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ABEL DRAKE'S WIFE.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "HIRELL," "THE SHADOW IN THE HOUSE," ETC.

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TO
DR. MACLEOD,

OF BEN RHYDDING, YORKSHIRE,

The following pages are inscribed,

IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF MANY KIND ATTENTIONS,

BOTH PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL,

SHOWN TO THE AUTHOR WHILE IN QUEST OF HEALTH IN ONE OF

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OF ENGLISH VALLEYS.

March 8, 1862.

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION.

I CANNOT allow the issue of the present volume to take place without acknowledgment of the favour with which it has been received, and of the generous criticism that has so largely contributed to its success. "Abel Drake's Wife" has been reprinted in America and Germany, and is now under process of translation in France. I hope yet to show that I do not misconceive this friendly welcome. That is all I can or dare say in connection with the work on which I am engaged, and which I hope to produce in the Spring.

LONDON, *September*. 1863.

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ABEL DRAKE'S WIFE.

INTRODUCTION.

WE are so used to think of a mill or factory as necessarily forming part of a great ugly conglomerate of similar buildings,—as situated in towns where the sooty atmosphere above is only in too complete a harmony with the muddy streets below,—as washed by foul “becks,” (or streams,) and surrounded by a stricken vegetation, that it is not easy to make the reader, who may happen to have no personal knowledge of the district in question, understand how numerous are the exceptions to so depressing a view of our manufacturing industry. Yet one might undertake to show, within a very few miles of Manchester itself, scenes of picturesque, romantic, and almost sublime beauty, the qualities of which seem to have been first appreciated by that very mill-owner whose doings so often give us the impression that, through some strange cala-

—
mity, beauty is with him but a lost sense. Between Manchester and Sheffield, and again between Manchester and Leeds, including the future classic land of Ebenezer Elliott,—who lived to see a tunnel, some three miles long, driven through his beloved “Stannedge, tipped with fire,”—many are the factories scattered about in individual dignity of isolation ; and each occupying a site that, at first glance, would seem to have been chosen with a most poetic disregard of any other consideration than its extreme loveliness. But as they appear before you in rapid succession (supposing you to be a traveller by the rail), you cannot fail to note one common characteristic which explains all,—the little streams in front, which formed originally, and in many cases, we believe, still form, the moving power of the machinery, and which everywhere supply the indispensable element of purification. Hence the reservoirs, with their grassy, lawn-like margins, so carefully preserved round the base of the factory ; hence the selection of those solitary and picturesque valley bottoms.

Hence, too, occasionally occurs a felicitous mingling on the same spot of the two oldest and most necessary of industrial arts,—those relating to the growth of our food and to the preparation of our clothing. The single factory will not spoil the air for cultivation, but it will quicken the cultivator’s industry by its demands, and diffuse new life into the rustic mind by its own vital energy.

On the other hand, the artisan walks to his work through sweet, wild, or majestic scenery; and he labours in a place where he can never feel entirely shut out from that communion with nature for which man everywhere so instinctively yearns,—as for his first love,—and which, with men of his class, is often the passion of a lifetime. Let but a door open, or the wind penetrate through some crevice, and in an instant his thoughts may be borne away to the wild flowers, or the new-mown hay, or the bean-field, which are wooing him so seductively by their scents.

In such a scene as this, though enjoying a more profound seclusion than the neighbourhood of a railway permits, occurred, a few years ago, the incidents now about to be narrated.

CHAPTER I.

BARBARA.

It was early ; an hour before the factory bell would ring for breakfast, and but few of the chimneys in the village had begun to smoke. A white mist clung about the steeple of the church, and floated over the distant Lancashire hills, making them look like great moving clouds on the horizon. It lay, too, across the bottom of the valley, and converted the black stalk of the factory into a dim palace-like spire or airy column. The village on the hill side—not at all a modern one—looked so quiet and still that everything in it seemed in a dream. The birds kept sinking their voices to whispers, and the very cocks crowed weakly, as if they were dubious about the time. Toys left by children lying about the cottage gardens ; implements of labour dropped by aching hands only a few hours before, looked as they lay low in the wet grass, or sank into the moist soil, to be taking an eternal rest. It was hard to believe that in a few minutes those toys would be found and rejoiced over, and another day's labour be demanded of the tools.

The sun had risen, and was projecting long bars of light through Barden Wood, which crowned the opposite hill. The tinkling of farm-horse bells was heard faintly in the distance. A low, busy hum now broke out in Barden Brow (for so was the village designated), as the first pails were brought to be filled at the draw-well on the green. The long lanky body of the bearer swayed lazily to and fro under a shoulder-yoke, which supported the empty pails. Empty as they were, he seemed to find the business of carrying them an oppressive one, for he stopped when within a few yards of the well, slowly lifted his arms and his broad shoulders, forgetting even the weights pendent from them, and gave way to a portentous yawn. Much relieved, he then went on to the well, unhooked the pails, and placed the shoulder yoke, with the clattering irons, athwart the edge of the low masonry. He did not seem to be in any hurry, for he stood now supporting himself on one leg, while languidly resting the other; and though after due pause and deliberation he moved as if to set to work, it was only to make the legs exchange positions and duties, and so give their owner a fresh spell of the luxury of rest. You could see what a favourite posture this was with him, if you looked at the knees of his trousers, which swelled out and hung like two bags. The cuff of his coat-sleeves did not nearly reach to his great hands, which dropped down as if not properly fastened on to the wrists. As he walked, his feet shuffled about in huge unlaced boots, showing a raw-looking, naked ankle at every step. When, at last, he did fill the pails, they were carried with a good deal of swaying, and balancing, and grumbling, and grunting, towards a little court, between

two rows of dirty, tumble-down looking cottages (built long ago for the mill hands), which appeared to be only kept from actual falling by the thick wooden beams that crossed the court from wall to wall.

As the man approached the houses, he began to do an evidently unusual thing with him,—quicken his step, for he saw something that interested him. Outside one of the most wretched-looking of the cottages, a knot of gossips had collected in spite of the early hour and their own several home occupations. They must have run out in haste while preparing breakfast, or dressing their children, for one held a tea-pot, another a loaf with a knife half-buried in it, and a third a baby's frock. Men—agricultural labourers—stood at the neighbouring doors, smoking their pipes, and somewhat impatient for the “bite and sup” that had been getting ready, and was now interrupted, but still looking on with a kind of apathetic interest. Job (for so was the water-carrier called) pushed a way right through the gossips, his wet and slopping pails securing him a respectful distance, and went to the door, where, having disencumbered himself of his burden, he knocked. There was no answer, so he called out, in the deep, lazy tone natural to him—

“Here's th' wayter, widow. Is there nowt else as aw can do for yo?”

There was still no answer from the darkened room ; but as they all listened, there issued a succession of thin, sharp, agonizing screams, that sent a spasm across the faces of some of the women ; for it was a child's cry, and the more heart-rending because of its weakness.

“God help the poor young mother! She'll na ha'

lung to watch now," whispered a woman with an infant in her arms, and with a bigger child clinging to her dress.

"If it hadna been for her pride, she might ha' saved it!" muttered an older woman, who stood a little apart with folded arms, listening apparently unmoved to the cries.

"Aw'm thinkin' it wasna reet pride," rejoined the first speaker, "to shut theirsels up, an wait till they're well-nigh clemmed, afore they'd ax a neighbour to help 'em. But aw wish aw'd knawed!"

The wish was echoed all round, the older woman alone taking exception to it, as she said contemptuously—

"An where's th' good if you had knawed? Both she and her mother'd liever starve i' their pride than tak' a scrap fro' ony on us. O' course every body knaws, they're a deal better than us: leastways they think so! I thowt this mony a day summat were wrung; an when my lad telled me yesterday whatten he'd seen, I couldna rest ony longer, and I went to th' widow, to ax if they wanted a bit o' tea, or a loaf o' bread, or a shovel o' coal, or that'n, but I'd scarce gotten th' first words out o' my mouth, when up goes a hond to the window-curtain, an pulls it to, as fierce as fierce, and as much as to say to me, 'Get along wi' yo! I want noan on yo, nor your help!'"

"Well, well, mother, it's na good talkin' that way. When folks are i' trouble they donna care whatten they says or does. Lord save us! Hear that now!"

It was indeed a cry; so sharp and peculiar in its piercing and ringing sound, that the elder woman started and shut her eyes. Job changed legs, and shuffled his great feet uneasily, while the younger mothers in the crowd

pressed their babies to their breasts, or huddled closer to their sides the hands of the little ones who gazed wonderingly on from the folds of the parental gowns.

"Mrs. Wolcombe owt to be telled," now observed another speaker, in a low voice; "sho's been the savin' o my little un. Aw've a good mind to send one o' th' lads. There'd be no harm i' that, surely."

"Well, I'll just speak to the widow first."

The woman placed her baby in her mother's arms, went to the door, and tapped softly. She waited a moment in silence, then tapped again, but still very softly. Then the door opened, and a woman stood within the threshold. She had grey, almost white hair; a strangely patient-looking face, and a kind of cold wintry light in her eye. Notwithstanding the extreme poverty and disorder of her dress, there was something about her appearance which betokened a kind of simple, humble dignity, which the neighbours might, on imperfect acquaintance, easily ascribe to pride.

"O, please, Mrs. Giffard, the neighbours ha' been thinkin' it might be as weel to send to the mistress at the big house, who might think o' summat to ease the sufferins o' th' poor bairn."

"What do they say, mother?" exclaimed a voice from within, in a high excited key.

"They want to send for Mrs. Wolcombe," answered the widow, looking behind the rude screen that hid the interior from observation during the opening of the door. There was no answer for a long time; and the gossips began to wonder whether it was intended to send them away without another word of explanation or acknowledg-

ment, when they heard the same voice, not sharp now, but broken and mournful, say—

“Yes; ask her to come.”

The woman who had offered to send one of her lads, immediately summoned him from a game of marbles lower down the court.

“Here, Jack, run up to th’ big house to Mrs. Wolcombe.”

“Na, aw think aw’ll go mysel.”

The woman turned and looked at the speaker. It was the man who had brought the water, and who, since the question of sending for the mill-owner’s wife had been raised, had been giving his head a succession of languid jerks, in order to free his eyes from the over-hanging matted hair, and in the hope, apparently, that his brain might thus become clearer for thought. Having at last arrived at the conclusion he had so suddenly and unexpectedly made known, he began to draw himself up, and apparently tell over his limbs, to see if they were all right before departure.

“Thee go, Job!” exclaimed the woman, with a smile of derision; “I wonder which ud be the first back, thee or Christmas? Run, Jack, run, and I’ll gie thee a ha’penny.”

But, for once, Job was in earnest. He had already left the court, and disappeared from the view of the woman; and by the time that Jack could again catch sight of him, Job’s ankles were bobbing up and down half way across the green, so the boy gave up the pursuit, and returned to his marbles, to the great annoyance of his parent.

Meantime, Job, not daring to pause and reflect on the possible consequence to his limbs of this sudden activity, had left the green, and turned into the plantation at the back of the manufacturer's house. It certainly was a long plantation, but Job thought it endless, as his breath grew shorter and shorter, and his pantings more and more noisy. Very glad he was when he escaped from the heavy chill air of the plantation, and began to shuffle along the drier path of the orchard, strewn with blossoms from the apple trees that met overhead. Still he trotted on, until he knew by the cackling of the hens that he had passed the poultry yard, and that the next break in the palings would bring him to the servants' quarters. Dim visions of rest, with coffee and hot rolls, began to interfere with, and a little confuse, the vivid philanthropy that had brought him so far: but on he went, till—yes, there was a kitchen door standing invitingly open, and a rousing fire blazing away inside. Job wouldn't spoil all by stopping now, now that he was so near. Once more he urged on his reluctant feet, which were growing heavier and clumsier every minute, and by getting continually in each other's way, had more than once nearly thrown him down, but then, 'twas clear, they hadn't been used to this kind of treatment. The goal was reached at last. He saw a chair just within the kitchen, it was no time for ceremony—exhausted nature could no more—what harm if the servants did see how fast he had come? Job flung himself over the threshold, and towards the chair, but overlooked a slight rise of the framework, and so went headlong across the floor, and thus presented himself to the genteel-looking man-servant, and the two housemaid who were

there at breakfast, and who burst into a general roar of laughter, as they saw who it was.

" Bless me, why it's lazy Job !" cried one of the housemaids, when the first paroxysm of mirth was over ; " whatever can make him in such a hurry ?"

" Why, havin' a heart wi' feelins in't, which is moor than some folk hae," grumbled Job, as he rose, and tenderly began rubbing the knee, while gazing in dismay on the other, which appeared blushing through a terrible rent in his trousers. " Go up, one of you, an tell your missus as how Abel Drake's wife's babby's a dyin' : will you ?"

" Abel Drake's wife ! What, that poor young thing as became a wife while she were hersel but a child ?" exclaimed the other housemaid.

" Now, are ye a goin', or mun aw tak' the message mysel ?"

" I'll go, I'll go, Job, though I dunna think Mrs. Wolcombe can be spared just yet," said the woman who had first spoken, as she jumped up, and hastily left the kitchen.

" Abel Drake's wife ?" inquired the man-servant, in an off-hand, easy manner, as though the whole affair were one that in a business point of view concerned only the women, and, therefore, that he might placidly go on with his breakfast. " Abel Drake's wife ? H'm ! h'm ! h'm ! Warn't that the young fellow that headed the strike, that cost master such lots of money ?"

" Yes," grunted Job.

" H'm ! So I thought. And what's become of him now ?"

"'Listed, long ago."

"Poor Barbara!" here chimed in the housemaid, "I guess she's had but a hard time on it, sin then. Here, Job, tak' a cup of coffee, and some bread and butter." Job took what was offered, and ate and drank faster than one might have expected, judging from his general habits, and from the abstracted air with which he handed his breakfast cup to and fro, and received fresh plates full of bread and butter, evidently he was deeply engrossed with something. At last, as he put down the coffee cup, once more empty, he sighed, and said—

"Well, sho had'n her choice atween a bad match and a good un,"—but there Job stopped, looking at the man-servant, and the man-servant looking at him, with an odd twinkle in his eye, that Job didn't understand, and that he did not like.

"Yes, Job, go on; I know of the bad match, but what about the good one?"

The man-servant had to guess for himself as to the nature of the reply Job might have made, for the housemaid now returned, saying—

"Job, Mrs. Wolcombe is already gone. She put on her bonnet directly I gave her your message, and went out. You won't overtake her, so may as well rest a bit."

"Na na, thankye," answered Job, with an important air, and rising for once to a full sense of the dignity of occupation. "Happen th' widow 'll want me." And so he hurried off, after again exchanging glances with the man-servant, who smiled an insufferably knowing smile, with eyes fixed on Job's face, while Job, sullen and savage, lifted and let fall his gaze, as though half inclined to ask

what was meant ; but, on the whole, coming to the conclusion that to do so would be absurdly troublesome.

As he recrossed the green he heard the factory bell calling the hands from breakfast, and he stopped a moment to look at the people flocking in through the great mill gates, across the ravine, where he used to go, and to ask himself whether he had done wisely to give up regular labour, and trust to precarious occupation. But, when Job asked himself a question, he seldom took the further trouble of exacting an answer ; so now he hurried on towards the court, which he reached just in time to see the manufacturer's lady gliding through it in her quick unaffected way, not holding her delicately tinted silk dress, of silver grey, a hair's breadth nearer to her, or behaving in any way differently among those poor people, and dirty houses, than he had seen her when walking to her carriage, or with guests on her lawn.

The door was opened by the widow in answer to Mrs. Wolcombe's knock. They spoke together a few words in whispers, as the visitor took off her bonnet and gloves, before going behind the screen. As she advanced into the close room, the smell of medicine made her feel faint after her rapid walk. But she waited while the widow went on stirring something in a saucepan over the fire, and gradually accustomed herself to the atmosphere. Then she began to look round. The screen before the door was merely a clothes-horse covered by an old patchwork quilt. In a corner stood an infirm tent-bedstead, which appeared to have given in its time so much rest to others that it began to feel the want of it for itself. These two articles, with a rocking-chair, an old settle, a deal table, and a few

of the very commonest and most indispensable household utensils, completed the miserable furniture. There was not a single seat, except the rocking-chair, even to offer to the visitor ; who understood at a glance the sort of life that must have been going on here, for many a week—what desperate struggles with poverty and want this chamber must have witnessed—and that even now it was not physical distress alone that had made them succumb so far as to request her aid. A figure, unconscious as yet of her presence, knelt at the bed-side ; and Mrs. Wolcombe stood for some little time looking silently down upon it, for the words of comfort she had intended to speak seemed all too weak and useless for the occasion.

When it is said that Barbara Drake, the mill girl, with a dirty coloured skirt over her night dress, untidy hair, and pinched haggard face, was still beautiful, the word must be understood to mean, not a beauty made up of roundness, and joyous eyes, and varying tints of white and red, fading and deepening under every emotion, as this China rose at the window loses and gains colour with every frown and smile of the sun ; no, Barbara had no beauty of that kind ; here was the cold colourless beauty of a statue, which you could not but see and be startled by when it presented itself under such an unlovely garb, and so injured in what might be called its own secret law—perfection of form—by the ravages of hunger, and of some still more terrible affliction of the soul. As she knelt there, holding a little passive hand, and gazing straight before her, with eyes that seemed almost unnaturally large and brilliant, and which made her face look even more pallid than it was,—as you noted the features, so bold in outline,

and the expression so full of character and will, with the black hair, neither waved nor glossy, so impatiently thrown back from the broad white brow, you felt growing upon you every instant the idea of the intensity of the conflict that must have been raging here, and of which the signs were only too obvious in the thin and pinched cheek, the sinking of the bed of the eye, and the inexpressible rigidity of the mouth, naturally so sweet, but now long, straight, and harsh, with the tension of prolonged resistance to suffering.

The gentle touch of Mrs. Wolcombe's soft hand moving the hair from her brow, made Barbara look up. She dropped her eyes quickly when they met the lady's kind gaze; the blood rushed to her pale face, and then left it paler than before. After a pause she spoke, and there was a slight tinge of bitterness in the words.

"I didna think to ha' come to this, to ask thee for help after what happened atween Mr. Wolcombe and my——" Some strong emotion stopped her utterance, and Mrs. Wolcombe prevented her from finishing the sentence.

"Whatever, Barbara, I may have thought of your husband's conduct in the strike, I should have been but too glad to have helped you, if I had known you needed help. But you have so shut yourself up, so kept your troubles to yourself, that I knew nothing until these last few minutes. But, tell me, how is baby now?"

The young mother tried to speak, but her lips moved ineffectually, and she gave up the attempt. She laid her hand on Mrs. Wolcombe's wrist, drew her close to the bed, and fixed on her face eyes that strained with wild eagerness to read the impression made by the first sight

of the child. Mrs. Wolcombe tried to bear the gaze unmoved, but it was hard to have to look upon that convulsed baby-face with those great searching mother's eyes watching the while, harder even than she would have liked to have owned to herself: for, independent of her sympathy with Barbara's position, there were certain past bereavements of her own which she did not wish to have too vividly brought again to mind. The hand that the mill girl held trembled, and then the dark eyes grew wilder, and the grasp round the wrist became so tight that the veins in those delicate fingers began to swell. Averting her face as far as she could from Barbara's observation, Mrs. Wolcombe bent down over the pillow. She saw a thin weird little face, that looked as if it had never yet worn a smile; and the bright golden hair that lay around it in shining rings on the pillow, seemed too full of life and brightness to belong to it. She looked into the blue eyes, and saw that they were dull and fixed; she looked at the tiny clenched hands, and she listened to the wailing cry, till her heart began to fail her, and she dared not look back an answer to the mother's questioning. But she perceived that she was but too well understood. Her wrist was let go, the straining eyes closed, and the quivering form sank down upon the sheet. Then, suddenly, the hands rose and clasped each other over the head, and great smothered sobs, more like a man's than a woman's, made the old tattered bed-hangings shake.

"Barbara!" and Mrs. Wolcombe tried gently to unclench the fingers, where they were buried in the hair. "Barbara, you must be quiet, you must indeed, or we can do nothing."

"Quiet!" The face was uplifted, the eyes blazing, the voice hoarse and broken. "Quiet! An whatten does that mean? Gie it up, like thee an th' doctor, an sit by an see it goin' an goin', and be quiet! O, ye dunna know what it is to me, or ye wouldna talk so. But ye will help me, will ye not? O, dunna let it go! Dunna let it be ta'en fro me. If it were your own yo'd save it, I know ye would."

"Hush, Barbara! Did I save my own three years ago?"

"O, but ye couldna want it as I do this. Ye hae gotten other childer; I hae noan but this. Ye hae gotten a husband; O, would to God I could say, I hadna one too."

"Hush, hush, my child," interposed the widow. "How can you speak so, at a time like this?"

"Mother, I canna help it," was the fierce reply. "I feel I mun hate him if my little baby's took fro me, as I began to hate him afore it coom, when he'd left me wi'out a penny, or a bed to lay me down in, wi' nowt but his bad name to help me thro th' warld. Ay, then I began to hate him, an all th' warld, an most of all mysel; an every neet I shut my eyes wishin' I might niver be able to open 'em again; an every mornin I woke sick o' th' light an sunshine, an wanting nobbut to die. An then my little baby cum to stop me, an comfort me, an mak' me better. As I lay awake o' neets, an felt it lying warm an soft an still in my arms, nestling to me, closer an closer, I couldna think o' hating ony longer."

Barbara, who had been speaking in a low, passionate undertone, with her eyes fixed on the child's face, suddenly stopped; for she noticed that the fitful breathing had

ceased, and that life seemed to have altogether passed away from the little frame.

"Mother! mother! what is this?" asked Barbara, in tones so low and soul-stricken, that Mrs. Wolcombe trembled as she heard. "No, whish't! Dunna tell me it's dead. Baby, darling! baby, wake up, does ta hear?" A little shiver convulsed the child, the breath came back, and with it the feeble moan. The mother's face lit up with joy, and sinking down at the bedside, she clasped his hands, and raising her eyes, now swimming in tears, ejaculated, "God, thae sent it to turn me fro my wicked hate! O, dunna tak it fro me now. Please dunna, or all th' good 'll go out of me agin. I dunna ask for owt but my baby. I'll earn its food wi' my own hands, an—an I'll forget and forgie him who is away, and never complain any more! Leave me my baby! O, leave it to me." Her head now dropped on her hands, and she stayed thus, for a few moments, in silent self-communion. When she rose, there was a strange calm on her face. The widow had been for some time holding a cup of tea, and a piece of dry bread, which she had vainly offered to Barbara, who had tasted nothing for many hours. To the surprise both of her mother and of Mrs. Wolcombe, Barbara now put out her hand for the cup, raised the spoon to her lips, and having broken a bit of the bread, began to eat, looking and moving as if she thought perfect faith, in appearance as well as in reality, might be necessary for the success of her appeal. Then, taking up the child, she seated herself upon the rocking-chair, turned away from the two spectators (who sat down together upon the bed, glad to see the change, which they attributed as

much to resignation as to hope), and, in an instant, the poor child-mother forgot everything, but that precious little burden, lying there so unconscious of the dread issues that were pending. The chair began to sway to and fro, and as the moaning ceased, there was, for a long time, no other sound heard, but that of the girl's bare foot patting the floor, as it touched with every forward rock. She was weary and faint with her long days and nights of watching; and by degrees her head drooped on her breast, but not to sleep. She began dreamily to hum a little song, that she had been accustomed in other days to sing to the child:—

Hark! the night-winds whispering nigh;
"Hush," they murmur, "hush a bye!"
Dobbin by the dyke doth drowse;
Dreamy kine forget to browse;
Winking stars are in the sky;
"Hush a bye! Hush a bye!"
See, the silver moon is high.
How the great trees rock and sigh,
"Hush a bye! Hush a bye!"
Low the little brooklet's cry;
"Hush," it lispeneth, "Hush a bye!"
All the peeping lights are gone;
Baby, we are left alone;
"Hush a bye! Hush a bye!"

It was strange to see her sitting there, hushing the child to that last long sleep, from which a moment before she had been straining every nerve to snatch it. Her voice kept mostly to the same low, dreamy undertone, but sometimes it rose with a single clear note that never lived its full time, but would tremble and break off at its very sweetest, drawing sudden tears to the listener's eyes.

After a while, something—it might have been the little

white empty sock on the table, so life-like in its form and suggestion—set her conjecturing, as she sang, why it was empty. Whatever it might be, it brought her rudely back face to face with the grim spectre who was gradually tightening his hold on her child. The wild distraught look again appeared in her large eyes, as she glanced questioningly from one face to another. The widow turned away, unable to utter a word, but Mrs. Wolcombe, steadying her voice, and bending over the babe, said to her,—

“Barbara, baby is going fast. We shall have her only a few minutes longer. Keep her quiet in your arms, so, and she may go without more pain, I think.”

“Go!” There was a mingling of passionate tenderness and scornful defiance both in the broken voice and the dilating eyes. “Go! I ha’ gotten it safe i’ my arms. What is it can tak’ it fro me? Dunna shake your head, mother; I tell thee I dunna believe it. I wunna believe that onything as has looked to you for life all along can be took fro you, if your whole heart’s set to keep it. An’ it’s mine! I *will* keep it! It’s my own baby. I gotten nowt else in all the world. My very own; an nobody on earth or in heaven either has ony right to it but me.” But even while she spoke thus recklessly, impiously, she trembled with an agitation so violent that she was obliged to sink down on her knees, and rest her arms on the bed, as they still supported their fond burden. And there she now watched the gradual darkenings of that little face, as the advancing shadow touched it; and she listened for the feeble breath that kept flickering, as though conscious of the contest between life and death, over the little body as a coveted prize; a contest that now ceased, as if Death

had conquered, and was now renewed as if the mother's fierce resistance had made him loosen his cold grasp. But at each return the breath was fainter. A white ring appeared in the centre of the eye, gradually increasing in size, as though Death, again returning to the contest, held up before it the bridal ring as a bribe, and approached the while closer and closer. There came also a fresh sweet redness to the lips, that made the mother's heart thrill with hope, until the last frantic struggle convulsed the shuddering frame, and the terrible rattle in the throat showed but too plainly, it was Death's own triumphant bridal kiss that glowed upon them.

But no evidence could yet make Barbara believe the child really dead. She breathed upon the cold feet, and rubbed them tenderly. She rose from her knees, and again seating herself in the chair, began to rock to and fro, and seem to say unto herself she was only waiting patiently for its recovery. Once Mrs. Wolcombe tried to take the no longer living infant from her, but Barbara pushed her back, and pressed the dear burden convulsively to her breast. A long time she sat thus, but with a something settling into her white, tearless face, that made Mrs. Wolcombe afraid to leave her; and she sat still where she was on the edge of the bed, looking at that face—so girlish and yet so womanly—so haggard and yet so beautiful—and trying to understand the amount and manner of the great change that had come over it in the last two years. She remembered also the day, still further back, when she had met Barbara with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes, heedless of the troop of wild, shouting mill-girls who followed her, with a lot of children at their

heels, as she carried off the prize from Isaac Sleigh's school. She remembered how much she had been struck with Barbara's face on that occasion, and with the kind of prescience of some bright future for herself that she seemed to feel in her moment of triumph.

It was the widow who endeavoured, next time, to take the baby from her arms. Barbara no longer resisted, but followed it with her eyes, letting her hands drop wearily in her lap, as though their work in life were over, and uttering a low, helpless moan. When the widow, after placing the babe on the bed, held a spoonful of tea to Barbara's lips, she turned from it with a shudder, laid her cheek against the damp and dirty white-washed wall, shut her eyes, and remained as still as was now her babe.

It was a strange and touching scene that the pale sunbeam looked in upon through a chink of the unopened shutter; and it flitted about, as if wonderingly, from one thing to another. Now it would peer curiously into the corner where the widow, with awkward tenderness—for her eyes were dim with tears—was arranging on the floor a little bed, hard, cold and white as snow frozen on the ground. Now it would linger for an instant on Mrs. Wolcombe's pale, shining bands of brown hair, and the lace head-dress with floating lappets, and on her tenderly-compassionate face, which seemed to reflect all the sorrow it looked on, but made sweet by some chemistry of the soul, of which she was mistress. Then the sunbeam would steal along the discoloured wall, picking its way among the stains, until it rested on and lighted up, with unkind exposure, all the agony in those compressed lips,

knit brows, and straight-staring eyes, wild, hungry, and tearless.

It was nearly an hour before they dared to rouse her; and then, when Mrs. Wolcombe, who seemed to divine, by some unerring instinct, the true moment, uttered the single word, "Barbara!" she turned towards them with a long, shuddering sigh, and made an effort to rise; but she was too weak. Wearily lifting her hands to do up her hair, she said,—

"Dunna let me keep thee ony longer, ma'am. Th' end's coom now, and I mun bear it. Ye are very good to stay so lung. What art doing, mother? Na, na, let me see its face first. Dunna be afraid. I shallna tak' on now."

She went and stood at the foot of the little bed, and while the widow held back the white cloth, she gazed upon the dead face.

"Mother! do ye see aught, or is it only my dazed e'en?"

The widow looked in her turn, and saw what Barbara referred to—a strange likeness to the absent father, that seemed now first to settle upon the child's face, in the wondrous peace that possessed it.

"Yes, Barbara, I think I know what you mean. It is strange, but——" and the widow paused, for she could scarcely repress a kind of superstitious feeling that the death was a token of the divine anger at the division between the parents.

"An this, then, is th' end on it all!" murmured Barbara; "of all that he talked about and I believed. This is th' end; our only child dead! for want, perhaps—O, God, help me, and keep me i' my reet wits!—o' proper food and nourishment!" Then, raising her voice, she

cried, with fierce vehemence, "O, how I wish he'd heard th' doctor say it, an had stood by, like me, an see it goin an goin——"

Mrs. Wolcombe's hand and voice arrested her,—

"Barbara, my poor girl, you must not look back now. You must think no more of him—no more of your past troubles. Pray, my child, for strength and comfort to Him of whom you have been strangely neglectful, and who alone can enable you to bear these great trials. Come, Barbara! and then lie down and try to sleep. We won't talk now, but I shall come again to-morrow to see you."

Her words fell on deaf ears. The face grew only more dark, the eyes more dry and wild. Presently she drew her hands from Mrs. Wolcombe's, and sank down on her knees. The two women looked in thankfulness on each other; but when Barbara spoke, the sound of her voice sent a shock through their hearts.

"Abel Drake! if ever ye come back to me—come ye rich or come ye poor, sick or in health—I tell thee now, o'er th' dead body of our child, and in God's own presence, I'll never own thee as my husband! Never!"

Long after the terrible sound of her voice had done ringing through the chamber of death, she knelt there, with her clasped hands extended over the body of her babe, and her strong, resolute face raised to Heaven.

CHAPTER II.

THE DIM FUTURE.

ON Sunday, the day after the burial, before anyone else was astir in Abbott's Court, Barbara got up without disturbing her mother to perform a task,—bitter, indeed, but which she could not leave to other hands. Quietly she collected together on the table before her everything her darling had worn or played with. She dared not leave a single garment or toy to meet her gaze hereafter ; but felt it as necessary to bury them as the poor little senseless, empty body itself. The stained red shoe, the sleeve bent to the shape, seemed even fuller of life just now than the foot or arm had ever been which the sexton had lowered into the dark earth.

She worked on in the morning twilight, with hurried, trembling fingers, seldom daring to pause over any one of the things she touched. O, the luxury to have given way to the hot tears that pressed so at her aching eyes ! O that she might but sit there and cry over those things all the day long, as other mothers might—mothers who had no occasion to rouse themselves from their grief till they wearied of it, in nature's own time and way. But Barbara knew well there were no such grief-luxuries for her. She must break down every impulse of sorrow that had the

least savour of indulgence in it. Monday morning must find her ready to go on as of old, taking her usual place and struggling in the ceaseless battle of life.

When she had collected the things together in a handkerchief, she tied the whole, knot upon knot, and then dropped the sacred little bundle into the seat of the old settle, and shut it up, to come no more into the light for many a year. Poor Barbara! This was like a second burial to her; and as she sat down, when all was over, she felt once more as though there could be nothing remaining to live for, or to do.

Presently her thoughts reverted to her mother, who was sleeping peacefully; and Barbara tried to draw some spirit and energy for labour from the study of that worn but invincibly patient face. As she looked, many thoughts—some apparently reproachful—began to rise, and a moist glitter appeared in her eye. That future, as it now presented itself, was inexpressibly blank and drear. She had to work at the factory side by side with her former companions, who would be always reminding her, as they talked among themselves, of days, hopes, and feelings which she must forget, if she were ever again to be at peace. Recent events, too, seemed to have broken all ties of sympathy with them. What the change in herself might yet portend she knew not, but she was greatly changed; and she shrank from the idea of again sharing their daily life, with an emotion of repugnance so strong, that she was angry with herself for its injustice. But there was no help. She must return to the mill, with no other earthly hope or aim but that of finding means to preserve what she most longed to part with—life. Her

mother might still get along as of old by doing needlework for some neighbouring ladies, but Barbara had no such resource ; she must go to the mill. It was a dreary prospect, and one that chilled her soul to look upon.

That morning, mother and daughter went to church. It was the first time for many Sundays, and it was against Barbara's wish they did so now. But when they had left the close court, and were ascending the hill, she was not sorry she had consented. The soft, sunless, tender morning harmonised well with her feelings. The breeze, too, soothed and comforted her. As she reached the church, she could not but observe how kindly, and it seemed even respectfully, every one she knew spoke to her ; or, better still, passed her with a quiet, cordial, hand-grasp. Then the music of the organ seemed suddenly to take possession of her, the instant she entered the church, and not to be willing to let her go, until her every thought and feeling became attuned to the day and place. The service began. Solemn words reverberated through the edifice, warning the sinner to repent. Every one of them sank deep into Barbara's soul. They seemed meant for her. She remembered now, with deep and growing anguish, the wild and wicked expressions that had escaped her during her child's dying hours, her bitterness of feeling towards her absent husband, and her vow—but there she stopped. That vow was still right in her eyes, and should at any cost be maintained. But she began now, as she knelt with the rest of the congregation, and tried to keep back the hot tears that dropped on her prayer-book, to pray in true contrition of heart. She could not follow the set forms of the book, nor had she the least idea of what she ought to have

been doing at any particular moment ; but what she did do was this :—with all the strength of her naturally strong soul, she pleaded passionately for pardon ; she told unto the Divine Father all that there had been in that poor wrecked, desperate, but loving soul of hers when she sinned. She made yet a second vow that she would endeavour by her whole future life to atone ; and then, forgetting herself, she asked for forgiveness and all imaginable blessings on *his* head—her erring and absent husband's. Then she waited, and was, as she believed, answered ; for the organ, at the close of the service, broke forth into a strain of mighty exultant thanksgiving. With a lightened heart and a chastened spirit, Barbara came forth. There was a buoyancy in her step, a kindling of her eye, and a faint flush of lovely colour just touching her cheek, that made her look at once so beautiful and so peculiar, that her mother could not for some time dissociate her in idea from the angel in the painted window she had so often gazed upon during the service, wondering if anybody else saw the likeness there to Barbara.

As the two were leaving the churchyard, Mrs. Wolcombe appeared among the crowd, speaking first to one, then to another, in her sweet, quiet, self-possessed way, so that it attracted no attention when she went up to the widow and her daughter, and spoke to them.

“ Barbara, I shall come down to see you this afternoon.” Then she added, in lower tones, “ I have something to say to you.” With a nod and half smile she passed on.

Barbara said nothing to her mother about Mrs. Wolcombe's words, but she thought of them a good deal. So did the widow, but she too kept her conjectures to herself.

In the afternoon, when Abbott's Court seemed to be deserted by all but themselves, the widow noticed a little flutter in Barbara's manner, and she guessed from that how anxiously her daughter waited their promised visitor; but still neither of them would venture to speak. Presently they both heard through the open window Mrs. Wolcombe's voice, in remonstrance with Job, who had been caught taking a nap on an old horse-stone under the chestnut tree at the end of the court; and when, in that lady's opinion, he ought to have been at church. As the two listened they could not help exchanging glances; and the widow thought she saw a flickering smile hovering about Barbara's mouth, notwithstanding a certain impatience at the delay Job was making for her.

"Pooh, pooh, nonsense, Job; no chance, indeed! See how you have been idling through all this long drought. Every pump has been dry, and the water in the well too low for anybody but you to get it up. You ought to have made quite a little fortune. I expected to have found you dreadfully worldly-minded for Sunday. I expected to have seen you pretending to pull a long face of sympathy with the poor housewives, but bursting out all over with secret glee, as you counted the coppers in your pocket."

"Aw bin seekin' more reg'lar wark, ma'am."

"All a pretence, Job. I know you too well to believe anything of the 'ind. Or, if you do go to seek it, I am sure you are praying to Heaven all the while that you mayn't find it."

Seeing Job rather enjoyed the joke than otherwise as he turned it over and over in his mind with unmistakable

relish, saying, however, in his mildest tone and in a deprecating manner—"Lor, ma'am,"—she went on:—

"I should be sorry to hurt your feelings, Job, but 'tis no use mincing matters; you are giving way to idleness."

"Idleness! E—law, ma'am. *Me*, idle!" was the water-carrier's reply, given in a tone that showed he was quite aware of the popular opinion that he was a bit of a favourite with the manufacturer's lady. But Job was sly enough not to presume too far on the knowledge, and began already to speculate on the end, and wonder whether it would be a shilling or a new gift from Mr. Wolcombe's wardrobe.

"Why, Job," continued Mrs. Wolcombe, "can you speak to me, even now, without drawling, or move without creaking, as though every joint were rusty? Try! If you begin a sentence, it's a chance if you don't stop in alarm at the long way there is to go to get to the end of it; and then, when you see people waiting for their answer, you stare sleepily about, wondering what has happened, or where you are. Come, come, Job, strike a light, as my old nurse used to say, and look for yourself. Are you awake now? Do you really hear me?"

"O' coorse, ma'am!" And then Job began to chuckle, "Haw! haw! haw!"

"I doubt it. See how you walk. Why, your very legs can't make up their mind whether or no they ought to walk; and if they do begin, are sure to stop again soon, and ask whether you really think it is worth while for them to go on any longer."

Again Job chuckled—"Haw, haw, haw!"

"And what's the matter with your head, Job, that you

let it hang and roll about so from side to side, as if it were too much trouble for it to take care of itself?"

"That's presentiments, ma'am."

"Presentiments?"

"Yes, ma'am; aw've knawed a lung whol aw shall soom day find a lot o' money, and o' coorse aw looks for't."

"Then, Job, you are so untidy."

"Now, ma'am, aw jest appeal to you," and Barbara could see that Job was stretching out his coat tails for the lady's better examination, perhaps with a secret hope things were now getting on to the right track. "Look, ma'am, at th' mendin,' if aw wur to begin."

"But when you have decent clothing, you won't keep it in order. Really, Job, I am ashamed to see you so dirty."

"Dirt, ma'am's, good!" broke in Job, with a positive tone of voice, as though now sure he was upon safe ground. "Artist once telled me so, when he took my pictur. He said dirt's a neutral tint, ma'am; warm i' winter, cool i' summer. Ony you try it, ma'am."

"O, you are incorrigible, Job," cried Mrs. Wolcombe, laughing; and hers was a strangely low, sweet, silvery laugh, so full of enjoyment that its mere overflow made every one else enjoy too; and without a touch of malice in it. "Well, here's a shilling for you,—the last I think I shall ever give you, if you don't mend. Good-bye!"

Ah, my dear Mrs. Wolcombe, that last "Good-bye" was enough to have undone any possible good your advice may have wrought in Job's mind. It will linger all day in his dull ears, haunting him with he knows not what of his youth, his early dreams, his first love

--for Job has loved--and still further indisposing him for the harsh realities of life, while he can luxuriate in visions so pleasant as your voice and manner have raised all about him. You can do much, my dear madam, by the sweetness of soul which seems always ready to be poured like a divine oil on the troubled waters of humanity! but, take my word for it, you will never cure Job. Sly rascal! I question whether he is not already yearning for another good talking to "by th' lady." But he musn't use up all his nice things at once; so he merely pockets the shilling, in rather a careless, dignified way, and wishes Mrs. Wolcombe a "Good mornin', ma'an," in a tone that implies an opinion, on Job's part, that on the whole he has got very satisfactorily through a difficult business. The next minute Barbara heard him shuffling away, in his great clumping boots; and then followed a low tap at the door.

The widow shut up the Bible that she had been reading until stopped by the talk with Job; and Barbara, repressing her first flurry, got up sedately and admitted the expected visitor, to whom she offered their only movable seat, the rocking-chair.

"Barbara," said Mrs. Wolcombe, after a brief pause, "I was glad to see you looking so much better at church this morning. I have said you will soon right yourself. You must not make me a false prophet." Then, after another pause, "Shall you be ready to begin work at the mill to-morrow?"

Mrs. Wolcombe looked inquisitively at Barbara as she spoke. The factory girl stood before her with her hands folded across her breast, looking down, so that the ex-

pression might not be too closely scanned. But it was impossible to disguise the deep shadow that had suddenly passed over it and rested there. The question about the mill had filled the heart of the listener with a sense of aching and disappointment that she did not quite understand and which made her feel very angry with herself. "What had she been expecting?" she asked herself, trying to avert her face, as if by accident, from Mrs. Wolcombe's searching, though soft blue eye. "What had she been foolish enough to hope for?" And then, with a kind of contemptuous bitterness, she dragged the hidden hope into the light, and held it up, and turned it about in her mind, laughing it to scorn. "Was it possible she had been dreaming that Mrs. Wolcombe was going to befriend her in some out-of-the-way manner, and prevent her from working at the mill?" A bitter inward laugh ridiculed the thought, but the weight at her heart remained, and warned her of the price she must pay for such moments of delusion. Yet even then the thin, firm outline of her face, as it was seen sideways by Mrs. Wolcombe, appeared so unchanged in its expression, that she was again asked, "What do you say, Barbara?—are you ready to go to the old work to-morrow?"

This time the face turned quite round before the voice answered, coldly and sharply, "I mun be ready, or starve. I hae no other choice."

Notwithstanding the sharpness and coldness of the tone, Mrs. Wolcombe knew, by the help of that familiar of hers who seemed to be ever whispering into her ears the most carefully-guarded secrets of the humanity about her, that before Barbara would again speak there must be

a burst of tears. She turned away not to notice it, but determined she must come quickly to the point.

"Well, Barbara, I am here to give you another choice. I can understand why you dislike going back to the mill, and have been considering how it might be prevented. Would you like to live with me, and take charge of my children under the governess? You know what I gave Martha: I offer you the same."

The depressed heart bounded upwards as it listened, the scorned hope gave a little laugh of triumph to see how truthfully it had anticipated, and there broke a vivid light and colour over the girlish face. Poor Barbara!—even now she was not eighteen; and she could not repress something of a child's shame-faced joy at the wondrous relief Mrs. Wolcombe's words afforded. But, as was her wont, she speedily recovered her outward equanimity of feature. Her voice, however, still trembled a little in spite of the obvious mastery that was being kept over it, as she said, "I canna speak what I feel. It's niver bin out o' mind sin ye telled me Martha wur goin' away."

"I am very glad to hear this, Barbara. I wanted to know your true thoughts, or I should have spoken more promptly. And so——"

"Please——" interrupted Barbara, but then stopping.

"Well, Barbara, what is it?"

"Has th' measter heard anything about it? Happen he mightn't like——"

"Oh yes, he is perfectly willing! He does not mix you up with your husband's affairs."

"But the name—he mun hate it!"

"Well, Barbara, I must tell you candidly there has

been a little discussion on that point. Mr. Wolcombe thinks we had best say nothing about Mrs. Drake, but call you simply Barbara—with the servants you would be the nurse,—so that difficulty's got over ! Anything else ?”

Barbara looked down on the sanded floor, unconsciously crushing, with no pleasing sound, a lump of grit, and seeming to be wrapped in deep and gloomy thought. At last she said, without raising her head, and playing the while nervously with her apron-strings, “Why canna I drop that name now for good an all ? I dunna see what I want wi’ it now.”

“That is a very serious thing to do,” answered Mrs. Wolcombe ; yet she did not appear either shocked or angry, but only troubled and thoughtful, as she weighed Barbara’s proposal.

“You see, ma’am,” urged the latter, with a somewhat hurried accent, “that if I’m ever spoken of by my married name, questions will be asked which will be a trouble to you—and—and to other folk—to answer, and to me to hear on.”

“Yes, that is true ; nor do I see any use in your exposing yourself to such perplexity and possible pain. But what then would you do ?”

“Tak’ my own maiden name, the ony one I feel I’ve any reet to—Barbara Giffard !”

There was a kind of pathetic dignity in the upraised head and in the expression of the rigid yet beautiful face of the mill-girl as she pronounced these words ; as though she were conscious of the humble recollections that alone as yet attached to them, but determined there should be a difference in the future.

“Well, Barbara, I am inclined to think you are right; and yet——”

Barbara looked up inquiringly, and met Mrs. Wolcombe's gaze fixed on her. She understood. She grew a little confused, but neither turned away her head nor allowed her answering glance to falter. So Mrs. Wolcombe went on—and there was, for her, something almost severe in the tone—“Barbara, I heard your vow at the bedside. I must tell you frankly I thought and think it a wicked and foolish vow, one that no Christian wife should make or keep. I do not understand the precise amount of your provocation, though I can see it must have been very great. Perhaps you and your husband may never meet again. Even if he were to return, I am not at present prepared to say I should advise you to receive him as your husband: I do not know enough of the case. But none of these considerations make me the less desirous that you should feel yourself a free agent to act as your own heart, your sense of duty, and your submission to God's will, may dictate. Don't you feel the propriety of this?”

“Yes!” replied Barbara, after a long pause, but not even then in so contrite and humble a spirit as Mrs. Wolcombe would have liked. Still she did not care to press her farther on so tender a point. “Oh, she will right all that by-and-by!” thought she. But then, again, Mrs. Wolcombe had a rather uneasy feeling that Barbara's desire to recur to her maiden name was only a sort of convenient buttress that she was erecting for the support of her vow; and that, in obtaining the sanction now sought for the former, she was making her—Mrs. Wolcombe—a kind of

accomplice in the determined purpose to fulfil the latter—a position which that lady was by no means inclined to submit to.

Barbara, seeing the pause and the irresolution, could not help saying abruptly, “He’s gone, an most like will niver wish to coom back. An if he did, I should say th’ same to him wi’out th’ vow as with. We’re mon an wife na lunger. Oh, please, I want to forget him! I hae forgi’en him. Yes, I want to forget him, an sometimes that isn’t easy. I want to think o’ my dead baby, an my mother, an the things I hae gotten to do. I’ll wark honestly an hardly for you an for your childer. Dunna cast me off because I say ye mun tak’ me as I am—a poor, ignorant, wilful factory-girl. Happen I’m na a Christian wife as yet: he as might hae made me one left me to my own evil thowts an ways. But I want to be a Christian woman, an to mak’ mysel o’ some use in the warld. I canna say ony more.”

“Very well, Barbara, I have confidence in you; and so, once for all, I leave these matters between you and your own conscience. When you need my counsel, say so. Till then you will never again hear from me the name of Abel Drake. Good-bye, Barbara! I shall expect you to-morrow. Take this—” and Mrs. Wolcombe put into her hands some money twisted up in a bit of paper. “You must have some clothes, which you can get ready-made for once; and you must make your mother a little more comfortable here before you go away.”

“The neighbours have been very good to me since—the widow; but Mrs. Wolcombe did not want to hear any more just then, so she added, “You can repay

me, Barbara, by-and-by, you know." Then, with a nod and a smile to each, that seemed in an instant to light up and gladden the very darkest and most inaccessible chambers of their hearts, she went out, leaving Barbara standing at the threshold, her great eyes, moist with their own peculiar dew, fixed on the graceful retreating form, and having in them a sense of new and fervid life, that told better than the most grateful words what was stirring in the heart of the poor mill-girl.

A long time after Mrs. Wolcombe had gone away, and when Barbara and her mother, still scarcely exchanging a word, had sat down to tea, the former suddenly exclaimed :

"O, mother, I'll do more for her than she thinks on. I knaw I can, an I will." She rose for a moment as she repeated the words, "Eigh, I will !" then sat down quickly, as if ashamed of the gesture. "An yo, too, mother ; dunna' think I had altogether forgotten ye, while I was so took up wi' my baby. I couldna' say onything then, but I knew all the while I'd gotten a mother, and it coomforted me, e'en when I wouldna' hae liked to own it mysel'. Eigh ! I hae gotten a mother ; an I love her dearly, an I'll wark for her, an——" but Barbara could go no further, for the poor widow, who had borne without a murmur not only her share of the common distress, but much of Barbara's impatience and unreasonableness while engrossed with her babe and her sorrow, now began to cry. She neither spoke, nor moved, but simply began to cry. At that sight all the pent-up tenderness of Barbara's heart broke forth in one great gush. Her life, which had been so unnaturally frozen or turned into waters

of bitterness, began to heave and swell in the old channels, and then to hurry along glad and sparkling. She seemed to recal in a moment all that the poor, fond, patient, undemonstrative mother had endured with such unfailing love, and to determine in as brief a space that she should yet be repaid. But Barbara did not attempt to talk. She got up from the rocking-chair, and went to the bedside where the widow was sitting, in a kind of happy dream, not daring to put a question about those few earnest and most precious words she had heard, lest they should slip from her, unproductive, as if spoken in a dream. But there was now thrown about her neck a pair of arms, that, though slender and attenuated, were still substantial enough in their fond yearning clasp; and there were presently ringing in the mother's ears an odd and not altogether intelligible compound of happy laughter and tearful sobs, through which finally stole a low, sweet, delicious child-voice, "O, mother! she's done me good, has yon woman! But yo shall see. Bide a bit. Yo shall see!"

CHAPTER III.

OUT IN THE WORLD.

THE splash of many water-spouts in the court waked Barbara on Monday morning, and told her how heavily it had rained through the night. It was not a pleasant awakening. This day was to be the turning point of her life. She set to work stitching, and she felt very sad at the thought that she had henceforward to struggle on alone. Her baby was dead; she had divided the last weak tie that bound her to her husband, and now her mother and she must separate. But she worked on. There was a good deal of mending, and trimming, and altering to do, independent of the ready-made garments that had to be bought, before she could go to Coppeshall in decent guise. So Barbara and her mother stitched away in a silence that was only broken now and then by a necessary question and answer; the heart of each was too full to talk unnecessarily.

In the forenoon, when the clothes were collected together as ready, they were so few that they looked almost absurd, Barbara thought, lying at the bottom of the hair-trunk, which a kind neighbour had brought in, and offered for Barbara's use. She began to demur as to the

propriety of a box at all under such circumstances, but the widow urged the advantage of a place of deposit under lock and key, and that consideration settled the matter in favour of the box. They did not need to ask who was to carry it, for Job had already presented himself in the court, evidently waiting to help Barbara off. What was the matter with Job, that he should thus keep slinking about there for above an hour in the pouring rain, and with the prospect of having that box to carry to Coppeshall at the end of the business? he who had such an unerring instinct for always taking himself safely out of the way of contingent possibilities of work. Whatever the explanation, Job himself does not, strange to say, see anything extraordinary in his conduct; and still more surprising, Barbara and her mother appear equally to take it as a matter of course.

As the rain did not cease, Barbara determined to start a little before two o'clock. None of the neighbours saw her go. It was mill-time, and Abbott's Court was nearly empty. Mother and daughter took no formal farewell of each other. The last thing—and when Barbara had walked to the door as quietly as if she had forgotten there was any one behind her, and watching her departure with silent but quivering lip—she suddenly turned, threw her arms about the widow's neck, kissed her with a strength of emotion that only flurried the poor mother more than ever; then, as if ashamed of so much self-manifestation, Barbara drooped her head for an instant on the widow's shoulder, said something—neither of them knew very well what—and then Barbara rose, turned, and with eyes a little uncertain as to what they looked on, followed the

one plain object they could see, Job's purple ankles, alternately proceeding before her down the court.

Beside the little bandbox that Barbara carried, she held a flower-pot, wrapped in a newspaper, and showing a few long grassy kind of leaves. It was an awkward thing to take to Coppeshall; she was well aware of that; it must seem childish, and would doubtless provoke questions that she would be pained and unwilling to answer. But for all that, Barbara was not going to leave it behind. It contained some bulbs of the larger and later-flowering snowdrop, potted one day long ago, when Barbara, during her brief honeymoon, had visions of a glowing and luxuriant window-garden that should bring all "Araby the blest" into Abbott's Court, and which was to spring up under her fostering care. One single flower had at last rewarded Barbara for all her patient faith. But it came not to be rejoiced over. It was plucked by the mother's trembling hands as a farewell gift to her dead babe, when the coffin lid was about to be closed for ever. As Barbara dropped the stainlessly beautiful blossom into the coffin, she took her parting gaze of the child: from that moment she could never dissociate these two. A casket of rubies or diamonds could not have been half so precious to Barbara's heart as was now this clumsy, weather-stained piece of earthenware and its contents. The plant, like herself, seemed to have given forth in one fair tender blossom all its own better nature—all that seemed worth living for—all, possibly, that in the end would prove that either of them had lived for: the snowdrop, like the child-mother, looked worn and fading. But these were only momentary fancies; and Barbara soon determined that she

and the snowdrop would both have a stout struggle for it yet, before either of them would succumb. Somehow these poor sickly leaves seemed to appeal to her for help in their weakness; and Barbara, as she thought of her mother and her plant, began to feel growing responsibilities: these were her dependents. Yes, she must get strong, that was very plain. So Barbara trudged along hugging the pot of snowdrops, and her mind already teeming with thick-coming fancies; out of which she suddenly drew herself when she discovered what she was about, sometimes with a frown, sometimes a laugh, and sometimes a sigh.

Thus the two walked on, Job with the hair-trunk, and Barbara with her handbox, and flower-pot. The rain had rendered it unadvisable for them to take the nearest way to Coppeshall, through the plantation, so they went round by the high road. Very pleasant it was—that old Cartney road, with open hilly country spreading on each side. The breeze blew strongly, and tasted of the fresh spring shower that had passed through it, and of the bruised and scattered hawthorn bloom which it had ruffled and rified, and the mere spoils of which smelt so delicious.

Barbara walked on, deeply engrossed with her thoughts.

Job, to do him justice, made numerous attempts at getting up a conversation, but it lagged, do all he could.

“Wonder if yo’ll hae much to do yonder?” he speculated on one occasion, making sure he must be rightly anticipating the nature of Barbara’s thoughts.

No answer.

Job sniffed the freshly perfumed air, almost raised his head, and looked across the country with a certain sense

of enjoyment that made him forget for an instant the unsociableness of his companion. There was, in fact, just a touch of the poetry of idleness in Job. Had fortune only made him a rich man, he would probably have been thought not only a good-natured gentleman, and a perfectly respectable member of society, but have died with the reputation of having fulfilled all the duties of life in a most exemplary manner. But remaining the same man—in poverty—of course he was only “Lazy Job.”

“Purty landskip,” continued he, making another attempt upon Barbara’s taciturnity; “ony th’ warkus down yonder spiles it. Warkus! The name’s enow to set ye agin it. Dunna ye think so?”

“Yo’ll be getting to a waur place nor that, if ye dunna gie up your idle ways, Job,” answered Barbara shortly, and with very much the same effect upon him as if, when meditating some cosy bit of enjoyment in a secret corner, a shower-bath had suddenly opened above. “A strung, hearty mon like you, a’most a livin’ on the parish! Ye’ve gotten a deal o’ pride to spare for railin’ at wark-houses, ye hae!”

“As to pride,” observed Job, dejectedly, “aw dunna boast o’ that. It got a knock o’ th’ head a whol ago, when yo——”

If Barbara heard this, she did not choose to notice it. And Job would have done well to take a hint and be silent. But, somehow, he must go on, till he had effectually roused his companion.

“Eigh,—Barbara! Aw’d bin a different mon, if yo’d ——” Yes, Barbara was now roused indeed. She stopped abruptly, just where she was in the road, turned

full face upon Job, and while her indignant gaze seemed to burn into poor Job's faltering and winking eyes, and while he shifted from one foot to another, and with a humble and deprecatory gesture strove to stay the impending storm, she exclaimed—

“Down wi' it! Put down th' box!” Seeing he hesitated, hardly knowing what she meant, or how he had offended, for his ideas were too slow to keep due pace with Barbara's, she repeated her words in so stern a voice that Job shivered as he obeyed her, and set down the box in the middle of the road.

“Now, then, ye know th' way back, dunna ye? Or mun I go wi' you to show you?” Job stared at Barbara, and at the box; then, in bewildered succession, at the ground, the way back, the way forwards, the trees and the sky, without getting the least bit of enlightenment anywhere. At last, as the tears gathered in his eyes, he gruffly murmured—

“Aw ax your pardon, Barbara, aw'm sure, iv aw said owt to hurt thi feelins. Aw didn't mean ony harm.”

“Harm! Mean! How daur ye lay your laziness o' me! I mak' you idle! Luve o' me (if that's whatten you mean) mak' you idle! I wonder yo're not ashamed o' yoursel to say so. It's luve o' yoursel, an' hate o' everything that's manly, an' honest, an' independent. Now, Job, I tell thee once for all, if ye dunna promise me this minnit that yo'll never daur to say sich'n a thing agen, never think sich'n a thing agen—dost mind me?—I'll carry th' box to Coppeshall o' my own shoulders, an' shame thee afore th' whole parish.”

“Aw wunna say so, wunna think so, iver agin! Aw wunna, indeed, Barbara!” snivelled Job.

“An’ will you go to wark, and see if yo’ canna let an old friend like me get up a bit o’ respect for yo’?”

“Aw will, Barbara! Aw will!”

“Very weel! there, tak’ my hond ou’t. Now, Joh, mon, dunna be all day shaking it!” cried Barbara, recovering her good humour, and more touched than she cared to be conscious of, by Job’s genuine emotion. “Now, then, which on us is to shoulder th’ box?”

Job laughed, while slyly wiping away a tear from his eye with his dirty coat tails, which were freshly wet and muddy from contact with the moist bank against which he had leaned during this dialogue. And then Barbara laughed—the first time for many a long week—to see the streak that ran playfully about Job’s face, following the devious course of his hand. Their mirth now infected each other, and they went on in capital spirits towards Coppeshall.

CHAPTER IV.

COPPESHALL.

JOB pulled the long bell handle, after gazing meditatively at the word "Servants" over it, and then stood the box on end, and sat down on it; while Barbara looked through the gate, feeling very small and insignificant beside it; such a great consequential-looking gate as it was, with two grey lions at the corner, which seemed to glance at one another in utter contempt of her and her poorly furnished box. But she saw, from within the iron barrier, the heavy plumed lilac, and the light-tressed laburnum nodding a kindly welcome; and on the border that skirted the short pathway she saw the tall blue iris, and the many-headed yellow daffodils lift themselves from where they had been dashed by the rain, and they too nodded at her; while through them all—trees and flowers—glowed the jolly genial red face of the house itself: originally a plain brick mansion, but which had grown, as some men and women grow, more and more good-looking with age. Love, the universal beautifier, had been here, and left his mark in all sorts of graceful adjuncts. And, in consequence, if ever a place looked like home at first sight, Coppeshall did to those who were invited to enter. Those windows—the quaint little odd-shaped ones above, struggling to maintain

an independent existence, as windows, against the ivy wreaths that were twining about them, and trying with every favouring breeze to clasp hands across them, and shut them up; and the broad and high ones below, with their projecting striped blinds canopying dainty boxes of red stock and mignonette,—spoke of pleasant nooks where one might enjoy luxuriously the sense of in-door comfort with out-of-door freshness. Then that delicious bit of garden border, that stretched so lovingly and closely round the base of the house, seemed to Barbara a kind of imprisoning flower band, saying to the inmates,—“Be content. Within and without have ye not all that heart can desire?”

“Eigh,” thought Barbara, in a kind of answer from herself, “let me on’y once be gotten comfortably inside, and you needna fear I’ll iver want to get out again. Eigh, but I hae knawn what th’ outside life is!”

The gate was opened by the man servant, who had looked, as Job thought, so disrespectfully at him the other morning in the kitchen. So the latter waited only to get a parting glance and nod from Barbara, and then went off, comforted not only with them, but with a smile that went straight to Job’s tender bosom. While Barbara heard the heavy iron gates swung to, and close behind her, Job delightedly took his way homewards; and, as Coppeshall faded in the distance, he began to consider, between the pauses of his fitful progression, whether, under the circumstances, he might not venture to look for a comfortable cup of tea and a chat with the widow on all the adventures of the day; a prospect that greatly inspirited him on.

The servant who had scanned, with no friendly eye,

Barbara's box, imagining it must be as heavy as it looked, was greatly amused by its lightness when he took it up. He led the way, holding it out by a couple of fingers, round the house to the kitchen door at the back, where he handed Barbara and her box—the latter after an additional flourish—to one of the housemaids. That young woman, after having eyed her from head to foot in a peculiarly leisurely way, as though it were a process that didn't at all incommode *her*, took hold of one handle of the box, as a signal to Barbara to take the other; and then they began to ascend the staircase leading upwards from the kitchen. Without much idea of the ground she had gone over, but ashamed at every step of the touch of her clumsy boot on the snowy strip that covered the centre of the rich carpet, Barbara found herself in a room, small and pretty, fresh and clean, and with a good deal of white about it. What a sweet, pure little room it seemed to Barbara! This the housemaid intimated was hers, as being next to the nursery. Her room! There was a sort of sigh of happiness from Barbara, as she looked slowly round and round, examining its aspect, as one dwells on a face seen for the first time, but that one knows instinctively will never again be as an ordinary face to us.

Gladly would Barbara have now been left alone. She wanted to sit down in this new cage, like a bird tired of its brief season of unaccustomed liberty, and familiarise her mind with—and master—the many new sensations that were flowing in upon her in so novel a position. But Mrs. Wolcombe, she was told, was waiting to see her in the schoolroom.

e, this is the nursery," said the housemaid, pushing

back a door on the landing. Barbara put her head into it, looked, and then turned to follow her conductress down stairs. She had seen, in that brief glance, a large airy room covered with a soft bright carpet, a cheerful fire with a high green fender guarding it, a doll on a rocking chair, and close beside it a crib with a tiny sleeping face that made her wish more than ever to stay up stairs.

On reaching the school-room they found that Mrs. Wolcombe had just left it; so the housemaid pushed a chair under Barbara, as she stood near the door, and left her while she went to inform her mistress. Inch by inch only did Barbara's eye venture to make acquaintance with that room, and with the persons who were in it. Heavy curtains of a brownish crimson nearly met across the broad and flat window, which looked out upon thick and waving tree-tops. The paper on the wall was of the same brownish crimson hue, with imitative panels of dark brown. The four desks along one side of the wall, the piano opposite, the oblong table in the centre, the old-fashioned chairs with high carved backs, and their lower cross-rails half worn away by the action of restless feet; the bookshelves at the end of the room, were all like the great geometrical figures of the carpet on the floor, only so many variations of brown. Yet, already thoughts were stirring in Barbara's mind that lent a charm, and an almost romantic colouring, to this otherwise unattractive place, this brown-visaged schoolroom.

Barbara drew her chair away from the door, as she now nervously anticipated Mrs. Wolcombe's entrance. The noise she made brought numerous eyes upon her. When she fancied they had satisfied themselves and turned away,

she looked up once more. Right before her, at the table were the high backs of two chairs. One of them she at first thought was empty ; but, looking down, she beheld a sturdy little leg in a Scotch sock and polished boot, kicking energetically backwards and forwards. In the other chair she saw, besides the feet, which rested quietly on the rail, a bit of pale blue sleeve, fluttering from time to time, as the incumbent of the chair turned over a fresh leaf. Across the table, in front of the glittering keys of the piano, was more of this blue, and over it a shower of brown hair. Barbara's eyes now endeavoured to steal a furtive glance at that other and larger figure which had attracted her attention the moment she entered the room, but which she had not ventured to examine, conscious that the figure was itself too busy in scrutinising her, Was it the governess who sat there in such large magnificence, arrayed in a morning dress of pink ! Doubtless. Barbara suddenly met her gaze. She saw a face no longer young, wearing glasses of a shadowy tint, and looking towards her with an expression of benevolent interest. The head was a little thrown back, apparently for the convenience of a more prolonged examination ; and Barbara even fancied she saw a big tear rolling down the cheek, but kept there, trembling, and unable to find its way, through the extatic smile of pity that barred its progress by the odd contortions of face it made. Barbara felt her colour rising. She was annoyed, and yet strongly tempted to laugh. Then she was frightened, as the governess rose in all the stateliness of her great height, and ample proportions of costume, swept like a ship in full sail towards her, but stopped close before Barbara to

pick up a pin, which she carefully placed in a little circular ivory cushion, restored the latter to her pocket, resealed herself, and again resumed her kindly contemplation of Barbara.

"Poor thing!" she said, at last. "How old was the baby?"

"Nearly two years, ma'am."

"Dear me! Just when children get so engaging. Don't you think so?"

No answer.

"And, let me see, how long has its father been away?"

No answer again.

"Oh, dear, how much trouble there is in the world! Poor thing!—poor thing!—so young and so pretty! But come, never mind, it may be all for the best. Perhaps he'll come back and——"

Here Miss Featherstonehaugh stopped abruptly, raising her head higher and higher to accommodate the altering focus of her glasses, for Barbara had risen without another word, turned, and walked straight out of the room. When the astonished governess could no longer see the retreating form, Barbara was still able to hear the ejaculation called forth by her departure: "Poor child! even sympathy's too much for her!"

Barbara hurriedly remounted the stairs to the nursery. To repress the hysterical mirth that seemed ready to overflow in some inconvenient demonstration, she went straight to the doll, took it up with the help of one arm, set it respectfully in another chair, and then seated herself in the vacated rocking-chair at the side of the crib where the child still lay. The chair and the child together—so like

the chair and child of Abbott's Court, and yet so different—were only too successful in bringing back a feeling of home. With an impulse she could no longer restrain she snatched up the waking child, pressed it to her breast, and kissed it with passionate tenderness. The infant was startled. As Barbara, with brimming heart, looked at it, she saw the little mouth begin to pucker, the eyes to look scared and fill with tears; and while she tried, by soothing tones and gestures, to reassure the babe, it broke out with a vehement cry. Oh, how that cry wrung poor Barbara. It said so plainly to her, "You are a stranger. I don't know you. No one here knows you. I don't love you. No one loves you. Go away!" She laid it down again in the crib, quite unable to try any longer to soothe it, put her elbow on the head of the cradle, covered her face with her hand, and wept with the babe. There is hardly a more touching sight than this, perhaps—to see a mother or nurse give up all attempts to hush a baby's cries, and break out weeping with it: it seems the very climax of all womanly wretchedness.

It was the babe who first turned comforter. The cry gradually ceased as the child became accustomed to the pale, sad, and no longer encroaching face bending over it. Presently a little hand was put up, then a faint April smile broke through the tears, and with it—oh, what a rainbow of hope, and joy, and glory, spanned poor Barbara's soul! But she had grown wiser through her former mistake; so the little hand was very gently touched with a finger, and the little smile was answered by another smile of winning, yet cautious tenderness, until Barbara felt her finger was being clasped by the tiny fist, and saw the

smile break out into a radiant laugh, and then—oh, triumph!—both the arms were suddenly stretched forth, saying to Barbara so plainly, “Take me! take me!”

And then Barbara, checking with a strong will her almost painful delight, once more essayed to get baby quietly up into her arms. But there should be no failure this time, that she was determined, and so she carefully avoided a premature snatching at success. O that some white-haired diplomatist had been there to see how she managed the business. It is difficult, no doubt, to teach gentlemen of his order any new mode of humbugging mankind; but surely even Talleyrand himself might have learned something from Barbara’s intuitive genius in the art of bamboozling babies, which are, as we all know, but mankind and womankind reduced to first principles. The ingenious eye-traps she laid for drawing away the victim’s attention from the business in hand; the fertility of her sudden resources when there was a momentary danger that things were going wrong; and lastly, the cool, confident—one might almost say impudent—gaze into the baby’s face at the critical moment (as if no doubt of success had ever for a moment been entertained, and that it was quite too late for baby to begin to entertain any such doubts now), were all admirable; and, what is more, they succeeded. Baby, it is true, got a thumb into its mouth, and seemed considerably confounded at the result; but, nevertheless, there she was, in Barbara’s lap, when Mrs. Wolcombe came into the room, sitting as quietly and familiarly as if she had been accustomed to sit there time out of baby’s mind.

The mother smiled to see her little one and the new

nurse already on such good terms. She sat down by Barbara's side; and although the latter had no very distinct impression of what was said, she drew from the words, tone, and manner, an unquestionable conviction that she was welcome. Her reception by the governess had suggested a painful idea to Barbara—namely, that Mrs. Wolcombe had been moved altogether by a charitable feeling in bringing her to Coppeshall. That lady's cordial greeting removed at once and for ever all such fancies. Barbara was secretly glad; and she listened now all the more earnestly to the account of the duties that were expected from her. They were very simple, and, as Barbara thought, very few, for she had known what hard work really meant. The chief things were the entire charge of Miss Poppy the baby, dressing the young ladies morning and evening, and fetching them from the drawing-room at nine o'clock for bed. All other matters fell to the care of the governess.

"By the bye," said Mrs. Wolcombe, "I must take you down to see Miss Featherstonehaugh."

"I hae seen her, ma'am, and I dunna think I want to see her ony more—I mean to-neet."

Mrs. Wolcombe looked at Barbara, saw her darkening face, and guessed something had occurred: what it was she soon drew out. The incident amused and vexed her.

"I told her your story, Barbara, in order to interest her, and that she might spare you accidental allusions that might give pain. But Miss Featherstonehaugh can never follow more than one train of thought at one time, and is apt to go at that——" Mrs. Wolcombe stopped and bit her lip; but Barbara saw the incipient smile, and

understood, and would have smiled in return but for an instinctive good sense that made her recoil from any premature assumption of position. "I asked her," continued Mrs. Wolcombe, "to be kind to you ; and she has taken what she thought to be the very straightest possible course to achieve that object. But never mind these trifles, Barbara ; she is a very worthy person and an excellent teacher. You will respect her as I do when you understand her, and cease to look for too much from her. I have found, Barbara, that one of the most precious rules we can establish for ourselves in our dealings with the world is, to take every one at their best, and persistently keep them so if we can. The perception of Miss Featherstonehaugh may not, perhaps, be quite so keen in some things as yours and mine, but she is a thoroughly conscientious person, and does well whatever she undertakes in her own proper sphere. And now, Barbara, try to feel at home. Be a good girl. Be always frank and truthful with me and with my children, and it shall not be my fault if you do not find here a real and permanent home ; so long, at least, as you may need one."

Barbara took Mrs. Wolcombe's hand, and pressed it silently to her heart ; then colouring, let it go. Mrs. Wolcombe again smiled, patted her cheek, and left the room.

It was hard to settle down to any kind of steady occupation just then, unless indeed it were to kiss baby, and cry over it for an hour or two. But there was in Barbara a natural love of quiet and order—a settled habit of restraint when not forced out of herself—that warned her a new life was beginning with new duties, and that she

must steadily check the irregular and exciting impulses which her recent life and sufferings had originated. She might not conquer them all at once, but she must begin. Accordingly, Miss Poppy presently found herself on the rug, amused with a new game invented for the occasion by Barbara, while the latter tidied the nursery, rubbing out a sorrow with every movement of her wrist, dispersing dust and rubbish alike from outer and inner chambers, and letting into both fresh breezes and a wholesome sense of renovation. It is surprising how much better and brighter both looked—the nursery and Barbara's face—after the process.

But when she went to another occupation, that of laying out the children's dresses—the face grew a little downcast and puzzled. There were so many little things about them unfamiliar to her. How should she fit them to the right persons and places, and in the right manner, without making the children laugh?

What a long day it seemed! When should she get to her pillow? When rest body and soul? The novelty of her position, and of everything about her, however often she tried to forget it, was oppressive. She longed to retire into herself, and collect her strength, and come fresh and renewed for the struggle in right-down earnest on the morrow.

Five o'clock was struck by the great clock in the hall, which in its loud slowness seemed to Barbara infected by the general indisposition of things to bring the day to a close. She heard tea taken to the schoolroom, and presently her own and Poppy's was brought up by the housemaid. Barbara dearly loved a cup of tea, if such a weak-

ness may be confessed of a heroine; but somehow there was not the flavour in Mrs. Wolcombe's expensive hyson that Barbara recollected in the pennyworths she had often fetched from the little shop in Abbott's Court. Strange to say, the poor widow who was sitting at that precise moment with Job over a cup of that precise tea which Barbara coveted, found the same want of flavour in her decoction as she looked round from time to time, and missed something that she couldn't explain by the mere fact of Barbara's absence. Poor Barbara! Poor widow! Neither of them guessed how heart was dumbly straining to heart, through all those intervening walls, gates, and roads.

Soon the children came tearing up-stairs to be dressed. This was an event Barbara had rather dreaded. She had almost hoped (as one does hope sometimes for a particularly nauseous medicine that happens to be of uncertain attainment) that Miss Featherstonehaugh would, on this particular occasion, come in to help. But she heard the great flounces sweep past on their way up-stairs, and she saw the three children standing before her, staring, as the manner of children is, at a fresh face. Barbara could not help one answering look of blank dismay. What was she to do? How could she possibly improve the appearance of these elegant little ladies? Their fine faces and tiny slender hands were white and clean enough surely. The hair might be smoother, but how could Barbara hope to imitate the arrangement of those beautiful curls, if she once put them out of order? She could not help feeling that Mrs. Wolcombe ought not to have left her alone thus to begin operations. But something must be done. They

couldn't stand staring at each other all the evening. Gladly would Barbara have exchanged her job for the washing of a dozen of the dirtiest children in Abbott's Court, on whom soap and water should certainly be made to produce an effect. Yes, something must be done; and it was plain from the mischievous glances of the young lady she had seen at the piano, that Barbara must keep her difficulties to herself. So, putting Poppy down, who wouldn't even cry and make a diversion in her favour, she determined to go seriously through the whole process of washing, &c., just as if they all wanted it. She was rather ashamed of the make-believe, but what better could she do? Which should she attend to first? One of the girls had moved away, and was busying herself in taking some white dresses from a drawer. She had a grave, almost melancholy face, not pretty, but with something in it that showed she had a will of her own. She placed each dress on a chair, and then said to Barbara, with a kind of patronizing, elderly manner, as though talking seriously to her doll:

"This is my dress, nurse; this is Maud's; and there is Hugh's. Please dress me first. I am the eldest."

So far so good, thought Barbara. And she was glad, for a time, of the running fire of remarks that the sad but consequential little lady kept up, as an accompaniment to all the nurse's doings:—"You are not turning that curl the right way, nurse;" "Please, don't hook in my hair, nurse;" "I have my sash tied in front, Maud has hers tied behind," &c. Barbara knew, at all events, that things must be going right, when she received no warning to the contrary. But the preaching grew tiresome as

Barbara rapidly fathomed the whole mystery, and began to laugh at her own fears. Miss Helen, however, who had a passion for dolls, and who had evidently found in Barbara a very large, superb, and altogether new doll, talked at her all the while that Maud, the second sister, was being dressed, till Barbara felt angry. But that feeling soon changed into amusement, as she stopped and looked at the little lady with so comical an expression, that Miss Helen, also stopping, began to think something must be wrong, without exactly knowing what; and then, under the recollection of that look, preserved a decorous and cautious silence.

Maud done with, Barbara turned to Hugh.

“Oh, bother! I don’t want any girls to touch me. I shall do,” said the young gentleman, turning away disdainfully. To his astonishment and unutterable disgust, he was seized in a cowardly manner from behind, hoisted on to a chair, and his mouth stopped, with all its natural and bubbling indignation, by a wet towel well soaped, and from which, when his face re-appeared, it was evident he had received no ordinary benefit. Again he would have rebelled, but he was under the strong hand of law; so he submitted to Barbara’s pleasure, while making faces at his sisters, who were laughing at his ignominious defeat. This substantial bit of trouble and work came as a decided relief to Barbara, after handling the silky curls, the delicate muslins, and the pale soft ribbon which she feared might get frayed, like a flower-petal, under the touch of her rough and awkward fingers.

She had just finished, when she heard a rustling of silk at the door, and in came Miss Featherstonehaugh, with a

grand sweep, ready to set everything to rights, no matter how great the difficulty, and rattling, as she moved, the beads of her head-dress.

"Oh, nurse, I am so sorry! I quite forgot that I had promised Mrs. Wolcombe that I would show you how to dress the children. Dear me! Well, it can't be helped now. They must go as they are. But I am so sorry, nurse, for your sake. Pray excuse me." And then Miss Featherstonehaugh went off, never once noticing in her remorse and forgetfulness that the children were, in fact, as well dressed as the fondest mother could desire. Grandly she swept down stairs, Maud on one side, and Helen on the other, both hidden in the majestic folds of her dress, while Hugh followed, lashing her train with his whip.

Barbara was once more alone, and measuring the space that intervened betwixt her and the visit to the drawing-room, which she dreaded more than all the rest.

When Poppy was gone off to sleep for the night, and not another occupation of any kind could be found or made, Barbara again found herself possessed by an irritable restlessness, coupled with a great desire to rest; and if, for a moment, she escaped out of these regions by sinking deeper into herself, there came an overpowering heart-sickness and an inexpressible weariness of soul that kept demanding when should there be an end to the interminable day? and which refused even to own that it was beginning to fade.

The rain had come on again. Barbara began to hear it beating on a little grave in the village churchyard; and her heart throbbed, and a passionate yearning to go through all that rain and throw herself on that grave,

seemed to be increasing minute by minute. She got up, determined to control the rising emotion before it might be too late. She went to the window, and saw there the little pot of snow-drops. It comforted her to find the leaves looking up more freshly than of late. Then she paced the chamber to and fro, evidently striving to thrust away from her some image which would force itself upon her attention. She stamped once impatiently, but was frightened by the sound of her thick awkward boots, from any repetition of that kind of effort to crush under her feet the unwelcome visitor. But she walked to and fro for a long time with so stern an aspect, and with so unwearying a frame, as though she were convinced she was walking her every weakness out of life. Once or twice she stopped; and it seemed then but the turning point of a straw, this way or that, under a gust of wind, whether she should not break out into passionate rebellion, or whether she would subside into a mute, passively-enduring machine, that might appear to the bystander to have known nothing beyond the dullest routine of existence. Happily, there was a something beneath, in Barbara's soul, which, sooner or later, would always be heard, no matter how terrible the chaos, above; and which, when heard, Barbara never failed to be guided by. "What mun I do?" was a cry of anguish that in the darkest hours would be finally translated (sometimes by unconscious transitions) into, "What ought I to do?" and then the answer and the decision were soon forthcoming. Just now Barbara's question and answer crept out in the low-murmured words—

"It was reet—and I hae sin' forgi'en him—and I will

abide by my vow ! I will do as she said—look back no more. Living or dead, he must be nothing now to me.” She spoke in all the calmness and conviction that a sudden light thrown upon us when wandering in gloomy and dangerous ways, gives ; and there standing, midway in the chamber, her head heavenwards, but her hand across her eyes, she addressed a few words of heartfelt prayer to God, to cheer, guide, and strengthen her. Barbara felt from that moment she would be a changed woman.

She did not light her candle, but sat bending over the fire, resting her arms on the high green fender ; now looking into the glowing flame, now listening to the howling of the rising wind, and the incessant beating of the ivy-leaves, mocking her as by a call to she knew not what.

Nine o'clock struck. She sprang up, lighted her candle, smoothed her hair, and prepared herself for her last great trial—the drawing-room. On reaching the first storey she saw in the distance, along the passage, a door standing partly open, with brilliant light streaming through ; and she heard the sound of a piano rising above a hum of voices. That then, she thought, must be the drawing-room. She went and knocked.

“Come in !” cried Mrs. Wolcombe’s soft voice, which Barbara never heard without a renewed sense of friendliness near.

“O, it’s nurse. Come, children,” she continued, as Barbara moved forwards into the confusing light, splendour and publicity.

While the children rose, unwillingly, to begin the round of good nights, the mill girl, who had never before put foot in such a place, began to raise her eyes from the

carpet, as she perceived that no one seemed to be noticing her, and to gaze on the novel scene. She felt strange things astir besides simple admiration. This moss-like carpet at her feet; these rich curtains looped back by golden-tasselled cords, and revealing here a dazzlingly white statue, there baskets of exotic flowers, that realised in colour, form, and fragrance, under the soft, warm light, all that Barbara's imagination had ever suggested to her of Paradise; those sumptuous damask coverings; these airy, lace-like fabrics—whence came they? They seemed at once foreign and familiar. The intricate design of the crimson damask, the leaf on the fairy muslin, the very rosebuds on the carpet, were hardly strangers to her. These, or such as these, which she now found blooming and growing in their beauty in the rich man's home, had she not often seen springing into life and loveliness under rough and weary hands, to the rude music of the shuttle and the wheels? Ah, how the sight of them carried her back to scenes from which the great iron gates appeared to have separated her for ever!

There were several strangers present; and among two or three elderly gentlemen who had escaped as far as possible from Miss Featherstonehaugh's performances on the piano, Barbara recognized Mr. Wolcombe. He looked, she thought, just the same man in his luxurious home as when he used to come down upon them at the mill like a dry east wind. Yes; his short, spare figure was every inch as upright, his iron-grey hair round his crown just as bristling, his small, round, grey eyes as widely open at the least suggestion of business advancement or agreeable business associations at his evening game of

chess, as they could be during the greatest of his bargain-makings.

His son, Mr. Lancelot Wolcombe, a young man of twenty, and of whom Barbara felt almost as much dread as of his father, having heard so much of his eccentric ways and restless love of mischief, was, as usual, busily engaged in doing nothing; an art he had carried to a high point of perfection. His latest achievement—and upon which he was now quite engrossed—was that of making a kitten slide down the tongs. Yet, listless and unconcerned as he appeared to be in all serious matters, not a word could be spoken, but you might see, if you watched him narrowly, he had caught it, and commented upon it in his own fashion, by a wry expression of his face, or a wandering glance of his eye, or an expansion of the nostrils, which almost twinkled at times with the rapidity of the movement, and sometimes even by a low laugh, which, though heard by others, was not easily connected with its true origin in Lancelot's mind, because he appeared all the while so inattentive and unconcerned.

"Come, be off!" he suddenly growled, in a deep but irregular-sounding tone. "Don't you see Martha's waiting?"

"It isn't Martha," replied Hugh.

Lancelot looked up. He was not an artist, and that face of Barbara's, untouched by colour, and made colder by its stern expression, and by the flash of the large eyes, and that figure so straight, and long, and so oddly garbed, did not strike him agreeably.

"What a queer, waxy face! She looks as if she had no blood in her!" was Mr. Lancelot's comment; and which,

with his usual disregard of ceremony, and being unaware that Barbara had approached near to give a fillip to Master Hugh's failing resolutions for bed, he said so loudly, that she heard every word.

Before Barbara could manage to pilot that young gentleman safely through all the intricacies of the place, which he had a happy knack of making the most of, Barbara could not help noticing that Mrs. Wolcombe had drawn Lancelot to her side, and was whispering something which he appeared to listen to intently. Barbara's burning cheek, which had already hastened to repel the calumny that she had no blood in her, now raged still more fiercely as she guessed the subject of their discourse: her story! O, how she sickened at the thought that she had a story, and one that strangers must and would again and again dabble with and speculate upon! She was obliged to turn towards them, for Mrs. Wolcombe spoke to her.

"Nurse, look carefully, please, to Hugh; he is apt to grow wild, and to let his spirits run away with him."

Barbara bowed her head, and as she raised it met Lancelot's glance a second time fixed upon her. Her colour, and a certain something hardly definite enough to be called resentment, that appeared in her countenance, told him he had been overheard. His face twitched, his nostrils twinkled, and he was about to speak, when he turned away with a laugh.

This was only a momentary trouble. The children were soon disposed of, and Barbara might rest at last. Ay, she felt at home now. Coppeshall seemed in a measure hers, as she laid down in her pretty bed, and in that pretty white room, with Poppy's crib by her side—treasure of

unimaginable price placed under her guardianship. No more harrowing thoughts kept rest from her pillow. The day and her past life were fading irrevocably together. Her eyelids began to droop under a gentle pressure. And while she was about to pour forth all the gratefulness of her soul to the Divine Listener, she went off, poor, innocent, weary, happy Barbara, with all her thanks and prayers unsaid, into a sleep sweet and unbroken, and such as she had long been a stranger to.

CHAPTER V.

TIMON'S TEETH CLEAR UP A FACT IN PHYSIOLOGY.

"A FROG-HUNT!" exclaimed Barbara, as one morning, about a month after she had been at Coppeshall, Master Hugh entered the nursery in a high state of excitement, with a cat in his arms, and something in his closed hands, which he kept peeping at through his fingers, while he ordered her to clear the nursery, as he was going to have a frog-hunt.

"Yes, a grand frog-hunt! Now, no humbug, nurse, but shut the door, and get out of the way." So saying, he set down the cat, and opened his hands, when out jumped two frogs, which began limping along the floor. The cat sprang after them; and Hugh, shouting with a kind of Indian war-whoop to keep Barbara off, followed the chase, seizing the cat whenever she got too close to the frogs, and holding her till they were well in advance, then letting her go again.

At last, watching her opportunity, Barbara seized the frogs, and threw them lightly out of the window upon the top of one of the thickly-branched trees, where they went, dropping from point to point, till they fell on the sward below, very little the worse.

"Barbara! You horrid wretch!" cried Master Hugh, in a perfect yell. "You've spoiled the game."

"Weel, an' I'm glad on't. It's a cruel, wicked game."

"And I say it's a jolly game!" roared Hugh, almost hysterically; "and I'll tell my brother you say he makes cruel, wicked games. See, if I don't! But it's always the way. O, how I do hate girls!" And therewith the young gentleman bounced out of the room. Presently Barbara saw him in the garden, apparently relating his wrongs to Mr. Lancelot, who listened as though decidedly interested.

Before long he stooped down, and said a few words to Hugh, that made the boy's face clear up in an instant; and then the two went off together towards the orchard, Mr. Lancelot switching off the buds of the fruit-trees with his riding-whip, and Hugh, evidently once more in high spirits, casting a look of triumph towards the nursery-window.

Barbara watched them with a puzzled, anxious face. Her life—which would have been otherwise almost monotonous in its quiet—had been, ever since her arrival at Coppeshall, a perpetual whirl of anxiety and irritation, through the behaviour of Master Hugh. Tiny arrows would whiz past her head as she sat at her work in the nursery; a hideous black mask would grin at her when she went to see if Master Hugh was safely asleep in his bed; miniature cannons, to which fusees had been previously attached, would suddenly explode while she was dressing him. Then, again, he would invariably disappear directly she had got him ready for the drawing-room, and would come back in a few minutes with his clothes torn, or covered with dirt, and Barbara would be called and

publicly reproved by Mr. Wolcombe for her neglect. Once she found her snowdrop set up as a target. In fact, so cleverly was each trick managed to touch Barbara in her secret points of sensitiveness, that she began to fancy they were being hatched in some other brain than Master Hugh's. It was as if she had some enemy in the house, determined to baulk her success. At times—though she always dismissed the idea as too absurd—she fancied Mr. Lancelot was this enemy ; that it was he who incited Hugh to all the mischief, for the purpose of annoying her.

While these thoughts were again passing through her mind, Miss Featherstonehaugh came to say that Master Hugh was, "as usual," missing from breakfast, and that his papa was very angry. So Barbara left her work, and crossed the garden in the direction she had seen the pair take. She soon reached the old orchard. The light, spring foliage, which had been drenched by a morning shower, glittered brightly in the sun. The fruit-trees were in the fullest bloom, and green buds were everywhere pricking through the moist soil. Barbara walked quickly on, past the pinky-stalked rhubarb, with its wrinkled leaves, and past the long bed of young peas, rising with bent heads from the soil, as if looking back regretfully upon their cradle, and wondering how soon it would be their grave. Presently she came to the old apple-tree, that had such an extraordinary twist in its trunk, and which, she had heard Mr. Lancelot say, looked as if it had been seized with a sudden fit of stomach-ache through the sourness of its own apples. While she was looking at it, her face was drenched by a shower of water-drops and apple-blossoms, and when she opened her eyes and looked

up, she beheld Master Hugh, perched on one of the highest parts of the tree, making faces at her, and shaking the wet branches over her head with riotous glee.

Standing a little apart, and looking on, with a curious stumpy pipe in his mouth, his hands in the pockets of his loose jacket, and his great knee-boots covered with mud, was Mr. Lancelot; and at his heels were two of the ugliest dogs Barbara had ever seen, and both of which began to bark as soon as they saw her.

"Hold your noise, Timon! Isidore, you ugly brute, if you don't stop that yelping, I'll send this down your throat!" said Mr. Lancelot, holding his spurred heel close to the smaller dog's muzzle.

This Isidore was a poor little scrubby-haired, snub-nosed, tailless brute, with large ears, and paws that were out of all proportion with the rest of his body. He had also a pair of miserable-looking eyes, that seemed to sympathise with everybody's disgust at his ugliness, and ask pardon for it. Barbara could not help laughing to see how, when his master spoke to him, he approached with ears laid back, eyes wincing as from imaginary blows, and with a kind of slide; then sprawled over on his back, and lay with his huge, ugly paws dangling down, his bit of a tail stuck close and tight to his body, and his beseeching eyes turned up, deprecating the beating that he owned he deserved, an irresistible picture of servile humility, that one longed to kick, but could not.

Timon—so named on account of his uncontrollable aversion to mankind generally, but with Toby most unmistakeably graven on his broad features—was as savage-looking as Isidore was meek. One could wish, for his

master's credit, to be able to say he was somewhat handsomer than his companion ; but indeed, truthfully speaking, he was not. His coat was smooth and of a dirty-yellow colour ; his head was too big, and his ears too short ; and an accident having deprived him of the use of one eye, he had to suit his movements to his sight, so always ran sideways ; which gait, with his long and bowed legs, had a very curious effect. They were both unquestionably low dogs, and in spite of Timon's bravado, and Isidore's gentle and obliging manners, were excluded by general consent from the canine society of the neighbourhood. No doubt they did think it very hard, that when they went down to the village behind their master, all the gentlemen's dogs they met should turn off into an adjoining field to avoid being seen in their company ; or that the butcher's dog, with still less breeding, should make a rush between them, sending Isidore sprawling in the mud ; and when Timon, with crisping tail and bared teeth, demanded satisfaction for such conduct, should add insult to injury by kicking the dirt at them with both his hind feet, in silent contempt, and pass on his way. And although some time or other, all such miscreants—the butcher's dog excepted—were sure to meet their due from Timon's white teeth, they always revenged themselves by waylaying the unlucky Isidore, when he chanced to be alone, and sending him home in such a plight as would raise Timon's ire for a week or two.

"Well, which do you think the handsomest ?" asked Mr. Lancelot, after Barbara had taken a long look at the dogs.

"Nae, I canna say, sir," answered Barbara, repressing

a smile, as she turned and looked up into the tree. "Master Hugh, come down directly!"

"Why, you don't suppose he'll mind what you say, do you?" observed Mr. Lancelot, smoking away quite at his ease. "It's no use. You had better give it up."

"I hae come for him, an' I shall tak' him wi' me. Please don't try to keep him. Now, Master Hugh!" The boy began slowly and hesitatingly to descend, and Barbara could not help casting a half-triumphant look at the brother.

"Here, Timon, boy; seize him, seize him! Isidore!" cried Mr. Lancelot, clapping his hands; and both the dogs began jumping round the tree; Isidore with a weak but noisy yelping, and Timon with a hoarse bark, that frightened Hugh, who instantly began to remount as high as he could get.

Lancelot now glanced quietly at Barbara, and found her eyes fastened on his, with a look of almost contemptuous surprise. He coloured slightly, but returned the look half-laughingly, half-haughtily.

"Mr. Lancelot, please call th' dogs away!" she said, in a low, almost commanding tone of voice, that made him smile, as she pointed to the dogs.

"And suppose I say I shan't do anything of the kind!"

"Eigh,—but yo will!"

"Shall I? What if I don't?"

"Then I mun, sir."

"You!" He looked at her, and laughed right out. "I dare you to touch them. No stranger ever touched Timon yet, but said stranger repented; so I warn you."

"Will you call them away, sir?"

"Not if you stamp your foot at me like that. Couldn't do it!"

"Will you, sir, *please*?" again appealed Barbara, emphasising the "please," like a naughty child who is made to say it.

Curious, perhaps, to see what she would do, and just a little annoyed by her manner, so calm and confident, in spite of the heightening colour that began to overspread her usually colourless face, Mr. Lancelot slowly and enjoyingly drawled out, "No!" He had scarcely said the word before he repented of it. Barbara thrust Isidore aside with a contemptuous push, rather than a kick, against his muzzle, which brought him instantly on his back, praying for mercy with dangling, submissive paws; and she at once seized Timon by the throat, forced his head to the ground, and held him there, with lolling red tongue and bloodshot eyes, in spite of all his dangerously quiet struggles to get free.

"Now, then, Master Hugh; quick, quick! or I shall get a bite! Mak' haste. I won't let him loose till you've gotten away."

Hugh hastened down, seeing Barbara's danger, and beginning to think matters altogether were getting serious. The dog still struggled; and there was a devilish kind of side-look at Barbara out of the corners of his eyes that told her the danger; and it was evident by her silence, and the strained attitude into which she had thrown herself, that he taxed her powers to the utmost. At the moment Hugh touched the ground, the dog made a new and desperate effort to release himself, and so nearly succeeded, that Barbara lost her grasp, and had to let go, and

make a second snatch in order to get a better hold. She succeeded in evading (as it seemed) a fierce snap from the foaming jaws, and then seeing Hugh safe beyond the orchard, and the door shut behind him, she resigned the dog to Lancelot, who had been vainly striving either to make the dog be quiet or to induce Barbara to let him interfere.

A tremendous kick from Mr. Lancelot finished the business, so far as Timon was concerned; and he and Isidore slunk off, without beat of drum, or other sign of triumph, to the kennel.

"Barbara!" began Mr. Lancelot, in some agitation. "You are bleeding! He has bitten you! The brute!"

"Happen, Master Lancelot, there is blood in me, after all," said Barbara, with a quiet smile, that had just a little spice of malice in it, and she walked away, without another word.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SURGEON'S FEE.

A FEW minutes later, Barbara walked into the school-room—a place she was fond of visiting during meal-times, when everybody else was sure to be away—and began to amuse herself by a strange kind of reading, that of the children's dog-eared school-books. Apparently, she had forgotten the scene in the garden, her wound, and every thing else, as she sat down to one of the books, looking strangely puzzled by its contents. Suddenly the door opened in a peculiarly gentle manner, and lo! Mr. Lancelot! Barbara had never once seen him in that place before. She looked at him coldly and inquiringly, and with such an air of "Pray, what do you want here?" that he smiled an answer, reclosed the door, and came and sat down by her side. Barbara rose.

"Very well," said he, also rising; "it's all the same to me; which you like—standing or sitting." Presently he went on. "Barbara!"

"Sir!" freezingly answered the latter.

"I don't know what you think of me, nor do I know that I particularly care. I dare say you mix Timon and me up together into a flattering whole. But I want to know about the wound—what have you done to it?"

"Washed it, and put a bit o' plaster on it."

"That won't do. Now if I had not had the evidence of my own senses that it takes a great deal to frighten you, I should be afraid of frightening you now. I don't suspect Timon of being mad—he has, I think, every evil quality under the sun but that—but I do think you should take precautions. But, perhaps, you can't stand pain. Many people can fight when their blood's up—and so can you; but how about letting me touch that place with caustic to make all safe?"

"What will it do, sir?"

"Burn—as though it were burning into your very soul!—but then it will leave your mind a very picture of contentment afterwards."

"Hae you gotten it wi' you, sir?"

"Well, yes; in fact, I have been to fetch it."

"Happen I can't stand it?"

"But you'll try?"

Barbara held out her wrist in answer; and Lancelot, with a tenderness of touch that contrasted oddly with the roughness of his general behaviour, removed the plaster, and looked carefully at the wound. It was slight to appearance; but unfortunately the dog's teeth had gone deep enough to draw blood.

"You are sure you washed it carefully?"

"Yes, sir, because I tried by keeping on wi' th' water to mak' th' bleeding stop."

"Very well. Now mind what I say. I don't think one woman out of a hundred could stand quietly to let me do this. Ah! yes—you feel it? I thought you'd wince

soon. If you'd like a good cry or a scream, have it out, don't mind me."

But Barbara, after the first cruel touch, bore all unflinchingly, only taking care not to trust herself too soon with the question, "Had he done?"

The high colour had now faded, and she began to look increasingly pale, as Lancelot, tearing off a narrow strip from his white cambric handkerchief, wetted one end in a jug of drinking water that he found on the table, observing the while, "It will cool the place;" and then wrapping the bandage about the wrist, he fastened the end ingeniously by tucking it under.

"Here," said Lancelot, fetching the water-jug, "drink; it will do you good."

Barbara did drink, and soon felt restored to all her courage and equanimity.

"Thank you, Mr. Lancelot," presently broke forth from those still pale lips, and accompanied by so sweet a smile that Lancelot, for the first time, began to feel a little confused; and although the effects did not last long, they were decided enough to make Barbara almost repent of her natural emotion of gratefulness, and more than enough to make her wish he would go away from the school-room before any one else should come in.

"Barbara!"

"Yes, sir?"

"I dare say you think me a very brutal sort of person?"

"No, sir; but I might hae done awhile ago."

"Come, then, I've disappointed my best friends, who are always predicting that I shan't redeem my character

in time. I wish, Barbara, you'd do one or two things for me."

"What are they, sir?"

"One is to tell me what you think of me."

Barbara shook her head, laughed, and remained silent.

"Well then, the other:—will you give me a word of friendly advice?"

Barbara looked doubtfully even as to that request also; but Mr. Lancelot gave her no more opportunity for refusing, for he continued to speak:—

"Well, now, I'll tell you, for it strikes me you are the only sensible and brave woman I ever met with—except my mother—and—but never mind her now. You wonder, perhaps, why I idle away a deal of time?"

"All on it, sir, I should say."

"Oh!—would you? Very well:—All on it!"

There was such a tone of unmistakeable enjoyment in Mr. Lancelot's voice as he repeated Barbara's words, and such a delicate imitation of her accent, as made her aware what he was about; yet that hardly justified the flush of resentment that instantly burned in the womanly cheek—and burned more fiercely even than the caustic had lately done. Barbara was sensitive as to her dialect; she was striving perpetually to master it, but in a way that no one should know what she was doing. And now here was Mr. Lancelot throwing down her screen and exposing her to the world's derision!

"Barbara, I like your dialect, mind that;" he suddenly broke in, forgetting the story he was going to tell.

"Hae you done, sir?" asked Barbara, with increasing resentment

"Now, Barbara, you must give a fellow time. He can't turn angel all at once. Now, can he?"

What with the tone in which this was said, and the wry look with which it was accompanied, and the rapid, involuntary twitching of the nostrils, Barbara could not help laughing as she repeated his phrase "angel!" and said she thought "he need not be afraid."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I'm at a loss to know what the d—— is the matter with me; what it is that makes me have such odd fancies and such idle habits. Somehow I think I could do something, if only that something would be good enough to show itself to me and say, 'Come, I want you.'"

"Yo donna like th' mill, sir?"

"No, I donna—that is, I don't like the mill."

"And whatten?"—Barbara was about to change the word and say "what;" but after her pause she repeated the former phrase emphatically:—"And whatten *do* you like?"

"The army!"

"Not surgery, or medicine, or aught of that sort?"

"Lord no! What made you ask?"

"Because I can see you're clever that way, sir."

"Ah, don't be deceived by the universality of my talents! Why, Barbara, I could preach you a capital sermon at a quarter of an hour's notice, if you'd let me, and shouldn't at all dislike the business. Only if you would be so good as to confess a little to me first, by way of getting me into the right spirit, and of giving me some materials for my discourse, my sermon would be better—would come closer home. What!—you are not going

away? Come—come! I won't stop you much longer; and when I do go, I shan't come again in a hurry, I promise you."

"Well, then, sir?"

"Well, then, my father hates the army, and feels a good deal about my want of feeling for the mill. My mother I can manage: but, somehow, she holds me here in spite of myself. Barbara, do you like my mother? Ah, yes!—you needn't say any more. Your face speaks for you, as it does with all honest people before they get spoiled. Now, what would you do if you were me?"

"Settle it before neet—I mean night—and either go to th' mill or th' army to-morrow, sir."

"Eh!—what? The deuce you would? On my life I believe you though. Hang me if I ever expected to find myself shamed by a woman. But I'm not going yet, if it be only for your sake."

"My sake, sir?"

"Yes, I'll stay a bit longer to plague you. Who taught you, I should like to know, to go at things in this straightforward fashion? I shouldn't wonder if you don't turn out a revolutionist of the first water—a Robespierre in petticoats, or a red republican fresh from the nursery. I want to know more about you; it's my duty to know more about you. You are hatching schemes of some sort. What means that light I have seen burning late in the night from your chamber window? Take care, Miss Barbara, my eye is upon you! Hullo!—what's the matter now?"

Mr. Lancelot turned to see what it was that arrested Barbara's gaze and raised the tint of her cheek. His

mother stood there. She was pale and placid as usual; but she did not attempt to conceal her surprise, or to deny the questionings of her look. Precisely for that reason, perhaps, neither of the two spoke.

“Do I interrupt conversation?”

“Nonsense, mother! Barbara was bitten by the dog through my fault; and I fetched some caustic, and made her let me cauterise the wound.”

“O, that was all. And is there no danger now?”

“None,” said Mr. Lancelot; and he turned in his usual careless style to go away, but was arrested by Barbara’s voice.

“Not all, ma’am!” she quickly said; and Mrs. Wolcombe’s interest and anxiety revived. “Mr. Lancelot has been asking my opinion about what he should do with himself.”

“O, indeed! Has he?” Mother and son here exchanged looks.

“Yes, ma’am. I donna think I was th’ proper person to be asked.”

“Neither do I, Barbara!”

“But as he did ask, I told him my opinion.”

“Yes—and that was?”

“That he should think it weel over to-day, and go to th’ mill or to th’ army to-morrow.”

Mrs. Wolcombe looked with more than her usual penetration of glance into Barbara’s clear frank eyes, and at last seemed so thoroughly satisfied with what she saw there, that she exclaimed, in all her old gladness and sweet geniality of manner,—

“Barbara, I thank you • both for my own sake and his.

You are right. He ought to have done this long ago. He is running to waste. We will see to it at once. Perhaps I have been a little to blame—a little selfish. But that shall be remedied.” There was a slight quiver in the fond mother’s voice as she said this. Perhaps Barbara noticed it; or perhaps she had felt more than she cared to own (for she was truly proud in her secret nature) the coldness of Mrs. Wolcombe’s looks, and the double meanings of her words; but, whatever it was, a very big tear now forced its unwelcome way into her eye, and began to roll down her cheek. Mrs. Wolcombe saw, and either understood or guessed what was passing, and her heart smote her, but she said nothing, and one minute afterwards no one would have guessed, from Barbara’s manner, that she was other than the children’s mere nurse, in feeling as well as in position, as she went quickly away to her ordinary occupations.

Two or three hours later, as she was crossing the corridor, she again met Mr. Lancelot full face, and he stood still, evidently determined to speak to her.

“Well, ma’am, be content. You have settled me. Paid me off in style. Yes. You’ve hurried matters with a vengeance. I’m sorry I can’t oblige you by going away to the army to-morrow, as I think you suggested. One must have a few traps with one. But, be easy—in a week—his place will know him no more!”

“Very glad—I mean, sir—”

“No, no, be honest, go on. Yes, you are very glad—”

“That you mean to mak’ a man o’ yoursel, sir.”

“Mak’!—I mean make, though you didn’t say so—
—Make a man of me! Pray what then am I, before the

making begins? O, well, my mother will be coming upon us again. Barbara, I'm going to give you a proof there is some good and some sense in me; God knows how little for all that! I want you to look after my mother. She is not strong. She likes you."

"I owe everything i' th' world to her!" said Barbara, with a direct expression of her honest feelings that she had not before vouchsafed to Mr. Lancelot.

"Very good; then I may rely when I am gone, that you won't forget all that, should any little tiff occur; my father may try you a bit sometimes; or that little rascal, Hugh, to whom—Heaven forgive me!—I think I have taught every bit of devilry I ever discovered in the way of mischief-making. But we understand—don't we?—I shall be sure to find you when I come back—taking care of my mother?"

"O, I hope so," said Barbara.

"Good bye, then!" and he held out his hand.

"Good bye?" asked Barbara, in astonishment.

"Yes, I don't mean to have any more of it. I shall flit in the night, perhaps, like a bat; or disappear in the day, like a shallow pool in an exhalation."

"O, very well. Good-bye, Mr. Lancelot."

"Good bye!" But Mr. Lancelot seemed unwilling to quit Barbara's hand, though also unwilling to vex Barbara herself, and he saw she was getting vexed.

"You wonna come back, I hope, sir, anything less than a general?"

"Won't I though? Look for me next Christmas two years, if I don't appear before. If I am not at the table when the roast beef comes up, I forbid you to touch

it—till I come. Good bye—once more—O, I forgot—the dogs! I say, Barbara! what about that blessed pair? Isidore *may* move somebody's bowels of compassion, if they can stand the first appeal; but Timon—poor Timon! Ah, Barbara, that dog hasn't a friend in the world but me. You couldn't look in upon them now and then, could you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And see that they are regularly fed?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that they're not taken a mean advantage of in my absence, and poisoned off out of the way, on the pretence of taking something that disagreed with them?"

Barbara laughed, as she said—"I'll do my best, sir, to keep 'em in health, sperrits, and beauty till you come back."

"Thank you, Barbara, that was what I really wanted all this time. Good bye!" And with a loud laugh, Mr. Lancelot passed along the corridor, and left Barbara free to go in the other direction.

CHAPTER VII.

A GARRET ROMANCE.

WHEN Mr. Lancelot had gone away, a kind of sadness spread over the whole household. Mr. Wolcombe was irritable and reserved, for a dream of his life had disappeared for ever, and he had not so many dreams that he could easily spare this one—of his son being his partner in the mill, helping him while he was able to work, and taking the management of the property when old age should begin to drive him more frequently to his quiet fireside. Mrs. Wolcombe's thoughts and feelings lay nearer to her heart. Lancelot was her earthly idol—so far as she permitted herself to have any such human object of worship. She had faith in him; she believed she alone understood him, as possessing all the rich but tumultuous elements that form eventually the stronger men of the world—its soldiers, statesmen, heroes. Often has she said to her husband, when he was not unreasonably exasperated by some of Lancelot's escapades, "All this is but the scum thrown to the surface, during the seething of the youthful blood. Wait, be patient, be kind to him, and all will go well." But she had hoped to see that point of assured safety reached while he was yet before her eyes; and she could not, in her secret soul, repress vague

feelings of alarm now that he was gone, and that his and their future happiness rested upon the accuracy of her appreciation. She became, in truth, very sad ; and though her sweetness of smile and voice, and her invincibly patient gentleness of manner, remained the same, every one about her felt she was changed, and asked uneasily how far the change might go.

Perhaps, if Mrs. Wolcombe had been at all selfish—if she had but allowed herself to indulge her sorrow to the shutting out of her duties, she would, like selfish people generally, have found the error carry its own punishment. But it happened differently. Trying to look around her with the same thoughtful glance as of old upon those who were in any way her dependents, she noticed that Barbara looked pale and troubled. Mrs. Wolcombe then remembered the thoughts that had passed through her mind when she found Lancelot and Barbara together in the school-room ; and she also remembered that Barbara's face had shown very plainly how well those thoughts had been read. Of course, after a moment's reflection she dismissed the idea that Barbara's discomfort was connected with what had then passed. But when she tried to find a more reasonable solution of the problem she was baffled ; and from the sheer desire to rest somewhere, the mother could not help again reverting to that scene in the school-room. But she waited and watched in her quiet way ; and became more and more convinced that something was wrong ; that Barbara was unhappy or dissatisfied. Mrs. Wolcombe was not exactly pleased with the discovery ; but certainly it had the effect of diverting her thoughts from the subject that so depressed them. Barbara's character had in-

terested her from the first hour of their acquaintance ; it had been a constant study to her ; and now she felt sure there was something going on which she had a desire to be acquainted with, even while she could not repress a certain uneasy fear that her confidence was about to be shaken.

One sultry July evening Barbara sat at the open window of the nursery. It had grown too dark to work ; and her hands lay idle in her lap, for she could not light her candle, and shut out the soft twilight. Poppy was sleeping peacefully in the crib. The other children, subdued and wearied by the heat, were walking quietly in the garden with Mrs. Wolcombe and some neighbouring ladies. An inexpressibly tender gloom lay over the rich summer landscape. On one side of the sky, where the sun had lately set, ran streaks of red fiery light ; on the other, a ghost-like crescent moon rose from cold pale-blue clouds. Barbara gazed : now upwards ; now on that beautiful garden, with its winding light-coloured paths ; its graceful trees ; its exquisite perfumes—now dying, now coming stronger, as if the tea-roses, from whence they issued, panted for notice in the growing darkness ; its white lilies rising tall, and statelily waving with a gentle pride, as if they knew they were the only flowers whose beauty was not hidden by the night, but were rather brought out from all the rest in their glistening purity ; its graceful human forms gliding in and out among the trees ; while other and darker forms, more dimly defined, made themselves suddenly known by the tiny red glow of a cigar. Altogether, it was like a fairy scene to Barbara ; and might surely have made her value the privilege of being so near.

But there was a hungry look in her deep-set eyes; and the lines about the mouth which had begun to lose, were now regaining, their former harshness. The fairest things seemed to jar upon her. No wonder; the instrument was out of tune. And so, when in addition to the visions of the dreamy beauty of the garden, there brake upon her ear distant shouts and laughter, and exhilarating music from the village, she rose, left the nursery, and began to wander about through the empty rooms and corridor, till she found herself once more in the old brown-visaged school-room. There, at all events, she seemed to find consolation, as she gazed upon the book-shelves with a kind of reverence almost approaching to awe. Whatever her secret thoughts might be, here at least they found either a solace or a diversion.

Mrs. Wolcombe had noticed her sitting at the window, and her withdrawal. Presently, she said to Miss Featherstonehaugh, who was standing on the lawn, with head thrown back, eyes half-closed, beating time to the distant music with a large fan, "Will you take a turn with me?" Then slipping her hand into the governess's arm, she continued: "I cannot think what is the matter with Barbara. I don't like to ask her; for on such points she is reserved. I fear, too, she might get the idea I am dissatisfied; and it is much easier to rouse than to allay such thoughts. I wonder whether she wants to get home oftener?"

"O dear, no!" said Miss Featherstonehaugh, without a moment's pause. "I know what it is! I knew it would be so."

"Indeed! pray instruct me."

"It's her shocking ignorance that presses upon her. Till she came here, she did not know her true state : now she does. That's all."

"But, my dear Miss Featherstonehaugh, don't you think that, even if this be so, we had better try the easier remedy first ? Could we not spare Barbara a little oftener ? I know it might a little inconvenience you."

"Leave it to me," was the prompt answer. "Let her go out as often as you like. Of course the poor thing must have some relaxation. I will see to Poppy and everything else. Let her go every evening, by all means."

Mrs. Wolcombe shook her head with a smile, as she said :

"You have too kind a heart, Miss Featherstonehaugh, to get on in this world. Every evening ! Why, she would rouse the jealousy and dislike of all the people in the house towards her. O no, that will never do. But I will speak to her at once, and tell her of your offer."

She found Barbara in the nursery, and she saw her hastily draw her hand across her eyes, as she became aware of her presence.

"Barbara !" said Mrs. Wolcombe, going up to her, and laying her hand on her shoulder, while she gazed anxiously into the half-averted face,—*"Barbara, you are not happy. If there is anything I can do to make you more comfortable, tell me."*

"O no, no ! You have been only too kind to me already, ma'am," answered Barbara, turning away her head.

"But listen ; I have something to propose to you. You are out of spirits ; people will get out of spirits sometimes,

even when they can see no particular occasion. I know I do. You must not think I am going to confer any particular favour, for there is nothing of the kind intended. It is a mere matter of justice, I tell you. You do so much more for me than Martha did, that something is due to you in return. It is early yet to talk of an increase of wages; but there is one thing we can do—we can spare you oftener to go home, if you would like it. Miss Featherstonehaugh offered most generously to help, and she and I have arranged to take your work, say for a couple of evenings weekly.”

The old bright flush of youthful pleasure that instantly overspread Barbara's face, told Mrs. Wolcombe how accurately she had (so far) hit the mark.

“You would like it, then?” she continued.

“O, ma'am, ye are too good to me,” said Barbara, in a trembling voice. “I wanted to ask you this, but I didna like; for—”

Mrs. Wolcombe waited, but Barbara had stopped abruptly, as if conscious her thoughts were escaping too far from her own control. Mrs. Wolcombe was now more puzzled than ever. There was evidently more in that glad surprise—that grateful flush—that tremulous tone—and that sudden pause, than could be explained by a desire for home society, or by the anticipation of meeting a mother somewhat more frequently. However, she fell back upon her usual recourse to wait and watch; so with a smile and nod she went away, saying, as she turned for a moment at the door:

“It is not very late yet. Go at once, if you like, and tell your mother what we have settled.”

As soon as Mrs. Wolcombe had gone away, Barbara walked rapidly to and fro; then stopped, with eyes bent on the floor, in deep thought. Her brow grew contracted, her lips compressed. Presently she looked up with a smile of strong resolution playing about her lips; then her hands, whiter than of old, but still rough enough to do, without flinching, much hard work, if it should be required of them, clasped each other firmly, while she said :

"Eigh,—but I can, an' I will!" She said no more, but just took a parting look of the sleeping Poppy, kissed the tiny hands that lay crossed outside the coverlid, ran up-stairs to her own room, put on her bonnet and shawl, and, after taking something from her box, which she hid under the shawl, again descended the stairs. As she passed out through the plantation, the village clock sounded nine, so she quickened her pace across the green. The sleepy sheep, who were beginning to gather in little groups, hardly troubled themselves to move out of her way, as if they saw how wrapt she was in her own thoughts. On coming to a low thicket, she laid her little parcel on the grass, and began to gather some of the white and pink wild roses which climbed through and overhung the bushes. This she did in a quick, business-like way, as though she had an object in so doing, quite apart from any enjoyment they might afford herself. She added a few pale blackberry blossoms, a spray of honey-suckle, which she reached with difficulty, but found so sweet when it was got that she was glad of the trouble and delay it had cost her; and then a circling border of daisies, in which, however, each flower kept its petals tightly closed up, as though feeling it had no business to be meddled with at such untimely hours.

Lastly, she insinuated into the centre the stems of some bearded grass, letting a few of the tips drop over in soft, feathery plumes, while others stood straightly up, tall and spire-like. Then she tied her little nosegay with a piece of the tough-stalked convolvulus-like flowers she found bordering the path, took up her parcel, and began to run to make up for lost time. She soon passed the pond and the drawwell where Job was sitting, letting a child feed him out of its tin mug, and teach him how to eat its slice of bread and butter, the sly fellow pretending to be uncommonly amused by the whole proceeding.

"What, Job!" exclaimed Barbara, "has th' prophecy come true at last, that soom day ye'd gotten too lazy to eat?" Job didn't seem to like the joke at first, or perhaps it took him time to understand it; but presently he burst out with a loud "Haw! haw! haw!"

Barbara now reached the row of cottages where her mother lived; but instead of going in, she struck off in quite another direction, to a spot where stood an old manor-house, that had sunk by degrees from one social rank to another, till at last it had become the habitation of two washerwomen, who occupied the lower rooms, and let out all the upper ones to farmers' labourers, mill hands, and to one or two families, which, though equally poor, enjoyed more social consideration among the villagers.

Barbara opened the door that led to the apartment she sought, and immediately closed it after her, as though desiring to escape observation. The ray of dim light which found its way through the round hole over the door, just enabled her to see the stairs, where she heard a sound of scrubbing; and where, as she ascended, she soon

came to a pail, with a pair of feet directed towards her. Barbara smiled as she found herself stopped for a moment, and saw the red, stockingless heels stuck out a good way from the slippers into which the toes were thrust, leaving them flapping back at every energetic movement of their owner's arm.

"Evelina!" said Barbara, trying not to frighten the girl, who had a particular horror of "ghostesses" in dark places; but the sound of her voice was lost in the hissing noise which the girl kept up, and which seemed to be a kind of imitation of that made by grooms when cleaning their horses. So Barbara placed her hand gently on the girl's shoulder, saying quickly:

"Evelina, is No. 9 at home?"

Evelina, a dirty, red-faced beauty, looked out of temper, and gave Barbara no other answer than might be afforded by her removing herself and pail to one side, so that Barbara might pass. Barbara stepped on quickly, and ascended to the very top of the house, where the stairs grew more narrow and steep at every flight. Yet, notwithstanding the height, the place had a damp, unwholesome, well-like odour, that chilled Barbara, though she did not remember to have ever noticed it before. Was Coppeshall spoiling her for the life of the poor? she could not help asking herself, as she knocked at No. 9.

"Is that you, Evelina? Come in," uttered a rather feeble, high-pitched man's voice from within.

Barbara gently lifted the latch of the door and entered the room. It was so full of smoke that, at first, she could discern nothing but the ruddy glow of the fire. Gradually, however, as some of the smoke passed out at the open

door, and as her eyes became used to the pungent atmosphere, the whole place became faintly visible. It was a large, low-roofed attic, with one corner partitioned off from the rest by an old paper screen. The floor was bare, except just at the fireplace, where a square piece of dingy carpet did duty for a rug. On this stood a table, covered by an old red cloth, which did not fall low enough to conceal its thin, dirty-white legs, half scratched away in parts by the old tabby cat, which was now curled up beneath it asleep. Just under the single window, which commanded a delicious prospect of the neighbouring country, and brought vividly home to Barbara the contrast between the world without and the world within, stood an old couch, and upon it, propped up by pillows, lay the figure of a woman. Her head was thrown back upon the pillow; and though the face, which was a little raised, bore marks of great age and long suffering, there was an expression of almost childish sweetness upon it just now, which would, Barbara knew, when she woke, change to one of mental vacancy. "Her wits wur a'most gone" was the common expression, and it summed up for the poor old lady the last stage of her long career. A man's great coat, drawn up to her chin, lay across her, and seemed, with its helpless-looking arms, to testify at once the affection and the impotence of him who was now her sole support.

Barbara's eyes were seeking for that other figure which she had always been accustomed to see here, and it emerged through the smoke at last. It was that of a very small and prematurely aged man, who might not have reached his fortieth year, but who looked sixty. He was sitting on the edge of a broken-backed wooden chair, with

his elbows on his knees, and his face resting in his hands. He seemed to be merely watching the smoke as it issued from the grate, and wreathed upwards in strange and fantastic forms. He was dressed in neat but rusty black, and wore a very white neckcloth, tied in a precise little bow. The firelight, every now and then, illuminated powerfully his face. It was long, thin, and pale, and his blue eyes were filled with a kind of melancholy intelligence, as they rested upon those luxuriant smoke-wreaths. Barbara had not seen him for a long time, and she was deeply touched by his aspect. She knew a little of his history, and could guess at the kind of thoughts that made his lips quiver every now and then as with an awkward attempt at a smile, and which was sure to end in a heavy, long-drawn sigh. Perhaps he was thinking of his childhood, or of his youth. His childhood! Alas, the picture of that boy,—feeble in body, and feeble in mind, kept by a harsh father and an ambitious mother, poring over his books from morning to night, could scarcely raise even the ghost of a smile. His youth! Are you looking at that, Isaac Sleigh? Are you thinking of your college days? Do you see yourself again winning that one "honour,"—small enough, and hardly struggled for, but still creditably won at last? Or is it the companions you look after who then so cheered you by expectations of a future that all alike afterwards forgot they had promised to aid in attaining for you? Or do you remember that day—that white day—that great day—when you were introduced to the Bishop, and actually had the honour of giving him your arm,—for he was somewhat corpulent to go alone,—and of walking down the High Street with him,—and of answering his conde-

scending questions about your future prospects? Ah, Isaac, thou wert giddy, thou must own, after that walk with the Bishop; and forgot strangely thy parent's humble condition, thy own powers, and the nature of the world thou wast living in. Well, well, thou hast paid a heavy penalty for all mistakes. No wonder thou askest thyself sometimes with a strange spirit of incredulity, was that young scholar, that supported the tottering steps of episcopacy in the face of the world, the same man as Isaac Sleigh, schoolmaster and parish clerk of Barden Brow, with a salary of fifteen shillings a week!

The cat purrs under the table; the sleeper breathes softly; the smoke still rolls up, and still the man's eyes follow it. Again the pallid smile essays to escape free, and again it is entombed in the dreary sigh. Perhaps Isaac now reviews his last outbreak of ambition, when—having arrived by degrees at the idea that he had originally aimed too high, and had *therefore* fallen so low,—he determined he would, by a new beginning, and more moderate expectations, work his way a few steps upwards. That part of his story Barbara knew only too well. He had, after much effort, and much writing of letters for help and introduction, and much and protracted negotiation, suc-

ded in obtaining a similar position at Bexfield, seventy miles off, where he was to have no less than a guinea a week! How elated he had been! It was all he could do to avoid writing letters of some kind to his old college tutor, to his chief companions, nay, even to the Bishop himself, who still lived, though in a kind of second childhood; but, as it was, he contented himself with a few glowing words to one who would, he thought, tell the others that he was again about

to emerge and mount firmly from step to step of the ladder. One or two were glad, and waited to hear more. But they never did hear more. Isaac returned after the first month to Barden Brow. He had failed ; and had then to humiliate himself before the clergyman to beg him to receive him back, erring and contrite, and even to ask the loan of a few shillings to fetch his mother. No one ever knew what passed between the two men, but Isaac was successful in his request, and almost broken-hearted by the humiliations to which he had been subjected in the process.

“ Why was all this ? ” Barbara asked herself now, as she had often asked before. He was industrious, indefatigably patient, and knew enough, she was sure, to make every child in the village a grand scholar. Alas ! he had no spirit. What little energy Nature had given him had been crushed out of him by his misfortunes and by his unsuitable life. Occasionally, when he got a new and hopeful pupil, he would seem to start up from a kind of torpor, and do a wonderful deal of good in a short time, but suddenly the youth or maiden would be drawn off to the mill, or to the field, and Isaac would relapse into his ordinary state. So again he would at times look round his school-room, and see his idle or riotous scholars caught for a moment by a sense of what learning and study would do for them, and lo ! poor Isaac, with a flush of enthusiasm, would waken up and talk to them, with tears in his eyes, striving with all the force of his weak but anxious soul to deepen the passing mood by conjuring them to listen to him, and to work hard. But on one occasion of this kind the clergyman happened to be an unobserved listener ;

and he reproved Isaac, almost in public, for his want of firmness and dignity, and said something that tingled hotly in Isaac's ears about his "high-pitched, quavering voice."

Barbara had not been sorry to stand for some time by the door, for she was puzzling herself about what she had to say. At last she spoke :

"May I come in, master?"

"Eh? Who is that?" asked Isaac, trying to peer through the smoke. Barbara closed the door, and crossed the room towards him.

"It's me, master; Barbara Giffard. I have come for my lesson; and here's the nosegay."

"Lesson! Nosegay!" The schoolmaster took the flowers doubtfully in his hand, and turned his blue eyes inquiringly upon her. It always took those orbs a long time to fathom the meaning of any fresh thing they looked upon;—no wonder, when life's problem had become so increasingly difficult to their owner;—but they never moved, if they could help it, till they had done so. Harmless as they were, few could, or would, stand their mild, longcontinued gaze. But Barbara returned the gaze steadily, with a look half pleased, half pitying; and through all there appeared a mournful pride, which seemed to say—"Read me, master; there is nothing I would conceal."

"Barbara Giffard!" repeated the schoolmaster twice—"Barbara Giffard!" Yes, he remembered such a name, but surely he had not heard it for a long while. He remembered such a pair of earnest brilliant eyes, but somehow he fancied they had used to look up at him, whereas

he was now looking up at them. Besides, it was a little awkward overgrown girl who used to stand there, with a copy-book, and dirty red spelling-book, presenting her wild flowers, with a jerking curtsey, and looking at him saucily from behind their defence, to see if he was going to scold her for being late. O, he remembered her well, and all her beauty, awkwardness, and wilfulness—how could he help? seeing he had cared more for her than for any other scholar (one alone excepted, whom he had also lost). “A child, sir,” as he had once said to his employer, the Rev. James Bartholomew, “that seems to take knowledge into her head faster than I can get it out of mine.”

Isaac poked the fire, rubbed his eyes before taking a second look at his visitor, then, as the wan smile of recognition lit up his face, he took her hand,—

“Barbara Giffard! My child, is it you!”

“Yes, master, it’s me.” Isaac smiled again, looked at the flowers in his hand, smelt at the honeysuckle, turned the nosegay about, and shook the quivering grass. “Eigh, master, it’s been a dree’ time ’tween then and now!” Barbara continued, in a low tone—“But we munna talk o’ that. Tell me how ye hae fared wi’ the children all these years.”

The master sighed deeply, and shook his head, as he said—

“It seems to me, Barbara Giffard, that children are no longer as they were. They come to me with the empty minds of babes, but with hearts old in worldliness and conceit. It is the child now who commands; the teacher who must obey. My heart is heavy, Barbara Giffard, when I think how I must answer for these little ones.”

He paused, and then added a moment after, as if speaking to himself—"There are but two of all those who have passed under me of whom I had any hope, and they—they were by no means what I would have made of them—they were full of faults, but I could see through his indolent temper, and her wilful impatience. I saw they came to me with simple hearts, and I felt they were indeed children."

"An' who are they, master?" asked Barbara, gently taking the flowers from his hand, which trembled with emotion, and made the rose petals—so briefly lived—flutter down upon the hearth.

"Who *are* they! Ask me rather who *were* they; for Abel Drake has belied all that his childhood promised; and Barbara Giffard—" The school-master paused, for the two names coming so closely together from his own mouth, and the expression of Barbara's face, brought back to his memory many things which had quite passed from it. He remembered all now; and he withdrew his eyes from her face, fearing he had given her pain, and shook his head sadly, that he might cease speaking.

"Well, master, and what has Barbara Giffard done?" inquired Barbara, sitting down on a large bundle of firewood, placed by the fender to dry, and clasping her hands over her knee.

"Barbara Giffard—excuse me, I meant Barbara Dr—"

"Barbara Giffard, master!" she interrupted, sternly. "Dunna forget—allus, while I live—Barbara Giffard!"

"Well, then, Barbara Giffard has forsaken her people, and gone to live among the gentry, and got much too

grand to think of learning, or of its poor professors. I suppose she has not found the words true, that the higher we strive to get, the heavier weighs ignorance on the heart."

"Master, I hae found it true, though I canna say I remembered the words. An' I come now to ask you if you'll hae me back agen. I think I'll learn better now than I used."

Very steady, and very full of wonder became the schoolmaster's gaze, as Barbara pulled forth from her pockets the old mottled-covered copy-book, and the very spelling-book that he so well knew, with its dirty red back. He looked at them, and then again at Barbara, who could not refrain from a slight smile at his serious, yet puzzled face.

"Ah, you mock me, Barbara Giffard!" he said sadly, at last. "But I knew well enough that girls grown up so tall and so handsome as you, never troubled themselves about learning."

"But, master," cried Barbara, rising with a sudden impatience which Isaac well remembered, and which began to carry conviction to his mind faster than her words could—"But, master, I tell you I hae come to ask you to begin agen wi' me; and I'll promise, if you do, to stick to it wi' all my heart an' soul."

The schoolmaster now rose, too, in a sudden excitement that he instantly tried to calm down by rubbing his hands.

"This is well! ah, this is well!" he cried. "My dear child, this is the first bit of pleasure that has crossed my life for a long while. But is it true? Do you, Barbara Giffard, really come back to me, Isaac Sleigh, your poor old master?"

"It is Gospel truth that I, Barbara Giffard, do come back to you, Isaac Sleigh, my dear old master, who I luvve dearly, if he will let me say so, as all his scholars ought to luvve him."

Poor Isaac turned away for a minute to dispatch an absurd tear that troubled him; but he soon turned back again, with a cheerful, bustling air, that Barbara saw was assumed to cover the strange flutter of his spirit.

"Come, come," said he, "we have lost a deal of time, and shall have much to do to make it all up. Of course, you will want to read well, and to write, and perhaps"—but he spoke hesitatingly—"you wouldn't mind going on to simple accounts?"

"Well," said Barbara, "happen just those to begin wi'."

"Begin with!" repeated the schoolmaster; "come, I like that amazingly." Again he rubbed his hands, but it was involuntarily, and with a decided air of enjoyment. "To begin with, eh!" he echoed, as he opened a cupboard at the side of the fire-place and took out a book, which he dusted with his handkerchief.

"Perhaps you thought of attacking grammar, and doing a bit of composition? Eh?"

"Yes, master, if you please," said Barbara, steadily, though conscious a little blush was rising to her cheek.

"What!—and geography—and the use of the globes?"

"Yes, master."

"Good lord!" thought Isaac to himself. "How much farther is the silly lass going?" But he grew himself more and more excited into a kind of strange sympathy with this ignorant but ambitious pupil. As he spoke to

Barbara an odd smile of delight, that was yet half ashamed to display itself, illuminated his eager face.

“ And history ? ”

“ Yes, master.”

“ And botany ?—You know what that means ? ”

“ Yes, master.”

“ And the French language ? ”

“ Yes, master.”

“ And the Latin ? ”

“ Yes, master.”

Isaac turned to the cupboard and laughed into it a low joyous laugh, while he took out of it a whole armful of books, which he presently threw on the table.

“ There they are. Come, Barbara Giffard, these shall try your metal. Aha ! We’ll see. We’ll see ! But stop, we shan’t want this, I think—not yet, at least.”

He looked dubiously towards Barbara, as if he were considering. Barbara did not know what it was, but in her passionate hunger for knowledge could not help saying,—

“ O master, teach me everything—that is, I mean,” said she, with a deep blush, “ everything that you think I am able to learn, and that is at all likely to be good for me. That is what I want. Donna mak’ me say it ony more.”

“ Everything ! ” Was Isaac in a dream ? Was it a very young woman who said this—a woman who had tasted of the bitterness of life, and must have dispersed some, at least, of its natural illusions ? He pushed his hands through his hair, and gazed out upon the landscape, and felt ashamed of his own feebleness of character, but

at the same time cheered and quickened, and in a measure restored to his own self-respect, by the appeal to him.

"And how many hours a day can you give me, Barbara Giffard?"

"Two hours twice a week, master."

"What?"

"That's all, master," said Barbara, half laughing, half sighing. "That's all, for the reading, and the writing, and the sums, and the geography, and the globes, and the history, and the botany, and the everything."

"Two hours twice a week," repeated the schoolmaster, aghast; and his elated face began rapidly to sober down.

"Come, master, I'll do my best. You know I ought to learn fast at my age."

"Pooh, child, it's all nonsense. You can't do it. Nobody does."

"Eigh, but I will, master. Do you happen to remember what you once told us at th' opening of th' evening school for th' mill folk?"

"No, child; what was it?"

"You said that the brain would often work better when the hands were at work; that *you* could *teach*, but it was *we* who must *learn*. Now cannot you put enough in my way in th' two hours to keep me agate while I am away all th' rest o' th' week?"

"Of course I can. That's it! That's it! And you remembered my words all these years, did you? Well, God bless you, you shall lack nothing I can do for you. I'll be better prepared by the time you come again. Ah, yes, I see, lassie, you're the same Barbara Giffard still. I used to think that let them put you to housework or the

factory, or to the field, they could not prevent you learning. I think I know now how it is. You have, my child, the foundation of all learning—the humility that teaches you your need, and the faith that enables you to work for it, and endure for it.”

“And now, master,” said Barbara, “I’m afraid I ought to hae telled you at th’ first, before you showed me all these grand things, that my wage is only ten pounds a year; and that I canna offer you more than two shillings a week out of it.”

Isaac turned his blue eyes upon her, and kept them there till the very tears began to fall. “Barbara Giffard, I didn’t expect this! I know I’m very poor. Everybody knows it. But I didn’t think you would have taken advantage of my poverty. I will not touch a penny of it. Not a penny! If it’s to be a matter of buying and selling, I wash my hands of it.”

“Weel,” said Barbara, pretending to go, “I suppose, then, I mun gie up the globes, and all the other.”

“Stop, Barbara Giffard! Stop! Headstrong as ever, I see. She always used to be teaching me how to teach her. Why, child, I was only thinking just now how I might help you to get another hour or two, by bribing Evelina to go up to the hall, and —— but I suppose that wouldn’t do?”

“O, certainly not, master,” said Barbara, smiling. “Weel, then, I mun go home, and see if th’ governess ’ll be ony kinder.”

“Let it be as you will,” said Isaac, but so very sadly that Barbara saw he was hurt.

“You are not angry wi’ me, master?” she inquired, softly.

Angry! Isaac Sleigh angry! He could scarcely understand the question. The world may tremble under some new danger, should ever spirits like his, after bearing so meekly all the bitterness heaped upon them, turn round upon that world in anger.

"No, child," said he; "not angry: only a little pained. I wanted to share with you your own spirit of unselfish love for knowledge, but you won't let me. Very well."

"But—but—master, how do you know this is unselfish? I do love learning"—and Barbara's looks and tones told how dearly; "but I want to get on i' the world, and be independent."

"Ah! and that's a noble aspiration, too. Well, well, well!"

Barbara saw what he was thinking of, but soon stopped him by gaily exclaiming, "And now, master, this mun be a secret atween us. I shall run in and tell my mother on my way home: but only we three mun know."

A secret, too! What, a bit of romance come to the schoolmaster's very fireside! Really! He began to look about him with an uneasy, indefinable idea that there was a deal to do; that life was changing somehow into a very different thing from the dull, joyless existence he had lately known; that he must brush up himself and his faculties, and put his place in order.

"Good bye, master," said Barbara, as she saw by his eyes he had come to the end of the problem of the moment. "Good bye! Tuesday evening! You wonna forget!"

Forget! Isaac took and held her outstretched hand, as he said, slowly, "My child, I have sometimes despaired of turning to any account the knowledge that God has given

me, and have feared it would all perish with this poor frame. I have prayed earnestly that it might be otherwise, and now He has sent you to me, Barbara Giffard—I know He has!—that through you it may live, and grow, and make the world richer. God bless you, my child, and keep up your earnestness and enthusiasm. It may do more for me even than you can guess.”

“Good bye, master,” now whispered Barbara; for she saw his mother was waking. And then she gave her old childish saucy curtsey at the door, laughing low the while; but the sight and sound filled the remotest nooks and crannies of Isaac’s heart, with music and sunshine, and then—she was gone!

Isaac sat down, with his elbows on the table, and his chin in his hand, again asking himself, “Why had this bit of happiness come to him?” But long before he had succeeded in logically answering the query, his thoughts began to run in a more useful direction. He set to work at his books, to make them look a little more worthy of their sudden resurrection. He mended covers, pasted in or stitched loose leaves, smoothed out creases, put them under heavy weights, and so on; breaking out, from time to time, into delighted remembrances of Barbara’s sayings—“‘To begin wi’.’ Ha! ha! ha! ‘Everything.’ O dear! the ambition of the poor ignoramus! Well, well, she shall see I can teach her. She made no mistake in coming to her old master; to the poor ‘worn out,’ ‘high-pitched,’ ‘quavering-voiced’ Isaac Sleigh.” From the books he turned to the furniture; and did all sorts of little things that might tend to make his room look a little pleasanter in Barbara’s eyes—for he began to see everything now with Barbara’s eyes

before she should come again. Lastly, he hunted up a small volume of tales to give to Evelina in the morning, in the hope of persuading her to wash his room, and clean his windows, on one, at least, of the days of Barbara's visits.

He was thoroughly fatigued when he lay down in his bed, but strangely placid and contented. The flowers were by his side, in a broken jug, and they seemed to assure him, as he looked at them, "O yes ; it is quite right. She has been here, and is coming again." And then Hope, that subtlest of genii, saw—what it had long vainly wanted—a new opening into the poor, perplexed, unhappy, and despairing brain ; and it entered, and began to play, as of old, all its kindly but fantastic tricks, to console, amuse, and stimulate ; and when Isaac awoke in the morning, his first recollection was of a scene in the Bishop's drawing-room, where a wonderful number of people were collected to meet him ; and where he was introduced to the Bishop's lady in terms of such commendation that he was overpowered and could not speak ; and lo ! all melted away, except the Bishop's lady ; and presently she too changed into—Barbara Giffard. And Isaac laughed at his dream, and was quite content to know that it had left him one reality—his old pupil, with whom he felt he was going to begin a new life.

CHAPTER VIII.

RIVAL PILOTS.

“You progress, my child, you progress,” said Isaac one day to Barbara, after some weeks had passed; but she herself was anything but satisfied. Perpetual difficulties embarrassed her, which she had no ready means to clear up. She often wished she could go down to Miss Featherstonehaugh with the children to learn with them, and be treated just like them. The responsibility of guiding and controlling her own movements during the days that intervened between her visit to her mother, seemed too much for her brain. Sometimes she would venture a question to Helen or Maud, but was soon warned by the fixed stare of curiosity that they were wondering what she was about. Vainly she strove by redoubled application to get over all obstacles. Her head became hot, her eyes heavy, her soul oppressed—now with feverish excitement, now with listless despondency—as the vista lengthened before her eyes, and the goal seemed only the more hopelessly distant at every fresh step she achieved in advance.

Isaac could see little of this, and was entirely unconscious of what he might have seen. She was at her best and cheeriest when with him; and she never failed to master whatever he had given her to do, provided only she

could by any effort get to understand what he had meant. But Mrs. Wolcombe, who had hoped to have seen a noticeable change for the better in Barbara's looks, spirits, and temper—for it must be owned the children now and then discovered Barbara could be out of temper (and they took good care to give their mamma the benefit of their discovery)—Mrs. Wolcombe, I say, had hoped this, and for the first few weeks had not been altogether disappointed; but then she found that Barbara was fast relapsing into her self-communion with some secret trouble that she did not or could not control. "What could it be?" Mrs. Wolcombe asked herself. It so happened that a letter had recently been received from Lancelot, now ensign in her Majesty's —— Regiment of Foot, to the effect that he could not get to see them as he had intended before going abroad, inasmuch as that his regiment, which had been for some time preparing for the Colonies, had just received orders to embark instantly for British Caffraria, where some local disturbances had broken out. When the poor mother had got over the first paroxysm of her grief, and turned with a smile that grew less and less mirthful every day to the cares of her household, she was again struck by Barbara's manner, and could not help connecting it with the letter. Vexed at her own injustice and folly, she tried to persuade herself that she had dwelt upon one idea till she could not get rid of it; and she determined that Barbara should remain ignorant of these unwelcome and probably injurious speculations. Still she could not help wishing that Lancelot had said nothing about Barbara in his letter; whereas, in fact, he had introduced her name no less than three times; once being in

a postscript: and though the subjects of remark were innocent and amusing enough—the dogs, and things of that kind—yet it was very evident to the thoughtful mother that Lancelot was thinking of Barbara more than she could see the least necessity for, to say nothing of its propriety. Mr. Wolcombe helped to make her uncomfortable. He rather liked Barbara on the whole, but being of a naturally suspicious, worldly temper, could not resist an occasional outbreak of doubt that she was *too* good. When pressed by his wife to give some grounds for his belief, he would acknowledge he had none, but would add, “Be cautious; don’t give your confidence till you know by experience it is deserved.”

Only a few days after the receipt of the letter, Mr. Wolcombe came home to dinner, looking as though something had happened which he did not like, and which yet did not altogether seem unsatisfactory to him. Watching his opportunity, he whispered into his wife’s ear, so that the children should not understand what he said,

“I fear Barbara is deceiving you. I am told she does not go to her mother’s on the evenings you spare her; or, if she does, that it is but for a minute or so on her way home!”

Mrs. Wolcombe heard, but merely replied, “I will see to it,” then passed to other subjects, and appeared to forget the circumstance. All that evening she was more than usually kind in her tone and words to Barbara, when she had occasion to speak to her; and she made occasions, when they would not otherwise have existed, for putting herself in Barbara’s way, when no one else was by, as though inviting a confidence that she thought ought to

be shown unasked ; and unwilling to lose the pleasure which such a confidence would give. But nothing came of it. Barbara did her duty as usual ; but her heart did not seem to be engaged. The children were cross and tiresome ; and she did not, as of old, win them out of their moods by her stories, or fun, or practical surprises, such as she sometimes invented when she could not otherwise properly control them.

When all the household were in bed, Mrs. Wolcombe determined she would seek a direct explanation. But Mr. Wolcombe was busy with certain projects which he must talk over with her ; and hour after hour passed, until it was doubtless much too late to disturb Barbara. The mother usually went up to kiss Poppy after the nurse had gone to bed, and had always found the room (as she wished) in darkness. To-night she had omitted her usual custom through Mr. Wolcombe's keeping her so long engaged in the drawing-room ; and she was about to go to bed, satisfied there was no need, this once, to see to Poppy's welfare. But the mother's heart and the mother's habit were together all-powerful, and she found herself presently stealing along the corridor without a light, thinking she would just open the door and look in for a moment without disturbing Barbara. To her surprise she saw, as she approached, light under the door ; and while wondering what that could mean, for it was now past midnight, she found, on gently turning the handle of the door, that it was locked. A quick, nervous tap (unlike her usual one) escaped her before she reminded herself there could be nothing to fear for the child. Mrs. Wolcombe heard a hurried movement within, and then there

was dead silence. Again she knocked, and a little impatiently. Barbara now came to the door, and said in a low voice, from within :

“ Is it you, Mary ? What do you want ? ”

“ It is me, Barbara. May I come in ? ”

There was seemingly just a pause for reflection, and the door opened. Barbara stood there, fully dressed ; and she appeared to wait inquiringly for Mrs. Wolcombe to speak, while rather repressing than inviting any further advance. Her cheeks were flushed, and there was in her manner a curious compound of embarrassment and dignity.

“ Mus’n’t I come in, Barbara ? ” asked Mrs. Wolcombe, with a soft voice and smile that would have sufficed to remove a thousand times greater obstacles than Barbara was capable of putting in her path.

Barbara seemed to find it equally impossible to invite Mrs. Wolcombe forward or to keep her where she was ; so she compromised the matter by going to the table, taking the light from it, and leading the way to the bedside. It was a capital stroke of policy, and ought to have succeeded, but it did not. One glance at the table showed Mrs. Wolcombe a whole history. It was overspread with school-books, some of them her own children’s, borrowed for the night—spelling-books, reading-books, and a thick dictionary—while, wide open, and not a little blotted, lay the pages of a copy-book, in which Barbara had evidently been writing, when so unexpectedly interrupted. This, then, was the secret of the pale looks, the sunken eyes, and the pre-occupied mind. Mrs. Wolcombe was inexpressibly touched. She knew now by the very secrecy

that had been observed how near to Barbara's heart this matter must lie.

"So, Barbara, you want to be a scholar, I see?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Barbara, from her place at the other side of the bed.

"And have you any instructor?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"May I ask whom?"

"Mr. Isaac Sleigh, my old master."

"Isaac Sleigh!" thought Mrs. Wolcombe; "so this is Mr. Wolcombe's grand secret."

"And how does he think you get on?"

"He's good enough to cheer me, ma'am, by makin' the best o' me."

"But what do you think yourself?"

"I dunna know. I wish sometimes I hadna begun."

"May I look at your writing and exercises?"

"If you please, ma'am," said Barbara, but with very much the air of acquiescence of a criminal when asked by his polite gaoler if they hadn't better proceed on to execution.

Mrs. Wolcombe looked, and looked again. Presently she said:

"I suppose your difficulty is not so much the actual learning, as that you are often puzzled to know what to learn, and where to seek for information?"

"O, yes, ma'am, that's it. I'm always comin' to stoppin' places, where I want somebody to help me over."

"And I suppose you did not care to ask me, Barbara?"
No answer.

"Have I in any way offended you, Barbara?"

"O, no, ma'am!"

But somehow Mrs. Wolcombe could discover a slight hesitation that her own truth-loving nature made her quite understand.

"Well, Barbara, we won't discuss words; but be frank with me as to the thing."

Barbara was still silent.

"Well, Barbara, my home is not a Spanish inquisition. So if you won't tell me either in confidence, or respect, or affection——"

"Affection!" The word fairly trembled on Barbara's lips, as they quivering repeated it.

"Yes, Barbara, I had begun to fancy you had some affection for me."

"O, ma'am!" and the tears appeared in those large, dry eyes, where they had so long been wanted.

"Well, then, what is all this about?—this secrecy, this want of confidence in me? Have I deserved it? Have I wronged you—misjudged you even in thought?"

"I think, ma'am, you have," at last said Barbara, very slowly, and meeting Mrs. Wolcombe's surprised gaze with a tremulous dignity of reproach. "I canna tell you how; but ever since that meeting wi' Mr. Lancelot——"

It was now Mrs. Wolcombe's turn to change colour, and to stand on her defence; and as she did so, she exhibited for the first time to Barbara an air of anger and resentment. She had accustomed herself so successfully to study others without attracting attention, that it came home to her in a new and unpleasant experience—the possibility of her own sanctuaries being similarly invaded in

return. She assumed a coldness which Barbara had believed her incapable of before, as she said :

“ I will not pretend to misunderstand you, though you have very much surprised me. But you must excuse me if I remember that I am a mother ; that Lancelot is young, rash, and reckless ; and I dare say you need not be told that he thinks well of you.” Mrs. Wolcombe paused, after saying this, as if to note the effect ; but seeing nothing in Barbara’s manner that implied more than the feeling that any young woman might naturally be supposed to feel at an unexpected compliment ; she continued, still keeping her eyes painfully steady on Barbara’s face : “ And in his last letter home, I told you, I think, that he mentioned you three times to once for anybody else. So, Barbara, I can scarcely wonder if——”

“ If what, ma’am ?” asked Barbara, impatiently, and her features darkening.

“ If he should, for the moment, think more of you than he ought, or than you would like in any way to be responsible for.”

Barbara sighed deeply, and was silent for a few moments. When she spoke, it was with an air of inexpressible sadness, over which, however, she kept a stern, unflinching control. “ Yes, ma’am, I knew these thoughts were in your mind. But I hoped they’d go away, and you’d be as you’d always been. And they did seem to go ; but not for long ; and so I thought what I had best do. Of course I couldna bide here. I soon settled that wi mysel. But if, ma’am, you see no reason agen my staying a bit longer, I think I can manage to pick up enough learning to open a school for children in a town where my

mother has some relations. I mean only for very little children, ma'am, that won't know how ignorant I am."

"Is this, then, what you have been planning and working so hard for?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And you really intend to leave me?"

"I do indeed, ma'am."

The voice was low, but firm, and the face resolute. For some time both were silent. Presently Mrs. Wolcombe said—

"And you mean this?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Even if I tell you, Barbara, that I can never have such doubts again?"

Barbara did not answer, but her fingers worked nervously, and great tears rolled down her cheeks, which she dashed hastily off with an impatient gesture. Mrs. Wolcombe went round the bed to her, and placed a hand on each shoulder, as she continued—

"Even if I tell you, Barbara, that I can, and shall, now trust and respect you more than any woman I know."

Mrs. Wolcombe was stooping, almost kneeling, that she might look into Barbara's averted face, as she added, "Even if I tell you that I want you—cannot do without you, Barbara?"

Barbara gazed for one instant on her mistress, and then forgetting or despising all social distinctions, she threw her arms round Mrs. Wolcombe's neck and wept bitterly, till she felt all the bad spirit was gone out of her. And when, after a brief period of delicious indulgence, she sought,

half ashamed, to withdraw her arms, she found herself still tenderly held a prisoner by those warm, soft fingers.

And then, when they did trust themselves once more to talk, and Barbara poured out all her inner life, Mrs. Wolcombe saw that in that sphere it would have been scarcely ever remembered that there was such a person in the world as Ensign Lancelot, but for the over-wise, over-cautious mother's own fears, which Barbara had seen and deeply resented, and which alone had compelled her to think of him.

From that night Barbara's position at Coppeshall underwent a gradual but rapid change. Mr. Wolcombe began to treat her with more respect. It was not long before he asked her opinion on some matter that puzzled him and his wife ; and he was so struck with the judgment and decision of her answers that she began to be often called into their secret council. As for Mrs. Wolcombe, though she did not say a single formal word on the subject to any of the household, it was very soon known that Barbara was no longer to be looked on as a mere nurse, but as one in whom the mistress took a personal and friendly interest. With her usual tact, Mrs. Wolcombe secured success by the simplest of means. Barbara's recommendation of any one, or of any project, became a sure passport to her or Mr. Wolcombe's favour. And though Barbara shunned the exercise of her power as much as she could, and at times seemed to weary of the determination exhibited on both sides to make her express opinions on, or feel interest in, matters that were indifferent to her, yet she could not but perceive and appreciate the amelioration of her state that was the consequence.

But Mrs. Wolcombe knew what she was about : a kitchen conclave is about the most unmanageable of democracies—the most jealous of any “pretender” rising from among its own “order.”

But this was of far less moment to Barbara than another consequence of the full understanding between her and Mrs. Wolcombe. Before many days elapsed, that lady, with her husband's full consent, introduced to the governess a new pupil, saying, as she did so, “You were quite right, my dear Miss Featherstonehaugh, about Barbara, and I was quite wrong. Here has this poor silly child been sitting up late at night, and for aught I know rising absurdly early in the morning, to plod her weary way through the briery paths of knowledge. But we will have no more of this, will we ? So I have brought her to you, to see if, out of the largeness of your charity, and the boundlessness of your zeal, you will take pity on her, and turn her lawless habits of study into regular ones ; and, but there !—I shall say no more. I leave you together to talk it over. O, by the bye, one word first :—It strikes me that under your eye Barbara might soon take some of the humbler and more mechanical parts of your duty off your hands, and so give you more time for the rest. Make her pay you honestly for all she demands from you, if you can. It will do her good, and satisfy her love of independence.”

The governess was evidently pleased, but not at all surprised. Strangely accurate in her perceptions where her one faculty was concerned, she had early divined what was passing in Barbara's thoughts ; but had said little, because Barbara showed almost ostentatiously (and, perhaps,

otherwise she would not have been understood) that she did not court her society. But thus appealed to, she gave what was asked (as she always did give anything she could bestow) with all her heart. And then Barbara discovered that her first feelings of repulsion and scorn, however natural or excusable under the circumstances, were quite unwarranted by the governess's true character. Nothing could be more sensible in itself, or better adapted to Barbara's position and duties than the plan Miss Featherstonehaugh now sketched out; nothing more genial than her sympathy with Barbara's difficulties, sensitiveness, and determination. And so the young scholar found herself at last setting off in full sail, with a flowing tide and unclouded skies, upon the great ocean of knowledge. One only perplexity remained: there were two pilots on board, knowing nothing of each other's relation with the adventurous mariner; both peculiarly jealous of their position, rights, and privileges; and while Barbara could by no means throw one of them overboard, she was equally puzzled as to how she was to steer her way right forwards, if they should happen to take it into their heads to give her contradictory directions. But she determined to keep her own counsel; and Mrs. Wolcombe laughingly agreed that, on the whole, perhaps, it was best that she should do so.

CHAPTER IX

LIBERTY.

NEARLY two years and a half have passed. Evening draws on.

Miss Featherstonehaugh stands at the window of the drawing room, looking through her large gold eye-glass at something outside. She is in full ball costume. Her scarlet and white dress is looped up with bunches of green holly, which, as Hugh complains to his mamma, scratch his bare legs every time she comes near. And now the holly rustles noisily as she turns with a sudden exclamation,—

“Barbara!”

Barbara is leaning over Mrs. Wolcombe’s arm-chair at the far end of the room, arranging the pillows with a tenderness of touch that makes the kind soft eyes look their thankfulness, as the weary head falls back upon the coveted place of repose.

“I’m so glad you came down,” whispered Barbara.

“Yes, mamma, this grand night, it would never do for you not to be here,” said Maud. “What would Lancelot and everybody say?”

It was indeed a grand night for Coppeshall. First, there was Lancelot coming home quite unexpectedly. Then,

Miss Featherstonehaugh, who, in spite of her peculiarities, was liked, and enjoyed general respect, was going to leave the next day, in order to live with a rich widowed sister, and educate her children. Lastly, Barbara was to take Miss Featherstonehaugh's place with certain special auxiliary aid ; and as her former position in the family was well known, Mrs. Wolcombe had thought it well to introduce her formally to her friends as her children's future governess.

"Barbara !" again called Miss Featherstonehaugh, "come and look at this quaint old man at the gate."

Barbara went to the window, and her face flushed with pleasure, not unmixed with a certain uneasiness, as she said—

"That is my old schoolmaster, Mr. Isaac Sleigh. Didn't you know Mrs. Wolcombe was kind enough to invite him ?"

"Dear me, no ! Ah, I know him now, the poor little man that is so troubled with the boys in the church. How kind of her ! He has something inside that brow. I must talk to him."

"He doesn't talk much," said Barbara.

"Ah, but see if I don't bring him out, my dear ag"

"I'm afraid you will," thought Barbara. Be-
 At this moment the folding doors were thrown wide open, and the man-servant announced, with a sort of ironical impressive-
 ness of manner,—

"Mr. Isaac Sleigh !"

Barbara saw Miss Featherstonehaugh advancing in all that amplitude of her garments which so expressed the expansion of her benevolent mind, to drop down upon and

take undisputed possession of the poor schoolmaster ; and she vainly tried to think of some word or deed that might prevent for a time the meeting she so dreaded. As she hesitated, she saw Hugh and Maud, who had understood the servant's tone, exchange a mischievous smile as they looked at the small, neat, and yet shabby figure that shivered dubiously at the threshold ; and Barbara, who knew well what brushing and renovating those rusty black clothes must have undergone, to become what they now appeared—what time that snowy white neckcloth must have taken to tie into so spruce a bow, in order that its mended portions might be kept out of sight—Barbara, knowing this, saw she must hesitate no longer ; for if Isaac noticed the smile, he would understand it but too well, and feel it but too keenly : the tiniest arrow may make sad havoc in the heart of an incurable wound. So while Miss Featherstonehaugh stopped to extricate her dress from the fringe of a table-cover, to which the holly had caught in passing, Barbara got before her, and welcomed Mr. Sleigh, and took him to Mrs. Wolcombe, who had promised to aid her in warding off the threatened explanations.

Barbara was glad to see that Isaac, though nervous and hesitating, was more self-possessed, on the whole, than she had expected. The people did trouble him a little at first, certainly ; but as to the magnificence of the place, he seemed quite unconscious of it, and, on the whole, appeared more at home in it than in his own squalid chamber. Though Isaac led what might be called a lonely life, he never was really alone anywhere. His learning, if not profound in itself, was still to him a separate, ideal,

and inexhaustible world, in which he could shut himself up, and forget the hard and actual world where the rest of his life was passed : a world peopled by things of such refinement, beauty, and grandeur, that, coming from it to this more common-place everyday sphere, how could he be very deeply impressed with any of the things, or the people, it might have to show ? This, at all events, was Isaac's own secretly-treasured theory ; and he was the best judge of its practical value in the wear and tear of life.

As Barbara led him to the arm-chair, and his eyes turned slowly from her face to Mrs. Wolcombe's, the latter said to him, " I'm very glad to see you, Mr. Sleigh ; I hardly dared hope you would break through your rules, and come to us to-night."

The politeness of the words, and the sweetness of the tone, puzzled Isaac much, by raising so many fragments of ideas of what he might, and, perhaps, ought to say in return, that there is no telling how long he would have remained with his eyes on that lady's face, shaking the thin, white, damp hand, if a sudden voice at the door had not made them both turn and listen. Job was standing there, having just deposited on the floor an armful of ivy, mistletoe, holly, and Portugal laurel ; Barbara, it seemed, was ordering him to go away, while the children were trying, by alternate threatenings and coaxings, to drag him farther into the room, to help them to fasten a great wreath of evergreens they had just prepared for the chandelier.

" What's the matter, Barbara ?" asked Mrs. Wolcombe, raising her voice with an effort. " Mus'n't Job come in ?"

"O, he is so dreadfully dirty, mamma!" observed the sage and sad Miss Helen, who, as elder sister, thought she ought always to take Barbara's part.

At this moment Job was fairly dragged in by Hugh, who had got hold of his coat-tails; and as Job knew that they at least couldn't afford to resist, he yielded, and followed the young gentleman across the superb carpet. But when he met the grave, slow eye of his former schoolmaster, and the quiet smile of Mrs. Wolcombe, he stood still, and looked, for once in his life, ashamed.

"You are indeed dirty, Job," said Mrs. Wolcombe, trying not to laugh; but her tone seemed so sad to Job, who had not seen her for a long time, that he was strangely touched; and not knowing how else to please her, he said, giving his head a jerk, and throwing back his hair, "Beg pardon, aw'm sure! Happen my feace is very mucky. But shall aw go and wash it for you, ma'am? Aw will—in a minnit!"

"Yes, pray do; and for me, Job, if you can't do it for yourself;" and Job shambled out of the room amidst the laughter of the children, and made for the kitchen, bullying the cook famously when he got there, in a sense of his authority and position.

Meanwhile Miss Featherstonehaugh had taken advantage of the fact, that Mrs. Wolcombe's attention was distracted from the schoolmaster to introduce herself to him, and to take a seat by his side. Barbara thought she would remain near them, and so possibly prevent their talk turning on herself. They now all gathered in a large semicircle round the blazing fire, with its hissing and spitting logs, except Hugh and Poppy, who would not

leave the windows, where they might get the first glimpse of Lancelot, and Mr. Wolcombe, who had gone to meet him. Mrs. Wolcombe looked at her watch.

"He will be here in five minutes," she said; and leant back with a happy smile on her face.

Barbara got up, and whispered something in her ear—to which she replied, "Yes, by all means;" and Barbara left the room. In a minute or two she returned with Timon and Isidore, for whom room was made on the hearth-rug: a trying position for such dogs before such a company. Timon, however, with a single glance out of his one eye at Barbara, that said, as plainly as it could speak, "You are the only person I care for among them all," and which reminded her of the very different glance she had once seen there, laid himself down, without the least ceremony, just as if he had never known any other resting-place. But poor Isidore was in a dreadful state of discomfort. He fawned, and winced, and rolled over on his back, and dangled his paws every time he was even looked at; and literally whined with sympathetic pain when Mrs. Wolcombe stooped to stroke him, in the hope of easing his mind.

"Here they are! Here they are!" cried Hugh, and he bounded across the room, and rushed out through the door; while Poppy—little, toddling, fat Poppy—tried, as usual, to follow his example, but rolled on the carpet instead. Maud and Helen clapped their hands, and ran after Hugh. Miss Featherstonehaugh rose, and shook out her dress, and stood prepared; while Barbara moved her chair into the shade beside her old master. Mrs. Wolcombe closed her eyes and sighed—she alone could

not go to meet him ; she could only listen with straining ears for the old footstep on the stairs. Timon, perceiving that something was up, pricked his ears and growled ; which made Isidore glance askance at him, and then—wagging his stump of a tail—wait for clearer orders.

The old voice was now heard on the stairs ; not quite so gruff perhaps, but fuller and deeper than it used to be. Then there was a quick footstep in advance of the others, and presently a figure knelt before the arm-chair ; and its head was clasped, and kissed, and its forehead bedewed with the holiest of holy water, a mother's tears. Then there was a long, deep, and agitated silence.

But when the fond mother could raise her eyes, and look upon Lancelot's face, so brown, manly, and calm, so full of quiet strength, O how happy it made her. She read all she wanted to know in a very few glances. And he too perfectly understood her.

" O yes, mother," he said, with a meaning smile, and in a deep tone, " still the same, only with all the nonsense knocked out of me. O, by the bye, I'm to be gazetted as lieutenant next week. What, Timon, you here ?" he exclaimed, as, finding a cold nose thrusting itself into his hand, he turned to see what it meant. " Isidore, too ; charming as ever ! Mr. Sleigh !" Lancelot rose, and shook hands cordially with the school-master.

" And how does the school get on ?"

Mr. Isaac did not answer very promptly. Lancelot wondered if he were remembering what the question used to be when they met : " Any pretty girls growing up in the school, Mr. Sleigh ?" but Isaac was simply bringing

his eyes into a position to understand the change he saw from the rude, mischievous youth to the dignified, gentlemanly man ; so Lancelot, without waiting, turned away to speak to other guests who had just arrived ; and Barbara began to hope he had seen her, and that no formal explanations about her were to follow. Presently Mrs. Wolcombe called her to come and stand by her side, so that she could introduce her to the guests as they came up. And to begin with, she looked round and asked for Lancelot. He had left the room, somebody said.

“ O, gone to dress ! ” observed Mrs. Wolcombe ; but in her thoughts she followed Lancelot’s steps to the school-room and nursery. In a few minutes he returned, and she fancied his face looked puzzled and clouded.

“ Lancelot,” she said, taking Barbara’s hand, and drawing her forward into the light, “ I must introduce you to our new governess, Barbara Giffard.”

He took her hand in silent surprise, yet seeming as if half inclined to laugh. What ! This quiet young lady, with her easy grace, the abrupt and plain-spoken Barbara ? It seemed too absurd ! And yet when she smiled and spoke, whose smile could so instantaneously convert strength into sweetness of expression ? whose voice but Barbara’s could have that round, even, richness of tone, where the fulness of the music seemed but the natural vehicle for the completeness of the thought ? and then the old accent still clinging just a little to the words, perhaps because she was somewhat nervous under his searching gaze. He laughed once, his old low laugh, when he heard that, and seemed to think it was all right. Then he looked round to his mother ; and Barbara knew quite well

what flattering things he was saying to her about her influence, &c., and that the wonder was fast clearing off, as he remembered who had been Barbara's protectress and friend. What else there might be of recognition of the thoughts of each other in the mutual glance it might be difficult to explain; but it was odd enough that both turned away into a kind of sudden silence.

And Lancelot presently found his eyes following Barbara about whithersoever she went, with an interest that he hardly seemed to care to conceal, not at least from his own mind. "Yes," thought he, "there is the old self still, in spite of the bloom upon the rounded cheeks, and the softness of the genial mouth and eyes which used to be so stern and cold. My mother is nothing less than an enchantress. Everything rough or unlovely begins to modify its nature when it gets under her eye; or to recover its nature if it had only been spoiled for the time. Yet, much as I did expect, I did not expect this."

Lieutenant Wolcombe (as folks now persisted in calling him, in anticipation of the Gazette) was not the only person who watched Barbara with unusual interest: Miss Featherstonehaugh stood at a little distance, touching her eyes with her handkerchief to wipe away a genuine tear or two, as she heard Mrs. Wolcombe receive the congratulations of the guests on her interesting protégée. Yes, "interesting;" that was the word; society always likes to get hold of some nicely-balanced phrase that won't compromise it to express the mood or opinion of the hour; so everybody agreed Barbara was an "interesting" young person.

Isaac heard all this, and felt as though he could have

gladly sat there for ever to listen to such praises of his pupil, and be able the while to look on her, and say, "It is less than she deserves."

Presently, Miss Featherstonehaugh caught sight of him sitting alone, and she swept grandly through all obstacles until she found herself a second time on a chair by his side, ready at last for a cosy bit of chat.

"What a change, Mr. Sleigh!" she began. "What a wonderful change! You remember her, I suppose, as she was?"

"Remember! Yes, O yes." Isaac remembered her.

"I assure you, Mr. Sleigh, I can hardly realise it myself at times. Look at her. Is it possible that that is the same poor, miserable, ignorant, wishy-washy thing that came here less than three years ago? Well, sir, that's what learning can do! There's a lesson for the world, Mr. Sleigh! Is it not? Learning has done it all!"

"Yes; all, all!" Isaac answered. And the tender joy that lit up his blue eyes, as he gazed at Barbara, showed how fully he believed what he said. Not for a moment did he doubt but that it was learning which lent the peculiar charm to Barbara's manner, gave the richness to her tone—the earnest, fearless glance to her eye—even the grace and the chaste whiteness to her dress. And his heart thrilled with a delight too great to bear in silence, as he thought—"And I have been the instrument of this, under God's blessing!" He wanted now to speak. He wanted to throw this almost perilous overcharge of the soul's electricity that seemed ready to push him on into any conceivable outburst of foolish conceit! Poor Isaac! He did now covet a bit of worldly praise, now that he

thought every one must be ready to acknowledge his right to it. Here was something he had succeeded in. But he would not forget his promise to Barbara to be quiet till he received her permission to speak. So he began to think of what he would say after supper, if Barbara's health should be drunk, and he be called on to respond. But while his soul was growing eloquent in advance, and the moisture was dimming his eye at the pathetic sentiments he was going to express, he was interrupted by something said near him, and a faint flush of excitement overspread his face. It was coming! He had heard a question put by one of the guests, and he saw that Barbara heard it too, as she stood by Mrs. Wolcombe's chair, for she looked his way, and then her eyes dropped. Yes, Isaac was right. Barbara did hear the gentleman ask who had been her instructor—and she also heard the loud answer, "O, Miss Featherstonehaugh!" And then she saw that lady bowing in a very stately manner to all points of the compass, while one guest after another made comments. And when that was over, the governess, feeling her tongue loosened at last, began to expatiate on the blessings of education generally, and of the particular modes that she found it best to adopt, with a zeal and *abandon* that seemed to show she was conscious this was her last night at Coppeshall; and that she felt it her duty to leave, as a parting gift, the full knowledge of not only how Barbara had been got to the existing point of success, but how any given number of Barbaras might be similarly produced at pleasure.

At another time Barbara herself might have scarcely known whether to laugh at or to resent all this absurdity, but now she could only wonder what Isaac Sleigh was

thinking about. Just then a slip of paper was put into Mr. Wolcombe's hands.

"Dear me!" he said, looking round after reading it. "Mr. Sleigh gone home, unwell! Very sorry;" and then he pursued a rather interesting conversation he was engaged in.

"Gone!" thought Barbara, and she felt now deeply to reproach herself for the consequences of her innocent secrecy.

Yes, Isaac had gone. He had seen and heard enough. He restrained himself sufficiently to think of some excuse—were it only that he might veil over his feelings; so he stopped under the hall lamp, and wrote with his pencil a hasty line to Mr. Wolcombe, gave it to the servant, and hurried out into the brilliant starlit night. He trembled and shivered with the cold, but he thought not of it, but simply hurried blindly on. His thin, half-clad figure was the only form that darkened the snow-covered road. For the first time in his life he seemed to turn against the feet that trod upon him, and to listen to the wild voices that shrieked in his ear—"Do something to repel this outrage!" But the utmost that they could get out of Isaac was the moaning cry—"I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!" But the words had no sooner passed his thin lips than he stood still in the middle of the road, and leaning with both hands on the handle of his stick, murmured, "What did I say? God help me, if I have not yet learned how to bear all things—how to endure all things! I must bear. I can do nothing else. O, God help me, nothing else!" Isaac took off his hat, and looked upwards, bareheaded, into the heavens, and his lips moved,

but no more words were audible. Then, as he pursued his way, he began to persuade himself that everything was as he might naturally have expected it to be. It was a truth, he supposed ; Barbara had been trusting to the governess, but why did she deceive him—why did she let him so deceive himself ? He shook his head, and went on faster. And then again he stopped, for his heart was throbbing violently, and compelled him to pause ; and again he looked up, with tears in his eyes, at the frosty stars, asking humbly once more as he had asked when the dream began—“Why was this happiness sent to me ?” And then he answered himself with his old mingling of faith and self-reproach—“Learn ! learn ! learn !”

At last he was at home ! returning to it as after another great contest with the waves of life, during which everything precious had been thrown overboard ; and the poor, black, dismantled hull of a soul came heavily, yet with a kind of gladness, into the harbour. He tended his childish mother with more than usual gentleness that night, and sat so long gazing yearningly into her vacant face that she grew troubled, and pushed him away from her, saying, “To your books, Isaac—to your books ; ’twill be school-time soon, when the Master will hear us all !”

And Isaac sighed, and went and knelt down by his bed behind the screen, and prayed that he might not be permitted to fall into any more such dreams, and that God would send him strength ere the morning to meet so joyless a dawn.

Let us return to the drawing-room.

Late at night, when most of the guests had gone away,

Lancelot, who had seemed to grow more and more restless every hour, said suddenly to his mother, "There's a fire in the little room; let me wheel your chair there. I want to tell you something."

Mrs. Wolcombe consented, though looking as though she did not particularly covet any kind of revelation then; she was weary with the long physical efforts she had made to sit up. However, Lancelot was allowed to do as he pleased, and his mother's weakness rendered all apologies unnecessary for her withdrawal from the few remaining guests.

Lancelot waited not a moment to begin.

"Mother, I bring home news that will startle a friend of yours, and that you alone can make known to her."

Lancelot's voice shook a little as he spoke, and there needed no more to warn the listener of what was coming.

"Abel Drake——"

"Yes—is dead. He died many months ago in Canada, through an accident on the river."

"How did you happen to learn this?"

"Because I made it my business to discover. I judged long ago he was dead, or he must have come back. I have seen one of his own officers, who told me so. Don't be surprised, mother, at what I have done. I could rest no longer without knowing the truth."

"Indeed! Is it so, Lancelot?"

"It is. And now, mother——"

"Well, Lancelot?"

"You know how all is with me, and has been. Little as your letters told of her progress, you could not be quite ^{wrong}, and I made much of what you did say. For months

past she has never been out of my thoughts. Well, I learned this, and then I wanted to see her once more; and now I have seen her. That's all."

The mother paused a long time, and Lancelot grew uneasy and impatient.

"You are grieved, mother?"

"No, I should have been, perhaps, a year ago; but I have grown to love Barbara almost like one of my own children, so how can I complain of your feeling towards her?"

"But she—what will she say?"

"I cannot tell."

Lancelot seemed for the moment unpleasantly affected by this answer; evidently he had not anticipated it, perhaps had rather calculated on something very different. After looking down for a brief space, with his hands on his knees, he rose, saying, "Well, mother, let her know about him as soon as possible; to-night, if you can."

"And if, as I fear, this rather sends her heart away from you, or, in other words, back to him, what then?"

"You do not fear she would refuse me?"

"You would not ask her yet?"

"Of course not. I would not even talk to you now, but that I must go away before long, perhaps to stay away for years. Remember, he has been dead nearly a twelve-month, and I am not bound to feel any special tenderness towards the memory of such a man; but I should not like to be refused. Do you fear that?"

"And if she did refuse, Lancelot, you are a man, and would get over the disappointment."

"Mother, I dare say it's all very absurd, but, in truth,

I have so long allowed myself to think of her as destined to be my future wife—that—that——”

Again the young soldier's voice became unsteady, and the mother's heart hastened to try to relieve and re-assure him by friendly counsel.

“ Your father——”

“ Would yield; I am sure of that. At the worst, I could but bribe him by a promise to stay at home.”

“ What !” and the mother gave an imperceptible sigh over some secret thought; “ would you resign the army and your prospects ?”

“ Not if it can be helped.”

“ But if it can't ?”

“ Well, then, yes. I have weighed all that, and decided to-night with a firmness and rapidity that even Barbara would respect; and she's about the suddenest person in settling things of any woman I ever knew. You remember how she helped to march me off; it was a mercy she allowed me time for a clean shirt! But, mother, I don't want to be rejected, mind that !”

“ So you wish to deprive poor Barbara of one privilege of her sex ?”

“ That one, certainly. And now, mother, speak ! How is it all to be ? I'm not fond of talking, and particularly about such subjects, where one can't, you know, when perplexed by an enemy's feints or diplomacies, put an end to the nonsense by a straightforward bayonet-charge.”

“ Well, I will tell Barbara the news you bring. After a few days I will draw her into conversation, and perhaps I may learn something that may guide you.”

"That's it! Just say, 'Lancelot, you needn't hurry away, I think,' or something of that kind, and I shan't."

"And if——"

"O hang the ifs! I shall understand but too well, if it comes to that."

What Barbara thought or felt on receiving Lancelot's news a few minutes later by Mrs. Wolcombe's bedside, no one ever knew. She asked—but it was as quietly as usual—if she could be spared to go to her mother's for the night, received the sympathetic answer with apparent coldness, and went away; to return not for three entire days. At the end of that time she came back, placid-looking and self-possessed, and resumed her duties without a word of explanation. And then Lancelot, who had grown irritable and absent-minded during the second day, and strangely depressed, moody, and solitary on the third, revived at once, and watched and waited from night to night for the promised signal. Not till nearly a fortnight had elapsed did his mother look at him in the way he knew she would look when ready to speak, and then, the moment they were alone, he needed only one glance at her face to guess what was coming.

"God bless you, my boy! I think you had better go." And he went, with a smile upon his face.

Some days after, when he was tossing on the stormy waves of the Atlantic, and amusing himself with a kind of ironical comparison between their tumult and the kindred agitation that reigned in his own breast, his poor mother was sending to him her last dying breath, in one passionate cry—"Lancelot! O my boy, Lancelot!" And he knew it not for months afterwards.

CHAPTER X.

JOB DISTURBED IN THE POETRY OF IDLENESS.

AGAIN our story takes a leap forwards. Job lay basking in the afternoon sun. He was not asleep. His dull, heavy eyes, shaded by the rim of his hat, kept a little open, fixed upon the fields of ripe corn. He was just conscious of the bird-boy's musical cry and rattle, now breaking faintly and soothingly on his ear from afar off, and now shrill and near enough to make him wince by the sudden and unwelcome clamour.

In this uncertain state he believed himself to be only enjoying the singular beauty of the ripe summer afternoon in a kind of poetic trance, broken only from time to time by an incipient yawn.

Far as he could see before him lay the swelling uplands, rising higher and higher as they extended further and further off; and covered with green fields of corn, so ripe that if the least breeze touched it it gave out a low seething sound; hardly a rustle, as the ears pressed shelteringly together. Between Job and the nearest of the corn-fields was a pond of stagnant water, from which a mist was rising. It looked hardly any cooler than the hot tongues of the cows standing in it, knee deep, and gazing dreamily straight before them, as though enjoying the heat

and beauty of the hour very much in the manner and spirit of Job himself.

As we have already intimated, that luxurious personage was not asleep. In proof, for instance, he would occasionally turn his back to the village, and let his eyes travel slowly along the green or common to where it sunk suddenly, and left only visible the black chimney-top of the factory. This rose from the unseen depths beyond, and stood out against the sky, like a low altar; giving forth, however, no fragrant incense. But as the sight of the fact suggested unpleasing reflections, Job's eyes never rested there long, but would gradually climb up the neighbouring hill (the only way it would ever be climbed by Job) and rest on Barden Wood, which the red sunlight was painting in such gorgeous colours that it would be hard to say whether it were more beautiful now, or when we saw the sun rise behind its delicate spring foliage some six years ago, at the period of the opening of our story.

When tired of that prospect, Job would turn heavily round again towards the village, and condescend to interest himself in the condition and affairs of his neighbours. Only a few yards away stood the row of cottages that had been recently built by Mr. Wolcombe; and, as every one said, at the suggestion of his deceased wife whose Christian name they bore. Their red-tile roofs were shining hotly in the sun. The plants in the little front gardens drooped low to the hard white soil. One or two doors stood open, showing a comfortable tea prepared within, while the old grandfather, or the ailing girl left at home in charge, stood on the threshold, or leant over the garden-gate, shading the eyes with the hands, and looking im-

patiently towards the factory. Younger children who had been left in the care of neighbours, and who were tired of playing on the green, and wanted their tea, had crouched down on their outside closed doors, and while waiting for their mothers to come home with the keys, had fallen asleep there.

The last house but one had a porch or archway framed of willows, and covered with everlasting peas, now in the richest bloom. Its two windows had plants outside—originally gifts to Barbara from Mrs. Wolcombe, and intended for the companionship of the snowdrops, on the sill of the nursery window, but transferred by Barbara to her mother's new home, one by one, on her visits to her. Inside the windows appeared white muslin curtains. All the cottages looked pretty, but decidedly this one stood out from the rest, by the profusion of its flowers, and by a certain air of refinement in all those little matters which tell to the passer-by something of the life within. At the door, with her knitting in her hands, and an old tabby cat curled up at her feet, sat the widow Giffard; looking, one could almost fancy, many years younger than she had looked when we first saw her in Abbott's-court. Still she was not without her troubles, even now. As ill-luck would have it, the little card, "Lodgings," remained where it had for some time been, in the window. Job noticed it, and could scarcely repress a kind of enthusiastic idea which would occasionally come over him, of relieving the widow's mind by taking them himself.

But Job's eyes—and certainly it were a calumny to call *them* idle—did not even rest there, after their long passage to and fro. Either the glazed red tiles, throwing back the

fierce red rays of the sun with equal fierceness, dazed them, or the pictures of neatness and industry they suggested troubled them ; so they went off again, travelling slowly on to where the rosy-cheeked apples nodded and laughed, mockingly, over the high garden wall of the parsonage, as though they thought Job was too lazy even to steal them ; thence to the little grey church, and the steep bit of hill behind, dotted over with white tombstones, some of which were overhung by low trees, until they reached the top of the hill, which stretched across in a straight line against the sky. It was behind this line the sun would presently sink, as Job well knew by past experience, and the sly rogue was quite aware he was keeping that spectacle as the last morsel of his feast, before making up his mind to be prudent, shun night-dews, and go home. Already the grand red ball was drawing down toward the edge, and throwing out into wonderful relief a haystack and a leafless old hawthorn, which at other times was unnoticeable, when Job's eyes, beginning to weary of blinking at the sun, and getting the worst of it at every encounter, turned away. Just then a great bluebottle fastened upon a naked part of his knee that was exposed through a hole in the trousers. Job winced, and shook his knee, and the fly dropped lazily off an inch or two, then dropped back, and settled in exactly the same place, and tickled Job till he could really bide no longer. So he suddenly hit his knee a tremendous blow, but left the bluebottle buzzing about, as if asking if anybody could tell what was the matter. Would he do it yet a third time ? Job seemed to ask, in a savage glance ; and, to his disgust, the fly did come to the same spot, and drove home his weapon right into Job's marrow. That done, he

buzzed so suddenly and unpleasantly in Job's face, that the latter struck out in an agony of alarm, with a strong exclamation. And then Job really was vexed to see and hear the great big bullying fellow go off, booming away, in triumph, to places whither Job dared not even in imagination think of the labour of following him.

Job now rose slowly up, feeling very naturally a little tired and somewhat sleepy after such exertions, gave a tremendous yawn that even the far-off bluebottle might have heard with dismay, and determined to do a "bit o' wark," by drawing up from the well all the arrears of water due to the neighbouring housewives. But when he had reached the low stone wall surrounding the spring, it struck him for the first time what a fine view that low wall afforded of the Cartney-road; so he sat down, stuck his elbows on his knees, his chin on his dirty hands, pulled his hat a little more over his eyes—no doubt to concentrate their vision—and—and—presently found himself going off into a cozy sleep. Pshaw! Job wouldn't do anything of the kind. That water he would draw—soon! though it was, as he reflected pensively, "uncommon low" in the well. However, he gave himself a sort of shake—that is, he fancied he did so. A breeze now began to stir, but it was hot and unrefreshing, and its unsatisfactory qualities seemed only made the more perceptible by the faint seething of the corn, the low rustling of the great tree over the pond, the fall of a brown horse-chestnut from it, the flutter of a dead leaf in the grass, and the rising of a cloud of white dust in the Cartney-road. As Job sat there dimly conscious of these things going on about him, he became aware of another and quite a different sound mingling with them.

It was like a heavy distant tramp in the dust. He raised his head, and looked along the straggling road. He saw a figure: a gipsy woman it appeared to be, with a child strapped to her back. A very strange figure it seemed, and Job stared till his eyes ached, in the endeavour to make it out more clearly; and then he shut them to give them a bit of relief; and then—why then he was gone! Yes, he was fast asleep, and dreaming of having his fortune told by a great bluebottle. A grand fortune it was too, though the particulars were so lazily droned out. He was promised handfuls of gold. He saw himself in bed at noon, with servants hanging about him splendidly dressed, who had long golden things hanging from their shoulder-knots, and who were all holding pipes of 'bacca ready filled, and jugs of creamy mild ale in a long succession; or handing him garments that seemed made to drop on to him, and fit into their proper place without an effort. But somehow the sixpence was missing wherewith to purchase all these good things; and the bluebottle wouldn't give credit. Job regretted now he had offended him, and so he went on hopelessly fumbling in his pocket with one hand, while he rubbed his knee with the other, which the bluebottle still tickled, as though afraid he would fall asleep, until at last Job told the bluebottle-gipsy woman it was no use, he hadn't got a farthing; when the old woman, in a rage, stretched out her hand, and pushed him maliciously—right backwards into the well!

And that part of the dream was not merely a dream. Job woke in an agony, finding himself actually being pushed back over the deep water; so he gave one tremendous yell that brought the people in the cottages to

the doors to see what was the matter, and tried to spring up; but he found his efforts unnecessary, the arm which had pushed was also holding him, and it now allowed him to jump to his feet, very wide awake indeed, and to turn fiercely on the intruder.

He saw the same figure he had noticed coming along the road; but which, instead of being an old gipsy woman with a baby, was a broad-shouldered man, with a large package, covered with oil-skin, slung on his back. His eye twinkled with a mirthful expression as it met Job's, who stood shaking with rage and fright.

"Why, old fellow, you were nearly gone! Lucky for you I came just in time!"

"Aw say!" replied Job, "dunna do that agin! Think aw wur asleep? This time o' day!"

The children now began to gather round them; and one girl, with a baby nearly as big as herself, and another clinging to her frock, walked right between them, looking up and staring agape from one to another.

"Come, come," said the man, "I've saved your precious life, now do something for mine. Give me a drink. I'm parched with thirst."

"Get it yoursel'!" growled Job, pointing sulkily to the well. The man unslung the package from his back, and set it carefully down on the edge of the well. Then by the aid of the draw-rope he lowered the pail which was fixed to it.

"Draw it full whol y'are about it!" now called out Job.

"Why?"

"Yo can drink easier out o' th' top, cannot yo?"

"True!" said the man, with a laugh, as he obeyed

Job's instructions. He drew up the pail with some difficulty, for he was evidently fatigued, set it on the low circling wall, knelt down, tilted its edge, and drank a long, deep, satisfying draught. As he raised his face, and turned away, Job, with considerable alacrity, seized the pail as though it were quite done with, and poured off its contents into one of his buckets.

"Coom," thought Job to himself, as he surveyed the result, "I gotten a pail out o' him! Wake enow for that!" And then Job gave vent to the low chuckle, which always expressed his feelings when he was particularly amused.

The man seemed much refreshed by his draught. He sat down on the edge of the well and gazed about him on the scene we have described. The children, emboldened by his nods and smiles, came gradually nearer. He tried now and then to chat with them, but it seemed impossible for him to keep his eyes quiet for an instant. They darted from one object to another incessantly. Very peculiar eyes they were. When they closed, as they often did, after gazing long in one direction, the face had a dark and Spanish air, with black bushy eyebrows, small sensitive mouth, black moustaches, and luxuriant black beard. But when the eyelids were raised, there looked forth from under those dark brows a pair of honest, genial, blue eyes, which with their friendly glance seemed to apologize for the stern dignity of the rest of the face, and give it almost a childlike simplicity of expression. At times, too, the eyes were moist, and the whole countenance suffused with tenderness, perhaps while reflecting on those dear to him, whom he might have left behind in the far-distant

country from which he appeared to have come. The poor, sleepy children thought it a very winning face as it smiled down at them. Fatigued as he was, he seemed quite struck with the beauty of the scene around him; and interested himself eagerly in every passing sight or sound, with something of the poet's clear, sensitive eye and enjoying soul. Thus, when the bird-boy, as he came idly sauntering along the corn-field, suddenly shook his rattle, and then strolled along close to the hedge singing an old bird-song that had been passed down from one bird-scarer to another, from time immemorial, the man stood up, looking after the boy with those moist blue eyes, and listening with intense pleasure to his every word. The sun now appeared cut in two by the line of hill; the corn began to fold its ears against the coming dew, while the long shadows flickered over it in every part, seeking vainly a stable resting-place, and while birds wrangled for their proper places in the chestnut-tree over the pond. The man looked and listened, unwilling to disturb the enjoyment he felt, until the bird-boy ceased, the sun disappeared, and a deep silence everywhere prevailed. In a voice broken with emotion, the man then said, while a sigh preceded the words,—

“Aye, ’tis a bonny, bonny place!”

“Happen y’are a stranger in these parts?” inquired Job, who had never once taken his eyes away from the man.

“Aye, we have come a long way, I and my comrade here,” answered the man, laying his hand upon the package.

“Comrade?” said Job, rather alarmed. The stranger smiled.

"Aye, comrade, brother, father, wife, child, everything to me;" and he sat down again to rest himself, and gently kept back the children, who were busy about the wrapper of the package, trying to get a peep at the stranger's family, which were confined there, they supposed. The factory-bell now rang; the gates opened, and the mill-hands came forth, chatting, shouting, and laughing across the green, some on their way to the cottages, while others turned off at the corner towards Abbott's-court and the back of the village. Job was now assailed from door and window by the women, as they bustled about in the preparation for tea.

"Job, when dosta mean to bring th' wayter? Job! Job! you lazy loppetts, I wish I wur at th' back o' thee—Job! Job! Job! I say!"

"Yo ma call," grunted Job, leisurely beginning the operations which could be no longer put off. "Why canna they draw for theirsels? E—law! How idle people grows." With another yawn, he now got up a bucket of water, filled his other pail, slowly adjusted the shoulder-yoke, hooked on the pails, and rose like a man to his hard fate, when the stranger stopped him.

"Where can I get a decent lodging for the night? I have some business at the mill to-morrow morning."

"Lodgin'?" answered Job, a little maliciously, and re-seating himself on the well, without removing his burden, but so that the pails rested on the ground, and he appeared in a kind of impromptu pillory. "Lodgin'?" he repeated, with a jerk of his head towards the open country. "Very nice fields an' hedgerows, an' warm ditch-bottoms!" The man shook his head with a smile. "Well, there's a

comfortable barn yonder, ony the rats is troublesome, and sometimes I 'spects fleas."

"Come, come," observed the man; "a poor tired fellow like me needs better accommodation than warm ditch-bottoms or barns with rats and fleas."

"Whatten, that won't do, neither!" chuckled Job. "Folks talk o' th' mischiefs o' idleness, but aw say look at th' corruptions o' industry! Aw dunna want father-beds, an' washhond basins—an'——"

"Well, if you can't, or won't help me, I suppose I must go back to the old lesson, and help myself."

But Job had begun to reflect a little more seriously, and so he said, "Lodgin'! There's widow Giffard's, second house yonder, wi' th' flowers and mooslins! Awm going there wi' th' wayter. She doesn't tak' in onybody. She's gotten too grand for that sin' her daughter——" Job was interrupted by a yawn, which he, in vain, tried to repress. "She ma tak' you if she likes yo——" "Aw'll see," he was going to say, but the words could not get out, for another prolonged yawn stopped the way. Again he tried to speak, "Aw'll——," and again the jaws began their involuntary expansion—till Job, with a great effort, suddenly exclaimed, "Con-found!" and rolled heavily away with the swinging buckets.

"Aw say, widow," observed Job, as he reached the place where she sat, "there's a man wants a lodgin'. Aw hae na opinion o' him. Dunna ye tak' him in."

"Have the goodness, Job, to mind your own business," was the answer, "and then you won't spill the water all over the floor." She immediately went towards the group of children that surrounded the stranger. He rose, with

a slight flush, as if ashamed to have given her the trouble to come to him—or as if suddenly conscious of the shabbiness of his clothes, which he glanced down at.

“The water-carrier, yonder,” said he, “suggested you might give me a bed. I shall be glad, if you can.”

The widow hesitated, not thinking so much of Job’s officious advice, but feeling reluctant to harbour one who in garb differed little from the ordinary class of tramps that visited Barden Brow about harvest-time; a class that the widow did not feel herself inclined at any time to accommodate. But she could not help liking the man’s face, so she said, “I have a spare room, certainly. May I ask your business?”

He began at once—and to the children’s great delight—to uncover the mysterious package. Some of them squeezed in between the widow and the stranger; others climbed on to the low masonry encircling the well, and looked over his shoulders, or under his arms, with mouth and eyes wide open; some half-dozen blackberry-stained hands even ventured to assist in drawing off the covering. But when they saw what it was, they stared in blank disappointment. It was simply a machine-model, occupying the inside of an oblong box, and which was exposed to view by dropping a small portion of one side, that was fastened to it by leather hinges, and used as a lid.

“See,” said the man, “this is my invention. It is the model of an improvement in the weaving process. It deals merely with a certain bit of detail in the ordinary machine, but that bit involves a saving of many hundreds a year in such a factory as yours. Imagine then its value, if you reckon up all the factories of England—to say no-

thing of other countries." The eyes of the speaker sparkled, and had a peculiar look with them as though they were gazing through some long-drawn vista. Then, with a sort of good-humoured laugh at his own absence of mind—and demonstrative enthusiasm—he seemed to check himself, and to speak more quietly: even with a sigh. "Yes," said he, after a long look at the machine, "I have been at it many years while knocking about in foreign parts. It was no easy thing to do." Seeing now the disappointment of the children at the exhibition of the stranger's family, he said, with mock gravity—"There's a boggart inside! he'll move soon!" They stared at him, drew a little off, and again stared. Meantime the widow stooped, and looked in. Presently she observed—

"What a maze of little wheels and odd crinkum-crankum-shaped things!"

"Doesn't it look mysterious?"

"Very."

"And quiet?" continued the Inventor.

"Quiet! Why, isn't it always so?"

"Put your finger there;" and the man indicated a certain round brass button.

"Here?" said the widow, putting it rather timidly, and half-inclined to play the child herself, and let it alone.

"Yes," said the man; "now press it down."

She did so, and the moment after could not repress an exclamation, as she saw what a multitudinous and noisy kind of life she had unexpectedly called into being. The whole machine seemed to become instinct with a wonderful kind of activity; innumerable wheels of every possible shape and variety went whirling round and round on a

business that was to her perfectly inexplicable, and with a rushing speed that made her almost dizzy to look at.

"Dear me! Why, it's alive!" she exclaimed, after a little recovering her self-possession.

The children who at the first noise and movement had huddled together in readiness for immediate flight, now came jumping about it, shouting in the wildest excitement—

"It's alive! it's alive! it's alive!"

As to the Inventor, he scarcely cared to conceal his delight. He rubbed his hands together, and smiled and nodded at the children, who, for their parts, took no notice of him, so engrossed were they with the strange antics of the machine.

"Come in—come in," said the widow, now leading the way towards her cottage, followed by the man; who wished the children "good-night," in a manner that sufficiently intimated he was not desirous of their company any longer. They eyed him wistfully till he disappeared—then ran home to carry the news of the boggart and his keeper.

CHAPTER XI.

AN INVENTOR'S DREAMS.

THE train of thought that had been started in the inventor's mind could not let him be still. He had scarcely entered the widow's cottage, and set his burden on the table, and re-opened it for the widow to take yet another look, before he began to iterate her word—

“Alive! Aye, but you don't know how much that means to me. Dost think these bits of rubbish, these odds and ends of old wood and iron mostly picked up in the street,—dost think they could do all this by mere hand-cunning? No! no! When I have sweated over it night by night in some wretched garret, after doing mayhap a hard day's work beforehand of regular labour, when I have sawed and punched, and filed till I was ready to drop down with fatigue, I have often felt as though there *was* some real and living thing in the chamber beside me, imprisoned in the dead wood and metal, but crying out to me to let it loose, that it might set to work for the benefit of the world, and for me. And at times I have almost fancied I heard an actual voice whisper to me—
‘Courage! your strength and youth are not wasted. They are here. All that you gave to me I will return you a thousandfold. Faint not! Fear not! Spare not! Mine-

shall be the voice that will tell how thou hast spent all these weary years.' And then I have risen with new energy and hope, feeling that I was infusing my own soul into that ungainly body, and creating an actual living thing."

The widow found herself listening with an interest that grew every moment stronger. And as her eyes and ears lingered on the man's face and voice, her thoughts unconsciously wandered back, years back, into her troubled life. For there seemed a something in them that revived the past; but dimly, and afar off; as a passage in a tune heard for the first time will sometimes bring back the feelings with which some other and familiar tune was once heard. Old thoughts and feelings seemed to revive; some sad, some happy. The widow seemed disturbed by both. And the patient, almost cold expression natural to her, softened strangely; and tears came into her wintry grey eyes, as she stood at the window listening to the stranger's voice—

"—looking on the happy autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more."

As to him, he by no means reciprocated the widow's state of feeling. He evidently thought of nothing just now but his machine and the opportunity of disburdening himself to one who was a good listener. After a pause the widow said to him, "But had you no one to talk over your schemes with—no friend, brother, or wife?"

"No!" answered the Inventor, hurriedly; "no one but the garret mice that used to come out at night and watch me at my work with their little glittering eyes, and

steal my bit of candle before my face ; thinking, I suppose, like the world at large, ‘ Oh, poor fellow !—he’s so very poor, he won’t mind it !’ . And so, for want of better companions, I used to wink a little at their conduct in that respect ; and talk to them as though I didn’t believe them capable of doing anything of the kind ; and I even fancy I went so far sometimes—for I had comical moods now and then—as to explain my plan to them, with a grave, imposing face, having, mind you, a shrewd eye all the while at a larger audience elsewhere that I knew. I should one day want to listen to me. But, of course, I didn’t tell the mice that ; and if they suspected it, they said nothing, but always seemed to listen with great natural politeness to any explanations I desired to give. And it was laughable enough to perceive, after awhile, that two or three of them made it a rule to appear at a crack in the wall (a stray tail not unfrequently hanging out as a token of the beginning of the meeting) whenever they heard the sound of my tools, as if to inquire, in a friendly way, how I was getting on.

“ What skill and patience it must have required,” said the widow, “ to make so many little things move all at once, with so many different kinds of motion, and all in so orderly a manner.”

“ Oh, it’s quite an education to become ever so small an inventor. I had to teach myself before I could teach them. It was a long while before I could make them fit for a place in the machine. Each had to know its separate duty, and convince me how well it would do it. I used to range them in a row before me like children at school ; and examine, and compare them, and rub them

against one another to make them take kindly to the fellowship, and to see if I could discover any bad faults. When I had got them well grounded, as an old master of mine used to say, then came the polish. ‘Remember,’ I would in fancy say to them—‘remember, I want no disorderly mob of vagabonds, neither do I want a set of idle ladies and gentlemen, but decent, sensible operatives, who know how to combine together for the common good, and go to work without nonsense.’ But I tire you—I am sure I do—with all this talk.”

“Oh dear, no! I am very much interested.”

“Well, and I don’t often get such a chat; so when the flood-gates are opened, you know——”

“Pray go on.”

“When I did at last bring them all together, of course, as usual, they wouldn’t go a bit; they were uncommonly perfect in theory, but they stuck fast at the practice. That was all. Lord, how they let out their true character at last when asked to do a bit of work and be of some use in the world! Lord, how they quarrelled and upset one another in all directions! I wiped the sweat from my brow, and kept as quiet as I could. Then I marked a few of the worst, and had a sort of *auto da fé* in my chamber. I was delighted to find I had discovered the true criminals—the black sheep that had infected all the rest with a sort of top-heavy dizziness and a kind of falling staggers; amusing enough, I dare say, to a bystander, but dreary work for the poor inventor. However, I got them all together once more, and found they fitted perfectly. And now how would they go? Well, they settled that by refusing to go at all. A sulkier set of little wretches I never

saw ; they wouldn't—no, they would not go ! And the more I tried to urge them, the harder they stuck fast, looking for all the world as though they thought that that was just what I had made them for. Oh, but I grew angry, while I pretended I wasn't, and tried to coax them along ! No, it was no use ; they would not go, they said as plainly as they could speak. ' Hang me, but you shall ! ' said I, and I gave an extra squeeze. Whew !—crash !—split !—crash ! They all let fly at me in one tremendous volley. The machine had gone back to its elements, the pieces were at my feet. My work was undone for many a long day."

" Dear me ! Did it take so long to remedy ? " inquired the sympathising widow.

" Why, you see, I had very little time of my own, and was obliged to work extra hours in order to earn the odd shillings and sixpences that my machine was always clamouring for. That was the worst of it, it would live upon shillings and sixpences ; uncommonly inconvenient food for a poor man."

" I can very well imagine that," said the widow, smiling. " And did you never seriously lose heart under your discouragements ? "

" Oh, often, for a matter of five or ten minutes ; seldom much more. The *idea* was vividly in my mind from the first, and every shortcoming seemed only, by the very contrast, to deepen and bring out the sense of its reality. Yes ; I knew the truth was there, and if I could not realise it, all the worse for me ; it was still truth. But I

I had one terrible overthrow. Let me tell it and I promise you that I'll then shut up the machine

and my mouth together." But he laughed as he said this, for he saw by the widow's look that he might go on till Doomsday, if he pleased, without tiring her. "Again and again did I bring the model to the same point, fitting perfectly, so far as I could see, in every part, yet still with the same result—it would not act. Theory and practice remained equally positive of their own individual opinions, and equally at issue in their relation to each other. I cannot tell you how wearily I retraced the ground, over and over. But on one particular occasion there was a something in the preliminaries that whispered to me success was dawning at last. Imagine my feelings to find another clear, absolute, unmistakeable failure!" The Inventor paused, and wiped the dew from his face, as though the very remembrance brought back the physical emotion he had then felt. Presently he went on:—"I sat and looked at the model, hour after hour, without one effort to think, touching nothing, questioning nothing, only gazing in a kind of blank despair. No meals; no work; I couldn't go to work. I felt it was all over with me. So many years' labour—so many years' dreams and hopes—gone in an instant, leaving only behind a something to cling to me like a poisoned garment all through my life. Yes; there I sat in my grim silence, confessedly beaten down to the last extremity. I hadn't a hope left. Couldn't see one bit of light in all creation. There the thing stood before me, dumb, moveless, meaningless. Once I felt a great wish to dash my fist into it, and cry—'Curse thee, why doesn't speak and tell me what's the matter?' Morning, noon, evening passed, and I sat or paced to and fro, like a mere ghost of myself, heedless of the growing dark-

ness; all strength and manliness crushed out of me by the weight of my despair. But something whispered—‘Dost think such works as thou longest to do are ever accomplished by poor fellows like thee without such failures? For shame! Up, man! At it again!’ I suppose,” continued the Inventor, with his favourite self-satirising smile again gleaming over his face; “I suppose nobody did say anything to me. The mice, you know, couldn’t talk. But I declare to you it was as if a new door had been opened into my soul, and a new spirit had there entered in. I sprang up, pulled the whole machine to pieces, leaving no two together untouched, and began to build again, as if I were then doing it for the first time. Big thoughts, you see, are like big waggons; if once they get into the ruts, they can’t get out again without a strong effort. But I got out; and all at once saw with a new sense of sight. I burst into a great laugh of scorn of my own blindness. Brighter and brighter grew the way. My heart danced along faster and merrier than my fingers, till I gave it a sudden pull up, and reminded it how it had played the fool before. And then I worked on in deep, intense, almost unearthly quiet, until all was once more ready for the grand trial. It was then Sunday morning. I trembled as I touched the spring, but it moved. The machine moved! I pressed the spring down, and off went the whole, bounding away like a dog from the leash. Aye, and just at the instant that I saw and heard for the first time what you have now seen and heard, and while the tears were rolling down my cheeks, and my limbs were quaking with an excitement that I could not control, there broke out from a neighbouring chapel, O

such a glorious strain of psalmody and thanksgiving, that I cried aloud in transport,—I couldn't help it—'It is done! It is done! He blesses my work!'"

"You felt repaid then for all?" observed the widow, wiping away a tear from her cheek.

"I did! I did! And you wouldn't think it; but once set going, how that machine did talk."

"Indeed! and what did it say?"

"Well, I confess at first it was very personal; kept on hinting what a clever fellow I was, how rich I should be, and how my name should be spread through the world; and, above all, it kept slyly whispering,—I know what you are thinking about. Already you are planning how to cut me out by some much more imposing affair; art saying loftily to thyself as you look down upon me, 'What's this to the things I can do, with opportunity and appreciation!' I won't deny it, such thoughts were lulling me into a delicious day-dream. O, 'twas amazing the eggs that were being hatched and sold, and the castles that were being bought with the money. Well, well," continued the Inventor, after a pause, and as he began to cover up his model, "everybody, you know, has his follies, so even a poor Inventor must be excused his dreams."

"But are they, then, only dreams after all?" asked the widow, somewhat earnestly.

"That's the very question I come here to solve," replied the man. "You know now my business, and all about me. There's a manufacturer ——"

"Mr. Wolcombe?"

"Yes; they say that he buys inventions, and that it is peculiarly in his way."

"Would you like to speak to him now?" continued the widow. "This is always the best time to catch him, if you want a quiet talk: just after mill hours. I don't think he has yet gone home."

"Then I'll go at once."

"And I'll get you a cup of tea and something to eat by the time you return. See," said the widow, as she led the way into the open air, and, stopping, pointed to the pretty upper window of her cottage, "there's your bedroom, with a nice outlook over the valley, and to the opposite hill. 'Tis my daughter's room, when she gets home for a night or two. She's governess to Mr. Wolcombe's family."

"Governess!" echoed the Inventor, as though surprised at the discrepancy betwixt the positions of daughter and mother.

The widow noticed the tone, but answered quietly, and without the least appearance of pain or offence, "Yes, I understand your surprise—my poverty."

"No—yes—that is—I mean—" exclaimed the man; but in his desire to avoid offending, made the matter worse by making so much of it. The widow, however, went on to say—

"I moved once in a different sphere. But the death of my husband left me without money or friends, and with this, my only child, then an infant. Ah! it has been a hard struggle since then, I assure you; or else Barbara—that's my daughter—should never have gone to the mill."

"What! worked in the mill—and now a governess! I own you do, indeed, astonish me! How might that be?"

"Why, she was taken under very sad circumstances—

but I need not make a mystery of that which every one about her knows so well. She married one Abel Drake, but they quarrelled and parted, and he's dead now."

"Indeed! But—governess!"

"Mrs. Wolcombe took her home as nursemaid; there she got on so well by devoting every spare half-hour to learning, that she began to be noticed, and helped—and raised—until at last the education of the children was entrusted to her."

"A touching story!"

"Yes," continued the widow; "and since the death of Mrs. Wolcombe, who was a sweet, good lady—God ever bless her for what she did to mine and me!—everything at the hall falls to her to see to."

"Then you think Mr. Wolcombe won't have gone home?" hurriedly interrupted the man, as if impatient now to get to his own business.

"No, but I would make haste," observed the widow. "It was thoughtless of me to detain you so long, but you so much interested me with your story, that somehow I couldn't help letting you know a bit of mine. You will laugh at me, perhaps, for saying so, but I am not generally very talkative."

"Ah, then I'm afraid you won't like me, for I am—that is, when I care to open my mouth at all."

"I shall be quite anxious to hear the result of your interview," said the widow.

"Well," replied the man, "it must be an absolute hit or miss, for I can wait no longer. Come, old fellow, another hoist on to the shoulders that have borne thee so long and so far that I don't know how I should get on

without thee. Yet, who knows? perhaps it may be for the last time. Come, then, work of brain and hand, child of many years of toil, I must now present thee to the world, and hear what it thinks of thee. Thou hast promised much. What wilt thou now realize? All? Ah, the blood dances in my veins but to think of it. Good-bye, widow, for the present. Wish me luck. I shouldn't like to tell you how much depends upon it. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, and good luck!" exclaimed the widow, moved out of her usual passionless exterior; so much so indeed that she could not help watching him cross the beaten path of the green, to reach the mill gates, where she saw him knock, and then pass through the little wicket-door that was opened to him, and closed after him.

"Poor fellow!" said the widow to herself, as she turned away to prepare the tea; "I am greatly deceived if he has not left dear ones behind him, for whose welfare in this venture he cares even more than for his own."

CHAPTER XII.

THE HIGGLING OF THE MARKET.

ALL the loud noises of the factory—the whirring, beating, booming, confusing noises—were still; the endless bands were at rest, the looms silent, the place deserted. So profound was the solitude, that the occasional jingle of keys, or the chink of money in the cash-box from Mr. Wolcombe's counting-house, or the watchman's heavy footstep, broke upon it harshly, and vibrated through the building. Mr. Wolcombe slammed his desk, locked it, put the keys in his pocket, restored the ledger (which he had been carefully examining) to its place on the shelf, and began to put on his great coat, looking the while through a glass door upon the glow of the watchman's lantern as it appeared and disappeared continually among the weaving machines of the great room. He waited till it approached the counting-house, and the watchman came in and hung up some keys.

“By-the-bye, Jansen,” said the manufacturer, as he buttoned up his coat, “I'm told there are suspicious characters in the village: harvest tramps, I suppose. Make your rounds carefully. Stay, who's that? See what that shabby-looking man wants.”

“Yes, sir,” said the Inventor, as he came in, and set down his machine model on a chair just inside the door,

taking off his hat as he continued to speak ; " yes, sir, I am very shabby, I know ; but——"

" O, you overheard me, did you ?" remarked Mr. Wolcombe, as he examined the man closely from head to foot. " I'm sorry if——"

" No harm, sir. I am a poor man, and have learned, as poor men must, not to take offence lightly."

" Poor man, eh ? Case for the Union ?" asked the manufacturer.

" Why no, sir ; not just yet, I think," was the reply.

" Your business, then ?" said Mr. Wolcombe, shortly.

" Please to look at this," said the inventor, uncovering his model.

" What is it ?"

" A new weaving machine ; or, at least, new in an important part."

" No, no !" exclaimed Mr. Wolcombe, taking his hat. " I don't want to see it. I've burnt my fingers too often with pretended improvements and showy novelties that never came to anything—except, indeed, in my book of costs."

" But please, sir, to look," said the Inventor, earnestly. " You will understand at a glance what I have attempted, and I am told no one can better judge than you whether or no I have succeeded."

" If I look," objected Mr. Wolcombe, buttoning up his pockets, " I certainly sha'n't buy." But he went towards the Inventor, who at once set the model in motion.

" You see, sir," he said, after a pause of some duration on both sides, during which the manufacturer's eyes were busy, " there is a piece of cloth, that shows the pre-

cise part of the manufacture where my machine comes into play."

Again he was silent. Mr. Wolcombe's first indifference was evidently passing away. He gazed with increasing interest every instant, until at last he seemed perfectly absorbed ; so much so as to be unaware of the eager eyes that were fastened upon him.

"Bring it a little nearer the light," said the manufacturer ; and then he asked, as the man moved it to the window, "this is your own invention—absolutely your own ?"

"My own flesh and blood doesn't more thoroughly belong to me," replied the Inventor.

"Certainly," remarked Mr. Wolcombe, "if this could be accomplished, it would be——"

"Would it not, sir ?" exclaimed the Inventor, anticipating the manufacturer's thoughts ; "would it not be a splendid thing for our manufacturing industry ?"

Mr. Wolcombe coughed drily as he remarked, "I was going to observe, if you hadn't stopped me, that such a thing under certain circumstances might be of some little use."

The Inventor changed colour, and was silent.

"Very odd," continued Mr. Wolcombe, as he tried to pull up the blind a little higher ; "there was a hand once in my employ who used to say something of this kind might be done. He came to me once about it, but of course I sent him back to his work with a flea in his ear. A raw factory lad wasn't very likely to achieve what I myself, with all the skill and appliances of my establishment, had vainly tried again and again to accomplish. If

it were to be done at all, I was quite sure an idle fellow like Abel Drake wouldn't be the man to do it."

"Not perhaps, sir, without more experience, knowledge, and——"

"I tell you, sir," said the manufacturer, in a sharp tone, "he couldn't have done it under any circumstances. I know something of men's minds and capabilities. I should think I ought. But it is odd so worthless a fellow should have thought of this so long ago."

"Very," remarked the Inventor. "He seems to have behaved badly to you, sir. May I ask how?"

"O, he was the ringleader of a strike."

"O, indeed."

"Truly, a precocious rascal; only eighteen, I think, when he misled the hands, and cost me thousands of pounds." Something he had not noticed before now caused him to stay these unpleasant reminiscences, and to call out loudly, "Look here, Mr. —! O, what's your name?"

"Hope, sir. George Hope."

"Well, Mr. Hope, what's this complicated bit of mechanism in the corner for? It doesn't seem to be doing anything."

"Sir," said the Inventor, smiling, and pointing with his finger successively to two pieces of metal, "I call that my 'feeler,' and that my 'corrector.'"

"Feeler—corrector?" repeated Mr. Wolcombe.

"Yes," answered the Inventor; "the one feels for the slightest defect or extra thickness or foreign obstacle in the thread, which would be unmanageable in this kind of machine, and the other corrects it the instant the feeler gives warning. Try it, sir. See, there is now a kink about

to pass : it is arrested, stretched, straightened, and all goes on as before."

"Very well done, indeed !" exclaimed Mr. Wolcombe, forgetting for one instant his caution in his admiration. "But what if it could not straighten it ?"

"It would cut it right out, re-unite the ends, and again move forward," modestly observed the Inventor.

"I should like to see that," was the manufacturer's brief comment.

"There, sir," said the Inventor, still very quietly ; and to Mr. Wolcombe's astonishment it was instantly done, as the man had said, all the other parts of the machine going on meanwhile undisturbedly.

Mr. Wolcombe now walked away, and observed as he looked up at the window, "It grows late." The indifferent manner and tone chilled the Inventor, who had been anticipating that now at last he was on the eve of something like business success. Poor fellow ! He did not know that now when he imagined, and not without reason, that his proper work was done, his actual and vital work had in a sense yet to begin. But Mr. Wolcombe, as he walked away, was saying to himself, with an animation not usual to him—

"The fellow astounds me ! He has done it ! Yes, this shabby rascal has done it. But stay ! No more wild-goose chases for me. How will it work on a large scale ? Ay, there's often a hitch there with the most promising schemes. Think of your last patent, and keep on the safe side !" As he returned towards the Inventor, he said to him— "Well, my man, you're a clever fellow, that I will say, and this is a clever machine. But will it be of any use commercially ?—there I have my doubts."

"Would you, sir, allow me to hear them?"

"Come, come, that's my business."

There was an awkward silence. It was broken by Mr. Wolcombe's saying—

"No, I don't feel inclined to speculate."

"Sorry to hear that, sir. I thought—"

"Why you see it will cost a deal of money to try; and take up a deal of time and thought, and may fail after all. Or somebody else may get the start of me with a similar, possibly a better invention."

"True, sir; but these remarks apply to all inventions. And I am quite prepared to admit they ought to have a certain weight in determining the price, and mode of payment."

"No—no. I shan't speculate—not just now."

"I cannot, sir," said the Inventor, with just a touch of earnest appeal in his manner that he might be listened to—"I cannot give you a better proof of my own faith than to say I wish only to receive a moderate sum in hand, and to depend mainly for my remuneration on actual and proved success."

"My good fellow!" exclaimed the manufacturer, almost with a smile of pity, "if I have heard one inventor say that in this room, I have heard at least a dozen."

The Inventor heaved a deep sigh, as much as to say, "Ah, poor fellows! where are they all now? Am I about to follow them, I wonder?" But immediately he returned with increased earnestness to the charge: "Sir, I will be very frank with you. I know that in contests like these, betwixt inventor and capitalist, the weakest must go to the wall. Look, sir, I have just two pence in the world, and my machine, that's all."

"Hem ! hem !" coughed the manufacturer, who was by no means without feeling. "Well, really you deserve encouragement, though I don't see how I can help you. No, I'm afraid not." Again he walked away, to hold a little debate with himself, running something like this :—"Poor devil ! He'd be glad to take anything, I suppose. But if I do buy I must do it handsomely ; both for my own credit's sake, and because the poor devil is so helpless ! Poor fellow !" Then suddenly facing the Inventor with the air of a man who knows he is about to do a good action, "Well, come, I'll give you fifty pounds, and try my chance."

"Fifty pounds !" cried the Inventor, eagerly, and almost with a laugh. "Yes, sir ; and then about the share—?"

"Share ! share !" echoed Mr. Wolcombe, with darkening brows. "What d'ye mean by that ? D'ye want to be my partner ?"

"I didn't look upon it in that light," faltered the Inventor. But the manufacturer went on :—

"Messrs. Wolcombe and—what name did you say I might add to complete the new firm ? Eh ? A good joke, truly. Was that your thought ?" The Inventor turned suddenly round upon him with flashing eyes, and said in a deep concentrated voice of anger—

"I thought, and think, sir, the inventor might have equal rights with the capitalist ; and that the man of business, however exalted, would best consult the dignity and welfare of his order by taking care of the interest of the man of genius."

"Genius, eh ?" repeated Mr. Wolcombe, looking hard at the Inventor.

"You do right to look at me, sir," commented the man

bitterly, as he caught the glance. "I often look at myself in the same way. It was a foolish phrase, but it slipped from me."

"And if I had been ever so much inclined to yield a share," thought the manufacturer, "that speech would have settled me." Then he said, coldly, as he passed the man, and put his hand on the door handle, "Good evening!" He opened the door and was going.

The Inventor stared vacantly at him for a moment without speaking, then he called out hastily, but in a voice husky with emotion—

"Stay, sir, I implore you, one moment longer."

Mr. Wolcombe shut the door a little impatiently, and waited in a significant silence.

"Excuse me, sir, if I cannot in a moment make up my mind to sacrifice my machine. It is my all!"

"Ah, well, don't then! Don't. I didn't ask you, did I?" briefly rejoined the manufacturer.

"Yet, what can I do? My means are quite exhausted. Though I come now from a foreign country, I am of English blood, and I have lived but in the hope to see this at work for the good of my country. I have offered it to no one but you, for I heard some time ago you bought such things, and could appreciate it—so I have toiled on, with this on my back, all the way from Liverpool since yesterday morning, when I landed. I have literally tasted nothing since breakfast."

"Then why the devil didn't you take the fifty pounds, and have done with it?"

"Look, sir, I have been at it more than six years. Six years, sir, before I could succeed! But there it is at last.

Now, sir, will you listen to me patiently but for one minute, while I make you a proposal?"

"O, certainly!"

"Well then, sir, instead of the fifty give me ten pounds just to get along with for a few weeks, and to buy decent clothing, while I find work, and I will ask no more from you, till you can try the machine, and see what it really is worth. Then, if you are satisfied with it, give me a moderate share of the profits. Let it be what share you please. If half be too much, give me a third, only let me have something to repay me for the past, and to rest on for the future. O, sir, you know not, nor can I tell you how much depends on my success in this negotiation."

"Really, you are a strange fellow," said Mr. Wolcombe, a little moved by the earnestness of the speaker, whose low, deep, tremulous tones spoke but too plainly of the agitation that he sought vainly to control. "Well, on the whole, perhaps you are right to look for some small share."

"And you consent, sir?" cried the Inventor. "You will give it to me?"

"Hem! no," resumed Mr. Wolcombe, in embarrassment; "but you're welcome to my advice. It don't suit me to take it on your terms. I never do buy that way. But others may not be of my mind. I advise you to try. And that you may see I give you this advice sincerely—there—there's half a sovereign for you to enable you to carry it out."

The Inventor looked at the coin as it lay on the desk before him, and at Mr. Wolcombe, then, in a transport of indignation, he swept it off on to the floor, with his hand.

Mr. Wolcombe returned his look, with a wondering and contemptuous elevation of his eyebrows, but also with a little tinge of red in the centre of his cheek, that spoke of an undercurrent of feeling, more akin to the Inventor's own mood. But as they gazed upon each other, the Inventor's face underwent a complete change; he stooped to pick up the piece of gold, and restored it to the place, almost with a courtly grace of deference and apology, as he spoke; "I beg your pardon, sir. My blood used to be a little hot. I thought time, trouble, and years, had cooled it down to a safe point. I was mistaken. I will be more guarded. Sir, though I cannot accept your kindness, I thank you for it, gratefully. And now, sir, I will no longer occupy your time. Will you allow me to consider this offer still open—say for a week only?"

"O no; pray excuse me; you are unreasonable."

"Then I must accept absolutely, or reject at once?"

"You must."

"I reject it, then. And so, sir, good night."

"Good night. Mind, I don't say I won't buy if you do come back, but I do say I won't enter into any engagement whatever on the subject."

"I understand, sir. Good night."

"Good night."

And so ended the Inventor's first experiment upon the capitalist.

Three days later (and the Inventor has been heard to say, that were he to live to the age of Methuselah, he could never forget the bitterness of the experience those three days gave), he returned to Mr. Wolcombe,—failure stamped upon his every feature, word, and movement;—

and he seemed almost grateful when he found that the manufacturer not only received him courteously, but made no attempt to lessen his former offer. An agreement was drawn up and signed, and the money placed in the Inventor's hand; "five sovereigns," as Mr. Wolcombe observed, "for present use, and the remainder in notes."

The Inventor spoke scarcely a word while the necessary business was going on. He answered any questions that were asked, and did mechanically whatever he was told to do. But when Mr. Wolcombe, at the close, shook hands, and said "good-bye," and, with a feeling of delicacy not common with him, left him alone with the machine, to take his last look of it, the agitation that had been kept down in the presence of others began to break forth, in his gestures and low quivering tones.

"Fifty pounds! There must be ingratitude in my very blood to be so little thankful. Why, I was never master of fifty shillings before. Fifty pounds! Surely, for me, it is unfathomable wealth! Stay, there are deductions. I mustn't be puffed up too soon. My little debts to the good Samaritans, by the wayside, who helped me across the seas, and enabled me to reach this goal,—surely I shall be honest enough to pay them. Then there are clothes to buy: the lord of so much wealth mustn't disgrace himself. Suppose I have thirty pounds remaining—thirty golden sovereigns! Am I afraid to go home with that? Why, like the Jupiter that I used to read about in my book of fables, I shall be able to drop into any woman's lap a perfect shower of gold. Who could resist me? O, fool! fool! fool! And I have built for six years on this basis!"

He walked about to quiet himself, as he disposed of the money in his pockets; and then he seemed to linger and hesitate over some secret thoughts. But, presently, he stopped right before the machine.

It has been already intimated that, in his long solitary labours, he had so accustomed himself to speak aloud, that the desire came spontaneously to him whenever he was more than ordinarily moved. Just now he could not resist talking once more to his old "comrade."

"Come, come; what must be, must be. Time's come, old fellow, to part; and if the feeling's all on one side, never mind. We won't have many words. I didn't think, after all that has passed, our way in life would be so very different. Never mind! Thou art going to be made much of—to be honoured—to be great; while I—ha! ha! ha!—as though a poor inventor hadn't himself to blame for expecting anything else! Come, we won't darken the farewell hour. I am very glad I made thee. Don't forget that. And if the poor pauper world can't afford to pay honestly for the things it needs and covets, and if it likes to please its fancy by thinking—'No doubt things are all arranged for the best; why should we trouble?'—let it have its own way: I sha'n't contest the matter. Besides, who knows, old fellow, but that you, who won't be able to get me bread while I live, shall secure me a glorious monumental stone when I am dead—ay, in yonder churchyard? The glory of it! Among one's native grave-stones! The vision wins so, I could half make up my mind to go at once, select my own grave, slip quietly into it, and there wait in luxurious ease and expectancy. Ha! ha! ha!

“Come, one last touch! One last sound of the old voice!” The Inventor’s own voice had now changed from the tone of bitter mirth to one of acute pain, and of the deepest tenderness. As he touched the spring and listened to the sounds, so harsh and grating to other ears, but so inexpressibly sweet to him, he knelt down by the machine, his head bowed upon his breast, and remained for a long time silent. It was as if he desired to assure himself that all within there was well, before he left it for ever; and as though, physician like, he listened to the most secret beatings of the heart, with a skill that could detect in the slightest faltering or peculiarity of sound any weakness or danger. He rose as if satisfied; and again gazed long and yearningly, before he muttered, “Ay, whirl and whiz and bustle along! O the sweet music for humanity, that may be drawn out of one sad heart and brain; and O, the world’s payment!”

When Mr. Wolcombe returned to take another look at the machine, the Inventor had gone.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEHIND THE SETTLE.

THE grey twilight was slowly closing round Barden Brow, dimming the gold of its ripe corn fields, and throwing into shadowy indistinctness its encircling hills.

Widow Giffard turned from her gate, where she had been looking anxiously across the green, till the white footpath faded from her sight.

“Poor fellow! I wonder how he gets on to-day!” she said to herself, as she gave one more touch to the graceful folds of the newly-washed white muslin curtains, that fell on either side a little table placed in the window, and which, for the last two hours, had been spread with the lodger’s tea-things. Through the gathering dusk one could just see the sheen of the best gilt-edged china; the common but elegantly formed tray, with its bright border of blue and yellow pansies; and the round pat of butter with the cow reposing on the top within the diamonded edge. On the other side of the high settle, which the widow had drawn out so as to completely screen off a corner from the rest of the room, a cheerful fire threw its light upon the dresser of plates, and made the silver sand on the floor sparkle, and revealed through the open door of the oven a tray of rich brown cakes,—getting *too* brown

the widow feared,—which mingled their fragrance with that which issued from the bright teapot on the fender.

The widow was now getting really anxious, and could not keep still a minute. She passed from one side of the settle to the other, now to look through the window, and then back again to the fire, to stir it or do something to it, or think what she might do to it—though all the while no fire could be going on more satisfactorily in every respect. Really the widow gets quite cross; there, she is now whiffing off a poor fly from the sugar basin, when it was doing nothing worse than taking a walk round the edge, and benefiting by so favourable and airy a position for sending up its hind legs, and giving them a quivering bath of air.

“When will he come?” she asked herself wearily, almost pettishly. People will get pettish as they begin to grow uncomfortable, no matter how angelic may have been their previous patience. She looked at the still deepening brown of the cakes, and at the cream that was beginning to settle thick and yellow on the jug of milk. The butter cow seemed to answer her by looking wonderfully easy as to its fate, as though quite assured it was not going to be disturbed yet awhile. The cat at the door, instead of giving any sign of intelligence as to footsteps coming, suddenly opened its jaws, gave a sleepy yawn, and turned back into the room. The widow had just determined to give over watching and sit down to her work, when the little garden gate was thrown violently open, and a voice at the door cried exultingly—

“All right, widow! Here I am, you see, alone! My comrade gone!”

"That is good news indeed," said the widow, going to meet him. Then stopping, she exclaimed, "But you are ill! Ah, you have had another dreadful day's walking in the sun. Come, sit down. I won't hear a word till you have had some tea."

"Hang tea!" cried the Inventor, his eyes flashing, and his swarthy cheeks glowing with excitement, "I mean, not your tea, widow, which I am sure will be delicious, but tea in general. One wants wine when one's in such glorious spirits!"

"What, have you exceeded your expectation, then?"

The Inventor leaned back in his chair, and laughed.

"Exceeded! O, immensely! Why, I only expected the thing would bring me a fortune by driblets for the next twenty years or so, and here have I got it all in a lump. Look! Look!" He put his hand in his pocket, and took out the five sovereigns, and threw them rattling on to a plate. "That's a foretaste only!" he continued, feeling for the notes. "But look here, widow; all five-pound notes! See, one—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine! Let's paste them together, end to end, and see how much they'll measure. Nay, we'll send a paragraph to the local paper, and 'twill fly all over England. 'All that paid to a poor working man for only a few years' labour!'"

Again he laughed, and so strangely and mockingly, that it made the widow heart-sick to hear him. She poured out his tea silently, and set the cakes before him.

"Cakes! Ah, that's right!" he cried, pulling his chair to the table, and breaking one of them open, steaming hot, and spicily flavoured. "Widow, you may fancy you have

seen a hungry man before, but you haven't—not till now. What cakes! Delicious!"

"You like them?"

"Like them! I wish I'd invented them!" The widow smiled, and, opening the door, said—

"I am going to hurry Job with a pail of water. You'll find more cakes in the oven, and plenty of water boiling if you want any for the teapot. I shan't be long."

"Mind!" called the Inventor after her, as she was going, "I shall eat all the cakes! so don't expect to find any when you come back."

But no sooner had the door closed after her than the cake he had seized and broken dropped, almost untasted, from his hand, and he muttered, with a sigh of relief,

"I should have choked soon."

Slanting his elbows on the table, and resting his chin in his hands, he sat gazing straight before him out of the window, with his face full of gloom and despondency. Minute after minute went by; the darkness gradually increased; still he sat there motionless. At last a voice at the gate made him start, and withdraw his eyes from vacancy. It was the widow come back; and he tried to rouse himself, and begin to eat his neglected meal before she entered the cottage, and discovered his kindly hypocrisy.

Why was the hand that reached towards the cup drawn back so suddenly? Why did the other hand meet and clench it, as if to keep it quiet, and the whole strong frame quiver as it rose slowly up, and drew back into the deeper shade, while the face was agitated by emotion violent and changeful? Amazement, doubt, tenderness, and passionate yearning, swept rapidly over it. As the door opened, he

made an involuntary movement forward, but shrank back again instantly. The widow entered, not as she had gone out, alone, but accompanied by Barbara, who said :

"All in darkness ! Is your lodger out, mother ?"

"I suppose so," replied the widow, glancing at the vacant chair at the table ; "unless he's in his room." She listened a moment at the foot of the stairs, then said, "No, he's not there. He must have gone out." And she seemed to understand why, when she saw he had neither eaten nor drunk of what she had prepared. "Stay where you are, Barbara, and I will get a light."

"What do we want with a light, mother ?" asked Barbara : and she put her hand on her mother's wrist, as if to stay her.

The widow fancied it shook a little, and wondered to herself what was coming.

"Let us sit here at the door," and she placed a chair for her mother on one side of the doorway, and remained standing on the other, leaning against the lintel. She had taken off her little white bonnet, and hung it by the strings on her arm. Her head was towards the green, and her profile stood faintly yet distinctly revealed in all its bold yet delicate lining against the sky.

"Hark ! Why, what is that ?" exclaimed her mother, as the church bells broke out loudly and joyously.

Barbara smiled as she answered, "Mr. Lancelot has come home."

"Captain Wolcombe come home !" cried the widow in amazement. "And you, Barbara, away at such a time. Surely Mr. Wolcombe and all of them will think it very strange of you."

"Mr. Wolcombe knows I have come here."

"But the Captain?"

"I expect him here, directly."

"What do you mean, Barbara?" cried the widow, rising hastily, and looking about her as if everything ought instantly to undergo a new process of tidying. But Barbara gently pushed her back into the chair, and for a moment held her in it, and laughed; and then, moved by some inexplicable impulse, kissed her; then, growing sedate once more, she took a low stool, and sat down by her side.

"Mother!" she began in a low voice, and then a hand went groping upwards in search of another hand, and found it before the lips could proceed: "You remember what Mrs. Wolcombe told me, when she was dying, about Mr. Lancelot, and why he went away after that Christmas?"

"I had a letter from him this morning, in which he tells me so himself; and he says it rests with me whether he is now to stay or go for ever."

"But Mr. Wolcombe?"

"I gave the letter to him. He read and returned it without a word. He has been kinder to me than usual all day, but has said nothing till this evening. He came up to me where I was standing looking at Mrs. Wolcombe's portrait, and he asked me, I thought rather abruptly, 'What are you going to say to Lancelot, Barbara?' Much as I am used to him, I could not help being pained by his short sharp manner, and I did not answer him directly. So he went on. 'Perhaps you want to know my feelings about it? Well, to tell you the truth, I shouldn't have liked it once; but it's different now, quite different. The

house couldn't very well get on without you. I've got used to you, which I never could to any woman before, except her. And I suppose you know what she thought about you? Besides, I want Lancelot here, sooner or later. I'm not getting younger, and I need help. There, now you know what my mind is. And unless you positively dislike Lancelot, I don't think you ought to let any nonsensical ideas stand in the way. 'Tisn't every woman gets such a chance—or so deserves it,' he added presently."

Barbara ceased speaking. Both remained for a little time in silent thought. Presently the widow said inquiringly:

"Well, Barbara?"

"Well, mother, folks would think it very grand, wouldn't they, for one who went to Coppeshall such a miserable, broken-down creature, to become its mistress? And yet do you know, though I respect and honour Mr. Lancelot more than any other man I have ever known, I can't help wishing this had not been."

"And why is that, Barbara?"

"Hush, mother, listen! Yes, here he is."

She rose hastily from the stool, just as a quick step came down the garden, and a tall form bent to pass under the arch of pendent blossoms. The widow met him first. He seized her hands, and shook them heartily, as he cried:

"Well, Mrs. Giffard, are they dinning you to death with those bells? Ah, I little thought when I got into such a scrape that day for going up with Job into the steeple to smoke a cigar, that they would ever prattle about me in this absurd fashion. Perhaps if some one would remind the sexton, he'd see the impropriety of encouraging

He passed on, and paused by Barbara, whose white dress gleamed in the twilight, and who had not advanced. Holding out his hand, he said :

“ Barbara ! ”

There was more than simple greeting in the deep, earnest, suppressed tone in which that word was uttered. She felt it was a question, trembling under the weight of all that for him hung upon the answer.

“ I am very glad to see you back again, Mr. Lancelot,” said Barbara ; and she gave him her hand. He grasped it fast, and drew her forward to the light, and then looked in her face, as he repeated, half impatiently, half supplicatingly, “ Barbara ! ”

It was strange she should be so long in replying. Yes, it was as if she felt, however unconsciously, there were other ears besides his straining through the intense stillness to catch the first word that fell from her lips.

“ Mr. Lancelot,” she said at last, in a voice so low that but for a certain distinct slowness which had become habitual to Barbara, while getting rid of her dialect, it would have been inaudible, “ you forget I have had no certain and formal proof of Abel Drake’s death.”

A slight shiver passed through her as she uttered the name that had not passed her lips for years.

“ That,” answered Lancelot, “ I hoped to have been able to place in your hands now, but I could not wait for it in London, so it will be forwarded to me by post in a day or two. But, Barbara, when you have it—what then ? Speak plainly. Am I to go or stay ? Mrs. Giffard,” he said, turning to the widow, and laying his hand on her shoulder with a faint smile, “ I am but an ill hand at

this kind of work. Tell me. You know, and may spare her—if——”

“God bless you, sir!” said the widow, in a quivering voice, “I think I may say—yes!”

Then Barbara made a step towards him, and held out her hand with that inexpressibly sweet smile which seemed to light up the very obscurity of the eve, and which he had only once in his life before seen to shed its radiance upon him—the time when he had bound up the wound made by Timon’s teeth, and she had thanked him—but which had since haunted him with its strange tender beauty wherever he went, and had often made him feel that, like a knight of the olden time, he could face any danger to earn such another smile. No wonder that his heart was now too full for talk, even if he had felt the least temptation that way. He could only, in his soldierly, almost reverential, manner, stoop and kiss her hand; a hand none the less honoured that it had, as he well remembered, been a worker at his father’s looms.

“Come, Mrs. Giffard,” cried the captain, in a tone that implied that a great deal of very important business had been very satisfactorily got through, “my father gives me strict orders to bring you. It is one of the rules of the army, you know—orders must be obeyed. Any hand-boxes, or things of that kind, I can carry for you? Come, no one is there; we shall be quite to ourselves.”

“Yes, mother, come,” said Barbara, beseechingly. So drawing on her shawl with a somewhat nervous gesture, but still preserving a sedate preparedness that neither good nor bad fortune could entirely destroy, the widow followed them to the porch. She paused there a moment, looking

after their retreating forms and Barbara's white dress. And she listened to those joyous peals, which seemed not only to tell her of the soldier's glory abroad, but of the battles and conquests of the domestic hearth at home; of the victory of the humbly-born but nobly-destined nature over all obstacles. And then she had one little, but very comforting, cry to herself before she moved to follow them.

All three were gone. The last rustle of the widow's black silk dress against the lavender bush had died away, and for a moment all within the room was still. But the darkness had something terribly oppressive in it. The short, hard breathing from behind the settle seemed every instant as if it would break into a cry of anguish. At last there was a vague, groping step towards the door; a pair of hands, with fingers knotted in a clasp of agony, were thrust out into the faint starlight; and through the darkness and the happy ringing of the bells rose a hoarse cry of passionate but smothered emotion—"Barbara! Wife! Wife!"

CHAPTER XIV.

STRAWS IN THE WIND.

THE next morning, when the widow opened her door for the first time to look out, she was surprised to see her lodger crossing the green towards her. She had no idea he had gone out so early. As he came in, he smiled, and said he was afraid his coat was wet, could she dry it for him? But she hardly knew how to answer, she was so struck by his appearance. His face was black and haggard, and his whole appearance so full of disorder, that she could not help thinking he must have been out many hours, perhaps the greater part of the night.

Again he smiled, as he said,

"I am sorry to give you so much trouble, but would you mind letting me use my bedroom as a sitting room while I stay, which will not be long? I have a good deal of writing and thinking to do—and—"

The widow hastened to assure him it was no trouble; and while he took off his coat, and hung it before the recently lighted fire, and cowered down himself near to it, for warmth, she bustled about, and in half an hour had turned the pretty bedroom into one of the prettiest of sitting rooms also. Then remembering how chilly the poor man looked, and that the room itself might be the better for a fire, she lighted one.

When the Inventor came up-stairs at her invitation, he thanked her—though he did not seem to dwell on the comfort she had made. So she went down to see about his breakfast. He could not eat it when it was ready; but jested about the surfeit of his last night's tea, then smiled a little confused, as he met her sad searching eye, and remembered that she must have found it almost untouched.

While the widow was considering all these things, she took up the coat, saying to herself,

"Dear me, how wet it is! Where can he have been? There has been no rain. It must have been the night dews that have soaked it so thoroughly. I suppose he is greatly troubled at the sacrifice of his machine, and won't openly acknowledge it to me."

Just then there was a tap at the door; and the tap was followed by the lifting of the latch, and the entrance of Job.

"O, you are come!" observed the widow.

"Yes,—yo'tell'd me, didn't yo, ma'am?"

However satisfactory this explanation might be to the widow, who had sent a message to him that he was to call, it would do wrong to Job's intuitive skill in shunning work and scolding, to suppose he would have answered the invitation so promptly, if he had not had certain secret temptations of his own. The fact is, Job had taken a dislike to the Inventor from the moment the latter had so rudely broken his sleep at the well; and from dislike he found the way easily to distrust; and of course a man who comes to be distrusted ought to be watched. Now that kind of work suited Job exactly. He dearly loved

gossip ; and many a provoking bit of slander that ran the round of Barden Brow, and raised the ire or the mirth of its inhabitants, would often have died prematurely but for Job's loving and helping hand. He had, then, watched the Inventor's movements pretty closely during these last few days ; and putting together certain vague personal recollections of his own, and certain peculiarities in the conduct of the stranger, he had arrived at the conclusion that he was on the heels of a brilliant discovery. It was wonderful how the mere idea changed him, giving a sort of glow to his ordinarily lack-lustre eye, straightening his body, and making buoyant his dragging step.

"Well, Job," said the widow, pursuing her avocations, "I am glad you are come, for I want to give you a last warning."

"E—law ! Ma'am ! Yo donna say so !" And Job, not at all frightened, began to look inquisitively around, as if speculating on the whereabouts of the lodger.

"Well, Job, this is how the matter stands. Since the death of Mrs. Wolcombe"—the widow paused ; and it was touching to see a kind of shade pass over both the faces for an instant, as though an actual form had passed between them and the light, "you have had but one friend—my daughter—who was at all inclined to interfere with Mr. Wolcombe's determination to make you find something to do, or go at once into the workhouse, and be properly dealt with there. He says you set a bad example to the younger people. So now, Job,—what's to be done?"

"Aw shan't go into th' warkus, ma'am !"

"Workhouse !—I should think not indeed. Well then, how will you live ?"

"Aw'm a very contented mind, ma'am, and donna want much. Th' odds an ends o' cowl meat, an a cowl potatoe now an then, with happen a cup o' tea o' cold neets;—aw likes a cup o' tea, ma'am,—donna you?"

"Yes, Job."

"O' course yo do—and yo knows whatten a poor fellow like me likes; an yo've bin very good to me, an so hae th' other folk; an aw say agin, aw'm a contented mind, ma'am; and axes nowt more."

"Yes, Job," returned the widow, "all that's very well, but we cannot any of us go on acting, not only in opposition to Mr. Wolcombe's wishes, but to our own sense of what is right. You must really ask yourself in earnest what you are going to do. Consider, Job, the supplies are to be cut off from every quarter."

"For a while, ma'am, perhaps; for a while," responded Job, with an air at once consoling and confident, as though he feared the widow might be unduly depressed, and he must, therefore, encourage her. "For a while, ma'am! An then, yo know Job mun be patient." The water-carrier began to chuckle over his joke like a hen over her newly-laid egg. Presently he went on gravely, "Besides, ma'am, every mon has his periods o' adversity!—aw—aw—might be obliged to wark." Seeing the widow could not resist this second attempt to secure her good humour, Job began to revert to the business that had brought him to the cottage; and, looking round once more, he saw the coat on the chair. It seemed to hold his eyes spell-bound. He drew towards it. The widow had got to a bit of needle-work, and did not notice him; for he took care to continue talking, as he stood between her and the coat, with

his hands behind him, and looking very impudently at the widow's face the while. Presently she said,—

“And you really mean to say that you cannot work?”

“Na, na, not dizactly, ma'am. Aw can work when aw hae a object; aw allus wants a object, ma'am.” Job's hands began to be very busy now, as though they had found an object, and were determined to justify his good opinion of himself.

“Indeed!”

“Eigh, ma'am, ony yo see me then!” Finding nothing in the ordinary pockets, Job was giving up the search, when it occurred to him that there might be other and secret ones. So he went on talking. “Besides, ma'am, aw has seasons.”

“Seasons, Job?”

“Yes, ma'am, seasons; when aw feels as though half a dozen men's honds wouldn't be enow to do the wark. Isn't it odd, ma'am, aw feels uncommon industrious just now. It's you, ma'am, no doubt! It's your valleyable influence—”

“Very glad to hear it, Job, for now we may get to the point. My daughter has directed the servants at the Hall to put out a carpet for you to beat. You are to have a shilling for it, and more jobs after, if you do it properly. Now then, strike while the mood's on you, and establish for yourself a new character.”

“C—carpet—ma'am?” inquired Job, faintly.

“Yes, just the thing for you, you know, with those half-dozen men's industry you spoke of.”

“But, ma'am,” deprecatingly interposed Job, “them seasons is short; very short; they coomes and goes like a

strong tide, ma'am ; and aw feels low now, ma'am, very low !" Job's tones, though they expressed truthfully his mingled feelings, belied his words, for he was secretly delighted to have discovered a pocket in the coat, to which, however, he could not find the mouth ; but he felt there were papers in it ; and he could not make up his mind to go away—no, not even now, when the widow's thrusts were becoming dangerously close and practical.

"Happen to-morrow mornin' 'll be best?" suddenly asked Job, as if in a fit of inspiration.

"No, Job, it must be now. Come, come, it's only a small carpet. Courage, Job, courage!"

She put down the needlework, and rose ; and Job, to his inexpressible vexation, was obliged to move too, to let her get to the fire, and turn the coat ; and he saw his chance of any more intimate acquaintance with the contents of the secret pocket fast disappearing.

"But, ma'am," said he, gradually yielding, as she urged him towards the door, his eyes wistfully regarding the coat, "carpets to begin wi' ! Think on it ! If now it wur to brush a coat, or owt o' that sort. Lor, ma'am, why there is a coat." Job advanced at once to take the benefit of his discovery. "Aw'll jest show you how aw does this, and then—" Job took up the coat and was marching off with it, when the widow exclaimed, laughingly,—

"Put it down, Job ; put it down this minute. You'll do nothing of the kind. Go and fetch the carpet."

"Well, ma'am, if aw do mak' a mess on it, it wunna lie wi' me—and yo'll be sorry, ma'am. Aw do say it's puttin' too much on me. Aw'm not strung—though aw looks so. Eigh, ma'am, aw didn't expect this. Aw've knawed yo

a lung while. Aw'm hurt i' my feelins. I' fact aw've a good mind to say—"

"What? Always say out a good mind. You've a good mind to say what, Job?"

"Yo'll know too late may be." Job now wiped his eyes, as he stood at the door. But the inexorable widow pursued him thither, saying,—

"Will you, or will you not?"

"Will aw!" almost shouted the exasperated Job, "O' coorse aw will. O, aw'll beat the carpet!" and Job banged himself out of the place, leaving the widow reason to be thankful that he did not beat her instead. Nothing Job hated so much as to be worried into work, unless it were to be worried into a clear, unequivocal statement that he wouldn't work. Job had a bit of diplomacy in his soul, and knew well the folly of exposing or acknowledging his weak point under any circumstances.

There are people whose only laugh is an inward one; and the widow was ordinarily one of these. But Job had made her do what she did not remember to have done for many years, have a good, hearty, enjoyable, honest laugh, right out, when he had gone: a laugh that brought tears into her eyes. As she wiped them away, a kind of happy feeling came over her at the thought that such tears could have once more visited such eyes. But, somehow, the latter were losing their cold, wintry light, and becoming more genial looking in their kindness. That laugh, and those tears, and a certain sense of amusement that she had felt in her dialogue with Job, told of a wonderfully ameliorated life, and of her brave Barbara, to whom everything was owing. While thus her thoughts sunned themselves in the

unwonted gladness that wooed them, she stopped, and exclaimed reproachfully,—

“My lodger! Poor man, I had forgotten him, and the message Barbara sent me from Mr. Wolcombe. She’ll be here presently for the answer.” She looked at the coat, but it was not yet dry, and she thought she would deliver the message, without waiting for it, and went up the stairs for that purpose.

The Inventor was sitting in a little wooden arm-chair at the fire, bending low over it, his face completely hidden in his hands, while the long black locks were streaming down, wet and tangled, and showing at the roots the true flaxen colour, which had been artificially concealed.

It is hard to realise the emotions of such a person under such circumstances. To return after an absence of seven or eight years, believing he brought wealth to the fireside that he had left in the deepest poverty; independence to the wife he had deserted; means of reparation to all whom he had wronged; new habits and tried powers to redeem the indolent and disgraceful past; a yearning, passionate desire for love and forgiveness, which he had taught himself to believe he might obtain, when he could show why he had so long stayed away,—that it was only that he might bring back the proofs and the fruits of his repentance to lay at his wife’s feet. Such were the hopes he had nursed through long and dreary years, and through countless hardships; and now, when he had succeeded both in disciplining himself and perfecting his work,—that work, the product of so many years, had brought him fifty pounds; while, as to himself, all his dearer projects were ended at once by the ghastly discovery that his wife had long looked

on him as dead—had loved another—was about to marry him. Her improvement, personal and mental, and her superior social position, only now aggravated the terrible nature of the blow, by seeming to throw him further from and below her; to make the very image of him and his poverty one that she must shrink from with terror and loathing. He suddenly started up and began to pace the chamber to and fro.

How much longer was he to toss thus helplessly about? he asked himself. Something must be determined and done. If he stayed he ruined her. Nay, if she but heard the remotest hint of his having been here, she would have something still harder to forgive him than she now had. Why, then, did he not go? Why did he haunt, like a spectre, the place where she was, knowing that a single glimpse of him in his true character would freeze her blood? Why did he give way to that weak desire to see her, to speak to her, to learn from her own lips how unutterably miserable he was and must be, and in the learning to know that she shared his fate?

Did he not want to show her the fruits of his new life, his many years of toil? "The fruits!" And here the Inventor broke out into a bitter laugh: "I must take care they do not turn her head with a sense of sudden elevation."

The door opened and the widow entered. She had tapped, but he had not heard her. He tried to greet her with the usual smile, but couldn't manage it, so dropped, as if tired, into the arm-chair.

"Mr. Wolcombe," she said, "has some brother manufacturers dining with him to-day, and as there has been a slight accident to the machine, he thinks you had better look

to it, and then you can help to give the gentlemen any explanations that may be desired."

"I will not go," broke out the Inventor, fiercely; then recollecting himself, he added in a quieter tone, "He has no right to ask me. And I am going away—possibly in a few hours."

"My daughter sent me the message, and she has just now herself called for the answer. Perhaps you will see her, and explain?"

"No, no! I will not trouble her on so slight a matter. Say, then, I will come."

"I think you are right. Your refusal would offend." The widow turned to go away, but could no longer resist the impulse that had been so long moving her. "Excuse my plainness, but I am an old woman, and have known what trouble is. You are in trouble?"

"I, widow?" exclaimed the Inventor, with an effort at jocularly that did not even impose upon himself. "I, in trouble! If so, it must be that I can't tell how to spend all this money. You couldn't help a poor fellow by taking some of it off his hands, could you? I wish you would, and I'll come back for it when I want it."

The widow shook her head; and believing this to be a hint that she was not to press him any further, simply added, "Well, I have no right to inquire into your affairs;" and, with a sigh, went away.

What had he undertaken? Again he began to pace through the chamber, with a feverish glow over the head and face; a peculiar nervous twitching of his hands suddenly up from time to time, as if some new thought stung him; and occasionally with a hollow, despairing, but low

cry, that seemed to come from the depths of his soul, try to dissipate itself into the free air, and then drop back again shuddering at its own existence. His thoughts, which now only occasionally broke into speech, seemed at times so hopelessly tangled, that he would stop and put his hands to his forehead, and stay thus, with brow lifted heavenward, but the eyes shut, and the cold hands pressing upon the burning lids.

“If she had come to me now and here, and said even by chance one kindly word, all would have been lost. I should have revealed myself and sacrificed her. Sacrificed her! How do I know that she loves him? Who can tell what is in the heart of a woman? Or if she loves him, thinking me dead, how do I know that such love would not itself die at once when she knew that I lived? O pleasant illusions! If I fail in the trial, what matters? I shall know the worst, and she be once more sacrificed; that’s all. Guilt! What guilt could such a marriage be in her who knew nothing; should know nothing? And in me; if this my silence make guilt, what would be innocence? Why, to blast her life a second time; to undo the work she has so bravely accomplished; to say to her, ‘Yes, Barbara, these are the two positions:—You shall marry the man you love; enjoy the happiness you have created; advance still higher by another’s aid in the social atmosphere, having already so worthily proved your right and fitness for your happy fortunes; and then from the height of your felicity you shall look back upon your early struggles and misery simply to enhance the deserved bliss. That was one position; the other:—Entangled for life; never for one moment slight accident sense of freedom; wrongs and humiliations

behind ; solitude and despair before. Married to one man, who reduced you to the lowest depths of distress, and then left you ; innocently loving another man, who can only look on you with anguish, feeling the uselessness of his love ; and so waiting for your own death as the easiest solution of so cruel an enigma.' ”

Yes, these were the two positions ; and he has to decide which of them it should be. He threw himself into a chair at the table, and leaning his head on his hand, tried, by arresting the whirl in his brain, to think more calmly and clearly.

This message ! What did it mean ? How was he to go there ? How stand among all the people in Mr. Wolcombe's rooms ? How meet her ?

And yet, do as he would, one thought returned perpetually. He might err, and the error be fatal.

“ No, no ! No more thought ! It maddens me ! ” he cried, starting up ; “ my brain only gets more and more helplessly confused. This message ! Is there some fate involved in it ? I grow strangely superstitious, and fancy I know not what. The air must be heavy and close. Would the meeting were over ! My mind misgives me. And yet, who can tell, but that all things may be working together onwards to some appointed end, and compelling me to march with them ? Mysterious forces seem to hem me in. Yet I can see nothing ; hear nothing ; nay, I know there is nothing but myself in the place. Why, then, this shrinking of the spirit and of the flesh ? What can that be to which I dare not give name, and which so oppresses me ? I can no longer breathe. Ha ! I begin to see it now It rises fiercely looming through the

darkness of my soul. O, God, how it glares upon me ! Those burning eyes, they entrance me—they draw me on—on to perdition ! O, God, help ! help ! They lure me to self-murder. Away ! away ! away !”

The Inventor dropped on the bed, face downwards, and tried to shut out the appalling vision which the anguish of his mind, the raging fever of his blood, and his night of ceaseless wandering over the cold and misty hills, had given birth to. And he lay there long, without farther token of feeling—or even of life.

CHAPTER XV.

JOB'S NEW START.

ON leaving the widow, Job went doggedly on to Coppeshall, as though determined to show people for once he could work, and make no fuss about it either ; but he was in an awful temper ; and finding no dog on the way to kick, no beggar to insult, and no little boy to cajole or bully into giving or lending him a penny for a glass of beer at the public-house, he grew worse as he proceeded, and as he began to realise the fact in all its significance, that he was caught ; that he was really in for half an hour's hard work. Then, too, the example—the precedent ! That's what hurt him most. How was Job to know what might be expected next from him, if he gave in to these innovating ways ? He had a sort of acquaintance, a labourer, living in a cottage by the roadside ; and he had planned, as he went along, a bit of comfort, to help him on ; he had thought he would just drop in, in passing, at the dinner hour, and secure a hot baked potato, if nothing better were obtainable. But Job's friend and family were out for the day, and the door was locked ; and after vainly trying the latch, and knocking with his fists till a rusty nail ran into one of them, he fairly gave way to his vexation, turned and kicked, with his great hob-nailed boots, against the door in sheer spite ; and that being insufficient,

at last finished off by swinging his head, in a kind of ironical frenzy, also against the door, two or three times, before he sobered down, and asked himself, "Where's the good on it all?"

Then he resumed his journey in a more subdued state of mind, and went straight to the paddock, where he had been told he would find the carpet lying ready. Yes, it was there, neatly folded up. Job looked at it, lifted one end to try the weight, and dropped it again in disgust. He "warn't goin' to tak' all that up on his back." So, opening the door wide, and clutching a piece of the carpet, and dragging it over his shoulder, he turned tail to the carpet, and began, with immense difficulty, to draw his dusty and variegated train.

He was in a sweat by the time he had got the whole fairly on to the grass, a few yards from the gate; and then he began to think he hadn't taken the easiest way after all. Of course not. Job knew that. And yet people to call him lazy!

He stopped, looking puzzled, and began to find a quiet luxury in having a good scratch of his head. Then a thought struck him. He went to the gate, and stood watching for a minute or two. Presently he shouted:

"O! aw say! ahoy!"

Two little schoolboys, with bags in their hands, answered the signal.

"Na, na, not yo; t'other boys. Ye arn't strong enow."

"O, arn't we, though!" sung out the smallest of the boys in a shrill treble. "You try us, Job. Here, put half on my head and the rest on Billy's."

Job laughed right out. It was so comical the spirit of the little fellow. As a philosopher he wondered now whether they would and could do it, if he were to let them try.

It was worth while if only for the fun of the thing. So Job did as he was told ; and the two little chaps presently stood some distance apart, staggering under their unmanageable burden, and coughing with the dry dust in their throats, but uncommonly tickled with the general idea of the thing.

" All right, Job ?" asked the brother of Billy.

" One, two, three,—Off !" exclaimed Job, clapping his hands.

The boys started, the bellying carpet almost touching the ground between them ; but presently Billy stopped, for he too had got an idea.

" I say, Job. We'll carry you too, if you'll get on to the top !"

" Get along, you young cock-a-hoop !" shouted Job. And in this order the pageant moved over the grass to a space between two trees, across which extended a cord, from tree to tree.

Just then the widow peeped into the paddock, saw what was going on, and slipped out again before Job could get sight of her.

" Brayvo ! brayvo !" cried Job to the boys : " that'll do. Put it down ; anyhow ; aw'll manage th' rest mysel'."

" Job, a bird's-nest for this !" suggested Billy.

" Half-a-dozen, ma cock-sparrer ! Eigh,—what strung chaps y'are. Now, go to th' school, and donna forget th' lessen ye've gotten."

" Lesson, Job ?" asked the least boy.

" Ay—to do as aw do :

Gather honey all the day,
Fra every openin' flower.

Ax mester the meanin' o' that. Go alung, little boys."

When they were gone, and Job had enjoyed his secret chuckle, he began to think he had been over-magnanimous in his dealings with them.

" Idle rogues ; thae might hae helped me on to th' line wi' it. Coom, coom, thank goodness, aw'll soon hae done, and git ma shillin', and go and look after th' lodger."

By an intricate and elaborate series of manœuvres Job managed to get the carpet on to the line bit by bit, though when he made the last haul the exclamation was wrung from him in self pity : " Eigh ! ma back !"

Next he looked for the stick, which he found close by ; and so, at last, Job was prepared to beat his first carpet.

" Now for a tremendous blow," he said to himself, but the stick fell so innocently, and excited so little commotion, that a butterfly chose, the very instant after, to settle down on the top of the carpet, as if to take a good look at Job, and ask him what he meant to do.

Job, however, felt fatigued, and looked about him, muttering, " Aw seed a lady's garden-cheer hereabouts ;" yes, it was there still, by the wall ; and Job fetched it, and sat down, contented with the past, but grimly contemplating the future. However, he again raised his stick, and struck a second, and decidedly harder blow. It was well the butterfly had gone zig-zagging off before then.

" Two !" emphatically and cheerily grunted Job. " That wur a one-er, aw think ! Not industrious, eh ? O, it's na use, if a mon once loses his carackter ; it's all up then !

Nowt but injustice, no more!" Again Job raised his stick, in a fit of moral and social indignation, when he stopped, and began to rummage his pockets.

"Aw think aw'll have a pint o' mild ale, first." Then he shook his head, saying, contemplatively, "Na, na brass! Na tick! An' if aw go to th' house, happen the widow'll be there, an'll bullyrag ma for nowt. How aw do hate this kind o' wark! There!"

Job had struck this time with all his strength, yet so vaguely and savagely, that he cut the cord where the carpet on it terminated, and down dropped the heavy burden, leaving Job with the broken stick in his hand, staring helplessly.

"Ivery bit on it to do ower agin!" was all he could murmur, between his teeth, when he did speak. No wonder he was too much occupied to notice that the widow, who had gone away after her first peep at Job's operations, now returned, bringing Barbara with her; and that under cover of some espalier apple-trees which extended from the gate, round the paddock, and close by the trees, they were stealthily approaching him.

"O——h!" grinned Job, with rage, as he kicked the prostrate enemy. "Down, are yo! Mak' ma a bed, then!" He gave another kick. "Now a pillow!" And again he kicked. "There, aw'll mak' summut o' yo." And then Job, giving a sidelong glance, to see that no one could watch his movements from the upper windows of the house, began to lay himself down, and tuck himself up, and make himself comfortable for his noontide nap; talking, however, aloud to himself the while, "An' aw'll tell yo a bit o' ma mind; an' yo may tell widow, if yo

likes ; ay, an' her daughter too, for whatten I care. Hang wark ! Dosta hear ? Aw does hate wark ! Hear that ? Aw won't wark ! If aw does wark, may aw be——”

Why does Job suddenly become speechless, and turn pale, even through all the dirt of his face, lying there in innumerable strata ? Can it be on account of the widow, whose look he sees fixed on him ? Unable to stand the gaze of those mild, yet genial eyes, Job thinks he'll turn and get up—when lo ! Barbara's beautiful countenance greets him, trying to shake her head, but involuntarily shaking her sides instead ; while the brilliant, roguish eyes are teeming with mirth, and the quivering voice trying to be indignant—merely says, “O, Job ! Job ! Job !”

Job can stand it no longer. Who could ? He turns and leaves it to his heels to extricate him as well as they can.

“I think, mother,” said Barbara, as Job disappeared through the paddock-gate, and they returned together to the house, “I shall now do what I have often thought of—give Captain Wolcombe a hint. My life on it, Job has something in him, and, I do believe, would make a good soldier !”

“Well, Barbara, we have done our best, as our poor dear lady did before us, and failed. Job knows he can get over us, and needs, I suppose, rougher handling. But you'll never persuade Job to enlist. He is much too sly and knowing for that.”

“Well, mother, we shall see. If one could but stir a bit of ambition in him——”

And so saying, they turned—met each other's gaze—and both again began laughing as they moved away.

CHAPTER XVI.

JOB FINDS AN OBJECT.

IT was a curious thing that Job, after his unsuccessful attempt at carpet beating, when smarting under the ignominy of exposure, and while endeavouring to restore his peace of mind, by sending widows and their daughters to all sorts of unmentionable places, should have suddenly taken it into his head to go himself towards the very last place where any one would then have expected to find him, the widow's cottage. It was still more curious to hear a low chuckle every now and then alternating with a deep heavy grunt, as though there were something even attractive in the prospect. Whatever it was, he did not need any co-operation in his intended enjoyment; and he looked back now and then, to be sure that no one was following or noticing him. But the most curious thing of all was that, when he had nearly reached the row of cottages, instead of taking the shortest way to the widow's, which happened to be at the farther end of the row, he took a winding route by the back through some garden ground, thus taking a deal of extra trouble, and for no earthly advantage, unless, indeed, it were that Job was rather ashamed of his proceedings, and modestly wished to keep out of the sight of his fellow men (and of their

wives), and so slipped into the widow's cottage at the back door, unnoticed.

He was some time before he came out again. But he looked radiant when he did come, though he glanced furtively about, as if less than ever courting observation. He then made towards some broken ground close by, where he could get out of sight in the hollow; and when he had reached the bottom he dropped down with a great bump and slide upon the sward, and said, with his usual self-satisfied chuckle,—

“There wur a secret pocket; an’ this wur in it.” Job took out of his breast an old worn-looking letter or envelope, which seemed rather bulky with enclosures. “Let ma see if aw hae forgotten ma larning, Mester Sleigh.” And Job began to spell the address letter by letter, the voice getting more emphatic as he progressed, until having mastered the component parts, he essayed the whole.

“Mester—Abel—Drake! Eigh, lasses, but laugh’s o’ ma side now. Aw an’t clever! Aw an’t industrious! E—law!—whatten a detective aw should hae made! There mun be summet wrung i’ our social institootions. If thae wonna gie fair ploy to a mon’s genius, how can he get on?”

Job began to study the outside look of the letter.

“In a lass’s hond; how owd and ragged it looks. Bin carried maybe mony a lung year. Happen soom o’ his wife’s letters inside. Eh? O, goodness gracious—it’s brass! It’s bank notes! Lots on em! Aw’m ruined! Aw’m all in a tremble. Stop! Yes, aw knaws what aw’ll do; aw’ll put it back again afore he tak’s notice, and afore widow cooms hoame!”

Job rose with a strange mingling of alacrity and trepidation, but instantly bobbed down his head; there was the widow just going into the cottage.

Job leaned back on the slope, and looked aghast into the blank skies, as he murmured—

“It’s too late! Aw’m trapped! Mercy on me, aw’m an innocent thief!”

Presently Job began to blubber, as his thoughts for once in their life began to run very fast indeed over the consequences.

“Aw’m taken up! Aw’m tried! Aw’m found guilty! Aw’m put i’ prison! Aw’m sentenced to—to—**HARD LABOUR!**”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MAN WITH THE MACHINE.

AT noon the next day the carrier's cart drew up in front of the widow's cottage, and the carrier handed her a bulky parcel addressed to Mr. George Hope. It arrived just as the Inventor was again thrusting himself into conversation with the widow, under cover of a volley of indignant remonstrances at her presumption in offering to clean his boots. It was strange to see how anxious she was that he should go to Coppeshall as well dressed and as gentlemanly-looking as possible; but, in truth, the widow had her own secret hopes of something good resulting for the Inventor through this summons by Mr. Wolcombe—something, indeed, which might prevent him from leaving Barden Brow. Not that she suggested anything of the kind to him; but often during the morning had she gone out on to the green, and stood, shading her eyes with her hand, looking anxiously down the road for the appearance of the carrier with the new things which she had persuaded him to let her send to the town for.

He took the parcel from her and went up-stairs to his room. His manner seemed now altogether quiet and thoughtful.

She called after him, "I told the man to send you plenty

to choose from ; so I hope you'll find something to fit you. But you have no time to lose, if we are to go together."

"In ten minutes, widow, I shall be waiting for you, and getting confoundedly impatient," he answered gaily. And in very little more than that time she heard him go down stairs ; and she slipped on her black silk dress and white cap with nervous haste. Going to the chair in the parlour where she had laid in readiness her bonnet and old-fashioned mantle, she found spread over it a summer shawl, with a broad wavy fringe, very ladylike and pretty, but so neat and unassuming that even she could make no objection to wearing it.

"How came this here ? Has Barbara been in ?" she asked herself, looking at it with a certain subdued sense of pleasure and admiration. Just then her eyes fell on the Inventor's guilty-looking face, and she saw at once he had been tampering with her written orders to the town ; and she began to scold him for his pains, but he interrupted her : He "knew it was a great liberty to take — perhaps it was too great a one ;" if so, would she "return his poor present and forgive him ?"

"No, I will not," said the widow, touched by the humble words and inexpressibly melancholy voice. "It is much too good for me ; but I shall keep it and value it as long as it or I last."

"Will you ? Ah, it will be pleasant to think of that when I'm alone on the sea again ! I shan't feel quite so desolate as I used when I saw the sailors smiling to themselves as they looked back towards England, as if they were feeling that some one was just then thinking about them."

"Oh, then, you have been in England before, and left it to go across the sea?" asked the widow.

"Lord bless you!" said the Inventor, turning away, "I've been a wonderful traveller to and fro. Shall we start? I'm quite ready now."

By this time the widow had locked the door outside, and secured the gate that the boys might not get at her flowers. She was quite aware that there were two or three tall carnations just then looking and breathing temptation to the passers-by. And then they set off together across the green towards the old Cartney road. How hot it looked; how it seemed to twist and wind, as if vainly trying to wriggle itself out of the fierce sun.

"Eh, dear, but it's weary walking!" remarked the widow, as she sighed and panted with the heat and the unusual exertion, and wondered when they should come to some tall tree or find any sort of green shade; but each turn only revealed a fresh length of white, glowing, dusty road, shut in between brown, thirsty hedgerows. They did not talk much; partly because of the dust and the sultry silence that everywhere reigned, and through which it seemed too great a labour to raise the voice; and partly because they felt that each other's thoughts and feelings must be so widely different in their respective self-engrossment. The Inventor, however, never long lost sight of his anxious eager desire to conceal his emotion from the widow, though sometimes he would sink into gloomy reflection, and then into the habitual measured tramp, which the widow found it so difficult to keep up with. But directly he discovered what he was doing, he looked back with alarm on the few moments of forgetfulness almost

dreading to meet his companion's gaze lest it should show him he had betrayed himself.

But the quiet half-smile that met his look, as if the widow was conscious of her physical weakness as a pedestrian, and begged him be patient with it, reassured him ; and then for a few minutes he would devote himself to her with that frank, cheerful politeness that had made the neighbours at once set him down as a foreigner. If there was a single early ripe blackberry, glancing like a bright eye from the hedge, it must be picked while he waited for her at one of his sudden pauses, and given to her ; or if a cow had pushed its way through the broken fence, he seemed to know instinctively the widow was not brave about cows, and he was sure to go forwards and drive away the hot, thirsty, innocent animal, who was only looking into the road with the delusory notion of finding a pond there. And then they would laugh for a moment over their joint victory ; and the widow, who was not very well able to follow the changeful impulses of such a mind, would begin to wonder if the Inventor himself was getting her fancy into his head, that something good might turn up from this visit to Coppeshall. His constant attention to her through all his own trouble had touched her deeply, and made her feel a tender, almost motherly, affection for him. There was a yearning in her heart, which could not be altogether satisfied by the love and devotion of Barbara, who always kept a stern hold upon herself ; and the widow well understood why she had been driven to do so. Still mother and daughter, while holding each other in the deepest love and respect, did not commune sufficiently to draw out of their mutual re-

lations the greatest amount of possible comfort and solace. Both were habitually reserved, and needed some electric touch from a different nature to make them know their true selves.

Sometimes it seemed to the widow as if the son who had died in his infancy, and of whom she had dreamed such grand things, had returned to her; and she felt a strange longing to know and to soothe the Inventor's hidden grief.

Just before coming to Coppeshall the road lay across a corner of a wild common, and they were glad to turn from it into the grass, where the little yellow heath gleamed sunnily, though every other flower, clover, poppy, and daisy, lay scorched and faded in the brown herbage. The Inventor, turning his head away from the widow as they walked, looked down at this little flower, and a smile, half tender, half bitter, played about his lips. Stooping, he picked a bit with apparent carelessness, and looked at it lying in his hand, till his whole face softened, and his eyes grew moist: so that it was easy to see it was something more than a bit of yellow heath he had got there. And yet the widow—who threw a passing, and, as it were, accidental glance at his hand—saw nothing but the tiny yellow flower. She could not see, as he did, how it was slowly revealing and lighting up with its exquisite pale tinge a summer-morning picture of the past into such vivid reality, that he could but turn to it, and forget the dark, lowering present in which he moved. Yes, he forgot the heat—the time—the place, and his companion. He was again standing cold and wretched on the green, watching the light breaking slowly over it, and waiting for that door to open. They

had quarrelled the night before, their first quarrel, and now he could not rest till he had seen her ; and yet he felt too proud to speak to her when she at last came with her pitcher to the well. He picked a spray of yellow heath from the wet grass, and laid it on the wall. Proud and sorrowful they both stood, she looking down at it sideways, his eyes fixed upon her face. At last she took up the little peace-offering and placed it in the white neckerchief that crossed her bosom, and held out her hand with a smile, and a rush of tears.

The Inventor could see his picture no longer. Had he been alone he must have fallen to the ground, and kissed those tiny flowers, and wept over them, his second answer—after so many years. But her mother was by his side ; so he abruptly closed his hand over the flower, asking himself bitterly what life were worth if all its strongest, holiest passions must be similarly crushed.

They now stood before the gates of Coppeshall, under and between the bars of which Timon and Isidore poked their ugly noses, and barked furiously at the strangers.

They were shown up to the dining-room, where they parted ; the widow going to look for Barbara, the Inventor to take his stand beside his old comrade, which was placed on a table in the alcove at the far end of the room. From thence he looked out, with strange feelings, upon the interior of the manufacturer's house.

The spacious, handsome dining-room was glowing darkly in the sunset. Its polished wainscoting flushed out in patches, as if stained with blood. The long table, richly spread with glass, and chased silver utensils, caught at intervals the rich suffusion, and gave back, here the in-

tensest ruby dyes, there an almost intolerable radiance. The files of high-backed, carved and velveted chairs, drawn up on either side of the table, were all dyed in the same red light, which seemed to burn itself into whatever it touched, and to become a part of it for ever. Sometimes, as a soft-footed servant glided in and out of the folding doors, came a brilliant strain of music ; or a chorus of light, silvery laughter, in which he dreaded, yet strove to hear, *her* voice mingling.

Meanwhile the widow went upstairs, and tapped at the door of Barbara's bed-room.

" Why, Barbara, not down yet !" she exclaimed. " They tell me that ever so many people have come. What makes you so long ? Now if I had been late,—or, for that matter, had not come at all—"

" Ah, but you have come, and won't get away, mother," said Barbara, with a rather wan smile ; " you shall face them all now, I promise you !"

" What a beautiful dress, Barbara !"

" Do you like it ? Mr. Wolcombe gave it to me yesterday," said Barbara, rising wearily from the chair into which she had sunk, with the rich dress of violet satin thrown loosely on, and beginning to adjust it with troubled haste.

" Why, you don't look well, child !" cried the widow, arresting Barbara's cold, moist hand, and looking anxiously in her face. " Is anything the matter ?"

" No, mother," replied Barbara, with a somewhat more cheery smile than the former one, and laying her burning cheek against the widow's palm. " Nothing is really the matter. Only, as Mr. Lancelot says, 'I have been pos-

sessed all this morning with an unquiet spirit. I have felt as though I could not sit still two minutes at a time, and I think he's a little disturbed about it. But I couldn't help it. I always feel so when there's thunder in the air, and I'm sure there must be now." Barbara rose, and pushed the window wide open, and looked out upon the angry and tumultuous sunset. She saw that the greenhouse and the path by the fruit wall were crowded with guests. Among them she saw Mr. Lancelot, as she still always called him, gathering flowers, and presenting them to the ladies.

"Come, mother," she said impatiently, as the widow pulled out the rich web-like lace of her sleeves—"come, let us go down while they are all in the garden. The introductions won't be so formal. Mr. Lancelot," she added jestingly, "promised me a bouquet; but I can see he is supplying the whole company first."

"Shocking! I will tell him what you say," said the widow; and Barbara laughed, and began to threaten her a bit, in the old imperious style, as they descended the stairs; while the widow, also as of old, remained imperturbably silent as to her thoughts or intentions, no matter what provocation she received.

But the secret of the captain's behaviour, which kept all the ladies about him in such an amiable and charming and thankful flutter as he went along the greenhouse, stripping it of its finest flowers (I wish he had seen how the gardener looked at him and at them, between the grins of acquiescence he was constrained to make), was one that he would have been rather reluctant to explain to that brilliant suite. Lancelot was hard to please about Bar-

bara's flowers ; and so, what the sly rogue was really doing was to pick everything that looked at all beautiful, or smelt at all sweet, and then, while apparently giving them all away, lay by just the very sweetest and the most perfectly lovely only. The roses, for which Coppeshall had long been famous, seemed to his critical and jealous eye more or less defective ; and it was a long time before he released that poor gardener's soul from purgatory, by staying his hand and collecting from his pockets his acquisitions, and sauntering out of the greenhouse, arranging the spoils.

When the Inventor saw him enter the dining-room shortly after, his hand clutched the end of the table tightly ; and, having returned the captain's reserved but polite inclination of the head, he bent down and pretended to be doing something to the machine. But, however he sought to control himself, his eyes turned with the fascination of hate to the dark manly countenance and resplendent uniform of the captain, who had been that morning to pay an official visit in the neighbourhood. Lancelot stood by a little table near the alcove arranging his flowers, and once a smile passed over his face. It needed the power of a love greater even than hate can ever be to keep the Inventor quiet as he noticed that smile, and attributed to it his own meaning and significance. It was but for a moment, however, that he yielded to the violent desire to dash forward, tread those fragrant roses under foot, return the reflective smile by a defiant laugh, and stay for ever by a single word that low joyous whistle that stung his ears like a mocking laughter.

But now another sound came—*her* voice ; and it softened the cold, almost cruel, glitter of his blue eyes, and

gave him strength to stand erect and face the torture that he saw preparing for him. The captain heard it too ; and leaving his flowers on the table, as though he would not give them to her where so many people would be looking on, he went towards the folding-doors and threw them open. The Inventor half feared, yet half hoped, that he would not shut them. It seemed to him that only while he could see and hear her, would he have strength to keep true to his purpose. With those doors between them and him he would be straining to catch every whisper, till the suspense must become intolerable. But the doors were still left open, he saw.

Another minute, and through the doorway, on which his eyes were fixed (though he kept himself the while as far back as he could, that he might not be unnecessarily noticed), he beheld Barbara standing, with her hand in Lancelot's ; not as he had previously seen her in that terrible twilight, but with the sunlight full upon her, softened by the distance. He stood transfixed, almost as one appalled, gazing at what seemed to him her wondrous beauty. It is true the Inventor had, in his wanderings, somewhat idealised that face of Barbara's ; had added many a grace that did not at all belong to the black-eyed, overgrown mill-girl at her best ; and sometimes he would smile and shake his head at his comrade, saying, as he brought his hammer down upon it to make it listen the more attentively, — " Pooh ! I don't believe anybody thought her good-looking but me." But now, as he looked upon her, after all these years of growth and development under a kindly atmosphere, there sprang up in his soul a sense of life-long desolation. His heart seemed to

drop dead in his breast like a dull, heavy weight. Between him and that tall, beautiful woman—her face so faintly flushing with the consciousness of the many eyes that were upon her, and yet so easy and self-possessed and self-reliant under such exciting circumstances—all ties seemed to shrivel up, and be as of no account. He could have nothing to give to her; he could only take away from her whatever she might be about to possess.

But presently, his thoughts changing their course, began to ask,—Had he been allowed to feed his soul so many years with so false a hope? He looked up, and seemed to ask murmuringly of God if he had really permitted him to drag on day by day, year after year, a painful and laborious existence towards a goal that he was thus forbidden to reach? All the depths of his nature seemed rising in rebellion. The faith to which he had clung in his darkest hours, that God was good; that repentance and restitution would be acceptable; that all the evils of life are but shadows, painful perhaps for a time, but certain to pass away from the brave soul that still marches patiently on; this faith was now fading fast, and leaving only behind a despair too great to be borne, and from which some shelter must be obtained.

But then yet again his thoughts would change their current, and take a more tender aspect. How did he know that they might not have slandered him to her? Besides, she thought him dead; what feelings might not revive in her heart towards him, could she know that he lived; learn his history since they parted; and that it was the love of her that had made him so changed a man? Could that he could see her look upon some sign or token that

would remind her of him ; and that he could, unsuspected, watch her face the while ! And in that moment, blinded by the one passionate desire to know the truth from her own inner self, a crowd of rash and dangerous ideas swept through his brain. He grew faint and dizzy with their rush and tumult ; but he let them all go by (holding fast to his purpose not to compromise her), all but one. That one idea he could not put away. In his hand, tinged his brown fingers, still lay the bit of yellow heath he had plucked from the common. Lancelot's flowers were within his reach. The Inventor knew well they would be fetched presently, even if not given in his presence there, out of the way of the crowd. What if Barbara should find the bit of heath among them ? If all the old love were dead she would not even recognise, in all probability, his little messenger. The sight would trouble her not. But, if it were not dead ? If he could only see it assert itself—in a tear from the eye, or a quiver from the lip ! How his heart swelled at the fancy ! Even were it so, and the mere thought was suffocating in the emotions it brought with it, he would do nothing rash. He would keep his great happiness firmly to himself ; thrown down as it were, and lovingly held low for a time in his heart ; he would not even speak to her now, but go away, and commune with himself in his quiet holy joy, as to how he should make himself known to her, and how he should give the least pain to him, on whom a minute before he had looked with the bitterest hate.

One quick, almost involuntary movement of the body and hand, and it was done : the bit of heath lay partially concealed among the other flowers.

Just then the widow passed through, and gave him a friendly nod of recognition ; and seemed, as she glanced with a timid smile towards the drawing-room, and shrugged her shoulders, to ask good-humouredly for his sympathy under her trial.

Following her, came Master Hugh, in full Highland costume ; but he stopped on seeing Abel, and stood before him looking at the model, and asking questions about "Papa's new machine ;" which the Inventor tried to answer with the gentle playfulness that characterised his manner to all children, whether of the street or of the drawing-room, but throwing the while uneasy, hurried glances towards the place where Barbara was.

Lancelot had gone away. Maud and Helen, looking very pretty and graceful in their white dresses and coral ornaments, were showing the widow some prints, and trying, in accordance with Lancelot's express orders, to keep her amused, though they could not help, from time to time, casting wistful glances over the flower-boxes in the windows, to the hats and parasols they saw moving about below, in the garden. The Inventor could also just see Barbara, where she sat, leaning her elbow on the table, with her face turned from him.

"O, Lancelot, what is inside that pretty box ?" cried Poppy, with sparkling eyes, as her brother entered the room with a small round casket in his hand.

Barbara looked up, and an expression almost of pain came across her face as she did so. She had seen the contents of that casket once in her lifetime before. That which Lancelot now lifted from it she had seen lying like a string of glittering dew-drops on a thin white hand, too

weak to hold them up, and when it was touching for the last time its earthly treasures. She had heard the faltering voice say over them, and looking with strange meaning towards Barbara's tearful face,—

"These will go to my son's bride, Barbara. Ah, child, they say mine was a proud family, but as for me, God knows, I would rather see this little cross that hangs here, rise and fall on a beggar's neck than over a heart that he didn't love, or that did not love him as he deserved; for there are few like him, Barbara, very few. And where he does love once, he will love for ever."

How solemnly the sweet voice rung in her ear now! but it was the latter words that seemed so impressive—the warning against any one who did not love him as he deserved. The diamonds were glittering in Barbara's eyes. Was she, of all women, justified in wearing them? Did she love him as a noble heart like his deserved to be loved? Almost involuntarily her hand rose to avert his, and her lips began to murmur, inaudibly,—“No, no, Mr. Lancelot, please—” but he only smiled, as he fastened them round her neck, firmly but gently. Then he said to her in a low voice, as he partly guessed her thoughts,—

“She who wore these last, Barbara, would, I know, be very happy to see them here.” There was a delicate but unmistakable emphasis in the words “I know,” which told Barbara that more had passed between mother and son than had ever (till now) been suspected by herself. No wonder the sanction of one so loved and venerated by Barbara came to her as a fresh support: she would no longer doubt or hesitate. She would yet be true to him—even in the fervency of the love he sought.

"Are these Barbara's flowers, Lancelot?" inquired Maud, coming in with them. "What beautiful roses! Where did you get them? I couldn't find a single white rose this morning. Give me just one, Barbara, won't you? Only one?"

"Thank you," said Barbara, glancing up with a smile in Lancelot's face, which almost unmanned him by its sudden sweetness. "They are very beautiful," she continued, speaking half to Maud, half to herself, as she looked down at them, and allowed that young lady to draw out one of the white roses that she so much coveted.

But again, with strange and unwonted weakness of soul, Barbara found her thoughts resuming their former gloomy hue. The diamonds seemed to lie so cold and heavy on her neck, that they oppressed her. Every one's eyes would be attracted by them, and already she heard dresses rustling on the stairs. Lancelot had left her side to speak to some persons entering the room. Why could she not shake off this strange, foolish, ungrateful foreboding? It was very wrong, very pitiful, she felt. She was sure she had a sincere affection for Lancelot; was not that enough? Could she have ever hoped for something altogether transcending what was now promised to her?

At that moment, as she stood looking down upon her flowers just inside the dining-room, to which she had retreated, almost unconsciously, to avoid the entering guests, Barbara had a vision. She saw before her eyes a face looking up into her own—a face more beautiful for its youth and intellectual strength and passion than for any perfection of feature. The lips quivered in the struggle between pride and tenderness, but the blue eyes were raised to her

own in an abandonment of sorrowful, passionate pleading, that needed no accompanying words; and that made her gaze and gaze into their depths, drawing her soul irresistibly farther and farther into the past, till she felt herself a girl again, standing by the old well, in the morning sunshine, looking down with the proud but troubled look on the little peace-offering that lay upon the well. How vivid and life-like the whole scene was! Why had it come now back to her; why, when she was trying to make her heart acknowledge a new love, was her soul to be thus shaken by remembrance of the old love, that had been so long dead and buried, killed by neglect and wrong? She closed her eyes, shudderingly, to exclude the vision; and when she opened them again, that youthful head, with its long flaxen hair, and delicate down-covered chin, was gone; the well and all had vanished; and yet there lay before her the flower—the peace offering—that had so beguiled her fancy! She started, trembled, and looked round, but she saw nothing to justify her superstitious fears. None of the guests, she was glad to know, seemed to have missed her. She turned, and her eyes rested on the gentlemanly, black-bearded man in the alcove, standing by the machine, and who appeared to be again occupied with his invention.

Yes, but there still lay the flower. Strange accident!—that should have made Lancelot put such a flower among his gifts to her. Yes, it was all within the compass of its pale tinge that that picture she saw had arisen. What evil omen might this be? The diamonds seemed now to be absolutely tightening about her throat. Could she—she once more asked herself—pay their price? Then she thought of Lancelot's years of silent devotion, his manly

fortitude, the generosity of character implied in such a wooing. And then she saw his face, as it was but a few minutes ago, with that smile upon it which Fortune could never change: if the goddess smiled, Lancelot smiled back, and was glad; if she frowned, Lancelot still smiled, and waited till she could come of his mind! Barbara had—she well knew—already answered the question once this morning, but been unfaithful to her resolve. It should not happen again, she thought; and her soul grew calm as she felt already the dawning conquest. She raised the little cross reverently to her lips, dropped the flower to the ground, and crushed all doubts and misgivings with the yellow heath under her foot, before she turned round with her old clearness and decision of purpose to meet Mr. Wolcombe, who had just then entered the dining-room.

The Inventor had watched narrowly though furtively all that passed—all at least that to him assumed external shape. He saw that action with the diamonds; he saw his flower dropped, and her foot raised and pressed upon it in indignant scorn. That was enough. He was answered. His face resumed the hard, hopeless expression it had generally worn since the discovery of Barbara's position. He had but one idea now—when should he be able to escape? Nothing more here seemed to live for him. He listened, as in a painful dream, to Mr. Wolcombe's voice, as he made some little speech, which he thought necessary, to Barbara about the diamonds, for he knew their value, and could not let such a gift pass without making sure that Barbara knew it too—though he did not speak unpleasantly: in fact, he was satisfied with the marriage on the whole. But as he was speaking, in a loud voice, the

Inventor heard her whisper, "Mr. Wolcombe, sir, forgive me; but we are not alone."

Mr. Wolcombe turned in the direction of her eyes, and seeing merely the Inventor, said, "O, I know: it's only the man with the machine! Come!" And taking Barbara's hand, he led her into the drawing-room, and the Inventor was again alone. He was smiling now grimly.

"The man with the machine!" Mr. Wolcombe flattered him, he thought. Were he a man, would he be here and thus?

"I wonder," said he aloud, as though careless whether or no he were heard, "if it would outrage the decencies of so hospitable a mansion to ask for a glass of water?" He tried to moisten his baked lips with his tongue, but seemed to find no relief. Then he seemed to give way to an impatience that showed itself in his gestures and incessant shifting of position: while a dull red light seemed to be growing in his eyes, more and more fiercely, every moment.

"Miss Giffard's compliments, sir," said a servant, coming up to him with a tray; "and she says will you take a glass of wine? She is sure you must be fatigued."

"This?" said the Inventor, taking a glass of sherry from the tray. "I thank Miss Giffard; say so."

So; it was from her! This wine was *her* gift. The only thing she could ever again give him in life! Every drop of it should be dearer than the heart's blood it would join and nourish!—He gazed on it—as the wine undulated in the glass held so tremulously—for some time, in silent agitation; and once he looked upwards, as in a kind of prayer to God. His face lightened. A strange sweetness played over it, as he asked himself, in the spirit of one who

knew the foregone conclusion—How should he pledge her? How, but with his all? And while he laid one hand on the machine, he raised the glass with the other, and the low, deep, but clearly-uttered words broke from him—"To the bride and bridegroom!" But the glass had scarcely touched his lips before they turned from it with an overmastering repulsion; a death-like pallor overspread the face; the hand shook so that it was unable to place the glass on the table without spilling some of the wine; and then, with the sense of relief from its touch, the whole frame seemed to drop into the nearest chair, and to collapse into a mere wreck of humanity. Nature itself had revolted, as from something monstrous and criminal, to which it had nearly fallen a prey.

Presently, warned by approaching steps, he roused himself, and his first act was to take up the glass again, and drain its contents to the last drop. And then he stood by the machine with very much the air of a wild animal at bay. He was not long kept waiting. The doors were thrown open, and Mr. Wolcombe entered, laughing heartily, and followed by numerous guests; and, with the latter, the Inventor saw also Barbara and her mother.

"Well, I haven't heard a better story for a long time. Why, it even made Miss Giffard smile; who if she has a fault—— But come, now to business for a few minutes. Brother spinners and weavers"—and Mr. Wolcombe looked round, for when he did joke he always liked others to enjoy it as much as he did himself—"who clothe the majesty of man, if not in purple and fine linen, then in excellent broadcloth and the best of calico, come, tell me what you think of this—my new machine—that this cunning chap

here induced me to buy. Eh, Mr. Hope?" And again Mr. Wolcombe laughed, and expected the Inventor to laugh too; who, however, turned away, as if to prepare his machine, and took no more notice. The guests drew round; the gentlemen with serious business faces, the ladies laughingly, and with a kind of pretty wonder.

"Now, Mr. Hope, will you please to explain?" said the manufacturer.

The Inventor bowed, and set the machine going; and as he listened, he felt as if he could laugh too—as if he would like to laugh in a way that should make these fine people whom he was to amuse shudder and turn pale.

"But come, man, talk?" said Mr. Wolcombe, patronisingly. "Talk a bit, can't you?"

"Any question you please to ask me, sir, shall be answered," replied the Inventor, in as cool a tone as he could command.

"Question!" echoed Mr. Wolcombe, impatiently. "Well, but you needn't wait for that. Talk, man! I'm sure you talked uncommonly well to me when you talked me into buying;" and then Mr. Wolcombe, forgetting his momentary irritation, laughed and winked at the company, to make his joke more significant. "Here, wine!" he cried, stopping a servant, and taking a glass from his tray. "Come, Mr. Hope, a glass of wine, to set you going."

"I thank you, no," said the Inventor, rousing himself. "And as for the machine, these gentlemen will understand its object at a glance, while the details speak for themselves."

Mr. Wolcombe was now getting annoyed. The fellow had exhibited, he thought, quite enough sentimental in-

solence in the mill, but he was not going to pass the matter off in this way in the manufacturer's own house.

"Hark you, Mr. Hope!" he said, standing face to face with the Inventor, his hands behind him, and his head inclined to one side; "if there's much more of this circumlocution and nonsense, I shall begin to think you have deceived me."

"Deceived you!" repeated the Inventor, his blue eyes flashing fiercely, though he still seemed to be under some peculiar restraint.

"Yes; and that you can't explain it. I mean not fully, because it's not your own invention, sir." Mr. Wolcombe tried to make up for his want of faith in his own words by the loudness and impressiveness of his voice; and when he ceased speaking there was a dead silence.

"Mr. Wolcombe!" The Inventor was speaking now in a low, measured, though somewhat wavering voice. "I am here at your request. Let me, I pray you, be free from insult while I remain."

"Insult!" Mr. Wolcombe turned upon him with an angry frown, and was about to speak, when there was a movement among the guests, and presently Lancelot came towards them with two letters in his hand.

"Father! Barbara!" he said, with some excitement of manner, and making a gesture to draw them aside. "I am ordered—or at least so asked that I cannot refuse—to return instantly to the Crimea. To-morrow evening I must go."

"To-morrow evening!" echoed Mr. Wolcombe and Barbara, in dismay.

"Yes; but listen. There is something else," he added,

turning round, and speaking loudly, "of deeper interest to me; and all present should, I think, hear it. This letter is from the Horse Guards, and officially confirms the fact that Abel Drake was drowned in Canada."

He handed the letter to Barbara, who took it, and ran her eyes over it, without being able to decipher a word. A thick mist seemed to melt all the lines and words into one confusing black wave. Then while the guests whispered among themselves, some asking questions, and others explaining the nature and present significance of the news they had just heard, Lancelot took Barbara's hand, and, leading her apart to a window, said to her,

"Barbara, you know now you are absolutely free. I must leave you to-morrow night. Must I take with me the feeling that your presence here is a thing which accident might terminate in a day; or may I leave behind me—my wife?"

Barbara was silent; partly pre-occupied. She was hearing her hateful story buzzed about all over the room; her cheek was burning with the thought of the glances that were turned, however innocently, towards her; even the man with the machine seemed to gaze upon her, as something strange, preternatural, monstrous! She tried to speak to Lancelot, and ask him to let her go away a little while, but the hysterical feeling in her throat made her afraid to open her lips. Was there behind these matters yet another trouble—that of fresh pain in connection with the confirmation of the news of her husband's death? Mr. Wolcombe seemed to think so, for he advanced to her, saying, as he took her cold, passive hand, and placed it in Lancelot's,

"Come, come, Miss Giffard, be thankful. He was your husband, certainly, but I really don't see that you are called upon to show even a semblance of respect to so poor a creature. I am sure," he continued, as they all began to move slowly down the long room, towards the dining-table, "no one here, and least of all, you, need be sorry to be able to say—as I do with all my heart—there's an end of Abel Drake."

They moved on in a brilliant stream, crossed and coloured by the crimson sunlight, and they were just seating themselves at the table, when a great crash at the far end of the room made every one start, and look towards the alcove, while a hollow ring vibrated among the silver and glass, from end to end of the table. Barbara shuddered, and rose, feeling as though the thunderstorm she had anticipated all day had burst at last.

"Why, why it's the machine!" cried Mr. Wolcombe, starting forwards.

The Inventor had left the alcove, and met him half way. But Mr. Wolcombe saw not what was in his face, and merely said to him,

"Why, what on earth could you be doing to upset that?" And then he added, as he passed the Inventor, to see the extent of the mischief, "What an unlucky fool it is!"

But if Mr. Wolcombe saw nothing in that advancing form and face that could interest or stay him while thinking of the injury done to the machine, it was not so with Barbara. She stood with starting eye-balls, and hands that were for a moment clenched, and that then sought instinctively for Lancelot's supporting arm, who, like her,

glared on the menacing movements of the stranger. The voice of doom seemed, indeed, to burst upon her ear at last, as these words were heard by all in the room, in a terribly low, deep voice :

“ Take your hands off that woman ! Take your diamonds from her neck ! You hear me ? ” The words seemed hissed from between the closed teeth.

“ What do you mean, fellow ? ” cried Lancelot.

“ To claim my own ! ”

“ Your own ? ” echoed Lancelot.

“ Yes, my wife ! ”

Barbara, as he grew near, gave one long searching gaze into the dark face, with its glittering blue eyes and distended nose ; then, as she heard the word “ Barbara ! ” she turned shudderingly away. She knew her husband.

Loud murmurs now rose among the guests, and there were cries of—“ His wife ! ” “ Oh, impossible ! ” “ Mad-man ! ” “ Turn the fellow out ! ” But Lancelot, unwilling even at the last to believe, said to him, faintly, “ Wife ? You are—— ”

“ Abel Drake ! Yes, I am.” Then turning from him to the guests, he said, “ Oh, kind ladies and gentlemen, pardon me, I pray you pardon me, that I do not go so quietly as you could wish into eternal oblivion ! I am but a poor man, a ‘ shabby ’ man. What business have I in these magnificent saloons ? How is it that I can disturb, even for a moment, the delicious flow of your luxurious life ? I will tell you yet again in plain language, I want that which belongs to me—which you are conspiring to rob me of ! ”

“ Ha ! ” exclaimed Lancelot, and a red spot burned on

his forehead, which some had seen in the battle-field a moment before receiving their death wound at his hand.

The Inventor turned upon him with a laugh, loud, almost joyous in its bitterness, and with all his pent-up hate glittering in his dangerous eyes.

"You threaten me?" he said, with a strange calmness, that lasted, however, but for a moment. Again he looked at Lancelot, and laughed as he said, "Beware! I stand upon my rights. Before you all, I claim this woman as my wife! Perhaps I ought to thank you for making a fine lady of her, and teaching her to scorn her husband. But I tell you again, she is not one of you—she is, and must remain, a woman of the people! She is my wife!"

These last words were spoken with dignity, and with something of pathos, as though already the fit of wild, almost brutal, violence were exhausted, and the sense of past and future were reviving. He stopped, voiceless, and stood with chest heaving, and his hand so tightly clenched on the table that the nails dented themselves in his hard palm.

Barbara had been standing pale and stunned at Lancelot's side. But as the Inventor ceased speaking she raised her head, lifted her cold, brilliant eyes to his face, and walked slowly towards him amidst a silence among the guests so intense as to be painful.

"Abel Drake!" Her voice sent a shudder through every one present; it was so cold, clear, and thin, like the sound of rushing water under ice. "It is not to you that I owe any explanation, but to him to whom I have been the instrument of bringing misery and disgrace. Will you, then, be silent while I speak?"

Abel gazed on her, his lips moving as if he wished to say, "Yes," but could not. Barbara turned towards Lancelot, and began to speak to him, but her large dark eyes were fixed on vacancy, as she stood there in the flush of the sunset, with one hand pressed against her heart, and the other hanging down, white and rigid, in the folds of her violet dress.

Lancelot dared not trust himself to look either at her or at Abel, but fixed his glance on the carpet, keeping very near to her while she spoke.

"Captain Wolcombe, if you would know what I must feel at this outrage upon me in your mother's house, let me tell you how this tie began. When I was a little girl, working at the mill, I had a strange passion, that grew upon me every day, to rise—to be different to the poor hardworking people I lived among—to do something or other, I knew not what, to make myself and my mother independent. I became discontented and unhappy; no one understood or pitied me. I do not know that I deserved pity, for there was then much of selfishness in my desires. But it was then I met *him*. I found his brain teeming with visions far more brilliant, far more wild, than my own, but mixed with a passionate yearning to benefit in some way his fellows by his future career. And there sprang up a childish sympathy between us. He did me good. I hoped was also, to some extent, favourably influencing him in return. We were thrown much together. We often learned out of the same books at the school, and for a long time worked side by side at the loom. At last it seemed as if we grew necessary to each other—could not live without each other—Our differ-

ing natures seemed to harmonise into one nature. I will not conceal it from you—we loved. And then, young as we were, he proposed marriage. I ought not to have listened; but he had no parents living, and I could not but greatly pity him. He was perpetually being drawn away by temptations, and I fancied that a home might save him. He lived but in dreams of the future, and I thought that I might help him to realise some of the m Nor can I deny that I felt a secret pride in the sense of some high destiny that I believed he would one day achieve. We married: he was then but seventeen; it was my fifteenth birthday. He took me home. Home! O God! what he made that home in a few short months I dare not even try to recal. Not but we were happy for a time. But he grew indolent. Distress came—debts grew—humiliations—shame. We moved in an atmosphere of broken promises, and made to people whose very kindness in the midst of their own poverty made me feel more keenly the disgrace we were incurring. He heard not; he dreamed on. At last a strike broke out: he became the leader. Week by week our little means melted away, our furniture, our clothes.

“One night I reproached him. I spoke out of my misery and anger, and my words stung him to madness. Spare me—spare me—we separated that night for ever!”

Barbara ceased for a moment, moistened her burning lips with the water which the widow handed to her, then went on in a deeper voice, that trembled with irrepressible emotion:

“I must not dwell on the next few fearful months—the discovery that I was to become a mother—”

“A mother!” echoed a smothered voice near her, but

she heeded it not, but went on, growing at each word more passionate and vehement in her tone. As the widow looked on her, she forgot her dress, her changed accent, and every thing of the present hour, and seemed to see and hear only the mill-girl—as she bent over her child, defying death, that memorable spring morning.

“It came to me like a new life, my little baby; and for nearly two years I kept it; but—” and here she again turned to Abel, whose eyes, form, soul, hung spell-bound upon her countenance and words,—“but the curse his indolence had brought upon us clung to me; and I lost it at last, for want of means to give it timely aid and nourishment.”

All eyes were directed to Abel in scorn, or anger, but he did not notice them. His face dropped upon his hands. Barbara’s voice, now half choked with sobs, went on:

“When I had recovered from the kind of stupor I had fallen into after this last blow, it was to find that I owed life itself to her who is now no more, who raised me, comforted me, filled me once more with peace and hope, took me home—here—and now,” she continued, her voice broken by wild hysteric laughter, “here he comes, and thus! O, yes, it is my husband who stands upon his rights! It is a man who defends his outraged dignity. O noble, noble man! Look upon him! See who it is that claims me. Equal in all relations. Man! Husband! Father!”

Hemmed in by a circle of tearful and sympathising eyes, her own full of scorn and indignation, she had stretched out her arm, pointing to him, where he stood, his head upon his breast, wringing his hands like a woman in

agony, while the words oozed from his white lips,—“ The child—I didn’t know—O, God, did she say I was its murderer ?”

There was a terrible pause. It was broken strangely. A firm, light footstep, and the rustling of a dress, were heard amid the oppressive silence. Every one looked to see who it was that advanced towards the stricken man, thus abandoned by all the world. It was the widow. Touching the Inventor’s arm, she said, simply,—

“ Abel Drake, come home with me.”

“ Good God ! Mrs. Giffard,” remonstrated Mr. Wolcombe, in whom the recollections of the strike had brought back all the old dislike to its leader ; “ look at your daughter ! You would not surely leave her at such a time as this.”

“ Sir,” she answered, “ my daughter has a home and friends. She did nothing to bring this trouble about. God will give her strength to bear it. But this man feels as though he had neither God nor friend on his side, not a corner in the world to lay his head. God help me, I will not desert him. Abel, lad, let us go away home.”

Lancelot heard, and somehow his look again met the Inventor’s, but with a new expression on it.

As to Abel, he looked at the widow with a vacant glance, and repeated, as though he did not quite understand her word—“ Home !” Then a more deadly pallor—a whiteness truly appalling, overspread his face. His knees trembled and bent under him. A moment more—and he was lying a senseless heap at the feet of Barbara.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ONE FRIEND LEFT.

THE first dawning of returning sense showed to Abel's wondering eyes the widow kneeling by him on the floor, gazing earnestly into his face ; and life, at the sight of her, seemed to leap back into its throne, and remind him of all that he had passed through, and of all that he must expect there would be yet to come.

He looked into her eyes, and he met her soft, grey, tearful glance, and it answered him with so motherly and sympathising a look that he could not venture to dwell on her face any longer. Turning in another direction, he saw Captain Wolcombe standing at some distance, who seemed to be letting all things pass before him as matters in which he had no longer any personal concern, and which yet painfully absorbed him. Abel rose at once, and was about to leave the place for ever, when he found his head becoming giddy, and he was obliged to pause and take the widow's arm before he could venture to move on. The fresh air in the hall revived him, and he seized his stick, which he had left there, and said, with a kind of fluttering gaiety, " I can manage, widow, now, I think, if you'll go back to them."

" Indeed I shall not. I shall go home with you."

" Home!" He echoed the word, then relapsed into

deep silence ; and rather than speak again, took her arm, and tottered forth into the air.

For a long time they did not talk to each other. They passed through the plantation, the widow feeling the hand that lay in her arm trembling and fluctuating in its weight or lightness, its rest or sudden movement, with all the emotion that was otherwise silent, and that was evidently striving to keep itself unrecognised by the widow.

When they got outside the iron gates he drew a deep breath, but he would not stop till they had reached a turn of the road which shut out Coppeshall from their view ; then he sat down, his face alarmingly pale, but smiling as he saw the widow's growing uneasiness.

"'Tis nothing—nothing !" he said ; but it was evident, as he half seated himself, half dropped on the bank, that a deadly conflict was going on within, quite beyond his power to subdue, and that he increased its intensity by his endeavours to shut out all external observation.

But after a while the colour came back to his cheek, and his breath grew free, and then he laughed, as he said to the widow,—“ And so you did not know me all the while ?”

“ No,” said the widow ; “ but I wonder I did not, for I don't get so readily interested in mere strangers. But you are greatly altered. It was not the hair alone ; but you are taller, and so much stouter, and your voice is so much deeper and fuller, and, in fact, you are altogether so different. Why, you seemed a mere soft-faced boy when you left us ; you return now looking a middle-aged man.”

“ Ay, widow, trouble don't improve one's beauty.”

“ But I hope you are quite recovered now ?”

"O yes," said the Inventor. "It was the heated room, and—I suppose the voyage, for I was very sick the whole way, and then so many days in the burning sun; and the ——" His voice, which had been gradually growing more indistinct, now ceased altogether, as though he had forgotten not only what he was about to say, but even that he was speaking to any listener.

They resumed their walk in silence. The widow, who watched his every manifestation, was rather pleased to see that he again began to notice things as they went along—a flower in the hedge, a bird singing up in the sky; and once he even climbed the high bank apparently to look at the prospect that the top commanded, though she noticed he looked in the wrong direction, and seemed to be seeking Coppeshall, but he only laughed as he descended, and said,—“There you see, widow, I am all right again, now;” but as she was trying to reciprocate his smile, he suddenly caught something in her face that caused him to stop, and with a look and gesture of such anguish as the widow had never before had experience of even in her long life of suffering, cried out,—“O God! O my God!” and then threw himself on the bank, and covered his face with his hands, and resigned himself to the emotions that he no longer hoped to conceal. The widow could do nothing but sit down by his side and weep with him.

When he again looked up his aspect had undergone a great change. It was composed and sad, but also stern and gloomy. The lips were compressed, the nostrils expanding, and the lines of the brow which pure thought had first traced, suffering seemed now to harden and make more prominent.

"Come," said he, "we must have done with all this. I am glad it is you—and you alone—who have witnessed my weakness. Bury the remembrance of it in your own breast; if not for my sake, then for hers and your own."

They walked on. Presently he said to her,—“It is not well, I think, for us to enter into long explanations. I shall leave you to-day. Ask me anything you please, and I will answer you. Let us both feel we have not that still to go through.”

But the widow was thinking much more of him than of any particular explanations that might simply gratify her curiosity; and she would probably have remained in ignorance upon matters that she really did feel an interest in, if Abel had waited for the questions he had invited. So presently he went on:—

“This story of my death, no doubt, puzzles you. The accident did happen, but I was picked up by a vessel belonging to the United States, that set me down in one of its ports, and I did not choose to return to garrison, and so held my peace, and went about my business—the preparation of this model, which I had long been planning.”

“But are you not in danger, then?”

“What! as a deserter?”

“Yes.”

“O, no. I had been long promised my discharge, and had even deposited the money; and I believe the documents were lying in the commanding officer’s hands. But I had made myself of use as an armourer, in repairing fire-arms, and when the rumour of some impending quarrel betwixt England and the United States began to reach Canada, all questions of discharge were kept in abeyance.”

"I am glad of that. I feared it might be a sense of danger that had brought you here in disguise."

Abel turned, and looked in the widow's face, as she said this, with a passing shade of reproach on his own.

"Did you, indeed, understand me no better? What if Barbara had been married?" He said no more, and his voice quivered as he uttered these last words in so low a tone that the widow rather guessed their import than actually understood what he said. She saw all then: his forethought—his self-denial—and his inability to keep the resolve he had made; for which inability, however, the widow was devoutly glad. Dark as the future was, such a marriage, with all its possible consequences, was even yet more horrible to think of.

"There is much more that I intended to have told you, but forgive me if I am silent henceforth on such subjects. And now, widow, for one grateful word."

If anything could make the widow talk rather than wait to be talked to, it was when people began to thank her. Nothing made her more uncomfortable. It was, in fact, a real pain to her, perhaps because it revived many a passage of her career which she had struggled, and for the most part successfully, to bury in oblivion. She began at once to speak, at the mere alarm of hearing Abel's grateful words.

"But, Abel—" it was the first time she had called him by his Christian name. "But, Abel, ought you not to tell Barbara whatever may be necessary to a right understanding of your absence and your proceedings?"

"Yes—perhaps," said Abel, slowly, after a long and gloomy pause. "But to what end, except to give her un-

necessary alarm as to my motives, and to subject myself to a torture that I have not fortitude enough willingly to incur. And yet it was to tell her this story that I have worked, and endured, and hoped, and schemed, and borne a thousand humiliations ; but," he added, bitterly, " I did not, I confess, think of making such a narrative to the affianced bride of another man. No, no, it is better as it is. I shall go away, and hope she will find it possible to forgive me the fact—that I do live."

Again they both relapsed into silence. But when they reached the cottage, and he parted from her at the foot of the stairs, to go up to bed, he said hurriedly to her—

" You will think me a wretched liar if I confess there is not one word of truth in all I have said of my objecting to another interview. I want it, and I must have it ; I will have it !" Abel cried, with fierce hoarseness ; " but I wanted to persuade myself I was doing my duty to her ; that I was unselfish ; but they were both lies. In my secret soul there has never been a doubt but I should say to her what I have said to you now :—I will be heard."

The widow's hand trembled in his fierce grip, as she listened, and she began to dread that she had made matters worse by her own advice ; but he seemed to understand her, and said suddenly,—

" God bless you, widow ; don't let me hurt you in any way. I always loved you ; and when I returned now, I made up my mind to win you over first, if I could, to my cause ; and—come—may I not use the old word—for your own sake and mine only—God knows no other
—"

The widow was growing agitated, and scarcely knew

what he meant, so she repeated, half unconsciously—
“The old word, Abel?”

“Mother!” said the deep, tremulous voice.

“O Abel, Abel, Abel!” was all the poor widow could say, as she clasped him in her arms; and they then sat down together at the foot of the darkened stairs, and forgot everything but their mutual affection. She was the first this time to speak, when he raised his head from her shoulder.

“Well, Abel, I shall go to her, and try what can be done.”

“God bless you, mother! I won’t take up much of her time. Good night.”

CHAPTER XIX.

GOING TO GLORY · OR, A SCENE FROM LIFE'S STAGE.

THE hint concerning Job given by Barbara to Captain Wolcombe, in accordance with her promise to her mother, was duly passed on by that gentleman to the proper quarter ; and, in consequence, a noticeable dialogue took place opposite Coppeshall.

We must premise that Captain Wolcombe, like other gentlemen in the army, found his personal consequence flattered, and his home recollections gratified, by having as many soldiers as possible about him in his regiment, collected from his own neighbourhood. His individual popularity, and the wants of his regiment, had just now served to urge on with special vigour the business of recruiting in and around Barden Brow ; and his father, who rather objected as a mill-owner, was still prepared to submit as a magistrate, to any little inconvenience the process might bring on him. Besides, none knew better than Mr. Wolcombe the value of the social art of seeming to yield to, in order to manage, inconvenient or dangerous encroachments in the name of the public good. Captain Wolcombe would sometimes wonder to his father how it was that none but the worst blackguards of the place would enlist ; and Mr. Wolcombe, with raised eyebrows, would

say. "Well, it *is* odd!" and inly congratulate himself, as he reviewed the various little arrangements he had made to produce this very result.

But hark! What a clamour there is in the road to Coppeshall! And what clouds of dust appear to be rising over it, some distance down there! Yes, those are the shouts of people, and the roll of drums, and the squeaking of fifes. The hubbub comes this way, nearer and nearer, dustier and more dusty, noisier and yet more noisy. At last they appear, ragged boys and girls, drunken men and drabby women, one of them drunk too; smart soldiers, with flying ribbons; recruits, illustrative of the native material that is shortly to be worked up into such handsome results; drummers and fifers rolling with hands and squeaking with breath; while, conspicuous among the whole, appears the leader of the soldiery, the great man himself who opens negotiations between Queen Victoria and her subjects, touching matters of high concern to both, the recruiting sergeant, radiant and swelling with success and beer. And with him, walking in loving brotherhood, arm linked in arm, marches Job, who seems to have found in drink what other men lose there, sense, and who appears to grow musical as he grows martial: equally happy in both.

JOB (*singing*): "'The girl aw left behind ma!' Halt! Stand at ease! Eigh, Sergeant, that's th' attitude for me! Stand at ease! Donna it sound own brother to nice mild ale?"

REC. SERGEANT: "H'm! Yes. Only you see one gets so much ease and ale in the army."

JOB (*knocking off the hat of a recruit*): "If th'art á ta-lor

thae needna be allus teachin' thae hams how to go up an' down, as though balancin' and settlin' to th' shopboard. Look at me !"

RECRUIT (*indignantly*) : "Come, Job, I say ! No more o' that."

REC. SERGEANT : "Grumbling ! Mutiny !" (*He puts his own hat on Job's head.*) "Respect authority."

JOB (*vainly striving to keep the hat in equilibrium*) : "Sergeant, is authority allus so shaky i' th' top ?"

REC. SERGEANT : "H'm ! They likes it so at the Horse Guards."

JOB (*in a pet, letting the hat take its own way—to the ground, then picking it up, and looking at it inquisitively inside and out*) : "Sergeant, whatten's th' ribbins for ?"

REC. SERGEANT : "Ribbons !—pooh. That's the flag of glory, crimsoned with gore, and ready to fly under the least bit of breeze to the farthest ends of the earth."

JOB : "But this ain't a flag ; it's ribbins !"

REC. SERGEANT : "All the same, only cut to pieces to signify the fate of the enemy. Fine thing, boys, to be a soldier, and have personal relations with the Queen."

JOB : "Queen ?"

REC. SERGEANT (*producing a shilling*) : "Look at that !"

JOB : "Whatten a beauty !"

REC. SERGEANT : "Queen herself gave me that !"

JOB : "E—law !"

REC. SERGEANT : "Did, indeed ; and said I was to tell her frankly if I wanted any more."

JOB : "Now, did she though ? (*Then, looking wistfully at the shilling.*) How aw should like—— !"

REC. SERGEANT: "H'm! Would you? I don't want to part with it, but you're a good fellow, so, there!"

JOB (*putting his hands behind his back*): "Eigh! but, Sergeant, aw've had a deal o' things on yo already."

REC. SERGEANT: "Pooh, you're quite welcome. Put it up. Put it up."

JOB: "Eigh!—but, Sergeant—yo see aw bin reckon-ing up all those pots o' beer, and pipes o' bacca; an' then yo hae ta'en such a deal o' trouble wi' me, showing th' exercises and such like; an' aw say, Sergeant!—What capital tales yo tells. How aw should like to go wi' yo."

REC. SERGEANT: "You shall. O, I mean it."

JOB: "Eigh! but yo see, though aw likes yo, aw partickler hates th' army!"

REC. SERGEANT: "What! O, nonsense. Who's for another pint?"

JOB: "Bless yo, yo've no idea whatten a mortal dislike aw hae to th' army."

REC. SERGEANT: "Hark ye, Job, you don't mean that you've been humbugging me?"

JOB: "Bless yo; aw ain't 'cute enow for that."
(*General roar from the crowd, who have been listening open-mouthed. Sergeant joins in.*) "Na, na; ony aw thowt like aw'd hear what yo'd gotten to say."

REC. SERGEANT (*to the crowd, who seem uncommonly tickled*): "Very good! I own it, gentlemen, he has done the old soldier. Play up. March!"

JOB: "Stop, Sergeant!" (*He goes close to him and*

REC. SERGEANT: "A deserter, you say? How do you know that?"

JOB: "Coomed here i' disguise! Blacked his hair! Lor bless you, it's as fair naterally as a woman's!"

REC. SERGEANT: "Hem! That looks suspicious certainly. You are sure he 'listed?"

JOB: "Seed him do it mysel', seven or eight years ago."

REC. SERGEANT: "And what do you say is his name?"

JOB (*looking round*): "Abel Drake,—but mum!"

REC. SERGEANT: "And you are quite sure it's the same man?"

JOB: "Eigh, lad, that I am."

REC. SERGEANT (*meditatively*): "Ah, well, I shan't meddle unless I get orders."

JOB: "Why, Sergeant, aw did think yo'd a bin glad to do the Captin a good turn."

REC. SERGEANT: "The Captain?"

JOB: "Yes; there's a lady thou knaws. Aw shan't say ony more. But Captin 'd be partic'ler glad if yon mon were quickly gotten out of th' way."

REC. SERGEANT (*briskly*): "Well, Job, that alters the case. You are quite clear he must be a deserter?"

Job nodded so knowingly in reply, that the Sergeant took out a note-book, wrote something in it, then tore out the leaf, and gave it to one of the soldiers, whispering as he did so:

"Be prompt and careful. I don't mean to lose sight of Master Job. Play up! March!"

As the tumult of the mob, hushed for a moment by the consciousness that something interesting was going on, had

broke out once more, and the march was resumed further along the road toward a distant hamlet, the Sergeant's face seemed to be mirthful with some unexpected confluence or opposition of thoughts. Perhaps he was trying to reconcile the secret hint he had received from Captain Wolcombe about Job with Job's unconscious but Christianlike attitude towards the Captain in return. Just then the latter came through the iron gates, looking gloomy and absorbed, and would have passed on but for Job's voice and gesture, who said, as he made a military salute:

"Mornin', Captin!"

CAPT. LANCELOT WOLCOMBE: "What! Entered the army, Job?"

JOB: "Na, na; that's ony whatten they wants."
(*Then with a confidential air.*) "Captin!"

CAPT. LANCELOT WOLCOMBE: "Well?"

JOB: "Aw done it."

CAPT. LANCELOT WOLCOMBE: "Done it? Done what?"

JOB: "Mad' yo all coomfortable for life!"

CAPT. LANCELOT WOLCOMBE: "Really, I am very much obliged to you. But I would advise you to quicken your explanations, or——"

JOB (*whispering*): "Abel Drake, Captin! Deserter."
(*Pointing to the Sergeant.*) "He knows. We're shut on him now. Be happy, Captin, you and Miss Barbara. God bless yo both, be happy. Yo wunna forget poor Job."

CAPT. LANCELOT WOLCOMBE: "Sergeant, is this true?"

REC. SERGEANT: "Yes, your honour. We'll soon have him. I've sent orders."

CAPT. LANCELOT WOLCOMBE (*looking troubled*): "Why this haste? But, no, Sergeant, I commend you: quite

right. Now, Job, a word. Don't trifle with me. I'm not in the mood. This man—this Abel Drake—has lost forty-five pounds in bank notes while in Mrs. Giffard's cottage: stolen, he says, from a secret pocket in his coat. Will you see if by any chance the money has got into *your* pockets?"

REC. SERGEANT (*eagerly*): "Shall I search him, your honour?"

JOB (*falling on his knees*): "Mercy! Mercy! Captin! Aw didn't mean to steal it, aw didn't, indeed!" (*Taking the envelope from his pocket.*) "Here it is. All on it." (*The Captain takes it.*) "Aw nobbut wanted to—to——"

CAPT. LANCELOT WOLCOMBE: "Gratify your curiosity? An expensive taste, Job. Sergeant!" (*drawing him aside*) "I don't wish to see this man prosecuted—family reasons—but couldn't you—hem——?"

REC. SERGEANT (*considerably elated*): "All right, your honour! Leave him to me."

CAPT. LANCELOT WOLCOMBE: "I shall be returning presently." (*He goes away.*)

REC. SERGEANT (*musings*): "Something's wrong with th' Captain. He looks as though he didn't see, and listens as though he couldn't hear. Well, that's his affair, not mine!" (*He goes to Job, and puts his hand through Job's arm.*) "Bad business, old fellow; I am ordered to arrest you."

JOB: "A—a—arrest me! But yo won't?"

REC. SERGEANT: "Can't help it! Had you been 'listed, I might have done something. Too late now, I fear."

JOB. "O, much too late? Think o' summat else!"

REC. SERGEANT (*retreating a little, and surveying all Job's bodily points with a critical eye*): "Well, if I were

before a whole bench of magistrates, I'd say it's a burning shame, gentlemen, to make a felon of a man like this! with such a figure, such limbs, such mettle!"

JOB: "Eigh!—Sergeant, th' owd tale!"

REC. SERGEANT: "Well, you know your own tastes best. I shouldn't like to be huddled up in a felon's dock with all the scum of the earth. I shouldn't like to have everybody poking their eye-glasses at me; and to hear this delicate lady say, "Dear me, is that the murderer? what a horrid-looking wretch!" or to hear another reply, 'O no, my dear; that's only a common thief!'"

JOB: "Aw say, Sergeant!—"

REC. SERGEANT: "And then the jury convicting me, and the judge sentencing me—HARD LABOUR! Hard labour, Job, for Lord knows how long; with, probably a whipping or two between whiles, just to keep me from stagnating or committing suicide, which is really the only luxury in those model prisons."

JOB: "Now, Sergeant, that'll do. Aw donna want not no more on it."

REC. SERGEANT: "Then the prison dress, and all this beautiful hair shaved off!" (*He holds up Job's matted locks with the point of his stick.*) "And the baths, Job; O, they are so disgustingly clean in those prisons now; and the prison fare—gruel—a teaspoonful of oatmeal to a gallon of water! O, it's too bad! 'Taint Christian, is it? But, worst of all (hang it, I do call *that* tyranny!), if a poor fellow only thinks of speaking to another chap, or forgets himself and blows his nose—my eyes! just arn't they down upon him!"

JOB (*coaxingly*): "Coom, now, Sergeant, there's a good

tellow! Aw'll do yo a good turn sometime if yo'll ony tell me what aw mun do now."

REC. SERGEANT: "Can't say, I'm sure. I'm not going to be again suspected of treachery to a friend."

JOB: "O, Sergeant, mun aw choose between——"

REC. SERGEANT: "Gruel or glory? What do *you* think?"

JOB: "But it warn't a joke; aw do hate th' army. Aw canna 'list, at no price."

REC. SERGEANT: "Very well: speak out like a man; say you won't. I respect your determination. Here! Captain!" (*Appearing to call and beckon to some one in the distance.*)

JOB: "Na, na; be quiet, Sergeant! (*He comes up close to the Sergeant, and after an uneasy look around, whispers falteringly*), "Whatten do they mean by hard labour?"

REC. SERGEANT (*sympathetically*): "I never could exactly learn. It's my private opinion it's something so bad they darn't let the country know."

JOB: "W—w—where's the shillin'?"

REC. SERGEANT (*showing it: Job looks with a shudder*) "Don't go into fits, man. I can put it back again."

JOB (*opening a pocket with his hands, and turning resignedly away*): "Donna let me see it. Drop it in. Ugh! An', Sergeant, now th' job is done, yo wonna say aw wur obliged——"

REC. SERGEANT: "Obliged! You choose glory, don't you?"

JOB: "O' course aw do! Think I'll get promoted, Sergeant?"

REC. SERGEANT: "Now, do you suppose I'd have taken

all this trouble to catch a paltry private? I saw at once you were cut out for——. Well, well, I won't say what, just yet! But, hark ye, Job, the founder of the Moham-medan empire, the Great Mogul himself, was only a water-carrier, like you, to begin with."

JOB. "Warn't he, though, really?"

REC. SERGEANT: "Mind that, and remember that I was the first to tell you——"

JOB: "O, aw will! But, Sergeant, aw aint a goin' to be mad' a Turk on."

REC. SERGEANT: "By Jove, but you must, though. The women, Job—the women do so love soldiers! O, you can't move without your harem. Prospects arn't so bad, after all, eh? (*nudging him.*) Won't we sing when we go away, (*sings*)

" 'The girl I left behind me!'"

JOB: "Eigh, Sergeant!—or the lasses, when we march in, (*sings*)

" 'See the conquering hero comes!'"

REC. SERGEANT: "Bravo! bravo!" (*Ties the ribbons on Job's hat.*)

JOB (*sighing*): "O dear! Aw mun mak' th' best on it, now."

CAPT. LANCELOT WOLCOMBE (*returns, and walks about, muttering to himself. Then aside,*) "So, Master Job, you're caught, and in the very trap you laid so ingeniously for another. The scoundrel! He has committed us all. Yet how to undo his work without fresh exposure? Will Barbara never come? Has she mistaken the time I fixed?"

JOB (*going up to the Captain*): "Yes, Captin, aw'm

goin' to glory!" (*Wipes a tear out of his eye.*) "An' glory, captin's, very nice. An aw know yo'll all be cooming out to meet me when aw cooms back; an' aw can hear th' bells a ringin'; an' aw donna mind bein' killed, if ony they'll do it quick." (*Another tear gets in the way.*)

CAPT. LANCELOT WOLCOMBE (*grimly smiling, gives Job money*): "Keep this to yourself. You'll be in my regiment, you know. Be on your guard (*pointing to the Sergeant*); offend him, and you won't be able to call your soul your own."

JOB: "O, aw know! That's what kept me safe until — O, Captin (*blubbling*) aw'm telled they flogs yo for nowt, and shoots yo if yo donna like that."

CAPT. LANCELOT WOLCOMBE: "Farewell!" (*He walks away in the same direction as before.*)

JOB (*stands looking after him, tearfully, and raising his voice*): "Good bye, Captin!" (*Suddenly the Sergeant strikes him with his cane a swingeing blow across the shoulders.*)

JOB: "O—h!"

REC. SERGEANT: "Attention!" (*Job falls into an attitude, and as the Sergeant continues to give the word of command, he strikes him every time he speaks, with an unpleasantly playful air.*)—(*Strikes.*)—"Right about face!" (*Strikes.*)—"Full front!" (*Strikes.*)—"Eyes right!" (*Strikes.*)—"Eyes left!" (*Strikes.*)—"Left foot forward!" (*Strikes.*)—"Right foot forward!" (*He pauses.*) "Understand all that? Or shall we run through it again?"

JOB (*wincing with the smart*): "Na, na; aw understand."

REC. SERGEANT: "What are you fidgiting about? Fleas?" (*Strikes.*)—"Attention! It's a little more than a mile to head-quarters at the village. I'll give you (*looking at his watch*) ten minutes to get there. That'll be just one o'clock, when they always put the dinner on the table. Guard me, without winking, the beans and bacon till I come."

JOB (*trembling*): "T—ten minutes, Sergeant! Aw couldn't do it, if you'd gie me all the warld."

REC. SERGEANT: "Think not? Come, then, we'll go together." (*Strikes.*)—"March!" (*Job begins to run.*) "HALT!" (*Strikes.*)—"Left foot backward!" (*Strikes.*)—"Right foot backward! Easy this time, Master Job, if you please." (*Strikes.*)—"March; Halt!" "March; HALT!" (*Strikes.*)—"March; HALT!"

JOB (*in an agony of pain and rage*): "Aw can do it! Aw will! If yo'll ony let me go!"

REC. SERGEANT. "And let no one touch the beans and bacon?"

JOB: "Na, na; not e'en mysel'!"

REC. SERGEANT (*giving with fervour a parting salute*): "Off, then!" (*Job flies along the road, the meteor flag of glory streaming behind him from his hat.*) "Ha! ha! ha! You'll play with an old soldier again, will you?"

goin' to glory!" (*Wipes a tear out of his eye.*) "An' glory, captin's, very nice. An aw know yo'll all be cooming out to meet me when aw cooms back; an' aw can hear th' bells a ringin'; an' aw donna mind bein' killed, if ony they'll do it quick." (*Another tear gets in the way.*)

CAPT. LANCELOT WOLCOMBE (*grimly smiling, gives Job money*): "Keep this to yourself. You'll be in my regiment, you know. Be on your guard (*pointing to the Sergeant*); offend him, and you won't be able to call your soul your own."

JOB: "O, aw know! That's what kept me safe until — O, Captin (*blubbing*) aw'm telled they flogs yo for nowt, and shoots yo if yo donna like that."

CAPT. LANCELOT WOLCOMBE: "Farewell!" (*He walks away in the same direction as before.*)

JOB (*stands looking after him, tearfully, and raising his voice*): "Good bye, Captin!" (*Suddenly the Sergeant strikes him with his cane a swingeing blow across the shoulders.*)

JOB: "O—h!"

REC. SERGEANT: "Attention!" (*Job falls into an attitude, and as the Sergeant continues to give the word of command, he strikes him every time he speaks, with an unpleasantly playful air.*—(*Strikes.*)—"Right about face!" (*Strikes.*)—"Full front!" (*Strikes.*)—"Eyes right!" (*Strikes.*)—"Eyes left!" (*Strikes.*)—"Left foot forward!" (*Strikes.*)—"Right foot forward!" (*He pauses.*) "Understand all that? Or shall we run through it again?"

JOB (*wincing with the smart*): "Na, na; aw understand."

REC. SERGEANT: "What are you fidgeting about? Fleas?" (*Strikes.*)—"Attention! It's a little more than a mile to head-quarters at the village. I'll give you (*looking at his watch*) ten minutes to get there. That'll be just one o'clock, when they always put the dinner on the table. Guard me, without winking, the beans and bacon till I come."

JOB (*trembling*): "T—ten minutes, Sergeant! Aw couldn't do it, if you'd gie me all the warld."

REC. SERGEANT: "Think not? Come, then, we'll go together." (*Strikes.*)—"March!" (*Job begins to run.*) "HALT!" (*Strikes.*)—"Left foot backward!" (*Strikes.*)—"Right foot backward! Easy this time, Master Job, if you please." (*Strikes.*)—"March; Halt!" "March; HALT!" (*Strikes.*)—"March; HALT!"

JOB (*in an agony of pain and rage*): "Aw can do it! Aw will! If yo'll ony let me go!"

REC. SERGEANT. "And let no one touch the beans and bacon?"

JOB: "Na, na; not e'en mysel'!"

REC. SERGEANT (*giving with fervour a parting salute*): "Off, then!" (*Job flies along the road, the meteor flag of glory streaming behind him from his hat.*) "Ha! ha! ha! You'll play with an old soldier again, will you?"

CHAPTER XX.

NEW PATHS.

WHEN, at the close of that day of misery, Barbara at last lay down upon her bed, she pressed her burning brow to her pillow with a vague sense of much to be done and thought of, and yet with an idea of the necessity of quieting by sleep the hubbub which she found raging in her brain, now that the first great shock was over. Gradually, as she lay there, watching the curtain flapping noiselessly in and out at the open window, giving her brief and occasional glimpses of the stars in all their soft summer brilliancy, she drew into her soul something of the quiet and heavenly peace of the night; and she soon found herself looking with strange calmness at all that had befallen her. She thought now of Abel's conduct to her, and of Lancelot's; and vivid indeed appeared the contrast between the two. Lancelot so patient, faithful, and so full of deep respect; Abel so violent, selfish, brutal. His disguise—his behaviour altogether, made her feel sure he had intended to leave the village after the sale of his machine, without so much as ascertaining whether she were dead or alive; still less intending to win her back. And it was only when he had been stung with envy at the sight of her prosperity after his own disappointment, that the thought had come to him of wreaking his spite and malice

on them all, by claiming her with such savage violence. Her only hope about him now was that she might never see him more. She determined to forget as soon as possible all that had passed; or, if that might be out of her power, then, at all events, to shun whatever might tend to bring back the recollections that even now, as she again in thought looked at him, and listened to him before all those people, made her cheek burn with unnatural fire, and her heart beat with an almost stifling emotion.

Yes, she hoped he would go away again, and leave her alone to drag on the old life! The old life? Could she stay at Coppeshall? Could she any longer look on Lancelot's home as her's? She raised herself in agitation on her elbow as this thought came for the first time. And as she looked round at the dear and familiar walls, with two great tears rolling down her cheeks, she cried, half in terror, half in conviction, "Must I go, then? Go out into the cold, hard world again?" Then she remembered how she had asked herself the same thing six years ago, when she guessed Mrs. Wolcombe's fears about Lancelot. Perhaps, if she had gone then, it would have been better for her. Yes, her faith and ignorance, and hope, were better companions to take with her than her cruel knowledge, her blank future, and, worse than all, the vague fear that the sharp, new pain she felt at her heart when she thought of Lancelot, meant that she had to struggle with a yet greater and more insidious enemy, to whom she had at last given possession—that, in a word, she loved him. Poor Barbara! Her love for him seemed to be like a plant, which, while she simply tolerated it in her heart, remained with drooping leaves and closed buds, but now that it was torn

market-coach, which would take her to the town. Her things were to follow next day. It was just about two hours from the time fixed for her departure when she sat at the school-room window with Poppy's head in her lap. The little thing was crying bitterly, and could not be stopped. Explanations were useless, and Barbara did not venture to prolong the attempt to make them : it seemed easier, and just as useful, to give way and cry with Poppy. Still, from time to time, she stroked the child's curls, and said a few common-place words of comfort, and turned her face away as she listened, with an aching heart, to the hollowness of her own words.

"Well, I have come to say good bye !" exclaimed a voice, with a strange mixture of gaiety and huskiness.

Lifting her head, Barbara saw Lancelot, with his cloak on his arm. She rose hurriedly ; but Poppy, holding her dress, pushed Lancelot back, crying fretfully, "No—no : don't say good-bye to her. Don't let her go. It is cruel of her to go. Maud says so, and so does Hugh !"

Barbara tried to speak, but when she looked from the little, upturned beseeching face to Lancelot's, and met his sad, reproachful gaze—all the smile gone out from it—she could only sink down again into the chair, and weep and press the child convulsively in her arms, who immediately broke out into a fresh fit of passionate distress. But she managed at last to say, in quiet, mournful accents,—

"Barbara is not half so cruel to Poppy in going away as to herself ; but she feels it is right, and must do it, however hard it may be."

Lancelot felt this to be as much said to him, in answer to his grave look of reproach, as to Poppy's tears. Hold-

ing out his hand, while the pale smile came back to that still paler face, he said,—

“Well, I can’t ask you to stay, Barbara. Only, for their sakes, I beg you to heed well what you do. Remember, I shall certainly not come home for years, and that it would be a great comfort to me to know that you were under my father’s protection.” He paused, and then said, with a changed voice and some constraint of manner, “*He* would scarcely venture here again, I think.”

“No, he is going away,” replied Barbara, quickly. “My mother tells me he *was* going, secretly, after the sale of his machine, and never meant to have discovered himself.”

“Yes,” said Lancelot, in acquiescence, and with a slight touch of contempt; “I suppose he had no choice, if Job rightly understands the case.”

“What do you mean? What has Job to do with him or his affairs?” inquired Barbara, hastily.

“He tells me he has put the Sergeant on the track of a deserter: that’s all.”

Barbara’s hand shook a little as she placed it on Lancelot’s arm, and said earnestly,—

“No, no, there must be some mistake. I do not think that Abel Drake is a deserter.”

“You do not?”

“O, no, indeed!”

“That unlucky Job! What has he been about now! Well, don’t be uneasy, Barbara; I will, if possible, undo what has been done. I will tell the Sergeant he must not act except under certain knowledge. At a hint from me he will carefully shun all zeal—depend upon that.”

And Lancelot laughed, and looked to see some faint reflection of his cheerfulness in Barbara's face, but in vain, and his own emotions were rapidly re-asserting themselves, and pushing aside the kindly falsenesses of his countenance, as he went on, "Besides, Barbara, I will get my father to see to it. He would share our feelings in this matter. No harm or suspicion of harm must come to Abel Drake through any of us. And what if he be a deserter? Let him only keep his secret till he is off."

"I thank you. Yes, Lancelot, that is generous. You are still yourself." And Barbara looked at him with swimming eyes, and she did now smile a little in return at his smile.

Lancelot took her hand, and looked at her long and fixedly. But his thoughts were not of the future. He knew too well there was no future for him and her. No, his thoughts were in the past. He was remembering how, six years ago, he had listened in this very room to the blunt, honest reproof and advice of the strange, ignorant girl. He had thought then he should like to see what those great, queer eyes of hers would be when glowing with animation or gratitude, instead of, as he had then seen them, with anger and scorn. Truly it would be pleasanter to hear the rich, full voice uttering words of praise than anything else. He had not then dreamt—while he amused himself by imagining Barbara under the influence of more genial feelings—that to see her thus with him would become the one wish and longing of his life. But it had come now: a sweet, sweet drop in a very bitter cup, and he accepted both in silence and in mournful triumph.

“Good bye, Barbara !” he said to her, at last. “Don’t say, let us forget each other, for I know we shall do nothing of the kind. No : on the contrary, I say don’t forget me : be sure to remember me, as a brother ready to come to you from any part of the world, and be only too glad to be called.”

Again Lancelot smiled, but before Barbara could take the extended hand he stretched out, it was suddenly drawn back, he turned away from her, and presently she heard his slow, heavy footsteps descending the stairs. She stood with Poppy at the window, and watched him going out at the great gates on his horse, to ride to the station. He raised his head as he passed, and by the last lingering ray of daylight she could see he was gazing on her, and that his face was again lit up with the smile that should never again leave his soul, either in its pain, its tenderness, or its unselfish devotion.

Barbara saw the great iron gates close after him. Yes, once more the soldier had gone forth to battle with a great sorrow, yet with the reflection of the coming triumph already on his face : such triumph, at least, as he could now alone desire.

A few minutes later, when Barbara was leaving the schoolroom, she met her mother at the door. Barbara was a little surprised, for they had bidden each other good bye in the morning. A strange dread came over her as she looked in the widow’s face, and murmured, while closing the door, and leaning against it,—

“Is there anything the matter, mother ?”

“Barbara,” said the widow, “I have come to ask you to see *him* before he goes away. Will you do so? He

wishes it very much ; and as it is for the last time, I think you should consent."

"No, mother, I will not," answered Barbara, firmly. "What does he want to see me for? No good can come of it—only pain. Tell him, if he wishes it, I forgive him. I wish him well. But I cannot see him any more. No, no, no!" Barbara was growing agitated, but her tones expressed a resolute will.

The widow was silent, but Barbara felt that she was being looked at with a fixed and reproachful gaze.

"Surely, mother, you cannot have reflected upon this that you ask of me. Remember, that though I leave this house, in obedience to my own sense of what is right, that I am not insensible to the treatment I have experienced here. Mother," and Barbara's voice here sunk as she went on, "I have just now parted for ever with one to whom, I will honestly tell you, I consider myself more truly bound, both in the sight of God and of man, than to him who calls himself my husband. Never shall Abel Drake have it in his power to reproach me with a forgetfulness of such rights, God help me! as he can lay any kind of claim to. Let him be equally assured that he will not make me forget the higher claims on my affection, respect, and remembrance, that Lancelot's nobleness creates. I will not again see Abel Drake: I cannot again meet with Lancelot! Mother, I can say no more."

Still the widow did not speak; and Barbara grew impatient:—restless. At last she said, almost in an irritated tone,—

"Mother, why do you not speak? Surely you do not still think I ought to meet him?"

"Barbara," said the widow, at last, with a low sigh, "I think that even if you could be sure you had nothing to blame in yourself for the unhappiness of those days, your treatment of him now would scarcely be just, and certainly not kind. But I know you will not listen to me. You act, no doubt, as your judgment tells you is for the best."

"Then what more, mother, could I do?"

"*Feel*, Barbara! Show that your heart is not dead or dying. Well, well, good bye. Perhaps I shall come to Gowerend to-morrow to see you. Good bye." The widow spoke in an excitement so unusual with her, while the tears coursed down her cheek, that Barbara, though deeply wounded, tried to soothe her. But she simply kissed her daughter's pale cheek, and went away without another word. Barbara dropped into a chair, and seemed to be quieting herself, but presently gave way to a passionate burst of grief, her arms dropping on her knees, and her head bowed in a sense of utter forlornness and despair.

CHAPTER XXI.

AILSIE'S GRAVE.

THE moon was high over the hills, and a light breeze rustled along the hedge-rows, when Barbara slipped out of the great gates of Coppeshall. As quietly as she had first entered them, did she now depart; and, turning her back upon Barden Brow, begin the journey to her new home. She walked quickly on, her eyes too dim with pressing tears to see the beauty of the long sloping corn-fields, and sheep-dotted meadows, as they lay tranquil in the moonlight; her ears too full of questioning, reproachful voices from the past, to perceive the gleam of the trickling rill that ran by the road side, the chirp of the grasshopper in the hedge, or the many other subdued voices of the summer night. She stopped before a low, white stile, for it was the last place on the road from which she could catch a glimpse of home. Leaning her arms upon it, she looked across the long field which lay between the road and the village. She could almost smile as she asked herself *what* it was from which she found it so hard to drag herself away. A few clustering cottages, yellow hay-ricks, and slanting fields—what was there in these to regret leaving?

What was there? It might rather be asked—what was there not? Was there a single cottage that had not some

dark, or pathetic, or laughter-moving history attached to it? Was there a rick of hay which she had not known as blooming daisied grass; a field of ripe corn which she, or others dear to her, had not watched since when its furrows lay open-mouthed from the plough? Above all, was not the whole consecrated by the name of home, and teeming with a thousand thousand memories, which rushed in upon her with such overwhelming force, that I doubt if Ruth, gazing back through her tears upon her beautiful country, stretched her arms towards it with a greater yearning than did poor Barbara towards that little straggling nest upon the hill side? Her heart seemed bursting as she pressed it against the stile; and she felt the longing of a child to lay her head upon some kindly breast and weep out all the passion of her grief. What right had this man to come between her and her mother? It was very hard, now that this trial had come upon her, that she should turn away from her to him. Who else had she to sympathise with, and strengthen her for the task? True, there was Isaac Sleigh; and once she had a great mind to go to him. He might, as he had often done before, infuse into her troubled, fainting heart a something of his own sweet patience and religious faith, and send her away a little comforted.

But then he knew nothing about these changes, and she could not bear to talk of them. Oh, no! She could not go to Isaac Sleigh. Who, then, could she go to? A spasmodic smile passed over her face, and setting her foot on the stile, she looked along the footpath curving whitely in the moonlight to the back of the churchyard. She had come away much earlier than was necessary to meet the coach. She could reach the spot on which her mind's eye

was fixed, and be back again in plenty of time. So she crossed the stile, and was soon hurrying along the field in the black shadow of the hedge. The creak of the gate when she opened it broke harshly on the profound silence of the churchyard; and her own footsteps seemed to awaken strange echoing sounds from behind the white tombstones as she walked quickly up the narrow middle path. She stood still between the church and the low stone wall which divided the churchyard from the lane leading in one direction up to the parsonage, and in the other down to the village. Quitting the path, she began to thread the way among the maze of narrow mounds unmarked by stone or tree until she came to a very tiny one, where a fragile willow bending over from the headstone mingled with the grass its long leaves, all white and silvery in the moonlight. How sweet, how tranquil a home! thought the wanderer, while she cowered down beside it, fearing to let the cry of anguish and yearning which rose to her lips break upon the holy silence. Silence I should hardly call it, for the long grasses waving together, the low sigh of the cypresses round an ancient family tomb, the grasshoppers calling to one another shrilly from grave to grave, the rustling of the ivy on the church wall, kept up a perpetual sweet and faint sound that seemed like music from endless instruments, and voices descending with the moonlight into this garden of the dead, to quicken the sad with whispers of immortality. O, to be one of those senseless mounds!—one of the peaceful dead! Why should they lie there in such sweet rest, while she, with a torn and bleeding heart, must struggle on in the bitter world alone? Just then it was as if every sorrow that her soul

had ever felt lived in it afresh in all its bitterness. The first break with Abel, the loss of her child, the death of her true and noble-hearted friend, the parting with Lancelot, these first harsh words from her mother, all swelled her heart to bursting; and again she abandoned herself to grief, wild, passionate, and unrestrained; she clasped the little mound with her arms, she buried her face in the wet grass, crying in a voice stifled with great sobs,—

“Ailsie, Ailsie, darling! Mother wants thee. Speak to her. Her heart is breaking. Come back to her! O, my God! Why was she taken from me—my child—my sweet little one, that kept me from getting hard and cold? I would understand, but I cannot—No! I cannot!”

She laid her cheek upon the little, rough headstone, and bathed it with her hot tears; and the willow bent lovingly over her weary frame, and the mysterious music of the churchyard hummed about her dreamily and plaintively, but with an inner voice of joy. And this music, and the scene, and the tender beauty of the night, seemed to draw the sting and passion from Barbara's misery, soften it, and steep it with poetry, till it became a calm and holy thing. She stopped her tears, and gazed with new tenderness and awe upon the little turf flowers which she had crushed under her; for as they rose one by one,—the daisies so lily-like and pure, the pale evening primroses drawing their golden glimmer from the stars,—she was filled with a new and exquisite delight; and clasping her hands to her breast, and raising her eyes to heaven, cried, in trembling joy,—“She lives!—my hope!—my darling!—my little Ailsie! These flowers, nourished by her pure body, are full of her and her sweetness. She is

passing through a great and glorious change. But she lives! I shall see her—I shall hold her again!”

Then, on her knees, with tears streaming down her cheeks, she read aloud, in a kind of ecstasy, the lines which Isaac Sleigh had caused to be engraved upon the round stone:—

“SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN TO COME UNTO ME.”

Luke, chap. xviii., v. 16.

Go, little martyr, go, and plead
For struggling souls forlorn;
Tell Him those baby-hands that bleed
For us the cross have borne.

No shining robes, no martyr's crown,
O, darling, seek to win;
But lay thy stainless glory down
To ransom souls in sin.

A strange and startling sound thrilled through Barbara as she finished the last line. It was like a half-smothered sob, that seemed to come from the depths of the earth. Rising quickly, and looking down, she saw the shadow of a man's form projected across the grave. She recognised it, and drew back hastily; but Abel Drake, instead of noticing her, knelt bare-headed by the grave, and muttered some words in a voice so broken and thick, that she only caught one or two, but those made her shudder, and say involuntarily,—

“No, no; hush! I did not mean that!”

He raised his face as she spoke, and its wan, jaded, and sorrow-stricken look, as the pale light of the moon fell on it, pained her to the heart. Trying to steady her voice, she held out her hand across the grave, saying,

“Let us, as we are now going to part for ever, part

friends. Forgive me for what I said about the child, as I forgive you from my heart all that has passed."

To her surprise he did not take her hand, but remained standing silent, with his head bent in a kind of proud humility. Barbara thought she had been mistaken. He was, then, only sorrowful about the child, not repentant. He did not desire her forgiveness. She felt humbled in having given it unasked, and turned away.

"Barbara!"

The word sounded like a cry of acute pain, and chained her feet to the spot.

"Barbara! you offer me forgiveness," he cried, with one of those sudden bursts of passion which she remembered of old so well, that his voice and hurried flow of speech seemed bearing her irresistibly back into the past of which he spoke. "You offer me forgiveness. Well, God knows, I need it at your hands; but I want more, Barbara; I want you to hear me. You would crush me to the earth with the story of your suffering, yet you would turn a deaf ear to all that my heart bleeds to say of its own anguish and remorse, of the penance it has paid in its long exile; the expiation of the past that has been its one and only hope for years. We part, as you say, for ever. Hear me, then, as you would be free from self-reproach in the future. Hear me now, as you value my eternal silence hereafter, for I feel that, in spite of myself, I should hover round you, I should haunt you, till my heart had spoken freely to your heart, and forced you to see its love, its yearning after good, its bitter suffering."

"Say no more," interposed Barbara, faintly struggling, with all her strength, against the charm by which this

man, whom she felt she must fly from, held her to the spot. "Say no more, Abel Drake. I am willing to own I may have judged you wrongly, but let me go."

With a gleam of light in his eyes, the Inventor saw that, in spite of her words, Barbara did not move; and, in truth, when his passionate voice ceased, she had felt a chill, a desolation of soul, that seemed like an eternal banishment from all human emotions. When she turned her face, as if to go, the cold breeze blew on it, and the cypress greeted her with a hushed funereal wail. Very hard and toilsome the road which her feet must traverse looked in the cold moonlight, and to what did it lead? The great grey cross of the church of Gowerend standing out against the sky, between the two hills, seemed to answer her. The chill increased upon her heart as she gazed upon that vision, but when Abel again began to speak, it trembled at the sound of his voice with a sudden rush of new life and heat, that suffused the pale face with the old rich colour, and almost sent tears into the eyes.

"Listen, then, Barbara," he said, while he watched every varying expression of her features, "for I know that your conscience tells you you ought to hear me, though you give it the lie with your tongue. You have suffered through my errors, and you should know what they sprang from. Think of me as you first knew me,—for you did know me, then, Barbara, though you've never known me since,—uneducated, undisciplined, my brain seething with thoughts I could not master, with powers I could neither rightfully employ nor lull to rest. Ah, yes, I followed every vague instinct which pointed to the dim great future that at times I seemed to see, and dared not disbelieve.

But a few weeks before that strike, a great change—one that you, that no one could understand—took place in me. Up to that time I had looked almost with contempt upon the wretched condition of my fellow-workmen. To me, with my youth, my strength of arm, my clearness of intellect, it seemed an easy thing to break from the chains of dependence which held them. Yes, I looked upon their miserable state with pity and contempt. But, O my God ! that terrible winter, when I beheld families starving round their fireless hearths—strong men reduced by want and misery to premature old age and grovelling meanness—women, whom I had known as good and gentle, changed into drunkards and furies ! O, then, their wrongs and oppressions burned and rankled in my heart. I made their case mine, careless of myself, seemingly careless of you,—though, God knows, it was the thought of you that stung me to action,—careless of the misery and disgrace into which we were falling, I went on in my mad enthusiasm, till I had compromised all my fellow workmen—brought on the strike. We gained our point. That night, full of triumph and excitement, intoxicated with the grand future I dreamed of for the working man, and to which I seemed to have made the first step, I turned in from the riotous street, from the grateful, haggard faces, and came to you, yearning for your sympathy.”

“Hush, Abel Drake,” cried Barbara, laying her hand on his arm, and looking up to him with pleading eyes. “Hush ; I cannot bear this. I may have been blind. I may have wronged you greatly ; but do not, O do not, tell me any more. You trouble me. You torture me.”

“You heard me in dead silence,” continued Abel,

"or rather you turned a deaf ear to me, and heeded nothing of what I said. When I had finished—had poured forth all my dreams and aspirations, you asked me, with terrible calmness, if you might now speak."

"Abel!" cried Barbara, in a hoarse, imploring voice.

"And you did speak," he continued, shaking her grasp from his arm, and speaking sternly, to hide the thrill of emotion which his name from her lips caused him. "Since I had deprived myself of all means of getting employment, you said,—since I had thoroughly disgraced us both,—since I could no longer support you, you would thenceforward support yourself: you would take your way alone. I listened, stunned and stupefied; but when you took the ring from your finger, and laid it in cruel significance at my feet; when you passed me with your white, resolute face, without a word, went out and closed the door after you, as it seemed for ever, there was a something crashed in my brain—maniacs might feel so in their first seizure—I ran frenziedly from the house; how I passed that night, I can never remember; the next day I enlisted. After that, a dull, heavy despair settled over me. My life became a blank. Beyond a few confused images of the daily routine of duty, and the going on board ship, I have little recollection of anything pertaining to that time, until one day I found myself lying on deck, and recovering from a slow fever. My returning strength seemed to give me the sense of a new birth. It was the past now that I could only see through a softened haze. The sea lay round me placid as a lake; and while I drank in the spring breeze, and watched the tender changing colours of the April sky, or fixed my eyes upon that little sketch of you

which I held day and night in my illness, an unwonted calm seemed to suddenly settle upon the world; a sublime peacefulness that seemed to hush all human troubles. It was at that moment that I seemed to hear a voice of ineffable sweetness breathing—it did not seem speaking—words of strange warmth and light, and comfort: ‘O, feeble and complaining spirit!’—methought it said, ‘Arise, lift thyself from the ground and rejoice. A second youth is borne in upon thee. Thy first was wasted in dreams for the future, thou shalt now try the worth of them for the present. Those gifts which thou hast so misused, and which have caused thee to be ashamed, shall now justify thee before men. Rise, then, poor pilgrim, who hast departed from the straight road. Know that strength is given thee to win thy way back through danger, and toil, and hunger, and humiliations, and distant and uncertain hope.’ Barbara!” he cried, with a sudden change of voice, and drawing away the hands in which her face was buried, “Barbara, I have done this—all, yes, all! Even here I dare to say it. I came back to you with the fruits of my long labour, my years of repentance and expiation, to find you waiting but for the full assurance of my death to seal your contract of marriage with another. O, can I need to ask you to forgive me the outrage to which my madness prompted me, when I saw you thus solicited? Barbara! Barbara!”

Barbara gently drew her hands away as he ceased, again hid her face in them, and sobbed audibly, and remained in that posture for several minutes: Abel watching her uneasily with his whole soul in his eyes. At last she looked up, and held out her hand across the grave a second time, saying, “Abel, I am terribly shaken. You have

made my heart bleed to-night. You have humbled it to the dust. O, I have suffered as well as you, through its blind ignorance; I have indeed. Forgive me, then. Yes, out of that great love which I have never deserved, forgive me, and let us part for ever. Yes, Abel," she said, more firmly, as she saw the look of anguish fast settling into his face, "we must part now and for ever. The memory of your love will always be held in honour by me, but I have long believed you dead, have been married in soul to another, and it seems to me I must ever now be loyal to him in soul, though he and I will never see—and rarely hear of each other again. He left his home yesterday, and I also leave it now, never to return. Don't you see—don't you feel, Abel, this must be so? Do you not acknowledge we must here part?"

"O, Barbara, Barbara!" he cried, clutching both her hands, and gazing into her face with all his old abandonment. "O, my first love! My sweet little innocent girl! My patient, noble-hearted wife! I could cry 'No!' so as to shake your whole soul with pity, but something whispers to me, in spite of myself, you are right. I understand: you love him, and have ceased to love me! Send me away, then. Let us part. But if I go, I will not go in anguish, but in exultation of spirit. Let me bear the future as I may, it is enough, for the present, to know I have won—I have deserved your respect."

"You have! you have! my deepest, most profound respect!" said Barbara, bending, and kissing his hands.

"Is it a sin to wish for death at a time like this?" muttered Abel, raising his eyes to the sky, with a smile of holy rapture.

"Death!" repeated Barbara, with a shudder, "no sin? In heaven's name, what do you mean, Abel?"

He was silent, and she saw that his eyes were fixed with a strange expression of inquiry or alarm, not at—but beyond—her. She turned, and a cry of surprise and terror escaped her lips as she saw a glow of scarlet, and a flash of steel in the moonlight. Soldiers were coming stealthily towards them, and, perceiving they were noticed, one of them made a sudden rush, and laid his hand heavily upon Abel's shoulder, saying, "Abel Drake, I arrest you as a deserter."

Surprise and horror held Barbara for a moment mute. Abel, too, stood for an instant passive in the corporal's grasp, with hands clenched, and a moody, dangerous fire in his lowered eyes. Then, with a fierce strength, he wrested away his shoulder, ran back, and leapt upon the low wall of the churchyard.

"Stop, or we fire!" shouted the corporal. The two men with him levelled their muskets. Barbara saw, and tried to raise her voice to warn Abel of his danger, but her tongue was paralysed by the sudden terror. But she tottered forwards, placing herself between the men and her husband, and extended her clasped hands towards them imploringly, and murmured, in a faint, indistinguishable voice, "O, stay! stay!"

"Stand back! Barbara! The guns!" shouted Abel, hoarsely. "Do not fire. I surrender." He leapt down, and took up his position between the soldiers, saying, menacingly, "Beware! You may suffer for this. I am no deserter."

A dubious expression passed over the coarse face of the

soldier as he replied, "Then, why didn't you say so before, instead of running away?"

Abel fixed his eyes on the ground in moody silence, and spake not another word. But Barbara now recollected what he had said before the soldiers appeared, and she shuddered at the ghastly suggestion raised by his speech.

The corporal, reassured by Abel's silence, made a gesture of impatience to one of his comrades, who, handling a white bag, took out a pair of glittering handcuffs. This mark of ignominy and degradation was more than Barbara could bear to look on. She turned away, wringing her hands in inexpressible anguish. All the natural force of her character—all the strength of her hitherto indomitable will seemed to be lost. She could think of nothing—resolve upon nothing. She hardly knew why, but in her present state of helplessness it seemed to send an electric thrill of hope through her when she beheld her mother coming breathlessly towards them.

"My poor child," said the widow, touched by her look of misery, and folding her in her arms, "don't be afraid. Mr. Wolcombe is here. I saw these men prying about the cottage ever since tea-time; and to-night, when they followed him here, I could rest no longer, but went up to Coppeshall and begged Mr. Wolcombe to come. The captain told me to do so, in case anything of the kind should happen."

"But look, mother," said Barbara, "they won't believe Mr. Wolcombe." It was true. In vain Mr. Wolcombe reasoned with the corporal in his cool, business way. In vain he reminded him of his own position as a magistrate, or warned him that he was putting himself into

legal peril. The corporal doggedly refused to give up his prize.

"Where is your sergeant?" asked Mr. Wolcombe, after a painful silence.

"Waiting for us at the public, your honour," answered the corporal.

"Send one of your men to ask him to come here, and to bring Job with him." After a brief pause for deliberation, the corporal consented.

They all stood waiting his return—Mr. Wolcombe and the soldiers impatiently, Abel with a dull apathy that pained Barbara more than any amount of rage and resistance could have done. It was not many minutes before the tramping of feet was heard down the middle path, and Job was marched up by the sergeant till he stood just in front of Abel.

"Now, Job," said Mr. Wolcombe, sternly, "have the goodness to let us hear what you've got to say about Abel Drake."

"Deserter, sir," replied Job, with military decision.

"Pray, how do you happen to know that?" Job played with his fingers in sulky confusion.

"Attention!" shouted the sergeant, with a rousing switch of his cane. "How do you know that this gentleman is a deserter, eh?"

"Aw knawed he listed," replied Job, with increasing ill humour; "and when a mon lists, an cooms back sneaking hoam wi' different coloured hair, an wi' a different neame, o' course he can be nobbut else nor a deserter."

"And that's all you have got to say about it—is it?"

asked Mr. Wolcombe, and Job again relapsed into a dogged silence.

"Just that'n, sir," said Job, his fright divided between Mr. Wolcombe's keen eye and the uneasy twitchings of the sergeant's cane.

"You hear," said Mr. Wolcombe to the sergeant; "is that enough to warrant his arrest?"

"Certainly not, your honour," replied the sergeant, with a show of indignation, and with an angry wink aside at the corporal, who instantly touched his cap, began a half apology to Abel, which he didn't trouble himself to finish, and signing to his men, went away with them.

"Now, master Job," said Mr. Wolcombe, "let this be a lesson to you. Another time you mayn't get off so easily."

"O, I'll trounce him for it, your honour," said the sergeant, grasping his cane, and laughing as he followed the retreating Job out of the churchyard.

"Are they reconciled?" whispered the manufacturer to the widow, as he saw Barbara and Abel holding one another's hands.

"I don't know—yes, surely,—I hope so," she answered, watching them uneasily.

"Yes, mother," said Barbara, who had overheard the question, and hurried to answer it; "we are reconciled; there is no more ill feeling betwixt us, but we part here. Go home, mother," she whispered. "Don't speak to him now. Let him alone awhile. He will be better where he is, with little Ailsie. But watch and comfort him when he rejoins you. As for me, now that it is so late, I shall go back with Mr. Wolcombe for this one night, but I shall

leave early in the morning. O no, I forgot to-morrow is Sunday ; well, then, I shall stay till Monday morning. Look to him, I charge you, as if he were your own."

Barbara went to Mr. Wolcombe, and took his arm, saying, with a half-smile, "You must take me for a couple of nights more." Treading silently in the long grass, the three left the spot, while Abel remained sitting on a tombstone near the child's grave, and looking after the retreating forms with a pallid face and wild eyes.

When the familiar creak of the gate told him he was alone with the dead, one great sob broke from him, and he sat bent double, with his head in his hands, and his fingers buried in his hair, the cold dews falling fast around him.

CHAPTER XXII.

UNDER CURRENTS.

AN hour or two later the widow sat in her arm-chair, looking strangely wan and hopeless : all the wintry, grey light had come back to her eye, as she turned from time to time towards the stairs, listening nervously to every sound, and shrinking in apprehension from her every thought. He was safe upstairs, that was one comfort ; but he had not spoken to her on entering, and she could see by his looks and gestures that his interview with Barbara had only plunged him into deeper despair. It had failed then. The widow had been mistaken when she fancied that the meeting

in such a spot, and the better knowledge which Barbara would gain from it of her husband's career during those eight years of absence, and of the motives of his return, would have revived in her heart the old love, and have swept away in one natural gush of affection all lesser obstacles.

As the widow sat turning these thoughts over in her mind, and asking herself—what next?—she heard a step, that she thought she knew, outside the door. It came close, but seemed to come very softly;—but the door did not open; the person, whoever it was, must be listening. The widow was frightened for an instant, but, recovering herself, seemed to understand; and went to the door, and opened it without noise, and there, just as she anticipated, was Barbara, looking like a spectre that shrank from the sight of humanity, and yet was desirous to speak and be spoken to.

“Is it you, Barbara? Come in.”

Barbara paused a moment, and her bloodless face seemed to confront the widow's questioningly. The latter answered it, saying,—“Yes, we are alone.”

“But he—?”

“Is upstairs.”

“Thank God!” inly murmured the anxious, tremulous soul, but the white lips could only be seen helplessly to move.

They sat down, and for a time did not even look at each other, much less speak. But the widow saw that her own secret fears were also Barbara's fears, and she also saw that her daughter was as unwilling as herself to give them definite form or appellation.

At last, when the long silence had become perfectly intolerable, Barbara rose, and said hastily—

"Mother, do not mistake anything I may say or do just now."

"No, no. I understand."

"Well, then, I must go up to him."

"Yes."

Barbara began to steal softly up the stairs, but returned to whisper:

"I shall not go into the room if I can feel satisfied with what I may hear. Go on with what you were doing. If he knows you are moving about, he will be less under constraint."

"Call me if you need me," said the widow.

"I will. I will slightly stamp on the floor."

And so saying, Barbara went up the stairs, while the widow began to bustle about, so as to cover the sound of the footsteps, and let the Inventor know that she at least was not watching him.

She would have spared herself the trouble and pretence could she have looked in upon him, and seen how utterly had passed away from him all consciousness of ordinary things.

He sat at a little table on which was his hat, and a black travelling bag, ready packed, as if for immediate departure. A lighted candle was close before him, which he had forgotten to snuff, and which by its heavy yellow flame seemed to throw into deeper and more ghastly shade the black lines under his eyes, and the quivering muscles that played about the mouth. He seemed to have emptied his pockets and other receptacles of all their contents in the shape of papers, documents, letters, &c.; and to be examining them one by one, and burning them, generally

without a word or comment by voice or gesture. But there were two or three things among the rest which he seemed to shun instinctively so long as he could; and it was not till these alone remained that he appeared to formally recognise their presence. He paused; seemed to reflect, or to concentrate his energies, before he meddled with them; and at last he rose, paced the chamber to and fro for a minute in deep silence, before he seemed able to proceed with his task. But he sat down again, and took up a card, and gazed at it long and earnestly.

As Barbara stood outside the door, listening as though her own life depended upon the power and accuracy of her ears, yet feeling her heart beat so tumultuously as to confuse if not altogether overpower every other sensation, she could from time to time hear him break out in low, dreamy, but agitated tones, which seemed to be uttered by one who mourned in sleep; or who, if awake, spoke like one already half-dead to the world, but yet only too vividly alive to its pain. And so, himself unconscious of what he did, Abel gave her from time to time, by some passionate exclamation—some broken sentence—the key to his thoughts. What was it he gazed on now? She gently unclosed the door, and forced it a little open, so that she could observe his movements, as he sat with his back towards her. She knew then what he gazed on. Her portrait! As she was. Yes, thought Abel, they went to Gowerend together one holiday, to get that in token of their reconciliation, that morning, by the well. From that pale-tinted, slender, immature bud, what a glorious flower had opened upon the world! And that was his! *Was*? He smiled a terrible smile, and kept it upon his face all the time that he was

engaged thrusting the card into the flame. It seemed as though it would not burn, however he tried it—corner-wise, or sloping, or level. The card shrivelled, but still she looked upon him (for he could not turn that side to the flame), answering his smile, with so different a one, so filled with divine tenderness, that the agony of the flame seemed to burn into his soul, and he was ready to shriek with a kind of sympathetic agony for her. The cold drops came out upon his forehead. The blackened card, with the hand that held it, dropped on the table; and the latter shook under its quivering weight, as he stayed thus irresolute for a few seconds, while the unnatural smile faded slowly from his cheek.

Must he burn it? Dare he not place it on his heart? No one would know it away from Barden Brow. Or, if she did know, that fact alone could not injure her. Nay, might it not do good? What if, when she saw there was no more to fear from him, some of the old feelings began to revive; for she did love him once; he was surc of that. He should rest happily in his grave, did he but know there would come a day when she would look upon it with moistened eyes and some lingering regret. Again he paused, and again he burst out with a kind of horrible mirth, that no longer merely smiled, but laughed loudly:—

“So, even in an hour like this, I can go on juggling with facts. Fool! ask the right question, and take an honest answer. Suppose all to be as thou sayest, and she had—and why should she not have some day or other?—new ties, another husband, would the discovery be a very happy one for her then? To work, man, to work?”

Again the inventor held the card-picture in the flame;

and though he would probably have found it easier to have borne the destruction of his own flesh, he held it firmly, if not steadily, till the picture was no more.

He then stretched out his hand for one of the two papers that now alone remained before him.

What was that? Oh, his property that was to be—the magnificent benefaction he intended to have made. This gave her the machine, in case of his sudden or unanticipated death on his way home. He would no longer trouble her with his superfluous liberality. He lighted the paper, and held it—heedless of the flame which played about his fingers—till he saw it altogether destroyed. And then he took up the last paper. As he opened and began to read it, he tried once more to smile, but the emotion quivered ineffectually about his lips and nostrils, and the bitterness he felt could alone reveal itself in the tones of his voice.

Ay, there it was—plan, drawings, particulars, estimates, details—nothing omitted from the greatest to the least item. And that was the house and garden he bought for her—bought in his own way of buying—and that he furnished for her, also in his own happy way of doing such things, with such loving, patient industry. Poor fool! How hard he tried to remember every flower that he had ever heard her say she liked for her garden. How skilful he was in anticipating her every household wish—in building up for her into reality her own ideal home. The very study had sent him back to a thousand lost scenes and incidents that told him of her childlike but ever sweet and pure tastes, that no evil conditions could extinguish or spoil. Yes, that was the house and home he was to have had secretly prepared for her, after the first gleam of success

with his machine. They were to have met there, he in his disguise; and he was to have heard all her little pretty exclamations of wonder (for he could never see her but as his child-wife), and to have watched her, as she came upon this thing and that, that she so liked; and as she went on with ever-increasing astonishment to see her own inmost thoughts everywhere reflected back in material forms, until at last she must have felt the mystery, and have turned to him, and then—"O, the look—the cry—the burst—the explanation—the pardon—the bliss—ending—*here!*" Once more the table shook with the half-suppressed mirth or madness of him who leaned his elbow on it, while the hands, stretching forward to the flame, and both holding the paper, gave the last of the Inventor's documents to speedy destruction.

"Well done, Abel, thou wast an architect to build and plan all that out of nothing." Mingling now with his own laughter came the faint sound of a distant sob; but he heard it not.

It was a minute or two after this that Barbara stole down to her mother; and while the widow gazed in mute surprise on her tearful and agitated face, which had ceased, however, to be pallid, the former said,—

"Mother, I know not what ails me; all strength, all resolution seem to die out. I cannot—dare not trust myself in his presence. And yet I will not go away till I know more of his intentions."

The widow saw her daughter was strangely moved, and thought it best to comfort her and be silent. She made her sit down by her side, and she was drawing the half-yearning, half-reluctant arm round her neck, when they

were disturbed by a knock. The widow went to the door.

"Please, Mrs. Giffard," said a dirty but handsome-looking girl, "Mr. Sleigh is very bad, and he wants to see Mr. Abel Drake afore he dies. He knows he's in the village, and says he must see him. And I'm going to the great house to tell your daughter, ma'am, that he wishes to see her too."

"O very well," replied the widow. "I will tell them both. You need not go any further." She closed the door, and turned to see what Barbara thought had best to be done.

"I will take this message to him," said Barbara. "God help me, I wanted some excuse, though I did not dream poor Isaac would give it to me."

She returned up the stairs, but with the same soft step, as though desiring to choose her own time for going into the Inventor's room.

He was still sitting there, gazing into the lurid flame of the candle, as though seeking in it the elements of all that it had so lately destroyed.

Yes, all was over. He was alone in the world. No tie left, here or hereafter! He was going a fearful journey, and had not even a token of her to cheat him into some pleasant delusions by the way. "O merciful God!" he cried, "is it so? No tie? Here or hereafter?" His head dropped, and for awhile he was silent. But at last he rose abruptly, saying, "Well, thus stripped of my every earthly possession, it is easier to go. That's one comfort, I suppose." He put on his hat and overcoat, and was about to take the bag from the table, when he stood a moment, arrested by some new thought. He turned, and looked

slowly round the room ; gazing intently, with a strangely tender interest, on the paper of the walls, the plants of the window, the pretty hangings of the bed ; and upon the few but elegant ornaments that had been placed there by some sympathetic hand.

Yes, that was her chamber. Here she slept. Half unconsciously he removed his hat, as he said—"Ah, Barbara, wife of mine no longer ! Too great, too good, to have been ever meant for me, I salute thee, now for the last time in life, as the humble peasant salutes some holy saint." It was not her beauty now that he thought of, or her wrongs, or the patient, noble fortitude shown in her career. No ; at that moment he felt only that this was her temple, and he stood reverently in it, and felt purified, as he worshipped before the altar of all that to him was most holy, most glorious in womanhood. "O no !" he murmured, "this is *not* to die after all !"

"Abel Drake !"

The Inventor, whose face was turned from the door, listened as one paralysed. In the highly-wrought state of his mind, he seemed to hear some supernatural voice, appealing to him in severe reproach ; and though he quickly recovered himself, it was not till he was a second time addressed, "Abel Drake !" that he could summon up resolution to turn and meet Barbara's form and face, waiting him on his threshold. And when he did so, it was with an attempt to appear unconcerned, and as though he were then going away, by taking up his bag.

"Abel Drake ! where are you going ?"

"Why, Barbara," said the Inventor, after a moment of irresolution and struggle, "I have no time to lose, you

know. My little funds will be speedily exhausted if I do not get into work ; and although I have not been very lucky with this my first invention, I can, you know, try again with another ; as a certain gentleman said to me when I was pleading for a reasonable price for my labour."

Barbara, in whose face there was a something more startling and imperative than all the natural agitation which she could not control, and did not any longer strive to conceal, looked at him long and fixedly ; and though he felt his colour changing, and his glance quivering, he did not turn away, or shun her examining eyes.

"Well, Barbara, wish me good-bye," he said at last ; and he held out his hand, and his lips seemed to be smiling, though his eyes were sad enough, and terrible in their icy expression.

Barbara listened, and looked like one suddenly baffled, and turned aside, at the beginning of a task for which her soul had braced itself up. She grew confused, and more and more deeply agitated ; and as she hastily threw aside the long curling hair that had become loosened in her watchings outside the door, she said to him, as though suddenly recollecting herself,—

"There is a message to you and to me, from our old master, Isaac Sleigh. He fears he is dying, and wishes to see us."

"Yes, yes ; I will go to him on my way. Once more, farewell !"

"He—he—" hesitatingly began Barbara ; yet with a firmness of purpose that might not allow itself to be shaken ; "he wished to see us together."

The Inventor's face grew gloomy, and his gesture in-

patient ; but after a brief reflection, he seemed to be satisfied ; and turning to her, said, with something of the tone of eager politeness which he had shown to the widow,—

“Come, then, let us go ; and after that, let me, I pray you, for the sake of my own peace of mind, slip quietly away. We cannot need any more leave-takings, Barbara.”

Barbara seemed at that moment to pay little attention to his words ; she had taken his hand, and seemed to hold it spasmodically, as a something she had no desire to keep, yet that she was compelled, by some over-mastering influence, to retain and guard. And so, hand in hand, they went down the dark stairs, and thus presented themselves to the widow.

“Remember !” said Barbara, in a significant voice to her mother, as they passed on towards the door.

The widow understood, and looked her answer, in patient resignation.

The Inventor also divined the meaning of the phrase, and the mocking laugh again played about his face, though Barbara saw it not.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LAST LESSON.

AFTER knocking several times at the door of the school-master's garret without receiving any answer, Barbara gently turned the handle, and Abel followed her into the room. They stood for a minute without being able to speak or move, gazing at the scene before them. The great round harvest moon stared boldly in at the windows, lighting up the bare walls and sloping roof, and making the room look twice as large as it really was. By the sofa, under the window, Isaac Sleigh was huddled down in a heap. A little half-clad girl was bending over him with her sleepy face full of fright, dabbing his temples with rag dipped in vinegar. His poor mother had drawn herself up as far as she could get from him, and stared wildly, with her hands pressed to her forehead, as if hopelessly trying to understand what was going on.

"That will do, child, that will do," said Isaac, in a voice more feeble than ever: and he helped himself up by the girl's shoulder, and sat on the edge of the bed. Before his slow eyes could recognise the visitors, Abel, who was (as Barbara could see) shocked and pained at the change which a few years had made in his old master, went up to him and took his passive hand.

"Heyday, master," he said, huskily; "this is a bad look-out. What's the matter?"

"Ah, Abel, lad," said the schoolmaster, recognising him in an instant, and his pale-stricken face lighting up with joy; "and is it really you? I don't know but I've a right to take it hard, lad, that you've been here so long without coming to see your old master, who always said you'd come back and right yourself, and be a credit to the place. Didn't I, Barbara? Is Barbara there?"

"Yes, dear master," said Barbara, advancing, and taking his left hand, for Abel still held the right in both his; "I am here. Do you feel very ill?"

"Oh, no; I shall get over it. I've had a shock. Good fortune's come at last, my children, and it's been almost too much for me. But I shall get over it, please God. Oh, yes; I shall get over it. Why, where's my letter?" he said, raising his voice, and looking anxiously about. "Where's the letter, Nelly?"

The child picked up a crumpled letter from the floor, and gave it to the schoolmaster, who smoothed it out on his shaking knee.

"Read it," he said to Abel; and while Abel obeyed him, Isaac whispered to Barbara, "It's from the Bishop, my child. He actually remembered me—wants my services. Think of that!" he said, as Abel returned the letter. "Isaac Sleigh secretary and librarian to a noble society like that! With a hundred pounds a-year, and a comfortable house for mother and me to live in. Do you hear, mother? You'll be a lady again. You shall have every comfort that money can buy you. Poor soul! I wish she only understood me just for a minute!"

The poor witless mother did seem to understand in some sort of manner what was passing, for she smiled at

him, and said to the girl, who was smoothing the clothes around her:—

“I knew he'd be a scholar. I always said he should be; but it's my doing. He wouldn't be at college now, if I hadn't worked hard for it, and pinched sore for it. But the lad shan't know that. No, he shan't know where the money comes from!”

Isaac sighed as he listened to her, and shook his head sadly; but when his eyes again fell on the Bishop's letter, they brightened up, and a feverish red came out in his sallow cheeks.

“Come,” he said, impatiently, taking hold of Abel's arm; “let me try and walk now. I've no time for sickness. There's a deal to be seen to and done. There, that will do. Now, let me alone.”

He got up on his feet; but before he had taken two steps forward, he was seized with violent shivering, and fell on his face. Abel took him up like a child in his arms, and the schoolmaster hid his face on the breast of his old pupil, and burst into tears.

“It's all up with me, lad. Good fortune's too much for me. I've had so much ill-luck that you see I got used to it; but that—that letter—I couldn't stand it!”

“Come, come, master,” said Abel, trying to steady his voice, as he laid the quivering, wasted form on the mattress, which Barbara had dragged from the bed behind the screen. “Don't be down-hearted. You've been over-hasty in getting to your feet. That's all. You'll hold your head up with the best of them yet. Cheer up! Cheer up!”

Barbara and Abel were kneeling down by the mattress, one on each side of the schoolmaster; and for a few

minutes Isaac lay with his hands folded on his breast, and his eyes fixed on the discoloured ceiling, neither speaking nor moving. All triumph and agitation vanished slowly from his face; and presently he turned to Barbara with a smile so melancholy, yet so full of resignation, that it made the tears rush to her eyes, as she said,—

“You’ll soon be better, master. The Bishop will be so glad to see you.”

He laid one cold, shaking hand on hers, and the other on Abel’s, saying:—

“My children, I shall never see the Bishop again. Never—never! I shan’t go out of this house, except in my coffin. Good fortune’s come too late. It’s been too much for me. I’m sorry I can’t speak to the little ones in the school before I go. I should like to have said good-bye to some of them. I’ve done my best for them, poor things! I wonder who will take my place? There’ll be two after it; there’ll be Martin, and there’ll be John Sickles. I hope they’ll let Martin have it. He’s old and tough, and knows what drudging is; but as to John, he’s a young fellow beginning the world. I wouldn’t like to see his spirit broken down at the outset. No, don’t let a young man have it. I was a young man when I came, and look at me now, children. I’m a poor sight, ain’t I, for a man in his prime? Well, well, I don’t complain; only don’t let a young man have the place. It’s wearing work—killing work.”

He covered his eyes with his hands, and the tears trickled fast through the bony fingers.

“Don’t grieve for me, children,” he said, as he looked at the two careworn but still young faces bending over

him, and said to the girl, who was smoothing the clothes around her:—

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He covered his eyes with his hands, and the tears trickled fast through the bony fingers.

“Don’t grieve for me, children,” he said, as he looked at the two careworn but still young faces bending over

him. "My life has not been so happy as to make me sorry to part with it. Of course it's different with you— young, and strong, and beautiful, and loving one another. You ought to be happy, Abel, lad ; I never knew what it was to be loved, or I might have been a different man. Men can't grow strong if they are always in the shade. But, somehow, nobody liked me as a child, I was so plain and weak. Poor mother ! It was a blow to her to have such a child—her only one too—but she determined to make the best of me. She thought she could make up for all deficiencies by turning me out a great scholar. Poor thing ! She's had one disappointment after another about me till it turned her brain. Well, I'm thankful she doesn't comprehend much now ; as this disappointment would be worse than all the rest : to die just when her plan was going to succeed at last."

After thus speaking, Isaac lay still, greatly fatigued and looking sorrowfully at his mother, who was sitting up, watching them with a kind of vacant interest, something akin to that which a baby, who cannot run alone, watches the games of other children.

Suddenly, the schoolmaster half rose on the mattress, and said to Abel, beseechingly,—

"Help me to her, lad !"

Abel lifted him tenderly, bore him to the sofa, and let him sink on his knees before it. The mother looked puzzled, and drew back.

"Give me a kiss, mother," said Isaac, throwing his thin, wasted arms round her neck. "Try and say something to me. Tell me you forgive me for being such a disappointment and trouble to you. It was no fault of"

mine, mother; try and say something. Try and say it after me: say—'Isaac, God bless you!'"

The face of the poor creature grew more and more troubled and perplexed; but at last a ray of something like intelligence lit it up. Her lips moved as if she were repeating inwardly the words Isaac asked her to say. Then she bent down towards him, parted the thin hair, grey as her own, from his wrinkled brow, looked into his face and smiled, and said, in a cracked, weak voice,—

"Isaac, God bless you!"

As she held the head in her hands, she seemed suddenly struck by the thin and haggard face, for she stooped and kissed it tenderly, then fell back on the pillow and burst into tears, crying feebly, "My poor, dear child! I've broken his spirit, but I've made him a scholar. Yes, I've made him a good scholar, thank God!"

Abel lifted him back on to the mattress, and Barbara held a cup of water to his lips, for she noticed that the effort to speak had exhausted his little strength. As she did so the two exchanged a sad significant glance; for they felt he was right, he had not another hour to live. He saw the glance, and smiled, and lay back on the pillow.

"Barbara!" he whispered, presently. She bent down to him. "I leave you all my property, child. It's a grand lot. My books and my bit of furniture, and poor mother. Thank God! I've been able to save enough to keep her alive for a year or two, and she won't want it longer. I pinched hard to do it, for I knew I should go first. You'll find the money in the little box you made me, Abel, on the shelf over my bed. You'll take care of her, won't you? She's as quiet as a child." Abel and Barbara at the same

moment pressed his hand silently. Isaac paused, and passed his hand over his eyes, as if to think whether he had anything else to ask of them, and then said,—

“ Give my duty to Mr. Bartholomew, and tell him, now that I am going to give up my place, I can ask what I had never the courage to ask while I held it : that, for the children’s sake, he will raise the schoolmaster’s salary. It’s not enough ; no, it’s not enough to keep soul and body together.”

Again he drank from the cup Barbara held, and then laid down and turned his eyes towards the open window.

“ What light’s that, Barbara ?” he asked ; “ is it morning coming ?”

“ Yes, master ; it’s Sunday now.”

“ Sunday !” he repeated, with a smile. “ I always loved Sunday. It seems to me as if it would all be Sunday for me now.”

He folded his hands, and kept his eyes fixed on the beautiful sky, with its declining stars, and slowly-kindling new light. The idiot-mother moaned quietly to herself. The little girl had fallen asleep at the foot of the sofa. Abel and Barbara seemed to forget themselves in that awe that steals over the heart, when it feels itself in the presence of one who is seeing beyond the reach of mortal eye. In that pale morning twilight Isaac’s face—so passionless, so meek—told more of stricken youth than of worn-out old age. His blue eye, bright and tranquil, seemed to have solved life’s problem satisfactorily at last, and to be taking in divine promise to the struggling soul, while his thin lips were parted in a smile placid as an infant’s.

He seemed to return to a consciousness of actual bodily

life with reluctance, but again smiled as he saw the two faithful watchers.

"Have I been asleep?" he asked. "I seem to have had a very beautiful dream, children; a glorious dream."

"What have you dreamt, master?" asked Barbara, who knew that he had never closed his eyes.

"It seemed to me that I stood one of a band of weary pilgrims in a Presence which I could not see for the light. The lame, and the blind, and the imbecile were among us; and I dreamt that when the Presence questioned us, saying—'What hast thou done to inherit eternal life?' we fell down before him in great tribulation, and answered—'Nothing, O Lord, we have done nothing, but endured patiently what thou hast laid upon us!' Then the voice spoke again, saying—'Enter, blessed ones; ye do what the great and strong leave undone. Enter to thy eternal rest!' And he laid his hands upon us, and we rose up—all of us—new and strong."

Abel buried his face in his hands.

"A little more water, master?" said Barbara, raising his head, for she saw the lips turning bluely pale, and the eyes dim. When she had put down the cup, he looked tenderly from her face to Abel's, and said in a faint voice,—

"It's a great comfort to have you with me, children; I didn't reckon upon that."

He stopped, and struggled for breath, and pressed his hand to his side.

"Abel, lad, give me your hand. Where's yours, Barbara?" She hesitated, while the colour rushed to her face. "Child, where's your hand?" repeated Isaac. "I

can't see. Take my blessing, children, before I go." She gave him her hand reluctantly, and he placed it in Abel's and held them both clasped in his own, while he said, without noticing how they trembled,—

"O God, bless and keep these children! May they ever use their strength and youth for the purposes for which they were given, to struggle with and overcome difficulties and temptations, and shrinkings from life's conflict."

Abel's hand burned, and he bent his eyes on the floor, while Barbara raised hers, and fixed them sternly on his face, and whispered solemnly,—“Listen!”

“I know that now their hearts are pure,” Isaac went on, his voice seeming suddenly to gain force and volume; “but should there come a day when a great temptation shall hover about one of them, urging the hand to some deadly crime against thee, O, remember my prayer, my last prayer, O God, and aid and help. Put light into their eyes, that they may see clearly the precipice they tremble on, and they shall turn back and fall down before thee, covered with shame.”

Abel dashed his left hand over his eyes, and Barbara could see the veins of his full bronzed throat swell almost to bursting. Presently, turning away his head, he stretched out the hand towards her, in significant silence. Barbara grasped and pressed it earnestly, and smiled through her tears, for she knew now he was saved.

Isaac went on speaking with closed lips and voice that was getting gradually weaker,—

“O, keep them pure and simple in heart, kind to the weak and suffering; above all, keep them true to one another, for in that lies all their strength. I know them

both. Their hearts are one, however they may have tried to deceive themselves."

Barbara shook from head to foot, and the blood rushed tumultuously to her face. Was it not the voice of Fate speaking with the lips of the dying man? her heart asked. Was it not now time to break down, to struggle no more? Then the thought of Lancelot, and a momentary vision of his face as she had last seen it in its stern sorrow, and noble chivalrous smile, rose up like a mute appeal between her and Abel, and he felt her hand grow suddenly cold, and saw her face turn as pale as that of the dying man. But, in spite of the pang it gave him, he could not help whispering with a faint smile, "Listen!"

And again a deep glow suffused her face, and she drew her hand away. Isaac did not notice it. A great change had come over him. At first they thought him really dead, but, after a minute, the shrivelled eyelids rose quivering, and the white lips murmured,—

"The letter—give it to me!"

They laid it on his breast, and put his hand across it, and he smiled contentment. Abel saw his lips moving inarticulately, and he bent down to try to hear.

"Tell the Bishop, Isaac Sleigh would have liked to serve him, but he sent too late. Yes, good fortune's come too late."

"I shall tell him," said Abel, bitterly, "that, like many others, he sends his favours when they're not wanted. Isaac Sleigh has no need of them now. He has gone to serve a better Master."

Isaac fixed on him that long, wondering gaze with which he had looked out on the world ever since he was born.

He seemed to understand nothing of what Abel said, except that some reproach was intended toward the Bishop, for he smiled and muttered,—“God bless the Bishop!”

They were his last words.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHURCH MUSIC.

THE sun rose, and the Sabbath morning deepened and mellowed its autumn beauty. A fresh, vigorous breeze wafted in snatches the sound of church bells wide over hill and valley, over orchard and cornfield, swaying and rustling in their last stage of ripe perfection. It was a morning which, in its dreamy splendour, had power to lull even bodily pain ; to steep the restless heart in a kind of holy languor ; to pervade every soul with a sense of rest and peace to come.

Some such influence was over Abel when he awoke from the brief sleep he had snatched on leaving the school-master's death-bed. Instead of turning from the sun with heart-sickness and loathing, as of late he had done, he rose and met its rich autumn beams, not without a sad and bleeding heart truly, but also a heart in which all rebellion against fate had ceased, and which now bent like a reed before winds, either kind or rough. He had quite determined on setting off that very morning, but it was the wish of Barbara's mother that he should stay ; he was ill, she said, and must have one day's rest. And so, partly

because he knew too well the truth of her words, and partly because he would not own to himself, still less to her, that he had any fear of himself, he stayed ; and the widow made him go to church with her. Yes ; once more he found himself following the buzzing voices and creaking Sunday boots up the quiet lanes and field pathways to the church. The widow stopped at one or two cottages by the way to give her humble charity in the shape of a few kind words, so that when they reached the church, the bells had ceased, and the red inner door was closed. They opened it noiselessly, and stood just inside, waiting till the prayer was over. Abel tried to listen calmly and unmoved ; but the familiar voices praying the old prayer,—a thanksgiving for the magnificent harvest weather, which he had heard prayed in the autumn before he went away,—the old dialect, so much sweeter to his ears than any other language he had known,—all disturbed his heart afresh, and brought all kinds of forgotten things rushing back on it. He lifted his eyes from the chequered floor and looked around. A thick sunbeam lay aslant the rows of bent heads from one corner of the church to the other. The kneeling forms his eyes rested on would bring others to his mind that he had not thought about for years, and looking for them in their accustomed places, would wonder to find in all so little change. The one great change seemed to be in the children. He could not remember a single little face in all the rows by the organ. But strangest of all was it to see old Martin's bulky figure and red face where Isaac Sleigh used to kneel with his whole soul shining from his sorrowful, blue eyes, and trembling on his thin lips, as he prayed. At last the Inventor turned his eyes (whither he

had not yet dared to look,) towards that pew under the grand old painted window. The rich light which seemed to shine from the robes of the saint touched each figure kneeling there with a kind of glory. On one side knelt the manufacturer and his daughters; on the other, motionless as a cathedral statue, one knelt alone, with her face buried in her hands. Barbara was there, then. He had hardly expected that. How like a dream all seemed to him! Here was he,—he, a doomed wanderer upon the face of the earth,—he, to whom home and rest were as dead words,—here was he, in the very heart of his native place, joining in thanks for the harvest which he should never help to reap, the plenty of which he should never partake.

Strong emotion was again visible in his face; but he must smother it, for the prayer was ended, and now they had to pass that pew on their way to the widow's seat. They walked quietly down the middle, when suddenly their way was stopped by the tall pew door being thrown open, and Mr. Wolcombe, leaning towards them, motioned them with earnest look and gesture to come in. Slightly confused by this honour paid her in the face of all the church, the widow entered; and presently Abel, feeling more in a dream than ever, found himself sitting between Barbara and her mother in the pew which they two, when they were children, had often looked at, while criticising the grand folk there, or over which their childish glances had passed to the beautiful saint upon the window. Sometimes he had whispered to her, when Isaac Sleigh's mild reproachful eye happened to be turned away, about a dream he had had,—a dim, delightful dream,—of inventing

something so wonderful that the manufacturer should invite him to his pew, and ask him to become his partner; and then Barbara had made him solemnly promise not to go, unless they let her go to.

And now they really sat there side by side. O, children! children! When in your purity and largeness of heart you conceive a daring, dazzling hope, and set it up as your idol, and worship it, and toil towards it with your best, your freshest strength, how little do you then dream with what pain and bitterness you may in after-life, when all wish to gain it has passed away, stumble upon that self-same hope realised; or how long suffering and delay may sicken the heart, so that instead of rejoicing, it falls at last at the feet of its cherished idol, blind to the beauty that once lured it on, blind to everything but its own despair!

While both their hearts were heavy with reflections such as these, the organ lifted its mighty voice, and other voices melting into it, filled the church, and floated out into the glorious morning sunshine. They stood up side by side, and, singing the same words out of the same book, poured out all the anguish of their hearts into the heaven-soaring music. Up it went—now heavy and laboured, like the cry of the weary, and gradually thinning into a shrill wail of lamentation; now bursting forth into full, rich, trembling strains of praise and thanksgiving. They sang—these two weary ones—with their whole souls, forgetting all that lay beyond the music, all but the time when they stood together among the children. And now their voices rose where all the rest were weakest, startling the ear with their passionate

mournfulness. But this season of relief, of delicious abandonment, must cease; and yet they hardly felt it had ceased as the music died away, and they sat down, still in a kind of dream of the remote past.

I say they, and speak of them as having the same emotions; yet it was not so, though they both found relief in the same thing. For once in singing, when Abel turned involuntarily to see if Barbara were also carried away by the same ecstasy that for the moment filled his soul, he was startled by the wild expression of her face. Her large eyes were raised as if joining with her voice in entreaties for Divine aid, her mouth quivered, and her whole face worked with some fierce internal conflict. But the instant she met his eye, with one effort the storm was subdued, and she returned his gaze with calm strength and sadness.

He tried to forget it; but, do what he would, that strange look on Barbara's face haunted him throughout the rest of the service, breaking in upon his resignation with wild flashes of hope. He now longed for church to be over; for painful, bitter thoughts would rise when he caught Mr. Wolcombe's eyes fixed in calculation upon him,—of how he might have welcomed these advances,—how he might have rejoiced at the selfishness (as he thought it) that he now turned from with repugnance.

As they left the church, Mr. Wolcombe begged him, in his politest manner, to go to Coppeshall in his carriage, and dine with him. Abel and Barbara riding in the manufacturer's carriage! Another of the childish dreams to be fulfilled! Quietly and respectfully Abel

declined the honour ;—he must be going presently, and wished to spend his last moments with Barbara and her mother. So the three went home together. It was evident every one thought them reconciled, and their looks and words of delicate congratulation fell like bitterest mockery on the hearts of both.

He would surely come in, Barbara thought, as she walked a little in advance up the garden to the porch. No footsteps followed her; and she turned sharply round, while the blood died out of her very lips, and her limbs trembled. Yes, he was bidding her mother farewell at the gate; he would not come in; he would never speak to her again; she was looking on him for the last time. Well, better so, perhaps. She turned in from the blinding sunshine to the shady parlour, and busied herself in the window amongst the flowers. The air, heavy with the rich spicy odour of the stocks, seemed to stifle her as she fixed her misty eyes on the two forms at the gate, and twisted and untwisted the while the delicate tendrils of a sweet pea round her fingers. Yes, he was really going without a word. Had she not wished it might be so? Should she not be glad? Glad! Glad he was going for ever! What hailed her then when she heard his footstep approaching—saw his form stooping to enter the low doorway? Was that rush of heat sorrow or disappointment? What were these upon her hands? Tears! Large, burning tears, pattering down like the first passion of a thunder-storm. What could have brought them at such a time? How should she conceal them? She wondered, as they came faster and faster, if his eyes were on her face; for her own

were blinded, and she could only see him through a thick, hot mist.

“Barbara—good-bye.”

No. She felt by his tone he had not seen her face. Now, if she could only speak that one word calmly, her poor weak, uncertain heart might still rest unbetrayed. She exerted all her energies, and her lips moved, but all that escaped from them was a quick, gasping sob. Now, indeed, she felt those eyes turned upon her, searching her very soul with their keen, fierce questioning. Utterly unable to bear them calmly, and not daring to let them read what she felt must be traced there, she hid her face in her hands. They were torn down almost fiercely, and held in a grasp of iron:

“Barbara!”

She pushed him off. She would make one more effort to keep to her purpose. She turned away her face, and tried to call up that picture of her clay-cold babe which had never failed to poison the memory of her love for him; but all that that picture brought now was an overwhelming sense of how she had wronged and misunderstood him. All she could do was to sink into a chair, and clasping her hands in her lap, let her tear fall unrestrainedly, while she murmured,—

“Abel! Abel! I cannot say good-bye. O, may God forgive me, but I can keep my vow no longer!”

The Inventor heard her words, and half guessed their meaning, but gazed at her a moment incredulous or stupefied. Then, with a cry of “O God, is it true?” dropped at her feet, and his head sunk helplessly on her knees. She pressed it convulsively to her breast; while,

amidst tears and sobs, she poured into his ear, in her sweet, trembling voice, her childlike confession, where the tones of the old dialect became again strangely perceptible:

“I love thee, Abel. I never loved Mr. Lancelot. I thought I did—but I was wrong. I never loved any one but thee—only thee ever. And O, I have suffered too, Abel. I have wished I was dead many’s the time. And now, O, I could never, never have said good-bye. I could have died sooner. Yesterday I was strong and wilful in my resolution, but to-day I have felt like a child in God’s hands.”

When the widow, growing anxious at this long farewell, went into the cottage, she found Abel Drake lying at his wife’s feet, with his face buried in her dress, while Barbara, holding back her disordered hair, was weeping passionately over him.

“God will forgive me, mother,” she said, looking up with streaming eyes, while a vivid blush overspread her face—“God will forgive me for breaking my vow.”

“Yes, O yes,” the widow said, as she bent and kissed them both. “Do not fear, my child; it is the vow made in love and broken in hate that is accursed before God; but a vow made in hate and broken in love is a good and blessed thing.”

Under the harvest moon that night, over little Ailsie’s grave, Abel replaced his wife’s wedding ring.

CHAPTER THE LAST.

MR. WOLCOMBE'S LETTER.

Coppeshall, Sunday night.

MY DEAR BARBARA,

SINCE I may no longer hope to call you my daughter, let me at least claim the privilege of a friend. Enclosed is your husband's receipt for the machine: accept it from me. And if he likes to come to me, at the mill, to-morrow morning, I will refer him to a gentleman who is willing to give a considerable sum for the exclusive right to the invention. But I incline to think he might do better by carrying out his original idea of retaining a share. So, if he would like us to work it together, I am ready to go into the matter with him, find the capital, and I don't think we shall disagree about terms.

One more word, and I have done. Is it necessary now for you to leave us? I can only say I hope not. There are, as you know, rooms enough, and to spare, which you and your husband can have, and where he may be as much or as little alone as he pleases.

I do wish this, I confess, for my own and the children's sake, if there be nothing to prevent. But do as you and he think best. In any case you have—both of you—my best wishes for your future happiness and prosperity.

I am, my dear Barbara,

Ever sincerely yours,

JAMES WOLCOMBE.

THE END.

