

E 07014-



~~LIBRARY~~
FAMILY TROUBLES.

A STORY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

CHARLOTTE HARDCASTLE,

AUTHOR OF

"CONSTANCE DALE," "THE CLIFFORDS OF OAKLEY," &c.

VOL. II.

London :

T. CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,
80, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.

1862.

[The Right of Translation is Reserved].

FAMILY TROUBLES.

CHAPTER I.

VAIN REMONSTRANCES.

But in prime vigour what can last for aye?
That soul-enfeebling wizard Indolence,
I whilom sung, wrought in his works decay.
Spread far and wide was his cursed influence.

CASTLE OF INDOLENCE.

THE new inmates of Lynwood gradually settled into the habits of the place; Beatrice and Cecil daily becoming more attached to one another, and the former feeling that the companionship of her cousin was a matter for rejoicing rather than for lamentation, so quiet,

sensible, and unobtrusive did the latter prove—whilst, on her part, Cecil recovered much of the cheerfulness which was natural to her, without ever rising into high spirits.

Good she was, forbearing, patient, gentle ; ever unselfish, ever ready to please others ; and above all, ever wrapped up in her brother's welfare, and watchful of any opportunity of serving him. Her aunt became very fond of her ; and even her uncle, with all his fault-finding propensities, found her almost free from blame ; for though he was always calling upon her to fulfil some labour, execute some commission for him,—partly to excite his daughter's jealousy, and partly from a desire to make his young charge *useful*, as he termed it, she obeyed all his wishes with such cheerful alacrity, and was so quick and neat about any work with which she was entrusted, that the most unreasonable could scarcely be dissatisfied.

It was always, " Cecil, since you have nothing particular to do, just hem these hand-

kerchiefs ;” or “Cecil, go and weed those borders ; no-one here does anything that I desire.—Cecil, come and mend my gloves,—and sew this button on my wrist-band. Just sit down and play me a few tunes, &c.” All these requests being made at unexpected times, and generally taking poor Cecil from some favourite occupation ; yet she readily complied,—nor ever expected thanks ; only too glad if she could escape reproof. But these constant calls upon her, made her feel unsettled, and over anxious to afford due satisfaction.

Harry, on the other hand, though perfectly good-natured, was much more careless about pleasing, or avoiding ‘occasions of offence ;’ and consequently, Mr. Mordaunt had often much to say in his disfavour ; treating him capriciously ;—sometimes seeking his companionship, and setting his nephew but a bad example by his own pursuits and conversation ;—and at other times behaving towards

him with unjustifiable harshness,—just according to his mood.

Beatrice pitied Harry, thus left in part to his own guidance, and at the same time treated with such tyranny ; and when she saw him idly lounging about the house and grounds, now in the stables talking to the men, now striving to divert the weary hours by fishing, shooting rabbits, or smoking, as he lay upon the grass, she endeavoured indirectly (for *direct* advice would have given him alarm), to inspire him with a nobler and more energetic spirit. The task seemed all the easier, that he liked and trusted her ; often teasing her by boyish tricks, and entering into a playful war of words, such as she now relied upon as the safest vehicle for conveying her remonstrances ; though now and then she spoke more seriously, —and found him more ready to agree with her, than to be really influenced by her wishes. But let her exert herself to the utmost ; let her fancy for a moment that she had con-

vinced, and laid the foundation for a lasting reformation; let her smooth all difficulties between him and Mr. Mordaunt;—still in the end she never found that she had actually gained ground, for the influence of the very next person who obtained his ear, always had power to obliterate her own. And thus ‘blown about by every blast of doctrine’—guided by every counsellor in turn, whether for good or evil, but too frequently the latter—Harry Leslie wasted several weeks at Lynwood, to the inexpressible sorrow of his sister and cousin.

“What, Harry! Smoking already?” exclaimed Beatrice one morning, joining him as he sauntered about the garden.

Spite of his affected assurance, Harry looked abashed, as he replied:

“Yes, madam Beatrice, smoking already,—for it soothes me, just as working soothes you women.”

“*Soothes* you! Would it were as harmless—or as useful as *our* despised employment.”

"Rubbish! But there you go again! I do declare you are always at me about something."

"And that something is generally one and the same thing.—"

"Yes, you are always harping on one string."

"The string—or rather, *stream*, of horrible tobacco smoke which I see for ever issuing from your lips."

"Well, well, let us hear no more about it. *You* are not required to smoke."

"No, thank goodness! And no more are you."

"But if I like it?"

"That makes not the slightest difference, for you know as well as I do that we are not at liberty to do everything we please,—otherwise, we should soon lose all power of distinguishing between right and wrong."

Harry smiled impertinently, as he flung the end of his cigar away.

"So you girls are always preaching; but

pray what do *you* know about such matters?"

"Only this," said Beatrice, with increasing earnestness; "that in the first place it is a nasty, idle habit, and leads to others still more objectionable; in the next it stupifies."

"Oh, there you are quite wrong! It helps one to collect one's thoughts."

"I doubt that. *I* believe it gradually dulls the intellect and feelings."

"Nonsense! Not a bit. You have never tried, so how should you know anything about it?"

"By the testimony of my eyes, which see things pretty clearly,—instead of through the medium of a cloud of smoke," replied Beatrice; then pausing for a moment, she renewed her remonstrances in a softened tone. "Besides, it grieves your sister. Think of Cecil, who ought to have you to look up to."—Harry winced, but was still silent.—"Only think how much she cares about you, and how

grieved,—how lonely, she would feel—if you went wrong.”

“She is a good girl, and I will take care not to do anything to give *her* trouble,” was the low and hurried answer.

“But what if you do already? She is proud of you,—ambitious upon your account; and —”

“That is all girlish nonsense. So long as I keep tolerably straight, she has no right to expect more, or to bother me with silly notions—such as may be picked up in some maudlin novel, where the men are women—if they are not parsons!”

“Well, they might be even worse than either,—though *I* don’t see the manliness of doing wrong. However, we will not discuss that point just now,” was the quiet answer, as Beatrice deemed it best to shift her ground.

“But, Harry, remember that you almost gave your promise.”

“About what, pray?”

"About this same bad habit. That you would not smoke so much."

"No more I do. You should have seen what I did before I came here."

"I have no desire. It would not be an edifying sight."

"Eh, Beatrice? Surely you are not turning cross; for if you are, I'm off at once."

"Cross! Oh, dear no! Nothing of the kind. I am only sorry that I cannot persuade you for your good."

"The story-books again! But if I don't smoke, how on earth am I to pass the day?"

"Oh, what a question! Why not turn your thoughts to some profession."

"Such as which?"

"Whichever you have talents for—and suits you best."

"Easily *said*; but I don't much fancy any. I would not be a doctor, or a parson, and I hate the drudgery of the law. In short, there is no occasion to do anything, for when I come

into my property, I shall have the occupations of a country gentleman."

"And in the meantime?"

"Take it easy. Why should I go lawyering or preaching, when I have no turn for it? It would not do the slightest good, besides being _____"

"*Beneath* you, I suppose! Oh, Harry, Harry, nothing is so far beneath you as the idle, lawless habits, which gain ground we know not how!"

"What a fuss about nothing!" he answered, turning very red. "I never said so."

"But you think so?"

"Not exactly; but the fact is that I hate all sorts of trouble."

"Why not try the army then? There you would have change, companionship, and not too much to do."

"And smoke all day!" said Harry, laughing. "That is all those fellows do. But that is not so bad a plan, and I *have* thought about it—and even mentioned it to my uncle; only

he made some trouble about getting a commission,—threw cold water on the plan, in his contemptuous sort of way,—and so of course the subject dropped again.”

“The more the pity!” cried Beatrice; and an interval of silence followed, broken at length by Harry saying:—

“One thing I am resolved *not* to do.”

“And what is that?”

“To go back to College, for *that*, I know, would be utter ruination. I have had enough of that already. Fellows lead you on, until—you don’t know where you find yourself at last.”

“But why let them? *I* should be more independent.”

“Would you? I should like to see you there.”

“And so should *I*, in *your* place. I would prove myself superior to temptation, or ridicule, and try if it were not possible to—” here she paused: “But what avails it talking of impossibilities?”

"Just what I should like to know myself."

"But, my dear Harry, you *will* think about this army scheme?"

"Oh! yes, I'll *think* about it!"

"But you will not let it drop entirely?"

"That depends. Don't tease me, and I'll see."

"And in the interim, if time hangs heavy, why not take a book?"

"Like those you offered me the other day!"

"Yes, certainly, if you please, like those I offered you the other day."

"The 'Heir of Redcliffe,' and a thing called 'Heartease!' No, I have not come to such a pass as that. If you must find books for *me*, find something spirited and adventurous, and written by a *man*."

Beatrice smiled at this last cut.

"Oh! very well! You will not be under any obligation to a *woman*, even for amusement! In that case, let me recommend Sir Walter Scott."

“Oh! I must have read all his works long ago.”

“They will bear a second reading, but I can provide you with a tolerable variety, if you will only promise to read *any*. Cecil said that you were fond of reading.”

“And so I used to be; but,” (confidentially), “I’ll tell you what it is. You are a good girl, Beatrice, and mean all right, but we men want something more exciting. Now if my uncle would only let me keep a horse; it should not be the least expense to *him*!”

“Oh! if he only *would*!” said Beatrice, with a sigh. “But you know him, and he will *not*—more’s the pity!”

“I have a great mind to buy one, and keep it at some neighbouring farmer’s, for I have a right to please myself, and I won’t stand being kept down like a child. It is too bad; and you can’t deny it.”

Beatrice expostulated—entreated Harry to be patient, cautious, whilst he, working himself into a sudden passion, vowed he would

not submit to such ill-usage, but assert his rights, though he finally gave a *half* promise that he would keep quiet—for the present. And thus the controversy ended, leaving both parties equally dissatisfied, and equally far from having gained the victory ; it being in truth, a drawn battle, from which neither side had reaped advantage, having spent their time and ammunition all in vain.

CHAPTER II.

NEWS OF ARTHUR.

Ah, dear, but come thou back to me ;
Whatever change the years have wrought,
I find not yet one lonely thought
That cries against my wish for thee.
TENNYSON'S IN MEMORIAM.

THUS time passed onward, but not very smoothly, for Harry Leslie could not refrain from occasional outbreaks, and the altercations and coldnesses which arose between him and his uncle, were very distressing to the other members of the family. Mr. Mordaunt repeatedly vowed that he might go elsewhere, for he would not have him longer in *his* house ; and then Beatrice and Cecil again urged the necessity of choosing some profes-

sion ; but Harry procrastinated, and the storm blew over, leaving all things exactly as they were before. That is, a hollow truce ensued, to be broken either by some fresh fit of tyranny on Mr. Mordaunt's part, or by some new idle freak on Harry's. And in the meantime, Beatrice saw the "shadow of a fear," which had from the first rendered her uneasy about her cousin, slowly but surely deepening on his brow ; his flushed countenance, dull vacant eyes, and nonsensical flow of words, frequently alarming her towards evening ; nor could she flatter herself that his sister was blind to his terrible failings, for she saw too plainly that Cecil also noted all these evil signs, and that they caused her the wildest apprehension.

In vain they endeavoured to keep Harry out of mischief, by persuading him to walk or sit with them, for sooner or later he was certain to escape ; the temporary restraint only causing a still greater re-action.

It was evident that Mr. Mordaunt also was

aware how matters stood, and not with the less displeasure than he himself was often instrumental in leading his nephew into new temptation; and at length Beatrice resolved to speak to him upon the subject, in order to avert she knew not what impending climax. Whilst making her father's breakfast one morning, she accordingly commenced; Mr. Mordaunt having given her a fair opening, by making some disparaging remarks about his nephew.

"Oh!" she said, "you should not be too hard upon him, for, though I do not deny his faults, they seem to *me* to be the result of outward circumstances."

"Pshaw!" was the contemptuous answer; "you know as well as I do that he has had every advantage, every indulgence, (far more than *I* had at the same age), he has, I say, had every chance for doing well—a College education," (with a half sneer)—"money, power to do whatever he pleased,—and after all, *this* is the sole result!"

Beatrice summoned all her forces, conscious

that they would be wanted, and replied with energy :

“ I think he may have had too much indulgence, too much liberty, and that has been a decided *disadvantage*, for he wanted control and guidance rather than such full power of following his own will in everything.”

“ Well, he will not have *that* in my house,” interrupted Mr. Mordaunt. “ He shall do what *I* wish, or abide the consequences.”

“ He seems to have been in need,” resumed his daughter, quietly, “ of some one to control and guide him, *gently, wisely*, for he is sensible of every act of *kindness*, and I think would submit to authority of a proper kind—though anything like oppression at once rouses a defiant spirit in his breast.”

“ What are you driving at now, I wonder ?”

“ Simply at this : that Harry should have something to employ his time ; idleness being the ruin of many a young man of good abilities and feelings.”

“Well, let him! I am sure I should be thankful.”

“So should I; but will *you* speak to him upon the subject?”

“I should think I have told him some few scores of times that I will not have any of his lawless ways here; and that he had much better get some occupation.”

“Of what kind?”

“I have left that to himself; and, confound me! if I care, so long as it is something which will take him off, for I like a quiet house, and will have it, too,—though it is very evident that he will go on, dawdling, drinking, getting into all sorts of disgraceful scrapes, so long as I do not actually *turn him out*. But we shall see about *that*, if he does not mend his ways.”

Mr. Mordaunt spoke with sullen fierceness, and his daughter trembled for her cousin's future; knowing that any act of tyranny or violence, would in all probability lead to some

catastrophe; and her heart was wrung for Cecil, as she made a last attempt to influence her father.

"Oh, if you would only try to *lead* him to do right! If you would talk kindly to him, *you* might do some good, for he would have more respect for *your* words, than for mine or Cecil's."

"I should hope so!"

"Why not suggest something,—name some special occupation which might suit him?"

"If you will only tell me," was the sneering interruption, "of anything which *would* suit him, or that he is fit for, I would do so with the greatest pleasure."

"He might go into the army."

"Pshaw. To learn to drink, and spend a little more?"

"Well, then," cried Beatrice, despairingly, "name anything you please,—a farm."

"A fiddlestick!"

"So long as it is *something*, and soon fixed

upon. I lay less stress upon the *nature* of the employment, than upon the mere fact of its being such at all."

"Oh, yes! Anything would do for a few days, and then I should have him returned upon my hands, having incurred a few new debts, and committed a few more disgraceful—"

"Do not talk so!" interrupted Beatrice; "but *try* the scheme, and then, even if it prove a failure, you will have the satisfaction of thinking that you have done everything in your power."

"That I have had every trouble to no purpose!"

"Oh, no! I feel sure it will not be in vain! *Do* try for Cecil's sake, if not for his!"

"Confound Cecil! How I wish you could be quiet."

"And so I would, if—"

Mr. Mordaunt's patience could not last the sentence out, but with an oath, and mutter-

ing something to himself about impertinence, and wishing that he might have his breakfast in peace, he rose abruptly, and left the room, leaving Beatrice in a state of utter hopelessness; nor would he even suffer her,—although she did attempt it,—to speak to him again upon the subject. Thus, as the weather grew warmer, new temptations overcame her cousin, and his bad habits daily appeared more settled.

On a bright, warm morning, towards the end of May, she and Cecil wandered up and down the garden, sadly discussing Harry's future prospects.

"Then you *have* tried?" asked the latter, sadly.

"Oh, my dear Cecil, I have indeed used every argument,—tried every persuasion, but—"

Here Beatrice paused, and sorrowfully took her cousin's hand, just as Mr. Mordaunt suddenly appeared.

"Beatrice," he said, "you never told me that the Wiltons had

She started violently at this unexpected allusion to them; much to the surprise of Cecil, who felt her clasp her hand with vehemence.

"Returned!" she exclaimed. "I did not know it. When?"

"Oh, only yesterday; but I thought you and your mother kept yourselves *au fait* at all their doings. It seems to me that you are always scribbling."

"We have not heard very lately. Have you?"

"Oh, I cannot stay to answer questions. I must go and see to that unlucky mare of mine:—that infernal scoundrel, Jim, has been up to some of his abominable tricks, but I'll pack him off upon the instant."

With these words, the injured *padrone* disappeared. Beatrice stood for an instant lost in thought, her hand still tightly clasping Cecil's, who at length asked gently:

"Are you grieved at anything?"

"I? Oh, no! But I was surprised. You

must have heard us mention the Wiltons repeatedly,—some of our earliest friends ; but they have been in trouble lately, for one of their sons—the youngest, is in the East ; and—and—” She paused and drew a deep breath, “ Arthur—the elder one, has always been so delicate, that his ill-health has been a constant source of sorrow,—and he has been so much worse the last year or two, that he has been forbidden to spend the winter months at home,—and so, with his father and mother, he has passed the last winter at Torquay.”

“ And is he better now ? ”

“ I hope so ; but God only knows ! I shall judge better when I see him.”

“ He is now at home ? ”

“ So I suppose,” said Beatrice, trying to speak calmly, whilst her heart throbbed until she could scarcely stand, and all her pride and settled resolution yielded to an intense desire to go and see him who was ever in her thoughts.

Cecil, with womanly instinct, guessed that her cousin was more deeply interested in Arthur Wilton than she chose to own; and that there was also some mysterious difficulty in her way; but she forbore all questioning, and Beatrice relapsed into her absent, silent mood; starting from it, however, in a few minutes, to observe:

“I must tell Mamma about this. I suppose we ought to call.” And accordingly she hastened to the house, leaving Cecil to meditate upon this new incident.

Just as the former passed into the porch she heard a sound which arrested her attention,—the sound of wheels approaching; and returning hastily, she saw Mr. and Mrs. Wilton driving towards the house. She hastened to the side of the low pony-carriage, in such a flutter of excitement that she scarce could speak, though the clasp of her hand supplied the place of words.

“Why, Beatrice, you seem quite breathless,”

said the gentle voice of Mrs. Wilton. "I suppose we have taken you by surprise."

"No, not quite; I had just heard that you were returned."

"Yes, only yesterday. I did not write because it was uncertain. But you are looking better, love, than when I saw you last."

"Am I?" was the absent answer. "How—have you all been?"

"In trouble. Arthur—"

"Had we not better go into the house?" asked Mr. Wilton. "You intend to admit us?"

"Oh, by all means!" replied Beatrice, hurrying them in, whilst a vague anxiety seized upon her. "Then he has not been so well?" she inquired, looking from Mrs. Wilton to her husband.

The latter looked grave and care-worn, and his wife had the pale, suffering expression caused by long watching and uncertainty.

"His health has been but variable," said

Mr. Wilton. "But we have been most anxious about Reginald."

"Ah," sighed Mrs. Wilton, "it has been a miserable winter; though our poor dear boy has happily escaped the utmost of its horrors."

"How thankful you must be! Then he was well when you last heard?" asked Beatrice; her anxiety to hear something about Arthur, causing her to take less interest in Reginald's welfare than she would otherwise have done.

"Yes, but it had been a trying time. I will tell you all about it. But first, how is your mamma?" enquired Mrs. Wilton, sinking wearily into the first chair.

"Pretty well. I thought she was here, but I will send to her," replied the impatient girl, ringing as she spoke; and summoning her courage for the all-important enquiry: "How is Arthur after his long journey?"

"Oh, he is not at Stapleton," said Mrs. Wilton.

"Not at Stapleton!" gasped Beatrice, colouring with excitement.

“No; he has some fancy that he is always worse there; so we parted company half way; we to come home again, and glad we were to do so,—he to start upon a sketching tour through Wales, and whither afterwards, Heaven only knows; one thing only is certain, that he has no intention of coming into *this* neighbourhood at present.

“To avoid *me*!” thought poor Beatrice, her spirits sinking until she had much difficulty in sustaining the conversation till her mother came.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilton talked much about Reginald, but though she tried to listen in the hope of hearing something more about his brother, she scarce took in the sense of their words, being only conscious that the party was augmented, first by her father’s entrance, and then by that of Cecil, and that the Crimean war, with its dangers and discomforts, was the chief subject of their conversation.

Drearily passed the remainder of the day;

her cousin's brow, and her gloomy pre-occupied manner, that something had caused her either sorrow or annoyance,—and that that *something* bore reference to Arthur Wilton; but in what manner she refrained from asking,—fearful of forcing herself into Beatrice's confidence; and indeed the latter seemed only too anxious to avoid all comment.

CHAPTER III.

A CATASTROPHE.

Fill the cup and fill the can !
Mingle madness, mingle scorn !
Dregs of life, and lees of man :
Yet we will not die forlorn.

TENNYSON

THE sun set before Beatrice had roused herself, and she was sitting listlessly beside an open window, with a book (by way of an excuse for silence) open on her knee, whilst her large, wistful eyes absently fixed themselves upon the glowing sky, and her thoughts took a still wider range, when a hand was suddenly laid upon her shoulder. She started, and hastily looking round, perceived that it was

Harry who had thus disturbed her, and who now laughed loudly at her discomposũre.

“Did I startle you?” he said. “Why, Beatrice, what could you have been thinking about? I had stood here for full five minutes without your knowing it.”

“Had you? I never heard you,” she answered, colouring. “You are not generally so quiet in your movements.

“Which means that you think me rather noisy. But come, I am tired, and want you to play something while I rest.”

Beatrice, who had been too much absorbed by her own thoughts to take much notice of him during dinner, now looked at him more attentively,—struck by some peculiarity of tone and manner,—and saw that the ominous flush was on his brow. The untimely interruption made her feel unusually impatient, and she turned from him with an air of ill-repressed disgust; observing:

“I should prefer being left in peace, for I also happen to be very tired ~~this~~ evening.”

"Very cross, *I* think," was the reply.

"Well, very cross then, so you had much better leave me alone."

But Harry was not so easily repelled.

"Come, Beatrice," he persisted, "don't be so ill-natured. Play me one tune, like a good girl, and then I'll go."

Beatrice, only considering at that moment, the quickest way of ridding herself of his importunities, replied :

"Then just *one*, but you must not ask for more; for if I had not wanted to be quiet, I should have gone with mamma and Cecil out into the garden."

"Why, what is up with you? You seem in a queer sort of humour to-day," was the next observation; to which no answer was returned, and Harry, with more perseverance than tact, continued his enquiries. "Has the governor been bothering?"

"Harry," said Beatrice, reprovingly: "remember what you are saying."

"Well, confound it! so I do. But as he

has been bullying me, I thought he might have had a fly at you as well. Now," sinking his voice to a confidential tone, "I'll tell you what it is. We have had an argument about that horse, and a horrid shame it is!"

"What horse? What is a shame?"

"You know,—or ought to know, you stupid girl," returned Harry, rudely. "The one I want to buy. He will not hear of it, though he has half-a-dozen for his own use, and he knows perfectly that it would not be the least expense or trouble to *him*; but he won't let me have it, just to spite me." [Here he paused, expecting some slight mark of sympathy; but Beatrice, highly offended by his manner, looked straight before her, and preserved a frigid silence.] "I could keep it at old Pearson's, over yonder, if he would not let me have it here, and it would make every difference in the world; for one must have something to do, and here have I been walking,—walking, all about the country, through this broiling day ;

—and now I'm dead tired,—just as might have been expected.”

“You are foolish to walk so much in hot weather. It might make you ill.”

“But what on earth *am* I to do then? I can't stay dawdling about with all you women.”

“You might certainly do worse; but I think, Harry, you had better rest now instead of exciting yourself, and we will discuss this matter at some future time.”

“All very well for *you* to say so, for it does not concern you as it does me. But I mean to come to an understanding with my uncle,—and that shortly.”

Beatrice was now alarmed; and making an effort to overcome all personal feelings, she said in a more conciliatory tone:

“But not this evening. Promise to keep quiet till the morning.”

“I'll promise nothing. I am tired of promising,” exclaimed Harry, turning towards the door.

“Well, wait a few minutes. You asked

me to play something, and now you are running away before I have had time."

"Time! You have had plenty of time. I thought you did not mean to stir. Be quick then, for I cannot stay here long;—the house is like an oven. Let me help you up," he answered, seizing her two hands, and dragging her abruptly from her seat.

"Gently! gently!" she said, withdrawing her hands, and feeling sorely discomposed by such behaviour. "Now sit down, and keep quiet—if you can."

Harry muttered something, and flung himself down on a sofa; but nothing pleased him, and he could not settle. In a minute he had again risen, and was walking excitedly about the room. Beatrice left off playing, and approached him.

"Harry!"

"Well, what is it?"

"Do not work yourself into a fever. Only tell me your wishes, and I am quite ready to do anything you please."

“Are you?” (with rather an insulting laugh.)
“But don’t be angry, Beatrice, for you are a good girl, and I did not mean to make you cross. I’ll go—”

“No, don’t. I want to talk to you,” said Beatrice, soothingly; and laying her hand upon his arm.

He drew himself away, but gently.

“I must. I cannot stay here, for I want to smoke. Now don’t try to hinder me; it will do me all the good imaginable, so I will just go out and sit down quietly somewhere whilst I smoke.”

“Shall I go with you?” asked his cousin, who was really afraid of losing sight of him.

He glanced at her suspiciously; and seemed anxious to shake off every restraining influence.

“You? No thank you, I would rather be alone;—though I am much obliged to you all the same. But I daresay I shall soon be in again.”

“Yes; come to tea.”

“To tea! You know we are forbidden to

drink tea," he answered laughing; and added: "Nor have I any particular fancy for it. If I must have anything, I should prefer something—Well, I had forgotten, but I will not offend. Goodbye for the present! I shall go and look up Cecil."

As he spoke these last words, he passed through the open French window into the verandah, and, after pausing whilst he lighted a cigar, walked on slowly, as if intending to join his aunt and sister.

"If he will only do *that*," thought Beatrice, relieved, "he will be safe *at present*; but what a wretched life is this! Wretched for him, and all the rest of the family, and all the more so that there seems no hope of any change. He is—I grieve to think so,—but *such is* the case, much altered for the worse since he first came here; and if some measures are not taken before very long, I foresee *that* he will be utterly,—hopelessly ruined. *Then* what *will* become of Cecil? It is a miserable prospect every way, and I am always afraid

of some catastrophe,—some terrible outburst on my father's part.—Oh, that Reginald Wilton were only within reach, for *he* might help me, and, if possible, I know he *would*."

Sighing wearily, she sank back into her former seat, and watched the clouds which were beginning to float across the sky, driven rapidly onwards by a freshening wind. The moon had risen, and all external objects seemed so soft and clear by that mild light that she could not help dwelling on the contrast between the scene without, and the darkness and perplexity of her own mind.

"Yes; all is deepest obscurity within; and will that gloom and dimness *ever* be dispelled?"

Her heart had no cheering answer at command, and she yielded to her sad reflections; thinking first about her cousins, but soon, through the medium of Reginald, passing on to still more mournful thoughts, in which his brother—and herself, were chiefly concerned. Arthur,—his strange avoidance of her,—and

the wild, ever increasing desire to see and speak to him but once again.

“For then—*then* I should cast aside all pride, and do my utmost to arrive at a better understanding. If I only understood him—then I should not care; but now,—it is horrible to grope on in the dark. This evening reminds me of some we spent together by the sea. And how beautiful the bay looked, with its silvery waters rolling in! He sat at the window with me, gazing out upon it, and on one occasion I bade him sketch the scene; but he shook his head, and said it was too glorious,—too unearthly in its beauty. “We may enjoy *for the moment*, but we cannot *seize upon* anything so exquisite. Such pleasures are too ethereal, and vanish with a touch;—a bright foretaste of some more lasting ones. But who has ever yet had power to paint the rainbow, or the liquid silver of the moonlit sea? And the sun in its glory? Claude alone has given us some faint notion of it upon canvass, but the brightest ornaments of heaven

and earth are *unapproachable*. We may but wonder, and admire them at a distance. More would be presumptuous." Ah, I feel,—I felt *then*, that he spoke truly; that the most exquisite sensations are too evanescent to be retained. I thought so, thinking less of the scene before us, than of him who sat beside me,—fragile, beautiful, impassioned. Those *were* supremely happy moments; but they have vanished,—and will they ever return? Yonder sits enthroned the same pure, lustrous moon, amidst fleecy clouds, which from time to time half veil her light; but she shines down,—not upon the rippling sea, but upon an unhappy home, divided against itself. Oh, Arthur! Arthur! Do not quite desert me in my trouble! Arthur, come to me! I entreat you to return!"

Thus cried Beatrice, with an urgent, inward cry, as if she thought that he whom she invoked could indeed hear her, and be charmed into compliance. Her hands clasped, her face upturned, and the tears in her eyes glittering be-

neath the moon, she sat pale and motionless as any statue, until Cecil, stealing noiselessly along within the shadow of the verandah, at length broke in upon her lonely musings.

“Still here, Beatrice! I hoped that you were coming out.”

She turned away from her cousin, answering hurriedly :

“No; I preferred sitting here. I suppose you are coming in now. Did you meet with Harry?”

“Yes; he stayed with us a little, and then I think he went on towards the village. He seemed hot and tired.”

“I thought so too. But it is his own fault if he will not rest.”

Cecil, without answering this remark, bent over Beatrice and kissed her.

“Do I tease you, dear? Perhaps you would rather be alone.”

“Why should you think so?” replied the latter, starting. “I am afraid you think me a strange, unsociable person.”

Cecil knelt down inside the room, and taking her cousin's hand caressingly, said :

"No ; but shall I tell you what I *do* think ?"

"If you like."

"Then—something weighs upon your mind. You are unhappy—and you will not tell me why."

"I unhappy ? What should make you think so ?" returned Beatrice, with another start.

"Oh, do trust me ! Let me try to comfort you !" pleaded Cecil earnestly, and pressing closer to her cousin. "Beatrice, I saw,—I guessed,—this morning ; but I dare not say more, lest you should be angry."

The pale cheek grew crimson, and Beatrice's breath came short and fast ; but not with anger. She was making up her mind to tell her tale.

"Cecil !—*What* did you see and guess ?" she finally enquired.

"That—the mention of—these Wiltons had some strange effect upon you. Was it not the case ?"

"It was." A pause. "But, Cecil,—I can scarcely explain this to you, for—you might not understand. I mean, my feelings. *You* have never loved."

"No, Beatrice; except such love as may be given to a brother."

"And you know that what *I* mean is very different. Are we alone?" asked Beatrice, lowering her voice to a whisper, and looking round ere she ventured to proceed.

"Quite," returned Cecil, drawing as close as possible to her, and affectionately pressing the hot, trembling hand she held. "But first, dear Beatrice, let me say this. I feel for you, because I love you; and I think I fully understand *your* feelings. Do you not believe me?"

"Perfectly. I *never* doubt *you*, Cecil, or I would not tell you what I am about to mention. Those two brothers were my earliest playfellows, and I was accustomed to be so much at Stapleton that I always looked upon it as a second home. I was as fond of Reginald

as you might be of Harry; but—hush! I heard some one coming?”

“No; I think it was only fancy.”

“Was it? Tell me if anybody should come, for I have no desire to be overheard. I was going to tell you about Arthur Wilton,—but you ought to have seen him, or you cannot comprehend. Yet,—Cecil, I must defer it, for I *do* hear steps and voices. Ah, it is your brother!”

She broke off abruptly, and disengaging herself from Cecil, sprang to her feet with feelings of sudden, though vague apprehension, just as Harry burst upon them; his features inflamed with passionate excitement, his whole manner disordered in the extreme.

“Oh, Harry!” cried his sister; “what *has* happened? Have you met with any accident?”

Beatrice summoned her courage to be ready for *any* emergency; Cecil’s pale, dismayed face furnishing an additional reason why *she*

should appear calm ; but she awaited Harry's answer with intense inward agitation.

“ Happened !” he repeated, with an affectation of carelessness which accorded ill with his wild demeanour. “ Only that the governor and I have had a row,—and now I'm off, for he says I shall not stay here any longer ; and I'll be hanged if I will after all that he has said.”

Cecil shook with fear, and looked in her brother's face with an expression of such mute despair, that Beatrice was impelled to do her utmost. The latter accordingly stepped forward, and laying her hand gently upon Harry's arm, said :

“ You are angry now, and scarce know what you say. But come with me, and we will take a quiet turn in the garden together, whilst you tell me all.”

“ I have no time. I must pack up at once. Here, Cecil, come and help me.”

“ I will,” was the scarcely audible reply ;

as his sister, white, and trembling from head to foot, prepared to follow.

"No, Cecil," said Beatrice, assuming a tone of authority. "You stay here at present, whilst I talk to Harry. And, Harry," she continued, lowering her voice; "take care what you say. You frighten Cecil. She is not strong, and if you do so, you might make her seriously ill."

"Not for the world!" cried Harry, throwing his arm around his sister, and kissing her in the same hurried, excited manner. "Don't be frightened, Cecil. It is all right; only, you keep quiet till I have had a talk with Beatrice. She's the girl to settle these affairs."

"I am not frightened," cried poor Cecil, clinging to her brother as he turned to leave her. "But—do let me come with you, and tell me what has happened. I am quite ready to go with you, or do any thing you wish."

"You come with me! nonsense! You

must stay here, and Beatrice will take care of you till my return."

"Oh, Cecil: you cannot think of leaving Lynwood, now your only home!" cried Beatrice and Harry almost in a breath.

"I must, if he does,—for I will not let him go alone. I am ready to do anything—go anywhere, so long as we two only keep together. What would my mother say if she were here?"

"For heaven's sake don't talk about my mother! I can't bear that now. But, Cecil, it is all rubbish, for we cannot always keep together; and it would be impossible for you to go where I am going."

"Why, where are you going?" asked Beatrice; "I did not know that you had settled any plan."

"But I have, though—Is there anywhere—"

"Any place where we may discuss this business quietly? yes;" returned Miss Mor-daunt, less in reply to her cousin's words than to his hasty glance around; and leading him

to an apartment, formerly used as a school-room, and where she and Cecil often passed their mornings, it being more out of the general turmoil than any of the down-stairs sitting-rooms. Cecil followed, quietly, but with a determination not to be shut out of the conference, and then Harry entered into an incoherent account of the events of the last hour, which it will suffice to give in a condensed form, instead of following the turnings and windings of his not very concise or comprehensible relation.

It appeared that he, already excited when he quitted Beatrice, had encountered his uncle, who was also heated and out of temper, something untoward having happened to a mare of his, and of which accident the groom could give no satisfactory explanation. Mr. Mor-daunt, ready to attack his nephew upon any pretext, now fiercely accused him of taking the said mare out in his absence, and without permission; an accusation which Harry indignantly repelled, retorting by the

tion that "it was a most infernal shame he was not allowed to keep a horse of his own, &c." This still more incensed Mr. Mordaunt, and neither party being in a state to know or care what lengths they went, much was said on either side which was not likely to be forgotten or forgiven; the conclusion of this disgraceful altercation being, a command on Mr. Mordaunt's part that his nephew should immediately leave Lynwood, and a vehement answer upon Harry's, that no earthly power should make him stay there longer; with which last words of defiance the latter rushed away, to present himself as has been described before his sister and cousin.

"And now," said Harry, "I will tell you what I mean to do. You know, Beatrice, you have always been at me about getting some employment, so you ought to be contented. I have thought of this before, and now I've quite made up my mind to do it. I shall join the Turkish Contingent, and have

a turn with the Russians, and that sort of fun."

Cecil, at these words, uttered a half exclamation of dismay, but Beatrice, feeling actually relieved by them, laid her hand warningly upon her cousin's arm; a hint which Cecil instinctively obeyed; remaining silent whilst Beatrice quietly said:

"Yes: that is not at all a bad plan. Reginald Wilton is out there, and has gained distinction; and who knows what you may do, if you only go steadily to work? But, Harry, that requires some preparation, and you cannot start to-night."

"I must—from here at least. I can go anywhere,—to Pearson's till the morning."

"Nay: take my advice, and go at once to bed; then you will start fresh when the time arrives."

Harry, always easily persuaded, and now yielding to the lethargy which frequently follows such excitement as that by which he had been influenced, hesitated.

“ If you think so—but, my uncle?”

“ Oh, leave that to me,” said Beatrice, renewing her persuasions, and finally inducing Harry to accede to her desire.

“ Well, then—if you think so, I suppose it is all right, so I will go. Good night, Cecil; do not fret, you silly girl,” he returned, bestowing an affectionate embrace upon his sister, and giving Beatrice a most energetic squeeze of the hand. “ You’re a wise woman; mind you keep things straight till my departure,—and afterwards too, for poor little Cecil’s sake.”

Beatrice promised: Cecil tried to speak, but could not; and he left the room, locking himself into his own, from which he emerged no more that night.

Once more alone with her cousin, and Cecil threw herself into her arms.

“ Oh, Beatrice, this is dreadful. Do not let him go.”

“ Nay,” was the answer, “ do not say so. It is better that he should, for this is no fit

home for him ; and if he stays here, something worse will happen."

"But, at least—not so far away. He is in no state for such an expedition—and alone. If any one were going with him, then I should not care."

"Comfort yourself," replied her cousin, thinking it would be better for Harry to go anywhere than to remain at Lynwood, though she herself despaired of any good ensuing from this scheme ; "he is young and strong, and I will talk to him before he goes ;—point out to him the necessity of trying to do well—"

"Ah, but will your words have any lasting influence when he is far away from you ?" cried Cecil, in her anguish betraying her perfect acquaintance with her brother's weakness.

"I trust so. We must pray that God may take him to His good keeping, for it is impossible for *us* to do more. But, my own dear Cecil, do not let Harry think that you oppose his

“No ;—if I might but be with him,—or near him, at the least ; in case of illness or accident ? Oh, Beatrice, if anything should happen to him, it would break my heart to think I had not done my utmost,—that he was *alone !*”

“Indeed you cannot go with him so far. You are too young and delicate.”

“God would protect me also. I have not the slightest fear.”

“But,” persisted Beatrice, full of admiration at her cousin’s noble, self-devoted spirit ; “but my darling Cecil, you would only embarrass him ; and cause him to be laughed at for his weakness.”

“Never !”

“But men *would* deride his helplessness, and inability to take care of himself. It would be better for him to acquire self-reliant habits ; therefore, let us do our best for him, and leave the rest to God.”

“If it must be so,” was the faltering answer, “I can only say, God’s will be done.”

“Oh,” groaned Beatrice, “that we had but any male friend or relative who was strong and wise enough to help us in this emergency. But we have no-one! No-one! We must rely entirely on ourselves; so, dear Cecil, you stay here, whilst I go and try if *I* can do anything with my father.”

CHAPTER IV.

LETTERS.

I trusted not. I hoped that I was loved,
Hoped and despaired, doubted and hoped again,
Till this day, when I first breathed freelier,
Daring to trust—and now—Oh, God, my heart!
It was not made to bear this agony—
Tell me you love me, or you love me not.

PHILIP VAN ARTEVELDE.

BEATRICE contrived to smooth matters so far that Harry was allowed time for preparation, and to quit Lynwood in a creditable manner; though whilst he remained there, he and Mr. Mordaunt seldom met, and never spoke, nor was any—even the slightest—form of leave-taking considered necessary when he left.

Cecil worked hard to get all things ready

for her brother's departure ; assisted by her aunt and cousin, who were deeply moved by the air of silent misery with which she followed him about, and by the wild, straining look which finally watched him until he was lost to sight. Cecil was always patient and uncomplaining, but her pale, anxious face bore witness to her sufferings ; and Beatrice half forgot her own immediate troubles in endeavouring to bestow comfort where it was so sorely needed ; and moreover, when the first feverish excitement of this new event had in some measure subsided, she told her cousin that story which had been interrupted by Harry's entrance on that miserable evening, and which possessed for Cecil all the romantic charms which such stories usually possess for the minds of very young and inexperienced girls.

The two comforted one another, gradually resumed their former occupations, and visited Stapleton together ; where they always received the warmest welcome ; Beatrice pointing out

all her old haunts, and solacing herself by many an anecdote of Arthur, whom she seemed to miss more and more each time she visited his home.

“Cecil, what is *your* opinion?” she would whisper. “Will he ever change?”

My opinion,” was the constant answer; “is that he *must* love you,—must have always loved you, but that some sad misunderstanding has caused this estrangement, which it rests with yourself to remove.”

“With *me*? Oh, only tell me how?”

“By telling him the truth.”

“How can I *tell* him when he keeps away? Besides, it is impossible. I could not enter upon such a subject unless he first led the way.”

“Yet you might inform him that you perceived a change, and required to know the reason why it was so; his answers guiding what might follow. But whilst he remains at a distance, such a step is, as you say, im-

possible, and I wish with all my heart he would return."

"Ah! if he would do *that*!"

"Why not say something on the subject to his mother, then? She seemed so kind and gentle, and so fond of you, that were *I* in your place, I should not hesitate, feeling certain that she would give you every assistance."

Beatrice only sighed and shook her head at this suggestion, but still she had already often thought about it when alone with Mrs. Wilton; something, however, always seeming to withhold her, even when the words were trembling on her lip.

But one hot summer's day when Cecil did not feel equal to the walk to Stapleton, and she herself, like a restless spirit, felt impelled to wander there in hopes of gleaning some new tidings of a more satisfactory nature than the information she had as yet acquired, she entered the house, without ringing, and softly opened the door of Mrs. Wilton's sitting-room,

secure that she should find a ready welcome. Yet no sooner had she done so than she wished the deed undone, for Mrs. Wilton sat beside the window in an attitude of deep dejection and perplexity; an open letter lying on her knee.

“What can it be? Ill news of Reginald—or Arthur?” thought Beatrice, growing faint with sudden apprehension, and her first idea being to retreat as silently as she had entered, and to endeavour elsewhere to obtain some explanation of this scene. But ere she had time either to advance or retreat, Mrs. Wilton looked up, forced a sad smile, and bade her enter.

“Oh, Beatrice, is it you, my love? Come in. Is Cecil Leslie with you?”

“No, I am alone,” returned Beatrice, hastening forward, and as she took the offered hand, enquiring, with a quick glance at the letter: “Are all well? I feared—” she hesitated, “that I was intruding,” she continued, with an effort; the sight of Arthur’s hand-

writing making her feel as though she scarce dared trust herself to ask about him.

“I am thankful to say that Reginald reports himself in good health and spirits; dear boy, may God bless him! But,”—she paused, and took the letter in her hand, whilst Beatrice, overcome with this excitement after her hot walk, sank wearily into a seat beside her, gasping:

“But,—what news of Arthur? You have heard from him to-day?”

“I have. A strange, sad letter, which perplexes me,” said Mrs. Wilton, once more glancing over it with tearful eyes.

“He is ill, then,—as I feared?”

“No! not exactly *ill*, but out of spirits; in a morbid state of mind and health. *I* think he will exert himself too much, and that he would be far better living quietly here.”

Beatrice now summoned resolution to enquire:

“Have you any idea why he objects to stay at home,—or even to visit it occasionally?”

“No ;—unless he misses Reginald, or this fancy springs from the caprice of illness. I incline to the former opinion, whilst his father seems to hold the latter. But from whatever cause it proceeds, his continued absence is a trouble to us both.”

“So I can easily conceive,” said Beatrice, in a low voice ; thinking that she knew the cause too well, and endeavouring to gain courage to come directly to the point. But ere she had time to do so, Mrs. Wilton spoke again.

“It is indeed a strange, perplexing letter. I will read it to you, and hear your opinion.”

“Yes, do !” was the eager answer ; and the reading was commenced.

“MY DEAR MOTHER,

“Do not scold ~~me~~ for not writing oftener, for indeed my time is fully occupied with sketching, planning subjects for future pictures, and wandering about ; and yet, work hard as I will, I do not seem to get on very fast, and what I do is never very satisfactory.

This is a lovely neighbourhood, and devoted as I am to art, I ought to feel quite happy, worshipping it side by side with nature,—yet I am *not*, and at the same time scarce know where to seek the true cause of my discontent;—unless it springs from my own exacting, dissatisfied disposition, which, whilst ever craving something unattainable, is but too apt to quarrel with the good within its reach. Else, why should I so perversely run away from *you*,—my father,—and my home, and become a wanderer and a vagabond, when such a life has really no charm for me but the charm of constant motion, and is anything but suited to my wretched state of health? Answer the question for me those who can;—*I cannot*; and you will probably pronounce me (and with justice), most unaccountable, unsatisfactory, and capricious. I am sorry; yet I cannot help it, or promise to amend, for it seems my destiny to be a constant torment, not only to myself, but to all who care for me; and I often wish that this weary and weariful ex-

istence were—But pardon, I will not end the sentence, for it might displease you. All that I *will* say is, that “all is vanity,” and whilst it is a necessity of our nature that we should ever toil on, no work seems to afford us any satisfaction,—at least, I may say safely that it never brings *me* any, and the days and nights come round with painful monotony, each seeming in turn most wearisome, yet each too quickly over when its rival takes its place. O truly do we groan beneath the curse! And I think a special curse is on *me*, or I should not write so selfishly and wickedly, for no apparent purpose but to grieve her who has ever met my frowardness with the very perfection of all gentle, patient love. Mother! My own dear mother, I entreat you to forgive and make allowances for me, your most unworthy son; and would that you were here, both to enjoy the loveliness of nature, and to speak peace to my weary spirit. Teach me, as in childish days to believe and trust, and to see good in all things,—even the most grievous

disappointments, for yours is truly a Christian soul, and your hopeful words sink down on *mine*, like oil upon the troubled waters, leaving a profound calm where so lately all was storm. Think of me, pray for me, write to me frequently, and above all, make allowances for all my faults. Would that my disposition were as much amended as my health. Shall I burn this letter, lest it grieve you? No; I think not, for you will expect one, and there is no time to write another for this post. And besides, it would really be a comfort that you should see the worst of me (no novel sight, my father would exclaim), and then you could advise me, scold me, if you pleased, —do anything, but leave me to myself. I have a drawing of Snowdon awaiting your acceptance, which I flatter myself you will not altogether despise,—more, however, for the unworthy artist's sake, than for any intrinsic merits of its own. What news of Reginald? Do let me always hear without delay; and tell me also all that passes in our neighbour-

hood; remembering me to such friends as may take the trouble to make enquiries. Love to yourself, dear mother, and my father,—who I trust is not again quite out of patience with me. Tell me what you both wish, and I will do my utmost to obey, for my selfish mode of life has brought me little satisfaction, and I see now,—what I must have been an idiot to have overlooked before, that *duty* alone can bring us any shadow of contentment. Therefore, speak your orders, and they shall be implicitly fulfilled. Say, “Come home, Arthur,” if you *desire* to see me, and I *will* come instantly; but if you do *not* care about it,—I am perhaps, better where I am at present,—wandering in loneliness amidst the eternal hills. Once more, farewell, and peace be on our house!

“Ever your affectionate son,

“ARTHUR WILTON.”

Mrs. Wilton read to the end of what she so justly termed, this “strange, perplexing letter,”

though with a faltering voice ; and when she had ended, fixed an anxious look on Beatrice, who herself felt far too much distressed for comment ; so doubly painful to her was the spectacle therein disclosed, of such a miserable, hopeless state of existence, as that to which Arthur seemed to have doomed himself by choice.

“ Well, my love ? ” said Mrs. Wilton, after vainly waiting for some ray of comfort.

“ It is very strange :—but he ought not to be alone,” she then exclaimed. “ Bid him return home. Tell him that his old friend, Beatrice Mordaunt, wishes it as well ; that she bade you tell him so for her. Say, as his own letter desires, ‘ Arthur, come home, and that instantly ! ’ Once here, and he is safe !—*safe !* ” she repeated, with increasing vehemence, as if she feared she knew not what danger for him while he stayed away.

“ Ah,—safe ! ” repeated Mrs. Wilton. “ Would that both our boys were safe. Yes, Beatrice, you give good counsel. I will write

at once. I have not shown this letter to any one but you,—not even to my husband; for—it is written in such an excited strain, that I judged it would be better not.”

“ Oh, much better not! But you will not forget my message?”

“ Certainly not. I think it is as follows: ‘his old friend, Beatrice Mordaunt, also wishes him to return.’ And now, dear Beatrice, tell me what you think about himself. What can have caused this fevered, restless state of mind?”

For one moment Beatrice was upon the point of telling all, but suddenly a new idea entered her mind, and caused her to withhold her confidence;—a new and bright idea, which flashed through it like a gleam of golden sunshine,—she would write to him herself.

“ Surely, there can be no harm;—to my old friend and playfellow! I shall only write in general terms, of course; that is, I shall say nothing that could displease him,—or—in short, that anyone,—even my father could

object to ; and he, surely, surely cannot coldly turn away. At any rate, I can but try, and then—”

Here her meditations were interrupted by Mrs. Wilton anxiously repeating :

“Beatrice, my love, do tell me what you think.”

“I can tell you better—after I have seen him. Till that time, I can only say that I grieve deeply, both for him and for yourself ; but, dear Mrs. Wilton, do not make yourself uneasy about him. You know his health was always delicate, and where that is the case, such otherwise inexplicable freaks are easily accounted for. It was always the same—”

“And, I fear, will be to the end.” Mrs. Wilton paused, and then added sadly : “Do you know, Beatrice, it is that thought which distresses me the most ? He is so different to other people, that I cannot fancy him ever becoming a settled, happy character. He wants—not energy, but strength of mind ; something steadfast to counteract the eccen-

tricities, the morbid self-consciousness of genius."

These words chilled Beatrice to the heart, and all the more so that they found an echo there; and impelled by a growing fear, she suddenly broke in upon them by exclaiming: "Oh, in mercy do not say so! Do not prophesy evil for him! His shall yet be a happy, noble character—when these mists of error have dispersed. Please God, he shall, for he is pure in heart, and gifted with many dazzling qualities. How few young men would have been so proof against temptation! Only let him come back, and——But,—" She broke off abruptly, and flung her arms round Mrs. Wilton's neck: "comfort yourself, and hope the best, as *I* do! Now, good bye! I keep you from your letter."

With these words, she disappeared, as noiselessly and quickly as she had appeared upon the scene; leaving Mrs. Wilton in a less despondent state, whilst she herself was in a tumult of excitement. Yet the fever of her

mind did not prevent her from hurrying home to write *her* note, which she then carried to the post herself. A few words sufficed,—both where her own feelings and Arthur's were concerned,—and had they been written sooner, would have saved them both much sorrow.

“DEAR ARTHUR,

“I have just seen your mother, who is in much grief about you. Do come home *at once*, for *her* sake,—if not for that of others who have long desired to see you;—for why should you wilfully cause sorrow to your friends? And why—*why* should you avoid *me* as you have done for so long? Have I offended you? If so, I pray you to forgive me, and to meet me—as you would have done in days gone by, for my heart is heavy at the thought of your displeasure. But, perhaps, I flatter myself too far in thinking that you have ever cast a thought upon your ancient play-fellow. Yet, once more, at the risk of

seeming too officious, I conjure you by the memory of happy vanished times, to return home, and by so doing, brighten more than one sad countenance. Much, and much that is sorrowful, has happened in this neighbourhood since you left it, but a more fervent welcome awaits you from that very circumstance. I shall say no more—*until I see you*, save, God bless you! and I dare not hope that my solicitations may prevail.

“Ever your attached friend,

“BEATRICE MORDAUNT.”

Her solicitations did prevail, however; and, as she had hoped, brought back the following answer by return of post :

“DEAR BEATRICE,

“How shall I thank you for the kindness which prompted *you* to send me a recall? I scarce need add that I will obey it, and not for my mother’s sake *alone*. God bless you, for the interest which those lines

express! This indeed is happiness beyond my utmost hopes,—and when I arrive, I shall have much to say upon the subject. *Till* then, let me live on hope, for surely, I cannot have deceived myself! It is,—it *must* be true; that— But I dare not write the words, for fear the entrancing spell should be dissolved; and I must go now to make arrangements for *my immediate* return to Stapleton. Adieu, my own true Beatrice, until we meet; and, oh! do not *then* tell me that I dream!

“Ever your devoted,

“ARTHUR WILTON.”

“Oh, how thankful I am that I *did* write!” thought Beatrice, reading and re-reading his note with feelings of happiness proportionate to her long period of uncertainty, and loneliness of heart. “Then he *has* loved me all the time! And I! how blind and foolish I have been! Why did I not seek this explanation sooner? Oh, these long and wearisome delays! But they are past now, with their

doubt and pain, and only one joyful certainty remains;—that *I am* loved,—that *he* is *mine*,—my own! Poor Arthur! *He* has also suffered; but I must endeavour to efface the memory of those sufferings. And now, let me dream!”

CHAPTER V.

AT LAST.

Think not so,—

Love, like an insect frequent in the woods,
Will take the colour of the tree it feeds on ;
As saturnine or sanguine is the soul,
Such is the passion. Brightly upon me,
Like the red sunset of a stormy day,
Love breaks anew beneath the gathering clouds
That roll around me ! Tell me, sweet Elena,
May I not hope, or rather, can I hope,
That for such brief and bounded space of time
As are my days on earth, you'll yield yourself
To such a love as mine, whose lamp of love
Is lighted at a funeral torch ?

TAYLOR'S PHILIP VAN ARTEVELDE.

“ His *immediate* return ; Then—it may be possible that he is back already ! Oh, to think that I may see him,—hear my hopes confirmed by his own lips, to-day ! Can this indeed be a reality ? ” exclaimed Beatrice, in-

wardly, after she had sat for some time pondering over the well-known characters. "I feel as if I scarce dared stir, lest, as he himself says, the entrancing spell should be dissolved. Yet I *must* bestir myself, for it would be far better for me to see him at Stapleton than *here*,—here where my father may interrupt our conference at any time,—and if I delay long, he is sure to come. I will set out early, for impatience will not let me wait.—Yet stay, Beatrice Mordaunt," she continued, endeavouring to check the eagerness which flushed her cheek, and sparkled in her eye: "Do not be too sanguine, but walk soberly, like one inured to disappointment; for what if he is not there, or if his reception of you should fall short of your warm expectations? *That*, however, *cannot* be, for his own words are clear as light. There is, thank Heaven! no longer room for doubt, for at length we understand each other. I *cannot* terrify myself with the ghost of a misgiving, and I will set out without fear, as soon as possible," she said,

finally starting up with animation in order to prepare for her expedition; and looking quite like 'the Beatrice of old.'

At that moment Cecil entered, and gazed with surprise upon her bright, hopeful countenance, for this interchange of letters was as yet a secret.

"Why, Beatrice, what has happened to transform you thus? Some pleasant news! I need not ask if you have had good tidings;" and Miss Leslie glanced from her cousin's face to the letter which she clasped so lovingly.

Beatrice, acting under the influence of sudden joy, moved forward, threw her arms round Cecil, and embracing her with impulsive affection, answered:

"You guess rightly. I am very, very happy!"

"And so am I to hear you say so," whispered Cecil, as she kissed her cheek; though a sudden rush of recollections, awakened by these joyous words, only made *her* feel doubly desolate. But she was too unselfish to yield

to personal regrets at a moment when Beatrice claimed her sympathy; so she added softly: "Tell me, has *he* written? After so much uncertainty, *that would* be happiness."

"He has! Sit down, and I will tell you all," cried Beatrice, and in a few more minutes both her secret and the contents of Arthur's letter were revealed. "What do *you* think about it Cecil? Is it possible to doubt?"

"Oh, no indeed!" replied the latter, impressed as deeply as such young girls generally are by the whole transaction, and overflowing with zealous love for Beatrice. "I ~~think~~ you acted very wisely, and I feel sure ~~that~~ this will end as happily as you deserve."

"As I *deserve*! Oh, do not say so, for my *deserts* are very, very small! Say, rather, as happily as I could *desire*, and then I shall attach far more importance to your words. But I must not linger now; time is too precious. *You* will stay and make breakfast for papa?"

"I will."

"And if *I* am asked for, only say that I am

out. I mean, do not mention Stapleton, for I would be the first to tell my own adventures."

"Ah, I understand; and you may rely upon me to keep your counsel," returned Cecil, once more pressing Beatrice's hand, and adding: "Now good bye! And may my wishes speed your expedition."

"Dear, dear Cecil, I am sure they will! How good,—how perfectly disinterested you are!" exclaimed Beatrice, feeling suddenly as though there was something selfish in this display of her own private hopes and happiness; and to Cecil especially, as she stood at the garden gate, in her black dress, and with her pale, quiet face, watching her as she took her course across the meadows,—sorrow cast behind her, and a joyful hope before. "Were we to change places, could I rejoice as sincerely in *her* happy prospects, whilst I felt myself in such an isolated position, my heart burdened by anxiety (such as she feels for poor Harry), and with nothing to look forward to in the future? I *hope* so, but I dare not

answer for myself, and I only trust that *she* may yet be happier."

Thus Beatrice continued her reflections, as she passed with light steps beneath the shade of tangled hedges, and over soft green grass; a glimpse of Stapleton peeping forth from the shelter of its fine old trees, gradually changing the current of her thoughts, until, from pensive, they became warm and glowing; giving her step and eye new elasticity and brilliancy.

She passed into the grounds by a small gate of communication between her father's property and Mr. Wilton's; and scarcely was she underneath the shadowy branches of the plantation which formed the boundary, than she saw a light, graceful figure advancing towards her along the chequered pathway, whose general outline, rather than his very slight degree of lameness—(now scarcely perceptible)—proclaimed him to be Arthur.

Arthur, coming in search of *her*! How good of him,—and yet no more than she had

reason. to expect! Her whole countenance was at once lighted up, and she impetuously hastened on to meet him; their hands being the next minute passionately clasped together. Neither of them doubted; neither hesitated; one all-absorbing thought casting out all others, and forcing forth the simultaneous exclamation:

“Oh, at last!”

Arthur gazed earnestly at Beatrice, who looking fixedly at him in return, thought his expression more beautiful, and his whole appearance more fragile than even before; the hand which held hers being also thin and burning.

A vague fear instantly mingled with her happiness, but she had no time to indulge it, for those well known accents,—so clear and sweet, and yet so trembling and impassioned,—once more fell upon her ear.

“Beatrice! *My* Beatrice, tell me—is this true?”

"I would have asked you the same question," was her answer, as she clasped his hand more closely.

"Then you are indeed *mine*! Oh, what happiness! But let me hear it from your own lips. Tell me that you really love me."

She answered fervently, without a moment's hesitation: "I do: with my whole heart,—as, God knows that I have done, for years."

Arthur's eyes lit up with sudden rapture at the words; not that he had doubted ere she spoke; but those tones,—that confession, made with so much mingled modesty and firmness, filled him with such passionate joy, that on the instant he clasped her closely to his heart.

"Thank God, that I have lived to hear this! And now,—now let the end come when it will! I care not, for I have at length drunk deeply of the cup of happiness. Oh, Beatrice, how could I be so blind?"

He spoke vehemently,—almost wildly; and fearing the evil effects of such excitement,

she drew herself gently away (though still permitting him to retain her hand), and entreated him to sit down upon a rustic seat, ere they entered into further explanation.

Nor was the precaution needless, for a deadly paleness suddenly succeeding his enthusiasm proved too plainly that his life hung merely on a thread. The hand which held hers so tightly, trembled, and in fact, he shook all over with emotion, nor for some minutes could he say another word. Yet never for one instant did he turn his eyes away from her countenance; and hers met them with an earnest, anxious look, as the thought suddenly crossed her:

“I may lose him yet! But I will put *that* dread from me for the present; and till then, I trust that we shall never part. I will be with him till—oh, of what am I thinking, and at such a moment? Yet *he* himself said it—till the *end*! There is a merciful God above us. I entrust my cause to Him; my only hope being that I may have power to help and comfort

Arthur. All that love can do to make him happy shall be done. Arthur," she said aloud, "you have hurried home, and the journey has exhausted you."

"Oh, no! And how could I delay an instant?"

"Well, I trust it is not so; *I* will take good care of you in future; and—for *my* sake dear Arthur,—do economise your strength, for your life is too valuable to be lightly thrown away."

"Oh, Beatrice," was the passionate answer, "I used to think it valueless,—to hope it would not be a long one; but now,—*now* I desire to live on for a little while—at least; just to feel that this is true; for, as yet, I can scarcely realise that *you*,—full of all vigorous life and beauty, can indeed love *me*,—a miserable wreck,—a morbid, unnatural, and repellant being."

"Oh, hush, Arthur! Do not say such dreadful things. I have told you—the truth. Let that suffice."

"I cannot. It bewilders me; and I want

to know *how* you first came to love *me*,—such a wretched contrast to yourself in every way !”

“ Perhaps, because we all delight in contrasts, and seek—in those we love, the qualities which we ourselves lack. But I can scarcely tell ; it is so long ago. This—feeling grew upon me gradually.”

“ Beatrice, I cannot comprehend this.”

“ Yet it is so.”

“ And—my brother ?”

“ I have ever looked upon him as a brother also ;—and *he* knows my secret. I betrayed myself before he went.”

“ And he never told *me*, when it might have spared me years of pain !” cried Arthur vehemently, as the idea flashed upon him that though Beatrice had only *sisterly* affection to bestow on Reginald, the latter might have been inspired by a deeper feeling. And in that case doubtless *he* had suffered too ; but why did he withhold this intelligence ? From jealousy ?

The tumult in Arthur's breast was speedily ended by the following answer :

“ No ; he did not tell you, because I placed him on his honour not to do so.”

“ And wherefore ? Why inflict such useless tortures on one who only erred in loving you ? ”

“ Would I had known that sooner ! I had then been spared much suffering. But why recall the past ? Arthur, you do not think that, had I not been overwhelmed by doubt —(and more than doubt, for I even fancied that you quite disliked me)—I could have maintained so resolute a silence ? ”

Arthur leaned back, with an air of deep dejection.

“ Good heavens, Beatrice ! What demon could possess, and find means to persuade me that you only loved my brother ? ”

“ Did it,” asked Beatrice, slowly, “ enter into you upon that fatal evening of the *fête*, when you overheard some foolish words which passed between us ? ”

Arthur shuddered.

“Oh, no! long before; or it would have been more easily exorcised. *That* seemed merely to confirm the interpretation I had placed on former passages; nor could any human power—perhaps not even your own asseverations—have then convinced me that I was under the influence of a deadly error, so impossible did it seem that *any one*, far less so bright a being as my Beatrice, could ever care for such a miserable wretch.”

“Then how—how, Arthur, have I had power to convince you now?”

“I scarcely know. The conviction seemed to flash upon me all at once.”

“With my letter? Oh, I never can be too thankful that I wrote.”

“Nor I; for had you *not*—I was on the very verge of despair.”

“I know it; for I saw your letter to your mother.”

“You did! I would have given worlds that it were not so; and yet, I speak fool-

ishly, for in that case this happy explanation never would have ensued; and then—then, God only knows what would have followed! But I have been saved. You have been permitted to be my good angel, and save me from the consequences of my selfishness and folly. And, see! I have never, never for a long time been without the influence of your protecting image!”

Even as he spoke, he drew from his bosom a miniature of Beatrice, which he had himself painted from one of his slight sketches of her, aided by memory; and this little picture had for years been worn next his heart. Beatrice gazed upon it till her eyes grew dim, for many and deep were the emotions which this unexpected revelation excited.

“Oh, how little did I guess it.”

“No; nor (in case it had been as I thought with you and Reginald), would you have ever done so, till the end. After my death, perhaps, you would have learned all, but not

before. Look, here is a piece of your hair upon the other side."

"Where did you procure that? Not from me?"

"Yes; but so long ago that you may have forgotten. In the old days, when (as you reminded me) we were *play-fellows*, I myself cut it off with your own scissors; and you, if I recollect right, were indignant at the liberty."

"Little guessing how the jest would turn to deepest earnest. Yes, I *do* remember perfectly. And you have kept it ever since?"

"As one of my chiefest treasures; and I should thus silently have worn it to my grave. Oh, I have often felt so very lonely, that life would have been insupportable but for this slight relic of my vanished hopes. I have wandered about like a restless spirit, seeking repose and finding none. I turned to Art, and it was all insufficient to appease my cravings. I stood amidst the multitudes who

throng the splendid churches of foreign countries on high festivals; I endeavoured to yield to the enthrallment of the entrancing music, the intoxicating incense, but in vain. 'I am lonely,' I said, 'and this is a paternal religion; why not enter its bosom, and there find consolation?' But I could not; for looking closer, all seemed hollowness and corruption, a tissue of deceit, a mockery of true religion, bedecked in tinsel to disguise its worthlessness. And I turned from it with loathing and despair —"

"Back to our own more simple forms, I trust," exclaimed Beatrice, who had hitherto been listening with breathless earnestness.

"Back—I know not whither!—to the Egyptian darkness where I sat alone! But latterly I have groped a little nearer to the light, though —"

"Arthur, I have also felt the influence of this darkness; but, by God's mercy, it has also been dispelled," cried Beatrice, entering into an account of her mistaken notions, and

their ending. "But, oh! to think how much *you* must have suffered!" she continued, bursting into tears. "I cannot bear to dwell upon it, yet it has a horrible fascination for me also. Tell me *all*."

Arthur, thus adjured, continued his confession, and ere they parted, each knew all the other had endured and felt; their mutual sufferings proving a bond of union almost as powerful as their mutual love; or, rather to speak correctly, born of it. But brighter flashes occasionally lighted up their conversation. Beatrice dispelled Arthur's last lingering suspicions of his brother's real feelings for her, by a touching picture of the truth; the brotherly and sisterly affection which had sprung up between them; and which, whilst relieving Arthur's mind, nevertheless caused him many pangs of self-reproach; and now that they talked it over, the whole affair appeared inexplicable.

"And to think of all the precious moments that are lost for ever! lost through my own

folly ! Beatrice, how was it that you did not guess the truth ?”

She shook her head sorrowfully.

“ Ah, if they could only be recalled ! But since that is impossible, let us make the most of what remains.”

“ Just what *I* think,” he answered. “ Beatrice, after my return home late last night, and the excitement of meeting my father and mother ;—not to mention other and still deeper sources of emotion, I found it impossible to sleep ; and, therefore, to beguile the weary hours, till morning came, and I could seek you, I occupied myself in writing the following lines.”

He placed a folded paper in her hand ; but she, recollecting how he had once done so before, and how his verses had, instead of raising, caused her hopes to sink, started slightly, exclaiming :

“ Ah, I trust this is not also an ill-omen ! I think trouble has made me almost superstitious.”

“An ill-omen!” he repeated in surprise; and she explained her meaning. “No; I hope not. But take them and read them when you are at home;—that is, if you think it worth your while.”

“You cannot doubt *that*, surely,” was the answer, and after they had parted, they were duly read; the concluding lines leaving an ominous impression on her heart: contrary in all probability, to the writer’s intention, for his last desire would have been to give Beatrice pain. In order that others may form their own judgment, we insert them: giving permission that they may be read or left unread at will.

THE DREAM.

I dreamed; and in my dream I glided down

A sluggish stream, that deep in shadow lay:—
The shadow of a weird and silent town,

Where mortal foot may find no place to stray;

For all is water. Where long streets should lie,

’Twixt marble buildings flows the darkling tide;

And ghostly gondolas alone float by

The dead remains of Ocean’s haughty Bride.

I was borne onward thro' the shades of night,
Past lofty palaces,—beneath that Arc
Of Sighs, whence by the moon's uncertain light
Despairing souls were led to caverns dark ;—

The moan of waters the sole earthly sound
That ever reached those wretched captive's ears,
In those dark dungeons far beneath the ground,
Where never ray of light nor hope appears.

“O dismal lot!” I cried. “O cruel fate !
“To die an endless death !”—I stayed my speech :—
The gondola had paused before a gate
Where all was darkness, far as sight could reach.

And none might say what lay beyond those walls :—
That dark, drear portal with its arch of gloom,—
Whether it led to bright, luxurious halls,
Or dungeons yawning like a living tomb.

Green sea-slime overspread the mouldering stones,
Cold waves found entrance by that opening wide;
I spoke again. In low and hollow tones
My words were borne adown the darksome tide.

“Lone is my life, and sad—devoid of cheer,
Why should I wish to stay my fleeting breath ?
Why, coward-like, still pray to linger here,
E'en tho' yon portal prove the Gate of Death ?

“The Past—*is* past, beyond my weak control :
The present is replete with hopeless woe ;—
The Future !—hath *it* terrors for a soul
O'er which regret and sorrow ceaseless flow ?”

“Oh, rest is sweet! But dare I hope for rest
Within the shelter of these solemn walls ?
Do they conduct to regions of the blest,
Or scenes, whose name the shuddering sense appals ?

"The barge which bore me down the sluggish stream
Is stayed beneath the shadow of Death's Gate;
And some resistless, viewless power doth seem
To urge me onwards.—I must dare my fate!"—

I rose, and by the moonbeam's wavering light
Stepped forth;—the oozy waters kissed my feet
Above the slippery stair;—and brooding night
With its dread stillness gave me welcome meet;

Unbroken, save by a low, shuddering sigh,
That echoed back the sighing of the wave,
'Neath the dim vaulted roof which hid the sky,—
Mysterious, cold, and gloomy as the grave.

I paused in awe; for mortal being ne'er
Can overcome that shrinking from the tomb.
When, "Onward!" cried the secret influence: "There
Behold thy destined bourne!" In total gloom

I trod those marble steps, ascending slow
• 'Midst chilly airs; and vaguely wandering on,
Was cheered at length by such a fitful glow
As from some distant taper might have shone.

Onward! Still onward, o'er the stony floor,
Led by that single ray, until I came
To a dim-lighted, echoing corridor,
Where streamed on high a lamp's uncertain flame.

Onward! Still onward, till there came a breath,
Not of the charnel, but of breezy woods,
And sweet green meadows. Then I thought, "Can Death
Steal o'er our senses in such balmy floods?"

"So softly—tenderly?"—I dreamed of home,
And all its rural pleasures, as I stood
Entranced beneath that dim and shadowy dome,
In a strange, dreamy,—yet—more hopeful mood.

And as I lingered, brighter grew the light,
Until at length the steady, silvery ray
Dispelled the horrors of that two-fold night,
And arch and corridor shone clear as day ;

While far beyond seemed rosy-tinted halls,
Where moved gay figures ; and the ringing sound
Of joyous voices echoed from those walls
Where nought, I deemed, but horror might be found.

“ Strange ! Wonderful ! ” I cried. And as I spoke,
My arm was pressed. I started—at my side
I saw a form which heightening wonder woke,—
A female in the habit of a bride ;

Completely veiled,—and in her hand a cup
Of cunning workmanship, where tempting wine,—
Cool—clear,—’midst gold and jewels, sparkled up,—
The product of some more than earthly vine.

“ Drink ! ” cried the stranger : and her accents thrilled
Thro’ heart and soul, for well I seemed to know
That voice, whose liquid sounds, with rapture filled
My being—and I answered, “ Be it so ! ”

Stretching my hand to take the proffered gift
From one that seemed familiar. The soft touch
Of those fair fingers, half-advanced to lift
That goblet to my lips, proclaimed it such.

“ Oh stay ! One moment stay ! The day is past,
And it hath been a sad one. Night is come.
Yet drink,—drink to a happier meeting when at last
We meet again beyond the envious tomb !

“ Life hath been dreary, for our love was crossed
By strange mischance,—and what is life without ?
Let this one hour redeem the thousands lost,
By its pure ecstasy, untouched by doubt !

"I love thee! I have ever loved! 'Tis true
As heaven is above us, and the grave
Before!"—Those whispered accents flew
Thro' every vein.—I drained the draught she gave;

And lighter grew my heart. I knew,—I *felt*,
Her words were truth,—that she had ever loved
With fervour like mine own. I humbly knelt
Before her, and essayed my faith to prove.

She bent and kissed me;—kissed my throbbing brow,
And it grew calmer. "Oh, it doth not need
Ardent professions to assure me *now*,"
She murmured, "for I feel thou'rt mine indeed!"

"Yes, thine for ever! And now let me die
Ere the sweet spell which holds my soul is broke.
For those who taste—e'en *once*,—such ecstasy,
No more remains!"—And with these words I woke.

CHAPTER VI.

FRESH TRIALS.

Alas!

I have no protectors. I am a poor girl,
Exposed to insults and unfeeling jests.
They wound me, yet I cannot shield myself.

LONGFELLOW'S SPANISH STUDENT.

BEATRICE read Arthur's poem before she went in search of her mother or Cecil, and she consequently entered the house in a sadder and less hopeful frame of mind than would otherwise have been the case ; thinking to herself:

" Oh, is it—*can* it possibly be true that he will escape me at last ? That my new hopes will prove delusive ? No, I will not believe it, for it seems so hard ! "

Her reflections were broken in upon by her cousin, who had been anxiously awaiting her return, and who now fixed an enquiring glance upon her face. But Beatrice looked so sad and serious, that Cecil feared to put the question.

“ You have seen him ? ”

Yet when she at length summoned courage to do so, she was relieved by the sudden smile which accompanied the answer :

“ Yes,—I have.”

“ And all is well ? ”

“ It is ;—so far as a perfect understanding is concerned.”

“ Oh, I am so glad ! ” cried Cecil, accompanying her words by an affectionate embrace.

“ Oh, Cecil ! If I may only venture to hope !—But I fear—”

“ *What ?* Is he ill ? ”

“ No.—But—I am so tired that I must rest a little before I talk to you,” returned Beatrice, beginning to ascend the stairs.

Cecil was puzzled, and half alarmed by her

trange manner, but though reluctant to leave her before some explanation had ensued, consideration for her cousin's feelings impelled her to repress her curiosity, and say :

“Then I will not tease you. Perhaps you would rather be alone?”

“No; come with me if you like,” was the answer, and Cecil eagerly availed herself of the permission; following Beatrice into her own room, and scrupulously refraining from taking any notice of her, until Beatrice's own voice hinted that she might.

Beatrice seemed over-excited just at first, and sinking wearily into a chair, could for some minutes scarcely refrain from bursting into tears, so much had she been enduring for a long time past, and so sudden and unexpected had been this *éclaircissement*. The proud thought that she *was* loved after all, was almost overpowering; and then, that dread,—that shadowy presentiment, stealing across the brightness of her new hopes,

—filled her with wild sorrow; but she shook it off, with the half-involuntary exclamation:

“I will not dwell upon *that* possibility. ‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof!’ ”

Cecil drew nearer, and laying her hand caressingly upon her cousin’s, asked:

“*What* evil, Beatrice? *Do* tell me all?”

“Oh, it is nothing—save a vague apprehension of my own. An almost superstitious fancy which possessed me for a minute,” answered Beatrice, rousing herself, and adding gaily: “Yes, you may congratulate me now. And, darling Cecil, if all ends well, you shall come and live with us until you feel inclined to follow our example. When I am married you shall have a safe and happy home,—unless,” she added, with more seriousness, “you prefer the thought of staying with mamma?”

“We can think about *that* afterwards; but at present I want you to tell me more about yourself,” returned Cecil, repressing a sigh; and Beatrice willingly complied with her re-

quest, gradually talking herself into a calmer, happier mood; in which more satisfactory state, she went to claim and receive the good wishes of her mother.

Mrs. Mordaunt, spite of her severe judgment of Arthur's conduct, and an inexpressible regret that Beatrice had not rather been his brother's choice, was pleased—in her despondent way, and quite ready to wish her daughter joy. Putting Arthur's ill-health and peculiarities of disposition out of the question, the match would be in all respects desirable; and considering the miserable, unsettled home she had at Lynwood, it appeared as though Beatrice *must* be the gainer by such a marriage.

Thus far, therefore, Beatrice was satisfied; but when she met her father's dark unsympathising glance, she dreaded the hour when *he* should learn the truth; the fear of his disapproval making her, however, more bent upon enjoying the brief moments which remained

ere he was put in possession of the secret. Arthur *must* communicate it, and till then, she would not dwell upon the future.

Those moments were few, for just when the family was assembled before dinner, a letter was delivered to Mr. Mordaunt, and his daughter's quick eyes, rendered still more keen from expectation, in one hurried glance recognised the well-known hand-writing; and what would she not have given that it should rather have arrived at any other time? She observed her father's look of surprise, and her heart beat nervously whilst he examined its *outside*; but when he proceeded to break the seal, muttering as he did so :

"What can *he* want? Pshaw!"—she absolutely turned and fled in haste: nor did she return, until summoned down to dinner.

She rejoined the little party with heightened colour, and an intense anxiety, yet dread, to know the worst; but Mr. Mordaunt's countenance was much as usual—a shade darker,

perhaps, than before—yet otherwise betraying no signs of having received Arthur's communication.

“Come! Why do you get out of the way, just to give one the trouble of sending for you?” was his only remark, as he ungraciously *drove* the ladies before him to the dining-room, following with his accustomed air of gloom, and commencing business in profound silence.

Dinner passed over rather more heavily than usual. Mrs. Mordaunt ventured to address her husband, and received no answer; Cecil looked uncomfortable; Beatrice felt so, but assumed a haughty air; twice Mr. Mordaunt swore at the servant, and once at his wife's little dog; and that was all that occurred to break the monotony of the repast. At least *three* of the party felt relieved when it was over, and Mrs. Mordaunt coughed significantly as she rose to leave the room, observing:

“Well, I think it must be time for *us* to

go, though it seems a pity to quit such a cheerful scene."

No one spoke, but Mr. Mordaunt noted down the obnoxious words; and Beatrice heartily wished they had remained unsaid, as they only made her part all the harder, for she had made up her mind to seek some explanation with her father ere she left him, and now lingered behind the others to put her design into execution.

"Are you not coming, Beatrice?" asked her mother, looking back.

"Not just this moment," was the hurried answer; and the door closed, leaving her and her father *tête-à-tête*.

Of course he guessed why she lingered, but it was also a matter of course that he should refrain from affording her any assistance; he taking out his tablets, and beginning to write down some memorandums; and she (embarrassed how to enter upon so delicate a subject), playing in silence with a fruit-knife, till she dropped it, and aroused her father by the

sound. Then indeed he looked up, but it was only to say, sullenly :

“ I wish you could be quiet. Do leave off that fidgeting, and go.”

Beatrice raised her head, with a quick, impatient gesture.

“ I will not stay long ; but I first want to know —”

Here she was interrupted by an insulting laugh, which caused the angry colour to deepen still more painfully upon her cheek.

“ Oh ! ho ! I thought *that* was it ! Why could not you say what you wanted, without so much beating about the bush ?”

“ You have no right to treat me so,” was the quick answer.

“ Then speak out openly. I hate such underhand behaviour.”

“ *Underhand !*” echoed Beatrice ; but she could say no more.

Mr. Mordaunt now began to work himself up into a more actively savage state.

“ Yes, underhand ! He drew forth Arthur’s

letter, and flung it down upon the table. "Pray how long has *this* affair been going on? I think it would have been as well to let me know a little sooner; but there is no trusting any of you; all are just alike."

Beatrice drew herself up haughtily.

"I do not understand you; but I see that Arthur has not delayed writing. *What* he has said, and how you choose to receive his—communication, is, of course, best known to yourself. Yet this I *will* say, no one has a right to breathe a word against *him*."

"No," said Mr. Mordaunt with a sneer. (*He* was also vexed it was not Reginald instead). "Oh, doubtless he is a most eligible *parti*. Never mind about his personal defects. You did well to fix upon a sickly cripple, and I trust he will do credit to your choice."

This was beyond endurance. For the moment, Beatrice felt as if she never could forgive her father's remarks upon the misfortunes of one so dear to her, and she answered fiercely: •

"That is *my* affair. Such as he is, I love, and will marry Arthur Wilton, convinced that such a step would be for the happiness of both. *I* know none like him."

"Heaven forbid you *should*! *One* of the kind is quite sufficient. So you mean to have him, whether *I* approve or no?"

Beatrice was about to answer vehemently in the affirmative, but fortunately she was enabled to check herself just in time, saying, instead:

"There *can* be no objection. Family, fortune, everything must seem desirable; even —"

Again she was interrupted.

"Oh, I understand *now*, and commend your prudence. You regard the matter from a worldly point of view, and think far more of the *husband* than the *man*."

This taunt was almost beyond endurance, yet still she controlled herself enough to reply, with some show of calmness:

"You know better, so I need not answer

that remark ; and instead, I ask you why you would wish the happiness of my whole life to be sacrificed ? I repeat, that even *you* must in your heart regard this as an eligible connexion ; and what have *I* done to merit such hard treatment ?”

Mr. Mordaunt, having no better answer ready for these questions, only answered : “ Pshaw ! ”

Beatrice was silent for a few moments, turning her rings upon her fingers, whilst she looked down, trembling with excitement ; but at length she looked up again.

“ Will you not tell me ? ”

A muttered oath was all the answer she received, though Mr. Mordaunt felt that she had reason on her side ; and that there could be no objections to the match, except those raised by injustice and caprice. Hard pressed for money as he often was, the prospect of Arthur’s fortune (derived from his mother), would have been at any time a great temptation, and the connexion *was* all that could

have been desired, Mr. Wilton's being one of the first families in the county. But he did not like Arthur personally, and whilst unwilling to acknowledge to his daughter herself the possibility of her doing anything better, was angry that he had lost all chance of a son-in-law whose *outward* attractions might have proved more dazzling to the world; an athletic personage of daring character, and one who might, too, prove a more congenial spirit. Therefore, he felt aggrieved, and thus vented his disappointment upon Beatrice, to say nothing of his natural love of tyranny. Beatrice poured out a glass of water, and drank it, before making what she intended to be a last effort; and Mr. Mordaunt observing the action, said, sneeringly :

“That's right. Cool yourself before you speak again.”

She looked up, and for the first time contrived to meet her father's eye; her own glance being so reproachful, that it even softened him in some degree.

"Only answer me," was all she said.

"Well, I suppose you want this fellow, because no one else will have you? Anyone is better than no one; eh?"

"You are at liberty to think so, if you please," she returned, with an air of desperate endurance.

"Provided you may have your own way in the end?"

"You know my feelings. All I ask is common justice."

"Rubbish! Save all that nonsense till you talk to *him*, for it only fills *me* with disgust. Well, do as you like, so long as *I* am left in peace. You may go and tell him so if you like."

Beatrice now thought it time to close the conference; and so it was, for she was already chafed and disgusted more than she would have owned, even to herself. She rose proudly, saying:

"Then you will send him an answer?"

"Confound it! Don't bother me any more."

I am quite competent to manage my own affairs without *your* interference."

So spoke the kind, judicious parent; but the daughter, accustomed to such strange behaviour, only answered "very well," as she left the room, though every pulse was throbbing with resentment.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

Oh, God ;
Too great a destiny it were for me !
But say not that your days on earth are brief.
I see the long procession of your days
Through the far distant future streaming light,
Triumphal, crowned with glory.

PHILIP VAN ARTEVELDE.

SUCH a scene was calculated to destroy all the romance of Beatrice's engagement, and that evening her feelings were bitter enough. She was hot and angry when she left her father, nor had she shaken off the unpleasant impression left by his unfeeling words, even when she rose next morning ; and uncertainty as to whether Arthur's letter had been answered, was

not calculated to diminish her irritation. At first, she shrank from mentioning the subject to anyone, but at length her mother's questioning extracted some confession of her fears and feelings, as well as of Mr. Mordaunt's conduct upon the preceding evening.

"Well, my dear Beatrice, you know your father's ways, so it could be no surprise," was the reply. "But I trust, for your sake, he will not offend the Wiltons by his want of courtesy ; as, in truth, seems but too likely."

"Then you think he has *not* written?"

"I am very much afraid he has not, for when people once begin to tyrannise, they forget how far they may go with safety,—especially where any member of their own family happens to be concerned."

"A pleasant hearing, truly!" sighed Beatrice.

"But," resumed her mother, "you say he gave an ungracious sort of assent?"

"He did."

"Then I will tell you what I think would

be the best plan. We will waive ceremony, and go to Stapleton together, in order that you and Arthur may talk matters quietly over, for in case your father has not written, I do not imagine he is likely to come here."

"Nor I," said Beatrice, bitterly. "Such treatment is not likely to attract him!"

"Well, my love, do not distress yourself about this. Try to think rather of your future prospects," returned her mother, kissing her, and speaking soothingly. "These annoyances cannot be prevented, so there is nothing for it but to endure them patiently."

"Consoling myself by the reflection that they cannot last for ever! No, I feel thankful that I have a chance of escape left—"

She paused suddenly, struck by her mother's dreary, hopeless look, and by the recollection that for *her* there was no prospect of relief. She would have said something about her regret at leaving Mrs. Mordaunt, and attempted consolation by reminding her that Cecil Leslie would supply a daughter's place; but was

prevented doing so by the sound of the doorbell.

"Who can that be, so early?" exclaimed her mother.

Beatrice listened attentively, and then answered with flushing cheek :

"Mr. Wilton! He is come to see papa; and I trust the interview may pass over smoothly, though I tremble when I think about last evening."

"Better him than Arthur. What *he* says will have more weight. And your father is not down yet; so I can see him first, and that will be a point gained," answered Mrs. Mordaunt, just as Mr. Wilton was admitted.

Beatrice looked as she felt, hurried and excited; but she felt happier when her intended father-in-law approached her, and in the warmest manner expressed his joy at welcoming such a daughter. Both he and Mrs. Wilton had been pleased when Arthur told them, though, like the Mordaunts, they had wondered at her preferring him to Reginald.

who was a general favourite; but Mr. Wilton had comforted himself by the reflection :

“ Well, perhaps it may be best so. If she can but endue him with some share of her own high spirit, I shall only be too thankful; though, to do him justice, he is much improved of late. Far more manly and independent; and with such a wife, he may turn out very creditably after all.”

Little did Beatrice guess how Arthur's father viewed the matter, or she would have met him far more coldly; but happy in her ignorance, she returned his kind words with impulsive gratitude, and then escaping, left him with her mother, who listened with pleasure to his commendations of her child.

“ But, it is strange Arthur has received no answer to his letter,” he observed next, “ and therefore. I thought it best to come and see your husband.”

Mrs. Mordaunt endeavoured to give this uncourteous action a less unfavourable colouring, and contrived to smooth matters over be-

fore her husband was visible; feeling thankful that she had managed to succeed so well; for, through Mr. Wilton's kind speeches to herself upon the occasion, and his evident delight at the prospect of Beatrice becoming a member of his family, she perceived that he was more than half inclined to be offended by Mr. Mordaunt's strange behaviour, and dreaded the engagement being broken off after all.

But fortunately, Mr. Wilton's superior mind always exercised a salutary sway over that of the tyrannical master of Lynwood, and the latter had no desire to be at feud with *him*; so he made an effort to be gracious, and utter a few suitable civilities, which were favourably received by his visitor. And whilst the two gentlemen were shut up together, Mrs. Mordaunt and Beatrice set out towards Stapleton.

Again a warm reception from the lady of the house; and then Beatrice escaped in search of Arthur, whom she found wandering impatiently about the grounds, assured that

she would come to seek him there. It was easy to see that his proud, sensitive feelings were deeply wounded by Mr. Mordaunt's contemptuous silence, and her indignation increased in proportion, though to *him* she endeavoured to make light of this unpardonable slight.

"But, Beatrice, did he say nothing? Am I to be left in ignorance whether he consents or no? Or am I to take it for granted that though utterly distasteful to him, I am at least to be *endured*? Is it thus that I am to interpret your presence here?"

Thus spoke Arthur, with kindling eyes; but not for worlds would Beatrice have told him the real truth.

"Be contented," was her answer. "You are well acquainted with my father's disposition, and that it would be impossible for him to seem satisfied with any plan, not originated by himself. Our house is unfortunately, far from a happy or united one, but we get accustomed to all things in time, so that now

I look upon such annoyances as mere matters of course."

"I will free you from such bondage," exclaimed Arthur, passionately. "It is high time that you escaped from such a galling yoke; and, once *mine*!"—

He clasped her hand tightly, and paused to give emphasis to the word "*mine*;" she returning the pressure as she concluded the unfinished sentence for him.

"Ah, yes! *Then* we may be happy, Arthur. Forget all that is painful, and let us enjoy any glimpse of happiness that is offered. Such have been rare enough of late! Let your father and mine talk matters over as they please, whilst you and I think only of each other. Will not our mutual affection suffice to blot out all real or imaginary wrongs?"

"It will. Let us be happy in the present, since the future ever must be dark and uncertain. I cannot bear to waste *one* of the precious moments which are fairly within my reach."

Something in Arthur's tone brought back the mournful feelings with which Beatrice had read his last lines ; and she answered hastily :

“ Do not speak thus about the future. I *will* hope ; and do you follow my example. Rouse yourself, and shake off all dreary forebodings.”

“ Ah” (with a sigh), “ if it were only possible ! But I believe it is my nature to despond.”

“ Then conquer nature by the force of your will. *Live*, dearest Arthur, instead of merely *existing*. You have genius.”

“ True ; but that has ever been a curse rather than a blessing.”

“ From the force of circumstances ; but let the past be past. Why not shake off despondency, and live a new life from henceforth ? Power has been given you to rise superior to misfortunes,—far above the heads of ordinary men ; and wherefore slight the blessings which have fallen to your lot ?” cried Beatrice, with increasing enthusiasm.

Arthur caught the infection, and his melancholy forebodings vanished; for a moment he saw the future in a brighter light; and his reply was:

“You have given me new hope. With *you* for a companion, how can I give way to gloomy thoughts? I *will* strive to lead a manly, active, useful life, that when the end comes I may feel I have not lived in vain. Oh, if my life had but begun under more favourable auspices, I might never have been the miserable wretch I am! But you know how my father always misunderstood me? His influence might have done much; but—however, I will not revive old grievances. He is very kind *now*, and I must try to make amends for wasted time. *Alone*, I do not think I could have risen; but with *you*!—Oh, Beatrice, I think that you have power to make me what you will. I feel new strength of mind and body in your presence. Let us ‘live our life!’ ”

It did seem as though a favourable change had

come over Arthur Wilton, for from that day his health improved, and he began to speak hopefully about the future. Many happy summer days did he and Beatrice spend together,—in the woods and gardens; or the studio, where new and grander conceptions grew upon the young painter's canvas.

They wandered through every familiar haunt, reviving old associations, and forming plans for the future; Mr. Mordaunt treating his intended son-in-law with some show of civility, if not of cordiality, and all the other members of the two families seeming desirous to promote their happiness by every possible means. Arthur made Cecil's acquaintance, and she sometimes joined their rambles; endeavouring to forget in their society the weight which lay so heavily upon her own heart; and Beatrice was not jealous of her cousin,—even when Arthur took her pure, pale face as a model for the Madonna; for she felt so sure of his undivided love, that she could afford to spare to another some slight

share of his interest and admiration ; and all the more willingly to Cecil Leslie, that it was evident, spite of her patient, uncomplaining manner, that she was not happy ; so that their prospects formed a striking contrast.

For what had Cecil to look forward to, except a dull, aimless life at Lynwood, and the return of a brother who was not likely to bring her peace or do her credit ? It was some time before she heard at all from Harry, and then his hurried letters were but chapters of disasters ; then came another interval of silence, during which his sister fearfully studied every paper which fell within her reach,—but still no tidings, either good or bad ; and imagination was at liberty to conjure up all manner of terrible possibilities. But at length another letter arrived, hinting at dangers escaped, and services rendered to him by a new friend, whom the writer in his haste, forgot to name ; ending with some slight complaints of illness, and an expressed desire to be once more back in England.

Thus passed the summer; and in the beginning of autumn, the whole party (with the exception of Mr. Mordaunt), once more paid a visit to that same sea-side place which was already so well-known to all but Cecil; and where, in making excursions in the neighbourhood, her eyes first rested upon a spot, which then inspired but admiration, but which was shortly to become terribly familiar.

Little do we guess when we first visit a new scene, *how* important it may become to us in future; whom we may meet or accompany thither, or in what degree our sojourn there may affect the whole course of the days which are not yet called into existence. We seat ourselves upon the warm, soft, flowery grass, and little dream that we rest upon a grave! We look sea-ward with careless eyes, watch-

ing the gull skim over the freshening waves, and white sails appear and vanish in the distance, and know not how wildly our glance shall one day strain in that direction. The sweet village bells are ringing from a grey, ivy-covered tower, and we listen dreamily to their lulling sound,—ignorant how gaily they may ring our marriage peal, or toll sadly the knell of our departed hopes. O dark, dark Future, who may read thy secrets? Yet they are better hidden, or our life would be an intolerable burden; all its freshness and spirit withered by untimely frosts; and then, what would avail the sunshine and the flowers?

CHAPTER VIII.

UNTOWARD EVENTS.

When lovers meet in adverse hour
'Tis like a sun-glimpse through a shower,
A watery ray, an instant seen,
The darkly-closing clouds between.

SCOTT'S *ROKEBY*.

It were vain to expect earthly happiness to be perfect or enduring, for storm and sunshine ever will succeed each other, and those are wisest who enjoy the latter while it still remains. Beatrice and Arthur *had* enjoyed it, but at length new clouds began to gather. Late in the autumn they were out together, when they crossed the path of Mr. Mordaunt, who, as their evil fate would have it, happened to be in one of his most sullen moods.

From time to time he had placed obstacles in the way of their marriage ; which Beatrice, satisfied for the present in having Arthur always close at hand, and in such improved health and spirits, had endured patiently ; unwilling to exasperate her father by rebellion. Not that he would like to see the engagement broken off, but that his tyrannising spirit was too strong to be subdued, even by the prospect of permanent advantage ; and more than once, Beatrice had witnessed passages between her father and her lover, which had made her apprehensive for the future. Sneers and taunts half-spoken on the one hand, frequently aroused fierce flashes of anger on the other, for Arthur's proud spirit was ever too much on the watch for such ; and again and again did he entreat Beatrice to end this state of torment by decisive measures. And so she would have done, had not she felt some scruples of conscience as to active disobedience,—even to her father's most unreasonable wishes (or rather, *whims*), and trusted to prevail by

gentler means ; but several weeks had passed, and nothing was as yet settled, though no satisfactory reason could have been assigned for the delay.

On this fine autumnal afternoon, therefore, the important subject once more occupied their minds, and after some discussion, Arthur asked, a little warmly, "How far Beatrice intended to carry her submissive principles?"

She paused a moment before answering ; the fallen leaves which strewed their path, rustling in the silence underneath their feet ; but then she replied firmly :

"Do not be impatient. Can you not afford to wait a little, when you know there is no danger that *I* shall ever change?"

"No, I cannot ! We are losing precious hours which never can be recalled ;—fretting them away in avoidable dissensions ;—instead of settling into a newer, happier state of life. And how do I know how long I may be here ? By the time you have resolved your doubts, —made up your mind whether you will be

mine at all risks, or sacrifice me to your father's dominating spirit, it may be too late. My doom may then be settled, and only time left for a long adieu."

Beatrice might well preach patience, for Arthur spoke in no measured terms, and it was evident that anger was predominant. She looked at him almost in terror, and laying her hand soothingly upon his, endeavoured to calm him by promises and persuasions.

"Nay, Arthur, do not excite yourself. It shall not be too late. Only tell me your wishes, and I will do anything you please."

"Even though your father should forbid compliance?"

Never had Arthur looked so resolute as now, when he cast such a searching glance upon her countenance, that she half-involuntarily turned away ; hesitating, ere she answered :

"Do not tempt me. I feel weak enough already."

“Make your choice,” he persisted. “Choose between the two.”

She made no answer for a minute; then, drawing a deep breath, she replied:

“If it must be so—you cannot doubt what it will be!” He waited impatiently to hear more, and she added, passionately and almost in tears: “You *know* that I am yours; that, were the whole world, and all of value that it contains,—life,—hope,—happiness even, in the opposing scale, and I were bade take my choice, I *could not* hesitate.”

They were walking in a wood; the trees preventing them from seeing very far on any side, but now a sudden rustle amongst the dead leaves arrested their attention, and as Beatrice concluded these last words, her father stood before her, his brow darkened by an ominous cloud.

“So, now I understand you!” were his opening words, spoken in a tone of suppressed anger, which might have reminded his hearers of the first low mutterings of a thunder-storm.

“ *This* then, is the consequence of his companionship !” (indicating Arthur by a motion of his head). “ It is from *his* example that you have learned those sullen and defiant habits which have so much disgraced you of late ; and now he would have you put the finishing stroke to your—*dutiful* line of conduct by altogether shaking off my authority.”

“ No, no !” cried Beatrice, recovering from her first breathless state of surprise ; “ it is not so ! You know it is not. I have never set you at defiance, but on the contrary, have studied to be obedient and patient—even when sorely tempted !”

“ *Tempted* ! By whom ? But I need not ask *that* question,” was the wrathful answer. “ I have just heard enough to satisfy me on that point. Take your choice, then, as he bids you, for from this moment you must renounce either him or me ;—you may please yourself which of the two it is ; but with *my* consent you shall never marry a man, who thus openly instigates you to rebel against

your father. But of *this* you may be assured ; no good will ever come of disobedience, and if you choose him, I disown, and will *never* speak to you again."

Well might Beatrice (whose sole desire in this matter had been to do right, and who had already made more painful sacrifices to her sense of duty than even Arthur guessed), feel desperate ; though now that a crisis had arrived she never wavered for a moment. Her voice was clear, although it trembled slightly, as, clasping Arthur's hand tightly, she replied :

"Then—if it *must* be so I will stay with him, for being betrothed and loving him as I do, I already look upon him as my husband in the sight of Heaven. And therefore, *no-one* has a right to part us now."

Mr. Mordaunt, deeply incensed, was about to make a still more angry answer, when Arthur, who had hitherto listened in silence, pressed Beatrice's hand re-assuringly, and then, gently dropping it, advanced a step or

two with an air of resolution, of which his adversary had not thought him capable. The steady light in his eyes, and the perfect composure of his manner, even prevailed so far with Mr. Mordaunt as to gain him a hearing, whilst he said :

“ This is most unjust. Our engagement was not without your knowledge, and at least your *tacit* consent. Consequently, I had a *right* to look for its fulfilment ; and I now claim Beatrice as my promised wife.”

“ Take her then, and keep her, for she enters *my* house no more ! But mind, if you do, it is in direct defiance of my wishes. When I say a thing, I mean it ; nothing can ever make *me* change, and if you *do* take her upon such terms, she must make up her mind to give up all family ties,—and all prospect of fortune from *me* too ; for all that I have I intend to leave to Cecil Leslie.”

Thus spoke Mr. Mordaunt, and Arthur answered proudly :

“ Be it so. I shall then have a better op-

portunity of proving my disinterestedness ;— that I want *her*, and not her fortune.”

“And that you do not care about the scandal—the disgrace you bring upon her name ! Truly, *you* may be glad to take her upon any terms, for I do not suppose that any woman in her senses would feel disposed to wed a—”

“Do not say another word !” cried Beatrice, impetuously ; for the bitter, sneering tone convinced her that her father was about to launch forth into some disparaging personal remarks, such as Arthur’s sensitive nature would have found most difficult to bear. Already the firm, proud air had changed to one of hatred and defiance, and she dreaded some violent outbreak upon either side. “Why enter into further discussion ?” she continued. “I have already decided, and will abide by my choice ; pitying those whose blindness prevents them from discerning——”

“Hush !” interposed Arthur, with a calm, authoritative manner which surprised even Beatrice, and checked her father’s angry re-

tort. "Remember, you are speaking to your father, and happen what may——"

"I do! I will remember!" was the answer, as bursting into tears, she flung herself into his arms. "I will do anything you please. Only let me be with you. Do not let anybody separate us, and then I can endure anything;—but not alone."

Arthur suddenly felt as though new strength and energy were given him, and when he passed his arm round Beatrice as if to protect her, a proud sense of power came over him, and gave still more manly courage to his tone.

"No, dearest, I will never leave you. Be contented, you are safe with me."

"With *you*!" was echoed in accents which sent the blood flushing to his forehead; and glancing at Mr. Mordaunt, he observed the latter running his eye contemptuously over his slight, delicate figure. "*You* protect her! If it came to a contest, any boy might master *you* without a struggle! Yet you talk as

though you had the strength and courage of your brother."

An evil spirit was at work in Arthur's heart; and once more setting Beatrice aside, he confronted her father with flashing eyes; but by the strongest of efforts he subdued the tempter, and spoke—save for a touch of scorn in his accents,—calmly as before.

"Not the bodily strength, certainly; but I trust, were it put to the test, I should not be found wanting in spirit."

"What if *I* test it?" exclaimed Mr. Mordaunt, with lowering looks, and measuring the object of his anger with eyes which seemed impatient to have recourse to active violence.

Arthur met their savage glance with firmness.

"You can do as you think proper; but the contest would be more than unequal,—for I could not raise my hand against Beatrice's father."

Mr. Mordaunt actually felt a touch of shame,

which tinged his dark features, though he endeavoured to answer in the same tone :

“ Pshaw, boy ! Did you think I meant to harm you ? Your strength is in your weakness, and you are safe enough from *me*, for if ever I try my skill again, it shall be upon an equal. What do *you* know of the noble science of defence ? *You*, a poor weak, dreaming creature.”

“ What do *you* know of the courtesy due from one gentleman to another ? Of all generous and honourable feelings ? Of the disgrace of insulting one who has neither power nor will to retaliate,—and that unprovoked ? But I do not *fear* you,—much as I despise,” retorted Arthur, stung beyond endurance.

Mr. Mordaunt clenched his fist, and would have struck him, had he not suddenly stepped aside ; and at the same moment Beatrice sprang forward, and clung with the strength of desperation to her father’s arm ;—with such tenacity, that though he rudely attempted it, he could not shake her off.

"You said that he was safe from you. In Heaven's name do not break your faith with him," she exclaimed. "Think of the consequences of a moment's passion! If his life should be upon your hand! And you, Arthur, go when I entreat you. Go at once."

"And leave you?" was the answer. "That I never will."

"Pshaw!" repeated Mr. Mordaunt, with affected indifference, though his heart was full of hatred and humiliation. "It was *his* doing; he provoked me, and had I struck him, there would have been no-one but himself to blame. But don't make a scene, fool. Loose your hold of me, and stay with *him* in the fiend's name if you will."

With these words, he succeeded in shaking his daughter off, and walked sullenly away, a dark, ominous figure, obscuring the low light of the setting sun, like one of the demons supposed to inhabit German forests. Arthur Wilton gazed after him with wild, hot eyes; but *he* was conscious of having gained a noble

victory, all the more glorious that it was known only to himself. Fear he had not felt; but anger, burning, maddening anger, such as hurries men on to desperate deeds, he *had* experienced; and he had had strength and courage to subdue it, and achieve a grand self-conquest. *Now*, he drew a deep breath, such as a soldier might have drawn whilst wiping the red stains of battle from his weapon, and exclaimed:

“Thank God!”

Once more Beatrice flung herself into his arms, echoing, whilst she trembled with excitement:

“Oh, thank God! who has preserved you from this danger!”

She could say no more, so great was the reaction. Arthur pressed his lips passionately upon her forehead, saying:

“Beatrice, my own! take courage. Sit down here, and rest.”

She permitted him to place her on a fallen piece of timber; then he seated himself beside

her, feeling on his part quite exhausted by the violence of his feelings; and an interval of silence followed. Their hands were clasped together, but they did not even look at one another, and to a careless observer they might have seemed solely occupied in watching the ruddy sunlight glistening and burning on the autumnal foliage, as the ball of crimson fire sank lower and lower, till it dipped behind the horizon.

Such a notion, however, would have been far removed from the truth: shame for her father, and anger at his violent conduct towards Arthur, together with increasing love and admiration for the latter's character, being the predominant feelings in Beatrice's breast; whilst Arthur was steadfastly occupied in revolving projects for the future, with the desire of doing that which seemed most right and honourable. He spoke first:

"Beatrice, I fear this is *my* doing. God forgive me,—and do you forgive me also,—for it was those hasty words of mine which

drew down this misfortune on your head. *Now*, I repent my impatience; but it is too late."

Gently and lovingly she turned towards him, with a look of perfect trust:

"Never mind that. Do we not belong entirely to each other now? And if so, why should we be cast down by unavoidable misfortunes?"

"But, dearest," he persisted, "do you realise your true position?"

"That my father's doors are closed against me—yes."

"You bear your troubles bravely; but the question now is, what are we to do next?"

"That I leave to you. Think for us both, dear Arthur; you will judge most wisely."

"Then come with me to Stapleton, and let that be your home, until —"

She interrupted him; her colour heightening: -

"Oh, Arthur! under such strange circumstances! What will your father and mother

think of me? And what if they refuse to have me there?"

"They cannot. On that point I have no fear. Dear Beatrice, we must go somewhere until matters can be arranged; *then* we may live peacefully and happily where we will. In the first heat of passion I was about to exhort you not to sacrifice yourself to other people's tyrannous caprices, but to fly with me at once—I cared not where—so that I were only sure you were my own, and that no earthly power could separate us more. But now I see that I was rash and inconsiderate, and by acting thus, should have placed you at the mercy of evil tongues, which would not have scrupled to give utterance to whatever malice or detraction might suggest. And then, too, there would have been no hope of future reconciliation with your father."

"No, that step once taken, I should *never* have been forgiven. Yet I care not what I risk for your sake. *You* are my first con-

sideration, and I promise that whatever you desire I will do, convinced that you will be more scrupulous on my account even than I am myself. Speak, then, and tell me what you wish."

"That you shall come home with me, whilst I tell my mother how the matter stands—*my* mother, as I always call her, for such she has ever been to me; and doubt not that she will prove one to you also."

"And your father—what will *he* think?"

"No evil of you. But, come, and leave the rest to me," said Arthur, rising; but Beatrice still remained seated in the same place, heedless of the dark clouds which had gathered since the sun set, and of the heavy, warning drops of rain which now began to fall.

"One moment. I was just thinking of *my* mother. How will she bear this? Oh, how could I forget?"

"You shall see her, but not this evening.

I promise. And now, dear Beatrice, do come with me. Look, it is beginning to rain heavily, and you will take cold if you remain here longer."

"I will," she answered, starting up, as she suddenly recollected the danger to which Arthur was himself exposed, though she had too much tact to speak of *that*, so soon after her father's sneering allusions to his weakness. But as she took the arm offered for her support, a dread of the consequences of such excitement, joined to those of exposure to the weather, caused her to quicken her pace; and she found herself drawing nearer to Stapleton with the strangest sensations, for it seemed more like a dream than a reality, to think that that was now her only home. Arthur guessed her feelings, and, pressing her arm closer to his side, said, gently:

"Be comforted, Beatrice, for you have done no wrong; this was none of your seeking, and if blame rests with anyone, it is with

me; therefore, do not seem so downcast, for to see you unhappy is the severest punishment."

"I am not unhappy," was the answer, "though I have cause to be so, for it is a terrible thing to incur the anger of a parent; and who knows if he will ever forgive me? Then, my mother; it will be worse for *her*, alone at Lynwood."

"But she has Cecil Leslie."

"Ah, dear Cecil will do all she can to help and comfort her; yet, still, this is so strange and sudden that I can scarcely realise it at present; and through it all, I do not feel so wretched as I suppose I ought to do. Perhaps because you are with me, and we now more than ever belong to one another."

Arthur turned towards her with a countenance, not pale and haggard, as might have been expected, but absolutely flushed and radiant with triumphant joy.

"You are satisfied! Then so am I. Nay, more than satisfied;—*too* happy to feel that

you are quite my own ; and I would not exchange this present moment for any period of my past life, even for the hour in which you first told me I had gained your love. I feel almost wickedly contented with this afternoon's adventures, and, but for your sake, could not wish them to have turned out otherwise."

Beatrice could scarcely comprehend his feelings, for the true source of his exultation was concealed from her—the proud delight which sprang from a sense of manly courage and decision, sighed for all his life, but never actually proved till now, and which exercised a half-intoxicating influence. She looked up, sighing as she tried to smile, but not attempting question or reply ; so marvellous a change appeared to have been lately wrought in both of them ; he having become all firmness, and she all patient reliance upon him,—whose character once seemed the weaker and more yielding of the two.

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW DEMAND FOR ENERGY.

QUEEN.—“One woe doth tread upon another's heel,
So fast they follow.”

HAMLET.

ONWARD they went through the rain and gloom, the over-arching branches of the wood almost shutting out the fading light; but they were unconscious of the want of sunshine and cheerfulness, for the path leading to Stapleton was too well known for them to miss it, and their own private thoughts prevented them from paying much attention to the state of the outer world; Arthur's meditations being of a bright and hopeful cast, and Beatrice's no less absorbing, though more sad; for she

had now time to think of all that she had lost, as well as gained ; and though her home had always been a dreary one, to be driven from it so suddenly and unexpectedly was very painful ; even though it were for Arthur's sake.

She could not,—*would* not, believe, that she must never re-enter it; and whilst feeling as though it were scarcely possible to forgive the unprovoked insults which her father had heaped upon Arthur,—out of the very wantonness of tyranny, as it seemed,—she thought tenderly and lovingly of her mother and Cecil, and began to plan means for letting them know her real situation ; Mr. Mordaunt's taciturn habits rendering it especially improbable that they would learn the truth from *him* ; and as she wandered farther and farther from them, she drew still more alarming pictures of their uncertainty and dismay. Evening was closing in, and what would they think when she did not return ? She imagined Mr. Mordaunt cruelly exulting in their

terror; turning a deaf ear to their questions, or answering them by such a misrepresentation of facts, that even if they did not fancy her in danger, they would be led to believe that she was very much to blame; for otherwise, how should a father close his doors upon his child? And what would others think? On every side the prospect was disheartening; and like the sullen drops which pattered down upon the leaves, little by little, a cold, dreary feeling fell upon her heart; though she steadily refrained from infecting Arthur with her despondency; this one thought ever and again recurring: "*Am I doing right?*"

The doubt whether even an explanatory letter would be allowed to pass, did not tend to cheer her; and she shrank, moreover, from presenting herself under such circumstances before Mr. Wilton, of whose opinion she had always stood in awe; in short, she was thoroughly weary; too much so to think or act for herself, and consequently glad to leave all responsibility to Arthur.

Neither had spoken for some minutes, and all around was gloom and silence, save the rustling caused by their own footsteps, and the monotonous dropping of the rain upon the trees, when suddenly the stillness was dispelled by the sound of a gun, so close at hand, that both involuntarily started.

"Who can that be in our woods?" said Arthur. "Some poacher,—if it is not my father himself. And rather dangerously near, too! Who is there?" he called aloud.

"Oh, never mind them; you had best come on," exclaimed Beatrice, thinking they had had enough of adventures for that evening: "If it is your father, it might only distress him to learn the possible risk which we incurred;—and if not, leave the unknown sportsman to himself, for I don't think remonstrances would do much good."

But Arthur was unwilling to proceed without having first solved the mystery of this sudden report,—being unaccountably seized with a vague alarm; and he once more repeated:

“Answer! Who is there?”

“Arthur! Where are you? Come here, instantly!” was the reply, in the voice of Mr. Wilton; but spoken so urgently, that Arthur was still more convinced that something untoward must have happened: and at once withdrawing his arm from Beatrice’s hold, he hastened forward in the direction whence the sound proceeded.

“Stay here;—don’t be frightened,—whilst I see,” was all that he had time to say; whilst his heart throbbed with the wildest apprehensions; shared by Beatrice, who once more roused, disobeyed him by following as speedily as possible, thinking (and justly), that in case of accident, her assistance might also prove of use.

They soon reached the spot, which was less overshadowed by trees, and consequently light enough for them to see Mr. Wilton, who was leaning against the stem of a beech, with a blood-stained handkerchief wrapped tightly round one hand; but though faint and in

pain, his manner was cool and collected, as he quietly observed :

“I have had a slight misfortune. The trigger of my gun caught in a branch or something, and I shot myself.”

Arthur's feelings were not enviable at that moment. Always peculiarly sensitive, such an accident, happening even to a stranger, would have had a violent effect upon his nerves ; and such his father fully expected would have been the case then, and therefore he made a two-fold effort to seem indifferent and calm,—not less for Arthur's sake, than for that of his own credit. But his son, though full of horror, once more summoned all his courage, and betrayed no symptoms of his inward feelings ; thinking of his father rather than of himself, and thus being enabled to act with all the promptness which the case required. Nor did Beatrice scream, or utter any exclamation of terror, as too many women would have done on such an occasion ; it is true that she shuddered at the sight of

blood, and passed her hand rapidly across her eyes; but then she was ready both to look boldly on the wound, and to act with the steadiness which such an emergency required.

"Are you seriously hurt?" cried Arthur, rushing to his father's side, and endeavouring to ascertain the worst.

"I believe not,—but I cannot exactly tell at present. But don't distress yourself: just lend me your handkerchief, for mine is wet through already, and then go home. Send some one to me, whilst you break this to your mother, *quietly*, mind; don't tell her hastily—and say that it is nothing. Ah! you here, too, Beatrice? *You* had better go away."

"No; show me. Let me help you. Are you much hurt?" she enquired.

"It will only make you sick. Such things look worse than they really are," returned Mr. Wilton, rather faintly, as with his other hand he took the handkerchief from Arthur.

"Go, Beatrice," whispered the latter, hastily. "Run to the house and tell my

mother. And send some one here with brandy. They must fetch a doctor, too."

"Better let me stay with your father, whilst you go," she answered, in the same quick, low tone; thinking that she had more strength to endure the ordeal of remaining on the spot. But Arthur answered determinedly:

"Do not lose time; every moment is of value."

She knew it was, and was out of sight immediately; Arthur meanwhile turning to attend to his father, and assist him to gain an easier position whilst he waited. There was nothing more for him to do, after he had bound the handkerchief round the wounded hand, so as in some degree to staunch the blood; and all the time he was ignorant of the extent of the injury, which his imagination represented to be of the utmost magnitude. The suspense, —the feeling that he could be of no active use, was terrible; and he could only endeavour to support Mr. Wilton, who seemed growing fainter every instant: the fading light

just revealing that his countenance was of death-like paleness, though not paler than that of his son, who, kneeling beside him in the rain and darkness, supported him as he best might, as he now reclined upon the damp ground, calm as before, although in agonizing pain.

Mr. Wilton now for the first time appreciated his son's powers of self-control, for he guessed what an effort it must have cost him to show firmness and presence of mind at such a crisis, instead of yielding to dismay; and Arthur's affectionate solicitude touched him deeply. He repented all his former harshness towards him, and began to think that he had quite misunderstood his character, when he inveighed so strongly against the weakness which contrasted unfavourably with Reginald's fearless disposition, wishing when too late that he had always been more patient and forbearing. He pressed the thin hand which had put forth all its powers to aid him, saying:

"God bless you, Arthur. I wish I could

have spared you this. You will see, however, that it will prove but a trifling accident, though it is a great nuisance, and has made me feel rather faint. Don't tire yourself, my boy. I shall do very well without your wasting all your strength."

Tears rushed to Arthur's eyes upon hearing these kind words, and after having borne himself with so much courage until they were uttered, he now began to tremble violently; his anxiety increasing with the cold and darkness, until every minute seemed an hour; but still he endeavoured to speak cheerfully, and the brave effort *was* of service to his father.

"Oh, I daresay it is nothing. They *must* be here soon, and till then, rest yourself by leaning all your weight upon me. I am stronger than you give me credit for; and I am very thankful that I happened to be near at hand."

"Yes,—it was fortunate. What if the shot had taken more effect, and there had been no one to have given the true version of the story?

Some poor fellow might have been unjustly accused. But, Arthur, I feel rather better now; just help me up again, and I will try with your assistance, to get on slowly towards the house. This is no pleasant spot to spend the night in; being rather too damp to do either of us any good."

"Had you not better wait?" was the doubtful answer; but Mr. Wilton insisted upon making the attempt; and leaning heavily upon his son, had by slow and painful degrees half traversed the intervening quarter of a mile before further aid arrived; and then, revived by a little brandy, managed to achieve the other half; though once at home, he sank down fainting from pain and loss of blood; the last object which met his closing eyes, being the pale countenance of his wife, as she bent over him in speechless grief.

CHAPTER X.

ANXIETY.

Behold of what delusive worth
The bubbles we pursue on earth,
The shapes we chase,
Amid a world of treachery !
They vanish ere death shuts the eye
And leave no trace.

Time steals them from us, chances strange,
Disastrous accidents, and change,
That come to all :
Even in the most exalted state,
Relentless sweeps the stroke of fate ;
The strongest fall.

LONGFELLOW.

UPON examination, the injury to Mr. Wilton's hand appeared likely to prove very serious, and for some time, none of the inmates of Stapleton thought of anything but him ; Beatrice exerting herself to the utmost, and show-

ing, all the coolness and forethought which such an emergency required. As for Mrs. Wilton, it would be impossible to describe the pale, stricken look with which she hovered round her husband; watching every change of countenance with silent terror, though when she spoke to him she made the most praiseworthy efforts to assume a cheerful air. Arthur kept his eye on Beatrice, obeying, as if by intuition, her slightest signs, and thus these three watched over the sufferer; who lightened their cares by the patient, uncomplaining manner in which he bore the intense pain of his wound, even endeavouring to treat it as of little consequence; whilst they all clearly understood and appreciated the noble motives which inspired such fortitude.

As a general rule, men are far more impatient of pain than women, and much more difficult to manage upon such occasions; but Mr. Wilton submitted patiently to the doctor's orders, and would have scorned to let a murmur pass his lips.

“ Alice, go and rest ; or at least revive yourself with a glass of wine. You look so pale, that I am sure you must have been more frightened than the case required. Let Arthur get it for you, whilst Beatrice waits on me. She is a first-rate nurse,—quite worthy of the Crimea ; and you may safely trust me to her care. I assure you there is no occasion for alarm.—You may be thankful you are not a soldier’s wife, or you might have been called upon to witness much uglier sights ; as Reginald will doubtless tell you upon his return. *He* must have seen some fine specimens of gun-shot wounds,—such as would astonish us novices,—though I hope he will escape himself, poor fellow.—What ! I am not to talk ! Oh, very well. But, by the bye, Beatrice, *you* ought to be at home, I suppose. Mind that some one sees you safely back ;—not Arthur : it is too late for him ; but one of the men,—or you had better take the pony-carriage. Will you give your own orders ? Do not mind staying with me, for I am very comfortable now.”

Thus, whenever he did speak, he endeavoured to inspire confidence in the anxious trio who attended upon him; but Mrs. Wilton would not leave him for a moment.

"Let me stay here," she entreated, when desired to go. "I shall feel far more comfortable by your side. But, Beatrice, don't you stay. Arthur shall tell them to bring the carriage round, for they will be uncomfortable about you at Lynwood if you don't return."

Beatrice, who had for a short time forgotten the primary reason of her being at Stapleton in the hurry and confusion consequent upon Mr. Wilton's accident, now recollected the whole circumstances,—though this was no time for mentioning them; and she coloured as she answered:

"I would rather remain here. I may be of use; and I ask it as a favour to myself."

Mrs. Wilton was only too thankful to have her there; yet still she considered it right to press the point.

"You are very kind, dear Beatrice, but I

really think you ought to go home. Let me persuade you to set out, my love."

"No; I am unpersuadable. I *intend* to stay here to-night," was the whispered answer. "Arthur must be taken care of too."

"Oh, yes; you are right; make him go down and rest. If you *will* stay, I am very thankful," replied Mrs. Wilton, in the same low tone, whilst she affectionately pressed her young friend's hand. "But send a note to explain *why* you are remaining here."

"I will," returned Beatrice, beckoning Arthur from the room; and remembering for the first time with dismay that he was still in his wet clothes. "Oh, go and change them instantly!" she implored, with new alarm, "or we shall have you ill also. Go, dearest Arthur, whilst I write my note."

He complied with her request; and not before it was high time, for he was thoroughly chilled, as well as exhausted by such unusual demands upon his strength and energy; and when he returned to her in the library, he

was so unfit for further exertion that he at once yielded to her suggestion that he should lie quietly upon a sofa, whilst she brought him such refreshments as she pleased. His faint remonstrances were quickly overcome.

“ But Beatrice, don't tire yourself. Sit down by the fire, and rest as well ; for you yourself look almost worn out. Why will you trouble yourself on my account ? ”

“ Because I choose. Keep quiet, and I will sit down presently ;—when I have time. Oh, Arthur, we ought to be very thankful that matters are no worse ! Only think what *might* have happened ! ”

“ Ah, I cannot bear to think of *that* ! Such accidents are terrible ; and I thank God with all my heart that it is no worse ;—though, as it is, my father's case is bad enough. Tell me what you *really* think about it yourself,” continued Arthur raising himself to look anxiously into her face.

She turned away, under pretence of stirring the fire, but in reality to conceal the

doubt which was too visible upon her countenance.

“We can only hope for the best. Your father’s temperate habits are much in his favour, as there is far less danger of inflammation. I have written home. I hope my mother will receive the letter.”

“So do I. What did you say to her?”

“I mentioned the accident, and said that I was staying here to help to nurse him; but that I had more to tell her when we met. In the meantime, I begged her to make herself easy about me, and not to mind about my father’s hints. I desired her to tell him what had happened, as it might possibly have a favourable effect upon him.”

“God grant that it may,—although I dare not hope it!” interrupted Arthur.

“And finally, I asked mamma, if *possible*, to come and see me in the morning; as then I can explain all. Will not that be best?”

“Much best. And you desired the messenger to wait for all you wanted?”

"I did ; and I *may* have a note in answer," she replied, settling herself down for a few minutes ; though she soon stole up-stairs again to see if Mrs. Wilton wanted anything.

Everything was quiet, however ; though Mr. Wilton was full of the restlessness of pain, and (like most people,) inclined to think the worst of his own state. But his apprehensions were carefully conceal'd from his wife, who sat patiently beside him, hoping from the silence that he slept ; and raising her finger warningly, when Beatrice—stealing there without the slightest sound,—made her appearance at the half-open door. The latter was accordingly retreating, when Mr. Wilton spoke.

"Who is there ? Beatrice ?"

"Yes," was the low answer.

"Come in for a moment." She obeyed.

"So you are bent on staying here ?"

"I am. I hope I did not disturb you ?"

"No ; I was not asleep. Is Arthur resting ?"

"Yes; I have made him lie down upon the sofa."

Quite right. Take care of him, poor fellow; and of yourself as well."

"I will."

She turned to go, but was re-called.

"One moment." Mr. Wilton paused, and then continued: "I must congratulate you upon Arthur's conduct under very trying circumstances. I don't know what I should have done without him. No one could have shown more promptitude—and kindness too. Just tell him so;—and tell him also, that I am very sorry for any former injustice which I may have done his character. You will not forget?"

"No;—if you wish it; but there is no need—" began Beatrice.

"There is. It would be a satisfaction to us both."

"I will go to him at once, then," was her answer, as she again turned away; afraid of

the consequences to either, of any new excitement ; but while passing out at the door, she heard Mr. Wilton sigh heavily, not with pain, but regret.

“ Oh,” she thought, “ how little we guess how we misjudge those nearest to us, or what suffering we cause them by so doing,—till too late ! We may see our error at last, but its consequences still remain ; though I am very thankful that Arthur’s father sees the truth more plainly now. I think that no one ever understood him—but myself ; but for the future, I trust it will be very different.”

She entered the library, where Arthur still lay gazing into the fire, and thinking over all the events of the day ; the flickering light causing him to look so pale and weary that she scarcely ventured to speak, for fear of agitating him still farther ; for she knew too well how fragile his frame was, and how delicate his state of health,—even under the most favourable circumstances ; consequently, her anxiety about him was not groundless. But

Mr. Wilton wished her to deliver his message at once, and she was wondering which would be the best mode of doing so, when Arthur asked :

“ Well, Beatrice, what news ? How is he now ? ”

“ Quiet and composed, though not asleep,” was her answer ; and she then proceeded to fulfil her promise ; though Arthur’s lip began to quiver with emotion.

He was thoroughly worn out and unnerved, insomuch that one kind word was sufficient to upset the calmness, which, by a desperate effort, he had hitherto succeeded in maintaining ; and it was more painful than surprising to her that the effect of her communication was a sudden burst of tears ; so violent and uncontrollable that when it subsided he was utterly exhausted.

“ It was good of him to say so ; I am glad. Do not despise me for my weakness : for I cannot help it,” were his only words ; and Beatrice could only sit by and wait until the

storm had passed ; the wind and rain which beat against the windows, adding to her dismal feelings ; and depriving her of all power of viewing matters in a cheerful light. All seemed once more dark and hopeless ; suffering and danger and suspense obscuring the future, and giving the gloomiest colouring to her meditations, as she sat watching, waiting, fearing, until very late.

CHAPTER XI.

A NIGHT-WATCH AT STAPLETON.

Encamped beside Life's rushing stream,
In Fancy's misty light,
Gigantic shapes and shadows gleam
Portentous through the night.

And when the solemn and deep church-bell
Entreats the soul to pray,
The midnight phantoms feel the spell,
The shadows sweep away.

Down the broad Vale of Tears afar
The spectral camp is fled ;
Faith shineth as a morning star,
Our ghastly fears are dead.

LONGFELLOW.

SITTING by the library fire, Beatrice began more and more to realise the strangeness of her situation, and to wonder what the future

would bring forth. Only once was she disturbed, and that was when an answer from Lynwood was brought in;—just a few hasty lines from her mother, expressing sorrow and uneasiness at the ill-tidings of the day, and stating her intention of being with her early on the morrow, “when they should be able to talk over and explain matters more fully.”

Arthur seemed tired out, and lay in silence on his sofa; but when Beatrice at length gently approached, she perceived that he was not (as she had hoped,) asleep. He endeavoured to rouse himself and talk to her, but that she would not permit; persuading him to go to bed, (though not without much trouble, and a promise to call him immediately in case he could be useful, or Mr. Wilton should prove worse than they expected,) whilst she remained below alone, in readiness for any thing which might next occur.

“Nay, Beatrice,” remonstrated Arthur, “I would far rather *you* would rest, and let me

sit up, for I am certain that I shall not sleep."

And indeed he looked too nervous and worn out for her to hope that he would rise refreshed by rest ; but still she was firm, and finally he went. She herself felt far too unsettled to attempt to read, and she would not lie down upon the sofa, lest she might unconsciously fall asleep from utter exhaustion, and thus miss the purpose of her watch ; so she made up the fire, wrapped a shawl round her shoulders, and drawing up her chair, resumed her painfully-absorbing train of thought.

The rain still beat against the windows ; and she shivered, less from cold, than from the strange sensation which is apt to creep over lonely watchers in the dead of night, and in which an indefinable feeling of superstition often finds place. A dread of approaching evil, a sense of powerlessness and weariness, a half-desire to lift the veil which conceals from us events yet to come, mingled with a dread of that same knowledge, and a fancy

that we are not *quite* alone ; such is the state of mind which causes us to shudder and look round from time to time ; straining our eyes into the darkness, as though we expected the invisible companions of our night-watch to assume suddenly a form palpable to mortal eyes. And thus Beatrice's glance would wander round the gloomy chamber, although it encountered nothing more terrible than the grim old pictures on the walls, between the book-shelves ; and her ear was strained to catch the slightest sound, though none fell upon it save the shrieks and moans of the unresting wind ; wailing as if spirit-voices swelled and mingled with its varying tones ; their song being ever of sorrow, danger, and death.

At length she stole upstairs to see if Mrs. Wilton wanted anything, but the same pale, patient figure, motioned to her to go down again ; and back she went ; now striving to quiet her anxiety by reading a chapter of the Bible, while still her wandering eyes and

thoughts proved how very far she was from being calm. Another interval of solitude, and once more she ascended the stairs; first taking off her shoes that she might run less risk of disturbing the invalid, and bearing in her hand a glass of wine and water for his wife, who she knew must be faint and weary, though no persuasions could have made her quit her post.

Again Mrs. Wilton saw her, and repeated her signs that no assistance was required; but perceiving that Beatrice still lingered in the passage, she went out to her, enquiring :

“Well, what is it, my love? Do *you* want anything? Arthur is in bed, I trust?”

“Oh! yes, long ago, and I should hope asleep. How is Mr. Wilton?”

Mrs. Wilton shook her head sorrowfully, and had there been more light, Beatrice would have seen the rush of tears which filled her

“About the same. Quiet; but in great pain, and very feverish. But why do *you* sit

up, dear Beatrice? My maid is within call, if anything is needed, and it would make me more comfortable to think that you were resting."

"Will you not let me take your place for an hour or two? Do, dearest Mrs. Wilton; you are not strong enough to sit up all night," was the answer.

"Strength will be given me. I cannot leave my husband."

"Then at least, drink this," persisted Beatrice; and to please her, rather than because she felt the need of such refreshment, Mrs. Wilton complied; though it required a great effort to swallow anything, and to eat even a morsel of biscuit was beyond her power.

Her hand trembled violently as she returned the glass to Beatrice, who was, however, better contented to see that its contents had vanished, since it was now several hours since Mrs. Wilton had broken her fast, and her health had of late been very delicate.

“Thank you, my love; and now lie down a little.”

Beatrice promised that she would, and accordingly settled herself upon the library sofa, closing her eyes, but only to open them again in an instant with a start, and to discover that sleep was impossible. How she wished for daylight! But there were still some hours of darkness to be endured before it came; and the gloom and stillness of the old manor-house oppressed her painfully; the wide oak staircase, down which she had so lately passed, the long passages, the ghostly hall, and the large wainscotted rooms, which, under more cheerful circumstances, were so pleasing to her imagination, now only increasing the vague terrors which possessed it, and rendering her more than willing to exchange all the romantic grandeur of Stapleton for the comfort and cheeriness of a smaller and more modern dwelling.

She rose, stirred the fire into a brighter blaze, lighted a fresh candle, wrapped her

shawl more closely round her, and walked up and down the room to unstiffen her aching limbs, thinking that of all trials that of having nothing to do but watch and wait at a period like the present, was the most intolerable.

“Oh, for anything to do,” she sighed. “Any occupation, however wearisome or painful, would be light and acceptable in comparison with this! These long, dark, dreary hours of suspense and idleness! Is there nothing I can do? No;—yet, stay, I am wrong, there is—for I can pray. How is it that I did not think of this before?”

Down she sank beside the table, her hands pressed upon her eyes to shut out all outward objects; and in this attitude she remained for nearly half an hour; her air when she rose again being that of one who has striven for and attained some measure of that peace which this world has no power to understand or give. She had thought more of Arthur and his family, than of herself and her own, though not one member of either had been passed

over ; her anger against her father having not only subsided, but been almost swallowed up by anxiety for Mr. Wilton. It now seemed scarcely strange to find herself at Stapleton instead of Lynwood, for the accident which she had almost witnessed was of itself a sufficient reason for her being there ; and her thoughts still dwelt, not on her wrongs, but on her apprehensions, and her desire to be of use. She opened one of the shutters, and to her joy now perceived a faint grey glimmer, and a streak of red on the horizon ; signs that day was dawning. The rain had ceased, and the wind moaned itself to rest ; leaving a sad, silent, dripping landscape for morning to break upon, more mournful in its stillness than when under the influence of driving cloud and storm. Beatrice stood at the window till the light grew stronger, and a sleepy housemaid entered ; starting back with the exclamation :

“ Oh, dear me, Miss ! I had quite forgotten you were here ; and I was so frightened, for I quite thought you were a ghost.”

“What if you had sat up here all night?” asked Beatrice smiling.

“What, alone, Miss? have you been actually here alone?”

“Yes, quite alone, for nothing has disturbed me; so that you see it is not so dangerous after all.”

“Oh, dear me, have you? well, it may be so; but I durst not have done it for the world.”

“Perhaps not,” returned Beatrice, smiling again at the truth and simplicity of this remark; and thinking that Betsy did not possess the qualifications necessary for such an emergency. “Have you heard how your master is this morning?”

“No, Miss, I have not. I never thought to ask.”

“Of course not,” was the mental response, “when did a servant of this class ever condescend to think about such trifles?—Is anybody stirring?” she enquired.

"Only some of the other servants. La, Miss, it is very early yet. But ain't you tired with sitting up all night? You must have found it rather dull and lonesome; I should never had known how to get through all them hours, unless I'd had the luck to fall asleep. You must feel tired and stupid like."

"Rather. But I thought it best to stay here, in case I should be wanted."

"To be sure," said Betsy, and then she paused reflectively, as if struck by the novelty of the idea. "But, Miss," she added, presently, "there is such things as ghostes's; don't you think so?"

"I can only answer that I never saw one," replied Beatrice, with a faint desire to laugh, but with none to discuss so vexed a question with this ardent lover of the marvellous. But Betsy was not to be so easily silenced.

"But it's not all people as can see them," she replied; undauntedly returning to the charge. "Perhaps you've never heard say

that there are ghostes's in this very house? That there's one room they call the Haunted Chamber?"

"Oh, yes, I have heard the story; but I don't think you need alarm yourself," returned Beatrice, escaping from her round-eyed questioner. "But I cannot stay to talk now, for I must go and ask how Mr. Wilton is; and perhaps, Betsy, you had better see about the rooms. Will some tea be ready presently?"

"To be sure, Miss, if it's wanted. Cook had set some water on to boil, and I daresay you'd be glad of some—"

"I should," was the answer, as Beatrice moved towards the door; starting in her turn when she encountered Arthur, who was just upon the point of entering. "Oh, why did you rise so early? I was flattering myself that you were safe asleep?" she exclaimed, looking reproachfully into his pale thin face. "And I daresay after all that you have never closed your eyes, for you look just worn out."

“And what are you, I wonder? I never saw a whiter and more weary countenance.”

“Oh, never mind me. I am strong enough for anything, and shall be none the worse for one night’s watch.”

Arthur coloured at these last words, saying:

“Oh, the old story! And I am good for nothing, I suppose?”

“Far from it,” replied Beatrice, making allowance for the irritation of weariness and ill-health, placed her hand caressingly in his, and leading him back into the hall. “Yesterday placed that beyond a doubt; that is, to those who ever did doubt. But we cannot help it if we are not made of iron, and a night of wakefulness and intense anxiety, is enough to try anybody’s strength.”

“Except your own?”

“I said I should be none the worse for it; and no more I shall; but I do *not* say that I feel the fresher or stronger for it now.”

"Poor Beatrice! You don't look as if you did," returned Arthur, stealing his arm around her waist, and pressing his lips to her cold cheek; "but you must rest when you have had some tea. My father is a little easier now, though my mother will not leave him till the doctor comes."

"Ah, what has this night been for *her*? But we must be very, *very* thankful that things are no worse."

"I am. You do not think," said Arthur, with an effort, as though unwilling to touch upon so serious a subject, "that I forget either the mercy or the danger—in my prayers? I should have been a heathen if I had." A pause. "Oh, Beatrice," he continued presently: "how trifling every other trouble seems when—shall I say it? Yes; when Death has passed so near! All the heat and resentment of yesterday's encounter have already sunk into mere nothingness; and I only feel the comfort of having *you* here—though I wish it were not under such sad circumstances."

“These are just the times when we desire to be near those who are dear to us,” was Beatrice’s answer. “The times too, which prove the sincerity of our affection. *Summer* friends are scarcely worth a thought.”

Arthur smiled.

“But *we* can never doubt each other. Let us encourage one another to walk fearlessly onward upon our appointed way; certain that—though we should be separated for a time, even Death could not have the power to destroy our perfect love and confidence.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE ASPECT OF AFFAIRS IMPROVES.

For thy dear sake,
I will be gentle. Thou shalt teach me patience.
SPANISH STUDENT.

LATER in the morning, Mrs. Mordaunt arrived, and Beatrice had to enter into hurried explanations; for her mother had already some confused notion of the events of the preceding afternoon, and seemed to dwell far more upon her daughter's peculiar situation, than upon Mr. Wilton's accident; though she was really much concerned about the latter. Beatrice, to whom all matters immediately connected with herself had shrunk into comparative insignificance, was surprised, and almost

shocked to find her mother so impatient to pass on from the narrative of Mr. Wilton's misadventure, to the history of her meeting with her father.

"Why, mamma," she could not help observing, "you appear to think this accident a matter of such little consequence, that I am sure you cannot understand how painfully important the result may prove, nor how much suffering Mr. Wilton must endure."

"Yes, my dear, I do," returned Mrs. Mor-daunt, with rather an injured air. "I fully comprehend how serious it might be, and only wish that I could be of any use. But it is natural that I should think of *you* first, even now: since the consequences of this unfortunate affair,—this strange freak of tyranny upon your father's part, may prove (especially if much talked of), of the utmost consequence. You have no idea how people speak and think on such occasions."

"Perhaps not:—nor do I particularly care. My only desire has been to do what is right,

and if I am unjustly treated, it is not *my* fault. The world is at liberty to speak of me as it pleases, that is, if I am considered worth its notice, which I scarcely can believe."

Mrs. Mordaunt looked displeased by Beatrice's answer.

"It is foolish to talk so ; for *I* know from experience that it is impossible to be so independent as you imagine."

"Oh," cried Beatrice, wearily, "I have no wish to be, but I am too tired to think about *that* now. My thoughts have been forcibly diverted to a very different channel,—but if you can advise me, I shall be too glad."

"It seems an intricate affair. Does Mrs. Wilton know?"

"No ; I could not trouble her with my affairs at such a time. I intended to have done so, for of course, under ordinary circumstances I could not have come here without ; but now the whole house is so absorbed by one sole thought, that my presence is scarcely noticed, or seems but a matter of course."

"Then—perhaps you had better not say anything about it till I have had time to think the matter over. It requires some consideration, and we must not do anything in haste. Your father—I must see what can be done with him, for he *ought* to listen to reason ; and *I choose* to have you back at Lynwood. It is not the thing for you to be staying here for an indefinite period."

"No ; nor should I like it ; but what could I do?"

"What indeed!" said Mrs. Mordaunt, gloomily.

"Our intention was," resumed ^{she} But lighter, "to end this suspense as soon as ^{possible} ~~as~~ ^{possible}—by marriage ; but now we must ~~wait~~ ^{wait}. And in the meantime, I am very ^{glad} to be here, both for Arthur's sake and his mother's."

"I daresay you are ; and they equally glad to have you with them. But, my dear Beatrice, as soon as Mr. Wilton is a little better, you must come home again. It would have

an ill look should you be married from this house instead of Lynwood."

"If you can make arrangements, I am ready to return,—as soon as I can conveniently be spared ; but just at present, Mrs. Wilton ought not to be left alone."

"Certainly not. I wonder whether she would like me to stay instead," said Mrs. Mordaunt, reflectively ; for she never could be quite convinced that Beatrice was other than a child, or able to make herself of real use.

"I think," she answered, influenced by the knowledge of this fact, and afraid of giving offence by hinting that *she* might possibly be preferred, "I had better remain here."

"Oh, for Arthur's sake," exclaimed her mother, in a tone of pique.

"For his, and for the obvious reason that I cannot return home, whilst *you* are free to do so. Besides, I do not like to trouble Mrs. Wilton by enquiries, and she seems content to have me here."

"Oh, very well ; that is all that is necessary. Do the best you can, dear, but do not tire yourself. This is wretched work for you."

"For all of us ; but I care little, for my own part, so long as I can only be a help and comfort to poor Arthur. I cannot stay now to tell you how nobly he behaved throughout, though I intend to make you do him justice yet."

"Justice ! Have I ever done otherwise ?"

"I think no-one, save myself, and perhaps his brother, has ever yet done him perfect justice. His character is too little understood to be appreciated."

"Ah, poor boy ! I pity him with all my heart," exclaimed Mrs. Mordaunt ; rather too patronisingly perhaps, for Beatrice at once fired up in his behalf.

"Don't *pity* him ! Mamma, it makes me angry when you do so. Let us speak of something else. My father ;—did he know that you were coming here ?"

"I told him, and also about Mr. Wilton's mishap ; but of course he made no answer ; so I did not think it necessary to say more until I had seen you ; especially as, beyond a few vague hints, just to alarm me, he never vouchsafed to explain what had happened ; so that, without your note I might have imagined you were drowned or lost,—or any other wretched probability."

Beatrice sighed deeply.

"What an unfortunate house ours is ! It will be best for all of us when I am married."

"It is to be hoped it may."

"And now, mamma—"

"And now," interrupted Mrs. Mordaunt, "tell me more about Mr. Wilton. *Now* I can pay more attention than I did just now ; and I want to know exactly how the accident occurred."

Beatrice re-commenced her explanations ; but Mrs. Mordaunt, accustomed to give way to fits of absence, frequently compelled her to repeat them, and at other times broke in upon

them by a variety of questions foreign to the matter, so that in the end she had but a confused idea of all that had really happened; as her daughter guessed by her remarks.

“Oh!—Then *you* stayed with him till help arrived? And where was Arthur? I don’t quite see—”

“Arthur stayed with his father whilst I hastened here,” began Beatrice, for the third or fourth time; but she was again interrupted by Mrs. Wilton looking into the room, and at once Mrs. Mordaunt’s sympathies were awakened on her friend’s account.

It would have been strange had it been otherwise, for never was human countenance more expressive of anxiety and weariness, and at the same time more touching from its gentleness and patience; the few moments which Mrs. Wilton reluctantly spared from her attendance in her husband’s room, being spent in talking of him alone.

The doctor had called, and his report was more favourable than she had dared to hope;

for he predicted that with proper care Mr. Wilton would, *in time*, regain the full use of his hand, though he must make up his mind to endure some weeks of pain and inactivity.

"But that seems light, compared with what we feared last evening," added the attached wife, with tears of mingled sorrow and relief. "He is very uncomplaining; and the fortitude with which he bears his sufferings is more in his favour than any other circumstance."

"So I can easily imagine," was the reply. "And his constitution is so strong."

"It is, thank God!" said Mrs. Wilton, earnestly; and Beatrice sighed as she thought of Arthur, and his fragile state of health, which might be utterly ruined, even by yesterday's excitement and exposure to the weather.

"Where is Arthur?" she enquired.

"With his father. He feels this so very much."

"So Beatrice tells me," answered Mrs. Mordaunt.

"And now I must go back to my post. I

will give your message ; but—ought Beatrice to stay here ? It is very miserable for her ; and glad as I am to have her amongst us, I almost think it would be better if you took her home.”

So spoke Mrs. Wilton ; and both Beatrice and her mother felt as though they were guilty of deceit in concealing *one* reason for the presence of the former ; it being, however, unavoidable at such a time.

“ Nay, let me stay. I wish it, and so does Arthur,” once more pleaded Beatrice ; and once more the same answer was returned.

“ Then do so, if you wish it, love. I only thought about your comfort.”

“ Is there nothing *I* can do—or Cecil ?” Mrs. Mordaunt asked.

Mrs. Wilton thanked her friend, but said that there was not ; and after a little more conversation on the same subject, Mrs. Mordaunt departed ; leaving Beatrice established quite like a daughter of the house.

Mr. Wilton’s injured hand continued to go

on well, and he was glad to have Beatrice to help to entertain him.

“You have made a most sensible choice, Arthur,” he observed, on one occasion; “and will find her just such a kind and thoughtful wife as mine has been. I don’t know what would have become of me without your mother.”

“Not *my* mother! How would it have been if *she* had lived?” suggested the evil spirit which whispers at times, even to the best men’s hearts; but Arthur hastened to shake off its influence. “She has been a mother to me,” was his next and better thought. “Beatrice will make such a wife as any-one might be proud of,” was his answer; “and I seem to appreciate her more fully every day.”

It was still too soon to speak about their marriage, so he said no more; although the desire to tell all was very powerful; but Arthur judged it most prudent to reserve his communication until his father’s health should

be more settled. In the meantime he attended upon him with the utmost solicitude, and gradually the gloom which hung over Stapleton seemed to clear away. Beatrice proved an acquisition to all, and found enough employment of one sort or another, though she also found time for many an interesting *tête-à-tête* with Arthur, in the studio or elsewhere; and in the course of which their future plans and prospects were discussed at leisure. Mrs. Mordaunt and Cecil Leslie also paid them frequent visits, and Beatrice would have been almost happy, but for Arthur's state of health, which continued to cause her much uneasiness. He had kept up wonderfully, and insisted upon exerting himself as much as any member of the household, refusing to acknowledge that he felt the very reverse of strong or well, and regarding any observations on the subject as an insult; yet he could not conceal the truth from the loving eyes which kept incessant watch over him, and Beatrice too plainly saw a change. His face was paler and thinner,

with an occasional hectic spot on either cheek; his cough was worse; and his hand so shadowy that she shuddered when she touched it; in short, every outward sign convinced her that his life hung as it were upon a thread, though that conviction only rendered her more anxious to have him for the remainder of it lawfully delivered up to her sole charge,—if love could find no method of prolonging it. And, she would try to save him, for what would her own life be when he was gone? She would not anticipate such an irreparable misfortune, but pray for, watch over, nurse him back to health and strength; and surely her exertions could not be in vain! If he were but once her own,—then her whole time and thoughts should be devoted to him, and he must revive. It was, nevertheless, grievous to hear him speak confidently about the future, for her fears were stronger than her hopes, and she could only look to One who holds the future in his hand; One, mighty to save, and very merciful.

“And if the worst comes, may I still have power to say,—and from my heart,—‘Thy will be done!’ Thy strength is all sufficient, even unto the day of trouble.”

Such was her prayer; and strengthened by it, she was enabled to meet with firmness the shadow of an approaching trouble, heavy enough under any other circumstances to have crushed her down.

“Has my father said anything?” was her constant enquiry; and her mother’s despondent shake of the head, told her before the words were breathed that he had *not*.

Nor had he been to enquire after Mr. Wilton, though his wife went the length of inventing one or two half-messages from him; and Beatrice knew that Arthur (if not his parents), must feel the slight; but one day when she least expected it, she turned with a start to find Mr. Mordaunt at her side, with an expression half of sullenness, half of shame, upon his countenance.

She was engaged in gathering a few of the

last autumn flowers, which still blossomed in front of the house ; and now dropping them in the agitation of the meeting, she waited with beating heart and rising colour, for him to make the first advance. Considering the circumstances, the terms in which he did so might have seemed singular to any one who was unacquainted with his peculiarities.

“ So it is *you* ! Still here ? ”

“ Yes. You have heard all about Mr. Wilton ? ” was her grave reply ; as she read something in her father’s looks which induced her to think that he had become anxious for a reconciliation.

“ I have. It was an awkward accident. How did he do it ? ”

“ The trigger of his gun caught in something.”

“ And went off, and shot him ? Oh, I see ! It might have been a very nasty business.”

“ It *has* been bad enough for him as it is,” answered Beatrice, still contenting herself with stating simple facts.

“ Ah!—How is he now?”

“ Much better: though his arm must be in a sling for weeks to come.”

“ It must! He has had a deuced narrow escape of it; but I’m glad that he is better.”

“ So am I.”

A pause: Mr. Mordaunt appearing to have something on his mind, which he at length thought proper to disclose.

“ So he is better, is he? Then they cannot want *you* now,—so I think you had better come home. Eh?”

This invitation was not altogether unexpected, for Mrs. Mordaunt had told her daughter that though he had never made any enquiries about the state of affairs at Stapleton, he had always listened to any spontaneous communication; which he would not have done, unless he had relented: but Beatrice could have smiled at the determined manner in which he chose to ignore the fact that, save Mr. Wilton’s illness, there had been any urgent reason for her stay at Stapleton.

She looked full at her father, with a meaning glance, as she replied quietly.

“If you desire it, certainly.”

He turned uneasily away; saying hurriedly, and with more harshness in his tone:

“Just as you please. I thought you might be tired of staying here,—or they of having you, now that there is nothing particular for you to do. But there is no need of haste.”

Beatrice bent down and collected her flowers, reflecting:

“It is my duty to obey my father. My own wish and Arthur’s; for *he* even bade me *seek* a reconciliation; and now a chance is offered, which it is far from my desire to slight.” She again looked up, with clear, calm eyes. “I am ready, if they do not want me.” Here she paused. Then, summoning resolution, “I shall be glad to come home until matters are arranged; but now that Mr. Wilton is comparatively well again, Arthur and I think it high time to—fix our wedding day.”

Spite of his daughter's conciliatory looks, Mr. Mordaunt felt aggrieved by this fresh allusion to her intended union with Arthur Wilton, and it was with difficulty that he suppressed the abusive words which rose to his lips. Some slight tinge of shame for his late violence, joined to a desire of saving appearances in the eyes of the world, proved a restraint however, and he only said :

"Well, well! Do not bother! We will see about it. All in good time, if you only can keep quiet."

It would have been a mockery to say, 'Thank you,' for such a concession, so Beatrice was silent, till it occurred to her to say :

"Will you not come in and ask Mr. Wilton how he is? He is well enough to see you now."

The same peculiar, hesitating expression once more returned to Mr. Mordaunt's face.

"Not to-day, I think ; I have no time. But stay, I will just come and see him for a moment. Only for a moment. Lead the way."

She obeyed; and as they entered the house, her father encountered his future son-in-law; a disagreeable meeting for them both; though Mr. Mordaunt forced himself to say, with a sullen approach to courtesy :

“How are you? I am about to ask your father how he does.”

Arthur turned crimson, and his slight figure trembled with excitement, as he bowed courteously, though rather haughtily; and he only said :

“I believe you will find him in the library.”

Then he passed on, and shut himself up in his painting room; where Beatrice soon followed.

“Arthur, papa desires it, and I have promised to go home.”

He was mixing colours on his palette, with unsteady hand, and answered without looking up :

“Quite right. We agreed before it would be best.”

“But,” persisted Beatrice, puzzled by his

manner, and approaching and laying her hand caressingly upon his shoulder ; “ is not this *your* wish also ? You know my first object always is to do what you desire.”

Still he did not look up.

“ Yes : it is your duty.”

“ But are you angry with me ?”

“ No.”

“ What then ?”

He continued his occupation for a moment ; but then suddenly laying brushes and palette aside, he caught her hand, and looked up with his gentlest expression.

“ I was wrestling with the demon which has always tempted me from time to time ; and I think,—I *hope*, that I have conquered its suggestions. They were to the following effect : ‘ You have been aggrieved,—insulted ; and an honourable pride forbids you to forgive.’ But *I* said, ‘ It is *her* father ; how should I cherish anger against *him* ? *I will* overcome it. Let the past be past !’ And I trust that I *have* already overcome it, though

all evil feelings were awakened when I met him in the hall. But that is over, and I am thankful."

"And so am I," said Beatrice, kneeling down beside him. "Let us talk things over, and I will tell you what I think best, in order that you may give me your opinion."

CHAPTER XIII.

SHADOWY DANGERS.

Doubt thou, the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar.
But never doubt, I love.

HAMLET

"I feel," said Beatrice, in the course of conversation, "as though I were playing a deceitful part. When your mother speaks of my kindness in staying here to help her, I can neither disclaim nor accept her commendations. What can I say? Undoubtedly, I should have volunteered my services under any circumstances; but as it happened, I had no power to choose. And now I want you to counsel me. Ought I to tell the truth or no?"

“What do you think?” answered Arthur.
“Let me hear first, and then I will tell you what seems to me the best.”

“I have repeatedly taken the subject into consideration, and after having been several times upon the point of confiding all to Mrs. Wilton, I have desisted, from a reluctance to speak ill of my father. ‘A house divided against itself, cannot stand;’ and am I not right in thinking that, unless it is unavoidable, we ought never to betray the faults and failings of our belongings,—especially of our parents?”

“Right! Quite right! I knew that you would say so, Beatrice.”

“And I felt sure that you would agree with me. Had it not been for your father’s accident, we must have mentioned the scene in the wood, as a reason for my coming here; but now, I feel as if it were my duty to be silent. What is forgiven ought also to be forgotten, and let him be harsh or unjust as he pleases, I trust I may never forget that he is my father,

and that therefore respect and obedience are still his due."

So Beatrice explained her feelings, leaning fondly against Arthur's shoulder; and his words and looks alike expressed approval.

"There spoke my own clear-minded Beatrice, and I honour her for her high sense of duty. How could we expect a blessing, if we began life by setting the authority of our parents at defiance, or forgetting the respect, which as you observe, must always be their due? It may sometimes be difficult for us to render it; but we must nevertheless try,—and with all our hearts; determinedly closing our eyes to their defects; for it is ill for a son or daughter to pass judgment upon those they ought to reverence most; and I think that those who do so, often bring a curse upon themselves."

"Ah, so I think," was the low answer: accompanied by a regretful sigh at the thought of the impossibility of loving and honouring Mr. Mordaunt as a daughter ought.

"Do you know," resumed Arthur, "I had

had desperately evil passions working in my heart for many a day before the crisis came? A defiant spirit took possession of me, and I longed to carry you off in opposition to your father's wishes, in order that I might triumph over him who had so long irritated me by half-sneers and petty acts of tyranny. I thought, 'she shall be mine, when I choose, and in spite of him;' and I was determined to overcome your scruples. But when the storm came,—when your father shewed such harshness towards you, after hearing those words which I had wrung forth from reluctant lips, *then* I saw my error, and repented having drawn down such trouble on your head. A father's anger is a thing to be avoided, and therefore I strove hard for composure. It was a very difficult task; but from my heart I thank God that He did not suffer me to fail."

"Amen!" said Beatrice, with an inward shudder, as she recalled the horror and peril of that afternoon,—the menacing hand raised

against her betrothed ; the wild dread which almost overcame her ; and the feeling which succeeded, that she never could forgive.

There was a pause ; for Arthur also recollected that fearful moment, and the struggle in his own mind, whether to meet violence with violence, and raise his hand against Beatrice's father, or to stand merely upon the defensive, and by remaining passive under insult, incur the imputation of cowardice and incapacity. The blood flushed to his brow at the very remembrance of that hateful scene, though it was a satisfaction to feel that the passion, which, under such trying circumstances had well-nigh gained the mastery, was not fear. No ; ill-matched as the two opponents had been, he had been influenced throughout by a truly manly spirit ; and this conviction probably assisted him to overlook the past.

"I have forgiven all," he said, at last, "though it is impossible that there should ever be any cordiality between Mr. Mordaunt

and myself; but now that I have spoken, I trust never to mention this again. The painful incident which so immediately followed, seemed as if intended to counteract the effects of passionate resentment, by reminding us how trivial are all events, compared with that inevitable one which levels all distinctions, and alike puts an end to every mortal passion. Which of us dared have asserted when we discovered my father, that we were not standing in the dread presence of death?"

Beatrice shivered under the sudden influence of a dreary thought. A thought which made her press more closely to Arthur's side, and clasp his thin hand convulsively, as if to hold him back from some hidden danger.

"Ah, do not speak of it! But we ought always to be prepared."

He seemed to guess what was passing in her mind, for his fingers closed tightly upon hers, as he turned himself so as to see her face more plainly. Their eyes met, with a long, earnest gaze, and then he said:

"It is always near us ; nearer than we often think. Nay, Beatrice, do not shrink back, for I wish to speak upon this subject."

The sad earnestness of his tone withheld her from opposing his desire.

"I am ready to listen," she answered, in low, firm accents ; though her heart throbbed with apprehension of what might follow, and her eyes were withdrawn from Arthur's countenance, to fix themselves upon the ground.

There was a moment's silence, during which he seemed to be summoning courage to say something painful. It was broken by the following address :

"Oh, Beatrice, have you ever seriously considered the sacrifice you are about to make? You, young, strong, full of hope and spirit, with the prospect of a long life?—"

"Arthur," she interposed, "I know what you would say, and will not hear you. This is not the first time you have touched upon the subject."

“No ; but—”

“You are also young,” she persisted, with increasing vehemence. “And—”

“Ah ! you would persuade me that I may also look forward to a long and active life ; but you know it is scarcely possible ; that the case is widely different. Dear Beatrice, do let me speak this once. Did you not say that you would listen ?”

“Yes ; and I will,—whatever you may say.”

“Thank you. This is—what I shall not feel easy till you have heard. I have acted very selfishly in wishing you to give up everything for my sake ;—*mine !* whose life is already drawing to a close ; and once for all, I entreat you to—”

“Recall my promise ! Leave you to your fate !” she broke forth, unable to restrain herself. “Doubtless such a course would make me very, *very* happy. What have I given up for you ? Nothing ;—except a weight of anxious uncertainty ! What would I not

give up for you, if it were possible ? Everything I possess on earth, so that I might but save you for another year ! Drive me from you, and you break my heart. Let me be with you, *always*,—and I ask no more ; for are you not already mine—my own—my husband almost ? How then can I change ?”

Arthur was silenced ; nor did he desire to bring forward further arguments upon his side of the question ; his *wishes* coinciding with her own, although his sense of duty had prompted him to speak. All that *might* have been urged was lost for ever, in passionate caresses, and professions of affection ; and he felt that, living or dying, it must be happiness to have her always near at hand.

“ Then if you are determined—why should we delay ?” he asked, at length. “ I will go and tell my father that we think it time to fix the day for our marriage. There is no use in waiting longer, now that he is better.”

“ No ; and I should like to hear before I go home,” was her answer.

He rose and left the studio ; she looking after him with anxious tenderness ; and then endeavouring to beguile the brief period of his absence, by examining a half-finished picture on the easel. She had seen it more than once before, and knew its name, "The Dawn of Hope," for he himself had told her, when he explained its meaning.

A dim, twilight plain—or rather, undulating moor, as it appeared from the rich purple hues which veiled its barrenness, with fragments of rock scattered here and there in the foreground ; upon one of which was seated the figure of a young man ; his face concealed, and his whole attitude betokening despondency. In the distance lay a chain of rugged mountains, with their peaks rising dark against the morning sky, whilst their lower crevices and projections were half lost in shadow ; vague, mysterious mist-wreaths curling upward from their base. But from behind the mountains slanted upwards the first glorious rays of the sun, tinging the loftiest crests

with gold and crimson, and flooding the whole eastern sky with light; a pool of water in the foreground, glowing with warm reflection. And, reflected in it also, stood a female form, young, vigorous, graceful, and handsome, with one hand resting on the shoulder of the downcast youth, whilst the other, pointed towards the heavens, seemed to direct his attention to the breaking dawn. And that female figure was intended for herself; therefore the rest might be easily comprehended; but she now gazed upon it as earnestly as though its meaning never had been fully understood before.

“The Dawn of Hope! And must its light be so soon quenched again? Must he, who possesses genius and ambition enough to raise him to distinction, leave his grand projects unaccomplished? Worse than all, leave me, to pine for one glimpse of him, and feel it is impossible? If it must be so, I would pray to die also—if I dared. But I must not. I must wait with patience; but, oh, God! in

mercy support me under such a heavy burden !”

Tears began to flow, and she sank her head upon her hands ; yielding to the sickening apprehension which had seized upon her heart. It was a pitiable spectacle ; she, in her first youth and beauty, bowed down by a sorrow which she could not name to any one, which it was misery to dwell upon in secret ; which seemed yet a vague, uncertain shadow, though she knew it was a dread reality. Sorrow of sorrows, to have loved, hoped, waited patiently, and now that the prize was offered to her, to find it still elude her grasp !

Meanwhile, Arthur was with his father, who listened to him with an air of interest ; though he objected :

“ Why this haste ? Would it not be better to await Reginald’s return ? ”

“ I think not ; it is so uncertain ; and I have other reasons for wishing our marriage to take place soon. Life is too short for

any matter of moment to be unavoidably delayed."

Mr. Wilton looked earnestly at his son, as he spoke these last words; and a sudden alarm possessed him also, at the sight of Arthur's countenance, now flushed with feverish eagerness. He thought of his own first marriage, and of Arthur's mother; the reluctance with which he had approached the altar, forming a strong contrast to his son's impatience; and remorse for past mismanagement—it might be even, past unkindness—which had embittered and perhaps helped to shorten his boy's life, softened his features into an expression of absolute tenderness. If Arthur's confidence had not been persistently repelled; if he had not been treated harshly; scorned, neglected, he would not have been driven to brood over wrongs, which the more he dwelt upon them, seemed the more to increase; and which wore and fretted his already fragile frame. It was a sad mistake,

and now Mr. Wilton felt it to be such, and would have given much to recall the past—as well as to prolong a life which was not so valueless as he had once imagined.

After Reginald's departure, he had begun to think more about his elder son ; to care for his society ; and to regard him with increased affection—though he still felt that there was always an invisible barrier which divided them—their secret thoughts and feelings from each other.

The thought that Arthur's days were numbered, seized upon him with all the force of a presentiment, and caused him to wonder how he had hitherto been so blind or indifferent to his danger. One hope he had—that Beatrice might save him—that her companionship might endue him with new vigour ; that her loving arms might have strength to hold him back from death ; and he resolved to cast no further obstacle in the way of their union. But his first care was to answer his son's arguments in favour of a speedy mar-

riage, without permitting him to see his real thoughts.

“You are right,” he said; “and I consider long engagements most objectionable. Speak to your mother. Settle it with her and Beatrice. You look tired out with all this miserable work—this care and anxiety upon my account—and I shall therefore be glad to see you bid adieu to Stapleton. You want a thorough change, and with such a charming companion as the one you have had the good taste to choose, (and who, I do not think, has shown any want of discernment in preferring *you*,) with such an one to take care of you, and share your pleasures, I do not imagine that you will require much pity. Thanks, my dear boy, for all that you have done for *me*. You have exerted yourself wonderfully; quite beyond your strength, I fear.”

Mr. Wilton held out his hand to his son, who took it gratefully,—affectionately; for his father’s words drove out every evil thought, and his answer expressed some part of what

he felt,—spite of its being brief and incoherent. More of the same nature passed between them; but at length Arthur went in search of his mother; with whom and Beatrice, he soon settled the question which was uppermost in his mind. Should Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt raise no objections, the marriage was to take place in a fortnight,—*trousseaux* and settlements, although usually considered matters of the first importance, (even more so than the husband,) being by some strange accident, entirely overlooked; for Beatrice was in such haste to have a *right* to be always with Arthur,—ready to cheer, amuse, or wait upon him, as the case required, that she forgot to give the subject due consideration. Later in the day, she found herself alone with Mr. Wilton, who talked to her about herself and Arthur in terms which even brought tears into her eyes,—so full of warm affection were his words; and though all at Stapleton felt anxious about the future, their fears were, as if by mutual consent, suppressed.

Beatrice was to return to Lynwood on the following day, and seemed determined to employ her last evening at Stapleton in raising the spirits of the little party there, though a heavy weight was secretly pressing on her own. Once more her voice, accompanied by the organ, swelled through the old hall with more than its ancient power and feeling; whilst Arthur sat near her, with half-closed eyes, and a dreamy sense of enjoyment, drinking in the music.

She endeavoured to shut out the future, and think only of the present; that he loved her and was near; she held his hand, and felt its pulses throbbing warmly; she saw genius and feeling shining in his eyes; she knew that he possessed the power necessary to achieve distinction; and above all, she knew that he had suffered, but was now contented; and her heart swelled within her bosom, as she strove to forget what *might* be;—that the warm hand and heart might soon be cold,—the high powers of intellect forgotten in the grave.

Forgotten ! Must it be even so with genius, as with lower gifts ? Mere outward beauty, and that superficial polish which the world admires. Yes ; by that same world, so soon as they have ceased to please, the power of genius, and brilliancy of wit, will be no more remembered ; but the *few* who once appreciated them, will still endeavour to preserve them from oblivion. And with the soul itself, how will it be ? Must its noble strivings,—its high aspirations, prove valueless in the life beyond the tomb ; or will they not rather have helped to purify and fit it for the glory that shall be revealed ? He whose eyes are fixed upon the sun, looks far higher than he whose gaze is on the ground, and sees less of this world's imperfections and impurity.

Surely no good gift (unless wilfully perverted,) was ever bestowed upon us vainly ; and their ideas of heaven must be very, very narrow, who imagine that intellectual pleasures will be banished thence ; for what could be a more glorious possession than genius combined

with perfect holiness and love? The power of doing and understanding all things, joined to deep humility and thankfulness, in lieu of the wild passions,—envy, jealousy, dissatisfaction, doubt, despondency, and scorn, which tear man's heart, and embitter his existence here? Instead of that to be *at peace*: to comprehend all mysteries; and feel that even our earthly sufferings were ordained in mercy to wean our affections from an imperfect and transitory, and raise them to a perfect and enduring world; to find our hearts filled with all love and joy, and admiration; and thus rest for ever in the light of God. O what more could our hearts desire, than to comprehend, participate, and feel that all is 'very good?'

CHAPTER XIV.

DANGEROUS REALITIES.

Yet in the ears, till hearing dies,
One set slow bell will seem to toll,
The passing of the sweetest soul
That ever looked with human eyes.

I hear it now, and o'er and o'er,
Eternal greetings to the dead;
And 'Ave, Ave, Ave,' said,
'Adieu, adieu,' for evermore.

IN MEMORIAM.

BEATRICE'S heart was as yet too young and untamed by suffering, to turn willingly from this world's hopes, to rest entirely upon those of the life to come. She would not believe in the possibilities which she could not succeed in shutting out; and retired to her own room,

wearied, yet excited with the events of the day, and incapable of sleeping soundly. Troubled dreams, from which she awoke with a sudden start, alternated with long periods of wakefulness, during which she prayed that the desire of her heart might be granted, rather than, whatever happened, she might be resigned. 'Spare him! Grant him yet a little rest and happiness!' being still the burden of her prayer.

The night wind, sighing in that peculiarly mournful manner in which it ever seems to sigh around old houses, suggested melancholy reflections; and the same vague awe which had stolen over her during her vigil in the library, now seized upon her more forcibly than before. The voices of the night, chaunting wild songs of woe to come, to the notes of an unseen spirit harp; moaning at the window, till the nerves thrill, and the spirits fail, and the whole body is enslaved by the spell of that viewless, nameless fear, exercised a powerful influence over her, until she, who would

have met any tangible danger with a courage worthy of the other sex, now started and trembled without cause; looking fearfully around the ghostly room.

Blame her, despise her not for, her weakness, ye strong-minded women who are never nervous; even though you cannot understand how long watchfulness, anxiety, and apprehension induce that utter weariness of mind and body, which prepares the way for almost superstitious fears. A comfortable coat of selfishness, is, in general, a wonderful defence for machinery at once so complicated and so fragile as the nervous system; and may be honestly recommended to those who desire to pass through life with as little pain and inconvenience as possible. But such persons as are weak enough to love and sympathise with others; to suffer with and for them; grieving over their misfortunes, endeavouring to share (if not entirely bear) their burdens; thinking of them in their absence, and scheming how they best may cheer and aid them, must be

content to endure the penalty of such folly,—for what does the world care for their toil and sorrow?

Let them suffer in silence, carefully concealing their pale, anxious countenances, for their morbid feelings will obtain no sympathy. Men like those of a similar nature to their own; therefore, avaunt! poor sickly sensibility, with ruined health and aching heart! and welcome—thrice welcome, rosy, strong-limbed, self-absorbed, hard-hearted selfishness! Hence, dim spectre! do not disturb our revels with thy croakings and misgivings about the happiness of others! Let us live our life, and die (oh, that we *must* die!) after we have drained the cup of enjoyment to the very dregs, un-missed, un-cared for, at a green old age! No fear but that plenty of the kind will be ready to supply our place.

Beatrice was not so strong or sensible as might have been desired, but the fears which shook her were not on her own account. It was still Arthur for whom she trembled, as

she listened to the night wind's mystic song. Some evil impending over him, she dreaded ; and it was for him that, shivering from head to foot, she prayed.—“ Oh, spare him ! save him ! or if not—”

She paused, suddenly impressed by the idea that even then—at that very moment,—mischievousness was hovering over him ; and instinctively she raised herself to listen. All was still ; her strained sense of hearing could distinguish no new sounds, for a strange ringing in her ears confused her ; she was chilled with dread, and the dark room seemed full of flitting shadows.

“ Nervousness !” she thought. “ How often have I had such fancies ! It is foolish to give way to them. And yet I have a settled feeling that this is not altogether fancy.” Still she listened. “ What if he were ill ?”

She rose, and groping her way to the door, unlatched it ; looking as he himself had once done—out into the shadowy passage. Everything was silent ; yet she was not satisfied, for

- such a profound stillness now seemed to her disturbed imagination ominous, and her forebodings of evil were increased by the recollection of his pale and weary countenance, when their hands and lips had met, and he said, "Good night."

So near, and yet cut off from all means of ascertaining whether there was any foundation for her fears. There is no loneliness so terrible as that which sometimes seizes on the mind when watching and fearing in the dead of night. She longed for morning, but the dawn was yet far distant; and without some good reason, she felt that she ought not to draw nearer to that closed door, which was invisible through the darkness, save to fancy's eye. Yet she did steal softly out into the passage; one wild dream of evil rapidly succeeding another, as she again paused and listened. But at length she crept back shivering to her dismal chamber, and lay down again, though not to sleep. Her eyes were hot and dry; her forehead throbbing; and

she could not have endured the situation until daylight if she had not prayed,—vehemently, urgently, for him and for herself. And thus she lay until the first faint glimpse of light appeared; then weariness of body strove with watchfulness of spirit; she turned uneasily from side to side; closed her eyes; started—closed them once again, and finally exchanged her waking dreams for slumberous visions of a more fantastic nature, yet equally painful, and still bearing reference to Arthur,—who was in danger and beyond her reach.

It was no surprise to learn that Arthur had on that same miserable night had a return of all his worst symptoms,—pain in his left side, violent oppression on the chest, and fever;—and that when morning came he found himself too ill to rise.

“I knew it! I felt sure of it!” she thought; as dressing in haste, she prepared for the worst; feeling almost as though she were past suffering any more.

His attack proved very serious; the doctor was called in, and Beatrice of course gave up her plan of leaving Stapleton; being, with Mrs. Wilton, in daily and nightly attendance on the sufferer, who at first endeavoured to smile at her evident uneasiness, and re-assure her by asserting that "it was nothing." But when he saw it was impossible to convince her that her fears were groundless, he spoke more seriously about his case. "If I must leave you, do not grieve too much," he entreated. "I have faith in God; and though it may seem so, I will not say that this is hard. I feel in charity with all men, and content to die, so long as you are with me to the last."

But we will not dwell longer on these saddening details. Beatrice's dreary feelings may be easily imagined; and it was well for her that she had little time to yield to them, though the end was not so near as she imagined, when, upon going to the painting-room for something which Arthur wanted,

she stood gazing for a moment at the picture on the easel, exclaiming in the bitterness of her soul :

“The *Dawn* of Hope! Let it be rather called the *Death* of Hope; for yonder slanting rays of light, might as well represent the setting as the rising sun. Take the smile from the lips of the female figure, and she will seem to be mourning the approach of night; the long dreary night which knows no dawn!”

After three days of danger, during which Arthur was scarcely permitted to speak or move, his illness took a favourable turn, though he was so weak that the slightest exertion quite exhausted him. He insisted upon going down stairs, and lay on a sofa in the library, —a mere shadow— with Beatrice for ever by his side, and his father and mother generally near him, and full of the most intense anxiety. But he himself seemed patient and resigned, as if a great change had come over him of late; such as a conversation which he held with Beatrice upon one occasion, when they

two were left together, appeared to indicate. "The danger is over for the present," he said quietly; "but still, Beatrice, you must not hope too much. I have a feeling that I cannot live much longer, though it may be months before I leave you. I will not grieve you again by bidding you leave me to my fate; yet such an union as that of life, health, and spirit, to a being full of hopeless pain and languor, will appear a strange one, and your constancy doubtless a matter of surprise." Beatrice felt too deeply to have either the desire or power of relieving her feelings by any passionate outbreak. Calmly she sat beside him; so composed she seemed, indeed, that an indifferent person might have accused her of cold-heartedness; but Arthur knew better when he felt the icy touch of the hand he held in his—his, which burned with consuming fever—and saw the silent, tearless sorrow in those eyes which were so steadfastly fixed upon him, as she listened to his words.

"Be it so," she answered. "I can struggle

no longer. I am willing to submit, and have but little hope of any earthly happiness left now. One thing only I desire; and that is, to be with you to the last."

He returned her look by one of deepest love, and pity for *her*; with just a tinge of regret that the glimpse of happiness revealed to *him*, must be withdrawn so soon.

"Such partings always must be painful, even when our hopes of a happier re-union are strong; but we must think of *that*,—look forward to that joyful time; and whilst we remain here, pray for resignation. Oh, Beatrice, I cannot imagine how anyone can bear to give up that bright hope of immortality; questioning, scoffing, doubting, till their faith becomes unsettled, and they know not what they believe or desire in that unknown future state towards which we are all hastening. *I* once doubted and questioned, in the first bitterness of disappointment; but, thank God, I was convinced of my error, and repented it with all my heart."

“So must all who desire to do right, and are only seeking truth,” returned Beatrice. “I feel sure, that to *them*, light will always be given. It is only those whose pride forbids them to ‘become as little children,’ believing, without question, that which is so far beyond all human comprehension, simply because God bids them to do so,—or those whose self-indulgent habits render them unwilling to think about another world, who are permitted to go hopelessly astray.”

“Yes; those who loose their bad passions until they become their slaves; and then, when they suffer from the consequences, exclaim that everything has gone against them, and that there is no justice either in heaven or in earth;—if there *be* a heaven, as I have heard men add; though I do not believe that in their hearts they doubted it.”

“Nor I; unless such blindness were permitted as a punishment.”

“Possibly,” said Arthur, leaning back exhausted. “If we wilfully close our eyes to

the truth, how can we tell but that the very power of seeing may be taken from us? And then, how wretched must the end be! Looking down into a dark abyss, instead of upwards to the throne of God! Nothing but darkness everywhere, and the weary—intolerable pressure of a mis-spent life, to weigh us down; without even the comforting sense of having *striven* after something better. But we believe that all is for the best, even when called upon to suffer. How often have we talked over the pleasures and advantages of a quiet, useful life; to be passed between intellectual pursuits, endeavours to help others, and the recreations of a peaceful home! But if such innocent desires are not to be gratified, still, my own Beatrice, we must believe that it is better for us thus; and be content to rest upon a surer hope.”

“Ah, if we could but do that, it would be well with us!” she answered, with a sigh. “And now, dear Arthur, you must talk no more.”

“I will not,” he said, and thus the subject dropped; but from thenceforth it was often renewed; and Beatrice gradually gained power to meet one most painful thought with fortitude, convinced that *he* would be the gainer by the change.

Their wedding was deferred; but only for a week beyond the appointed time, for now, each was more anxious on the subject than before; and Mr. Wilton undertook the difficult office of persuading Beatrice’s father to consent to this arrangement. Finally, the day arrived, and Beatrice was married *properly*,—from Lynwood,—with her father to bestow her on the bridegroom, and in a dress of pure white: though the ceremony was as quiet as could be imagined.

Arthur, so weak that he could scarcely stand till it was over, was accompanied only by his father and mother; and Cecil Leslie was her cousin’s single bridesmaid. Mrs. Mordaunt looked very dismal on the occasion, and some of the servants noted, as an unlucky omen, the

circumstance of her dress being entirely composed of two half-mourning colours, grey and violet;—Beatrice, herself, however, being happily either blind or indifferent to the fact; it being a gloomy time of year, and it being moreover Mrs. Mordaunt's custom to select sombre hues as more suited to her state of mind.

The bride was pronounced to look beautiful, though very grave and pale, and there were some wondering murmurs at her choice. Yet Arthur looked graceful and handsome enough to justify it; had she chosen him merely for his *personal* attractions, instead of those unknown, or undervalued by the vulgar, who found it impossible to understand the singleness of her devotion to a lover who was passing rapidly away.

But *he* understood it, with the deepest thankfulness and joy; and when he clasped her hand, and felt that nothing could ever come between them and their love, he was, as he told her, almost too happy for this world.

And thus they started on their journey southward; Stapleton being once more forbidden as a winter residence; and Beatrice feeling triumphant in the midst of her anxiety, to think that her husband was left entirely to her care. Hers, who would have cheerfully laid down her life to prolong his, had it but been possible.

CHAPTER XV.

A HOMEWARD MARCH.

He has arrived ; arrived at last.

LONGFELLOW.

CECIL LESLIE felt very lonely after the departure of her cousin ; for though she had enjoyed but little of Beatrice's society for some time past, it was something to see her occasionally, and her absence left a dreary blank. Mrs. Mordaunt daily grew more dismal, complained more of ill-health, sat up later at night, and seldom left her room before mid-day ; whilst Mr. Mordaunt became more morose and tyrannical than ever : for though he had behaved so ill to his daughter, he began to miss her now

that she was gone. Consequently, except when Cecil went to Stapleton, she was generally left entirely to herself, (if we do not count the various objectless interruptions of any employment which engaged her time and thoughts, caused by her uncle's restless and exacting habits;) and, as might have been expected, she began to dwell much upon the past;—the loss of her mother, and the painful events which sent her only brother to the East.

Anxiety about him; the long intervals between each letter, and the unsatisfactory nature of those letters when they did arrive,—a life of such monotonous unrest, was very wearing, and it was no wonder that she became so pale and still, though her patient, gentle expression never changed. She had but one source of satisfaction; and that was the favourable accounts which she received from Beatrice, who pronounced Arthur to be better, and herself even happier than she had dared to hope.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilton went southward for a month, and brought the same satisfactory tidings with them on their return; but the air of the midland counties was considered so much too keen for Arthur in the winter, that Cecil had no prospect of seeing Beatrice until the spring was far advanced;—a long time to wait, when days, and even hours were counted.

But, in the meantime came tidings that the war was ended; Mrs. Wilton being overjoyed to think that Reginald would soon be home again;—her brave boy, who, young as he was, had for his gallant actions been promoted to the rank of captain;—and Cecil thought of Harry; wondering how *he* had sped, and whether he would be allowed to return to Lynwood. At length she ventured to mention the subject to her uncle, but he returned no answer, and to all appearance, might not have heard one word of her petition. With tears of disappointment in her eyes, she

next appealed to Mrs. Mordaunt, who was kind; but, despondent herself, was the last person to afford her any comfort. She next spoke of her anxiety to Mrs. Wilton, and from her received a promise that were her brother excluded from Lynwood, he should find a home at Stapleton. A rash promise, all things considered, many prudent people would have thought; but Mrs. Wilton was more noted for christian gentleness and charity, than for worldly wisdom; and therefore, though she had heard an evil report of poor Harry Leslie, whom she had only seen on two or three occasions, just before he went away, his sister's troubled looks were not allowed to plead for him in vain.

What a blessing it is, when we are in trouble, to find *one* real friend! A treasure doubly valuable from its rarity; for though we may have many in prosperity, just when we want them most, they always vanish,—like birds and butterflies when winter is at hand! And for that reason, Cecil held the kindness which

she met with at Stapleton as beyond all price, and went homewards greatly comforted.

Time passed on; the weather became warmer and more settled, so that at length Arthur and Beatrice ventured to leave Torquay for Stapleton; their return thither being rendered all the more pleasant by the prospect of seeing Reginald so soon. Arthur was still very thin and weak, and everyone wondered how he had lived on so long; though he himself was in good spirits, and asserted that he felt far better than when he went away. It was altogether a happy re-union, and Beatrice and Cecil had much to say to one another. Reginald had been heard from very lately, but the exact time of his return was still uncertain; though his mother expected him daily, —hourly; and each night retired to rest with a sense of bitter disappointment that he had not come; and thus sped the first fortnight after the return of the young married pair.

Cecil was inspired with a strong desire to see Reginald; partly for his own sake, and

partly for her brother's, for she fancied that he might bring tidings of the latter ; and one warm, bright afternoon she was sitting meditating upon the subject, alone, within the grounds of Stapleton, when a hand was laid upon her shoulder.

"Beatrice," she thought ; and did not trouble herself to look up (perhaps because her eyes were filled with tears), until a voice, which belonged neither to her cousin nor to any other woman, addressed her in the following terms :

"So, my dear sister, you are all alone !"

It was a pleasant voice, and yet it made her start, raise her head, and turn round in astonishment ; so unexpected and inexplicable was the interruption. She looked up, to meet the laughing glance of a tall, handsome young man, who she at once guessed to be he who had of late been the object of so many surmises,—the longed-for Reginald ; and though she coloured, she was not ill-pleased by his mistake.

"It is not Beatrice," she said.

At the first glimpse of an unknown face, and a young and fair one too, Reginald Wilton drew back in embarrassment; and colouring even more deeply than she herself had done; "Pardon me," he replied; "I thought you were—my brother's wife."

Cecil rose, and bowing slightly, answered:

"Shall I find her? I believe she is somewhere in the grounds with Arthur."

He had now in a great measure recovered his self-possession, insomuch that he was able to take pleasure in the sight of Cecil, and desirous to hear her speak again. There is a powerful charm in a sweet well-modulated voice, and hers was unusually soft and musical.

"Oh, no thank you," was his answer. "I have no doubt that I shall see her presently; but I must first find my mother. Can you tell me whether she is in the house?"

"She is; and if (as I suppose), you are Captain Wilton, she has been anxiously looking out for you for many days. I believe,"

added Cecil, gaining courage from the sight of his kind, open countenance, and smiling shyly, "that nothing could induce her to stir beyond the grounds. But *now* she will be happy."

Reginald was so much affected by this simple speech, that he almost unconsciously offered her his hand. She blushed, but unhesitatingly met his friendly advances, by giving him her own; he, saying earnestly:

"Thank you for saying so. My own dear mother! So she was afraid of missing me? How is she?"

"Well. I can give a very good report of all. And—" but here Cecil hesitated, for she was longing, yet fearing to ask some question about Harry; unwilling to let Reginald pass on without, and yet feeling that she ought not to detain him from his family.

It was an agreeable surprise, to obtain the wished-for news unasked; Reginald's next words being directly to the point.

"Excuse my asking the question; but are you not Beatrice's cousin,—Miss Leslie?"

“ I am.”

“ Then I am happy to inform you that your brother has returned. We travelled down together, and he left me but a few minutes ago for Lynwood.”

Cecil felt for a moment almost overpowered by the news ; coming thus suddenly after such a long period of suspense ; and her heart beat so fast that she could scarcely answer :

“ Oh !—then I must go at once. Thank you,—thank you very much, for your kindness in telling me.”

She turned as she spoke, and taking leave of Reginald, began to hasten homewards ; walking very rapidly down to the entrance gates, and actually running as soon as she was safe beyond them, and screened from the eyes of her new acquaintance. He raised his hat in answer to her salutation, and then, though in haste to see his mother and the rest of the family, paused to watch her as she flew along,—with grace and lightness worthy of a fairy.

The wistful expression of her eyes had

touched him to the heart, and he already felt interested in her,—knowing something of her story. Looks and manners, innocent as hers, had always possessed a charm for him, such as more self-conscious, cultivated beauty often wanted ; and he, who had passed unscathed through the ordeal of many meaning tones and dazzling glances, was moved at first sight by the graceful simplicity of an unaffected country girl:—all the more powerfully perhaps, for the pity as well as admiration, which her young, earnest face excited.

“ Ah, poor little thing !” he sighed, “ she looks so child-like in her innocence, that I would give much to save her from—the shock in store for her when she first sees her brother. What a brother, for one so delicate and helpless ! Yet, poor fellow ! he has a kind heart, and, in my opinion, deserves far less blame than pity : for let the world say what it will, his faults are partly due to the companions, who, endued with more natural cleverness and strength of will, have done their best to

lead him quite astray. Oh, what a misfortune to be easily persuaded! Led, from fear of ridicule or trouble! My father might well say (as he used to do,) that moral weakness is the worst of vices. I wish I could have warned her; but that was not possible; and I can only hope that from her previous knowledge of his character, she will not be much surprised. I always wished to help him for his own sake; but now that I have seen *her*, how much more do I grieve that it is so far beyond my power! Had it been my privilege to possess such a sister, I would rather have died than caused her such uneasiness, as poor Harry Leslie, in his frequent mention of her, has openly confessed to have occasioned."

He watched the little figure with her large hat, and plain grey dress, until she had quite disappeared; and then turned to continue his route towards the house; he having walked from the nearest railway station, leaving his baggage to be sent after him; and it was not

without strange sensations, that, after so long an absence, and so much toil and peril, he once more—and thus quietly, and unexpectedly approached his home. But such reflections did not succeed in driving the image of Cecil from his mind.

“What a curious mistake! To fancy she was Beatrice! But I suppose that, taking it for granted, I scarcely stayed to ascertain the fact; for seeing a female figure seated near our house, I, of course, imagined that it must be her.”

Yielding to such thoughts, he recalled the whole scene,—her startled air, and the confiding look which had succeeded it; and he began to wonder when they next should meet. Soon, very soon, in all probability, and he rejoiced in the idea that she was as much at home at Stapleton, as ever her cousin Beatrice had been.

After so much rough work, so many painful scenes, and so long an abstinence from all home-pleasures, such a hope was quite refresh-

ing; and invigorated by it, the handsome, sunburnt young soldier lightly traversed the short space which still divided him from the house, and, almost before he was aware of it, found himself clasped fondly in his mother's arms.

Leaving him to the affectionate greetings of his family, (including Beatrice, who was now at liberty to express her feelings without incurring suspicion, and who gazed upon the tall, moustached young hero with such pride and joy as a sister well might feel,) we will return to Cecil, whom we left bound upon a less hopeful expedition.

"How will Harry be received?" she wondered. "To enter the gates of Lynwood without notice, is, in truth a hazardous experiment, and I can only trust that it may turn out well, though I dare not expect that such will be the case. My uncle! If he were but different,—kinder, more forbearing, all might yet be well. How very kindly Captain Wilton spoke! He has a manly, open counte-

nance, and I have no doubt has often befriended Harry. Ah!" (with sudden recollection,) "I should not wonder if he were the person who had been so kind to him, and who Harry so provokingly forgot to name. I hope so, for I like his looks,—and I feel convinced he is the same. How happy it would have made me to have had such a brother! They may well be proud of him at Stapleton."

She slackened her pace for a moment, to recover breath; and at that precise juncture, the village bells broke out into a merry peal; their sweet tones floating to the fields which she was crossing.

"It is for him," she thought. "They have discovered his return."

And she was right, for he had been recognised as he passed through the village; the person who made the discovery had claimed his notice, and been made happy by a smile and a few kind words from "Mr. Reginald," and then, while he proceeded on his way, had flown to spread the news, and call the ringers,

who did their duty with not the less good-will that they felt certain of being liberally paid.

“Ah, how delightful!” continued the forlorn Cecil, “to be the object of such flattering attention. Everybody seems to love him, whilst—who cares for Harry? No-one but myself,—and perhaps my aunt and Beatrice. Three persons only in all this wide world; but I know that it might have been very different. Well, I must not stay to think about that now, nor even to listen to the joyous music of the bells. Their young hero is come home again, (he looked every inch a gallant soldier,) and I am glad that he has met with such a cordial welcome. But my thoughts should be at Lynwood, with poor Harry; and I must hasten to see whether he looks better, and how he is received. I wonder whether he is there already.”

She need not have hurried; for upon arriving at home, she only found her aunt, who was apparently in a state of great excitement,

and occupied in giving a variety of orders, so much so, that her arrival on the scene was scarcely noticed, and she had to wait some little time before a fair opening presented itself for addressing a question to Mrs. Mordaunt. Meantime, whilst eagerly watching her opportunity, her impatience was increased rather than alleviated, by hearing some mention made of "Mr. Leslie's" name.

"He is come then?" she enquired.

"Oh, Cecil, when did you arrive? Did you speak before? I never heard you," was the answer.

"Harry!—where is he?" persisted Cecil.

"Oh, did you not know? He made his appearance about a quarter of an hour ago, and finding you were not in, insisted upon setting out in search of you; although I told him that was the surest way of missing you. And now,—I am sure I don't know where he can be gone."

"How tiresome!" sighed poor Cecil, turn-

ing to go in quest of him; but suddenly pausing to ask: "Has my uncle seen him yet?"

"No; he is out. But I fear—"

"Ah, I fear too," was the hurried answer, as the poor anxious sister once more left the house; pausing at the garden gate, to look all ways, and wonder whether she had better go in search of Harry, or remain there till he returned. The latter seemed the wisest course, and she stood for some time, watching for her brother; whilst one perplexing thought after another distressed her mind; but at length, to her great relief, the object of her quest returned.

"Harry!" she exclaimed; the customary quietness of her manner having yielded for the time to strong excitement; and even as she spoke, her arms were tightly clasped around his neck.

"Well, Cecil, my dear girl; I am very glad to see you," was his answer, as he returned

her embrace with interest. "You are looking well, are you not? You've had no bother, I suppose, since I set out upon my travels?"

"Let me look at *you*," she said; and half laughing, half reluctantly, he submitted to her scrutiny; observing:

"Make haste, then, for I can't stay here; I don't think there is much to see."

"How have you been, dear? And how are you now?"

"Oh, all right! All right! I look so; don't I? But we've had a sharpish time of it, and once or twice I thought it was all over with me. And so it would have been, if that good fellow, Wilton, had not helped me through. You know I travelled down with him to-day?"

"Yes; and I am glad of it."

"But—how did you know, though? He has not been here?"

"No, but *I* have been at Stapleton."

"Ah, I see! So that's where you have been; and I was looking for you in the vil-

to *her* mind, was expressive of the truest manliness : the glance of *his* intelligent blue eyes haunting her even as she crossed the threshold of her dreary home at Lynwood ; dreading the first meeting between Harry and her uncle.

CHAPTER XVI.

SISYPHUS'S STONE.

Some, the degraded slaves of lust,
Prostrate and trampled in the dust,
Shall rise no more ;
Others by guilt and crime maintain,
The 'scutcheon that, without a stain,
Their fathers bore.

LONGFELLOW.

MR. MORDAUNT was standing in the hall ; and when the brother and sister entered, his surprise at the sight of the former was so great that he actually forgot for the moment to look and sound as ill-tempered as under other circumstances would have been the case.

“ What ! Is it *you* ? ” he exclaimed, with a scrutinising glance, as though he almost

doubted the evidence of his senses. "And when did you come back?"

Harry,—always more confused in the presence of his uncle,—answered by giving a rather incoherent account of his proceedings; his only intelligible words being:

"I and Wilton travelled down together.

"Wilton! Then Reginald has returned?"

"Oh, yes! And all right too," said Harry, with more confidence; "though he has had more than one near escape. He's the bravest fellow that I ever met with anywhere; and I am glad he has gained his step."

"Ah! *He* is one of the right sort!" returned Mr. Mordaunt; so pointedly, that his nephew winced. "*He* will get on; and deserves to do so. Pity there are not a few more like him in the world! He stands in no danger of *your* rivalry at present; for I suppose you have neither managed to 'achieve greatness,' nor to have it 'thrust upon you,' in the course of your campaign?"

These bitter, taunting words cut Cecil to the

heart, and she wondered how her brother could bear them so composedly; but he, poor creature! heard them with more shame than indignation; answering, as a matter of course:

“No;—I have not. But it is something,—isn’t it? to have seen a little of the world!”

“*Undoubtedly,*” said Mr. Mordaunt, emphatically, and with a sneer. “One might easily guess it by your distinguished air. Don’t you think so, Cecil? Only look at him!” (Cecil did not dream of making any reply, though her cheek burned, and her bosom swelled with the nearest approach to resentment which she had ever felt. Mr. Mordaunt, thus having all the conversation to himself, was at liberty to continue). “Come! get ready if you mean to dine with us, and I suppose by your appearing just now, that such is your intention!”

“If—you have no objection. I wanted to see Cecil,” stammered Harry, turning very red, and looking towards his sister as he spoke.

She, who had hitherto been silent, now spoke for him; perceiving from her uncle's manner, that his rude observations were intended for a gracious intimation to her brother that he need not leave the house again at present, and humiliating as such treatment was, she was obliged to be satisfied that matters were no worse.

"Harry will be glad to be with me a little. And I, to have him back again," she said.

"Indeed!—Strange taste on your part! But just go and dress for dinner, will you?" sneered Mr. Mordaunt, as he left them to themselves.

Harry stood still till his sister laid her hand upon his arm.

"Come with me, dear. Your old room is ready. Don't be long."

"No, not I? At present I can't do much in the way of adonising: since I have nothing with me but the clothes I have on now. My things are waiting at the station till I find some means of sending for them. Shall I do?

Or" (nodding his head in the direction whence his uncle disappeared;) "will he make a fuss about it, if I dine in these?"

"Oh, no! Surely not," said Cecil, trying to speak reassuringly, though secretly far from easy on the subject. "He cannot, when he knows you have no choice. Let us make haste, for it is growing late."

All things considered, dinner passed over pretty smoothly; that is to say Harry was allowed a place at table, and something to eat; though his uncle watched him sharply whenever his glass was filled, observing, half aside:

"That's right. Go on. I should think by this time you feel tolerably comfortable."

Harry made no answer, but endured this taunt (and many others,) with exemplary meekness; feeling so helpless when left to himself, that he was thankful to stay at Lynwood upon sufferance; though a vague sense of degradation troubled, and made him drink more than he might otherwise have done.

Perhaps, weak and foolish as such conduct was, some slight excuse might have been made for him from the fact of his not being permitted to volunteer a single remark ; and of his being only spoken to in an insulting manner. Mr. Mordaunt made only one observation which was not applicable to his nephew, and that—(muttered with his eyes fixed upon the table, and addressed to no-one in particular), was to the following effect :

“ So Reginald Wilton is at home again ! Now some one may be sorry that they did not wait a little longer.”

Mrs. Mordaunt and Cecil both understood that this was a sneer at Beatrice, and her want of taste in choosing Arthur ; and the former coughed significantly, whilst her niece coloured and looked down ; and Harry, quite in the dark as to the meaning of this speech, turned from one to another for an explanation, which, however, was not given.

After dinner, Harry seemed so tired and sleepy, that Cecil was disappointed in her

hopes of a little quiet conversation ; and lieved when the evening was fairly over without any serious misadventure. Her brother would go out and smoke, but only for a short time, during which he managed to avoid coming in contact with his uncle ; and as soon as he came in again, retired to bed ; his sister being ready to present him with a candle, go upstairs to see if anything was wanted, and finally (with an aching heart,) to say, "good night !"

When she herself lay down to rest that night, she felt so anxious and out of spirits, that she could not sleep ; her old fears for Harry returning with double force, whilst a sense of utter powerlessness to help him, wrung forth bitter tears ; and her uncle's treatment of them both seemed hateful ; but she, at least, was a fast prisoner, and there was nothing for her but patience and submission—submission to an almost intolerable yoke.

It is strange how fond some men are of oppressing, instead of protecting and assisting,

the weak and helpless amongst their fellow-creatures; but tyranny seems so natural to all baser natures, that it is an absolute luxury to have something to torment; and that was probably the reason why Harry Leslie was permitted to remain at Lynwood; not from any desire to do him good. The poor boy's disposition was full of all kindly impulses, and his character, though weak, was free from all violent passions: requiring merely to be trained in the right direction by someone whom he could respect, and in whose hands it might have been moulded like soft wax. But it was necessary that that person should be a man, and one much older than himself; such as his uncle, had his influence not been worse than useless. How Harry progressed under his superintendence, has, however, been already related; and the reader will be at no loss to imagine Cecil's thoughts and feelings now that her brother had returned; so that we need merely add, that, sleeping or waking they were by no means of a rosy hue.

The next morning found him rather more able and willing to talk; and Reginald Wilton's praises formed the favourite subject of his conversation; Cecil listening to them with equal pleasure. It seemed, from his account, that being accidentally thrown together, Reginald had befriended him in more than one way when in difficulty, taken care of him when ill, and endeavoured to persuade him that the effort to give up old bad habits, might not only be made, but made successfully.

"And so it might, perhaps," he added, "if I had not been a very foolish fellow; but others persuaded me, and so" (with a sigh,) "I broke through all my good resolutions, always ending just where I began—in proving myself an idle, good-for-nothing creature. Don't abuse me, for I know that it was very wrong; and now it is of no use talking about it, for it is too late."

"Nay, Harry dear!" exclaimed his sister, "do not say so, for it can *never* be too late.

And you should try—should think about some occupation ; for your life is all before you yet. It was very kind of Captain Wilton to—”

“Take any notice of such a worthless wretch? Eh, Cecil?” interrupted Harry.

“No ; you do not think I meant to say so, though it was more than many people would have done.”

“There you are right, Cis. He’s a jolly fellow—that young Wilton, for he did not know anything about me, my belongings, and so forth ; nothing good of me, in short, till lately ; and he did everything that he could for me all the same ; lost no opportunity of doing me any good turn that lay in his power ; not from any interested motives, for I need not tell you there was nothing to be got from me. Unfortunately,” added Harry, laughing, “my acquaintance does not offer great advantages ; being perhaps, rather a drawback than otherwise to respectability. But, by the bye !” he exclaimed, as if struck

by a sudden bright idea, "are we not some sort of relations, or connexions, of the Wiltons now?"

"On account of Beatrice's marriage? Yes; I suppose so. But, dear Harry, I was saying—"

Here Harry looked uneasy, changed his position, replenished his pipe, (his constant out-door companion, and they were walking in the garden), interposing:

"Ah, I know! I know! Don't preach, and I'll think about it, there's a dear, good girl. But there's plenty of time. You know I am only just come home, and I want a little rest; a holiday, whilst I take breath and look about me; and it would be only fair to give me *that* before I settle down for good."

The old answer! Harry was always *intending* to do something better, but somehow, the precise time for reformation had never yet arrived; and Cecil much feared that it never would. He had gained nothing by his campaign, (though, thanks to Reginald, he had

not lost so much as might have been expected,) and was now returned upon his relations' hands; his services not being particularly wanted elsewhere. And when she pictured him hanging about Lynwood, as in bygone days; getting into new scrapes, wasting the most important period of his life, and causing her ceaseless, endless, anxiety; her heart almost died within her, and she had not spirit to say another word.

Harry saw her lip quiver, and her cheek grow paler, though he could not tell how very much she felt and suffered upon his account, nor guess what horrors even she anticipated. Ever since she had heard some portion of the story of Mr. Mordaunt's encounter with Beatrice and Arthur in the wood, she had feared him more and more, until her dread had at length risen to such a height, that at times she fancied him capable of any violent and unreasonable action; nor did Harry's return prove reassuring; for it seemed that in all probability, he would be the next victim of

his uncle's tyranny; consequently, (as her brother in some measure perceived,) her feelings were anything but cheerful.

He knew that it was *he* who had made her look so sorrowful; and being, through all his faults and follies, really very fond of her, he was touched by her trouble; and taking her hand affectionately, said:

"Well, dear, don't be down about me, and I promise to do anything you please. Only, there is no great hurry, is there? I will talk to Wilton, and abide by *his* advice."

Cecil's face brightened with a new hope. Reginald might save him yet! and revived by the thought, she clasped her brother's hand, exclaiming:

"Ah, yes. Talk to *him* about your plans. See him as frequently as possible, for I am sure that he *will* help you, if he can. I do not want to hurry you too much; but remember, Harry, how time slips away, and how impossible it would be for you to live here always,

though my uncle is not opposed to your staying at present, just while you decide."

"Stay here always! What should make you say so? I should never dream of such a thing," was the emphatic answer. "*That* arrangement would never do for long. But I must have time to see what would be best. Has the master said anything about me, or his wishes on the subject?"

Cecil sighed deeply, as she answered:

"Not a word."

Harry looked rather mortified, though he replied—

"Just what I expected! What a queer man he is, never to say a word, and never to write one line to me, all the time that I was away. I *did* feel it, though I do not care much now; but it seemed so unforgiving; and, to tell you the truth, I hardly liked to venture here, though now that it is done, upon the whole I am not sorry that I came. It was something to see *you* again."

“ Ah, Harry, if you had but a nice, quiet home of your own, *then* we might live happily together.”

“ Ah!” he echoed, “*if!* But wait a little, and we’ll see about it some day. And then you shall not be bullied or tormented. I expect, though, that the home you talk about will not be ready for you just at present. How I wish that Wilton would take a fancy to you. I am sure that you would suit each other, and then I could look out for myself, and there would be no more trouble thinking about *you*.”

“ Harry!” cried Cecil, blushing crimson, “ do not talk such nonsense.”

“ Nonsense! It is sense. You are old enough to marry, and it would be better for you than remaining here,” he returned, assuming all an elder brother’s dignity. “ Just look at Beatrice, for instance. Did you not yourself say that she was twice as happy now that she was married? And why should *you* be worse off, I should like to know?”

“I really have not thought about it yet.”

“Then it is high time that you did; and if you get Reginald Wilton, I can tell you that you will secure a real prize.”

Cecil dared not risk offending Harry by again asserting that he was talking nonsense, or by venturing to hint that his schemes for her were rather premature; so she only said:

“That I can quite believe, from all that you have told me. But be contented, dear, with enjoying his friendship, for *that*, as you say, is not to be despised; and I can never be sufficiently thankful that you have found such a friend.”

CHAPTER XVII.

A CONTRAST.

“Seest thou shadows sailing by,
As the dove, with startled eye,
Sees the falcon’s shadow fly?”

Bear a lily in thy hand ;
Gates of brass cannot withstand
One touch of that magic wand.”

LONGFELLOW.

AT this point, the conversation (if such it can be termed), was interrupted by Mrs. Mor-daunt, who came to summon her nephew and niece to accompany her to Stapleton.

“You will come?” she said, addressing Harry.

“What a bore!” he grumbled; “I shall

have to dress, I suppose, and all that sort of thing. And there are such a number of them, too. No, I can't afford the time and trouble just now, so I will look round *this* place a little whilst you go. And you may tell Wilton that I am coming soon to see him *privately*. I think that arrangement will suit both of us much better."

"Then you do not care to see your cousin Beatrice?" was the reproachful answer.

"Oh, I had forgotten! I beg pardon. But I do not know the others; and you know how I hate strangers."

"Yes; but all the same, you are paying but a poor compliment to either Beatrice or Reginald. Come, Harry; do not be unreasonable. It will help to civilise you; and *all* the Wiltons are worth knowing; so prepare to start."

"Yes, *do*," urged Cecil, "to please my aunt and me."

Thus pressed, Harry yielded; and the trio soon set out upon their expedition; which was

beguiled by horrible Crimean anecdotes, calculated to make Cecil shudder, and thank heaven that her brother had returned in safety.

"Oh, it must have been a dreadful time!" she exclaimed.

"I believe you; but it was good fun, too, occasionally; and I was glad to have a cut at those infernal Russians. But I can't do justice to the subject. You must ask Wilton, and he'll tell you all about it,—except his own share of the performances. Now, mind you cultivate him, Cecil."

"Oh, of course!" she answered, laughing, though the broad hint also made her blush again; and moreover, set her thinking about Reginald. Thinking about him, once more reminded her of the contrast between the two friends, and she felt almost ashamed to present Harry to the Wiltons; not for her own sake, but for his; for his deficiencies were so painfully apparent, even to her partial eyes, that she dreaded the effect they might produce on others; and would, if possible, have saved

him from such an ordeal. But it was *not* possible ; for, being such near neighbours, the two families must inevitably meet soon, if not that very day ; so perhaps it was as well to get the first shock over. And if Reginald were but half as kind as she imagined, he would surely do his utmost to soften any harsh impressions !

Consoling herself with these reflections, she contrived to look composed as usual, (although her heart was fluttering like a frightened bird,) upon entering the presence of the family at Stapleton. They were all assembled in the library ; Reginald being the centre of attraction ; and their entrance disturbed him in the midst of an interesting story.

Cecil could not account, even to herself, for the tremor which this second interview inspired, for there was nothing terrible in his appearance. On the contrary, she already liked and trusted him ; to say nothing of her girlish admiration for one at once so gallant and so handsome. Perhaps the very exalta-

tion of her feelings rendered her more humble and more diffident of pleasing, for when we are over-anxious to make a favourable impression, we not unfrequently mistrust our powers of doing so, and Cecil was desirous to please "Harry's friend."

But fortunately, her humility and shyness, instead of making her look awkward, only heightened her attractions; and Reginald, at least, found no deficiencies in the pretty girl who blushed so becomingly, and stole such a timid glance at him, as, saying gaily:

"Ah, we need no introduction. We have met before," he at once stepped forward, and took her hand.

No accomplished coquette could have played her part more skilfully than Cecil Leslie did in the simplicity of her heart; and the young, susceptible soldier yielded to her influence without a struggle.

"So you found your brother?" he said, smiling.

“Yes; and brought him here to see you.—
Harry!”

And she turned to call him forward; as seized with sudden and less graceful shyness at the sight of so many strangers, he was hanging back. Reginald shook hands with him.

“You arrived home safely then?” (Harry nodded significantly, thereby intimating that his reception had been rather less uncourteous than he had expected, and Reginald continued): “You are, I believe, already acquainted with my father and mother, so I have only to introduce you to my brother.”

Harry bowed, with the best grace he could assume; feeling a little more at ease when Mrs. Wilton, after a few kind words, delivered him over to the care of Beatrice, who received him with warmth, although his looks and manners secretly shocked her, for she saw the truth at once, and foreboded evil. Reginald had in some measure prepared her; yet still

she was deeply grieved for Cecil's sake, and at once resolved to try what her influence could effect for both.

In the meantime, Reginald was patiently replying to Mrs. Mordaunt's friendly greetings and congratulations; his answers, however, being occasionally not much to the purpose, whilst his eyes *would* stray in search of a little figure in a delicate half-mourning muslin dress; the said little figure being discovered in conversation with Mr. Wilton, who had playfully imprisoned both her hands.

"Oh, a pet of my father's! I am glad of that," thought Reginald, with inward satisfaction. "Something between a fairy and a child,—all grace and innocence,—and yet (from all I have seen and heard), quite a woman in good sense and feeling. When my mother wrote to recommend Harry Leslie to my notice, how little did I guess he had such a sister; or that the wild scapegrace I had already tried to help, was the object of such affectionate solicitude! Dear little thing!

What would I not give to shield her from a moment's unhappiness. So, for her sake, I must try harder yet; and would that the task were not so difficult!"

Whilst these thoughts were passing through his mind, their eyes met, and the little maiden blushed again; a few degrees deeper for the following remarks from Mr. Wilton:

"He is a fine fellow; is he not? You cannot help liking him; he is so clever and amusing."

So she thought, when, the party having settled down again, he resumed his narrative of Eastern adventures, quite unaffectedly, and as if with a desire of entertaining his hearers, rather than of increasing his own importance; an unusual trait in one who was made so much of, but which rendered his society doubly delightful.

Arthur, leaning back in the corner of a sofa (now his usual place), with Beatrice beside him, looked quite happy, and content to listen to a conversation in which he felt too languid

to take a very active share. Once, to see his younger brother the object of such general attention and admiration, whilst he himself was comparatively unnoticed, would have caused him the keenest pangs of jealousy ; but *now* he could not only endure it calmly, but was so far from thinking of himself,—his own requirements and deprivations,—that he honestly rejoiced in Reginald's good fortune, and the universal satisfaction created by his return. An observation which he had that morning made to Beatrice, may perhaps in some measure account for such a favourable change.

“Look at my mother,—how she follows Reginald from room to room, as though unable to endure his absence for a moment ! And my father !—neither can he bear to lose sight of his favourite son ! But, never fear, Beatrice, I do not mind it now,—now that *you* are all my own.”

Beatrice pressed his hand, and whispered :

“I can understand that, for I feel the same.

But it is only natural that Reginald should be first just at present ”

“Quite natural. I am only too glad that we are once more together. Once I thought— But never mind about that now,” he said, checking the words which were rising to his lips ; “I feared that we should never meet again.”

But Mrs. Mordaunt *did* give way to jealousy when she saw her own daughter made so much of by her husband’s family, that she seemed far more at home with them. than she had formerly been at Lynwood ; and unable, from the numerous claims on her attention, to exchange more than a few occasional words with her mother.

“Ah,” was the bitter thought awakened ; “she does not care for,—does not want *me* now ! Mrs. Wilton quite supplies *my* place in her affections ; and, except for Cecil, I am left alone. All are too happy here to desire my dismal company, so I will relieve them from its weight by going.”

Unjust to Beatrice and all the rest, though they might have been more pleased to see her had she appeared more cheerful, and less exacting withal ! But when she rose, she was warmly pressed to stay ; though she steadily declined the invitation, and Harry was too thankful to escape.

Upon leaving the house, they encountered Mr. Mordaunt, who had also walked over to see Reginald ; and who looked exceedingly angry, and muttered some half excuse upon being detected in such an unwonted act of politeness.

Cecil sighed as she passed out through the gates of Stapleton, for she had been well contented and amused, and was reluctant to leave so pleasant a party,—even when she might hope to see them all again so soon. Reginald Wilton had found a moment to apologise once more for his unceremonious greeting of the preceding day ; though, of course, she knew, and so did he, that the facts required no further explanation. But, perhaps it was an

excuse for a little confidential conversation; or her blushes were so becoming that he thought it a pity they should not be recalled; and therefore took that step in the hope of bringing them back to her cheek; in which case his trouble was rewarded. At any rate, he succeeded in making her think about him all the way home, and for some time afterwards; and her thoughts were in no-wise to his disadvantage, for she believed him to be a very hero of romance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SYMPATHY AKIN TO LOVE.

My lighter moods are like to these,
That out of words a comfort win.
But there are other griefs within,
And tears that at their fountain freeze.

TENNYSON'S IN MEMORIAM.

A DAY seldom passed without some members, either of the Lynwood or Stapleton family, going to see the others ; and Cecil and Reginald were soon on terms of intimacy ; the mutual liking which had sprung into life at first sight, continuing to increase, instead of diminishing, upon further acquaintance. Reginald found it absolutely necessary to pay frequent visits to Lynwood, to look up *Harry* Leslie, as he

said, though he never left without having also spent some little time in company with Harry's sister ; a proof of his good taste, for she was certainly by far the more intellectual companion of the two ; and, moreover, had always a pleasant smile of welcome when he came. There was only one drawback to his happiness in her society, and that was occasioned by the sad, anxious look, which seemed too habitual, and which always settled down upon her countenance, the moment that they began to talk of Harry. It was more distressing than surprising that such should be the case, for her brother had fallen into his old disorderly habits, and there was scarcely a day in which some misunderstanding with his uncle, or other annoyance, did not arise to trouble Cecil's peace.

Beatrice once more undertook the task of reasoning with Harry, and endeavouring to persuade him to get some employment ; and Reginald had many and many a long conversation with him on the subject, in which he

promised all the influence of his family to assist him in obtaining any kind of appointment which might be considered suitable, but without avail; for though Harry always declared himself extremely grateful for the kindness of his friends, the business never made any perceptible progress.

So long as he was not actually turned out of his uncle's house, he seemed contented to remain there, spite of all the hints and insults lavished upon him by Mr. Mordaunt, though he frequently complained to Reginald of such ill-treatment. He sometimes asserted that his situation was beyond endurance, and that he was ready to go anywhere—do anything for the sake of independence; but when urged to put his design into immediate execution, he had always some good reason for delaying a little longer. In fact, he seemed utterly helpless, and incapable of forming any plans.

“You ought to set to work in earnest, Leslie,” urged his friend. “For your sister's sake. You cannot tell how miserable you

render her by your lawless ways, or I am sure you would make an effort to do something different."

Such remonstrances affected Harry for the moment, and sometimes even brought tears of remorse into his eyes ; but unfortunately the effect was never permanent ; and half an hour afterwards he would be once more loitering about the village, associating with low companions, entering into idle practical jokes, and drinking and smoking far more than was good for him. And this after just observing :

" Yes, Wilton ; you are right ; I *am* a good-for-nothing fellow, and I know that poor Cecil feels it very much. I will endeavour to be steady. Only advise me, and I promise to do whatever you please."

Such a person could not possibly be considered an agreeable companion, and yet Reginald actually seemed to court his society—in the hope of keeping him out of mischief, and thus averting some impending catastrophe ; though it seemed impossible that this state of

affairs could go on much longer. And in the meantime it effectually destroyed the pleasure which family meetings would otherwise have afforded; often even preventing the Mordaunts from dining at Stapleton,—because Harry could not be left behind with safety, and they felt too much ashamed of him to take him there.

All this, Cecil felt keenly and bitterly, just as she felt Reginald's kindness with the deepest gratitude; though, much as she always desired to see him, a painful sense of humiliation often made her feel as if she would rather have avoided the meeting; as he partly guessed by her shrinking, nervous air, and the evident reluctance with which she mentioned Harry. Reginald became more and more interested in her; insomuch that it soon appeared to him as though no attention on his part could half atone for all that she had suffered; and what he could do to comfort or amuse her, speedily became his constant thought.

That she liked him, took pleasure in, and looked forward to enjoying, his society, he had never doubted; and daily her hold on his affections strengthened; so that before he had been at home a month, love for Cecil Leslie was the most deeply rooted feeling of his heart.

It was impossible that she should not divine this; and her secret conviction that she was no longer *alone*—neglected, or but partially comprehended—in a great measure atoned for all her trials; and if she could but have seen Harry settled—steady, she would have thought herself too happy. But to such a desired consummation, his conduct proved the surest bar.

“Cecil,” Harry would knowingly observe, “you will have no further occasion to bother yourself about me soon. I can see how matters are progressing, and when—when—” (with a significant nod) “you are Mrs. Reginald Wilton, what I do won’t matter in the least. Fancy you married! how ridiculous it seems.

But all the same I shall be very glad ; and will not the governor be enraged to find that you have slipped so nicely out of his power ? I should like to see his face when he first hears the news ; for when you are married, and I settled somewhere comfortably on my own account, he will not know what to do, for want of some one to torment."

"Harry, how can you be so foolish?"

"And why foolish, pray ? It is but the truth, and everybody knows it too ; so there is no use in trying to look so innocent. I was talking to Beatrice about it yesterday, and she laughed and looked as pleased as anything ; in fact, she owned that it was just what she had wished—to have you for a sister. And in my opinion, you will be by far the best off of the two ; though you must not tell her so on any account."

"Do you think it likely?" answered Cecil ; half amused and half annoyed by Harry's nonsense ; but following her usual plan of letting him talk on as much as he pleased, for

the sake of keeping him a few moments longer in her sight.

"Why, no ; not very. But, that Arthur Wilton is not half so good a fellow as his brother. He seems good-natured enough, but rather slow,—and fine, I think. At any rate I can't get on with him so well."

"You don't do him justice. He is ill, you know," said Cecil ; "and that is the reason why he is so quiet."

"Consumptive ! I can see the hectic on his cheeks ; and has he not a hollow cough ?" cried Harry, with a degree of levity which was very painful to his sister. "Does he mean to make a die of it, Cis ? He does not look as if he could hold on much longer."

"Hush ! How can you talk so ? Mind you never let his brother hear you ; they have always been so much attached to one another. And I *hope*,—I pray God, he may live on for some time yet, for—all their sakes, and especially for that of Beatrice."

"And so do I. How odd ! I had forgot-

ten *her*. It seems so strange to think she is *his* wife; and I am always on the point of saying something that I should not do. I believe" (with a laugh), "I *did* commit myself the other day."

"How? Oh, do be careful!" exclaimed Cecil, in alarm.

"Why, we were talking together, when all at once, she said she must return to Arthur, which *I* thought a bore. So without thinking, I called out, 'Oh, never mind *him*! It is time he learned to take care of himself; and you make as much fuss with him as if—' 'As if *what*?' she asked rather sharply. 'Do you not know that he is far from strong, and if *I* should not look after him, who should?' or something to that effect; and I saw her change colour as she spoke; so *then* I remembered that he was her husband, and I felt foolish enough to have made such a slip. I was going to apologise, or something, but she added quickly: 'Never mind; you were speaking without thinking.' And off she

went into the house at once, leaving me to wonder whether she was angry or no; but it was all right the next time we met."

"I am glad of that," said Cecil, with a sigh of relief: "but, dear Harry, do be careful not to hurt her feelings."

"Oh, I would not for the world. But *accidents* will happen now and then."

"Too true," thought Cecil. "Would that it were otherwise!"

And a painful conviction of the unfavourable light in which her brother was regarded by others was once more forced upon her mind; followed by the anxious, and constantly recurring question,—how was he to be improved?

She was one day sadly revolving these thoughts, whilst engaged in clipping and trimming the few plants in the little greenhouse: it appearing to her that Reginald alone could be of use in this emergency; and she was wishing that she could see, and summon courage to tell him all she felt, when,

upon turning, she suddenly became aware that he was at the door. Tears were in her eyes; and spite of her efforts to conceal them, as she turned, the glittering drops rolled down. Reginald observed them with concern, and, taking her hand, said earnestly:

“I fear I have startled you,—but I thought I might come here.”

“Oh, yes,” said Cecil, trying to smile. “I should be very sorry if you stayed away.”

“Then,—if it is so,—will you tell me what has troubled you? Do let me try to help you. It is so wretched to see *you* sorrowful.”

He still held her hand, which was cold and trembling; and looking into her pale, child-like face, longed for a right to fold her to his heart, and bid her there sob her griefs away. He *did* kiss the little soft white hand he clasped in his, and then, stroking it tenderly, as though it had been a tiny, fluttering bird, fixed his eyes steadfastly upon her, whilst awaiting her reply.

The pale face grew more rosy, and she

looked shyly down; but she made no effort to withdraw her hand. It seemed so great a comfort to have it held fast by one so strong as that of Reginald, that she was content to leave it in his keeping;—at least, during the few moments in which she was searching for a suitable reply. Words would not come so readily as she had but a short time before imagined: and moreover, his *more* than kindness proved so overpowering, that she scarce dared trust herself to speak. She felt that he was watching her with the deepest interest, and she felt also the warm pressure of his hand; and at length, with a fresh overflow of tears, she managed to gasp out the one word:

“Harry!”

“Ah!” said Reginald, “that was what I feared. Has he—been causing you any fresh uneasiness?”

Cecil drew away her hand, and twisting the two nervously together, still seemed unable or unwilling to reply. But finally, with a half-sob:

“No:—that is,—*you* know him, and his disposition; so I need not tell you what I fear. Oh, if you could but help him!”

“You may be sure I *would*. Surely, Miss Leslie does not doubt my *willingness*?”

“After all that you have already done for him! Oh, no! You cannot think so! *That* would be impossible! But—”

“He ought not to stay here. This place, and his indolent, unsettled mode of life, are especially dangerous to—(may I say it?)—one so easily led for good or evil. I have told him so, and he agrees with me; but the difficulty is, how to persuade him to set to work in earnest. He ought to seek some employment which would remove him to a distance. I would do so for him, if I thought that it would be of any use.”

“Ah! if you would!” cried Cecil, eagerly. “But you are afraid that if it *were* provided, it would be in vain. He is so changeable,—and has so great a fear of trouble.”

Reginald was silent for a minute, then he asked :

“ Suppose I were to speak to your uncle ? Would that be of any good ? ”

“ I have also thought about it. He is very peculiar, and I doubt whether anybody understands him ; but I have observed that he will listen to you, when all other people find their efforts wasted. *I* have no influence with him, nor has Beatrice *now*—”

“ Because,” he interrupted hastily, “ she was constant to *my* brother. And, God bless her for it ! But—I beg your pardon.”

“ I was saying,” continued Cecil, “ that no one *here* has any influence with my uncle. I daresay you are aware of that. But he likes *you* ;—he thinks highly of you ; for I have heard him speak more favourably of Capt. Wilton, than of any other person in the world.”

“ Indeed ! He does me honour,” was the dry remark. “ If, however, I *have* any influ-

ence, you may be sure that I will use it. Empty professions do no one any service, otherwise I might have added that I would try *anything* to make *you* happier."

As he spoke, he again took her hand, and pressed it with all the warmth of genuine feeling. "Oh, Miss Leslie, this is such sad work for you."

"Say rather, for *him*!" she interposed, looking gratefully and confidingly at Reginald. "It is far worse for him, although he may not feel it so deeply. But I fear he *will*."

"Do not despair," replied her companion, assuming (to cheer her,) a more hopeful air. "I must think the matter over; *then* I will do my best. Let us take a turn round the garden, whilst we talk about it."

Cecil assented; and found him so kind, so gentle, and so sympathising, that she was insensibly led on to confide all her fears and wishes to one who seemed so sincerely interested in her welfare. It was such a blessing

to have someone to look up to when in trouble, someone good, and strong enough to help her, that she could have walked by his side the whole day long, and still talked on, and felt no constraint or weariness. After her long, dreary sojourn at her uncle's house, with no one (since Beatrice married,) to enter into all she thought and felt, Reginald had suddenly appeared to rouse her from despondency; and she had every reason to believe that the love which he had awakened in her heart was returned;—a belief which (as we have hinted before,) would have made her very happy—if it had not been for Harry. Even now, though talking over such a serious and perplexing subject, she felt a satisfaction long unknown to her; and gradually began almost to fancy that Reginald possessed the power, as he did the will, to bring it to a happy termination.

“It should be something light, but calculated to furnish him with regular employment. I will speak to Harry, and to Mr. Mordaunt;

and then, if *they* will not take any steps in the business, *I* will look out for something on my own responsibility," he said, at last. "I have *your* sanction, have I not?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! And if you are successful—"

"Some one, whose esteem I value, will not look coldly on me for my pains, and tell me that I have done the wrong thing, after all? And if I fail, she will still be merciful? May I not hope that such will be the case?"

"Oh! you do not know what a relief it is to hear you speak so confidently! What a comfort to find anybody ready to—" began Cecil; but she found it impossible to proceed, and could only fill up the blank by an expressive look, and movement of her hands.

Reginald perceived that her heart was too full to permit her to speak openly of what she felt, and judged it best to change the subject for the present; so, after they had taken a few steps in silence, he resumed the conversation, by observing:—

"You must miss your cousin. Lynwood is not a very cheerful place."

"No; though one becomes used to anything in time. I *did* miss her,—I still continue to do so, very, very much; and I do not think I shall ever be quite reconciled to the change; though when she is at Stapleton, I see her frequently, and have the comfort of knowing that she is happy."

"Do you think she *is*?" asked Reginald, with sudden earnestness.

"Why should you doubt it?" was the half evasive answer, for Cecil guessed the reason of this question. "She always cared for Arthur, and desired to be his wife."

"I know it, and I do not doubt for an instant that they are devoted to each other. But that is exactly why I doubt her happiness. Have not *you* observed that she is changed? It is useless denying it, for you *have*."

"She is certainly thinner, paler, and more anxious. More grave and thoughtful she could not be."

"Then she was changed when you first came here, for she used to be all gaiety and spirit."

"There has been so much to trouble her of late years."

"True; but there is a wild look in her eyes at times; a sort of feverish restlessness, and—how shall I describe my meaning?—a something which seems to indicate that she is ill at ease. It is as though she dreaded some approaching evil, and she follows Arthur like his shadow. Her eyes are seldom turned away from him, and their expression is so full of mingled love and fear, that I too am infected by a vague alarm. Yet *he* seems better, both in health and spirits, although he seldom walks much now. He is weak, I know, and never can be strong; but—tell me,—*do* tell me, is there any danger? He looks quite calm and happy, far more so than formerly; and therefore he cannot be uneasy about himself. He says he does not wish to settle any where at present, and perhaps he

is right, for constant change is often of the greatest use; and when he desires to feel at home, the old house at Stapleton is large enough for all. We should be too glad to keep him and Beatrice altogether. But, do not deceive me, for I wish to know the *truth*. Have you heard any thing from Beatrice, or—You are silent. Tell me, for Heaven's sake, what you know or guess."

Reginald's manner had become more and more agitated as he proceeded, and when he at length paused, Cecil saw that tears were standing in his eyes. She knew how deeply attached to Arthur he had always been, and feared to tell him, yet felt she ought to do so, for Beatrice had more than hinted at the truth.

She recollected one conversation in particular, in the course of which her cousin had suddenly clasped her hand tightly, and looking at her with the wild, restless expression Reginald had just described, said:—

"Oh! I feel sometimes as if I were dream-

ing, and it is a dreadful dream. I must lose him, Cecil; we both know that his life is surely (if slowly, but it is not slowly, for the moments seems to fly,) passing away from me. And afterwards?"

It had been vain to offer words of comfort, for the young wife was convinced that he whom she loved better than all else on earth was dying. It might be months first; it might even be a year or more before he left her, or it might be much sooner. That was still uncertain; but one thing was sure—that the end was drawing near. And, (as Beatrice had said to Cecil,) afterwards, what then? The widow—left in the very bloom of youth and beauty, with every warm feeling, every capability of enjoyment, still in full vigour,—it was sad to think of her,—and who dared sketch out the probable outline of her future life? Oh! it was a very, very dreary prospect. The storms which rage in winter are not half so terrible, as those which strew the rose-leaves on the ground, and leave

that which was so lately a bright, fragrant garden, but a scene of desolation ; and such are the comparative misfortunes of old age and youth ; for the former, being inevitable, are expected, whilst the latter fall with sudden, and consequently, overwhelming force. Cecil felt this, and had hitherto grieved most for Beatrice ; but now she shared all Reginald's solicitude for Arthur ; though she still felt that he required less pity.

“ He has been very ill. You know that ? ” were the first words she could bring herself to utter.

“ Yes ; it was after my father's sad accident ; anxiety and over-exertion brought on what nearly proved a fatal attack. But I am speaking now about his present state ; and I turn to you because I dread concealment elsewhere. Little do they think that it is but false kindness on their part, to endeavour to hide that which sooner or later must be known. Beatrice, I dare not question, and my mother only

evades my enquiries ; gently entreating me to hope the best. Yet I can see plainly that she does not hope ; and by degrees this feeling has so grown upon me, that uncertainty is far more terrible than the most painful reality. Why then, add to my misery, by prolonging this suspense ? Put yourself in my position ; fancy for one moment that it is *your* brother we are speaking of, and I am sure, Miss Leslie, you will then be able to realise my feelings. Would *you* wish the truth to be concealed ?”

Cecil sighed deeply, and dared not meet his enquiring glance, as, reluctantly, she answered :

“ No !”

“ Nor would *I* torture *you* by such concealment. Tell me then whatever you may have heard.”

Thus pressed, she spoke the truth ; Reginald listening with his head slightly bent, and his eyes fixed upon the ground ; for he did not wish her to see how much he was affected by this sad intelligence ; but she never doubted

that—even though he asserted that any certainty was preferable to suspense,—this confirmation of his fears would cause him the acutest sorrow: and she sorrowed for the pain he caused her to inflict.

He was silent for a short time after she ceased speaking, and gently as the intelligence had been conveyed, it had seemed so bitter, that it was not without a struggle that he regained sufficient calmness to say at last:

“My only brother! But God knows what is best. Poor Beatrice!” He sighed, and added after a short pause: “And this should be another bond of union. Miss Leslie, we can feel for one another; and why not—”

But he was not destined to conclude the sentence; or at that very moment, he and Cecil might have vowed to share each other's troubles; for the thicker the misfortunes which were gathering round them, the stronger grew their mutual love, and the more closely did they cling to one another.

The reason of this sudden pause, was that

his quick ear caught the sound of Mr. Mor-daunt's voice,—an ill-timed interruption, as both thought ; and turning with a resigned air to meet him, Reginald said quietly :

“ I had more to say, but I must reserve it till another time ;—perhaps to-morrow. And now, I will try to introduce a word or two about your brother.”

Cecil looked her thanks, and left him to join her uncle, whilst she went into the house ; stopping, however, beneath the verandah to watch Reginald's tall, well-formed figure, and to listen to the last tones of his voice, before he passed out of sight and hearing.

“ So kind,—so full of all true manly feeling ! It is very sad that he must suffer too !” she thought. “ But my trouble is the heaviest, because shame is mingled with my grief. God help us both !”

CHAPTER XIX.

STORM AND SUNSHINE.

They called me fool, they called me child;
I found an angel of the night,
The voice was low, the look was bright;
He looked upon my crown and smiled.

He reached the glory of a hand,
That seemed to touch it into leaf;
The voice was not the voice of grief;
The words were hard to understand.

IN MEMORIAM.

CECIL was in no doubt as to Reginald's feelings towards her; but still, it was only natural that she should wish to hear them explicitly declared, and to feel that they were firmly bound to one another. When he had once spoken, she knew that she should feel quite at

ease,—secure in the love and protection of so true a heart; and she longed, too, for a right to pour forth all her own loving, grateful sentiments; therefore, she waited with impatience for the morrow.

She had half hoped to see him again before he left; but Mr. Mordaunt completely monopolised his attention during the remainder of his visit; finally coming in alone, and leaving her still in ignorance as to the result of their conversation about Harry,—if indeed, they had mentioned him at all. That Reginald would, if possible, do so, seemed certain; but whether her uncle would evade the question, or listen for a moment only to give way to irritation, was more doubtful; and instead of feeling relieved, for the whole of that afternoon and evening, she felt doubly anxious about her brother. Yet through all her troubles flashed a hope,—a happy consciousness of being the object of affectionate solicitude, and she passed from dark reveries to brighter dreams.

And Harry, reckless as he was, should not

be lost ! Reginald would save him ; their joint efforts would surely have power to recall more manly feelings, and to save him from his worst enemy—himself. *Then*, there would be a home for him, and a noble example ever before his eyes ; and it was impossible that he should still prefer an idle aimless life ! Cecil was determined not to lose heart. She *would* hope.

When morning came, she could not settle down to any occupation, so convinced was she that he would soon arrive ; but Harry and his uncle fidgetted in and out continually ; her aunt came down complaining of a violent headache ; she was obliged to rouse herself and attend to their requirements ; the hours passed on, and still no Reginald appeared. Disappointed, for more reasons than one, she endeavoured to console herself by the reflection :

“ I was foolish to be so impatient. He has been delayed, but will come this afternoon.”

But afternoon came, and he did *not*. Her

disappointment increased, and gradually deepened into absolute anxiety, for it seemed so strange that he should stay away. Under these circumstances, she felt unwilling to go to Stapleton, fancying that such a step would have an air of forwardness; and though longing for an interview, if it pleased him to withhold it, she was too modest to seem to insist upon one. If her aunt had proposed the expedition, then the case would have been entirely altered; but she preferred suspense to going there alone.

“It will all be explained when he *does* come,” she thought, “and therefore I will endeavour to wait patiently.”

Accordingly, she sat down and hemmed a handkerchief for Mr. Mordaunt; and then, growing weary of remaining still, stole out, and leaning against the garden gate, looked wistfully along the fields which led to Stapleton. But no one came. At length—a figure! Could it be?—No, it was only Harry, who, hot and excited, came towards her in a hur-

ried, impetuous manner, which she knew foreboded evil. Her face flushed painfully, and she could only await his approach in silence, and with a beating heart.

"I can't stand this any longer!" were his first words. "It is just the old story. He has been bothering and bullying as usual, until—the end of it is, I will not stand it any longer."

"What! Who has? My uncle?" gasped poor Cecil.

"Yes, of course. Who else should? And I swear I will not."

"Harry! Pray do nothing rashly. Speak to Reginald—to Captain Wilton,—before you make any resolutions."

"Why, what good could *he* do?" answered Harry, roughly. "I mean, what good could *anybody* do me whilst I stay in this infernal place. He himself said, that if I intended to get free, I must help myself; and so I will, before I am much older."

"But speak quietly to me. Tell me first,"

said Cecil, soothingly, "what has happened to excite you now? It is but two hours since I last saw you."

"Yes; but a great deal of business may be done in two hours, especially when one has to deal with that confounded—"

"Oh, hush, Harry! You are angry, and it makes you quite forget."

"Forget what? Come! explain yourself!"

"I will;—what is due, both to your uncle and yourself."

He laughed derisively.

"To *him*! I wish he had *his* due! I am angry, am I? And with reason too! He has insulted me; so now, good bye! I am going," was the wild answer, as, bestowing a half kiss on Cecil, he abruptly turned away.

Cecil remembered the time when he had said so once before, and a sudden terror seized upon her.

"Harry! Stay! One moment! Let me

“speak to you,” she cried, springing forward, and clinging to his arm.

But he would not listen ! her weak hold was shaken off, and in another minute he was far away ; hurrying across the fields towards Stapleton. Inspired with a vague dread, she at first stood watching him, with a feeling of utter helplessness. Where was he going ? What could she do to save him from the consequences of his angry passions ? Oh, if Reginald were only near ! Should she go in quest of the only person who could help her in this new emergency ? No ; for by so doing, she would lose time, and her brother might escape. She was losing time then ; but would delay no longer. She would follow Harry.

This thought had no sooner darted across her mind, than away she flew in pursuit of the fugitive, who was, however so far in advance, that, spite of her utmost efforts, she soon lost sight of him ; and coming to a spot where two paths branched in different directions, found herself at fault. One led to

Stapleton; the other to a village two miles off; and she paused at once to take breath, and weary herself with vain conjectures as to which he was most likely to have taken. But finding that it was impossible to obtain a glimpse of him, she finally decided upon following the first-named track: continuing her course with far less energy and speed.

The day was sultry; heavy clouds had gathered, and all the mornings she had heard the sound of distant thunder. Now it drew near and nearer, and a few large drops of rain began to fall. She looked up at the sky and wondered whether he were near to shelter; but as for herself, it never once occurred to her that unless she hastened onwards, she ran the risk of being overtaken by a violent storm. In fact, it would not have made much difference if she had, for she was already so weary that she found it impossible to quicken her steps; and at length was obliged fairly to halt, and lean against a gate to rest.

But whether resting or hurrying onwards,

still her anxious eyes kept wandering in search of Harry, and her pale face bore witness to her bodily and mental suffering. It grew darker ; a blaze of lightning, brilliant, though not very near, half dazzled her, while a long, deep roll of thunder shook the ground. It was evident that it would soon close overhead ; and quitting her resting place, in all the more haste that a tall tree bent over it, she exerted herself to the utmost to reach Stapleton before the storm increased.

Another field had to be crossed before she reached Mr. Wilton's grounds ; and again a flash more vivid, and followed by a loud, reverberating peal, fell on her ears, ere she had traversed half the distance. She started, and pausing, measured the intervening space with her eye ; thereby perceiving that a figure was approaching the stile towards which her steps were bent. She at once felt her sinking spirits reviving ; and even a faint smile dawned upon her countenance, as she again hastened forward, thinking :

“It is he! Coming in search of me, I know. Now he will help me, and all may yet be well.”

Even whilst these thoughts were passing through her mind, he also caught sight of her, as she guessed by the increased speed at which he advanced; and almost immediately afterwards, they met.

He at once saw that something was the matter; and taking her hand, exclaimed upon the impulse of the moment:

“My darling! You are frightened. What has happened?”

She was scarcely surprised to hear him call her by so fond a name; the only feeling of which she was conscious, being the relief of finding him so near; and she answered breathlessly:

“He is gone again; some new misunderstanding,—but I know not what. I was wishing for you; and now—”

But here a third flash of lightning, and a peal of thunder interrupted her, and without losing

another moment, Reginald drew her arm through his, and began to lead her quickly towards the house.

“I understand. But we shall have a heavy storm, and it is not fit for you to remain out in it, so I shall convey you to a place of safety; then you can explain yourself more fully, and I will set out instantly in search of Harry.”

“But it would be equally dangerous for you.”

“Oh, never fear for me! I am pretty well accustomed to all sorts of weather, and my first care must be to find your truant. Poor little thing! How much you have to suffer!” he exclaimed compassionately, and drawing her still closer to his side. “And this thin dress of yours will be quite wet through.”

“That will not matter much,” said Cecil, soothed by his protecting presence. “But shall I tell you all I know of this affair?”

Reginald answered in the affirmative, and she soon gave him a slight sketch of it;—all

the more brief, that her knowledge was so limited; and when she had concluded, he endeavoured to re-assure her.

“You may trust in me. For I promise to find him, and will endeavour to make matters smooth; and then by some means or other we must get him off. This continued uncertainty will never do. I spoke to Mr. Mordaunt yesterday, and he quite agreed with all I said, though, as I expected, he would settle nothing. So you and I must hold another consultation.”

“Ah, I wanted so much to hear what you had done.”

“And thought it strange I never came this morning? I *was* coming; but just before I set out, Arthur had a sudden and rather alarming attack of faintness, and I did not like to leave the house; but happily he is much better now. I think,—I *hope*, it was only the oppressive heat.”

“I was afraid that something of importance had detained you,” replied Cecil, in a tone of

deep concern. "And I need not tell you how sorry I am to hear such sad news."

"No; for I think I comprehend your feelings, as fully as you must comprehend the reason why nothing of less moment could have prevented my coming to see you earlier. You can guess my meaning?"

He looked earnestly at her; and she, who was all truthfulness, would not appear to misunderstand him, but answered in a low tone, whilst her colour rose:

"I think so."

"And you are willing to unite your fate with mine?"

"I am."

"My own dear Cecil! I will try to make you happy! Ah, there was a flash! Come on as quick as possible." He passed his arm around her. "Let me help you, for you seem so tired."

She was glad to let him do so, for she was scarcely capable of walking unassisted; but

amidst the storm without, and the trouble within her mind, she was buoyed up by one happy thought, and even felt a kind of enjoyment stealing over her, as she went onwards, leaning on her future husband's arm. A strong safe resting-place in all her trouble! They gained the house just as the rain began to pour down; and as soon as they were safely in the hall, he clasped her to his heart in a long, tender embrace; the seal of an engagement entered upon under circumstances of so trying a nature.

Fortunately, no inquisitive servants were at hand, to disconcert them by their sudden appearance, or carry their comments upon what had occurred, to entertain their companions in the servants' hall. No-one was near; and thus Reginald was free to utter such endearing words as the occasion called forth, whilst Cecil had leisure to recover from her first excitement. He had made her rest upon the nearest seat, and having placed himself

at her feet upon the lowest of the steps which raised the organ from the chequered pavement, he began to converse in a low and earnest tone ; the hall being now almost darkened by the storm which was raging round the house, except when lighted up by the brilliant flashes, which every moment became more and more vivid and frequent.

Each flash brought out Cecil's pale, though now tranquil face, in strong relief from the sombre background, and disclosed the handsome, eager countenance of Reginald, upturned to meet her eyes, whilst they talked. But after some little time had thus elapsed, he half rose, saying :

" I will set out now. Let me take you to my mother, and promise to wait quietly till I return."

" I will ;—but, oh !" (as a terrible peal of thunder shook the windows,) " you must not go now. You shall not leave me until the storm is over, for Harry has surely found

shelter somewhere ; and even if not, you could not help him. Stay here, or I shall be miserable."

She clasped his hand to prevent him putting his project into execution ; and he, nothing loth, yielded readily to her winning words and touch ; answering with a smile as he resumed his seat :

"Should you ? How pleasant it is to be made of such importance ! But if I do stay, tell me your wishes ; and I will do my best to remove the cause of your distress. Poor little darling ! you are not fit to encounter unassisted the griefs and trials of this stormy world ;—nor shall you in future, if I have my will. It grieves me to the heart to think how much you have already suffered, whilst I was at a distance,—powerless to aid you. Had there not been a strong heart within this delicate little frame, I think you must utterly have broken down."

"Nay," she whispered, "it was not my

own strength which upheld me. There was higher aid at hand."

"I understand; and your religious feelings seem to give you more courage than many a strong man possesses."

"They are our surest stay in the time of trouble. Have *you* not found such to be the case?" she answered with an enquiring glance; and he, man and soldier as he was, had too much real manliness to be ashamed to answer fervently :

"I have indeed."

These few words made Cecil happier than all the rest, for she felt that there was unity in their hearts upon a point of the utmost importance; and which would influence the whole tenor of their future lives.

In about half an hour, the violence of the storm abated, and then Reginald, (though not without reluctance,) rose again; and professed his intention of setting out at once; Cecil, though equally unwilling to lose his society,

this time offering no opposition. So he took her by the hand, and led her to his mother.

Mrs. Wilton was alone ; engaged in writing letters ; but she looked up with a smile of welcome when they entered, and seemed by no means surprised by Reginald's first words :

"Mother ; I have brought my wife."

"Seriously ?" she asked, embracing Cecil.

"Yes ; seriously. She has promised," he replied ; whilst Cecil blushed, and Mrs. Wilton said with animation :

"She is a dear child, and I am very, very glad."

"I never doubted that.—And now I am going to look for Harry,—who has had some sort of quarrel with his uncle. But I must not stay to talk about it. I am losing time ; so you must make her tell you all ; and take good care of her till I return."

He went, and Cecil was glad to have an opportunity of speaking, both about her joys and sorrows, to one who had already proved so true a friend. In return, her sympathy was

claimed for Arthur; about whom it was evident that Mrs. Wilton was extremely anxious; though she endeavoured to make light of her fears, by constantly repeating :

“It is nothing. Nothing new, I mean; though it alarmed us all at the moment; especially poor Beatrice, who has never left him since. But he is subject to attacks of faintness; and the heat and thunder might have something to do with it.”

“Ah, so Reginald thought,” was the reply.

“Did he say so? I am glad of that,” returned Mrs. Wilton, with an eagerness which showed how ready she was to catch at any ray of hope. “Would you like to see Arthur? He is lying on the sofa in his dressing-room, but I daresay Beatrice will admit you for a moment.”

They ascended the stairs together, and were admitted to the presence of the invalid, who looked very pale and faint, though he endeavoured to say a few cheerful words to Cecil.

“ So you find me down as usual, whilst you have ventured here on such a stormy day ! Did you get wet ? It was hardly fit for you to come.”

This was no time for explanations, so Cecil tried to look easy and indifferent, whilst she answered :

“ The storm had not begun when I set out, and I did not observe the heavy appearance of the sky. It rained a little when I was nearly here, but, fortunately, I got in just in time.”

Arthur smiled significantly at Beatrice, who was sitting close beside him ; and a faint smile flitted across her weary, anxious countenance in answer ; as though they fancied they knew what attraction had drawn her thither.

“ That was well,” exclaimed the latter. “ But I think you want some one to look after you,” she continued, with an attempt at gaiety.

“Ah, where is Reginald, by the bye?” asked Arthur.

Cecil coloured, and, for various reasons, made no answer.

“Sit down, Cissy dear,” said Beatrice.

“But I shall tire Arthur, shall I not? I only came to see if he was better.”

“No, no! You will not. Do not go,” he pleaded; as she turned to leave the room with Mrs. Wilton, who was going down again to finish her letters.

So she changed her mind, and sat down; contriving to enter into such a quiet, desultory kind of conversation as Arthur’s state permitted; listening eagerly all the time for voices or footsteps.

But pre-occupied as she was, she could still spare a few compassionate thoughts for Beatrice, whose happiness seemed upon the point of being blighted for ever; and the image of Reginald,—strong, hopeful, full of life and vigour,—vividly impressed upon her mind,

rendered the spectacle of Arthur, lying pale and helpless on his sofa, doubly affecting.

“So young and talented, and above all, so deeply *loved*;—and yet he is doomed to an early death! Why should it be so? Life is indeed a mystery.”

She suppressed a sigh as this reflection was suggested, for fear they might guess the reason of her sadness; but it seemed wrong at that moment for her to indulge in happy anticipations. And not only wrong, but presumptuous; for who could tell what the future had in store? Some unforeseen sorrow might yet embitter the whole course of her life; she might lose Reginald—or Harry might bring shame and grief upon them both; or—there were numberless vague dangers ready to start up unbidden, and cover her new hopes with their impenetrable gloom.

Upon the walls hung some of Arthur's pictures; and whilst struggling with the depression which was fast gaining dominion over her, she suffered her eyes to rove from

one to another, until they rested upon a bright Italian scene,—so full of life, and warmth, and sunshine, that now it moved her almost to tears. The fair landscape, and the glorious blue sea beyond; the rich masses of trees, and above all, the groups of figures in the foreground,—some all joyous animation, as they seemed to dance, converse, or touch some sweet musical instrument, whilst others reclined with an air of more languid enjoyment upon the marble steps of a classical portico,—instead of (as was intended), exciting pleasurable feelings, only awoke those of the most melancholy nature;—so painful was the contrast between the actual situation of the young painter, and the imaginary scene created by his hand. It was a relief to turn to two pictures of a very different description; one, a wild sea-piece, with a dismasted vessel drifting helplessly before the storm; sea birds screaming around, and gigantic billows tossing their foam on high;—the other a desolate, iron-bound coast, where the sullen waves rolled

on, and broke upon the beach ;—(you might fancy you heard their hollow thunder, and could feel the salt spray dashing in your face) ; the sky was lowering, but not all dark, as in the first-named painting, for there was a dim red glow on the horizon, lighting up a stranded wreck ;—the miserable remains of the same goodly vessel.

Arthur perceived both that she was gazing at them, and that her glance was sad ; and waving his hand towards them, said with a half-smile :

“ Dreary, perhaps, but true to nature ;—especially the fate of that gallant ship. ‘ *Telle est la vie !* ’ There is nothing new in the idea. I daresay you have often seen the same symbol engraved upon a seal ? ”

“ I have ;—but the working out of it is masterly.”

“ Because I painted feelingly. The subject interested me ; I had both seen and felt something like it, and consequently met with more success than usual. I think it is impossible

ever to attain excellence,—in art, at least,—unless our feelings, as well as our judgment, are engaged.”

Cecil pointed to the other picture,—the bright, sunny landscape, and replied :

“I agree with you. And you must have felt *that* too; otherwise the sight of it would not affect others,—would not have affected me as it has done.”

“Has it? And why? Explain the kind of feeling that it awakens,” said Arthur, rousing himself, and speaking with somewhat of the enthusiasm which his love of art had formerly kept burning in his breast; but which had of late been but a low, smouldering fire.

She was embarrassed how to answer; for she could not reveal to him the nature of the thoughts which had been in reality passing through her mind; and she began to wish that she had not remarked upon the picture. He awaited her explanation with his eyes fixed earnestly upon her, and she feared to

delay longer, lest her silence might lead him to divine the truth. She was beginning to say something not much to the purpose, when a sound below,—the wished-for sound of voices,—diverted her attention; and with a sudden flush of expectation, and the not very comprehensible exclamation: “Oh, I hear them! They are come!” she rose to leave the room.

Arthur looked surprised, and Beatrice followed her to ask:

“Who? What has excited you all at once?”

Cecil took her hand, and drew her out into the passage; closing the door that Arthur might not hear.

“I cannot stay now to say more than that Harry has had some new quarrel—”

“With Papa?” exclaimed Beatrice; her face assuming an expression of painful interest.

“Oh, how did it happen?”

“That I cannot tell you, for I do not know myself. Only” (speaking in almost breath-

less haste), "Harry told me he was going, and at once rushed off;—and Reginald set out in search of him. I must make haste and see if he is found ; for suspense is terrible."

As she spoke, she began to hurry onwards, Beatrice keeping pace with her, and saying :

"I will come with you. Poor Cecil ! Who would have guessed this from your quiet manner ? To think you were in trouble all the time !"

"I should have told you—but for Arthur. Do not mention this to him."

"Unless he asks. But if so—" began Beatrice, her sentence being destined to remain unfinished ; for just as they reached the head of the staircase, Reginald appeared.

Without even seeming aware of the presence of his sister-in-law, he at once possessed himself of Cecil's hands.

"I found him at Elvington,—in the village inn ; and persuaded him to return with me."

Cecil gave him a look expressive of the most affectionate gratitude.

“ Ah ! I thought if you found him, you could prevail upon him to come back. Where is he ? ”

“ Waiting without ” (here Reginald lowered his voice a little). “ I asked him to come in, but he would not. I believe he was ashamed. Come down, and let us go. Ah, Beatrice ! ”

A light had broken in on Beatrice’s mind, as she stood in the back-ground during this short conference ; and she now came forward, saying in answer to Reginald’s exclamation :

“ Ah, I understand.” He smiled, and she pressed his hand warmly, adding, “ I congratulate you both.” She turned and embraced Cecil. “ Reginald, take care of her. I will not keep you, for I daresay you are anxious to set out ; and I will wait patiently until you have time for a fuller explanation.”

“ You shall have one before the day is over. Arthur continues better ? ”

“ Yes, but I must return to him, or he will wonder what has happened.”

Reginald smiled ; and answering quite gaily,

"*Au revoir*," took Cecil's hand, and led her down into the hall.

There they met Mr. Wilton, who also embraced Cecil in a paternal manner, which proved that he too knew all, and was satisfied.

"I will not ask you to stay now," he said, "for I know you are in haste to return home. But you will come again to-morrow?"

Cecil promised that, if possible, she would, and hastened out of doors to meet her truant; who—hot, flushed, and looking rather ashamed of his escapade,—was impatiently waiting for her in front of the house.

"Here I am! He teased me so to come back, that I gave in for this once; but I would have you both know that I shall not do so again," said the troublesome individual in question, as if in self-excuse. "And now, if we *are* to return to Lynwood, let us set out without any more delay. You have kept me so long already, that I began to think you never meant to come."

"Dear Harry!" exclaimed his sister, "it was very good of you."

"And now," said Reginald, "let me give my opinion. I think it would be quite as well to take things easily, for you look hot enough already, and Cecil was fairly tired out when I met her. So we will walk slowly, if you have no objection. And Cecil," he added, in a lower tone: "leave all to me, and I will engage to smooth this business over."

"You are too kind to me," she whispered; to which observation he replied by drawing her arm through his; and thus they started on their homeward way; the presence of a third person rendering the walk less interesting than it might have been, though even with such a drawback, it was tolerably pleasant. Upon their arrival, Reginald sought Mr. Mor-daunt, who, being the aggressor, and not the aggrieved person, chose to appear ignorant that anything unusual had occurred; a few

more bitter and insulting words than usual, lavished upon one who seemed so entirely in his power, appearing to him of very little consequence. Reginald therefore thought it best to say no more upon that subject; exchanging it forthwith for one more nearly concerning himself; and one, moreover, the first mention of which, caused Mr. Mordaunt much surprise. It is scarcely necessary to explain that this last-named subject was his attachment to Mr. Mordaunt's niece; nor that the latter, although with difficulty believing it to be possible, readily granted his consent; telling Cecil in private, that she was one of the most fortunate people in existence, and that he hoped she would endeavour to prove herself worthy of Captain Wilton's choice.

Cecil was willing enough to admit the honour he had conferred upon her, and rejoiced to find matters taking such a pleasant turn. Reginald stayed and dined at Lynwood: Harry, though sullen, was under some

degree of self-restraint; Mrs. Mordaunt became more cheerful than usual; and her husband was in singularly good humour all the evening; so that altogether Cecil had cause to feel more satisfied and happy.

CHAPTER XX.

A SUDDEN FLIGHT.

The winds and the waves of ocean,
They rested quietly,
But I heard on the gale a sound of wail,
And tears came to mine eye.

LONGFELLOW.

REFRESHING to the soul, as is the green oasis with its cool, clear spring, to the weary traveller through a burning desert, was the interval of peace which followed the events narrated in the last chapter; and Cecil and Reginald enjoyed it to the full. The more her character developed itself, the more innocent and loveable it seemed; whilst, on her part, admiration for his noble qualities, and

wonder at her own exceeding happiness, daily increased, instead of suffering diminution.

Some weeks passed away, during which period Reginald had been exerting himself to obtain some appointment for Harry, who had latterly been particularly tractable; and his sister began to entertain strong hopes of his reformation, which were increased when Reginald one day informed her that he had at length almost succeeded in his endeavours. A little more negociation was still necessary; though he already considered the business nearly settled.

“Oh! what joyful news!” Cecil exclaimed. “It seems too good to be true! To think that Harry will be safe and independent, usefully employed, and earning a new character! I scarcely dare believe it yet.”

“Wait till it is confirmed then, and you have helped to pack his effects, and start him on his expedition. Even such a delay will not leave you much more time for the indul-

gence of your doubts; and then, Cecil, we shall have leisure to turn our attention to our own affairs. My father and mother desire that we should make Stapleton our home. What say you?"

"It would make me very happy,—as it would to do anything that you desire. And then too, I shall be near my aunt, and thus she will be prevented from feeling lonely."

"Ah!" said Reginald, "my gain will be her loss. That dreary life at Lynwood must be very trying! No spectacle can be more painful than that of a husband and wife who have long ceased to care for one another, and have no feeling, no interest, in common. And it is all the more melancholy, that it is so hopeless. There could surely have been no real love or congeniality of disposition, from the very first; for if there *had*, all traces of it could not have worn away. Do *you* think that it could be possible for true, deep love to undergo so sad a change?"

"No; *passion* might, for it is blind and

reckless ; but not that pure, earnest love, whose foundation is esteem. *That* must, on the contrary, ever grow more strong and steadfast ; until, at length, it approaches as nearly to perfection as is permitted to any mortal feeling. And such," added Cecil, placing her hands in Reginald's, "is the nature of the love I feel for you."

It was true, and he felt it to be so. Such was the nature of the love he felt for her ; and so long as they were together, both were happy, and she secure from fear of evil. But a change was at hand. His leave had expired, and it was necessary to part from her for some time ; though it was his intention, and his parents' wish, that he should give up his profession when he married. There was no necessity that he should lead an idle life, for a person of his position might find ample occupation, if he had the will ; and already many schemes for future usefulness had been laid out, but, meantime, duty called him, and for the present he must say "Farewell !"

There was a thorough breaking up of the family party at Stapleton. The precarious state of Arthur's health once more rendered sea air essential; and he and Beatrice went to a watering place in South Wales for the remaining months of summer. Reginald joined his regiment, promising to make speedy arrangements for bidding adieu to it for ever, and to put the final stroke to his negotiations about Harry; Mr. and Mrs. Wilton set out to pay a fortnight's visit to some friends in an adjoining county, and poor Cecil was once more left desolate, though there had been much talk of a re-union by the sea,—after her brother had settled down to work.

Upon this hope she rested; but the change was very dreary, and even Reginald's daily letters scarcely saved her from despondency. Her aunt was ill; her uncle more tyrannical than ever; and Harry,—deprived of his friend's guardianship, and weary of so long a period of good behaviour,—constantly alarmed her

by some new act of folly. No wonder, then, that she was out of spirits.

At length came that which she had dreaded; a new crisis in her brother's destiny. Mr. Mordaunt had detected him in the act of making too friendly overtures to a pretty housemaid; and whether his sense of propriety was really shocked, or he was indignant at his nephew's encroachment on his own prerogative, is of little consequence; the result being all with which we need concern ourselves. A storm gathered in the moral atmosphere, to which all previous ones seemed trifling, so violent was its nature, and so disastrous its effects.

Harry was driven forth from Lynwood, in such haste that Cecil had barely time to see him ere he went; yet even in that moment of excitement and distraction, she found time to extort a promise that he would wait to take leave of her in that same village inn where Reginald had found him when he once before set out in anger.

So near to hope, and yet to be overtaken by such a sudden calamity ! In another week her brother might have left his uncle's house on very different terms ; but now, all was confusion, and with Reginald at a distance, to whom could she turn for help ? She dared not leave Harry entirely to himself ; and, rendered desperate, made the sudden resolution to go with him to some quiet sea-side place, and remain there till she could communicate with Reginald. There was no time to write to him before she went ; for Harry might become impatient, and set out alone ; every moment's delay was dangerous ; therefore, hastily collecting a few clothes and other necessaries, both for herself and him,—he, having been compelled to leave the house at once,—she requested a servant to take them to the inn, and then went to explain her project to her aunt.

Mrs. Mordaunt was in bed, having been suffering for some days past from a severe attack of cold and rheumatism ; and hurried and

anxious as she was, it went to Cecil's heart to leave her thus ; but exacting as Mrs. Mordaunt was in trifling matters, she could prove her unselfishness on great emergencies, and if she did at first endeavour to dissuade her niece from setting out on such an expedition, it was simply because it seemed too hazardous for one so young and inexperienced. But Cecil, usually so gentle and yielding, was now resolute.

“ I dare not let him go alone. Excited as he is, I know not what might happen if he did ; whereas my presence may prove a check. Do not try to prevent my going, for, in case—(which God forbid!)—any misfortune *should* occur, and I were not with him, I should never forgive myself ; and as for other considerations, I am acting from good motives, and I feel that God will give me strength.”

She spoke firmly, and Mrs. Mordaunt yielded ; wondering at her sudden courage.

“ Go then, love, and may God bless you ! I would come if I were well enough ; but as

"But *where?* That is the question," said her brother.

"Where should you have gone?" asked Cecil, "had you started by yourself?"

"I don't know. I had never thought about it. My only care would have been to get clear of this abominable neighbourhood, and then I should not have minded much about the rest. I should have got into the next train, and lighted somewhere; and then looked about for some employment."

A very vague explanation; but one which proved to Cecil that she had acted wisely in following her brother; especially as even his short sojourn at the inn, had not improved the clearness of his intellect. It was necessary that she should instantly decide for him; and dreading the temptations of a large town, she at once named a village on the north-east coast, which had formerly impressed her by its romantic charms and quietude.

"Let us go there," she said, after a few introductory words.

“Nonsense!” answered Harry. “You go home again, for it is madness on the part of a girl like you. I should do much better all alone.”

“Perhaps; but I cannot go back *now*. My uncle will have closed his doors against me, so we must travel together. You are competent to take charge of me, until Reginald either arrives or writes.”

“What! is *he* coming then?”

“I hope so. I shall write to him to-night. But we must set out now, or we shall miss the train.”

Grumbling some inarticulate reply, Harry roused himself and started; the station being near at hand; and it was fortunate that Cecil had taken the precaution to bring some money, for, upon arriving there, her brother suddenly discovered that he had spent—with the exception of two or three shillings—all that he possessed.

“Come! you are a sensible girl!” he said, approvingly, as they took their seats in a rail-

way carriage. "I should never have given you credit for so much forethought; but Reginald Wilton will find that you are of some use, after all."

Cecil forced a smile, and entered into a disjointed sort of conversation, about the country they were passing through, &c., with the view of concealing her uneasiness; but she was secretly very anxious,—and doubly so, when she found that it was impossible to prevent her brother from alighting at every station where refreshments were procurable, in order to obtain a glass of beer or sherry.

It was late in the evening when they arrived at their destination, and Harry was by that time so tired and stupified, that Cecil had to exert herself, and to attend to all arrangements; feeling thankful when they were once safely established in the inn, which, to her relief, appeared quiet and respectable.

Millthorpe occasionally boasted a few visitors, and consequently made some efforts to afford them decent accommodation; but when

Harry and Cecil Leslie arrived, the place was empty, so that they were at liberty to choose the best rooms, and monopolize the attention of the landlady. Under more favourable circumstances, Cecil might even have enjoyed such an expedition, but now, anxiety upon her brother's account prevented her from deriving much pleasure from the first fresh scent and view of the sea, though the sky was flushed with the fairest tints of evening, and the waves were stealing silently onward and onward into the innermost depths of a secluded bay. Northward were high cliffs, terminated by broken and fantastic rocks; and southward a tall headland stood far out to sea;—the waves chafing and moaning round its base; for, though they were quiet elsewhere, there they never seemed to rest.

Cecil ordered tea, while Harry slept uneasily upon the little horse-hair sofa with which the small and rather dingy sitting room was accommodated; and whilst it was in preparation, she stood at the window, listening

to the low wash of water on the beach, and watching the fishermen draw their boats and nets in for the evening; thinking sadly, how happy and free from care *they* seemed,—singing, as if their labour were a pleasure.

But that their life was not all sunshine, the records of many a terrible wintry storm might prove, when wrecked boats and floating corpses strewed that shore, which now looked so peaceful in the low light of the setting sun.

Cecil roused her brother,—but not without difficulty,—when all was ready for their simple repast: he partook of it sleepily, and as soon as it was over, again sank back upon the couch, and slept. His sister watched him for a moment with a sorrowful expression, and then sat down to write a few hurried lines to Reginald, which she posted herself, and then returned to keep guard over Harry; her reflections being, as may be imagined, anything but cheerful.

It was late before he awoke, and then he wanted to go out; she however, finally per-

suading him to go to bed ; and feeling thankful that, so far, he was safe. She was unable to sleep all night ; a vague dread of misfortune keeping her awake ; and she was not only up in the morning, but down upon the beach, hours before her brother thought of rising. The fresh morning air revived her ; and she paced backwards and forwards upon the smooth sands at the foot of the cliff on which the inn was situated, wondering whether Reginald would come, and if so, how soon, and what he would contrive for Harry.

The latter seemed less confused,—and in fact, altogether better, when he descended to breakfast ; and afterwards he went out with her ; talking more rationally about his future prospects ; declaring himself penitent for having caused such shame and scandal, and resolved to set to work in earnest, so soon as Reginald thought fit to give the word.

Cecil felt more at ease ; her spirits rose, and when he proceeded to point out favourable subjects for a sketch, and exhort her to use

her pencil freely while she remained at Millthorpe, she began to think he was far more like his former self,—in the bye-gone days when his manners and conversation gave frequent proofs of gentlemanly tastes. She promised to do her best to please him, so soon as she could obtain a drawing-box and book,—her own having been left behind in the hurry of departure; but she strongly opposed his scheme of going over to the next town to procure the necessary materials for sketching.

“No, Harry, wait till Reginald arrives,” she pleaded. “I should not like to be left here alone.”

He reluctantly yielded to her wishes; and moreover, gave up a design—formed whilst watching the fishing-boats going out, of spending the afternoon upon the sea; consoling himself for such abstinence by holding a long conversation with a young boatman, whose society seemed to afford him great satisfaction.

Altogether, the day passed over tolerably

smoothly ; though Cecil found the constant strain upon her attention so productive of fatigue, that when night came, her head ached terribly ; but she still had to sit with Harry whilst he smoked ; fidgeting whenever she lost sight of him, and imagining all sorts of evils ; yet comforting herself by the hope that Reginald would be with them on the morrow ; and turning a deaf ear to the unpleasant possibility suggested by her brother :

“ What if he cannot obtain leave ? It may be a week before he arrives, and it is rather slow work doing nothing all that time.”

“ Oh, but he *will* come. I feel sure of it, so *do* be patient,” was her constant answer ; while she inwardly prayed that she might not be deceived.

CHAPTER XXI.

FOREBODINGS.

The fame is quenched that I foresaw,
The head hath missed an early wreath ;
I blame not nature, no, nor death ;
For nothing is that errs from law.

We pass ; the path that each man trod
Is dim, or will be dim, with weeds :
What fame is left for human deeds
In endless age ? It rests with God.

IN MEMORIAM.

A DAY later, at the hour of sunset, another watcher sat beside the object of *her* care,—whose eyes were also closed in sleep. But this time, a husband, and not a brother, was the cause of such intense solicitude as was visible on the countenance of Beatrice Wilton,—so late a bride, and so soon to be a widow !

She knew it ; she had known it ever since her marriage ; for nothing short of a miracle could save Arthur from an early grave ; but the very depth of her love for him enabled her to bear up while he was still with her, and to seize eagerly upon every ray of happiness ; her thought being :

“ I will put my sorrow from me whilst he is yet present ; for my whole future life will afford me time enough to mourn.”

That day, tempted by the beauty of the scenery, the fineness of the weather, and a slight increase of strength, he had been exerting himself more than usual, walking slowly along the smooth sands with his sketch-book in his hand, and transferring to it more than one memorial of their visit to that mild, lovely spot in the south-west ;—memorials which would one day prove of the highest value,—not to himself, but to his faithful companion.

Then they had rested at the foot of those rocks ; talking quietly about matters which to

them possessed the most absorbing interest; the future; the joys and solace of the unknown world,—and the work which remained for Beatrice to finish.

“I have no wish to grieve you,” said Arthur, gently, “by constantly recurring to subjects which must ever be tinged with a melancholy hue; and were that which awaits me more uncertain or distant, I might perhaps still put it from me for some time to come. Not that I think that would be wise; for, since we can never be sure how long we may remain here, it is always best to be prepared,—and to learn to fix our thoughts upon the inevitable change;—but when life and hope are strong within us, it may in some measure seem excusable.—Beatrice, I know how firm is your belief in the goodness of Him who sends these heavy trials; and therefore I am confident that he will afford you the necessary support. You will not be left alone,—to feel that all is dark, and that this life is but a dreary riddle, which cannot be

solved on this side of the tomb. You will bear up bravely,—for *my* sake,—looking forward to a happier meeting, and remembering that though earthly happiness is taken from you, much is left for you to *do*. Your father and mother!—*they* require your care; the former all the more that his conduct has in many instances been open to reproach. You will live with them, and derive comfort from your dutiful efforts to cheer and support them on their way. And who knows what your influence may effect? Then there is the church we wished to build; and the improvements in that scattered and neglected parish,—Hilstone. You will have money, and the power of acting independently; therefore throw your whole heart and soul into the work, and it will bring a blessing upon you even here. We may feel forlorn, but we never can be utterly miserable, when we are faithfully endeavouring to do our Master's work."

Checking the agonised expression of her grief, which would at once have overflowed

from her eyes and lips,—in passionate tears, and still wilder and more passionate words,—she answered calmly; promising to do his bidding; yet thinking how dreary,—how over-powering almost, was the prospect of her future desolate life.

Much more passed of the same nature; and then, dismissing the subject, they sat and gazed upon the transparent sea; which, upon that picturesque coast, is frequently so calm and clear, that even at some depth below its surface, every shell and pebble may be easily discerned.

Upon this evening it was even more beautiful than usual; being flushed with the most glorious colours from the sun-set sky;—gold crimson, purple; whilst the rocky islands, with their rifts and caverns, which invested that spot with a peculiarly romantic charm, were reflected in its bosom with wonderful distinctness. The cliffs were brightened by the green shrubs or golden corn-fields on their sides and summits, and at a short distance rose the

solved on this side of the tomb. You will bear up bravely,—for *my* sake,—looking forward to a happier meeting, and remembering that though earthly happiness is taken from you, much is left for you to *do*. Your father and mother!—*they* require your care; the former all the more that his conduct has in many instances been open to reproach. You will live with them, and derive comfort from your dutiful efforts to cheer and support them on their way. And who knows what your influence may effect? Then there is the church we wished to build; and the improvements in that scattered and neglected parish,—Hilstone. You will have money, and the power of acting independently; therefore throw your whole heart and soul into the work, and it will bring a blessing upon you even here. We may feel forlorn, but we never can be utterly miserable, when we are faithfully endeavouring to do our Master's work."

Checking the agonised expression of her grief, which would at once have overflowed

from her eyes and lips,—in passionate tears, and still wilder and more passionate words,—she answered calmly; promising to do his bidding; yet thinking how dreary,—how over-powering almost, was the prospect of her future desolate life.

Much more passed of the same nature; and then, dismissing the subject, they sat and gazed upon the transparent sea; which, upon that picturesque coast, is frequently so calm and clear, that even at some depth below its surface, every shell and pebble may be easily discerned.

Upon this evening it was even more beautiful than usual; being flushed with the most glorious colours from the sun-set sky;—gold, crimson, purple; whilst the rocky islands, with their rifts and caverns, which invested that spot with a peculiarly romantic charm, were reflected in its bosom with wonderful distinctness. The cliffs were brightened by the green shrubs or golden corn-fields on their sides and summits, and at a short distance rose the

crumbling ruins of a castle, and various other interesting relics of a by-gone age:—old ivy-covered walls, and remains of buildings, whose weather-beaten, time-worn stones, bore testimony to the substantial nature of ancient masonry-work.

“How beautiful,” said Arthur, with a half-sigh. “One might grieve to leave it, but for the reflection, that if this earth is so glorious, how much more wonderful and bright must Heaven be! See Beatrice, how proudly those old ruins hold their own against all destructive elements! They have already braved them for centuries, and will doubtless still last out many lives like ours;—nay, perhaps they may even stand there till the end of time. Is not that a strange thought? And to think how many, and what varied scenes they have witnessed, and what countless eyes have looked upon them since they first were raised! Strange, how all created things must suffer change;—ever passing onward,—ever varying their forms! How I wish those

mouldering walls could recount the history of all that *they* have seen !”

“It would form a complicated, and yet interesting story,” answered Beatrice. “But now, let us go in. I am afraid you will be chilled if you remain out after sunset.”

They accordingly ascended the steps, cut in the rock, which led from the sands to the house where they were staying; pausing more than once by the way to rest, and at the same time cast back another admiring glance upon the deep bay, with its purple islands, and bright-tinted sea. Weary with his exertions, Arthur lay down to rest as soon as he was within doors; and ere the sun had sunk below the horizon, was asleep; Beatrice watching tenderly over him, and thinking how sad and strange it was that he must die; that the voice which she had just been listening to, would soon be heard no more; and that the beautiful, expressive eyes which had looked so lovingly into her own, would ere long be closed in deep, unbroken sleep.

He slept peacefully ; the soft hair falling over his hollow temples, and thus concealing the surest traces of the disease, which was slowly, though determinedly, wearing him away ; for his face, notwithstanding its transparency of skin, and thinness of feature, was, in lieu of being drawn and disfigured by illness, rendered by it more attractive. The broad, intellectual brow was full of repose, and on the lips was a calm, holy smile ; proving that the soul within,—once torn and vexed with many cares,—was now resting from them, and at peace, both with the whole world, and with itself. All hopes of earthly fame were quenched for ever, but a more glorious hope was lighted in its stead ; and Beatrice, bending over him to ascertain whether he still breathed,—so deep and motionless was his rest,—could not weep, and could scarce regret his approaching departure, for she felt that he was more fit for Heaven than earth.

She turned her eyes from his countenance to the evening sky, where clouds were piled

up in fantastic shapes;—huge mountains; castles; armies struggling in the realms of boundless space;—such were the images which imagination might create; and she gazed long, half absently, half wistfully, upon the dark purple masses, fringed with gold.

“Ah, the dark side is turned towards us now. Would that I could see what lay beyond! I could fancy that those mighty barriers shut in a land more beautiful and peaceful than the heart of man has ever yet conceived. Strange, to think that I *may* some day see that blessed country, and that he *will* do so very soon!”

She leaned her head upon her hand, and endeavoured to *feel*, as well as meditate upon, the wonderful truths suggested by her situation, and the scene without; but the weakness of mortal nature interposed,—not altogether, but in part,—as a thin veil half discloses, half conceals, the form and colouring of its wearer’s countenance. She caught some faint glimpses of the hidden glory, but her

brain ached with the effort; and turning from the window with a sigh, she opened the first book which presented itself, and began to read. The volume was Tennyson's "In Memoriam," a favourite, both with Arthur and herself; and by chance she opened at the following lines :—

'Tis well; 'tis something, we may stand
Where he in English earth is laid,
And from his ashes may be made
The violet of his native land.

'Tis little; but it looks in truth
As if the quiet bones were blest
Among familiar scenes to rest,
And in the places of his youth.

Come then, pure hands, and bear the head
That sleeps or wears the mask of sleep,
And come whatever loves to weep,
And hear the ritual of the dead.

Ah yet, e'en yet, if this might be,
I, falling on his faithful heart,
Would breathing thro' his lips, impart
The life that almost dies in me.

That dies not, but endures with pain,
And slowly forms the firmer mind,
Treasuring the look it cannot find,
The words that are not heard again.

She could read no more, for now her eyes were filled with tears, and laying down the book, she turned towards Arthur, thinking:

“They might have been intended for *my* Arthur! Ah, if I only could impart ‘the life that almost dies in me!’ But it is beyond my power,—and it will be something to know that that fair frame is indeed at peace amidst familiar scenes, and where I can visit its last resting-place, whilst the soul that beautified it is in Heaven! It was but to-day that he expressed a wish, if possible, to return home to die, and we must soon set out upon that melancholy journey. Yet, once more I repeat, God’s will be done!”

It was late before he awoke, and then the moon was shining brightly down upon the sea. He raised himself, and the two sat with their hands clasped together, looking silently upon the scene. Arthur was generally wakeful at night, and disinclined to go to bed, so that it was no unusual thing for them to sit up until after midnight,—as they did on this occasion.

After making one or two remarks upon the fine effects of light and shadow, he observed :

“ I wish that Reginald and Cecil were here, for they would enjoy this quite as much as we do.”

“ Yes. Poor little Cecil ! She will be lonely without us all. I wonder what she is doing and thinking of just now.”

“ I hope she is asleep at this late hour,” began Arthur ; but suddenly pausing in the midst of what he was saying, Beatrice felt him shudder violently.

She started.

“ You are cold, or—”

“ No, I am not ill ; but—it would be impossible to tell you what I feel. It may be that persons in my state of health are susceptible of influences which are unknown to stronger natures ; or, it may be fancy ; but, as I looked out upon the sea, a sudden nameless terror seized upon me, and I cannot help fancying that evil is abroad. We spoke of Cecil. Let us pray for her,—and Reginald ;

that they may be preserved from harm. Do not deem me superstitious ; but *pray*, Beatrice, and fervently, for them, and *all*."

His strange words and manner infected Beatrice with the same mysterious awe.

"Ah, I have felt something of the kind before,—at Stapleton,—the night you were taken ill," she answered ; "but I trust that this is merely the effect of the late hour acting on your weakened nerves."

Yet once suggested, the vague dread was not to be allayed ; and the young husband and wife only found relief in prayer.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FATAL ADVENTURE.

FORT.—Where is this sight ?

HOR.—What is it, you would see ?

If aught of woe, or wonder, cease your search.

HAMLET.

CECIL'S second day at Millthorpe was more trying than the first, for Harry disappeared soon after breakfast, and was lost till evening ; when he returned—hot, tired, sleepy, and unable to give any satisfactory account of himself. His sister had spent the whole morning, either in watching or searching for him, and the afternoon in writing and posting a letter to her aunt ; in attempting to read, and in meditating upon the painful situation in

owing to Harry's inconsiderate conduct, she was placed. Not that she ever thought of him with aught but affection, or was inclined to judge his follies with severity ; but still, she could not close her eyes to them, or to the unfavourable impression they were calculated to create in other and less partial minds. She fancied that people eyed him with suspicion or contempt, and wondered what they both were doing there. It was so strange to her to be left alone in a country inn, that every trifling incident disturbed her, and added hourly to the reluctance which she felt even to pass from one room to another.

A stranger fixed his eyes upon her in the passage, and she instantly imagined some disparaging remark ; though, in reality, his look was expressive of respectful admiration, called forth by such an unexpected meeting with a young, attractive girl.

Their landlady entered to receive her orders about dinner, and Cecil coloured and hesitated as painfully as though she had been detected

in some guilty action, for it seemed puzzling to be acting on the independent system ; and as the day passed on, she began more and more to wish that Reginald would come.

At length, Harry's return afforded her some slight relief, for whilst he was present, she was sure he was safe ; but she felt certain that his day's occupation,—be it what it might,—had not done him any good ; and so tired out was she with long anxiety, that when he fell asleep, she could scarcely refrain from yielding to her feelings.

He slept for some time ;—she listening to his heavy breathings, whilst the pages of the book which she had opened, remained unturned, and her poor weary eyes roved restlessly around the dingy room.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he awoke. Then, half raising himself, he looked vacantly towards the table, asking :

“ Have you had your tea ? ”

“ No ; I would not ring, for fear of disturbing you,” was the reply.

"Eh? you silly girl, what makes you think so much about me? Better take care of yourself. I'll ring, and you shall have some now."

He rose as he spoke, and gave the bell so vigorous a pull, that Mrs. Stacey answered it in haste, under the impression that something was the matter. But being greeted with the sole word, "Tea!" she ventured to hint that it was growing late.

"Well, what of that?" asked Harry, impatiently. "Let us have some tea at once."

Mrs. Stacey, a hard-featured, but not unkindly person, muttered something about irregularity, and the advantages of early hours, as she retired to do the young gentleman's bidding; and Cecil, with a sigh, sug-

"You will have some, too, dear, and then go to bed?"

"What for? not at present; I must smoke a little first."

"I thought you were tired?"

"And so I was; but I am rested now. Quite fresh, in fact. But if you are tired, don't wait for me. I advise you to be off at once."

"Nay, I would rather stay with you, if you will let me," was the answer; and Harry graciously responded that she might.

With aching head, and a heart so heavy, that she could with difficulty maintain a cheerful aspect, Cecil made tea, but when she offered her brother a cup, he declined partaking of it; lighting his pipe, and ordering a jug of beer instead.

Cecil drank her tea in silence, growing every minute more and more weary and dejected, and wondering when her long watch would be brought to a close. A sigh, so deep that it arrested Harry's attention, at last escaped her; and laying aside his pipe, he rose and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"What is the matter with you, Cissy? You seem dull. I dare say you are tired of staying here?"

Cecil was equally surprised and touched by his unusually kind manner, and forced a smile, as she replied:—

“No, Harry, I like Millthorpe; though I own that I should like it better, if—”

“If *what*?” She made no answer, and he continued: “If I did not leave you?”

“Yes.”

“Ah! I thought so. But you see—it is difficult to manage. You are a woman, and I want some other companionship occasionally. I do wish you had not come, for you are only in my way—I mean,” he added, fancying that these hasty words had hurt his sister’s feelings, “that it is impossible to keep with you for ever. And as to fidgeting about me, I am safe enough, so you will do better to let me follow my own devices. I dare say, if the truth was known, you were fretting about me all to-day, and there was really no occasion, for I only went along the cliffs with that young sailor-fellow, who you saw me speak to yesterday,—Jim Hodges, and he is as

quiet and respectable as you are. Now are you content?"

Cecil tried to answer that she was, but the effort was too much for her, and hiding her face in her hands, she suddenly, to Harry's consternation, broke forth into a violent fit of weeping.

"Why, what does this mean?" he exclaimed, seating himself beside her, and endeavouring to draw away her hands. "Cissy, dear Cissy! do not cry so, for indeed I did not intend to make you unhappy."

But Cecil could only answer:—

"Oh! I wish that Reginald was here!"

"Well, dear, all in good time; you know that he is coming. But speak to me. Tell me that you forgive me. I have been a brute to cause you so much uneasiness, but I promise to do better." He bent down and kissed her. "There! you will not give way, for it drives me half distracted; and," (growing more excited,) "I would do *anything* to make you happy."

She looked up, and attempting to smile, said :—

“Never mind me, Harry; it was very foolish, but I felt so tired, and—”

“What? uncomfortable about *me*? Just what I expected! So you *have* been fretting about me! It was all *my* doing—unlucky fellow that I am!”

Cecil endeavoured to soothe him, but he was now thoroughly excited, and talked on in the same strain, with raised voice, and working features, until finally, he also burst into a sudden storm of tears; and it was long—long before she could succeed in reasoning him back into a calmer mood.

“I am miserable!” he exclaimed. “I do no one any good, nor ever shall. My life is a burden to me, and I wish that I were dead!”

“Oh, hush! hush, Harry!” answered Cecil, terrified by his wild manner. “For my sake, do not talk so. Wait till Reginald comes, and he will soon convince you that it is foolish

to despond. This appointment,—surely you have not forgotten?”

“No; but I don’t think I am fit for any thing.”

“Oh! but you are; you do yourself injustice. Only try, and we shall be so happy, when we see you steady.”

“*When!*” repeated Harry, resuming his pipe. “But, Cissy, I *will* do my best. I promise to make a fresh start to-morrow. Will that do?”

She threw her arms around him.

“Thank you, dear, dear Harry!”

“And now, go to bed,” replied her brother. “You are about worn out with all this trouble.”

“Nay, do let me stay with you,” she pleaded.

“Well, as you please; but keep quiet, or you will be ill. How hot it feels,” he added, opening the window wider; “but it is a lovely night. Come here, and look out at the sea.”

She drew a chair up, and leaned out.

"It is, indeed; how beautiful and calm it looks! I should never grow weary of watching the moonbeams playing on the water."

"Ah! you are romantic! But if you had heard the stories about storms and wrecks, which Jim Hodges told me when we were out this morning, the illusion might be dispelled. He says his old mother never can look at it without a shudder, and a fancy that she sees corpses floated up upon the beach; and no wonder, for her husband and two sons were drowned; and Jim himself has had more than one narrow escape. He pointed out the place where the fishing-boat which had his elder brother in it, went down,—straight before his eyes; everyone could see it, and nobody could help; and he says that the cry which those poor fellows gave was something terrible, and often haunts him when he is asleep."

Cecil shuddered, as she answered:—

"A fisherman's life is full of hardships,

perils, and misadventures. I always pity the poor wives and mothers—watching anxiously for those who may never more return—when I see those frail boats tossing wildly amidst the waves; now lost to sight, now re-appearing for a moment, but only to be again hidden in the next. Poor men! their livelihood is dearly earned!”

“You may well say so,” said Harry, “but for all that, it is a jolly, easy life; no cares, no trouble beyond that of drawing in their nets, and so on, as they lie rocking on the waves the whole day long.” He paused, and let the smoke curl slowly from his lips, and out into the evening air; then he added: “Yes, it *is* a jolly life; and I wish I was one of them, for then I should be free from care.”

“Nay, surely not; for that would be sinking to a lower state.”

“I don’t know that. And if it was,—what matter? *My* chief aim would be to get through life as pleasantly as possible; for I have none of the ambition, or high moral views, which

Beatrice used to like to preach about. Poor Beatrice ! She sometimes bored me with her lectures ; but all the same, I wish that she was here. She was a good girl, and I was very fond of her ; although I daresay she would never guess it from my manner."

" Oh, yes ; she did,—and she was very, *very* anxious that you should do well."

" At any rate, she used to say enough about it. But we will not talk of that just now," was the rather nervous answer. " When will Reginald be here, I wonder ? I suppose you will be married very soon ?"

" I don't know."

" But why wait ? I shall tell him that he ought to make haste and get matters settled, for *now* I don't think you will ever have much peace at Lynwood ; and at present it is not in *my* power to take care of you."

" No," (with a sigh ; and then, to change the subject) : " How very still the night appears. Scarcely a breath of wind, and no sound but the ripple of the waves."

"Still enough, and very hot," said Harry.

"Yes; but it is fresher here than it would be inland; and the stillness is not so oppressive as at Lynwood. There I used to look out and see nothing but black trees and hedges, and pale, ghostly fields, instead of the broad, living sea, and shining sands. And what a dead stillness used to reign there after night-fall. It was a relief to hear the plaintive cry of the plover, or that peculiar grating sound the corn-crake utters; or even the faint rustle of the leaves; so oppressive was the utter silence. But here, the low wash of the water sounds companionable."

"There I agree with you; and if—you were not here, I would go and spend the night upon the sea. It is so suffocating in the house!"

Harry rose as he said this, and leaned out.

"Nay, Harry dear," replied Cecil, gently; "you have been out all day, and it would do you far more good to go to bed."

"*You* had better go, at all events."

"Not till you have finished smoking. We will leave the room together."

Harry turned round, with a half-indignant air.

“Why, what are you afraid of?”

“Nothing, dear; only I like to stay with you. But it is late; you will not sit up very long?”

“I don’t know,—it depends. No; I am going now,” he answered, looking out into the darkness, and speaking as if her importunity was irritating. But after a moment’s pause, he added in a softer tone; “I will light a candle for you, dear. It is bad for *you* to sit up till this time of night. And—never mind me; I can take good care of myself, and it will not be long before I also go upstairs.”

“Nay; but come *now*,” pleaded Cecil, looking at him wistfully.

He impatiently shook out the ashes from his pipe; and closing the window with vehemence, replied:

“Oh, how you tease! But I will come. I will not be cross with you to-night, for though

you do bother, you are a good little thing, and mean it for the best."

Cecil felt happier after he had said "Good night;" and when his door was closed she shut her own; kneeling down at once to say her prayers. She had just risen, when a slight sound arrested her attention, and listening eagerly, she heard Harry softly turning the lock of his door, and in another moment stealing down the staircase. In an instant she was out upon the landing.

"Harry!"

She spoke in a whisper, and he affected not to hear. She called again,—this time a little louder, but he still continued to descend in silence. A third time did she breathe his name, and then he turned angrily to ask:

"What is it? You ought to be asleep."

"Is anything the matter?" was the hurried answer, as she stood divided between the fear of irritating him by interference, and that of leaving him entirely to himself. "Do you want anything that I can get?"

“No ; nothing. I thought you were in bed.”

“And I hoped *you* were,” she said, following him. “But—why have you got that coat on? And your hat in your hand? Oh, Harry, surely you are not thinking of going out?”

He appeared extremely disconcerted by her questions, and as if he were revolving some means of escape.

“No ; nonsense ! That is, not for long,” he answered ; “but it feels so hot in-doors, that I would just go out for half an hour. Mind, only *half an hour*, so go to bed, instead of wearing both yourself and me out by this childish folly. Go, when I tell you. Cecil, do you hear ?”

She heard, but nevertheless, was not to be dissuaded from her purpose. Emboldened by fear, she clung to him ; entreating that he would give up so wild a scheme. Mrs. Stacey overheard them, and coming forward, also told him that he must not, and should not, go ; but

to her remonstrances he turned a deaf ear ; and finally, shaking off his sister's hold, kissed her, and told her not to be a fool, for he was only going out to cool himself, and would certainly be back in half an hour ; and with these last words he broke away.

Cecil's first impulse was to follow him, but when she looked out into the darkness, she involuntarily drew back. A black cloud concealed the moon, preventing her from making out the form of any object, and when it had passed away, her brother had entirely disappeared.

Good-natured Mrs. Stacey, who began to understand the state of affairs, took pity on her trouble, and attempted comfort.

"Don't stand here, my dear ; come in, and go to bed ; and I'll sit up until your brother comes back. How you tremble ! But you need not be afraid ; this place is so quiet, that scarcely any accidents occur."

"There are the sea and the cliffs," said Cecil, drearily, and as if half-speaking to her-

self, "He might miss his footing in the darkness, or— You need not mind me, for I am used to being alone. But I will sit up till he comes in, for I dare not go to bed."

Again Mrs. Stacey offered consolation, but in vain. Sick at heart, poor Cecil slowly went up stairs, took out her hat and cloak, and returning to the sitting room, laid them in readiness to slip on in a moment. The good landlady still lingered.

"This is lonesome work for you, my dear. I see your brother is a wild one; but don't make yourself uneasy. Just lie down upon the sofa, and my son shall go and bring him safely home."

Cecil's face brightened.

"Thank you; this is very kind. I shall feel much easier now."

Mrs. Stacey smiled, at once complacently and soothingly; and then left the room to find her son. Presently she returned to say:

"I have sent Tom; he is very steady, and I made him understand. We had a young

gentleman of the same sort staying here a little while ago, and Tom was always on the look-out for him. He was such a one ! But a very nice lad, too ; and I was fond of him with all his faults."

Cecil was obliged to listen to some long stories ; or at least, to *seem* to listen ; for though worn and anxious almost beyond endurance, she was afraid of offending the only person who could help her in her need ; and moreover, grateful for that person's kindness. But it was no slight relief, when Mrs. Stacey at length left her to herself ;—left her to horrible forebodings which made every minute seem an hour. She threw herself upon the sofa, but only to rise again immediately, to gaze out at the window, look at her watch, and walk hurriedly about the room ; inwardly praying, and starting at every sound.

An hour passed,—then another, and her fears increased ; then came a step, but it was only Tom—whose search for her brother had been unsuccessful. She questioned him closely ;

turning so very pale, that Mrs. Stacey feared she was going to faint; but her strong will bore her up at present.

“I daresay,” said her hostess, “he has gone off in a fishing boat, in which case he will be lying out at anchor till the morning. Don’t you think so, Tom?”

“Yes,” answered the son, who was himself a rough, sailor-looking man; yet with a heart soft enough to feel for Cecil. “Yes, miss, you may depend upon it, that is what he has done; and out there, he will be safe enough. But if you like, I’ll go and look again.”

“Oh, if you will!” she answered earnestly; and again he set out; whilst she watched and listened by the window, till the early summer morning dawned upon the scene.

And still no Harry! Oh, how desolate she felt! The calm, fair morning seemed to mock her misery; and unable to bear the suspense any longer, she put on her hat and cloak and hastened out. But still no signs of him; the sands lay quiet and deserted in the first pale

light of day ; and only a boat or two at anchor in the bay, gave signs that any living thing was near.

Presently a few stray fishermen appeared, and she questioned them,—with the same ill-success. She looked up at the cliffs, and then with straining eyes, followed every slight indentation of the shore ; her agony increasing every minute. Then she went back to the inn ; but he was not there ; nor had Tom Stacey returned again.

Once more, with weary limbs and fainting heart, walking like one who wanders in a dream, she began to descend the winding path-way to the shore ; pausing at every step to gaze around. The sun had now risen, and the inhabitants of Millthorpe had awakened to their daily toil ; boats were being hauled out, fishing nets removed from the places where they had been spread to dry ; and men in rude, though picturesque attire, began to give an air of life and bustle to what had of late been such a lonely and deserted scene.

Suddenly, a shout arrested Cecil's steps ; her heart stood still, and she felt for a few moments absolutely paralysed with terror. She turned a wild look in the direction whence the sound proceeded, and perceived, at the distance of two miles, a small group of figures standing near the sea, whilst others were hurrying towards the spot.

Collecting all her strength for one final effort, she gained the beach, and flew onward, with all the energy of desperation. A quarter of the distance intervening between herself and the object of her dread was traversed, when she encountered the landlady's son, hastening homewards, with a countenance expressive of horror and concern.

He would have passed her without speaking, but she stopped him saying :

"What is it ? Do tell me. Is it—*he* ?"

"Come back, miss," was his only answer.

"Come into the house ?"

"I cannot. I must know what has happened. Tell me ; for it would be kinder to

let me hear the worst at once. It cannot be more terrible than that which I anticipate."

He looked compassionately at her; yet refused to speak; and at that moment, Mrs. Stacey, drawn to the beach by that instinctive feeling which always appears to collect crowds in an instant to the scene of any accident, appeared. Her son ran up to her, communicating some intelligence in a whisper; and calling forth an exclamation of dismay.

"Oh, tell me," repeated Cecil, wildly, "what has happened!"

Mrs. Stacey answered with a sudden burst of tears:

"Don't ask me, my dear. God bless you! You will know too soon."

"Mother! How can you say so. After all it may not be so bad," cried Tom.

But Cecil had heard enough, and was now desperately endeavouring to reach the spot; though her head was giddy, and a deadly faintness was beginning to creep around her heart.

“Stop her ! Do not let her see him !” exclaimed the mistress of the inn ; and her son obediently followed Cecil, laying a sudden grasp upon her arm.

“You must not go on, miss. Stay a little.”

Her only answer was an attempt to free herself from all restraint ; and weak as she was, the emergency had rendered her so determined, that she had almost succeeded in breaking from his hold, when another person unexpectedly appeared upon the scene. Reginald Wilton, who had been travelling all night, and only arrived in time for this catastrophe.

He had entered the inn, and found her absent ; a few hurried words explaining the cause sufficiently to make him hasten to the beach ; and now, throwing his arms around her, he exclaimed :

“Cecil ! My own Cecil, I entreat you to return.”

She was, however, far too much excited to listen even to him, and as if scarcely aware

who spoke to her, she still struggled to escape.

“Do not go on,” said Reginald. “Surely you will do what *I* desire?”

But she, so gentle and obedient under ordinary circumstances, now only answered by a wild glance, and the wilder exclamation :

“He is dead ! I know it. Do not hold me, for I *must* go,—must just look upon him once again.”

“Why do you say so ? It is not yet certain, and you shall not—”

Reginald paused here, for worn out by her long anxiety, and agony of mind, she had suddenly fainted, and now lay,—a dull, lifeless burden,—on his bosom. His heart was wrung with grief and apprehension for her, though he said :

“It may be best so. She is now unconscious of her loss.”

There was no time for delay, so lifting her tenderly, he carried her back to the inn,

and laid her down upon a sofa. Mrs. Stacey had returned with him ; and therefore, merely staying to impress one kiss upon the unconscious Cecil's forehead, and to commend her to the care of her kind-hearted landlady, he at once set out for the fatal spot where Harry lay,—cold, stiff, and wet, his fair hair dripping, and the seal of death upon his brow. A boat,—how overturned was never known,—had been found floating, keel uppermost, at sunrise ; and washed shorewards by the flowing tide, were the bodies of Harry Leslie and Jim Hodges,—the young sailor who had accompanied him upon his luckless expedition. Reginald gazed upon the melancholy sight with horror, and his sole thought now was how,—O how to comfort Cecil !

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DARK VALLEY.

A hand that can be clasped no more—
Behold me, for I cannot sleep,
And like a guilty thing I creep
At earliest morning to the door.

IN MEMORIAM.

ALL the usual remedies were tried in vain ; for no efforts which humanity could suggest, had power to recall the souls to those poor lifeless bodies ; and the only duties left for friends or relatives to perform, were those last sad ones which consign the ashes of the lost to their parent earth.

Cecil was permitted to see Harry once again, and press her lips upon the cold, pale forehead,

which she had last kissed when it was hot and throbbing; but not until the still form was decently composed, and laid upon that bed in which he had slept for two successive nights. Then she seemed better satisfied, and yielded passively to Reginald in everything; for the fever of terror and excitement had already given place to that dull, dead sensation, which on such occasions, makes us feel as if all hope and energy were gone for ever; insomuch, that but for the supporting and protecting presence of him whom she loved even better than her brother, she might have sunk beneath the dreadful shock.

Death, under all forms, must be very awful; but to come thus suddenly and terribly! —It was well for her that her religious principles were strong; that the love of God,—joined to the firmest reliance on His mercy, had ever been firmly rooted in her heart, so that faith could support her, even in this hour of deepest trial. Meekly and patiently, she bowed her head, and prayed for light that she

might not only *confess*, but *feel* within her inmost soul, that all was indeed ordered for the best.

Even Mr. Mordaunt could not hear the news without remorse and horror; and when, together with Mr. Wilton, he was summoned to attend the quiet funeral, his demeanour proved how much he was affected. He dared scarcely look at, or address his niece, who, with all her gentleness, could not help shrinking from him, as, in some measure, the author of this calamity; and when he stood beside poor Harry's grave, he gave way to such wild and uncontrollable agony, that a stranger, witnessing such passionate outbursts of feeling, might have fancied that his nephew had been deeply loved.

Mrs. Mordaunt was still too ill to travel, or she would have accompanied her husband on his mournful expedition;—not to offer consolation, for that she knew would be of no avail, but to take care of, and convey the sorrowing sister back to Lynwood. Cecil, how-

ever, was as yet too much absorbed by grief to desire anything but perfect quietude, and leisure to dwell upon her loss; so that even Reginald felt that it would be kindest to leave her for the present undisturbed; though not only he, but also his father thought of her continually.

They took her away from Millthorpe and its dread associations;—first remembering to afford such consolation and assistance as were possible, to the relatives of Harry's partner in misfortune, poor Jim Hodges;—and in compliance with Mr. Mordaunt's earnest wish, his niece consented to return to Lynwood; feeling as though all places—save the one so fatal to her brother,—had become indifferent. Nay, not only did Cecil Leslie readily comply with this desire, but she even felt deeply, and was almost roused by the sight of her uncle's remorseful sorrow,—contrasting so strangely with his former conduct. She prayed that his heart might be really touched, and that his better feelings might not pass away again;

and in this soft, forgiving frame of mind, she once more crossed the threshold of a home which had been fated to work her so much misery.

But, once there, and at full liberty to dwell upon the past, her strength gave way; an illness ensuing, which brought her to the very verge of the grave, from which she was only rescued by the utmost care. Reginald was constantly at hand, and in all probability it was *his* presence, and her love for him, even more than her aunt's anxious care (though the latter attended upon her night and day), which finally had power to win her back to life, and to raise her—a pale, silent shadow,—from her bed of pain.

Reginald bore up wonderfully; and upon him fell the chief trouble of this trying time, —even to writing the sad news to Beatrice; who he begged would break it gently to her husband, guessing the effect that any intelligence of such a nature would exercise over him in his precarious state; though it was

not to be expected that Arthur would grieve deeply for poor Harry.

But there was so much that was terrible and painful mixed up with the fate of Beatrice's cousin,—her father's share in the catastrophe,—his own and Cecil's feelings,—and the deep gloom thrown over both their houses by the tragical and unexpected end of one in whom, if they had never dared to hope much, they had still felt strongly interested,—that Reginald knew that his brother could not possibly hear the intelligence unmoved; and therefore he recommended caution.

The letter arrived, however, when Arthur and Beatrice were seated side by side upon a sofa; and attracted by her unsuspecting exclamation of, "From Reginald! Now let us see what he has got to say," he looked over her shoulder, and before she could prevent him, possessed himself abruptly of the tidings which were to have been more cautiously disclosed.

Beatrice drew away her hand,—too late!

for a glance at his wan countenance revealed that he already knew the worst; and sinking back shuddering into his corner of the sofa, he at first attempted no comment, for he felt too sick at heart. She thought of her father, and dropping the letter, hid her face, exclaiming :

“ Oh, this is worse than I expected ! He might have been saved ; but now, who can restore that poor lost life, and make atonement to his unhappy sister ? ”

Arthur understood, and at once, rousing himself, he passed his arm around her waist.

“ Poor Beatrice ! ”

“ Nay, you should rather say ‘ poor Cecil,’ for this blow will never be forgotten, though, I pray God, that she may finally forgive.”

“ She will. I know it,” answered Arthur, confidently. “ And, so far as her ill-fated brother is concerned, this early death may have been sent in mercy, to save him from future suffering—and sin.”

“ God grant that it may be so ! But at

present it seems very terrible,—so young and thoughtless, and to be summoned without any warning ! It was this calamity, which, though yet unknown, oppressed us so powerfully the other night, and I trust that our prayers were heard. Poor Cecil ! how I grieve for her ; and Reginald—” said Beatrice, yielding to a burst of sorrow which prevented her from saying any more.

Arthur was also silent ; but though outwardly composed, this intelligence had seized upon his nerves, and he never wholly recovered from the shock.

He became more urgent to return home ; for the news of Harry Leslie’s death appeared to make him dwell even more than formerly upon the prospect of his own, and he longed to bid adieu to those he loved ; deeming it unnecessary to disguise the object of his hasty journey northwards, for Beatrice already knew the truth.

Setting out at once, but travelling thither by degrees, they reached Stapleton before the

end of the week ; and beyond a little extra fatigue upon their arrival, Arthur seemed much the same as usual ; though all who saw him were convinced that there was now no longer room for hope. Yet his own spirits were so calm and even, and his intellect so clear, that at times it was scarcely possible to realise the fact that a few weeks only would pass over ere he died ; though when the mind could grasp it, every moment spent in his society seemed doubly precious,— for the time was rapidly approaching when he would be seen no more.

Six weeks elapsed ; and autumn had begun ; —a fine, bright, warm season ; filled with the glory of the waning year. The golden harvest was almost gathered in, and the woods round Stapleton were dyed with the richest and most varied hues, before the end came ; and those last brilliant days of his earthly sojourn caused Arthur Wilton the most heart-felt satisfaction. He had seen and conversed with—not only every member of his family,

but Cecil Leslie also ; and his words, springing from an insight into mysteries concealed from the strong and prosperous, went home to her heart, and made her happier and more hopeful than before. For all, he had many words of sympathy and kindness ; but his consolations were bestowed where they were most needed, and ever afterwards remembered with the deepest gratitude.

It was a quiet Sunday evening, and though too weak to go to church, Arthur had felt well enough to ask to be assisted out into the garden, where he had sat for some time with evident enjoyment ; for though fast wasting away, his sufferings had of late been very slight ; and he had conversed with an animation amounting to enthusiasm upon such important subjects as were suggested by the time and circumstances ;—his countenance becoming almost radiant with the light of hope. But at length, feeling weary, he returned to the house ; Beatrice alone remaining with him, whilst he lay down and composed himself to

rest. After an anxious glance, she knelt down by his side and said :

“ You have done too much. I fear that you are very tired, and blame myself for letting you stay out so long. But you looked so much better, and had such a clear fresh colour, that not only the others, but I myself was also quite deceived for once, and permitted you to exert yourself beyond your strength.”

He smiled,—a bright, soft smile, and answered :

“ Do not grieve about it ; I have been so happy, that I would not have exchanged this day for any other that I can remember. It has been such a lovely, peaceful afternoon, that, to sit in the sunshine with those so dear to me, seemed like a foretaste of the happiness to come. I thought of those lines of Tennyson’s :

The Sabbaths of Eternity,
One Sabbath deep and wide—
A light upon the shining sea—
The Bridegroom with his bride.

And I felt thankful instead of sorrowful that I was hastening towards that rest."

Beatrice regarded him more earnestly, and thought that the light which shone from his eyes proceeded from no earthly source. A deep awe fell upon her,—yet unmixed with fear or grief; for at that moment she could not think of her own approaching loss, but of the gain which such a change would bring to him. He seemed to read her thoughts, and drawing her still closer, said, in low, soft accents :

"Thank God! *Now* you seem resigned."

"I try to think of the time when I shall rejoin you; and that you will be beyond the reach of pain and sorrow," was her answer, whilst tears started to her eyes; and she felt that it would be dangerous to venture more.

"Yes, dearest Beatrice, my life has been a short and stormy one, but its evening is full of peace and brightness. Draw aside the blind."

She obeyed, and he gazed wistfully upon the setting sun.

"See! it is disappearing into such bright realms of glory, that we cannot gaze upon them without dazzled eyes; but still we know that yonder is our home. My life once seemed a failure; full of bitter disappointments and regrets; but now I feel that they were sent to withdraw my hopes from this world to one far more glorious. Think of that, and let it be your consolation in the hour of gloom. And should your own lot seem a dreary one, remember, darling, that whom God loves best, it often pleases him to try the most."

"I will remember. I will think of it," replied Beatrice, almost in a whisper.

Arthur talked a little longer; mentioning his father, mother,—all of them, by name; and then he added, rather faintly:

"Now I will say no more. Sit near me, love, and read to me a little."

Beatrice first procured him a reviving draught; and then read a few passages of Scripture.

"Thank you, love, for all your kindness. May God bless you!" he said, looking at her

fondly when she ceased to read. He drew her towards him, kissed her lips and forehead, and requested her to sit beside him whilst he slept; and so, with her eyes intently fixed upon him, and her hand fast locked in his, she watched over him, until a change took place; for he never roused up or spoke to her again; though once or twice he smiled in sleep. And thus calmly and happily he passed to his eternal rest.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONSOLATION AND RESIGNATION.

“O, days and hours, your work is this,
To hold me from my proper place ;
A little while from his embrace,
For fuller gain of after bliss.”

IN MEMORIAM.

WE should gain little by dwelling upon the mournful scenes which followed the sad events recorded in the last chapters, for it will scarcely be doubted that they were deeply felt by all ; every member of the two families, not even excepting Mr. Mordaunt, being more or less affected by this double calamity, and feeling as though the gloom which hung over Stapleton and Lynwood could never more give place to light and sunshine. Reginald felt his brother's death very deeply ; but for

Cecil's sake he roused himself, and his endeavours to comfort her, whose loss was so much more bitter than his own,—not more from its suddenness, than from previous circumstances, were the means of restoring him to some degree of cheerfulness.

“My own Cecil,” he said, with tears of grief, which he vainly struggled to repress, when he folded her to his heart, and thus told the news of Arthur's death, “these are heavy sorrows, but it is our duty to submit without a murmur; and the fewer of us that are left, the more closely should we cling to one another. Think of poor Beatrice, and all that she has lost.”

“Oh! who could comfort her?” sobbed Cecil. “Yet, he died so happily, that thankfulness might mingle even with her first deep grief.”

Here tears of agony, wrung forth by the remembrance of Harry's wild ways and unexpected end, rendered it impossible for her to say another word; and long, long was it

before the horror of that dreadful night and day at Millthorpe ceased to haunt her; whether sleeping or waking, in company with Reginald, or alone. But she was young, and in course of time, new hopes and interests were wakened in her heart; and after her marriage, which took place a few months afterwards,—Reginald asserting that an event of so much importance ought not to be delayed, as then they would be better able to console and help each other—she gradually recovered strength and spirit, though her manner was generally grave and quiet.

He took her on the Continent, where the total change of scene revived her; and after an absence of a quarter of a year, they returned to Stapleton, which was from thenceforth to be their home; and from whence they paid an annual visit to poor Harry's resting-place beside the sea; a spot marked by a plain white cross, and the name, age, and date of death, of him who now slept quietly beneath. And when two children were added

to the small, still party, who inhabited the old family abode, the curtain of gloom was lifted, and bright gleams of sunshine reappeared, insomuch that at the present time, an air of cheerful, useful life and occupation pervades that mansion, which in its time, has seen so much unhappiness, anxiety, and regret, but which is no longer "a house divided against itself."

As for Beatrice, she is resigned, though she shuns all general society; devoting herself entirely to her father and mother, and the neighbouring villagers, who hail her visits, and regard her with an affection amounting to reverence; so kind, so gentle, and forbearing is she; and so evident is it that the course of her whole life has been changed by one deep, irreparable loss. Her father feels this also, treating her with marked respect, and her efforts to promote peace and unity in their small household are no longer unavailing; for he too, is changed, and greatly for the better. And if she sometimes faints beneath

the burden of her lonely life, a visit to the quiet church-yard, where Arthur, (whose last wish was to rest beneath the open vault of Heaven,) sleeps, and an hour of prayer and meditation by his grave, at once restore her wonted strength and fortitude; and she feels that she has patience to remain on earth, so long as she is useful, and a blessing to her parents. Life is indeed a mystery, but she believes that she shall one day understand it, and be happy.

THE END.

•

