one of honest, noble work? Is it for the sake of a little present ease only? For the sake of tasting a little beer, of sitting idle in a

tap-room, of lounging about? You have many times read the history of Esau and Jacob, and have no doubt thought as many times what a foolish young man Esau was to sell his birthright, his inheritance, for a few spoonfuls of soup; but you are now like Esau, nay, you are worse than he, you are selling youth and health and strength, your intellect, your soul, your whole inheritance from God, for a few cans of ale, for a few idle hours. Think what you are doing before it is too late! Stop while you can. Let me beg of you, my dear fellow, to begin a new life from this day."

"I don't know how. I wish I could—but—"

"But what? Let me know your difficulties."

"Ah, difficulties! that's just the word. There's a many difficulties; you've no notion, sir, what a young chap like me has to fight against."

"Then you really do fight? That's good! You've only to go in in thorough earnest, and you will conquer."

James looked abashed. He had some little honesty in him, and did not like to take credit where it was not due.

"I can't say I've tried very much yet; everything's been contrary, mother and father, and even Sally."

"Has Sally forsaken you?"

"She says I'm not one of her sort, and her and me's parted."

"Perhaps she has lost confidence in you?"

"When I first knew Sally," continued James, "I thought I'd found what I wanted, somebody to love me, who wouldn't always be snapping and snarling. She was a merry laughing lass, fond of a joke and a

bit of fun as much as anybody, and she was very pretty too. Well, she and I made it up, she knew what I was, and what I liked, and she said she was fond of me; and she was quite a respectable girl too, though father did abuse her! She went out to service, and then in a while she sent me word I wasn't good enough, and that's what I call behaving shabby to a fellow, and so I told her. Since that I haven't cared how things took."

"Perhaps Sally has been doing what I want you to do, James, she has been thinking;—she sees life cannot all be joke and idleness; that there is something serious in it; that it has many sorrows for the lazy and self-indulgent, and there is no hope for a happy future for her or for you, if drinking and idleness are to be the rule. She is industrious and sober, I suppose; and I cannot imagine you would like her to be otherwise, and she no doubt wants to see you doing your part. Has she ever asked you to give up the drink?"

"Well, I can't deny as she hasn't. But it's altogether unreasonable. I'll do what's fair, and I always meant to work for her."

"Yes, as you are doing now. A day or two at the end of the week. All the rest spent at the Prince of Wales over beer and cards. That would not be the way to support her, or scarcely yourself. I daresay you are in debt now?"

"Only a shilling or two. And I could work all round in a month or so, and be as well off as anybody, but she wouldn't believe it."

"Because she didn't see you make the attempt in real earnest. Sally is quite right. But here we are at the ferry. Now for it."

They ran down the bank and leaped into the boat, just as the ferryman was pushing off. He had waited for the two passengers, and was impatient to be gone.

Clara had not expected any visitor. School had been over half an hour, and the cloth was laid for two, but another knife and fork and spoon were quickly placed, and she gave the unexpected guest a thorough welcome. James noticed, with some admiration, the cleanliness and order of the room, the fair white cloth, shining silver, glittering glasses, and the geometrically arranged dinner-table. A warm fire glowed upon the hearth, and though the day was cold and windy and cloudy without, here was quiet and comfort and joy. John put on his slippers, and then conducted his visitor to a room where he could wash and brush his hair. As the young shoemaker looked round the neatly appointed chamber, he inwardly drew a comparison between this house and the noisy untidy lodgings in which he had lately been content to live. "But then," he thought, "Mr. Broadbent has plenty of money, and I have next to none; that makes all the difference." "Did it make all the difference?" asked another thought. "Might not peace and order and cleanliness be insured in a two-roomed, or even a one-roomed house, as in four or six—with fourteen shillings a week as with forty? But in neither, where was no industry, or sobriety, or self-denial."

He descended the stairs slowly, half afraid to tread with his unbrushed boots upon the flowered carpet; and as he opened the room-door timidly, the dinner was steaming upon the table. A chair was ready for him; he placed himself upon it, awkwardly enough, but as

no one appeared to notice his rude attempts at good manners, he was soon more at ease.

"Make a good dinner," said John, as he put upon his plate a second heap, "the walk ought to have given you a famous appetite."

But James's appetite was not up to the healthy mark; he had lately lounged and drank and smoked it away, and he was compelled to say, "Enough," before John had nearly finished his ample meal. Water to drink—there was nothing else! It was untouched by him, and it gave him a species of shudder to see his host pour from the decanter a second glassful, and drink it with evident pleasure. Miss Broadbent also took water, and for a woman James thought it not so bad, but for a man! Even his father took beer for dinner regularly, and for supper, half a pint each time—he never exceeded; and beer was always given to him at his father's table, as soon as his childish years were gone. It was a necessary of life. He began to fear Mr. Broadbent was a teetotaller; if so, half his respect for him would be gone. He had heard teetotallers so laughed at, so spoken against, so despised! And where was a man's liberty if he might not drink ale?

But though the young shoemaker noticed much, he spoke little. His answers were chiefly in monosyllables, soon ended. This was safest for him he felt, and then he was not in good spirits, for notwithstanding his friend's endeavours to make him comfortable, he did not find himself in congenial society. He was dimly conscious that his present way of life was not right or good, but he was not willing entirely to forsake it. Forsake tobacco and ale and idleness? Dear Saint Monday,

lounging card-playing Tuesday, sleepy Wednesday? All his pleasant companions at the Prince of Wales—"Tom and Dick and Harry"—and go on the jog-trot ways of soberness and wisdom? His heart rebelled from the thought of such a life as his father's—work, work, work, "from early morn till dark," and no rest, nothing that he called pleasure. Such a home as that at No. 11? No; most certainly not. He could never live and work merely to keep such a home as that about him!

But such a home as, we will say, this. With plenty of nice furniture, of light, of music—for he had noticed the piano—and of leisure-time, with a garden. He liked prize flowers, though his father thought them nonsense, and their culture waste of time; and with a companion, a sister like Miss Clara, so tall and fair, and —no, she was by far too stately for him—with a wife, perhaps, like Sally, with her ringlets and laughing face; yes, he might be induced to give up ale and tobacco for this!

But where was the money for all this? And he sighed as he reflected how poor he was. This sight that he was having just now was like a peep into Paradise; and he felt himself at the bottom of an abyss, from which it was all but impossible he should emerge. He was poor and in debt, and he was half inclined to feel morose and angry with the two pleasant faces near him, for they had so much—he so little. Why had he been brought here to look at their happiness?

"Do you read?" asked John, as, after dinner, they were seated by themselves at the fire.

"Not much," said James faintly. And he was afraid

John would ask him next what sort of books he read, for they were chiefly the lowest novels, of violently sensational tendencies, in which intrigues, murders, and the wildest improbabilities were mingled together in a distracting manner, and which he read as he took his early pipe in bed, before coming down to a late breakfast.

"Because I was thinking if you did read, or wished to read, I could lend you some books. Here are some." And he laid before him on the table a few illustrated works that he thought might prove interesting. James opened them and looked into them mechanically, but his eyes did not rest long on the pages, and John, who noticed, without appearing to do so, saw that he had not yet obtained what he wanted, the knowledge of a motive. However, 'not so fast!' thought he, as an expression of interest dawned on the young man's face, on opening one of the last books, a work on gardening, with large gaily-coloured plates of florists' prize flowers. A gigantic pansy, with a yellow ground, seemed especially to meet his approbation. It was a royal flower, or at least had a royal name—Prince William—and he read the pages descriptive of it and its triumphs at various horticultural shows with a good deal of interest. Then he seemed to recollect something, and put down the book with a sigh.

"Can I help you?" asked John.

"No; thank you." But opening the book again, "That's a fine pansy," and he pointed to the picture.

"Very; and you are fond of flowers? I am glad of that, for I have some pansies in my garden—only one or two, very poor things compared with that one it is

true; but if you will come with me I will show you them, and perhaps you can tell me their names."

They went out together, and looked at the pansies, placed in pots in a sheltered corner, and in full flower, but James did not know them. Still he admired them greatly.

"You shall have them, and take them home with you, if you like."

The young shoemaker's eyes brightened. He took up two of the pots, but directly afterwards put them down again, as if they had burned him.

"I have no room in which they could grow," he said sorrowfully.

"Not a bedroom? Give them light and water and a little fresh air, and they will do very well for a time."

"No. I'm leaving where I am to-morrow. I can't take them."

"That's a pity. But why shouldn't you go where you can keep plants? And why shouldn't you have a garden? It is not a dear pleasure, and might be made to pay its own expenses, if you were very attentive to it."

"A garden?" asked James in a sort of astonishment. He had never thought of such a thing. "How could I pay the rent?"

"It would not cost so much as the ale. How much can you earn a week if you are industrious?"

"I have earned a pound; but say fifteen shillings."

"And how many hours must you work to earn fifteen shillings?"

"From nine to six; about"—

"Well, suppose you pay for lodgings and food eight shillings a-week. I don't suppose you pay so much as

that now. You would then have seven left for clothes and other expenses and your garden—five or four for clothes and two or three for the garden. Two shillings a week are five pounds four shillings a year. You might have a splendid garden for that if you worked in it entirely yourself; and you ought to be strong enough to dig and do everything it needs. Only you must give up the ale."

"I should get as weak as water without the ale."

"So you would. And water is not so weak after all. Think of the number of mills it turns, the corn it grinds, the cloth it weaves, the silk it winds; and if you change it into steam, you know how immensely strong and powerful it is! I need not remind you of steam-engines and steam-vessels that do the world's work and perform the world's journeys with so much ease, because with so much strength. Water is very strong; and if you are only as weak as water you will have no reason to complain. But I see it is the water-drinkers whom you fancy to be so weak. Look at me. Do I look so very weak?"

And John laughingly displayed his well-formed muscular arm up to the elbow, and invited James's fingers to touch the ball of his thumb, and tell him if it felt like wash-leather.

"I've been a water-drinker, I am glad to say, for nine years or more, and I am wasted away as you see! But I am by no means the only strong man who drinks nothing more intoxicating than water. Do not go away and think me a wonder. Many friends whom I have known and still know have told me that they were stronger and healthier after they had given up the

use of ale and wine than before; and I feel quite sure if you were to give abstinence a fair trial you would be able to say the same.

"I should like to see you with a garden! You would have plenty of time to attend to it in summer, when it wants most attention. From six to nine are three good hours, in which you might dig and plant at your pleasure. A bed of prize pansies would look beautiful in it. Cannot you fancy you see it? And how proud you would be to take a prize! Then you might have pleasant lodgings out in the country; why shouldn't you? for you work at home, I suppose, and could see your garden growing beneath your eyes. With fifteen shillings or a pound a week, good health and sobriety, you might be more happy than I can tell you."

Clara came out at this moment. She had on her shawl and her garden-hat, and a very pleasant smile, like sunshine, about her eyes. James felt half dazzled to look at her.

"Have you seen my violets, Mr. Miller?" she asked; and as she spoke the wind blew about the strings of her hat, and brought a faint pink into her cheeks. "It is quite a mistake that you have not shown my violets, John!" There was a little pretended indignation in her tone. "Here they are, just at your feet, and no notice taken of my darlings! See how double they are; and so deliciously sweet. Will you have one?"

And she presented some to James, who accepted them timidly; half afraid to bring his own dark-grained fingers near her delicate white ones.

"Have you a garden?" she continued. "If you have, I shall give you a root of these violets as a great

favour." James thought her smile very enchanting; he longed for a root of her violets; but he was obliged to say, "No! he had no garden."

"No garden! That is a pity. But why not have one? I can see you are fond of flowers. Why shouldn't you have a garden?"

"Thank you," he said; for he had forgotten till now to thank her for her gift. "I think I will have a garden."

"Now, that's sensible of you! for you will have so much enjoyment in it. And John and I will find you some of every kind of flower we have to stock it. I know John will give you some of his double primroses, and a few tulips and hyacinths, and a shoot from his yellow rose; and I will give my violets and some geraniums. I have some fine ones in the house. And when your garden is in order we'll come and look at it, and congratulate you."

John stood, admiring Clara's new-found animation. It was not often she showed so much to a stranger, and he inwardly thanked her for its display just now. She understood the case; and as she told him afterwards, "seeing the flour before her required more yeast to raise it than usual, she employed her barm liberally"—a true housekeeper's simile. The garden decided on, it was found on looking round that other floral treasures might be dispensed, and quite a list was promised.

James was half bewildered by the prospect. And where was the garden to be? About Trentham were certainly many gardens within the reach of a poor man—perhaps few towns had so many; but by this time, even if one were to be let, they would all be stocked,

and would require money beforehand to obtain them; and while James was earning the money, the spring would be advancing into summer.

John was thoughtful a few moments. Then he looked up—and his bright earnest eye fixed itself with some little anxiety upon the young man. James felt himself growing very serious under this gaze.

"Are you in great earnest about this garden? Have you reflected that if you are to have it, you must give up the drink entirely? If you have not, think well before you answer me."

"I will try."

"Don't deceive yourself. You will find it very hard at first. You will have to be very resolute. You will have to be self-denying and industrious. But you will have great pleasures too. The pleasure of finding yourself doing right—of living a more noble life—the pleasure of pleasing all your true friends—and Clara and myself will honour you for your trial, and help you as well as we can. The pleasure of your garden, and perhaps, in time, of a home of your own—comfortable and happy."

"But you must forsake your old habits, your old friends—never enter a public-house, never taste ale, never touch cards to gamble, never idle away Saint Monday."

A lingering regretful look was in James's eye; a look of indecision, almost of fear. The garden was a glorious prospect—the approbation of these new-found friends very pleasant; but, how could he pass the Prince of Wales, and not go in? how could he sit steadily at work for hours? The dreary monotony of work at

No. 11 returned to his remembrance; his face became gloomy and dissatisfied in expression. John Broadbent noticed the change, and understood its cause.

"You can't make up your mind to work as your father does, day after day, in a dreary dark house? and you are not quite sure that you could give up the Prince of Wales? Is that it?"

"What should you say to living here at St. Wilfrid's, near me, with a garden close to you, and a room all your own? You would go to the town once or twice a week with your work, and the rest of the time be in the country. I should often see you then; for I am hoping and expecting that you and I shall be good friends for many long years. I would, as I told you before, assist you in every way I could, to begin a new life, and continue in it earnestly and manfully. You would have many pleasures that you know nothing of now; for the way of duty is not only the way of safety, but the way of happiness. What do you say?"

A cloud passed away from the young shoemaker's face as these last words were spoken. "It is just what I should like, sir," was his reply.

"Then it is settled," said John; "that is, as soon as I can find the lodgings, and I think I know where to look for them."

Not long afterwards James went away. His heart had been opened by the kindness of his friends, for he had not had much experience of love. He was like a plant growing in the shade, that had longed for light and warmth, and knew not where to obtain it; and suddenly a wall had been broken down, or a tree removed, and at once around it lay open vistas of fields

and greenest meadows—a revelation of a new world; while upon its head fell the sweet life-bringing sunshine. A sort of intoxication took possession of him as he returned slowly homewards; not the dull sensuous intoxication of alcohol, but that fine ethereal mental inebriation produced by rich unusual draughts of hope and joy. His bright eyes and springing step were a great contrast to the morning's glance and motions. He felt that there was something more within him than a sot or a drudge—the two points of the compass between which his life had hitherto oscillated; and that for him there was a future, bright, but attainable and inspiring. Many more words had been spoken to him than I have here recorded, wise, thoughtful words, dictated by a loving care, and he had to some degree appreciated their importance and meaning. An opening had been made, through many thick folds of ignorance, to the soul so long shrouded beneath them; a small opening at present, that might so soon be reclosed; but there was for the present freer breathing, and a sight of the great sky, and the long-hidden soul rejoiced. James had been permitted a few hours' association with friends in a much higher sphere than his own, and by the touch of love had been made to see something of the excellence of this sphere;—at first he had envied, before he left it he ceased to envy, and began to love. They were happy, these kind friends of his, but they wished to raise him to happiness; they showed him something of their joy, that they might induce him to seek for the same—and themselves pointed out the way. How could he envy or be indifferent? Again and again he made the promise to himself, as he proceeded on his

way, that he would begin a new life—flee from his great temptation, drink; give up idleness, and make himself worthy of their friendship.

"After all," said John, as he was seated once more with his sister by the fire, "it was you that won the battle. What an amount of forces you brought to bear! Your charge was irresistible. I did not know you had so large a reserve, Clara."

Clara laughed, and replied, "I hope the battle will prove won; but I fear there will be some skirmishing yet, and perhaps a formidable rally."

"Most likely; but forewarned is forearmed, and we must be prepared. I think if we can get him here, and he has a real love for the country, and for gardening, with you to take an interest in him, and myself, and Mary Plowden, for friends—for I mean to bring in Mary to the rescue—we may get him in time to forget the public-house. Poor fellow! he will need many flowers laid in his path besides garden ones, if he is to make progress. 'Prince William' must help to eclipse the 'Prince of Wales,' and all other princes and potentates whatever, that rule their subjects by drink, and we shall have to look after him for some time to come, lest the sheep we have brought back on our shoulders rejoicing, should again go astray."

CHAPTER V.

THE PAINTING DRESSMAKER.

MINDFUL of his promise about the lodgings, John called the next morning upon Mary Plowden, the basket-weaver's daughter—the most likely person, as he imagined, to help him in the business. Mary lived at St. Wilfrid's with her father and mother. She was little and stout, and sang with a voice clear as the lark's. She was not at all pretty, but she was musical and intelligent, and her great forte or failing—which shall we call it?—was, that she fancied she could paint. Not little paltry pictures merely, in washy water-colours, but real, large, oil paintings on mill-board or canvas, portraits the size of life, and landscapes certainly a little smaller than life, for field and sky and water-nature is so large! but good-sized bouncing landscapes too. Mary was almost a universal genius, besides being a dressmaker by profession, turning out a print or merino dress very creditably, though in St. Wilfrid's she had not much of this work to do. On Saturdays she generally accompanied her father to Trentham in the light-cart, and waited upon basket-customers at his stall; and on other days she helped her mother in the house, or her father in the workshop,—she could make the lighter kinds of baskets at a pinch, or sew band and skirt and body, and when these were not needed she painted.

A very enthusiastic energetic little body she was,

with no lack of dignity either. The clergyman called her "Miss Plowden," something put out perhaps from his usual appellative rules by her talents and attainments. As the daughter of a basket-weaver she could not have been called "Miss" with propriety, he would have acknowledged, but as a painter in oils, of much energy and with some natural aptitude as an artist, he could not well refuse her the title. She was his *lusus naturæ*, his pet village phenomenon, and many a stranger did he bring to Ebenezer Plowden's cottage, to look at Mary's room-full of paintings, murmuring in their ear as they passed out, amused or interested, "Quite self-taught, you understand, quite self-taught!" Mary was not perfectly easy under his well-meant patronage, but how could she frown away the clergyman? She had not many frowns in her composition, and those she had, she reserved for more fitting occasions. He had been very kind to her in many ways also, had lent her several paintings to copy, from his drawing and dining room walls, and had procured her the sight of more in the houses of his friends.

Copying was not Mary's specialty, however. She loved to create, and though some of those creations of hers were ghastly, with too many cold grays, or were alarmingly "foxy," with too liberal dashes of burnt sienna, still no one could say they were not original, and totally unlike received models. Some of her portraits were certainly like the originals, but all were more or less what artists call "out of drawing," and all wanted that almost infinite series of graduated tints that nature gives in every human face, and that is to an untaught amateur so difficult and almost impossible to imitate.

John and Clara had very soon become acquainted with Mary. Some of her neighbours called her "the painting dressmaker," a title which aroused curiosity; and as the brother and sister were not above so humble a vice or virtue as curiosity, their eyes often had been attracted towards the basket-weaver's dwelling, as they passed it on their walks to reach the churchyard.

One windy day in February John's hat was lifted by a venturesome blast, carried away from him triumphantly, and rolled across the green, and so through Ebenezer Plowden's open door into the kitchen. With a laughing face, and hair blown roughly over his forehead, John entered the house with an apologetic knock in search of his wandering "chimney-pot." Mary was standing in the parlour doorway at the time, a few words were spoken, John explaining how it was he had taken the liberty to enter, and these few words were the beginning of what was now become a true friendship. Clara and Mary were frequently together, and lately Mary had been taking gratuitous lessons on the piano from her friend; she had a great reverence for both brother and sister, had painted their portraits in her best style, begging with so much earnestness the favour to do it, that they could not well refuse, and had, we are obliged to confess, considerably belied them on the canvas. Clara's clear-cut profile especially charmed her, and she was at odd moments frequently engaged in sketching it from memory, on slips of paper, or waste ends of millboard. "It possessed her," she said with a smile, if friends noticed the perpetually recurring "*nez celeste*," high forehead, and waved hair falling in natural and heavy curls beside either cheek.

Ebenezer Plowden was short and stout, Mary resembling him in these particulars; he was a man of some importance among his poor neighbours; the house he lived in was his own, he rented several osier-beds and two or three islands in the river, the Poet's Island among them, of which we shall hereafter speak; and the excellence of his baskets was acknowledged far and wide. He was reckoned a man of substance. A twinkle in the corner of his eye suggested a smile, it was in fact the "at home card" of that article, the smile always being ready to appear when called upon. Yet he was a shrewd man, sturdy, and brown-skinned, energetic, and capable of almost mythical feats of sustained labour; and idolizing his daughter, to whom he allowed many privileges seldom granted to her sex and station. Her "works," as he called them, were perfect in his eyes, the parlour where they were displayed he spoke of as the "*stud-dio*," though a little garret in the roof, with one dormer-window, and with worm-eaten floor and massive picturesque beams, sloped and crossed like the letter A, did duty for that place. Here hung what Mary called her "failures," safely hidden among the black shadows of the beams, and here was her easel and box of paints and models. The parlour was in fact but the picture-gallery, the exposition of Mary's industry; here guests were received, here strangers came to admire or criticize; here the Sundays and gala-days were spent by the family; and here Mary always sat or stood or walked, with simple unpretending homeliness, unmoved by sneers or praises, but with a hidden enthusiastic light in her eyes, ready to shine forth, when with a friend who understood or loved her and her art. It

was this balance of hers that had attracted John, and when he saw her with unflushed quiet face receiving the praises of gaping admirers at her untaught genius, or the covert sneers and haughty indifference of some of the good clergyman's lady friends, replying to all with the same calm unconscious look, he recognized in her something worthy and extraordinary. Before, she was simply an oddity, a freak of nature; now, she was an interesting woman.

But we began this last paragraph intending to describe Ebenezer himself, not his daughter, and we have been carried away, as was John's hat, though not certainly against our will, to Mary's feet, by a toss of the prankish wind. We feel bound to confess that Ebenezer was by no means a perfect specimen of humanity. Shrewd as he was, he had yet one conspicuous weakness. He was a smoker, the pipe and he were firmly wedded. Morning, noon, and night it was in his hand or mouth, or close beside him, ready for service. Not a short pipe, black and dirty, but a long clean piece of baked clay, properly waxed at the end, and fed with fragrant tobacco. No doubt this habit of smoking accounted in some measure for his brown skin, and for certain decayed black-looking teeth, that spoiled the pleasantness of his smile; but he would not have believed it had you told him so, and if he had believed, he would still have smoked. This morning when John called, Ebenezer was standing before his door smoking. His coat was off, he was in working costume, in a well-worn waistcoat, corduroy breeches, blue knitted stockings and shoes, and was taking his preparatory whiff before the morning's weaving. He called this, "getting

a breath of fresh air," and it was indeed getting one breath of fresh air to a dozen or so of smoke.

Between the puffs of smoke he looked contemplatively along the road that stretched from his cottage corner to the elm-covered walk by the river. A few gables and chimneys, and a few doorsteps and lines of front wall retreating in perspective, were all he could see of his neighbours' domiciles; but he liked to look at these, with an eye that missed no single foot put out of the doorway, and that noticed every cat and bird hovering near. There was not much news in the village that did not find its way to Ebenezer, and he knew how to weave any one circumstance that came under his notice into another, as deftly and swiftly as he wove osiers into baskets; not more so, for he was no idle man, and his baskets were renowned far and near, as we have said before.

While he was thus looking, the tall figure of John Broadbent came in sight. Ebenezer's eyes brightened, and he took quick anticipatory puffs, the twinkle of his eyes also spoke its "at home" more clearly than ever, and he moved one foot a little further forward.

"Good morning, Plowden. A fine day! How are you all?" were John's first words of greeting.

Ebenezer took out his pipe and shook its contents on the grass near the door-step, as he replied, "Pretty well, sir; how's yourself?"

"Rarely.—Making more smoke I see? Still at the old trade?"

"Yes, sir; clearing my head for the day's work."

"And spoiling this sweet morning air. How is it

possible you can prefer the scent of tobacco to that of fresh-springing grass and violets?"

Ebenezer smiled. "That is one of your poetic speeches, sir; nobody but a poet ever smelled the grass growing."

"I have, when it has just begun to grow: a real, fresh, truly delicious scent. But you lose that, and many more sweet scents, for the sake of your pipe."

"Tobacco's a sweeter smell than violets, let alone the grass, to my thinking, Mr. Broadbent."

John shook his head with a laugh. It was an old quarrel between him and the basket-weaver.

"Can I see Mary? Is she at home?"

"Mary is at home," said Ebenezer sententiously. "Will you walk this way, sir? I think she's in the stud-dio."

He led the way into the parlour, and as John entered, a half-completed picture stared him in the face, as it stood upon the table, propped up by books and boxes. Mary was not there, however, so while Ebenezer went in search, John had time to examine the new work. It was a "Raising of Lazarus" that she was attempting this time, a great undertaking, though not the first of the kind the daring artist had endeavoured to depict. The principal figures were drawn in, and one or two were partly painted, but Mary and Martha still knelt before the tomb in outline. There was nothing very striking in the arrangement of the figures, and the painter had neither knowledge of drawing nor of colouring sufficient to make a pleasing picture. In several artistic respects it was an enormity, but John admired the enthusiasm and pluck of the young dressmaker.

He lifted his head and found Mary standing beside him.

"What do you think of it?" she asked.

"It is a daring thing for you to attempt."

"Then you mean it's a failure, even for me?"

"No, not a failure for *you*. It is a success in some respects. This figure of Christ is drawn more correctly than you generally get full-length figures. The right arm is too long, and the feet are too large; but as a whole, it is tolerably true. Why don't you set yourself to study the figure systematically before you begin such ambitious pictures? And your notions of perspective are not at all true and clear. Those distant trees we see through the opening of the cave are much too large."

"I wish I could study! Sometimes I think I will, and I earnestly copy for a short while those anatomical plates you lent me, but I am so soon weary, and in truth have so little time for real hard study. Then an idea seizes me which I must draw out, and it is such a pleasure to see it grow up that I cannot tear myself away from it. Besides, why need I study so much? By practice and observation I shall improve, and my pictures after all are only to please myself and my father."

"There are several good reasons why you should study more than you do, and I hope some day you will see the necessity for it, though it is true you have not much time, and good instruction is expensive."

"*Very* expensive," replied Mary emphatically. "And those drawing masters only teach you to copy after all; I should throw away my palette and brushes in disgust if I must do nothing but copy. But can you tell me

what colour is worn for mourning in the East? I know I have read somewhere it is not black, but can't remember what it is."

"It is yellow, I believe. But I will look for you when I get home, and let you know."

"Thank you, you are very kind."

"Am I? Well now, I wish *you* to be very kind, for I have a favour to beg of you, Mary. I want you to find me or tell me of some lodgings for a friend of mine in St. Wilfrid's. He is poor, a journeyman shoemaker, and will want a room to himself, that must serve for workroom and bedroom for the present, I fear, till he is richer."

"A friend of yours?" and Mary reflected.—"I do not know—though perhaps Mrs. Jones might have a room to spare just now."

"Is that your next-door neighbour?"

"Yes; she has just lost her son, and is now quite alone. Poor thing! she has fretted so about him, though he has been ill two years, and was a constant burden. To comfort her a little, I took his portrait the other day from memory, and she keeps it in her bedroom, and I believe kisses it every night before she goes to sleep. It does her good, she says. Will you go in with me to see her? I think we might arrange it at once. She has odd ways; but she's a kind-hearted woman, when you know her."

"Certainly I will. But there is another thing my friend wants—a garden, or part of one, where he could cultivate prize flowers."

"Mrs. Jones's garden will be the very thing. She was asking me the other day what she must do with it,

for the doctor and the funeral have made her very poor, and she can't afford a gardener. It is quite a wilderness, indeed, for last year it was entirely neglected, though she kept it on, thinking and hoping poor Will might get better."

"Lead on then; we will hear what she says at once."

Mrs. Jones's door was quite close to Ebenezer's, so there was no need for Mary to put on bonnet or shawl. When she tapped at it, a rather hoarse voice within said, "Come in, Mary." The widow was seated close to the fire, a round deal table was near her, on which was laid a pile of clothes—a man's coat, waistcoat, and trousers, several shirts, handkerchiefs, and stockings, and on her arm was drawn one of these last that she had just been darning. When she caught sight of the stranger, she hastily pulled off the stocking and laid it with a trembling hand upon the table. Then she rose up, smoothed her apron, a blue checked one, in a nervous way, and waited till her visitors should explain their coming.

"Don't put yourself about," began Mary. "This is Mr. Broadbent, he has been to our house this morning looking out for lodgings for a young man who is a friend of his, and I ventured to tell him that I thought you might want to let one of your rooms."

Mrs. Jones kept a bewildered silence, and still stood smoothing her apron.

"Do sit down again," Mary proceeded, "and we will sit too for a minute or two, if you will let us. Mr. Broadbent, will you take this chair? There now, we shall be more comfortable! You told me how lonely you were in the house now, and I'm quite sure you

must be; a lodger would be company for you sometimes. If you only heard him stirring about in his room, it would be something. Have you ever thought of such a thing as taking one?"

"I can't say as I have."

"But it would be a good thing for you; don't you think it would? He would pay you something for the room, and he would like to rent the garden too."

"The garding?" she passed her hand over her eyes in a weary way. "The garding is worth seven shillin', so Job Simpson tou'd me, an' I wouldn't let it for no less."

"Well, and I should think it's quite worth it, too," replied Mary; "it's a nice piece, but it's sadly out of order. And about the room? couldn't you let that too?"

"Is the young man steady?" asked the widow.

"He is Mr. Broadbent's friend," replied Mary; but John now interrupted.

"Let me explain," he said, "he is a journeyman shoemaker, quite a young man, about nineteen. But he has not been so sober as he ought to have been, and it is on account of his bad habits I am bringing him away from the town. He promises he will be steady, and go to no more public-houses, and I hope he will keep his promise."

The widow reflected. "You need not decide just now," said John; "I will bring him here for you to see, and then if you think well, you and he can arrange about money." And in this way it was left.

As Mary was following John out Mrs. Jones seized her by the arm, and pointing to the heap of clothes on the table, said hysterically, "Them's *his* clothes! Did

you know 'em? I was mendin' his stockings. I'd like to put 'em by all tidy!" and she put her apron to her eyes and began to sob. "Don't fret," said Mary sympathizingly, "I'll come in again presently, and help you to put them to rights," and she gave the poor forlorn mother a compassionate kiss.

In a day or two all was settled. James Miller came over, saw the room and the garden, and was much pleased with both. The room was low, with a plaster floor, but was clean and tolerably light, with a pleasant view of the river seen between the boughs of drooping trees. Mrs. Jones at once took a fancy to James's looks. He was so like "her poor lad" she said. Mary could not see the likeness, but that was no matter. The price she asked for the room and for attendance upon him was very small, but she would not hear of him carrying up his shoemaker's tools into his bedroom. "He's welcome to work i' the kitchen, an' I don't like my poor lad's room to be stinkin' wi' leather," was her speech. Nobody of course objected to this arrangement. It was healthier and better in every way, so James's tools and bench were put in a light corner of the down-stairs room, and his leather apron hung up behind the door that very day, and James began his new life in the country. John supplied him with a few shillings to pay the debts he owed at Trentham, that he might have no further need to approach old friends or haunts, and this was to be paid back in instalments.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SERMON.

At Trentham, upon the walls, had been seen for the last week, large blue and yellow and white posters, announcing that on Sunday, April 26th, anniversary sermons would be preached, by the Rev. Stephen Morris, in the chapel, High Street, for the benefit of the said chapel; and upon the day named a great number of people were gathered together in this place of worship to listen to what the Rev. S. Morris had to say. Amongst the rest were Clara and John Broadbent. John had not seen Stephen since the visit we have related; though he had twice called upon him, he was not at home both times.

The brother and sister found themselves seated this morning, with hundreds of other well-dressed people, in a large and well-built chapel, lighted by tall Gothic windows, and resembling in many details of its architecture a modern church. There was at first a subdued rustling, and sort of universal settling down of these many gaily-dressed atoms into their fit places, occasional coughing and scraping of feet, varied by the march of new comers up the well-matted aisles, and the opening and shutting of pew doors. But when a side door opened and the minister appeared, with black gown and bowed head, and ascended the pulpit stairs, a hush came upon all these breathing atoms, and woman, and man, and child prepared themselves by silence for

the introductory words of prayer about to be spoken. The young minister looked more than usually pale as he raised his head in the pulpit, and for a moment surveyed the congregation. Then he lifted up his hands, and all bowed themselves, while in a few solemn words he prayed for a blessing upon the morning's services. He ceased. A hymn was given out, the organ first took up the song and went through the air, sweetly and softly, with its inimitable voice, and then the whole congregation rose up and sang with it. Another prayer, a chapter of the Bible read, another hymn sung, and all settled themselves finally to the sermon.

In some respects John found it a wonderful sight, this large congregation composed of various grades of society of both sexes, and of almost all ages, from the tiny child who can just be induced to sit sufficiently still by the aid of papa's grave look, and mamma's occasional half smile, through an hour's discourse, without too much disturbing those near, to the man and woman of mature life, and the white-haired grandfather or mother, all looking up to, and listening with more or less fixed attention, and not without much reverence, to the words of a man still very young, placed before them in the prominence of the pulpit, and allowing him to lead their minds through the intricacies of a discourse founded upon the inscrutable depths of divine providence.

With a slow, solemn, deep reaching tone the young pastor delivered the words of his text: "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel the Saviour!" and as he looked round upon his congregation after their utterance, with the air of a man deep in thought, and about to launch forth upon some vast

sea of revealed truth, his audience felt their expectations raised in no ordinary degree, and breathlessly awaited what he should next declare.

The subject he had selected—full of mysterious meanings, and needing, in truth, an angel rather than a man to seek into it and to give it expression—was yet one that suited his peculiar powers of mind, and drew forth some of the highest, deepest thinkings of which he was capable. Mystery is dear to the poetic faculty; for in its heights and depths, illimitable and endless, the grandest aspirations of the soul may be called out. Within it, what wondrous worlds of splendour and beauty may not be hidden—what paradises, what vast oceans of knowledge, of life, of love! It is eminently dear to the strong-winged and aspiring, for it is a perpetual excitement, and has a voice that ever calls to explore its mazes, and a hand that is always beckoning onward. As the hammer is made for the nail, the spade for the soil, the axe for the tree, so is the mind of the poet and the intellectual aspirant made for the unravelling of mystery. The one comes to it with the awe of a worshipper, the other with the joy of a treasure-finder. The true poet and divine pierces the veil and ever sees God behind, trembling as he sees, not with fear, but with ecstasy that is akin to the joy that flutters the wings of the angels. Ever to him behind the mystery is that which is more mysterious—the "God that hideth" himself.

Stephen Morris came to his subject with the gladness of the poet and the minister. The mystery he had chosen to talk about that morning to the child, the youth, the man, the woman, the aged—impossible to be more than hinted at, infinitely high, infinitely deep as it was, and

therefore unreachable by a finite mind, and utterly untellable by the poor speech of a man, yet invited him forth, dared his utmost strength of wing, and, like a young racer that would emulate the lightning, though content to be left far behind, he exulted in the impotent trial, and cut the air in all but impossible periods. His hearers followed his quick, daring flight as best they could, and admired, as they panted for breath after him.

None but a young man, perhaps, would have treated the subject as he attempted it. He was not, however, the less applauded, though, of course, the applause was silently bestowed. But he soon left the rare ether, and came down to more breathable atmospheres, and, in the aspect of the Divine One as the God of Israel, the *Saviour*, was more at home, and nearer human sympathies and human wants. Here he drew after him all hearts, and carried them with his own, in adoration and love, to the feet of the great Lover of humanity; and, by a wonderful gift of eloquence, and a subtle sympathy of soul, entered all other human souls in that large assembly, and, using them as instruments, played upon each stop to perfection. They smiled or wept, adored or shuddered, rejoiced or trembled, and gazed into hell or heaven, as he bade them. When at length the sermon was ended, and his deep voice ceased to sound, men and women, released from the spell, took deep breaths, looked into each other's faces, and asked silently, with eyes glistening with mingled tears and rapture, "Where have we been? What are we? Is it really we ourselves? or, like him we have heard, are we changed, and do we shine transfigured?"

John and Clara felt the strange entrancing influence with the rest. They walked home thoughtfully. Unknown as they were, not one of all the crowd had ventured to address them, nor did they wish to be addressed. Greetings even from well-loved faces would have been undesirable, so much had they been stirred out of the spheres of wonted life and thought.

"What a wonderful power is this!" exclaimed John at last, when they had walked some distance out of the town, under the wide-spread sky of the open Trent-valley, and found themselves again on earth, pulled down by invisible strings from their elevation, nature treating the soul as a tied Montgolfier, that she never allows to rise very far or for very long. "What a wonderful power is this which one human being has over others by the aid of eloquent words, of out-breathed soul! A preacher like Stephen touches all who hear him on the divine side, and straightway they are aware of new faculties, are raised for a time above their ordinary selves, and feel themselves winged. What a joy for him must be the possession of this gift!"

"The gift has something awful in it, too," was Clara's low reply.

"Responsibilities are always awful, and great gifts bring great responsibilities. Great trials also come with them, but we cannot deny the joys. What a glorious course is apparently before him! What souls he may be the means of saving from the 'beggarly elements!' What purity and greatness of life he may teach! What grand truths hold forth, and what numbers of lost and weary ones he may show the way to the Giver of rest—the Saviour!"

John and Clara were not the only ones who made the young minister and his sermon the topics of conversation as they proceeded home this morning.

"A truly magnificent discourse," said Mr. Gresham, the mayor, as he rode away to his country villa, four miles out of town, with his wife and family beside him in the barouche.

"Yes; it ought to be printed," added Edward, the only son. "The bishop's sermon we heard last Sunday was nothing to be compared to it."

"I hope it may do good," was Mrs. Gresham's observation, a little bashful woman, as she wiped away the tears, not yet dry, from her face.

"It must do good!" exclaimed Charlotte, with the decision of manner belonging to her father, whom she in many things resembled.

Jane, the youngest daughter, had not yet spoken. She was in truth looking earnestly in the direction of the dispersing congregation, as if in search of some one she knew, and had scarcely heard what was said. When she at length turned her head, and brought her face and her little pink satin bonnet into proper dignified, lady-like position, her father surveyed her with a smile upon his broad face. "Well, Jane?"

There was nothing very formidable or alarming in the words; but Jane, nevertheless, coloured a deep blushing red, paling her pink bonnet by contrast, and still kept silence.

"And did you like the sermon, Jane?"

"Yes, papa. It was almost too beautiful!"

"You need not have asked her, papa," was Charlotte's observation. "Everything Mr. Morris says is

grand to Jane. I do not think she took her eyes from his face the whole sermon."

"And where were *your* eyes, Charlotte?" asked the father. "They would have been better fixed on Mr. Morris than employed in watching your sister. I am afraid, my dear, you forget the purpose for which you go to chapel.—It was certainly a fine sermon—a wonderful sermon! I shall get Morris to give me the manuscript, and I will have it printed at my own expense. Such a sermon as that deserves to live."

"I knew we should have one of his best," said Edward, "he looked so pale when he began. He'll study himself into a consumption if he doesn't mind. Mrs. Grant says he buries himself in his books more than half the day, and he's often up till midnight, writing."

"A bad habit—a very bad habit. It is lighting the candle at both ends. We must have him with us rather oftener, my dear, and try to get him to be more reasonable. You must talk to him about the danger to his health, for we could not afford to lose him. I think he *does* look thinner and paler than he did."

"I could cure him," interrupted Edward. "A few hours' boating a day on the river with our club, and a little of your best Madeira, father, would soon give him a colour."

"Boating!" repeated the mother in surprise. "You forget it is not proper for a minister to spend his time in boating, my dear!"

"And why not?" asked Edward. "I'm sure it's a very healthy amusement. But ministers now-a-days are kept up like a cat in mittens. There's nothing

manly or healthy about them when once they're out of the pulpit. I'm sure Morris would preach even finer sermons than he does if he took to boating now and then, and he'd live a great deal longer."

"I will bring him home with me to dine to-morrow," said the mayor; "and if you can persuade him to take healthy walks with you, Edward—but no boating with your club, remember, it would not be proper, your mother is right—you will be doing him a service, and be a more useful member of society than you have been of late."

Edward was silent. He knew what his father's rebuke meant, and his conscience told him he deserved it. The many idle, profitless hours he spent in company with the dissipated and the gay fools of fashion, male and female, often returned to his memory like a cloud, dimming the day; for he was not quite ignoble and had aspirations for higher things, but, like many others, he put aside his better thoughts, and it was ever to-morrow that the new life was to be begun. It was a real misfortune for him that he had no profession or calling, his father's wealth making this appear needless; for with no serious employment to engage his time, he was at the call of every idle companion, and the plaything of every whim belonging to himself or others. He was not vicious, but so often near vice's mantle as to be lost in its shadow; and though of a really energetic temperament, made himself subject to the punishment of idleness through the aimlessness and littleness of his pursuits.

As to Stephen Morris himself, he returned home by the least-frequented streets. It was understood by all

that on Sundays no hand-shaking or conversation, either before or after service, must disturb their minister. Quietly, thoughtfully, he walked through the crowd, some turning to look after him with admiring gaze, some almost reverently making way for him. He had preached what was called a great sermon; but he was not vain at his outward success. He was even humiliated. He had heard one speech not meant for him, said all unaware of his presence, by an old woman, whose withered, wrinkled face he had often seen just beneath the pulpit, in what were called the "free seats:" "It wer all very fine, all very fine; but I couldn't reach it." Her tone was sorrowful as she said these words, her head shaking between palsy and emphasis, to a young Sunday-school teacher who stood with her at the chapel door. Stephen had made his way past with bent-down head; but the words and tone of his aged hearer followed him. There was one of his "flock"—soonest perhaps to leave him, and to be gathered into another fold (into *which* he knew not, the fold of the Good Shepherd or the fold of the Evil One)—whose time was so short on earth that, if she still needed teaching or comforting, it should be done at once—there was no time to spare; and he had let her come hungering and thirsting—he had invited her to come, and had sent her empty away. "I couldn't reach it" was all her sorrowful experience. To display his own riches, he had brought out dishes of gold and silver and high-spiced dainties; but no nourishing food to support the soul about to set out on so long, so wearisome a journey—the journey of death.

He reached home, and before he dined laid aside the

sermon he had elaborately prepared the last week for the evening—a deep and argumentative one—and chose one of the simplest and clearest he could find, with the determination that, for the future, he would speak with words for the child and the aged, rather than for the deep thinker and the highly educated. He sighed as he put by the splendid oration; but it was a sigh of relief. His conscience was now in some measure quieted, and he could eat his dinner in peace, such as the dinner was. On Sunday this meal was an anchorite's feast with him—little beside bread and water, we were about to say; but it was in truth bread and wine. Wine revived him after the exhaustion of preaching; it cleared his brain, and aroused it gently to the work before it in the afternoon and evening; and bread was all the solid food he allowed himself at that period of the day.

On the following morning, Mr. Gresham called upon him while he was still in his study.

"I've promised my wife to bring you to dine with us to-day, Mr. Morris, and I hope you'll oblige me so far. It is a splendid morning, and the ride will do you good."

"Thank you," replied Stephen quietly.

"That is right. I shall call for you about three o'clock. I've a little business to attend to meanwhile; but I'll be up with the brougham about that time."

"Thank you," again said Stephen; "I'll be ready." He was not a man who had much facility in conventional phrases; but it was not expected of him, and he knew it.

At three o'clock, true to the moment—for punctuality was one of the mayor's cardinal virtues—the brougham

drew up at Mrs. Grant's door, where were the minister's lodgings, and the two were soon on their way to Swansford House.

"I have another favour to beg of you, Mr. Morris," said the mayor, when he had placed himself in a perfectly comfortable attitude in the carriage, "which is, that you will lend me the manuscript of your Sunday morning's sermon. I wish to print it."

A slight, very slight flush rose to the young minister's cheek as he made answer, "I have it only in the merest skeleton, which would be of no use to you, I fear."

"You don't mean to say that that sermon was delivered with only a few notes? You astonish me! It is the most wonderful sermon I have heard for years. I was so delighted that I brought Grantley to hear you at night. He's a churchman, you know, high church, and believes no one can preach well out of the Establishment; and I wanted him for once to hear what we dissenters listen to. But you disappointed me, I must confess. You had lost your wings at night."

"I felt it necessary to preach more simply. There are poor and aged in the church, and little ones, and these must have their bread."

"True, true." The mayor mused.—"But still you could write that sermon out, I hope. I want particularly to send a copy of it to Grantley, and I shall make a present of a handsomely got up one to each of the aldermen and the town council."

"I can write a sermon, certainly, from the notes I have, though it will not be exactly like the one you heard; and I will do so if you really wish it very much."

"Thank you. I do wish it. I thought you would

oblige me." And the mayor's usual smile hung radiant upon his face.

The four miles' drive was a pleasant one, enlivened by talk chiefly from Mr. Gresham on politics both of church and state. The dinner was thoroughly good, and the wine of the best vintages, for the host prided himself on his cellar. After dinner over the walnuts and the wine, conversation was abundant. Mr. Gresham had been attending that morning with the other magistrates, as was his duty, at the police-office, hearing various cases of robberies and of disorderly conduct, that were brought under the notice of the bench, and he now detailed some of them. He complained much of a certain Joseph Gutteridge, who had been before the bench no less than thirty-six times, for disorderly conduct, and who was again present this morning, for using insulting language and assaulting the police while drunk. "We committed him to prison for one month with hard labour, and he would have had more, had I not, with some other of the magistrates, been sorry for his wife and six small children, who will have to starve or go to the workhouse, while he's away. I can't forget," continued Mr. Gresham, putting down his glass and turning to his wife, "that that poor woman was servant with us when we were first married. A good girl she was, better than many we have had, though we have had some good ones too, my dear! Poor Fanny! she should have been content in service, and not married a sot like Gutteridge. I told her so, when she came crying to me a month ago to ask me to let her husband off that once; and all the poor silly woman said, was, that her husband would be good enough, if it wasn't

for the public-houses and the drink! Some women will go through fire and water to defend their husbands, and the worse they are, the more they cling to them."

"But wasn't it the drink, papa, that made him so disorderly?" asked Jane.

"What! you mean to defend Fanny, do you, my dear? Well, I have no objection. Only mind, miss, that *you* do not marry a drunkard, and have to come to me, to defend your husband some day!

"*Respectable* people don't get drunk," said Charlotte, with a slight toss of the head.

"And yet I had a young man that called himself respectable, and would have been quite offended if he had believed you had thought him otherwise, before the bench this morning, who had been in the lock-up since Saturday night, for disorderly conduct, while drunk. He had a torn coat, a crushed hat, a black eye, and a damaged character to bring into court, but I am sorry to say he didn't look at all ashamed. He called it a 'lark,' and paid his fine with the air of a so-called gentleman; that is, of one who didn't care how the money went. It is astonishing the number of drunk and disorderly cases that take up our time on the magistrates' bench, more than one half of all the rest. I might safely put it at two-thirds. How do you account for it, Mr. Morris?"

And the mayor, as he asked this question, put out his hand for the decanter, and filled his glass with some fine old Madeira.

"The lamentable ignorance and spiritual destitution of the people I consider to be the great cause," replied Stephen.

"That may be so in many cases, perhaps in most, but the young man I spoke of just now was what is called well-educated. He went to school with my Edward, and had a hundred a year paid down for his instruction, as I happen to know."

"Who was it?" asked Edward surprised; "not James Hope?"

"It was some one of that name," replied the father drily. "Won't you take another glass, Mr. Morris?"

"Thank you. Perhaps the young man you name may have had evil influences about him at home."

"His father was a steady honourable man, and I believe he had a good home, and every Lord's-day, too, he was taught to attend a place of worship. But everything seems thrown away—good ancestry, good home, good name, and religion itself—when drink gets possession of a man. It is a most pitiable and awful besetment."

"What a shame!" exclaimed Charlotte; "so well taught and brought up as he has been."

"Oh! there are many such shames as that," laughed Edward. "Only look round a certain chapel I could name. There's Mrs. Sharp"—

"Don't be censorious, Edward," interrupted Mrs. Gresham, mildly. "You don't know—you've only heard, and you've no right to speak."

"But I do know some cases, mother dear. Don't you think I've eyes? Ah! I could tell some queer tales if I might."

But the mayor now interposed with a frown. "I will have no scandal at my table. Your mother has spoken. Let that be sufficient."

Edward said no more, but employed himself diligently in peeling a walnut, and soaking it in his wine.

The mayor went on:—"I do not know whether drunkenness is more prevalent than it used to be, but certainly it comes before the public oftener, in one way or another; and if drunkards are silent, temperance people will not let you rest. I was called upon this morning at my warehouse by a man who styled himself a temperance lecturer, and who wanted me to subscribe, as mayor of the town, to the temperance cause. He and I had a little conversation. I asked him what he meant by temperance, and I soon found out it was teetotalism, which is anything but temperance, in my view of the case, whereupon I told him I could not conscientiously subscribe to what I thought a piece of fanaticism. Of temperance, strict temperance, I approved, as what right-thinking man, or Christian, does not? but teetotalism was quite another affair. And, also, I told him that the wild utopian talk of himself and his brother-teetotallers did more harm than good to the cause of temperance, and aroused opposition in many minds that would have gladly assisted in more reasonable schemes. What think you, Mr. Morris?"

"Exactly with yourself. I consider wine to be one of the good creatures of God, allowed for our benefit and use. That there is abuse, and great abuse, we all know; but what good thing is not abused? And it seems to me, the greater possible good a thing may be to us by its right use, the greater is the harm it may inflict by its abuse. To ask me to refuse wine entirely, because some have injured themselves through excess, is like asking me to close the shutters and refuse day-

light, because some have employed it in deeds of murder and wrong."

"Exactly; and I should much like you and this Mr. Bolt to meet on this question. He is going about the country lecturing, and wants the use of any chapel he can get, to speak in, on week evenings. I told him candidly that I could not give my consent to our chapel being lent for such a purpose; conscientiously I could not, and I think you and the deacons will think with me."

"There is no doubt of it. You know my sentiments, and I believe the deacons have the same, with the exception perhaps of Mr. Green."

"I had forgotten Green. Well, perhaps *he* may think differently. I know he has teetotal tendencies; and I fully excuse him (pity as it is that so sensible a man should have a weak point!), because he has himself suffered so much in his own family. A burned child dreads the fire, you know."

There was no further allusion to Mr. Green, but all at table knew that the mayor referred to a death that had occurred in the deacon's family not long before through the excess Mr. Morris so much deplored. His brother, who had for some time been a secret tippler, committed suicide when afflicted with delirium tremens.

"The grace of God is sufficient to restrain all evil passions," said the young minister solemnly; "this of drink included. Let us pray for more of this grace for ourselves and our fellowmen."

There was a silence for a moment. Then the mayor's deep voice uttered "Amen!" in a fervent tone. Mrs.

Gresham's eyes looked towards Edward with some solicitude; she had not counted the number of glasses he had taken, but she knew he had had more than strict temperance would have allowed.

The mayor glanced round the table. Most of the glasses were empty.

"Another glass, Mr. Morris?"

"No more at present, thank you."

Edward put out his hand for the decanter, but his father quietly removed it—saying,

"I think you have had wine enough to-day, my boy. Shall we withdraw?"

There was a cheerful fire in the drawing-room, and a ruddy glow on the varnished sides of Indian jars, and screens, and polished couches, and easy chairs. Everything was luxurious and comfortable, and throughout the room were many tokens of the ease of wealth that carelessly exchanges gold for the products of art, no matter their price. Tables and cabinets were covered and filled with toys from every country in Europe, collected by the family in their many summer wanderings; carved wood from Switzerland, china from Sèvres and Dresden, vases from Florence, and amber pipes and jewelled slippers from Constantinople. The walls were covered with paintings of value, and the windows made stately with curtains of flowered damask and gold lace. Through these windows, opening on to an ancient lawn, velvety with moss, might be seen clusters of lovely spring flowers, arranged on beds laid out with line and compass, with the clearness and precision of a geometric drawing or an architect's plan; and around, but not too near, depths of shrubbery

and woodland, just tinting with the tender green of early spring.

Charlotte and Jane repaired to the windows, to talk each to her pet canary, that hung in a gilded cage, beneath the shade of heavy bullion fringe, in sight of two pleasant worlds—the outer, white and green; the inner, white and gold. The birds' eyes were perhaps never weary of the former, for the green of trees and grass must be inestimably lovely to a bird, and amongst it, could they attain it, was the wide world of liberty, constant change, and the delight of motion, so dear and bewitching to wings; but from the latter came many agreeable gifts, warmth and food, and caressing words, though, alas! tainted with slavery.

"Papa," said Charlotte, with one hand lifted up to her bird, as she held a grape for his eating, "Burton says we shall have no cherries this year; the frost took the bloom last night."

"I hope not, my dear. Perhaps Burton may be mistaken."

"It will be very provoking if it is so. For I am so fond of cherries. And so is Bob. Aren't you, my pet?"

Bob replied with a gurgling chirrup.

"Bob's tipsy," said Edward. "He's been eating grapes till he doesn't know what he's about."

"How absurd!" was Charlotte's reply. "I'm quite tired of your talk about tipsy people; I hoped we were going to hear something better. You'll talk about them so long till you think all the world's going drunk together. Do change the subject."

"Willingly; I shall be only too glad. What do you girls say to a walk in the shrubbery before it gets dark?"

Mrs. Gresham heard the invitation, and mindful of her husband's request about attending to the health of their guest, proposed that all should go out for half an hour, before the chill of evening came on, if 'agreeable to Mr. Morris. The mayor had just subsided into his large easy chair for a lounge and a fireside conversation, but acquiesced at once with a good grace, and Stephen agreed that a walk would be pleasant. Hats, and bonnets, and shawls were obtained. Edward and his sisters were soon in advance of the rest, and while the elder ones loitered by the aviary, admiring the plumage of the gold and silver pheasants, these made their way to the lake, and fed the swans with biscuits from Edward's pocket, amused to watch the birds soak and macerate the hard pieces in the water before they attempted to swallow them. When the biscuits were exhausted, they stood some time admiring the graceful motions of the male swan as he glided about with thrown-back head and swelled chest, ever and anon striking out impetuously, till the water, pushed into rebellion, rose around him in tiny waves and ruffled his snowy feathers. "What a prow the fellow has," said Edward. "There's a model for a boat! I'll have one made some day after his fashion, and we three will sail in it up the Trent and astonish the folks."

"That would be beautiful! that would be delightful!" said Jane and Charlotte; "to sail in a swan; only think! You would paint it white, of course. What a beautiful boat for a bridal!"

"Yes; that would have been a good idea, if I had only thought of it a little sooner. By the by, have your dresses come home yet, girls?"

"They came quite early this morning," replied Charlotte; "and we've had such a time of trying on before dinner! But they are all a beautiful fit, and the bonnets are real loves."

"Pale blue and silver, aren't the dresses? The lace will look splendid over the blue silk. There isn't any more of the same pattern in all Trentham, and I'm glad you asked me to help you to choose it. I saw cousin Emmy's things this morning when I called. Her veil will almost touch the ground, and has cost forty pounds. They're in a pretty bustle, I can tell you; and aunt said cook was in an awful temper, because some of the ices were quite spoiled, and she'd fresh to make."

"Did Emmy look well?" asked Jane.

"O yes; gay as a lark! We'd a talk about the breakfast, and I had to tell them how the table was set out at the Star and Garter at Richmond when John Oakes was married. But come, shall we walk on?"

He gave each of the girls an arm, and then proceeded with his talk, as they roamed among the rhododendrons and laurels. "Emmy told me that at first uncle had objected to champagne, but she coaxed him to getting it. She said that Sarah Hooker had champagne at her wedding breakfast, and that she wasn't going to be behind Sarah Hooker. Emmy's rather spirity and dashing in her notions. She asked me what I thought, and whether she had done right to insist on it. Of course I said, yes, champagne was the thing."

"How old-fashioned uncle is," remarked Charlotte; "I believe he'll grudge the expense of the wedding awfully. He wanted to have had just such a humdrum wedding as he and aunt had thirty years ago,

with one cab and one bridemaid. Only think how strange! But aunt said she wouldn't hear of such a thing, and that she was determined people should know when one of her girls got married."

"And yet Grayson's only a banker's clerk. I wonder Emmy didn't look a little higher. But that's no business of ours; is it, girls? All we've got to do to-morrow is to be as jolly as possible. And stay—I've something for you to look at, in my pocket. Here it is, or rather here they are." And he brought out two small morocco cases, and opening one, disclosed a beautiful pearl bracelet, laid luxuriously upon its crimson velvet bed. "Will this thing fit either of you?" He put the box into Charlotte's outstretched hand, and opening the other, revealed a similar one, which he himself took out and clasped upon Jane's arm.

"How lovely! how beautiful! Thank you! thank you, you dear good brother!" said they both in a breath, and Jane threw her arms round his neck and kissed him repeatedly. "When did you buy them? and how kind of you to think of us!"

"That will do; don't smother me!" said he laughing and gently shaking her off. "I'm glad you like them. I was passing by Hart's window this morning, and saw Charlotte's just as the shopman was laying it out. It looked pretty; and it struck me it would just do for the wedding, so I went in and asked if they'd another like it, for I couldn't forget my little Jane; and that's all about it. And now put them by again, and say nothing about them till to-morrow, and then we'll surprise

By the time the bracelets were safely put by, Mr.

and Mrs. Gresham and their guest came in sight. They appeared to be deep in grave conversation, but began other talk on the approach of the younger people. A walk to the greenhouses and gardens was proposed. In the first the camellias, azaleas, and cinerarias made a splendid show, and Mrs. Gresham gathered with her own hand flowers for the minister to carry home, when the walk was ended. Then the drawing-room once more received the party. Charlotte at the request of her father played on the piano, and with dexterity and ease performed several brilliant pieces of music, and afterwards accompanied her sister as she sang with a low but pleasant voice several simple melodies. Afterwards came tea, and lights, and more conversation; and altogether a cheerful bright evening, that the young minister thought upon with pleasure as he rode home by starlight in the mayor's carriage. Mrs. Gresham had been almost motherly in her inquiries after his health, and in her advice to take more open-air exercise and to give up late studies; and at parting, as she stood well-dressed and handsome in the light of the drawing-room chandelier, she had pressed him to pay Swansford a visit very frequently, assuring him of a thorough welcome at any time. "John shall always drive you home," she said, "and fetch you whenever you will let us know you are coming, if you prefer riding to walking." And then when about to shake hands, "I will tell you something of a secret, which will however be none in the morning. We are to have a gala-day tomorrow; or at least the young people expect one. Their cousin Emily is to be married; and if you happen to be near St. Mary's Church at eleven o'clock or so,

you will see a gay procession. Edward especially intends to enjoy himself. It is well you have come to-day to see the greenhouses, for to-morrow they will be stripped; he has ordered Burton to make up more bouquets than I can tell."

"Now, mother dear, what fables are you telling about me to Mr. Morris?" asked Edward with a smile, as he came forward and put his hand affectionately on her shoulder.

"No fables at all, dear, only—"

"I trust they are," interrupted the father's voice from behind. "Edward must buy some of his bouquets if he wants so many; I cannot have the greenhouses left quite bare."

"There, mamma," in a lower voice; "you see what you've brought upon me. I shall have to go off to-morrow with shorn beams; and I had intended to have not only been crowned, but buried in flowers, as I rode to uncle's. You won't let me bury myself that way, and yet you ought—it might save you some trouble some day; and a coffin would cost you a good deal more than the flowers after all."

The words were very lightly said, and very lightly taken; but to Stephen they returned with a solemn meaning on that lonely drive homewards. For, thought he, was not death far too solemn a subject to be jested about? and ought he not perhaps to have spoken some fitting word at that moment?

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHAMPAGNE BREAKFAST; OR, FIRST WINE, THEN WATER.

STEPHEN MORRIS did not see the gay procession Mrs. Gresham named; he remained at home, absorbed, as was his custom at that hour of the day, in ministerial studies.

There were, however, many of the inhabitants of Trentham who on that Tuesday morning, bright and sunny as it was, were glad to run out and watch the young bride and bridegroom enter and leave the church; who counted the number of carriages, noted the size of the postilions' white rosettes, the length of the bride's veil, the richness and colour of her dress, the number and splendour of the bridemaids and their attire, and the grandeur of the groom's waistcoat; and these declared it was a "fine enough wedding for a lord." The bride's mother, who was present in rich brocade and lace trimmings, would have been gratified had she heard this and other remarks made by the outstanding crowd; and her pride was sensibly gladdened when she saw among the spectators within the church the mother and sister of the Sarah Hooker, whose wedding, gay as it had been, was now fairly outrivalled and outdone. Not in vain, then, had been her shaping and trimming, and managing of her husband's temper, her secret struggles, her cares, her contrivances, the month's bustle, the last week's hurry, the year's forethought, to

this end, since Sarah Hooker's and all similar weddings must now hide their diminished heads! She was a proud and happy mother.

The old church—gray, as it had a right to be, with the shadow of its five hundred years about it, with its monuments of the dead upon its walls and the graves of its dead about its feet, its water-worn, time-eaten buttresses and porch, and its crumbling font, telling of the generations who had been born and baptized, and were now passed away, since first its massive stones had been cut from the quarry, and jointed and fitted, and carved with grotesque adornment—was once more made glad with the step of the bride and bridegroom over its pavements, and echoed softly, as it had done so many thousand times before, the whisper of the bride's "I will." Hidden amongst its pillars and monuments there might be perhaps a grim smile—the smile of the past, of endurance, of stone, over the present, the quickly perishing; over those human lilies and roses, so soft, and fleshy, and fading, and those still more swiftly to change, and die, and pass away, than the bride herself—the flowers she held in her hand. And between spandrel and arch and pillar a silent laughter might take its way, as satins and silks and laces rustled by, and flowers and perfumes for the moment overpowered the scent of the charnel-house close by; but whatever smile or laughter the old church had this morning, it kept the secret well, as it had so often done before, as it will ever know how to do.

It was a gay wedding, not only for its dresses and decorations, but for the youth and merriment it had—the last scarcely kept in check by the solemnity of the

marriage service, and breaking out afresh directly this was over. The first to kiss the new-made wife was Edward, and he did not forget to claim the pair of gloves due to him for that pleasant feat. Charlotte and Jane, as two of the bridemaids, were perfectly well-dressed, and did not shame their trappings, as sometimes bridemaids are apt to do, by too great a contrast between the freshness and youth of the dress and their own faded faces. And the whole party were pronounced, by those who eagerly scanned them over as they re-entered the carriages, to be a "thoroughly handsome lot."

The breakfast at the bride's home passed off much as such breakfasts are accustomed to do. The table was covered with delicate, rare food of all allowable kinds—fruits, and creams, and ices, and cakes, and luxurious provisions, with the bridecake in the midst, large, and grand, and snow-white, and adorned with a pyramid of figures and flowers clothed in frosted silver. There was talk, and merriment, and jokes, and smiles, and the daintiest of eating and drinking, as we have said. There was youth, and health, and beauty, the sparkle of jewels, of gold, of bright eyes, of happiness—that finest sparkle of all—and there was champagne. How it danced, and foamed, and sparkled in the glass! what an exuberance of joy seemed to lie in its clear brightness! what an inviting taste in its delicious freshness! All drank, in honour of the bride, in honour of the bridegroom, in honour of the bride's father and mother, in honour of themselves. Speeches were made, compliments and congratulations passed, bottles were emptied, glasses filled, and tossed off, and

re-filled. The gentlemen's talk became louder, the ladies' cheeks redder, and in the midst of all the jollity the bride went away with her companion, with the kisses of her father and mother upon her cheeks.

Then when all was over, and the feast was ended—for a marriage breakfast, like the marriage itself, must come to an end some time—and the ladies were enjoying themselves in the drawing-room with their women's chat about "Emmy and Mr. Grayson," and the appointments and furniture of the new home, the young men proposed a walk.

"What say you to a row up the river?" asked Edward of his cousin William, Emily's brother, when in a while they were left to themselves walking arm in arm across the park. Below them—for the park lies upon part of the high rocky terrace on which and out of which the town is built and dug—stretched the level of the meadows, and long miles of the lovely Trent-valley lay full in sight; the shining river running through it its now rapid waters, and suggesting, no doubt, to Edward, the amusement he proposed.

"The very thing. It will be a glorious pull up to-day; and I'll get a lad from the warehouse to take care of the boat while we have a stroll up the Grove."

With rapid strides and bounding hearts the two proceeded through the streets, calling for the boy as proposed—a thoughtful-looking, large-headed boy, designated a "warehouse lad," who was glad enough to leave the perpetual folding-up of hose, and the monotonous life of the warehouse, for an afternoon's pleasure with his young master.

"Now, Ike, you young dog, run on before and get

the boat ready for us, will you?" was William's speech, in a half-patronizing, half-authoritative tone; and the "young dog," in dark, seedy cloth jacket and cap and gray checked trowsers, ran gladly off in the direction of the Trent bridge with a cheerful "Yes, sir."

Then the two young men walked more slowly, and presently Edward said, "I came off from home without my cigar-case, Will. It wouldn't have been the thing, you know, to bring out cigars at a wedding. Suppose we go in to Shelton's and buy a couple?"

"All right," replied William, to whom a cigar was also a desideratum, and who perhaps considered it a necessary of life, in his benighted, fashionable young-man condition.

A couple, therefore, were bought at the tobacconist's, and a couple or two more "in case of need;" and both, lighting a cigar a-piece in the shop, joked the while with the young woman that waited upon them, who was both pretty and bold.

"That girl's a stunner," said William admiringly, as they went out. "What a pair of eyes she has! and what eye-lashes!"

"Mind she doesn't catch you with them," laughed Edward. "Tom Green laid a wager the other day with Sam Wright that those eye-lashes of hers were an inch long."

"And lost, of course?"

"Of course, my boy. If he hadn't been half-seas over he wouldn't have been so soft."

"Did she let him measure them?"

"Yes, and professed to cry because Tom lost. She's made one or two awful attempts to catch Tom; but I don't think she'll get him; he's not so soft as that."

This was not exactly the sort of language the two young men had lately been using at the wedding, nor was it the language they allowed their home friends to hear. Slang is always ugly, it belongs to the jail and the ale-house, and gives fitting expression to the evil passions drink stimulates, whether it be "that poor creature," small beer, or that drink of the more refined, champagne.

There were some afterwards who remembered, or fancied they did so, that Edward did not walk quite "serenely balanced" on his way to the river; but of this fact we are not quite certain. Only one thing we know, that amongst the curious gray matter of his brain was some degree of ferment—that vein and nerve called to one another excitedly—and that along their conduits and wires ran a subtle poison, a stimulator riots and insurrections. The red flag was up, the judgment down; and combativeness, destructive- nd obstinacy, with others of their followers, rode uppermost, and were heard and listened to alone. When the river steps were reached no boat was ready launched, and they were indignant. Ike alone stood waiting, with a look of mingled fear and vexation. To the questions of his master he replied, "Bowlby won't let me have the key, sir, and I can't get it out."

"Why not? What's the matter now?"

"He say's the river's too high, and the boat's sure to be swamped if you try to go up, sir."

"What confounded nonsense!" growled Edward.

William turned to the boy with an eye flaming with anger. "You go and fetch that key, or I'll swamp both you and Bowlby when you come back!" The boy

went away quickly, and returned presently with Bowlby, a short bandy-legged man, with muscular brown arms bare to the elbows, and short bristly hair surmounted by an oilskin cap.

"How's this, Bowlby? Why can't you send the key without all this bother?"

"Why, Mr. Gresham, beggin' your pardon, sir, it's not safe to go on this here water to-day. Ike said you meant to go up'ards through the bridge, and I toud him it couldn't be done; that's all. But if you must, you must; here's the key, sir. Only I say still, don't blame *me* if you get a ducking."

The river washed muddy and restless by their feet, and rushed by the boat-house and dashed against the wall that bounded one of its sides; its current running impetuously and swiftly onwards, like a strong untired racer that sees the goal; and as the eye looked across the yellow rolling waters, its impetus and strength might be guessed by the flakes of foam that rose and sank, and were tossed and drifted hither and thither in the centre of the whirling mass. Bowlby glanced at the whole with a cool knowing gaze; but the young men knew no fear. Why should they? They were members of the Trentham Rowing Club—well accustomed to the river; they were young, and felt untold strength in their limbs, their warm blood running almost as quickly and fiercely as the river's cooler current; they had put to sleep by that magic brew, the sparkling champagne, the watcher by the telegraph wires, and he put out no signal of danger. Why should they fear?

Ike unlocked the boat, placed the oars in order, and

the two jumped in, laughing at Bowlby, and bidding him go home and "get his old woman to make some gruel to put his nerves in order." Bowlby shook his head as he turned on his heel to go away, muttering to himself, "Them young chaps has had a drop or two too much, or they wouldn't be after that game to-day. But let 'em go and feel the stream, they'll soon tire theirselves, an' if they get a souse, it'll cool 'em and do 'em good."

Bowlby's organ of benevolence was not large. He had quieted what conscience a rough unthinking life had left him, by refusing the key to the lad, and he now went indoors, to smoke his pipe and grumble at the world and the river collectively. To tell the truth, however, he did not anticipate the young men would really attempt to push through any one of the arches—he imagined they would come back when fairly their strength had been tried against the current; and he was too well accustomed in his situation of boat-keeper to the vagaries and hair-breadth escapes of young men on the water, to feel at all nervous or anticipative of danger.

When the boat was turned with its head against the current, then came "the tug of war," as Edward laughingly observed; but it was a tug they liked; and their muscles asked for labour to relieve the excitement of the brain. Moreover, they felt some amount of exultation in having opposed and "shut up" that old fellow Bowlby.

"He might think we didn't know what rowing up stream was," said Edward boastfully; "but you and I, Will, have been here times enough to know it, I should think. Pull away, old fellow!"

But they made slow progress with all their exertions. The muddy waters gurgled round the boat; the current was rapid and strong, and for every two feet forwards they took at least one backwards. Still they were by no means daunted. "Once through the bridge and we shall get on," said William, and he began to sing—

"Bonnie lassie, will ye go,
Will ye go, will ye go,—
Bonnie lassie, will ye go,
To the birks of Aberfeldy?

"The braes ascend like lofty wa's;
The foamy stream deep-roaring fa's;
O'erhung wi' fragrant spreading shaws,
The birks of Aberfeldy."

Edward joined him in the chorus, and their voices sounded pleasantly as it reached the shore, while their oars beat time to the music. But now the "pour" of the impetuous stream under the arches could be seen quite near; all thoughts of music and singing must be abandoned, and they were aware they must apply all their energies to the work before them. As they neared the bridge, the current was still stronger, and they saw how the waters whirled and tossed, and pushed about and against the abutments, and ran madly through the outlets, or dashed backward from the opposing stones with foam and fury, and rush and roar. So far the boat had been managed well. It had been a hard pull; but their muscles were vigorous, and their nerves excited to the struggle. Now they hesitated a moment. Through which of the arches should they attempt to force the boat? which of all those foaming onpouring torrents should they attack and resist with their feeble oars? William inclined to try one at the left side—

Edward proposed the centre arch. "I have been through it before," he said confidently, "with as great a swell as this."

"It will be dangerous; better try the other."

"Nonsense! this is the best, I tell you."

William gave a hasty glance. For a moment he was sobered, as he saw through every arch the strong waters running, overflowing the piers, and chafing at the abutments, swirling, rushing, tumbling, racing, surging, swelling.—In truth, all seemed equally fearful and impossible.

"Stay, Edward; let us go back—it can't be done."

"What? and not see the birks of Aberfeldy? What a coward you are, man! Pull hard. Here we go for the middle arch."

William obeyed; he let the stronger will lead.

Ike sat at the end of the boat, with a pale face, but an unfearing heart. Boys are not often timorous—and his nerves were of iron. And then he was with his young master, who was so strong, so clever, so knowing an oarsman. The waters were stubborn and noisy, but in imagination he had already passed through the arches, and this afternoon's strain and turmoil was but another tale to tell to the listening "stay at homes," who would applaud his quiet courage.

A mighty strong pull with all their strength; with close-shut teeth and lips; swollen veins on forehead and arm, and perspiration starting from every pore. Ike held his breath. The oars were rapidly lifted for another pull, and already these touched the water, when the boat turned rapidly, struck the abutment, and received a blow that threw the boy out, and nearly

upset the rowers. All was confusion in a moment—the current carried the boat back; the cousins grasped their oars *tightly*, but their eyes sought the boy. He rose close to them, and seized the oar held by William. "Let *me* save him!" cried Edward, and leaned over the boat-side to lift him in, in spite of William's entreaties to sit still. The boat overbalanced, and they were *all* in the water, and the two young men *thoroughly* sobered in a moment.

Helplessly the overturned boat was tossed about, and drifted down with the current as a half-submerged cork, scarcely noticeable, to be caught perhaps in some bend of the river, miles away; and still more the playthings of the mad waters, the oars floated madly seawards. The living prey of the river did not yield to their fate so passively. With eyes straining towards the shore, and arms and feet thrown with the impulse of self-preservation into the attitude of the swimmer, the cousins battled long with the cold, heavy, mercilessly powerful water. But the boy had in his lifetime laid aside more hose than waves; he could not swim, and his efforts had no experience or judgment to second them—he fought and paddled in the water like some frightened animal, and sank repeatedly. Before he sank the last time, he passed close by William, and with a never-to-be-forgotten look, shrieked to him to save him; but William let the lad pass by, his own life was in jeopardy, and turning his eyes from him, scanned the shore with an anxious, terribly anxious look, to see if help were coming, for as yet the land seemed far away from him, almost as far as ever, in spite of his exertions. His clothes were heavy, thoroughly satu-

rated, and impeded his movements; he was getting exhausted; his efforts relaxed; the river, the sky, the shore mingled, became one vast blue; the sound of rushing water filled his ears, he uttered a wild cry, and sank beneath the foaming waters.

Bowlby heard the cry in his cabin—threw down his pipe, overturned his chair, and ran down the steps to look out. No boat was in sight above or below the bridge; but a long way down the river, was that small black speck a human head? It must have been, though now it was invisible; and that was a living hand that his practised eye discerned, raised a moment above the tumbling stream; and that was, good God! the overturned boat, drifting towards the sedges.

He understood it all in a moment—unlocked a boat, took the oars in hand, and was quickly flying over the water to the rescue. He had no need to row, he had but to guide the boat; the current bore him very swiftly downwards, and he kept a sharp look-out as he proceeded for a sight of any of the unhappy party, though long, as it seemed to him, he looked in vain. But what does he at last see? A good way further down a head again rises above the waves, and at the same moment a tall figure, hidden by the trees till now, bounded from the shore and plunged in. The stranger swam boldly out, and with powerful arms made way across the stream, reached the still visible head, and seized the rapidly sinking body, held it up bravely with one arm, and slowly bore it to the side. Bowlby gladly and swiftly turned his boat to the help of the brave man; but he shouted, "There is another lower down," and again the boat swept on with the current. No second head

emerged, however; and the boatman's keen eyes gazed in vain. "It is of no use," he murmured; "they are at the bottom, sure enough, by this time, if they haven't got to shore!"

CHAPTER VII.

DEATH AND HIS DOINGS.

DEATH has many costumes—quiet and sombre, often sad and repulsive, almost always solemn, and but rarely gay. Gaiety and death seem so opposite that we should think them impossible to be joined did we not know that all extremes are to be found in our little earth, since man, the microcosm, is there. From the deepest, blackest shadow to the palest ash-gray—to the thinnest, tenderest, etherous white, death's garments are of various tints and colours; and the whole rainbow is exhausted in them, though the graver, colder tints predominate. Infinitely varied as are his costumes and their colours, so are his exits and his entrances; and in no two homes does he appear the same.

Invisible and soundless he draws near to some. His tread is soft and gliding, his shoes are of velvet, his drapery has no rustle. He enters the house, mounts the stairs; none hear or see sound or form as he slides past, through passage or corridor, to the chamber of the doomed one. Not till perhaps the last moment is he revealed. Not till the last sigh is ready to be drawn do we perceive the attendant shadow, thin and pale, and own the sad vision.

With a grave smile he puts his hand upon the pendulum of the heart, and arrests its feverish motion; breathes upon the brain, dulling both sense and feeling till they are lost in the stupor and catalepsy of the grave; and, breaking gently the case that has for a longer or shorter time shut in the mystery, lets out the imprisoned soul. When, in our agony, we turn to chide the destroyer, he is gone—he is no longer there. Or if we see him, he has the face of an angel, and we chide no more.

In other homes he has long been seen and recognized. He has visited at morning, noon, and night; appeared to the dull eyes of the waking sick; hovered near their pillows as they sank to sleep; sung to them lugubrious or blessed lullabies; shown them pictures from his wonderful primer, that has the alphabet of the next world within its pages; talked to them of unutterable things. And this he has done for weeks, and months, and years, till his step is no longer feared, his form has lost its harshness, his face its gloom; he is one of the household, necessary, almost unregarded. When his last visit is paid, his office performed, his mystery revealed, there are tears, or sighs, or sad looks; but the long-expected blow has lost half its power. The cutting through of bone, and muscle, and tendon, has been done long ago; all the blood has been shed; the wound has grown over; there is but a thin coating of the cuticle to sever. It is cut, and is scarcely felt; and we ask, Is this death, this gentle parting?

But quite otherwise is it in other homes. Here, when he comes, his aspect and manner are terrible. His clothing is of the storm, dark and double dark; his walk

of the whirlwind, his motions harsh and rude. He rings and shakes at both bell and knocker; and while the alarum sounds and vibrates, he marches on with the tread of thunder. Perhaps he has already done his chief work, and comes but to terrify the living. Undisguised, no feature softened, no bone draped, no terrible grimace absent, he looks into boudoir, and drawing-room, and library, and chamber, and makes himself known roughly and without introduction for what he is. And then before him are stretched stricken forms, anguished blood-weeping hearts; and he beholds wrung hands, tearless eyes, hysterics, and delirium, or the silent despair of those who, alas! see only

> "An ever-breaking shore,
> That 'tumbles' in the godless deep."

Yet even here a consolation may become apparent—a great and lasting one to those who truly love. This harsh appearance of that which we call sudden death is most frequently more frightful to the survivors than to the victims. To these last the short pang, the sharp mortal agony, unstaying, irresistible, can be but for a few moments; and we have yet to learn that the pain of dying is even so great as it appears. To how many souls has the lightning-stroke of sudden death been the chariot of Elijah—built of fire, but mounting to heaven! to how many, the quick shutting of the mortal book, in which were inscribed only tear-stained words, best to be closed! to how many the soft, glad voice of an angel telling of the immortality that has so long been thought upon with the trembling heart of Much-afraid!

But the survivors—those who had built their hopes upon the future of the beloved one; those who loved

with the passionate fondness of individual love; those who, consciously or unconsciously, had let the dear ones grow too near the heart-strings—to these the sudden wrench is fearful; the heart seems torn out with the removed object, and lies bleeding and cooling with it on the earth. What can be said to these?

A dark shadow had fallen upon Swansford. When first the news came of Edward's death, it seemed too terrible to be true; and a dumb, stubborn unbelief at once rose up, refusing to accept such a catastrophe. "He may yet be saved, as is his cousin William; possibly some other friendly arm interposed for his life, and drew him to land, and we shall hear of it before long." This was their hidden thought. And this unbelief held sway till early the next morning, when his body was found some miles below the bridge, caught in the roots of an old willow. The mayor covered his face with his hands when he recognized the pale, rigid face—with its open, eager eyes seeming still to strain in death for a sight of the longed-for, unattainable shore—as the face of his son. He covered his face with his hands and wept, and all the spectators in the inn-room kept silence, reverencing and pitying a father's tears. "My boy! my Edward!" were the words that alone burst from his agonized bosom; and as he did not soon regain self-command and calmness, he was gently led away, and persuaded to leave the body to the care of other friends.

Can we speak of the mourning of the sisters in the darkened home? Their abundance of tears, till no more tears would rise; their low voices; their pale, haggard faces; their slow steps? Better to leave all

these to be imagined. Of the mother we must speak presently. Death had visited this house with his fiercest step, and the rooms yet trembled echoing his tread. The inquest disclosed little more than we have related. The friendly stranger who had saved William's life at the risk of his own was said to be a Mr. Broadbent, residing at St. Wilfrid's, who happened to be passing at the time. The boy Ike was yet unfound; and for some weary nights living people lay awake in the long dark hours, seeing with shuddering distinctness a large-eyed, large-headed boy, with fair hair, half-buried in sand, and mud, and weeds, with many feet of heavy rolling waters above him, or carried slowly, head foremost, by the current, to a burial in the wide German Ocean.

But the body was spared that fate. In a week it too was discovered, and buried in the churchyard of St. Mary's, one mourner only following—a young girl dressed in rather forlorn black, whose large blue eyes bore a certain resemblance to those of him she had lately called brother. Stephen Morris visited the mayor's family the day after their bereavement. He went to endeavour to comfort, in the only possible way left, by speaking of the great Comforter. He prayed with them; he read to them words of Scripture best suited, as he thought, to their state of mind; he inculcated submission to the will of God.

But Mrs. Gresham was in an excited state; the numbness that first follows a heavy blow was gone, and the smart was excessive; she refused to be comforted. A mother's heart clings, we are told, most to a son; and hers had loved with increasing fervour all these years—

one who loved deeply in return, one who was the pride of her eyes, the joy of her soul. She quarrelled with his death in all aspects—its mode—its time of occurrence—its cause.

"It is God's will," solemnly and tenderly repeated the minister.

"God's will to take him now, in his thoughtlessness, and on that day of all others! No, never! God could not will *that!* And you will tell me," she said, looking almost fiercely round, she who usually was so timid and gentle, "you will tell me next that it was His will he should drink that wine till he did not know what he did. But I will not believe it. I will not be resigned! I cannot be resigned! Oh, my Edward! my Edward!"

"My dear," said the mayor, who had gained an outward appearance of calm, and whose pale face and sunken cheek turned towards hers, with an unusual meekness, "these are wild words. Calm yourself; remember, you are not the first mother who has lost a son. God is good and kind even now."

Her red tearless eyes looked upon him with scorn. She was so changed from her old self that he feared her as he gazed upon her. "She is deranged," he said in a low voice, while his lips blanched.

"If I remember right, sir, it was you that taught him to drink wine; was it not? Look at your work!"

She pointed towards the next room, where lay the dead body, and then fell into convulsions.

And on this scene Stephen Morris thought sadly as he returned home.

For a time no doubt Mrs. Gresham had been deranged, and had used words such as in her normal state could

never have passed her mouth; words of bitterness, and rebellion, and upbraiding; they were the ravings of an almost broken-hearted mother; but they pursued him like a nightmare.

On his next visit, a few days afterwards, she was quiet and subdued, and had no relapse of what was called her delirium. If his words of consolation did not reach her wounded heart with healing power, at least she did not oppose or refuse them, and her tears had their way without hindrance, mingling with those of her daughters.

A new vault was made for the only son of the mayor, in the churchyard at Swansford—a quieter and less crowded churchyard than those of the town. The finest flannel, and oak, and broadcloth, were laid round his remains; a silver-mounted plate recorded his name and age, and the year of his death; and he was lowered into the dark brick dwelling prepared for him with holy words, and prayers, and tears, in the presence of a multitude of people, attracted to the funeral by his sad death, and his father's position.

In a fortnight people ceased to talk about him, and in a few months even the terrible wounds in the parents' hearts that his untimely death had made, were slowly cicatrizing.

Cousin Emmy (Mrs. Grayson) shed many tears over Edward's fate. She had loved him much in a cousinly way; she deplored his "want of self-command about the champagne that morning;" she called him "poor dear Edward," and kept a miniature of him in a drawer that she sometimes affectionately sighed over; and a little of his hair in a rich gold mourning-ring adorned

her finger for a twelvemonth; but at all convenient or "proper" occasions the wine was on her table, for her guests or herself, to try their self-command over; and she did not cease to order champagne whenever Mr. Grayson would allow it.

CHAPTER VIII.

COMUS.

SPRING went by, and summer came. May had left her moist buds for June to open, with warm electric fingers. The river had long forgotten its time of flood, and where sand and gravel, and mud, and wreck of weeds, had lain on its banks, now grew herbs and grasses, and beds of flowering rushes, tall and grand. With low midsummer current the stream fled along, singing and rippling over the stones of the shallows, that it had rounded and polished industriously in the winter, and the willows and alders drooped their full-leaved faces admiringly over its clear mirror. The blue of the forget-me-not, mingled with the gold of the trailing money-wort and the green sedges by the shore, and the rich crimson of the spired loose-strife shone above tufts of foamy meadow-sweet.

The brother and sister at St. Wilfrid's still enjoyed the freshness and charm of their by-river life—and a great peace was with them. Mary Plowden painted early and late, views of the river, and the river-islands, and was quite happy. James Miller, in the widow's

kitchen, made women's shoes, and enlivened her lonely moments by his presence. He worked with tolerable industry, and pleasant to relate, as yet, with tolerable sobriety. He had only fallen once, and was so much ashamed of his fall as to remain in-doors for a whole week afterwards, lest he should see the grave rebuke of John Broadbent's kindly eyes. His garden was not quite a success; but who ever learnt gardening in a day? It is true his prize pansies, of which he had now at least twenty, did well; proper food, and air, and water, were allowed—and brilliant clothes were spun for them by invisible fairies, worthy of a monarch. But the general effect of the garden was not beautiful. The walks were weedy and irregular, and worse still, the beds were weedy, and badly raked and dug—the whole appearance was weedy. James however tried, and was every day getting more strength, and patience, and knowledge about horticultural matters—and John did all he could to encourage him in his efforts.—Old Roberts and the baby basked in the sunshine every fine day, for the baby had comfortable shoes, and the potatoes were thriving; and many a cheerful greeting passed between them and the strong gardener, who had one morning before breakfast completed the digging of the small plot of ground. Clara's school progressed; the children sang with sweeter voices, and looked into the world that was still so new and fresh to them, with more and more of wonder, appreciation, and delight.

Stephen Morris paid frequent visits to his friends at St. Wilfrid's during these two months. His close-sitting student habits seemed leaving him, and he was more willing to put aside the teaching of books for the

teaching of nature, and to get into a broader region of thought through the wide ever-changing symbols of the sky and outspread earth, with all their multitudes and varieties of life. The "Fathers" for awhile were laid aside for the contemplation of older manifestations of God than they—the sun, and moon, and stars; and modern divines slept peaceably on their shelves, while their late companion and scholar wandered among fields, and listened to the speech of birds and flowers. His sermons did not lose by this change in his mental diet, but rather gained in vigour, truth, and felicity of speech and thought; and the silent communion he frequently held with God among the more beautiful of His works, nourished both the body and the soul.

As warm days came on, and "midsummer heats" were frequent, the cool enchantment of the river grew upon our friends. A boat was obtained, and John many times rowed Clara upwards to the Grove, past the long rank of elms, by the Grove, and the gray old Hall half-hidden in its thick-boughed ancestral trees, underneath the Brand, where the old Bel-fires were lighted, and so on to the weir beyond. Then returning, they would float gently down the stream, and enjoy the mingled earth, and sky, and water-prospect, singing sometimes as they proceeded an old-world chant, or song of later days, in praise of summer and the river; or lingering beside the "Poet's Island," a narrow green pleasaunce, bounded by river-rooted trees, and surrounded by alders, and willows, and osier-beds, they talked of the poet to whom it owed its name, whose memory still haunts the neighbourhood; and of other poets who have here passed pleasant days, as their books

testify. Now and then, Mary Plowden would sail with them to some favourite scene or other, with her paints and brushes—and they would deposit her where she wished, and call again for her on their return; and once or twice James Miller had tried the oars with John, and helped them to boil their kettle in the woods.

Stephen Morris especially enjoyed these water-parties, and whenever he neared the cottage, looked with some solicitude towards the river to see if the boat were lying close at hand by the shore—a signal that that day there would be a sail. A book was always taken on these excursions, selected alternately by John or Clara, and Stephen also would produce one from his pocket—Herbert, or Philip Quarles, or Jeremy Taylor, or Sir Thomas Browne—to give theirs what he called "due seasoning;" and the Poet's Island, or the wooded flats beneath the cliff, being favourite resting-places, were generally chosen for the readings. Stephen read well, and his voice, at once deep and melodious, harmonized with the soft liquid noises of the near river and the rustling trees. His two friends, leaning each by his or her tree, listened to him with thoughts near or far away, as the subject or the sound of his voice led them.

One evening they had been thus engaged; the boat was moored among the alders, and the three friends were seated upon the island. Stephen had brought with him Milton, and had been reading *Comus* to quiet and attentive hearers. With hat drawn over his brows, and arms folded across his breast, John listened, his lips curved to a half smile, and Clara near him, with her head propped by one hand, looked dreamily upon the

river, her long curls lying, darkened by the contrast, upon the whiteness of her neck. As the reader pronounced the invocation to the goddess of the Severn—

"Sabrina fair,
Listen where thou art sitting;
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
In twisted braids of lilies knitting,
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair;
Listen for dear honour's sake,
Goddess of the silver lake,
Listen and save;"—

he lifted his head towards his hearers, and his eyes rested upon Clara a moment with an almost startled expression, as, quite unconscious of his glance, she continued looking through green boughs upon the surface of the restless water. The next moment he had withdrawn his eyes, but his pulses beat more quickly, and with deepened colour and richer voice he proceeded with the poem—while for him Sabrina was turned into Clara, and Clara into Sabrina, in strange confusion, and new meanings found their way into the poet's words not originally contemplated.

With the slightest perceptible tremble in the intonation, Sabrina's song was concluding—

"O'er the cowslip's velvet head,
That bends not as I tread;
Gentle Swain, at thy request
I am here;"—

when John rose up with a half-troubled, half-comic look. "If Sabrina were here, indeed, I would employ her just now!—It is a shame to think of it, but I would send her after my pocket-book. Do you remember my pulling it out when we were sitting by the mullein a

mile higher up? I must have forgotten to take it up when we came away, for I haven't it now."—And as he spoke he put his hands first into one pocket then into another, and brought out various "belongings," but no pocket-book.

"There is no help for it; I must go at once! Don't read any more till I return, for I wish to hear all." And he untied the boat, swung himself into it, and was gone before the others had thoroughly comprehended the cause of his departure.

A silence fell upon Stephen and Clara for a few moments, and their ears caught the gradually decreasing sound of John's more and more distant oars, till the river's song was again all that was audible. The book was still in Stephen's hands, but as he was forbidden to read aloud at present, he laid it on the grass beside him, and thought with a perplexing mixture of joy and trepidation, "I am alone with her at last."

"It is very beautiful!" said Clara at last, thinking of the poem.

"Very. Of course you know it almost by heart; but I thought this place so appropriate to it that I could not resist the temptation of bringing it."

"It is years since I last looked into it, and it has come upon me quite as a new delight. With what different ears we may hear a poem, or indeed any book; —not half the beauty of *Comus* was understood by me when I read it with Madame Schwartz at Heidelberg. The mind seems to me like a cup at the potter's wheel, that gradually rises as the lathe turns, and so is capable of holding more and more; and perhaps for every turn we may allow a year of life, but that varies. I have

had many turns since I read *Comus*,"—this was said with a smile,—"and can now therefore hold much more of its meaning."

"And may we not say also that the *heart* expands with years?" asked Stephen with sudden fervour. "To me it seems that it must be so; nay, I am conscious that mine has done so." He paused a moment. "When it was smaller than now, it was full; and now the cup is enlarged, it is again full.—Clara," and his voice trembled with emotion, "do you not understand me? Seven years ago I asked you a question—a very important, vital one to me—and you said, 'No.' Our hearts have both grown since then, and mine overflows, and I must ask you again—Can you love me?"

Clara was startled. She had not expected such words, for she had long since ceased to think upon the young minister as a lover. To her imagination the lover had entirely been extinguished in the friend. Deep hidden within her own breast had been the knowledge that he had ever spoken to her of love; the very recollection of it seemed buried; and now it was all painfully renewed and revived, and her heart shrank with great sorrow from again inflicting pain. Yet it must be done.

She rose from the grass with a look of surprise and sorrow in her dark eyes, and said firmly and gently, "I have but the same answer—the 'No.' And believe me, I am grieved at heart that I must again pain you!" Quick tears sprang into her eyes as she uttered these words; but she turned slowly away to hide them.

For a short time Stephen remained alone, inexpressibly dejected. A very dear and beautiful dream had

suddenly faded away. The river, and the woods, and the green of the island, became sensibly darker. A great cloud passed over his vision, the symbol of the thick one that enveloped his heart in its damp, cold folds.

Then he rose slowly and approached Clara. "Forgive me," he exclaimed; "I have done wrong to trouble you! I know I am not worthy of you, and I can only promise never to so annoy you again. But let me be your friend still, if it be possible. Let me know I am forgiven!"

He put out his hand to clasp hers in token of amity and forgiveness. She gave it him frankly. "It is best so, believe me," she said; "we will be *friends*." The hands met and parted; but the warm midsummer wind fell cold on Stephen's cheek as from an iceberg.

"How grave you both look," was John's smiling remark, as he brought the boat to shore soon afterwards. "Did you think I had vanished, and had left you to wade ashore as you best could?"

Clara asked after his pocket-book.

"It was just where I thought, close to the mullein. Very fortunate I remembered it in time! And now, Morris, let us have the conclusion, if you please, of *Sabrina Fair*."

He placed himself cheerfully and expectantly upon the green mound he had so lately left, and Clara and the young minister seated themselves near him. Stephen, with pale, serious face, finished the "Mask of Comus."

"We can never say there has been no grand poem written upon temperance while this is before us," John exclaimed enthusiastically. "I honour you, Morris,

for selecting it. You must in some way have come round to the right way of thinking. Confess; you are become a teetotaller!"

"I cannot claim that title at present," said Stephen.

"You will do some day, I trust. But have you marked throughout the poem how finely is handled the subject of total abstinence, and not of temperance merely? Milton had thought deeply and truly on the matter. How he speaks of 'the pleasing poison,' as Comus's

> "'Orient liquor in a crystal glass,
> To quench the drought of Phœbus, which as they taste
> (For most do taste through fond intemperate thirst),
> Soon as the potion works, their human countenance,
> The express resemblance of the gods, is changed
> Into some brutish form of wolf, or bear,
> Or ounce, or tiger, hog, or bearded goat—
> All other parts remaining as they were;
> And they, so perfect is their misery,
> Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,
> But boast themselves more comely than before.'

"Believe me, there are many like Comus now-a-days, sons of Bacchus and Circe, whom we meet in the wild wood of this world, who attract, and delude, and ensnare their victims by that 'orient liquor in a crystal glass.' And when these have partaken, how truly does it change them internally into brutish form of 'wolf, or bear, or ounce, or tiger, hog, or bearded goat!'

—"The crisis of the poem hangs upon the lady tasting only *once* the 'orient liquor.' She refuses; she is a true teetotaller, unpoetical as the word sounds (when shall we get a better?), and she preserves her purity and human shape. Her release is effected by the river goddess, Sabrina. Pure, fresh, water dissolves the spell.

"'Thus I sprinkle on thy breast,
Drops that from my fountain pure,
I have kept of precious cure.'

"Did you note Comus's argument, too? How like it is to a very usual one now:—

"'Wherefore did nature pour her bounties forth,
With such a full and unwithdrawing hand—
* * * * * *
But all to please, and sate the curious taste?'

"And again—

"'If all the world
Should in a pet of temperance feed on pulse,
Drink the clear stream, and nothing wear but frieze,
The All-giver would be unthanked, would be unpraised,
Not half his riches known.'—

"A very specious argument, but, after all, a very low one, that regards only the employment of the bodily senses, and of taste especially, as a means of praise to the All-giver, and disregards that which truly completes the man—the intellect and the soul. We must take of all that God sends, says this sensuous argument, in the way of food and drink (though the drink here meant is intoxicating, and does not come from God's brew-house, but man's), even to repletion, so that God's gifts be not despised and he not unthanked. How, then, about his other gifts, his higher ones—those belonging to the mind and soul?

"'When the wine is in, the wit is out,' is so true a saying that nobody contradicts it. And with intoxication comes demoralization. When the body is surfeited, the soul is starved.

"'That which is not good, is not delicious
To a well-governed and wise appetite,'

said the lady; and her appetite refused to taste the drink of enchantment."

John paused, and Stephen could not forbear an answer.

"I expected something of this speech," he said, "as I was reading. And I could go with you entirely, if you would put the word temperance, instead of total abstinence. To enjoy the gifts of God to the body temperately, does not hinder our enjoyment of his gifts to the soul, but the contrary. A wise appetite would not take too much."

"I am speaking now," said John, "of Milton's view of the case. The lady's wise appetite, as I said before, did not wish for that which was not good: she would not taste *at all*."

"Because in her case the cup held enchanted liquor."

"Precisely. And that is why *I* will not taste at all! With Milton I see that intoxicating drink is deeply enchanted. You may not see it, but to me it is apparent that every man and woman who habitually drinks, even what is called temperately, loses so much soul; and the divine image is surely, however slowly, imbruted."

"You exaggerate for the sake of your argument, which is not fair."

"I think not. To me it seems as I say.—But,—is that the moon between the trees? It is time we set sail, or we shall have the evening mists about us; and they are like cold-hearted friends, sometimes dangerous, and always depressing and chilling. Now Clara, like the goddess of the Severn, you may say—

"'By the rushy-fringed bank,
Where grows the willow and the osier dank,
My sliding chariot stays!'

"It is true it has no agate, or turkis blue, or emerald green about it. It is but a poor brown thing; but it will take you safely home, I hope."

The boat glided eastwards, obedient to John's oars. The sun was setting, and threw up, on broad-spread clouds towards the zenith, golden lights. Over the now silent party these clouds hovered with wide orange-tinted wings, deepening into pale red. A clear, transparent sea of gold lay at the horizon, and from this sea rose up small rocky clouds of pale gray and purple —clouds which grew slowly till they were topped with castles and towers, from one of which floated a banner, distinct and sharp against the paler atmosphere. These mounting towers seemed to overlook silently a silent dream-world. Clara gazed at them long with her deep earnest eyes, and watched them as they changed or renewed, while glowed or faded the environing sea; and noted how the dark skyward trees of the distant Grove stood looking over the verge of the horizon, awe-struck, like mortals to whom is opened a strange spiritual world.

In the river the reflection of all this variety of colour and form appeared in waving, moving bands of gold, and crimson, and purple. The whole sky scene, a thousand times repeated, flowed and mingled with the flowing ripples in lovely, formless confusion—a palette of mingled colours, a prism in motion—and carried the glory and beauty to the feet of our voyagers. At each stroke, John dipped his oars into a rainbow. Laughingly he tossed some drops of the painted water upon Clara.

"It is a present," he said, "from the goddess of the

Trent. She no doubt heard my lament about the absence of precious gems in your boat. And she sends you rubies and pearls, emeralds, and diamonds, and gold, that you may know she is no less rich than Sabrina. Do you not see how she has sown your path with jewels?"

Clara smiled. "I have been looking at her treasures some time. But she is a thief: she has taken them from the sky."

"Taken or accepted, which? For my part, I will believe no evil of my river. The sky has poured them upon her, has made her rich, and she gives you generously some of her wealth. Why don't you thank her with a song?"

But Clara could not sing while Stephen's serious face was beside her; which was, however, no longer pale. The jewels of the Trent glittered among his hair, and reflected themselves in his cheeks. Like the rest of the party he was tinted with rose and amethyst.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLIND FATHER.

"VERONICA, put on your bonnet. We will take a walk."

"Yes, father." And the speaker, a young girl about thirteen years of age, rose from a low chair near the window, where she had been mending lace. The lace was black, and the light had been rapidly decreasing; and as she lifted her large blue eyes from the work,

they looked weary and dim. Her face was pale and thin, and her light unbrushed hair hung in some confusion about her cheeks. She had been working diligently for hours, anxious to finish her piece of net; but there was still a good breadth to be done; and she remembered with a sigh that it must be finished by candle-light—a trying light for black work. Taking her shawl from a peg, she pinned it quickly on; and pushing her rough locks behind her ears, slipped over them a worn black bonnet, tied it securely, gave a doubtful glance at her slippers that were wearing down at the sides, put into her father's right hand an old white hat, with a band of crape round it; and taking hold of his left, led him to the door.

Led him; for he was blind, though the fact could scarcely have been guessed by the appearance of his eyes. A stranger would have supposed them to be good as his own, since their clearness and lustre were scarcely, if at all, diminished. Still large, and of a deep gray, they were but little dimmed by years. The world was in them mirrored as distinctly as ever; but the picture on the retina no longer reached the shut-up, darkened brain; the optic nerves were paralyzed; the wires of the visual telegraph were useless.

We have heard it said that the blind are habitually serene, and that their privation is less productive of unhappiness than that of total deafness. But we have seen some very sorrowful blind faces, and the loss of sight seems to be an immeasurably greater privation than that of hearing. Mark Lee's face was one of these sorrowful ones. As he stood, while waiting for his daughter's hand, pale and somewhat sallow-faced from

long confinement within doors, with that slightly one-sided bearing of the head peculiar to the blind, produced half from a feeling of uncertainty, and half from the habit of listening attentively to what is passing around, he seemed to be about fifty-five or six years old, though he might be, and probably was, younger, for it was not difficult to see that grief and illness had marred and withered whatever might have been left of manly freshness, or comparative youth of outline. A dejection that was seldom absent was apparent in his air, his motions, his spiritless walk, and in the melancholy sound of his voice.

He clasped his daughter's hand with limp, cold touch. "It must be sunset," he said as if to himself. "It is time to be gone."

"We are going, father! Mind the step. There, now we are on the landing, and now the stone steps begin, twelve of them, remember. And now, we have reached the bottom."

It was not by any means necessary for Veronica to tell her father all these particulars, he knew these steps well; they were his only means of reaching the street. The six-roomed house under whose roof he dwelt had been divided into three habitations, two of which were reached by this open-air staircase, and he could have found his way down it, and across the boulder-paved yard at its foot without a guide, but Veronica was proud of her office of leader, and he liked to feel her warm fingers in his. The street in which they lived, though in the heart of Trentham, was a quiet one, having no thoroughfare. The chancel window of the ancient church of St. Mary's overlooked it, however, and

the music of its bells occasionally filled it with pleasant sounds. On reaching the street, Veronica did not hesitate, but at once turned towards the churchyard. Every day for the last month her father had visited it; he was restless till he had been, and he was often more restless on his return, but he said it did him good to see it, and she had no wish to prevent him: in her eyes the walk was the very best that could be taken. Here was her brother Ike's grave, and here was a green open space. To her it looked green, though in truth there were more grave-stones than grass—for she seldom had the opportunity of seeing open fields and gardens. Houses and pavements, and the dingy brownness of her home, black and white lace, and her father's pale cheeks, with occasional peeps at a dim sky, supplied the sober tints that most frequently met her eyes—a very meagre palette did destiny lay out for her.

So to her the greenness of the churchyard, thin as it was, was refreshing, and the graves charming, with their variety of upright, and leaning, and flat, carved and plain, small and massive stones, with here one grown up wonderfully since yesterday, like a new fungus, the growth of a night, and there one removed, to make way for the sexton's spade and another sleeper. She had wandered in this churchyard more years than she could remember, and every corner of it was familiar. It was her play-ground, her arboretum, her gymnasium, her promenade, her school-room—to spell out the epitaphs had been an old delight—and it was also her garden. A wandering daisy, a tuft of green moss, a spike of flowering grass, a circle of plantain leaves, and,

greatest treasure of all, a bunch of crimson yarrow, were plants to be cared for and protected, wonderful apparitions, pearls of price. It was not always she could obtain admittance, but this only made the enjoyment the more when with the grave-digger she entered its inclosure. He was good-natured, and did not frighten away the large-eyed little girl who was so quiet in his presence, and whose reverence for him was so great. For he was the lord of this soil, the planter of this delightful garden, and his spade revealed sometimes strange antiquities. She did not quite like to touch them, but those curious necklace-bones, that might be threaded at once—the long bones of the arm or thigh—and, most interesting and awful of all, the round eyeless skull, with its naked teeth, were irresistibly attractive to look at. The last year or two she had not had so much play-time here, for she had had to work, to earn money, to mend lace, it was true; but the place was as dear as ever. A great sorrow had been laid in it, within the last two months her brother had been buried here—her only brother. She had seen him placed below its soil, had wept many tears over the grave, but now—the first rush of grief passed, this grave was but an additional attraction, sorrowful, but not painful. And, too, there seemed so little connection between that mound of coming grass, and the bright cheerful brother Isaac who had walked out with her on Sundays, and read to her at nights from *Robinson Crusoe* and *Paul and Virginia*, and had kissed her each morning when he went away to work, that she had almost ceased to mourn for him there. That he should lie beneath all that heap of light-brown loam

was, after all, an unrealizable fact, too strange to be believed even now, except at intervals.

The iron gates were reached, and the two, with slow steps, walked for a little distance up the flagged pathway, and then crossed the grass, over half-a-dozen mounds, and by a dozen or two more, till they came to the grave. Mark let fall his daughter's hand, and stood quite still, as was his wont, when he reached this place. Veronica seated herself upon the grave, and looked up at her father. She had never known him other than blind; but it had for several days been a wonder to her, why, when he came here, he should so steadfastly fix his eyes upon one point in the sky. Now and then a tear would roll down his cheeks, and fall on her hand, or be lost in the grass—but he never moved his head from its first position, unless she spoke to him, which she was careful not to do. His eyes to-night looked so bright, reflecting the warm tints in the western sky, that she felt almost sure he must see something, and what was it that he saw? Why did he always appear to be looking at that patch of sky between the two tall chimneys?

Veronica turned her head that she might see this patch of sky better. There was a crimson flush across it, and floating above, in the palest green sky conceivable, was a small rose-coloured cloud hovering, with delicatest purple edges. It was a very beautiful cloud —not only for its colour, but for its form, resembling a dove with outspread wings. But she decided that it was most like one of the stone cherubim, carved on a very old grave-stone near the gate. She was not childish enough to think it had flown from

this stone, as she might have done seven or eight years ago; but she watched it so long and so intently that her strained sight at length gave it motion—the wings trembled, if they did not flutter, and the head stirred very gently. No doubt some rising vapour, or thin smoke-cloud, between her eyes and it, helped the delusion, but this she did not stay to consider. The lovely rose-tinted cherub, for a moment or two, was in her imagination a real living creature, flying alone in the wide, pale heavens. But like other creatures of the imagination, it was thin, and without stability, and while she looked it broke, and changed, and fell away piecemeal—one wing drooped—parted—sailed off; the other vanished feather by feather, while the round perfectly formed angel-head became a shapeless blur, that also broke up into nothing. It was a grievous disappointment, and the young girl uttered a deep sigh.

"What is the matter, Veronica?" asked her father, suddenly lowering his head towards her. His quick hearing was sensitive to the slightest differences of sound, and the sigh he heard was a peculiar one.

"I thought it was a cherubim," said Veronica, simply and sorrowfully, "and it was only a cloud."

He listened intently a moment, as if to catch all the meaning of her words. Then a shudder passed through him, and with an indescribably mournful voice he exclaimed—"Ah yes; it was only a cloud, only a cloud!" He was still a moment—then he said abruptly, "Let us go."

The summons to go came much earlier than usual, and the young girl was puzzled. "Why was he tired so

soon? And had he really seen the cloud? But what else could he mean?"

More silently than usual she led him home. His step was even more spiritless than before. Veronica unlocked the door, and he entered the room with a heavy sigh. She led him to his great arm-chair; he sank into it, and the deepest dejection was expressed on his face.

Tea was prepared at once. It was well to employ the last half-hour of twilight in this meal, and thus save the expense of burning a candle, and Veronica saw that her father needed refreshment. Since that sad day on which Ike was drowned, he had had a month's illness, and was still very weak, and easily exhausted. With the quick hands of love, tea-cups and saucers were soon set upon the tray, tea made from the kettle that had been singing by the hob, bread and butter cut, and sugar and milk brought from a closet by the door, and the table placed close to her father's chair.

"Now, father dear, all is ready. You look so tired, but tea will do you good."

A cupful was poured out, and set before him. He took it with a trembling hand. "You are a good child," he said, but in a mournful depressed tone that made her feel more sorrowful than glad. And then the meal was taken almost in unbroken silence. Once she spoke to him, but he answered absently; his thoughts were so far away, she did not like to call them back.

After tea he folded his hands upon his knees, and seemed to gaze upon the ground, the firelight playing about his thin hair, and among the many wrinkles on

his high forehead. In a while, Veronica lit the candle, and seated herself by the table to her work. Generally, he liked her to talk after tea; the sound of her voice broke the loneliness of his dark life. So she began her talk with a question, her mind still dwelling on the illusive cloudlet.

"Did you really see the cloud, father?"

"What do you mean? What cloud, child?"

"The cloud above the chimneys, over the church yard, that I thought looked like a cherubim."

"I saw nothing, not even your face. Why do you ask?"

"But you said you did, at least I thought so! I said I thought the cloud had been an angel, and you said 'so did you,' or something of that sort."

"You did not understand me. I have not seen one of your clouds for ten years or more, though I have seen many of my own. Very dark, heavy clouds, too," and he sighed.

"You mean *inside* clouds. Oh yes; I understand now! But how could you mistake one of your inside clouds for an angel?"

"Very easily. Though I can't make you quite understand it now. You will be doing it yourself some day, perhaps; and then you will know, with me, that there are no angels, no real angels; but in their stead cold, wet clouds."

Veronica's blue eyes opened widely. She gazed upon her father with an eager expression; her soul seemed struggling to find suitable words with which to reply to him; but she shook her head the moment after, as if she felt the impossibility of being able to do so.

Her father did not seem inclined to let the subject drop. He sat upright in his chair. "So it was a very beautiful cloud you saw?"

"Very. With rose-coloured wings and a smiling face, and once I really did think I saw the wings moving!"

"Very likely! You should have imagined a little further, and it would no doubt have come flying towards you. Nay, it might even have placed itself beside you."

The young girl gave her piece of lace a slight twitch of impatience; she did not like her father to be sarcastic.

"I am not quite so foolish as *that*, father. You might think I was a baby yet;" and her lips took a decided pout.

"Not so; I know you for a very wise little woman. But in truth, Veronica, it would not have been wonderful at all if you, a young girl of thirteen, had been so deceived, since your blind old father has been so often the same. A year ago there was something very like one of your cherubim in this house, and I believed I saw a real living angel. Well, only two months ago the angel lost its rose-colour and its wings, and changed to a cloud, a *nothing*."—His voice faltered, and he could say no more.

Veronica rose and put her arms round his neck, "But you have *me*, dear father! You love me a little, don't you? I am no cloud!"

He allowed her to embrace him passively. Even her tenderness could not at this moment cheer him. "You will be in a while, or I shall be, which is the same thing," he said bitterly.

"Never!" was Veronica's reply, standing up, while a strange brightness lit up her eyes. "God did not make me a cloud. O! father, I wish you could feel as I do."

"And have all the disappointment to encounter again? No, my child; I would rather know myself to be what I am, a little piece of thin chilly vapour, that will soon be dissolved into the nothing from which it came."

"And I will *never* believe myself that!" exclaimed the girl, shutting her lips close, with a look of determination.

The father laughed an inward mocking laugh—"And you think, my poor child, that your will, will decide it? But even you must bow to the great inevitable fate."

Veronica had contracted a hatred of the word fate; for whenever her father used it, he became gloomy and austere. She looked defiant therefore, and it was well perhaps he could not see her.

A wind had arisen since sunset, and was blowing wildly down the quiet street, roaring in the chimney, and rattling the panes in the casement. To the girl it sounded very mournful, and voices seemed borne on it from the churchyard—voices that uttered sad words by the window behind her. Her father listened to it also, and presently he arose and began walking a few paces backward and forward in the room, a customary habit with him when restless. He called it his "hyæna walk."

The weird wailing of the wind at evening brings up to sad hearts dead memories, and the dead themselves rise, as to the sound of bells at midnight.—To the blind man's inner sight the graves opened, and the roaring of the atmospheric billows called up many a buried grief

Hastily and shudderingly he tasted again of the cup of his past life, that had at first contained such sweet liquor, but afterwards so much aloes and wormwood.

He had not been born to poverty, but had known by experience in early life the advantages of a good education, indulgent relatives, and a wealthy home. He had possessed good talents, and had been praised, and flattered, and sought after, as was to be expected. Too early he had been left his own master, and like many other human flowers, exposed to too much sun, had withered early. Flattering friends and idle acquaintance enticed him into evil company, where first he lost a good part of his wealth, and afterwards his health, by dissipation. At length, willing to begin a new life, he married a rich woman, cold, and stern, and proud. He expected a companion and a friend; he found a critic and an enemy. Dissension arose between them early; she was disappointed, and let him know it with bitter words; and he, conscious of his faults, but proud also, and unwilling to amend, retorted, and used the power the law puts into the hands of every husband, to revenge himself. Their home was soon a hell, where disdain and bitterness and outrage were served up with every meal—a perpetual dish of evil mixtures, unsavoury and poisonous. In a while they parted by mutual consent, the separation being the only thing they had mutually agreed to for a long time.

Then Mark Lee's old habits returned upon him with double power—he drank and gambled in all ways and at all seasons. He lost his remaining property, and sickness overtook him in very humble lodgings, where he had been compelled latterly through poverty to reside.

A young woman, poor and homely-looking, but rich in patience, and love, and gentleness, nursed him, the daughter of the widow who let him his rooms. She knew well his poverty, asking for and expecting no reward. When he recovered they were already attached to each other, and were soon after married. His first wife was still alive and undivorced, but this he never told to the mother of Isaac and Veronica. It was a secret of his own, a guilty secret that clung to him, and persecuted him more than the remembrance of all his former sins. The children he had by Jessy Lee were very dear to him, dear as the mother; but when Veronica was three years old, Jessy sickened and died. The loss was sudden and unexpected; he was lightning-struck; he shed no tears, uttered no complaints, but when he had seen her laid in the grave, was carried home insensible, and awoke from a dangerous illness,—blind.

In the early days of his last marriage he had learned to bind books, inferior ones, for he was too young in the art to get the skill requisite for the best work, but it had brought him and his family a bare maintenance. When, however, he could no longer see, his binding craft was useless, or nearly so. By the aid of a kind friend he now learned to make the finer kinds of baskets, and this work, with the manufacture of fishing-floats and flies, procured him his daily bread. With great exertion he had managed to put Ike into a warehouse, working often far into the night, that the boy might be clothed well enough for his place. Ike was growing up, was sixteen last birth-day, and was already earning his own livelihood. Soon the father thought he would be able to help his sister, for himself he

scarcely cared. But that fatal day upon the river had destroyed all his hopes, and now all seemed dark again.

Yes, for more than five-and-twenty years he had had a series of troubles.—Would that wailing wind never be still? It brought up recollections that harrowed his heart. Why was it—when he was beginning to feel the blessedness of love, of living for another—that that patient, loving face was taken from him? Why did his blindness come? And why did this last, and as it seemed to him this greatest misery of all, fall upon him, the loss of his only son? though, indeed, there was another, a constant running sore, that could never be healed.—But he should go mad if he thought long upon that.—He must hide it—he must leave it. Wearily he exclaimed, "I am fated to be unhappy; I must suffer; I must endure as I can." And thus the wretched man folded round him the thickest, wettest cloud that adversity has to give—the most sorrowful companion a man can take to his breast—an unbelief in good, in God. He beheld himself alternately as the plaything of chance, or the victim of an unbending, uncaring, pitiless law.

Veronica heard his last words; they were spoken louder than he was aware. She dimly comprehended his trouble. This fate—which he believed in so tenaciously, which his head acknowledged as lord of all, and which his bleeding heart refused to harbour, and so perpetually rose against in rebellion—was a bugbear to her, chiefly because she saw it was a source of disquiet to him. The word "fate" was a troublesome visitor, whom it was her duty to drive away, whom it was her instinct to push out. She could not

reason upon or understand it; but she rejected it utterly. She had a strong will, and those blue eyes of hers could flash with intense energy, and those small hands could clench with sovereign determination when she had to oppose. The milder plan, the persuasive, was, however, more accordant with her nature. She did not "stoop to conquer," since there is nothing lowering in tenderness. Love is a more regal weapon than force; and when she took it up she rejected the iron for the gold, and ruled from the higher sphere; not knowingly, for she was an undeveloped child, but instinctively and from inmost nature.

So, when her voice took one of its sweetest tones, and her hand let fall its work, and clasped that of her father as he passed close by on his restless hyæna walk, she cheered as does the sun that shines and warms, obedient to internal law.

"Father, we won't have fate; we will have love! Let me love you!" And she kissed his hand and stroked it tenderly.

This second appeal softened him. "*My darling,*" he murmured, laying his other hand affectionately on her head. Then with a smile, the innocent smile of the conqueror, she drew down his head to hers, and kissed his lips.

He let her lead him to his chair after this; and when he was seated, with a happier look and something like a smile upon his face, he turned his eyes towards her, and waited for her voice to sound again.

CHAPTER X.

VERONICA'S ADVENTURES.

A KNOCK at the door startled them both. Veronica rose and admitted a young man, who asked to see Mr. Lee. It was William Gresham. He had been several times before on the same errand—an endeavour to benefit in a pecuniary sense the father of the poor boy Ike, whose death he felt in some degree answerable for.

"Good evening, Mr. Lee; I hope you are better to-night," was his greeting, in as kind a voice as he could command.

"Thank you, Mr. Gresham," was Mark's reply. "Won't you be seated, sir?"

William threw himself into a chair. He always felt very awkward when he paid these fortnightly visits. It was something of a "bore" to come, and yet his conscience told him that he ought to come, and it was his father's particular wish that he should do so also. The "old blind fellow," as he called him, kept him at arm's length and treated him with distant respect. A certain aggrieved accent was perceptible in the sound of his voice, and William felt conscious that he was no welcome visitor.

"I've come on the same errand as usual," was his rather blunt beginning of a negotiation his father intended and expected should be very delicately conducted. "My father has sent you a present as a token

of his good-will and sympathy, and I hope you'll let me leave it this time." And as he spoke, he laid upon the table from his purse five sovereigns, which he took good care to jingle a little ere he put them down.

Mark's face flushed, and his hand moved nervously with a gesture of refusal, and as though he were pushing something away. "I can't take it, Mr. William, and so I've told you before. It seems to me like blood-money! My poor boy was all I had." (Oh, Veronica, had he then forgotten you?)—"And you've lost him for me, that's all. But no money can make it good—not all your father has in the world."

"I know that;—I know that, my good man; and sorry I am to know it. Haven't I told you so twenty times? And you are quite mistaken in thinking this little bit of gold is meant to pay you for his loss. It's no such thing. It's only a little conscience-money my father and I would like to give you to help you out of your distress. You must be badly off enough here." And William looked round at the dingy room, his eye resting a moment upon Veronica, who sat busy again with her lace. "And," he added, as he thought of another plea, "your daughter needn't bore her eyes out over that black work any more, if you'd only be reasonable and let us provide for you—at all events for a little time till something better turns up."

"Nothing better will ever turn up for me in this world," replied Mark dejectedly; "but, if I go to the workhouse, Mr. Gresham, I couldn't take a shilling of your money. I've never received alms yet, though I've been sore pressed; but if I ever must take them—for even that fate may be in store for me; who knows?"—

his voice here had a bitter tone—"I can never receive them from my son's murderer."

William rose up suddenly. "If those are your feelings, it's of no use my staying any longer. And, sorry as I am for you, let me tell you, Lee, that I think you have used words for which you have no warrant. Neither I or my father are murderers. Didn't *I* run the same risk of losing my life as Ike did? And if it hadn't been for the bravery and humanity of a stranger, a man I shall ever respect and be grateful to, I shouldn't have been here now to say bad or good words to you. But your mind's soured, and you can't see things in their true light."

"Perhaps I see them in a truer light than you do," retorted Mark, the veins swelling on his forehead with anger. "If you'd lost the boy in a common accident, such as happens without any forethought of ours being of avail, I shouldn't have blamed you, much as I should have grieved at my own bereavement. But what business had you young men to take a boat up the river, and my son in it, when the flood was raging as it did that day?—when it was almost certain death for him to go? *You* could swim, *you* were full of strength and ability; but he, poor lad, never swam a stroke in his life! It was clear murder; as clear as ever murder was."

"I assure you, Mr. Lee," replied William, in an apologetic manner, "we shouldn't have taken him, or ourselves either, if we'd known what we were about. We'd had a drop too much; everybody knows that, and I thought you knew it."

"I do know it, Mr. Gresham, and to my mind it

makes no better of it. What business had you with a drop too much? You were your own masters, I suppose? Nobody poured it down your throat against your will. But, however"—and he sank back exhausted in his chair—"it's of no use talking to you in this way."

"No, indeed; there you're right! And I don't think you're such a simpleton as not to know that when good wine comes in the way of a young man, he hasn't the heart to measure how much he can carry away. You were young yourself once, I'll be bound."

Mark was dumb. Yes, he had been young himself in the way William meant, and bitter knowledge he had gained from his wild youth. What could he say?

"So you really won't have the money?" asked William, taking it up.

"No; I cannot take it."

"Very well, then." And he replaced the gold in his purse, dropping it in deliberately and with an indifferent air. "I've done my duty in offering it to you; and I intend never to trouble you again on the matter. I'm very sorry, but so it seems it must be. Good evening, Lee;" and he went out.

When he was gone and his footsteps had died away in the distance, Mark became calmer again. He called Veronica to him. "Are you sorry I have sent the money away, Veronica?"

"I wish you could have kept it," said Veronica, truthfully.

"But I couldn't, dear! Don't regret it. That money would only have choked us both with the bread it brought. They buried the boy, and that was enough—too much; but I couldn't help it then. To-morrow I

will work, and we will have money of our own earning —not theirs."

Veronica sighed. Her father had said so many times, "To-morrow I will work," and when the morrow came he was unable as ever to do it. It was now a month since he declared himself well from the illness that came upon him at her brother's death; but a weakness still remained both of mind and body, and his nerves seemed unable to master the shock. Some osiers and an unfinished basket lay in the corner, where they had been for the last two months, the dust collecting about them; and his trembling hands still wanted strength to weave them into shape.

"And now, father, I must go with my work. I've finished it; and Mrs. Bartlett said she must have it home to-night, as she's got to take it to the warehouse the first thing in the morning."

"To-night? Must you go to-night?"

"Yes, I must.—But I shall soon be back. I'll go very quick all the way—that is, if I can;" for she remembered that the lace was bulky, and the night windy. "And I might as well bring your beer back with me. I shall have the money, you know."

"Make haste, then; and never mind the beer to-night."

"Oh, I'd better bring it! You know you never sleep well if you don't have it, and it won't take me two minutes longer."

The old bonnet and shawl were put on quickly; the lace tied up in a square cloth; and giving her father a kiss, Veronica set out on her travels. Mrs. Bartlett lived some distance off. Half a dozen streets and the

long market-place had to be traversed before her door was in sight. But Veronica was used to the walk, and did not generally mind it, even at night. Now, however, it was not a very pleasant journey. The wind was abroad, and, besides persecuting her and her bundle in a wholesale way along the streets, met her at every corner and crossing with a fresh and riotous gust, and made her pant, and strain, and stagger, and clutch her lace with all her strength. She carried too much sail for the relentless blusterer; and very hard did he try to overturn her weak bark, but fortunately did not quite succeed. Out of breath, but victorious, she ascended the steps at Mrs. Bartlett's green door; and after a preliminary knock, entered the house. A busy sight met her dazzled gaze. About twenty young women and girls, seated in groups and in various attitudes round three or four candles, were employed with large bundles of black and white net; some "drawing" or pulling out the threads that united in one large piece many breadths of narrow lace for bordering and insertion, and some mending holes and imperfections that might have been left by the machine, in other large bundles of lace. Mrs. Bartlett, a dark-complexioned, pock-marked woman of about fifty, in a black-lace cap, black gown, and almost universally black dress in other respects, sat in the midst, superintending and "drawing" also. She was Veronica's mistress, who had taught her the mystery of lace-mending; and allowed her, as a great favour, and in consideration of her blind father, to take her work home, instead of doing it at her house with the rest. She was a sort of middlewoman, employing a number of apprentices or hands, and paying

them at reduced rates; making herself responsible for the lace, and receiving it at first-hand from the warehouses; thus gaining a tolerable income out of her responsibility and supervision.

"I've brought the lace, ma'am," said Veronica, shutting the door, and taking her bundle to the mistress. Mrs. Bartlett received it silently, looked it over very carefully, and gave the girl eighteen-pence—her reward for two days' close work, telling her to come for more to-morrow, and wished her Good-night. She was a hard-working, methodical woman, who had no time to spare for gossip, and but little inclination; reckoned rather hard in her bargains with her work-people, but keeping her word honourably as regarded the payment.

Veronica was quickly on her way home again. It was much easier to return now she had no bundle to carry; and, according to promise, she walked as fast as possible. And yet there was much to tempt her to stay — brilliantly lighted shops, full of gay-looking shawls, and dresses, and ribbons, and bonnets, which she would much have liked to have surveyed at leisure; curious toys, pictures in the booksellers' windows, and heaps of tempting provisions. Every little apple and walnut stall in the market-place had also charms for her eyes; but resolutely, like Christian and Hopeful in Vanity Fair, she kept on her way, and refused to linger. There were sights not so pleasant—flaunting, ill-dressed women laughing loudly, of whom Veronica felt afraid, she scarcely knew why;—tipsy men shouting and swearing;—and poor miserable-looking old men and women tottering in and out of gin-shops. One drunken man trundling a wheelbarrow beside the causeway, full of

fishmongers' refuse and other offal that he was trying to sell for cat's-meat, or even for human beings, if they so pleased, at a very low price indeed, had a crowd of boys and youths after him laughing and jeering at his attempts to trundle straightly. One of these had just treated him to another pint of ale, seeing he was not quite ripe enough for the practical joke he intended; and was now encouraging him on with ironical speeches of —"That's a good 'un! Wheel straight, old fellar. At it again! You know what's what, don't yer? Sell 'em yer fresh fish." The boys laughed as they saw the poor wretch plunge about and stagger, while he still went on, since to stop abruptly would be fatal to his further progress, by upsetting him altogether. Some shouted "Puss, puss!" and mewed in imitation of the animal his barrow-load was destined for; and the noise and the hubbub attracted still more persecutors, pressing round him like flies around carrion. At length a wild yell of exultation arose from the crowd, as the wheelbarrow was brought to a dead stop by a large stone placed purposely in the way; and the man, unable to resist the shock, fell heavily forward on to his load; crushing the whole into a mass of putrid jelly. This was the grand crisis the ale friend had purposed; and I suppose he thought his threepence well laid out, to produce so delightful a spectacle. The poor drunkard might have been suffocated—for he was quite unable to raise himself—had not a humane passer-by interfered, and raised him out of the defilement into which he had been so basely thrown by the aid of that potent ally of all evil—drink. As he stood up, blinded, and gasping, and bewildered, a spectacle of horror and

abomination, another great laugh greeted him. "Are not you ashamed of yourselves," asked the one who had acted the part of good Samaritan, "to laugh at a fellow-creature in such a state as this? I'm disgusted at you! I'm ashamed for you! And I suppose if I were to give you money enough, you'd all go and make yourselves just as drunk as he is!"

Veronica heard the last words of this speech; she was passing quickly at the time, and looked for a moment with amaze at it all. "Could it be true that all those men and boys would really like to drink themselves drunk? and to make themselves liable to fall into just such a state as that poor half-senseless dirty wretch?" She could scarcely believe it, though the gentleman, and he looked like one, said it so earnestly; he knew much better than she did, no doubt about it, and she ought to believe it. And how was it they could like drink so much?—*she* had tasted her father's beer, and did not like it at all. It was a strange thing to believe! Full of such thoughts as these, she made her way along several streets. The wind still blew wildly, and pulled and tugged at her raiment. Down every alley and cross street it poured out upon her. It seemed so very senseless and foolish and wild in its motions, that the thought was forced upon her that the wind also must have taken what Mr. Gresham had called a drop too much, and be tipsy. Laughing to herself the next moment at the fancy, she turned the corner of the street abruptly, and fell, oh horror! into the arms of something far worse than the tipsy wind—a tipsy man. He seized hold of her at once, and attempted to kiss her. His breath gave out a noxious

disgusting odour; he called her "my dear," and alarmed her very much. She struggled and tried to escape, but his grasp only became the firmer. In the struggle her bonnet was crushed, pulled off her head, and thrown upon the ground, and her wrists were hurt by the pressure of his hard hands. "Let me go! let me go!" she cried out, and looked round to see if no one were near to help. A woman was coming slowly along not far off, "Help me! let me go!" she shrieked again.

The man only laughed. "Don't sh-truggle so, my dear, but give me a kiss, like a woman!" In another moment, the woman whom she had seen coming was at her side; she gave the man a dexterous push, that sent him reeling to the other side the street, and picking up Veronica's bonnet, straitened it, and put it on her head "Thank you! thank you!" gasped the girl, and looked up at her deliverer gratefully. The flickering lamp-light showed a dark tall figure of a woman—a face still young, with large dark eyes, though somewhat hollow, whose strange brightness lit up the whole countenance, an abundance of dark ringlets, and cheeks of a vivid red. Her attire was smart and fashionable—a flounced silk dress, a satin spenser, a richly-embroidered collar, and a gaily-trimmed bonnet, while her well-gloved hands were small and lady-like. Veronica gazed at first with some awe at the well-dressed stranger, but immediately afterwards retreated a step from her, saying, "O, it's *you*, Letitia!"

"You needn't go away if it is Letitia," replied the other sharply; "I shan't bite you!"

"No; I know," said Veronica hurriedly; "but I can't stop; I've got to get father's beer." She paused sud-

denly, remembering her money. Where was it? It had been in her hand a few minutes ago, just before she had met the drunkard, who was now staggering along and swearing loudly in the distance; but it was not there now. How had she lost it? It must have dropped in the struggle. Bewildered and distressed, she exclaimed, "I've lost my money! what shall I do? I've lost my money!" "How? where?" asked Letitia. Veronica explained, and the finely-dressed lady helped her to seek for the missing silver. Veronica wept and sobbed, for she was only a child, and knelt down upon the stones to see better the small coins. What should she do if they were really gone? How get her father's beer? How buy the loaf for breakfast, the cheese for dinner, and to-morrow's tea and butter? where was it to come from? But it was in vain she looked; after a quarter of an hour's fruitless search she was obliged to come reluctantly to the conclusion that she must go home without it, that it was lost.

"Don't cry, dear," said the sympathizing lady; "I'd give it you myself, but I haven't got it by me. You shall have it though before the morning, if I've any luck. Don't cry."

But Veronica did not look the less sorrowful. "No, no; I mustn't take *your* money; I can't have *your* money! I must go to father, he'll want me, and I promised to be so quick. O that horrid drunken man!" And she was turning away, when Letitia took hold of her arm, "One moment," she said hurriedly; "tell me, how is father?" "He is very poorly yet, Letitia; but—leave go,—I must be gone." Letitia took her hand away, "You needn't be so frightened at my touch; I

shan't hurt you." "No; but I must go—good-night;" and Veronica ran off.

Letitia looked after her a moment and gave a deep sigh? What was it for? or whom? For Veronica or for herself? Who can tell? A few minutes afterwards she might be seen in the next street, laughing and talking loudly with a companion dressed very much like herself, and with the gayest of smiles on her pink cheeks.

Veronica reached home breathless, with but half-wiped tears lying round her eyes. With a palpitating heart she opened the door; what was she to say to her father? As she entered he lifted his head and turned it towards her with a smile.

"So you're back, my bird? That's right. Come here and look what good fortune has come to us."

He held out his hand and opened it; in the palm were lying four half-crowns. Veronica gazed astonished. He continued, "You may well be surprised; but while you have been gone I have had a visitor, a Mr. Broadbent, who has spoken very kindly indeed, and who asked for you; he had heard of you, my child. He has lent me this money till I can pay him back; so you shall have a holiday to-morrow from that terrible black net that tries your eyes so, and I will work. I really think I could almost work to-night. Bring me the twigs and let me try."

"No, father; indeed I will not. You are to rest to-night. But how glad I am! how very glad I am! For what do you think? A drunken man met me and frightened me so that I lost the eighteenpence Mrs. Bartlett gave me for the work—I did, indeed!" and a

little sob escaped against her will as she recalled her trouble.

"Don't fret! Come to me and let me kiss you. Never mind the money, we are rich for the present. And you must not go out again at night; no, never again at night."

"Indeed I must, though, and I must go to-night; but I shan't meet any more drunken men, I daresay. I must fetch your beer, father."

Mark hung down his head. Yes, it was true, he let her go every night to fetch his beer, for he had no one else to send. This beer was but half-a-pint, but he felt so lost without it, and had such wretched nights, that he had not the courage to give it up. It was a habit remaining from his former indulgences, and he did not know how to break it. A very poor pitiful habit, but persisted in so many years, that he could not overcome it, or fancied he could not.

"Be quick then, and go to the 'George.'" The "George" was the nearest public-house. Veronica took a small jug and one of the half-crowns, and was soon at the "George."

There was a great fire roaring in the bar chimney, and there was plenty of company, and a jingle of glasses and cups, and there was tobacco smoke curling in and out of the rooms, and merry songs and talk, and laughter and oaths; plenty of light and warmth and bustle, and the landlord and landlady were in the best of tempers accordingly. It was a gay scene, Veronica thought, while she stood waiting for her jug to be filled, and getting occasional glimpses of the interior of the drinking-room, as the door opened every now and then

to admit a fresh visitor. But then for those men to sit there and drink till they were as silly, and helpless, and horrible, and tyrannizing as those two tipplers she had seen just now! Child as she was, the folly and enormity were tolerably clear to her of the drink-selling, drink-imbibing world around her; but no wonder, since she had just now so feelingly experienced it.

A young man with a cigar in his mouth was standing in the passage speaking soft words to the pretty barmaid who simpered and tossed her blue-ribboned cap behind the counter. "Now, my girl, half-a-pint for you?" asked the pretty barmaid, taking the jug without waiting for an answer—she knew Veronica and her usual evening's errand.

The young man looked superciliously down at the pale face and large blue eyes; a stray curl had escaped from under her bonnet, and lay across her cheek. He took out his cigar, holding it in the air between two fingers. "Where did you get those big eyes from, my lass?" he asked, rudely. "My! you'll be killing some fellow's heart with 'em some day!" Veronica felt her cheeks flushing, and turned her head away, a little offended, from the bold questioner. "You won't speak, little 'un? Not up to snuff yet? Let's look at those peepers again!" But Veronica kept her face steadfastly away. He laughed. "Give me a kiss, then," he said, in a tone of mock entreaty. "Come now, do." He stooped his head as if he were about to suit the action to the word; but the girl only drew back. "Here's your half-pint," said the barmaid, returning with the jug. To get at it Veronica would have to go nearer the young man, a thing she dreaded. But she advanced

one step, and put out her hand. "Not till I've had my kiss," said the tormenter, putting himself between her and the counter. "*Do* let me have my beer, please!" And a look of real distress was on her face. "No; not without the kiss." He saw his importunity teazed her, and it pleased him to teaze her. He had been drinking and smoking till he was ready for a "lark," to use his own expression.

"Don't be so soft," said the barmaid, not over-pleased to find anybody sharing his notice with herself.

"You be hanged!" was his polite reply.

"Thank you," said the barmaid, tossing her head.

Veronica was much troubled. How was she ever to get the beer? She gave a sudden dart for it, hoping to reach it before he could see, and get away; but he was too quick for her, and caught hold of her hand just as she had seized the jug, and with the shock the beer was spilt, partly into her bosom, and partly on the ground—while the young man burst into a loud horse-laugh. Veronica looked at the empty jug with dismay—the colour mounted to her cheeks. She stood still a moment, indignant and angry. Then, in a sudden spirt of passion, she lifted her small hand, and seized hold firmly of one of her tormenter's cigar-scented curly whiskers, and gave it a tug that must have brought blood. He roared out with the pain, and the noise brought the landlord from the bar to see what was the matter.

"A little vixen her!" exclaimed the barmaid.

"A confounded scratching monkey!" shrieked the young man, getting out his handkerchief to wipe the cheek.

"What's the game now?" asked the landlord.

Veronica attempted to explain; but her voice was drowned in the swearing and objurgations of the young man, and the shriller notes of the barmaid.

"What! scratch a young gentleman's face, you hussy?" asked the landlord, looking severely at the poor girl.

"He spilt my beer; he wouldn't let me have it," responded Veronica, almost crying.

"Nonsense. Tell none of your lies here. Be off with you! Cut!—be quick!"

"But I want my beer; he ought to give me my beer."

"Be off, I say. You and your jug, be off."

But the landlady now appeared. She had been listening to the whole in the adjacent room. "Don't be a fool, Jones," was her lofty speech, as she swept past him with her portly form; "the girl comes here reg'lar; I know who she is. Give her the 'alf-pint, Mary," and she herself put the empty jug into Mary's hands. Rather sulkily Mary refilled it, and Veronica, taking it, and thanking Mrs. Jones, withdrew, only too glad to get away. "You'd soon lose all your customers if it wasn't for me," said Mrs. Jones to her husband, with a scornful glance, and then retreated to her private room again, majestically. Twice in one night Veronica had been alarmed and annoyed by drunken men. She had come off without bodily injury—happier therein than so many thousands of her fellow-creatures who daily and nightly suffer from the blows and tortures inflicted by husbands, and fathers, and mothers, when full of maddening intoxicating liquor, by whatever name called. But she had been aggrieved and insulted;

her modesty had been offended, and an injury had been done to her soul. The public-house is not a school of virtue for young girls any more than for grown-up people; like the fabulous upas-tree, it blasts whom it shades, and the fruit it produces is wholesome food for neither man or beast. But our statesmen and rulers, however, are fond of this public-house upas; they do not cut down the deadly tree, root and branch, but regulate its planting, and sell its baneful shadow at so much the square-yard — satisfied to get enormous revenue from the mildew and destruction of the people. Revenue they must have for expensive wars, and costly vice-producing armaments in times of peace, and if not from the food, they will get it from the poison of the nation, and they shut their eyes very willingly to the fact that two-thirds of the poverty, and misery, and crime of the country may be traced to this one cause, the free diffusion and enticement of intoxicating drink. Or is it unwillingly that they shut their eyes?

With, we fear, rather revengeful feelings towards drinking mankind, and with also a dim sense of humiliation and sorrow at her own want of temper, Veronica returned to her father.

She did not tell him of this last trouble, for she did not like to distress him, but at night tears were on her pillow, and her sleep was restless. A miserable dream visited her in the early morning; the distorted shadow of the night's experience—a dream of a drunken man, who with fiery eyes, and hot scorching breath, and long clasping arms, pursued her in a dark place, while she, fixed by terror, could not lift one foot to escape. A scream of hers awoke her father in the room below.

"What is the matter, Veronica?" he shouted.

"Nothing, nothing," replied she, when fully awake, "it was only a bad dream." Satisfied, he went to sleep again.

Would that such bad dreams were not sometimes bad realities!

CHAPTER XI.

LETITIA.

VERONICA did not so soon compose herself to sleep. She lay wakeful for an hour or more: by that time the wind had nearly ceased its raving, and sounds from the street below became audible. Once or twice she thought she heard footsteps on the pavement, and once her name was called quite distinctly. But when she rose and went to the window, there was no one to be seen. The stars were very bright, and the lamps were still alight, but it was too dusk to distinguish objects clearly, and the cold warned her back to bed: shivering she drew the blankets round her, and endeavoured to sleep once more. In a while her weary eyes closed, and the early dawning found her lying in quiet rest. Later than usual she awoke, and hastily dressing prepared to go down-stairs. As she lifted up the window-sash to admit the fresh morning air, a small brown paper parcel met her eyes lying on the window-ledge. It was tied round with string, and seemed to have been thrown up from the street: "Veronica Lee" was written in large letters upon it. On opening it, she found a

note from which two or three shillings dropped to the ground. The note ran thus—it was a very short one—

"I have sent you some money as I promised, and if you want it you shall have more. Don't say who sent it, and it will be all right. You'll find me in the same street every night. LETITIA."

Veronica looked troubled: she gathered up the shillings, there were five of them in all, folded them again in paper, and put away the note and parcel in a box very carefully, as if she feared prying eyes, a very needless precaution, and murmured to herself as she did so, "I wish she hadn't sent it! What shall I do with it? I must give it back to her again some way! Father would be so angry!"—For a week she had no opportunity to do so. But one evening at nightfall found her in the street Letitia indicated, and before long the same smartly flounced gown, and lace-trimmed bonnet made their appearance round the corner.

"So you're here at last! I thought you'd never come again," said Letitia eagerly as she looked into her sister's pale face. "Do you want some more money? If you do, I've got it for you."

"No, Letitia, I've come this once, but I must never do so again! Here's your five shillings. You're very kind, but father wouldn't let me keep the money if he knew, and so I've brought it back as soon as I could." She held out the money-parcel, but Letitia did not offer to take it. "Throw it on the ground if you like!" she said angrily. "*I'm* not going to take it. What! my money's dirt, I suppose, and will spoil your fine hands to take?"

"No, it isn't, Letitia! You know that," and Veronica still held out the parcel with her gloveless hand. "It was very kind of you, and I'm so sorry to say so, but I can't have it!"

"Throw it in the kennel then!"

"Do take it! We're not poor, and father's begun to work again; not so poor as to want your money. Indeed we don't need it."

"*My* money; yes, *my* money you despise, you little proud thing! It isn't as good as other people's money, I suppose?"

"It isn't honest money, is it, Letitia?" asked Veronica, driven to say clearly the reason.

"And who told you that, pray?"

"Father told me. I don't know what he means, I don't want to know, and I'll never ask him, if you don't like. I only told you what he said himself once. Why are you so cross with me? Do take it, that I may go, for I know I oughtn't to be with you now, father would be so angry, if he knew!"

Letitia's eyes had flamed with anger, but they suddenly softened, not so much perhaps at Veronica's words, as at some inward thought. She spoke now in a soft and entreating tone. "Oh Veronica, I nursed you when you were a baby, and you used to throw your arms round my neck *then*, and kiss me. I think you loved me in those old days; won't you love me ever so little now? I know I'm not good enough to touch the soles of your shoes; I know I am very wicked, but I can't help it! Would you give me just *one* kiss, and say you love me? I shan't live long, I know I shan't," and a tear appeared in each eye; "but it

would make me better, for everybody else despises me, and that's why my heart feels so hard sometimes. Only one kiss, dear? I'll never ask you again, for when you know what I am, I shall blush to ask you, and you—you'll hate me!"

Veronica gave her the kiss as if half afraid. It was a very innocent kiss, and yet she felt as if she had done some guilty thing. Letitia took the money with a sigh. "And now, good bye, Letitia!"

"Good bye! Won't you ever let me talk to you again? But no,—no! What am I asking? Good bye!"

And the wearer of the silk dress and satin spenser parted from the poorly clad and almost shoeless Veronica with a pang, and a wild regret that she was not as poor, and as innocent.

And how was it she had so fallen? How is it that so many of our sisters fall? From innocence and purity and respect of friends and the world, and the prospect of perhaps a long and honoured life, to degradation and vice, and contempt alas! when most frequently there should only be pity—pity, angel-eyed and hearted, that strives to raise and nourish the latent good, where scorn only withers and blights, and utterly destroys what faint budding green there might be on the cankered tree.—Letitia was left motherless early. She had a blind father. She was good-looking and headstrong and vain, fond of dressing above her station. Those bright eyes, and long ringlets, and delicately-flushed oval cheeks, were surely meant only for silk bonnets and rich lace to environ, and those white arms and taper fingers for bracelets and kid-gloves. So one or two young men whispered to her, and so she be-

lieved, too willing to believe. But she had a more dangerous enemy to her virtue than even this of vanity, and consequent love for expensive dress.

Old nurses and mothers of families, wise in their generation, will shake their heads and talk knowingly of Mary Jane's or Thomas's weakness of body, and paleness, and want of stamina generally, coming from the delicacy of the mother's health previous to marriage. "The first child takes it," we have heard them say, and they will give many examples to prove the truth of their words. And physiologists and physicians are of a similar opinion, expressed in a different way, and refer peculiarities of constitution generally to parental antecedents of both sexes. Mental and moral characteristics are as liable to be transmitted from parent to offspring as physical ones. And is it not true that "the first child," and in some cases not a few of the others in a large family, inherit the father's or mother's physical tastes, and moral or immoral propensities? —the propensity to excesses of all kinds, and the love for intoxicating drinks?—a certain moral weakness that succumbs before the power of the passions, and a longing for forbidden food, both physical and mental?

Mark Lee's propensities in early life we have noticed briefly. He was now what would be called a reformed character; he was neither drunkard or profligate, and bore his own punishment for former misdeeds—injured health, melancholy, and blindness—as quietly as he could, and, as he would have said, "he submitted to the inevitable;" though his submission, we fear, was too much akin to that of the slave, fearful and fretful.

But his eldest born, his daughter Letitia, with her

beauty and high spirits, carried off like the scape-goat of old, heavy sins into the wilderness. An indisposition for honest labour, a desire for unlawful amusements, and a real, innate longing and craving for intoxicating drinks, these were some of her besetments—the last one much the most dangerous of the three. These besetments were her inheritance, and she received them from her father as directly and clearly as she did her fine eyes, and straight, lissom form, and arched forehead. Truly an awful inheritance to give! Did her father ever think of his own share in the iniquity, as he deplored her faults and follies, and fall? Do parents ever think of the future sin and misery they may thus bring upon their offspring when indulging in evil habits, when yielding to temptation, and when committing known sins?

A dancing-room was kept at a public-house not far from Letitia's home. The powder was dry and ready prepared, and it needed only the spark to set it on fire. To the dancing parties here assembled she insisted upon going, and became acquainted with wild, ill-taught companions, of her own age and of the other sex, who flattered her beauty and gave her maxims of disobedience and plenty of immoral advice. They treated her to spirits and wine—a piece of gallantry thought becoming and necessary to dancing partners at these public-house reunions. Of course at such parties, in such a place, there was more than a sprinkling of the dissipated and depraved—young women who had lost modesty and virtue—and young men seeking for fresh victims to their evil lusts, and she soon became a prey to one of the latter—the

way made easy by the excitement of drink—an excitement he knew how to use effectually to attain his purpose. Repentance and terror seized upon her in the morning when perfectly sober; but it came too late. Her seducer threatened to expose her if she would not conform to his wishes for the future; and partly by his threats, partly by flattery and cajolery, but mostly by the aid of drink, from thenceforth her life became a series of sorrowful downfalls. Cast out from home with indignation and scorn by a father who saw repeated in her the sins of his youth, she had no home to flee to but one too dreadful to name (shame that they should be permitted in our land!), no means of livelihood but the streets; and here, accordingly, we find her, not yet the lowest of the low in outward appearance, since she has still fine clothing, and some remains of beauty, to attract and ensnare to ruin, as she has been ensnared and ruined herself; one victim thus dragging after her numberless others—a species of retributive justice, befitting the pandemonium into which she has fallen. As drink led to her ruin, and was the chief instrument before which her virtue fell, so drink keeps up the game of loss. In the day, drink and sleep; in the night, drink and prostitution; so runs the round of her rapidly shortening life.

The moth caught in the blaze of the candle is an old simile, but an "over-true" one, representing her condition. The light—the evil, baneful light of drink—attracts; she must near it; it is death, ruin, and agony, to one like her, if she touches it; but no matter; touch it she thinks she must, again and again! How the wings scorch and blister and shrivel up! how the nerves leap

and twist, and throb with excess of pain! How the whole body suffers with them! Useless wings now, that might have carried her away from the destroyers; worse than useless, since they agonize and struggle in the melted grease, and fix there like anchors, grounded and buried, and hold her to roast and frizzle slowly in that heated, burning atmosphere. And thus the moth consumes away, till a tiny black speck, till not even that, is left to tell of what was once a creature of grace and beauty, fitted for quiet flittings to and fro at summer's twilight, among cool shrubs and sleeping flowers; —of a woman endowed with capacities for virtue, and happiness and love.

The red light of a gin-shop lamp standing out of the darkness of the street at night; the ruddy blaze of the publican's fire; the bright twinkle of the smart barmaid's eyes; the cheery glitter of the publican's welcoming smile — are not these so many moth-candles, set alight, and placed to attract and burn? And there is much moth-nature in humanity—so much, that we fear to think of the numbers that lie every year scorched and wingless in the scalding tallow-grave. Letitia has been in the blaze again and again. Her wings are scorched, her beauty rapidly fading away and vanishing. The moth-candle set for her has been a large one with two flames. Between them both she lies helpless and consuming, and no one seeks to save her.

"Correct" society ignores the fallen woman. It is too usual to look upon her as utterly virtueless and worthless—since her one peculiar virtue, chastity, is gone—and to place her almost out of the pale of humanity; to consider her as lost, utterly lost, and utterly un-

worthy of a name and a place on this vast motherly earth of ours. But not so thought the great Moralist, the divine Lover of the race, who said to the adulteress, pityingly—"Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more;" and of the Magdalene, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she *loved much.*"

But society is not yet brave enough, not holy enough, to do this. It starts back prudishly afraid lest pity should be construed into sanction, and loving forgiveness should lead to laxity and increase of crime. It is afraid to follow the Saviour's example.

Shall we say Christ set a dangerous precedent, when he led the way to the ready reception of the repentant —the free forgiveness and reinstatement of the fallen ones? that he did wrong to teach us the prayer, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those that sin against us;" since these are some of the sinners that sin against us, when they sin, as we all confess they do, against society?

What rejoicing will there not be in heaven over some of these poor scattered, fleeced, and worried wilderness sheep, when they have been brought back by the good Shepherd! More, I say unto you, "than over ninety-and-nine just men that need no repentance!"

And when we shut our hearts and doors upon these lost ones, and refuse to help them to return, refuse to induce them to return to the fold—we refuse to partake of the joy of heaven, we shut out the hallelujahs of the angels with a shrug of the shoulders.

Letitia was what was called a lost woman; but she was not virtueless. The locusts brought by the east wind had not yet eaten all the verdure away. A few

green ears stood still erect in her blackened cornfield, and the sun and the rain did not refuse to do their work of blessing and refreshment upon them. A lingering love for her younger sister, and a wish to benefit her; a desire to be loved again by some pure innocent soul; perhaps a faint tremulous desire to leave the ignominy and impurity of her life for a better; perhaps a passionate, longing desire. Who knows? Many in her position have this; but despair and human apathy come gradually like deadly frost upon them, and burst the life-vessels, and they rot only a little the sooner for it.

Her case is no uncommon one, as we all know well. Many thousands like her, walk our streets and lanes every night, and live more or less openly by the wages of shame. And intoxicating liquors help fearfully to produce this social gangrene. They are the chief cause of it, if we may give credence to prison inspectors, ministers, physicians, and moralists who have made it their special study, anxious to meliorate and cure. It is *drink* that first smooths the path to ruin, and that helps the ruin on to its fulfilment. Drink is the fruitful mother of this vice, as of so many, many others!

CHAPTER XII.

THE MINISTER AND THE WINE-CUP.

TIME flew on. The Trent flowed on its way, with alternations of flood and fall, very much as it had done for some thousands of years, with a wise admixture of work and play—ever the same river, yet ever renewed from cloud and fountain, lake and stream; carrying on its beneficent mission of draining, and cleansing, and purifying, and, like the life of a good man, softening, and harmonizing, and blessing all around. The great temperance missionary, as John Broadbent called the river, preached its perpetual sermon, and lay bright and clear among the low lands and green meadow-swathes, reflecting both heaven and earth, but chiefly heaven, as a good man or woman ought to do. The sun brightened it; the moon put silver touches on its sable waves; trees and flowers, beasts and birds, drank and dipped in its shallows; and man waded, and forded, and swam, and fished, and boated in and over its incessantly moving waters, and sometimes drowned in them, his unwilling body carried seawards with the rest of things that the river pushed thither; while the great placid stream sang the same requiem for him as for the grass and pebbles, and gave him the same burial.

During this time, Stephen Morris's visits to St. Wilfrid's had not been frequent. After his last recorded visit he went twice or thrice, and had other walks and sails up and by the Trent; but the zest of the whole

was over for him, and gradually he sank back into his old student quiet, his long porings over books, his midnight studies. His church, too, required more of his attention—so he told his friends—his sick, and his poor. He had never been a haunter of the houses of the richer part of his congregation, and he was in reality but ill fitted in some respects for social life. It had been much lamented that the young pastor was so seldom seen out of the pulpit by most of his admirers, and a few had even been offended at his shyness; but time softened the peculiarity to some of them, and they remembered charitably that such sermons as he gave needed quiet of body and mind for preparation and that all desirable qualifications could not meet in one individual. The last pastor had been an adept in the art of "shepherding his flock," visiting, as some thought, "in season and out of season." Visiting was his gift; he delighted in it, he shone in the warm parlour and drawing-room; but in the pulpit his words were commonplace, his thoughts tedious, and he had none of that earnestness of zeal that more than makes amends for want of eloquence. Stephen was the reverse of this; but he did not neglect the poor and dying, and hundreds of sad, trembling hearts were cheered by the prayers and teachings of their young minister, and acknowledged him, if not in words, in thoughts, to be a true bishop of souls.

If we say he was idolized by the greater part of his people, shall we say wrong? We think not, for there are many unconscious idolatries; and not a few pious hearts, who would start back in terror from the word "idolatry" as applied to themselves, nevertheless do

commit the sin sometimes in a dim, unthinking way. By some, his every feature and motion, as seen in the pulpit, were inwardly reverenced; and a very high pedestal indeed did they accord him in their hearts' adytum. The very retiredness of his nature helped to keep up this reverential feeling. His soul was to them a strange secret sanctuary, lighted only by rays from the heavenly world. "He was too good for this world" was often said by the poorer and older members; and they shook their heads sorrowfully when they talked of his pale, worn face, and his thin and already slightly stooping form. It was but the student's stoop; but they fancied they saw in it a proof that their beloved young pastor would soon leave them.

His growing popularity had attracted so many strangers to his chapel, and finally so many pew-holders and new members, that a larger place of worship was needed. A site was selected in the most fashionable quarter of the town, and a large, handsome chapel erected by subscriptions that flowed in as from a fountain, needing only the labour of gathering. An uncommon enthusiasm influenced all; the chapel was the largest and finest dissenting place of worship in the town, the minister the most popular and beloved. Almost all the pews were at once taken, leaving the deacons still in the pleasing difficulty entailed by a straitened place. They smiled and shook their heads at the same time. Magistrates and dignitaries forsook their accustomed Sunday pews in church or chapel, and flocked to hear the sermons of the Rev. Stephen Morris, the new attractive light of the ministry. Even the neighbouring villages caught the contagion, and car-

riages, gigs, omnibuses, and light carts frequently filled the stables of the town on the day of rest.

Yet a deep religious humility did not forsake the young man; he was not made vain by his popularity, he remembered that he was only clay in the hands of the great Potter, and that to him no laudation was due in that he had been made a vessel of honour. "Of him to whom much is given, much shall be required," was a saying he never forgot; and at times he was almost overwhelmed, instead of being elated, by his increasing popularity.

Was there no deterioration, then? Was his path indeed that of the just, that shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day?

It is painful to the sight to search for spots in so brilliant a sun; very painful and revolting to seek for and find stains upon the otherwise pure, white garments of a saint; very sad and humiliating to discover any fungus growth of vice in the set-apart holy land of a Christian minister's heart. But already the evil spore had been sown there, and, though hidden deep, was growing, not with usual fungus rapidity, but slowly, as meeting with but imperfect food in that quiet heart-garden for its sustenance and development.

What was this fungus? It was not vanity of mental gifts and attainments, as we have seen; it was not love of sway, or of money, or of impure society. What love was it that was beginning to oppose itself to the pure love of God? The love of that which comes in the guise of an angel, a helper to the satisfactory performance of pulpit duties, a reviver from its exhaustion, a cheerer in moments of depression;—comes in the dress

of food, and is but poison—a carnal, sensuous love, that seemed at first so innocent, so lawful, so necessary. We need scarcely name it; our readers must have seen it exhibited so many times, at the rich man's feast and the poor man's dinner, at the fireside, and the table, and the shop, and abroad in the streets most of all; happy if he or she has not seen it in the chamber of the sick and the dying. This demon with the angel's face has practised his delusions upon man almost ever since his creation. The "preacher of righteousness," Noah, fell before him, and hundreds of thousands, nay millions, have fallen since; rich have been his harvests, overflowing his garners.—A consumptive patient is frequently not aware of his danger, and thinks lightly of symptoms that make the physician hopeless. A bright eye, a clear transparent complexion, a brilliant colour, do not seem to the ignorant, fatal prognostications, but the reverse. So much added beauty and health of appearance cannot be harmful, he thinks; all must be well with such pleasant outward manifestations. The insidious love for drink attacks its victim much in the same way, and deludes equally. The flow of spirits, the agreeable excitement, temporary improvement of health it may be, and the intellectual activity induced by the first mild use of alcohol, cannot be injurious, must be good. The labourer does more ploughing and digging, the mechanic gets through more work, the artist paints more easily, the author's thoughts flow more genially and brilliantly, the minister's sermon has an added force and glow about it. Dangerous and unholy, when the minister seeks other force and glow than that which he may gain by com-

munion with God, or wants other strength to deliver his message than that which the obeying of God's physical laws gives him! It is putting false fire upon the altar.

But the wise physician sees this temporary benefit, and gives it its right name—unnatural excitement. He asserts, "This is not health, but disease. Check it in the first stages, or you are lost. Do not laugh at me because I look serious; or, if you will laugh, do it at your peril! I have seen your symptoms too frequently not to know them and their danger."

Stephen Morris had no such physician close at hand. He lived much alone, and his landlady—a kind-hearted, but in many respects an ignorant woman, respectably connected, and what was called "educated," but following old custom and routine, and thoroughly conventional. By her grandfather, grandmother, father and mother, uncles and aunts, sisters and brothers, wine or alcoholic drink had always been considered a necessary of life; and the whole of her respectable acquaintance took it daily, as she did herself whenever she could afford it—therefore it must be good. This was the sole argument which she understood—the argument of precedence and usage. She was called a good motherly woman by her friends; and many of the church, who felt solicitous about the welfare of their much respected, much loved young minister, congratulated themselves and one another that he would be well cared for with so kind and careful a person as Mrs. Sollory. It was with true motherly solicitude that she looked after Mr. Morris's wardrobe, attended to the comfort of his rooms, and saw his food prepared in a wholesome,

cleanly manner, and regulated her buyings-in to his appetite and state of health.

The same solicitude of hers placed the wine regularly upon the table; "sherry was a good digester," and port also, highly medicinal and useful, "her poor dear Mr. Sollory had always been fond of port;" and such a thin spare habit of body as the minister tolerated required wine to nourish and strengthen it. The small glass of sherry after dinner in a while became two, but Mrs. Sollory only rejoiced. Then supper must be heralded by wine, and what so comforting as a tumbler of hot negus, or better still, rum and water, for a nightcap? Stephen had an attack of illness, and restless wakeful nights succeeded; he had refused the rum and water till then, but induced to try it once, found it bring sleep and quiet rest, like a charm, and he took it again and again. Once or twice a gleam of dissatisfaction with the habit crossed his mind, and he refused for some nights the pleasant draught; but Mrs. Sollory became so solicitous for his health, had such a persuasive smile as she poured out the mixture, and foretold so much good from its use, that what could he do but take it, and set her anxious mind at rest? Still he was perfectly temperate; he was but using the good things a kind providence sends for our benefit, and he certainly was becoming a little stouter, and a trifle less pale, under the regimen. Mrs. Sollory was beginning to think he did her credit, and smiled when any allusion was made in her hearing to the minister's improved looks.

This gradual advance from bread and wine for the Sunday's dinner, and an occasional glass or two in the

week, to wine as the rule after every dinner, and wine or spirits at night, had come on slowly, so slowly, so almost imperceptibly, that Stephen himself was scarcely aware when the change had commenced. He was aware, however, of a very pleasing fact, that after the glass of wine that was now considerately provided for him in the vestry, his sermons had more vigour, his intellect for the time seemed clearer, his imagination took higher flights. Who would dare to tell him wine was injurious when such results followed its use?

He was still unmarried, as we see, and this one circumstance gave rise to immense talk and speculation among his congregation. Some thought he would never marry, he was nearly thirty it was said, and never had he been noticed to "pay attentions" to any young lady whatever. But others boldly asserted that from thirty to forty was the golden age for a minister as regarded matrimony. He had studied, had attained a position, obtained a good income, and was therefore then, and then only, prepared for so solemn an undertaking as marriage. Before that period of life it would not have been proper or discreet to take to himself a wife; now, no doubt, he would think of doing so. Let the young ladies beware!

For he was an acknowledged prize in the matrimonial lottery. Chapel-going mothers and fathers thought with a longing sigh how much they should delight to see Sarah or Matilda hanging on that slender student-like arm, as the wife of the minister who had gained so notable and honoured a position in the town, or sitting with meek pride, if there be such a paradoxical state of

mind, and we believe there is, in the green-curtained ministerial pew, listening to her husband's deep voice as he delivered his soul-entrancing sermons; and young women, with hearts newly touched and glowing, responsive to the Saviour's love, let at times their affections wander in a lower channel, and imagined the happiness that would fall to the lot of the one who should be chosen as bride to this holy messenger of God. Even those in a very humble station dared to raise their eyes to the phœnix, and sensible of their own outward or inward attractions, or remembering the caprices of love, revelled occasionally in the heart-beating thought or supposition, "If he should choose *me?*"

But common-sense people, and those who had no eligible daughters or nieces, had long given him to one of the Miss Greshams. The eldest from her age, and because she was the eldest, and of course ought first to find a husband, was generally awarded to him. Some said timidly, "Perhaps Miss Jane;" but this was scouted by most. She was too girlish, too unformed—a minister's wife should be a woman of some force of character, with considerable womanly dignity, worthy of being in a while, if God permit, a true mother in Israel. The ex-mayor was a deacon of the church, a man of wealth and influence, and was, it was well known, most kindly affected towards the minister; Mr. Morris had only to ask, and have, should he fortunately fix his eyes upon Miss Gresham. And why did he not?

This question remained unanswered a long time. Mrs. Sollory was privately interrogated on the subject. Did she know? Had she ever seen or heard? What

correspondence did Mr. Morris keep? Were there ever notes addressed to him in a lady's handwriting?

To all of which questions Mrs. Sollory said, "No, she knew nothing."

So this delightful mystery remained one still, and every young lady in the chapel might yet indulge her day-dreams, and whisper to herself, with her humbler neighbours, "If he should choose me? who knows?" At length, however, since all suspense, especially on such a subject, must have an end some time, more definite light arose. Was it, or was it not true, that Mr. Morris had of late visited Swansford at least twice a week? and, suspicious fact, had he not been seen by some very prying eyes indeed, walking by the river banks with Miss Gresham, and with no other friend, male or female, near? A very strong and decided "yes" was given as answer to these questions, by some who "had reason to know," who had had it "from good authority," &c.; and very softly and timidly at first it began to be generally talked of among the chapel-frequenters that there certainly was an engagement between Mr. Morris and Miss Gresham. Mrs. Sollory was again called upon; this time she did not say "no," but she was mysterious, and evidently inclined to put the delicate inquirers on a false trail. "Miss Gresham! not at all likely; a young girl of nineteen! What did people think of? What should they say to Miss Angus? Mind, she didn't mean to compromise herself or Mr. Morris; she only told them to have their eyes open, that was all."

Now Miss Angus was an old maid, highly respectable, with an independent fortune, who made herself

very active and useful at Dorcas-meetings, Bible-collectings, and missionary and other tea-parties; but there was no denying she was old, past forty, rather plain-looking, and though a very good woman (her non-admirers could not refuse her that praise), was inadmissible as the wife of, in their eyes, their still young and interesting pastor. The gossips retreated, inclined to be offended with Mrs. Sollory.

Triumphantly they returned to the scent; for was it not a perfect truth, a thing that could not be gainsaid, that last Friday, unattended by sister or footman, father or mother, Miss Gresham and Mr. Morris had driven out in the pony carriage, through the village of Raven's-nest, and by Sheepland Park, in sight of Mr. Stevenson, the deacon, and his wife, who met them twice on their route?

And for once gossip was right. The minister was really engaged, and to one of the Miss Greshams; but not to the one that had been given him so certainly. His choice had fallen upon Jane the youngest sister, young as she was—barely eighteen, and Jane, who, to tell the truth, had given her girlish heart away to him some time before, made no opposition to his choice. With a trembling joy she accepted, what she felt to be the great gift of the love of a noble and intelligent man, of one whose life was dedicated to that which, in her eyes, was the highest mission that can be bestowed on a human being.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WEDDING CARDS.

CLARA BROADBENT was picking gooseberries in the kitchen. It was a warm July morning, the windows were open, and the bees' hum among the flowers could be heard very plainly, for she was silently engaged about her work, seated placidly in her print morning-dress and white apron near the dresser. Rather further away than the hum of the bees another hum was distinguishable. It was John's voice singing low, as he propped dahlias, or transplanted annuals. His thoughts were otherwhere than among his flowers, she knew, by the sound of his undersong, and she wondered whether Mary Plowden's last picture, or James Miller's brobdignagian strawberries were the subject of his thoughts, or whether it was something less agreeable than these, which she half feared from the tone.

A knock at the door startled her, and a letter. The postman was late this morning, and the rather dainty-looking letter he left behind was addressed to Mr. J. Broadbent. It lay on the table therefore, till John entered, which he was not long in doing. "A letter? Ah, I thought I saw the postman go by!" and he proceeded to open it, but not very quickly. No closely written sheet of paper was within, but in its stead another envelope and two enamelled cards. On one was engraved a well-known name, the "*Rev. Stephen Morris.*" On the other and larger one, an entirely un-

known one, "*Mrs. Morris.*" They were tied together, after the fashion of those days, with a bow of white satin ribbon. "Wedding cards! do you see, Clara?" he asked, as he held them towards his sister. Clara lifted her eyes from her gooseberries. "A wedding!" she exclaimed with some surprise. "Whose cards are they?" "Read." She read slowly and quietly.

"I am very glad!" was her remark, with bright cheerful smile. "I suppose it is to Miss Gresham."

"I suppose so. Morris has been very sly too! How quietly he has kept it all!"

"People don't generally talk very loudly of their own marriage before the event."

"No; but in this case! However, I have no right to complain. Only I had fancied he would have brought us his intended bride, and made us acquainted with her a little. Now, I suppose, we shall just be expected to call when they return from the wedding journey, as any other strangers would. It is very strange!"

To Clara it was not quite so strange as to John. Ever since that day on the island Stephen had been reserved to her. He had asked for friendship, and she had gladly granted his wish; and yet a gradual coolness had arisen between them. She thought it his fault, for she had tried to be in all things the same as before; perhaps she had not succeeded well in her attempts; perhaps he had not properly understood her and them; perhaps—perhaps, she could not tell how it was! If it were indeed her fault she was exceedingly sorry! During the last year or so John and she had been frequently away from St. Wilfrid's, at London on business,

and elsewhere, and consequently they had not seen so much of Trentham friends. They had only recently returned from one of these journeys; but Stephen Morris was quite aware they had returned, John having called upon him more than once, but not a word had been said about an intended marriage.

John seated himself near Clara, and looked thoughtfully out of the window for a minute or two. Then he said, "I knew of this last night when I was in the town, I heard of it quite by accident in a shop, but did not tell you, dear, just at first. I thought with me you would feel the coolness a little, and, somehow or other, I didn't like to talk about it. There was an unfriendliness in it, to leave us in the dark so entirely. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps so," replied Clara. "But on the other hand you must remember how shy Mr. Morris is on personal matters, and I do not believe he meant it unfriendlily."

"Well, dear, you shall hold your belief, and I will try to have the same. But, I saw him only last Thursday, and he said not a word! In his place I could not have kept such a secret from a friend."

"It might be the lady's wish."

John laughed. "You're quite a pleader for him, and he doesn't deserve it. I thought once, Clara, he loved *you*."

"Did you?" And Clara went on diligently with her gooseberries.

"He had not sufficient good sense, however, for that! That was a long time ago, however, so long that I had almost forgotten it, till this brought it to my memory."

"Miss Gresham is a very lovely amiable girl, I sup-

pose, and very well connected. Indeed, John, I think you ought to be rejoicing for his sake! What could he have done better?"

"Nothing, I daresay; for, Clara, I should not have thought it better if he had carried you away, or so well! I am too selfish a brother for that. It is most fortunate he has not thought of it! I will rejoice therefore, and put away my grumbling. And it is high time I left you to your puddings and pies, and finished my dahlias. Adieu, then, fair lady!" And he strode out of the kitchen.

Once more out among his flowers the slight ruffle in his temper was soon smoothed down, and the accustomed cheery light returned to his eyes. Clouds never stayed long in his sun-loving sky, and once again he sang among the bees, outrivalling their "breezy bass;" himself the most industrious, jolliest bee among them all, as he was so decidedly the largest.

When he had finished his gardening he put on his hat, and walked to Ebenezer Plowden's, to see Mary.

As he passed Mrs. Jones's door the widow stood before it. There was a care-worn look in her eyes, which cleared away a little on seeing John. "Mr. Broadbent, sir, would you mind stepping in a minute?"

"Certainly not, Mrs. Jones." And John entered her low room, where he generally at this time of day saw James Miller at his bench, busy at work. But he was not there now.

"Where's Miller?" he asked.

"That's just what it is, Mr. Broadbent, sir! I called you in to tell you he's not been here since yesterday morning."

"Did he tell you he was going to stay away?"

"No sir, or I shouldn't ha' minded so much. He just started off after breakfast yester morn without a word, as he does sometimes when he goes to fetch work, an' I thought sure he'd be home by dinner. An' I'd his bit o' bacon just ready to frizzle, an' his 'taturs boiled at about the usil time, but he never came. I got quite wonderin' by night, an' sat up till after midnight, but he ne'er came."

"Has he ever been away all night before."

"Well, sir"—and here Mrs. Jones hesitated, and lowered her voice, as if afraid of listeners—"I don't like to tell tales of nobody. But the truth's the truth, an' perhaps you ought to be knowin'. He hasn't been ne'er so reg'lar lately, as he'd used."

"I was afraid not, from several things I have noticed about him. Poor lad! He's tried hard sometimes, but he can't forget old habits. I wish I could get him to sign the pledge."

"There's where it is, sir! He's so conceited like, he thinks he's no need to sign, an' that he can allers do as he wants to do when he's at home. No ale nor bacca never comes across my doorstep, I wouldn't fetch it him on no account whatsumever, an' to give him his due, he never asks me to. He's very good at home. I've no fault to find with him, but now, when he gets out i' the town, he can't stand again it, as he'd used. If he would but sign the pledge, he'd surely never be tempted no more."

"I can't say he would never be tempted, Mrs. Jones! But it would be a great help to him to remember a solemn promise he had made in black and white. Even

then he might fall, but I hope he would not, I trust he would not! But have you no idea where he is?

"He's i' Trentham, I expect, somewhere, but where I dunnot know, an' I can't be certain of that. Perhaps you could find him, sir!"

"Does he never talk to you of who he sees in Trentham?"

"Not he! He's close enough about his company. Won't you sit down a bit, sir?"

"No, thank you. And he works as much as usual?"

"I can't say as he does, sir. He's be'n, as I say, unregular for some time. He hasn't paid me his last half year for the garding; but then, I'm not complainin' of him, I can wait a bit."

John left the cottage with some anxious forebodings: James Miller was evidently going the downward way. What could he do for him? How arouse him to a sense of his danger? He had been tolerably steady for the last three years, though he had passed through one serious time of trial. The young woman he had been attached to had married from her place of service, and the hope which poor James had always clung to, that he should one day persuade her to look favourably upon him, was therefore quite gone. Depressed and wretched, he had at one time threatened to commit suicide; then to go back and live at Trentham, which his friend combated, knowing it would result in his ruin; and he had been intoxicated one whole day, but by a mixture of kindness and entreaty and command—for John Broadbent could at times exert over the young man the power of a strong character over a weak one, and enforce a command without appearing to do so—he had passed

through the danger, and forgetting or burying his unfortunate love, had taken furiously to the culture of strawberries.

Every encouragement was given him. Mary Plowden took a sisterly interest in him, and brought him her pictures to criticize or admire; and even painted for him a group of his prize strawberries, arranged on a green plate of their own leaves, though fruit-painting she secretly despised; Mary's ambitious painter-soul listening willingly only to the claims of "high art" and landscape. And John Broadbent had endeavoured to interest him in the proceedings of a kind of "labourer's institute" he had established at St. Wilfrid's, where of evenings in a hired room could be had books and newspapers to read, a cup of coffee, and a seat by a good fire, for the small sum of a penny; lectures also being occasionally given by John and other gentlemen, and musical performances by amateurs in the village, for the instruction and amusement of the poor, both men and women. James had at first been tolerably earnest in his attendance, and had even undertaken one of the reading classes for adults that were held in John's kitchen on winter evenings; but in a while he had cooled. One of his pupils had offended him in some way; and he voted the whole affair "slow and seedy," and retired to his garden again in his leisure hours. He seemed to be one of those weak-minded individuals who require every help and encouragement for themselves, but will grant little or none to other people, and the seeds of true philanthropy were not yet sown in his bosom. He was in truth a discouraging pupil, and his master's patience had been frequently tried not a little by him.

Mary Plowden was not at home. "She's gone up the Grove a-painting," said her mother with a curtsey, which she always persisted in bestowing on Mr. Broadbent. So John turned his steps towards the river and the town; intending, as he had an hour or two to spare, once more to go in search of the strayed sheep.

He found him sooner than he expected, coming across the meadows with a bundle of leather on one arm; but his step was slow and unwilling, and he did not meet John with his usual smile. He looked confused and ashamed, his eyes were bloodshot, and he appeared as if he had been drinking.

"Well, James, you've chosen a fine day to be out! I was just looking for you, and I'm glad to find you so soon."

James murmured something about "not knowing he was wanted," and said he'd just been to Trentham.

"So I see. Your leather proclaims the fact. I hope you have brought a good order with you. Have you been to see your father?"

James's reply was in the negative, and an angry flush came to his brow. "Why was he asked that question?" he demanded.

"I did not ask it to offend you, my dear fellow! But last time I was at No. 11 your mother told me he had not been well for some days. I was hoping you had been to see him, for you perhaps may not have him long. I thought him a good deal altered when I saw him last. But you visit him every now and then, don't you?"

"No, I don't. And I tell you what it is, Mr. Broad-
" and James

voice—"I'm a man now, and I won't be questioned and dogged about as if I was a child. What business have you to come after me in this way?"

John knew that if James had been perfectly sober he would not have used such language to him, or have so misunderstood his motives. He knew also that though he boasted to be a man, he was in many respects but a child, and failed decidedly in one manly attribute —self-government. He replied in a gentle tone—

"Do you ask me what business? The business of a friend who sees you going wrong—of one who sincerely loves you, and would do much to prove it. I can't let my sheep wander away into the wilderness. I *must* seek after you. If you were in the fire, and I came to pluck you out, would you ask me my business? And if not in the fire now, you are very near it—much too near it for safety; and I am bold enough to say to you, 'Keep out of the reach of the flames.' I know your danger; for, as I have told you before, I have been in it myself; and was only rescued from it by the hand of a friend and by God's good providence. Don't you think I should be very wicked if, seeing your peril, I did not endeavour to save you?"

James made no answer to this appeal. He pulled his hat over his eyes, hugged his leather more closely, and walked on in sullen silence.

When John had seen him safely over the ferry, he said, "I'll trouble you no more, Miller. Good bye! I see you're not exactly able to hear me to-day. To-morrow you and I will talk." And he left him, taking the river-ward way, while James proceeded through the village.

James's thoughts were not very pleasant ones, as he walked on alone, his best friend having left him in sorrow. At first, it is true, he felt glad to be relieved of his presence; but in a minute or two, when a little of his anger was gone, he was ashamed and troubled. He had been drinking hard the previous day and night; but was now tolerably sober, quite sober enough to understand what was said to him, and to know what he was about. But his nerves were irritable and his temper morose—the consequences of his debauch—and he muttered to himself, "What right had he to bother me? I hate such prying and spying. Can't a fellow do as he likes?" and other similar expressions indicative of his state of mind. He made up his mind he was a very ill-used person, and he half determined to leave St. Wilfrid's altogether, and go to live in the town, where he could do more as he liked.

Conscience interposed once or twice, asking him where he would have been by this time, most probably, if this same troublesome friend of his had let him alone. Perhaps in the workhouse, perhaps in a prison for debt, or in a lunatic asylum, or perhaps underneath the damp gray soil. For a drunkard so many places of punishment are open, so many unhappy compulsory homes prepared; and he needs them all at times!

When he reached his lodgings, he did not deign to reply to Mrs. Jones's kind inquiries whether he would have dinner, but went at once up-stairs carrying the bundle of leather with him, at which the good widow was surprised, for he usually left it on his bench. "He's not quite hisself!" she said to herself with a

that litther with him." She listened awhile anxiously at the foot of the stairs for any sound that should enlighten her as to his proceedings; but he was still, quite still, and at last she seated herself in the old arm-chair by the fire, and went on with her sewing.

When James reached his room, he first carefully closed the door, and fastened it with the wooden button that did duty for a bolt. Then he looked cautiously around, as though he feared some lookers-on might be seated on its one chair, or reclining on its bed, or hidden in one of its whitewashed corners—rather an unlikely thing in broad daylight, and in a room so bare of drapery or curtains as this. He next put the bundle of leather on the top of the box that contained his clothes, and began to untie and unroll it. From its centre he drew out a something wrapped carefully in paper, and placed it also on the box. Then with his hand upon this last parcel, he once more glanced around and listened. There seemed to be perfect solitude and silence, except that a fly noisily buzzed about the little room, and hit his head insanely against the window-panes. But the fly was not to be feared, he told no tales but in his own occult language, and his small wings, while they perpetually said, "Listen, listen!" could make no further progress towards a speech in English. Not quite at ease, however, he remembered that the door was old, and that there were cracks in it of various sizes. If any prying eye should now be at one of these cracks? Mrs. Jones's for instance, she was suspiciously silent just now: a direful supposition! He rose up from his kneeling posture beside the box, and taking the counterpane from the bed, covered the inside of the

door entirely with it, fastening it to the wall by large pins. The cracks were not large, he found on looking, but it was best to be secure.

Again he went to his box, this time with a feeling of thorough safety. He lifted the paper parcel cautiously, and unrolled the paper slowly; but suddenly a shock went through him—a terrible shock; the parcel almost dropped out of his hand, for a voice called him close to his ear, and a touch, soft but frightfully startling, came upon his shoulder. With wide starting eyes, and trembling hands, he turned his head. Psha! The voice he heard so alarmingly close was only the plaintive "mew" of the cat, who had perhaps been hidden under the bed, and now came to let him know of her presence, climbing on the chair close beside him to get upon his shoulder. How could he think her harmless cry to be the voice of a human being? Why did he not recognize it at once? He almost smiled at his own foolishness. The cat is no tell-tale any more than the fly, so he may proceed with his business. He unwrapped the parcel resolutely that had caused him so much trouble. What could it be? Had he discovered in some field or lane a bag of sovereigns that he was now afraid to lose? Had he gained by some mysterious means a wonderful treasure of art, the knowledge of which he was wishful to keep entirely to himself? Was it some love-token? Some gift from a beloved one? Or more likely, some perfection of a shoe, that he was allowed to bring home for careful reverent study; a shoe equal to any St. Crispin could manufacture? No, it was certainly not a shoe, for he had laid away the noisy rustling

between his eyes and the light. Not a work of art even, not of fine art at least; and surely that ugly glass cylinder was no love-token, no gift a loving woman would bestow on one she cared for! An eager greedy light was in his eyes as he gazed, his lips parted with something like a smile, his hands trembled, but not with fear now, with excitement; he drew a long breath.

And could that ominous-looking bottle with its liquid contents—something stronger than Trent water we fear—touch him with a greater joy than the sight of his friend? Were there no stirrings of remorse within him? Remorse at the deception he was practising—the hopes he was intending to blast—the friend he was ready to grieve and alienate—the soul within him he was about to ruin? For he stood now on ground where life or death, fair fame or infamy, happiness or misery, oscillated in the balance fearfully for him. He was possibly at the most momentous turning-point of his life. Perhaps at this very moment an angel with tender pleading looks and words of celestial entreaty might be uttering her last warnings in his ear, and another of dark aspect be whispering seductive speeches, that could lead to but one result for him, if he listened and obeyed—destruction. Which will he attend to?

He put the bottle once more on the box; he remembered he had better not uncork it at present, but he could not persuade himself to leave it just yet. He stroked puss, who had climbed on his knee, for he was now in a good temper with her and all the world. Had he not brought a treasure home with him? Was he not now a man who could do as he pleased? That bright sheeny liquor—he shook the bottle to see it sparkle in

the sunlight—contained joy, contained comfort, contained blessed oblivion of all trouble for him! When he should take it, adieu to thoughts of work, to monotonous shoe-stitching and hammering, to thread-waxing, and awl-boring, to long dull hours of labour; for awhile he should be in a bright jubilant state that would refuse to listen to care, he should be too happy to envy the king on his throne! With a sigh, and a trembling hand, he put the bottle in the box, closed the lid, and heard the lock click above it. For the present he must leave it.

At tea-time he went down into the kitchen. The widow spoke to him mildly behind her tea-cups. She had patience with the faults and shortcomings of young men, for her heart was tender to them, remembering her poor William; and, moreover, she had often proved that a "soft answer turneth away wrath," and James's face had been cross-looking enough when he went up-stairs. His ill-temper was gone now, however; his eyes shone brightly, and he laughed more than once or twice over the tea-table. Still he was restless, and complained of headache when he came to sit down to work after tea, and before long retreated to his room, saying he should go soon to bed, as he intended to be at work in his garden very early in the morning.

CHAPTER XIV.

FIRE! FIRE!

At St. Wilfrid's, night was generally a very quiet time. The only public-house was on the outskirts, the same white cottage we have named before that overlooked the ferry; and the "Labourers' Institute" had done much to check the evil habit of evening-tippling, so common among the farming-men and work-people at almost all towns and villages. During the midnight hours the villagers slept quietly, undisturbed by sounds of drunken merriment or brawling, and to the healthy and good came dreams of peace, while the river, that had no time to sleep, slipped softly past, as time did. John and Clara generally retired early to rest, and on the night of the 15th of July, were fast asleep long before midnight.

An hour later, a bright red light shot up into the sky from the midst of the quiet houses; and soon after, that cry that is so alarming in the dead of the night to the newly awakened, the cry of "Fire! fire!" was heard by all the inhabitants with uncontrollable terror or excitement, and all, who could, arose in haste, and prepared to go out. Hurrying feet were soon on their way to the burning dwelling, and noise and bustle and terror reigned where half an hour before was the most profound silence.

John Broadbent was one of the first out, and was quickly at the scene of destruction, which he found to

be, to his great concern, Mrs. Jones's cottage. Flames were coming out of one of the upper windows, and the thatch had already caught the blaze. It was thoroughly dry, after the late hot weather, and blazed furiously. Already a crowd was collected in front of the burning building, and confused shouts and contradictory orders were given, the alarmed humans not seeming at first much more sensible or methodical in their way of acting in the emergency, than did the crows, that, wakened by the glare and the noise, cawed and flip-flapped about the elms and the old church tower, seen now so plainly and ruddily in the glow of the red, high-reaching blaze. "It's of no use," one shouted. "Nothing'll stop that! It's gone too far; the thatch burns like tinder." "Water! water! Buckets! buckets!" cried others; while others, more helpful and wise, went to fetch the necessary articles. John appeared among them; his tall form, head higher than the rest, conspicuous and well known. Under his direction a chain of living links was formed between the cottage and the river (beneficent river! always willing to give of its cooling, quenching waters!) and buckets were passed from hand to hand quickly with their precious burden to stay the devouring flames. But what had become of the inmates of the burning cottage? Mrs. Jones's sleeping room was at the back of the house. Had any one seen her? John inquired. No one replied. "She couldn't get out this way, mester, the flames is too bad," said a labouring man at length. "True; most true," thought John; and giving up his bucket to one of the standers-by, ran at full speed round the block of buildings, and made his way to the back of the cottage. Here he met Ebenezer

Plowden and Mary, with the poor widow's half-fainting form between them. They had dragged her out with some difficulty. "Where is James?" asked John, breathless with haste. "He's inside!" said Mary, with horror-stricken face; "we couldn't persuade him to come out; he seemed quite stupid and bewildered." John endeavoured to enter at the back-door; but volumes of smoke, mingled with flames, came out now so fast, that it was impossible to get in that way. The stairs were on fire also. "A ladder!" he shouted; and almost as he said the words, a ladder was brought. He placed it at the bedroom window, mounted, and entered the cottage, the lookers-on watching in silent terror his disappearance in the blazing building. One pair of lips, especially, were blanched with fear, and one pair of straining eyes gazed horror-struck at the blank window that had swallowed up his beloved form. When would he return? Would he ever? Ah! if the building should fall upon him!—if that blazing roof should drop down!—if those walls should give way and bury him!—a living man amongst all that destroying fire and smoke! If he should be suffocated, or burned to death before he could reach the window once more! If—but now, thank God! oh thank God!—that is his face at the window once more—he is black and smoky—his hair is on fire—but in his arms he has the senseless form of James Miller, which he drags through the window, and with difficulty brings down the ladder! The men below helped as they could, but it was at the peril of their lives and limbs, for sticks and blazing thatch fell down thick amongst them. And now a pair of white hands at the foot of the ladder, the only white

hands in that dangerous neighbourhood—for no other female dared venture near—threw over John's head a thick shawl, taken from the shoulders of the same form to which the hands belonged, and put out the blaze on his head and arm by this means. It was Clara's hands that did this; she had followed him out of doors, and had watched his exploit with a beating heart. Two of the neighbours at once carried off James to a place of safety, and Clara at the same moment seized her brother's arm with an exclamation of terror, and dragged him away. It was but just in time, for now came crashing down, with volumes of smoke and sparks and burning splinters, thrown far and wide, the blazing roof, and with it part of the cottage wall, and on the spot where John had stood the moment before was a heap of bricks and beams and smouldering thatch higher than himself.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Clara, gratefully, once more, as they walked away from so dangerous a place. "Are you hurt much?"

"Not at all, dear! I should have been but for you! You have saved my life," and he looked down into her face with inexpressible affection, as he replaced the shawl upon her shoulders. "But it is time you went home. There is no danger for me now."

"Not yet; not at present," she said firmly. They returned to the front of the cottage, where an ominous cry was being raised. "Plowden's thatch has caught; all hands to the buckets!"—Which cry was unhappily too true.

Ebenezer Plowden's cottage and that inhabited by Mrs. Jones adjoined; the older part of it was unfor-

tunately thatched, and had caught fire at a corner that was not at first observed. Great exertions were made to subdue the flames, for by this time the whole village was astir, and every man and boy, and not a few women, worked to the uttermost. Ebenezer was much respected, and all were doubly inclined to help him, and to save his dwelling, if that were possible. Even the clergyman did not disdain to use the buckets with the rest—a fire-engine was not at this time attainable —and the squire was present with every able servant on his establishment. The fire was at last quenched, but not before more than one-half of Ebenezer's house was a heap of smouldering ruins, and the rest much injured. The workshop, with its store of osiers and baskets was burned down, and the "studdio" with Mary's paintings was utterly destroyed.

Clara returned home early to prepare beds for those who might need them; and soon Mary Plowden, with her mother and Mrs. Jones, were located in the cottage, Ebenezer remaining on his own premises, with some friends, to guard what remained. John Broadbent came home soon afterwards, and the villagers returned to their different places of abode, all but a few, who kept watch, lest any fresh outbreak of fire should occur, so that when the sun rose, all was again tolerably quiet. It was found that James Miller was not much burned, though he was suffering from the effects of the smoke he had inhaled; and the doctor said he must not be moved at present from the house of the neighbour where he had been at first taken.

A severe pain in his right hand and arm reminded John, when the excitement was over, that he had not

escaped without hurt; and his hair presented a sad appearance—his thick rich locks being burned away almost entirely. For two months afterwards he felt the effects of the fire, and the scars remained upon his arm through life; but they were honourable scars of which he had no reason to feel ashamed—more honourable than those gained in the heat and smoke of battle, that the world so much delights to laud.

But how had it all occurred? How was it that the cottage had been set on fire? Rumours varied for a while. It was accident; it had been set on fire by malicious persons; it was done by a mouse carrying a lucifer match into a hole too near the thatch; Mrs. Jones herself had done it, by setting clothes to dry too near the fire; James Miller had done it by smoking in bed. The real truth of the case was for some time unknown. Circumstantial evidence revealed it at first, and confession made all clear. James Miller had retired to his room early, as we said, and to a dangerous companion. The bottle he had shut up, and locked so carefully in his box, was a bottle of gin, and when he had gone to rest, as it was supposed, he indulged himself with drinking part of its contents. It was a great enjoyment, one for which he had been longing some time, and he made the most of it. When almost senseless, he threw himself, dressed as he was, upon the bed, leaving a lighted candle close to his open box of clothes. Some spark from the candle, it was supposed, must have fallen upon the linen. It smouldered, no doubt, for a while, and then burst into a blaze; but James was too heavily asleep to know anything about it, and even after the bed and roof had caught fire, was insensible

to his danger. When Ebenezer awoke him with great difficulty, his senses were still too much obscured to be of real service to him; he refused to follow him downstairs, and in the meantime, while those below were calling for him, the stairs caught fire. At length he was awake to his danger, but it was too late—the smoke overpowered him, and he sank down upon the landing to perish, had not John Broadbent, at the risk of his own life, entered by the window and rescued him.

John visited him the next day. His own arm was in a sling, and a black mark upon his temple showed traces of the fire. James was dressed, and sitting below stairs, his elbows on the table, resting his head in his hands when his friend entered. He lifted his head as he heard some one approaching; his face was very pale, and he became so ghastly, and trembled so much, that John, in a few minutes, finding him quite unable to talk, retired, nor did he attempt to see him again.

In a few days, however, James was better, and himself called upon John. By this time it was known how the fire had occurred, and the village was loud and deep in its condemnation of the "gin-drinking, good-for-nothing shoemaker," and those who took many a sly drop themselves were loud and condemnatory as the rest—perhaps a little more so.

John Broadbent was lying on the sofa. A slow fever had attacked him, the result of his burns; his face was pale, and it was apparent that he was suffering. James threw himself on his knees before him. "Oh! Mr. Broadbent, I'm not fit you should ever speak to me again, but I cannot help coming, to ask you to forgive

me—then I will go away, and you shall never be troubled with me any more."

"No, Miller, that will never do. I cannot spare you. Rise up, my man, why do you kneel to me? Kneel to God, and thank him for sparing your life."

"I do; I do; though I don't deserve to have it spared. And it was you that saved me, too. I should have been a dead man if it hadn't been for you." He rose up slowly, and took John's left hand, the other was bound up. "Tell me how I can serve you; how I can prove my gratitude; how I can repay you in any way for what you have suffered, for what you still suffer, then I can consent to live."

"I will tell you," said John, solemnly. "There is only one way by which you can repay me. Promise me faithfully, before God, that while you live, you will never again taste intoxicating drinks—and keep your promise. Then I shall be abundantly repaid."

The tears rose in James's eyes, as he said, fervently and slowly, "I promise before God!"

"Amen!" added John, with a full heart. "Now sit down and tell me how it all occurred."

James made a full confession—he did not strive to hide his guilt in the least, he even seemed, in the excess of his contrition, to wish to throw every possible blame upon himself.

But he was terribly agitated and dejected, as indeed he might well be. How could he ever make good again the damage and loss he had caused? One thing seemed clear to him, and he repeated it frequently, that he must leave St. Wilfrid's, for how could he bear to meet those he had so deeply injured?

"Will that make the injury less? It seems to me that it will increase it. Besides, it is cowardly to run away from the punishment that is so much your due: bear it and make the best of it. If you cannot rebuild your friends' houses, or refurnish them, you can surely do something, if ever so little, to assist. You can sell the produce of your garden for their benefit, and though Mrs. Jones may most likely hesitate to live with you again, you owe her at least all you can spare from your own maintenance, and every kind attention you can bestow. By going away you make much of this impossible. Show yourself a man at last! You have never yet had any one dependent on you. Begin a fresh life from to-day, and live not only for yourself but for others. You owe a serious debt, more than you can ever fully repay, but be determined to pay what you can and redeem your character."

This was the advice his friend gave him. He listened humbly, he promised to do his best, and he left the house with a less heavy step than when he entered it. Sad as life was become, there was still much left to live for, and the necessity for exertion was strong upon him; his tools, his clothes, all his worldly possessions, had been destroyed; he must work to regain them, to get his daily bread, to help those he had so seriously injured.

Money was collected for the benefit of the widow, and in a short time she was placed in a small cottage that had long stood empty, but was now repaired for her use, with a new stock of goods about her, and James once more went to reside with her. When she knew he had taken the pledge she was afraid of him

no more, and two years' companionship in the same house had given to her lonely heart a sort of motherly affection for him. "Somehow she didn't like to part wi' him," was her speech to Clara, and Clara gladly encouraged the kindly feeling.

Ebenezer Plowden's house was soon rebuilt. With his usual vigour the basket-maker set about clearing away the rubbish, and with John and Mary's help drew out on paper a plan for a new and better building. He had been wise enough to insure, so that he had but little loss, and indeed the loss in the end brought a positive enjoyment to him. To watch the progress of the new house, pipe in mouth, in the ripe autumn evenings, to contemplate the satisfactory appearance of the "front elevation," and reckon the number of days that would clapse before it could be roofed in, was a great delight. He was something of a trouble to the workmen—he would allow no Saint Mondays or idle hours, and no surreptitious cans of ale to be brought in while they should be at work. "It should be raised by teetotalism," he said, "as the last was burned down by gin;" for he had been sensible enough to see the advantages of strict temperance for many years, and now more than ever was he earnest in publishing his opinion of the folly and wrong entailed by drink.

One morning as John passed, he found him busy dealing out steaming coffee at eleven o'clock to the men, and preaching the while to them in rather a loud voice on the disadvantages of intemperance. His pipe lay in a corner ready at hand, when it should next be wanted. It was seldom far away from Ebenezer.

"If vou men had half sense, you'd never drink again

for your own sakes, let alone your wives and children. It is a nasty, dirty, degrading habit, that of swilling down ale; makes you fools one-half your time, and knaves the other half; for when you should be at work, instead of doing the best you can for your master, which is your bounden duty, you're only thinking how much drink you can crib from them at home out of your wages! Aye, drink that coffee now, and tell me if it isn't as good as ale! Which of you says it isn't?" "I do, mester," replied Sandy Peach, a long red-nosed bricklayer, who was reckoned very quick and clever at work, but a great drunkard. "You do, do you?" Sandy laughed; he rather enjoyed what he called "setting the old fellow's monkey up," for there was ever a feud going on between Sandy and "the mester."

"Good morning, Mr. Broadbent; a fine morning, sir," and Ebenezer touched his hat;—returning then to the fight with Sandy, "You do, do you?" and there was some contempt in the tone of his voice; "well, I'm not surprised at you, for you've lost the good wholesome nateral taste your Maker gave you long ago, and you're no judge therefore; but any man in his right senses would say different—would say that coffee's a better drink than ale—better for the head, and the stomach, and the purse. Do you think if I'd gone tippling in your public-houses in my young days, and now, that I should ever have possessed a house of my own, or had the good sense to insure it, so that when the fire came I'd no need to pipe my eye, but only to send for a lot of chaps like you to put it up again for me? Don't you think I'm a good deal happier this day than I should have been if I'd done like you fellows, and spent most

of my earnings at the public? I was but a poor basket-weaver when I was a young man, with not a ha'penny to bless myself with but what I earned, and with less wages than many of you get; but I've taken better care of them than to throw them all down my throat, and that puts me in mind that the Scripture says, 'Cast thy bread upon the waters, and it shall be seen after many days;' but it never says, 'Cast thy bread, that's thy money, you understand, upon the ale,' for then you'd never see it again at all!"

John, who still stood by, could not help smiling at this new and perhaps not very allowable use of the text; and Sandy Pearce, who rightly judged that the greater part of this exordium was intended for him, and who was reckoned rather "'cute" by some of his compeers, replied drily to the latter end of the speech, "And it doesn't say, either, 'Cast thy bread into the baccy-pipe,' does it, mester?"

Ebenezer was nonplussed for the moment at the question. He glanced uneasily down towards the well-beloved "clay idol." But he returned manfully to his argument. "Baccur doesn't make a man tipsy till he doesn't know the gutter from his bed nor the lamp-post from his friend; it doesn't make a man abuse his wife and little ones, nor half-murder them; it doesn't bring up bad passions as you know ale does; and it doesn't call the blue devils about you. No, my boys. If it had done any of these things, I should never stand up for it nor use it."

Sandy finished his cup of coffee as Ebenezer concluded, and, giving his mouth a wipe with the back of his hand, stood looking at the burly basket-maker with

an air of comic defiance. He was bullet-proof against all arguments opposed to the use of his well-beloved alcohol; he rather enjoyed the battle, indeed. It set flowing the quicksilver in his brain, of which quicksilver he had decidedly too much for his own well-being; and it brought the ready, saucy words to his lips, "Baccy's done me quite as much harm as ale ever did, Mester Plowden."

"Prove it, Sandy, and I'll make you a present of my pipe, and you shall break it into as many pieces as you like."

"Thank you! *One* piece will do for me, mester. I wouldn't break it into more on no account whatsomever." The rest of the labourers laughed. "Well," he continued, "I shan't have fur to go to prove it, for it was smoking as first made *me* fond of the ale. Smoking's thirsty work, and water didn't taste right wi' it, so the more baccy I had the more ale I took, that's all about it."

"*I'm* not obliged to drink ale because *I* smoke," retorted Ebenezer.

"No, mester, may be not. But you're an exception, an' exceptions only prove the rule, as fur's I've ever heard. You ask all these chaps if they don't say as I say, that them as smokes has to drink. Here,—Phil, Joe, Jim, what do you say?"

All the men upheld Sandy's theory of smoking.

Ebenezer looked thoughtful. "What do *you* say, Mr. Broadbent?"

"That Sandy's very much in the right. To you it may be no temptation; but to the greater number of men, I believe, it is a serious one. Smoking induces

drinking. The two are not quite like Siamese twins, indivisible; but they are often twins, and go very much together. Aren't they, my men?"

"Aye, aye, sir, sure enough."

Ebenezer went slowly to the corner, where his pipe lay in modest security. He lifted it up tenderly. He looked at it wistfully. If he had been a man given to sighing, he would have sighed. But he held it out firmly, and presented it to John, and resolve was in his eye as he said, "There, sir, take it and break it to atoms! And bear witness for me, that I say I will never smoke tobacco again while I live. Or,—stop,—I promised Sandy he should break it."

But Sandy, who saw there was no hope of saving the victim for himself, signified his wish that Mr. Broadbent should be the officiating priest, and offer the sacrifice.

With a smile, John took the offending piece of clay, and broke it, not to atoms as he was requested, but into sufficiently small pieces, and threw them on the ground. "I am witness," he said in a loud voice.

The men stood staring in some surprise at what must have appeared to them a very strange act.

"Which of you will do the same by your mugs and glasses?" asked Ebenezer, wishful to improve the occasion. "You'll never repent it! Lay by drink, as I've laid by smoking, from this hour. Come, my good fellows; you won't let me be alone, will you?"

After a little hesitation one man came forward, and said he didn't mind promising; he'd long thought it would be best to give it up. "I've no glass to break," he continued, "but one in my mind's eye, an' it's been

a very deep, big 'un, an' 'll take some breaking. But here it goes!" And he lifted his hands in the attitude of throwing away.

Ebenezer shouted, "That's right, that's right!" and enthusiastic, mercurial Sandy patted him on the back. "Brayvo! old fellow! Brayvo! Phil!" Phil took him by the hand, and said in a beseeching tone, "Join me, Sandy. You'll always be glad of it." "Not I," replied the incorrigible Sandy. "What's the use? I couldn't keep to it if I did."—A momentary solemnity came over his mobile features. "I only wish I could, old fellow; it 'ud be the better for me." And then the old careless smile resumed its place. No more proselytes followed Phil's example, and all were soon again at work—perhaps, however, to think seriously on the advisability of eschewing ale for coffee. At all events, let us hope so.

CHAPTER XV.

CHANGES AND SECRETS.

With the bride and bridegroom at Trentham, all settled down very much as is usual with such interesting personages for the time being. The new minister's home was still necessarily in the town, for Stephen must be near his people, ready to be consulted, to be seen and called for in emergency. A minister's work is generally of more importance out of the pulpit than in, and in the week-day he has many engagements. Meetings of

the church, Bible-meetings, prayer-meetings, classes for young men and women, and one week-evening service, at least, take up much of his time. It is only astonishing that he can visit at all, when he has so many calls upon his exertions, and yet, as we have seen before, visiting was considered one of the minister's duties. Stephen had hitherto done as little of this as was possible, restricting it, wherever he could, to visits to the sick and poor. Now he was married, however, the supposed duty could no longer be avoided, at least not for a time, and visits to one house after another, belonging to his numerous and wealthy congregation, were considered perfectly indispensable. The bride bore her part in it womanfully, if we may use the term, and for awhile, when the first shyness belonging to her position was overcome, she enjoyed the excitement. She was loving wife enough to be proud of her husband, and of the praises overt or implied that were so liberally given him.

But Jane, though so young and inexperienced, and well pleased at first with the outside enjoyments of her lot, was not satisfied to remain absorbed in them. She had upon her a strong sense of the importance of the sphere into which her husband had introduced her, and though entering it with some trembling, remembering her own deficiencies and liability to errors, she accepted her place in it with satisfaction. Was it not an honourable, holy calling? She thanked God for it daily, with a tender thankful heart, and long and ardently did she pray that she might be no stumbling-block in the way of so good, so exalted, so all-perfect a character, as her husband appeared to her in their first married days.

They were indeed smiling, hopeful days, perhaps almost more so than fall to the lot of most young brides, for two worlds seemed to her to smile upon their union—the earthly and the heavenly. Her parents, thoroughly satisfied and content, looked upon their youngest daughter's settlement in life as all that could be desired, and no misgivings or dull doubt-clouds of any kind came across them as to the happiness of her future. The "church" accepted her cordially and lovingly at once, as the wife of their honoured pastor, and the daughter of their wealthiest and most influential, if not most respected deacon; and were ready to look favourably upon all that she said or did. And the consciousness of God's protecting loving guidance, the perfect confidence she felt in her husband, made her new duties appear no burden.

John and Clara visited the new-married couple. They found them located in a well-furnished, handsome house in the Park, the "west-end" of Trentham, with an abundance of this life's good about them. Their abode seemed one of "music and light," and the view from the lofty windows was one of the finest that Trentham could produce; the broad extent of the Park, a plateau of undulating green, overlooking the Trent-valley far below, with its winding river and trees and villages, and its blue-gray distance softening into the horizon tints of the sky. Stephen showed his friends the view with some pleasure.

"*Our home!*" said Clara with a smile, and a tender light in her eyes, as she looked down at St. Wilfrid's, seated among the shadow of its trees on the banks of the shining Trent, and more beautiful to her than even

the butomus then so richly in flower on the rushy borders of the river.

"Is that your home?" asked Jane interested, endeavouring to distinguish the dark mass of the church tower. "I shall like to look at it for your sake. But are you not damp by the river?"

"Not at all, though we look so low to eyes up here," replied John, anxious for the honour of his favourite St. Wilfrid's. "You overlook us entirely, but I do not think you are much nearer heaven." This last speech was addressed to Stephen, who made answer by a smile, and a roguish "Possibly not, though we shall be obliged to call you our *low-lived* friends!"

Clara was much pleased with Jane. A sisterly feeling sprang up in her heart for her, and Jane on her part admired the calm grace of her visitor, and felt inclined to love the pleasant, affectionate glance of her eyes. "We must know more of each other," she said, as she clasped Clara's hand at parting, "for you will come again? And I shall be sure to visit you!"

And thus a new link united the two houses speedily, and across the ferry friends came and went from either side, and the golden autumn days became still richer from their mutual enjoyment. The joy was the more perfect, because for these friends three worlds met and embraced—the religious, the intellectual, and the physical. Winter, however, brought a temporary cessation of these pleasures, and in the spring new duties commenced. Jane promised to become a mother, and her father suffered from an attack resembling apoplexy. The doctors feared it might presage it indeed, and recommended spare diet and less wine.

John and Clara too had other duties. Books that John had written began to attract attention in other countries, and a call to Germany came for him. Clara accompanied him, with the hope and expectation that in a year or less they should be able to return to their quiet nest. But the year became two, and in the meantime changes had taken place, that they could note and appreciate among the friends they had left behind.

Clara had received letters from Jane during her stay abroad, acquainting her with some of these changes. Her letters had not been so cheerful of late; but Clara did not wonder at this. Her father had died very suddenly. The "less wine" order was not effectual to restore health. It came much too late, and his plethoric habit of body could not be reduced quickly enough. "No wine at all" might possibly have saved him—with consistent diet; but the family surgeon and the two physicians who attended him, did not dare to give so stringent a command, or did not know its necessity. Mrs. Gresham was still residing at Swansford; but was lonely amid all her riches, her eldest daughter Charlotte having married a retired merchant, whose home was some miles away. Jane was therefore frequently required at Swansford to relieve the tedium of her mother's solitude, and went over to spend every spare evening she could command from more pressing duties. These were not small or slight; for she had now a baby, a boy of some eighteen months, whose delicate health called forth her motherly solicitude; and the needful attention she had to bestow upon him, sadly interfered with the time she wished to give to her husband individually.

At the first meeting of the long-parted friends, Jane's eyes looked sweet and good as ever, though there was a shade of care came across them at intervals, even in that short morning call. She looked almost as young and well as before, however, apart from the paleness that mourning confers upon fair complexions. Stephen was more altered in outward appearance. He had grown stouter, and the hair that used to be so abundant grew thinly upon the top of his head—indeed there was a bald spot that no dexterous brushing or combing could quite conceal. There was a restless glance in his eyes, and an increased fulness of the lower lip; but his manner was friendly and courteous; and if he did not shake John's hand with the old cordiality, still there was no real or apparent coldness to complain of.

He inquired after Germany and German friends, of whom he had several that were mutual acquaintances; and then said, with a sigh, how much he should like to rest a while from his numerous duties and engagements. "I find," he said, "my pulpit duties press upon me as they never did before," and he put his hand to his head in a weary way. "The constant strain for the fresh sermon every Sabbath is very trying; for I need not tell you that ordinary fare does not suit my congregation," and a faint smile came to his pale feverish-looking lips.

"It must indeed be a great strain," answered John, sympathetically. "But why not give them something simpler? Nothing that you could say would be trite and meaningless, and the plain brown bread might occasionally taste sweeter than spiced cake."

"So they tell me sometimes. But if the wheat is

failing, how am I to give them either cake or brown bread? I sometimes fear"—and he passed his hand over his brow again, while Jane regarded him anxiously —"that my brain will fail me."

John and Clara looked shocked and alarmed. "Why not send for advice at once?—Or if you think that is what you require, why not take a year's holiday, and travel abroad?" asked John.

"No," he replied in a hopeless manner. "I have had advice; but the doctors do me no good. And I do not know really that it is a holiday I want."

"It might be just the thing for you," said Clara, earnestly. "You are depressed now, and cannot imagine anything will do you good; but once get away, and breathe the fresh clear air of the Continent, and your hypochondriacal fancies will fly away."

"I wish you could persuade him! I am sure he needs rest and an entire change," was the young wife's remark.

But he still said, "No," and changed the subject.

The baby was brought in, and duly nursed and kissed, and presently highly delighted with some Swiss toys "aunt Clara" brought him in her pocket and reticule. John and Stephen walked round the garden, that was laid out in terraces and slopes in front of the house, while the two ladies had their own talk in the green-curtained drawing-room. There was much to say on both sides. The death of Mr. Gresham and the lonely life of Jane's mother came first; and then more cheerful subjects—motherly cares and pleasures, the good a minister's wife might do amongst the poor, Jane's evening school for young girls, her Bible-class, her

Sunday-school class—all of which Clara heard about with great interest. Her turn came next, to relate some of her more striking travelling experiences, the success of John's last book, and their future prospects. "We shall live, I expect, at St. Wilfrid's for some time again. The dear old cottage is to let once more; so that we shall have the pleasure of being near you, and hearing all about you at once, without the necessity for those tedious but delightful letters," was her concluding speech.

Jane's eyes glistened with pleasure at the thought. But quickly a dim cloud found its way beneath her long eyelashes. "We shall need you, dear, oh, so much! I know we shall, and God has sent you back for that!"

"You do not anticipate any misfortune?" asked Clara, concerned at her manner.

"I ought not; but sometimes a very sad thought comes over me. And yet I cannot tell it you at present. However"—and she lifted her head from its mournful gaze at the baby on her knee—"I may be mistaken. Brighter days will come. Isn't it *that* you wish me to say? And God knows how it all is." Clara could ask no more questions; but she was glad to see her look more cheerful again. Presently, as she took her over the house, to show her the alterations that had been made in several rooms—the nursery and its pretty little swing-cot, "a present from poor dear papa;" and her collection of baby's hoods and dresses; detailing which amongst the magnificent store had been embroidered, and made up, and presented to her, by the ladies of the congregation, and which she had worked

herself, &c. A collector amongst his gems and curiosities could not have displayed his favourites with more zest. And baby, as he looked down upon them also, snatching at first one and then another with his fat tiny hands, evidently thought with mamma and her guest that they were all very beautiful.

On their return to the drawing-room, Jane opened the piano, and solicited a song, or at least a little music. Clara sat down and played a symphony of Beethoven's —an old friend of hers, that had cheered many a lonely moment in the foreign land, and played it with pathos and sweetness; her touch was like her voice, both sweet and strong, and she had too much feeling for the music to obtrude its execution. It was not the *instrument* that spoke so much as the soul. When she had finished, she found the number of her auditory increased—John and Stephen had entered unperceived by her. Upon John's face she saw still shining that which the music had awoke within him—a something inexpressibly grand and solemn and sweet; but over Stephen's brow a cloud still rested. Even Beethoven could not lift it.

Mary Plowden was delighted to regain her friends. Ebenezer's new house they found lightsome and cheerful-looking, with its taller windows and improved elevation. It was now, and had been some time, thoroughly finished and refurnished. Still it was only a cottage, and had no higher pretensions, for Ebenezer hated what he called finery. A "studdio" had not been forgotten—a real one, and not a parlour, or yet an attic with an imperfect light, but a room entirely dedicated to the works finished and unfinished of the

artist for whom it was built. It had a window facing the north, "the right studdio light, you see, sir," said Ebenezer, as he accompanied John and Clara and Mary up-stairs to see it. Mary drew back a little as the others entered. To their amaze the walls were already nearly covered; works of art of alarming size and colour once more decorated the basket-weaver's home. A survey was taken pretty leisurely. "And now," said John with a smile, addressing Mary, "you must have a phœnix painted over your door, with a proper motto, for certainly from the ashes of the old these new ones have arisen. I only wish they had been less like the originals—we want a fresh inspiration here;—but I remembered you when we were away, and have brought one with me." He produced a large parcel he had hitherto held under one arm, and revealed a beautiful painting, which he placed upon Mary's easel. It was a skilful copy of Ary Scheffer's "St. Augustine and his Mother." Mary uttered a cry of joy. "O my dream!" she exclaimed, and then a moment after, drawing a long breath, "How beautiful! and this is for me?" "For you,—on one condition, that you study it, and endeavour to find out the difference, the essential difference, between this painting and yours. I don't mean as regards colour and drawing merely, for of course you see at once how superior this is in both respects to yours. When you have studied it really, perhaps you will be ready to make a new beginning, and put some of these away."

"I will put them *all* away at once!"

"No; not till you really feel they should be hidden. Better let them stay till you have found out the differ-

ence, the whole difference, between this and them, though that is too much to expect, perhaps."

Ebenezer Plowden's brow cleared up a little. We have said he hated finery, but we find we must make one reservation. Mary's pictures he admired from his heart, and they were fine enough. He had stared disrespectfully at the small painting just introduced, small in comparison with the gigantic labours around, and he now sniffed a dissatisfied opinion. To his eyes it was far inferior to any of Mary's, so colourless and insignificant, and wanting in effect. Bold untamed reds and blues, in violent contrast, and in considerable masses, were alone worthy to be called colour. It was absurd to suppose that Mary's clever eyes and hands needed to be taught anything more, and from such a poor bit of a thing as that! Mr. Broadbent, we fear, sank in Ebenezer's estimation very much. "Hadn't the rector said that Mary's pictures were very clever? and didn't almost every visitor who came to see them say the same? Mr. Broadbent had been so long among them furreners, poor ignorant creatures, till he didn't know a good thing when he saw it!" This was his final conclusion; and he looked with a feeling of pity upon the bold critic. "And that they should be taken away? these great beauties for that poor pale-faced thing?"—Mary continued looking at the pale rapt face of St. Monica, with those deep heavenly meanings in her tender eyes that you feel have wept many tears, but never impatient ones, till her own were full of blinding mist. Then she turned to her father, "Is it not very beautiful, father?"

Ebenezer could not understand her emotion. "It may be all very grand, my dear,"—he conceded this to

his daughter's weakness, "but to my eyes yours are much better. There's no colour about it, and I can't tell what the man and woman are looking at, for my part!"

Mary turned disappointed away. She and her father had hitherto thought alike on matters of art; now she had leapt suddenly out of his sphere, and must go on her way alone. With a sigh she accepted the lonely gift, and with a great rejoicing also. When a new sense is opened we cannot but be glad, though all around us may be mocking and incredulous at what to them is an unknown or unvalued possession.

James Miller was waiting for them at the lodgings they had taken till the old cottage could be ready for them. They were much struck with his altered appearance. He looked much older—but this was an improvement rather than otherwise, as formerly a certain want of decision and thought was apparent in the expression of his face. Now both were to be seen, and they conferred upon him an air of manliness and resolution. He was, too, more refined in his manners, and his dress was improved. There was a very warm hand-shaking. "This is a happy day, indeed! How glad I am you are returned."

"And I am very glad to find you here still, and in so honourable a position. Let me congratulate you!" said John heartily.

Let not my readers suppose that any sudden windfall of wealth or what are called honours had fallen upon the village shoemaker by this observation of John's. To be honest, and industrious, and sober, are honourable attributes, and to these I think we shall find he referred.

The colour mounted into James's dark brow. "It is all owing to you, sir! But I am so attached to St. Wilfrid's now that I don't think I could ever leave it."

"And you are quite a large gardener now, I understand?"

"Yes, I have this week given up shoemaking entirely. I have nearly an acre laid down in strawberries, and have just taken the nursery gardens close by."

"Capital! I wish you every success. What does your father say to it?"

James smiled. "He was here the other day, sir, looking over the grounds with me. He is very well satisfied, I believe."

"And you work very hard now, I hear.—Indeed, you must, or you could not have got on so well in this short time."

"I am always up before six, frequently at four and five, and on Saturdays I attend market."

"Early to bed and early to rise. Yes, yes, you deserve your good fortune. You will let me see your new home, James?"

"If you please, sir. And—I have brought you these, if you will please to accept them." He opened a basket that stood beside him, and showed some splendid peaches and grapes, the first-fruits of the season. John lifted them out admiringly. "Accept them? Yes, indeed! How could I refuse? Did you ever see finer, Clara? They are splendid—much too good to be said 'no' to. Thank you, my dear fellow. You could not have brought me a better present."

James stayed a short time longer, talking of the

widow Jones, who was now his lodger, or rather housekeeper, keeping house for him in the larger cottage he had taken, and of the three men he employed in his gardens and strawberry ground. May we tell a little secret here, which is, that James could not have got on so rapidly—not even with teetotalism, and early rising, and industry combined—if a little money, by the help of which he was enabled to make the first advantageous start in the world, had not been lent him by a kind friend, who was so like John Broadbent that we might almost say it was himself, did we not fear our secret would be made known and might reach his ears? But if he had not been a teetotaller this money most certainly would not have been forthcoming, for who could trust a drunkard, or one who might become so any day? Another secret remains. Must we unfold it at present? We think not; we will be silent about this secret for the present, for neither John or Clara Broadbent are as yet acquainted with it.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LETTER FROM THE DEAD.

It is three years since we left Veronica and her father—an important three years for both. Veronica had unfolded from a girl to a woman, tall and slight, with the same large blue eyes that had first, when a baby, led her father to give her the name she bore; but they were now much more beautiful than then, as it is right

the perfected flower should be than the bud, however lovely. Poverty still clung round the blind man and his daughter, though honest labour had always hitherto been sufficient for their wants. Basket-weaving and lace-mending—these were the arts that supplied the daily bread and the necessaries of life; and they had been diligently pursued. Veronica had lately obtained work direct from the warehouses, and this had been a great help, for she now gained much more remuneration for her labour than before; and the young girl was able to make some little improvement in her scanty wardrobe, and "to seem more like the rest of the world," to use her own expression. With the hopefulness belonging to her time of life she had just begun to anticipate a somewhat easier life. Ebenezer Plowden, who now bought her father's baskets, paid him better than his late employer, and the little room in which they lived had a more cheerful and better furnished look than of old. She almost felt they were getting rich, as she looked round on her father's newly-covered chair, on a small square of carpet at the hearth, on a new shiny tea-tray, and on the pots of flowering geraniums in the windows; and her voice was heard singing about the small room, in rivalry with that of the pet canary that had been given her, which hung in a cage near the window. Dicky had neither a splendid prospect outside or inside—very differently situated in that respect from the aristocratic birds we saw at Swansford. A narrow dingy street, and a small, poorly-furnished apartment, were all the glimpses into paradise he ever obtained; but he evidently made paradise of them, and sang, and carolled, and flirted his wings as merrily as

did those in gilded cages and varnished drawing-rooms. A few seeds, a little water, a bunch of groundsel or plantain, or a tuft of grass—these were his necessaries and luxuries, his lawns, his groves, his fountains, or rather were in place of these delights, and he was satisfied. Like Veronica, he had never known other and more exciting joys than were to be found in this confined town-world of his; and his song was full of joy as hers.

But for the last week the song had been mute on Veronica's lips, and Dicky had been fain to follow suit; he took his moods very much from his young mistress. Mark Lee had been taken seriously ill; suddenly the powers of life were failing him. A stroke of paralysis had seized him one night on getting into bed, and he was now, the doctor said, without hope of recovery. Mournful news, indeed, for poor Veronica. A foretaste of the loneliness, the bitterness of this great seething world was already stealing to her lips. When her father should be gone, what was there left for her?—What friend, what lover, male or female, on this wide earth? An orphan indeed, she would be left to wander through long, weary years, with no one left to guide, and console, and shield. As she sat by the side of the dying father's bed while he slept, these thoughts came across her at intervals, filling up the mournful moments sadly enough. He, too, seemed to be remembering this; for, when awake and conscious, he would lie with his face turned towards hers with an anxious expression not to be described, and the tears would roll down his cheeks slowly. Then he would say, "Veronica, come closer; let me feel your hand, dear;" and she would clasp

his hand, that looked so pale and thin on the sheet and was so all but powerless, and sit thus for half-an-hour or an hour at a time. "It is hard, very hard," he would murmur; "but what can I do?" And then suddenly, "You have that paper, Veronica? Promise me again you will go." And she would say, "It is quite safe, dear father, and I will go." The paper was a letter written by him, and the promise Veronica had made was, that when her father was dead, she would take it and deliver it with her own hands to the lady it was addressed to, and wait for an answer. "She will surely do something; yes, she will surely do something when I am gone," he would say. He had written the letter some time ago anticipatory of this illness, when brooding over the unprotected, friendless condition in which he should leave his daughter; and he trusted it might reach her heart as well as her hand, and that she might stretch out a kindly, fostering arm over the young destitute girl. He had written it himself, blind as he was, for he could not bear to reveal to Veronica the wrong he had done to her and her mother. "When I am gone," he thought, "she will then discover it; but she will then forgive me, and I shall not have to blush before her." And this poor letter was the sole worldly provision Mark Lee could now make for his only child —he who had once possessed broad estates and thousands of pounds, and who might still have so possessed them but for the enticement of the wine-cup, that had led the way to his ruin.

The days he had lain upon what he felt to be his death-bed had brought still more vividly than ever to his mind the scenes of his past ill-spent life. A book

out of which he was always reading, more or less, was this book of his past life, and very ugly were its pages become to him. But gradually was dawning upon his dark mind a sense of something more than chance, or mere order in the arrangements of this world, both physical and moral, and a faint hope and expectation that in the vast universe was somewhere a creating, controlling God, before whose clear vision all the contradictions and seeming accidents of this life, stand out in order and brightness, and are only as He wills them. And with this idea or sense dawned also a sense of his own weaknesses and sins, and of the purity and holiness of this great controlling God. He saw imperfectly "men as trees walking," as yet; but it was the commencement, let us hope, of a truer, purer vision.

"I have had a dream, Veronica," he said one morning, as she came as usual after breakfast, to sit by his side, and to put her hand in his. "A dream of your mother and your brother. You remember the rose-coloured cloud you once saw over Ike's grave, when you and I were there, that you thought looked like an angel?" Veronica pressed his hand in token of assent. "I saw in my dream last night two such clouds in the sky, that were very beautiful, and that came nearer and nearer as I gazed. Larger and larger, too, they grew; and in a while, one was your mother, and one was Ike. They looked solemnly at me, very solemnly, and a voice seemed to come from them; they didn't speak it, but I heard it. 'Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed!' I was down-hearted at the words, for I had not believed, because I had not seen, and there was no blessing for me. It seemed to over-

whelm me at last, the thought that there was no blessing for *me*. I sank down before those two, and dared not look at them. In a while, when I lifted up my eyes, they were gone, and I awoke. But it is all as clear before me as ever, and the words still sound in my ears. 'Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.' Those words are in the Testament, find them for me, Veronica, and read them."

Veronica found them, and read of Thomas, who could not believe in the risen Saviour, and was convinced, and forgiven, though forgiven with those words of gentle reproof Mark had heard in his dream.

When she had finished, he lay for some time as in thought. He lay so still at last that she supposed he was asleep. But he was only exhausted after his long talk—long for him in his weak state—and was recovering, by perfect rest, a little strength before the final exhaustion, from which there is no rally.

A gentle tap came to the door as he lay thus. Veronica said "Come in," thinking it was Mrs. Christy, the neighbour who helped her to nurse and attend to her father, but there entered an elderly white-haired man instead, of middle height, with fair complexion, and deep gray eyes, whose expression was peculiarly benevolent and penetrating, and attired in black coat, cut square, and collarless, white neckerchief, and broad-brimmed hat, which he pulled off at once, as his foot crossed the threshold, saying, in a deep peculiar voice, "Peace be to this house."

Veronica was awed by the entrance of a stranger with such words upon his lips, and looked at him wonderingly with her large eyes, a gaze which he

returned with a pleasant glance, and words explanatory of his appearance.

"I have come to speak a few words to your father, and to pray beside him, if he will allow me, or is able to attend to me, for I have heard of his state from your neighbour below. I am Jonas White, my dear, the Methodist preacher.—Can he understand me?" and he drew gently near the bed, and looked upon the sick man.

"Thank you!" said Mark Lee, feebly. "Thank you, Mr. White; God has sent you."

"Of that I am assured," answered the white-haired stranger, reverently. He has laid your case on my mind all the night, and obedient to Him I am come to give you his divine message—'Believe, and thou shalt be saved.'"

Heralding his teaching and prayers by these words, the preacher sat by the dying man for half-an-hour, and spoke to him as he was at the time impressed to do. He saw he was exhausted, so praying fervently a short solemn prayer, and commending him to God, he left him early, promising to call again on the morrow.

But before the morrow came, a light had shone on the spirit-eyes of the blind man, that was not of this world, and over his body the partial paralysis of disease had been succeeded by the total one of death. He had now neither hand or ear left for Veronica.

It was a very small, pauper-like funeral. It is true, it might have been otherwise. Young Gresham again made his appearance, with offer of aid to Veronica in the burial; but after thanking him, she refused his money, believing her father would not have wished her

to accept it. Sorrowfully she made a sale of his bed, and arm-chair, and whatever else she could spare, to defray the expense of the coffin and grave, and of a very humble suit of mourning for herself; and then, when all was over, and he was put in the ground with her mother and brother, she took the letter in her hand, read once more its address, and prepared herself for a journey to the place it spoke of. It was to "Mrs. Lee, Brunswick House, Aldborough." Who Mrs. Lee was, she did not know; some relative of her father's, no doubt; perhaps an aunt of hers; a rich lady, she fancied, from the way in which he had spoken of her. But whoever it was, it was her duty to go to her, letter in hand, and she felt no hesitation about it. Aldborough she found was twelve miles away. How was she to get there? It was winter time, and the snow was on the ground; but the morning after the funeral was fine, and she was young and tolerably strong. She had never walked so far as twelve miles in her life before; but she thought she might accomplish it. She would walk, therefore; and by starting early in the morning, she hoped to reach the place before dinner. An hour, she calculated, would be long enough to wait for an answer, then she might return home; perhaps some one would give her a lift in a cart; she had heard of such things; and with two shillings in her pocket, all her present wealth, she could buy food at dinner-time; and the lady might do something for her—make her a present, or ask her to stay with her a few days; who could tell? Her father had evidently expected some benefit would accrue to her from the visit, and it might be so. At the worst, however, it would only be a long walk!

These were her thoughts as she put on her new mourning, and arranged her clothes as neatly as possible. It was necessary she should look tidy and respectable; and though the tears would come while dressing, and made her eyes red, she remembered the fresh morning air would soon blow the redness away. Locking the door of her rooms; alas! they were desolate now; no father was there within to think of or care for! and taking Dick's cage in her hand, she left him and the key with Mrs. Christy.

"I shall be home to-night, perhaps, Mrs. Christy, or perhaps I may stay a day or two, I don't know; but at all events you will hear from me or see me in less than a week." Mrs. Christy knew of the letter, and whither she was bound, and wished her success on her errand.

"Wipe thy tears away, lass," she said kindly, "before thou goes in to the lady; great folk don't like to see 'em."

"That's if I can, Mrs. Christy," replied Veronica. And the tears poured down afresh at the thought.

Why did she look lingeringly at the well-known window ere she turned the corner of the street that would hide it from her? She could surely leave it for a few days without regret. A few days, did we say? Perhaps it would only be one. "Most likely, only one," said Veronica to herself, as she went on, with a sigh. And yet there was at her heart a strange feeling, as if now, for the first time in her life, the anchor-cable had been cut, and the pathless ocean was alone before her.

Brunswick House, Aldborough—how shall we describe it?—was a tall, grand house, among taller trees.

It was grand; but it had been grander years ago—when, in George I.'s time—newly built of brick and stone—it had its first maidenly complexion upon it—pure, clear, white and red. Now, the sun and the wind had faded and dulled it, and had left behind them visible marks, as the sun and wind of many summers and winters will fade and muddy all other clear complexions. Moss had grown between its stones, and among the carved garlands on the flanking urns above the pillars of the entrance gates, and on the scallop-shells and other devices that adorned its front, and moss lay in round little cushions at the widening joints of the great stone steps that led to its wide hall doorways. Ancient yews stood on each side of the long sloping lawn in front, and immense elms shielded it with their high broad shoulders from the cold north and east.

It was an interesting old place. We wish it had had a more interesting and a better inhabitant than was now its mistress. She was elderly and stately and proud; and duly she aired it and herself with guests, and made it as lively as her austere nature permitted it should be; but it was not a gay, merry house, and the "eld" of age and weariness and dulness were all upon it, and were perceptible even from the road, that wound at a respectful distance among the rising ground at its side.

Little did its mistress think—as she sat on the particular morning of which we write, at work, upon a piece of embroidery, representing a doll-like shepherdess amongst her lambs, with a vividly green distance behind her and a very deep blue sky above her—of the visitor who was now on her way, painfully toiling along

the icy roads, where every third step was a retrogression, instead of an advance, and of a certain letter this coming visitor carried in her bosom, from a husband she had tried so much to forget, and wished never again to see, though she was at present quite as ignorant of his death, as she had been for years of his place of abode.

It was a cold day, and the lady was dressed in the warmest and softest of woollens and silks, and had her embroidery-stand placed quite close to the high-piled fire, that filled the wide antique fire-grate, with its comforting blaze. She had no guests in the house at present; but not far from her was a parlour-maid, busy "filling in" a similar piece of embroidery to that upon which she was engaged. The parlour-maid looked timid and unhappy; and as her dexterous fingers carried the worsted or silk out and in, she stole an occasional furtive glance at her mistress, who was now with grim determination planting her needle through and through the eye and cheeks of the rosy-faced sheep maiden. Breakfast had been over about an hour only, for the lady always rose late at this time of the year, when a footman appeared at the door, with the announcement that a young woman wished to see her.

"Who is she?" tartly demanded the lady.

"I don't know, mum. She says she must not give her name till she sees you; she has a letter to deliver, very partikler, she says, mum."

"Has Mrs. Thompson seen her?" Mrs. Thompson was the housekeeper.

"Yes, mum; and can't make nothing out about her at all."

"Send the woman here," said Mrs. Lee, crossly, while

she pushed her embroidery-frame impatiently away, and arranged her spectacles.

In a minute afterwards, Veronica entered the room. She glanced timidly round at the lofty apartment, and at what seemed to her its gorgeous furniture; but she did not curtsey on her entrance, as Mrs. Lee was accustomed to expect all mere "young women" to do. She was tired, and her boots were sodden with the snow; but a deep colour was in her cheeks from her exertion in the fresh air, and her large blue eyes shone brightly, with a subdued radiance however, half timid, half expectant. Mrs. Lee might possibly have been mollified had she taken time to examine her sweet countenance, and note its expression; but she only saw before her a young girl in scanty raiment, "poor, flimsy, housemaid-sort of mourning," she would have called it, who had not curtseyed to her; and she asked, angrily, "What's your will, young woman?"

"May I speak to you alone, ma'am?" asked Veronica, with a slight tremble in her voice, she could not quite control.

"What do you mean?" said the lady haughtily; and then, bethinking herself, "Gardner, you may go to the next room!" Gardner, the parlour-maid, was glad enough to get away from her mistress's presence generally, but she was just now rather curious to see a little more of the pretty girl who had come with so mysterious a communication; however, she dared do no other than obey at once, and vanished behind a side-door opening into a closet, called her work-room.

When the maid was gone, Veronica came a few steps forward with the letter in her hand.

"My father is dead, ma'am," was her not very luminous introduction to her mission, "but he made me promise to deliver this letter to you, yourself, and to let no one else see it but you."

"Some begging letter," thought the lady, and did not deign to inquire who the "father" was. She took the letter from Veronica with an air of scorn. "Really, young woman," was her observation, "your forwardness is beyond conception! Why could you not have delivered this to Thompson in the proper way?" And she handled it as if she thought some plague might be hidden in its folds. "Where do you come from, pray?"

"From Trentham, ma'am! My father was Mark Lee, who said you knew him well, and would read that letter at once. I should not have brought it you but for his wish." Veronica regained confidence under the lady's scornful words.

"Mark Lee! Mark Lee!" repeated the lady. "What Mark Lee?" And then added severely, "I'll have you taken up for an impostor, if you don't mind what you're saying."

"I am no impostor, ma'am! I am his daughter, his only child living; he was blind, and a basket-weaver, and was buried only yesterday! Surely, ma'am, you know who he is!"

The lady opened the letter with an air of disgust. "Why did such low people trouble her?" It was written very indistinctly, words here and there only half formed and the lines sadly interfering with one another. She had to read again and again to make sense of the words. Still, as she read, she understood so far that it was indeed from her husband, and was asking for

pardon for himself, and for protection and assistance for his daughter, "his dear Veronica." It prayed for forgiveness, humbly, and especially forgiveness for the last sin committed against her, his marriage with another, but "trusting to her womanly nature, to her charity, to her memory of the days when she had loved him, he had faith to think, to hope, to believe she would take his only child to her bosom, and provide for her." It was a forlorn hope truly, and perhaps only a man like Mark Lee, cut off for years from communication with his fellows, blind and poor and sick, would have dreamt for a moment that such a letter would reach the hard heart of the woman he had so wronged, or that if it did, the result would have been desirable for Veronica. In finding her a home, he might only have provided her with a prison, and with a tyrant for a jailer.

Veronica, as we see, did not know the contents of the letter, or what it asked for her. She remained standing near the bilious-looking, repulsive face of the so-called lady before her, whose "charity" had not yet led her to provide her with a seat. She saw there was no gracious look or word to be expected from that face, and now, weary as she felt, all she desired was that she might go away at once to some poor cottage, where she could buy bread and get an hour's rest before she must return to Trentham.

The lady was shocked by the letter. It came upon her at last as a thunderclap. "When you receive this, I shall be under the mould," it began. "Was then that hated husband dead? The man she had vowed never to forgive gone at last? Was she really free?" Her

heart did give a throb at this thought, a throb of rejoicing, such as she could feel.—But this daughter! That he should have dared to give her name to another woman! (Strange, though she had no love, she could feel jealousy, and of the sharpest, bitterest sort!) Some low creature, no doubt! Out of the streets, most likely! and to beget children, chits like this before her, who perhaps had the presumption to take the name of Lee also. No, this was an only child.—There were no more. So much the better then. But what was this one to her? It was profound, unmitigated impudence in that man, impudence that she had not expected even he possessed, to send to her house such a child of shame. "Take her to her bosom," indeed! A low, bitter laugh escaped her lips as she read this again. Presently she looked up. Veronica had laid her hand upon the back of a chair, to give her a moment's change of posture. Tall for her years, and graceful, with those deep beautiful eyes, and that abundant waved hair flowing in and out in golden curves underneath and from out the crape, her beauty of form the more conspicuous from the fewness of the folds of her scanty drapery, the product of so slender a purse, she might have called forth a momentary admiration and pity even in the selfish woman before her, had she been less proud and less irritated. But to admire a poor girl was inadmissible to her pride, to pity the daughter of "that man," impossible.

She remembered, however, it would be well not to demean herself by angry words. Cold sarcasm was more befitting from one in her station to one so low, and so utterly mean.

"Your father," and she laid stress on the words, "imagined I should forgive and forget all his sins immediately I saw your pink cheeks. He asks me to take you to my house and home, which no doubt you are aware of. If, however, you have had any such expectations, I advise you to give them up at once. Your disreputable origin is enough for me. I will have no bastards in my house." She paused a moment to note the effect of her words, and then waving her hand loftily, added, "Now, you may go!"

Veronica was stunned by such strange words. What did this proud, insulting lady mean? Bastards?—did she talk of bastards to her who was none? Her eyes flashed with sudden fire, and lifting her head proudly (ah, poor Veronica!), replied—"You are no lady, or you would not speak so! I am not the name you say, but as honourable and well-born as yourself, though so poor, ma'am; and you do me wrong to say so, and my father wrong too. I do not know who you are, or why you use such cruel words, but I know you have no right to use them! I am Veronica Lee, and not all the water in the Trent can wash my name away. My mother—"

The lady put up one hand to her ear, with a gesture she would hear no more, and with the other rang the bell. The parlour-maid came back in a trice.

"Show this young woman the hall-door, Gardner, immediately."

"You *shall* hear me to the end, ma'am!" said Veronica, passionately. "I am here, and will speak my mind. You have insulted me without a cause; you have been proud and haughty, and insulted my father's name also,

and let me tell you once more, that my mother, Jessy Lee, was as good and honest a wife and mother as ever you may have been, and perhaps a good deal more so!"

She had fired her ineffectual gun, and at once retired, following the maid with quick excited steps, and flushed cheeks, to the hall-door. It opened, and let in upon her the cold raw air of January. Snow was beginning to fall in small infrequent flakes at present, but the sky was gray and lowering; the fine morning had been deceitful, as are so many other fine mornings, both of nature and life.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SNOW-STORM.

THE parlour-maid bid her good morning with indifference. She had sorrows and troubles of her own, and of course knew little or nothing of those of Veronica, who was in her eyes merely a good-looking young woman, with uppish airs, who had managed in five minutes to make her mistress "awful savage;" a thing, by the way, not uncommon for the parlour-maid herself to do in less time. But then, some people's tempers are like bottled ginger-beer—you have but to touch the cork, and out they fly at once.

The door was closed behind her, the great heavy oaken door, that had let out and in generations of happy and unhappy ones, of young and old, of living and dead—of those who could move gracefully and joyously

by its massive hinges, full of life and vigour, and of those who went by, oh so passively! on the shoulders of others, heavy and lumpish as clay.

But Véronica was too much absorbed in her own thoughts to notice the young woman's indifference, or to think of the gay or silent ones who might have passed, as she did now, from out the portals of the great old house. She walked on dreamily through the stately avenue leading to the outer gates, her feet leaving tracks on the new-fallen snow, and neither heard the great elms shivering their bare shoulders in the blast above her head, or saw the half-frozen robin who hopped some paces before her, as if to solicit charity. His pitiful look was disregarded; she had no crumbs to bestow, and she was too much herself like the robin at this moment, without food or shelter. But the village was near at hand, and one cottage that had taken her attention in coming, she determined should be the one to apply to, to procure some bread, and half-an-hour's rest.

Aldborough was a very small insignificant place; twenty cottages or so, straggled hither and thither among little plots of garden ground, and a few farmers' houses, contained all its inhabitants. In very old times it had been an important town, but it was now dwindled down to what we see. Every year its inhabitants decreased—the young people going to more flourishing localities for work, and settling there, and the old dying away. The owners of the large estates near did not encourage new buildings, or repair the old that belonged to them; their object was to drive away the whole population in time, for the place was an eyesore

to them, and its pauper population came inconveniently upon the rates. But small and poor as it was, there was a public-house in the village; nay, Veronica even noticed two, as she passed on. She shrank from entering either of these places—for full well she knew they would be no fit resting-places for a wayfarer like herself, alone and friendless. Rude observation, staring, and perhaps insult, from some of the rough men who haunt such places, was what she must expect. As a child, we have seen, she could go for her father on the nightly errand for beer, but still smarted in her memory the rough encounters she had endured, and the scenes of riot she had witnessed on these compulsory visits. A public-house was to her anything but a refuge or a place of entertainment. So, as we have said, she passed them by, with almost a shudder, and made her way to the cottage that stood alone, by the road-side, with a half-open door, and two ruddy children playing in the snow in front.

A woman clothed in blue bedgown and linsey petticoat was at the wash-tub just within, the white suds rising above her red rough elbows, and the steam of the hot water enveloping her face and neck. She lifted up her head at Veronica's approach with surprise. "Who could this strange body be? Some new servant mayhap coming to th' Ha'," as Brunswick House was called by the villagers.

"Could you let me sit down a bit by your fire?" asked Veronica, timidly.

"O aye! miss, sure. Come in!" and she scraped the suds from her dark-skinned arms, and wiped her sodden hands on her apron, to place a chair for the stranger near the chimney-corner.

Veronica thanked her, and sat down, and then, and not till then, did she find how wearied and exhausted she was. She had come away from home with but a slender breakfast, and a sudden faintness and sickness overpowered her for a few moments. The good woman looked at her increasingly pale face with some concern.

"Why, sure; bless my life! Art ter ill?"

"No, no," gasped Veronica; "I shall be better directly, but I believe I'm very tired—" and hungry, she would like to have said, but the words someway would not come.

"Maybe you'd like a bit of summat?" said the woman considerately. "It 'ud do you good, and cheer you up a bit."

And at once she fetched out a loaf and a piece of cheese, and with a knife and plate laid them on the round table near her.

"A cup of water, please," murmured Veronica; and the cup of water was brought, with some apologies that she'd no milk. But the water was more grateful and reviving to the wearied stranger than milk could have been. When the cordial (more worthy of the name than many so called) was drunk, she was better, and could look up and thank her kind entertainer, and begin to eat with good will. The woman looked better satisfied now, and went on with her washing, every now and then asking a question of her guest, to feed a curiosity she saw no harm in gratifying.

"An' how fur may you have walked, miss?" was her first query.

"From Trentham;—twelve miles I think it is," replied Veronica.

"Twelve mile! A longish step for such as you. I reckon you don't often walk twelve mile?"

"No; I never walked so far before."

"H'm! it's a baddish day too for walkin'. An' are you a goin' any furder?"

"No; I'm going back again as soon as I can."

"Back again! to-neet? Nay, that you shanna! an' the snow a fallin' down as it does!"

"O yes, I must though. I shall get on quicker going back; it'll be more downhill."

"But it'll be dark afore you get to Trentham. I reckon you've bin to the Ha' for a place, an' *she* woudna' give it you?"

"No," replied Veronica; "I didn't look out for a place there. I mean," she added, "I didn't ask for service."

"O aye!" doubtfully. "Well, her's a glum 'un, an' no mistake. Her wouldn't give much if her hadn't a mind. An' let me tell you, miss, you wouldn't ha' done for her at all. You're a sight too good-lookin'; she'll ha' none but frouzy things about her; her doesn't like to be outdone, you see;" and the washerwoman laughed merrily. Mrs. Lee was evidently no favourite of hers.

When Veronica had finished her bread and cheese, and felt tolerably rested, she took a shilling and would fain have paid the poor woman for her meal. But she wouldn't hear of it. "Not she; she niver took nout o' that sort. Her husband wor a temperance man, he wor, an' niver went into a public-house from wick's end to wick's end. He wasna so poor as them poor creeturs who stay all the neets a drinkin' an' a fuddlin' at th' 'Unicorn;' an' she'd a bit an' a sup for them as

needed it, and wor none the poorer. You're none too rich, miss," she added, in a gentler voice; "keep your money for summat else;" and she pushed Veronica's hand back towards her pocket, with a smile.

"But dunna go to-neet. You shall have a bit of a shake-down somewhere, if you can put up wi' it, an' to-morrow you'll be fresh-like. It's not fit to go to-neet."

Veronica however would go. She was unwilling to be any further trouble and expense to the good-natured cottager, and she felt so much revived that the walk did not seem to her too formidable. Besides, she longed once more to be at home—the day's excitement and disappointment (for now it was all over, she found she had counted a little on the good offices of her father's friend—*friend?* she recalled the word in a moment, and had been disappointed) seemed too much for her, and a quiet rest in her own little room—her father's room—appeared doubly to be desired.

So she bid good-bye, with many thanks, and started out—the woman looking after her down the road till she was out of sight. "I should like to be a knowin' what that poor young miss is about," she said to herself, "her's a look in her eye as if her'd cry every minnit, that her has. Ah, well! I hope there'll be no more snow. It doesn't come much yet, an' maybe it wunna; but her's a stout 'un to think o' walkin' home to-neet."

The snow did not behave well, and agree with her hope. It came steadily down, and presently faster and thicker, and by the time Veronica was on the high-road, two miles from Aldborough, the fall of snow might be

called a storm. The wind, however, was just now at her back, and helped her on, and the road was for the present a little downhill. It was not quite three o'clock yet, and she was getting on fast, and even after the sun should be set it would not be dark, for there was a young moon, and the snow would make it light. These were the thoughts with which she cheered herself.

But in another hour her steps were slower, and she found herself fighting with the wind that was now in her face—for the road had turned, and with an increase of snow, and a greater increase of weariness. The snow was most troublesome of all, for it came in her eyes, and prevented her seeing clearly the way she took. She was now, too, on that portion of the road that was carried over the great uninclosed lands of an ancient forest, a wide dreary-looking space of uniform appearance, excepting where here and there a drift had accumulated by some hollow, or by a group of tree stumps, and the road was covered and hidden by the falling snow. Not a track was now visible; the further she went on the less did she seem to know her right way, and the more bewildered she became. There was no cottage or farmhouse in sight, no human being, no living creature. What must she do? She stood still a moment to consider, and with a forlorn, half-despairing gaze, surveyed the vast white wilderness. Before, behind, and around her on all sides was one undistinguishable blank of snow—no road, no track, no sun or moon visible to guide, but a gray, uniform, perpetually-moving shower of fast-falling flakes, that above seemed black, and below white. Dazed, confounded, weary, almost hopeless, half-blinded

and utterly bewildered, she again went on, not knowing whither, but with the fast-fading hope that she might happen to be right, or might get in sight of some house or human being. And now she bitterly repented she had not stayed at Aldborough, and thought with dismay, what would become of her if she must pass the night on so bleak a bed. It was getting rapidly darker, there became less and less probability of any one passing, and with the light gradually faded her hope. It would be better, said her wearied limbs at length, to stay and rest at once, to give all up and die, if so it must be, among the snow. And, after a little more weary tramping and struggling, she did so. Sinking beside a drift-heap with a moan of mingled pain and despair, she lay down for the blinding snow to bury her—to die alone. Many thoughts were with her before she became insensible, chiefly of her father—Did he know where she was now? Could he see her situation? or was he in that dim, mysterious, far-away region of the dead, that has no cognizance of earthly weal or woe, no remembrance of the loved and left behind? She thought not, she hoped not, and yet how dark and blank all seemed now that related to him. If he were happy, his happiness took no note of her misery; if he were not—but of this she dared not think.

There was one living Friend who alone could help her, and to him she prayed a few trembling words—to him she lifted up her heart. Then as she lay still a moment, a voice seemed suddenly to sound in her ears, and with distinctness she heard repeated the salutation of the Methodist preacher, "Peace be to this house." Was it a delusion—a memory merely that

was haunting her on this open waste? Or did some voice really utter those words, "Peace be to this house?" Again!—How clear it sounded this time! She lifted her head, expecting to see the face of a deliverer near her; but all was blank and dark, and there was a great silence. It was a delusion, then! She shuddered; a horror fell upon her; God himself seemed absent. For a moment a few whirling thoughts snatched her hither and thither, and then she remembered no more.

But close at hand was deliverance, though she knew it not. A horse and gig were coming slowly along, covered with snow. In the gig an upright form, a sort of snow-mountain of a man, held the reins, and cheered on the horse. Had there been more daylight, and had there been less snow, we should have seen that this man was dark and sinister-looking, while before him and around him sat and clung a distinct shadow. We should perhaps, too, have seen a diamond ring on his finger. Suddenly the horse to whom he had for sometime trusted to discover the way, stopped, stood quite still, and refused all solicitations from the driver to move a step further. The whip and the oath were unavailing to make him proceed, and equally futile were soft and coaxing words. Swearing loudly the traveller dismounted to see what could be amiss, and found what appeared a wreath of snow lying before the horse's feet. Indignant and angry, he kicked the snow away with one foot, but encountered something solid and soft. "Hi! what have we here?" Another and gentler kick revealed a woman's black bonnet, part of a face, and a hand. The mystery was made known: the intelligent horse had refused to step over a human body,

though hidden in the snow, and had thus been the means of discovering the wayfarer. For we need scarcely say it was Veronica, who had lain down here, as she supposed, to die, and who was in this strange manner discovered. A few vigorous pulls released her from the snow. The dark stranger felt if her heart still beat; and finding it did, lifted her in his arms, rolled round her as well as he was able—for she was still senseless —his cloak and plaid, and placed her in the gig beside him.

Then "Hi! ho!" crack went the whip, and the obedient animal now moved willingly forward. He had a double burden up the hills; but his cheerful snort told only of satisfaction at having done his duty.

At a large house on the outskirts of Trentham, the traveller stopped, dismounted, and brought out his burden. Veronica was carried indoors immediately, undressed, and placed carefully in bed by female hands. When she awoke from her stupor, she found herself lying in a lofty bed with handsome curtains, placed in the centre of a large apartment lighted by the blaze of a ruddy fire, and a lady bending over her with a doubtful smile. As Veronica opened her eyes in wonder, the lady said musingly: "She is coming round. We shall see! we shall see!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

JONAS WHITE, THE METHODIST PREACHER.

TRENTHAM possessed many chapels besides the somewhat aristocratic one at which Stephen Morris was minister. Independents, Baptists, and Methodists, with several of the smaller sects, had their distinct places of worship, larger or smaller; and the inhabitants had full opportunity from these numerous streams, to taste and discover that one which best suited their palates, or which best agreed with their ideas of religious truth or church government. Almost from the locality of these various chapels, you could determine the character of the congregation as regarded their position in society; for great is the distinction of rank even among tradespeople and workmen; and though caste has no irreversible laws amongst such constantly fluctuating members, distinctions are drawn and recognized, and maintained, just as jealously as amongst what are called the higher classes.

The several sects of Methodists had each its separate chapel. One of these, standing in what might be called the back of the town, in the thickest of the smoke, and among poor, unevenly paved, overpopulated streets, had the Hebrew name "Bethesda" affixed to it. It was a square gaunt erection, with many windows, and a closely-pared roof,—a roof that gives the same kind of character to a building that a shabby, narrow-brimmed hat does to its wearer. A house at its

side, a sort of diminutive wing, was the "preacher's house," whose unadorned exterior, short white muslin blinds, thoroughly clean but badly painted windows and door, and gardenless front looking on to the street over a few flagstones and iron railings, had an equally cheerless look with the chapel. Within, the chapel was as bare and unadorned as its exterior. A swallow's-nest pulpit, singing gallery immediately below, and a series of high-backed square pews, chiefly without lining or cushions, were the principal furniture of the place. A gallery on three sides, supported by meagre-looking pillars, increased the space for the congregation; and a clock conspicuously placed in front of this gallery, and immediately opposite the preacher, gave him silent notice of the progress of time—a reminder frequently needed, when, warmed up and carried away by the vehemence of his feelings and the importance of that which he was enunciating, he was tempted to exceed the limited hour. For the men who spoke in this place were thoroughly in earnest, "sons of thunder" chiefly, who wielded the spiritual hammer, and smote with the spiritual sword with all their strength, till from the hard hearts about them sparks flew and blood flowed, and sleepy, sense-lost souls woke up in terror. No wonder, if at times, time and all else was forgotten, except the excitement of their mission —the salvation of souls. No wonder if even that clock, large-figured and prominently placed, did not suffice frequently to check the flow of tongues, whose owners, set on fire by the love of God and the love for souls, poured out from the volcano of the heart words of persuasion and melting tenderness—words burning from

the intensity of the passionate heat within.—Still the clock was there and did its duty, telling the hour by its warning hand, and let him who exceeded be satisfied in his own conscience why he did so!

The community who worshipped here were chiefly from the poorer classes—mechanics of the lower grade, and small shopkeepers, with a sprinkling of some who had risen from the same low station, by industry, sobriety, and native talent, to a position of what is styled respectability. Their preachers were men of the same class;—the circuit or itinerant preachers who were set apart for the ministry being those who, possessing the requisite talent and a moderate education, generally gained by their own unaided exertions, were wishful to devote themselves to the work, forsaking all other means of livelihood, and therefore supported entirely by their people; and the "local brethren," who, pursuing their various trades and avocations during the week, with a Bible in their pocket and a small sheet of notes, or sometimes without either, walked every Sunday hither and thither into villages far or near, to preach such sermon as they could, or to hold camp-meetings on moorland and common and road-side. These last formed the unpaid class of preachers, and from their ranks most frequently the circuit preachers were drafted.

It was not certainly with the wisdom of this world, or of the schools, that these men could speak, not with the refinement of the gentleman, or the aptness of the scholar, or the precision of the logician. Their only books of study very frequently had been the Bible and Wesley's *Sermons*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim*, or Doddridge's *Rise and Progress*, and a few similar works; but they were

admirably fitted to speak to the classes who came in Sunday-best to hear them. In fishing for souls, as for fishes, different baits and flies are needed. So these men, full of untaught, uncurbed zeal, praying and preaching with loud stentorian voices, in rough unhewn speech and imperfect grammar, were suited to their hearers far better than if they had come from Oxford or Cambridge, fresh from Greek and Hebrew studies, with the Fathers and fine manners to back them.

They were not steel penknives, and smooth-edged razors, for their work was not to cut quills or hairs; but mallets and pick-axes and hammers, strong hardy iron and oak, having to deal with quartz, and limestone, and grit, fresh from the wild mountains. Amongst them, however, now and then, came spirits of greater gentleness, men who, while touched with the same "hallowed fire," sought to win souls by persuasion and love, by the sweetness and fitness of the gospel, rather than the terrors of the law. Amongst this number was the present inhabitant of the chapel-house, the Rev. Jonas White, or Mr. White, as he was generally called by his people. He was, as we have seen, an elderly man, with white grandfatherly hair lying in thin locks upon his Methodist collarless coat, with a gray keen eye, and a fair wholesome complexion. Elderly as he was, he was still very active, and was to be seen in all parts of Trentham on the week-day, walking along somewhat quickly, in a broad-brimmed Quaker hat, with most generally an umbrella or stick under one arm, and his rather prominent nose lifted up, as though pointing out the way. If met or accosted by any of the "friends," there was a warm grasp of the hand, and a smiling eye turned to

the greeter, at once penetrative and kindly. He had the utmost simplicity of manners, the refinement and gentleness that was in him being genuine and arising from the law of love, and in no way from the law of etiquette. Of conventional societary laws he knew little and cared less. The laws of Christ, as he understood them, were with him paramount and final.

He had only been two years in Trentham, but was already well-known, not only by his own community, but by all others. His congregation knew him for his simple effective sermons, short and racy and sweet, and for the purity and activity of his life: the booksellers knew him, and the printers, for he was constantly having printed and on sale, books and pamphlets of his own writing on various subjects, chiefly sermons however, which he carried about with him in his large coat-pockets, and sold after service-time to his hearers; announcing to them ere they dispersed that he had now by him a number of discourses to young persons, or a memoir of some pious young man or woman, lately deceased, or a book of hymns for revivals, for a small sum of money, and that "Brothers" Saunders, or Smith, or Jones, could also supply them.

The other town-ministers knew him, for at this time were established by some liberal unity-loving Christians, meetings for the various ministers of the evangelical denominations, held each week in their own houses by rotation, at which they could converse on the best means for promoting the spread of religion in the town, and Jonas White was soon an important member at these meetings; he was thoroughly in earnest, and he could work, and no plans were put forward, or schemes pro-

posed, but he was ready if he approved and his approval was by no means hard to gain, to help in the same with heart and soul.

The poor knew him; for he visited their houses daily and nightly, he prayed and exhorted and read with them and to them; he had not much money to give, for a Methodist preacher in those days had but a bare maintenance, but he gave sympathy, good advice, and his prayers, freely and liberally, and frequently parted among them his raiment and his last loaf.

But there was still another class that knew him well—the drunkards,—and with these we may also place the drink-sellers and publicans. Only a year or two before the time of which we are writing he had been in Ireland, and had stood near Father Mathew at Limerick, on that memorable occasion when so many thousands took the pledge of total abstinence. The scenes he saw at that time were not forgotten by him, and from that date the subject of temperance was dear to him. A poor maudlin drunkard tottering along the street, or shouting in wild insanity to passers-by, at once attracted the sympathy of Jonas White, and if it were possible, he would accompany the man home, or discover that home's whereabouts, that he might at a more fitting season visit the man, and endeavour to bring about a reform, by persuasion, by prayer, by entreaties, by any and every means that he had at command, or that he thought right to use. He himself was a rigid abstainer, and had signed the pledge of abstinence, and to these poor men he could say, while he offered them the same teetotal promise, "I also have signed it! Do not be afraid." For at this time considerable ridicule

attached to those who were bold enough, or wise enough, or were possessed of sufficient love to their neighbours, to affix their names to such a document.

His white reverend hairs,—the glow of love from a higher sphere, that love to God which embraces necessarily, and leads to, the love to the neighbour, shining through his face from the soul within;—the earnest pious words, all had their effect, and many a man and woman were induced to leave the delusive pleasures of the tap-room, and the lowering love of drink, to hear Jonas White preach, and not a few to sign the pledge ultimately, or to become regular attendants at his place of worship, "clothed and in their right mind." Temperance lecturers and missionaries, of course, found a welcome at the house of the Methodist preacher, and to them his chapel was always open on week evenings.

Most of his "brethren in the ministry" smiled at the enthusiasm of the old man on this subject of temperance, which was only partially recognized among them, for ministers like other people were fond of wine, and talked largely of moderation, and but little, if at all, in praise of total abstinence. The teetotal movement was at present but young, and though the great apostle of temperance, Father Mathew, had brought it into public notice in an unmistakable manner, it was by many looked upon with a degree of jealousy and dislike, as affecting to remove evils religion only could radically cure. They did not see, or would not see, that a powerful handmaid to religion had arisen in this movement, and the chapels and churches in the town were almost universally refused to advocates of its cause.

So in Silver Street, in the plain brick building we have named, was the only place almost in which temperance could lift its head and proclaim its mission to the drink-lost thousands of Trentham, and men in plain garb, and often in plainer speech, rose up and held out the despised ark of safety to the drowning drunkard, and on a square deal table placed beneath the singing seat, many a struggling soul was saved from the flood of destruction by signing his name or cross, with trembling hand, beneath the teetotal pledge. "These are my jewels," said Jonas White, as he added the names to his own private list, thinking perhaps of the parson's case of jewels he had read of, that lay in the churchyard, awaiting the resurrection. His were living jewels, however, and he did not forget to examine them, and see if any flaw or dimness was spoiling their brightness; and if he could put them in a gold setting as members of his church, so much the better, *that* was an added security, and they might thus become, he trusted, jewels belonging to a richer owner than he was. For ourselves, we will not say whether we think him right or wrong in giving them the name. All human souls must be, indeed, inestimable jewels in God's sight, and the souls of drunkards, reformed or otherwise, are no doubt dear to Him; though like Cleopatra, they may have thrown their pearls into the corroding acid of drink, He never loses sight of them, who alone fully knows their value.

But to our thinking, this loving appreciation of the worth of his fellowman, whether drunkard or reformed, this tender sympathy with him amid his besetments and temptations, is a far higher and more

Christian trait than the indifference that passes the helpless drink-slave by with a shrug of the shoulders, and an implied, if not a spoken, "I am holier than thou;" or with, perhaps, the futile question, "Why cannot you do as I do? Take wine or spirits or whatever it may be, in moderation, and put away the third glass, or the fourth, or whichever number makes you to offend?" Not that we would for a moment assert that his fellow-ministers had such indifference. Their avowed mission was the salvation of souls, and if some were not so successful in this mission as others, it could be surely from no want of willingness on their part, no want of sympathy with the spiritually dying and destitute. It was rather, we will hope, from a want of light than of love, that they were led to disregard the drunkard. He was an outcast, his very condition made him blind and deaf to gospel light and sounds as proclaimed by these ministers; he was lying far away on the verge of a precipice, they all acknowledged with a sigh. But why, since their own pastoral staff was too short, did they scout the use of the longer wand that temperance supplied, which might drag the poor wretch further from the abyss and nearer the sheepfold?

Jonas White had no conscientious objection to teetotalism. With the pledge in one hand and the Bible in the other, he could go abroad "into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in." He was no physiologist, and had not studied how much alcohol the human frame could bear without decided injury, or whether it was nutritive or a mere stimulant; such studies had not been in his way; but he recognized its baneful influence upon the morals of its victims, and

the thorough degradation it brought to both soul and body when taken freely. He saw in it an enemy to the soul, and he combated it with all the weapons God gave him.

Amongst his own people he had the subject often brought under his notice. Now and again, a member whose conduct had for a long period been blameless, and whose deportment showed that he was sincerely endeavouring to live a new life, according to the pure precepts of the Saviour, fell away from his vocation and became a backslider. On inquiry it was most frequently found that the temptation of drink had been the first cause of this backsliding; his daily business had led him into the company of the ungodly, who spread this snare for his feet as for their own, and induced him to transgress. Sometimes the shame of the first fall was known at once, and sufficed to expel him from the society; sometimes he practised the indulgence secretly for a long time, till it could no longer be concealed, or till it led him into other vices and open profligacy, and then the scandal went through the community like a sharp sword, wounding each person in it.

A recent case of this kind made our preacher pensive and sad, when at the weekly ministers' meeting, held this time at the house of Stephen Morris. His usual benevolent smile was wanting at the feast, and he replied to many of the observations of his brethren absently. Drunkenness was sad enough when among the world's outcasts, and the unbelievers; but when it entered the house of God, it was an agony to this man. He felt, too, that the world, always so ready to find a stain upon the garments of professors, would this time

have a more flagrant case than usual for its sneer to feed upon, and he shrank from the speech he anticipated, and which he already seemed to hear, "See how these Christians drink!"

"Are you not well, Mr. White?" asked Stephen of the silent old man, as after tea all were seated at their ease on the luxurious chairs and couches of the large apartment—a very different room to Jonas White's own foursquare, barely-carpeted sitting-room.

"Very well, I thank you," was his reply, in a mournful tone.

"Nothing amiss, I hope, at home, brother?" inquired the Rev. James Aldershaw, the Baptist minister, sympathizingly.

"No.—My complaint is not of the body, brother, but the mind," he said, as he gave a slight and only half-audible groan.

No more questions were asked. It was understood that he did not wish to speak just then of his trouble, and the conversation and business of the meeting proceeded.

Two or three were talking upon the subject of singers. There were but few organs in those days in dissenting places of worship; and the singers, as leaders of the voices of the congregation, and almost indispensable adjuncts, as it was thought, to the due performance of public worship, were apt to imagine themselves of too much importance, and to take airs in consequence. In some chapels a perpetual change was occurring in the members of the singing gallery, especially if the leader were a man of insufficient energy and tact; and occasionally the whole of the singers would migrate in a

body, and place themselves in front of the gallery overlooking their accustomed seat, leaving their leader alone to get through the service as he could. This was but rarely the case, however; but when it did occur, an unseemly staring and whispering was the consequence among the younger part of the congregation, to the annoyance of the minister, and the mortification of the deacons. Such an outbreak had lately happened—the result of a quarrel—and there was some consultation now upon the subject. To have none but church members in the singing-pew—to do without singers at all, or with only one leading voice to set the tunes—were schemes proposed as fit cures. But opinions were divided as to the possibility of such schemes. The Rev. John Jones openly complained of the singing-leader at his chapel. "We have never had a good leader since Evans went away," was his concluding remark.

"Ah! what has become of Evans?" asked Mr. Grant, the Wesleyan minister.

"He is now in the workhouse, and dying, I fear," replied Mr. Jones. "I visited him yesterday, for he has been ill some time, and sent for me to pray with him."

"No relation, I suppose, of Evans the composer?" asked one of the younger ministers.

"He is the same man—an uncommonly clever fellow! He led our choir admirably for twenty years, and had really a fine musical talent. What pieces he composed! And some of his Christmas anthems are universal favourites yet. Poor Evans! how little I thought I should ever visit him as a pauper, at one time. But

never man looked more changed. I should not have known him, had I not been told."

"How did he get into the workhouse?" Mr. Grant inquired.

"In the way so many others get there. He had been a fearful drunkard for the last four or five years, and had literally spent in drink every penny he could lay his hands upon. He pawned everything of any value about his home and person; and before he was taken to the workhouse, was lying upon the bare floor, and subsisting upon bread and gin, chiefly the latter, if there is any subsistence in it, and was looking more like a wild beast, they tell me, than a man. When I saw him he seemed very repentant, but said he feared he should go to the gin again if he were to get well. His is a lamentable case indeed! He told me he obtained his first love for drink when he became a member of a glee club. He had a fine voice, and a fine knowledge of music, as we all know, and was enticed by promise of pay and hope of gain to join the club, which met at a public-house. Then, his way was all downward; drink became his master, and he found that 'the wages of sin is death,' to use his own words to me yesterday."

"Yes, death; eternal death!" said a solemn voice near. "And he is not the first singer that has found drink to bring death."

The speaker rose up and faced the assembly. It was Jonas White. All looked at him, wonderingly.

"My dear brethren," he continued, "I can no longer keep silence on this subject. It is one that presses on my mind very much at this present time. I mean, as you must all know, the subject of drunkenness. And

I feel it the more important for me to speak now, because I have long been guilty in the matter. I have not raised my voice as I ought to have done in these our weekly meetings. I have refrained from a weak fear of offending man, when I ought only to have considered what was well-pleasing to God. Circumstances, almost too painful for me to name, have this week impressed it on my mind, that I must speak out as I have never yet done; for 'if the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle?'" He paused a moment; while all regarded him questioningly; what could *he* mean by being guilty?—he, who had always done so much for the cause of temperance, and who carried his precepts of abstinence out so faithfully in his life?

"I have considered this matter well, and I find that drink fills our workhouses, our asylums, our houses of correction and jails, and helps largely to fill our graves. It takes away members from our churches, and it plenishes hell. It brings scandal upon the house of God, it brings misery to the house of man, strife to the fireside, want to the mother and the child, despair to the wife, destruction to the husband. It brings the young man's name to be a reproach, the young woman's to be a scorn and a hissing. Shall the souls for whom Christ died be so lost? Shall the wolf in sheep's clothing, the publican with his accursed drink, be allowed on every hand to tempt and ensnare and destroy his victims, to tear and rend the sheep, and we, shepherds of the flock, under Christ the great and good Shepherd, utter no protest against him, or strive to remove one tooth from his bloody jaws?

"I speak strongly, my brethren, but I have strong cause! We as ministers are verily guilty in this matter. We do not as we ought, set our faces like a flint against this traffic in souls; for drink, as we are well aware, destroys the soul with the body, and the drink-seller, for the sake of gain, trades away the souls of his customers. Why do we not publicly protest against this open sale of demoralizing, soul-killing poison—a sale conducted even on the Lord's day?" Jonas here looked round upon his brethren with eyes of searching inquiry; he waited for an answer, but none came; most of his hearers, with averted eyes or downcast heads, were listening with some impatience to his earnest words, while upon the lips of one or two was a smile of pity, coupled with the thought perhaps that second childishness was coming upon the old man.

He continued, "Why do we not, I say? and here, when I give the answer, I will class myself with you, for, as I said before, I also am to blame in this matter, and have not been thoroughly true to my convictions. It is because we ourselves are helping at the same unholy work, not by selling, it is true, but by accepting the drink-sellers as members of our churches—by allowing them to put into the Lord's treasury their unholy offerings. Truly, when I think of it, I am reminded of Christ's words when he drove out the changers of money from the temple, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves.' But by God's help this shall no longer be so at Bethesda!

"Do we not also offer the unclean thing to our people? Do we not, some of us, even partake of the

same in our houses, and share it among our friends and children, thereby setting an evil example, and giving encouragement to evil-doers? But, my dear friends, I will confess my own sins. Last Sunday evening I presented to my people, more than sixty of them, old and young, male and female, some of this same strong drink, the sacramental wine, and I have so presented it hundreds of times before; but never more can I so give it, except in an unintoxicating form; my conscience will no longer permit me. I have also, and you must forgive me here if I seem to speak hardly of you, sat here in silence night after night, in these weekly meetings, while you, my dear brethren, have been passing round the cup, not of life, but of death, I mean the wine-glass, and have not warned you as I ought to have done, or told you of the evil you were committing, and the awful danger you might be the occasion of bringing other souls into by so doing. But I now do it, and tell you in the name of the Lord I can no longer sit by and see it!"

Here one of the ministers interrupted by saying, "I think, brother White, you are going much too far, and had better say no more. You seem to forget that we also are capable of looking into this subject, as well as yourself, and that the interests of the Lord's kingdom are as dear to us as to you. We have long known that your opinions on this temperance question are excessive, but we have had respect to you, if not to them, and have let you alone; and now we only ask that you should do the same. Give us equal liberty of conscience with yourself, and do not condemn what you do not seem able to understand—our moderation."

"Hear, hear!" was said approvingly by one or two, with confirmatory raps on the table.

But Jonas White did not yet sit down.

"Allow me a few words further," he said in a firm and gentle tone; "I will not trouble you long. If the interests of our Lord's kingdom are dear to you, as ye say, I ask you to look with me at a picture or two I shall show you. In my chapel in Silver Street, about two years ago, and when I first came to this town, I saw every Sunday, sitting in her father's pew, a young girl, a young woman I may call her, seventeen years of age, comely of features, nay, beautiful; but that which made her interesting in my eyes was that I hoped and trusted she was, like Solomon's spouse, 'all glorious within.' And it seemed so, truly it seemed so! She was a member with us, and young as she was, adorned her profession by many works of faith and labours of love, and by the purity of her life. She was poor—all her friends were poor—but she had gained a better education than falls to the lot of many in her station, by the kindness of a friend; and she was very active amongst us as Sunday-school teacher and visitor to the sick, and in other ways in which women can be useful in the church. Many much older than herself took example from her, and were not ashamed to follow after her. In our prayer-meetings, and class-meetings, and band-meetings, her voice arose like a song of praise, and by the side of the dying I have heard her pray as few could, with so much freedom and power, and yet with so much humbleness. Truly many times, when I have thus seen and heard her, I have said inwardly, 'This is a tree of the Lord's right-hand planting,' and

have thanked God. Do you see her, my dear brethren? Can you picture her sitting before me in her pew every Sunday, with a face almost like an angel's?

"And now I ask you to leave my chapel, and go down with me into another part of the town—into an alley near our greatest thoroughfare. There are plenty of wretched houses in this alley—tumble-down, decayed-looking places—and there are some of smarter appearance. If you walk down this place in the day-time, and have no female with you, most likely you will be shocked and insulted; but if you go at night, you will be sure to be so. But there is a poor creature in one of these houses who is very ill; and as our commission is to preach the gospel to every creature, and especially to the outcasts, we will enter this house and ask to see her. We are shown up some narrow dirty stairs to the first story, but we have another and narrower flight still to ascend; and we at last enter a three-cornered, plaster-floored bed-room just under the roof, with a stump bed in it, a worn rush-bottomed chair or two, and some bits of dirty finery hanging about. There is no carpet but dust and dirt, and that is pretty thick; and the whole room looks wretched, and is full of an evil scent. But we forget all that, at least for a time, when we look at a heap of skin and bones, with rolling eyes and wasted cheek, that lies tossing beneath a ragged blanket or two; and that we find to be the sick woman we are in search of. There is not much of what has been called 'the human face divine' left about her, except perhaps that pair of bright sunken eyes that look sometimes with awful earnestness into our eyes, or rather into mine, for she has seen me and

known me before. She has been very ill, has had a fever that, together with distress of mind, has reduced her to this state; but she doesn't ask me what I think of her body; she asks about her soul. 'I am dying, I know it,' she says; 'but where will my soul go to? I have been a sinner above every other; oh! what will become of my soul? I have put Christ to open shame, I have trodden on the blood of the covenant, and I am lost; I cannot, dare not ask for mercy.' I speak to her as Christ commands me. I tell her there is mercy and forgiveness for even her; I tell her of the words of our blessed Saviour, 'Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out.' I remind her of the Magdalen who found grace in our Lord's eyes. I speak to her of the infinite love and mercy of God to the repentant sinner; but while I am speaking, a change passes over her face. She gazes at me a moment in unspeakable terror, she shudders, she tries to utter the word 'Pray;' and while I am kneeling down, and am offering up petitions for her at the throne of mercy, the body collapses, the death-rattle is in her throat, and she dies!—Death is no new acquaintance to us, dear friends; we have necessarily seen it in many guises; but this death-bed has some peculiar horrors. The sunken face before us, with the terror-stricken eyes, out of which the light has departed, while the horror remains; the poor corpse of skin and bone, underneath the dingy woollen, is only nineteen years old, and last year was full of beauty, and youth, and health; and the poor soul that has just now fled to its account, its awful account, in despair and fright, was a few months ago rejoicing in the light of God's countenance. It is the same body and soul

that I saw so lately sitting before me in chapel, full of radiant life and loveliness—the same who was a member of my church, active and blessed in her work, an example to all about her. Now her body lies there before you, blasted, disfigured, a loathsome heap of corruption, in a brothel; and her soul—ah! who can tell what has become of her soul?

"Do you ask what has brought the change? What it is that produced this terrible falling away—this miserable life and miserable death? Do you ask what fatal bridge conducted from the home of peace, of purity, of love to God and man, to this abyss? I reply—and note my reply—it is the bridge of strong drink: that bridge that has led so many thousands to ruin from our chapels and churches; that bridge, my dear brethren, upon which you walk whenever you put the glass of wine to your lips, and thereby encourage the young and weak to do the same to their destruction. Oh, think what you are doing! Remember the frightful risk there is to some from its use; and refrain for their sakes, if not for your own. Put it away—this accursed strong drink—from your homes, your wives, your children, your servants; from your communion-table, your members, your flock, young and old, and walk before God with clean hands and a pure heart."

He ceased, wiped his brow, and then sat down, with his face buried in his hands, praying silently.

All were affected by his earnest, solemn words, and silence reigned for some time; till Jonas White rose up, and in a meek and hurried manner, bade them good evening. There were tears in his eyes as he spoke;

and they shook hands with him without a word, but with much silent respect of manner.

Still it was a relief when he was gone, as was evinced by the gradual clearing up of faces, and the less restrained conversation that speedily ensued. Stephen Morris alone of the company remained silent, and the cloud did not once remove from his brow that had settled upon it during Jonas White's speech. When the servant at the usual hour brought wine, as was customary, he left the room, and did not press his visitors to partake; and it was observable that no one had the hardihood to fill his glass with the rich-coloured liquids in the decanters, One of the party rang for water, to the silent amazement of the young woman, who had never heard that order given before, except by Jonas White.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DOCTOR AND HIS PATIENTS.

MR. WILBRAHAM the doctor was on his morning round. A gray horse and a species of hooded chaise conducted him every day to the homes of his patients, far or near, and he was now seated beside the servant-man who was driving, with a heap of books and papers in the ample recesses of the hooded seat; for he liked occasionally to read on his longer journeys, and he had that morning called at the library and news-office. He was not a physician, though styled Doctor Wilbraham by

the poor; but he had a large practice as surgeon and family medical attendant, and had been settled many years in Trentham.

He was therefore well known, and his carriage and gray horse were well known likewise. As he proceeded through the principal streets and the wide market-place, he encountered bows and greetings from persons of both sexes, from friends and ex-patients not a few. Bowing benignantly over his spectacles, the doctor drove on: he had no time to spare of course. Several important cases were just now under treatment at his hands; and he must, if possible, have visited and attended to all before two o'clock, his usual dinner hour. It was now ten, and he had this morning a good many miles to travel. If we take wings and fly beside him, we also must hasten, but we shall not enter all the sick chambers that are on his day's list to be visited—one or two will be sufficient for our purpose.—Occasionally as the doctor proceeded on his way, a look of care came across his ample brow. He had just now special cause to look full of care, and to consider what would be the consequence if he continued to do as he had done the last three months—to deny alcoholic stimulants of all kinds to his patients, and what would be its effect upon his popularity and practice.

More and more he had become convinced that these stimulants were needless, and every day's experience convinced him also that they were harmful. He had been an abstainer himself for some time, and now was beginning to introduce abstinence into his practice—not partial, but total abstinence; a perilous experiment, as he was well aware, for he should gain no new patients

by it, and might lose many old ones. He would be looked upon as that very objectionable person to lovers of routine and precedent, "the man with the bee in his bonnet;" and he would be despised and avoided by lovers of self-indulgence—so large a majority in every medical man's number of patients—as a rigid, and, awfullest of all awful words to self-indulgent lovers of the table, as a *teetotal* doctor.

Yet his conscience—and our doctor had a large supply of that article, an inconveniently large supply, as he was beginning to find—would not allow him to do otherwise; let his practice rise or fall, he must still do his duty, and refuse poison when he knew it to be so, though all the rest of the medical world should see no harm in it, and administer it almost *ad libitum*.

His first visit this morning was to a lady possessed of ample means, and in the decline of life. She was nervous, and had several imaginary ailments, and one or two real ones. He had attended her in his capacity of medical man for more than twenty years; she had always hitherto professed the greatest confidence in his skill and judgment, but now, that he forbade her her daily stimulant, and endeavoured to convince her that it was not only unnecessary, but really injurious, she looked coldly upon him, and complained of his prescriptions. "They did not suit her; he did not understand her constitution," &c.

As he entered her thickly-carpeted chamber, fresh from the open air, he perceived a distinct odour of spirits, and the nearer he approached the patient, the stronger became the scent. She was seated near the fire, having just risen and dressed, and looked smil-

ingly into his face, as she pointed to a rich velvet-covered easy chair, and begged him to be seated, with the fascinating grace of manner she knew how to command, when she pleased.

To his question about her health, her answer was—

"I am much better this morning, doctor. Wonderfully relieved! I do not feel like the same being I did yesterday."

"I am glad to hear it," was his grave reply. "Do you attribute it to the medicine I sent you?"

"Well, no—not exactly. The fact is, your medicine has not done me much good lately. I told you so, if you remember, last visit."

"You did, ma'am. And I changed the medicine, hoping to be more successful."

"It had no more effect than the former. It might have been so much clear water."

"That is strange indeed! May I see the medicine, to know if my dispenser prepared it rightly?"

"Certainly! Charlotte, bring Mr. Wilbraham the last medicine."

Charlotte, the dark-haired, primly-dressed maid-in-waiting, brought a bottle in her hand for the doctor's inspection.

He took it from her, and regarded it curiously. Then he opened it, and strong was the perfume that met his nose.

He tasted it, he made a wry face. "This is not medicine," he said.—"This is not my medicine, my dear lady! this is gin!"

The lady coloured to her temples, and gave Charlotte a glance of wrath—such a concentration of anger and

mortification as is not often seen on a fine lady's face. Her husband had, at the doctor's special request, denied all strong drinks to the sick-room, and some had therefore been put in a medicine bottle to avoid detection; but Charlotte had unwittingly betrayed her mistress.

However, the lady quickly recovered herself. "The fact is, doctor, I could not do without *a little*, and I came to the conclusion to take it, as you see. Now, do not be such a hard-hearted man as to say 'No' to it, for I assure you I shall die without it."

She smiled, she looked beseeching; she had deigned to entreat, but the doctor was unmoved, and invulnerable to her smiles.

"My dear madam," he replied, "it cannot be. Gin is neither good for food or medicine, and in your complaint I should be a fool if I allowed you it. It is a rank poison, and I should be cruel indeed if I prescribed it for you. You must therefore allow me to take this bottle away with me, or to let me see its contents thrown away. Which shall it be?"

"Whichever you please," said the lady, with some hauteur, throwing herself back in her chair with an indifference real or affected, which made the doctor suspect other bottles of gin might be concealed in the convenient closet. The doctor quietly emptied the bottle into the toilet-basin, taking care to mix a large proportion of water with it, and the contents of a small paper packet from his pocket, that contained a nauseous medicinal powder, giving it to Charlotte to remove from the room.

"Now," said he, "I can understand why my medicine

had not due effect. But I trust you will allow it fair play for the future, or my visits here are really useless —worse than useless." He spoke firmly, but gently, and with as much kindness in his tone as possible; but he saw very clearly the lady was offended.

When the pulse had been felt, and the customary and necessary medical questions asked, during which she turned her face in cold dislike a little away from the obnoxious doctor, he ventured to say,—

"My dear madam! I am truly sorry to disoblige you in this matter; but my conscience so clearly opposes the admission of alcohol in any form as a medicine, that I cannot do otherwise than refuse it. I have had, as you know, an extensive practice for many years, and ought therefore to be capable of judging. I have found it in every case injurious, and in yours especially, as I said before, it is inadmissible."

"Yet you used to order me wine, doctor!"

"I did. But that was in my days of ignorance. I intend never to order it to any patient of mine again."

"There is no other medical man in the town but allows wine or brandy occasionally, as a strengthener and a tonic; and one or two of those medical men are exceedingly clever. I am sure I require a tonic—my digestion is so awfully bad—and—the fact is—I must have one."

"You shall; but there are plenty of tonics without having recourse to wine or spirits—tonics infinitely less dangerous. You ask me for poison, because it is pleasant to your taste, but should I be worthy of my profession if I gave it you?"

"I, at least, will absolve you from any harm that

may happen in my case," said the lady lightly, "if you will allow it."

"But I should still be answerable to my conscience, and to Him who gave it me," he replied. "No, no; my dear lady; I again repeat—it cannot, must not be."

Soon afterwards he departed, with a foreboding on his mind that he should be discarded, for some more flexible medical rival—a foreboding that proved too true; the lady the next day sending for Dr. C——, who allowed alcohol in his pharmacopæia, and did not quarrel with patients taking a little "innocent" gin or brandy.

His next place of call was where a little patient was recovering from scarlet-fever. She was a thin delicate child, and her recovery was slow. A smile came upon her pale face when she saw her friend—for the doctor was a great favourite with most of his little ones.

"And how are you, my dear, this morning? You have not yet been to buy those roses for your cheeks, I see! but we must get them before long!"

The mamma looked anxious. "Emma does not gain strength as she should do, doctor. She wants more nourishment; but she has no appetite. I can get her to eat so little, so *very* little."

"Does she get her half-hour's walk in the sunshine?"

"Not always; it has been such weather! and she is so soon tired."

"Yes, the weather has been unfortunate for us—it has kept her back no doubt. But we shall be having finer days in a while; in the meantime she must be encouraged to play about in-doors, and to go out whenever the day will permit. It is not my medicine

she requires now, but good kitchen physic, and exercise."

"But,—doctor,—papa and I have both been thinking a little wine would strengthen her. She really needs good nourishment."

"All the good nourishment you can give her, let her have. But no wine; there is no food to be obtained out of wine. It is quite a fallacy to suppose otherwise."

"You are prejudiced, doctor! Excuse me for saying it; but I know wine to be really strengthening. I have tried it myself; it once saved my life."

"Wine, madam?"

"Yes; port wine. I am ashamed to tell you how much I was ordered to drink each day; eight or nine glasses, I think, by a very clever physician at Dundee, and I firmly believe if it had not been for that wine I should not now be alive." The lady closed her lips and looked very decided indeed. She seemed to wish to impress it on him that she was a very wise woman, and was not easily to be put down.

"Whether you recovered by the aid of the wine, or in spite of the wine, though I rather suppose the latter, is not for me to say. But you are quite mistaken if you imagine it was in consequence of any nutritive qualities the port wine might possess. It might act, it no doubt did act, upon you as a stimulant. But there are other stimulants to be had, far better and safer than port wine or any alcoholic mixture whatever. Alcohol, ma'am, is poison; pleasant tasted most frequently, and there is its danger, for people like it, and because they like it, will take it. But beware how you give it to your daughter; I give you my word

it is not needed, that it would be injurious.—In fact, I forbid it entirely." The lady could say no more after so decided a refusal, but in her heart she thought the doctor a sort of monomaniac, and scarcely to be trusted.

"It is astonishing," thought the doctor, as he once more seated himself in his carriage, and took up a pamphlet that had just been published on the subject of intoxicants, by a medical man of his acquaintance, to read as he went along.—"It is astonishing what a hold alcoholic drinks have on the affections of the respectable portion of society! We talk of the poor man being infatuated with his glass of ale and his public-house, but there is equal infatuation if we look higher. Well, well! this pamphlet I hope will do good," and he read with satisfaction from its pages. "Alcohol is a most dangerous luxury; it is neither adapted for food or medicine. The ancients called it 'a delightsome poison.' I have been long convinced that I should be criminal, were I to give it or prescribe it, either in health or disease. Alcohol is given to gratify an unnatural and depraved appetite, not having anatomy, physiology, philosophy, science, or common sense, to sanction its use; in fact, as a medicine, it is the most dangerous quackery of the present day."

The next visit was to the house of the Rev. Stephen Morris. One of the maid-servants was ill. She was feverish and sick, and moaned pitifully as the doctor, with Mrs. Morris, entered her room. A young girl about seventeen, who had only lately been engaged as under-housemaid, was standing over her, and said something about "Martha having taken poison." "True enough, she is poisoned," said the doctor, after a few

moments' examination and a few questions. The minister's wife turned pale, as did also the young housemaid. "And I suspect," he continued, "she has poisoned herself. She has had too much drink. Young woman," he added sternly, addressing the patient, "how dare you disgrace yourself in this manner in a respectable family? Were it not for your mistress, I would take no further notice of you, but leave you to get well as you could, and remember what drink does; this is not the first time, I believe, that you have taken too much." He wrote a prescription quickly, sent it to his surgery to be made up, and then went with Mrs. Morris a moment into the breakfast-room.

He asked if she knew how Martha had obtained the drink? Jane said she could not tell, unless it was, that she had made too free with the barrel of beer in the cellar.

"Will you take the advice of a doctor, and an older housekeeper than yourself, my dear lady?" he asked kindly. "I know it is very difficult to make a stand with servants on this subject; but you will save yourself much trouble, and do them an immense service, if you give up the beer-barrel entirely, and allow of no drink in the kitchen that can intoxicate. Who knows the temptation that beer-barrel has been to Martha, or the evils it may bring upon her? Many a girl has been ruined for life in places where the beer or porter-barrel, or perhaps the gin and brandy bottle, have been close at hand."

Jane looked thoughtful. She thanked the doctor for his kind and well-meant advice, but did not seem hopeful. For the question came "How could she deny

drink to the kitchen, when it was taken in the parlour? How could she tell her servants it was wrong and unwise to drink beer, when the master, and that master a minister, who should be an example in all self-denial, and sobriety of life, to his household, took wine and spirits so freely?" It was a perplexing question. Mr. Wilbraham saw her hesitation and her despondent look, and perhaps guessed the cause; but he could not speak openly unless she gave him the cue. It was a delicate subject. When the doctor's carriage had rolled away, Jane still remained in the breakfast-room, deep in thought, her head resting on her hand. The doctor's advice was very good, and suggested the right thing to do, but how could it be done? She was not, in such a matter, afraid of her servants, for Jane was courageous, and in a cause she felt to be entirely right, could be heroic. Heroism may seem too lofty a virtue to bring to the help of a mistress who differs from her dependants in so apparently trifling a matter, and yet it may be needed, for it is far from a trifling matter in the eyes of most servants, as many have proved, and, we may say, is also far from trifling in the eyes of a philanthropist. It is a serious matter, a servant thinks, to be debarred from beer and ale and porter; a very serious matter to have to live in a teetotal family, and never to have the chance of finishing a glass of wine, or drinking the dregs of a bottle from upstairs, or wishing the master's or mistress's good health, in sherry or home-made, on festive occasions. Servants have appetites, and often unruly ones, quite as unruly as those possessed by master or mistress, or more so, and they have not had the superior

education that should teach them to repress them. And Jane knew this well, and that, most probably, she would have to lose her well-trained servants, and endure the annoyance, many times repeated, of young, ignorant, and perhaps turbulent domestics, who would waste and destroy her substance, and jar on all the refined ears of the household. For servants who had learned their business had also learned to consider strong drink of some kind an indispensable perquisite, nay, a necessary of life. She knew, too, that she would be called stingy, a title a kind, open-hearted mistress does not like any the better because she knows she has not deserved it; and that, though higher wages might be given to recompense for the lost indulgence, they would not be considered sufficient compensation. All this, however, she could and would bravely face, glad to do so, for the minister's young wife had, for some time, thoughtfully considered the question. But—and what a powerful *but* this was;—how could she take away the beer from the kitchen, and retain the wine, and gin, and brandy, for the parlour?

If her husband only would help her in this, gladly would she herself give up all such indulgences; but he, she feared greatly, never would. For, ah! was it not true? and the thought that now arose made the blood rise up over neck and brow, into a burning shame-blush, "he was already too fond of these things, he liked them only too well." She sighed heavily.—A kiss upon her forehead from behind, made her start.

"So thoughtful, dear?" It was Stephen who spoke, and he looked tenderly into her eyes. "What is the matter?"

"I have been thinking about Martha," answered Jane, confusedly. She felt, in some way, as if she had wronged him by her last thought.

"Well; isn't she better? Mr. Wilbraham has been here, I see."

"Yes; he says—What do you think he says, Stephen?—that she has been drinking, and that that is the sole cause of her illness."

"Drinking?—You must get rid of her at once, my love. It will never do to have a drunken servant in the house."

"I would,—and I fear I shall have to do;—but what would become of her? And—I have been thinking that it may in some way be my fault."

"Your fault? That is an absurd thought. You would never encourage her to drink, I am sure. Of course you only allow her a daily pint."

"No. I only allow a pint. But that is enough to give her the desire for more, and the barrel is always at hand."

"You must keep the key of it, then; though you ought to have a servant you can trust to take charge of such things."

"Wouldn't it be better to have no barrel at all?"

"Why better, my dear? I cannot see it. If you do not give the maids beer in the house, they will only be tempted to go out for it. But do as you please. If you think it better, try the experiment."

And he walked to the window, as if he thought the whole matter was settled.

"I would do so at once," proceeded Jane boldly; "but I cannot see how I can ask them to give up beer, while we take wine."

"Well, then," replied Stephen, facing her again, and looking the least in the world annoyed, "I suppose you must leave the matter just as it is. And I believe that is the only sensible way."

"Couldn't we, for their sakes and our own, give up the wine? Don't you think it is our duty?—You know, Stephen, Martha is not the only servant I have had to dismiss for drinking. Hannah Green said she had first learned to drink here, and you remember what became of *her*. I would send Martha away to-morrow, and must, indeed, unless she will promise to amend, or unless I can send away the beer; but my heart won't let me turn her on the streets. And you know it might, and most probably would, come to that. It is shocking for any servants, and especially for your servants, to leave this house for the gin-shop and the jail, or perhaps worse."

And Jane's face expressed the utmost distress as she said this.

"But there is no need that Martha should go to either. Calm yourself, my love, and do not let imaginary fears trouble you! Martha will learn by the things she suffers. She will lose a good place through over-indulgence, and will take care for the future not to do so again."

"But I cannot give her a sober character, Stephen."

"Of course not. But she will get a very fair place nevertheless, and have another opportunity of redeem-

character. Do not fall into John Broadbent's

or; he's a fine fellow, and much do I respect him, but he is rabid on the subject of temperance, and has, I fear, bitten you—he or Clara. Over every one who

tastes a drop of wine or beer he puts a turpentine garment, and applies his torch, and forthwith they are in flames, while he cries, 'See what drink does!' Martha will get on very well."

"I will give her another trial, for she is a good servant in other respects, and I have not been sufficiently careful with her. How I wish intoxicating drinks had never been made!"

So has wished many another mistress of a household, when troubled by intemperate servants or children, or a drink-loving husband; and yet too often she has been the first to recommend its use in any sudden illness, forgetting how "delightsome" was the poison, and how subtle its tempting influence, and that she was probably laying the foundation for, or building up the very troubles she so much deplored.

Did Stephen feel the confidence he had expressed to his wife about Martha's future well-being and doing? or was it that he would not see her danger? For it would have been inconsistent indeed to have allowed conscience to cry out in her case, and to have pursued the same path himself. He was certainly not willing to give up his own self-indulgent habits; therefore, perhaps, he shut his eyes to their consequences, and therefore he said, "Peace, peace, when there was no peace."

A few years ago he would have started with dismay if you had told him he would ever show such apathy with regard to the bodily and spiritual welfare of any human being, and more especially of one of his own household. A Christian's conscience should be

> "Quick as the apple of the eye,
> The *first* approach of sin to feel."

But so long now had his conscience lain under the effects of the stupefying draught of expediency and self-indulgence, that it rarely opened its eyes to the light, and pulsated feebly under what would once have startled every nerve, and sent the blood in quick courses through furthermost vein and artery.

He retired, however, to his study that morning with an uncomfortable feeling. Conscience still lived, though enfeebled, and reminded him dully, and as it were from afar off, that somewhere across her filmed eyes a pin had pricked for a moment. As he sat down to think out and prepare his next Sunday's discourse, he found himself inconveniently recurring to his wife's words, "Couldn't we, for their sakes and our own, give up the wine?" and though he could not assent to her proposition, it gave him a secret displeasure that he could not.

His text had been chosen the day before for the sermon he was about to write; but the heads of his discourse did not come kindly to the birth, and their coming at all was long delayed. A perplexity, not unusual of late, had settled on his brain, and placed impediments there with wild entangling fingers. He put the sermon aside with a sigh, and opened a book. But reading did not suit him, and in a little while he found himself seated before the study table, with his head resting upon his hand, in the same attitude in which he had recently found his wife. Thus he remained for half-an-hour or more, a dull melancholy oppressing him. Was it because it was a cloudy morning, or that he was clouded within? Life was often now a drag and a weariness; this morning, almost more so than usual. What should he do? He looked listlessly round the

room, lined with well-filled book-shelves, with books written by men upon the highest subjects that can employ the human mind. These seemed to reproach his idleness. "Up, sluggard, to thy work! Life is short, time is fleeting, death is near! Work while it is called to-day, for the night cometh when no man can work." These voices had often called to him before, and he had obeyed; but the capacity for work appeared departing from him now, unless—and he glanced instinctively towards a small cupboard in a dark corner. He rose, felt in his pocket for a key—a very familiar, often-wanted key—and, grasping it between thumb and finger with a nervous grasp, was about to apply it to the lock of this dark corner cupboard. Did no humiliating and confounding reflections seize him—no remembrance of the great divine souls who had left for him as for others the record of their Godward thoughts, of those who "had all gone into a world of light,"—and that these had needed no fire but that from heaven to illume their intellects and warm their hearts when writing on the theme of God's salvation? By prayer and fasting, by watchings and tears, they had gained their insight into the spiritual world—by self-denial and supplication, the gifts of the Spirit. Did no breath, no vibrating chord sounding from them to him touch his heart?

Apparently not. Between his soul and theirs he had suffered to fall a thick cloudy curtain, and his weak eyes no longer thought of piercing the veil; his heart no longer desired communion with theirs; and no electrical touches stirred him now from their pure sphere.

He gave the key a vigorous turn, the bolt withdrew, the door flew open. Before him on the shelf stood an inviting bottle and a wine-glass. He laid them both upon the table, and seated himself once more. A strange content was in his eye; the expression of weariness had left his face. Near him, within his grasp, was the false magician's rod, with which he was about to do such wonders; the rod of Moses—prayer, and fasting, and self-denial—was neglected. A few taps at the window-pane made him turn round suddenly. Who was it about to intrude? Could it be Jane? Not likely! for the window of this room looked on to a piece of garden-ground seldom trodden, a plot of grass and shrubs shut in by a high brick wall from the road. As he looked, he saw that at the middle pane a little bird was fluttering, anxious perhaps to get in on this cold day, attracted by the shut-in, quiet, warm room. "Tap, tap, tap," went its small beak at the window-pane, and the bird's wings fluttered with impatience and desire.

By God's smallest creatures, if we will open our souls to listen, may divinest truths be taught. No "sparrow is forgotten before God;" and this little, gray, God-remembered sparrow might have had a mission to the minister—one more warning intrusted to it for him—which it endeavoured to make known, by the efforts of its feeble beak to penetrate the hard, mysterious crystal of the window. "Pray, beseech! do as I do!" and at the window of God's mercy and love he has said you shall not pray in vain. For to you a promise is given —"Knock, and it shall be opened; ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find;" and "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it."

Did he understand the sparrow's mystic speech? did he go at once upon his knees, bending low before the throne of God's love? or did he lift one earnest prayer, seated beside the table, for help from on high to resist temptation? No; the sparrow flew away unheeded—its message delivered in vain. Prayer's fountain was sealed; a hard, dry frost was upon his heart. It was but half-a-minute's more delay, and then the glass was filled and drained, again and again; and as each glass emptied, his eye became brighter, his lip ruddier, his heart lighter, his brain clearer. Then the paper was once more brought out and placed before the willing hand; for, touched by the unholy wand of drink, the dead men in the brain-city rose to galvanic semblance of life, and ideas and words came at command, almost faster than he could write them. With a look of triumph he at length put the finished sermon away; his task was accomplished once more.

He threw himself back in his easy chair, and was sensible of a slight headache, a slight confusion, now all was over. Reaction began, and with it came speedily renewed languor and depression. Again more wine was necessary. Before evening he was sunk in deep lethargic slumber upon the couch in the drawing-room, and Jane sorrowfully threw over his flushed, swollen countenance her delicate embroidered handkerchief as a veil.

Was it not become a hopeless matter to think of preaching sobriety and self-denial to the kitchen, with such an example from the sacred study of the minister before its eyes?

CHAPTER XX.

THE RESCUE.

THE week went by, and Mrs. Christy heard nothing of Veronica, at which she began to wonder. At first, however, she was inclined to suppose the girl had forgotten her promise about writing, or was so pleased with her new situation as not to notice how quickly the days sped by. For Mrs. Christy made no doubt from the little she had gathered about the letter, that it was to some rich relative, who would amply provide for and perhaps adopt Veronica.

About the middle of the second week, however, a little alarm came upon her. What if Veronica had lost her way, or been ill treated, or had perished in the snow that first winterly stormy night of her absence? But she was a woman not given to anticipations of evil and to forebodings, and she speedily put such fears to flight: it was not wise to fret and trouble; and, besides, what good could it do? Infirm as she was, and ignorant of Veronica's whereabouts, she could not seek her up; she must wait patiently for time to reveal the secret. Still, however, she had her moments of wonderment. "The girl surely would send," she thought to herself, as she went about her work; "for there was the rent going on, and who was to pay it? And the bird —poor Dick, Veronica's pet—had already cost her twopence in seeds; though she didn't mean to say she grudged it; and Dick she always *would* keep, no matter

what happened, unless Veronica came back to claim him."

Mrs. Christy lived in the lower house. It had a window facing the street, with a shutter that each night had to be closed from without. At this closing time the old woman generally took the opportunity to look up the street, and down the street, the shutter in her hand, in hopes of catching a glimpse of the well-known form of the young lace-mender. One night that she stood thus she remembered it was now ten days since she had seen her. She had opened the rooms up-stairs once, and looked round at everything, and could find no clue there to the mystery of the young girl's absence. Everything was just where it should be: Veronica's faded work-a-day bonnet and shawl hanging up in the old place behind the door; her dress, though only a washed-out cotton, put away carefully in the box; the fireplace neatly arranged, and the coal laid in the grate ready to light. The geraniums in the window wanted water, and she watered them; but all else was as if the tidy mistress had only just left it, except perhaps that a little dust had collected in the window-seat.

The old woman shook her head somewhat despondingly, as she stood with the shutter in her hand, slowly closing it, thinking of these things. "I'd give summat to know where that poor lass is!" was her ejaculation, or rather speech. Before she had done speaking some one touched her familiarly on the shoulder. She "a'most screeted," as she said afterwards, relating the occurrence to Mrs. Scrubbins, her neighbour and gossip, "for I thought it were the lass herself; but it was some one taller than Veronica, and darker." It was nearly

dusk, and Mrs. Christy's eyes were not very good, so she curtsied low to the gentility of the apparition that met her clouded gaze, a lady in fashionable dress, and waited respectfully for her to speak first.

"Is Veronica at home, Mrs. Christy?" Mrs. Christy's complaisance and humility were gone in a moment; she recognized the voice, and raised her stooping back as much towards the perpendicular as was possible to her ere she replied. "Don't Mrs. Christy me, you baggage! I won't be spoken to by none on you; I won't! An' keep away for shame from this house!"

The fine lady did not resent this rough speech, or look in the least surprised, but only moved a little forwards, so as to stand in the way between the old woman and her door-step, and thus holding her, as it were, at bay, continued—

"Now, don't be so hard, Mrs. Christy! I've heard father's dead, and I want to know if it's true or not. Do tell me it's not! and let me speak to Veronica a moment, I won't keep her longer!"

"Your father's dead, sure enough," replied the old woman impatiently, holding her hand to the side of her head, as if to shield it from the cold wind, for she had come out without a bonnet; "if that's any comfort for such as you to know. Like it is! Go to the church-yard, and speak to him there; there's nobody here to talk to."

"Then it is true!" murmured Letitia, in a deep hollow voice, as if talking to herself. "O my father! I didn't think it would be so soon! I hoped I should have gone first."—Then louder—"But Veronica! where's she? I must know. I will know!"

"You shan't know from me!" said Mrs. Christy angrily. "Such as you's no business wi' such as her."

"I *will* know, I tell you!" And Letitia seized the old woman by the arm. "You shan't go into your house again till you tell me, not if you stay here all night."

Mrs. Christy lived alone, she had no one to shout to for help, and she began to reflect what she must do with so obstinate and determined an assailant. She was, too, half inclined to be frightened at the glare of Letitia's eyes; they looked fierce and determined; and what if she should really keep her standing here, a poor old rheumatic body like her, in the cold January night air!—And so bring on another illness like the one she endured last winter? It was not to be thought of! With a shudder she at once signed a capitulation. Besides, under the circumstances, there could be no great harm in telling. Veronica, poor girl, was far enough away no doubt.

"She's not here, I tell you; she's gone away."

"Gone away? Where to?"

"I don't know, not I! How should I know?"

Letitia's eyes flashed. She thought the old woman was deceiving her. Her grasp became tighter, as she hissed into her ear, threateningly, "If you don't tell me true, old woman, I'll half murder you! Where is she? Where is Veronica?"

Poor Mrs. Christy was completely frightened now. She looked round helplessly, no living being was in sight in that quiet no-thoroughfare. The gas-lamps only revealed their own blurred shadows. Tremblingly she told her imperious jailer that Veronica had gone

away ten days ago with a letter to an aunt, and had not since been seen or heard of. That she didn't know what had come to the lass, she only wished she did; some harm, she was afraid!

"An aunt?" asked Letitia. "We've no aunt or uncle, that I know of, in the world. What's her name, and where does she live?"

"Her name's Lee. Mrs. Lee, that I'm sure of! And she lives at Aldborough; yes, Aldborough, that's the name. I remember it, 'cause my husband toud me he lived at Aldborough, afore he knowed me; but what house it is, I've clean forgotten. It had a grandish sound with it."

"Mrs. Lee, Aldborough," repeated Letitia slowly; "and how far's Aldborough from here."

"Twelve mile, if it's a step."

"And she walked there, you say?"

"Aye, sure she did! Do you think she'd a coach an' four to ride in?"

"Twelve miles on a snowy day! Ten days ago—that was—ah, that was just before that great snow! She's lost, she's lost! Mrs. Christy, lost in the snow!" And Letitia wrung her hands.

"God preserve us!" said the old woman. "I hope not!"

But Letitia went away murmuring, "She's lost! she's lost!"

Two nights afterwards a low knock was heard at the door of John Broadbent's cottage at St. Wilfrid's. It was a dark windy night, about nine o'clock, and the rain came in gusts driven by the wind. The young servant, as she opened the door in answer to the knock,

felt the rain-drops pelting through the bare rose and woodbine boughs at the trellised porch upon her head and smart cap, and somewhat impatiently asked, "Who's there?" "Can I see Mr. Broadbent?" demanded a female whose voice she did not recognize. "Yes, ma'am; come in, please." To her surprise, a young woman, without umbrella or shawl or cloak, but dressed in silk and satin and lace, whose faded grandeur the rain had helped to spoil and the mud to defile, entered. She had very bright, dark eyes, and, as the unsophisticated girl thought, fine blooming pink cheeks, though her hair was tossed about and disordered by the wind, and gave her a forlorn look. Standing now in the kitchen, with the fire-light full upon her, she looked, spite of her wet shabby garments, so much a lady, that the girl, curtseying, asked what name she should give, and prepared to open the parlour door to admit her.

"Your master will not know my name. Ask him if he will see me here for a moment," said the bright-eyed lady. The girl felt someway uncomfortable under the glow of those large eyes.

"You'd better walk in the parlour, ma'am, I'm sure."

"No, no; I will stay here." And the wondering girl went forthwith to acquaint her master with the advent of the new-comer.

John came out with some curiosity depicted on his face. "A strange lady, wet through," the girl had said hurriedly. Who could she be? It was Letitia, but John Broadbent did not know her; he had never seen her; and bowing reservedly—his wonder increasing each moment at the aspect of the strange lady, he asked her business.

"May I speak to you alone? or," she added, "with only your sister?"

"Certainly. Come in to the parlour, my sister is there."

"Alone?"

"Yes." She no longer hesitated, but followed him into the small but well-lighted and warm apartment, where Clara was tranquilly engaged with her sewing. John had been reading to her aloud, no doubt, as an open book lay beside his arm-chair on the table. Clara looked at the stranger with equal surprise to that which her brother had felt; for a moment only, however; then she moved her head with her customary gentle and graceful acknowledgment of a visitor, but the stranger, not heeding the chair John placed courteously for her near the fire, and still standing in the middle of the room, exclaimed abruptly, "Don't bow to me, madam! I'm not worth a bow from any one. I belong to the dirt of the streets, that you would not like to touch with the hem of your dress. And forgive me for coming here; I would rather have been put in your outhouse than your parlour, but I couldn't help it, indeed I couldn't. But I have a sister, Mr. Broadbent." Here she turned the glance of her large dark eyes upon John —there was witchery in them still—and John's sank from their gaze, with a troubled, pained expression. "You know her, I think—Veronica Lee, the daughter of the blind basket-maker, a good, pure girl—innocent and good, as I am guilty and desperate—and I want you to save her! You only, perhaps, can do it. I have heard of you, sir, and of the good and noble things you have done for the poor. You know her, for I have seen

you walking by her side in the streets, and you knew her father. He's dead, they say, and she, she's lost if you won't save her." She uttered these words in a beseeching plaintive voice, much in the way some wounded wild animal would make known its trouble could it speak.

It was true what she had said. John had once or twice met Veronica in the streets, and had spoken to her there. He had seen her at home several times on his visits to her father, though lately he had, of course, lost sight of her, through his absence abroad. It pained him to hear of Mark Lee's death, but almost more to know that his daughter was in trouble. "What was the matter? how was it that she was lost? and how could he help her?" he inquired.

Letitia related all that she had extracted from Mrs. Christy first, and then that she had herself been to Aldborough in search of her sister; that she had heard of her there, but had lost trace of her on her return, and that for some time she had feared she must have perished in the snow.

But to-day a new discovery had been made. A friend of hers had heard of her being at a certain house in the outskirts of Trentham very ill, and, as it was supposed, in a fever, a house whose character Letitia knew only too well.

"How she got there, Mr. Broadbent, I can't tell! I only know one thing, it hasn't been by her own will. She's been carried there by force, or by guile, and if she is not soon brought away, she's lost. Ah!" said Letitia bitterly, "I don't want any more to be in *my* place, least of all my sister! She's beautiful and good and

pure. But you'll save her, will you not?—I'll take you there. Don't be afraid of me, I'll do you no harm. You believe me, do you not?" she asked as John kept silence, her hands clasped, and in an agonizing voice.

"But I have no authority, no right," said John. "Your sister must have other friends, who should interfere."

"None in the world; none but you. Oh, Mr. Broadbent, will you refuse?"

"Give me the address of the house, and if it be as you say, if your sister is really detained there against her will, I will get the aid of the magistrates. I will see to it: she shall be saved. But you must stay here; let your clothes be dried. My sister will care for you."

"No," replied Letitia, "I cannot stay. Do you think I mind a little rain? What do I care to preserve my body? It is best to go, and I will, and must, go with you. But I will not trouble you; no one shall see me near you."

"But how do you know it is your sister that is there?—Suppose you are mistaken, or have been misled? We cannot enter the house on a supposition merely."

"It is no supposition! See here. This was written eight days ago, and has only reached me this morning."

She showed a slip of paper on which was written a few words in pencil. It was dirty, and had evidently been in the mud, but still could be read with some difficulty.

"I am a prisoner here, in this house; I don't know its name. Oh, some one save me, will you?—VERONICA LEE."

"This was picked up by a friend of mine, who gave it me this morning, and told me where she found it. I've been searching this day all about the neighbourhood, and have got to know that she is certainly there, and very ill."

"And this is really her writing?"

"Yes, yes; I know it well."

John reflected a few moments. Then, after consulting with Clara, he decided to go at once to the help of Veronica. He dressed for the storm, and insisted that Letitia should do the same, and, with Clara's help, succeeded in persuading her to do so. Throwing over her a large cloak, and providing her with thick boots and an umbrella, all the change of dress she would allow, they both set out, Letitia leading the way with nervous haste.

"Why do you turn towards the ferry?" John asked, "the ferryman will be long since gone away. We must walk the long way by the road, there is no help for it."

"It is not quite ten o'clock," replied Letitia, "and the man promised to wait till then; I paid him to wait."

Inwardly admiring her forethought—for by it their way was shortened by at least one-third—John followed quickly, and soon reached the river. The man was inside the boat-house waiting. He proceeded at once to the boat, looking at his watch by the aid of a lantern. "You're but just in time," he remarked; "in another five minutes I should have gone away." Silently they passed over the water, and as silently went on their way across the long flat of the wet plashy meadows. It was eleven o'clock when the town was gained. John at once proceeded to the office of the

chief-constable, and stated to him the cause of his visit. A search-warrant and a constable were obtained, and with these he and Letitia quickly gained the house of Veronica's detention. It was a lonely house, surrounded by a high wall, and Letitia said was the resort of gamblers and of persons of bad character.

Here, however, they were not long detained. Veronica was found, changed indeed, and ill, but not so ill now as to be incapable of being removed. With a joyful cry she recognized John Broadbent and her sister. "Take me away" was all she could utter at first; and when fairly placed in the cab, and they were driving away, she fainted, overcome by her emotions of joy. By early dawn St. Wilfrid's was gained. Clara was still up, waiting for her brother. She received the released prisoner tenderly, and preparing her a bed in her own room, at once undertook the office of nurse. Letitia stole away unseen, it was believed, as soon as Veronica was removed from the cab, leaving behind her, however, the cloak and boots and umbrella.

Veronica's account of her imprisonment was soon told. When she was able to sit up, she related the whole to Clara, as it had occurred—her journey to Aldborough, her bewilderment in the snow on her return, her despair of help, and her lying down to die, and then her awakening with the strange smiling woman bending over her, in the large well-furnished room. Her own words perhaps will tell the tale best, a tale we should not tell but for its bearing on the subject of drink. Shortly as we can we will relate her words. "I was fascinated with that strange smile, though it was not a pleasant fascination. I can't describe it.

But she was kind, or at least seemed so; brought me tea and bread and butter to revive me, and sat down by me gently, asking me of my adventures. I told her I had been lost in the snow, that I had been walking from Aldborough to Trentham, that my name was Veronica Lee, and that I lived at Trentham, and gained my living by mending lace, and that my father was just dead. I don't think I told her these things all at once; she got them out of me, you understand, by a smile and a question, one by one, before I was well aware.

"Then I asked her in return where I was? She answered, with kind friends who would take care of me. But I could not get from her either their names or the name of the house at which I was staying. 'Am I at Aldborough, at Mrs. Lee's?' I inquired, for I fancied, I don't know why, once or twice, that I might have been found by some of Mrs. Lee's people, and taken back, and that she might have had pity on me after all. But the lady would not say; she only smiled, with a 'Never mind, my dear; you're in a good home, so be content.'

"Content I was not, but what could I do? I think she must have put something stupifying in my tea, for soon after taking it I slept very heavily indeed, and did not wake till next morning long after daylight. The room did not look so grand by daylight. I got up and dressed, and looked out of the window, anxious to see where I was, but to my great disappointment there was nothing visible but a great high brick wall, some heaps of dirty snow, and a piece of gray sky. I tried to open the bedroom door, but found it locked. Then I became

alarmed, and looked round for any other door or concealed closet, but could not see any; and yet I know there must have been one somewhere, for afterwards people would come in and go out of the room—strange horrible men and women—without opening the other door, and talk over me and laugh. That was when I was ill (Clara judged this to be the fancy of a sick and delirious person only).—But, however, in a while the lady came again. I was sitting crying beside the bed; I felt ill, my head ached, and I fancied it might have been caused by the medicine in the tea, so I was angry with her, and would not speak to her at first."

"But how do you know there was medicine in the tea?"

"I don't know. I only fancied it must have been so. She asked me why I cried. I said I wanted to go home. She replied smoothly, 'Presently, presently, my dear;' but I could see by the look of her eyes that she did not mean what she said. I distrusted her as I watched her about, sliving here and there like a cat, without making any noise. In a while she dusted the looking-glass—it was a very large one—and asked me to come and look at myself, telling me I was very pretty, and didn't I know it? And she assured me she had some very handsome clothes that I should look well in. She brought out some pearl bracelets, and a grand necklace, and wanted me to put them on, but I tossed them away; I didn't want any of her finery I told her. Then she asked me whether I liked to mend lace, and wouldn't it be well if I could give up all that tiresome work, and live like a lady, in fine clothes, and ride in my carriage? She knew some one, she said,

who would make a lady of me—a real grand lady, if I would but say 'Yes,' and be his daughter, for he had lately lost a daughter, just as I had lately lost my father. That it was he who had saved my life in the snow; and because I looked so much like his dear Herminia, and reminded him so strongly of her, he had got the idea of adopting me. Would I let him come to speak to me for half-an-hour about it? I said no; I didn't want to speak to any one, and she needn't ask me. All I wanted was to get home; and then the gentleman, if it was really true what she said, could tell me himself what he wanted, there. She replied that wouldn't do; that he was by far too great a gentleman to consent to be seen in my poor lodgings. But why should I tell you all her lies? I knew they were lies at the time, for her eyes and her mouth went different ways when she spoke.

"I was sick and ill, too, and began to be really frightened. Where was I? Where could I be? I shuddered to imagine where.

"She went away in a while, and then I knelt down and prayed for deliverance from that house, whatever it might be.

"I tried the window, and opened it a little, but it was too far from the ground; then I wrote that little note on a scrap of paper with a pencil I had in my pocket, and managed to make it float away clear of the window, and great was my relief to see the wind carry it over the wall. The door I had heard her lock as she went out.

"At dinner she came again, and at tea, bringing me food, but I would only take a little bread and water.

Once she brought me a glass of spirits and water, and begged me to take it, that it would do my cold and headache good; but if I had been inclined I would not have drunk it, for I remembered what your brother once said to father about the danger of drink. I told her I never drank such things, and that it was poison; but she didn't understand me, and asked how could I think of such a thing; no one would poison me in that house, that I was much too beautiful to be poisoned.—O, I cannot tell you all the vile flatteries she tried to make me believe! And again she wanted me to see my deliverer, as she called him, and said I was ungrateful not to wish to thank him, when I still refused. She still smiled, with her false, smooth smile, and called me obstinate, with the same air with which she would have chid a kitten; and therefore, she assured me, I should be sent home without delay, but that it was necessary *he* should come to release me, and take me away.

"I can't tell you more," added Veronica, laying her head on her friend's neck, "only that I still wouldn't see him; and at night I was taken ill, so ill that they put me to bed, and sent for a doctor. I think, perhaps, the strange woman became frightened, and thought my fever infectious, for I saw no more of her. But I didn't like the doctor at all; he was so dark, so frightfully dark, and had a black shadow round him; and there were more black shadows, a little old woman amongst them, who was my nurse I suppose, with a hump-back, and one tooth hanging from her jaw in front, very ugly. And yet she was kind to me, and really good, I think; at least, she never told me any lies.—And I was delirious some days, they said; but a day or two before

your brother came was better, though my hair was all gone, and my face as pale as a sheet. Ah, how much I owe you both! and poor, poor Letitia, too!" she added thoughtfully, "I wonder where she is!"

"One thing I am thankful for," she exclaimed energetically, a day or so afterwards, "that I did not take that drink, that spirits; who knows what would have become of me if I had?" She shuddered, and clung to Clara, while Clara thought, "Who knows, indeed?" and thanked God with her, that she had escaped that snare.

Veronica recovered her health and good looks, and as soon as possible went to assure Mrs. Christy of her welfare, and to give up possession of the rooms. Her heart ached as she did so, for the memory of her father clung about them, but she could not resist the entreaties of Clara and John, to take up her abode with them for the present, at St. Wilfrid's. They proposed for her, that she should have a year's earnest study in various branches of knowledge, and so prepare herself for a teacher; to tell the truth, she did not need much persuasion to induce her to accede to this scheme, lace-mending had very few charms, as may be imagined, and most thankfully she accepted the kindness of her friends. Her ambition stretched no further than to be able to teach the very young, and we may picture her therefore, for the present, cutting stars, and folding papers, modelling lilies and king-cups; mastering pentagon and hexagon and octagon, and going through numerous preparatory exercises on the piano, while the little ones about her look lovingly into her deep sweet blue eyes, or talk admiringly of the little curls that are just beginning to replace those heavy tresses lost in the fever.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES.

TIME like a good horse speeds along with its rider, man. Now galloping swiftly over the level, breezy uplands; now trotting complacently along the valleys, or walking occasionally by the side of

> "Shallow rivers by whose falls
> Melodious birds sing madrigals,"

that the traveller may listen both to the rivers and the birds, and some little also to the pleasure-beatings of his own heart; and now, breathing deeply up the steep ascent, or gently descending from the craggy edge, to the sleeping town at the base.

An untiring horse is the time-horse; he asks for no "hostel, barn, or grange," at which to rest his tired limbs; night and day, sunlight or moonlight, or pitch darkness, are alike to him; rain or fair, snow or sunshine, wild wind, or the sleep of the summer's noon. His rider may burden him as he will; he goes but the faster, the more he has to carry; he may put nothing upon his back, he only trots the harder. But he never stays or rests, and his feet are like Lear's horses, shod with felt, instead of ringing iron. Chaucer's wondrous horse of brass, that could

> "Bearen your body into every place
> To which your hearte willeth for to pace,"

was less wonderful, by far, than he is. How little do we know, sitting by our quiet firesides, it may be at

this present, where, in a few months, or years, or even days, he will carry us, or what strange, or sad experiences he will give us, before we have done with him!

Jane did not dream when she married Stephen Morris the much-admired and popular minister, of the thorny path that lay before her. Few brides, we suppose, anticipate sorrow. Could the future be revealed and opened to the gaze of some, when at the marriage altar, there would be sorrowing and silence instead of blushes and smiles, and the momentous, "I will." Jane had a brave heart, and she loved deeply, but I do not know that she would have sealed her betrothal kiss, with the ring and the marriage vow, had she seen her future husband, as we saw him a while ago, and as we shall see him presently, transformed by the potent Circean liquor in the cup of Comus, from the figure of a man, of almost an angel, as he seemed once to her, to the near likeness of a grovelling animal. Perhaps, indeed, she might have thought, with the elastic hope of a young and loving woman, that her arms would be strong enough to save him from such a fate, and that her mission was to be his deliverer and earthly stay, and she might thus have accepted it with a mixture of joy and trembling.

But she had entered on her path in complete ignorance of the gloomy turn its course so soon would take, and she found herself now in a wilderness of sorrow. Where did it terminate? From which brier could she gather fruit? Many a hero, in the garb of a woman, walks on the shady side of the path that is generally allotted to the sex. And many a female "Great Heart" pursues her way through "the valley of the shadow of

death," God-sustained and strong, on whom no lanterns of this world's fame are ever turned. And thus she pursued her way, drawing her strength, not from man, but God, and in the midst of deep sorrow and humiliation, found comfort and peace in Him.

Stephen's frequent fits of despondency she strove to cheer and remove, if it were possible, by the utmost kindness and love. His increasing desire for stimulants, though not fully known to her, alarmed her, and she endeavoured by direct and indirect means to check it. Jonas White's solemn appeal came to her knowledge, and she hoped and prayed it might produce blessed fruit in her husband's mind, and lead him to reconsider his ways and be wise. It had a temporary good effect;—the study cupboard was not looked into for a week, and the decanters were left unopened on the dinner-table for about the same period of time. But he was gloomy and abstracted during this interval, and complained that his brain was dull, and his mental powers were leaving him. The constant pulpit gladiatorship, to which he seemed condemned, was a great strain upon his powers; he must always come off victorious, or he must die; his popularity would be gone, his church decline, his best friends go about mourning, if he ceased to be the bright, particular star of Trentham, —if he became content to deliver stale bread and platitudes to his congregation. So he thought. He must therefore work, and keep thews and sinews in order, —and to do this he must *drink*.

We shall not stay here to show the false ground upon which he now stood, and how this gangrene of self-indulgence had eaten into his marrow. When

man leaves God, the rock of strength, the giver of all power and wisdom, and takes to rushes and feeble staves of his own contriving, to support him, and to his own wisdom for enlightenment, then he must needs sink and fall prone. When he leaves the Fountain of living water, the sand of the desert soon absorbs the little he has with him, and he is left athirst and perishing; he must die if he find not again the spring. Though, let us thank God! prayer and repentance can always discover it.

But Stephen was not aware he had lost it. Surrounded by the arid wilderness of his own lust, a perpetual mirage led him onwards, he saw wells and pools of water ever near, and his cheated eye mistook them for the pure waters of life. He talked of the living waters to his people, but he himself was far from them, and though at present they did not know it, a faint wonder was beginning to dawn upon them, and a loss of something in their minister, they knew not how to describe, was perceptible to them. His discourses became unequal—alternately lethargic and of luxuriant energy, and from his countenance had passed away a beautiful something that had once both awed and charmed. When the human has been face to face with the divine, even for a short time, there remains a glimmer of that sweet and awful light that in old times shone from Moses' countenance, and more or less it perceptibly illumes the man, as he walks again among his fellows. It beams from his eyes, and they behold it, though they know not what name to give it,—it lies tremblingly upon his every feature, and when he speaks they find his "hallowed lips have been touched with

fire," and they are conscious of its nearness in the electrical, soul-touching accents with which he greets them. The aura round the head of a saint is no myth, no pictorial exaggeration put in for effect, but very faintly is it to be seen in the dull ordinary atmosphere of this world, and not at all by eyes profane.

He still had eloquent words, and glowing imagery, logical sequences and deductions, clear illustrations and expositions, he still charmed and surprised, but could his hearers have seen within, they would have found the true glory had departed—the shrine vacant, the ark stolen. He had been able as yet to hide the emptiness, but a terror seized him at times, lest some penetrating eye should pierce the veil, or lest he himself in a moment of madness should tear it asunder, and expose the nakedness of the sanctuary.

And he did not fear without a cause. Premonitions were not wanting that the balance of the brain was being disturbed; that the constant and unnatural stimulus of wine was wearing and fretting its delicate fibres and cells, that a slow disease was progressing and sapping its soundness. A decreased power of attention, a loss of concentrative energy was beginning to be painfully felt, and at times, the unsolicited and pertinacious recurrence of one train of ideas.

Terrible dreams made the night hideous and the day languid. But when his wife pleaded for change of air and scene, he refused to listen to her,—when she hinted gently, and at length openly accused the "delightsome poison" as the cause of his decreasing health, he called her prejudiced and childish; and when she proposed a doctor, he shook his head with a decided

"No." He knew he was ill; ill in body, and ill in mind, ill at heart, and ill at ease, but he still loved the disease that preyed upon him, and he could not resolve to be divorced from it.

His week-evening duties were now sometimes entirely neglected, and sometimes only half performed; the young men's class for increase of biblical learning, about which he had once been so enthusiastic, was frequently left without his presence, and a zealous, but not too wise, deacon filled his place, to the disappointment of the young students, whose decreasing numbers soon testified to their dissatisfaction at the change, and want of interest; the Thursday night's sermon was often languidly given; but the prayer-meetings perhaps suffered most of all, and they were at last allowed to die away.

Want of health was pleaded as the cause of this decline in energy, and his people indulgently listened to the plea, and fearful lest they should lose his valued services altogether, wished to release him from some of his pulpit labour, or even to grant him a lengthened holiday. Urged from without and within, he at last took the holiday for six months, and visited some of the loveliest and healthiest places and scenes on the Continent. He came back stronger, and his health was for a time recruited, and those who saw his brighter eye and firmer step, said he was recovered, and congratulated him on his permanent improvement. Jane did not feel very hopeful, however. The black cloud was not removed, though a break of sunshine had occurred for a while, and while that cloud was in the heavens, how could she do other than expect rain, sooner or later?

The wine-merchant's bill was not reduced on his return, and frequently more potent liquors than port or Madeira were now needed. The servants began to remark the frequent importation of strong drinks into "master's" house, and of course had much more than a guess as to who required them. "Master" himself became less circumspect—and once or twice the servants' parlour had its ominous whisper about his "queer laughs," and "red eyes," and rolling walk. The sword of Damocles hung over the head of the minister and his wife, and any inadvertent broom, or mouse, or infinitesimally increased force of gravity, might at any moment break the hair that held it. With terror Jane saw it, and her white face almost betrayed the expected doom to ignorant friends; but Stephen became more and more lethargic and indifferent to consequences, and professed not to see the sword when it was pointed out to him.

Not always, however, was he thus apathetic. There were moments of keenest vision, of torturous excitement, of intense horror at what was so surely coming, and then so acute were his sufferings, so helplessly did he feel himself bound down to them, that his wife almost preferred for him the state of somnolency.

Do my readers think she ought to have exerted herself more freely and wisely to avert or remove the evil? It may be so; I do not claim for her the greatest wisdom in the world. But her path was no easy one. A husband whom she loved intensely, and at one time reverenced so much, had contracted an evil, dangerous habit; a habit which, indulged in to a certain extent, was one the world and the church approved of, but

which led to fatal consequences, if persevered in beyond that dim, ever-shifting circle of so-called temperance. His first wanderings beyond this circle were viewed by her with wonder and concern, but not with actual alarm. So far angelic was he in her eyes, so superior to the ordinary, every-day humanity, that she unfearingly saw his footsteps tread where others would be sure to slip. *His* feet were shod for ice, it was almost impossible *he* should fall; and when at last she did see him too visibly slip and stumble, she was half inclined to believe it was her eyes that were at fault, not his feet. And now, that it was become her duty to uphold him, and shield him from all possible danger, his passion for stimulants was much too strong for her weak arm to withstand; she warned and entreated and forbade, to little or no effect. When he was opposed he obtained by cunning what he was determined to have, and this cut her to the heart even more than the open refusal to attend to her entreaties.

On different characters and constitutions the mania for intoxicants has different phases and different rates of progress. On some it comes gently, and gains power and breadth only in the course of many years, like a stream that has had no rocky oppositions, and no impetuous freshets and numerous feeders to widen its banks and deepen its waters; but by a constant flow and slow increase has wound lazily through meadows and swamps.

On some its progress is rapid and alarming from the first outset. But frequently this deceitful passion accumulates power and strength, in secresy and silence, like a hidden reservoir, long held up and kept in bounds by the rock and clay and sand of conscience, or societary

proprieties and decorums. At last,—it is only a child perhaps, who perceives it,—a tiny hole through the embankment lets out a small driblet of water; then a jet, and then a runnel finds its way from the enlarging orifice. The child laughs and claps its hands, and throws upon the small streamlet boats of paper or walnut-shells, and in a while, tired of play, and lulled by the sound of its flow over the stones, goes to sleep by its side. But suddenly the embankment above gives way, a wild rush of waters leaps across the plain, desolating the valleys, carrying before it men and cattle, rocks and debris, hay-stacks and human habitations, as so many pebbles; and the next day where the child played and slept, is a wide lake, spread above corpses and destruction, engendering miasma and disease.

A few vague rumours began to float about the congregation at the chapel, that peculiarities had appeared in the conduct of the Rev. Mr. Morris—very gentle rumours at first. By and by, a tale came that he had been seen one night without a hat, and with his hair and dress in some disorder, walking backward and forward before his house with an unsteady step. In the pulpit it was remembered he had once burst into tears, and had been unable to proceed in his discourse, though there seemed no special call for the tears; and it was noticed that while preaching he frequently appeared bewildered, and put his hand to his brow, with an air of perplexity and distraction. Was it possible that his mind was giving way? Genius and madness, some say, are so nearly allied, that it only requires a little more phosphorus in the brain to conduct from one to the other, and it did really seem as if in his case the

excess of chemical substance had been given. There was certainly something unusual and occasionally startling in his manner in public, and a wild roll of the eye had not passed without observation.

He had hitherto been so far fortunate, that his fits of abstraction, to use a very mild term, had been unseen, except in the one case previously named, by any but those of his own household. Jane deprived herself of necessary rest and out-of-door exercise, to perform the office of dragon and motherly guardian in one, for him. And when he was unfit to be seen or heard, she closed the door jealously upon all visitors. The last two years' strain of mind and body had worn her more than ten years of quiet could have done, and her eyes were getting hollow and dim with frequent tears and watching, while amongst her bands of bright hair not a few gray ones showed their tell-tale whiteness. Her mother became alarmed for her health, and attributed her ill-looks to town air, wishing her to spend more of her time at Swansford; but that was impossible now, and she managed on all possible occasions to smile away her mother's fears. Clara, too, looked anxiously at the worn face of the young wife, but though she might sadly surmise the reason, she could not name it to her.

One afternoon John called upon his friend.—He was in the study the servant said, "Would Mr. Broadbent see him there?" Jane was out, and John replied, "Yes," and followed the young woman to the door of the room. A knock admitted him. Stephen was seated before a heap of books and papers. He looked at his visitor with a troubled expression; lately indeed he had avoided John, and no wonder, for he dreaded the

keen encounter of the eyes of such a friend. He shook him by the hand, and they conversed on the usual topics of the hour or day, but the minister could not look his visitor fully in the face, and averted his eyes whenever it was possible. His seat had its back to the light, and his face was therefore in shadow, but John noticed his efforts at concealment, and felt pained to think of the estrangement that made them appear necessary. Why was it his friend was now so uneasy in his presence? Why did he of late avoid him? Why did he seem depressed and at times perplexed?

"I was preparing my sermon when you came," he said after a short pause in the talk.

"I have interrupted you," replied John, "and perhaps had better take my departure. Your time is of great value, no doubt."

"No, no, nothing of the kind. I wish it were! The fact is, I was going to tell you of how little use it was to me this morning, I can't get along at all with my writing."

"Take a walk then. Go with me, this fine day with its fresh invigorating air will do you good. You will come back fresh and vigorous."

"No, thank you. I walked yesterday, and it did me no good. The air does not seem to reach me now as it used to do. I seem cased in hot plates."

"You are feverish and require medicine. Let me send Wilbraham to you."

"How fond you are of doctors, Broadbent! No, I want no doctor. It is no new thing; I am always feverish now, but I shouldn't mind that at all if it weren't for one thing," and he paused.

"Well?" inquired John, expectantly—

"You won't name it to any one, of course! But the fact is, when I sit down to write, I can't put down what I want, some other word comes uppermost. Are you ever plagued in that way?" John averred he was not, but advised his friend again to give up writing, and to take a walk with him. "You have been overworking yourself, perhaps?"

"I don't know. I can't tell! I wonder whether other ministers are teazed in the same way. One word has been particularly troublesome. And it is not only when I write.—I see it everywhere, on the ceiling, the floor, the table, the desk.—And if I take a walk it is on the sky and the grass just the same. I cannot get away from it. Look here!" he exclaimed with a sort of desperate energy, as he seized one of the sheets of manuscript lying on the table, and held it before John, shudderingly pointing out the obnoxious word.

It was not a pleasant word to find mixed up frequently in a sermon, yet it was written not only freely in passages not admitting such a word with propriety, but impertinently introduced, at random, in almost every line. The word was "devil," and was often brought out with a flourish and in larger letters than the rest. Stephen gazed with feverish eye at his friend to watch the effect the strange word might have upon him, but John kept his countenance unmoved, and after looking quietly at the paper a minute, laid it upon the table again with an indifferent air. Then he put his hand affectionately on Stephen's shoulder. "My dear fellow, you need rest, and rest you must have! Will

you let me advise you?" Stephen had been trembling with feverish excitement just before, he had quite expected an alarmed speech or a frightened look from his friend, but the coolness and calmness of this latter had a sedative effect upon him. He put his hands in his pockets, leaned back in his chair, and said languidly, "Yes, certainly."

"Will you first answer me a question truly?"

There was an earnestness apparent in John's voice now that commanded attention, and the minister's heart beat audibly as he replied more faintly than before—"Yes."

"Have you not been exciting your brain lately by strong drink?" And as John asked this direct question he looked directly at him.

Stephen's pale lips, from which all colour fled in a moment, uttered "I have," in almost indistinct tones; and then putting his hands before his face, he burst into tears.

For some moments there was an almost perfect silence in the room, the sobs of the nerve-shaken man only audible at intervals. In a while he lifted up his head, and said in humble, almost abject tones, "I have sinned deeply, I know it! but have a little charity! Ah, if you knew my wretchedness!"

"I am not here to condemn you," replied John sorrowfully; "but no doubt God has sent me here to advise you. I have no heart to condemn you, and I could not do it if I would, for I have been in the same gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity with you, though my feet have been mercifully kept from falling quite so far. But, Stephen, my friend, my dear brother, let me

advise you once more, for your soul and body's good! Look at yourself, and see what you are! Think of yourself, and see what you were, a few years ago—only a few years ago! What has brought about the difference? What has shorn you of your strength?—The Delilah of alcohol, the snare of the evil one. You thought it an innocent, weak thing, that could do no harm; you almost braved it to try its worst. You dandled it upon your knees, and called it your heart's delight, your bosom's comforter; and it has played you the same trick it has done before to so many others, so many thousand times. But put it away from you, now and for ever, and you shall still be saved. Let no drop ever again cross your lips, and banish it entirely from your house. I have no better advice to give you. And let me tell you, my dear friend, that this is the only way of redemption left for you—the only one. Whatever it costs you, in God's name and strength, take it!"

He was silent again; but he laid his hand once more beseechingly upon his friend's arm, and his eyes beamed with love and entreaty. Stephen looked at him with a touching expression of longing and despair. Such a look a shipwrecked man might cast at the rope thrown out for his deliverance, which his benumbed fingers have no power to hold.

"I cannot, I cannot!" was all he could say.

"You think so now, for the way seems difficult and impossible, while you are so weak and unnerved. But try only once, and you will get strength for another trial. Do not throw away this, it may be, your last chance. I know not what will become of you if you do! Will you let me make a beginning for you? Will

you let me tell your wife to put away all the drink? Will you—"

"No; I could not do that.—It is impossible!" and a burning blush arose upon his cheeks.

"Resolve then yourself, my dear fellow. Possibly your life depends upon the resolution you make to-day."

"I know it; I believe it! I feel that my brain is affected; all is very strange here sometimes!" and he put his hand to his forehead, "and you cannot think how that horrible word pursues me."

"A nervous fancy which must be got rid of as speedily as possible. Will you come and stay a week or two with me at St. Wilfrid's? It would be a good place to make a good beginning. We will do all we can to amuse, and interest, and comfort you, and I am a capital doctor, I assure you! Clara, also, is a most excellent nurse."

At the mention of Clara, Stephen's face lengthened. He had nearly come to the conclusion that a week at St. Wilfrid's would do him good; but how could he bear to be humiliated before Clara?

"No; I am indeed grateful for your kindness, but I cannot come."

"What can I do for you?" asked John with a look of distress. "Stephen, I would give my life to save you!"

"I believe it!" and Stephen pressed his hand convulsively. "But you are too good. I am not worthy. My life is not worth saving!"

"Let *me* rate its value, Morris. I should put it at a very high figure. Your talents, which are so great, and might do such immense benefit to the world; your

youth, your influence; O, Stephen, what a glorious worthy future is before you if you do your duty! Is it possible you can forget this? Will you throw it all away and become a reproach, a castaway, an apostate, for the sake of one low passion? Have you indeed no love left for souls—for God?" A burning blush again rose to Stephen's cheek. He tried to speak, but his lips refused utterance to the words.

"Think of the ruin that must come upon you and your beloved ones—your wife, your child, if you do not from this hour resolve to forsake, and begin a new life. Think of the souls that may through your apostasy be lost; of the terrible havoc that will come among your people; of the reproach that you will bring upon the name of Christian!"

"Spare me, spare me! I am not worthy you should talk to me any more. I *would* alter if I *could;* but I know my own weakness. What will you say to me when I tell you that I know I *cannot* refrain, not though all the woe and misery should come upon me you mention?"

"Then let others lead you, let others constrain you for a while to be perfectly sober and truly temperate—truly abstinent, I mean, and strength will come. Ask, too, for strength where it is never denied, and you will get it."

"Yes; I am well aware. But do you suppose I have never prayed?—thousands of times? I used to quote that text, 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much'—only of a righteous man, you see—when I spoke to my people. Now it upsets me. Of what use are *my* prayers?"

"There is another prayer, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'"

Stephen rose up agitated, and walked quickly about the room. He then approached John, took hold of his hand, and grasped it with a force that would have pained any less robust member, "Leave me; I will think upon what you have said; but—leave me!"

"I would rather have stayed with you, and had your promise of abstinence before I went. Then you and I would have made a bonfire of that manuscript, and gone out a walk together. But I leave you in God's keeping. May He guide and preserve you!"

He met Jane upon the stairs. Her face was flushed, as if she had been hurrying. A look of content however came over it when she saw John. "You have been with Stephen? I am so glad!"

"Yes; I have been talking to him, and now I want to talk to you."

She led the way into the drawing-room, and John told her his fears about Stephen's health. "He must not be left alone for the present, and I strongly advise that you send for the advice of Mr. Wilbraham."

"But Stephen is not willing to see a doctor. I have wished to send for one some time, but he will not hear of it."

"It must be done, however. If I have your permission I will call upon the doctor this morning, and get him to come up in the course of the day."

"Thank you, Mr. Broadbent! You are a true, kind friend."

"And I may send him?"

"O yes; it will be a great relief to me if you will."

Fervently hoping Mr. Wilbraham might be at home, John rang the bell of the surgery. An old servant quickly answered it, and telling him the doctor was within, led him into a sombre, but well-furnished reception-room. In a few minutes the doctor appeared, and looked grave indeed, after John had as lucidly as he could explained his errand. "Serious symptoms! Must be taken in time.—Some derangement of the nervous system generally," he said, as if to himself; and then louder, "You did well to come, Mr. Broadbent—quite right; and I will go as soon as possible."

"But," added John, "I have yet another thing to tell you; that he does not know you are sent for, and has, moreover, a great objection to any medical attendance."

"Mrs. Morris is at home, I presume?"

"Yes; and it is at her wish that I came here for you."

"Then we can manage it. I must make an afternoon call, and be invited to tea."

And so it was agreed.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MINISTER'S MARTYRDOM.

THE vigorous measures the doctor thought fit to take averted for this time any more serious symptoms. He saw well, however, that Stephen Morris was on the verge of an abyss, into which any sudden fright, or excess

in diet, or mental strain of any kind, might precipitate him. With double stress, if that were possible, he forbade the use of alcoholic stimulants; and gladly Jane obeyed him, and banished from the house, at this period of strict regimen, everything that might tempt either herself, or her husband, or the servants, to break the good rule of the doctor, and which in truth he imagined would only be observed by his patient.

Of course, all attempts at preaching were forbidden; the utmost quiet of the brain, or at least of those powers that had been of late so much overtaxed, was prescribed; and a temporary arrangement was made with another minister in the neighbourhood to undertake his pulpit duties.

Mrs. Gresham offered Swansford, and all the comforts and luxuries of her house, for the recreation and recovery of her son-in-law; and in a while he was removed thither. But in the meantime many other pleasant and beautiful country mansions were offered to him for places of temporary abode, whose inhabitants would have deemed it an honour to wait upon him in every possible way and provide for his comfort. The poorer members gave their prayers for the recovery of their pastor, and their affectionate thoughts; the richer, delicacies from green-house and farm-house, and all procurable luxuries for an invalid. Supplies of various kinds poured into the house, almost as if a siege had been expected; even wine was sent in abundance—wine of the delicatest and rarest—to recover the lost strength of the overwrought preacher. Jane dared not refuse this last present, lest remarks should arise from its rejection; but she privately had it removed to

Swansford, where the old gardener, a rigid teetotaller, took a grim delight in pouring it out upon the ground —at a safe distance, however, from the roots of his favourite plants.

General nervous debility and a threatened attack of brain fever were stated to be the causes of the minister's illness. Few, if any, suspected the real truth. The servants in the house were faithful, and kept the secret well; and, though a rumour now and then found its way, and oozed out among some of the scandal-lovers in the town, of want of sobriety, &c., it was almost universally rejected as soon as heard, with indignation, and with a warm protest against backbiters and the well-known spite of unbelievers.

At present, therefore, the sword of Damocles had not fallen, though that it really hung in such nearness to the minister's head was become plain to his most intimate friends and his doctor.

It was still there, and not once had it been removed, as was only too apparent to the sickening gaze of Jane. The drink had been taken out of Stephen's way, but the love for it was unbroken; and by some strange means he obtained it, notwithstanding the vigilance of his wife. On their removal to Swansford, she thought with almost exultation that there it would be impossible to bribe servants, since they would not be his servants, and he would not dare to make known his weakness to such comparative strangers. The gardener was grimly virtuous, as we have shown before, and would not consent to be made a link of communication with the outer-world bottles and barrels. Mrs. Gresham herself had never tasted

wine since her son's death; and now that she was sole mistress of Swansford, enforced the same rule of total abstinence upon her servants. There seemed to be no opening for the enemy in such a castle—every window was barred; and with so vigilant a sentinel as herself, she expected, not unreasonably, to hold her own. But she was deceived. Gin and wine certainly must have wings, and come by aerial passages, for they found their way even into Swansford House; and their private sitting-room and bed-room were its favourite places of resort, and port wine, to her dismay, left its stain upon her husband's handkerchiefs.

Still his health gradually improved, for these indulgences were of necessity much more rare than formerly, and the regular out-of-door exercise told upon him also. His hypochondriac fancies and torments left him, and he was able to laugh at what a few months back would have filled him with a hundred fears. In two months he was at home again and at work.

But he was not the same man as before. "His powers are leaving him," said his people, sorrowfully, as they sat listening for an hour on Sunday to a discourse delivered in a vapid, monotonous strain, evidently without pleasure or interest to himself, and as evidently without pleasure to them. His dull and frequently blood-shot eyes never lightened up now under the influence of holy aspiration or contemplation of the highest love; he seemed to have no heart-beatings for humanity, no enthusiasm. With a sort of mill-wheel round he went through his duties, and praise or blame appeared to him indifferent. A settled, stolid stare became habitual to his face; and when he conversed

with his people or his deacons he could seldom be stirred to a smile.

Gradually he lost his admirers; his sermons were now often careless in their composition, and commonplace in thought. "Poor Morris" was the title he most frequently got from the outer court and the world, who began also to understand he was a falling star, while his people deplored aloud the illness that had brought about all this change. Mr. Wilbraham looked unusually thoughtful whenever he met him, or heard him spoken of, and over John Broadbent's brow a shadow came at the mention of his name.

One morning, as this last was correcting the proofs of a work of his shortly to appear in print, he received a note from Jane.

"You are Stephen's only real true friend," it began, "whom I *can* ask, and I do ask that you will come over here and see him as soon as possible. I dare not leave him. Yours, JANE MORRIS."

A hurried little note, with but little in it, and yet it said much to John. He showed it to Clara. "Don't expect me at home again at present," he said, as he put on his coat and hat. "If I need you I shall send for you, dear!" and he was gone.

Clara and Veronica watched him out of sight, from the porch, now full of the pale green leaves of spring, while purple lilac blossoms filled the air about them with sweet scents. But the beauty of the day had no pleasure for Clara, and she sighed as she thought upon the trouble of her friends.

When John arrived at the well-known door, and was

admitted, he found Jane in the hall waiting for him. She was in a state of nervous agitation, and her eyes were red and heavy with weeping. Silently she conducted him into the breakfast-room. "I knew I might depend upon you," she exclaimed. "You are always kind and thoughtful. How glad I am to see you, I can scarcely say!"

"Where is Stephen?" asked John.

"That is what I want to tell you. He is in the study; has been there for hours, ever since last night in fact, and I cannot persuade him to come out and get breakfast, or to let me go in. He has locked the door, and I know he is drinking, or has been. I have tried to keep calm and quiet lest the servants should talk about it, but you cannot imagine the dreadful fears I have had; I can hear him moving about at times, and lately he has been talking a good deal to himself, that is all I know, but what can he be doing? Do you think, Mr. Broadbent, he would admit *you?*"

"I will try, but I fear it very much, since he has refused your presence."—He went to the study door, and rapped.

Stephen seemed to discover it was not his wife's rap, and asked after a moment, "Who's there?"

"John Broadbent."

There was a pause, and a shuffling. And then Stephen said, "I'm busy, I can't admit you."

"But I wish much to speak to you."

There was no answer for a minute. Then a low and quite a different voice said, "It can't be done, old boy!"

"Was that his voice?" asked John, in surprise, of Jane.

"I think so; he talks in that way sometimes, now."

"Is there any other entrance?"

"None, but by the window."

"Then I must try the window." All this was in a whisper.

She led the way out of the house to the little back garden, with its shrubs and grass. Pushing through a laurustinus, John found himself just beneath the window. Fortunately it was open. It was not unusual for Stephen to sit with it open in fine weather, and he had done so this morning. Bidding Jane return to the house, he at once clambered up, and was soon upon the window-sill and in the room. Here a strange sight greeted him. The table was littered over with manuscripts and books; books were removed from the shelves by the dozen, and were piled up near the fire, their covers starting and blistering and cracking with the heat, while in the chimney a heap of papers were smouldering, and within the fender lay quantities more, half or wholly burned. Stephen was standing without his coat in the middle of the room, his face turned towards the door, and did not therefore at first observe John, the crackling of the paper on the fire, no doubt, having diverted his attention from any other noise. But he soon became aware of the presence of another, and turned round, quick as lightning, facing the intruder.

His eyes flashed, his nostrils dilated, his mouth foamed, and John saw at once that he had to deal with a madman. He stood at once firm and erect, however, and after giving one cool glance around, fixed his eye steadily upon Stephen, as he said with a half smile, "Your window was open and invited me in, you see!

It was not good manners, but I know you'll excuse it. You're very busy here, what are you about?"

Stephen's face expressed bewilderment, but he still looked fiercely at John, and exclaimed, "Be off! You're not wanted here!"

"Yes, I'll go in a minute or so. I don't want to bother you. But you'll let me sit down a little first, won't you?" And he took hold of a chair.

Stephen gravely brought out a watch. "In a minute," he said, looking down at the minute hand, "in a minute you go!"

John seemed not to notice this. He sat down, with his face, however, to his companion, and said, "What a bonfire you're making! I suppose you thought it cold."

"Very cold!" replied Stephen more mildly, and his teeth chattered as if he really felt chilled. "But you see those papers are rubbish, and won't make a good blaze."

"Perhaps they're damp," suggested John.

"No; I know how it is. They've a queer name on them, all of them. So have all these," and he brushed a number on to the floor as he spoke. "They must all burn, burn, burn! How long will they burn, do you think? How long shall I burn? We must all burn together! That will purify us." And he fixed his eyes upon the fire.

"True," replied John, "but we won't burn just at present. It would be better to wait till night, for instance, the blaze would be seen better then."

Stephen had put back his watch. He had forgotten about John's minute. He came and seated himself by

his friend, and fixed upon him his eager restless eyes. "You really think it would?"

"Decidedly. Isn't all fire seen best at night? And if I were you I'd make a great heap now, in preparation, in the middle of the floor. Let me show you how to begin, shall I?"

Stephen made no opposition. He seemed pleased with the thought of a grand bonfire at night, and John arose and went towards the chimney-piece, for the apparent purpose of collecting the books, but really to take possession of an open clasp-knife he saw there. He grasped and concealed it dexterously. Then he stooped for the books, and brought a heap to Stephen's feet.

"More, more!" exclaimed Stephen, and John fetched more, the madman helping, till a great heap was piled, John contriving his movements so as to pass and repass the door, and at one opportune moment to unlock it. Then he pleaded they had enough, and might well wait till night.

Meantime Jane, who had been listening painfully at the door, had heard it unlock, and thinking she might now enter, opened it, and came in. Her husband, who had been kneeling before the pile, sprang to his feet, and rushing towards her in a sudden access of fury, seized her by the throat, exclaiming, "Begone, Satan!" and would no doubt soon have strangled her, had not John come to the rescue. There was a violent struggle, the madman releasing his wife to attack John. He was strong, as are all the insane in their paroxysms, and with grinding teeth and flashing eyes and wonderful dexterity of movement, making himself now slippery

to hold as a fish, and now strong to attack as a tiger, he proved for some time more than a match for his opponent.

We called it a violent struggle, but it was a succession of struggles, Stephen alternately suffering himself to be held fast, both arms bound down, and then suddenly, with an almost superhuman effort, getting loose and renewing the attack.

John's strength began to fail. His right arm had received a powerful wrench, and was rapidly becoming useless. The female servants, collected about the door, were attending to their mistress, who was still gasping and all but insensible, but the coachman, whom they had called in to help, stood apart, irresolute and afraid. "Will no one help?" shouted John, giving a hasty glance at the crowd. No one stirred, all were too paralyzed by fear to come forward; but at that moment a tall figure advanced from behind, and pushing the women gently away right and left, entered the room, and with powerful hand collared the maniac.

It was Dr. Wilbraham, who had been passing in his carriage, on his way to a patient, and was "impressed," as he said afterwards, to call. He found the front door open, and came in unobserved, just in time to effect the capture.

Resisting violently, Stephen was hurried away up stairs to his chamber and there secured, his cries and screams being heard through the house with terrible distinctness for a long time.

What a night was the one succeeding! John did not once leave his friend, though other help was procured, to be available in case of need. It was an attack of

delirium tremens, the doctor said, and might have very lamentable consequences. Alternations of frenzy and cowering fright, that imagined devils in every corner of the room, and one especially frightful one upon his bed, that would crawl about him, and that kept him in constant fear,—with stupor and partial sensibility, passed over several days.

Clara came from St. Wilfrid's, at Jane's wish, and helped her to pass over these sad days. Jane was much shaken by her fright, and quite unable to leave her room for a week, but Clara's presence was like moonlight penetrating through clouds.

John was untiring in his attentions to his friend—his hand gave the medicine, and his ear listened patiently to the maunderings and delirium of the goaded, overwearied brain, and his firm one-handed grasp—for his right arm was still weak—held down the sufferer in his ravings, or rang for help if it were required.

When the distemper had been conquered, and reason sat once more on her throne, though mourning and disconsolate at the wreck around her, and when the body had a little recruited its exhausted forces, when, pale and weary, Stephen lay upon the couch in his bedroom, his soul sank within him humiliated, he could scarcely bear to meet the friendly eyes that had watched over him so many hours. He had long fits of silence, during which John left him to his own sorrowful musings, but he had also some periods when talking seemed a relief.

At one of these times—it was twilight, and the fire burned languidly, throwing an occasional dull gleam across the room—he said, "If it were but possible to

begin again one's life! How different all should be with me!"

"It is possible," John replied. "A new era may begin for you, if you will. You have only to will it. To let your will be one with the divine will, which calls upon all men to love holiness and purity of life.—To die to sin, to be born again to new life and holiness; how blessed that would be for you! And it may be."

Tears came in Stephen's eyes. "I am the chief of sinners, John."

"There is a Friend of sinners, do not forget that."

"I cannot, or I should die at once of shame and grief. But I am utterly unworthy to have a friend of any kind, and especially such a friend."

There was a silence of some minutes, then Stephen partially raised himself from the couch. "I have determined," he said, as he looked at John.

"What have you determined?"

"To give up my church; to leave the ministry; I have long contemplated it, now I am determined."

"It will be right to do so," said John. "And indeed, I do not suppose you could have kept it."

"All is known then?" asked Stephen, feverishly.

"I fear so, though everything has been done that could be done to conceal it."

Stephen hid his face in his hands. John heard him breathing deeply as in pain. The sword had fallen at length.

"Tell me all!" he said at last, in a suffocated voice.

"I do not know all. But I will tell you what I know, if you think you can bear it."

Stephen moved his hand in token of assent.

"Yesterday one of the deacons called here, Mr. Strange, I think, and asked to see me. He said there had been a church meeting about your illness, and that several resolutions had been passed, one especially, it would be well for you to know as soon as you were able."

"I understand,—they have dismissed me, or asked me to resign, the same thing!"

"They have." John did not tell him that he had heard further that the whole town was full of the scandal, and that it had spread far and wide that Mr. Morris was a drunkard.

"Does Jane know?"

"Not at present; it is not necessary. Clara will tell her before long, when she can bear it."

"Ah, Jane had better never have married such a castaway as myself. What harm I have done her, poor girl!"

"Yet you may still be happy, and make her so, if you will. In some other place you may begin life anew. All is not lost yet! Only determine to give up that which has caused all this mischief."

Stephen turned his head away, and listened wearily to the rain, which splashed upon the window-pane. Then he said in an inexpressibly despondent tone, "I had better die; I think I had better die!"

His friend said no more on the subject, he waited for a better opportunity. "Strange!" he thought, "that he should be so remorseful, so apparently repentant, and yet not be able to determine to give up the fatal indulgence. Alas! of what good is such remorse?" He sighed. Stephen heard the sigh. "I have grieved

you again," he said, "and I know it, but you cannot tell how weak I feel, how little able to promise anything. If I thought I could keep my promise, then there would be less difficulty; but the fact is, I am utterly lost.—Oh John, leave me, give me up! I am not worth your care and love; I shall shame your friendship again—I shall dishonour you—leave me!"

"I cannot; I will not leave you a prey to the tempter, while I can hold out a hand to save you. But what am I saying? It is God only that can deliver you. My hand is impotent, unless He gives it strength. I will pray for you, but I will not give you up."

A grateful look passed over Stephen's face, then he shut his eyes, and lay for some time perfectly quiet. Presently he passed into an uneasy slumber. He seemed to dream and to struggle for something. "Only a taste!" he muttered, "just one glass, and I shall be satisfied—only one glass!" He awoke uttering the last words.

John beheld him with concern. Then, as he shook off the evil dream with a deep sigh of deliverance, he said,

"It pursues me even in my dreams. How do you think I am ever to be free?"

"You are not yet well. In a while all this will pass away, never fear."

"In the meantime I am wretched, and believe I shall ever be so. You do not know how I long after the drink. You cannot tell the horrible feelings I have to endure."

"Take courage! They will soon pass away, and then you will have conquered. This is part of your

punishment, your martyrdom; you must endure it. In awhile it will be gone."

"*Martyrdom,*" Stephen repeated with bitterness of tone. "How I once used to long to be a martyr; what a dream it was! A Christian martyr! And now, I am martyrized in this way. Truly the devil has martyrs as well as God. What a martyrdom I have chosen!—Oh John, is there need of any other hell than this?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CHILDREN'S PARTY.

If again we let loose the reins of our Time-horse, and suffer him to march on with us, past brake and brier, and dreary wildernesses of sorrow and shame, of which our moral earth is, alas! so full; being in this respect perhaps, ages behind the physical earth, abounding still in saurians, and sea and land monsters not yet extinct, and in chasms, and arid volcano-lands, that are to be in the happier future closed, and fertilized,—we must ask pardon of the reader. Not willingly do we stay beside the bed of what may appear to our defective vision, almost hopeless anguish, for we confess scenes of horror are to us as repugnant to record as they would prove to some to witness.

With a deep, deep sigh of relief we turn our gaze from man in torment, to man in hope and joy; from the *Inferno* to the *Paradiso*, or at least to that which

most nearly approaches it in this world. Not to the city shall we go for our *Paradiso*, nor to any of the dusty, humming hives of men, those builders of combs which are not always stored with honey; nor yet shall we take our course to the hills, though upon their heads rainbows repose, or arch them in gloriously, a grand frame to a grand picture, and though upon their thymy sides our feet love to linger, among the purples and the gold of broom and heather, the last the "*ling*" that perhaps suggested the word linger to some poetic heath-lover of old times, whose ankles loved the rustling touch of its purple bells, and lengthened out the parting with "sweet, reluctant, amorous delay."

By the river is our present paradise. There were four such round Eden, a quaternion of delights, but to find one lovely stream at once, is all we can now expect in these latter days of dimness, in any of our far-away western Edens—all we desire, it may be.

The brother and sister at St. Wilfrid's, at least, asked for no more. To them its pure flowing waters were endlessly suggestive of deep peace and progress combined, a combination at once symbolic of, and springing alone from, the union of the human soul with the divine. Its morning changes of tint from deepest gray to clearest, softest white and blue, and its evening splendours of gold and crimson, preached ever to them what man's life should be, a gradual putting on of light and beauty, and the richnesses of love; and when night absorbed the colour for another morning to reveal, and hid the flow of the current with the shadow of her hand, they saw in this shadow an emblem of death, that hides, but does not take away or destroy.

Veronica grew increasingly lovely by the river. That last storm that had swept across her sky, and had threatened to wash her away by its violence, left the heavens bare for the sun to shine out without stint. Her whole life till now had been gray as an overcast morning; all the more did she now enjoy the free unclouded brightness; she unfolded like a flower after rain. Clara's face, sometimes too thoughtful in its womanliness, became younger and gayer near hers, and when John was absent on some of his many engagements, with Jonas White, or some other friend of temperance, seeing to his school for drunkards' children, or arranging the classes and library for his Labourers' Institute, or preparing, it may be, a lecture for the same, the two friends at times wandered, without his welcome company, it is true, but very happily, up the Grove, and among the cornfields beyond.

They were walking out one summer's evening in this way. Gathering, as they proceeded slowly, handfuls of forget-me-nots and way-side grasses, with wild roses and meadow-sweet, money-wort, and convolvuli, to adorn the room at the cottage on the coming children's festival, and Veronica had laughingly placed in Clara's hat a grand trail of bryony, and in her own a single wild rose, fragrant and white, when a fallen tree irresistibly suggested their need of a rest, and they sat a while upon its rough but convenient trunk to talk and overlook their flower treasures.

"It is a shame," said Veronica, as she gazed upon her group of beauties.—"I have said many times I would never gather this again, and yet I have broken my word to-day.—My poor veronica! why will you always

fade so?"—and as she spoke she drew out a withered branch of her namesake, the lovely germander speedwell, whose delicate blue flowers had dropped away in dying. "You are only good for the open meadow or bank, and no water now will revive you!—Clara, it is like what *I* should soon have been in the town, a poor withered good-for-nothing.—How much, how very much, I owe to you and John! Where should I have been now but for you? Working in that gloomy room at black lace.—How happy I ought to be! how very happy I am! And yet," here she paused, her eye resting on the tree-shadowed stream at her feet, "I sometimes feel I have no right to my happiness while I do nothing for Letitia. How could I save her, Clara? What can I do for poor Letitia? I am so useless—not able yet to earn my own living; if it were not for your goodness I should perhaps have no bread to eat, so it seems absurd to talk of it; and yet to get her away from that horrid life is the one great wish of my heart? I would do *anything* to save her!"

"John has thought of it," replied Clara, "though I am telling you a secret. He has taken her away from that house."

Veronica clasped Clara's hand.

—"A month ago," continued Clara, "though he did not mean to tell you just yet; and—she is now abroad."

"Abroad?"

"With old friends of ours in Germany, a benevolent old doctor and his wife, who are devoting their lives to the reformation of people like her. John meant to tell you in a day or two, for he has had a letter from the Hermanns, that is their name,—and I am a very

naughty sister indeed to have spoiled the surprise he intended for you. I begin to feel quite repentant already!" Happy tears were in Veronica's eyes, and it might be that on this account she did not see at first the approach of a man, who, with downcast head, as immersed in thought, was nearing them. He, however, lifted his head before he quite approached, and seeing her, stood still.

It was the dark stranger, whom some years ago Stephen Morris met at the ferry, but looking much older and thinner: and where once dark hair lay about his temples, were now locks of iron gray. His eyes were sunk, and his whole aspect dejected.

When Veronica saw him he was leaning half-hidden by the trunk of an elm, but with his eyes fixed steadily and sorrowfully upon her. She changed colour suddenly, and with difficulty suppressed a scream. Gathering her flowers from the tree beside her, with trembling hands, she said to Clara in a scarcely audible voice, "Let us go, Clara, at once! The man of my dreams is there!"

Clara turned round amazed, but the tree hid the stranger from her sight, and she hesitated, "What is the matter, dear? what man?"

Pulling her by the sleeve, Veronica whispered hurriedly, "He is there, by that elm!—Come away!—Don't you see him?"

Clara obeyed, and with her change of position gained a sight of the dark stranger. But he had by this time left the side of the elm, and was advancing towards them. He was so near that it was of no use to attempt to flee. They must face him now.

Veronica clung to her friend, but Clara stood up erect and fearless, with that calm sweet dignity that became her so well, and as her eyes met those of the intruder, his fell with a look of abasement and humiliation.

"Forgive me!" he murmured. "I am not here to alarm.—I have no wish to annoy.—I have but come to ask forgiveness of one I have wronged, and to whom I wish to speak a few words of explanation. You will surely allow me to do this? Then I will go away and never trouble you again."

"Speak," said Clara's clear ringing voice. "What do you wish to say?"

"It is to your friend I wish to speak. I have no right indeed to claim a hearing from her. I saved her life, perhaps, from the snow-storm, but I conducted her to that which she would, no doubt, rather have died than met. And though she was saved not entirely against my will, I cannot rest till I have told her how much I have suffered for, how bitterly I repent, the alarm and anguish I caused her!"

He paused, and seemed to await Veronica's reply, but she was unable to speak. She still trembled so much that the words died soundless upon her tongue.

"Call me the vilest names you will," continued he, "they will not be too vile for me! My life has been a series of crimes, one vast crime, I ought to call it.—From boyhood I have been a profligate and a companion of the wicked. I ought not to expect you to forgive such as I am, I am not worthy to approach you, and no doubt you think I ask too much. I acknowledge it.—And yet, remember, even an angel can pity and forgive!"

"I do pity and forgive you," murmured Veronica. But her eyes were still unable to look upon him.

"It is enough!" he said. "Thanks for your pity also! And now I must go my way amongst my fellows;" he uttered these last words bitterly, "and from them I have no favour to ask; wolves and sharks can only bite and rend!"

"But," said Clara, impelled to speak to this forlorn soul by some supreme sentiment of compassion. "Why return to the company of the wicked? You were born for higher things, higher society. You have better desires, why not follow them?"

He listened to the music of her voice attentively, as to words from a higher sphere; but he shook his head.

"No, madam; the die was cast many years ago! Had I power to begin a new life, your presence and encouraging words would be sufficient to induce me to try it, but it is too late! I must go again to my captivity, the life I have chosen. And yet, I have seen lately its odiousness,—the depth to which I have fallen has been revealed to me.—I once had a mother;" here his voice trembled a little. "But this is weakness! I have been ill, and, as I thought, near death; and at that solemn time my whole life has passed before me. It is that illness which has caused the change in me, for I feel I am not as I was. Formerly I existed for the sake of revenge on those whom I thought had wronged me; I worried, because I had been preyed upon myself, and I thought I had a right to do so. But now I see that it is myself alone who has been to blame. I live for remorse and punishment, that is all that is left to me now.—I must drink the dregs of the cup I have mixed

for myself.—It is bitter enough, but bitters, they say, are wholesome!"

"At least let my brother speak to you," pleaded Clara. "He is good and noble, and would, I am sure, help you."

"I want no help from man! I say again, it is too late!"

"There is help in God! Go to him, and sin no more!"

He made no reply, but lingered a moment, regarding her with a strange despairing expression, bowed, and withdrew. They heard his feet crack the dry twigs that a late wind-storm had brought down, and then gradually the sound of his footsteps ceased. A minute afterwards they were standing once more by themselves.

Veronica raised her head. "I am glad he has been," she said with a sigh of relief, "though I was so terribly frightened. Clara, do you think we shall ever meet him again?"

"I think not," answered Clara thoughtfully; "he said not, if you remember."

"That is right. I hope he will never come near me any more. I could never walk up this Grove again with any comfort if I thought he would meet me here again. He brings back all that fearful time to my memory; and yet how sad he seems! I feel half-wicked that I cannot pity him more than I do."

Thoughtfully they returned home. As they reached the village, however, happy little faces, that peeped from window and doorway, and smiled upon the flower-bearers, lightened up theirs with answering smiles. "To-morrow, to-morrow!" shouted the children, and clapped their hands, anticipative of delight. And "to-

morrow, to-morrow!" remembered the two friends, and hastened home to prepare. They threw off hats and shawls in haste, for there were wreaths to make of forget-me-nots and grasses, of bryony and convolvuli, bouquets of roses, and other flowers, both from the garden and the field—garlands for the little ones, and garlands for the pictures also—Veronica's quick fingers weaving, and Clara's placing and arranging.

They were busy in this way when John arrived from the town, laden with picture-books, puzzles, boxes of toys, and a magic lantern. "Some oats for the pack-horse, ladies!" he said laughingly, as he laid upon the kitchen-table his load. "He's fearfully hungry, for he has been working very hard."

"He shall have oats and hay both if he will come here," replied Clara from within the parlour, and as he entered obediently, she met him at the door, and threw over the masses of his brown hair a garland of her choicest wild flowers. "Now you are ready for the feast! Sit down; tea shall be here in one minute."

The table was spread out, everything was ready but the tea-pot, and John seated himself at once before a pile of bread and butter, bidding Veronica do the same. He was still adorned with the garland.

"You are a magnificent pack-horse," exclaimed Veronica admiringly when they were half through the meal, and when the "noble rage of hunger" was somewhat appeased.

"Indeed I am! I don't know what you would do without me. Three weary miles I travelled with those gimcracks in the heat and dust, and if I hadn't remembered the oats at the end of my journey, should perhaps

have fainted. I hope to-morrow you will teach your little ones to sing my praises. But,—however,—I must not take more than is my due; I had better tell you the whole truth. I met Plowden's cart, with Mary and Ebenezer, and they gave me a lift. Ebenezer was singing his song of 'Old Grumbo,' with his nose in the air, quite unaware of my presence, but Mary's eyes were brighter. She seized the reins and stopped the horse, to take in me and my load."

"Good creature!" exclaimed Clara.

"Very good! I thought so I can assure you. There are not many like Mary. I learned a little secret too, but as they say ladies cannot keep secrets, I had better not tell it you at present, I think. If, however, you think you are good secret-keepers, I will confide it to you."—

Clara and Veronica looked at each other with a peculiar smile: Clara perhaps let her guilt appear in her face. John noticed the glance. "You don't say Yes, and therefore," with comic gravity, "I will not tell it you to-night. It shall be what the boys call 'a jolly cracker' to startle you to-morrow."

After tea, Mary Plowden came in, with perhaps a tinge of colour more than usual in her cheeks.

"I am come to see if I can help you," she said to Clara, "I understood how busy you were likely to be, and you know how clever I am at flowers. But,"—in a tone of disappointment, "I am too late, I see! You will not need me this year."

"Thank you," said Clara, "but Veronica has been so industrious and clever that we have nearly done all that is wanted in this room. What do you think of John's garland?"

"It is splendid, it is magnificent! May I take a sketch, just a *little* one? you look so well, Mr. Broadbent!"

"That is not fair of you, Mary! You are trying to wheedle me into compliance,—but as a man I am *not* to be wheedled! To support my dignity it is necessary I should say 'No.'"

As however he did not remove the garland but sat still, looking at her with very laughing eyes, Mary's ever-present sketch-book came from her pocket, and she began to work at once with the utmost self-possession.

Meantime Clara retreated into the kitchen to superintend the unpacking of various baskets of fruit, cherries, and strawberries, and sweet June-eating apples, and to place them upon plates and dishes, while Veronica hovered near, and assisted as far as was possible, carrying them afterwards into the cool pantry, where they were to remain over night in company with cakes and confectionary of various kinds, of Clara's making. Long after the children who were to enjoy the feast were in bed and asleep, dreaming perhaps of the happy "to-morrow," these preparations and others were going forward.

Ebenezer Plowden had lent one of his fields, just cleared of the hay, for the children's games; but after tea all were to be gathered in the well-known cottage school-room to see the wonderful entertainment that had been provided there for them.

We will not describe this children's party, because we have another and more important one to speak of presently, and we might weary our readers with so

much dissipation. Strawberries and cream even, will pall upon the taste if too often repeated. Also, two parties occurring so near together are quite too much for our humble pen to describe. It will be sufficient to say, that no lambs in a sunny May-meadow skipped and played and exercised their limbs better, or to greater hearts'-content, than did the little ones of Clara's school, on this holiday; and no lambs cropped the grass or nibbled the hedge to more purpose than did these innocents, the cakes and fruits, the tea and bread and butter, that were so liberally put in the afternoon's pasture for them, disappeared swiftly. The magic lantern charmed all eyes, and its "Tom Toddy's" and grotesquery lived long, in the little boys' memories especially, while the magician who showed it was an universally pleasant personage; the toys were accepted with shouts of delight, they were the crowning pleasure of the evening, and as the little voices joined in a circle of song at the close, the piano ought to have felt, if it did not, that it had never accompanied happier trillings from young throats.

The news that was to resemble a "cracker" for its startling power, and that John announced with due emphasis to Clara and Veronica, was not told till all the little ones were gone away, and the three were left sitting together in the parlour, wearied but well content. We who can travel about whither we will, need not wait for his communication, but may see and hear for ourselves, and at once be transported to an orchard near the house of Ebenezer Plowden, the basket-weaver. It is an old orchard, with mossy-rooted, crooked-trunked apple-trees, but the old trees

have not yet lost the knack of bearing good fruit, and Ebenezer will not have them cut down to make way for younger growths, as James Miller has advised. He has pleasant remembrances about all the trees. One grandmotherly "ribston" used to solace his boyish appetite, how many years ago, he is almost afraid to think, with its delicious crimson russets, the very queens and moss-roses of apples; and under another, he once sat a whole summer's afternoon, when Sarah Hawthorn had rejected him—sat in dudgeon dire, and with not the most amiable feeling towards the thorn he had touched only to prick himself. Now he laughs as he shows the very spot where his jacket rubbed the trunk of the old tree—old now, young and vigorous then—till his back was green from the moss, and his mother suspecting, perhaps, his ailment, dusted it off with a joke, a very bad one he thought it at the time, about his "greenness."

He has more memories, in fact, than we have time to record. Evening is closing in, though there are long days now, and St. John's day has not long slipped by, and even our eyes will not be able to see presently two figures walking in this old apple-garden if we do not make haste—a man and a woman, walking and conversing as once in very old times two walked and talked and admired in the garden of Eden. They look perhaps quite as affectionate as these last, though not so noble or beautiful, and though both just now are near a dangerous tree, an apple bowing down with its early fruit, and thus the resemblance is more complete, it is not Eve but Adam, who plucks the fruit and hands it to his companion. For Adam is the taller, and can

more readily grasp the tempting apple. He is speaking, and we will listen.

"That is the finest 'June-eating' in the neighbourhood, Mary! I shall get your father to let me have some grafts next year."

"What trees will you graft?" asks Mary. "I thought all yours were in full bearing."

"Yes, but I must have constantly young trees ready to sell. You shall read some gardening books that I have, that you may learn all about it, for you will have to be very clever in that way! By next spring your education must be finished." Mary does not reply, so his arm winds round her waist, and he leads her on under the trees, over the soft green grass.—"In March, what do you think of March—?"

We can hear no more, for they are now the distance of at least six trees from us, but two things we notice before they are out of sight. One, that March must be a very delightful month in Mary's eyes, if we may judge by the expression now in her face,—very different to the blustering, bellowing wintry month we often find it, neither winter or spring, but with some of the least amiable features of both in it; and the other, that the Adam who has just given an apple to his Eve, and talks so wisely about her horticultural education, looks exceedingly like our old acquaintance, James Miller.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FROM ST. WILFRID'S TO BRUNSWICK HOUSE.

THE next morning John and Clara and Veronica were seated at breakfast, when by post came a letter for Veronica, to her great surprise, and almost dismay, as she knew of no correspondents. Opening it with some trepidation, and no little curiosity, she read—

"ALDBOROUGH, *June 30, 18—*.

"DEAR MADAM,—I am instructed by Mrs. Lee, of Brunswick House, to request your attendance upon her. She has business of importance to communicate, and as she is at this present time extremely ill, she will be glad if you will make arrangements to visit Aldborough the same morning you receive this. Mrs. Lee will send her carriage for your use.—I am, Madam, yours respectfully, RICHARD GALE."

"How strange, how very strange!" exclaimed Veronica, as she passed the letter to John for his perusal.

"Strange, indeed!" he replied, after reading it twice over. "But I suppose you will be obliged to go."

"Shall I? I wish though Mrs. Lee had not sent."

"You shall not go alone. Clara or myself will accompany you; do not fear. But it seems of importance you should go.—Richard Gale?—Richard Gale? who can he be? Is he a solicitor? There is one of that name, I think, in the town."

"Most probably," said Clara; "but we shall perhaps hear when the carriage comes."

In the course of an hour a close carriage and pair drove up to the cottage, and out of it came a short, middle-aged gentleman, who asked for Miss Lee, and was shown at once into the parlour.

"Miss Lee, I presume?" and he bowed elaborately to Clara; but Veronica came forward and announced herself as Miss Lee.

"My name is Gale," he continued, introducing himself, "of the firm of John and Richard Gale, solicitors, King Street, Trentham. You may possibly have heard the name. I am come this morning, by the express desire of Mrs. Lee, of Brunswick House, Aldborough—a lady you are acquainted with—and I may say, a relative of yours, and who I regret to say is in a dying condition, to ask you to accompany me to her house. You have received a letter, I believe, informing you of this."

"I have," replied Veronica. "But first let me introduce my friends to you—Miss and Mr. Broadbent."

"Most happy to make your acquaintance, madam! Glad to see you, Mr. Broadbent!" and the little lawyer bowed with some grimace.

"Miss Lee is for the present under my guardianship," said John; "and of course I shall not object to her visiting Aldborough, as the business is of the importance you say, but you must allow me also to accompany her. The last time she was at Brunswick House she was not well treated by Mrs. Lee, and, moreover, nearly lost her life on her return, alone."

"I am sorry to hear it—very sorry to hear it," replied Mr. Gale; "but, let me assure you, Mrs. Lee is much altered—the young lady need fear no abuse now.

Of course, far from having any objection, I shall only be too happy to bear *you* company on the journey also."

In a short time all were ready to depart, and with loving adieus to Clara, Veronica and John started in company with Mr. Gale. It was summer, and the weather was warm, and even close, and Veronica soon persuaded Mr. Gale to have the carriage-top let down for air. Memory was busy; and she looked out at the highroad, and noticed how beautiful all things appeared on this midsummer morning, how the birds fluttered and hovered joyfully over fields rich with grass and clover, and with corn in the ear, and how the hedgerows were filled with leaf and bud and flower, of thousand hues and shapes, and she drew the comparison between this pleasant morning's journey and the one she had six months ago—only six months ago—taken, when toiling friendless and desolate over the snow, all things around her had appeared so bleak and barren and inhospitable. With eyes wet with thankful tears, and with awe-stricken face, she looked across the uninclosed forest-land through which the road wound, teeming now with life and beauty, a lovely wild of heather and broom and gorse, on whose million flowers the sun looked down with brilliant effect—for every tree had been shorn away years ago from its wide expanse—and pointed out to John the spot she imagined must be the one where she had lain down so despairingly to die.

"You do not mean to say, my dear young lady," interrupted Mr. Gale, who had heard the conversation between the friends on this subject with undisguised astonishment, "that you lay there, on that piece of road, lost and dying, last winter!"

"I do, indeed!" replied Veronica; "and if it had not been for a stranger who was passing in his gig I must have died."

He looked wonderingly at her blooming countenance, so lovely with health and beauty, and at the golden ripples of her hair, falling from beneath her bonnet upon her rounded shoulders, and muttered, "Impossible!" But she shook her head at him, and said it had been too possible, as she had experienced to her sorrow.

"But God preserved me," she added reverently; "and here I am!"

It was a great contrast, certainly, that despairing forlorn time, and this, with its harvest of content and happiness. It is true, she was on her way to see one who was ill, perhaps dying, but no slightest tie of affection united them, and though there might be pity, there could be no grief.

"And Mrs. Lee?" she asked at length of Mr. Gale, remembering the cause of this sudden journey.

"She is much altered, as I said," replied he. "You will scarcely know her; she is not the same woman, either outwardly or inwardly. There is a most amazing change, to be sure." He paused a moment, and then he added, "I have heard lately, quite lately, the particulars of your last visit to her."

"My last and first," interrupted Veronica.

"Last and first, of course.—And I find from her account that you have never been absent from her mind since. You made a strange impression on her. Though if you were half as beautiful then as now, my dear young lady, I can quite understand it," he said, with a little bow, while Veronica coloured under the ill-timed

compliment, to her vexation.—"But it seems she remembered you with uneasiness and dread. Or was it her conduct to you on that visit that gave her concern? for I understand she was haughty enough, to say the least of it.—Ah, well! I can scarcely tell.—She is a proud woman, odd and reserved too, at times, though none can be more agreeable when she chooses. You brought her a letter from your father, and her husband, I think?"

"Was Mrs. Lee my father's wife? How could that be?" inquired the amazed girl.

"Yes, certainly; did you not know it? She was your father's lawful wife. Your father married her at Stukely, December 22, 1802, and he also married your mother, at St. Mary's, Trentham, in April, 1812, or thereabouts. I have the dates all perfect among my papers."

Veronica was silent, not from stupor, however, but from abundance of painful thoughts.

"That letter, I need scarcely tell you, was a great shock to her; you cannot wonder it should be! Her first intention was to burn it, but she thought better of that. She sent for me, showed it me, and asked my opinion of it. Of course I sent immediately to ascertain how far the facts it stated were true or false. I found your father was really dead, and that you, Veronica Lee, were the offspring of a marriage he had contracted with one Jessy Hammond."

"An unlawful marriage then?"

"Yes, I grieve to say it, it *was* illegal. But facts are facts! The law does not recognize a second marriage when the first wife or husband is still living."

"And my father knew that?" She asked the question with a pain-drawn, half-suppressed breath.

"Your father, Miss Veronica, was a well-educated man. He must have known it, as well as I did. There were also two other children, a boy and a girl?—Your brother Isaac's death I found recorded, not your sister's. Where is she? She is living, I presume?"

"Yes, she is living, and she is—" And Veronica hesitated.

"Abroad," answered John, in a firm, assuring voice.

"Letitia, yes, I think her name was Letitia. Abroad, you say? Well, it is not with her I have to deal, fortunately." He said the last word thoughtfully, Veronica imagined emphatically, and she shrunk within herself with shame and abasement, as she wondered how much he knew of Letitia's history.

"Ah, if he should know all?" And the colour mounted over face and brow, and to the tips of her fingers.

But he did not seem to notice her, and continued with business nonchalance, as if what he was saying was of the most commonplace import. "There were no more, I think?"

"None," answered Veronica in a low voice.

"Well, these things I made out, and acquainted Mrs. Lee, to order. For some days she raved and raged about the house, very much, I am bound to say, like a caged lioness. She was so outrageous at last, and forgot herself so much, that I was forced to quarrel with her in self-defence. Then she came to. And presently I found to my astonishment that the cause of all this uproar, or at least the greater part of it was, that in spite of herself she had a soft corner in her heart for

you; aye, and even for your father, now that he was really gone. I don't believe in magic, that you may be sure, but if I did, I should be thinking that that piece of paper you left with her, just six months ago, had been magically prepared, and had wrought all this otherwise unaccountable change. She has no children of her own, no near relatives that she will own; there is one, it is true, but he has been long disowned, very much as your father was, and it has been a great question with her how she was to dispose of her property, for the greater part of it is at her own disposal absolutely. The knowledge of your existence has brought about a revolution in this respect. I may venture to tell you so far. But do not anticipate too much. 'There's many a slip'—you know the proverb? and to my mind there's no proverb truer. And though she has sent me on purpose to acquaint you with all this, she may recover, and revoke what she has done. I don't think she will! She seems to be dying, I must confess."

And in this way the little lawyer talked on, varying his sentences with an occasional pinch of snuff, while John and Veronica listened in silence.

They reached Brunswick House early: twelve miles are soon accomplished by the aid of two good horses on a good road, when there is not too heavy a burden, which there was not in this instance.

The old place looked pleasant, with its leafy, broad-stretching elm-avenue and its wide sloping lawn, and the sunshine picked out clearly every cut of the chisel upon the stone work of the front, and threw a shadow, well defined, as a lady's train, over the laurels and rhododendrons at the side. A couple of peacocks strutted with

sweeping feathers on the gravel, and surveyed the new comers with stately indifference; and the lake in the front distance shone brilliant as a metal disc, between the yews that guarded, but did not shade.

As the carriage drove up to the front, the great hall-door swung open, and a footman made his appearance to usher in the expected visitors. Gardner the parlour-maid, stood obsequious at the foot of the stairs, and curtsied low to Veronica, as she asked, "Would you please to come up at once, ma'am? Mrs. Lee is asking for you every minute." Mr. Gale and John Broadbent remained below in the dining-room.

Veronica ascended the softly carpeted stairs with a beating heart, and had not recovered herself when she entered the sick-room. A voice came from the gloom of the apartment, the blinds were drawn down, and thick curtains obscured the light of day, as the door opened to admit her.

"Where is she? Is she come?"—A voice that sounded almost as from the grave, so hollow and dim and strange it was.

"She is here, ma'am," said the nurse in a very audible whisper.

"Here? Where? I don't see her!" And the sick woman raised her head feebly, and turned her eyes towards the door, seeking for the longed-for face. Veronica advanced, and stood beside the bed silently. Looking down, she saw that Mr. Gale had spoken the truth. Mrs. Lee was certainly much altered, her face lessened, her eyes sunk, her nose pinched, and a sickly yellow hue spread over her whole countenance. She looked sharply and searchingly at

Veronica. "Take off your bonnet," she uttered in her low hollow voice; and then turning to the nurse, "Graves, draw up that blind." Veronica took off her bonnet obediently, and the sunlight, now admitted through the window, fell upon her hair, and lit up her sweet face and glistened in her large blue eyes. The dying woman gazed long without a word. At length she muttered, "His eyes! and yet they say he was blind. Didn't they say he was blind, Graves?" she asked querulously.

"Yes, ma'am, sure!" And then Graves whispered to Veronica, "Speak to her, miss."

"What can I do for you?" asked Veronica gently.

"*You?* do for me, indeed!" replied Mrs. Lee, sharply, some of the old fierceness returning to her eyes.

"I mean,"—and Veronica hesitated. What was she to say? How talk to this strange dying relative of hers? "Do you know me, ma'am? Do you really want me?"

"Yes, I want you. Your name's Veronica Hammond, isn't it? though I daresay you call yourself Veronica Lee. Well, you're *his* daughter certainly, though I little thought to live to see the day. But what was I going to say? Oh, Graves, Graves!"

And the sick woman clutched the nurse's arm, while her face became convulsed and pale as death, and her head sunk back.

Veronica was much alarmed, thinking she was dying; but the nurse reached out a restorative and gave it her, saying coolly, "She's only in a faint. She's often these fits. Don't be frighted, miss."

In a few minutes she revived. But she was some time before she remembered who was with her, and

what she had wished to say. When she did, Veronica was still standing near her, her head bowed down, while pity and concern at her sufferings were expressed visibly in her eyes. In a softer accent Mrs. Lee now murmured, "Sit down, sit down, Veronica! I want to speak to you before I go. There"—and she gasped for breath as she spoke on. "I've no relations but you.—I want to let you know that I thought of you; didn't despise you after all. I'm going to my account, and don't want that sin on my conscience. Take hold of my hand, child! There, —you're like your father about the eyes. He was a wicked man to me, though I loved him once.—I really did, and of course he didn't believe it.—Well, all I have is yours. When I'm gone you'll find it so.—Gale has the will, and knows it. Your father spent his money on drink and gambling. I spent it on pride and vanity—vanity all! Do you spend it better. Do some good with it. And God bless you!" Her voice became weaker as she proceeded, and the pauses for breath more frequent.—She glanced round the room anxiously. Soon a spasm seized her, and her mouth became convulsed. "Send for Gale!" she gasped, "send for Med—." She could not finish the word; she meant Medhurst, the doctor, who had visited her that morning, and thinking her no worse than usual, had gone to other patients. He was sent for immediately, but when he arrived his presence was needless—she was dead.

Mr. Gale was with her a few moments, but she had not strength to speak to him. She pointed to Veronica, as if to call his attention to her, then she closed her eyes on all earthly things.

And thus her death at last was sudden, for though

supposed to be on her death-bed, the end was not thought quite so near.

Veronica remained in the house, the virtual mistress of it, and John Broadbent returned to St. Wilfrid's, to bring back with him the next day Clara, as companion and support for the new-made heiress.

With all due pomp Mrs. Lee was buried at Aldborough, according to her wish, and Miss Lee (Hammond, in law) remained in Brunswick House for awhile, till Mr. Gale should settle all legal matters. She was not of age, and he was therefore left in trust for her till that time, but the house and a settled income were entirely at her own disposal at once. Afterwards,—but perhaps we shall tell best of what was proposed for afterwards, by recording a conversation that took place one evening in the lofty, well-arranged drawing-room, with its great pictures of Mrs. Lee's relatives, the old members of the Symington family, surrounding them.

"Yes, it is a fine old house," responded Veronica, to something Clara had been saying—Clara who sat with her delicate fancy knitting as calmly here as in the St. Wilfrid's cottage. "But it is not so cheerful here as by the river, and I miss my little scholars so much! Those gloomy yews on the lawn oppress me, and these great high rooms are half ghostly of evenings, with the old occupants still hovering about them, as I verily believe."

"That will never do, Veronica," remarked John, as he lifted his eyes from a curious antique manuscript he had discovered in the library, a Latin diary of an old monk of the twelfth century. "You must not have such fanciful notions, or how will you be able to live here when we are gone?"

"And you are *really* going? Yes; I knew you would be saying so! I dreamt it the other night. But why should you go?"

John smiled. "Do you forget my Trentham engagements—my schools, my lecture-nights, my drunkards' home? and Clara too has her duties. Then, too, we have to prepare for the fête of the Labourers' Institute. We must be back to our cottage before many days are gone."

"The carriage could take you every day to Trentham and back, and Clara the same, only not quite so often. I could not spare Clara! I know I must not keep you from your duties, but do oblige me, *dear, dear* friends, and come to live with me, share home and purse and all I have, for it is owing to you I have it at all, at least so it seems to me. Be still my guides, my best loving friends!"

"Your loving friends we shall ever be," responded Clara, "but we cannot live with you entirely. Our home is at St. Wilfrid's."

"And why cannot you live with me? Did you not share your house with me when I was poor and friendless? You are not just or generous; you will not allow me to have the same pleasure with yourselves."

"Not so, dear. If we were poor and friendless you should help us, but—"

"And then," continued Veronica eagerly, "how am I to dispose of all this wealth? You will not even stay with me to help me to bestow it properly. I am under promise to use it well, and it is a matter of great concern with me how to get rid of it rightly. For I will be a poor woman with you since you will not let me be

a rich one; and the bulk of the money I want your advice about. I thought we should all have lived together, and together distributed it as we saw best. But now since you won't join me, I must do it alone, and how am I to do it well?"

"And what have been your thoughts, Veronica, about its disposition?" asked John seriously.

"There are three things I wish to do especially. To provide for women like poor Letitia—I mean, for those who would leave that horrid life if they could. To give work and proper instruction to young destitute girls, so that they should not be so tempted to go wrong. And to do something to put down the ale-houses."

"Three noble works, on which you might spend twenty fortunes such as yours, and yet do very little good."

"That is just it. I want advice, help, assistance—and you are leaving me."

"No, we are not leaving you, Veronica. We are but going back to the place and home God has given us, and where he has sent us so much to do. Advice and assistance you shall have, as far as we can give it. But have you first well considered that you may possibly repent in after years so disposing of your fortune? A suitor may come whom you may love, and to whom this money would be a great gift. You may get covetous as you grow older. You may have ambitious desires, and grieve that you have cut the rope that might have pulled you to the top of the tree. You may—"

"Enough! You only make me more desirous to put it out of my power to repent. To be the prize of a fortune-hunter, to get old and covetous, to want outside

pomp and splendour—these are all hateful things! You have taught me how much better things there are than these. No, I will do good with this money if I can.—Besides, have I not promised that I will? How can I withdraw?"

No more opposition was given to her. John remembered that there were four years of reflection before her, during which she could not touch the principal; this lay safe in the hands of Mr. Gale, as we said, for the present. How the amount of her income in the meantime was to be disposed of was the only question remaining.

"I shall leave this place, of course, and Mr. Gale may let it for me, and if you will not give me back my own little room at the cottage, I must take another, as near you as possible. But it seems to me strange that you should turn me out of your home now, as if I were grown too big, or too wicked to get into it!"

"Not at all. Miss Lee, the owner of, let me see, how much a year—a thousand or twelve hundred, which is it? or perhaps more—can scarcely sleep under so humble a roof as ours."

"Clara, give your brother the most severe chastisement, you know how! He is abominable! Perfectly hateful! But, however, I will soon be even with him, when I have endowed a few alms-houses, and have but a single hundred left, I will come upon you with a vengeance."

John laughed. "Try us," he said.

"I will! Mark my words; and you know I have a hot temper when provoked."

"As for instance, when you pulled that poor young man's whiskers at the ale-house!"

"Yes, certainly. I advise you to take care of yours!"

John moved his chair a yard further off, as if afraid of her propinquity, and put his hand to his cheek doubtingly.

"I really think, Clara, we should take care what we do!—We must make her take rooms, or,—I beg her pardon, a mansion of her own."

"But in the meantime, the Reformatory," asked Clara seriously, "and the drunkard's, or rather the sober man's 'Rest,' what about them?"

"I have a plan drawn out for the last," said John, "that I have had by me for some time, but have failed to carry out for want of funds, though I have been hoping when my next book comes out—however, Veronica shall have the benefit of it if she likes."

"Thank you!" And Veronica's eyes glistened with satisfaction, "I knew you were the right person to apply to."

"The ground-plan of the scheme I can give you now; the ground-plan of the houses you can see at St. Wilfrid's."

"Let me hear, then, your scheme, if you please. For though I cannot till I am of age build much, as you know, I can lay out each year a thousand pounds or so in this way, or in some better way, if there be a better."

"Try one scheme first, Veronica. What do you say to what Clara calls the 'Sober Man's Rest' to begin with? For when you provide sober temperate places of entertainment for the poor, you cut at the root of many terrible evils. One gin-palace or public-house less, and one good, cheerful, cleanly, tempting 'Rest' more, and

you sow good seed that shall bring a hundred-fold harvest. Show that it is possible for such a thing to be, as a public-house, or whatever other name you like to give it, *without* intoxicating drink, where poor men shall go of their own free will, sure of a good fire, a clean house, plenty of light, and music if they wish it, books, newspapers, and good wholesome provisions; not cold sloppy coffee, half dregs, with stale buns, on a dirty plate, such as I saw the other day presented to a traveller in a so-called temperance house, with miserable accommodation otherwise for him who can only afford to lay out a few pence,—but with all the advantages and cleanliness and cheerfulness of a good public-house, and none of its drawbacks. Show that this is possible, I say, and others of the same class will gradually spring up, and replace the abominations now to be found in every street of a large town, where the publican leagues with the worst of society to get more unholy gains, and panders to all the bad passions of his victims at once. Money spent in this way will bring more than cent. per cent., for it will bring the blessings of the widow and orphan, and of him that was ready to perish, through the besetment of intemperance—the blessings of the wife and the child, and of the parents and relatives of young girls who are now enticed to sin and brought to ruin by strong drink more than by any other cause.—But to my plan."—

The announcement and entrance of Mr. Gale, however, interrupted for the present the bringing out of this plan.

"Happy to see you, ladies! Happy to see you, Mr. Broadbent! I have ventured to intrude upon you,

as I have some rather important news to communicate to Miss Lee."

Veronica bowed, and put herself in the attitude of attention. He seated himself opposite to her, beside John Broadbent.

"You may remember," he began, after a little preliminary and rather fussy arrangement of his person, "the first morning I had the pleasure of your acquaintance, that I named to you there was one relative of the late Mrs. Lee's left in the world—rather a near one, did I not say? I think I did. Well, no matter!—But in short, this relative was her brother, Mr. Hart Symington. He is living still, and is, of course, much astonished to find how matters are left here. Astonished is scarcely the word—angry, I suppose, is nearer the mark. He has been out of the way, but is now returned; and, finding his sister dead, claims her property as heir-at-law, wishing to make out that the will by which you claim has been executed at a time when his sister was incapable—mentally, you understand—of seeing to her own affairs, and is, therefore, null and void. Now, my dear young lady, there is no need to be alarmed at all this—none at all—we can make good our own; but what I wish to say is this, that he is an unpleasant man to deal with, and will put us to all the expense possible, and all the worry also. His men of business, Grinders and Grubb, have written me to-day, and I have come on to acquaint you with the case. But be assured that I shall do all that is necessary at once." And Mr. Gale took a pinch of snuff, and looked remarkably comfortable.

Veronica's heart sank within her as she remembered

her "girls' school" and the "Sober Man's Rest," now, perhaps, only to be dreams, never to be realized by her; but she replied as quietly as she could,

"Of course, it must all be left with you, Mr. Gale."

"Yes, yes; and I think I may say we shall be his match!" His eyes were remarkably bright, he seemed unusually animated, and evidently enjoyed the prospect of the legal battle impending.

No ardent lover of gymnastics, in the fulness of conscious vigour and strength, ever went to his bar and pole with more zest than did the lawyer to a wrestle at law with an opponent; and the natural shrinking or fears of his client, on whom the fall, if such there should be, might come with overwhelming and fatal effect, he viewed with a kind of pitying contempt, which he took care, however, to gild over by his professional smile, or with a patronizing pat on the back, as in Veronica's case.

Another thought had, however, come to Veronica.

"Perhaps,"—she said hesitatingly, for she felt her speech would not be palatable to her trustee, "Mr. Symington *ought* to have the property, and I have no right!"

Mr. Gale looked amazed. "I do not understand you, ma'am."

"I mean,—that perhaps really and truly it should be his; that Mrs. Lee might not, as he says, have been quite sensible; or that, if she had been well, she might not have given it to me."

"If she had not left it you, she most certainly would not have bequeathed it to Mr. Symington, that I may say positively, that I know! But it is quite out of the

question—it is yours as clear as noonday, nothing can be clearer, and that Mrs. Lee was in her right senses, I can vouch. Why, madam, do you suppose then I am a rogue?" And a decided frown settled upon his brow.

"Oh no, indeed! You quite misunderstand me, Mr. Gale! I throw no reflection upon you, not the most distant."

And she looked to John appealingly to help her out of her difficulty. "We must leave it to Mr. Gale to settle this affair, I think, Veronica. Till we know more about it, it is impossible to see where the right lies." He turned to Mr. Gale, "Is Mr. Symington a poor man?" Mr. Gale shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose so! I expect so! He is a spendthrift, has had very large estates, very near your residence they were, Mr. Broadbent. The house at Scarsville belonged to him, and the land about for many miles, but he drank and gambled it away; he is a bad one, and I may now make no secret of it, Miss Veronica, was one who did your father no good in his young days, for they were very intimate at one time.—The estates were sold to a stranger, and he went to the dogs. He was abroad for many years. I believe he got a living at the card-table, and made himself pretty notorious at Baden Baden, and such like places, till he was forced to come back. I have been told he has been hovering about the old place of late, but chiefly at night, and in a sort of disguise, though he need scarcely do that, he is so altered, few would know him. And now he turns up in this unpleasant manner. Ah, well, such is life! But," continued the lawyer, musingly, "the estates I have seen change hands in my lifetime is something

astonishing, chiefly, I may say, through bad practices,—drinking and such like. I must say, Miss Veronica, I miss my glass of wine when I come up to Brunswick House now, habit's habit, you know! and Mrs. Lee kept a good cellar, but I would rather see families doing as you are here, than as I've seen them in some places. Young Symington, I call him so yet sometimes, for he was young when I was, had every inducement given him to contract the habit of drinking, when with his father, a fox-hunter of the old school, who could drink and swear—begging your pardon, ladies!—and hunt with the best, I mean the worst; and the clergyman at Scarsville was a similar character, not quite so bad, you understand, for he did not swear, but he was a great drinker; port he drank, a bottle or two a day was only common practice. And when a young fellow sits at such a table as that every day, with the squire, or the baronet his father, and the clergyman his spiritual adviser, to set him the example and back him, what can you expect? Hart got into bad company speedily, he was ripe for it—betting at the ring and the horse-race when half-seas-over they told me before he was sixteen, and—you know the sequel of such doings. I understand now he's a ruin, a complete ruin, a black-leg and a vile character indeed! And yet, my dear young lady, you would make a present of all this money to such a man as that, or let him come and take it quietly, which is just the same thing!" He looked triumphantly at Veronica, with the air of a man who knows he has established his point.

"On the contrary," said Veronica, "I shall I fear be only too glad to think that the money is rightfully mine."

"The question of right is fairly settled, I think," said John, "now we are sure Mrs. Lee was fully aware of what she was doing, and that Mr. Symington has no other claim upon the property."

Mr. Gale did not stay much longer, he had to drive back to Trentham that night, and after partaking of supper bid the inmates of Brunswick House farewell.

It was a brilliant moonlight night, and when the lawyer was gone Clara suggested a walk. Veronica agreed with alacrity. A moonlight walk was to her a great enticement. John had again become absorbed in the crabbed old Latin of his manuscript, and proposed to join them on their return.

The two friends walked slowly across the broad gravel walk, and so down by the row of yews to the left, the moon lighting up their path till they trod among half-hidden gems, the drops of dew hanging from the grass bents, the night breeze softly touching their cheeks the while as with delicatest brush of down.

"How cooling it is, how lovely!" whispered Veronica.

"Lovely indeed, dear! And what broad sharp shadows those yews cast! Is it possible that you really dislike yews? To me they have many pleasant suggestions."

"I dislike them because they are heavy and gloomy even in the brightest sunshine; a perpetual shadow is about them, as if they knew of some mystery or crime that made them unhappy. They are like faces I have seen, that no amount of laughter can cheer. They put me in mind of—can you not guess who? The man with the shadow, as John calls him."

"Yes, they have their resemblance to him certainly.

But even he is not so bad as he seems. To you his heart has melted."

"It is wonderful such a heart as his can melt! But am I not ungrateful, Clara? He saved my life, I must not forget that! It seems to me I never do him justice."

"Perhaps," replied Clara thoughtfully, "if we really knew more of those we disesteem, and view with dislike, we should see not a little to admire, and even a something to love. I do not mean," and here she smiled sorrowfully, "that your dark friend could be loved as he is, but we know that he has human kindly feelings. Even the wickedest and most abandoned have some spark of good, could our eyes but discern it."

"Mr. Hart Symington for instance," added Veronica. "Yes, I have no doubt there is good about *him*, though Mr. Gale painted him in such dark repulsive colours. Yews are dark and disagreeable, and poisonous to cattle, but they bear berries for the birds to eat with pleasure, and they give shade from the sun and rain; and so, no doubt, Mr. Symington has his crop of annual berries, and does some good in the world, we will hope, somewhere. Have I not learned my lesson well?" And she turned the merry light of her eyes—a light that could be discerned even by the moonbeams—towards Clara, and was about to utter some smiling speech further, when Clara put up her finger and said suddenly and mysteriously, "Hush!" Veronica's heart seemed to stop beating while she listened, but she could catch no sound. "What is it?" she whispered.

"Did you not hear footsteps at our right? There! Look beneath that yew—ah—he is gone!" And Clara's

eyes followed some invisible object, invisible to Veronica, at least, who could discern nothing.

"I see nothing. What did you see?"

Clara stood a moment longer in the attitude of an intent observer, then unbending, but with a disappointed air, she said, "A man was here just now, quite close to us—he stole out of the shadow of that yew, and disappeared a little higher up the walk—who could it be?"

"Perhaps your brother, to play us a trick."

"No, John never played me a trick of that kind in his life; besides, it was a less man than John."

"Who could it be then? It is very mysterious."

"It seems so to me. And I think we had better go in, and let John know."

They retraced their steps, but had not proceeded far, before they were aware of footsteps near them. Veronica also heard them distinctly this time. And now, a little alarmed, they made greater haste, and were soon, to their satisfaction, in sight of the house. As they approached it they beheld John coming out to meet them. "Clara—Veronica, is that you? Why do you run? what is the matter?" They explained to him the cause of their fright.

"It is some follower of one of your servants, no doubt," he said.

"How could that be? He would have avoided us, but this man was evidently watching us, and listening to us."

John mused. "It is certainly mysterious, as you say, but there is no cause for fear. I will take a walk round, and try to find it out."

"You must take me with you if you go," said Clara.

"And me also," added Veronica.

"If it must be so it must." And he gave an arm to each. They walked by the yews, even to the lake, and home again by the other side the lawn, but heard and saw nothing of any other human being than themselves.

"You will think we have been silly sheep," said Veronica, as they entered the house, "frightened at nothing!"

"No, I know Clara at least is no silly sheep; and I have full faith that she really saw what she said. Some day the mystery may be discovered."

And the next morning it was all made clear to them.

A letter lay waiting for Veronica on the breakfast table, the address in a strange handwriting. Veronica opened it and read.

"ALDBOROUGH, *July* —, *18*—.

"MADAM.—That I annoyed and perhaps alarmed you and your friend last night, is a matter of regret with me, but I had no other means of obtaining the knowledge I sought. Finding now that Miss Lee and the young lady I had the happiness to release from a snow-drift, are one and the same, I at once give up further law-proceedings, and wish you far more enjoyment of my late sister's property than it has ever yet given to its possessors.—I am, Madam, yours most respectfully, HART SYMINGTON."

"Another mysterious letter?" exclaimed John, as Veronica put it into his hands; but when he had read it, he looked quite as much amazed as herself. "But

what is this? Here is more yet." And he turned over the page that Veronica had omitted to examine. "To your friend who spoke so kindly of the 'dark stranger,' I venture to present my most grateful thanks. Would that I were more worthy of her benevolent thoughts."

"There, Clara, he heard us as you thought! Heard you, you dear loving sister, and appreciates you, as all the world must!" said Veronica enthusiastically.

"What do you mean?" asked Clara, who had not yet seen the letter.

"At all events he has one virtue left," was her remark, "generosity. And who knows but the scale may yet be turned, even for him?"

In the course of the day Mr. Gale appeared, his face expressive of, and "written all over," as Veronica said, "with important news."

"I have good news to communicate," he said hurriedly. "I have heard officially, that Symington will give us no further trouble. Let me congratulate you, Miss Lee! You are born under a fortunate star, I perceive."

Veronica thanked him for his congratulations.

"It is strange, too! I cannot understand it, I confess.—Not the least in the world.—A desperate devil-may-care fellow like that, to give up so quietly, a chance of worrying us! We have only to be thankful, however."

Mr. Gale did not look particularly thankful. Clara even fancied he was a little disappointed that the excitement of the promised battle was not to be.

CHAPTER XXV.

DEATH AMONG THE BREAKERS.

SOME months have passed by since we left Stephen Morris recovering from his attack of delirium. It was a slow recovery, if recovery it may be called, retarded by feverish fears and anguish of mind, by almost all that could make a sick-room intolerable and painful, pain of body, shame and trouble of mind. He craved for alcoholic drink, and it was denied him; and part of the wearisome day he would spend in lamentation, and in fits of ill-temper that exhausted themselves on all around him. He became in a great degree regardless of the suffering he caused, and, lost in selfishness, would demand from all, wearying and harassing service. So changed was he in this respect from his usual self, that the doctor shrewdly argued from it some latent disease of the brain, and enjoined the strictest watching of symptoms, and constant surveillance.

It became necessary he should leave his present abode, and ever recurred the questions, Where was he to go?—How hide himself from the world? With an enfeebled mind as well as body, he shrank from the trouble and fancied dangers of a long journey; he was querulous and childish, and found difficulties where there would have been none to a stronger and healthier individual.

However, under the protecting shadow of a warm night in April, he was conveyed from his home at

Trentham, to Swansford. Short as the journey was, it annoyed and tried his nerves excessively, and Jane, who had intended to seek out some retired dwelling in the country, many miles further away, gave up this scheme at once. It was, no doubt, well she did, for her mother's presence and advice were a great comfort and support to her in her now worse than widowed position. Every day her husband seemed less and less able to converse rationally, and, alarmed at his continued and increasing mental imbecility, she once more sent for Mr. Wilbraham. He called in to consult with him an eminent physician, and both agreed that softening of the brain had commenced, and that the complaint was incurable. "Give him what he asks for that is not positively injurious; contradict him in nothing"—this was their advice.

And thus he passed into the condition of a child, his memory, judgment, power of concentrated thought, gone, or going rapidly; a mournful wreck. He was humoured and indulged as far as was possible, and the sad, hollow-eyed wife saw him sitting for hours together without change of posture, or spoken word, gazing at the fire or on the floor, not in the reverie of the philosopher, but in the apathy of the imbecile. We talked of the condition of a child, but there is not more difference between the fresh budding foliage of spring, so full of promise and joy, and the decaying, clay-trodden leaves of autumn, suggestive of death and ruin, than between his dull, worn-out, dying brain, and the rich swell and development of the faculties of a child.

Jane bore with his fretfulness and whimsical changes

of mood—for it was not all apathy with him; he had his hours of animal excitement and irritation—with patience and love; but it was a sad sight for the young wife and mother to come into the nursery and find him seated on the ground playing with his son's toys, or opening a book wistfully, and declaring he knew nothing of its contents. In a while, as the disease progressed, he forgot his friends also, both their names and persons, and evinced no interest in their presence. Every week, he required less and less mental pabulum, could digest less, and before long his little boy exceeded him in knowledge, and triumphantly pointed out to papa the difference between great A and little a. He lost memory of times and seasons, wife and child, and the sight of his nearest and dearest brought no recognition.

John Broadbent saw him once or twice at Swansford, but Stephen had no recollection of his old friend, gazing vaguely at his broad dark brow, following little Charley's example, indeed, by putting out his hand to be shaken, but with no slightest idea of him who had done so much for him. John came away melancholy and stricken at heart. "It is but the death-parting," he said to himself, as he proceeded on his way home, with bent-down head, "the soul being put to sleep before the body; but, alas! what will be its state when it awakes in the other world?"

The sleep, however, was not for very long. He died before the year was spent, and the unholy passion for drink finished the immolation of its victim in this world.

He had called himself a martyr—a witness; but he

had been a witness for error, not truth; for sin, not holiness; and the flames of his martyrdom did not rise towards heaven. What sort of a martyr's crown was his?

The grave-stone erected over his body by his mourning wife had little besides his name and age upon it. What else could be said? Tears best expressed the almost hopeless feeling of loss his death occasioned. There could be no words of commendation, and the outspoken or implied praise that is found on most monuments was withheld in his case.

Among his late congregation his name was seldom mentioned after the first tidings of his death had passed by, or with speech of his brilliant talent and former usefulness, followed by a sigh or an abrupt silence. Similar was the impression left on their minds to that which remains to a spectator on shore, after having beheld a gallant vessel coming into port, with colours flying, music playing, and general exultation, that manages, through the incapacity of the pilot or captain, to get stranded and wrecked utterly before one voyager touches the beach. Where was majesty, and strength, and apparent safety, is now only a few disjointed planks and the rolling breakers; and the eye vainly attempts to penetrate their white foaming deeps for sight of the living and dead treasure concealed below.

The same rocks that were so fatal to Stephen Morris yet remain, and many a fair vessel breaks to pieces upon them. Lighthouses are erected, and charts prepared, but the list of shipwrecks is still fearfully large. Heroes of the moral world, nothing daunted by the immense difficulties in the way, the labour and the skill required,

propose to remove some of these rocks, and themselves are ready to give a helping hand. "It can be done," say they, "and with God's strength assisting us, it shall! And for the poor man at least we will take away those enemies to his peace and safety—the houses licensed for the sale of intoxicating drinks, that now stand ever ready for his ruin. There shall be no breakers near our quiet haven of temperance, but treasure-ships of countless price shall come and go with safety, on their appointed journeys, and no wrecks or bodies of the drowned shall strew our shores!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

SUNSHINE AFTER RAIN.—THE TEMPERANCE MEETING.

THE fête John had named to Veronica when at Brunswick House, for which it was necessary he should prepare, was the anniversary festival of the Labourers' Institute, established by him some years ago at St. Wilfrid's. Each year the institute, with its inducements to the formation of temperate habits, became more popular, attracting more notice among the inhabitants, and enlarging the number of its members, and this particular celebration made an unusual stir in the village. There was indeed a grand gathering, not only of members and friends, but of people from far and near, usually indifferent to the temperance cause, who were not unwilling to partake of the jollity of their

Preparations were made for days beforehand, and Ebenezer Plowden and James Miller, as right and left hands, with John Broadbent as head, were busy from morning till night, on them chiefly falling the arrangements and conduct of the whole affair.

When the villagers rose on the important morning, they found put up, as by fairies' hands, invisibly and silently, long wreaths of laurels and evergreens, from the sycamore in the centre of the green to John Broadbent's cottage, and to Ebenezer Plowden's, and indeed to all the dwellings around, the sycamore itself standing in the midst, adorned like a gigantic maypole, with streamers and ribbons, and garlands of immense paper roses. And a triumphal arch, made gay with similar materials, and with coloured banners and printed mottoes, suggestive of the health and wealth to be found in temperance, and the rejoicings of its followers, rose grandly before the entrance to the field, where a huge marquee was erected for the accommodation of the visitors.

It was a splendid day; the sun shone out as if approving fully of the festivity, and looked down upon the merry faces and gay preparations with a genial eye; and lest his unshorn beams should be too hot for the pleasure-seekers, a gentle breeze rolled across the Trent-valley in soft waves, and floated with the coming boats up the Trent.

At two o'clock the fête began at the village, and long before this time boat-loads of people started on their pleasure voyage up the broad current of the Trent from the town, and brought an overflowing multitude of friends, and well-wishers, and strangers, to the anniver-

sary gala. Boats also were in readiness at St. Wilfrid's, gay with streamers and flags and banners, and adorned with garlands, to conduct all who pleased up the river to the fields beyond Scarsville, and when the Trentham boats approached, these started, taking the lead as became them.

John and Clara and Veronica were in one of the foremost boats, and near them were Mary Plowden and her father and mother, with James Miller and others of their friends; and when a Trentham boat came alongside, bearing at the prow Jonas White, with members of his congregation, or Mr. Wilbraham, who had also honoured the fête by his presence, there were many congratulatory speeches passed backwards and forwards, with jokes about the Invincible Temperance Armada, that it was hoped and believed would be more formidable to the enemies of temperance than the Spanish one of ill-renown had proved to its foes.

A song full of allusions to the river, with the joys and blessings of temperance for its burden, was given out and sung to a pleasant melody, also composed for the occasion, and a band of instrumentalists cheered and amused the intervals of talk and song by their aerial music. Merrily the oars pushed back the water; merrily the company talked and laughed; merrily the flute and hautboy and trumpet played; and merrily over all and upon all the sun sent down his sparkles of light and joy, while the sunbeams danced upon the ripples, as the hearts danced in those thousand bosoms.

For there were no regretful drawbacks, or fears, that Nathaniel, or Job, or Jonathan, would be getting to hidden bottles of ale or porter. Hannah, the wife, did

not fear for Robert, the husband,—or Lydia, that her lover, Matthew, would be half-seas-over by night, with potent stupifying drinks; and no mother with half-a-dozen young children anticipated having to lead her husband home after the gala, remembering with a sigh how much more troublesome he would be to drag townward, than her four-year-old Sammy or Jemima.

Glasses of water were drunk,—many of them,—by far too many for us to count, fresh from the great, clear, abundant, cheap river, who made no charge for the gallons that were consumed, or shouted out greedily "threepence a pint!" and still the people drank more and more, for it was a warm day, and joy is generally of a thirsty temperament; also, the water cooled, and revived, and cheered, without injury, as never wine did. The glasses descended and ascended rapidly from the boat sides, amid much laughter, and some roguish sprinkling (never mind! pure water does not stain), and little children drank joyously with the rest, and let the fresh clear elemental liquid gurgle approvingly down their tiny throats. The tall elms of the Grove that stood erect and full-feathered on their height, seemed to survey the glad passers-by with satisfaction. They too drank of the pure water that falls from the skies, and their lowermost roots sucked up from hidden water-veins and rills, the same life-bestowing fluid, and from among their multitude of boughs the echo of the mingled laughter and song, and cheerful talk, was sent back with pleasant repeatings.

Arrived at the field, the temperance friends landed, and passed an hour or so in quiet wanderings among them, gathering wild flowers; or seated themselves to

enjoy the view of the winding river and the trees, and to watch their more active companions; or joined in some of the various games that were at once commenced with vigour and alacrity by the younger part of the pleasure-takers; or paid a respectful visit to the old church lying beneath the shadow of the bold hill, where, long ago, Bel-fires were lighted in honour of the Sun-god, and cruel ceremonies and offerings gone through and presented. Many generations of the dead lay calmly around the old church, and made the place solemn, but not sad, to these strangers.

Then once more the boats were laden with their precious freight, and rapidly with the current they slid homewards, anticipating now with some of the zest of hunger, the meal prepared for them in the marquee. Here a surprise awaited all. At one end of the erection, duly surrounded by appropriate drapery and flower-wreaths, were placed two of Mary Plowden's pictures, lately completed, the one representing a drunkard's home and its inhabitants, in all its bareness and squalor and misery; not overdrawn, however—it would be difficult indeed to overdraw such a subject; and the other, the home of an industrious teetotaller, with wife and children about him, smiling and happy, himself in the midst, sane and proud, and more than content. The denizens of the first home miserable and half-naked, and crushed as they appear, were yet, it was apparent, the same personages beheld in the second, when changed and cheered, and blest, under the genial influences of temperance and industry.

Under one picture, was placed in large letters, on a printed label, "Want, misery, degradation, are the

fruits of the evil tree of drink;" and under the other, "Plenty, happiness, elevation, are the fruits of the good tree, temperance." The paintings were no masterpieces, as may be imagined, when we have named the artist, but they were effective, and told their tale well, and a large crowd was soon standing before them, forgetful of the tea-tables, spread out with tempting provisions, commenting, admiring, and explaining.

"Look at that, Sandy!" said a meagre-looking, ill-dressed wife, who had with her husband, an individual not quite unknown to us, joined the festive party through the kindness of a neighbour bestowing upon them tickets of admission. "Dost see? Which is the happiest house? Look at that poor little chilt's face, it looks for a' the world like our little Ned afore he was took; he'd just such a pinched *wizened* look as that; an i' that other picter, he's there on his mother's knees just as he was afore, but a sight deal fatter an' prettier lookin'! *That* father doesn't drink, you see, an' the baby's a goin' to *live*. But our Ned, poor little 'un, had no chance! Oh dear! I wish you'd be teetotal, that I do." Sandy, with his long red nose over his wife's shoulder, looked uncomfortable; he stood with his hands in his breeches pockets, staring hard with the rest. Something of the old merry hardness had vanished from his eye, for he had been ill since we saw him last; and his wife's tongue, like the constant drop, had worn the stone, though scarcely in the right direction.

"Why, mother," shouted a little wonder-stricken girl, held up in her father's arms, that she might see above the people's heads, "that's like you an' me, an' that's like father, isn't it? Father's just had his ale,

an' he's goin' to give you a punch!" The father turned red in the face, and put down the inconvenient commentator at once.

"You don't mean to say that, now?" asked a young man, of his smart-looking well-ribboned sweetheart, who took hold of his arm a little proudly.

"I do, Joe! I mean you to sign the pledge to-night afore we go away, or you'll be getting like that ugly fellow in the picture some day perhaps."

"*You* must sign it too, then, Sally."

"That I will, and welcome! You first, me after."

"You're quite hard upon a poor feller, you are," was his response. Nevertheless, he looked smilingly down upon the pretty face near him. It was plain he could deny her nothing *then*. And here we would whisper a word into the young women's ears. "Strike while the iron is hot." If you want to insure sober husbands, see to it that they are sober lovers, and get them to sign the pledge as early as possible, like Sally.

But Sandy's wife is talking again. "There now, Sandy, them picters is afore you, an' if ever man's had warnin' you have! Look at one an' look at t'other! One's our house, t'other's Phil's. Since Phil's been teetotal, he's put nine pound ten shillin' i' the savin's-bank, his missis toud me; he's gotten a good houseful o' things about him, an' his wife an' childer goes about wi' shoes to their feet an' decent clothes to their backs, a thing yourn never does, except they borrows. Look at 'em, I say. It a'most makes my heart burst."

"Well, well, woman, hold your tongue, can't yer? or I'll be off. I don't want to be preached to! I'm quite ashamed o' your noise."

"An' I'm ashamed o' you as can say so. *My* noise, indeed! I should like you to hear your own when you come home fuddled!"

"Tea's ready; tea's ready, don't yer see?" said Sandy, as he left her side diplomatically, and seated himself at one of the tables.

As it happened, he had placed himself next Phil and his wife. In his anxiety to get away from his wife's rebuke he forgot to look who he was about to get for neighbours; and to his dismay Phil, with a smart bouquet in his button-hole, and in a suit of, for him, stylish clothes, saluted him with—"Eh, Sandy, my boy, who ever thought of seeing you here? I'm glad to catch sight of yer!"

Sandy's clothes were seedy, and these, with his rather untidy, seldom-combed hair, and ominous red nose, contrasted ill-favouredly with the spruce, jaunty dress and carefully cut and brushed whiskers and hair of his fellow-workman. He knew this, and felt, spite of himself, the least in the world humiliated. We say the *least*, for Sandy was obtuse where he chose, and generally presented for the arrows of society, and especially *temperance* society, a thorough rhinoceros skin of indifference and self-assurance. Perhaps, however, his wife's severe strictures had penetrated his tough hide, and so prepared the way this time for Phil's bow.

He answered his comrade sheepishly. Phil saw his advantage. "Now or never," he whispered to himself. And then aloud, "This is my Bess; don't yer see her? She's lookin' uncommon young, isn't she? I've just been telling her so." "*Don't!*" said Phil's better half, who did not at first understand the affair. Sandy

glanced at her with an attempt at a smile. She was, in truth, looking bonny and blooming, with a face almost like a peony, partly the result of health, partly of shamefacedness at finding herself in so much fine company; and her dress—a smart mousseline de laine—a trifle too warm in colour for so hot a day, with her cap full of pink roses and pink ribbons, while it helped the general effect of pinkiness (to speak moderately) that there was about her, also helped to dazzle Sandy's eyes, much as the sun would. He turned them away as if they had been hurt. But we beg to say in explanation, he did not do so because of any artistic delicacy in his visual organs, but because so much splendour was a mortifying contrast to the appearance presented by his own dowdily-dressed wife.

"She's blushin' like a young one, isn't she?" went on Phil, still speaking of his wife. "An', do you know?—I must tell yer, for I can't help it, since I've been teetotal she's got younger every month, an' prettier, to my thinkin', because she's happier!—We've begun sweetheartin' again, haven't we, Bess? An' I've never bin so jolly in my life!"

"Reason for why," exclaimed Mrs. Sandy, who had now placed herself on the other side her husband, as much in a corner as possible, not wishing for any too damaging nearness to Mrs. Phil's smart clothes. "You've common sense, you have, Phil, I'll say that of you! An' what's the use of havin' a man as has all sense but common sense? Here's Sandy now's as clivver as ony on ye—ay, an' a good bit clivverer than some—right's right, an' I'll say that of him! but he's no common sense. He can't see through a glass winder, let alone a brick

wall. If he'd look i' *your* house, he'd see summut different to his own; but, bless your life, he nivver does wi' any eyes but a simpleton's. Them picters now! I've bin a showin' him them picters"—

"Picters be hanged," exclaimed Sandy fiercely. "I'm not a-goin' to swaller them picters! I want some tea, woman."

"*I* toud yer!" said his wife, giving her head a solemn shake, and looking at Phil. "I knew he wouldn't let *me* speak."

"Aye, aye, lad," smiled Phil at Sandy, perhaps remembering the fable of the sun and the wind; "it's right down comfortable to be here! I do enjoy my tea some, now-a-days, I can tell you. I'd used to think it poor washy stuff; but it's quite another thing now, specially as we can afford to get it pretty good. None o' your penn'orths for me, that's half hedge-leaves, or three-parts, may happen; but a quarter of a pound of right down good at a time! I'm a judge o' tea now, I am." And he seemed as if he were, smacking his lips in poor Sandy's sight and hearing, we are bound to confess, all unpolite as it was, after each imbibition.

Sandy swallowed his with some internal grimace. He had quite lost the relish for tea with his strong potations, and of course, in one afternoon, under however favourable auspices, could not regain it. Still Phil's hilarity and commendations influenced and had their weight with him, and he began to wonder whether, after all, tea and sobriety and a happy comfortable home might not be better than the most enchanting liquor the publican ever brewed, with poverty and seediness and self-contempt.

He saw plenty of people about him smiling and happy, far more truly happy, he could not help thinking, than he had ever seen drinkers to be in an ale-house—he heard merry talk and laughter, and not a little joking of the sort that does not make one wince for the jeers of the rest, but that makes all gleeful alike; and he noticed several well-dressed friends of his, not far from him, who had not such large earnings as himself, from which to provide for wife and family, but who were temperance men, and could therefore, like Phil, find the wherewithal for good food and respectable clothing, and he felt ashamed, thoroughly ashamed at last. He had not so many children as Phil, and yet how much poorer he was! He had quite as good wages, and could get through his work with more ease, for he was, as his wife said, "clivver," and had been intended for better things than to pass through life as a drunken good-for-little bricklayer. But ah! the ale was so tempting, and how could he ever resist the temptation, now he had given way to it so many years? How find courage to pass the ever-open door of the Seven Stars, and the Dog and Doublet? That Dog and Doublet had been a dear place to him. How many doublets had he not found for the dog, and how very few for himself, and fewer still, latterly, for his wife and children? For the dog was a greedy animal, and every year wanted more and more, while the family had less and less. "Why can't I do as Phil does?" he asked himself, and the food stuck in his throat, even the plum-cake, very good as it was, and little as he was used to anything very good, would not go down.

"I think I'll go to the door," he said at last, as he

found the tea and cake getting more indigestible and difficult to swallow. "I want a bit o' fresh air." And he left his place, and with some difficulty, for the tent was very full indeed, made his way out. As he was going Ebenezer Plowden's eye caught sight of him.

"Why, Sandy, my man, are *you* here?" And Ebenezer, the master basket-maker, owner of house and field, and who knows how much beside? put out his hand and warmly shook that of the poor red-nosed seedy bricklayer.

"I'm very glad to see you! Hope you've enjoyed yourself! Had a good tea, eh?"

"Pretty well, master," replied Sandy, a little "flabbergasted," as he told his wife afterwards, at people's eyes being fixed upon him. "Several grand ladies, Miss Broadbent and Miss Lee, her as has come into so much money lately, they say, and the vicar's lady, for the vicar was there among the rest, let alone Miss Plowden and lots more."

He went to the door, feeling that all the people's eyes in the place were upon him, not that Sandy was bashful, far from it, but he felt uncomfortable and unlike himself just now. He stood at the door of the marquee till he found himself in the way, the waiters passing and repassing with kettles full of steaming tea, and plates of bread and butter, and then he stood in the field not far off, looking at, but scarcely seeing, the youngsters who were amusing themselves by various games, till they could be admitted into the marquee for tea, there being far too large a company for all to partake at once.

The fresh air blew on his face, the river rippled and

rolled not far away. Did it sing him a song that stirred in his heart a resolve long needed there, or how was it?

When his wife came to him soon after, afraid of losing sight of him too long, lest he should shirk away to the "public," he turned round to her with a quick decisive motion, and astonished her by saying, "Grizzy, lass, I've made up my mind, I'll sign the pledge!" She did not go into hysterics or faint, for she was a woman of wire and bend-leather, and could bear very hard blows indeed, both physical and emotional, as he had proved many times, but she lifted up her hands and exclaimed in a joyful tone, "Oh, Sandy, you don't say so!" by which apparent denial she only meant to imply astonishment and gladness, not disbelief.

After tea the tables were cleared away, and in front of the pictures a platform rose for a dozen speakers or so, and the people prepared themselves by sitting upon the recently arranged forms, to listen to the orators of the temperance meeting.

The vicar of St. Wilfrid's was in the chair, and well he looked there, with his benevolent countenance lit up by a genuine smile of satisfaction as he surveyed the well-dressed, happy, sober company spread out before him. Mary Plowden, as she saw him, thought he had never appeared more like the kind good gentleman he was, and the good Christian too, not even in his own church on the Sunday, or when praising her industry and skill in the "studdio;" and that was much for Mary to think.

Near him sat Jonas White, with whom the vicar shook hands very heartily, John Broadbent, Mr. Wil-

braham, and a young man quite unknown at St. Wilfrid's, a Mr. Sylvester Reece, who was stated to be very rich, and a friend of Mr. Broadbent's; and a little behind the rest, but still on the same platform, Ebenezer Plowden, James Miller, and a middle-aged man of much muscle and sinew, a blacksmith of the neighbourhood, called "Gike Adams," a recent convert to teetotalism. These were to be the speakers, and all expected a treat.

After the vicar had introduced the business of the meeting to the people, and given a very short but pleasing account of the St. Wilfrid's Labourers' Institute, and the good it was effecting among that class of men, at present so lamentably neglected and ill paid, he named, with much praise, the labours of his much-esteemed friend Mr. Broadbent in the temperance cause, and his disinterested desires for the advancement and happiness of the working-classes.

Then he called upon Mr. Wilbraham to make the opening speech. The good doctor spoke fluently and happily for half-an-hour almost, detailing incidents in his professional career, with anecdotes from his own manifold experiences, causing considerable interest and some laughter, and sat down with much applause from his hearers.

The Rev. Jonas White, who had come over from a neighbouring town to attend this meeting, having left Trentham, gave an account of his first meeting with Father Mathew, his own conversion to teetotalism, and his labours and trials among the drunkards of Trentham. He showed a long list of teetotal pledges, which he brought out from his pocket, gained in this neighbour-

hood, and he said he hoped to add to them to-night, whereat Sandy's wife gave him a nudge with her elbow, not of the gentlest; and Sandy looked grimly resolute. The white-haired old minister ended by an earnest and touching appeal to all present, to come out from the city of destruction, and to seek after the things which pertained to their peace, one of which he said, a most important one, was temperance. He besought them to become truly temperate, not "moderation men," with their one or two glasses, that might so readily be made into three or four, or five or six, before they were aware; but to put by firmly, once and for ever, the cup that inebriates, and so frequently ruins. We cannot do justice to his speech, or indeed to any that were delivered, neither have we time; we cannot even give a faint abstract of it at all worthily; but few who listened to him, and saw the earnest pleading of his eyes, and heard the entreating accents in which he endeavoured to persuade, were not affected almost to tears.

John Broadbent rose next, his dark eyes glistening, his whole countenance glowing with delight and enthusiasm; but his speech was short, he knew there were others to succeed him, who also wished to say what was in them, and the time was limited. And first, an allusion he made to "their glorious river" pleased all present, both Trenthamites and those of the village. But he soon left the side of the sparkling water, to appeal to the sparkling eyes and glowing hearts before him, and called upon the women, as well as the men, to join hand and heart in the endeavour to put down intemperance. "First, by your own good example. I speak here to both women and men, for unhappily both

have sinned in this respect, both have yielded to the seductive temptation. Show by your own noble, unstained lives how temperance men and women should live. Then each may say, not proudly or exultingly, but thankfully to God, the giver of all good—

> "'My strength is as the strength of ten,
> Because *my heart is pure.*'

"Band together for holiness, for truth, for temperance, which is the handmaid of these, without which, indeed, holiness cannot be, true temperance, that does not dally with, but conquers the tempter, strong drink! How much you may accomplish, working men and women, if you will! Be determined never to rest till you see around you neither drunkards nor the licensed houses which too often make the drunkard, and which most certainly push him forward on the road to destruction; and in all fit places utter your testimony to the blessings and benefits of temperance; above all, preach this every day and hour by your *lives!*"

Ebenezer Plowden then came forward. His speech, he told them, would be very much like his basket-weaving, "in and out and round about," and before he sat down he made his assertion good. He did not forget ere he concluded to detail the particulars of his divorce from the pipe, and he told them with some humour, bringing many a laugh upon the faces of his audience. "And," he added, "the man whom I converted by my no pipe, to no drink, is here, just before you all, and all the better for it. I see his eyes twinkle with joy, and at this distance I can tell that his broadcloth is a good deal more nappy than when *he* made himself so, and

his wife's dress a fine deal handsomer than when he helped the *landlady* to her silks and satins." Phil and his wife laughed with the rest of the laughers, and these were not a few; they did not at all mind being made public characters in this, to them, flattering way.

"But," continued Ebenezer, after he had waited like a practised orator for the laugh to subside, "the man that converted me to 'no pipe' by his 'drink' is here too, and I think he will never repent coming here. I can only thank him again and again for the good he did me that morning, and ask him to let me return the compliment, I was going to say, but I'll say instead, return the *blessing*, and get him to throw away his glass, as I did my pipe, now and for ever!" Ebenezer sat down, but Sandy, who was an excitable subject, and was worked up by the basket-weaver's speech to considerable heat, rose up, forgetful of all but himself and the speaker, whirled his cap in the air, and shouted at the top of his voice, "Now and for ever!" "Hurrah! that's it.—Come forward, Sandy!" exclaimed Ebenezer, rising up again a moment amid much confusion and cheering and laughter. The vicar good-humouredly allowed the enthusiasm to find vent in this way for a minute or two, he knew the advantage of opening the safety-valve, and then called to order.

James Miller spoke a few words, and was listened to with some attention, though we cannot declare his speech was eloquent; but many knew him, and the beneficial change temperance had wrought in him. He told his "experience," the best thing he could tell, and certainly one pair of eyes were wet with joyful tears when he had concluded, his mother's, while the feelings

of his father and Mary Plowden may be supposed as not very sorrowful.

Mr. Reece next lifted his tall slender form upon the platform, and delivered a few sensible, well-spoken words, chiefly evincing his own interest as a landed proprietor in the cause of temperance, and declaring his determination to build upon his estates schools and temperance-halls; and, before all things, to put down the public-houses wherever his property or influence extended.

Lastly, the blacksmith hammered out his sentences, and brought sparks from many a piece of heated iron among the assembly; and, we will hope, welded some to thoughts of higher purpose than they had before known. With much applause he laid down his hammer.

We do not know how many signed the pledge at Jonas White's table that night, but the first to do so was Sandy. In long sprawling letters he affixed his signature, "Alexander Peach," ending with a flourish. Sandy liked to do all things with an air. "Now Grizzy, thine with mine," and Grizzy with much labour and twisting of the fingers, made a crabbed crooked stroke or two that she firmly believed represented her two names. Rather against the rules Sandy took the pen again, not content till he had given hers also a martial flourish. And then with a long approving gaze he surveyed the two names, and made way for others.

By the soft lengthened twilight, the happy but tired company made their way back to their respective homes. Little eyes were sleepy, and little legs and feet very quiet, as the boats glided with them down the stream, and mothers and fathers looked up at the fast-

coming stars, with, perhaps, some dim perception of the stars of moral light and beauty that were dawning as these, upon the earth, dawning and rising to fulness and glory, till the time should come when there "shall be no need of sun" or moon or stars,—when God shall be the sole light and life and love of this universe.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JOHN BROADBENT'S LETTER.

AND here we would close, but we have yet a word or two more to say of John Broadbent and some other of our friends.

The events we have related took place thirty years ago, and John Broadbent is now therefore an elderly man of sixty or thereabouts.

His tall manly form stoops a little, his dark hair is streaked with gray, but still remains the old genial light in his dark eyes, the pleasant smile, the cheerful voice. He is not in England now, St. Wilfrid's and the Trent have long lost his pleasant apparition, but lives abroad with Clara, who is to him dear and true as ever, sister and wife in one. Their lives are calm and blessed, for they are spent in doing good and being good, and the people among whom they dwell revere and love them equally.

James Miller and Mary Plowden have been married this many a year; about them are tall grown-up sons

and daughters, one of whom, a son, inherits his mother's painting faculty and more, or rather it is developed to better purpose. The schools of art established now, are an advantage not known in earlier days to budding talent, and Aaron Miller, the painter of landscapes and still life, proves how much he has been indebted to one of them.

A letter lately received by James Miller from his old friend John Broadbent, he has allowed us to transcribe,—

"H——, SEPTEMBER, 1863.

"MY DEAR JAMES,—The news you send me of yourself and Mary and your children is very charming and pleasant. Clara and I have talked much of you all since we received it. Our hearts have gone out towards St. Wilfrid's and you, and we have again wandered by the green-pastured Trent as of old. Whether we shall ever see you and it again, of course we cannot tell. God has placed our home here for the present, and till he guides us away, we do not really wish to move. But if he should ever send us to you, it would be a great joy, be assured of that, my dear fellow! What you say about the work I did at St. Wilfrid's, the good I accomplished, &c., I cannot receive. It is not I that can do anything, it is God that accomplishes everything. He seeks suitable instruments to effect his own wise ends; we have but to submit ourselves to be used by him, and He will employ us in the work he sees us best fitted to do.

"You ask me about Mrs. Sylvester Reece (late Veronica Lee). She is perfectly well and happy. God has given to herself and husband great wealth, and they

employ it as his stewards for good and benevolent purposes. You will be glad to hear that on all their large estates, no public-houses rear their heads, but in the place of these, are rest and refreshment houses in abundance, with the best of entertainment both for body and mind; and most of these houses charge at a rate cheap and low enough for the poorest labourer. Their people are happy and sober and industrious, and to ride through their lands is a delight to all, even the intemperate and careless are obliged to acknowledge it. As for Clara and myself, we also are well. Evening shadows are about us, but a light comes through the shadow that shall grow brighter and brighter to the pure and perfect day. Another river than your Trent is near us too, sometimes we think we see it flowing towards our feet—the river of death, not so beautiful and cheering outwardly, but we shall not hesitate to cross it when God calls.—For beyond it then will be our home!—With much love to you and Mary from Clara and myself, Your affectionate friend,

"JOHN BROADBENT."

THE END.

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