

BY THE BROOK

See p. 60

LENORE ANNANDALE'S STORY

BY

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Author of

'Paul Harvard's Campaign' &c.

60-160

'The Eternal God is thy refuge; and underneath are the everlasting arms.'—*Deut.* xxxiii. 27

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY

PATERNOSTER ROW, 65 ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD

LONDON : PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

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LENORE ANNANDALE'S STORY

BOOK I.

COTTESMERE FARM.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE ORCHARD.

LENORE ANNANDALE sat in the swing which hung from the gnarled and knotted bough of one of the orchard trees. She leaned her head dreamily against the hand which grasped the thick rope, and her deep-looking, hazel eyes were fixed on vacancy. Her other hand lay upon her lap, and held a small, well-worn volume whose dark red morocco cover and gilt edges showed traces of having been in constant use for many long years. At her feet lay a beautiful young collie dog of glossy blackness, who alternately lifted his expressive brown eyes to watch the movements of his mistress, and lowered them to blink contentedly at the declining sun, whose soft radiance was now

falling tenderly upon the earth, and turning everything it touched into shimmering gold.

The girl sitting in the swing on this lovely May evening seemed to be thinking deeply, and had remained motionless and absorbed for a long while. The birds sang sweetly in the trees around her; the breeze rustled through the tender green leaves; the blended sounds of human voices, lowing of cattle, and murmur of water reached her faintly from the wooded pasture land of the hollow below; the declining sun set the western sky in a blaze of glory, and filled the whole earth with an intense and transient beauty which seemed each moment to increase; yet Lenore still sat in dreamy unconsciousness of all around her, thinking out her own thoughts in the quiet solitude of the old orchard.

They did not seem to be sad thoughts exactly, for the serious young face did not look troubled, but only engrossed and absorbed; yet every now and then a shadow would flit for a moment across the expressive face, and at last a wistful look dawned in the clear, sweet eyes, and Lenore roused herself from her reverie with a soft long-drawn sigh.

'If I did,' she said half aloud, and the wistful look was more visible than before, 'I should have to say good-bye to all here—the dear old place that has been such a happy home to me almost

ever since I can remember; and it would be very hard, for I love it so much. . . . And they would all be against it, I know, for they have always treated me like a sister, and they are like brothers and sisters to me, and I have never had others. . . . Yes, they would be against it, I know; but then I must think of what is right—of what I ought to do. Women are not meant, I am sure, to lead idle, useless, helpless lives, just because they are women. . . . I know Philip is anxious about the future. I know the seasons have been bad; he cannot get the rents in; Terence is an expense to him—I wish he could learn not to be extravagant and careless—and there are Hector and Archie just getting to the most expensive age.'

Here Lenore paused and knitted her brows, and by-and-by went on still speaking slowly and dreamily:

'I ought to help them, and I believe I could help them if I really set myself to try. I am no relative, and yet they have kept me here all these years, and treated me like one of themselves. I ought to do something in return for them if I can; and I should so like to feel that I was taking a little off from Philip's burden of care. He is so good and unselfish that he never complains; but I am sure he must feel the burden very heavy sometimes.'

Again Lenore paused, and a soft, tender light shone now out of her eyes; her voice, too, seemed to take a corresponding softness:

'I should so like to help him, even if it were to take me away for a little while from them all. I don't think I should mind anything very much if only I could feel I was helping Philip. If I were gone there would be one less to keep—of course they would say that in a large family one makes no difference, but everyone must make a little difference. And then there is the twenty-four pounds a year which Philip always gives me for my dress—that would be saved, and if I could get a situation anywhere with a pretty good salary, why, then I should be able to send money home, to help them to get Hector's education finished and to give him a start in life, and I should like that!'

A smile of glad anticipation lighted the girl's face, showing that it was a face not naturally over grave or serious. Eyes and lips alike smiled, and two small dimples showed themselves in cheek and chin. Lenore's face was at all times a lovable and attractive one; but when she smiled there was a curious kindling light awakened there, which gave it a peculiar fascination.

The dog, who since Lenore had begun to soliloquise had risen and indulged himself in a

succession of luxurious stretches, now laid his head upon her lap in token of sympathy with whatever thoughts she might have. She looked down and stroked his black head and silky ears:

'Col—nice old fellow—I think I shall have to take you with me wherever I go, if I do go. I don't think we could ever bear to be separated; and it would be like taking a little bit of the dear old home with me to have you. You would come with me, wouldn't you?'

Colin wagged his tail in assent, and lifted up one tan paw as if to seal the compact.

Lenore smiled as she caressed him once more; but her eyes had grown dreamy, and her thoughts were already flowing in a different channel:

'I have been thinking about it a good while, and trying to make up my mind; but yet I don't believe I realise a bit what it will be like to go away and make a home somewhere else. It will be very hard, I know—sometimes I can't believe that I ever shall do it. I don't like changes. I like everything to be always as it is; but there is something which never changes—I suppose wherever I go I shall not lose that—nothing can take it away.'

Dreamily Lenore's deep eyes looked out upon the golden world, dreamily her fingers turned the leaves of the book she held upon her knee, until

they reached a well-worn leaf upon which lay a small bunch of dried violets, dreamily did her voice repeat some well-known words, at which her eyes did not need to look:

'"The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."'

A slow, sweet smile stole over Lenore's face:

'"The everlasting arms,"' she repeated; 'it seems to rest one only to say the words. They will be under me as much in one place as another. I need not be afraid. I sometimes have thought that the farther away we are from our earthly friends, the nearer we draw to God. He is our Refuge, and we can always go to Him in trouble.'

The sorrow had all gone out of Lenore's face, and a peaceful serenity had taken its place.

Colin suddenly pricked his ears, and looked towards the low orchard wall, which on one side bordered the adjoining field.

'It is Philip,' said Lenore. 'I should like to tell him, but I must not. I shall say nothing till all is decided. He would try and dissuade me, and I always find it so hard to oppose Philip. I think I will wait until things have gone so far that I cannot draw back. That will be the best way to do; for just now I hardly feel as though I knew my own mind, and I must make that up before I begin to talk to other people.'

Philip Egremont came striding along through the long grass, with his dog at his heels—another collie whom Colin immediately joined and tried to coax into a game of play. The young man was tall, broad-shouldered, and powerfully made, with a fine head which he carried well, and a something in his whole bearing which seemed to express the unconscious dignity of a man born to command. This he had inherited from a line of ancestors of which he had every right to be proud; and yet Philip himself knew little of fame or wealth, and all that he could call his own was the few hundred acres of farm-land around his home, and the large family of sisters and brothers for whom, since his parents' death, many years ago now, he had had to provide.

The Egremonts had once been a noble and powerful family; but they had been ruined by the Civil War in the days of Charles I., and they had never retrieved their fallen fortunes, to any appreciable extent.

Once they had owned a castle, but that was many long years ago; now the family lived in far more humble style, and Philip's house bore no higher sounding a name than Cottesmere Farm.

At twenty-one Philip had been left in sole charge of the farm and the land around it. His parents died within a few months of each other,

leaving him with seven sisters and brothers younger than himself, whom he, as head of the family, felt bound to watch over and guide, as he believed his parents would have wished, had they lived to arrange matters themselves.

That was seven years ago now; and the burden which Philip had taken upon himself he had borne bravely and well; but it had left some traces upon him, which showed that he had suffered anxiety and was familiar with care.

The dark grey eyes were serious and thoughtful; the broad brow was lined with furrows which do not generally appear till middle-life; and the whole expression worn by the handsome, well-cut face was one of gravity and determination, somewhat remarkable in one so young. And yet, with all its firmness, it was not a hard face, but a kindly and gentle one—a face to inspire trust and to win confidence. Philip Egremont might be too quiet and reserved to have many friends; but at least he did not know what it was to have an enemy.

That he was a friend to Lenore could be seen at a glance, by the lighting up of her face at his approach.

'Philip!' she said, and smiled as if to welcome him.

'I thought you must be asleep,' he said; 'you

sat there so still and so long. Shall I give you a swing?'

Lenore laughed and shook her head:

'Have you done for to-day? What have you been at?'

'Nothing special—rolling the grass and hoeing the wheat. It is a comfort to get some fine weather at last. What have you been doing—going to sleep?'

'No—I sleep at orthodox times only. I came out to think.'

'"A penny for your thoughts," then.'

'They are much too precious to part with at that price.'

Lenore spoke lightly; yet there was a look in her eyes which rather belied the gaiety of her tone

Philip's keen eyes met hers in a quick, penetrating glance, and then lighted upon the little book she held in her hand. But he asked no question.

There was silence for a moment. Lenore sat still in her swing, and Philip stood leaning against a tree trunk close by, gazing out over the soft, undulating country, now looking peculiarly lovely in the mellow after-glow left by the departed sun.

'Is anything the matter, Philip?' asked Lenore, fancying she saw an unusual shade of gravity resting upon his face.

He did not answer for a moment, and when he did speak it hardly seemed a direct reply:

'I have heard from Terence.'

'Have you?' said Lenore quickly. 'How is he? What does he say?'

'A good many things. For one, that he is coming home for a short time very soon.'

'Has he got leave?'

'Yes, and his regiment is to be quartered at Chiveley almost immediately, so we shall see a good deal of him through the summer.'

Lenore made no remark, but merely asked,

'Are you glad, Philip?'

'For some things I am. I shall be glad to see more of Terence.'

Lenore looked up at him, and said after a pause, and rather timidly,

'I'm afraid you are often very anxious about Terence, Philip.'

'Well, yes, Lenore, I am; it is no good trying to hide it—I am anxious about him. He is brave and generous and high-spirited, and a handsomer fellow never lived, I think, nor one more generally popular with all; but it is just such a nature that most wants ballast—you know what I mean—and that, I am afraid, is just what Terence lacks.'

'I know what you mean,' said Lenore softly. 'Oh, Philip, I sometimes think it must be dreadful

to grow up without that. I can't tell how they can seem so happy. I wish—I *wish* Terence could understand what it is, and how it helps and comforts us.'

'So do I,' answered Philip; and presently he added with unusual earnestness, 'Lenore, I feel as though I could give or sacrifice *anything*, if I could only feel assured of Terence's future.'

'And I wish,' added Lenore, with equal earnestness, 'that I could do anything to help you to feel assured of it.'

He looked at her with a smile:

'Perhaps you will help us both. Your influence over Terence is always great; and women can do more than men. I believe you will help us, Lenore, as you have helped us before. And now I think we must be going in. The dew is falling, and Madeline will be looking for me.'

CHAPTER II.

THE TREMONT FAMILY.

TOGETHER Lenore and Philip quitted the shady orchard, and turned into a winding gravel path which led to the well-stocked kitchen-garden, and through it to the thick, dark shrubbery which separated it from the lawn and flower-garden, that lay before the house itself.

Cottesmere Farm was a picturesque, old-fashioned building, long and irregularly built, with gable ends and latticed windows, and sweet-scented climbing plants, roses, jessamine, and honeysuckle growing all over its warm red brick walls. There was a deep, picturesque porch, literally curtained with white clematis, now just coming into bloom; and in the farther portion of the house, which looked more modern than the main building, some long French windows stood open down to the ground, to admit the sweet, soft air which seemed to speak of approaching summer.

Where the house stood, the ground sloped

gently down in terraces of smooth, close-cut lawn, which were dotted with dark evergreen trees and shrubs, towards a little silvery brook that babbled by, making much rippling music, and lost itself a little farther on in the shining waters of the Mere, which lay gleaming in the wooded hollow not a quarter of a mile away.

Although the lawns were kept in a state of velvet smoothness, and the paths were as neat as the lawns, yet the garden itself was not laid out with the geometrical precision that is often to be seen. That great care was taken with it might be seen by the absence of weeds, and by the luxuriance, without wildness, that was ever visible. But it was the care of loving, girlish hands, not the hired skill of the gardener, that produced the result described. No ribbon borders or mosaic work of flowers was to be seen in the gardens of Cottesmere Farm. The borders were full of sweet-scented roses, some amongst them just bursting into bloom, of tall lilies whose glory was yet to come, of graceful campanulas, many coloured phloxes, brilliant poppies, and other old-fashioned flowers, which would soon awake to their summer beauty, and make the garden one mass of bloom.

But the time of the summer flowers was not yet come, although the air was heavy with the fragrance of the lilac and lily of the valley; and the azaleas

and rhododendrons gave warmth and colour to the garden. Lenore plucked a spray of delicate yellow blossom as she passed the azalea bed, and fastened it in the front of her dress:

'Days like this make one feel as though the spring were almost over. Sometimes I wish it would be always spring-time, Philip.'

'Then the charm would vanish, I am afraid,' answered Philip with a smile; 'but I know what you mean.'

'Philip, is that you?' called a gay, girlish voice from the house. 'We thought you were never coming in. Supper is nearly ready. Is that Lenore with you? I fancied she was hopelessly lost!'

'Not quite hopelessly,' answered Philip, as he and Lenore entered the porch, and turned into a long, low, wainscotted room to the left, where stood a long table, spread with a white cloth, and laid out for a substantial supper. A hissing urn stood at the far end of the table, and Madeline Egremont stood beside it, making tea. At their entrance she looked up and greeted them with a smile.

Bright-eyed, curly-headed Marjory, who had called to them just before, was leaning out of the window, which stood in a deep recess, and thus gave additional length to the room, and as they entered she turned round laughing:

'You look like two owls—blinking at the lamps

like that! Col, come and kiss me. I wish you weren't so faithful to your mistress. I wanted you to have a walk with me; but of course you were with Lenore. Give me a paw—good dog!—you have the loveliest eyes in the world, Col—almost as beautiful as mine.'

'What an overpowering compliment!' said a lazy voice somewhere in the shadows of the room. 'If Col appreciated it properly he would never get over it.'

Marjory turned quickly towards the dim recess from which the voice proceeded:

'Are you there, Duff? I didn't know you had come in.'

A tall, long-limbed, broad-chested young fellow of two-and-twenty summers emerged leisurely from his secluded corner, and advanced towards Marjory. He was like Philip, although decidedly less handsome; yet what he lacked in regularity of feature, he almost made up for in brightness of expression, and a certain comical turn of the lips and twinkle of the brown eyes gave a character to his face, which was quite as prepossessing as actual beauty. He and Marjory were fast friends, and ceaseless wranglers, and every spare moment was filled up by teasing or disputing over anything and everything that turned up. Their voices always seemed to form a kind of running accompaniment to all

else that was said, and was no more heeded by the others than the babbling of the brook, or the rustling of the leaves without.

Lenore had taken her seat at table, and was resting her elbows upon it, and her chin upon her clasped hands, thinking of what Philip had said about Terence.

Philip and Madeline were talking together in low tones.

'Terence coming home?' said Madeline. 'I am glad of that. He has not been home for a long while now.'

'Terence coming home?' repeated Marjory, catching the words. 'Is he really? I am glad! How do you know?'

'I have a letter from him,' said Philip; but he did not produce the letter, and Madeline and Lenore both noticed the slight shade that rested on his face.

The servant had brought in the hot dishes, and had rung the great bell in the hall.

There was a sound of flying footsteps, and two rough-headed, brown-faced boys of twelve and fourteen rushed like a whirlwind into the room, and took their places at table with a vast amount of unnecessary noise.

Philip took his place at the foot, and the meal began; but there was still one vacant chair, and

presently the door opened, and a tall, pale girl entered quietly, and took her seat without any word of explanation or apology.

Dora was not like any of her family; she never seemed as though she could belong to the fair-skinned, open-faced Egremont family. Her face was handsome in its own way, but it was more like the face of a Spanish than of an English woman. Eyes and hair were jet black; the complexion was a pale, clear olive; and the dark, thick brows, which arched themselves over the lustrous eyes, gave an almost frowning character to the face. Her expression, too, was utterly unlike the one worn by the faces around her. It was grave to severity, and, besides the gravity, there was a look of discontent visible there, which at times was very marked, and which spoiled what might otherwise have been described as an interesting and intellectual countenance.

No one seemed to have much to say to her, and no face brightened at her approach; but presently Duff asked:

'Have you heard the news, Dora?'

'What news?'

'That Terence is coming home soon.'

'Is he?'

'So it seems. He has written to tell Philip.'

'Oh!'

That was all. Dora showed no sign of special interest, nor did the news rouse her to animation. However, as nobody seemed to look for any such result, it may be supposed that she was not given to manifest her feelings openly.

Hector and Archie finished their supper, and said good-night. Dora vanished as quietly as she had come. Marjory and Duff strolled out into the garden, and Lenore crossed over to the window and leaned out into the sweet, still night.

Philip and Madeline drew near together, for that quiet exchange of confidences which was one of the chief pleasures of their lives.

Madeline was but a year younger than Philip, and there was a strong likeness between them. She was tall and fair, with a calm, sweet, thoughtful face, and a serene expression which gave to it a subtle charm, almost more potent than delicacy of feature or brilliancy of colouring; and with all its sweetness it did not lack power, and there was much of the same kind of firmness in its lines as was more strongly traced upon Philip's serious face.

If Philip had tried to fill the father's place to the family left orphaned so young and so suddenly, Madeline had equally tried to fill that of mother, and the bond between brother and sister was unusually strong and tender.

'Madeline,' said Philip, as he drew from his

pocket a closely-written letter, 'Terence has been getting into debt again.'

'Has he?' returned Madeline, a shade of anxiety falling upon her face. 'I am very sorry. I did hope that after the affair of last year he would have been more careful; he seemed so very sorry for all the trouble he had given you. I thought it would really have made an impression upon him that time.'

'I am afraid impressions with Terence do not last long,' answered Philip. 'They are very real whilst they are fresh upon him; but their influence soon passes. He is very sorry, and writes most humbly, and I dare say, poor lad, that he does find it hard to keep within the limits of what I can allow him. Living more in the world, as he does, he feels our poverty more than the rest of us do; but I wish he could learn to be more thoughtful, and to understand, what I have so often tried to explain, that his extravagance is really robbing the younger boys. The money that paid his last debts was what I had saved to give Duff a start in life; and although he is content to stay upon the farm, and is so useful to me that I hardly know how I could spare him, yet it is hardly fair towards him that he should lose what was his by moral right; and here are more debts just when times are bad; and I am so anxious about Hector, for he will

never make a farmer, and it is time to be settling what the boy is to be. I hardly know what to say or do in regard to Terence's affairs. I must be just to the younger boys. Terence cannot have all; and yet an Egremont was never before disgraced, and to my mind there is something that almost amounts to disgrace in leaving a place in debt, and helping perhaps to ruin poor tradesmen who have dealt honestly, and expect to be paid honestly.'

Philip's face was grave and anxious, and Madeline's full of perplexed thought.

'It is hard to know how to act,' she said. 'But about the debts, Philip—they are not "debts of honour" like the last? He has not been gambling again?'

'I trust not—I hope not—at least he has given me no reason to think so. He has sent me the bills, and they are all honest debts; but what he has done with his pay and with his allowance I cannot tell.'

'What is the amount?'

'Just upon forty pounds. He tells me there are ten owing to him from a friend, and he expects to be paid shortly; but there is evidently nothing to meet the remainder. Thirty pounds in ready money is a mere trifle to many people; but it is a large sum to us.'

'Philip,' said a voice from the distant window,

'I don't know whether you know that I am here; but if you are talking secrets I will go; for I cannot help hearing partly what you are saying.'

'No, Lenore, you need not go,' answered Philip, looking up; 'if you have heard so much, you may hear all. You will not speak of it to the others, I know; though I am afraid it is no secret to any of them that Terence is not all we could wish.'

'No,' answered Lenore, as Philip's remark seemed by the tone in which it was put to demand an answer, 'they do know that he is reckless and extravagant; but Marjory is just as devoted to him as ever. I almost think she seems to glory in his escapades. Dora, of course, does not say much; but I fancy she half admires and half despises him; only I never do understand what Dora thinks.'

'Nor I,' said Philip; and then there was a short pause, after which he turned again to Madeline, and the quiet talk went on as before.

'I feel as though I must make one more effort, and help him to leave Munstead free of debt. When he comes home I must speak very seriously to him, and whilst his regiment is stationed at Chiveley I shall be able to look after his affairs a little, if he will let me; and perhaps the old home influence may help to keep him steady. I will make this one effort, though I hardly know how

the money is to be got together. I'm afraid I must sell the two Alderney heifers. They ought to fetch eighteen pounds each at least, though market prices are low just now. I don't like robbing the stock, and it is bad farming, I know; but I see no other way of doing it. The hay is almost gone, and all that comes in I want for wages and current expenses.'

'It is very hard upon you to have all this extra anxiety on Terence's account,' said Madeline with a sigh. 'If he could only understand the difficulties of your position, I do think he would be more thoughtful; but it seems as though he cannot learn care or consideration.'

'Poor lad!' said Philip once again, 'it must be very hard for him—popular, sought after, and caressed as he is—to learn the care and economy which are no hardships in our quiet, secluded life. We must try not to judge him harshly—no doubt the temptations in his path are very great.'

'Yes,' answered Madeline softly, 'and I fear poor Terence has not yet learned in Whose strength only temptation can be withstood.'

Then there was silence between the two, which was broken by the soft, quick footsteps of Lenore. They did not see that she had just before slipped noiselessly from the room, and had run up the shallow steps of the wide oak staircase that led to

the rooms above; but now that she had returned and stood beside them, they saw that her cheeks were flushed, and that her eyes were bright, and that her words came with unusual haste, as though she was confused or afraid.

She held out towards Philip a small bag, such as is often used to keep money in:

'There, Philip, let him have that—send that to Terence and keep the heifers. It is all yours—I have only been keeping it for you. Take it now, and don't let the thing trouble you any more. It will be enough, and Terence *must* learn to be more careful, when he comes home and sees how things are here.'

'But, Lenore, what is it? What do you mean? I do not understand you. What is in this bag?'

'Money,' she answered; and the delicate rose pink in her cheeks deepened to carmine. 'There is a little more than thirty pounds there. Let Terence have it for his debts, and keep the heifers. Don't impoverish the farm; send this—It is all your own.'

'I do not understand yet, Lenore,' said Philip, in his quiet, kindly way; and surprised as he was, he gave no outward token of astonishment. 'This money cannot be mine. How do you make it out? I know nothing of it.'

'No; but it is yours for all that,' persisted Lenore. 'Have you not been giving me money

year after year for dress? Well, I have never spent it all. Every year I have saved some. And then the chickens you gave me, you never would take the eggs amongst yours; you would give me the money they brought in—well, I saved that too. And those little stories and verses I write sometimes for that children's paper, I get guineas and half-guineas for them, and they all go into the bag. It is all yours, Philip; I have been saving it all for you. I wanted to buy you a horse to ride, for I know you want one; but I think perhaps that, as this trouble has come, it will help you more to send it to Terence. It is yours, Philip; take it, and do what you wish with it.'

Philip looked earnestly into Lenore's flushed face, and slowly reached out his hand for the bag she still continued to hold out, but then paused, and did not take it.

'Lenore,' he said, 'I hardly like to do it—it is most noble and generous of you—but it is too much.'

'Too much!' echoed Lenore with a quick spasm of pain in her voice. 'Too much—and after all you have been to me, and have done for me all these years! Philip, you should not say such a thing to me—to me who owe everything to you and yours.'

'Hush, Lenore! you owe us nothing—you have

been a sister—more than a sister to us. You are one of us.'

'I am not one of you!' cried Lenore with a sudden burst of the vehemence caused by deep feeling. 'I know that you have always treated me as such; but I am not one of you. I am a stranger—a friendless orphan, with no one in the world to love or care for me. Yes, Philip, I will speak this once—I will say a little of what I feel. My mother was a friend of your mother—that is all my claim, and when she died in poverty and sorrow, your mother took me into her house, and brought me up as her own; and you have all adopted me for a sister, and have never let me feel for one moment my dependent position. And I have accepted the place you have given me—I have taken a sister's place among you; and now I claim a sister's right to do what I can to help my brothers when the need for it has arisen. Philip, can you not see that, if you disallow my claim to do that, you virtually show me that I am not one of yourselves?'

The girl stopped speaking, and looked at him. It was not often that Lenore was moved to such earnest vehemence, and therefore this burst of feeling carried with it the more weight.

Philip hesitated no longer, but took the little bag.

'Lenore,' he said, 'you are right. You have

been as a sister to us, and your claim shall not be disputed; but Terence shall know to whom he owes this help. Perhaps that knowledge will help better than anything else could do to make him careful for the future.'

Lenore's face had cleared, but all she said was, 'Thank you, Philip,' and then she walked away, leaving the brother and sister together once more.

Philip's face was grave and pale; and a keen eye might detect a look of pain in his steadfast eyes.

'Madeline,' he asked in a low voice, which was not quite like his usual tones, 'do you think—have you ever thought that Lenore cares much for Terence?'

And Madeline answered, without looking at him, 'I cannot tell, Philip. I have no reason to think that she does.'

Philip rose and paced once or twice up and down the room:

'She has always had more influence with him than anyone else, ever since they were children together. Perhaps it might be the saving of him if it were to be so. He is the kind of man to win any woman's love; and Lenore has always stood his friend. I believe it might make a different man of him if it were so—and yet, and yet, Madeline, it is not the end for which I have hoped, and

about which I have sometimes dreamed.' The look of pain was very visible now, and there was pain, too, in his voice.

'I know what you mean, Philip,' said Madeline softly; 'I have hoped that too.'

CHAPTER III.

MARJORY'S OPINIONS.

'DUFF!'

'Marjory!'

'Lend me your knife a moment to cut this straggling branch off.'

'You shouldn't garden on the Sabbath-day,' said Duff, leisurely producing the knife, and pruning away the offending branch. 'Why do you not go with Dora, and teach in the Sunday-school?'

'Because I can't bear it. I like being good in my own way, not in Dora's; and I never could teach a class. I can't sit still all that time, let alone the talking. If I could play the organ in church, like Lenore, and train the choir, I would; but I never could teach in the schools.'

'Well, I'm sure I never asked you to,' answered Duff with lazy good-humour. 'You need not get so hot about it. I don't imagine you would be of any tremendous utility in the school if you did go. You might go as a pupil, though, and get Dora to take you in hand. It is always with the most unpro-

mising subjects she achieves her most brilliant successes, is it not?' Marjory tossed her head, but did not pursue the topic farther, and wandered off to the next subject which occurred to her:

'Terence will be here on Tuesday.'

'I'm aware of the fact.'

'I shall be so glad when he comes. He always has such lots to tell about places and people we never see or hear of.'

'Yes; he's quite the hero of the family when he comes home—like the prodigal son.'

Marjory gave him a quick glance, but could make nothing out from his face, which wore its customary expression of comical gravity:

'It seems to me that Terence is looked upon as a black sheep just now, for some inscrutable reason. Has he been getting into any scrapes?'

'Nobody has told me so, if he has.'

'Philip and Madeline look grave when his name is mentioned, and Lenore gets red and says nothing. I can't help thinking there is something in it.'

'Well, your thinking will do nobody any harm.'

'Don't be tiresome, Duff. Do you know anything about it?'

'I thought I told you that I didn't.'

'Well, I hope they'll all be nice to Terence when he does come, and not look grave or be silent

and reserved. I don't care what he has done—he may not be as virtuous or sober as Philip, but Terence is the handsomest and the most delightful brother that ever lived, and the house is always another place when he is at home.'

'Quite so; he comes home covered with glory, like the warriors of old, and is the cynosure of all admiring eyes. It is the happy fate of all those who wander away from the paternal roof, to seek fame and fortune.'

Something in his tone piqued Marjory—she fancied he was making game of her:

'It's all very well for you to gibe and jeer and talk nonsense; but Terence is twice the man that you will ever be.'

'What a proud distinction for him!'

'Yes,' pursued Marjory with increasing energy, 'I shall think what I like and say what I like; and what I say is, that the world would be a much slower and stupider place than it is, if all the men in it had no more enterprise and spirit, and—well, yes—and recklessness in them than you and Philip have!'

'I have no doubt you speak the truth; but we cannot all be bright and shining lights like Terence. A family of fallen fortunes like ours can only afford one meteor in a generation. We must try to shine by his reflected light.'

Something in the tone stopped Marjory's glow of eulogy. She looked up quickly at Duff, and saw an unusual gravity in his merry grey eyes.

'Why, yes—I suppose it does take a good deal of money to keep Terence,' she said slowly, and then, after a little thought, asked suddenly: 'Duff, why was it you never went to Australia to learn sheep-farming, as you were to have done? There was so much talk about it at one time, and then it all collapsed. Why was it?'

'There was farming enough here to keep me employed,' answered Duff. 'There goes the church bell; go and put on your bonnet. Family history becomes fatiguing when discussed at such length. I'll wait for you in the ten-acre field when I've tied the dog up. Come, Col—you can't go to church—you're too young and frivolous. You won't even go quietly home with Tweedie, but try and disgrace us by forcing an entrance into the church—so you must be tied up—come!'

Duff strode away with Colin at his heels, and Marjory went indoors with a graver face than was usual with her.

Marjory's gravity did not quite desert her all through the day. Serious thoughts did not often trouble her young head; but they would rise up now and again, and she asked herself many questions which she felt herself incapable of answering.

Lenore was usually Marjory's confidante whenever she was perplexed or distressed; but to-day there was no getting hold of her. Philip and Madeline both seemed to have so much to say to her, that Marjory had no chance of gaining her attention, and so it came about that, for almost the first time in her life, Marjory entered into conversation of a personal nature with her rather dreaded sister, Dora.

She was wandering alone in the fields at twilight when she met Dora, who was returning home from some expedition, and seemed very deep in thought, for she started when she heard her name spoken.

'Dora! Where are you going?'

'Home.'

'Yes; but I mean, where have you been?'

'To see Jim Crowder.'

'What, the woodman who was so ill? How is he?'

'He is dead.'

'Dead! Oh Dora! When did he die?'

'Just now.'

'What!—whilst you were there?'

'Yes.'

'Oh Dora, how dreadful! Who else was there?'

'Nobody. His wife had gone for the doctor.'

'Oh Dora! How could you stay? Wasn't it very dreadful?'

'No—it did not seem dreadful.'

'Weren't you dreadfully frightened?'

'No—I don't think I was.'

'Oh Dora! I can't think how you could stay. What did you feel like?'

'I think, if I felt anything,' answered Dora, in cold, measured tones, 'it was that I wished I could change places with him.'

'Dora!'

Marjory was so aghast that she stopped short to gaze with almost frightened eyes into her sister's pale, quiet face. Her next question was put in a frightened tone, little more than a whisper:

'Dora, what does make you say such dreadful things?'

'Why should you call it dreadful? That man was happier than I have ever been since I can remember—happier than I believe I shall ever be. He has a wife and children to love him and to mourn for him. His life was of use to some in the world. Mine is of no use at all, either to myself or to others. I say again I would gladly exchange lots with him, were such an exchange possible.'

Marjory looked awed and overpowered; by-and-by she summoned up courage to speak:

'But, Dora, what makes you say you are of no use? You know you are the cleverest of us all; and then you have your schools and your district,

and do more than any of the others, and go to church twice as much as anybody else, and visit the hospital at Chiveley, and lots of horrid places beside. I thought people who did things like that were always good and happy. I can't understand you when you say such things.'

Dora smiled bitterly.

'I thought so too, once—before I tried; but I have not found it produce that result,' answered Dora rather dreamily.

'Then why do you go on?'

'I really hardly know. Working stops thinking, and that is the worst thing one can do.'

'But, Dora, I don't understand you; why should you be unhappy?'

'The wonder is to me how anyone is happy.'

'Oh Dora!'

'Anyone here, I mean, stagnating in this little life. I feel stifled. I want to go out into the world, and see life as it really is. I feel as though I had power within me—I know I have ambition. I want to see more, to learn more. I am sick of this monotony of shut-in country life. But it is no use thinking or hoping. We are a fallen family. Here I am, and here I shall remain till the end of the chapter. My dream of seeing the world will never be anything but a dream. We are poor, and poor we always shall be. I do not wish to com-

plain; but oh! if I had only lived in the days of our past glories, when the Egremonts were a noble and powerful house! That life would have been worth living!'

Marjory listened with some curiosity to this speech, which gave her more insight into her sister's way of thinking than she had ever had before; but Dora, as if conscious that she had spoken with unusual freedom, at once drew into herself again, and declined to become more communicative. The walk was finished almost in silence.

CHAPTER IV.

TERENCE.

'PHIL—old fellow! how are you? I can't tell you how glad I am to see you again, and to feel that I am at home once more!'

'Why, Terence,' said Philip, turning round with a look of glad surprise and welcome in his eyes, 'how come you here? I did not expect to see anything of you for an hour or more. They are generally ready to devour you at home on your arrival.'

'Ah, yes; but you see I have not been home yet. I thought it was you I saw out in the fields, as I drove along, so I sent the man on with the trap, and here I am. I want to see them all again badly enough; but after all, Phil, you have the first place in my thoughts. I should be a worse scamp than I am, if it were not so.'

And Terence, who had not dropped Philip's hand all this while, shook it again with a warmth which left no doubt of his sincerity, and his bright,

expressive face glowed with an honest feeling which made it doubly attractive.

Handsome, warm-hearted Terence! Was it wonderful that Philip's eyes should rest upon him with almost more than brotherly pride and pleasure, as he stood there in the bright sunlight, in all the strength and beauty of his early manhood, rejoicing in the very fact of his existence, because life looked so bright and glorious a thing to him? Was it to be marvelled at that the elder brother should almost forget for the moment his doubts and anxiety, when he saw how unchanged was the old boyish affection, how open and fearless and frank the soft, bright eyes, how simple and unaffected the words of brotherly greeting?

If ever there was a man born into the world, calculated by the beauty of his person and the charm of his manner to conceal from himself and others the faults and failings of his nature, that man was Terence Egremont.

'Terence, it is good to see you back again!' said Philip with quiet warmth. 'The place never seems quite the same when you are away. And how long a time are we to have you this year? It is some while since you have had any leave.'

'Yes, the fates were unpropitious; but it was worth waiting for this. I must join the regiment at Chiveley on June 1. Till then I am a free

man. We ought to have glorious weather now that I am at home to enjoy it!'

'I trust we may—we want it badly enough. I am glad you are to be stationed at Chiveley, Terence. It will not seem like losing you altogether.'

'I can't tell you how glad I am,' answered Terence eagerly. 'It was as good as coming into a fortune to hear that news. I shall be able to turn over a new leaf and start fair, when once I get away from Munstead and the set there. I could not bear them and their ways, and yet I could not cut away from them. I am thankful to think I am clear of the place, and more thankful to feel that Chiveley is to be my destination, where the old associations and the influence of home will always be present to help me. I know you must think me very weak and foolish, and no doubt I am—I do not deny it; but unless you have tried it yourself, Phil, you never could know what a difference it makes to one to go out into the world, leaving all the dear old scenes and gentle, loving faces behind one, and feeling that there is nobody left to look after you, or to care what you do, or what happens to you. I don't think anyone living away as you have done amongst our sisters, and in this sweet, sinless place, can have an idea how easily temptation besets us poor fellows, who have to go

out and rough it in the world, nor how hard it is to withstand some of the many temptations.'

Terence spoke with a good deal of feeling, and Philip was moved by his contrition and humility.

'Terence,' he said quietly, 'I do not think I have ever judged you hardly. I know that you are often much tempted and tried. Perhaps, had I been in your place, I might have yielded more readily than you have done.'

'No, no,' answered Terence hastily, and with a slight flush on his cheek, 'do not say that. It makes me more ashamed still. You would have made a far more steady officer than I shall ever do. You would make a splendid soldier, Phil. But then you have a firmness and a determination that I shall never get, I fear. I can't tell how or what it is—it was just the same when we were boys together—things that tempted me never seemed to touch you; keeping rules was no trouble to you. If I only had your disposition, or whatever it is that makes you what you are, I should be a very lucky fellow.'

'There is nothing in my disposition that you need covet, Terence,' answered Philip with a grave smile. 'What you need more than you have, you have only to strive after, and you will obtain it. Some other time we will talk more of this; for you know as well as I do that there is a good deal that must be said between us by-and-by. But this is

neither the right place nor the right time; and if I keep you to myself much longer, I shall never be able to make my peace with the girls. Let us come up to the house. It is their hour for afternoon tea. If you are fashionable enough to patronise that institution, you will be just in time.'

'How are the girls?' asked Terence as they took their way up the sloping, green hill-side.

'Well, as usual. We do not trouble the doctor much at Cottesmere.'

'And Duff? Is he at home?'

'Yes, he's my right hand here, and has settled down wonderfully, all things considered.'

'I don't think he ever cared two straws about going to Australia,' remarked Terence, switching off the heads of some nettles which grew in the hedge close by.

'I don't know that, Terence,' answered Philip. 'He never speaks of it now; but at one time he was very keen about it, and his whole heart seemed in the plan.'

'He would most likely have made ducks and drakes of his money, and failed, and have had to come back after all,' argued Terence. 'I dare say things have turned out best as they are.'

'He might have failed, of course. It is not everyone that succeeds; but Duff has a long head, and knows what he is about. Play ducks and

drakes with the money, as you call it, he certainly never would have done; and he might have made a fortune and become a prosperous farmer. He has many of the qualities which are the best guarantee of success.'

'I dare say he has a much pleasanter berth here, all the same,' returned Terence, who did not quite relish the turn the talk had taken. 'He would have to rough it awfully out there for a good many years to come.'

'No doubt he is far more comfortable at home,' admitted Philip; 'not but what Duff enjoys "roughing it" more than any man I know. But what is so hard upon him is that he has absolutely no prospects now. He is working for me, not for himself, and I do not know whether I can ever make him any adequate return. Had he been able to go to Australia, he would, in all probability, be doing well and prospering in life; as it is, his future is as uncertain as it well can be. It has fallen hardly upon him, Terence, as you must know as well as I do.'

Terence bit the ends of his moustache, and looked up appealingly at his brother:

'I am awfully sorry, Phil. I would make any amends, if I only had the power.'

Yes, Terence, I know you would; but there seems no chance of that. Well, never mind; we

need not discuss the subject now. It is never a pleasant one at any time, and certainly need not spoil your home-coming. You will find a very warm welcome at the farm; there has been much rejoicing at the thought of your return.'

'Lenore is with you still?'

'Of course—where else should she be?'

'I don't know; only I have fancied sometimes, with her clever head and independent nature, she would some day leave the nest, and try to use her wings a little. It is nearly two years since I have seen her. She was away when last I was here. It was most generous of her lending me that money, though I didn't half like using it. However, I hope soon to be able to repay it; and meantime my warmest thanks must content her.'

'If you thank her do so in private,' advised Philip, with slightly contracted brow. 'Nobody knows anything of the matter but Madeline and myself; Lenore does not wish it spoken of.'

Terence laughed in his boyish way:

'You are all very tender over my faults and failings, I think. I should be much less secret about them myself.'

'Well, Terence, we do not find the subject a pleasant one, and therefore, I suppose, we avoid it as far as possible.'

Whatever might have been the reply to this, it

was cut ruthlessly short by the sudden descent upon them of Marjory, who came running down the path to meet them, and who flung herself upon Terence with an impetuous burst of welcome.

'Terence! you dear, darling boy! I am glad to get you back again. Now let me look at you. Yes, you are handsomer than ever—I knew you would be—you always are! And I should like to know what you meant by leaving the dog-cart and cheating us like that—as though I wasn't fifty times more anxious to see you again than Philip was! You bad, dear boy! It is nice to have you home again!'

Terence returned Marjory's greeting affectionately. He was fond of all his sisters, but perhaps Marjory was his favourite, because she never asked troublesome questions or looked grave over his escapades; and she was ever ready to be his devoted slave, to run about after him, to fuss over him, make much of him and pet him; and this was just what suited Terence, who was accustomed to be a person of importance, and enjoyed attentions and consideration that would have been all but intolerable to many men.

She led him triumphantly up to the house, where, upon the lawn, the whole of the family party was assembled with the exception of Duff, who was hard at work somewhere on the farm.

Terence was warmly welcomed, and a pleasant confusion of happy voices and the noisy greeting of the dogs filled the air, and for a time quite drowned the murmur of the brook, and the other soft sounds of a summer's afternoon.

The tea-table was brought out and placed in a shady spot, and the party disposed themselves at will around it.

Terence found it all he could do to answer all the eager questions showered upon him; but he did his best to satisfy all, and was very happy to find himself in the peaceful home-circle again, and surrounded by admiring and loving faces.

He was sitting between Madeline and Marjory, upon the rustic seat beneath the grand old yew tree at the bottom of the lawn; but his eyes rested most frequently upon the face and form of Lenore, as she stood at the table dispensing the tea, and listening with a look of bright animation on her face to the talk that went on around her. The faithful Colin stood beside her, looking up at his mistress with wistful brown eyes, his thoughts intent upon bread and butter; and her slight, graceful figure, in its simple white dress, stood out with picturesque distinctness from the back-ground of dark shrubs behind.

Terence was conscious of a feeling of pleasure and surprise as he looked at Lenore.

Two years ago, when last he had seen her, she had been a sallow-faced, angular girl, with an interesting countenance, and a pair of fine, expressive eyes, but without any claim to what would generally be accepted as beauty.

And now all this was changed. The girlish figure had attained a womanly grace and softness of outline; it was slight, but the angles had disappeared, and there was a buoyancy and lightness in all its movements that was very pleasant to see. And the face was even more changed. It was no longer sallow, but the clear, smooth skin was somewhat olive-tinted, and the faint colour in the cheeks was as soft as that in the heart of a pale blush rose.

Terence looked and looked again, marvelling at the change he saw, until Lenore, catching his intent and almost puzzled gaze, smiled brightly and frankly across at him, and asked:

'Well, Terence, what is it?'

'I beg your pardon. I'm afraid I am rude; but I can't make it out.'

'Make what out?'

'You. You are so changed; you are not like the Lenore I used to know.'

The girl laughed.

'Well, if it comes to that, you are a different Terence from the one I remember.'

'I hope time has been as kind to me, then, as it has to you.'

'Don't fish for compliments. Marjory has been quite explicit enough about your good looks. You will not find me encouraging your vanity.'

'No, don't; it would be bad for me;' yet nevertheless Terence looked as though he would find a little praise from Lenore very much to his taste.

But he was not permitted much opportunity for winning it, for Marjory was eager to take him all round the place, pointing out every change that had come about since he had last seen it, and winning promises of assistance for all the various schemes of improvement and alteration, which were always stirring in her busy brain.

The quiet beauty and the peacefulness of all around were very soothing to Terence. He felt that he loved his home very deeply, and that he was in harmony with it all.

'If it were only my fate to live always here,' he thought to himself, 'what a different kind of fellow I should be. No wonder Philip is so steady-going and so virtuous. One could hardly be anything else here, I think.'

'Dora has grown graver than ever, I fancy,' he said by-and-by to Marjory, interrupting the flow of her constant chatter. 'Is anything the matter?'

'Well, no, I don't think so; but I am sure she is not happy, Terence.'

'Why on earth not?'

'I hardly know. Perhaps I ought not to have said anything; but I fancy she is tired of the life here, and wants to see more of the world. It seems so odd, for to me this is the best kind of life possible. I wouldn't leave the farm for anything.'

'Quite right, Marjory. You always stay in that frame of mind. The world is a bad place, and the less one knows of it the better. That, at least, has been my experience.'

Marjory opened her eyes wonderingly.

'But, Terence, you would not like to stay here always, would you? I thought you were so fond of "seeing life," and doing as other men do.'

'Well, Marjory, I can only say that when I come back again out of all the strife and turmoil, I feel as though I would give anything to settle down, and end my days in peace in the old home.'

'Then do, Terence!' cried Marjory eagerly. 'Oh, do! It would be delightful to have you always here. Do come home and help Philip with the farm, and then Duff could go to Australia; because, you know, if you were at home, you would not want all the money you do now, and there would be some for Duff.'

Terence laughed, and stroked Marjory's rosy cheek with a caressing movement:

'I'm afraid, little sister, that such a plan as that is quite too Arcadian to be carried out. I am no farmer, you know, and should be worse than useless to Philip, and my small allowance would do nothing to start Duff in life.'

Marjory looked disappointed:

'If you want to come back and live at home, I'm sure I don't see why you shouldn't. I shall ask Philip if you can't.'

'My dear, foolish, little one, how your tongue does run away with you! Haven't you yet learned that we can none of us have all we want in the world, and that a man must go out and fight his own battle in life, and make his own way, however much he might like to stay in the pleasant shelter of home? No, Marjory, I must abide by the choice I made. My life is not a bed of roses; but I must battle on, and put up with the trials and difficulties that beset it. I should be a poor kind of soldier if I were to give up and run away, because all was not pleasure and play.'

Marjory looked at him with fond admiration.

A more experienced eye than hers, and one less prejudiced in his favour, might have noted that Terence's face showed but small signs of his having battled with trial or difficulty; rather, it would

have marked that he looked far more like one, who has drunk somewhat deeply of the cup of pleasure, and has known far less of work than of play.

But it was not to be expected that Marjory would detect this, and her loving admiration was much intensified by this conversation.

She was proud and pleased to have been, as it were, taken into his confidence; and that night as she and Lenore were preparing for bed, in small rooms adjoining one another, she said very earnestly to her companion:

'Lenore, I am sure Terence is really very brave and good—very much better than some of the others think him. I am sure he has a great deal to try him which we know nothing about, and that he tries very hard always to do what is right.'

And Lenore answered gently:

'I am very glad it is so, Marjory.'

CHAPTER V.

THE HERO AT HOME.

TERENCE was not as a rule an early riser; but for some reason or other he woke betimes upon the first morning of his visit home.

Perhaps it was the songs of the birds that woke him, or the sounds of life from the farm-yard near at hand; and perhaps it was the fresh sweetness of the early morning that tempted him to rise and dress, and stroll out into the bright world without; or perhaps it was a glimpse he had caught of a white dress passing out of a little gate below his window into the meadow beyond.

Lenore was always early to rise, and on these sweet, early summer days she was often up with the lark. Sometimes Marjory accompanied her on her rambles, but more often Colin was her only companion, and on this particular morning she was so engrossed in a game of play in which she was indulging him, that she did not see Terence until he was close upon her.

Then she stopped short, laughed, and held out her hand:

'Good morning, Terence. You are an early bird to-day. Have you and your bed quarrelled that you part company so early? Down, Col, down! Isn't it a sweet morning?'

'It is indeed! You see I have come out to enjoy it. May I join you in your walk?'

Terence had never treated Lenore with quite the same familiarity as his brothers did. Perhaps a little more ceremony and courtliness was natural to him; but from some cause or other the girl had never felt on quite the same footing with him, as with Philip and Duff. She was perfectly at home with him, and yet she never felt as though he were a brother to her; and after this long interval of separation, there seemed a considerable distance between them.

'Oh, yes, you may come. I am only going down to the brook for watercress. Philip likes them for breakfast, and I generally gather some for him on fine mornings.'

'Happy Philip!'

'Don't be silly, Terence,' said Lenore with frank fearlessness. 'You are not at Munstead now, you know.'

'Thank goodness, no!' said Terence with energy. 'I never want to see that place again.'

Lenore looked at him with a kind of grave disapproval in her eyes.

'I don't think anybody ought ever to feel that, about a place in which they have lived for any length of time.'

'Why not?'

'Because they would not and could not feel so, if they had lived as they should have lived, and done the work which they ought to have done.'

'Well, Lenore, I dare say you are right; but you must know as well as anyone, what a mess I have made of my affairs; and you cannot wonder at my feeling as I do.'

'Terence, why do you "make a mess of your affairs," as you call it? How is it you cannot learn wisdom by experience, and act prudently and honourably, as other men do?'

'Honourably!' echoed Terence quickly, with a flush mounting to his cheek, though his tone was light. 'May I ask what crime I have committed that my honour is called in question? It is a serious charge against a man, and a soldier.'

'Men and soldiers, perhaps, have different ideas about honour from what we have,' answered Lenore steadily and fearlessly. 'But it does not seem quite honourable to me, first to receive so much larger a share of good things than any of the other boys can possibly obtain, and then to deprive them of

the little that should be theirs by extravagance, which after the first time, you ought to have learned to avoid.'

Terence pulled his moustache, and tried not very successfully to speak carelessly:

'You are very severe, Lenore. I did not expect so uncompromising a lecture from lips that smiled so kindly upon me just now. But I cannot defend myself, as you know but too well; I can only throw myself on your mercy, and confess that I have acted very wrongly. Only, Lenore, remember that when you speak of the way in which "other men" act, you know very little of the world. "Other men" would think very lightly indeed of the sins that look so black in your eyes.'

'I am sorry for "other men" then,' said Lenore quietly. 'I was thinking of Philip.'

'We cannot all be Philips,' answered Terence, in a tone which Lenore did not quite understand.

'No,' she said quietly; and they walked on in silence to the brook.

The stream widened out at the point they now had reached, and the watercress grew freely in its broad, shallow bed. Stepping-stones had been laid down by Duff to assist Lenore in her task; and Terence stood upon the bank, leaning upon an old willow stump, and watching with interest

and admiration the quick and graceful movements of his companion.

The young man had something of an artist's nature, and it was positive pleasure to him to watch anything that made an attractive picture; and, in truth, a more fastidious eye than his might have looked with pleasure upon the scene which met his eye—the clear water of the brook sparkling and dimpling in the soft sunshine, as it went murmuring and laughing over its pebbly bed, and Lenore in her white dress, with sleeves turned back almost to the elbows, poised daintily upon the flat stones, plunging her white arms quickly into the water, and throwing off from them each time a shower of sparkling drops, which fell all over Colin's black coat, as he plunged, and splashed, and barked around her.

'Lenore,' said Terence, when she joined him again, her hands full of fresh green cress, 'you make me feel as though I should like to paint a picture, with you and Col for my models.'

'Col and I are much too busy a pair ever to have time to give you any sittings; and I don't think I care much for men who dabble in art. If they are not great painters or poets, let them leave it alone. Men ought to be too busy to have time to be dabblers.'

Terence laughed:

'I'm afraid, Lenore, if ever you go out and see more of life, your ideal of what man is will receive a rude shock, and your feelings will be much outraged. You seem to entertain a very high estimate of us.'

'Do I?' questioned Lenore. 'I did not know it. I suppose my ideas have been limited by what I have seen. Philip and Duff are the only men I know. They are always busy and active, and are generous and unselfish, and honourable in everything. I did not know such qualities were so rare. As you say, perhaps I shall learn wisdom by experience.'

Terence gave her a quick, searching look:

'Are you something of a cynic, Lenore, or do you speak in all simplicity?'

'I am not sure that I know what a cynic is, Terence; and what I say is just what I mean, neither more nor less.'

Terence was silent, and his companion also, for awhile; but after a pause he spoke again:

'Lenore, you must be thinking me very ungrateful all this while; but Philip said I was not to name it before others; but will you let me take this opportunity of thanking you for your most generous and timely help, which enabled me to leave Munstead with a mind at ease, and to feel that I could begin life afresh in a new place? I

am most grateful to you, Lenore—more so than I can express.'

The girl's face flushed a little, and her lip curled with an involuntary movement which Terence did not see.

'Please say no more about it. The matter had now better be forgotten. I wish to hear no more of it.'

'I will respect your wishes, Lenore—at least, until I have the chance of repaying you; which may, I trust, be soon.'

'Pay the money, then, to Philip, not to me,' she said hastily. 'It is his, not mine.'

'I thought he told me you had sent it—I know it was you. What do you mean, Lenore?'

'I mean what I say. I had saved it; but it was really his; and if ever you have a chance of paying it back, Terence, pay it to Philip. I don't want to see it again.'

'Well, Lenore, your will is law to me. I will do as you say.'

Again Lenore's lip curled slightly:

'I'm afraid, Terence, that no will is law to you but your own.'

'What do you mean?'

'You know quite well what I mean. I mean that, if you really cared for anything but your own pleasure, you would not act as you do.'

Terence cast a humble and appealing glance at her, and answered sadly:

'Lenore, I see you will not spare me; and I do not wonder at it, for I do not deserve to be spared. I have been careless, selfish, reckless—what you will. But do not accuse me of heartlessness, for indeed I do not deserve the charge. My love to all here has never cooled and never wavered.'

'I believe you mean what you say, and think it too, Terence,' answered Lenore more gently; 'but it seems a poor kind of love to me, if it cannot help you to resist temptation.'

'Lenore, I do resist—I do struggle,' said Terence eagerly. 'I have withstood a good deal; but I have not the strength and courage of some men; I find it horribly hard to say "no." You do not know how hard a time I have in the Army. It seems the soldier's motto, "Do in Rome as Rome does," and I cannot bear sneers and ridicule.'

'That seems to me a very poor kind of motto for a soldier,' answered Lenore gravely. 'I remember a soldier who lived up to a much better one than that'

'What was his, then?' asked Terence, glancing with interest into the serious, thoughtful face of his companion.

'"Trust in God, and keep your powder dry,"' answered Lenore with fearless emphasis.

Something in the words, and the tone and the look upon the girl's face, touched the right chord and aroused all the best side of Terence's nature:

'Lenore,' he said earnestly, 'you make me more ashamed of myself than ever I was before. You make me feel as I used to do when I was a child, and said my prayers at our mother's knee, and knew nothing of evil, and was confident that I should never give her, or anyone I loved, one hour's anxiety on my account. Oh, Lenore, if I could only recall those days! If I could only live my life over again, how differently I would act!'

'Yes,' answered Lenore, 'we might all of us say that; but we never shall have the chance, and perhaps it is better that we do not. "Ifs" are poor kind of things, Terence, and so are lamentations over the past. It is the present and the future about which we must make our resolves. The past is not our own—the future is. If you are so confident that you would live your life differently had you to live it over again, why not live it differently now? Why not be brave enough, and be man enough, to show that you can fight against your weaknesses and conquer yourself? Why not show us all that you mean what you say, when you tell us of your sorrow and promise amendment?'

'I will, Lenore, I will,' answered Terence, a good deal moved. 'It is what I have longed to do

times without number; but I seemed so much alone in the world that I despaired of success. I am weak, and I want help, Lenore; will you help me?'

'It is not my help, Terence, that you want,' answered Lenore quietly; and the emphasis on the pronoun made him ask quickly:

'Whose, then?'

'God's,' answered the girl, speaking steadily and resolutely. 'It is of no use your trying to do without that, Terence. You will only make resolves to break them, and fail more and more lamentably each time. If you try to conquer yourself by your own strength, and not by God's help, you will never do it—never! You must know by this time, without any telling, how such attempts always end.'

'I do indeed,' answered Terence earnestly. 'I have made miserable failures enough to know. Lenore, I believe you are right—I know you are right; but what am I to do? I seem to have lost all hold of the old, childish faith that I used to love. God is but a name to me—not a reality. I no more know how to seek Him than an untaught heathen does. I have cast away and ignored all the truths that once I held, and now everything looks dark and confused. I have forsaken God, and now He has forsaken me.'

'No, Terence,' said Lenore, 'that is not true, as you will find if you will but turn to Him again.'

'I would if I could; but I do not know how. I am ashamed—I cannot tell what I believe and what I do not. Do not trouble your sweet soul over me, Lenore. I am not worth the saving.'

'Terence,' was the grave reply, 'you should not speak so—you do not know what you are saying.'

'Perhaps not—I cannot tell—I feel sometimes like an outcast and a reprobate amongst you all. Lenore, I believe you are the only one who can understand and help me. Will you be my guardian angel? Will you teach me, and help me, to be like yourself?'

He stopped short and faced her as he said this, and she knew by his voice and by his face that he was not a little moved.

'Terence,' she said gently, 'I can be no one's guardian angel, and I wish to teach no one to be like myself; but if I can do anything to help you to regain what you say you have lost, you know that I will.'

'You will, Lenore?' he repeated eagerly. 'You will do all you can for me? I thank you for that assurance. Give me your hand, Lenore, and promise you will always be my friend, and will always give me your help.'

She placed her hand within his, and looked up gravely into his face, a little surprised by his vehemence.

'I promise, Terence,' she said simply.

'Always, you know, Lenore,' he went on in the same rapid way. 'I cannot ever do without it, if I have once learned to lean on you. You will not grow tired of me, you will not throw me off?'

She did not guess the thoughts that were rising within him, as he stood looking down upon her fair young face. She met his earnest gaze without faltering and without confusion.

'No, Terence, I will not throw you off. I will do as much as I can to help you—as much as our lives will permit; but first of all I must teach you that you must not lean on me, you must not put your faith in me. If you do, you will never learn the lessons that you say you wish to do.'

'You shall teach me anything and everything you wish. What you say will be gospel truth to me. I believe you could make of me what you would, Lenore,' said Terence fervently; 'for I know you will teach me nothing but what is true and pure and lovely, like yourself.'

Lenore made no answer, and they walked on again in silence. She did not like his last speech. It seemed to her, she hardly knew why, as though Terence could never rise to a high standpoint, and love right for its own sake; as though he must always have an inducement, and act always upon impulse, not upon steady determination. But she

tried to keep down all suspicions as to his sincerity, and to make due allowance for the temperament which, perhaps, made earnest purpose more difficult to him than it would be to another.

'I am afraid I am inclined to judge Terence hardly,' she said to herself, 'because of the trouble and anxiety he gives to Philip, and because of the light way in which he treats the generous sacrifice he allowed Duff to make for him. They say the young are always hard, and perhaps I am so, without meaning to be. I would give anything to help to steady Terence and to relieve Philip's anxiety; but I do not feel as though I could ever trust and like him as I do the other two.'

Terence noted the gravity of his companion's face; but he little guessed her thoughts. He was used to taking liking and admiration as his due, and never imagined anyone could withhold them from him. He smiled to see her pensive look, and allowed his thoughts to flow on in a very pleasant channel.

The conversation pursued so earnestly had rather delayed the two in their ramble, and breakfast had already begun when they entered the room.

Terence's face was bright and hopeful, Lenore's serious and dreamy; and under cover of the noisy greetings which hailed their entrance, Philip and Madeline exchanged meaning glances; and his

face was a little clouded, and his manner somewhat abstracted for the remainder of the meal.

Nobody else, however, seemed to think anything worthy of remark, except Terence's early rising. The breakfast was a merry, noisy meal, and was soon over, for the morning hours were precious, and no one in that busy household had time for any luxurious idling.

Lenore went off to the poultry yard to look after the young ducks and chickens, which were always her special care. Terence would have liked to be her companion still; but he was claimed by Marjory to help her in the garden, where her energies found more than full scope, and in which she always required as much extra help as could be obtained.

Terence was in gay spirits—with him a rebound after any serious thought was inevitable—and the garden resounded with merry laughter and happy voices. Marjory was more and more confirmed in her devotion to Terence, and was quite convinced that he was the cleverest and handsomest brother that ever lived.

The house was very gay now that Terence was home. He seemed to carry about with him an atmosphere of brightness that everyone was bound to enjoy. He was active without ever seeming to be so, and would join Philip half a

dozen times a day to have a few minutes' chat, and see what was going on. He chaffed the farm labourers, and left them with grinning faces; he played with the children, and made them happy with half-pence. He prescribed for a sick horse, mended a broken toy, or repaired an injured fence with equal readiness and facility. He worked in Marjory's garden, framed Dora's drawings, helped Madeline to make up the weekly books, and, in fact, made himself generally useful and particularly agreeable; until the whole household agreed that it certainly was a very pleasant thing to have Terence at home, and Duff teased Marjory not a little about her devotion to her hero.

But, amid all his varied occupations, Terence seldom seemed to lose sight of Lenore, and the impressions he had received at first only deepened with time. When she was present his eyes were seldom off her; when she was absent his thoughts were nearly always about her. Terence had many times before believed himself to be 'in love'; but, as he told himself fifty times a day, no woman had ever as yet so won his heart and gained so great an ascendency over him as had Lenore.

By the end of the third day of his brief sojourn at home, his mind was made up. Lenore should be his wife, and he would win her plighted troth before he left to resume his 'life of toil.'

That Lenore would fail to fall into this arrangement was an idea that never seriously entered into his thoughts.

Every morning he joined her in her early walk; and although he did not openly allude to the subject of their first interview, he gave Lenore to understand that his wishes and feelings were unchanged, and that he claimed the right to seek her out and make a friend and confidante of her, as a natural sequence of the compact they had made.

Lenore was puzzled by Terence's manner; but she did not trouble herself much to discover why he was so tender and chivalrous in his bearing towards her. It bored her a little, and made her feel a little impatient and disdainful; but she kept her feelings to herself, for she had promised to help and befriend Terence, and who could tell, with a volatile nature like his, at what moment an opportunity would occur, for giving him the counsel he said he so much needed and for which he was so eager?

So they walked together in the early morning, and sometimes in the dewy eventide; and Terence's face would be full of tender light, whilst Philip's would sometimes cloud over with a look of pain, which often left its shadow behind when it had passed away, and troubled the heart of Lenore not a little.

'Marjory,' said Duff one evening, 'don't you think it is a case?'

'What?' asked Marjory, opening her eyes wide.

'Terence and Lenore.'

'Oh, Duff!'

'Well, I don't know; why not?'

'Oh, Duff, I don't want Terence to marry—not even Lenore. I don't think there's anybody in the world good enough for him.'

Duff laughed.

'Don't you think so too?'

'Well, if I might be permitted to express an opinion, it would be this, that if things are to be so, Terence will have got a long way the best of the bargain.'

Marjory stared, and then laughed derisively:

'Oh, Duff! you are so ridiculous! You never do get hold of a sensible idea! But I wonder if it is so.'

'Time will show,' was the oracular response.

CHAPTER VI.

BROTHERS.

'WELL, Terence,' said Philip, 'four days out of your ten have gone by, and we have not yet had any serious conversation. Shall we say now the things that have to be said, and feel that the unpleasing subject is off our minds?'

'By all means,' answered Terence readily. 'You have been wonderfully forbearing to have allowed me to escape all this while without the roasting that I well deserve for all my sins.'

'I wish, Terence,' answered Philip, though he could not but smile, 'that the "roasting," as you are pleased to call it, troubled you half as much as it troubles me. I know which of us dreads it the most, and so do you.'

Terence laughed in his boyish fashion.

'Well, Phil, if it is so, it all comes from your being so much too kind to me. I cannot be filled with the dread which your displeasure ought to inspire. You have always tried to spare the rod

as far as possible, and now it seems as though the child were spoilt. But, seriously, Phil, I am very sorry for my past carelessness, and I will pass my word of honour it shall not occur again.'

It was Sunday afternoon, and as Sunday was Philip's only leisure day during the week, he and Terence had taken advantage of it to enjoy together a stroll in the woods. They both knew that it was necessary they should come to some understanding in regard to many things, and Terence had something upon his mind which he was anxious to discuss with Philip. It was almost a necessity of his nature that he should confide to another any hopes or fears which were much in his thoughts.

'Terence,' said Philip kindly, 'I know you are sorry, and I know you mean what you say when you promise never to get into trouble any more; but you must remember how many times you have said the same thing before.'

'Yes, Phil, I do remember,' said Terence. 'I don't know how it is I get into these scrapes. No man could be more anxious than I am to keep right, and yet things always seem to combine against me. I'm a most unlucky beggar. Sometimes I wish I'd never been born.'

Terence's bright face did not look as though its owner could have been often troubled by any such

gloomy thoughts; but Philip was not over critical where his well-loved brother was concerned, and did not listen to a remark of this kind with the fine sense of incredulity with which Lenore would have heard it.

'Yes, Terence,' he said, 'I know you are placed in a somewhat difficult position, and that it is not easy for you to keep within the allowance I am able to make you; but what I have to say to you is this—I really cannot give you more, and I cannot in future come to your aid if you get into difficulties. You must learn care and economy, for I have done all that I can, and more perhaps than I ought, for you, and it will be impossible to do more. It may seem a hard thing to say, but I must say it. I cannot rob the other boys as—well, as Duff robbed himself for the family honour. Hector must be educated for something—the Indian Civil Service is what he has set his heart on—and Archie comes not far behind him. You *must* take care, Terence, or I do not know what will become of you, for it will be absolutely impossible for me to help you any more. You must see the justice of this decision; and I am sure you will not wish all the boys to suffer for your sake.'

'Of course not, Phil. I wouldn't rob them for anything; only it is hard lines to have been brought

up to the Army, and then to have no chance of enjoying one's life there.'

'It may be hard on you, perhaps; and if our father could have foreseen his early death and the succession of bad seasons which we have had, he might have overruled your wish for a soldier's life, and arranged your future differently. But we have nothing to do with *ifs*. We have to deal with things as they are; and I cannot think that all enjoyment will pass out of your life, because you cannot indulge in lavish expenditure. You have enough for all your needs, and I think you should be able to be content. To me, yours looks a pleasant life enough—so free from care and anxiety, and with so small a weight of responsibility resting upon you.'

'From your point of view, I dare say it does seem so; but then, remember that you have never tried the life.'

'No; that is true enough.'

'And the difficulties and temptations are very great—greater than you would believe.'

'Very likely.'

'And you know how easily I am led.'

'Ah! Terence, that is just it. Why do you let yourself be so easily led?'

'It is my nature, I suppose.'

'But nature can be conquered, Terence.'

'It would need a very strong power to conquer mine, I am afraid.'

'Yes, no doubt; but there is a Power strong enough, if you would but seek it.'

Terence's face had grown grave and tender. Philip was struck by its expression, and wondered what had caused it, and what was moving his brother's mind.

'Yes, Phil, I believe there is—I believe there is a power strong enough to help me to resist temptation, and to make another man of me; and, what is more, I believe that I have found it and won it.'

'Terence, I am glad,' answered Philip with much subdued feeling. 'I am more thankful than I can say. It is what I have been hoping and trusting would come to you for many long years.'

'You had thought it, too?—you had wished it?' questioned Terence eagerly. 'I am glad of that, Phil, though, of course, I knew I was sure of your sympathy and good will.'

Philip lifted his head with a quick glance of wonder and perplexity; but Terence, intent upon his own thoughts, went on unheeding:

'You know, Phil, I have always been fond of her. Phil, I believe I shall be another man when I have her to think for as well as myself; when her sweet influence is upon me, and any misdeed of mine will cause grief and pain to her. It will be

the saving of me, I do firmly believe—the love of Lenore.'

A quick spasm of pain had passed over Philip's face when Terence first began his speech; but it died slowly away, and at the close he looked quiet and kindly as was his wont, although he was a little pale, and his eyes had not quite their usual serenity of expression.

When he spoke his voice was steady and betrayed no unusual emotion:

'Have you spoken yet to Lenore?'

'Not exactly—not in set words; but yet I think we understand each other.'

'She has given you reason to think so?'

'I think so. She promised me her help, promised to lead me to better and higher things, promised it for the future as well as for the present, and would she have done so if she had not loved me?'

'She may be offering you a sister's love, Terence, not a wife's.'

'I think not,' answered Terence quickly. 'I do not think she looks upon me as a brother. You and Duff have always treated her as a sister; it is easy to see by the way in which she speaks of you both that it is a sister's love she bears to you. But not so with me. I have never attempted to fill a brother's place. Our friendship has been of a dif-

ferent kind. And since my return home this time, I must have made it plain with what feelings I regard her.'

'Lenore is very simple-minded,' said Philip. 'She may not have understood as much of your meaning as you think.'

Philip felt like one who is trying for a moment to ward off the inevitable, to dally with a fatal truth, and make as though he did not believe.

'Lenore is pure and sweet and trustful—true; but she is still a woman, and women are never backward to know when love is being proffered them.'

Something in the tone jarred upon Philip, and he made no reply.

'Besides,' went on Terence, 'her conduct speaks for itself. Was it not she who came forward to help me out of my difficulties? Why should she do that, if she had no special interest in me? And then, when I would have thanked her, she stopped my mouth, and would not let me tell my gratitude; and when I spoke of repayment, she said she would never receive it back, and grew vehement over the protest. Does not all this show how glad and eager she is to help me, how identical in her mind are our interests, and how little she wishes to be released from the generous sacrifice she has made on my behalf?'

Philip's face still showed some dissatisfaction. His brother's light tone still jarred upon him. Womanhood to him was something sacred, almost too sacred to be carelessly named; and Terence was running on in a strain which did violence to all his instincts of reverence and of reserve.

'You may be right, Terence,' he said slowly. 'At least, you ought to be a better judge than I.'

'Yes, Phil; your honest, brotherly eyes would not be likely to take in all the sweet, subtle changes which her face expresses, which, when we are alone together, tell so very much to me. I do not think I can be mistaken. Say you wish me joy, Phil—say I have your good will.'

'You know that, Terence, without any word from me,' answered Philip, with feeling. 'I do wish you joy with all my heart.'

'Thanks; I knew I was sure of you. And now, promise me one more favour, Phil.'

'What is that?'

'That if Lenore, in her sisterly fashion, comes to you for advice—if her mind is not quite so ready as I think—that you will be my advocate, and plead my cause with her.'

'You must be your own advocate, Terence; you must plead your own cause.'

'I will. I have no fears; but in case of hesitation you will guide her choice?'

'No, Terence, her own heart must guide her.'

Terence's face clouded over for a moment. It was not that he believed he should require his brother's mediation, but he did not like to be denied anything upon which he had set his fancy; and he did not think Philip ought to refuse him so small a service.

'I did not think you would ever have refused me your help, Phil,' he said in a half-pathetic, half-injured way.

'Nor would I, Terence, on any other matter.'

'Nothing else could be so important to me as this.'

'I know; that is the very reason.'

'And Lenore thinks so much of your opinion and of your judgment.'

'Terence, I cannot give counsel in this matter, even should Lenore ask it.'

'It would be the saving of me, Phil,' said Terence. 'Let me once feel I had her to live for, I should never fall again.'

'I have no doubt it would be a powerful incentive, and I wish you all success.'

'You think she has power to make me happy?'

'I do indeed!'

'And yet you will not help me as I ask?'

'No'

'Will you tell me why not?'

'Yes, Terence, I will. I do not feel assured that you will make her happy.'

Terence looked dumbfounded. This was quite a new idea to him. He had always flattered himself that his future wife would be a most happy and fortunate woman.

However, he could not explain this to Philip, and only began rather feebly:

'But if she loves me——'

'If she loves you, she will not come to me for advice. If she loves you little enough to hesitate, I can say nothing. Love will cover a multitude of sins; love will turn all to gold that it touches; but without love, Terence, marriage can be neither holy nor happy, and least of all are you fitted to make the happiness of a wife who does not fully love and trust you.'

Terence pulled his moustache, and wished to goodness Philip would not be so solemn and so uncompromising. He liked to look at everything through the tender haze of uncertainty and romance, not in the prosaic light of everyday experience. Philip's tone and words destroyed the illusion, and brought everything down to the dull level of his own unaspiring fancies. Terence thought the interview had better come to a close.

'Well, Phil, I am sorry you have so low an opinion of me—not but what I fully deserve it; but

I thank you with all my heart for your patience in hearing me and for your brotherly sympathy and good-will. I trust that the future will prove to you that a woman's love can make a new man of me, and that my love will be enough to make Lenore happy.'

And then they shook hands warmly, and each went his own way to think over what had passed.

'Well, Philip?' said a voice behind him. 'You have been wandering round and round this field for an hour and a half, to my certain knowledge. I should like to know what evil deed you are plotting, that you are so deeply engrossed.

Philip started, and passed his hand across his brow. He had had no idea of the flight of time. He had been deep in thought—wrestling manfully with feelings which he was determined to subdue, and fighting against the sense of weary depression, akin to despair, which seemed in danger of mastering him.

When Duff caught sight of his brother's face, he dropped his bantering tone, and asked quickly:

'Is anything the matter?'

'No—nothing, thanks—why?'

'You look as though something was bothering you.'

'Do I? Well, talking and thinking of the future

makes one rather anxious sometimes. I have been having some talk with Terence.'

'Ah!' answered Duff, as though that admission threw considerable light on the subject.

'He has been telling me his intentions.'

'Indeed!'

'He wishes to marry Lenore.'

'So I imagined.'

'Did you? Why so?'

'From the way he has been mooning round after her these past days. But I should say it's quite another question whether Lenore wants to marry him.'

'Terence believes he has her love.'

'I should imagine that Terence would think that of most women.'

'You are severe, Duff.'

'Well, I don't suppose I am far out.'

'Have you any reason for thinking that Lenore will refuse him?'

'I never said I thought Lenore would refuse him. There is very little she would not do for an Egremont, and Terence has a curious knack of getting his own way. What I say is, that I doubt if Lenore wishes to marry him.'

'She shall not sacrifice herself!' cried Philip with sudden vehemence.

'From what I have seen of Lenore,' remarked

Duff, with slow deliberation, 'I should imagine she is just the kind of woman who would sacrifice herself from motives of gratitude, or a sense of duty. She may, of course, draw the line at marriage—marriage is an uncompromising kind of arrangement.'

'It cannot be allowed,' cried Philip.

'Who is to stop it?' questioned Duff. 'Who is to know? She will take precious good care we none of us find out, if it is so.'

Philip gave a weary sigh.

'Phil, old man, cheer up!' said Duff, putting his arm lightly across his brother's shoulders—a demonstration of affectionate feeling somewhat rare with matter-of-fact Duff. 'Don't you be low about it. It's one thing to be engaged, or to play at being engaged—it's quite another to be married. Terence has never been engaged as yet. Mark my word, he will never marry the first woman he pledges himself to. If he engages himself to Lenore this week, I'll bet you anything you like he'll never marry her!' and Duff went swinging away across the fields again, leaving Philip decidedly surprised and perplexed.

CHAPTER VII.

BY THE MERE.

'LENORE, are you very busy?'

'No, not particularly.'

'Can you come out a little while? It is such a lovely evening.'

Lenore looked up from her writing, saw how cloudless was the sky, how golden the sunlight, how tender and soft and summer-like the beautiful world without, and rose, smiling an assent.

'It does seem a shame to be indoors in such weather as this. Yes, Col, you may come too, you patient, faithful old fellow. Where shall we go, Terence? We have more than an hour before supper-time.'

'Will you come down to the Mere? I have not been there yet, and it is so beautiful there.'

'It will look lovely on an evening like this. Yes, Terence, we will go there.'

So, in the soft, mellow light of evening, Lenore and Terence set forth, and quickly reached the

beautiful and secluded spot for which they were bound.

As Lenore had foreseen, it looked peculiarly lovely at an hour like this. The still waters lay like a sheet of gold and opal glass under the cloudless sky. The trees that fringed its margin, and were reflected in their every detail in the shining mirror beneath, wore all the fresh loveliness of early summer. The ground was purple with masses of bluebells, which seemed almost to give their colour to the tree-trunks and to the underwood amid which they nestled, and filled the air with a kind of shimmering haze. All was very still and very peaceful. A few birds were singing their last songs, before the twilight should come down to silence them; others were twittering sleepily to one another from their leafy hiding-places. The harsh and hoarse cry of the water-fowl broke from time to time the increasing silence, and the gentle ripple of the water among the reeds, when a soft breath of wind played upon it, made a dreamy and delicious music.

'Isn't it perfect?' said Lenore; and she sat down upon a fallen tree to look about her, and a tender smile played over her face.

Terence leaned against a neighbouring tree-trunk, and looked at her.

'Perfect indeed!' he echoed, and wished that

she would pay less heed to the surroundings, and more to him.

'Lenore,' he said by-and-by.

'Yes, Terence!' she answered, waking out of a reverie in which he had no part.

'Do you know why I have asked you to come out here?'

'I did not know you had any special reason.'

'Yes, but I had. Have you no idea what it can be?'

He expected to see her eyes drop, whilst the colour rose in her cheeks and her voice faltered in sweet confusion; but, on the contrary, her eyes met his frankly, and she answered with a smile:

'Not the very least in the world.'

This was disconcerting and disappointing, yet Terence would not be baffled. He had come out with a definite purpose, and he did not intend to return until his object was accomplished. His musical voice became more low and tender; his dark, expressive eyes fixed themselves earnestly upon her:

'I came here, Lenore, to ask you a question.'

But Lenore was not looking at him, nor thinking very much of him, and her response came absently from her lips:

'To ask a question, Terence; why could you not ask it at home?'

'Because, Lenore, I wanted to be secure from interruption; I wanted to be sure that you were mine, and mine only, whilst I ask my question and receive your answer.'

Lenore was aroused now, by his voice and manner, and a vague dismay took hold of her; but she gave no outward sign of it.

Terence would have liked to lead gently and tenderly up to the momentous question—to have made eloquent speeches and whispered soft flatteries into her ear—to have played the suppliant lover with all the grace and skill of his nature; but there was something in the glance of Lenore's wide open eyes, something in the attitude of the slight, erect figure, which warned him that he would not be patiently heard—that he must speak out and come to the point quickly.

'Lenore,' he said, 'I want to tell you that I love you.'

She made no answer, and gave no sign of feeling—only sat very still and looked at him.

'Lenore,' he said once more, 'I love you. I have brought you here to tell you, if I can, how much I love you—to ask you if it is possible that you can return my love. My future is in your hands: you can do with me what you will. If you will grant me your love, and give me the right to watch over you and guard you, you will make of

me a happy and, I trust, a good man. If you refuse——'

'Terence,' interrupted Lenore quietly, 'do not use threats, and do not say what ought not to be true, and which I hope may not be true.'

The man stopped short, and looked at her with dismay and apprehension. Could it be possible that she meant to refuse him?

'Lenore,' he said earnestly, and with a voice full of feeling, 'I will say nothing, if you bid me be silent, and yet I must speak—I cannot go without an answer—tell me, can you not love me a little?'

Lenore was some seconds before she answered, and then her words came slowly and deliberately:

'I do not know, Terence.'

He was distinctly troubled and disquieted; but the very fact of her reluctance urged him to press his petition with more vehemence. He had been in earnest from the first, but now he was ten-fold more determined. He felt that to win Lenore was the one and only object of his life.

'You cannot mean to cast me off!' he cried passionately. 'You will not tell me that I am nothing to you—that you have no love or pity for me?'

'No, Terence,' answered Lenore gently, 'I did not say that exactly I think—I think I have some

love for you; but it is not the kind of love which you ask from me.'

'But that love will follow, that love will come!' cried Terence, with earnest pleading in his tone. 'I have surprised you—startled you. You have not been thinking and dreaming as I have done during these past happy days. The veil has not been lifted from your heart as it has been from mine; and you do not know what answer to make to me. But, oh! Lenore, have compassion—do not drive me to despair. My love is so deep, so tender, it must in time win yours. You are not hard nor cold. Give me time, and let me try to win you. They say love begets love, and if it is so, you must surely learn to love me in time.'

His face was pale and very earnest; his voice trembled with feeling. Lenore had not much belief in Terence's protests as a rule; but this evening she could not doubt his sincerity. He was desperately in earnest, and meant to make a hard fight.

She could give him compassion, if she could give him nothing else, and so, when she spoke again, the very tone of her voice gave him hope:

'Yes, Terence, you have surprised me very much. When we last met, you had no such thoughts, and four days is such a short time in which to learn the kind of love you speak of.'

'Love is like eternity, not time!' cried Terence with sudden fervent eloquence; 'it cannot be measured by days and hours.'

'No,' answered Lenore, a very different expression stealing into her eyes, 'that is true enough, Terence.'

He was encouraged to proceed:

'I think I loved you that first evening, Lenore. I have not needed four days to teach me love for you.'

'But, Terence, I have not learned to love you in four days,' answered Lenore, looking him full in the face, 'and I cannot say the words you wish me to say. I can make no promise.'

'Only the promise you have already made,' rejoined Terence humbly, 'to be my teacher and friend, and to lead me to higher and holier things.'

Lenore looked earnestly at him.

'Terence,' she said, 'are you in earnest when you talk like that? Do you really mean what you say? Sometimes I have thought that you cannot really care for those things which are so precious to us; or that you only think of them by chance, and only wish to strive after them when the impulse moves you. Impulse after what is right is very little good, Terence; earnest conviction first, and earnest effort afterwards, are the only things that will help you.'

When Lenore spoke upon subjects like this, there was none of the timid shrinking and shy hesitation in her voice and manner which so often hinder others from making their meaning clear. To her, religion was such an intense reality that she saw no reason to hesitate in speaking of it.

Terence felt this, and it inspired him with respect and wonder, and with a feeling akin to envy. He had not quite forgotten the teaching of his childhood and his youth. His mother's dying words of prayerful entreaty often haunted him with sad persistence; and many and many a time did he wish and long to be able to regain the childlike trust that she had taught him, and which once had been his own. He was not all bad—this gay, careless, thoughtless young man; and he had still many honest regrets for his past follies, many earnest longings after better things; and the high ideals and noble aspirations of his inexperienced youth had not been quite shattered, even by the evil lessons he had learnt since he had passed out into the great world which lay around his peaceful home.

Terence, always susceptible of influence, with his love for Lenore growing every moment more and more strong within him, felt he could do much and would sacrifice anything if only he might win her.

'Lenore,' he said humbly and earnestly, 'teach me what to do and what to believe. Teach me the beautiful old faith that I have lost. Under your influence, impulse will soon become honest conviction; and conviction will lead to continuous effort. I do indeed wish to abandon my old courses, to become a different man. I feel like one who has been driven about by tempests, without a rudder to guide my course, or an anchor to hold by when I longed to stop. If you would but give me your love, that would be my rudder, and by it I should learn to guide my life in accordance with your sweet teaching; and you would teach me where and how to win back the anchor that I have lost—the anchor of trust in God. Oh, Lenore, do not cast me off; do not deny me that help which alone, as it seems to me, can save me from shipwreck.'

Lenore sat still and silent; but she was not unmoved by this appeal. Her fine instincts told her that Terence was in earnest in what he said, that it was not a set speech, but the outcome of real and genuine feeling. She was moved, and she showed by her face that she was relenting somewhat.

'Terence,' she said, 'I am ready to help you; I wish to help you. I have told you so before. But is there no other way? Can you not accept a sister's love? Can you not let me be a sister and

a friend? Why should you wish me to offer that which is not mine to give—a love which is not yours yet, and which, as I think now, never can be.'

Lenore sat looking straight before her, her hands pressed closely together. She longed to refuse utterly and unequivocally what Terence asked, and yet she feared to do so, lest he should grow utterly careless and reckless, just when he seemed inclined to turn towards higher and holier things. She despised the weakness of the man who could be thus tossed about by the waves of chance, who could pin his faith to a human love, and rise or fall by it. But he was thus constituted, and she must look at things as they were, not as they ought to be. She was not one who could easily say, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' and so dismiss the question. Hers was a nature which would far sooner ask, 'Should not I sacrifice myself to save a fellow-creature, if I can do it without wrong?'

So she sat still in doubt and perplexity, with a great weight of care lying like a load at her heart.

Terence continued speaking in an eager, almost boyish fashion:

'It would give so much happiness, Lenore—not to me alone, but to all. Philip told me yesterday that it was what he had been hoping for, for many long years. It has been his dream as well as mine.'

Lenore's hands clasped themselves more closely

together for one moment. A curious shade had passed over her face. It looked pale and weary in the fading light, and the tone of her voice had changed a little too:

'Did Philip say that?'

'Yes. I made him my confidant yesterday. He was very kind, and wished me joy and success. I could see how happy it made him for my sake. You know how Philip has always loved me—far more than I deserve—and how anxious he has been for my future. He knows how your love would influence me for good, and he has hoped for this a long while. Lenore, I know you think very highly of Philip—for his sake as well as for mine I ask you to hear me.'

'I have heard you already, Terence,' answered Lenore wearily.

'But you have not answered me, dearest.'

'What am I to say? I have told you that I do not love you.'

'No, not as yet; but grant me time and opportunity to win your love. Do not dismiss me without hope. Let us be, if not actually pledged to one another, at least bound by the tender tie of a mutual understanding. To me that tie will be as binding as the sacred marriage vow that I hope and trust will follow. I suppose I dare not ask a promise or a pledge from you?'

'I can promise nothing, Terence,' answered Lenore, rising with a listless air. 'If you mean you are anxious lest I should marry someone else, you can dismiss the fear; for I shall not. I will love you if I can, but that is all I can say, for I do not feel as though it will be possible. What I can do for you, I will, and if you are determined to hope, I will not forbid you; only do not ever say that I have encouraged you, or I withdraw all that I have granted.'

'I accept your terms,' answered Terence gladly, the buoyancy and hopefulness of his nature again asserting itself, and he took and kissed one small, cold hand that hung at her side. 'I will live in hope. I place my life in your hands; do with it what you will. I am henceforth bound to you, whether or not you will allow yourself to be bound to me.'

'No, Terence, I cannot bind myself,' answered Lenore gravely. 'I can make no promise beyond what I have already said. I feel my future very uncertain. I cannot even promise you that our meetings shall be very frequent after a little time has passed.'

Terence's face fell:

'What do you mean, Lenore?'

'I have some thoughts of going away.'

'Where?'

'I do not know; but I may go for all that. I have been dependent long enough. I have youth and health, and I ought to profit by them.'

Terence would have protested, but Lenore checked him by a quiet gesture.

'Do not raise objections, Terence. My mind is not yet made up; but when it is, no arguments will move me. I shall act as I think right, and I will not be bound by any tie, such as you would put upon me. I must be a free agent.'

'Very well, Lenore, I will say nothing,' answered Terence, seeing full well that speech would be useless. 'You shall do as you will; only, if you take yourself away to any distance, promise me that you will write to me sometimes.'

'Yes, Terence, I will write.'

'Thank you, Lenore.'

'But you must not say one word of this scheme of mine to anyone else. I trust to your honour not to do so. I did not mean to have mentioned it to anyone until all was settled. You will keep my secret, Terence?'

'I will.'

They were nearing the farm now. Lenore looked up and said in the same weary way:

'I am tired, Terence. I will not go in to supper. Make my excuses for me.'

Terence did so, and not a single one of those at

table, who heard his words and saw his face, doubted for one moment that he and Lenore had plighted their troth to one another, by the Mere that evening.

'I think you may wish me joy, Phil,' said Terence, linking his arm within his brother's, and drawing him out into the moonlight night.

'May I? Then I do with all my heart, Terence. Is it all settled?'

'Not quite. It is hardly an engagement yet. She will not bind herself absolutely—she was startled and more unprepared than I had thought—but she has given me the right to woo her; and that is very much the same thing, is it not?'

'I do not know,' answered Philip. 'I should have thought Lenore would have been ready with a direct answer, yes or no.'

'Well, it was not so—unless a partial consent may be taken as a guarantee of a fuller one to come. She allowed me to bind myself to her, although she herself declined to be bound, for a little while to come at least.'

This did not sound very like Lenore, and Philip wondered somewhat.

'It is an engagement to me, Phil,' said Terence gladly. 'It has given me all the hope and the impulse for good, for which I have longed. I know how weak and careless I have been, how much

anxiety I have given you; but Lenore's love and help will keep me now, I trust, from falling into temptation.'

'I hope it may be so, Terence,' answered Philip. 'And yet I wish it was in a stronger love than Lenore's, that you would learn to put your trust.'

'I know what you mean, Phil, and I will strive after it. Lenore has promised to be my guide and my helpmate.'

'But she has not promised, you say, to be your wife?'

'No, she has not exactly promised; but I do not think that promise will be long withheld. It was only as we came in together that she confided to me some plans and hopes and fears of which she has spoken to no one else. She told me them, bidding me keep her secret. I think this looks like the beginning of the end.'

CHAPTER VIII.

LENORE'S RESOLVE.

How it came about Lenore never knew; but from that day forward she found that everyone persisted in treating her and Terence as an engaged couple, and it was evident that the matter was considered as settled, although it was not openly announced. It was very galling to the girl to find herself placed in so equivocal a position, and yet she could not protest openly, because no one spoke out on the subject. It was only by the small hints dropped, and significant glances exchanged, and by the tacit way in which the matter was accepted by all, that showed Lenore what was the generally-received impression in the mind of the family.

Marjory was the only one who made any open allusion to the matter, and then Lenore checked her with quiet firmness:

'Marjory, dear, you are quite mistaken—I am not engaged to Terence.'

'Oh, well, I don't know what you call it, but it is just the same as being engaged.'

'Indeed it is not.'

'At any rate, you soon will be, and so it isn't worth while making a fuss,' laughed Marjory. 'And it is very nice that you will always be our sister. I used to think it would be Philip; but Terence does just as well.'

Lenore's colour deepened so painfully that anyone more thoughtful than Marjory would have been surprised; but she said nothing, and Marjory supposed that she had conceded the point under discussion.

The days following that eventful Monday passed slowly and heavily for Lenore. Nothing could be more tender and chivalrous than Terence's devotion; and as he was really in earnest, and really sincere in much that he had said, and whilst the impulse towards right was strong upon him, as it still was, there was much that was very attractive and very lovable about him.

Lenore was dreary and unhappy, and his affection could not but bring some comfort to her, although there was much pain mingled with the pleasure it gave. And yet the girl had some consolation granted her, some assurance that the sacrifice she seemed likely to be drawn into, would not be made in vain, for Terence seemed very anxious to learn from her those sweet lessons of Divine Love, which he had cast away and forgotten; and he was so

teachable, so childlike and simple in the way he received her teaching, and gave signs of being so deeply impressed by what he learned, that it seemed as if the seed now planted must surely take root and spring up. As she watched his behaviour and listened to his words, she could not doubt that the good resolutions now made, were made with more earnestness than ever had been the case before, and there were great hopes in her heart that they were made no longer in his own strength, but in the strength of One more powerful and more sure—that he was no longer building upon the sand, but upon the rock.

This consolation was granted to Lenore during these long summer days, which were so dark to her, although everyone believed them to be so bright.

But the week ended at last, and Terence went away, and the girl felt, almost with dismay, how great a relief his absence was to her.

When he had said good-bye, he had thrown so much tenderness into his voice and manner, that Lenore had been able to say:

'Hush, Terence; remember what I have said. We are not engaged. I have made no promise. We are both free.'

He smiled fearlessly, and kissed her hand.

'You may be free; but I am bound, and shall be so as long as there is a Lenore in the world.

God bless you, my dear one! I can never thank you for what you have done for me; but in the future I will try and prove my love.'

He was gone, and Lenore breathed more freely, yet still a load lay upon her heart.

That night she encountered Philip in the orchard. They had not been there together since the evening when he had first announced that Terence was coming home. What a long time seemed to her to have elapsed since then!

'Lenore,' said Philip smiling, and in the deepening twilight neither could see the repressed pain written on both faces, 'do you remember our talk here? You said you would give much to be of any use to Terence, and I said that perhaps a time would come when you might be. You see now how true my words have been. God bless you, Lenore! your influence over Terence has removed a terrible load of anxiety from my mind.'

'So that was what he meant all the while—that has been his dream all these years!' mused Lenore, as she sat alone in her dim room a little later, her hands closely locked together, and her face pale and sad. 'Oh, Philip! Philip! and I, though I never knew it, have been making a hero of you all these years, and have been loving you with more than a sister's love. I suppose I may admit that to myself, for it is true—and oh! to be half bound to a man

like Terence—a butterfly—a gilded moth—a man who hardly is a man, judged by the standard I have set up. I can never, never marry him. I ought not to have conceded what I did; but it was so hard to refuse him all he asked. It seemed so little then; and now it has grown, I do not know how, into something so great. What shall I do? What can I do? I *cannot* remain here. The place that was once such a happy home has grown unbearable. What shall I do? What can I do?'

The girl was growing agitated; she paced up and down the room awhile, but then she conquered herself by a strong effort, and sat down again.

'I must think what to do. Words will not help me—I must act. One thing is plain—go I must. I cannot live on here, with things as they now are—with Terence coming constantly, and with everyone believing what they do about us. And then, too, now that I know what Philip has grown to me—how I have come to look upon him, just through watching his conduct through all these long years, I ought not to stay; it would not be right to Terence nor to myself. I must get away, and soon; but how? and where?'

She passed her hand across her brow, as if to clear away some troublesome mist.

'I have been thinking of going before this The idea is not new. I can truthfully tell them

all, that I have been thinking over the plan a long while. I want to help Philip with Hector's education. I shall do that if I am simply independent; if I could get employment that would enable me to save money, I could do more. I might even be able to take upon myself the whole charge of his education, and send him to Cooper's Hill when he is old enough to go.'

Lenore's face grew more animated as she proceeded, and the languor and pain died out.

'I know what I will do,' she said, rising and lighting her lamp. 'I will write to Mrs. Davidson. She will advise me, I am sure.'

Mrs. Davidson was an old friend of Lenore's mother, whom the girl occasionally visited.

She seated herself at the table, and wrote as follows:

'Dear Mrs. Davidson,—When I was staying with you last, we had some little talk about my probable future life; and, if you remember, you hinted to me, that I might perhaps at some time or another find it necessary to do something for myself. You also said that, if this should come to pass, I was to be sure to apply to you, as you believed you could always find some opening for me, where I should be able to make profitable use of such few talents as I possess. And now I am writing to ask if you are ready to fulfil the word

you gave me. I want some employment that shall make me independent, and, if possible, enable me to help in the education of one of the boys here. You must not think I have had any misunderstanding with the Egremonts. On the contrary, I know that I shall have much difficulty in gaining their approval of the step I am about to take. But I believe I am right to do so. I have been idle and dependent long enough, and now I mean to work, and, if possible, to do something to help those who have done so much for me.

'If you can help me in this matter I shall feel very grateful. You know what I can do, and what my services are worth. I do not mind hard work, and I am fond of children and sick people. I shall await your answer with much impatience; for, now that my mind is made up, the sooner the step is taken the better I shall be pleased.

'Yours very affectionately,

'LENORE ANNANDALE.

'P.S.—I should *much* prefer, if possible, to live in the country.

'Cottesmere Farm, June 1, 18—.'

When this letter was written and despatched, a load seemed lifted from Lenore's heart, and she went about with a brighter face than she had worn for many days.

She resumed her old occupations with the tender sense of farewell following her, and every duty seemed sweet, because she felt that very soon she would no longer be able to perform it.

After three days of suspense the answer came, and Lenore carried away the unopened letter from the breakfast table, to read it alone in a secluded corner of the orchard.

The envelope contained a letter from Mrs. Davidson and an enclosure. The former claimed Lenore's first attention.

It ran as follows:

'My dear Lenore,—Your letter came safely to me, and I am very pleased that you have taken me at my word, and have applied to me; more especially as, by a curious coincidence, I have just heard of something which will, I believe, suit you exactly.

'Mrs. Boghey, whose letter I enclose, is a widow, and she lives in a secluded part of Scotland, on the sea-coast. She is a strange woman, and leads a lonely life; but she is not as hard as she seems, and would, I believe, try to make her "companion" happy. She has had some dreadful trouble with a scapegrace son, who committed some crime, and died in enforced exile some years ago. If you could do anything to cheer her lonely and childless old age, I believe it would be a very great charity;

and it seems to me that you are the very woman of whom she is in search.

'Write and let me know your feelings, and if you would like to accept Mrs. Boghey's offer, enclose the required note to her.

'If this does not suit your wishes, I will try for something else; but I cannot but hope you may be willing to go to Auckness Point. It is a fine old place, and the scenery is wild and picturesque. The climate, too, is milder than is usual so far north.—Believe me, dear Lenore, to remain

'Your sincere and affectionate friend,

'ELEANOR DAVIDSON.

'22 Southwell Crescent, S.W., June 3.'

Lenore glanced rapidly through this letter, and then took up the enclosure, and read:

'Dear Mrs. Davidson,—You have helped me in other matters—can you help me in this? I want a companion. My sight is failing somewhat. My one resource is books; and I must have someone to read to me what I require. She must be a lady. She must be young. She must be quiet in voice and manner, independent in disposition, and she must have education and resources in herself; for I shall not want her always with me, and there is no society here. Nobody given to morbid depression could live here. She must have equable spirits

and a contented nature. You know what I and my household are like, and will see this for yourself. I am lonely, desolate, and unhappy. At times I feel as though the sight of some young, happy face would do me good. Can you find some young girl willing to come and share my sorrowful life, and be somewhat of a companion to me?

'As to salary, I know little of what is considered fitting in such cases; 100*l.*, or more if you think right, I would gladly give. Less I will not offer, for I must have a lady by birth and education, and it will be a dreary and lonely life for her.

'If you can help me in this matter, you will greatly oblige,

'Yours very truly,

'G. H. V. BOGHEY.

'P.S. If you find the girl I want, let her write me a note, enclosing a photograph, if possible, telling me her name, her age, what her daily occupations have been, and what are her favourite studies and amusements, and anything else she may care to mention. Nothing so reveals a person's character as her own letters.

'Auckness Point, June 1, 18—.'

Lenore had not finished reading the letter before her mind was fully made up.

'It seems just made for me,' she said half aloud, 'just what I would have chosen—some sad, lonely life to try and cheer and comfort. I hope she will take me. I would try to be a daughter to her, if she would let me. It does seem as though such an opening were just made for me. And I had been growing depressed—feeling as though I were deserted and left alone with my trouble.' Lenore looked out into the blue distance, and a faint, sweet smile broke over her face. 'But that was all my own want of faith; and now I can feel that the "everlasting arms" are under me still.'

That same morning a grateful note of thanks and acceptance was written to Mrs. Davidson; and then Lenore began the more difficult task of composing the required missive for Mrs. Boghey.

Lenore hunted up a photograph, lately taken, in which she and Colin were represented sitting together upon a fallen log of wood. It was not a good photograph, but it gave a good idea of the girl's graceful, supple figure and animated face, as she looked smilingly and warningly at the dog, and rested one hand with a detaining grasp upon his collar.

'I suppose this must go,' she said, 'for I have no other. And it will give me a better chance of getting permission for Col to come, for she will see by his engaging countenance how good and beautiful

he is. We could never consent to be separated, could we, Col? No, never! And now for the letter.'

Lenore took up her pen and began to write in the clear, characteristic hand which belonged to her.

'Dear Madam,—Mrs. Davidson has told me that you want a companion; and by her advice and by my own wish, I write to offer myself as such, if you will consent to allow me to try and fill that office towards you.

'My name is Lenore Annandale. I am twenty-three years old; and I am an orphan, and can hardly remember my parents. A friend of my mother adopted me on her death; and I have lived with her children and been treated as one of them ever since.

'It is a farm-house where I live, and I have taken charge of the poultry, and overlooked the dairy ever since I have been old enough to do so. I am very fond of flowers, and of gardening too, and of any kind of out-of-door exercise.

'My favourite indoor occupations are music and drawing, and I am always happy with a book. I like reading aloud, and do it a great deal in the long winter evenings, whilst the others work.

'I have a collie dog, who appears in the photograph. If I come to you, may I bring him with

me? I have brought him up from a puppy, and we are very fond of one another.

'If you mean to let me come, I am ready at any time to do so. Last days will not be pleasant, and I do not mind how few of them you leave me.

'Yours very sincerely,

'LENORE ANNANDALE.

'Cottesmere Farm, June 4.'

This letter was read over by Lenore with a critical eye:

'I wonder if I have said too much—if I have been too familiar or too outspoken. Well, I don't know; I've only said what is true, and I don't see why it should not stand. I will send it as it is, for I might do no better if I wrote half a dozen amended copies.'

So Lenore sealed up and dispatched her missive, and waited as patiently and as quietly as she could until the answer came.

In the shortest space of time possible, Lenore received the reply, which was short almost to abruptness, but perfectly to the point:

'Dear Miss Annandale,—I have received your letter, and I believe you will suit me. Will you come to me on the 15th of this month? You can bring your dog with you.

'Your salary will be 150*l.*, paid quarterly.

'Mrs. Davidson will give you full directions as to the journey, which will be taken at my expense.

'Believe me to be,

'Sincerely yours,

'G. H. V. BOGHEY.

'Auckness Point, June 6, 18—.'

Mrs. Davidson's letter, which arrived by the next post, contained a pressing invitation for Lenore to come at once to her in London, as she had quite set her heart on going over the girl's wardrobe, and taking upon herself the expense of sending her out into the world suitably arrayed for the position she was to occupy there.

The girl's heart was very full, as she wrote a brief and grateful acceptance of this kind offer, and fixed the following day but one as that of her departure.

When this letter was written and posted, Lenore felt that the question as to her future was now settled, and the matter out of her own hands.

A restful, thankful feeling stole over her, and it seemed to her as though the 'everlasting arms' were holding her very tenderly.

CHAPTER IX.

TELLING THE NEWS.

AND all this while Lenore had kept her plans to herself, and none of the Egremonts had the least idea of the important step she was going to take.

But they must be told now, and Lenore found it more difficult than she had imagined, to open the subject to any of them.

However, it had to be done; and the girl felt that the best chance she had of getting a quiet hearing was to speak first to Madeline and Philip. When she by chance came upon them that same evening, sitting together in a sheltered corner of the garden, she felt that her time had come, and that this was the opportunity she had coveted.

Perhaps her face betrayed some unusual feeling, for Madeline held out her hand, asking gently:

'Is anything the matter, Lenore?'

'I hope not,' answered she, trying to smile; 'only I have something to say to you, and I am afraid you may not like it. Only, please, please

don't be angry with me;' and there was a little quiver in her voice more pathetic than tears.

'No, dearest, nothing can ever make us angry with you,' said Madeline, pressing her hand; and Philip echoed with quiet emphasis:

'No, nothing.'

'Thank you so much for saying that. I am not afraid of anything else, and I will tell you everything. I am going away from here.'

'Going away!'

The expression broke simultaneously from both her listeners, and was followed by dead silence.

'Yes, going away,' continued Lenore, her voice gathering firmness as she went on. 'I have been thinking about it a long while, and now it is all settled. I want to be both helpful and independent, and now I can be so. I am going to be companion to a Mrs. Boghey, who lives in Scotland. I think I shall like her, and I hope she will like me. She is very liberal, and is going to give me a hundred and fifty pounds a year salary. I may have to dress more there than I do here; but I cannot possibly use more than fifty pounds myself. Philip, I want you to send Hector to some good preparatory school for Cooper's Hill. I believe a hundred pounds a year will be enough. You can then save what you would have spent on him and on me, so that in three years, or whatever

is the time for him to enter, there will be money enough for it; for, if I and Mrs. Boghey agree, my hundred pounds will still go on. I shall send you the first twenty-five pounds in the middle of September—in time to pay the fees for the Michaelmas term. And things will go on regularly afterwards. Now that you understand all that, there is no need to say any more about it. I wish to do it, and I will do it. Hector shall not be served as Duff has been; and if it is anyone's duty to try and make up for wrong done by Terence, I suppose it is mine.'

So firmly and rapidly had Lenore poured all this startling intelligence into their ears, that there had been no chance to get in a single word; and now that she had stopped, it seemed as though neither of her hearers knew what to say first.

'Dear Lenore,' said Madeline at last, 'there was no need for you to make this sacrifice.'

'It is not a sacrifice,' answered the girl quickly, 'not nearly so much as you think. I cannot explain myself quite, but you must not think I am making a great sacrifice. I shall be more sorry than I can say to leave you all, and Cottesmere, and the lovely places I am so fond of; and yet there are reasons why I feel I must go, and why I have done what I have told you.'

'Is everything finally settled?' asked Philip,

speaking for the first time, and with a curious, hard inflection in his voice.

'Yes, Philip.'

'Irrevocably?'

'Irrevocably.'

'And when do you go?'

'The day after to-morrow.'

'Lenore!' exclaimed Madeline, with almost a reproachful sound in her voice. Philip turned his face away and said nothing.

'Yes, Madeline,' pursued Lenore quickly, 'it is better so. It will be better for us all. I cannot bear the thought of last days and good-byes. I have shortened them purposely. The day after to-morrow I go to town to Mrs. Davidson's—it is she who has found me the work I wanted; and next week I go to Scotland. It seems sudden, I know, but I am glad. I do not want more time than I shall have.'

'But what will Terence say?' asked Madeline, with sudden doubt in voice and tone.

'Terence has no right to say anything,' answered Lenore decisively.

'Lenore! Terence no right!' echoed Madeline, with a look of wonder.

'No,' answered the girl quickly. 'I am not engaged to Terence, although you are all so determined to make out that I am. He *has* no right to say anything.'

'But—but—do you mean he does not already know what you have done?'

'Nobody knows except you and Philip, for the good reason that it was only to-day that the post in, and the post out, have brought and carried away the letters which have settled the matter. Terence will find out when he first comes over here.'

'Surely, Lenore, you will write to him?'

'I will if I have time, but I may not get that. He will be quite prepared, for I told him it was probable I should take such a step; only I never believed it could have been done so quickly, or that circumstances would have been so favourable. He may be surprised at that, as I am.'

A curious look had stolen over Philip's face. He had risen and turned away from the speakers, but now he wheeled slowly round, and looked down at Lenore with an earnest, questioning gaze:

'How long has this decision been made, Lenore?'

'I have been thinking about doing something for a long time.'

'But when did you decide to begin just now?'

'A few days ago.'

'Since you and Terence—came to an understanding?'

Lenore hesitated a moment, and then answered in a low tone:

'Yes.'

Philip asked no more questions. There was rather a long silence, during which a good many curious thoughts passed through his mind. Finally he spoke again:

'Well, Lenore, as you say the matter is irrevocably settled, I suppose it is useless to urge you to alter your mind, and that you would rather be spared our regrets; but will you tell me why you did not take any of us into your confidence? There was a time, Lenore, when you confided all your plans to me.'

Lenore looked up quickly, with a look as of mute entreaty in her eyes.

'I was afraid you would try to dissuade me, Philip,' she answered simply and deprecatingly; 'and I did not feel sure I could stand firm if you did; and yet I feel it to be right to go.'

'I cannot quite see it,' Madeline said gently and regretfully. 'We shall miss you sadly, Lenore. The house will not be the same without you.'

Lenore pressed her hand gratefully, and said, with rather a tearful smile:

'For Hector's sake, Madeline. He is so clever, he ought to have a fair chance.'

'Lenore,' said Philip gravely, 'I do not think I can accept for him what you offer. It is most

generous; but is it just to yourself? I must think your offer over. If I believed I could ever repay you——'

'Philip!' The look that accompanied this word checked him at once. 'How can you!'

'I beg your pardon, Lenore,' he answered; 'I did not mean to hurt you.'

'You do hurt me when you speak so,' she answered with a flash of indignation; but almost immediately she recovered herself, and added with a smiling playfulness:

'You have no voice at all in the matter, so you need not be so grand. Surely I may do what I please with my own. If you will not take it in trust for Hector, I have no doubt that Duff will, or if Duff won't, some lawyer will. There is no difficulty in arranging things my own way. So you might just as well make yourself helpful to me as not.'

And so Philip was vanquished.

The news that Lenore was going to leave them, fell like a thunderbolt on the family. The boys protested loudly, Marjory looked absolutely astounded and incredulous; whilst Dora's face, if it expressed anything, expressed envy.

'So, Lenore,' she said that night, 'so you are going to leave the nest, and try the power of your wings. Happy you!'

'Why happy for that?' questioned Lenore. 'The nest is as happy a place as I shall ever find.'

'Then why leave it?'

'Because I must. I have not the right to it that you have. It is my duty to leave it, and to seek independence.'

'I wish it were my duty too.'

'Oh, Dora!'

'I do.'

'But why?'

'I want to see life. I want to see the world; I want a sphere—a vocation—whatever you like to call it. I am sick to death of this narrow little round of home. I feel if I only had the opportunity I could do so much here I can do nothing.'

'But you can, Dora; you can do a great deal. You do a great deal as it is; you could do more if you cared to. Think of your schools, your district, your clubs——'

'Schools! district! I am sick of the very sound of the words,' echoed Dora disdainfully; 'anybody could do work like that. What I want is more space, more spirit and enterprise. I want to be in the great vortex of life, where things move fast and draw us with them—not in a little, dreamy, stand-still place like this.'

Lenore looked grave and perplexed.

'I wonder what makes you feel so, Dora?'

'I wonder why everyone does not feel the same.'

'It is a good thing they do not.'

'Why so?'

'Because it cannot be a healthy feeling.'

'How do you make that out?'

'I think it must spring from discontent,' answered Lenore; 'that is why.'

'Is discontent always wrong?'

'Is it not?'

'I don't think so. The world would never get on without it. It is the basis of all reform—of all law and order.'

'Perhaps in a way it is so,' answered Lenore thoughtfully; 'yet I should hardly call the feeling you mean *discontent*; and, Dora, I cannot understand why you should feel as you do. You have such a happy life, or might have.'

'I am not happy,' said Dora gloomily. 'If it comes to that, who is?'

'I am.'

'Are you?'

'Yes, I am.'

'Before you were engaged to Terence?'

'Oh, yes,' answered Lenore with a quick flush. 'That has not made me happy.'

'I wonder what has then,' said Dora thoughtfully. 'Marjory is happy as a child is happy, because she does not think, and Madeline because

she lives for other people, and has no thought to spare for herself; but you do think, Lenore, and life is not all play to you, nor all care either. I often wonder what makes you happy.'

'I can soon tell you, Dora.'

'Can you?'

'Yes, if you do not know without.'

'How could I know?'

'You must have heard so often.'

'I think not. Heard what makes you happy! No, I have not; tell me, Lenore.'

'The love of God,' answered Lenore simply and reverently.

Dora was silent awhile, and then she said:

'I do not understand you.'

'Not understand, Dora?'

'No; God's love is just a name to me; I know nothing of it, nor what it can do. I go to church; I teach my Sunday School class from the Bible; I say my prayers night and morning; but my heart is like a stone. I know that God is good, that Christ died for us - I know it, and I suppose I believe it; but what good is that to me? It does not make me happy. It does not make me contented. I cannot even understand by what power it can make anyone happy. What is there in such belief to bring about such a result? I cannot see the cause or effect.'

Lenore's face grew troubled.

'Dora, I am so sorry—so sorry for you. It must be very sad to feel like that. Have you ever prayed for faith?'

'I have prayed for everything; and the heaven is like brass above me.'

'Seems, perhaps, Dora, but never is. Our prayers are always heard.'

'But if they are not answered, how are we to know that?'

'We must trust.'

'I don't think my nature is a very trusting one.'

'And hope.'

'I am tired of hoping.'

'Do not grow tired, Dora,' pleaded Lenore very earnestly. 'Do not stop praying, and do not lose heart. Trust in God, and indeed, *indeed* you will have an answer at last.'

'You are very confident, Lenore.'

A curious smile played over the girl's face.

'I have reason to be.'

Dora looked curiously at her.

'These things seem so real to you.'

'Because they are real.'

'I wish they were so to me.'

'I wish so too, Dora. It would make all the difference to your life.'

'I believe it would,' answered Dora slowly. 'I would give anything for the hope and trust and confidence that others have; but I cannot attain to it. It is no use trying any longer.'

'Do not give up trying,' rejoined Lenore gently. 'I am sure light will come in time.'

'At evening time, perhaps,' answered Dora with a sad smile. 'If God is good, as you say He is, He may grant me that. But, so far as one can see, I am but in the morning of my life, and it is a long while to wait.'

'Oh, Dora!' cried Lenore earnestly, 'it will surely come to you before that. Do not despair. Hope on, and work on, and pray for light; and I know it will come.'

'Do you?' said Dora sadly. 'I wish I did.'

'Perhaps you are nearer the light than you think,' suggested Lenore softly.

'How do you mean?'

'I mean just what I say. What is it, Dora, makes you keep on so diligently with the work you do for others? You speak with contempt of your schools, your district, and the other things you do. What makes you go on sacrificing your pleasures, and spending so large a portion of your time just for the sake of others? You say it is not a labour of love—what is it then? and what makes you persevere so diligently in it?'

'I often ask myself that question,' returned Dora, 'and can find no sufficient answer. I suppose it is because I must do something, or life would be intolerable, and these are the only employments I can find. If I can make anyone else happy in this dismal world, I am very glad of it; but I never see how paying a visit and reading or talking to people can produce the effect they say it does. Still, as long as it is so, and as long as I am obliged to stay here, I should always go on. I suppose our lives are given us for some purpose, and if they help others in any way one ought to be glad of it.'

'Dora,' said Lenore smiling, 'you remind me of the man to whom our Lord said, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven."'

Dora was silent, and presently she said in a softened tone:

'Thank you, Lenore, for what you have said. I am afraid I have often been unjust to you—thought you trivial, thoughtless, and shallow, because you were happy and light-hearted; been jealous when I saw how much beloved you always were. I have called you hard names in my heart; but I was unjust, and I apologise for it. Will you forgive me?'

'Oh, Dora, yes—you know it without asking—if there is anything to forgive.'

'Thank you; and, Lenore, you will not forget me. Will you pray for me?'

Dora spoke in her ordinary cold, calm tones; but her voice was full of an unusual feeling, which could not quite be repressed, and which touched Lenore more than any outward agitation could do.

'I will indeed, Dora.'

'Your prayers should be more potent than mine,' said the girl with a curious smile, half sweet, half bitter, 'for you have faith.'

'And you will have faith yourself in time—I am sure of it,' answered Lenore earnestly. 'And everything will look different to you then. Oh, yes, you must have faith; and happiness will follow in time. Do not despair. You will write to me, Dora? You will not forget me?'

Lenore broke off hastily. It was hard to face the parting, now that the hour had so nearly come. Dora kissed her, and left her to herself; and Marjory cried herself to sleep in her arms that night; but Lenore's firmness did not desert her.

Two days later she was on her way to London, and the party at Cottesmere Farm felt that a great blank had been made in the house.

BOOK II.

A LONELY WOMAN.

CHAPTER X.

LENORE'S ARRIVAL.

AT half-past eight o'clock on a bright June evening, a train drew slowly up at the small station nearest to the little town of Bervie, in Scotland.

There was only one passenger to alight — a slight, graceful girl, who looked somewhat pale and jaded, as though she had travelled far that day; and she held fast by the collar a black collie dog, and by word and gesture restrained his impatient attempts to free himself.

Her modest luggage was already out upon the platform, the train was moving slowly onwards, and Lenore looked round her in a rather bewildered way, as though she hardly knew what her next move would be. Composed as were her looks, she was too inexperienced a traveller not to feel some qualms of anxiety as to what would become of her.

But almost immediately her doubts were set at rest.

A footman in a handsome but sombre livery approached and touched his hat:

'Mrs. Boghey's carriage is waiting outside, ma'am.'

Lenore followed the man silently, and found to her relief that the carriage was an open landau. It looked luxurious; the horses, a pair of powerful bays, won her admiration at the first glance. She hoped the drive would be a long one.

'Is it far to Auckness Point?' she asked.

'About twelve miles, ma'am. Would you prefer the carriage closed?'

'No, thank you, open.'

The horses started. Colin leaped and barked joyously round them. Lenore leaned back in her seat with a sigh of relief.

'An hour's drive at least,' she said to herself. 'How delicious! What sweet, clear air! What a delightful change from close, dusty railway carriages and the glare of a burning sun!'

It was a very picturesque road along which they were driving, and Lenore looked round with wonder and admiration at what she saw. Accustomed to the soft, undulating country, and the green loveliness of Cottesmere, these wild, bare hill-sides, craggy rocks, and stretches of gold and purple

moorland looked almost unearthly in their lonely grandeur. She was at once awed and delighted, and felt as if she had indeed penetrated into a new and unknown world.

The air had that peculiar crisp freshness which one hardly ever feels away from the Scotch sea-coast. The light was clear and soft, in spite of the lateness of the hour; the sky was like a dome of dusky, cloudless blue, which faded into pale grey towards the north and east, and into soft tints of green and gold and opal in the south and west.

'It is very lovely,' said Lenore softly. 'I wish Philip could see it.'

The scenery changed and shifted with every turn in the road, though it still preserved its strong outlines and grand combinations of rock and moor.

Once a vast pine wood seemed to rise suddenly in their very path, and the road ran white and straight through the solemn aisles of these great, bare, ruddy trunks, whilst far overhead the waving tops made weird music in the evening breeze, and cast a deep shade like that of night upon all around.

And when the wood was passed, a sudden turn in the road brought them full upon a scene which made Lenore catch her breath suddenly, and gaze, and gaze with a kind of strange joy, as though she could not take in at once what she saw nor realise what it was.

What she saw was a wide expanse of sea, silvered by the rising moon, tossing high its white waves, as if impatient of control, as it dashed up against the black rocks and covered them with showers of snowy foam.

The road ran close along the coast for two miles and more. The salt wind played over her face, and left its kisses on her lips. It was cold and wet, but invigorating. It seemed as if its touch was enough to restore life and health to the sick and dying, and to give new strength to all the world.

The music of the waves was in her ears, the quiet, never-ceasing murmur, broken each moment by a silvery splash, and at somewhat rarer intervals by a fierce boom and hiss, as a larger wave came racing up against a rock, dashed itself to pieces, and fell back with a sullen 'fr-r-s-ch' of disappointed anger.

The coast was marvellously grand at this point, and although in the failing light Lenore could not see all its beauties, she saw enough to impress her with great admiration and awe.

She had seldom seen the sea before—never in the beauty and wildness of a rock-bound coast; and she was filled with wonder and delight.

Then suddenly the road turned inland, the carriage dashed through a pair of handsome iron gates, past a picturesque lodge, through a well-kept

park, more wooded than the bareness of the surrounding country would lead one to expect, and it drew up finally at rather a gloomy portal, in a grim-looking pile of building, whose outline it was too dusk to take in, in detail; and the next minute Lenore found herself in a dark, square hall, panelled with black oak, hung with dusky-looking pictures and old armour, round which a gallery ran, from which the girl could almost fancy she saw frowning, ghostly faces gazing down upon her.

She had never been in such a place before, and coming into it, as she did, from the clear, soft beauty of the outside world, she felt a momentary thrill of dismay and fear creep over her. Colin, too, was quite subdued and pressed close to her; and she caressed his silky head with her ungloved hand, and felt thankful that she had so trusty a friend at her side.

Lenore had been but a few seconds in the hall when she was approached by a stern-faced, elderly woman, who by her manner and appearance seemed to be a kind of superior upper servant.

'Shall I show you to your room, ma'am?' she asked solemnly. 'My mistress will be happy to see you shortly.'

'Thank you,' answered Lenore mechanically, and she followed in silence whilst her conductor led her up the wide, shallow, oak steps, along one

wide corridor and into another which crossed it at right angles. It seemed to Lenore as though this narrower corridor were mysteriously and unnaturally long. Far, far down she saw the window which lighted it; and the number of doors that opened upon it struck her as being uncanny and ghostly.

She had not to go far down, however, for the servant soon threw open a door which led into a comfortable, well-furnished and well-lighted sitting-room, and beyond that the bedroom lay, which was also comfortable, and even handsome, in all its appointments, although it had not succeeded in throwing off the air of darkness and melancholy which penetrated through the whole house.

A small fire burned in either grate.

'I thought you might feel cold after your journey, ma'am, so I kept the fires in,' explained the woman, who spoke clearly and well, with a strong Scotch intonation, but with very few words that were unfamiliar to Lenore's ears. 'We often burn a little fire in an evening even in summer, for the air is chilly here. I think you will find the rooms aired, and all in order. One of the maids will bring you your tea at once. And when you are rested my mistress will see you, if it is agreeable to yourself.'

'Shall I go to Mrs. Boghey now?' asked

Lenore. 'It is ten o'clock. Will she not be wanting to go to bed?'

The woman smiled grimly.

'My mistress never goes to bed this side of midnight. We had better abide by what she has said. I will come for you at eleven. You will hardly be ready before that.'

Left alone, Lenore felt very strange—as one who lives in a dream, rather than as one who has full control over her actions.

She was not sad, she was not depressed, nor yet afraid, in spite of the ghostliness of her surroundings; but she felt as though she lived and moved in a new world, and as though she was utterly ignorant what new turn the aspect of affairs might at any moment take.

Colin was sniffing uneasily round and round the unfamiliar rooms. Lenore roused herself to look at them in detail.

They were good-sized square rooms, with a high, dark wainscot all round, and a rather sombre, but a handsome, paper above the woodwork. The furniture was solid, handsome, and old-fashioned. Some of the pieces were rather richly carved, and there was an inlaid cabinet which excited Lenore's admiration to no small degree. The carpet was soft to the tread and rich and dark in colour; the chairs were well padded,

and more comfortable than they looked; and there was a great deal that pleased the girl's fancy in the quaint, antique aspect of the rooms.

When a rosy-cheeked maid came in to lay the tea, Lenore asked:

'Can you tell me what kind of a look-out my windows have?'

'They look right over the sea, mem,' answered the girl with the prettiest Scotch accent possible, and with a broad smile on her face. ''Tis the bonniest view when the sun shines, gin ye like to look over the sea.'

'I do,' answered Lenore, smiling too. 'I like it very much.'

'Gin ye want any help, mem, or anything at a', and ye ring yon bell, I'll come up directly. I'm bidden by my leddy to wait on ye.'

'Thank you,' said Lenore. 'I shall remember; and what is your name?'

'Annie McIver, please, mem.'

The girl retired with a smile and a curtsey, and Lenore was left alone to her meal.

The keen northern air had given her an appetite, and she and Colin alike did justice to the good cheer set before them; and when the repast was ended, the girl went into her bedroom, removed all traces of her journey from her neat attire, smoothed her hair, and made ready for the introduction to

her – well, her mistress or friend, according as the issue should show.

If Lenore shrank from the coming interview, or looked forward to it with nervous dread, at least she showed no outward signs of doing so.

When the housekeeper came for her, she found her tranquil and composed, and quite ready to accompany her to Mrs. Boghey's presence.

'Shall I bring the dog or leave him?'

'As you please, ma'am. I have no orders about him one way or the other.'

Colin answered the question himself, by putting his nose into Lenore's hand, and asking in his eloquent, dumb way not to be left behind.

'Come, then,' she said, 'we will go together.'

It was a strange hour to set out on such an errand. To Lenore, as she followed her guide through the mazes of this great, strange house, it seemed as though it were some fantastic dream, which thus brought her to be paying her first visit to her patroness at this dead hour of the night.

But the journey came to an end at last. The servant halted suddenly at a door which stood within a deep recess. She knocked, waited a second, and then flung it wide.

'Miss Annandale,' she said solemnly, and motioned Lenore to enter.

The girl did so, and found herself in a very

long room, filled almost entirely with books. Books lined the walls and piled the tables, and each odd-shaped recess, of which there were several in the room, was full of them.

The apartment lay in deep shadow where she stood, but two shaded lamps and a small glowing fire at the upper end, gave sufficiency of light to reveal distinctly the figure and face of Mrs. Boghey.

She was tall and thin and upright—that could be seen even when she was seated, as at present. She was dressed in robes of clinging black, unrelieved by any kind of colour, or even by a white frill. Her very cap was black, and long black mittens covered her hands.

Her face was a remarkable one. It was thin, and yet each feature was beautifully formed and delicately cut, and it was evident that in her youth she must have been exceedingly handsome. Now the cheeks were hollow, the features wasted, and the rippling hair was as white as the driven snow.

But what most struck, and even startled, Lenore was the deathly, waxen whiteness of the skin. It was as colourless as marble, and even the lips were perfectly white. It gave the face a ghastliness quite indescribable; and the expression of the large, hollow, dark eyes, which had

not lost any of their fire, heightened the effect of a contrast which always produced a startling impression.

Those dark, luminous eyes! What dreadful meanings, or what hidden, awful knowledge, lay hidden away in the soul of which those eyes were the windows? In describing Mrs. Boghey's expression once to Philip, Lenore said that the impression produced upon her mind by the look in her eyes was that she had at some time in her life experienced an awful shock, or an awful revelation, and that she had never quite recovered it. The look upon her face was what one might fancy might be produced by a supernatural vision, or the sound of a voice from the dead.

Lenore had taken all this in during the brief moment whilst she stood on the threshold with an uncertain air, hardly knowing whether to advance at once, or to wait until she was bidden.

A voice from the far end of the room broke the deep silence:

'Lenore Annandale, are you there?'

'Yes,' answered the girl timidly.

'Then come here where I can see you.'

Lenore advanced slowly into the circle of light, and stood beside Mrs. Boghey.

'Sit down.'

She obeyed, and felt that the keen, piercing

eyes were scanning her face with unmerciful scrutiny. Her colour began to rise.

'Look up at me,' said Mrs. Boghey, in her hard, even voice. 'Let me see your eyes.'

Lenore obeyed, and the young woman and the old looked steadily into each other's faces.

'That will do,' she said. 'I see you can meet my eyes; it is not everyone that can, but I will not do with people about me who cannot. Are you afraid of me, Lenore Annandale?'

'No,' answered Lenore quietly. 'I am not afraid. I have no reason to be.'

'Good, again. Some people fear without cause.'

Lenore made no response.

'Are you nervous or timid?'

'I think not.'

'Why do you say *think*?'

'Because I have never been tried yet. There was nothing at home to make me so.'

Mrs. Boghey's face seemed almost to smile—at least so Lenore fancied, but she could not be sure—and next minute the cross-examination continued:

'Is that your dog?'

'Yes. I am very much obliged to you for allowing me to bring him.'

'What is his name?'

'Colin.'

'Colin, come here,' said Mrs. Boghey, holding out one thin, white hand.

Lenore half expected the dog would shrink away, but he did not; on the contrary, he advanced, licked the extended hand, and sat down with his head against its owner's lap.

When Lenore saw that, she felt convinced, by some subtle instinct, that she need not fear Mrs. Boghey.

'Have you been used to having him indoors with you?'

'Oh, yes.'

'Would you like him indoors here?'

'Very much, if you have no objection.'

'I have no objection.'

'Thank you—you are very good.'

Mrs. Boghey raised her hand as if to dismiss that subject from discussion.

'Now we must come to business. Do you know at all what your duties here will be?'

'Not very well. I think you want me to read to you a good deal.'

'Yes, I shall want you for that at times; but I have still good sight, although I have had warnings, which make me feel anxious to save it somewhat. For an hour or two each day, I shall require to be read to. That will not fatigue you?'

Lenore was surprised at the question.

'Oh, no! I should like to read as long as ever you wish.'

'And I shall want you to write my letters for me, for the most part. I am not fond of writing, and it fatigues me. You write a clear, legible hand which I like; it is neither a school-girl's niggle nor an affectation of masculine boldness.'

Lenore smiled.

'I hope it will continue to give satisfaction.'

'Then I shall want you to drive out with me each day. I always drive if the weather will permit, and shall request you to accompany me.'

'I shall be very pleased.'

'And after dinner—I dine at eight, and you will dine with me, of course—I shall be much obliged if you will remain with me for awhile, until you wish to go to your room. My medical man has spoken very strongly to me upon the necessity of working my brain less, and of seeing more society. I have yielded this much to him—that I will remain for an hour or more in the drawing-room after dinner, instead of coming back at once to this room; and as my own company is exceedingly distasteful to me when my mind is unoccupied, I shall ask you to pass that time with me. It will be but a dismal office for you; but we grow selfish as we grow old, and exact services which we would never have rendered ourselves

in our youth. It is the way of the world, you see.'

All this explanation had been given in the hard, dry, formal tone which seemed natural to Mrs. Boghey. She seemed to put aside the question of Lenore's position as a salaried servant, and to treat her as though she had been a guest in the house. It almost embarrassed Lenore to be so considered.

'Mrs. Boghey,' she said gently and sincerely, 'you know, and I know, that I owe you every attention that lies in my power to offer; but please believe me when I say that I am most anxious to be able to do anything to make you feel less lonely, and that it will be a pleasure to be allowed to be as much of a companion to you as you will permit.'

'Thank you, my dear,' answered Mrs. Boghey in a somewhat softened tone. 'I believe you; although I am not given to believing protests of the kind from others. For the rest, you can amuse yourself as you will about the house and garden. As you understand gardening and such-like matters, I shall be grateful if you will overlook things a little, and let me know what goes on. You need not be afraid to give orders; all the men will have orders to do what you tell them. Campbell—that is my maid—is very good and completely trustworthy; but she is, after all, only a servant, and cannot carry about with her any weight of

authority. You will be able to do so; and from what Mrs. Davidson has told me I have every confidence that you will not take undue advantage of the trust reposed in you.'

'But, Mrs. Boghey——'

'Well?'

'How can I give orders to your servants? How can I know what your wishes would be?'

'You can ask me, or you can act on your own judgment; I care very little which. I have neither the health nor the inclination to look after things myself; but I do not want any disorder or waste in or about my establishment. One of my reasons for wishing for a companion is that I may be able to learn more as to what goes on about me. Your country life and experience will stand us in good stead, because your knowledge is practical, whilst most people's is mere theory.'

'I shall be very glad to do anything I can,' answered Lenore, 'only—only—do you think the servants will like a second mistress, or do as I suggest?'

'Whether they approve or not is a matter of no consequence, and I will soon teach them who is mistress here. But if you think, Lenore Annandale, that they will resent your control because you receive a salary from me, you are much mistaken. Not a soul in this house, not even Campbell, is

aware on what footing you stand, nor knows that you are not here simply as my visitor. I do not wish the contrary to be known, so I ask you not to mention it. And now, Good-night; you have had a long and weary day, and it is time you went to rest.'

CHAPTER XI.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

LENORE woke next morning with a start of surprise, and wondered where she could be.

She had slept soundly all night, the dreamless, restful sleep that comes of a wearied body and a mind free from care; and now that morning had come, she woke refreshed and invigorated.

There was a sound beneath her windows of the washing of waves beneath, and springing up, Lenore drew her curtain and looked out.

What a glorious sight it was!

The sea lay tossing in all its restless beauty just below; the waves broke against the crags and washed the base of the rocky isthmus upon the summit of which the house was built. In shore the water was a deep green colour, flecked, and in places covered, with snowy foam; farther out it lay laughing and dimpling in the morning sunlight like a happy living thing at play; and the sea-gulls flew hither and thither, uttering their curious discordant cry, and dipping their white wings in the waves as

they skimmed over the sparkling surface of the water.

'How beautiful!' cried Lenore. 'Oh! I must dress and get down to it.'

It was but six o'clock when the girl left her room, and made her way carefully downstairs to the hall, which managed to look almost bright in the early light of a summer's morning.

Early as it was, however, there were sounds of life in the house, and soon Lenore encountered the smiling Annie dusting out one of the lower rooms.

'Can I get out, Annie?' she asked. 'I want to go down to the sea.'

'Oh, ay, mem! I'll open the door for ye.'

'Do you know where my dog is?'

'Oh, ay, mem! He's doon in the yard. Shall I bring him up?'

'Please, if you would,' answered Lenore; and soon there was the sound of pattering footsteps, and Colin rushed like a whirlwind through some dim back-passage and flung himself upon her.

The smiling Annie appeared in the rear, somewhat breathless from the attempt to keep up with her charge.

'Eh, but he's a bonny black doggie,' she said, in honest admiration of Colin's glossy coat and expressive eyes. 'He'll be a fine protector to ye, mem.'

So Lenore and Colin started off upon their ramble, and made their way down to the edge of the cliffs, where they could watch the play of the water beneath, and the lovely blending of sea and sky in the distance, and listen to the ceaseless music of the waves, of which the girl felt she could never tire.

She had brought out her little red Bible with her, to do her morning's reading, sitting beside the margin of the sea. Such a scene as she now looked upon, so grand, and yet so lovely, seemed to bring her very near to God, and as she read the beautiful words of tenderness or reproach, warning or pardon, her eyes filled with unwonted tears, and everything swam as in a dazzling golden mist before her.

'I wish they could all see it—Philip, and Marjory, and Duff, and all of them. It seems strange to be so very far away from them all; but I suppose it is just that which makes us cling closer to God. How good He is! always making up to us—and more than making up—for all the little losses we meet with in life. Once, the mere thought of leaving Cottesmere would almost have broken my heart; and now I am here in this beautiful place, with work to do, and a friend to love—for I believe I shall love her—and a heart as happy, if not quite as light, as the one I used to carry

about. I thought the trouble was such a bad one, and God has helped me through so well, that the bitterness is all gone now. He does indeed watch over us; our lives are in His hand. "The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."'

Lenore smiled a deep, inward smile, and gazed out over the shining sea.

'I wonder what is the story of that strange, lonely woman, and what has brought that awful look of fear and horror upon her face. It looks as though it had been stamped there by some dreadful scene, which can never be effaced from her memory. And there is such deep, deep sadness written on every line of her face. How I wish that I could help to smooth some of them out, and bring happier ones to take their place. I wonder how much I shall be able to do—how much she will let me do for her. I wonder, does she know, does she realise that the "everlasting arms" are underneath, and that she has only to rest in them, and then all her troubles will seem to melt away. I wonder if she knows—or if she knows, and is like Dora, and cannot gain comfort from the knowledge. I wonder what lies behind that cold, hard exterior.'

Thus Lenore mused, as she sat by the sea, and paced up and down the rocky pathways; and then,

when the sun rose higher in the sky, she bent her steps towards the house, and entered this time by way of the gardens.

Roses were in full bloom on many a bush and tree, and Lenore gathered a fragrant, dewy handful before she went indoors again.

Breakfast would be at nine, Campbell had told her over-night, and she and Mrs. Boghey were to take it together. There was time for Lenore to run up to her room and smooth her hair, which the wind had ruffled somewhat. She fastened one deep red rose in the front of her simple, light, morning dress, and after tying up the remainder in a tasteful way, she took them downstairs to the breakfast room.

Mrs. Boghey was already seated at the table in a stiff-backed arm-chair, although the urn had not yet been brought in.

'Good morning, Lenore Annandale,' she said, in her stiff, cold way. 'I hear you have been an early riser this morning.'

'Yes, I have had a delightful breath of sea-wind and sunshine; and see what a liberty I have taken already. I have gathered a bunch of your roses; but I thought I might be allowed to, because they are for you.'

And Lenore, placing her bouquet in Mrs. Boghey's calmly extended hand, stooped her head,

and just dropped the lightest of kisses on the cold, white brow.

Mrs. Boghey started slightly, and a thrill seemed to run through her. Lenore feared she had been too forward, too familiar.

'I beg your pardon,' she said, with frank humility. 'It was a liberty; but I have always been used to kiss people.'

Mrs. Boghey held out her hand—the hand which did not grasp the flowers—and the thin, white face, without smiling, softened in such a marvellous way that Lenore looked in wonder at it, and saw how beautiful it could yet be.

'Kiss me again, my dear,' she said quietly, and with the very least suspicion of a quiver in her voice. 'I think it is years since any young lips have kissed mine. It was the force of old memories that startled me. Do not you ever be afraid of me, Lenore; I know by instinct where I can trust, and where I can love.'

She broke off suddenly, as though afraid to say too much; and the servant at that moment entered with the breakfast.

Mrs. Boghey motioned Lenore to the seat facing her, and said:

'Take the urn to Miss Annandale. Will you pour out tea, my dear? I seldom feel strong in the morning now, and small duties fatigue me.'

Mrs. Boghey sat quiet during the meal, the bunch of roses beside her wafting their fragrance up to her each moment, as they lay in their fresh beauty upon the white cloth.

Lenore waited on her with tender, watchful care, coaxing her to eat by the dainty way in which she prepared the food, and talking brightly all the while, of the wonders she had seen that morning in her early walk, and contrasting by graphic word pictures the differences she already detected between the beauties of her new home and those of the one she had left behind.

Mrs. Boghey said very little, but she seemed to listen with a certain amount of pleasure to the girl's talk, and Lenore felt rewarded for the efforts she had made, when at the close of the meal her hearer said with a kind of sad approbation :

'I think my doctor will be satisfied with his new prescription. Thank you, my dear, for trying to amuse and interest a sour old woman like me.'

'Oh, Mrs. Boghey!' exclaimed Lenore.

'Well, my dear, are you shocked at my candour?'

'I cannot bear to hear you speak so.'

'It is true, Lenore Annandale; that is why I speak so. Forewarned is forearmed, and you will soon find out that what I call myself, I am.'

'If you were,' Lenore ventured to remark with

a little smile, 'I do not think you would call yourself so.'

'What are you going to do with yourself this morning, my dear?' was the next question.

'I do not know. What would you like me to do? What can I do for you?'

'Nothing immediately. At twelve o'clock you may come and read the paper to me, if you will. I shall be busy till then; you can do what you please.'

Mrs. Beghey rose slowly from the table, and gathered up her letters.

'Do you have prayers here or in the hall?' asked Lenore innocently, wondering whether the family prayers in a household like this would resemble the quiet, devotional little service conducted by Philip each morning in the hall.

'I do not have family prayer at all,' answered Mrs. Boghey quietly. 'I am not equal to the exertion.'

Lenore was silent, not knowing what to say, and a kind of chill fell upon her.

'I dare say you would like to go into the garden again,' said Mrs. Boghey. 'There is a good deal to see. I dare say you will make yourself happy there for an hour or two.'

'Won't you come too for a little while?' asked Lenore eagerly. 'It is so pretty out there, and so warm that you need not be afraid of sitting out.

Let me get you a shawl and a comfortable chair. I am sure you would enjoy it if you would only try. Do come!'

Mrs. Boghey made a faint protest, said something about never having done such a thing in her life; but something in Lenore's eagerness, or in her own melancholy indifference made her concede the point very quickly.

In five minutes the strangely assorted pair were sitting together in a shady, sheltered corner which overlooked a large extent of garden ground, and were enjoying each in her own way the novelty of the situation.

'I cannot tell why you made me come, Lenore Annandale,' said Mrs. Boghey. 'I never did a thing like this before.'

'Is it not very pleasant?' asked Lenore, smiling archly. 'Are you not very glad you came?'

'It is pleasant, I suppose; but I do not feel that there is pleasure in it for me.'

'Why not, Mrs. Boghey?'

'Because the power of enjoyment has long since left me.'

'Perhaps it will come back again,' suggested Lenore gently.

'Never!' answered Mrs. Boghey in a quick, agitated way; and a glance into the white, set face warned Lenore not to continue the theme.

After a short silence she began again on a safer topic :

'What a large garden you have. It must need a great many gardeners.'

'I dare say it does. My head-man arranges all that. I cannot be troubled with details.'

'But garden details are so interesting.'

'To people who have minds at leisure to be interested. And so you like my garden, child?'

'Yes, very much.'

'Does it look to you all that a garden should?'

'Well—not quite.'

'What is wanted then?'

'I can see a good many things that want attending to. The lawn there has been badly mown—see how uneven the lines are!—and several of the paths want picking over and rolling ; and none of the turf edges are properly clipped, and they have got uneven too ; they want regularly edging all the way along.'

'Why, child, how do you know all that?'

'I don't know—it comes by nature, I think. Philip was so very particular.'

'Who is Philip?'

'Philip Egremont. You know I have lived with the Egremonts almost ever since I can remember. They are not rich, and we had not regular gardeners; so the farm-men often came in to do the harder

work, and we directed them, and often helped ourselves. I suppose I learned in that way; and Philip was so very particular, that I think he made us particular too.'

'Well, do you see anything else wrong?'

'I think you might make the garden a great deal prettier by altering it and moving the things a little.'

'How?'

Lenore explained some of the alterations that suggested themselves, and Mrs. Boghey assented with some show of interest.

'Certainly—quite so—you are quite right. But why do the men not see these things?'

Lenore laughed.

'Perhaps they do not think.'

'They should think, then—they should use their eyes; and at least they should do their own work decently. Now that you point it out, I see these edges are shocking. They offend my eye. Why cannot the men do their work properly?'

'They never do unless they are looked after.'

'Then you will look after them in future, if you please, my dear. Nothing displeases me more than to feel that things about the place are not going on as they should do. Hampden,' she called out to her head-man, who happened to pass at a short distance, 'this lady will in future give you

instructions about the gardens. I am not satisfied with the look of things. Miss Annandale will speak to you about some alterations I want made. For the future you will take your orders from her.'

The man touched his hat and went on his way, with a respectful glance at Lenore.

'You do not mind undertaking that for me, do you, my dear?'

'Oh, no, Mrs. Boghey, I shall be very pleased.'

'I think, my dear, if you do not mind, you had better call me aunt when there is anybody to hear us. I do not mean that I have any intention of passing you off as my niece; but it is just as well for people to think that there is some bond of association between us. Already I look upon you as my young friend, as well as companion, and there is no reason why we should not let the world think that my young companion has not been also my friend.'

Lenore did not see exactly why any deception, however mild, need be practised, and had she known that the wish arose from a desire, on Mrs. Boghey's part, to mystify and dismay her nearest relatives, she might have declined to be a party to it; as it was, however, she said gently that she would call her patroness whatever she wished, and before the morning was out the 'aunt' fell naturally and easily from her lips.

After an hour of the garden Mrs. Boghey grew tired, and went in, Lenore with her, and then a note was written, and a few orders dispatched to different household dignitaries. Then she said she was fatigued, and wished to lie down; so that Lenore had better go out until luncheon time, and read to her in the afternoon.

Later on Lenore was to learn that, in spite of the loneliness of her surroundings, Mrs. Boghey was not without relatives, although they were not hers by blood, but connected only through her marriage.

Mr. and Mrs. Money, with their two children, Herbert and Edith, lived at Inverbervie, some five or six miles from Auckness Point, and endeavoured to keep upon friendly terms with their peculiar and eccentric relative at the Castle.

This endeavour, however, was prompted by no love for the stern, silent woman who reigned there; but merely because they coveted her great wealth, and fondly trusted that, at her death, they would reap substantial benefit from her accumulated riches. Little as they liked her in reality, they made great professions of affection, and had learned with distrust and dismay of the 'new craze' which had entered Mrs. Boghey's head. Who or what Lenore was, they had no idea; but they had heard of her expected arrival at Auckness, and were terribly alarmed by it.

Mrs. Money was the leader in all schemes and plots. Her husband was lazy, and trusted to his wife's diplomacy; her children were, as she said, culpably indifferent and careless. Herbert frequently told her frankly that Mrs. Boghey detested them all, and that blandishments were thrown away upon her. Edith was simply apathetic, and would take no trouble to please her aunt, whom she feared and disliked equally. Mrs. Money did what she could; but between her and her silent kinswoman a certain nameless hostility existed, none the less marked because carefully veiled on one side, and coldly displayed upon the other.

Lenore and Colin wandered down to the shore once more—this time to a rather more distant spot, and where a belt of smooth sand stretched away from under the shelter of the cliffs, and was now left smooth and trackless by the retiring tide.

Lenore had not been to the water's edge before, nor Colin either, and in all the experiences of his young life he had never met with anything half so perplexing and provoking as this great piece of water.

He rushed valiantly forward to meet an advancing wave, found it more powerful and more wet than he liked, and rushed barking before it, until it expended its strength and began ignominiously to retreat. Then, indeed, he felt the

victory was his, and pursued it, barking joyously, and snapping at the little receding crest of foam; when, all in a moment, and without warning, up it would rise once more in all its old strength, and drive him headlong to the shore again.

Lenore was so intent in watching Colin's gambols, in laughing at his absurd alternations of triumph and dismay, and in encouraging him to meet and attack each advancing wave, that she did not hear the dull 'thud, thud,' of a horse's feet approaching along the sand, and started when a young man reined up close beside her.

More surprised still was she when he, politely raising his hat, addressed her thus:

'Pray pardon the liberty I am taking, but have I not the pleasure of speaking to Miss Lenore Annandale?'

Lenore bowed, feeling quite mystified at finding herself already known.

The young man dismounted, and drew his horse's bridle through his arm.

'I have ridden over from Inverbervie to see my aunt. I believe she usually lunches at this time. Will you allow me the pleasure of walking back with you?'

'Is Mrs. Boghey your aunt?'

'Yes; and that reminds me that I have omitted



the ceremony of introducing myself. My name is Herbert Money.'

Lenore was none the wiser; but she held her peace, and merely bent her head somewhat.

Herbert looked approvingly at her as she stepped freely and easily along beside him, and thought that the photograph, which he had seen, did not do justice either to the delicacy of her features or the grace of her figure.

'How is my aunt to-day?'

'Pretty well, I think. She was sitting out in the garden for an hour this morning, and seemed to enjoy herself.'

'Sitting out in the garden!' echoed Herbert —'enjoying herself!' and he whistled.

'It is much better she should be out more,' said Lenore.

'Oh, I dare say; only she is so obstinate, she never will change her ways for anyone.'

'I do not agree with you at all,' said Lenore with a little warmth.

Herbert glanced sideways at her, and said no more.

As they walked up the drive they met the head-gardener, and Lenore paused.

'Hampden,' she said, 'will you get the turf along the paths edged and clipped. It is not at all tidy, and your mistress wishes it seen to.'

The man touched his hat and passed on. Herbert glanced again at Lenore.

'Are you boss here now?' he asked, with a half-careless, half-malicious laugh.

Lenore did not detect the malice, and she laughed too.

'I am to be "boss," as you call it, of the garden. Mrs. Boghey has not energy to look after things, and I am used to it.'

Then they went indoors together.

Mrs. Boghey received her nephew coldly, Lenore thought, and gave the needful invitation to lunch in anything but a cordial way.

Herbert was cheerful, almost affectionate, and talked with fluency during the repast.

'I hear you achieved great things this morning—a morning walk.'

'Lenore coaxed me out into the garden for a short while, if that is what you mean'

'I hope it did you good.'

'At least it did me no harm.'

'I hope you will get stronger soon.'

'Thank you.'

And the cold, dry tone made Lenore look up with a glance of surprise.

Herbert coloured slightly, and held his peace.

'Did you have a pleasant walk this morning with

your dog, my dear?' asked Mrs. Boghey in a very different tone.

'Yes, thank you, aunt, very.'

Herbert looked up quickly.

'And you will be ready for a drive with me this afternoon?'

'Oh, yes; I shall enjoy it.'

'I will take you to a beautiful spot; I think you are fond of natural scenery.'

'Yes, very.'

Herbert did not stay long after the conclusion of the repast.

When he arrived home and entered the drawing-room, it was with a comically rueful face.

'Well?' said Mrs. Money.

'Well?' echoed Edith.

'Well, ladies,' returned Herbert, with a solemn face, 'all that I can say is that in my humble opinion it's all up.'

'What do you mean?'

'That Miss Lenore Annandale holds the winning card—unless the aspect of the game should change very materially—and that she has the brains to use it.'

'Do explain yourself more clearly,' said his mother impatiently. 'What have you made out about this girl?'

'That she is pretty, graceful, ladylike. That

she calls Mrs. Boghey "aunt." That she takes the head of the table and begins already to manage the household. If that is not enough before the first twenty-four hours are over, I don't know what is!'

'Aunt!' echoed Mrs. Money, aghast. 'Is she a relative then? No; it is impossible!'

'If she is not, then it is the more marked,' said Herbert, who was not above the pleasure of teasing his mother, for whom he had no very great affection or respect. 'I'll bet you anything you like, this "new craze" will settle the matter. We shall never see a penny of the old woman's money.'

'It is a scandalous shame!' quoth Mrs. Money hotly; 'it shall be stopped if possible; I will see what I can do.'

'You had better leave things alone,' advised Herbert lacidly. 'You'll only make a mess of it.'

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE WOMAN.

IT was not long before Mrs. Money and her daughter drove over to Auckness Point.

They were told that Mrs. Boghey was resting after her drive, and could not be disturbed.

Mrs. Money then asked for Miss Annandale, and was informed that she was in the garden, but should be sent for with as little delay as possible.

So the visitors were ushered into the drawing-room, and cast curious glances round them, detecting everywhere subtle and graceful changes in a room which, ever since they had known it, had remained the same in every minute detail, grim-looking and formal, like its owner.

'Mamma!' cried Edith excitedly, 'how different it all looks! See, there are flowers everywhere, and the china is standing about the room instead of being all stuffed away in the cupboards; and those hideous covers are off the furniture, and everything looks so pretty and bright. How has Miss Annandale managed to get it so? Aunt

Boghey never could bear the very least change in anything; and the uglier everything was, and the more dark and forbidding it looked, the better she seemed pleased.'

'This Miss Annandale is evidently a very bold, forward girl,' answered Mrs. Money severely. 'Lacking all sense of delicacy and good taste. I wonder how your poor, dear aunt can put up with it.'

And then the door opened and in came Lenore, in her white dress, her garden gloves in her hand, and her hair just ruffled into little waves by the fresh breeze blowing off the sea.

She received her guests with quiet courtesy, and with an ease of manner which was a further aggravation to Mrs. Money. She sat down fully resolved to cross-question her, and discover what kind of tie it was that existed between her and Mrs. Boghey.

'We were all so pleased, Miss Annandale, to hear of your arrival here. Poor, dear Mrs. Boghey leads so sad and secluded a life, that the advent of any young friend who knows and cares for her, must be a great source of pleasure and profit to her.'

This was a feeler, and Lenore knew that it was. She had not herself the smallest desire to conceal from the world the fact that she was a stranger and a hireling in the house, but after Mrs. Boghey's hints and implied wishes on the subject, she did

not feel at liberty to explain her real position, more especially to the Moneys, towards whom she was quite sure Mrs. Boghey bore no good-will.

So she answered quietly:

'I hope the plan will answer. I shall do what I can to cheer and comfort her.'

'I am sure you will, my dear, if you will permit me to call you so. But perhaps you will allow me to give you one little hint. My poor, dear sister-in-law is so very peculiar——'

Lenore bent her head, as if to assent to hearing the hint, but her face was firm and grave.

'Is very peculiar,' continued Mrs. Money smoothly, 'and needs most careful management. She is very conservative in her tastes, very averse to all changes. I see here,' and Mrs. Money glanced round the room, 'a good many changes. Do you think, my dear, it is quite wise? is it not a little premature? So soon after your arrival too—I am sure you will excuse the hint. Of course you cannot know so much of poor, dear Mrs. Boghey's tastes and feelings as I do.'

'Mrs. Boghey and I made the alterations together,' answered Lenore quietly, though her eyes began to shine somewhat indignantly. 'We both think the room much improved. Do not you?'

Mrs. Money was taken aback somewhat by

Lenore's composed and fearless manner. She was growing irritated and uneasy, but she hastened to make a smiling rejoinder:

'Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Annandale; I am sure you will not take offence. I thought, perhaps, it had been done with intent to please and surprise Mrs. Boghey. We have so often planned little surprises for her, and have only given vexation instead of pleasure. And I could not help fancying that you, perhaps, had done the same.'

'Oh, no,' answered Lenore in the same quiet way. 'We talk everything over together. I do not act without consulting her, but if I did anything to displease her, she would prefer, I think, to tell me of it herself.'

'Impudent!' was Mrs. Money's mental comment, 'trying to set me down like that!'

Lenore had covered the somewhat awkward pause by ringing for tea. It was an institution Mrs. Boghey had never sanctioned, the social afternoon tea, and the guests were amazed to see the silver tray carried in as a matter of course— still more so when Campbell came in for a cup for her mistress, with a request that Miss Annandale would go upstairs when she was disengaged.

The guests did not stay long, and they did not learn any of the things they were anxious to discover. Lenore parried their questions by the

dexterity of perfect simplicity, and Mrs. Money went away baffled and angry, feeling certain that 'this upstart girl,' as she called her, had been warned against them by Mrs. Boghey, and extremely indignant, as she phrased it, 'at the disgraceful way in which she played daughter of the house to them, and patronised those who had far the best right to be there.'

Lenore went upstairs to Mrs. Boghey.

'Well, my dear, are your guests gone?'

'Yes, aunt.'

'And how did you like them?'

'I hardly know; but they did not like me, I am sure.'

'Probably not,' answered Mrs. Boghey drily. 'I never imagined they would.'

'Why so?' asked Lenore laughing.

'I have my reasons,' replied the old lady, nodding her head slowly, 'but I shall not tell them to you.'

Lenore said no more, and presently Mrs. Boghey added, with cold, bitter irony:

'You see, my dear, they love me so dearly that they cannot bear to see anyone about me who might draw my love away from them. It pains their sense of devotion. Great love is always apt to beget jealousy, as I dare say you know.'

Something in the extreme bitterness of the

tone hurt Lenore. It seemed to express such loneliness and desolation. She took one withered hand and kissed it softly.

'Dear aunt, do not talk so.'

'Why should I not?'

'They are your relatives; they speak with affection of you. Why should you distrust them?'

'I will not teach you worldly wisdom before your time, Lenore Annandale. So long as you can retain your ignorance and innocence, do so.'

The more Lenore saw of Mrs. Boghey the more she pitied her, for it seemed as though she had drunk to the very dregs the cup of sorrow—the gall and bitterness of life; and had become herself embittered and depressed beyond all hope of cure.

What the terrible sorrows of her life had been Lenore did not know; what awful mysterious grief overshadowed her, and poisoned at their source all possible fountains of happiness, the girl had yet to learn. What she did know was that the lonely, melancholy woman, whose home she now shared, sorrowed as one without hope; and her deep and prayerful wish was that it might lie within her power, by patience and by the influence of tender and thoughtful love, to bring one ray of Divine Love into that sad heart; and when once that light had penetrated there, the girl knew well that all the desolation and despair must flee away.

Her life at Auckness Point passed quietly and uneventfully, and the days slipped so quickly by that she could hardly realise their rapid flight.

Many hours were spent with Mrs. Boghey, reading to her, writing for her, or, when she was fatigued and wished to rest, playing and singing softly to her sweet, old-fashioned melodies, to which she loved to listen, and which seemed to soothe her better than anything else.

'It drowns thought, child,' she sometimes said. 'I used to dread to leave my books, sorely as I need rest sometimes, because the thoughts I dread so much would always come crowding into my head. But your music drives them away—carries me back to the days before I knew sin or sorrow, fear or despair. Child,' she once said, rising up upon her elbow, and transfixing Lenore by the terrible, despairing look in her dark, fiery eyes, 'if ever I am *dying*, and you are with me—I believe you will be with me when I die, Lenore Annandale play music to me—let me have music. It may drive away despair. Remember what I have said—music.'

Lenore came and knelt beside her, and took both the cold hands in her warm, tender grasp. Her eyes shone with rare feeling.

'Dear Mrs. Boghey, if I am with you when you die, I shall have for you some music—oh, so much

more beautiful and comforting than any I have given you yet! When you hear that music, I am *sure* despair can never come near you.'

Earnestly the two women looked into each other's eyes, but no explanation was asked or offered; only from that day forth a closer bond of union seemed established between them.

July and August slipped quickly and happily by. The garden gave Lenore much occupation during her leisure hours, and the drives with Mrs. Boghey were a source of constant enjoyment. And then her patroness found out that she was fond of riding, and a saddle-horse was at once put at her disposal; and every morning, before the rest of the household was fully aroused, she and Colin enjoyed together a glorious gallop along the grand coast road, or through the dark, whispering woods, or across the boundless, breezy moorland.

These morning rides were to Lenore a source of unmixed delight, and she seemed to drink in a supply of life and health and happiness, which supported her through any amount of the dreariness which was sometimes forced upon her during the day.

For as the summer days shortened, and the chill breath of autumn crept through the house—not the glorious, golden autumn of the south, but the keen, fresh, chilly northern season—Mrs. Boghey's

face grew ever more gloomy, and depression seemed to hang about her like a cloud.

And when the harvest was all in, and the long winter seemed settling over that northern home, it needed all Lenore's equable and joyous spirits to struggle against the feeling of gloom, which seemed to wrap up the whole household as in a veil.

'Lenore,' said Mrs. Boghey once, as the girl was saying good-night, 'you will have to take your meals alone to-morrow, and you will not see me at all. I shall not require you.'

Lenore gazed wonderingly into the white, sad face, which looked strangely set and unearthly to-night. The girl almost quailed before the terrible look of misery in the dark, hollow eyes, and the question she had almost framed died away upon her lips.

'Very well,' she answered very low, kissed the cold cheek, and withdrew in silence, feeling a strange sense of awe creep over her.

It was a relief to find the fire blazing cheerily in her own room, and Colin ready to welcome her, whilst Annie McIver was in the inner room, putting away in the drawers some clothes she had been brushing.

When she came out Lenore said:

'I think I will not take my ride to-morrow, Annie, if you will send word to the stables.'

'Ay, mem, that I will.'

The girl looked at her half curiously, half timidly, and said after a moment's hesitation:

'We'll a' be glad when the morrow be past, for the poor leddy's sake.'

'What is to-morrow, Annie?' asked Lenore with a slight shiver.

'Eh, mem, has she na' telled ye? 'Tis the anniversary'—here Annie lowered her voice to a whisper—'the anniversary, ye ken; and 'tis a sair lang day for my leddy, poor dear; and right glad we are a' when 'tis past.'

'What anniversary do you mean, Annie?' asked Lenore, almost unconsciously lowering her voice too. 'Is it the anniversary of a death?'

'Eh, mem, I'm thinking 'tis waur nor a death,' answered Annie cautiously. 'But I dinna rightly ken—naebody kens, only my leddy and Mrs. Campbell. But some sair trouble cam' on that day; and 'tis always keppit like a day o' the dead.'

Annie, who under Lenore's instruction was learning English phrasing and English pronunciation, always lapsed more or less into her own dialect in moments of excitement, although she made efforts from time to time to regain her ground and emulate Lenore's smoothness of speech.

'What was it that happened? Do you not know, Annie?' asked Lenore.

'Nay, mem, that I do not. 'Twas something dreadful, but what it was I canna tell.'

'Was it to her or to her husband that something happened?'

Annie lowered her voice still more, as she answered:

'They do say 'twas something to do with Mister Alan and his wild ways. But we're all bidden never to speak Mister Alan's name.'

'Is he her son?'

'Ay, mem, he was, but he's dead.'

'Did you ever see him?'

'Nay; for he died jest after I cam' here; and he hadna been near the place for lang years before. I think he did something awful bad, and had to hide away. But I dinna ken anything; 'tis only what we say among oursel's. Maybe I shouldna have said aught.'

'Never mind, Annie, I will not betray your confidence. Good-night.'

Lenore slept restlessly that night, and was disturbed by dim and terrible visions. She woke to the sound of the howling of the wind, the beating of the snow upon her windows, and the sullen roaring of the sea beneath. It seemed as though the winter was come indeed.

It was a strange, dreary day. The storm raged and howled without, and precluded all possibility of leaving the house. Mrs. Boghey remained all the day closely shut up in her own room, to which nobody was admitted except Campbell.

Lenore had to find occupation as best she might. She wrote long letters home, telling them any details of her present life which she thought might interest them; and she wrote at rather unusual length to Terence.

She had kept her promise about writing to him, and had done so regularly. At a distance old associations were stronger than new, and she could write more affectionately and more trustfully than she could speak.

His letters at first had been frequent, and long, and very full of love. Later on they grew less frequent, but were as tender as ever, with continual allusions to hopes as to the future. For the last few weeks these allusions had been wanting, somewhat to Lenore's relief; yet he always wrote very lovingly, and his letters were always full of tender and caressing phrases, which Lenore could read more patiently than she could hear.

He said little of himself or his own affairs; but from Madeline she heard that he was being very steady and careful, and that Philip was much

relieved. Lenore's influence, it was supposed, was working this reform ; but the girl felt that it was very small influence that she at a distance could exercise over a nature like Terence's, and she was more inclined to believe that it was from a higher and stronger motive that this change proceeded, and was full of hope that the lessons he had been so anxious to learn had not been learned in vain.

From Marjory's letters she gathered that Terence was not as much at the Farm as they had hoped from his near neighbourhood ; but that might be because his occupations prevented frequent visits. Marjory evidently believed this was the sole and only cause, and Lenore did not allow herself to doubt.

When her letters were all answered and put out for the post, Lenore wandered somewhat aimlessly about the house, hardly knowing how to pass the time ; when all at once it occurred to her that she had never explored the whole house, and that she had never entered any of the rooms which lay at the end of the long corridor upon which her door opened.

Rather surprised at herself for not having done so earlier, she made her way down the long, dim passage. It was very long and very dim, for the great window at the end was so bedewed with sea

foam that it hardly let in sufficiency of light. Lenore went up to it and looked down. This wing of the house was built upon a point of rock which jutted into the sea, and the water seemed to wash up on each side almost to the foundations. To-day it was a wild scene upon which the girl looked out, the moaning waste of tossing, foaming water; it seemed as if it surrounded her, and would fain have engulfed the whole house. She shivered and turned away, and tried the door of the room nearest to her. It was locked, and there was no key in it. Lenore was surprised, as none of the other rooms in the house, so far as she knew, were kept locked; but she tried the opposite door, and found that she could not gain entrance there either.

She discovered on further examination that the four rooms nearest to the window were kept locked, but all the others were open, and contained nothing of any interest.

'Campbell,' she said, somewhat later in the day, as she met the maid in the hall, 'would you please let me have the keys of the rooms at the end of my corridor? I have a fancy to go in and look at them.'

The woman gave her a hurried, scared glance, as though startled.

'I haven't got the keys, ma'am,' she answered; 'my mistress keeps them.'

'Oh, does she?' returned Lenore equably. 'Never mind then, Campbell.'

But the woman lingered uneasily.

'You have not heard any noise there, ma'am, making you want to go in?'

'Oh, no,' answered Lenore, smiling; 'are they haunted rooms then, Campbell?'

But she repented the careless question next moment, when she saw the grey shade of fear or horror which crept over the maid's face.

'Don't jest about it, Miss Annandale,' she said solemnly; 'for there's more ways of haunting than one, and living spirits are more terrible than the dead.'

Lenore was filled with awe, she knew not why; for she did not understand what such wild words might mean.

Campbell recovered from her emotion and added:

'Ma'am, excuse the liberty; but never ask my mistress for those keys. 'Twould do more harm than you think for.'

'I will not,' answered Lenore. 'How is your mistress to-day, Campbell?'

'Sadly, sadly, as she always is this last day of September. Oh, Miss Annandale, it goes to my heart to see her so bowed down - not one bit of hope or comfort left to her.'

'Would she see me, Campbell—just for a short time?'

Campbell shook her head gloomily.

'No, ma'am, she will see nobody at all to-day.'

'Would you take her a little note if I were to write it?' asked the girl with quick inspiration.

'Why, yes, ma'am, I will do that.'

Lenore stepped into the study and wrote a few words on a paper, which she folded and gave to Campbell.

The words were these:

'The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.'

CHAPTER XIII.

CAMPBELL'S STORY.

'CAMPBELL,' said Lenore in a low, quiet voice, so as not to disturb the weary sleeper who lay tranquilly upon the canopied bed, 'are you very tired with your watch?'

'No, ma'am, I have had a very quiet time. She has only wakened once, and I have had some sleep myself. You are before your time, Miss Annandale.'

'Yes,' answered Lenore, 'I woke up and could not get to sleep again. There are so many things that puzzle me, Campbell. I wish you could tell me a little about them.'

Ever since Mrs. Boghey had kept that last mysterious 'anniversary,' she had been laid up by a sharp attack of illness, or perhaps it should rather be called a complete prostration of strength, which had caused no small anxiety to her two faithful attendants, Campbell and Lenore.

They had watched over her by night and day, sharing alike the fatigue and the anxiety; and, as

could hardly fail to be the case, a mutual confidence and liking had grown up between them.

Their patient was now on a fair way to recovery, yet still the night watches continued as before; and thus it came about that, at four o'clock one cold October morning, Campbell and Lenore met in Mrs. Boghey's room.

It was a large, lofty room, and the bed with its half-closed curtains stood at some distance from the fire. There was no fear that their quiet voices would disturb the sleeper. When Mrs. Boghey slept at all, she slept soundly and well.

In answer to Lenore's last speech, Campbell looked half-disturbed, half-relieved, and said slowly: 'Surely, ma'am, I would tell you the story and welcome, if I knew my mistress would let me.'

'I do not wish you to do anything she would not like,' returned Lenore. 'If it is a secret, I will not ask any more.'

'I cannot think but what my lady would be glad you should know. 'Tis not so great a secret but what there's many a one she trusts less knows it. These days when her mind has been wandering a bit, she has said many things that have puzzled you, I'm thinking. She has talked a good deal, has she not, Miss Annandale?'

'Yes,' answered Lenore; 'that is one reason why I asked if you could tell me the story. She talks

just as if she thought I knew it, and seems troubled when I cannot make out her meaning or answer her questions.'

'Yes,' said Campbell thoughtfully, 'I dare say she does. She likes you and trusts you, and I dare say she fancies in her poor, bewildered head that she has told you herself.'

'I have fancied that too.'

Campbell noiselessly made up the fire, and put the kettle on to boil.

'You will be wanting a cup of tea, I'm thinking, ma'am; and I have not had mine yet. We can have a bit of talk while we drink our cups, and I'll tell you all I can that the mistress, I am sure, would like you to know. There are some things that I cannot tell to anyone—that only she and I know, or ever shall know, please God.'

A certain feeling of awe crept over Lenore at the grave solemnity of Campbell's tone. She knew by instinct, as well as by scattered sentences spoken by the sick woman, that she had a tragic story to hear, and she listened with deep interest.

'I have been with my mistress nigh upon fifty years,' began Campbell, 'and it would be strange if I did not know all her history. I was a slip of a girl when first I was engaged to attend upon her as waiting-maid. And she was a grand, beautiful young lady, just going out into the world.'

Campbell paused and sighed as her thonghts flew back to those far-off days.

'She was beautiful, was my lady then. I've heard say that "the beautiful Miss Chaloner" was the toast of all the county. And she had lovers too, almost more than she could count; for she was not only beautiful, but learned and accomplished, and an heiress to boot; for she was an only child, and these lands and a great fortune were hers by right, upon the death of her father.

'So my lady was courted and fêted and toasted enough to have turned the heads of most; but it never turned her head. She would laugh at her lovers behind their backs, mimic their airs and graces for my amusement and hers, when we were alone together, and it seemed as though she would have naught to say to any of them, and one after another they were sent away, and yet others would always spring up and take their place.'

'But she did marry by-and-by.'

'Oh, ay, by-and-by she did. There came a gentleman from the army, a Colonel Boghey, older than many of the rest, and he had been in foreign parts and had fought in real battles, and could tell stories that would freeze the blood in your veins with horror or excitement. And the end of it was that he wooed and he won her; and old Mr. Chaloner, who was too much wrapped up in his

gout and his ague to take much care of his pretty daughter, gave his consent—the poor lamb had no mother to care for her; and as he was so pressing nd she so loving, the end of it was, before they had known each other but four short months, they were man and wife.'

'Well,' asked Lenore, smiling somewhat sadly, 'was it not a happy marriage?'

Campbell shook her head mournfully.

''Tis hard to say what a marriage is like, when one of the pair dies before two years are out.'

'Did Colonel Boghey die so soon?'

'Ay, he did, and to my thinking none too soon, if it be not wicked to say so.'

'How do you mean?'

'He would have broken her heart before someone else broke it. He had made a sad woman of her before he was taken away.'

'How so?'

'He had no real love for her—only an idle fancy, which soon wore itself out. It was her gold he loved, and it was for gold he married her. Two months after the marriage her father died, and everything he had became hers. He had lived always in the south for the sake of his health; but this was the family estate, and it was here my master and mistress came to live.

'And then he threw off the mask, and showed

what he really was. He filled the house with his drunken, worthless associates, won the place such an ill name, that none of the gentry would come near, insulted his wife in public and abused her in private, and showed her what a fiend a man can be.'

'Oh, poor Mrs. Boghey!' exclaimed Lenore; 'no wonder she looks so sad.'

'You see that my lady is not one to do things by halves. She had loved and trusted him with her whole heart, and this was the return he made. Ay, ay, 'twas well he died when he did, or she must have died of grief—not but what it would have been a better and a happier thing for her to have died then, than to have seen the days she has seen.'

Campbell sighed deeply. Lenore made no comment, but waited for her to go on.

'So my master died, as I say; and my lady mourned for him, for all his wickedness, because she had loved him so well, and because death seems to kill all hard thoughts, and to make all memories tender and loving. She mourned for him in a quiet way, and kept herself very much shut up. It was then I noticed the change in her, how she was losing all her gay young spirits and growing cold and reserved. She talked less and less even to me, and instead of being a bright, bonny, laughing girl, she became a pale, sad, care-worn woman.'

'I cannot fancy Mrs. Boghey could ever have been merry,' said Lenore.

'Ah, but she was until she had learnt sorrow and distrust, and after that she was wholly changed. When her little son was born I hoped that she would be comforted; but when she heard it was a boy, such a look of misery came into her face as I shall never forget. I said, "Why, my dear" (I called her so sometimes, poor lamb), "why do you look so? 'Tis as bonny a boy as ever was seen." And she answered slowly and sadly, and with such a look of certainty as made me almost afraid, "Campbell, it is a boy; he will follow in his father's steps, and finish breaking my heart. I have prayed God day and night to send me a daughter, not a son, and He has not heard me. I will never pray to Him more." I was afraid to hear her speak so bitterly, and tried to comfort and cheer her. But she would not hear me. "Call him Alan," she said; "call him by his father's name, for he will have his father's nature." Was it not just as though the poor dear could read the future?'

'I don't know,' answered Lenore in a low tone. 'I must hear the rest.'

'Well, I was afraid, after that, that she would take against the bairn, and tried for a bit to keep it out of her way a good bit. But soon we began

to see that she was just wrapped up in the wee boy, and could hardly bear him out of her sight. She was quiet and she looked cold, but, eh, how she loved that child! I think no mother ever felt quite as she did. But there was always something very sad about the devotion of her love. Sometimes she would look up at me and say, "He will break my heart some day, Campbell; but I think it only makes him dearer to me now. I wonder, shall I ever love him less when he learns to scorn me and to hate me, and begins to follow in the footsteps of his father?" And I would say, "Oh, ma'am, do not say such things, do not think them. The bairn will grow to be a pride and a joy to you." And then she would smile such a sad, sad smile, and answer, "You will see, you will see." It was strange now, was it not, that she should be so certain?'

'Very strange,' assented Lenore; 'but was the boy a naughty one?'

'The best, the gentlest, the bonniest that ever lived,' answered Campbell with sudden enthusiasm. 'I loved him as if he were my own; and a more loving child you never saw, nor one more obedient and more passionately fond of his mother. He was like her in face—as she used to be in her girlhood, blooming and lovely and fresh as a rose. He had her high spirit and courage too, and was, as I was

always saying, "every inch his mother's bairn." I could see nought of his father in him, and I paid no heed to my lady's fears.'

Campbell paused again with a sigh of bitter regret. Lenore, who was deeply interested, pleaded that she would go on with her tale.

'Well, I must not make it too long; I must pass over the years quickly. They glided by very fast, and the bonny boy grew and grew, until he began to call himself a man, and at last we were almost forced to think of him as such. My lady said to me one day, "Campbell, we must not keep him always at home. He must go out into the world." I was surprised to hear her say so; and yet I knew that she was right. He could not stay always with a houseful of women. "He must go to the University," said my lady. "I shall send him to Cambridge."'

'And did he go?'

'Yes, he went, and he did well there. He was clever and liked his books well enough, and when he came home for his holidays he looked well and happy, and was as affectionate as ever to us all, and devoted to his mother. My lady did not wish him to lead an idle life because he was wealthy; she said idleness made more wicked men than vice did. She wished him brought up for the bar, and for awhile he seemed content that it should be so;

but one Christmas time, when he came home to us, he was full of some great, new idea. He wanted to be a soldier, he said. His friend Graham was going into a cavalry regiment in the summer, and he was bent on having a commission bought for him. He was set on the army. I shall never forget my lady's face when she heard him talk thus. She looked at me and said in a low tone, "This is the beginning of the end, Campbell." Well, I had a deal of talk with Master Alan—for as I'd been his nurse he always let me say what I would—and I did all I knew to persuade him to give up his notion and take to the law, as his mother wished; but 'twas no manner of use. The lad was bent on his own way—they all are, Miss Annandale, even the best of them—and he laughed at my fears, and almost laughed them away. My lady said little—it was not her way to talk, and he did not know her as I did; he did not know how much she felt, and if he had done, it might not have restrained him. So when the summer came the commission was bought, and the lad went away to be a soldier.'

There was a long pause, and Campbell's face grew very sad and grave.

'Well?' asked Lenore softly.

'Well,' returned Campbell, drawing a long breath, 'it was, as my lady had said, "the beginning of the end." The army is a dangerous place, they

say, now, to send young men into; twenty years ago it was ten times worse. And I suppose, perhaps, there was no worse regiment in the country than the one Master Alan had selected. First we knew how things were going by the way he kept on writing for money. My lady was very patient with him and very generous, but her face grew sadder and sadder as the months rolled by, and she talked to me less and less of the child she loved so well.'

'And did he not come and see you?' asked Lenore, her face full of sympathy, for she, too, knew something of a similar anxiety.

'His visits grew fewer and shorter; then his letters grew short and cold. He was always wanting money, money, money! and when at last my mistress wrote and said she could not go on allowing him so much, and that he must be more careful, then came a long, sullen silence; no word nor sign from him for weeks and weeks; and I sometimes thought her heart would break. And yet there was worse to follow.'

Campbell's face was full of woe, and Lenore's of deep interest and pity.

'Oh, Campbell, what a sad, sad story! How she must have suffered! No wonder her face is so full of misery. And how did it end?'

'Ay, ma'am, 'tis time I came to the end. 'Tis

too sad a story to spin out, though there is much I could say. I will come to the last chapter—the saddest one of all.'

Campbell had lowered her voice to a mysterious whisper, and almost unconsciously the two women drew closer together, and the night-light flickered dimly, and the fire ceased to sparkle, and only burnt with a steady, subdued glow, as though everything animate and inanimate sympathised with the sense of solemn sadness which pervaded this melancholy history.

'Mr. Alan wrote one day a short, almost insolent, note, saying that he and a party of friends were coming to Auckness, in two days' time, to stay for a fortnight. He asked no leave, wrote no word of love or even of courtesy; and the next day he and his friends arrived.

'My lady had made all suitable preparations. Everything they could want they had. Young princes could not have been better treated; but she did not go down amongst them. She shut up herself in her own room, and saw no one but her son; and his visits, short and grudgingly bestowed, gave more pain than pleasure when they did come. It was a sad, sad time. There were ill doings in the house by night and by day. We heard sounds of angry voices, drunken songs, and the kind of mirth that makes devils laugh and angels weep.

It was like the old days of Colonel Boghey's reign; and we both felt sure that what she had once foreseen was coming to pass.'

'And when he did come, how did he behave? Was he quite changed?'

'He was like his father,' answered Campbell significantly. 'The likeness grew stronger and stronger. I need not say more.

'Mr. Graham came with Mr. Alan, and so long as he was there things were not quite so bad. He was a real gentleman, and Mr. Alan looked up to him and took his advice in many things, though I did hear that they had words sometimes, and that Mr. Alan provoked him very much. He came every day to see my lady, and it seemed a protection having him in the house. But he had to leave shortly, to see after some business of his own, and though he left his things behind and promised not to be away long, we all felt sorry at his going.

'Things got worse directly he left. The noise downstairs lasted farther and farther into the night. We heard that play ran high, that they drank deep. We shivered sometimes at the sounds below, and feared almost to listen. And then there came one dreadful night—the noises had been worse than ever—and at two in the morning up came Mr. Alan, half mad with drink and excitement, to his

mother's room. We were both of us up, sitting together there, for we could not sleep. He came in and demanded money. He must have money. He had played, and he had lost. His outside creditors, too, were pressing him hard. Money he wanted, and money he would have. My lady was quite calm, and asked him how much it was he wanted. He named a sum so large that it took my breath away to hear it spoken. My lady said it was impossible to give him such an amount as that; that he had already had more money that year than she could well afford; but that she would think the matter over, and if he would come to her in the morning, when he was in a fit state to hear reason, she would let him know to what extent she could help him in his embarrassments. And in return for this quietly spoken promise, he turned and struck her—struck his own mother in his blind, senseless anger—and told her, in wild, furious words, that she would repent bitterly ever having refused him, and then he flung himself from the room.'

'Oh!' cried Lenore, horrified by the reality which Campbell threw into her story. 'Oh, how dreadful—how dreadful! Oh, poor Mrs. Boghey!'

'She did not cry out nor faint, nor make so much as a moan. She only sat down, as white as death, and buried her face in her hands.

'Mr. Alan never came near us after that. We



did not know what he was doing. The house seemed wrapped in a terrible mystery, and my lady moved about like one in a dreadful dream. In a week's time Mr. Graham came back, and sought my lady with a pale, grave face. He told her that her son had forged a cheque in his father's name, for a very large sum, and that the family were very angry and intended to prosecute at once. Then my lady's calm almost gave way, and she prayed for mercy for her guilty son, swearing the money should be restored fourfold, if only that disgrace and ruin were spared him. Mr. Graham was very kind, and said he would do all he could —that he had said a great deal already to his father, and would say more on his return ; but that he must see Alan first, and then he should know better how the matter stood.

'He went to seek him. Mr. Alan had the two locked rooms on one side that passage, Miss Annandale, Mr. Graham those on the other side. It was there they met. What happened no man knows. We suppose Mr. Alan was in no condition to reason or to understand properly what was said. He must have mistaken Mr. Graham's drift—have thought himself threatened and in danger. He was like a wild beast at bay. His gun was in his room ; he seized it, and struck Mr. Graham a terrible blow on the head. Then he

came tearing like a madman to his mother's room. Oh, ma'am, I cannot tell you more of that night. He said he had murdered his friend, and we all thought he spoke the truth. There was nothing for it but flight, and he fled—fled from his mother's house that night, we knew not whither. 'Twas on the night of the last day of September.

'But Mr. Graham was not dead, only so injured that he has been like a child ever since. 'Twas the brain that suffered, the doctors said; and he never had his reason again.'

'Oh, how very, very sad!'

'Ay, 'twas worse than death, they said; and after that, as you may guess, there was no forgiveness—no peace to be made with the Grahams. Mr. Alan was hunted for, as they hunt the slaves that escape, without mercy and without pause. You may guess how my lady suffered during those long days.'

'But they did not find him?'

'No. He got away to foreign parts. At last we heard from him, and could very cautiously and secretly supply him with funds to keep him alive. But the Grahams were ever on the watch. It was a terrible way in which to live. He felt like a hunted creature, and all joy in life was gone. We suffered with him, and lived in terrible fear lest we should innocently betray him. Twice we saw

him again. He came in a sailing vessel, disguised as a sailor, rowed himself up to the point, and so made his way into the house. They were dreadful, stolen visits ; and even then rumours got afloat, and we feared from day to day he would be taken. And so he would steal away again at dead of night as he came.'

'And then ?'

'Then he died in foreign parts, worn out by fear and anxiety. And when the news came of his death, you may, perhaps, understand why it was that it seemed more of a relief than of a sorrow. And that, ma'am, is my lady's story, so far as I may tell it.'

CHAPTER XIV.

LIGHT.

UNDER the skilful and tender nursing of Campbell and Lenore, Mrs. Boghey slowly recovered her strength again, although it was visible to all who saw her that the iron constitution, which had stood so many shocks of grief and horror, was slowly and steadily being undermined by the imperceptible action of time.

She had had warnings before that her health was giving away. She had shown that she was aware of it when she consented to make some slight change in her mode of life, when she decided to take a companion into her house—a companion who should have youth and hope and brightness, with which to brighten her lonely life—a companion who should not be ever associated in her mind with the dread hours of the past, as was her faithful and devoted Campbell.

And so Lenore had come to her, and had brought with her, although she knew it not yet, the richest of blessings which life can give, both to the

worn and weary, to the young and gay. She knew it not yet, that lone and stricken woman, but she was to learn it soon.

Lenore had seen but little of the Moneys since her arrival at Auckness. During a part of the summer they had been from home, and after that they had had the house full of sportsmen, and had been busy with gay doings, and the stormy weather of the winter months precluded much intercourse. Herbert rode over most often, and endeavoured to make himself agreeable; but Mrs. Boghey seldom cared to see him, and Lenore was always more glad to see him depart than arrive, although she bore him no ill-will, and was often amused by his gossiping talk.

Whenever she did see Mrs. Money and her daughter, she was conscious of an increasing dislike and jealousy on their part, which she could not at all understand; but she did not trouble her head about the matter, as she was profoundly indifferent to them, and knew, as by instinct, that there was nothing genuine in their professed love towards Mrs. Boghey.

When they had heard of her illness, they had been lavish in their offers of assistance, and most anxious to do all and everything in their power to show their interest and devotion; but all overtures had been promptly and coldly repulsed, and even

their visits had been fruitless. Mrs. Boghey was neither willing nor able to see them; Lenore was either with the patient or resting in her own room, and could not be disturbed—this was Campbell's strict injunction to the servants—and they had to go away as curious and unsatisfied as they had come, only hearing in the butler's stiff phrases, that his mistress was going on well, and that she improved slightly from day to day.

Mrs. Boghey was certainly improving. After a time she was able to leave her bed, to lie upon the sofa for a few hours each day, whilst Lenore or Campbell watched beside her.

One curious phase of her illness had been her utter silence. From the morning of the melancholy anniversary day, until she was approaching convalescence, she had hardly uttered one connected sentence, or spoken by her own volition. When her mind was very weak, she had wandered somewhat, and talked of past days and past scenes, with distress and terror in look and voice; but that was all. There was no attempt to hold converse with the outside world; what passed through the mind of that lonely woman, as she lay hour after hour gazing out into vacancy with her hollow, despairing eyes, was known only to her and to her Maker.

But one day this icy barrier of reserve was broken down.

It was twilight, and the fire flickered brightly in the grate. Candles had not been lighted, for the daylight had hardly yet faded. Mrs. Boghey lay upon the couch in her room, and Lenore sat beside her, hoping she slept.

But before very long she was almost startled by the sound of a long-unheard voice:

'Lenore.'

The girl turned her head quickly, and saw the dark eyes bent earnestly upon her.

'Yes, dear aunt.'

'Lenore,' said the sick woman, with a curious intonation in her voice, whether of reproach or of sadness she could not make out, 'have you been praying for me?'

It was a curious question to unseal for the first time lips that had long been closed. Lenore answered simply:

'Yes.'

'Have you been praying very earnestly—very determinedly?'

Again came the simple answer:

'Yes.'

'And what have you been praying for? Tell me, for I wish to know.'

'I have been praying,' answered Lenore quietly and gently, 'that our Heavenly Father will help and comfort you——'

'There is no comfort possible for me,' interrupted the sick woman quickly.

Lenore continued as though she had not heard the words:

'That He will show you how His great love can bind up the broken heart, and make sweet the bitter water of affliction. I have prayed Him to grant that you may know Him for a refuge, a very present help in time of trouble, that you may feel that the everlasting arms are underneath, in spite of all; and I have prayed Him to grant that at evening time it may be light.'

Deep silence followed these words. It was broken by a long, shuddering sigh:

'Child! child! what are you saying? Why are you troubling me with sweet words that mean nothing? Why do you torment me with false hopes? I have learned endurance—I have learned to bear all without a groan. Is it not enough? Why try to disturb the dead calm I have struggled for years to attain to?'

Lenore came and knelt down beside her, and laid her hand tenderly upon the white head, as she made answer:

'Because I know that there is a better and a happier thing which you can attain to. Would you not gladly change the dead calm of which you speak, for the peace of God, which passeth all understanding?'

It seemed to Lenore as though the bowed head trembled beneath her hand; but the voice remained still, even, and cold.

'Such words are but empty names to me, child. They bring no meaning with them.'

'And yet the meaning is not very hard to read for those who seek it.'

'I do not seek it,' answered Mrs. Boghey calmly 'I have deliberately chosen my own path. My god, in whom I trusted, forsook me; and I trusted him no more. I have sunk down into a calm, cold apathy, which, if it is not rest, is at least a simulation of it, and was enough for me. Why have you troubled me with your words and your prayers? Whilst I have been lying in the dark gulf of sickness—blackness all around me—the cold quietude of hopelessness from which I never wished to awake again—I felt a power from without drawing me whither I could not go, stirring the black waters round me, and trying to gild their edges. I know what that power was now, Lenore Annandale: it was your will, your prayers, what you like to call it. And I say, Let me alone, let me sleep; I am weary, weary, weary, and beg that I may not be awakened.'

'I know you are very weary,' answered Lenore tenderly; 'and that is why I do so want you to find One who said, "Come unto Me, all ye that

labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."'

Earnestly, searchingly, despairingly, the dark eyes fixed themselves upon her face.

'Words, words, words,' she repeated mournfully —'only hollow words.'

'Not so,' answered Lenore steadily, 'not hollow words—grand, comforting, life-giving words. Could hollow-sounding words move you? Is it not because you feel that they are living words that you almost dread them? Does not their truth make itself felt? They are true and lasting words. They are written as much for you to day as for those to whom they were spoken. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." Mrs. Boghey, Christ's words have not passed away, and His words are, "Come unto Me,"—"Whomsoever cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out."'

The sick woman covered her face with her hands and trembled.

'Child,' she said hoarsely, 'such promises are not for me. I have lived alone too long; and now I must die alone.'

'You cannot die alone,' answered Lenore. 'Christ's love will be round you whether you shut your heart to it or not. You cannot be alone—He will not desert you, though you may have

deserted Him. He will not leave you. He is standing now at the door knocking, and He will continue to stand so, until you let Him in. I do not think He will knock in vain. I think you have heard Him; I think you will open to Him.'

'Child, child, I cannot! I could not if I would. My heart is like a stone.'

'He can give you a new heart.'

'I have shut Him out too long now to change. It is too late.'

'If He does not say "too late," surely you need not.'

'I have lived without God. I have cast Him off, as he cast me off.'

'He never cast you off,' answered Lenore firmly.

'You do not know, child, you do not know. He has dealt very bitterly with me.'

'"Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth,"' answered Lenore gently. 'Oh, Mrs. Boghey! after Christ has come down to live as man for us, and has so sanctified and glorified every kind of suffering, how can we say that it is a sign of God's desertion of us? As soon might we say He had deserted His own Son.'

'And did He not?' questioned the sick woman bitterly.

For answer Lenore simply quoted the beautiful lines of Mrs. Browning:

'Deserted! who hath dreamt that, when the cross in darkness rested
Upon the Victim's hidden face, no love was manifested?
What frantic hands outstretch'd have e'er the atoning drops averted?
What tears have washed them from the soul that one should be deserted?

Deserted! God could separate from His own essence rather,
And Adam's sins have swept between the righteous Son and Father;
Yea, once, Emmanuel's orphan'd cry His universe hath shaken;
It went up *single*, *echoless*: "My God, I am forsaken!"

'It went up from the Holy's lips, amid His lost creation,
That of the lost *no son* should use those words of desolation;
That earth's worst phrensies, marring hope, should mar not hope's fruition,
And I, on Cowper's grave, should see his rapture in a vision.'

Then came a long, long pause. Mrs. Boghey lay still with closed eyes, and Lenore knelt in silence beside her, fearing to say more, lest she should be hurt by too great agitation, yet fancying, as minute after minute passed by, that a more restful look was stealing over that wan face.

At length she said softly:

'"The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."'

'I believe they are, Lenore Annandale,' said the

sick woman slowly and faintly. 'I believe they are. I think I feel them—now.'

Tears sprang suddenly to Lenore's eyes. She stooped and kissed the white, careworn brow.

'They will never let you go. They are always underneath. We can always rest in safety there.'

No more passed between the two that evening. Mrs. Boghey, worn out by mental excitement and agitation, lay still and silent. Lenore, her heart full of deep thankfulness, watched silently beside her.

Days wore on, and few words were spoken between Mrs. Boghey and Lenore, although their hearts were closely drawn together.

That strong, lonely heart might find comfort and help from words spoken by another; but its deep struggles after light, and fierce battles with despondency and despair, had to be fought out alone. The habit of a lifetime could not be changed in a week, and it was in silence and in loneliness that the weary soul freed itself slowly from its fetters, and was washed white in the blood of the Lamb.

And yet she was not alone, the weary woman bowed down beneath the load of sin and sorrow; for One was ever with her, to guide, to teach, to strengthen, to comfort; and she, too, learned to know herself not deserted.

Lenore guessed rather than knew what was passing in that sad heart.

'Read to me, child,' Mrs. Boghey would sometimes say; 'read me strong words, living words, which will drive away doubt and fear.'

Or she would say:

'Read me something to comfort me, my dear, for my heart is sorrowful to-night.'

And Lenore was always ready, ready with just such words as were wanted. Mrs. Boghey never looked to her in vain; and at last it seemed as though a settled peace had fallen upon her, very different from the 'dead calm' of former days.

'My dear,' she said one day to Lenore, after she had been reading to her, 'I often think what a wonderful book that is.'

'Yes,' answered Lenore simply, 'it is God's Word.'

'It has everything in it we can want.'

'Indeed, yes.'

'Lenore, I should like it read in the house; I should like all to hear it. Will you read prayers to the household each morning?'

'I will gladly, if you wish it.'

'I do wish it; it ought to be done. I have done wrong to rob others because I would not accept good gifts for myself. It shall not go on so. You will see my wishes carried out.'

Lenore had no difficulty about this. Campbell summed up the feeling of the household thus :

'It may not be that we're better than other folks, or more fond of good things of that kind ; but there isn't one of us but isn't glad of such a change, ma'am. It seems more Christian-like, and more home-like too, to come together to begin the day with hearing words like that. God bless you, Miss Annandale, for the change you've made here since you came !'

And so family prayer became a regular institution at Auckness Point.

November had come now. Snow lay upon the ground, and the cold of winter had fairly settled in.

Mrs. Boghey was much better, but still weak and shaken. She kept much to her own room, and there Lenore spent the greater part of her time.

'My dear,' said Mrs. Boghey one day, breaking a long silence.

'Well ?'

'Do you not find your life very dull ?'

'Not at all.'

'Are you happy ?'

'Quite happy.'

'And not home-sick ?'

'No, not even home-sick.'

'But what about going home ? Are you want-

ing to pay them a visit? Do they not want you?'

'They write about Christmas. I did say something before I left, about asking leave of absence then, but I will not leave you if you want me. You are my first charge now.' She spoke with the tender affection of a daughter.

'I should not know how to spare you; it would be very hard.'

'Then I will stay,' answered Lenore quickly and decidedly.

'Nay, my child, I must not be selfish——'

'You are not selfish. It is I who have decided it, not you.'

'I have no right to ask such a sacrifice.'

'You have every right,' answered Lenore, impulsively crossing the room, and bending over the white head she loved and reverenced so much. 'Besides, it is no sacrifice. Do you think I could enjoy my Christmas if I thought you were lonely, or sad, or missing me? No, I will stay. We will spend our Christmas together.'

'God bless you, Lenore!'

'He has blessed me already,' answered the girl softly and reverently; 'He has blessed me in sending me to you, who have made a home for me in your home and in your heart. I came here a stranger, and you have made of me a daughter.

You have been like a mother to me; may I not claim a daughter's right to watch over you and tend you? God has indeed blessed me in giving me this work to do, which is the one of all others I would have chosen.'

The first tears Lenore had ever seen there, sparkled in Mrs. Boghey's eyes as she folded the girl in her arms.

'My daughter,' she whispered, 'God has indeed blessed me in sending you to me. My child, my child, I have no words to express what I feel, but the light has come at last, Lenore—you have led me into the light; God bless you for it!'

BOOK III.

THE MASTER OF LANGDALE.

CHAPTER XV.

A STRANGER.

LIFE at Cottesmere Farm, after Lenore's departure, went on for some weeks calmly and uneventfully; but it was not so very long before an unexpected incident occurred, which broke to a certain extent the monotony of the life which they had led so long.

Marjory was sitting idly in the orchard swing one evening, watching the shadows slowly lengthen as the sun sank lower and lower in the sky, when she saw Duff walking homewards over the fields, and saw that he was not alone.

'Who is it?' she asked herself. 'Not Philip—it isn't his walk; not one of the men, because it's a gentleman. It isn't Mr. Ross; it isn't anyone I know. Duff is bringing him here, too. I wonder who he can be!'

Marjory's curiosity was aroused, for of course she knew everybody for miles round, and the advent of a stranger was something of an event. Still, she was too idle to move, and was content to wait until her chance came to find out what she wished to know.

She had not, however, to wait long. Duff caught sight of her white dress among the trees, and led the way into the orchard. His companion followed, and Marjory noticed that he was tall, and very much bronzed, and that his figure, though somewhat spare, was well built and wiry. He did not look very young. The girl put him down at five-and-thirty, which was a great age in her eyes.

'Let me present you to my youngest sister, Marjory,' said Duff. 'Marjory, this is Mr. Gordon Forrester.'

Marjory's eyes lighted with comprehension. The name evidently was not unfamiliar.

The stranger bowed gravely; but she extended her hand with a smile, exclaiming:

'So you have come back!'

'So it would appear.'

'And are you living at Langdale Hall?'

'I am; that is to say, I have slept there these last two nights.'

'Yes; but I mean, are you going to live there now and settle down?'

'My plans are not yet matured; but I intend spending some time there, at any rate.'

'I am very glad,' answered Marjory with a bright smile.

Duff laughed, and Mr. Forrester smiled.

'You compliment me, Miss Marjory.'

'Did I?'

'It sounded like it, at least.'

'Well, I am glad,' repeated Marjory. 'I think people who have beautiful houses and grounds, and everything they can want, should live at home, and look after their own people and places. If they don't want them themselves, they should give them to people who do. I think it is a shame to shut up a lovely old house, and go wandering about all over the world. I suppose that is what you have been doing all these years, Mr. Forrester; but I am quite sure you have never seen anything a bit more beautiful than the view from here.'

The girl looked radiantly confident as she made the bold challenge, and Mr. Forrester gazed gravely round him, and then allowed his eyes to travel back to her face.

'I am not sure that I ever have,' he admitted.

'I am glad you are candid enough to own it,' said the girl, laughing. 'I am quite sure there is no country in the whole world half so beautiful as England.'

'Spoken from the depths of your unbounded experience,' remarked Duff lazily. 'Where are all the others, Marjory?'

'I don't know. Philip hasn't come in yet, and Dora went to the schools to take the mothers' meeting for Mrs. Ross. I suppose Madeline is in the house somewhere, or in the garden.'

'You will stay to supper, Forrester, and be introduced to my people?' asked Duff. 'And I'll walk back to the Hall with you later.'

Marjory's eyes sparkled. To have a visitor to supper was quite an event in the quiet annals of Cottesmere Farm.

'Do stay, Mr. Forrester,' she pleaded. 'If you will, I'll make an omelette expressly for you; and I really can make them most beautifully, can't I, Duff? It's my one talent.'

The young men laughed, and Mr. Forrester declared himself powerless to resist such a temptation. Looking up into his bronzed face, and catching the amused twinkle in his eye, Marjory decided that the stranger was neither so old nor so grave as she had at first imagined.

The party then adjourned from the orchard, and Duff led the way through the garden, which was now one mass of bloom, to the smooth slope of lawn that lay before the front of the house.

Marjory and the guest followed, he looking

round him with eyes that betokened much quiet satisfaction, whilst more admiration was expressed in his quiet words:

'You have a very pretty garden here, Miss Marjory.'

'We are fond of it,' she answered. 'It is sweet and old-fashioned, and we can do as we like with it, because we do nearly all the gardening ourselves. What are your gardens like at Langdale Hall?'

'You had better come over and see for yourself. I suppose they are right enough. I always gave orders that the place was to be kept up properly; but I have not given them any special notice. I don't believe there is a single rose there as pretty as the one you have just gathered. What is the name of it?'

'I don't know. We call it "Marjory" because I budded it. Isn't it a lovely rich colour? I'm so fond of that deep, deep crimson.'

'So am I. Won't you give me one, Miss Marjory? That bud just bursting would make a perfect button-hole.'

'Well, yes, I think you may have it,' answered Marjory, considering, 'because you're a visitor, and one must be polite to one's guests; but you must not look upon it as a sign of favour, because it isn't one.'

Her face was grave and arch as she offered the flower. He looked at her curiously.

'Am I in disfavour then, Miss Marjory?'

'I may get to like you in time, now that I know you,' returned Marjory gravely. 'But I have had a very great aversion to you for many years.'

Here Duff, who was leading the way, chuckled audibly, as though he rather enjoyed his sister's frankness of speech. Mr. Forrester looked somewhat taken aback.

'Why, Miss Marjory, in what can I have had the misfortune to offend you? Here am I, come back from my wanderings, a staid and a sober man, just beginning to find how pleasant a thing it is to have neighbours near enough to one's own gates to make friendship and familiarity very easy and pleasant; and already I find myself an object of aversion to the first young lady, amongst these neighbours, with whom I have had the honour of conversing. It comes very hardly upon a man who has known so little of the delights of such companionship. Can I not persuade you to rescind such a hard sentence?'

Marjory shook her head.

'I told you I might get to like you; but I can't unsay what I said about having disliked you, because I have had a very great objection to you. I thought you must be a very disagreeable man indeed.'

'But why? Do tell me, that I may be able to amend my ways.'

'Well, I thought it very hard, the strict way your place was always shut up—not the park only, but the woods and the stream, and everything belonging to you. Some of your land is the prettiest about here, and I think it was a shame nobody was ever allowed to enjoy it. Your men were like dragons, there was no escaping them, and they always declared your orders were so very strict.'

'Well, can you blame me if they were? I value my property, and I suppose I have a right to protect it. I have a natural dislike to have it overrun by country bumpkins, who have no regard or owners' rights, or turned into a resort for picnic parties, who will strew the ground with newspaper and orange peel. The only way of putting a stop to such incursions is to make a strict rule. I cannot see the enormity of my offence.'

Marjory laughed heartily and with a ring of mockery in her voice.

'Well, and what have I said so absurd?' he asked, as if somewhat nettled.

'You do talk so funnily—just as though this was Hampstead Heath, or in the heart of a Cockney district. I don't think a few little children picking daffodils and primroses in the copses would "over-

run" the place very seriously; or that permitting the neighbours, of whom you profess to think so much, to stroll over or to lunch amongst the woods, would threaten the destruction of your property. If you had valued it so *very* much, I wonder you did not condescend to visit it rather oftener.'

'Well, Miss Marjory, I suppose you will admit that I had the right to liberty of action?'

'Certainly; and I have a right to liberty of thought.'

'And you think——'

'That people who will neither enjoy their own goods nor let others enjoy them, are acting just like the dog in the manger of the fable.'

'It's no good your trying to argue with Marjory,' laughed Duff, turning round towards them. 'You're bound to get the worst of it, Forrester. She always will have the last word. She is a true woman for that.'

'Thank you,' answered Marjory with a mocking reverence. 'And now I will leave you to smooth down Mr. Forrester's ruffled feelings, whilst I go and make the promised omelette.'

'I have not forfeited that, then, by my evil deeds?'

'Oh, no! I promised you that. I never break my word.'

CHAPTER XVI.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE OPINION.

GORDON FORRESTER became, in a few days' time, quite at home at Cottesmere Farm. He had met Duff accidentally upon the day of his introduction there, and the two seemed to have taken a mutual liking, which developed in due course into a warm friendship. The Forresters had owned Langdale Hall for many generations; but Gordon, the only one now left of the old stock, had been away from the place ever since his childhood, and had never made any stay there even then, so that he was an utter stranger to the Egremonts.

That one of the finest places in the county should remain tenantless year after year had been a grievance to the neighbourhood for a long while; and yet now that the heir had come back to enjoy his own, it did not seem as though many people were to be benefited by the change.

Gordon Forrester was neither shy nor morose, nor distant in his manner, and yet people complained after a short time that 'they could not get

at him,' or that 'they could not understand him;' and they never seemed to grow more intimate.

When they called upon him he made himself very pleasant, when he returned calls he was perfectly affable and courteous, and yet people were not satisfied. They were curious about him, and he would not satisfy their curiosity. He never spoke of himself or of his plans, of his past or of his future. When asked a question he replied with seeming unreserve, yet his hearer was never much enlightened, and nobody liked to ask too many questions, for fear of seeming intrusive.

Everybody agreed that it was a great pity he was not married. A bachelor owner of a large place like that was a disappointing being—especially when he was young. People were inclined to consider themselves ill-used, and cheated out of their rights. There could be no entertainments, tennis-parties, dances, and dinner-parties until a mistress reigned there; at least, Mr. Forrester seemed of that opinion, for he invited none but gentlemen guests to his dinners, and though he entertained them well, he did not seem inclined to extend his hospitality to their wives and daughters. So, after a little excitement and gossip, the neighbourhood ceased to feel much interest in Gordon Forrester's movements, and he was allowed to drop into comfortable insignificance.

The new-comer was well pleased when this result had been accomplished. He was one of those men who take life easily and quietly, but never allow themselves to be turned from any course they intend to pursue. He had no desire to pry into his neighbours' affairs, to regulate their actions, or even to criticise them; and he had not the smallest intention of being overlooked and advised himself. As soon as people began to find this out, he ceased to be troubled, and was let alone, as he intended to be; and yet he had offended nobody and rebuffed nobody, and was well thought of by all.

The only people with whom he became rapidly intimate were the Egremonts. There was something in that household that attracted him, and made visits to Cottesmere Farm very pleasant. Perhaps it was because they made no fuss of him, but allowed him to come and go as he chose. He was always sure of a welcome and a companion, for he could join Philip or Duff about the farm, or Marjory amongst her flowers or her poultry; and there was a warm, home-like feeling in the very atmosphere of the house which fascinated the wanderer, who had known so little of home life; so from one cause or another, Gordon Forrester visited the farm very frequently, and soon ceased to be looked upon as a stranger.

He liked and respected Philip, and asked his advice as to his choice of outdoor servants and the management of his estate. Madeline was his oracle on all points of domestic economy and indoor regulations; Duff was his friend and comrade, and Marjory his spirited playfellow, who teased him, and laughed at him, and quarrelled with him twenty times a day, but who, nevertheless, amused and fascinated him by her waywardness and whims.

Dora he did not see for some little while after his first visit. Mrs. Ross, the vicar's wife, was ill, and Dora was staying at the rectory, at the earnest request of the clergyman, to take care of his wife and to look after parish matters a little. Dora was often in requisition for services of this kind, and more so than ever, now that Lenore was gone. She had not a willing, joyous way of going about her work; but a very strong sense of duty, and a restless craving after some employment which should content her, and make life look better and brighter, acted as an incentive to action, and all who knew her, knew well that she was thoroughly trustworthy. She paid frequent visits home, and Madeline and Marjory came often to see her, so that she heard a good deal of this Mr. Forrester before she had even seen him.

Mrs. Ross was much interested to hear that

the owner of Langdale had at last returned, and was eager to hear everything that Dora could learn respecting him. Thus it came about that the girl asked many more questions, and took a far greater interest in the stranger than she would have done under ordinary circumstances; and this interest was considerably strengthened by the innocent and almost childish castle-building of the good little woman whom she was nursing, who possessed a warm heart but a not over-wise head.

Mrs. Ross was a warm admirer of Dora. She stood a very little in awe of her grave face and decided ways; but she thought her the cleverest and handsomest girl in the whole place, and looked up to her with unbounded respect and admiration. And Dora, in her quiet, undemonstrative way, was fond of the little woman—unconsciously flattered, perhaps, by her good opinion; and she found it pleasant to be with someone who looked up to her and treated her with so much deference.

They were sitting together one day in the evening, Dora at work, and the invalid resting in her chair, and the latter was smiling to herself as though some pleasant thought was floating through her brain.

'My dear,' she began, 'you did not see Mr. Forrester when you went up to the farm to-day?'

'No. He had taken dinner there, but had gone out with Duff.'

'Aren't you very curious to see him?'

'Not particularly.'

'I wonder if he is very curious to see you.'

'Nothing more unlikely, I should think.'

'I don't know. A young man is not always so indifferent about seeing and making friends with a young lady.'

'I do not think Mr. Forrester is very young; and besides, there are Madeline and Marjory at home.'

'Madeline and Marjory are not in the very least like you,' said Mrs. Ross in a meaning tone. 'You are different from them all.'

'Sometimes I think I must be,' answered Dora with a long-drawn sigh.

'I think, perhaps, it is just as well you were here at the first, that his curiosity about you may be aroused,' pursued Mrs. Ross mysteriously. 'But I must not stand in your way. I must not keep you here much longer.'

'I am very pleased to be with you so long as you need me,' answered Dora quietly, not heeding very much the oracular manner of her hostess.

'I am getting better, my dear, and I must not be selfish. It is a great pleasure to me to have you

here ; but I will not allow myself to stand in the way of your interests.'

'I do not quite understand you.'

'No, my dear? Well, you are so different from other girls—they would know in a minute—they would have thought of it all before.'

'Thought of what?'

'Why, my dear, perhaps I ought not to put ideas into your head—only you know I cannot help making my little plans.'

Dora was somewhat mystified by the turn the talk had taken ; but she saw that Mrs. Ross would be happier, if encouraged to unburden herself of the thoughts that floated in her head.

'Well, what are your plans? If they have anything to do with me, I see no reason why I should not hear them.'

'Well, my dear, perhaps it is hardly the thing to talk of openly ; but as everybody is saying how much better it would be if Mr. Forrester were to get married, perhaps he will think so himself one day.'

'Very probably.'

'Well, and then you see, if he does marry at all, why, then he must marry somebody.'

Dora could not restrain a smile.

'Yes, Mrs. Ross, he certainly must do that.'

'And you see, my dear, he has not seemed to care for any family but yours.'

'Has he not?'

'No; everyone says that. And then, you see, when you go back, and he sees you, he must admire you—everyone does that—and he will find how clever you are and how much you know. Well, well, my dear, I must not make you vain; but I cannot help wondering what will be the end of it.'

'You mean you think Mr. Forrester may wish to marry me?' said Dora slowly, not showing, however, that the idea had in any way struck her. 'I should think, if he wished to marry any one of us, it would be Marjory. He and she seem to be great friends already.'

'Ah, yes, that may be; but that is not everything. Marjory is very young, little more than a child; but when a man marries, he looks for more than a mere playfellow. Dear Marjory is very sweet and bright; but one could not fancy her mistress of Langdale Hall.'

Mistress of Langdale Hall!

This was putting a new face on the question. A curious sensation—she knew not what it could be—ran through Dora's frame; her hands sank slowly down upon her lap, and her work lay there unheeded, but she gave no other token of interest, and only said in rather a languid way:

'There is Madeline, you know.'

'Yes, there is Madeline, I know,' answered Mrs. Ross, nodding her head two or three times in a curious, emphatic way; 'Madeline is very good, no one better, and she understands household management as very few do; but I don't believe she would ever care to leave the old home for a new one. She seems to have taken root there. She and Philip are all in all to one another. I don't believe any man would ever have the courage to try and take her away, and I don't believe she would ever be persuaded. Everyone says of Madeline that she is a woman very unlikely to marry.'

Dora said nothing. She knew there was much truth in what Mrs. Ross had said.

The lady was encouraged by this silence to enlarge upon her theme.

'No, my dear, I've thought it all over; it won't be Marjory, and it won't be Madeline; the one is too young, the other too grave and steady. I cannot say whom it will be; but I have my own opinions. If he has come home to settle down for good, you may be sure he means to marry. A rich man is but a poor thing without a wife. And just think, love, of being mistress of that splendid place, with horses and carriages, servants and jewels, and everything you can want. I hope I am not worldly-minded—I don't want anything for myself that I haven't got; but I do like to think of you amongst

all the splendour. You are just made for it, so grand and stately as you are, and you have never found life suit you here; there was not enough scope for you; but there would be plenty there.'

Dora sighed and smiled at the same moment.

'What is it?'

'I don't know. Your words set me thinking what such a life would be like; but it is not probable I shall ever make a trial of it.'

'I am not at all sure of that.'

'It is only your idea. It is not probable Mr. Forrester would ever like me. I do not get on with strangers, as a rule.'

'My husband says Mr. Forrester is a very unusual kind of man, with great originality of mind and a great deal of talent. That is what makes me so sure he will think a great deal of you.'

Dora shook her head.

'You think me a great deal more clever than I am, Mrs. Ross.'

'Well, my dear, I know what everyone says of you.'

'And men do not like clever women, they say.

'I feel very certain that Mr. Forrester will like you, my dear.'

'Perhaps I may not like him.'

'You may not; but everyone says that he is very pleasant, and we know he is clever and a

traveller. Oh, I feel sure there is a great deal that is very nice about him, though he is almost a stranger still.'

Dora sat silent and thoughtful.

'They say he has thirty thousand pounds a year,' said Mrs. Ross, after a pause. 'Dear me! to think what a lot of money there is in the world!'

Dora sat quiet and composed as ever, to all appearances, yet her brain seemed on fire, and a new flood of thought had burst in upon her.

Why should not this thing be? Was it impossible? Had not rich men married penniless girls before now, and why not this Gordon Forrester? Had she not been yearning all her life for a larger sphere, for a greater meed of power, and might not this now be attainable? No definite form did her thoughts assume. She was afraid to allow them to do so, for she was half ashamed of the feelings of ambition and worldliness which seemed waking up within her. And yet she could not but dwell upon the brilliance of such a position as would be attained by the future mistress of Langdale; and Mrs. Ross's hopes that it would be filled by someone who would care for the poor and for the parish found an echo in her heart. What a sphere of usefulness such a woman might fill!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MEETING.

'Is Gordon Forrester coming this afternoon, Duff?' asked Marjory.

Marjory had a way of speaking familiarly of her brother's friends, when they were not present.

'I dare say he is—most likely, I should say. He didn't come up yesterday. He doesn't generally miss two days.'

'Well, I can't amuse him if he does come. I'm going to drive with Philip to the mills. He said he would take me, and I haven't had a drive for ever so long. Dora must entertain him.' Dora had returned home the previous day.

'I shall be in the hay-field; they're cutting the twenty acres to-day. He can come to me if he wants me,' said Duff. 'You can tell him so, if you see him, Dora.'

'Very well,' she answered quietly. 'I will send him to you if I encounter him; but, as I do not know him, he is not likely to accost me.'

'Oh, yes, but he will, if he sees you. He isn't

shy,' cried Marjory. 'He knows all about you, and often asked when you were coming home.'

Marjory ran off to prepare for her drive, Duff went down to the hay-field, and Madeline repaired to the back regions, to superintend a young cook in the mysteries of jam-making.

'I am glad I am not the eldest sister and mistress of this house,' said Dora in her heart, as she went slowly upstairs to her own room. 'I could not stand Madeline's daily round of duties.'

Almost unconscious of what she was doing, she pulled down her glossy and abundant hair, and rearranged it in a way which exactly suited the somewhat severe and classic style of her beauty. She was dressed in a perfectly plain white dress, which fitted to a nicety and well became her clear, olive skin, and showed off to advantage the stately grace of her figure. Still in the same dreamy fashion, she fastened one deep red rose at her throat, and looked steadfastly at her reflection in the glass.

Gradually a scornful look stole over the still, set face.

'I suppose I may be handsome to a certain extent; but to think I should fall so low, as to try and look my best for a man whom I have never seen, just because he is rich, and could give me the kind of position I covet! Well, I need never look

down on other women's paltry devices again. I never professed to think myself better than they; but I suppose I really did consider myself superior. Well, I can do so no longer. I am as vain and as foolish and as paltry as the weakest of them—nay worse; for what I do, I do with my eyes open, and they, poor things, often blind themselves. Well, I shall play my game, whether I win or lose. If I lose, I shall get my deserts; if I win, no doubt I shall soon find the stake not so very valuable after all. What can I expect it to be but vanity and vexation of spirit?'

With a bitter smile Dora turned from the glass, picked up a book from the table, and went slowly downstairs and out into the garden.

She knew by which route Gordon Forrester generally approached the house, and near to the path was a picturesque natural arbour formed by overhanging trees and clustering shrubs. A low rustic seat had been placed upon the smooth green turf; and here did Dora quietly establish herself, and Philip's dog, which she had summoned, lay at her feet in luxurious repose. The two thus grouped made a very attractive picture, of which fact Dora was perfectly well aware.

She had not been seated there very long before she heard footsteps approaching along the path; but she did not raise her eyes from her book. To

all appearances, she was intently engrossed by her reading ; in reality, she had not the least idea of the words upon which her eyes rested. All she thought of was, that the man for whom she was waiting was coming.

Gordon Forrester, tired of his own company, had braved the heat of the summer's afternoon to walk across to the farm in search of amusement. He was in an idle mood, more disposed to wander in the garden with Marjory than to trudge about the farm with Philip or Duff. He was therefore well pleased to see the gleam of a white dress amongst the shrubs that lined the path, and when he came to the opening between the trees, he paused in order to speak.

But it was not Marjory who was sitting there so deeply absorbed as not to hear his approach ; this girl in white was a stranger to him, and he was struck and agreeably impressed by her appearance. There was something about her uncommon, and unlike the rest of the family, which interested and half amused him.

He knew at once that it was Dora, the sister whom he had not yet seen ; the opportunity was too good a one to be lost, and he prepared to introduce himself. He had not, however, stood there two seconds before Tweedie rose up in his deliberate way to bid him welcome, and when the

dog moved, Dora slowly raised her eyes, and saw the stranger standing before her.

Gordon Forrester took off his hat, and she rose and came a step forward, acknowledging his salutation by a bend of the head.

'Good afternoon, Mr. Forrester,' she said gravely and quietly.

'Good afternoon, Miss Dora. I see we need not introduce ourselves. We ought to have been friends a week ago and more. I am fortunate in having this opportunity for making up for lost time.'

He held out his hand as he spoke, and she gave him hers without a word.

Dora had not Marjory's ready, saucy tongue, and had no experience to give her confidence in the game she was trying to play. She felt as much at a loss what to say, and how to act, as any country-bred girl, fresh from the schoolroom could do, when introduced to the world for the first time; but then her perfect self-control and habitual self-repression concealed all this, and lent a kind of severe dignity to her manner, which in one so young was rather interesting and attractive in its novelty. At least so it seemed to Gordon Forrester, who looked at her with an amused curiosity and was somewhat fascinated.

'My brother Duff asked me to let you know, if

you came, that you would find him in the twenty acres, if you wanted him.'

But Forrester did not take the hint. He sat down beside Dora, talking pleasantly, and glancing frequently at her.

'She has fine eyes, and rather a fine face and figure; but she has not much to say for herself, though I don't believe she is shy,' said Forrester presently to himself. 'I wonder if she has taken a great aversion to me, as Miss Marjory had. Rather amusing if she has. Her dislike would be more difficult to combat than the little girl's, I should think. I must make myself as fascinating as possible. I should like to see her smile. She is most preternaturally grave for her years. I wonder what makes her so; it is not like the rest of the family.'

'I should think you must be very pleased to be at home again, Miss Dora.'

'I don't know that I am particularly.'

'Are you so fond of visiting?'

'I don't know, I never tried.'

'I thought you were visiting at the rectory.'

'I was taking care of Mrs. Ross and doing her work. That is not what I call visiting.'

'Did you like it? It was very good of you to sacrifice yourself.'

'It was no sacrifice. I prefer doing something to nothing.'

'Have you nothing to do at home?'

'Nothing worth speaking of. They do just as well without me as with me.'

'Surely not.'

'I think so. A number of girls in a house are a mistake. One or two can do everything. Some always do all the useful things, and the rest are idle.'

'Are you idle then, Miss Dora?'

'Yes; at least, I never feel that there is anything to do really worth doing.'

'Do you like idleness?'

'No, I can't bear it.'

'And so you make work for yourself, and become an angel of mercy to others. You see I have heard of your good deeds.'

Dora looked restless and anything but gratified at the compliment paid her.

'Do not call them good deeds. There is no goodness in them. I only work because idleness is intolerable. There is nothing worth calling work which women can do.'

Forrester looked curiously at her. What made this girl so much in earnest and so dissatisfied? Surely she had enough beauty in her surroundings, and enough love in her family-life, to make her happy; what more could she want?

'Why should women work, Miss Dora? Cannot you leave that to us, and be content to "exist beautifully" yourselves, as the phrase of the day goes?'

'We have to "exist"—there is no choice left us—whether beautifully or not I do not know. I should prefer to *live*; but that is only granted to a favoured few.'

'You are terribly in earnest, Miss Dora. You make me feel quite ashamed; I'm afraid I have been content to exist comfortably without troubling myself about living in any energetic fashion.'

'No, you have not—you have travelled, you have seen life, you have played your part in it, whether you know it or not. You are a man, and a rich man—it is impossible for you to understand what I complain of. You have not experienced what we do, and nothing but experience could teach you.'

Dora had forgotten herself and her part in her favourite topic. She had not meant to allow herself to appear in the light of a discontented, 'strong-minded' woman—for such was the word applied by men to her views, and she knew that those two words were enough to ruin her hopes; but habit had been too strong for her, and it was only Forrester's next words that recalled her to herself—or, rather, to her part.

'So you would like to travel, and see the world and shine there, would you?' said he. 'You are wanting to try your powers—to leave the nest and try to fly alone? Yes, I know what that is. I have had the feeling myself—in the far-away days of my youth.'

Dora looked at him for the first time, and met his eyes fixed very keenly on her face. Yet there was a pleasant and kindly look there, as well as a humorous twinkle of merriment, and the girl was betrayed into the smile which he had wished to provoke.

'Do you think me very foolish if I do?'

'I? Why should I think any such thing?'

'I don't know. I rather despise myself sometimes for feeling as I do, and I fancied men always laughed at women who were not content with an utterly placid and uneventful life.'

'Do they? Very rude of them if they do!'

'I believe you are laughing at me yourself, all the same, Mr. Forrester.'

And Dora's colour deepened to a rich damask hue, though she smiled again to hide her momentary confusion.

'Indeed, no, Miss Dora. I am profoundly interested in all you say, and proud to think you honour me with your confidence.'

Dora's colour deepened still more, and he

watched her with an access of amusement and pleasure.

'I suppose I have no right to speak of such things to a stranger,' she said, wondering if she had made any grievous error in doing so. 'I hope you will pardon me for being so tedious. I ought to have been entertaining you instead of complaining. I am afraid we forget the simplest rules of hospitality, so shut up amongst ourselves as we are.'

Dora spoke with a simple dignity that impressed her listener with a new idea of her character.

'Indeed, you could not have pleased me more than by treating me as a friend, when I only deserve to be a stranger. You have shown me the greatest hospitality possible, and I am your sincere debtor. I only hope your wish may be gratified, and that you may, at some future time, be able to see the world and to gratify your tastes and wishes.'

Dora was silent. Forrester sat pulling thoughtfully at his moustache.

'I don't see why it mightn't be done.'

'What?'

'I mean, I don't see what is to hinder our having some mild dissipation here, if we wish.'

'I don't quite understand you.'

'No? Well, I will speak more plainly. When you say you would like to see the world, I suppose you mean the ways of the world—its gaieties and its follies. If we reproduce them down here, in little, for your benefit—get up picnic-parties, tennis-parties, dances and dinners at Langdale, would a glimpse like that satisfy you?'

Dora looked at him, a curious expression stealing over her face.

'I don't know quite—I hardly know what it is I do want to see; but it would be a new experience. I think I should like it very much; but, Mr. Forrester, you must not do it for my benefit.'

'And why not, Miss Dora?'

'It is too much.'

'Too much?'

'Yes, you know what I mean. You must not do all that, just to gratify a whim of mine.'

'Suppose it is my whim too?'

'But it is not.'

'Pardon me, how do you know?'

'You would have done it before if it had been.'

'Pardon me once more. Such things cannot be arranged for in a moment, and I have not been at home more than a couple of weeks or so.'

Dora was silent.

'Well, then, Miss Dora, shall we do it?'

'We?'

'Yes, we; for of course I shall rely on your powerful assistance.'

'But I don't know anything.'

'Nor I; but I suppose we can learn.'

'Can we? How?'

'By experience—the only real teacher in the wide world, as you will find when you grow older.'

Dora looked at him with an eager look of pleasure creeping into her grave eyes. She was but a young girl, and there was a delightful novelty in the idea of experiencing new pleasures, of which she had only read or dreamt before. And then, had he not said 'we,' as though some link already bound them together? And was he not altogether a wonderful man, not one bit like anybody she had ever seen before? A new and curious sense of pleasure and of power was stealing over Dora, which fascinated, whilst it half frightened her.

'Are you in earnest, Mr. Forrester?'

'In the most solemn earnest.'

'And you really want to do all this?'

'My whole being is set upon it.'

'You are not doing it because of what I said?'

'Nothing is farther from my thoughts.'

The gravity of his face and the solemnity of his manner was too much for his listener. Dora was actually betrayed into a laugh of girlish pleasure.

'Good!' said Forrester to himself. 'I am glad she can laugh. That is as it should be; and how her face lights up when she does! I call her a quaint specimen of girlhood altogether. I am glad I hit upon her here by herself.'

'Now, Miss Dora, you must be prepared to help me to entertain,' he explained. 'These open-air, *al fresco* parties are impossible to manage single-handed, and yet, in this kind of weather, and with a place like Langdale, nothing goes better with careful management and plenty of people to look after things. I am sure you will be a host in yourself, and will enjoy things all the more for being a *power*. You must be my *aide-de-camp* all through, and Miss Egremont will be our oracle on domestic matters, and Miss Marjory our helper in all things; but she is too giddy to be entirely relied upon, and it is to you I shall have to look for most support, I can see.'

Dora's face was unusually animated. It was not that she had any special taste for social gaiety; indeed, she had far less of it than most girls. Individually, none of these pleasure parties, thus planned, had any special attraction; but the idea of reigning, as it were, over all, and being a power and influence throughout, had an immense fascination for her. She would feel what others had felt, would know what the sense of power was like.

She would learn, to a certain extent, her own strength, and find out whether she did possess the qualities she sometimes felt lay dormant within her, finding no outlet in the monotony of her present life.

And so her eyes brightened and her face grew animated, and Forrester, watching her increasing vivacity with interest and amusement, laughed within himself as he thought:

'A true daughter of Eve! Perfectly happy in the prospect of a dance by lamp-light, and a few pleasure parties! Life is all *couleur de rose* now, when it was all dreary and sad before. What trifles serve to make the happiness or misery of girls! Well, I am glad it has fallen to my lot to do somebody a pleasure at so small a sacrifice. How like women are one to another! I fancied this girl was somewhat different from most of her kind, but not a bit of it. However, far be it from me to find fault with them. They are very charming creatures, and the world would be a dreary place without them. I am a lucky fellow to have established myself on so friendly a footing with two of them.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

DANGEROUS GROUND.

A NEW life seemed opened out, all at once, to the girls at Cottesmere Farm.

The old quiet routine of homely duties seemed to have passed away, and new pleasures and new interest to have taken their place.

There were long mornings, and sometimes whole days, to be spent at Langdale, during which the resources of the fine old house were thoroughly considered, and the most enchanting discoveries made whenever a shut-up room was opened, or old chests and store closets lighted upon.

Gordon Forrester was as ignorant of his ancestral belongings as a man well could be. The family plate and jewels had been sent years ago to the bank for security, and he had given no thought to the minor matters of glass, china, curiosities of nature and art, quaint costumes, costly laces, and the innumerable trinkets and old-fashioned treasures which always get hoarded up in an old house, that has been for generations the property of one family.

It was only in the rapture of Marjory, and the more quiet but evident admiration of Dora, that he first learned to put any value upon these heirlooms.

The festivities they had planned were not forgotten, although there was a little delay, owing to the time needed to get the house into a fit state. The floor of the long ball-room needed repolishing. The hangings and gilding in the reception rooms wanted attention, and, indeed, the whole house required a certain amount of care bestowed upon it in detail, before it would satisfy the fastidious eye of the master.

Marjory declared the delay most provoking; but Dora felt in no hurry to exchange the existing state of things. She hardly knew what it was had come over her, but she felt a slowly awakening interest in life, and a contentment with her surroundings which she had never known before, and which she did not understand; nor did she feel any wish to examine into its cause.

Had she cared to do so, however, it would not have been hard to find.

Each day, as it came, brought Gordon Forrester to the farm, to discuss some plan, ask advice, and take the family opinion upon some knotty point of indoor or outdoor management. More often than not he would want some counsel upon the spot, and Marjory and Dora would be persuaded to

come back with him to see what was wanted; and Duff would occasionally be pressed into the service too, or would walk over later in the day and bring his sisters home.

It was the beauty of house and grounds, and the amusement of watching all that was done there, that was the charm to Marjory; but Dora's feelings had undergone a change; she thought no more of the grandeur of the house, of the power of wealth, nor of the importance accorded to the mistress of such an establishment. Those thoughts had quite died away, she knew not how nor why; she hardly remembered they had ever had place in her mind.

She lived now in a kind of dream, dimly conscious that her heart was at rest whenever she and the owner of this fair domain were together; that she looked for his coming with feverish eagerness, felt as though the light had left when he was gone, that his voice was the only music for which she had ears, his face the only one she cared to look upon; that it was these constant visits to the Hall, and his visits to the farm that had taken away all the old weariness and dreariness out of her life, and transformed the dull, colourless future into a mystic dreamland of golden haze, into which she feared to look, lest its fairy-like beauty should dissolve away.

Gordon Forrester was a different being from any she had ever seen before. Her very limited experience had never brought her into contact with a man of his stamp, and he impressed her imagination vividly. His careless strength, his freedom from all constraint, and his independence of what people thought of him, struck her as very wonderful. He cared no whit for the old-fashioned etiquettes of the neighbourhood, went his own way regardless of public opinion, and yet so managed matters that he offended nobody, and increased his popularity by slow and sure degrees. And yet, with all this reckless independence of character, there was a courtliness and polish in his manner, quite different from anything she had met before, and which she found irresistibly fascinating.

They saw a great deal of one another, these two, during the days that followed their first introduction. Marjory was for ever flitting hither and thither, her eager interest carrying her from place to place with unwearied zeal; and she and Mrs. Alford, the housekeeper, were already fast friends, and had an immense deal to talk over and plan together.

Thus Dora and Forrester were left a good deal alone together, and although nothing of any special significance ever passed between them, these hours formed the happiness of the girl's life, and were

looked back upon, as times of unalloyed contentment.

She spoke little herself, for she loved to hear him talk. She listened with breathless interest to his tales of travel and adventure, and her face would grow slowly pale, and her eyes dilate with anxious horror, when he told of any situation of peril in which he had himself been placed.

Such a listener made a very agreeable companion, as Gordon Forrester was not slow to find out. He began to find her more interesting than he had done at first, and although Marjory's merry chatter amused him more than Dora's subdued gravity, there were moments when he said to himself that, after all, the elder sister made the better companion.

He was not a vain man, although he possessed a tolerably good opinion of himself and his powers, and he did not believe himself to be 'the kind of man women fall in love with,' and so he saw no reason why he should deny himself the pleasure of their company. He was so much older than these girls—that is to say, some twelve years older than Dora—that he felt himself privileged to speak and act much as he chose; and if ever the doubt did cross his mind, whether the wonderful softening and growing sweetness so apparent in Dora might not have some root in an awakening love, he put the thought away from him with a strong hand, and

laughed at his own folly. He was not the man to deny himself a pleasure for a mere fancy, or to let small scruples trouble his conscience. He liked to be with Dora, and she liked to be with him. He would take care of his heart, and she must take care of hers. He never spoke a word of love to her, and she should never have a right to reproach him for misleading her as to his intentions.

Not that the idea of marriage was distasteful to Gordon Forrester; on the contrary, he had serious thoughts of settling down in England and taking to himself a wife. But then he meant to look well about him, and make a wise choice. He was not going to be caught by a pretty face, or a winning manner, or fascinated by a pair of deep, earnest eyes. He was going to take his time, and find a woman who would be an acquisition to his home, as well as a loving wife to himself, and who would support with dignity the honours due to the mistress of Langdale Hall.

The idea of putting one of these Egremont girls into such a place, never seriously entered his head. They had no experience of life, had lived in the most simple and homely fashion, and would be quite at a loss in such a position. Even Dora, with all her quiet dignity of manner, was as ignorant as a child in many things that ought to be perfectly familiar to the mistress of a large house; and Forrester, who

had led for years a wandering, homeless life, wanted someone to direct him in the conventionalities of society, not someone whom he would have to direct.

Of these cool, calculating thoughts, however, Dora knew nothing; and though she had had her calculating moments herself, all that was now passed, and she thought no more of the position she had once coveted, but of the man she unconsciously loved; and the fascination of his presence grew upon her day by day.

She saw that he took an increasing pleasure in her society, and that he became more unreserved with his opinions of men and things, and that alone was enough for her.

Some of his opinions, however, gave her some vague distress and anxiety.

One day they had been talking of a narrow escape he had once met with, when he had, as it were, looked death in the face, and Dora asked him in a low, awe-stricken tone:

'Did you feel afraid?'

'Afraid of death?—oh, no!' he answered carelessly; 'why should I be?' and as she did not answer, he went on half mockingly, 'You know, Miss Dora, I am not one of your orthodox, good people, who long for the glory, or fear the punishment to come. As we know less than nothing upon such subjects, I decline to trouble myself about them!'

Dora always felt unequal to an argument; she let such remarks as these pass unanswered, but as they grew more frequent, she grew more uneasy and distressed, and one day she asked, after a similar observation:

'Are you an atheist, Mr. Forrester?'

'I dare say you would call me one.'

Dora's face grew grave and perplexed.

'Do you believe in nothing? Have you no God?'

'I believe firmly in what I can see and know, and I let the rest alone—the only wise plan, as it seems to me.'

'It sounds dreadful.'

'Not at all—only practical. How can we know what we pretend to know? It is all guess-work and delusion—innocent deception enough, but still deception. Church-going is a harmless form of entertainment, and very respectable; I patronise it myself, but as for believing what is taught—— Now, Miss Dora, be honest. Tell me your own views.'

'I don't know what to think about things,' said Dora restlessly. 'It is all so perplexing.'

'Then don't think; it is a troublesome habit of mind, and leads to no good. Be content to enjoy life, and take its good things as they come to you. Ah! and here comes Miss Marjory, full of some

new discovery. Our grave faces will frighten her.'

But Dora's face was grave all that day, and she could not regain her usual animation.

That night she was standing watching the stars with earnest, wistful eyes, when Philip came upon her, and asked with a smile :

'Well, Dora, what do they remind you of?'

'I don't know. What do you mean? Do they remind you of anything?'

'Of Lenore,' he answered dreamily.

'I think a good many things remind you of her,' replied Dora, half smiling.

'I think they do.'

Brother and sister stood together watching the star-lit sky, each thinking their own thoughts. At last Dora spoke in a quick, vehement way :

'Philip, look there—look at all those stars—they are all worlds bigger than ours. How is it Christ came to live in *ours*? It doesn't seem possible. I cannot understand it.'

'No,' answered Philip quietly, 'nor I.'

'But I want to,' continued the girl restlessly. 'I want to be sure.'

'You can be sure, Dora, without understanding.'

'Are you sure, Philip?'

'Yes.'

'Do no doubts ever trouble you?

'Not now.'

'I wish I could believe like that.'

'What is your difficulty?' he asked, turning towards her, with a quiet caress that invited confidence.

'It is all so difficult; I seem in a whirl; I can't grasp anything.'

'You must build on the Rock, Dora, or you will be always slipping into the sea of doubt. The Rock is Christ.'

'He seems so far away.'

'Only seems, Dora; He is close beside you always.'

'How can I tell?'

'You have His word for it. Is not that enough?'

'I'm afraid it isn't, Philip. I am frightened at myself, sometimes, I feel so wicked. How can we *know* that Christ was God at all?'

She was almost afraid of her own boldness when the words were out; but Philip did not seem shocked or horrified; he only asked very gently:

'You mean, you want a further testimony than the Bible gives us?'

'I want to be *sure*; nothing seems certain.'

'You believe in God, Dora?'

'Oh, yes, yes, Philip! Don't think me so very wicked!'

'No, I don't think that; I only want to know how things are with you. If you believe in God, you believe too in His perfect goodness and perfect love—goodness and love beyond what man can conceive of?'

'Yes, yes, Philip, I hope I do, I believe I do; but He seems so far away, so unapproachable.'

'We must approach Him, Dora, through His Son,' continued Philip gravely and quietly; 'and if you believe in the Father, you must believe in the Son; because if that deed of perfect love, perfect self-sacrifice, and perfect power which we call the Incarnation, were not the work of God, but the imagination of man, then man has been worshipping, all this while, a God of his own creation, more holy than the true God; and that, as we have said before, cannot be, because God, to be God, must by His nature be higher and holier than our sinful imaginations could picture Him.'

'I will try to think as you do, Philip; thank you,' said Dora as she left him.

CHAPTER XIX.

PERPLEXITY.

THE festivities at Langdale were pronounced by the neighbourhood at large to be a great success. Nobody was forgotten, and all the gentry of the place, for many miles round, met together in the gay gardens and spacious apartments of the Hall, prepared to enjoy themselves to the full, and take stock of all they could learn regarding the affairs of the young owner, who had come home to enjoy his own again.

Much speculation was excited by the position seemingly occupied by the Egremont girls at Langdale, and each person put his or her own interpretation upon Forrester's conduct, and solved the riddle according to taste.

The prevailing idea was that Dora was the bride-elect. There was a stateliness and dignity in her manner suitable to the position she would thus have to occupy, which favoured the supposition, and Forrester treated her with a grave deference which was thought by many to be very marked.

There were others who said that saucy Marjory, with her bright eyes and ready tongue, was the favoured one; and that he looked very kindly upon her no one could doubt, though more than that no one could say. A few of the elder men said it was Madeline who would be, in the end, elected; but the prevailing feeling amongst the matrons was, that Dora was the most dangerous rival their daughters would have to encounter, and that it was high time they bestirred themselves to make a diversion.

'Oh, my dear!' cried little Mrs. Ross, seizing her opportunity when Dora was alone, to unburden herself of some of the pride and delight which were swelling within her. 'Oh, my dear, I am so glad and proud!—is it not all coming just as I said? Oh, it is just what I have wished for you.'

'What do you mean, dear Mrs. Ross? What have you always wished?'

Dora spoke quietly, but the blood mounted slowly in her face.

'You know, my dear—for you to be mistress of a beautiful place like this.'

'I am not mistress here,' said Dora; 'we are only helping Mr. Forrester.'

'Oh, but they are all saying that it will be so. We can all see what he means, and how much he thinks of you. He must mean something by all

this. Oh, yes, my dear, we shall all hear something very soon, and we shall none of us be surprised.'

A curious feeling of mingled pleasure and pain stole over Dora, as she pondered these words. Was it true that Gordon Forrester meant to ask her for his wife? and, if so, was it because he loved her?

Ah! there lay the sting and the pain; for Dora, taught by the very intensity of her own love, was convinced that, however much Forrester might *like* her, he bore her yet no love worth calling by that holy name.

But yet they said that he would marry her—these said so who, as lookers-on, saw, or were supposed to see, most of the game. Her consent was taken for granted, as the girl had remarked with a half bitter smile; and yet, if he should make her the offer that was expected, what would her answer be?

It seemed a strange question for a girl to ask herself, who loved so deeply, and, even apart from love, had so coveted the position which might become hers in this way; and yet she did put that question to herself very earnestly and thoughtfully.

'If I were to marry him and he did not love me, I could not bear it,' she said to herself. 'I do not care one atom now for all the grandeur; I only care for him, and for his love; and if he does

not love me, I had better, far better, accept nothing from him, for I think such a life as that would break my heart.'

Her reverie was interrupted by her companion's voice.

'And you are looking so beautiful, my dear, everyone is saying so. I always did say so, you know; but some people said you were too cold, or too grave, or too pale; but nobody says anything like that now. They all say as I do. And you have such beautiful things too—those lovely, soft white dresses just suit you, and all that beautiful gold embroidery too, so exactly what sets off a face and figure like yours. I never saw such beautiful and curious things as you wear now. I cannot help wondering where they all came from.'

'They are curiosities Mr. Forrester picked up on his travels, and some are curious old relics that have turned up at the Hall. He is very generous, and he has no sisters or cousins, and so he gives them to us.'

'Ah, my dear, I knew it must be so; you know he could never do that, if he did not mean something.'

'I do not think it shows he means anything in your sense. He is open-handed, and enjoys the pleasure of giving, and of seeing his gifts appreciated. I do not much like taking them; but

Marjory is so delighted with her treasures and so childlike over them, that I have not the heart to say anything, and as long as she accepts them, so must I, or it would look too marked.'

'My dear, I did not mean there was any harm in it. I think it is all very nice.'

'I am not sure that I do; but Mr. Forrester has such a knack of getting his own way that it is useless to oppose him. He makes everyone believe in him and let him do as he likes.'

'Well, I do not wonder at it, for he is a fine, handsome young man, and has a most agreeable manner. He speaks so nicely to every one of us, that we all say the same of him—he is charming.'

'Is he?' said Dora dreamily.

'And so regular at church too. I'm sure he is very good. He met me coming out of poor Stone's cottage the other day--the man, you know, who broke his leg and had to have it cut off—and he asked me about him, and the very next day he sent me a cheque for ten pounds for my sick and poor; and he has been sending soup and all kinds of good things to Stone ever since, and has looked in once or twice to see how he has been getting on. Oh, yes, I'm sure he is a very good young man. Nobody who wasn't, would do things like that.'

Dora's face expressed several conflicting emotions.

'He is kind-hearted, I do think,' she said slowly.

'Very good, I am sure,' reiterated Mrs. Ross, who when she had once taken an idea into her head, was apt to harp upon it. 'He always comes to church in the morning, as regularly as dear Philip.'

'I know he does.'

'And it is not every young man in these days who would do so.'

'No.'

'No, my dear, for I am sorry to say my dear husband tells me there is a sad deal of atheism abroad in the world just now.'

'Is there?' said Dora, the colour mounting slowly in her face.

'I am afraid so, for Theodore always knows, he is such a reader; and just think, my dear, what a dreadful thing it would be to marry a man with views like that!'

'Would it?'

'Oh, my love, it would be too dreadful, I think! Fancy even going through the beautiful marriage service before God's altar, and in His house, with a man who had no belief in God, and whose vows to Him could be only a mockery. Fancy what life would be with such a man, if he had no love or reverence for holy things, and only tolerated, even

if he did not oppose, all those views which give us the only true happiness we can have here. What happiness or blessing could we expect in such a union?'

Little Mrs. Ross waxed quite eloquent in the earnestness of her thought, and her eyes were so full of tears that she did not notice the expression of pain and distress which crossed Dora's face. It was soon gone, and the girl asked quietly:

'Would not the believing wife sanctify the unbelieving husband? I think St. Paul says something like that somewhere.'

'Well, my dear, I'm sure, if St. Paul says it, it must be right, and it isn't for me to say any more. You know when people are already married they must stay with one another, because God has joined them; but I don't think it's quite meant that a woman is right in marrying a man of that sort. If she was sure she could help and teach him, it would be different; but men are so strong, and their wives have so to lean on them, that I'm afraid he would be much more likely to convince her, than she, him.'

'I'm afraid so, too,' said Dora, with rather a bitter and weary smile; and then some more guests joined them and the conversation was interrupted.

CHAPTER XX.

FORRESTER'S PLOT.

DORA'S mind was in a state of chaos. Her whole life seemed utterly changed. There were moments when she experienced the most exquisite happiness —these moments were when she and Forrester were alone together, and when he was in his gentler and more reflective mood—but these brief periods of happiness were almost always followed by hours of anxious uncertainty and wearing doubt, which seemed to try the girl almost beyond the power of bearing, until she was ready to long for the old placid monotony of life, which she had found so trying once, and against which she had been always, in thought, rebelling.

The two doubts which tormented her ceaselessly were, whether Forrester would ever return the love which she could not withhold from him; and whether, if he did love her, she ought to bind herself by the sacred marriage vow, to one who held in such light esteem all that she had been taught to look on as high and holy. Was Mrs. Ross right in

saying that no blessing could rest on such a union? Was it possible she would have to make so terrible a sacrifice to a religion for which she had little real love? Ought she so to sacrifice her happiness? Yet, if she did not, might not the shipwreck of her faith, which she felt must follow such a union, be the worse misery of the two?

She was torn in twain by conflicting emotions; and yet it seemed as if the worst misery was yet to come; for suddenly it dawned upon her that Forrester had only been trifling with her, whilst he had secretly engaged himself to Marjory.

How she arrived at this conclusion she hardly knew. She suddenly found that all the world had awoke to the fact, and although no word had yet been openly spoken, merry, laughing Marjory was looked upon as the future mistress of Langdale.

An explanation of this state of affairs must here be given. Forrester had found himself of late dreadfully persecuted by certain ladies of his acquaintance, who were anxious for themselves or their daughters, to secure a prize in the matrimonial market. Not prepared to pledge himself to anyone, yet anxious to stop the manœuvring, which he found very trying, Forrester had racked his brains to find a way of escape.

For this, he had had to look out for a confederate, who was not likely to take too serious a

view of life or its proprieties, and his choice fell upon Marjory, who would, he thought, be amused and pleased to assist him in mystifying the world.

Having come to this conclusion, Forrester lost little time in opening his mind on the subject to his proposed accomplice.

It was at a tennis-party at one of the neighbouring large houses that his chance came. He and Marjory had played a match together, and beaten all adversaries, and then they had strolled off, flushed with victory and their past exertions, to cool themselves and rest in some of the shady shrubbery paths.

There was a fountain in a sequestered, grassy place; and Marjory pulled up her sleeves, and amused herself by dipping her arms into the cool water and letting little streams trickle through her fingers.

'Oh, it is so cool and delicious!' she said. 'I'm glad we beat them, aren't you, Mr. Forrester?'

'Yes. We don't like being beaten, do we, Marjory?'

He called her by her Christian name purposely; but she did not notice.

'I *hate* it!' she cried with energy, and then she laughed. 'Well, I do, Mr. Forrester—I can't bear being beaten. I don't care if it is babyish to say so.'

Forrester looked at her with a smile, and seated himself beside her on the edge of the fountain.

'Well, we are alike in that, at any rate; for I don't like it either. By-the-by, do you know what people are saying about you and me?'

'I should think they say how very well we play tennis,' answered Marjory, making a futile dive after a gold fish. 'And I really think we do, don't you?'

'Certainly; but they are saying something else beside that.'

'Are they? How can you tell? Oh, I have wet my sleeve; what a pity! Do you think it will make the lace look draggled and dirty?'

Forrester smiled to himself, but would not be diverted from his plan of action.

'They are saying, if we could but hear it, that we are in love with one another.'

Marjory laughed merrily.

'People do say such very ridiculous things!' she answered, meeting his eyes without a blush, or the least sign of confusion.

'Is it very ridiculous then?'

'I think so.'

'Why?' he asked, amused and well pleased by her indifference, and yet a little nettled too.

'Oh, I don't know quite, only you're so wise and so old, and quite different from anybody about here;

and I'm just like country people always are, and it seems so ridiculous to talk, just because we like each other, and like to play tennis and dance together.'

'Then you do like me, Marjory?'

'Oh, yes, very much.'

'Why don't you call me Gordon, then?'

'I always do when you're not there,' admitted Marjory naïvely. 'I think it's a much nicer name than Mr. Forrester.'

'So do I; and I wish you would always call me so when I am there.'

She laughed as she answered:

'Well, I will if you like; but won't it make people talk?'

'I want to make them talk.'

She stared at him now in amused surprise.

'You want to make them talk! But why? I don't understand.'

'Ah, no! But you would understand well enough if you were what I am, a persecuted man.'

'Are you persecuted?'

'Indeed I am.'

'Who persecutes you?'

'That race of beings commonly called match-making mammas.'

Marjory laughed mischievously.

'Ah, yes, you must expect that. You are fair game.'

'I don't want to be thought fair game any longer.'

'Then you will have to get married.'

'But I don't want to get married.'

'Well, engaged then.'

'I don't want to get engaged, either.'

'Neither should I, if I were a man and could go travelling about all the world over,' answered Marjory. 'It must be so stupid to settle down and be just like everybody else.'

'But we are wandering from the point, Marjory.'

'Are we? What is the point?'

'How to stop this persecution of a helpless and unlucky bachelor.'

'Well, how are you going to stop it? Have you got a plan?'

'Yes; but I want an accomplice. Will you be one?'

Marjory laughed, and began to look more interested.

'What could I do?'

'Nothing much, only be great friends with me; call me Gordon, and don't answer any questions when they are asked. Let people see we have a great secret between us.'

Marjory's face expressed many feelings, but mischievous amusement was the one which prevailed.

'Oh,' she said slowly, 'I see what you mean now.'

'What do I mean?'

'You want people to think you are engaged to me, so that they may stop bothering you.'

'That is exactly it. Don't you think it will be great fun?'

'Yes, perhaps it will; but do you think it is quite—quite—proper?'

'No, I don't think it is; but I never did care about being proper.'

'No more do I. I think I like to be rather naughty.'

'Then we are agreed there, Marjory, and you will help me to shake off my persecutors?'

'Yes, if you like; at least I will call you Gordon, and make people think we have a secret, and all that. I don't a bit mind teasing and puzzling people, only you must be quite sure' (she spoke with sudden, imperious gravity) 'that you never try to play the game in earnest, for I should not like that, and could not be friends any more.'

'You may trust me,' he answered, laughing, yet looking curiously at her. 'I will not abuse your good faith and fellowship, but tell me why

you should so dislike me as an aspirer for your hand.'

'Because I don't like you a bit in *that* way,' answered Marjory with the candour of her nature; and after a short pause she added, more slowly and with lowered eyelids, 'and because I shall never marry anybody but Jack.'

'And who is Jack?'

'A kind of cousin; he is a sailor. I haven't seen him for an age; but we just understand each other. We're not engaged, and you must never say anything; but if ever he gets on and gets a ship, I shall marry him, and if he doesn't, I shall never marry anybody else.'

Forrester looked at her with a smile, half relieved to hear of this rival, whose image kept Marjory's heart safe from all chance of harm, half jealous of the unknown Jack, who had won so warm a place there.

'Is that a secret too between us, about Jack?'

'Oh, yes; you mustn't say a word. People think it all play, because we are not very old, but it is not play, really.'

'No, I see it is not—the most solemn earnest; and this Jack, I suppose, cuts me out altogether—leaves me not a chance?'

Marjory laughed archly.

'No, not the least chance;' and then her face

grew suddenly more grave, and she looked up and added quickly, 'but I never could have cared for you in *that* way, ever, not even if there had been no Jack.'

'Could you not ever?'

'No, indeed I could not.'

'I feel flattered. Tell me, Marjory, am I so very hideous or dreadful?'

'No, you are not, but your thoughts are.'

'What do you mean?'

'You are an atheist, are you not?'

'Who told you so? How do you know?'

'Nobody told me; I can find it out for myself. Lots of times, when you are talking, I can't bear what you say; it sounds so wicked.'

'Does it?' he asked, smiling indulgently.

'Yes, it does,' she answered, kindling into increased earnestness. 'I know it's considered very clever now, not to believe in God or in anything; but I don't see anything clever or great in it. I think it is mean, and ungrateful, and unmanly—yes, and *stupid* too, because the whole world tells us about God when we will listen to it, and not get so conceited about what we think and what we don't think, and won't believe anything we can't see and understand. Why, it's too ridiculous! We might just as well say we didn't believe in the electric telegraph because we can't see or understand

it—for I can't even do that; yet I'm not silly enough to say I don't believe it.'

Forrester laughed at her vehemence.

'We won't argue, Marjory; I don't want to shake your trust, I'm sure.'

'No, we won't argue; I couldn't argue, I'm not clever enough, and I know you could puzzle me. I couldn't answer you. But I know I'm right, and you'll know it too some day, and then you will see how dreadful and wicked it is to think such things.'

'And would these dreadful views,' he asked with a smile somewhat less ready than usual, 'really stop your marriage with a man you loved?'

'I never could love a man who thought such things,' was the quick response. 'Yes, you may laugh at me, but I never could, never, never! Jack,' she added, with a smile that was peculiarly radiant, 'Jack is not like that. Jack will help me to be good, will teach me when I am wrong, will lead me where I want to go. Jack and I have often said our prayers together; I pray for him every day, and he for me, and that seems to keep us always near together. Oh, Gordon!' (the girl broke off suddenly, and looked him full in the face) 'how can you go on believing such dreadful things?'

'Come, come, Marjory, we have not time to

discuss the subject to-day. People will be wondering what has become of us. I did not mean our compact to bring about such a serious talk. No doubt you are right, and I am wrong; but don't let us quarrel, because you know we are lovers now.'

Marjory was but a child, and her mind seldom dwelt long upon one theme. By the time they reached the company again, her smiles had all come back, and she was playing her part with a mischievous zeal.

From that day dated the ever-increasing conviction that Gordon Forrester and Marjory Egremont were engaged.

CHAPTER XXI.

A HARD-FOUGHT FIGHT.

THE conflict of feeling which had gone on in Dora's mind during these past weeks, had not been without effect upon her; and the darkness which now seemed to have fallen upon her life put, as it were, the crowning touch to the mischief already begun.

She began to look pale and jaded; she could neither sleep nor eat; she cared no longer to join in the gaieties going on round her, and her brothers and sisters began to feel some anxiety about her.

'I do not feel very well,' she admitted wearily to Madeline, when questioned as to her pale face and heavy eyes; 'I feel as though I wanted a change. I feel as if I *must* get away somewhere—anywhere! I don't know what is the matter with me. Perhaps it is the hot weather, or that so much gaiety does not suit me; but I do so much want to get away somewhere and rest and be quiet. I shall never be better until I do.'

Madeline expressed no dissent, although she

might reasonably have asked where better could rest and quietness be obtained than at Cottesmere Farm? She looked anxiously at her sister and asked:

'But where can you go, dear?'

'I think I know. You remember Mrs. Laine, whose children I helped to nurse when they had fever. She used to live in the cottage by Hunter's Wood.'

'I know,' said Madeline; 'she went away about a year ago.'

'Yes; she had some money left her, and is pretty well-to-do, and is living by the sea in Dorsetshire. She begged me, if ever I should be near, not to forget her, and to come and see her if I could. She would be delighted, I believe, to take me in for a week.'

Madeline thought so too; and an exchange of letters soon confirmed the impression, and Dora's visit was fixed for an early date.

It was like a load lifted from the girl's mind to feel that she could soon free herself from the necessity of seeing Forrester almost daily; for the sight of him was growing almost more than she could bear; and it seemed to her that the only chance of clearing her mind from the haunting doubts and fears which filled it, was to go quite away, and think over and face the future that lay before her,

far away from the place which seemed now to stifle her, so full was it of sweet and bitter associations.

Forrester, however, was much surprised and not very well pleased to hear of this sudden move. He was surprised, because he fancied that his presence was agreeable to Dora, and that she found pleasure in his society, and in the gay doings which he had been the means of starting. And he was ill-pleased, because the girl inspired him with a good deal of interest and admiration, and he liked to be with her and to talk to her, although he did not quite understand what could be the attraction.

Of late there had been a still greater charm in the subdued reserve and almost sadness of her voice and manner ; and Forrester, who wished to be interested, and who liked a character subject to subtle and inexplicable changes, had been more attracted by Dora during the past days than ever he had been before.

On the eve of her departure, he walked across to the farm, and by a little skilful manœuvring found her alone in the garden. She was looking pale and sad and very full of thought, and he was close beside her, before she was aware of his presence.

When she saw him she started, and a wave of colour swept across her face, leaving it paler than before.

'She is very handsome,' thought Forrester. 'There is something strange in all this; I must get to the bottom of it somehow.'

Aloud he said in his easy way:

'I have come over to see you and say good-bye, Miss Dora; I am sorry to think we are to lose you for a time. I hope you will think of our loss, and let your visit be as short as possible.'

'I am afraid it is my way to think more of myself than of other people,' answered Dora quietly; 'at any rate, in the making of my personal arrangements.'

'You malign yourself there, Miss Dora.'

'I think not.'

'Then you are anticipating a very lively visit, I suppose,' he said, feeling an absurd and unaccountable jealousy at the thought. 'A country house, full of nice people, all bent on amusement, and the shooting just beginning. You will have gay times!'

'No, not that; I am not going to a country house at all; but to a little cottage by the sea, in a very, very quiet little place.'

He looked at her in surprise.

'Does some great friend of yours live there, whom you are charitably about to enliven?'

'No; but a nice old woman whom I was kind to once, who is very pleased to take me in and "do for me" for a little while.'

He looked more and more amazed.

'But *why* are you going?'

'Because I wish to.'

'What makes you wish it? if I may take a friend's privilege and ask the question.'

'I go because I am not feeling well, and I think the quiet and the sea air will do me good.'

He looked at her with some concern, and saw that she appeared anything but well.

'You look as though you did want a change,' he said kindly. 'What is the matter with you?'

His tone sent a thrill of mingled pain and pleasure through her, but she answered quietly:

'I do not know. Perhaps the heat has something to do with it; and we have been so much more gay than we usually are.'

He smiled a little.

'"Seeing the world" does not seem to have agreed with you.'

'No,' she answered quite quietly; 'I do not think it has.'

There was silence awhile, and then he asked:

'When will you come back?'

'As soon as I feel better—like myself again.'

'I hope that will be soon, for I shall miss you very much whilst you are gone.'

She smiled as naturally as she could.

'You have plenty of friends beside me.'

'Yes; but I shall miss you nevertheless. I consider that I have a right to do so.'

'A brother's right,' thought Dora; and she said as if to tempt him to speak:

'Yes?'

'Yes,' he answered; and then, by an impulse for which he could hardly account, he added quickly, 'because I sometimes fancy that we shall see a good deal of each other in the future.'

'Do you? Yes, perhaps so—it may be so,' she answered quietly, and then felt justified by the admission he had tacitly made, to add, with a brave smile, 'I hope you will be very happy, Mr. Forrester.'

'Thank you,' he answered, and pulled his moustache and looked at her in an odd kind of way which she did not notice. He knew quite well then to what she alluded, and was half amused, half vexed that she should have fallen into the trap he had laid to catch others.

'She can't care for me as much as I thought she did,' he said to himself, 'or she would not speak so quietly or so readily. I never can understand this girl. She's much more puzzling and interesting than most, and she provokes one somehow, though I can't tell why.' And being somewhat provoked, Forrester amused himself by keeping up the deception.

'Do you think you will find room in your regard for another brother?'

'I dare say I shall, when the time comes.'

'Do you think I shall make a nice brother?'

'Very possibly.'

'Do you think you will ever be fond of me?'

'I am not going to be drawn into any rash admissions.'

'Well, I am not so prudent. I think sisters will be a very desirable acquisition; and I am sure I shall be very fond of mine.'

Dora made no answer, and when he looked at her he saw that her face had grown very white.

A sudden fear and a sudden hope flashed through him, startling him out of his lazy indifference; but he thrust them back with a sneer at his own vanity.

'Nonsense!' he said to himself, 'the girl is seedy, that is all. I needn't flatter myself she cares for me. I don't even know if I wish for her regard.'

Aloud he said, as he rose up and held out his hand:

'Well, good-bye, Miss Dora. I have accomplished my purpose and given you my adieus. I hope we shall soon see you back, as well and strong as ever; and we must console ourselves for your absence as best we can. Good-bye! I shall be benighted if I linger longer.'

So Dora went away to the quiet and seclusion of the humble friend's home; and in her trouble, and in this peaceful solitude, she turned at last to that only source whence lasting peace and comfort can be obtained, and began to read her Bible in a different spirit from the one with which she had studied it in the days before.

At first she read in a weary, desponding mood, not expecting to find consolation or help, but rather because all else in the world seemed flat and unprofitable, and she had heard of people who had been comforted by Bible promises in times of trouble. If they, why not she? At least, she would try, and see if any new meaning came to her; and so day by day she carried her book down to the water's edge, and in the cool shadow of the rocks, read and re-read the familiar words that the pages held.

And as she thus read, her mind humbled by sorrow, her spirit bruised and crushed by the conflicting doubts and fears which had battled there, her whole nature yearning unspeakably for something unchangeable, something certain upon which to lean in time of trouble, the familiar words, which had seemed but dead things once, now seemed living, burning truths, so grand that she almost trembled as she realised their meaning, yet so tender, so beautiful, so full of unspeakable love

that her heart glowed within her, and a sense of joy and peace stole over her soul, which at first she could not understand, but could only grasp at, and try to hold fast, with restful thankfulness too great to reason about or question.

Gradually the world, the people by whom she was surrounded, and even life itself seemed transformed. Nothing looked as it had done before. There was beauty in all around her; and her very sorrow, though not yet gone, seemed sanctified and blessed to her, because through it she had been led to understand the Father's love.

Yes; she understood that now. Now she knew what those words meant, 'the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,' and through the Son she had found the Father.

There was no room in her heart then for anything but childlike trust, and such a sense of restfulness, that she almost feared to think, lest the calm should be broken up. Alone by the seashore she wandered, in a dreamy state of subdued happiness and quiet meditation, not exactly thinking and not exactly praying, yet with much of thoughtfulness and prayer in her mind. It was as if she had been given a quiet breathing space, to gather strength and courage, after the conflict of the past and before the conflict of the future.

'I think I need not ever fear again,' she would

say. 'God will give His help if ever I am tempted again; but I do believe, I do trust in God's love. His Spirit is teaching me to know Him better every day. He has given to me His peace, which passeth all understanding. I do not think I can ever doubt Him more.'

And a deep sense of thankfulness sank down upon the girl's heart, and she felt that she had learned at last the true meaning of the words 'rest and peace.'

But during these weeks that were so restful and happy for Dora, Gordon Forrester was growing daily more dissatisfied and restless.

The neighbourhood had settled down to its accustomed quietude. There was shooting, to be sure; but it was not specially good, nor did he care much for sport in his present mood.

The farce he and Marjory had acted together no longer amused him; and he began to feel he had done wrong in thus allowing the world to couple their names. The rumour of their engagement had not yet reached the farm; but, as everyone in the place believed in it, no doubt the Egremonts would all hear it in time, and be much annoyed with him. In fact, he felt as though he ought himself to say something.

So restless and unquiet did he become at last, that everyone observed his changed manner, and

wondered what could be the cause. Marjory ceased to find him an amusing companion, and returned to her former pursuits. Madeline was engrossed by her household, Philip by his harvest, Dora was still away, and there seemed nobody inclined to befriend him but his first comrade Duff, whom of late he had somewhat neglected.

'What's up with you, Forrester?' Duff inquired of him one day. 'You've not been a bit like yourself for a week or more. What's the matter?'

'I've been behaving like an ass; and it's not a pleasant feeling when one wakes up to the consciousness of it.'

'You mean about Marjory, I suppose?' said Duff, in his lazy way.

Forrester looked at him surprised.

'Why, what do you know about it?'

'Well, you don't suppose I am blind? Anyone can see the game you have been playing, for what reason is best known to yourselves. I don't suppose it means anything, and I fail to see the sense of it.'

Forrester pulled his moustache, and cut off the tops of some nettles with his cane.

'Idle people do a great many foolish things.'

'Then there is nothing in it?'

'No, nothing.'

'Just done to throw dust in people's eyes?'

'That's all.'

'Well, you had no business to do it, then.' Duff spoke in his habitually lazy fashion; but there was something in the tone that made Forrester wince.

'It's done no harm,' he said.

'No, I believe not; Marjory is whole-hearted. Your attractions were not powerful enough to turn her head. But it was a dangerous game to play, and you had no business to try it.'

'I know I had not; though I never led your sister to suppose that our love-making was anything but jest. Do you think any harm is done?'

'No, at least not much. People will soon forget all they said, and she is too much of a child to be blamed. I doubt if anybody will give the matter a thought now that you are no longer seen together, and the excitement of your presence here is abated. But don't you try that sort of thing on with anyone again, especially with a sister of mine.'

'No, I won't. Next time it shall be in earnest.'

Duff looked at him under his eyelids.

'Contemplating matrimony?'

'I believe I am.'

'You haven't made your mind up quite?'

'I don't know. I vary from day to day;' then, breaking out into a kind of impatient anger, he added. 'I am a perfect fool, Duff. I don't know

my own mind two days together. I never felt so restless in my life as I do now. When is your sister Dora coming home?'

Duff's eyes opened a little wider; his lips formed themselves for a whistle, but made no sound.

'I don't know.'

'Why did she go away?'

'I don't know.'

'Was she really ill?'

'She did not seem at all well.'

'What was the cause?'

'How can I tell?'

'Duff,' said Forrester, stopping short and facing him, looking pale and almost fierce, 'tell me one thing: is it only my abominable vanity, or had I anything to do with her flight?'

'I really cannot tell you. Dora is very reserved and very hard to read.'

'But you do not think it impossible?'

He spoke so eagerly that Duff was surprised and touched.

'No,' he answered; 'I do not suppose it is impossible; you had better go and see for yourself.'

CHAPTER XXII.

REJECTED.

THEY met face to face round a jutting piece of cliff. Forrester had seen her from above, and had swung himself down to the path, that he might meet her when she came round the headland ; and yet anyone who had watched the meeting would have said that it was he, not she, who had been taken by surprise.

'Dora!' he exclaimed, and his voice sounded hoarse and unnatural, and his face was pale, as if he had slept little, and thought much, during the past days, as indeed had been the case.

She looked up at the sound of a human voice, and started from her reverie. Her face, too, was pale, but, unlike his, it wore an expression of deep peace ; and a tender sweetness and serenity which were new to it, gave it an inexplicable charm.

Forrester's pulses throbbed, and his head and heart seemed set on fire. Why had he not known earlier, how beautiful and noble a woman's nature lay hidden away under this girl's calm and reserved

exterior? Already the power of his love had transformed her in his eyes. Why had he not learned sooner to love her?

These and a hundred more wild thoughts and fancies flashed through his mind in a second of time. He advanced with both hands outstretched.

She placed one of hers quietly within his eager clasp, and said:

'This is an unexpected meeting, Mr. Forrester.'

He made no reply, and his silence, and perhaps his suppressed agitation, startled the girl, and she asked quickly:

'You do not bring me bad news from Cottesmere, do you, Mr. Forrester?'

Forrester commanded himself by a great effort, and spoke almost in his usual way:

'No, Miss Dora, I am no ambassador of evil tidings; I am only fulfilling what seems to be my destiny, wandering aimlessly up and down the earth, seeking amusement and enjoyment.'

'You have chosen a strange place to come to for that. There is nothing to see or to do here.'

'There is the attraction of your presence.'

She smiled quietly, and without the least self-consciousness or emotion. She looked, he thought, more beautiful than any woman he had ever seen, in her grave sweetness and dignity. A great gulf seemed suddenly to have opened between

them—how, he could not imagine or explain. He could only chafe at the sensations he experienced, and wonder if it was only his fancy or if the girl had really changed.

'Are you better, Miss Dora?' he asked abruptly.

'Much better, thank you.'

'When do you return home?'

'I hardly know. I must not be very much longer away, I suppose; but this quiet place and the sea have been very refreshing. I feel inclined to linger a little while longer.'

'Don t you find it very dull?'

'No; I have been happier during these weeks than ever in my life before, I think.'

He gave a short, hard laugh.

'It seems strange to hear you talk like that, Miss Dora. A little while ago you were all for change and excitement. Your ideas must have undergone a vast modification.'

'I think I have myself changed a good deal of late,' answered his companion in the same gentle, quiet way. 'I suppose we do change more or less, as we grow older.'

'Very few people will admit that. They seem to think it something of a disgrace.'

'I do not feel disgraced by the change in myself, and so I do not mind admitting it.'

Again he looked at her, and again was struck

by some subtle change in her manner as well as in her face. Why was it he felt tongue-tied and awkward? Why could he not assume the easy familiarity of past days? What made him feel all at once that she was his superior, this girl whom he had trifled with, and led on and sounded, as he had thought, to the depths of her nature? What was it that seemed to hold him back from his protestations of love, and hindered him from speaking the words he had come to say?

Her perfect calmness and self-possession perhaps, disconcerted him. In past days he had been used to feel her thrill at his presence, at the sound of his voice, or the touch of his hand. He had felt such power over her, that he had but to speak, to make her his tool or his slave, ready to do his bidding, even to believing all he chose to instil into her mind.

He may have exaggerated his own power—men of his calibre not unfrequently do so—but it was undeniably great; and yet, now that the moment had come when he most needed it, he felt that it was gone—the charm broken, he knew not when nor how.

His companion must have noticed his silence, for she began to ask questions, so that the conversation might not wholly flag.

'Have you been to the farm lately?'

'Yes, tolerably so.'

'How are they all?'

'Very well, I imagine; I heard nothing to the contrary.'

'How is Marjory?'

There was a smiling inflexion in the girl's voice which made Forrester feel savage.

'I suppose she is all right; I made no special inquiry.'

She heard the resentful tone, and wondered. Can they have quarrelled? or what does it mean? She knew that something must have gone amiss with him, to have wrought so great a change in his manner.

'What is the matter, Mr. Forrester?' she asked, looking into his face with her dark, grave eyes. 'Has anything vexed you?'

'Yes,' he answered shortly, pulling at his moustache and looking thoroughly ill at ease.

'I do not think you need be vexed. I do not know what has happened, but I think it cannot be very serious. Marjory is very young, almost a child; she——'

'It is not with Marjory that I am annoyed,' he answered shortly. 'I have no right or wish to criticise her. It is with myself.'

'With yourself? What have you done?'

'Behaved like a fool,' he answered fiercely.

'I do not understand,' she said, feeling perplexed and half alarmed at the vehemence of his manner.

He made no answer, but strode along the beach, making the pebbles fly at each stroke of his heel. Dora kept up with some little difficulty, wondering what all this could mean and what would come next. Silence was almost more trying than words, so she asked:

'I'm afraid you are in trouble. Can I do anything for you?'

'You can if you will,' he answered, stopping suddenly and facing her.

'I am sure I will if I can,' she said gently, feeling sure that the office of mediator was about to be thrust upon her.

'You will?' he cried with eager vehemence.

'If I can, most certainly I will.'

'Then promise to be my wife!' he cried, and seized both her hands in his, with a grasp so strong as almost to give her pain.

She started and gazed at him with dilated eyes. Then she recovered herself and slowly withdrew her hands.

'You say this to *me*, Mr. Forrester!' she said slowly. 'I think you cannot be yourself to-day.'

The calm reproach of the tone recalled him to a more sober frame of mind. Her steadfast gaze

warned him that the battle had yet to come. She was not to be won by a single word now.

'Why should I not say it to you,' he asked, 'when I love you?'

'And are engaged to Marjory,' she added quietly.

'I am not engaged to Marjory.'

'You have quarrelled, I suppose, and this is the revenge you wish to take.'

There was something almost like contempt in her voice, and it stung him to the quick.

'You have no right to say such things to me,' he said hotly; 'you judge me falsely.'

'I judge you only by your own lips,' she answered quietly. 'Your creed is to get all the enjoyment possible out of life, as its sole aim and object. Having amused yourself with one sister, until the entertainment has palled upon you, you now come to amuse yourself with the other;' and look, as well as voice, gave token of a boundless scorn.

'You wrong me,' he cried; 'you are unjust and untrue in your thoughts and words. I never loved Marjory, and was never engaged to her.'

'That was not your tone when last we spoke together, and I congratulated you upon your engagement.'

'I did not accept your congratulations.'

'You certainly did not reject them. All you said was, "Thank you." To my thinking, that is quite sufficient for an acceptation. I took it as such, and you allowed me to do so. Why did you wish to deceive me if it was not true?'

He bit his lip, not knowing what to say. All his worldly wisdom had deserted him, at this great crisis of his life, when most he needed it. His love, like a blinding torrent, seemed to sweep him away, he knew not whither. He had a mad desire to clasp this girl in his arms, and force her, by the power of his love, and the tenderness of his caresses, to acknowledge that she could love him, and would be his wife; and yet she stood before him so calm and composed, in her stately pride and indignant scorn, that he felt himself humbled and abased before her.

'There was no harm in it,' he answered almost sullenly; 'Marjory and I understood each other. It was nothing but play on both sides. You may call it foolish, if you will; but there was no harm done.'

Dora's lip curled slightly.

'No harm in coupling Marjory's name with yours in the mouth of the whole country side, so that she will get the name of a jilt, or a girl who has been jilted—an unenviable distinction, whichever way the case is stated! I knew your ideals

were not high; but I did think that you were too much the man and the gentleman to take advantage of the simplicity and thoughtlessness of a girl like Marjory, and induce her to put herself into so false a position. I am disappointed in you, Mr. Forrester. I think we had better bring this interview to a close.'

'I will not!' he cried excitedly. 'You shall hear me. You make too much of this matter—it was a mere nothing—the veriest trifling——'

'The very fact that you can trifle with so holy a thing as marriage is enough for me,' answered Dora quietly. 'I suppose girls brought up as I have been, have old-fashioned views on these points; and to me it seems a very strange thing that anyone can amuse himself, as you have been doing, by making light of the subjects we have been taught to think most sacred and beautiful. That was not the way in which my father loved my mother, nor is it the way in which my brothers would go about to seek a wife. Our ways are not your ways, Mr. Forrester, and I think, if you desire a wife, you had better go and seek one who will prove more of your own fashion of thinking, than you will be likely to find in our family.'

He stood silent before her, with lowered eyelids, feeling for the first time in his life thoroughly abashed and humbled. Perhaps something in his

attitude and manner touched the girl, now that her first scorn and anger had spent itself, for after a moment's pause she spoke again, and spoke more gently:

'Let us say good-bye, Mr. Forrester, and part friends. Perhaps I had no right to speak as I did just now. Let us both try to forget each other.'

The calmness of the tone hid all the misery in the girl's heart. He had no idea what it cost her to speak to him thus.

'I cannot!' he cried hoarsely. 'I cannot, will not, forget. I love you, Dora—I love you with all my heart. Do you hear?—I love you.'

'I hear,' she answered, with trembling lips. 'I am very sorry you do.'

This time her agitation betrayed itself a little.

'Dora!' he cried, with something of his old commanding way, 'can you look into my face and tell me that you have no love in your heart for me?'

She did not even try to answer.

'Dora,' he said softly, 'I have thought in past days that you bore some love for me. Has it all gone?'

She faced him bravely.

'It is not what it was,' she said. 'I cannot give you now, the love that a wife should give her husband.'

'And could you have done so once?'

'I think I could.'

He clenched his hand hard as he asked:

'Had I been earlier in the field, you would have consented to become my wife?'

'Yes.' The answer was spoken very low, but without hesitation.

'Then Dora—you are not false or fickle—I claim you as my wife now.'

He approached, and would have taken her in his arms; but she drew herself away.

'You cannot do that, Mr. Forrester. You are too late. I cannot marry you now.'

'You can, and you shall, and you will!' he answered slowly and vehemently. 'You love me, and you are mine.'

'I have loved you,' she answered, controlling herself and speaking steadily; 'but I cannot marry you—I cannot be yours.'

He saw no yielding in her face or voice, yet both were full of pain.

'Do you mean to say,' he asked, with a desperate impatience almost amounting to resentment in his voice, 'that for a foolish, childish game I played with your sister, to silence gossiping tongues, and of which now I heartily repent—do you mean to say that for that, you will sacrifice your own life's happiness and mine?'

'No, not for that,' answered Dora. 'You have disappointed and hurt me by acting as you did. I cannot think so well of you as I once did; but that alone would not have been enough.'

'What do you mean? What can you have heard? Has some false report got abroad?' he questioned eagerly. 'Tell me, that I may explain it all away, for, upon my honour, I know of no offence but the one we have discussed.'

'There is nothing to explain. You have condemned yourself. You have no God; you believe in no world but this one; you have no object but pleasure. I cannot marry you, Mr. Forrester. You would break my heart or blight my faith. I must live my life alone, for I cannot share it with you.'

He gazed at her as if thunderstruck. When he spoke it was with deliberate and bitter emphasis:

'And do you mean to tell me that you are willing to sacrifice my whole life's happiness for a miserable superstition?'

'I must put God's will before everything. He has shown me what His love is, and what it can do. You would undo His work in my heart. I cannot marry you.'

'You might convert me.'

She heard the sneer and flushed deeply.

'I am very weak. You would be too strong for me.'

'Would not your God, in whom you have such faith, come to your aid?'

'If I were to take a step which I felt would alienate me from Him, and upon which I could not expect His blessing to rest, how could I look to Him for aid?'

He sneered again.

'Your creed is a very selfish one, Miss Egremont. I am glad I do not share it. You care nothing for the misery you inflict upon me, so long as you think you can get into your so-called heaven yourself. I had an idea Christians professed to be very loving and self-sacrificing towards their fellowmen.'

She clasped her hands closely together to keep down her emotion.

'I would die for you gladly,' she answered with simple, earnest pathos. 'If only you and I were concerned, I would put your happiness before all else. I am afraid I should peril my own soul rather than give you pain. But that is not all.'

'What in the name of all that's holy are you driving at? Who else is concerned?'

'Christ,' she answered, lifting her eyes to his, as though even the use of the sacred name gave her strength. 'Christ, the Son of God, is concerned in

this matter. If I marry you and deny Him, it will give Him pain, for He loves me more than you do. He died for me.'

Forrester gazed at her speechlessly.

'Are you a mystic—a dreamer—a fanatic? or do you say all this simply to torment me?'

'I say it because it is true. I must choose this day between my human love and the divine, and I choose loneliness, with Christ's blessing, to the love and happiness of this world, which I should find with you. I am not speaking on the impulse of a moment; I am neither a dreamer nor a mystic. I have fought the battle out before, and you cannot move me now. My choice is made, and I can only wish you farewell. May the God whom you deny, not deny you His blessing! I shall pray for you.'

She held out her hand, and he kissed it passionately. He would have pleaded or have threatened; but he was acute enough to know that he could not move her now. All he said was:

'Farewell, then. We may never meet again. If you hear that I have come to a bad end, you will know that you have had a hand in the matter. You might have made another man of me, and you declined the trust. You will be in part responsible.'

'No,' she answered gently but firmly, 'I shall not be responsible. I have declined no trust.

You know as well as I do that I could not make of you what you had no mind to be, that I am powerless to lead or guide you; but your own power over me would be almost boundless, did I give myself to you, and therefore I decline to do it. You are responsible for your own actions, and I think you are too manly and too high-minded to let yourself sink down to the bad end of which you speak. If you ever feel that you are weak, and need help and strength, do not go to any weak woman for it—go to Christ, the Son of God. He will hear and help.'

He turned from her impatiently.

'Is that all the comfort you have got for me?'

'I can give you no better.'

'Good-bye, then,' he said abruptly. 'It is no use waiting any longer. I must forget you as fast as I can. It is not likely we shall ever meet again. You need not hope or fear that you will be troubled by any further attentions on my part. I shall renew my travels and soon forget this unpleasant episode. Good-bye.'

He strode away in anger and humiliation and bitterness of spirit, feeling, as such men always do feel at certain times in their lives, all the hollowness and joylessness of the world they live for and the god they worship. But his heart was still hard, and the day of repentance far off.

Dora stood still where he had left her, feeling numb and stunned, not quite conscious where she was nor what had happened. Gradually a sense of realisation came over her, and an expression of mingled sorrow and satisfaction settled upon her face.

'I believe I have done right,' she murmured. 'I am glad it is all over. I could not stand it a second time. I did not know how hard it would be.'

BOOK IV.

THE MYSTERY AT AUCKNESS.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SHADOWS.

THE joyous Christmas-tide, which had always been such a busy season for Lenore, passed quietly and strangely in her northern home.

To many young girls there would have been much of dreariness in such a life, shut in by stress of weather in a vast, empty house, tenanted only by one lonely, desolate woman and her servants, seeing nothing within doors but pale, care-worn faces, and without nothing but blinding snow-storms and a waste of grey, foaming water, whose dreary, ceaseless moaning, combined with the howling of the winter wind, was the only sound that broke the silence surrounding that lonely, snow-girt abode.

Desolation certainly reigned without — such desolation as Lenore, in her sheltered southern

home had never dreamed of; and yet there was a wild, weird beauty for her in the great, snowy, silent world without, which lent a certain charm, and grace even, to this absolute desolation.

Lenore was neither lonely nor unhappy in this strange life she was leading; on the contrary, it possessed an attraction and interest for her, which kept away all thoughts of melancholy or despondency.

Since the last conversation recorded between herself and Mrs. Boghey, a very tender bond of sympathy had drawn the two together. A ray of light from above had penetrated into the recesses of a lonely, darkened heart, and Lenore had the happiness of seeing the gloom there gradually clear away, and of watching the growth of hope and peace, whose seeds she had been the means of planting.

The stern, cold manner and the habit of self-repression and reserve did not pass away with the change that had come over her nature. The sorrow of a lifetime and the habits it has engendered cannot be laid aside in a few days or weeks: and to all the world beside, Mrs. Boghey was the same hard, loveless woman as before. Only Lenore's eyes saw the change. Lenore's heart responded to an unspoken love, which could not find expression in outward forms; but only to her and

to the faithful servant who loved her mistress with an unchanging devotion was this tender softening visible, and an equal source of happiness was it to both.

But it appeared by-and-by to Lenore, who watched her with a love filial in its intensity, that the clouds of melancholy and oppression, which seemed somewhat to have cleared away, were gathering in all their former blackness.

Christmas time had passed peacefully, and almost happily, in that lonely house, and Lenore had felt a deeper and purer joy, ministering, as she was now doing, to the needs of a heart left desolate of all earthly and heavenly joy, than she had done in the merry days of Christmas festivity at Cottesmere.

But, after that season was passed and the new year had come in, Lenore noticed a relapse into the old dark despondency and gloom.

It came on quite suddenly, without apparent cause. Mrs. Boghey had been talking one evening to Lenore with an unusually calm sweetness, telling her that her coming had been a great blessing, not only to herself, but to the whole household, thanking her for all her love and care, and parting from her with a greater tenderness than was at all customary.

The next morning all was changed.

Mrs. Boghey never came downstairs before mid-day during the cold weather, and since her illness she was often later than that. She generally sent for Lenore to pay her a visit after she had finished breakfast, but on this particular morning no such summons came.

Much at home as Lenore was now at Auckness, there were traditional formalities which neither time nor increasing familiarity ever abolished. One of these was the custom of receiving the message requesting a visit from Lenore in her bedroom, which Mrs. Boghey sent by Campbell morning by morning.

But to-day no such message arrived, and Lenore felt a strange misgiving as hour after hour passed by, and she heard and saw nothing either of mistress or of maid.

At length the girl became really anxious to know the cause of this strange silence, and she went upstairs and lingered in the corridor, hoping to see something of Campbell as she passed in or out.

This wish was soon gratified. The maid appeared, coming quietly from her mistress's room, and Lenore, herself unseen, marked that a strange shadow, as of dread or haunting fear, was stamped upon the woman's face.

'Campbell,' she said softly, in an awed undertone, 'Campbell, is anything the matter?'

The woman started violently and turned as white as a sheet, whilst her eyes seemed full of a nameless horror. Then, when Lenore advanced from the shadows and showed herself, she made a violent effort to recover herself, and pressed her hand to her heart with a sickly smile.

'Why, Miss Annandale, how you startled me! These dark passages and these dark days do make a body nervous. I had no idea anybody was near; you gave me quite a turn.'

'I am very sorry,' said Lenore, wondering to hear the immovable Campbell speak of being nervous, and feeling sure from her unnatural look and manner that something was seriously amiss. 'I did not mean to startle you; I was anxious to know if Mrs. Boghey were ill, or if anything were wrong. I am afraid something has happened.'

'Oh, no, Miss Annandale,' answered Campbell, still in the same hurried way, with a nervous catch in her voice and a wandering, shifting glance that seemed to be staring from one dark corner to another. 'What made you think that?'

'Because she did not send for me this morning as she usually does. I began to be afraid that she might be ill.'

'Well, she is not just herself this morning,' admitted Campbell, who was gradually returning to her usual manner. 'She slept badly, and then,

you know, Miss Annandale, the thoughts of former days do come over her now and again, especially in these gloomy winter days, and she does have an attack like this. I'm sure it's a wonder she has not had one before. If it had not been for you, ma'am, and the help and comfort you have been, she would have been as she is now, over and over again.'

'You do not look well yourself, Campbell,' said Lenore compassionately.

'I? Oh, I am well enough, ma'am; only when my lady gets like this, I always seem to feel it.'

'Can I go and see her?'

'Presently—by-and-by. She said she would like you to come later, when she feels more tranquil. I will come for you when she is ready.'

But it was evening before the summons came, and the intervening time seemed to hang heavily upon Lenore's hands. The snow lay too deep all round the place to permit of outdoor exercise, and although she tried to play with Colin, and to keep her spirits up to their customary level, there seemed an oppressive silence and melancholy all over the house, which weighed her down in spite of herself.

When at length she was summoned to Mrs. Boghey's room, she found her much changed. The white face looked pinched and drawn; the hollow

eyes were full of that haunting look of dread which had almost died out of late. It was the Mrs. Boghey of the past, not of the present, upon whom Lenore now gazed, and her heart was filled with compassionate wonder and pain.

She did not speak, nor was she spoken to. Mrs. Boghey sat rigidly in her chair, and Lenore just paused to press one soft kiss upon the white, lined brow, and then she crossed the room to the shadowy corner where the piano stood, and began to play in the soft, dreamy fashion which she knew was found most soothing and most comforting.

When she had finished she came and took a seat at Mrs. Boghey's feet, and sat there silent and quiet. She felt it easier to speak, or be spoken to, out of sight of that sadly changed face.

'I am not quite well to-day, Lenore,' said Mrs. Boghey, speaking at last in a low voice, which seemed to struggle after indifference.

'I see you are not. I am very sorry. What has caused it?'

'Nothing—it is nothing—you need not be sorry. It is not of the slightest consequence. Everyone of my age is liable to slight fluctuations of health.'

The words and manner were alike forced and unnatural. Lenore was perplexed, not knowing what could be the cause of such a change.

'I hope you will be well again very soon.'

'Perhaps, perhaps,' answered Mrs. Boghey in the same strained voice; 'but I have not the strength I once had to throw things off. You must not be surprised if this attack lasts some little while. They often do.'

'Are you subject to them?'

'I have had them before now.'

'Should you not see a doctor?'

'A doctor!' repeated Mrs. Boghey, with an indescribable scorn and bitterness in her voice. 'As though doctor's skill could cure *me*! Ah, child! I think it is only the very young, or the very credulous, that place any faith in doctors.'

Lenore looked up into the dark face above her, and was struck by the wild melancholy that reigned there. It was the old look of bitter hopelessness that she had thought never to see again.

'Not in doctors, perhaps,' said Lenore gently; 'but we may have faith in One—the Great Physician.'

There was no response, and presently the girl looked up, only to find the cloud resting more darkly upon Mrs. Boghey's face.

It was difficult for her to go on, but she felt that silence was worse than anything.

'He can cure troubles of mind as well as of body. There is nothing too hard for Him.'

'My trouble is past healing,' said Mrs. Boghey in her hardest voice. 'I have had my hopes and my dreams of peace; but there is no peace for me.'

'Is it gone so soon?' asked Lenore sadly. 'For you had it once. Oh, do not let go your hold upon it so easily! What God has given, He never withdraws, unless we cast it away from us.'

'Child,' said Mrs. Boghey harshly, 'you do not understand—you cannot understand the workings of a mind tried as mine has been. You do not know what trouble is—God grant you never may!'

'I do not understand,' assented Lenore quietly; 'but One does—the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief. No trouble is too great for Him to remove.'

'I do not ask Him to remove it,' said Mrs. Boghey; 'I would rather bear it.'

'He will help you to bear it.'

'I would rather bear it alone.'

Lenore said no more, seeing that some weight too heavy for her words to lighten lay upon that troubled spirit. What had happened that could have produced this effect she could not imagine; and yet she was sure, from the unnatural manner of both mistress and maid, that some bitter wave of sorrow was sweeping over the latter, and submerging for a time all the hope and peace which had taken root in her heart.

Ponder as she would, Lenore could not make out any cause for the change she saw; but her suspicion that all was not well developed into actual certainty, when she found herself shut out from the confidence of the two who had grown so entirely to trust her.

It was only in little things that she found this out; it seemed as though both were anxious she should not guess that it was so; but the magic of perfect sympathy was broken, and Lenore knew perfectly that she was denied some of the confidence which used to be accorded to her. It was as if an impalpable cloud hung between her and Mrs. Boghey, which eluded any attempt at dispersion, yet steadily declined to depart.

Of one thing Lenore was sure, which was that nothing in her own conduct had given offence. Whatever the secret was, she was in no wise to blame. Mrs. Boghey and Campbell both made her understand this, each in her own way; and with this certainty she had to be content.

Two days passed thus heavily, the feeling of oppression still hanging over the house, and Lenore had gone to bed at night somewhat depressed. It was a dead calm. The wind seemed to have shrieked and howled itself into exhaustion; and something in the perfect silence, after many weeks of blustering storm, added as it were to the loneli-

ness which encompassed that gloomy house and all its occupants.

Lenore fell asleep with the soft plash of the waves beneath filling her ears; and how long she slept she knew not. She only knew that she was presently awakened by a low, fierce growl from Col, who always slept at her bed's foot.

It was so unusual for him to express his feelings in such a way, that Lenore was startled, and listened for any sound which might have caused it.

She heard presently a curious, hollow sound. What it was she could not imagine; it seemed to be near, and yet it sounded as if it came from deep down in the earth far below. The dog growled more audibly than before, and Lenore sat up in bed to listen.

She heard again the same inexplicable hollow sounds, that seemed below her window and upon the inaccessible face of the cliff; but they were so faint and so peculiar that she could make nothing of them. Once she thought it resembled the clanking of a chain, and then like footsteps in some hollow place. There was something altogether *uncanny* in these sounds coming in the middle of a winter's night, and Lenore's heart beat rather fast. Colin continued to growl and to pace the room in an excited, restless way.

At length Lenore got up and drew the curtain.

All was silent now, and the moon shone brightly. She looked out over the sea, and down upon the ridge of cliff, which projected beyond the foundations of the house and dipped down precipitately into the waters. Certainly there was nothing in the stillness without to account for any sounds at all. Colin came up, put his paws upon the window-frame and looked out too, with pricked-up ears, as though he, at least, heard something.

'What is it, Col?' said Lenore, half laughing, half nervous; 'what do you hear?'

Colin gave a low whine, and continued to gaze downward.

Lenore heard nothing, but the next moment she gave a start, for a boat glided quickly and noiselessly from under the shelter of the cliff, and, propelled by one solitary oarsman, cut its way rapidly and quietly through the heaving waters. From the absence of any kind of splash, as well as from their peculiar appearance, Lenore fancied that the oars were muffled.

For a moment she was startled, and thoughts of smugglers and pirates flashed through her brain. Then, however, she smiled at her fears, drew her curtain, and returned to bed.

'It is only a fisherman in his boat,' she said to herself. 'It was my fancy about the oars; I suppose he was careless in rounding the point, and ran

his boat against the cliff. It was just such a sound as I heard, that and pushing off again. I need not have troubled my head so much about it. I suppose I am getting nervous, like the rest of the household.'

And then she fell asleep again as quietly as a child.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHANGES FOR LENORE.

THE next morning dawned bright and clear and frosty. The sun sparkled upon the snow-covered ground with a dazzling brilliance. There was an exhilarating freshness in the keen air without, and Lenore arose refreshed and cheered, feeling more light at heart than she had done for many days.

She breakfasted alone as usual, and when she had finished Campbell came with her customary message. Her manner was more composed and staid than it had been during the past days, but her face was white as a sheet, and there were dark rims round her eyes, which seemed to speak of a mind much troubled, and full of anxiety and fear.

'Are you ill, Campbell?' asked Lenore quickly.

'No, ma'am, thank you.'

'You look as though you had not slept all night,' continued the girl.

Campbell gave her one sharp glance, whose meaning she could not fathom, but she answered in her most quiet and measured way:

My lady slept but poorly herself. I was up with her once or twice. She seems better this morning, and she would like to see you, ma'am.'

Lenore went up to the room. Mrs. Boghey was already up, unusually early for her, and was seated in her chair, wrapped in a dressing-gown. She too was changed in a curious way, for her eyes were peculiarly bright, almost feverishly so, and there was a pink flush upon her waxen-white face, the first that Lenore had ever seen there, and it looked so strange, contrasting with her usual ashy paleness, that the girl felt uneasy.

'Good morning, my dear,' said Mrs. Boghey with more than usual energy. 'I trust that you have passed a quiet night.'

'Yes, thank you, Mrs. Boghey. I wish you had done the same.'

Lenore fancied that she started and looked disturbed; and then Campbell from behind said quietly:

'I was telling Miss Annandale that you had not slept quite so well as you sometimes do.'

'I dare say it was the quiet after so much storm,' said Lenore. 'I think any sudden change like that makes sleep more difficult.'

'But you slept well?' said Mrs. Boghey quickly.

'Yes, very well,' answered Lenore, a fleeting thought of the solitary fisherman running against

the rock passing through her mind, but seeming too trifling a circumstance to mention.

'That is well. Young people always should sleep well;' and then Mrs. Boghey, dismissing that subject, plunged into another topic which seemed to be uppermost in her thoughts.

'I have not thought you looking very well lately, my dear.'

'I have felt quite——'

'And it seems to me that you are in need of some little change. You have been so sadly weatherbound of late. I think we must manage something, or we shall be having you grow quite thin and pale.'

Lenore said nothing, but smiled, waiting to hear more. She felt like one in a dream, knowing that more was meant than met the ear, and that this sudden idea was not grounded upon any giving way of her health. It was only a few weeks ago that Mrs. Boghey had implored her to stay, never to leave her even for a short time. Something had happened to put this idea into her head, and again a sense of mystery seemed to fall upon her.

'How would you like to spend a few days at Inverbervie? They have asked you so many times, and you have not been able to go. I think they would be pleased to see you, and it would do you good to have a little change.'

'They will not be expecting me,' said Lenore doubtfully, 'but I can go if you think it best. Mrs. Money has asked me a great many times. When shall I write to ask if they can take me in?'

'You will not have to write, my dear. I had to send over to Bervie this morning, and I took that opportunity of asking if Mrs. Money would like you to come over this afternoon for a few days. The weather will permit it now, and if the frost lasts, you will be able to have skating and sleighing and to enjoy yourself as young folks should. The man will soon return with the answer, and I think it is sure to be a very cordial assent to my plan. I hope, my dear, that it will give you pleasure.'

'I hope—no doubt I shall have a very pleasant time,' answered Lenore. 'And if you can spare me, and think it best, I will gladly do as you suggest; but be sure you send for me back if you want me when I am gone.'

'I shall miss you, my dear, we shall all miss you,' said Mrs. Boghey, with a subdued tenderness in her tone; 'but I am not quite myself. I am depressed and unnerved, and I fear you may become the same if you stay here constantly with me. I should not like to feel that you were far away from me; but I should like you to have a little change and a little society, beyond what this house is able to offer.'

Mrs. Boghey spoke so naturally and affectionately, that for a moment Lenore's first idea as to any secret motive faded into insignificance. She sat with Mrs. Boghey until the messenger returned with a warm assent to the proposition received, and then she was dismissed to put up such things as she would need during her short visit, and the carriage was ordered to take her. The roads were hardened by the frost, and there was no difficulty in getting to the town of Bervie.

'You will take your dog with you, my dear,' said Mrs. Boghey. 'He would be so unhappy without you.'

'Oh, yes. Col goes everywhere with me. I like to have him.'

And then Lenore went to her own room, to make her preparations.

Mrs. Money made what use she could of Lenore's sudden visit. She imagined at first that some rupture had occurred between Mrs. Boghey and her young companion, but a little talk with the girl convinced her, in spite of her reluctance to be convinced, that no misunderstanding had taken place—that nothing but affectionate good-will existed between that oddly-assorted pair.

Lenore remained a fortnight at Inverbervie, and during that time Mrs. Money managed to convey to her the information that she was looked upon as a

kind of fortune-hunter by the neighbourhood, and that in time Mrs. Boghey's suspicions would fall upon her, as they had done upon her kindred, and she would be ignominiously driven from Auckness. In addition, Mrs. Money made it plain to her that as a matter of bare justice Mrs. Boghey's wealth ought to pass to her children as the next-of-kin; and in this theory Lenore fully agreed.

Mrs. Money was always suave and kind in manner, yet Lenore could neither like nor trust her. Herbert made himself far more agreeable; she grew to feel a sort of affectionate interest in him: still, the time hung heavy, and she longed to return, and at last wrote and asked permission to do so. A short yet affectionate letter from Mrs. Boghey granted her this permission; and the girl felt, from the few sad, loving words the paper contained, that she had been greatly missed and would be warmly welcomed back.

So Lenore went back to Auckness, leaving Mrs. Money in a doubtful, dissatisfied state, hopeful, but not confident, that she had sown the seeds of discord and distrust, which would grow up and bear fruit in due season.

The girl's spirits rose as the carriage conveyed her back from the more populated regions round Bervie to the wild, snowy fastnesses that surrounded Auckness. She had felt shut in and imprisoned in

that enclosed valley, and here seemed freedom and peace.

Col, too, raced along beside the carriage in wild spirits, as though he was as glad as his mistress to be going home.

At length the dark, silent house was reached, and Lenore descended and made her way into the hall. Campbell was not visible, but Annie was waiting to welcome her, which she did very warmly, and fairly hugged Col, who was an immense favourite with her.

'How is the mistress, Annie?' asked Lenore.

'Eh, mem, but I'm thinking she's no so well at all,' answered Annie, shaking her head gravely. 'We're all rarely glad to see you back, mem, for there has seemed something uncanny like about the house ever since you left.'

Lenore smiled a little.

'Well, Annie, perhaps things will be better now. I suppose my room is ready? I will go upstairs, and you shall tell me everything whilst you unpack for me.'

'Please, mem,' said Annie, when they had mounted the stairs, 'the mistress has changed your rooms. She said they were cold and cheerless in the cold weather, and we have put these to rights for you. They look real bonny.'

It was the two handsomest of the guest

chambers that had been made ready for Lenore; and very luxurious and comfortable they looked, and yet the girl fancied they lacked the home-like appearance of her old quarters, and she would rather have returned thither.

'Do you know what made Mrs. Boghey think the other rooms too cold?' asked Lenore as she sat beside the fire, warming herself after the cold journey, whilst Annie brought in the tea-tray and busied herself about the room.

'Mrs. Campbell only said because it was cold and dull,' answered Annie slowly; and then, dropping her voice to a whisper, she added with a scared look, 'but they do say it's no the cold at all, but the ghaist that they are afeared at.'

'Ghost! Why, Annie, what are you thinking of? What do you mean?'

'I dinna ken mysel', mem,' answered Annie timorously, 'but they do say such things.'

'Who say so? What do they say?'

'Why, the men downstairs, and some of the girls too. They say they hear steps walking about the house at night—walking in the wing where your rooms used to be, Miss Annandale.' Annie spoke now very slowly, carefully, and impressively. 'John, the groom, he got up one night, to go and see to a sick horse, and he saw a strange figure gliding about the house, and it seemed to vanish in

at one of the windows of the great library, but when he got there, the window was locked and barred. And he felt all in a creep, he said, but he couldn't be comfortable without trying to find out something, and he went round the house, and kept hearing footsteps up and down and here and there, as though somebody was dodging him about the old wing, but he could find nothing and see nothing, and at last he went to bed all of a shiver.'

'It must have been his fancy,' said Lenore, shivering a little herself, in spite of her words, for Annie's face was full of awe.

'Nay, mem, nay, it was no his fancy,' returned the girl quickly, 'for there were strange footsteps in the snow next morning. John went out to look, and found his own and some others—a smaller foot—maybe a big woman's or a small man's, he couldn't rightly tell, but someone had been there.'

'I do not think a ghost could leave footmarks, Annie,' said Lenore with a faint smile. 'Perhaps it was Campbell; you know she does sometimes take a turn in the park at night, when she has been much shut up during the day. Did John see what the figure was like?'

'It was all wrapped up in a mantle; he could not see it well; but it was too late at night for Mrs. Campbell.'

'Has anything been said to Campbell or to Mrs. Boghey about it?'

'Nay, mem, there is not one of us dares say a word. Mr. Dyson he says there have been strange noises heard in the old house before now; but never a word is allowed to be breathed about them. He says the mistress cannot bear it. He says she and Mrs. Campbell try hard to find out what it is, but he does not think they ever do.'

Lenore shivered a little in spite of herself. Was there in truth some strange mystery going on in this house, unknown and unexplained even to those who lived in its very midst? Was it on this account that she had been sent away so suddenly and so curiously, and that her rooms had now been changed to quite a different part of the house?

Dyson, the butler, was an old and faithful servant, and, although not in the confidence of his mistress like Campbell, knew pretty well all that went on in the house.

'How does Dyson know that they know nothing, and cannot find it out?' asked Lenore, feeling that she must learn something more about this strange story she had heard.

'Because they have both grown so pale, and anxious, and changed. And then at night they go about and look, and try to find out what it is.'

'How do you know?

'We have seen them. Mary and I got up one night. We could not sleep, and we kept fancying we heard noises, and we crept down without a light, and when we got down to the corridor we saw my lady and Campbell coming out of one of the rooms beyond yours, with a lamp in their hands; and oh, mem, they did look dreadful, so white and scared! They were in their dressing-gowns, as though they had been roused up by the noises. Mr. Dyson has seen them before doing the same thing. Poor dears!' concluded Annie, with her eyes full of tears, 'we all know that something dreadful did happen, but they know what it was, and when these strange sounds come, it seems as if they can get no rest. Oh, dear! I wish people could rest in their graves, even when they have come to a bad end.'

'Hush, Annie,' said Lenore, 'we do not understand these things; but most likely there is some simple explanation of all you have told me. Is there anyone in the neighbourhood who has a grudge against Mrs. Boghey, and would be likely to play a trick upon her? Or is there any smuggling along the coast?'

Annie shook her head, and Lenore soon found that she had nothing fresh to impart, though she was willing enough to dilate at length upon the

various strange sounds and fleeting visions which had been seen or heard. Lenore took her tea in thoughtful silence, and then Campbell came in to say that her mistress would like to see her.

Annie had not exaggerated the case when she had said how much both were changed. Lenore was quite shocked to see how many lines of care and sorrow, and anxiety, a fortnight had been able to trace upon their faces.

Mrs. Boghey held Lenore closely in her arms and murmured endearing words over her. For a moment all the hard sternness seemed to vanish, and the girl felt the warm tears drop slowly upon her head one by one.

Then the close clasp was relaxed, and Mrs. Boghey put her gently back, so that she could look into her face, and asked :

'Are you glad to come back to me, Lenore ?'

'Very, very glad.'

'This dull life does not weary you ?

'Oh, no !'

'I believe you, my child ; I trust you. But you shall read these letters. You shall not remain in ignorance of what your friends say of us.'

She gave Lenore two hurried notes from Mrs. Money, full of hints about her young guest ; how sadly she had been feeling the life at Auckness, how it had weighed upon her spirits and depressed her, and

how unfit a position it was for a young girl to occupy. Without actually saying so much, she implied that Lenore's real wish was to throw up her irksome situation and return to England ; and Mrs. Boghey was warned in ambiguous, mysterious terms against making the mistake of having her back. An impression was left upon the mind of the reader that Lenore was not to be trusted, and yet it would be almost impossible to say how it had been conveyed.

Lenore laid down the letters, and raised her clear, sweet eyes to Mrs. Boghey's face. No words were spoken between them.

'Burn those papers, Lenore, and come and sit beside me, and tell me about your visit.'

Lenore obeyed, and talked on in a quiet way which seemed to soothe Mrs. Boghey. Some of the sharp lines of care smoothed themselves from the white brow, and the strained expression relaxed somewhat ; yet there seemed a very heavy load lying upon the troubled spirit, a more dark and leaden cloud of sorrow than the girl had ever seen before.

'Mrs. Boghey,' she said presently, 'I know that you are in anxiety and trouble ; is there nothing I can do to help you ?'

'Nothing, my child, nothing. Only pray for me. I cannot pray myself.'

'I always do that,' said Lenore gently; 'but pray for yourself too; it will be your greatest help.'

'I cannot. I know not what I would ask. I know not what I wish.'

'Pray "Thy will be done," and then there will be no need for more.'

Mrs. Boghey was silent, but pressed Lenore's hand tenderly.

'Will this cloud soon pass?' asked the girl by-and-by, looking up half timidly.

'I cannot tell. I know not what to hope, or wish, or say. I can only wait and watch. "The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me," Lenore.'

'I think,' said Lenore quietly, 'that God always knows whom He may afflict, who they are that will come out purified from the furnace of sorrow.'

Little more was said that night. Mrs. Boghey gave no confidence to Lenore upon the subject of the trouble that was weighing her down. No allusion was made which could explain any of the mysterious reports afloat in the house.

Only, when Lenore said good-night to Mrs. Boghey, she asked with a smile:

'When may I come back to my old rooms?'

Mrs. Boghey looked keenly at her.

'Do you not like the new ones?'

'I like the old better. I was fond of the sea-view and the wildness of everything.'

'You shall come back in time, Lenore,' answered Mrs. Boghey gravely, 'but, trust me, you are better where you are for the present. And do not, if you can help it, let your dog be running backwards and forwards to those rooms.'

'Then there is something strange going on there,' said Lenore with a slight shiver, 'and they are afraid for me as well as for themselves.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN APPARITION.

TWO or three days passed quietly away, and Lenore began to feel as though she had never left the silent household of which she was so important a member. She resumed her customary occupations, and tried to feel that all was as usual in the house; but, do as she would, she could not rid herself of the sense of mystery which seemed to pervade the whole place, and to make itself felt in every corner.

The servants went about with awed faces, and avoided the old wing entirely, and never seemed to like being alone in any part of the house. Annie's eyes would look big and startled, and she would come stealing into Lenore's room in the twilight, to tell her some real or fancied tale of strange sounds or ghostly visions which had been seen or heard by some of the inmates of the house.

Lenore did all she could to quiet and reassure the girl; but the conviction that something odd

was going on around them made argument a little difficult, and poor Annie always ended up with the same doleful conclusion, 'that it was ill living in a haunted house.'

Col's restlessness and suspicion convinced Lenore more than anything else that something was amiss. He seldom slept quietly at night, but was continually starting up with a growl or a short, sharp bark, and would scratch at the door to be let out, as though he heard some intruder walking about the house.

Lenore could never be sure that she heard anything herself, although she not unfrequently fancied there were stealthy sounds proceeding from the wing in which her old rooms were situated. She often had a great wish to explore and try to find out for herself some cause for these mysterious sounds, but she was deterred from so doing by a conviction that Mrs. Boghey would not wish it. Why this should be so, she could not explain even to herself, but her instinct told her that it would be a mistake to make any active search herself.

She kept Col away as much as she could from his old quarters; but she felt sure, by the sudden rushes he often made down the long, dim corridor, and by his reluctance to come back, that he was excited by something he heard or scented there.

Sometimes the girl felt inclined to speak to

Mrs. Boghey upon the subject herself, but she never could summon quite sufficient resolution to do it. If she had really heard or seen something distinctly strange, she might do so; but so long as it was only vague rumour and sounds, of which rats might be an ample explanation, she felt it would be better to avoid the subject.

Mrs. Boghey was very gentle and tender with Lenore, and seemed to cling to her in her silent, undemonstrative way. She spoke very little, and always seemed abstracted and very mournful; but she liked the girl to sit beside her and read to her and talk to her, and the weary lines of anxiety and care would smooth themselves gradually away, and a softer look would steal into the hollow eyes, which always seemed to be full of a horror as of great dread and darkness.

She never spoke now in the calm, peaceful way which she had done before Christmas time. Sometimes she seemed full of haunting fear and restless dread, sometimes of dark despair which nothing seemed able to lighten; yet she would bid Lenore come to her and read, and speak of comfort and peace, even if she could grasp neither, and the girl was never weary of doing this.

It was late one night when Lenore left her room. Col was sitting upon the mat outside, waiting for her. She was very full of thought,

and turned abstractedly towards the long dark corridor where her old rooms had been situated.

The passage was quite dark, but, through the large, dim, ivy-grown window at the end a few faint moonbeams came struggling in. Suddenly Col gave a low, fierce growl, and darted forward at full speed. Lenore woke out of her reverie with a quick start, and looked fearfully out into the darkness.

'Col! Col! come back!' she cried under her breath.

She could see nothing in the black darkness before her; she did not know whether the dog had heard her call or not. She was about to repeat it, when she saw a sight which arrested her voice, and sent the blood ebbing away from her face, until she was white to the lips. A dark, muffled figure was crossing the end of the corridor with a gliding movement, and without the least noise. She saw it outlined for a moment distinctly against the moonlit window, and then it vanished into the blackness beyond.

Lenore's resolution was soon taken. In a low tone she called the dog, who slowly returned to her, bristling all over with restless excitement. Taking him by the collar, she walked swiftly and firmly down the corridor towards the window. For one moment she fancied there was a gleam of light



streaming from under one of the doors ; but, if so, it was immediately extinguished, and she could not be certain that she had not been deceived by fancy.

She walked boldly up to the door and knocked. It was one of those doors that were always locked, and, although she tried the handle, she knew beforehand that it would not yield. So she knocked and listened, and knocked again. And then she felt almost certain that a cautious footstep crossed the floor, and that someone was standing listening on the inside of the door, as she was doing on the outside.

Her heart beat fast. Col whined and struggled under her hand ; but she held him fast. In a low voice she asked, 'Is anybody there ?' but there was no answer. She waited and listened, but there was nothing more to be heard, and the silence grew awful in its intensity. Then she turned and walked quietly and quickly back to her own room.

She sat down beside her fire in a troubled bewildered mood, not knowing what to think, almost ready to doubt the evidence of her own senses. She felt unable to sleep, and paced up and down in a restless way, wondering if she ought to make any further attempts to solve the mystery and satisfy her own curiosity, or whether she had better take no notice and ask no questions.

'I wonder if it could have been my fancy—but then Col was so excited. I should like to know if anyone is there. If so, Mrs. Boghey ought to know. What can it all mean? I think by-and-by I will go again, and see if anything is really going on. It is very strange. I wish I could tell what it was. It cannot really be anything supernatural. Col has not the least fear.'

Later on Lenore made a second expedition down the dark, ghostly passage. She was alone now, and her heart beat quickly as she noiselessly traversed the long, matted gallery. She paused suddenly with a start, for she heard a low sound, as of voices, proceeding from the room at whose door she had lately knocked, and before many seconds had passed, there came the sound of a hollow cough, sepulchral enough to send a light shiver through the girl's frame.

She stood as if rooted to the spot, and then, with a quick instinct of terror, which almost unnerved her, she slipped into the dark recess of her old doorway, for the door at the end of the passage opened slowly, and Mrs. Boghey and Campbell came out, the latter carrying a small hand-lamp.

The utter misery and hopelessness of Mrs. Boghey's face and its deathly paleness smote Lenore to the heart. Campbell looked white and careworn to the last degree. Both faces spoke of

such misery and pain that it was most melancholy even to look upon them.

Lenore shrank yet more closely into her recess as the two passed by, and the girl heard them say one to another as they passed:

'What shall we do? What can be done? This is too dreadful!'

When they had passed by without seeing her, Lenore retired quietly, and with a weary feeling at heart, into her own rooms, there to ponder and to think.

'Is it, as Dyson says, that they are looking for some clue to the mystery, or what can it be that takes them there? I wish I could know something. But I shall have to speak to Mrs. Boghey now. It would not be honourable to keep silence.'

The next evening, when Mrs. Boghey and she were sitting together, Lenore took courage to begin upon the subject so near to her heart.

'Mrs. Boghey,' she said quietly, 'I want to ask you a question, if I may.'

'I believe I understand what you mean without your asking,' returned Mrs. Boghey calmly; 'you have been trying to find out the mystery of the east wing.'

Lenore looked up quickly.

'Not exactly that.'

'You were there last night—once, if not twice. Something must have taken you there.'

Mrs. Boghey spoke quietly, and without any severity of manner, yet Lenore felt that what she had done had not been approved.

She explained what had taken her there, and told what she had seen and heard. Mrs. Boghey listened attentively, making from time to time a gesture of surprise or assent.

When the narrative was finished, both sat silent awhile, as if thinking deeply. Lenore wondered if any explanation would be vouchsafed her, and her heart beat rather fast.

'It is very strange, Lenore, is it not?' said Mrs. Boghey at last.

'To me it is,' answered Lenore. 'I have wanted so much to speak of it; but I have not liked to do so. I was afraid you might not wish it.'

'You knew something, then, before last night?'

'Only what the servants said.'

'What do they say?'

'Not very much; only that they hear sounds and think they see apparitions. They are very nervous and superstitious. I believe they are convinced that the house is haunted.'

Mrs. Boghey made no reply at first; then she said slowly and impressively:

'Lenore, you may say that I also am nervous and superstitious, for *I* believe that this house is haunted.'

Lenore looked wonderingly into the dark, troubled face, that seemed full of a deeply-seated awe.

'Yes, Lenore; now that you know so much, you shall know all—at least, all that I know; it is not much. I think a curse rests upon this house, upon our race. From time to time these awful visitations come upon us—the house seems alive with mysterious sounds, flitting figures are seen moving in the east wing, and an awful sense of oppression seems to fill the place. How and whence these visitations come I cannot tell. Generally it is during the winter months—sometimes years go by without one—but again the terrible visitor darkens the house, and no peace of mind can I know, night or day, until the cloud is taken away. It vanishes in the same silent, mysterious way as it comes, and I try and forget that we are under a curse; but as sure as a little peace of mind comes to me, again this awful reminder comes, to disperse all thoughts of hope and rest.'

Slowly and very mournfully was this strange revelation made, and Lenore looked with dilated eyes into the white, set face.

'This is the reason I sent you away, Lenore,

when the ghostly shadow fastened itself upon us again. I hoped it might quickly pass—I would not have you frightened. I sent you away, but it was useless; the shadow still rested, and I felt to need you the more. I removed you more away from sight or sound, but even that was useless; you have found out already the heavy curse that rests upon us.'

'But what is it?' questioned Lenore breathlessly; 'surely you know something. What is it? What is it like? Is it some figure? Is there nothing? I am sure I saw a figure of some kind?'

'Yes, some impalpable, ghostly presence there certainly is. It haunts those rooms which I can never approach without a shudder; but it never reveals itself. Flesh or spirit, angel or fiend, it eludes all pursuit. More than you have seen no one has seen, nor has more been heard than you have heard.'

'And you know no more than that?' said the girl under her breath. 'Have you never found out more?'

'Never,' answered Mrs. Boghey with steady, mournful emphasis. 'We have tried everything, Campbell and I. We have left no stone unturned to discover whence and what is this awful visitor, and the meaning of its haunting presence; but we

know no whit more now than at the first. The mystery grows more inscrutable year by year.'

'I wish I could help you.'

Mrs. Boghey lifted her hand with a quiet gesture of authority.

'Lenore—my child—I ask you, I bid you not to try. Whatever the secret is, it is too sad—too awful a one to be confronted by your innocence and youth. I fear but too truly, if ever the clue is found out, that it will lie in some wild, wicked act of my dead husband or my dead son. Lenore, no hand but mine must unravel this mystery, no eye but mine look upon the page upon which so dark a history has been traced. Trust me that this is right. I, and I only, must solve this dark mystery; but when, Lenore, it is so solved, you shall know the truth, if I may confide it to any living soul. Be content with this, and do not seek to find out more, for I fear there is danger in such a quest.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

A VISITOR.

AFTER this strange conversation between Lenore and Mrs Boghey, life went on quietly at Auckness, and the girl tried to forget that any dark cloud hung over the place. It was not easy to do this, for day by day Mrs. Boghey grew more wan and white and desolate, her eyes more hollow and more darkly lined, her face more shrunken and wasted. Campbell seemed to suffer almost as much as her mistress, and looked equally worn and ill, and Lenore pondered in vain as to the cause which could produce such a result. But no amount of pondering seemed to clear up the mystery which darkened over them each day.

The weather had improved somewhat of late. The snow had melted, and the girl was able to resume her horse exercise. This was in itself a pleasure, and Lenore rode out for several hours each day; but nothing could quite bring back the elasticity to her spirits, for the sense of conceal-

ment, mystery, and sorrow which surrounded her had damped them more than a little.

She began to think with a tender regret of Cottesmere Farm and the old, happy life there. She wanted to be with Dora, to comfort and strengthen her in this season of trial, of which she alone was the confidant. She had no thoughts of quitting Auckness; Mrs. Boghey was still her first care and her first object; but the shadow which rested upon her cast a chill upon the girl's spirit, and made the old, sweet confidences almost impossible.

She had returned one day from a long ride, and the twilight was just drawing on as she mounted to her own room. Her thoughts had been with those in the old home, and a little home-sickness had stolen into her heart. She reached her room and entered it abstractedly, but then started violently, for the figure of a man stood outlined against the window, and advanced with one long stride towards her.

'Lenore!'

She looked up quickly at the sound of a long unheard, and yet familiar, voice.

'Terence!'

'Lenore!' he cried again, with a glad, loving tone of welcome. 'My Lenore! Oh, my darling, how I have wanted you!'

He drew her towards him and kissed her brow and lips. She did not resist. It was such joy to her to hear some familiar voice, to see one of the dear faces from the old home. It seemed like a soft wind, laden with sweetness, this breath from the world without. Smiles and tears struggled for mastery in her voice.

'Oh, Terence!' she said, 'oh, Terence, how did you come? Oh, this is such a surprise!'

'I came because I could not keep away. I came because I felt I must. Ah, Lenore! you do not know how I have wanted you, how I have missed you through all these long, weary months!'

She smiled gratefully. It was very sweet to feel that she had been so missed—that the love she had almost doubted, had stood the test of absence, and had but deepened with time. She looked up at Terence, and read in his beautiful face only devotion and tender love.

He drew her towards the couch, and they sat down, he still holding her hands in his.

'Let me look at you, Lenore. The light is almost gone, but I can see you still. I think you have grown pale and thin. I do not think this lonely life suits you. I think I shall have to come and take you away. I cannot let you pine away up here, with nobody to take care of you. I shall have to take law into my own hands.'

His tone was full of a tender authority, which the girl felt no disposition to resent. It was a pleasure to feel that her welfare was dear to those at home; and even if Terence meant more than this, had he not a right?

'I am quite well and quite happy,' she answered, smiling, 'but it is good to see a home face again. I am glad you have come, Terence. It is very good of you. It is such a journey.'

'If it had been twice as long, I would have come. I made up my mind to that, as soon as I heard you were not coming back for Christmas. I only waited for my leave, and then I lost no time. I was on the rail long before daybreak this morning, for I felt too impatient to wait longer.'

'I am glad you have come, Terence,' said Lenore again. 'I will ring for tea. You must be hungry and thirsty after your journey. We will have a cosy time together, and you shall tell me all the news; but I had better see Mrs. Boghey first, and tell her that you are here.'

'You need not trouble, Lenore. I have seen her myself. What an awful-looking woman she is!'

'You have seen her?'

'Yes, I had a good long talk with her. She has made me welcome to stay as long as I can, and she seems glad that you will have a

companion. I suppose she is a little off the hook, isn't she, Lenore?—a tile loose somewhere? She was most kind in all she said, but her face, her manner, were something quite too awful. What can have made her so?'

'I believe she has had a great deal of trouble to bear,' answered Lenore, 'but there is nothing odd about her. She is very good to me, and I am very, very fond of her.'

'She seems very fond of you.'

'I believe she is, but she is not demonstrative. I think we understand one another.'

'She calls you a ministering angel—a pretty strong expression for an undemonstrative woman.'

Lenore smiled, sighing at the same time.

'You mean to stay here so long as she wishes?' asked Terence.

'I believe I shall stay so long as I can be any comfort to her.'

'And that will be till the end of her life.'

'Very likely it will. Sometimes, Terence, I think she cannot live long.'

They sat together in the deepening twilight, silent and thoughtful. Then Terence drew a long breath like a sigh, and said:

'Well, Lenore, if it must be so, it must. It may be your duty to remain, and help and comfort her, as you say. If she has had trouble to bear already,

I will not be the one to add to it by trying to take you away. It is weary work without you—waiting, and never seeing you; but that is better than feeling I have selfishly stood in the way of another's happiness.'

Terence spoke with some feeling, and Lenore pressed his hand in token of gratitude and assent. She was grateful to him for the sympathy he showed towards Mrs. Boghey, and she did not, in her present mood, resent the implied authority he assumed over her.

'I am glad you feel so, Terence; I hope they all feel the same,' said Lenore. 'I know my duty lies here, yet I should not like them to think that I had needlessly deserted them. But tell me how they all are. I am hungry for home-news. Letters are so unsatisfactory; they tell so little. And, oh, Terence, I am so glad you are come to stay a little while. I almost wonder Mrs. Boghey made you so welcome. There is no man in our household; and, after all, our cousinship is only nominal.'

Terence laughed in his low, soft way, and gently caressed the hand he held.

'It was not as your cousin that I introduced myself, Lenore, but as your affianced husband.'

She gave a little start, and the colour swept over her face. He drew her closer to himself.

'Oh, Terence,' she said softly, 'but that was hardly true, you know.'

'You can make it true, Lenore,' he said, bending his head lower over her, and speaking in a more firm and manly way than was usual with him. 'Listen to me, Lenore, and let us settle this matter one way or another, at once and for all. I love you—you know I love you, and we are half pledged already to one another. I find that a half pledge is not enough. I thought it would satisfy me; but it does not. I crave for more love, more certainty; I cannot rid myself of the haunting fear that I may lose you. Hear me, Lenore. I would not have you sacrifice yourself for me; if you cannot marry me, let us part, and I will try to live it down; but if you have some love for me, if you can trust your future to me, if you can give me the assurance for which I crave, the pledge I have asked before—then I can leave you a happier and better man; and I will wait patiently until your labour of love is ended, before I claim you for my own. But let me have an answer, Lenore; let us go on no longer in this uncertain way. Oh, my darling, can you not give me the love I ask? You shall never repent your promise, if once you plight your troth to me.'

Terence spoke with less of impulse and with more of manly, simple straightforwardness than in

old days, and Lenore's heart was touched. What could she say? What should she say? After the half-promise she had made, could she draw back and take from him all that once she had granted, and send him hopeless away? Might not this soul be given to her, if she would but accept the charge? If a life's destiny lay in her hands, could it be right to cast the responsibility lightly away? She knew she was by far the stronger of the two, and that she would be able to lead and guide him. In old days this consciousness of superior strength had made her feel a shrinking from and distrust of Terence; but just now, when he had come upon her in her loneliness and home-sickness, and had cheered her by his tenderness and comforted her by his sympathy, all those feelings had passed, and the love she bore to all the race who had been her friends and benefactors from childhood was strong upon her, and the prevailing feeling in her heart was loving gratitude.

There was a long pause after Terence's appeal, whilst the girl revolved many things in her mind. Then she spoke slowly and gently.

'Terence,' she said, 'you must listen to me now, and hear what I have to say, and then you yourself shall decide your own fate and mine. I have very high and holy views of the depth and infinity of love which a wife should give her husband.

Perhaps my standard is too high, perhaps a lesser love may be enough for happiness—I cannot tell how that may be ; I can only tell you what I feel. I believe I have an infinite, boundless love to give ; but, Terence, I cannot give *that* love to you. Why these things are, and how we know them, I cannot tell ; all I can say is just that—the best and purest love in my heart can never be yours. I can love you, Terence, and I do love you. I think I could love you more than I do already, but there will always be a limit ; my whole heart and soul can never be yours. I do not think any such reservation should exist between husband and wife ; to me there would always be a flaw in that most holy bond. But I do not want to think only of myself. I believe our lives were given us to live as much for others as for ourselves. Terence, I am ready to live mine for you, if you are convinced that it would be for your welfare and happiness, here and hereafter. Leave me to my duties here so long as they shall last, be it months or years, and after that time, if you wish it, I will be your wife. There, I have told you all ; it is for you to decide.'

'I have decided,' he answered tenderly, and folded her in his arms.

And so Lenore's choice was made and her fate decided. She had elected to make this sacrifice of her own happiness for Terence's, if he persisted in

his wish to marry her, and now the decision was made, and there was no drawing back to be thought of. Yet Lenore was in no wise unhappy; she did not feel as though the sacrifice had been a hard one. Terence was more loveable in her eyes to-day than ever he had been before; and her own unselfish nature enabled her to share in the happiness she had bestowed upon him. She was still very young, not yet three-and-twenty, and unable, with all the thoughtfulness and womanliness of her character, to estimate the full meaning of the words 'unequally yoked.' The glow of happiness which an act of self-sacrifice and devotion always brings with it, was still upon her, and there was no place as yet in her heart for misgiving or regret.

It was a happy evening that those two spent together. Annie brought in the tea, and looked smilingly at them as she waited upon them, and Mrs. Boghey did not appear at dinner, so that there was no sense of restraint upon their talk. Terence was very tender and gentle, and watched Lenore about, with eyes that shone with loving pride and happiness. The girl felt very happy too. It was so strange, in this lonely house, to be cared for and caressed, so pleasant to see a familiar face, and so delightful to talk over old times and to hear all the news from Cottesmere.

Since hearing the sad history of Alan Boghey's

life and death, Lenore had been filled with very grave thoughts of such responsibilities as are imposed on mankind by the weaknesses of their fellow-men. Suppose that Terence, loving, weak, well-meaning Terence, should fall as Alan Boghey had done? Would she ever be able to forgive herself, had she denied him the help he had asked? But all doubt was over now. She had elected to follow out what seemed to her to be the path of duty. She was Terence Egremont's affianced wife, and already the love she had always borne him, to a small degree, had begun to grow more deep and strong.

When she went to say good-night to Mrs. Boghey, her hands were held in a loving clasp, and a deep, searching look was bent upon her.

'You are not going to leave me, Lenore?'

'Never so long as you need me.'

'You promise me that, child?'

'I promise.'

The set face relaxed a little, and Mrs. Boghey smiled in her dreamy, far-off way.

'Are you happy to-night, Lenore?'

'Yes.'

'You are glad he has come to see you?'

'Yes.'

'And some day you are to be his wife?'

'We are engaged to be married.'

'I shall not live to see that day,' said Mrs. Boghey slowly and sadly. 'Yet I think I can see it now. Oh, my child, if he will be as good a husband as you will be a wife, I need not fear for your future.'

Lenore made no answer.

'Child,' continued Mrs. Boghey hoarsely, 'I married for a handsome face and winning manner, and I was a miserable woman. You are not going to do the same?'

'Oh, no!' answered Lenore earnestly.

'Lenore, do not mistake the glamour of a youthful love for the real, holy, sacred feeling which alone is worthy the name. Only one thing can make a married life tolerable, and that is perfect love. God bless you, my child! May you be as happy as you deserve to be!'

Terence stayed a week at Auckness, and saw Mrs. Boghey several times, and sometimes alone. She questioned him as to his worldly prospects, and finding them hazy, she once dropped a hint that Lenore would not be forgotten in her will. 'Spare her to me,' said the lonely woman, 'so long as I live; she shall come to you with a daughter's portion.'

Terence promised he would never take Lenore away; and when he left, the parting was a loving one, and he left behind him many tender memories. Mrs. Boghey parted from him with gentle words of

motherly counsel; Lenore with the kiss of more than a sisterly affection. Her word was pledged, and she accepted the position she had taken up, with the earnestness characteristic of her.

Some few days later Mrs. Boghey told the girl that she intended to leave her property to her; but Lenore gently and firmly put away from her the proffered boon.

She quietly told her patroness that it seemed almost unjust in her eyes to leave property to strangers, when there were relatives to inherit; and in her simple way she explained that neither she nor Terence looked for a life of ease or wealth, and that work would certainly be the best discipline for him as well as for her.

Mrs. Boghey listened with a quiet, intent look stamped upon her face. At the close of the interview she said:

'You have been more than a daughter to me, Lenore; I meant to have left you a daughter's portion, but perhaps you have judged wisely and well. But I ought not to, and cannot, forget you. Five thousand pounds will pass into your hands at my death, and you may write and inform Terence Egremont of this fact.'

And with a gesture of the hand Lenore was dismissed, before she had time to utter words either of remonstrance or of gratitude.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

HARDLY had Terence taken his departure, before the dark cloud which rested upon the household at Auckness seemed to descend yet lower, and to wrap the whole household in its impalpable folds.

It was as though the ghostly visitor had been alarmed by the presence of an outsider in the house, and had withdrawn more into itself so long as he remained, and that, as soon as he went, it reappeared, prepared to reassert itself more firmly than before.

Night by night Lenore was disturbed by Col's restlessness and perturbation, and yet she felt a protection in his presence, and would not have liked to be without him in her room.

After Mrs. Boghey's prohibition she could no longer take any steps to try and solve the mystery, and yet it was very hard to remain inactive and incurious, whilst all manner of strange, inexplicable sounds troubled her rest night by night.

Removed as she now was to some distance

from the east wing, yet in the silent hours of the night, when the deep stillness around her magnified any sound to more than its wonted significance, she heard distinctly the sound of muffled footsteps passing to and fro, heard low-toned voices in seeming deep discussion, and many other noises for which no theory could account.

However vigorously Mrs. Boghey and Campbell might be prosecuting their search after the invisible enemy, they could hardly do so night by night and almost all night long; yet these voices and footsteps were to be heard so continuously that it became impossible for Lenore to believe that they belonged to them.

Annie, too, began to look more pale and frightened than ever. She told of 'corpse candles' that had been seen in the churchyard, of strange dreams which had visited an old woman near (who was supposed to be a kind of witch and to have an insight into the future), which she attributed to some misfortune threatening the Boghey family. Another maid—an Irish girl—declared that she had heard the sobbing and wailing of a 'banshee,' which always meant death; and stories were told by the fisher-folk of lights gleaming late at night from the windows in the east wing, and of smoke curling continuously from one chimney, which could not be seen except from the sea-side of the house.

Campbell was hardly seen by Lenore from day's end to day's end, and Mrs. Boghey's room began to have the neglected look of a place not properly attended to; and, at last, when Mrs. Boghey's strength seemed ready to give way altogether, and her looks frightened even a most casual observer, there came a night which Lenore never forgot so long as she lived—a night in which the whole dark mystery was solved.

She had gone to bed very much oppressed and disquieted. Mrs. Boghey had been extremely unwell throughout the day, and yet Campbell had hardly been near her. Lenore had taken entire charge. Campbell was in her own room resting, Mrs. Boghey kept repeating. She had had a disturbed night, and she had been ordered by her mistress to lie down and take some sleep. But when something Mrs. Boghey wanted could not be found, and Lenore, unknown to her, went up to Campbell's room to ask her for it, she was not there, nor could she be found anywhere in the house. More than once Mrs. Boghey had vanished in the same mysterious way, and, when Lenore had returned from some errand on which she had been sent, was nowhere to be found. Each time she came back looking as white as a sheet, and said she had been in one of the rooms in which Lenore had looked in vain for her.

The girl had gone to bed in a very disturbed and anxious state, and soon found it impossible to sleep. The footsteps and voices were more continuous than ever; there even seemed a perpetual opening and shutting of doors in the east wing; and the customary caution and quietness was laid aside, as it appeared, for never had the sounds been so distinct before.

At last she could stand it no longer. She rose and dressed herself, and, stirring up the fire, sat down and tried to read her Bible, and not to listen to the sounds from without.

She grew more calm by degrees, and the house became more quiet; but just as she was thinking of returning to bed, she was startled by the sound of stealthy footsteps approaching her door.

Her heart beat more fast than was its wont as the steps halted just outside. Then came a low, distinct knock.

'Who is there?'

'It is I—Campbell,' said the woman's voice outside, with a strange, fearful cadence in it. 'Miss Annandale, can I speak to you?'

Lenore rose and opened her door. Campbell stood without, holding a light in her hand. Her face was colourless as marble, and its expression full of pain and fear and despair.

'Campbell!' cried Lenore, with a sudden start,

and then was silent, not knowing what to say more.

'You are up and dressed, ma'am?' said the woman in her usual quiet way.

'Yes, I could not sleep. I cannot help hearing all these strange sounds. I know that all cannot be well. Oh, Campbell, Campbell! what does it all mean?'

The woman put down her lamp suddenly, cast her apron over her head, and broke into hard, tearless sobs, most painful to hear.

Lenore watched and listened with a beating heart.

'Campbell,' she said, 'oh, what is it? Can I not do something? Indeed, indeed, you may trust me. What is it you want of me?'

With a great effort Campbell mastered her emotion and recovered the power of speech.

'My lady has bid me fetch you. Will you come to her? Miss Annandale, will you be afraid to look upon death?'

'I think not,' she answered, and looking quickly at Campbell with a pale face and dilated eyes asked, 'Is she worse?—dying?'

'No, no, not that. She will be the next; but she will live to drink the last dregs of sorrow. Come to her, ma'am. She must tell you, not I.'

Again came those fearful, long-drawn breaths

so painful to listen to; but Campbell did not give way. She took up her lamp and looked at Lenore.

'I will follow you,' said the girl, and she followed like one in a dream.

It was not to Mrs. Boghey's room that Campbell led the way. With a start, half of dismay and half of satisfaction, Lenore saw that it was the east wing that was her destination.

Past the doors of her old rooms they went, and Campbell did not pause until she reached the last door at the end of that dim corridor—the door which, ever since she had been at the house, had been kept strictly locked.

It was not locked now, for Campbell opened it softly, and a stream of subdued light stole out into the dark corridor. Lenore's heart beat fast as the maid turned and signed to her to enter; but she showed no outward sign of fear, and quietly followed her into the room.

It was a large apartment, dimly lighted by carefully shaded lamps. A high folding screen shut off a great part of the room. What Lenore saw was nothing very remarkable: a round table, upon which stood some bottles and glasses, a few books, and some other trifles, a couch, against the end of which Mrs. Boghey seemed to lean somewhat heavily as she stood, and a few of the high-backed chairs common to all the rooms in that house.

The windows were closely shuttered and the curtains drawn, and what struck Lenore more than anything, was the atmosphere, which seemed to her that of a sick-room, pervaded with the odour of drugs, and warm with the equable heat of a carefully regulated temperature. What was hidden from her view by the screen she could not tell; but she fancied she heard the sound of quick, hard breathing.

'You have come, Lenore; it is well,' said Mrs. Boghey, whose mind seemed wrought to such a pitch of tension, that there was no place left for any of the old reserve or distrust. Her voice was low, and her words more rapidly spoken than usual; she looked at Lenore with hollow, hungry eyes, as though she would read her very soul, and see if there was help or comfort to be found with her. 'Are you afraid?'

'Afraid of what?'

'Of death.'

'No; I am not afraid.'

'Is there hope in death, Lenore Annandale? Can the dying make their peace with your God?'

'God answers that question Himself: "Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." It is God's Spirit that says "Come," and "whosoever will" is an invitation without any reservation.'

Lenore felt as one who dreams, though her words came in unwavering tones, which seemed to emphasize their significance. What could be the meaning of this strange summons? and what mystery was about to be unveiled to her at this still hour, betwixt night and day? Was she called to bring God's message of love and peace to some unhappy, dying soul? Who could it be that was dying here, in this deserted room at Auckness?

'Campbell,' said Mrs. Boghey, 'does he sleep? Can he speak and understand?'

Campbell vanished behind the screen; and Mrs. Boghey turned to Lenore, and said in the same repressed way:

'Lenore Annandale, God sent you here to comfort me and keep me from despair. Now do the same office for another—help and comfort my son.'

'Your son?'

'My most wretched, miserable son. Tell me, Lenore Annandale—— Ah! what is that?'

From behind the screen came the sound of a choking, gurgling sigh. Mrs. Boghey's ghastly face grew one degree more ghastly.

'Oh!' she exclaimed, 'it has come at last!' She took Lenore's hand and led her behind the screen. One glance at an almost skeleton form, which lay there upon the bed, showed the girl that

this was indeed the son of the miserable mother, who leaned upon her shoulder, and that death had all but set his seal upon that marble brow.

A tremor ran through Lenore's frame, but it was not fear. Instinctively she knelt by the bedside, and with all the fervour of her own living faith and hope, she commended into the hands of the Everlasting Father the erring, sin-stained soul which was even now taking its flight.

It was all she could do, all that human love could do, and it was done with a calm, steadfast confidence in the eternal mercy of God, through the atoning blood of the Lamb, which could not but bring with it some sense of peace to those two devoted women, who, even as the girl rose from her knees, watched the last, laboured breath drawn by that motionless form.

Lenore stood perfectly still a full minute, and then looked slowly round. Mrs. Boghey and Campbell stood together at the bed's foot, gazing upon the dead face.

'It is over at last,' said Campbell in a low, tearless tone—'over at last.'

Lenore saw Mrs. Boghey turn towards the speaker, heard her gasp out in hard, quick tones, 'Campbell, Campbell—my son—my son!' and then she stole quietly away to her own room, feeling that the faithful two, who had suffered so long and so

terribly together, should be left alone in their grief, in the presence of the silent dead.

It was three days before Lenore saw Mrs. Boghey again; and when at length, in the dimness of an early twilight, she was summoned to the darkened room, she could not but be struck by the change that had passed upon the haggard face.

It looked indeed as if the unhappy mother had not long to wait before following her son.

'Lenore, do you forgive me?' were her first words.

'Forgive what?'

'Forgive me for deceiving you.'

'Did you deceive me?'

'You know that I did. You remember what I told you, when you asked me about the sounds you heard?'

'Yes; did you know then what you know now?'

'I knew everything. I told you falsehood after falsehood on purpose to deceive you.'

Lenore looked perplexed and distressed.

'Do not think I distrusted you, Lenore. I would have told you all if I had dared. But my son's life lay in the balance. One rumour of his presence here would have brought the Graham bloodhounds swooping down upon us—they have been here before now on some trivial suspicion. Once let them hear of strange sights and sounds,

and they would have been here before we knew they were near; and had they found my son, he must surely have been branded as a felon, and bound over to what would have been a life-long imprisonment.' She shuddered strongly. 'Lenore, do you wonder now that I guarded my secret jealously?'

'Indeed, no,' answered the girl earnestly; 'but did you fear me? I would not have betrayed your secret.'

'Would you have lied, Lenore Annandale?' questioned Mrs. Boghey. 'You have seen how I could look even a friend in the face and lie without a sign of shame. Could you have done the same?'

Lenore was silent.

'That is why we could not trust you—we could not trust you to lie. Had these idle servants' tales got wind, we might have had the Grahams down upon us—the avengers of blood who have thirsted for blood, my son's blood, year after year, and have hardly been satisfied by the news of his death. They would have questioned and cross-questioned you without mercy, as they have cross-questioned Campbell and me before. We have lied to them until they have been forced to believe us. Could you have done the same? We talked it over, and decided that you could not. That, and that alone, has been our reason for excluding you from our confidence.'

That was all that Lenore heard from Mrs. Boghey for a long while about her unhappy son and his miserable later life. It seemed as though the subject was one she could not bear to dwell upon, and it was not one which Lenore could introduce unasked.

How the arrangements for the funeral were made Lenore did not know. Very early one dark morning the coffin was carried out by a few fishermen, to the little chapel near to the house, and the service was read over it by the aged clergyman, who had known Mrs. Boghey almost all her life.

There was no plate on the coffin, no name upon the grave. Campbell gave out that the body of a poor smuggler or fisherman had been found in the cellars under the east wing, where he had evidently been living for some days or weeks unsuspected and undetected.

This story gave rise to a good deal of talk, but as it seemed to explain a great deal of the mystery which had seemed to pervade the house, and accounted for many odd noises and sights, it was received readily and firmly believed in, and became a favourite tradition throughout the neighbourhood.

Lenore held her peace, avoiding the subject as far as possible, and only listening to what was

said, without joining in the talk. Some inquest upon the body had, of course, been held, but no evidence had been required from her; and the unsuspecting country folks who had come in an official capacity to Auckness were quite satisfied by Campbell's story, and granted the order for interment without the least idea whose body they were looking upon. It could matter little, now that the unhappy man was dead, Lenore thought, even if the world did know the whole story; but it seemed as if the secret, so jealously guarded during his lifetime, must be guarded to the very end and buried in a nameless grave.

It was from Campbell that Lenore heard at length the end of the mournful story, of which she had been told only the first part.

They were again together in Mrs. Boghey's room at night, sitting over the fire in the dim light after she had fallen asleep. She had been suffering for many days from extreme debility and nervous prostration, and it was as much as the two could do to keep her mind from a perilous tension of excitement.

Now at last the overwrought brain was at rest, the wearied frame reposing peacefully, and the two watchers drew nearer to each other, fearful of disturbing this hardly-earned sleep by any incautious movement or word.

But Mrs. Boghey slept on calmly, and as the slumber deepened, they grew less afraid of interrupting its quiet course.

Campbell was the first to speak, and she did so with a long-drawn breath like a heavy sigh.

'Ah, Miss Annandale, she will be the next to go. She has lived to the very end, as I knew she would; but it has sapped away all the life that is in her. She will never hold up her head again. He died before her eyes, too—died all but in darkness and despair. I had never thought it would be so—never dreamed of that.'

'He is in God's hands now,' said Lenore, 'and God's love is infinite. I think we may have faith in the eternal mercy of the Heavenly Father.'

'Yes, yes. I do try to have faith, but the trial has been a long and weary one. I have thought it all but endless. I am full of thankfulness that at last it has ended, for I have often feared that the strain would be too great, and that one or both would give way, and the ruin of the house be consummated.'

'Campbell,' said Lenore, 'will you tell me all about it? You told me half the story once. Will you finish it now? I know the very end; I think there is no reason why I should not be told what lies between.'

'No, there is none. My lady bid me tell you

all now, if ever you asked the question. She cannot talk of it; it is overmuch for her even to think too much; but it is fair you should hear all, and know why we deceived you, whilst you trusted and helped us. It went against us both to do it, but the secret had to be kept at all costs.'

'I understand about that. Mrs. Boghey told me that part.'

'Were we very wicked, Miss Annandale?' questioned the woman wistfully. 'Is it a great sin to speak an untruth to save a life—two lives, I might say—those of mother and son both? Was it a very bad sin? Can God forgive, who knows all the secrets of our hearts?'

'God can and will forgive all sin that is repented of; you know that, Campbell.'

'Was it very wicked, ma'am? Ought we to have given him up rather than lie? What would you have done?'

'It is hard to say always what one would have done under temptation, and we cannot judge and must not condemn one another; but, Campbell, I always think we should try and do right, and speak the truth bravely, and leave the consequences in God's hands. Then we can ask His blessing and throw ourselves upon His mercy, as we never can do whilst we are breaking His laws.'

Campbell sighed and shook her head.

'I have thought the same myself at times, but we had not faith enough to trust to Him.'

'It is not always easy to do it, but we have only to try, and then we see how foolish our fears are. But your story, Campbell; begin from where you left off once, when the news came of Alan Boghey's death. Was that not true either?'

'It was true enough that the news reached us. He had been killed, they said, in a railway accident in America; and when weeks and months passed away, and we heard no word from him, we made up our minds that the report was true, and that we should see him no more. I was thankful when that assurance came to us, for I thought it would be the beginning of better days for my lady. It seemed as though at last she was able to know something of a peace of mind which formerly had been utterly out of reach.

'And did it not last?'

'Not more than a year—hardly so much. I remember well the night when all my dreams of peace and rest were shattered in a single moment. It was winter time, and quiet, snowy weather bound us in from all the world. My lady had grown more quiet and more calm during those long months of freedom from fear and anxiety. That very evening I had been saying to myself that her dark days were over, and that her old age would not

be rendered miserable, as her life had been, by the wickedness of those nearest and dearest to her, and, even as I was thinking these things to myself, I went up to my room, and started, and almost screamed, for I thought I surely saw a ghost there.'

'He had come back? He was alive?'

'Yes, he had come back—as usual, in trouble and fear, like a hunted creature flying from its pursuers. It was always so with him. He never could keep out of harm's way; he must rush straight into trouble, if ever there was trouble near. He told me his story before he went down to face his unhappy mother. He had been in the railway accident of which we had heard, and had been hurt near to death. He lay months in hospital, never expecting to recover. It was he who had caused the news of his death to be sent to us. As he lay sick, he resolved that, even if his health were restored, he would never come back to us, to be a burden and a disgrace to his mother. She should believe him dead, and should never hear of him more. He recovered. He adhered to his resolve a good while; but, like all his resolutions, it did not bind him long. Again, through his own reckless ways, he found himself an outcast, flying from the pursuit of justice, and he fled here to the place which had sheltered him before in time of need.'

'How did he come? How could he get here

without being seen? I have wondered so often how he managed that.'

'He came by sea. There are caves in the rocks under the east wing, which can only be approached at certain states of the tide, and there is a secret way from one of the caves into the house. I believe nobody but Mr. Alan himself knew the ins and outs of this way of entrance, but by it he has come and gone many a time these past years.'

'But how did he get to the cave?'

'By a boat from some foreign vessel passing near this coast. He understood how to arrange all that, and he could wait his time, and on some calm night would get put across by some ship's boat, and then would make his way to the cave, and so into the house. We knew nothing of his movements, save that he would appear at intervals like a ghost from the dead, and our lives were a burden of terror and anxiety so long as he remained here.'

'How dreadful!'

'Dreadful it was, more dreadful than I can say. Mr. Alan, he always grew rash, and would not use the care we begged about noise and light and many other things; and he would go out at night, and wander about the place, and we had terrible scares that he would be seen, and even as it was strange things were said; and more than once we had the Graham brothers down here, in full cry after him, or

traces of him, when he was actually in the house. I don't believe they ever were convinced of his death. They always seemed so full of suspicion.'

'How dreadful!' said Lenore again, wondering less and less at Mrs. Boghey's changed appearance. 'Why was he allowed to stay?'

'He often would not go. He would not believe in his own danger. We had sad work sometimes to send him away, even when detection stared him in the face. Oh, Miss Annandale, if you had heard some of the scenes between that unhappy man and his more miserable mother, your heart would ache for her, as mine has done.'

Lenore's heart ached already, and her face showed it.

'And this last visit—tell me about it.'

'He had been longer away than usual. We never knew anything of his whereabouts unless he wrote for money, and when he did so, it was always for so large a sum that there was no need to hold any further communication for a long while. Letters were dangerous, and my lady was glad that but few were needed. Well, he had been silent longer than usual. Your presence had done us good, and we had begun to breathe more freely and to take comfort. Do you remember the day when my lady seemed to change, when she would not see you at first? On that morning there had come a

letter from Mr. Alan to say that he was close at hand, and might appear any day. One night soon after, he came, and we were in a terrible fright that you would see him, and either be terrified at the mystery we made of his presence, or else find out the truth. That is why you were sent to Inverbervie, and why your rooms were changed. But my lady missed you sorely when you were gone; we all did that, and she most of all; and right glad were we to have you back, even though our secret was in some little danger.'

'And did he fall ill whilst he was here?'

'He was ill when he came. He looked dreadful from the first; but he would take no care, and would go out at night, and be as careless and reckless as ever. He grew more weak and ill by-and-by, and became much more quiet and tractable—this was whilst Mr. Egremont was here—and then all of a sudden he gave way, and we knew at once that he must die.'

'What did you do? Did you have no doctor?'

'We dared not, and he would not hear of it; besides, no doctor could have saved him. It was the lungs. He had been told not long before, by a doctor, that his days were numbered, and that only extreme care could prolong his life. He had taken none, and he knew from the first that it was "all up with him," as he said. How to nurse him we did

not know. Night and day we had to be with him. He was fretful and exacting, and could not bear to be alone. I took him by night, and relieved my lady by day when I could. It was a dreadful time, made more dreadful by his despair and wickedness. You know the end. It came more suddenly than we had thought, and we sent for you, because our hearts had grown cold and dead with misery, and our comfort had all gone from us. I am glad you came; I am glad you know all, because you have been a friend in need to us, and deserve confidence from us.'

That was the end of the melancholy story of Alan Boghey, as Lenore heard it from Campbell's lips; and after that narration no further allusion was made to his most unhappy life and death. The dead past was left to bury its dead in merciful oblivion.

BOOK V.

IN THE OLD HOME.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DORA'S RETURN.

THE winter months, which had passed so eventfully for Lenore in her far-away northern home, proved peculiarly quiet and uneventful to the inhabitants of Cottesmere Farm.

All incident and excitement seemed to vanish with the sudden disappearance of Gordon Forrester from the neighbourhood; and the manner of his departure gave rise to a good deal of speculation and discussion.

Duff was the only person who was made aware at first hand of what had taken place. He received a few pencilled lines, containing the following information: 'Your sister has refused me. I'm off again, I don't know where—to the devil most likely. Good-bye.'

Duff, however, kept his own counsel and said

nothing of what he had heard ; yet the secret oozed out in some mysterious way, and soon the whole neighbourhood had an inkling as to what had taken place.

Later on they knew how this had been, for Terence came over to the farm in a state of considerable excitement and anger, to know what they could all be thinking of.

Forrester had been met by some of his friends and Terence's fellow-officers on his way abroad, in a very gloomy and irritated state of mind, and he had recklessly spoken of his rejection at Dora's hands, and his consequent determination to leave the country.

'Where is Dora?' was Terence's first question, after he had made known the substance of this information.

'She comes home to-morrow,' answered Philip, who had listened very quietly to his brother's excited talk.

'I hope you will speak seriously to her when she does. Don't spare her. I have no patience with such folly, and vanity, and selfishness!'

Philip lifted his eyebrows.

'What do you mean? What has she done?'

'Haven't I told you? Haven't you taken it in yet? Gone and refused Forrester—the wealthiest man in the county.'

Terence fairly fumed in his indignation. 'She must be mad.'

'She had a perfect right to refuse him. I cannot see on what ground you wish to find fault with her. I respect her for proving that she would not act as some women do, and marry for position, and wealth, and influence.'

'I believe you are mad too!' cried Terence irritably. 'Fancy refusing a position like that! And think what she might have done for the family. I shall never get on unless I can get more influence. The Army is an awful place for a poor man.'

Philip looked at him steadily.

'Surely, Terence, you would not have your sister sell herself to a loveless marriage, in order to advance your prospects in life!'

Terence's patience seemed on the verge of giving way, but he controlled himself by an effort, and laughed in an uneasy way.

'How blind you are, Phil! Dora was head over ears in love with him. She had simply no right to refuse him.'

'I suppose she is the best judge of that.'

'Girls are so stupid!' cried Terence irritably; 'they think nothing is good enough for them. They never know their own minds for two days together. They want to keep fellows dangling

after them weeks and weeks, waiting for an answer. She has made a mistake about Forrester; he will not give her another chance.'

'Terence,' said Philip almost sternly, 'you have no right to speak so of Dora; she has given you no cause to say such things. She is neither vain, nor fickle, nor capricious. I am quite satisfied that whatever she has done has been done thoughtfully and conscientiously, and no one has any right to criticise her for it.'

'She ought to have thought of the family,' persisted Terence gloomily.

'She ought to have done no such thing. If I thought any sister of mine wished to sacrifice herself in that way for the sake of the family, I should do everything in my power to prevent it.'

Terence laughed.

'You are so simple-minded, Phil; there is no making you see anything. Fine dresses and fine horses, and jewels and an establishment, are all that women want to make them happy. If you had lived longer in the world, you would know that as well as I do.'

Philip wheeled suddenly round, and faced Terence with a subdued flash in his eyes which was very seldom seen there.

'Terence, how dare you say a thing like that? You know it is not true. It is one of the cruellest

and most unmanly slanders which your world has allowed to become fashionable, to screen its own folly and wickedness. I never thought to hear my brother use it. Has all the chivalry and reverence for womanhood, for motherhood and sisterhood, left the Egremont family, that you, the cleverest and most favoured of all its members, should sink so low as to insult what we have always held most holy? Terence, I am ashamed of you.'

Terence quailed before Philip's words and look. He tried to laugh and make light of his words, but Philip could not get over the impression produced.

'You to say such a thing, Terence—you, the affianced husband of Lenore!'

Terence looked distinctly sheepish.

'How you do take a fellow up, Phil! Of course I don't mean every casual word I say to be taken *au grand sérieux*. All women are not like Lenore or our mother and sisters. If you saw as much as I did, you would get some of your old-fashioned notions of the perfection of woman knocked out of you.'

'I trust not,' answered Philip gravely. 'New fashions are not always better than old, nor new ideas than older ones. Men used to work and toil for their sisters, and not expect their sisters to push them on in the world by making distasteful

marriages. And if it comes to a question of family help, I might reasonably ask, What have you done yourself, Terence, towards the general welfare?'

'Well, Philip,' said Terence in an aggrieved way, 'you are not often ungenerous or unjust, but I call that speech both.'

'I cannot see why, Terence,' returned Philip quietly. 'I do not wish to be either the one or the other; but you know as well as I do what your share has been in the work done for the family welfare.'

'How could I do anything, situated as I am?' asked Terence indignantly. 'Who could expect it of a man in the Army? What could I have done, I should like to know? Tell me that.'

'You could have been careful and economical, and lived within your means, so as to leave Duff's portion for him. You might and should have done that, Terence.'

So Terence did not get much satisfaction from Philip, and went away discomfited.

On the day following, Dora returned home. That some change had come over her nobody could fail to see. Even the expression of her face had altered, and the old restless, discontented manner had given place to a quiet gentleness, serene and unobtrusive. There was more of sadness in her eyes than before, but yet, in spite of this, it was a far more happy and tranquil face

than ever it had been in past days. And the quiet, contented way in which she settled down to the daily routine of small duties, and the willingness she evinced to take up new ones, and to be helpful to anyone who needed help, made the whole household feel glad of her presence amongst them, and wonder what it could have been that had so changed her.

She busied herself more than ever she had done before in ministering to the wants of the sick and poor, and never now complained of the emptiness or hollowness of the task.

A cold, wet, unhealthy autumn gave her work enough and to spare. There was more sickness than had ever been known before in the place, and all who would work had their hands more than full. Funds for such purposes failed to meet the demand made upon them, and the question arose, What was to be done next?

'Mr. Forrester ought to help, my dear,' said Mrs. Ross to her invaluable assistant one day, as they sat talking of ways and means; 'it is amongst his tenants that the illness is the worst, and he has money and to spare. I can't get my husband to write to him and ask. We have heard some shocking things about him since he went away, and I have been so thankful you did not marry him after all, though it was such a disappointment

at the time. But he ought to help us now, I am sure; and I never did think he could be such a very bad man, though they say he says there is no God; and I don't know what to do, I'm sure.'

Poor little Mrs. Ross shook her head in a bewildered way, and looked helplessly at Dora.

'We want money badly,' said the girl. 'It is not pleasant to have to ask for it, but the sick and poor must not die or suffer needlessly because of that. Either you or I must write, if Mr. Ross will not. I would much rather you did, if you do not mind.'

'Oh, my dear, I could not. I have never been used to business. I should not know what to say. You are so clever, and can say a thing so well. He will give twice as much for your asking. Do, please, write to him at once. His letters get to him through his banker, I know.'

Dora assented quietly, and wrote the short, business-like note without further delay. It was nearly Christmas time before the answer came, and her heart beat fast as she broke the seal. The letter was dated from an hotel in Paris.

'Dear Miss Egremont,—I enclose my cheque for 50*l.* When that is done, there will be more forthcoming, if you will let me know. I am much obliged for the chance given me of benefiting my

own people, whom I may likely enough never see again, as I have no desire to return to Langdale. I suppose I shall be forgotten by all in a short while, yourself included. I am not worth remembering, even by a sister of mercy like yourself. Farewell. God bless you!

'GORDON FORRESTER.'

When the cheque was handed over to Mrs. Ross the tears fairly started to her eyes.

'Well, to be sure! I always did say there was good in him. He must have a kind and generous heart. Fifty pounds! My dear, what an amount of good it will do!'

'He says we may have more when that is done.'

'Well, to be sure! Ah, my dear, you see what your writing has done.'

'I do not think it was that.'

'I do. My dear, is it true that he was very fond of you—that he is staying away because you will not marry him?'

'I do not know why he is staying away—at least, you know what you once said to me, Mrs. Ross, about marrying a man who denied God. Surely you can understand.'

Dora was somewhat agitated—her face was pale, and her eyes tearful. The letter of the morning

had a little upset her. Mrs. Ross kissed her tenderly, half crying herself.

'My dear,' she whispered, 'we can pray to God to change his heart; and when once he is God's soldier and servant, what a noble man he may be!'

CHAPTER XXIX.

RUMOURS.

So Christmas passed quietly away, and the early months of the year; and the only news which reached the Egremont family from without was that of the ratification of the engagement between Terence and Lenore.

Philip's face might have been observed to grow a little more grave, and perhaps a little sad in expression, after this intelligence had been received; but there was nobody in that household who watched him very closely excepting Madeline, and she was the only one there who spoke to him upon the subject.

'I cannot quite understand it, Philip. She certainly never loved him before she left us. She made a half promise for his sake, half against her own will. I never thought she would consent when it came to the point.'

'Did you not? I did. There is something very loveable in Terence, with all his faults. And then his own love was so great. Love begets love,

you know, Madeline, and Lenore was always full of concern for his welfare.'

'Yes, because she saw how much it was to you, Philip,' answered Madeline quietly. 'What was a matter of great moment to you, always became the same to her.'

Philip leaned his head on his hand and said nothing, whilst Madeline continued, rather sadly:

'Terence was very loveable once, Philip, but do you think he always is so now?'

Philip looked up quickly and uneasily.

'What do you mean?'

'I hardly know myself what I mean; but I cannot help feeling that Terence has changed of late. He sometimes seems as affectionate and well-meaning as in old days, but at others I have noticed a something in him which I hardly know how to describe, but which has struck me painfully, and has seemed to jar upon my preconceived ideas about him.'

'I know what you mean,' answered Philip in a low voice.

'You have seen it yourself?'

'I have. I believe I have tried to shut my eyes to it; but that there is some change I can hardly doubt. It almost must be so with a man drifting, as Terence has done, without sail or rudder along the stream of life, with no definite

plan of action, no steady principle, only vague ideals and aspirations which never reach fulfilment. It is a grievous thing, Madeline. I wonder—have I been too weak, too indulgent?'

'We have never been blind to his faults; we always knew his temperament. I do not think harsh treatment would ever have answered with Terence. Besides, he was almost a man before our parents died. We had no real authority over him. We may both have loved him too well to have treated his faults and follies quite as seriously as others would have done; but, Philip, it is not a question of outward influences; what Terence lacks, you and I know but too well. He has never sought for it, never felt the need of it seriously, and now his character is suffering sadly from its absence.'

Philip made a sign of assent.

'"The one thing needful,"' he said, with a sigh; 'how true those words are, Madeline! I am afraid he has not found that.'

Madeline shook her head and made no reply. Presently Philip said, with more hope in his voice:

'But Lenore's example and influence must change him. He has always said so himself.'

'I know he thinks so, and now he has persuaded Lenore to think so; and she has consented at last to sacrifice herself to this theory, and to

undertake his reformation at the cost of her own happiness.'

Philip started.

'Madeline, you surely cannot think that!'

'Perhaps I have said too much, more than I have any warrant for doing. Lenore says she is happy, and I am sure she means it; but I cannot think, from what I know of both, that he can ever make her happy. And, Philip, my own idea, right or wrong, is that, had Lenore not known how much your heart was bound up in Terence and his future, she would never have consented to engage herself to him.'

'Madeline,' said Philip hoarsely, 'do not tempt me to dream again. Lenore is my brother's promised wife; let me learn to love her as a sister. I have given her up to him, and I trust she loves him as he loves her. What I have felt and thought before must be forgotten. It is known to none except ourselves. Do not recall it to my mind, for it is more than I can bear.'

Madeline said no more. She had her own suspicions and her own ideas about Lenore's feelings towards Terence and towards Philip; but her instincts, she knew, might be at fault, and she dared not say too much. The wish might be father to the thought, she felt, and Philip's feelings were too deep to be trifled with.

Days and weeks slipped by, the busy weeks of early spring, and Philip's days were too fully occupied about his farm to leave him much time for solitary thought. He sometimes considered how strange it was that Terence's visits to the old home were now so very few and far between, and wondered how it was he could so seldom contrive to come over and see them; but he heard no disquieting reports of his conduct, and received no appeals for money, so he trusted all was well, and hoped that Terence had developed a love for study, or was working harder than his wont, and so had not the same leisure for going about. After his visit to Scotland, he had been over constantly, and all his talk had been of Lenore, and of all his doings during his visit to Auckness; of her perfections, and of her devotion to the strange, ghastly-looking woman, Mrs. Boghey.

But now all this was changed. He hardly ever came to Cottesmere, and when he did, he spoke seldom or never of Lenore. His manner was preoccupied, sometimes gloomy, sometimes gay, but with a kind of forced gaiety not at all like his customary spontaneous flow of high spirits. A year ago this change would have excited great commiseration and attention; but Terence was not now the observed of all observers, as he once had been when his visits home were few and far between, and

he had been always overflowing with fun and kindly feeling for all.

Seen at close quarters, Terence had proved disappointing. Nobody quite approved of him or his ways. Some were anxious, some were put out, some were inclined, perhaps, to be somewhat scornful, according to temperament; but with every member of the family he had gradually lost ground, they could hardly explain why.

But there was worse to follow, and the day of awakening was not far off.

Philip and Duff had been together to a cattle market some thirty miles distant, and were returning by rail in the dusk of the evening. There had been some races at one of the towns through which the train passed on its way to Chiveley, the nearest station to Cottesmere, and on the return journey the carriage in which Philip and Duff sat, became crowded with military men, returning to quarters after their day's dissipation. They were officers of Terence's regiment presumably, but none of the faces were known to Philip or Duff,who sat quietly in their corner, not at all disposed to join in the noisy talk that went on in the carriage. They were the only travellers there beside the officers, and so the talk went on amongst the military men without let or hindrance.

The two young men took no heed at first to

what was said, but presently they were forced to listen to a conversation which filled them with dismay.

'Where's Egremont?' said one.

'He's somewhere in the train. He'll have found a seat in a first-class, you may be sure. Trust Egremont for making himself comfortable and taking his ease.'

'He had his lady-love to look after too,' said another with a laugh, 'and her comfort to study beside his own.'

'His lady-love!' cried another. 'What, is the fair Lenore here? Why wasn't she pointed out to me? I always stipulated to be introduced.'

Duff felt Philip start, and his own hand clenched itself in an unconscious indignation; but both were silent.

A shout of laughter greeted this speech. The man who made it was evidently an old friend, and not a member of the regiment, who was well up in the gossip of past days, but not in that of current events.

'Lenore!' cried another. 'Why, Lenore was a last year's flame. You never expected to find it alight now, surely?'

'Well, I fancied it was an engagement this time. Besides, when I saw Egremont in the winter, his talk

was all of Lenore. I half thought this affair was going to come to something.'

'You couldn't expect it to live more than six months,' laughed his companion. 'I never understood how the passion for the absent Lenore managed to survive so long during her absence. It seemed dying a peaceful and natural death at the close of the year, when suddenly some unknown cause raised it into activity.'

'Unknown cause!' repeated a dark-faced, heavy-browed man who had hitherto remained silent in his corner. 'I should have thought the cause was plain enough for anyone to read.'

'What was it?' asked several voices. 'Out with it, if you are so wise. Enlighten our ignorance.'

'Well, Egremont makes no secret of his affairs; he babbles about them like a woman or a child. I should have thought it was all over the place by now.'

'He doesn't talk to us all as he does to you,' said another.

'The whole thing lies in a nutshell,' returned the dark man, summing up the case in a rapid way. 'He fell in love with this Lenore's pretty face, as he has fallen in love with half a hundred before. When he had played through the farce of being in love, and come out at the other side, the whole

thing would have drooped naturally and quietly, had not that young Money come down on a visit to the neighbourhood, fallen in with Egremont, and told him that his Lenore stood a first-rate chance of coming in for a big fortune from some eccentric old lady. Off starts the ardent lover to see how the land lies, and I suppose finds all satisfactory, for he comes back an engaged man, and more in love than ever.'

'But I thought you said he was after somebody else now!' cried the little man who had first started the subject. 'How comes that about?'

'I don't know all the ins and outs of the case; but I have a very good notion that his matchless Lenore has somehow made a mess of it, and that she is not, after all, to inherit this old lady's wealth. I know Egremont was in a fine fume during some days of active correspondence, and now Lenore is never mentioned, and the whole thing seems to have blown over.'

'Exploded quite,' asserted another; 'and now he's as good as engaged to that Hinkston girl.'

'Hinkston!' cried the little man quickly, 'you don't mean to say he's taken up with that blackguardly Hinkston's daughter?'

'He has a pot of money, you know,' was the reply, 'and it will all come to her, and she is handsome and has a taking way with her. They have

been playing for Egremont ever since he came here, fishing and running after him and doing all they could. Anything to get a man with a name and a family, even if he hadn't a penny, to raise themselves from their very low place in the social scale. They have been at him all this year, and now I believe they have hooked him.'

'Well, I did think Egremont had better taste than to take up with Hinkston's daughter,' said the little man. 'Why, he's a regular old swindler, and nobody respectable will know him.'

'Egremont's such a fool, anyone can lead him by the nose who only flatters him enough. The girl has been dangling after him this ever so long, and now that he's been getting into debt again, with betting and high play, and the old man has lent him money again and again, I don't see how ever he is to get out of the mess. He will have to marry her now, *nolens volens*.'

The train at this moment steamed into Chiveley, and the officers descended quickly to the platform and vanished. Philip and Duff got out more slowly, and saw in front of them Terence, walking from the station with a showily-dressed girl upon his arm. The two got into a carriage that was waiting, and drove rapidly away.

As Philip mounted the dog-cart, Duff noticed that his face was pale and set, as though he had

been greatly moved. No word was exchanged between them for a while, and at last Philip said:

'Perhaps it is not true.'

'We had better find that out,' said Duff.

'I wish you would, Duff. I do not feel as though I could.'

'All right; I will.'

'To hear Lenore's name bandied about between those men,' said Philip between his shut teeth, 'and to think that Terence allows it——'

'If he were anybody but my brother,' remarked Duff coolly, 'I should horsewhip him in presence of his precious companions till he yelled for mercy, and I'm not sure that I shan't do it as it is!'

CHAPTER XXX.

A GLAD SURPRISE.

PHILIP and Duff kept their own counsel, and not a word did any of the sisters hear on the subject of Terence, and what had been learnt respecting his affairs.

He did not come near Cottesmere all that week, and Duff was too busy to make the intended inquiries until some little time had elapsed; but on the first day that he could be spared he went over to Chiveley, to try and verify or disprove the rumours that had reached them.

Philip was left alone at the farm that day. His sisters had all gone into a neighbouring town for some needful spring shopping. It was a hot, still day in May. The cuckoo was calling softly through the clear, sunny air; the lights and shadows chased each other over the green fields. It was the kind of day to make simple existence a matter of delight and thankfulness, whilst the whole world seemed a paradise too beautiful for any taint of sin.

At noon, when the labourers were gathered together under the hedges, Philip wandered slowly back towards the house, his mind engrossed in somewhat sorrowful thought.

He had unlatched the gate at the bottom of the lawn, and was walking up the smooth, green slope, when suddenly out of the house bounded a young, strong collie dog, who greeted him with wild exuberance of joy, and raced round him in a perfect rapture of delight.

Philip stopped short in his walk, and his heart gave one bound, and then seemed to stand still.

'Col!' he said. 'Col, is it you come back? How did you get here? Where is Lenore?'

As if in answer to his question, there appeared standing in one of the long windows of the drawing-room a slight, girlish figure, dressed all in black.

'Lenore!' he cried, advancing with swift, long strides. 'Lenore!'

'Philip!' she said in a low tone, and held out both hands, whilst her face, which was very pale, quivered as with hardly repressed tears.

He took her hands in his and held them closely. He did not speak again, only stood beside her quite still and silent, holding her hands in a warm, strong clasp, and gazing down upon the upturned face with eyes that spoke more eloquently than

words could do. It was several minutes before that silence was broken.

'Oh, Philip!' said Lenore at last, 'it is so good to be at home.'

Then her voice broke suddenly, and she quickly withdrew her hand to dash away the unbidden tears that had started to her eyes.

Philip saw she was unnerved—unlike her calm, serene self; and he knew something had come to trouble her. He led her to a couch which stood in a cool, shady part of the room, and sat down beside her, assuming the elder brother's air of authority, which he was wont, in his gentle, manly fashion, to exercise over all the household.

'Tell me, Lenore, what does all this mean? When did you come?'

'Just now; I have only just come. I reached London this morning and came straight on. I have been travelling all night.'

'Poor child! No wonder you look so white and tired. But what made you hurry so? What is it has brought you here so suddenly?'

'I couldn't stay. It was so dreadful. I had to go straight out.'

'Why? Has Mrs. Boghey been unkind to you, Lenore?'

She looked at him quickly.

'Mrs. Boghey is dead.'

'Dead!'

'Yes; did you not have my letter?'

'We have had no letter for a week or more.'

Lenore pressed her hand to her head.

'I suppose I have come quicker than it did. I suppose it is on its way now. I wrote yesterday before I knew that I should have to go. I knew I might come home, Philip, without writing to ask leave.'

He bent over her and touched her forehead with his lips.

'So long as I am master here, Lenore, this house will always be a home for you, whenever you will let it be.'

'Thank you, Philip. I think it will always seem like home to me here.'

She leaned upon his shoulder a little as they sat close together, in the unconscious fashion of a tired child. She heaved a great sigh of relief.

'It is so good to be at home, Philip,' she said again, after a pause.

'It is good to see you back, Lenore. This has seemed a long year without you.'

'It has seemed long to me too.'

'And you have not told me anything about yourself yet, Lenore. What is it has happened? When did Mrs. Boghey die?'

Lenore put her hand up again to her head.

'Let me think, it seems so long ago. Last night I was travelling—it was the night before that, at two in the morning.'

'And were you with her?'

'Oh, yes; I had been with her all the time she had been ill.'

'Was she ill long?'

'No, only a few days at the last, though she had been growing weaker and more weak for a long while.'

'What did she die of?'

'Heart disease, they called it. I believe it was a broken heart. Oh, Philip, she had suffered so terribly and so long! Some day, perhaps, I will tell you the story; I could not now. But it was such peace at the last—such perfect peace.'

'Yes?' he questioned quietly and sympathetically, feeling that it would ease her heart better to talk of what was so much in her thoughts, than to keep it all shut up in silence.

'It was like one of our sunsets, Philip, after a day of rain, or a calm at sea after storm; it was all so bright and calm and peaceful—the clear shining after rain.'

Lenore's voice shook a little. Philip took up the word and continued:

'"At evening time it shall be light." It is a beautiful promise, Lenore, and is so often granted

to those whose lives have been full of darkness and trouble. I have noticed that so many times.'

'The everlasting arms were under her, Philip,' said the girl with a little sob in her voice, 'and she knew it. She was perfectly peaceful and happy. She had talked a little to us earlier in the night, spoken such loving, beautiful words, and bidden us good-bye. Campbell and I were with her then—nobody else. Then she sank into a kind of sleep, and we never thought she would wake again. But then at last, just when we thought her breath had almost ceased, she opened her eyes and looked at me. "The everlasting arms are folding very closely round me, Lenore," she said very gently and quietly. "The Eternal God is my refuge. He will not fail me now. God bless you, my child. May the eternal arms be under you, as they are under me, now and always!" And then she looked up with a curious expression, as though she saw something strange and wonderful, and she smiled, and then she shut her eyes slowly, and we saw that she was dead.'

They sat together in silence for a while—the restful silence of perfect sympathy and entire mutual understanding. Neither cared to break that silence for a long while.

'Lenore,' said Philip at last, 'I must not forget that you are a traveller and have journeyed far.

We must dine together to-day alone, for there is nobody else at home.'

'I know; Lucy told me so when I came. I think I was glad, for I felt bewildered, and I knew it would rest me to have a quiet time with you first. The house looks so natural, Philip, so unchanged. I went up to my room, and could hardly believe I had ever left it. It does feel so good to be at home again at last.'

They sat down together in the long, cool, shady dining-room to their mid-day repast. The green branches and half-blown buds of the climbing roses peeped in through the open lattice, and the sweet scents from the spring flowers without stole in with the warm, sweet breeze of early summer.

'You have not told me yet, Lenore, what made you leave Auckness so suddenly.'

Lenore could talk calmly and quietly now. Food and rest and the comfort of Philip's presence had produced their effect, and she no longer felt unequal to the task of telling her tale.

'Let us go into the garden if you have finished, Philip; I will tell you all about it there. It is so lovely out of doors.'

They found a cool, shady spot, an old retreat of theirs in the orchard, where many confidences in past days had been given and received; and whilst Col and Tweedie played a wild game of delighted

recognition amid the growing grass and clover, Philip and Lenore settled themselves in the gnarled, twisted limbs of an old apple tree, and the girl began her tale.

'Mrs. Boghey died in the night, as I told you, and we sent off at once to Inverbervie, where the Moneys live, to let them know, for they are the only relatives she has.'

'You do not like them much, I think.'

'Not much; and less than ever now. They did profess to be fond of her so long as she was alive; but I am sure it could only have been a pretence, or they never could have behaved as they did yesterday.'

'What did they do?'

'They all came over quite early, and from the first it was plain that all they cared for was to find out how the property had been willed.'

'Was the will there?'

'No; Mrs. Boghey's lawyer had it, and he could not be at Auckness till late in the evening; but I could tell them what they wanted to know.'

'You knew what had been done?'

'Yes; Mrs. Boghey used to talk a good deal to me about her affairs. She is very generous, Philip; she has left me five thousand pounds.'

'I am glad, Lenore. Does the rest of the property go to the Moneys?'

'Yes. There are legacies to the servants, and an annuity to be purchased for Campbell, and a few thousands to different charities; but all the bulk of the property goes to the Moneys.'

'Were they glad to hear that?'

'Yes, horribly glad—it was quite dreadful to see them gloating over everything in the place, and estimating its value, and Mrs. Boghey lying dead upstairs, and not a word or a thought for her, or a question as to her death.'

'How did they treat you?'

'Very well at first, almost deferentially, for I think they had a sort of fear that I had, or might have, come between them and their inheritance; but when they found out from me how matters really stood, all that departed at once. I think they were very angry at the large legacy left to me, for they talked in a very horrid way, and I'm sure it was at me. At last I felt I could bear it no longer—it was so dreadful to see them taking possession and turning over all Mrs. Boghey's things, and planning how to sell them to the best advantage. I had been mistress there all the time Mrs. Boghey had been ill, and had taken the management of everything, and now I was not allowed to say a word, and was treated almost like a servant. The whole place was unendurable, and there was no longer any reason for

me to stay. I knew you would let me come home without warning, so I packed up my things yesterday afternoon, and came straight off in the cart the servants use for the station work. Mrs. Money told me it was impossible to give me the use of the carriage—not that it was wanted for anything else, as the coachman indignantly told me.'

Philip frowned heavily.

'I am glad you came home, Lenore. I could not bear to have you treated so. What a woman she must be! And, by-the-by,' he added reflectively, 'I wonder that Mrs. Boghey left them her property if she liked them so little.'

'They were her only relatives, you see.'

'People do not always leave their money to the next-of-kin.'

'I think they should do,' answered Lenore in a low voice, 'unless there is a very strong reason against it.'

Something in her manner made Philip ask with a smile.

'Did you tell that to Mrs. Boghey, Lenore?'

'Yes,' she answered frankly.

'Might you have had more money left you if you had wished it?'

'I believe so.'

'And you declined?'

'Yes; I had no claim. I think it would have been unjust to others.'

'Was that all?'

Lenore hesitated a moment, and then added:

'I do not think wealth would be good for Terence. I am almost sure it would make him idle and extravagant. I have heard you say sometimes, Philip, that you thought a rich wife would be enough to ruin Terence.'

'And you sacrificed yourself for him, Lenore?'

'No,' she answered quickly, 'it was no sacrifice, for I do not want riches for myself. I should have liked to do more for you and the rest; but I can still keep Hector at school with my legacy, and things are doing better upon the farm, you say. Wealth has very great responsibilities, Philip, and Terence might not have felt as I should do about it.'

Philip was silent.

'How is Terence?' asked the girl presently.

'Well, I believe; but he has not been here for some little while.'

'I have not heard very often lately. I suppose he is very busy?'

'I hope so.'

Lenore hesitated, and then said quietly:

'I'm afraid he was rather vexed about what I said to Mrs. Boghey. I told him a good deal of what passed, and he said I had acted foolishly,

more like a child than a woman. He did not seem angry exactly, but he has not written so often since. When he came to see me, he was so good and loving, Philip. He was so gentle and thoughtful, so different from what he once was. Have you not noticed the change?'

'I hope he is changed; I have not seen him very often of late,' said Philip evasively.

He felt it impossible to speak to Lenore of Terence. He believed she loved him tenderly and sincerely, even if the absorbing, passionate element of love was wanting in her case. How could he talk of their engagement, suspecting, as he could not but do, that Terence was playing a double game, and was entangling himself with some unknown woman, whilst still holding Lenore bound to him by the betrothal vow—almost as sacred in Philip's eyes as that of marriage itself?

He could not speak of his brother, and Lenore soon turned to other subjects, and was eager to hear all he could tell of the home-life during the year that had passed.

Sitting there in the cool orchard, or wandering together in the shady shrubbery paths, the hours fled swiftly by for Philip and Lenore. The girl had come home wearied out in body and mind, and sorrowful to her heart's core, and already she found herself refreshed and cheered, and full of a calm

and sweet happiness she did not herself understand.

Neither of the two were impatient for the return of the absent ones, but they came at last, and very joyful and loving was the greeting Lenore received from one and all.

Whilst the glad welcomes were being exchanged upon the lawn, Philip saw that Duff was driving round to the yard in the dog-cart, having just returned from Chiveley.

Quietly separating himself from the group in front of the house, Philip walked round to the yard and met his brother leaving it.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TERENCE AT BAY.

'COME into the orchard, Duff. Keep away from the house for a while. Tell me, what have you found out? Have you got to the bottom of the mystery?'

Duff shook his head.

'Things look as ugly as possible, but I have not been able to prove anything so far.'

'Haven't you seen Terence?'

'No; he was away. He had gone with Miss Hinkston somewhere, and would not be back till night. Everyone believes they are engaged.'

Philip's face grew pained and anxious.

'How can he behave so?—he, engaged to Lenore. I never thought Terence could act dishonourably where he loved.'

Duff shrugged his shoulders.

'To my thinking it has never yet appeared, that Terence ever has loved anybody but himself.'

Philip made no answer. A few months ago he

would almost have resented such a speech; now he could not, for he felt its justice.

'I am afraid,' continued Duff, looking away and switching at the tall grass with his cane, 'I am afraid Terence has been behaving very badly all round—worse than ever.'

'What do you mean?'

'By all accounts he is more extravagant than ever. He plays high, and is in a regular set of betting and drinking fellows. He is always getting into trouble at head-quarters and being called over the coals by his superior officer. They say he will have to send in his papers if he goes on in this reckless way much longer. He is just ruining his prospects in the Army. His expenditure must be double his income at least. He keeps a dog-cart now, and has a splendid horse, they say, that he gave a hundred guineas for. He had taken Miss Hinkston over to some races in it to-day. He does not seem now to care about keeping up even an appearance of decency.'

Philip's face was very grave.

'He is in debt again then, of course, and heavily. Whatever will become of him?'

'No, he is not in debt—that is the ugliest part of it,' answered Duff significantly, 'at least, not to the tradespeople. Everyone of them is now eager to serve Captain Egremont. He is looked

upon as a millionaire, and has always plenty of ready money.'

The brothers did not look at one another. The shame that Terence never felt himself seemed to have fastened itself upon them.

'Where does the money come from?' said Philip at last in a low voice.

'From old Hinkston. He is rolling in wealth. It is the price paid by him for Terence's attentions to his daughter. His affection, it seems, is a marketable commodity put up to the highest bidder.'

'It cannot be, Duff, it cannot be!' cried Philip, with sudden pain and indignation struggling for mastery in his voice. 'Terence cannot have sunk so low as that. It cannot be true!'

'I am afraid it is only too true. I have not shared the family enthusiasm for Terence, as you know. Probably I was envious of his more brilliant person and his more ambitious career. Sometimes you have told me I have been needlessly distrustful and hard upon him. It may have been so, perhaps. I have not liked Terence particularly, yet I would give worlds to distrust what has been forced into my notice to-day.'

'We must see him, Duff. He may be able to explain something of all this. Appearances are against him, but things may not be so bad as they

look. We must see him face to face, and hear what he has to say for himself.'

'Exactly; that is what I felt. I left a note for him saying that it was absolutely necessary for us to see him, and that he must come over here to-morrow afternoon. I believe he will do so. My message was urgent, and I do not think he will fail to come.'

Philip paused and looked at Duff with an expression of perplexity.

'Terence here to-morrow?' he said. 'We must be very careful. Do you know, Duff, that Lenore has come back?'

'Lenore come back?'

'Yes; Mrs. Boghey is dead. She died two nights ago. Lenore has come straight back to us. She must not meet Terence till we have seen how matters stand with him. She shall not be trifled with in this way any longer.'

Philip's face was grave and stern. Duff stood with his hands in his pockets, and uttered a low whistle of surprise and perplexity.

'A nice state of affairs, certainly—one's brother engaged to two women at once!'

'We do not know that he is engaged in any way to Miss Hinkston.'

Duff nodded his head slowly and significantly.

'Old Hinkston's not a this year's bird. He's

no fool, and you may be sure he knows the game he's playing. It would take a cleverer man than Terence to get the best of it with him.'

Philip's face was full of care.

'What will Lenore say? what will she think? One trouble on another, and then treachery from him whom she has so loved and trusted——'

'Strikes me,' interposed Duff coolly, 'that Lenore will never break her heart over Terence.'

'She is his promised wife, Duff,' said Philip gravely, 'and therefore I am sure that she loves him truly.'

Duff turned away with a half smile.

'For your sake she promised,' he muttered, 'all for your sake. You have been so wrapped up in Terence, and she in you. I sometimes think you are both quite blind; but things seem coming right now— no thanks to you, though.'

Lenore was tired out by her days of anxiety and her night's travelling. She went early to bed, and the next day a severe headache and sudden prostration of strength confined her to her room, and quite prevented any danger of an accidental meeting with Terence.

This attack of illness, as it was not of a character to cause anxiety, was something of a relief to Philip and Duff, as it gave them a sense of security against any surprises; for both felt that

if Terence first met Lenore, more mischief might be done by his smooth, plausible tongue than could be undone by their practical common sense.

Terence did not disappoint them; but he did not drive over in his dog-cart, even though the day was hot enough to make walking fatiguing. He had come over on his own feet, and was met by Philip and Duff in the meadow down by the Mere, where he had, a year ago, held a memorable conversation with Lenore.

'Why, Phil, old fellow, I am glad to see you again!' was Terence's greeting, spoken with all his customary genial warmth. 'Duff here too? I was awfully sorry to miss you yesterday. It was no end of a nuisance to have to go to those stupid races, and I felt savage when I got back and found you had been. I wish you had given me notice, and I would have stayed for you.'

He spoke in an off-hand, easy way, and yet he did not appear quite so unembarrassed as he wished his brothers to imagine. His eyes did not meet theirs readily, and he talked on in a rapid and purposeless fashion, as if to leave them no opportunity for asking questions, or stating what their object was in seeking him out.

The brothers strayed slowly into the cool shade of the trees which bordered the Mere; and at

length even Terence's flow of words exhausted itself, and silence fell between them.

'Terence,' said Philip, 'we wanted to see you, as you know, and the sooner we understand each other the better. Have you anything to tell us about yourself and your prospects? We would much rather hear whatever there is to hear, from yourself than from strangers.'

A deep flush spread slowly over Terence's face; but he laughed in a forced, unnatural way.

'What is the good of being so confoundedly mysterious, Philip? Why can't you say out what you mean? I'm not a baby, that I am expected to come prattling here with every little tale of what I say and do, nor am I a woman, who wishes to make a father confessor of you. You arrogate too much to yourself. What right have you to call upon me to answer to you for my doings?'

The tone and the words both hurt Philip. Was this his reward for years of forbearance and affection? Duff was indignant and scornful, and as Philip lapsed into silence, he took up the cudgels and turned questioner, though his manner was so cool and impassive that it would not be easy to suppose how much he was interested in the subject.

'Well, if you wish to be asked questions, there is no difficulty in finding plenty to ask. In the

first place, who is this Miss Hinkston, in whose company you went to the races yesterday?'

Terence's face changed slightly, and a guarded look took the place of the forced expression of ease.

'Miss Hinkston? Oh, she's a girl I know—at least, I know her father very well, and he has invited me several times to his house. There's nothing special to know about them.'

'I hear they are a very low lot,' said Duff. 'I wonder that you care to associate so much with them.'

Terence laughed uneasily.

'Who says I do have much to do with them?'

'A great many people say so. Besides, we saw you with her returning from some races last Wednesday week, and yesterday you were her only companion on the race-course. Do you consider your conduct is likely to escape observation? As you do not seem ashamed of your acquaintance, perhaps you can explain your object in hobnobbing with such very low sort of people. I should not have thought it your style at all.'

'I do not consider myself responsible to you for my conduct!' said Terence haughtily, a dark flush spreading again over brow and cheek. 'I suppose I am able by this time to choose my own friends?'

'Oh, dear, yes, and your own horses too, and pay

a hundred guineas for them, and drive all over the place with your lady friends. Of course you are perfectly at liberty to do all that; only it is interesting to your family to know a little about your remarkable prosperity.'

Terence was pale now with passion, and would have made a fierce retort, had not Philip interposed:

'Do not get angry, Terence. Duff, what is the use of talking in that way? There are one or two things we must know; but that is not the way to get at the truth. Terence, tell me truly, are you engaged to Miss Hinkston?'

'No.'

'Are you entangled in any way? Do you suppose that she believes your affections are hers? Are you acting fairly towards her?'

'Yes, I am.' Terence spoke rapidly and hoarsely. 'She has nothing to complain of. I can't tell what she thinks, and I don't care.'

'You are sure there is no bond between you?'

'I am not engaged, and I never shall be,' answered Terence, still looking like a hunted animal brought to bay, seeming hardly to know how to get out his words. 'Surely that will satisfy you.'

'I don't know—you look so unnatural, Terence. Why cannot you be open with us and tell us all?

We have never given you cause to distrust us. If you are in any trouble, we will help you if it is possible.'

'You cannot—I mean, there is no need—I am in no trouble. I am much obliged, but really I stand in no need of sympathy or assistance. I feel at a loss to know from whence springs all this solicitude for my welfare.'

Duff looked scornful, and seemed about to retort; but Philip interposed by saying quietly:

'We had heard so much about you and Miss Hinkston that we could not but entertain some unwilling suspicions about you. As, however, you deny this alleged engagement, there is no more to be said upon the matter. You had better come up to the house. Lenore came home suddenly yesterday. It will be a great pleasure to her to see you again. You had better spend what time you have with her. There will be so much to discuss between you.'

Philip spoke with his usual simple straightforwardness; he had not expected to produce any great effect by his words, and was startled to see Terence fling up his hands as though he had been shot, whilst he exclaimed hoarsely:

'Lenore here!'

'Yes. Mrs. Boghey is dead. I believe she left her five thousand pounds. You will be able

to talk of getting married now. Terence, what is the matter?'

'Let me go. Don't talk to me. I will never see Lenore again! Good heavens, Philip! how can I tell you? I am a married man already, and a most miserable one too!'

A dead silence followed this sudden announcement. Not in their worst moments of anxiety had either brother imagined anything so bad as this.

'Married, Terence!'

'Yes, married to Julia Hinkston that was—trapped into marriage by that swindling, money-lending father of hers. I have been married three months and more, and a happy, happy life I have led!'

'Terence!' ejaculated Philip again; but Duff interposed a quiet question:

'Tell us all about it, Terence.'

'There is little to tell. I was a fool—I have been a fool all my life. Hinkston made up to me, invited me, lent me money, and so forth. Julia flattered me—she is handsome in a way, and not so underbred as he. One got me deeper and deeper into debt, and the other led me on more and more with her arts and fascinations. I hardly know how it did end. I suppose I had made a few silly speeches at a dance, for the next day old Hinkston called to "ask my intentions." I had

none, of course; whereat he vowed his child's affections should not be trifled with, and finally threatened me with ruin if I drew back from what he called my word. I was weak and foolish, as usual, and got out of it as best I could, but found I was then considered engaged. It was a hopeless struggle—ruin on the one hand, and no chance of ever marrying Lenore; wealth, and freedom from debt on the other. I made my choice almost under compulsion. We were married privately, and have kept the matter a secret—that was my stipulation. I had my I.O.U.'s and a cheque for 5,000*l.* for a wedding present. Julia has about 5,000*l.* a year, and any amount in prospect. I am a rich man now, and must be congratulated as such. Now that the disgraceful secret is out, I shall leave the Army and settle down in blissful conjugal repose. I have been putting off that happy day as long as possible. Now it has come. You shall not however be troubled with Mrs. Terence Egremont's acquaintance.'

Philip and Duff listened in dead silence. Then the former said softly:

'And Lenore?'

'Lenore knows nothing. She believes herself engaged to me.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

DUFF'S DIPLOMACY.

GREAT consternation and bitter sorrow prevailed that evening at Cottesmere Farm.

Terence had gone, humbled to the dust, unwilling to meet his family, now that the shameful story of his deceitful conduct and his wretched marriage could no longer be withheld from them.

Neither Philip nor Duff had reproached him. Even his treachery and baseness towards Lenore, which had roused in them deep feelings of indignation and scorn, passed unreproved and unremarked upon. Both brothers saw but too plainly how bitterly he was rebelling against the fate which his own weakness and folly and reckless following after pleasure had brought upon him, and they refrained from adding to his misery by any useless recriminations. He had 'sown his wild oats' indeed with no sparing hand, and now he was reaping an abundant harvest in the misery of a blighted life and ruined prospects.

They had let him depart in silence and shame, not knowing how to comfort him, unwilling to reproach him ; and then they had been obliged to break to the family the shameful story they had heard.

The dismay and consternation of all may be briefly passed over. A thunderbolt falling in their midst would have produced a far smaller sensation ; and amid the general sorrow and shame the same thought was uppermost in each mind—Who shall tell Lenore ? and it seemed as if nobody felt equal to this task. Madeline's words on the subject seemed to sum up the universal feeling :

'Somebody must tell her, but I can't.'

'Well,' said Duff at last, 'I suppose it is because I am particularly hard-hearted, but I don't feel the smallest compunction in taking upon myself the office of breaking this piece of news to Lenore. If she is well enough to come down to-morrow, I will tell her. It won't harrow up my feelings as it does yours. If you like to leave the matter in my hands, I will undertake it.'

They looked at him in surprise, but were glad enough to take him at his word. Lenore was fond of Duff, and seemed to understand him better than they, his own sisters, did. Perhaps, in his cool, matter-of-fact way he would perform the task better than they could do in their grief and sympathy.

At any rate, they were all glad to shift the unwelcome office upon his broad shoulders.

Lenore was much better on the following day. Sleep had done its marvellous work and had restored her exhausted powers. She still felt a little tired and weak, but that was all. She was able to come downstairs and to wander again around the well-loved garden, visiting her favourite nooks and corners, and renewing old friendships with objects animate and inanimate.

Lenore was very happy, calmly and quietly content. She did not try to analyse her happiness, but accepted it in a quiet, restful spirit, which helped more than anything to restore her wearied mind to its customary calm; and if she was conscious that this utter repose could not last—that sooner or later cares and anxiety would come again, and she would be obliged to face the battles and the perplexities of life—this consciousness did not trouble her, because she knew that help and strength would not be withheld when they were needed.

Evening was drawing on, and Lenore was sitting alone in a shady, sheltered nook with Col at her feet, when she saw Duff approaching, and smiled a ready welcome.

'Well, Lenore? Better?'

'Much better, thank you. Have you been very busy?'

'Not specially so. I have done now. I thought I saw you here. By-the-by, I have a piece of news for you.'

'Have you? What kind of news?—good or bad?'

'Well, I should say good, as far as you're concerned, but I find my family differ from me upon the point.'

Lenore smiled a little.

'You talk in riddles, Duff. Let me hear this piece of news, and judge for myself its effect.'

She laughed as she spoke lightly and playfully. Duff looked at her with a subdued humorous twinkle in his eye. He felt sure of his own theory, and did not fear the situation.

'It will be a great surprise, Lenore.'

'Will it? You make me curious.'

'A great shock perhaps—at least, so they tell me.'

'This is mysterious. Do explain yourself. Why were you deputed to make the revelation?'

'Nobody else liked to.'

Lenore looked up quickly.

'Tell me, Duff,' she said.

'Terence is married.'

She sat still a full minute, looking straight out

before her. It was not easy to read the expression of her face, yet Duff, as he watched her under his eyelids, felt convinced that there was no grief, no sense of personal loss, weighing upon her mind.

'Why did he not tell me himself?'

'Because he is a coward,' answered Duff with cool contempt.

'When was he married?'

'He has been married three months.'

Lenore raised her eyes slowly to Duff's, and he saw in them a kindling glow of indignation. Slowly she drew from her pocket a letter.

'He wrote to me a fortnight ago, as to his promised wife. Duff, how could he? Philip's brother!' She tore the letter across and flung it from her.

'Whom has he married?'

'The daughter of some low-bred, rascally Jew money-lender. It has been a piece of trickery from first to last, and Terence's own cowardly weakness lost him his one chance. We might have saved him, if he had told us. His own folly has ruined him.'

'Then he married for money?'

'He sold himself; that is the literal statement of the fact.'

Lenore's face was very grave.

'If I had not declined Mrs. Boghey's fortune, he would not have done it.'

'Possibly not; he would have sold himself to the highest bidder, and claimed you and your fortune. You have had a narrow escape, Lenore, of a most miserable life.'

'I have,' she answered, clasping her hands and looking dreamily before her; 'I have indeed. Oh, who could have thought it? Philip's brother!'

'Exactly, Lenore,' returned Duff quietly. 'It has always seemed to me that it was to Philip's brother you engaged yourself, not to Terence Egremont.'

'And if I did,' answered Lenore still dreamily, 'was there anything so strange in it? You know Philip, you know what he is. You know, we all know, how dear Terence's welfare was to him. He thought I could help him so much, and Terence said the same. Was it wrong to be willing to try? Could I have refused a trust like that?'

'I think you were most generous, Lenore, but I think you were wrong,' said Duff.

She started from her reverie, and looked quickly up at him.

'I don't know why I am saying all this to you, Duff. I think you have taken me unawares.'

'You have not told me anything yet, that I did not pretty well know already.'

She looked at him earnestly, and passed her hand across her eyes.

'You think I have acted wrongly, Duff? I begin to think the same myself, but I don't feel as though I saw anything clearly yet. Will you tell me what was wrong?'

'I think it was wrong—a mistake, perhaps, is a better word—to engage yourself to Terence, whilst all the while you cared for Philip.'

'I did it for his sake,' she said simply.

'I know you did. You were generous, you were devoted; but your generosity and devotion nearly made havoc of the happiness of two lives—your own and Philip's. Of yourself, I know, you do not think, but I do wonder at your not considering him.'

Lenore's eyes were wide open now, full of a kind of startled bewilderment.

'I thought he so wished it. Terence said so, and then—and then I said I would.'

'Exactly. You and Philip would both have sacrificed your several happinesses in life for Terence's sake; but did you never see, Lenore, what a terrible sacrifice it was to him?'

The girl's eyes were hidden now under their long lashes; her voice quivered a little as she asked:

'What do you mean, Duff?'

'Mean?' echoed Duff in his blunt fashion. 'Well, I don't know if I have any business to say what I mean; but really one feels inclined to speak one's mind plainly. Don't you know, can't you see that Philip never cared for anybody in the world but you?—and, what is more, I don't believe you care for anybody but him.'

After this surprising speech there was a dead silence, which lasted many long minutes. Duff stood peeling the bark from the tree against which he leaned, as if utterly engrossed in the task, and Lenore sat perfectly still, her hands clasped upon her knee, feeling dazzled and bewildered, as if a flood of golden sunlight had suddenly been let into a hitherto dark and unexplored recess of her heart.

It seemed a long while before anyone spoke, and then it was Lenore who broke the silence.

'Duff, why do you say all this to me?'

'Because I think it is time you should know, and I don't know who else will tell you.'

'I don't quite understand.'

'Well, look here, it's just this: you're not the only person who cares for and appreciates Philip. I think, for my own part, that he is the very best fellow that ever lived, and I can't bear to see his life spoiled all for a wretched blunder, or for want of a little mutual understanding. He has changed awfully this year since you have been gone. He

is brighter now again, because you are here; but he has grown older, graver, sadder in your absence, and I hate to see it. Now that Terence is married, the way looks clear enough; but you know what Philip is, and so do I; so sensitive, so chivalrous, so fearful of giving pain. Of course he believes you were wrapped up in Terence; was it likely he would guess your motive? He believes you desolate and heart-broken. Is it likely he will intrude upon the sanctity of your sorrow? Not he; he would eat his heart out in silence first. Look here, Lenore, the matter just lies here. If you will give him a chance of telling you what he is longing to say, all may be well; but if you copy his reserve and diffidence, and go away again without understanding one another, you run a great chance of ruining your own life and his too. There, Lenore, I have said my say, and, if I have offended you, I can but apologise; but if lookers-on see most of the game, as is said, then what I have told you is true, and I do not feel that I could be comfortable in my mind without saying it. I can't bear to see things all going at sixes and sevens, just because there is nobody sensible enough to speak out their minds on the subject.'

With that Duff turned and walked off. He had said his say, and had 'put his foot into it pretty considerably,' as he told himself afterwards; but he

did not repent his audacity, and he had a great confidence that everything would yet be well.

He met Philip strolling slowly towards the house.

'Well, Philip,' he said, 'I have done the deed.'

'What deed?'

'Told Lenore.'

'You have! What did she say?'

'She took it very quietly—did not seem at all cut up. I think you had better go and talk to her. She is in the nook by the stone pine. I fancy she would like to see you. You needn't be alarmed; she never could have loved or trusted Terence. She wanted to help you in saving him from himself; that was all:' and Duff again made off, beginning to feel a little nervous as to the results of his endeavours to put things straight in Philip's path.

The evening hours passed slowly by, and he saw nothing of either Philip or Lenore. At last curiosity prompted him to stroll past the spot where he had last seen the girl, in case she might still be there.

Philip and Lenore were sitting side by side, and her hand rested in his. Both faces were very quiet and peaceful. Lenore's eyes looked as though they sparkled through unshed tears; but they could hardly be tears of sorrow—her face was too serene.

'It is Duff,' she said softly. 'Yes, Duff, you can come; it is all right.'

'Wish you joy, old fellow,' said Duff, taking Philip's hand and growing rather red. Then he walked off again, very proud and glad, but not equal to the task of finding words in which to express his feelings.

'Dear fellow!' said Lenore, looking after him. 'I don't feel as though I have ever properly appreciated him before.'

'We shall appreciate him doubly now,' answered Philip, smiling. 'He has been the best brother in the world to me.'

Silence fell between them awhile, and then Lenore moved closer towards him.

'I am so happy, Philip,' she said softly; 'so very, very happy.'

He bent his head and kissed her.

'And I too, Lenore. I never thought such happiness could be mine in this world.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A STRANGE LETTER.

Two happy days slipped away. The family at Cottesmere Farm almost forgot their trouble about Terence, in delight at Philip's happiness, and in the thought that Lenore would still be their sister. Now that one brother had proved himself so unworthy of the love and confidence reposed in him, they all felt more than ever fond and proud of Philip, and he said with a happy smile to Lenore that he was in danger of being spoiled by so much affection.

Lenore clung to him with a deep, undemonstrative devotion that was almost touching in its intensity. She had been somewhat overwrought of late, and buffeted about by various strokes of fickle fortune, and for a whole year she had had need of all her strength to tend and care for another, who leaned upon her for help and guidance.

All this had been a strain upon her, for she was still quite young, and felt herself the need of a

strong arm on which to lean, and a deep love in which to trust. Now all that she needed she found in Philip, and, with a perfect sense of restful happiness, she had accorded to him the promise which would link her life with his, in the holy and sacred marriage vow.

Two bright days of perfect happiness had slipped away like a dream ; but on the morning of the third there came an interruption of this peaceful calm, in the form of an important missive from the world without.

When Lenore came down to breakfast she found a thick, business-looking letter awaiting her perusal.

'It is from Bervie,' she said, looking at the postmark—'about the legacy, I suppose.'

She did not open the blue envelope then. She believed she knew the contents of the letter without looking, and she had a vague shrinking from thus bringing home to herself the realisation of Mrs. Boghey's death and the break-up of the establishment at Auckness.

She took the letter out with her, and when she had seen Philip start off upon his round of duties, she made her way to the orchard, and slowly opened it there.

The envelope contained two letters, the one a brief, business-like communication from the lawyer,

the second a sealed packet addressed to her, as she saw at a glance, in Mrs. Boghey's hand.

A wave of feeling swept over Lenore at sight of the well-known, characteristic writing. She could not at once open that letter, made thus sacred by death, but turned to the lawyer's epistle.

'Dear Madam,—We have been unable before to communicate with you, as you had left no address behind you when you quitted Auckness; and it was only after a careful search amongst the late Mrs. Boghey's papers that we were able to obtain the needful clue as to your residence.

'This is to inform you that the late Mrs. Boghey has willed to you the whole of her fortune, with the exception of a few legacies to servants, together with the property at Auckness and all her personal effects.

'Her affairs being found in perfect order, the will will be proved within a very short space of time, and we await your instructions——'

What more was written Lenore did not know. She laid down the letter in a bewildered way, and put up her hand to her head.

What was it that had befallen her? Nothing more nor less than this: that in one moment she had become a very wealthy woman, with unre-

stricted control over what seemed to her simply boundless riches.

Her first thought was of Philip. Philip would be a rich man now. Philip's cares and anxieties for the younger brothers and sisters would be at an end. His hours of weary, wearing thought were over for ever.

'I cannot understand it,' she murmured, passing her hand across her eyes. 'It seems too strange to be true. Oh, it is a great responsibility! I must ask God's grace to use it aright. I must look upon it as a trust from Him. Oh, how thankful I am that Philip will always be with me to help and guide me! Oh, if it had been Terence! How wicked I was ever to give way to him, how weak, how foolish!' She hid her face and almost shuddered.

'And even if Duff had not spoken as he did, and I had been silent and reserved about what I thought of Terence's marriage, and Philip had believed I had loved him, how different it might have been. If he had known that I was so rich, perhaps —perhaps ——'

Lenore did not finish her sentence. Her voice died away into silence, and she sat still, looking straight before her. By-and-by she took up Mrs. Boghey's letter, read the superscription and slowly broke the seal.

'My dear Lenore,—When you get this letter I shall be dead, and you will be in possession of all that I have to leave of this world's goods.

'If you remember, when you hear this news, a certain conversation we once had together upon the subject of my will, you may be surprised at the way in which I have disposed of my property, and therefore I am writing you a brief explanation of my feelings.

'There are only two people in the world that I have really and truly loved. You are one, and my unhappy son Alan was the other. One of my loved ones blighted my life, and filled it with unspeakable bitterness; the other brought into my wretched and most lonely lot a meed of peace and love, and even of joy, which once I could not have deemed possible.

'So long as my son lived, my determination was to divide what I had to leave between you two. When he was dead there was no one left to dispute the succession with you, and I made my will, leaving you all. It was made before I held that conversation with you to which I have referred. When I talked to you on the subject I knew exactly what I meant to do, but I wished to know your thoughts.

'You have strong feelings in regard to family ties, therefore let me tell you at once, that under no circumstances should I ever have left my fortune to

the Moneys. They are nothing to me—mere connections by marriage, and no love has ever been lost between us. They have flattered me, hoping to deceive me; but I have always seen through their paltry devices. In no case would they ever have gained anything from me. They have already more money than is good for them.

'I let you leave me with an impression that these relatives would inherit my wealth, and that to you would only come the sum of five thousand pounds. You will wonder why I allowed you to believe this, and I will explain my motive.

'You remember how, in the winter time, your future husband, Terence Egremont, came to see you. There was something very engaging and genial about him, and although I, as a rule, distrust soldiers and handsome men, I took a kind of liking, perhaps for your sake, Lenore, to this young man.

'We had several conversations together, and I asked him about his future prospects. I soon learned that these were doubtful, and in a moment of weakness—how it came about I hardly know—I let out to him that I had intentions of leaving some property to you. I had hardly spoken the words before I repented of them. Perhaps I have grown suspicious or over-critical in my old age, but I fancied I saw a gleam, as of triumph or joy, in his

eyes, and I wished I could have recalled the admission I had made. I liked Terence Egremont, I tell you, Lenore, and yet my heart often ached as I looked at him. His gay, *insouciant* air, his gentle manner and winning smile, reminded me over and over again of my unhappy boy in his early manhood. Were their characters, too, alike? Was the fascinating exterior only a mask for an unstable and selfish, heartless nature? I did not actually believe it could be so, but I could not rid myself of the uneasy suspicion.

'I said to myself, Have I done Lenore an injury in thus making her a rich woman? Will he seek her now for her wealth, not for herself? Have I paved the way for an unhappy and loveless marriage? I dare say when you read these words, Lenore, you will smile, and think me a very uncharitable and suspicious woman. I do not deny the accusation. I believe I am suspicious and distrustful, and I am jealous, my child, for your happiness. I determined upon a course of action which should, if possible, undo any harm I might have accomplished. I held the conversation before alluded to. I let you carry away an erroneous impression, and I bid you write to Terence Egremont and tell him all. If he loves her, I said to myself, he will honour her the more for her single-mindedness and purity of heart; if he has been

building his hopes upon an ample fortune, he can make his decision before it is too late, and give her up. I dare say you will often, in your married life, smile over this strange fancy of a crabbed old woman. Never mind, I have acted as I thought best, and be the result what it may, I shall never repent the step I have taken.

'Now let me tell you a little about the property I have bequeathed to you. I have always been what the world calls a rich woman, and these latter years of my life I have, as you know, lived so quietly, that my money has accumulated steadily and rapidly. It is a surprise even to myself to see, by referring to my books, how large a fortune I possess. When the legacies to Campbell and other servants are paid, there will be, I reckon, about 170,000*l.* to be paid to you, in addition to whatever sum the Auckness property may fetch.

'It is my wish, Lenore, that you sell Auckness, unless you have any very strong wish to retain it in your possession. It has been so miserable a home to me, so full of sad associations, that I should shrink from the thought of anyone I love living there in the future. Let it pass into the hands of strangers, and lose the miserable traditions of evil by which it is haunted.

'As to the rest, I leave you full control over all, knowing that I leave it in worthy hands. I might

have bequeathed it to charities about which I know nothing, or done many things the world would praise and call philanthropic; but I have not chosen to do so. In your hands, Lenore, the money that has been but a curse to me, will become a blessing to many. I know this without a doubt, and I leave it to you with the full consciousness that a solemn trust will be efficiently carried out. Follow out, my child, the impulses of your heart. Make others glad and brighten clouded lives, as it seems your mission to do. Help on your adopted brothers and sisters in their paths through life; do good to the sick and poor, as I know you will without any prompting; and may your life be a blessing to very many. Money can do little to promote happiness, but where happiness is, it can add much that gives innocent pleasure. Use it freely, and think sometimes kindly and generously of the unhappy woman, whose life you brightened by your love and care.

'Farewell, my child—my more than daughter. When these lines meet your eye I shall have passed away for ever from this world. God grant that, through the mercy you have taught me to believe in, we may meet again in a brighter one above; and may the everlasting arms be around me and around you for evermore! Yours in deep and tender love

'G. H. V. BOGHEY.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN UNEXPECTED INTERVIEW.

LENORE raised her eyes slowly from the letter she had just read, and through the mist of tears that had gathered there, she saw that someone was approaching slowly through the long grass and clover.

She dashed the tears away and looked again, and her colour changed slightly, for her eyes met the wavering, conscious glance of Terence, and it was he who now stood before her.

For a moment neither spoke. She did not know if it were by accident or design that this meeting had come about. She sat silent in the old swing, and it was he who had to open the conversation.

'Will you not even shake hands with me, Lenore?'

She gave him her hand, and looked up into his troubled face. The old gay, careless look was gone. He was aged and worn, as though brooding over his past conduct had troubled his rest by

night and his peace by day. Lenore was touched. Her own happiness made her the more tender over the sorrows of others, and she could see that Terence had suffered. Her face told him that she bore him no ill-will for his treachery.

'Lenore, can you forgive me?'

'I have forgiven you.'

'Oh, Lenore,' he cried with sudden bitterness, 'seeing you brings it all back. I am the most miserable man under the sun!'

'Hush, Terence! Remember your wife. You must live for her now. Love can brighten every life, and bring happiness to every lot.'

'Love!' he echoed scornfully, 'love! I have never loved any woman but you, Lenore, and I never shall do.'

'Terence,' she said, with a certain sternness in her voice, 'you are a married man; I cannot, I will not listen to such words.'

'They are true——' he began recklessly; but she stayed him by an imperious gesture of her hand.

'I am your brother Philip's promised wife—I *will not* listen to you.'

She had silenced him now. He gazed at her with wide-open, wondering eyes.

'Philip's promised wife!' he repeated slowly.

She gave him no answer, no explanation, and

as the full bearing of her words came home to him, he smiled bitterly, for his miserable instincts of vanity and selfishness began to assert themselves.

'I might have spared myself my remorse and compunction. You, at least, found no difficulty in consoling yourself.'

She raised her clear, steadfast eyes to his.

'Did you think I should stand in sore need of consolation, Terence?'

'It is generally supposed that women do, who have lost a lover,' he answered sarcastically, 'but I dare say it is all a delusion.'

Or, rather, may it not depend sometimes upon who the lover may be?'

Terence flushed somewhat at the implied rebuke.

'You mean to tell me now, I suppose, that you never cared for me?'

'I mean nothing but what I have always told you—that I never could have given you that love which I consider that a wife should give her husband.'

'Then why on earth did you promise to be my wife?'

She looked at him with a sort of indignant wonder in her eyes.

'I think, Terence, you know, without any words of mine, how it was, and why it was, that I gave you my promise.'

Something in her look shamed him. He was silent a moment, and then said with dejection:

'You are well rid of me, Lenore; you have done very wisely to give me up. My life will only be a curse to myself and to everyone else.'

'Terence,' said Lenore, with gentle reproof in her tone, 'you cannot say that it was I who gave you up.'

He looked down and made no reply.

'I wish you had told me all, Terence; I wish you had acted differently. You might have trusted me—you might have trusted Philip. It has been such pain to us all, this discovery.'

'I have acted like a fool—you cannot blame me more than I blame myself, or say harder things of me. It was all that cursed money! I cannot do without that, Lenore.'

'Oh, Terence!'

'I cannot, I tell you, Lenore; I find out more and more how impossible it is for me to live upon small means. Money is a necessity to me. Oh, Lenore, why did you act so foolishly—childishly? Why did you stand so fatally in the way of our happiness? If you had not rejected Mrs. Boghey's splendid offer, we might now have been enjoying such happiness together.'

Lenore clasped her hands closely together, to

keep down all expression of the indignant scorn which filled her soul at these words.

'So it was the money, not me, you really loved, Terence. Was that the reason you hurried to Auckness to see me?'

'I wished to see for myself how the land lay,' answered Terence unguardedly. 'I had heard vague reports. But you know I always loved you, Lenore. I asked you for my wife before ever you had the least prospect of wealth. I am only a practical man, whom a knowledge of the world has taught common foresight and prudence. I could not afford to marry without money; it would have been an impossibility. We should have been most miserable. Oh, Lenore! why did you fling away your prospects? Why did you reject that most generous offer?'

'Oh!' cried Lenore, drawing a deep breath, 'what an escape I have had of a miserable, loveless marriage, and a money-loving, selfish husband!'

'Lenore!' cried Terence, shocked and hurt, 'how can you misunderstand me so! You know I always loved you devotedly.'

'It was my possible fortune you loved so devotedly, Terence,' answered Lenore slowly and sadly. 'Me you only loved a little. Your weak, time-serving affection is not worthy the holy name of love.'

Terence was silent. He felt it hard that Lenore should so fail to grasp the difficulties of his situation. He knew he had behaved badly, but he considered that he had had great excuses for his conduct, and it was hard upon him, he thought, that she should think so lightly of a love which he had believed very deep and sincere. Women were always so sentimental and unpractical, he told himself, that they could not understand or appreciate the most ordinary foresight and prudence in the question of marriage.

'I am sorry you find it so hard to forgive me, Lenore,' he said. 'I had hoped you would have had more trust in me.'

'Have you given me reason to trust you, Terence?' asked the girl quietly; and Terence winced at the simple question.

'Well,' he said resignedly, 'these idle recriminations are worse than useless. I know I have behaved badly, and you have a right to resent it. I am the only one who will suffer for my folly and weakness, and my life is already a ruined and miserable one. As for you, I hope you will be very happy.'

'I am sure to be,' answered Lenore, a tender smile lighting her face.

Terence looked at her enviously.

'You love Philip very much, Lenore?'

'I think I have never loved anyone else.'

'But you were engaged to me.'

Yes; I was very blind and weak; I did not know myself then. I am only young, Terence; I had not learned my own heart. I knew I had not the right kind of love for you; but I did not know I had almost given it to Philip.'

He gave a dissatisfied sigh. These were not palatable revelations to him.

'Well,' he said, 'I suppose you will live in Arcadia, and be as happy as the day is long; but I don't see how Philip can well afford to marry until he has the boys off his hands, unless he means to cut down my miserable pittance, and leave me wholly dependent upon the fortune of my wife. It is a very agreeable situation to be placed in, with a father-in-law always ready with pleasant and playful remarks and reminders!' And Terence laughed bitterly.

A faint flush had risen in Lenore's face.

'I do not think your allowance need be touched, Terence. And we shall be able to marry when we wish, without any fear of consequences.'

'I suppose the interest of your 5,000*l.* legacy will go a long way in this simple Arcadian home,' admitted Terence half enviously, half sarcastically.

Mrs. Boghey's letter lay still open upon Lenore's knee. Suddenly she took it up and handed it to Terence.

'I think you had better read that,' she said. 'You will not understand all the allusions; but you will understand enough to see what has happened, and to know that I have not deceived you.'

He took the papers quickly, with a wondering, startled glance into her flushed face. A vague uneasy sense of disquiet filled his soul.

Turning slightly away from her, and leaning against a neighbouring tree, he read the long letter, written by one who knew men and the world better than Lenore did.

When he had read the letter slowly through, he turned and handed it back to Lenore. Neither spoke for a while; they did not even exchange glances, but remained silent and motionless in their respective places.

'I congratulate you,' at last said Terence hoarsely; but the misery in his face touched Lenore.

'Terence,' she said gently, 'what is done cannot be undone; and it is useless to grieve over an irrevocable step, once taken. But if you have made a mistake from an unworthy—perhaps an unmanly—motive, show yourself a man now. Strive earnestly to make up in your future life for the mistakes of the past. Be an unselfish, loving husband. Oh, Terence, you might still lead such a noble life! You might yet win such happiness as you have hardly dreamed of. Oh, do throw

aside all unworthy, selfish longings and regrets, and use the opportunities left you, the life God has given you, to His honour and glory, and for the happiness of those nearest and dearest to you. You will then, Terence, find that happiness for which you have been vainly seeking all these years. It is not by living for oneself, but for others, that happiness comes. Try that way, and you will find what a holy and beautiful thing this life can be.'

Terence was moved by these words. Miserable and discontented as he was with himself and his life, and sadly conscious of the failure of his tactics, he was softened and humbled and ready to listen to Lenore's teaching.

'Tell me what to do, Lenore. God knows I have need of all the help I can get. Teach me what to do, and I will try and do it.'

'Oh, Terence,' cried Lenore earnestly, 'lay hold on the faith you have lost. Win back the old beliefs of your boyhood ; think of the lessons learnt at your mother's knee, which you have forgotten in the busy whirl of life. Ask God's help, for only He can help you. Make His Word your lamp and your guide. Make God your friend, and ask that His Holy Spirit may be your strength and comforter. You have forgotten God, but He has not forgotten you. You have denied Christ, but He will not deny you His help and His redeeming

love. Oh, Terence, never rest until God is all in all to you, and then at last you must find happiness and peace—God's own peace, which passeth understanding.'

Terence pressed his hand upon his eyes. He was much moved, and it was some while before he spoke again; when he did so it was in a low voice, but one that did not waver.

'Lenore,' he said, 'I will try. God knows I stand in need of help and strength. I am not worthy to ask help from Him; but I suppose even I may go to Him, in the worthiness of Christ?'

'Yes, Terence; Christ's death has given even the worst of us, the right to plead for forgiveness, because He died to save each one of us.'

There was silence there for a while, and Terence seemed to muse deeply.

'I believe Julia—that is, my wife, Lenore—is a good girl, though she has not been taught as my sisters have, and she is not like you, Lenore. I have had so little sympathy with her graver moods that I have silenced her confidences; but I do think in her own way she tries to be good. She always keeps Sunday quietly, in spite of her father's sneers, and reads prayers to the servants, though he will never attend.'

'Oh, Terence, I am so glad of that,' said Lenore

gladly. 'She will help you—you must help one another. Does she love you very much?'

'I believe she does, poor girl. She is a good girl enough, and much better than one could expect from her bringing up. Yes, she loves me, I know, and will do anything for me.'

'Then, Terence, you will love her, will you not? You will make her a good husband?'

'I will try, Lenore. Poor Julia!—yes, I will do my best for her. She wants me to leave the Army and buy a small property somewhere near here. I think I would, if only my family would receive her.'

'They will do that. I will answer for it, Terence. I think Julia's plan a capital one. Take her away from her objectionable father. Make her a good husband, and love her as she loves you. You will like country life immensely when you get interested in it. I don't think Philip's brother could be anything but a good farmer, and I shall come and see you from time to time, to see how you are getting on. You will have plenty of money and can live in good style, and will be able to have your London season and your Scotch shooting whenever you wish. I think you have the prospect of a very happy life before you, Terence; and if you will make it a useful and an unselfish one, I have not the least doubt that you will find your marriage, instead of being a great

mistake, has been the means of bringing you a greater meed of good and of contentment than anything else could have done. Remember, Terence, that unselfish love is the true secret of this world's happiness.'

'I do believe it is,' said he, drawing a deep sigh. 'Well, I will do my best. Good-bye, Lenore. God bless you!'

CHAPTER XXXV.

WEDDED.

THREE weeks later, upon a glorious midsummer day, Philip and Lenore Egremont stood together upon the cliffs of Auckness Point, and looked over the blue, laughing, foam-flecked waves, which raced shorewards before the summer breeze and sparkled in the golden sunshine.

'Oh, Philip!' said Lenore, drawing a long breath, 'how beautiful it is! Everything here looks tenfold more beautiful than ever it did before, now that you are with me to share it.'

He looked down at her with a proud smile.

'I could tell you the same tale, my Lenore, only that you know it already without any words of mine.'

Lenore looked up at him with eyes full of tender trust and love.

'Oh, Philip,' she said earnestly, 'we are very, very happy. I think no two people ever could have been so happy before.'

'We waited a long while for one another; the

time of probation seemed hard,' said Philip, with a proud, happy light in his grave eyes. 'But this atones for all.'

'Yes,' assented Lenore quietly and reverently. 'God has been very good to us, Philip.'

Two days ago Philip and Lenore had been quietly married from Cottesmere. It had been found that Lenore's presence at Auckness was a necessity for the winding-up of the establishment, and the arrangement of many important matters. The girl felt unable to cope single-handed with the responsibilities of her position, and looked to Philip to aid and to guide her.

The summons to Scotland settled the matter, for she saw at once it would be impossible to go alone, and it was only Philip who could give her the advice and the help she needed.

There was no reason for them to wait. Sudden as the engagement had been, it now seemed to both as though it had really existed ever since their childhood; certainly their mutual love and trust had grown up from their earliest years. There was nothing to urge against an immediate marriage, and so there had been a quiet wedding in the little village church, and Philip and Lenore, bound together by the holy and sacred marriage tie, had gone away north together, to visit the old house at Auckness.

A busy week followed for Philip and Lenore. The Auckness property was to be sold, according to Mrs. Boghey's wish, and already negotiations were being entertained by the agents for purchase. But Mrs. Boghey's personal effects, her books, and much of the old ancestral furniture, Lenore was determined not to part with.

'We will take it to Cottesmere, Philip,' she said. 'We need new furniture there badly enough and this fine old oak and mahogany will be far more appropriate in the dear old-fashioned home than anything we should be likely to buy. We will take them away with us. I could not leave them here for strangers.'

'Yes,' Philip assented, 'we will do so, Lenore. Now that we are to have the old home almost to ourselves, we shall want to make the rooms somewhat different. There will not be that continual trampling and wear and tear that we remember in old days.'

Lenore looked up at him and smiled.

'Those dear old days, Philip. What happy times we always had! What happy times we shall have yet! We shall have Dora still, and the boys in their holidays; and then we shall always have one another, which, after all, is the great thing.'

Yes, there was a great change in store for the

household at Cottesmere Farm, and a breaking up of the home party was at hand.

Duff was to realise his dream at last, and was to become an Australian sheep-farmer. Lenore had told them of Mrs. Boghey's wish that her money should be a benefit to the Egremont family, and ten thousand pounds was made over to Duff as his share in the general good fortune. He had heard of a farmer in a large way, who was wishful to dispose of his property and stock and return to England, and negotiations were already on foot. A few telegrams had been interchanged, a few interviews Duff had held with relatives of the farmer in England, and the matter seemed so far satisfactory that he had made up his mind to start for the Antipodes in a few weeks' time, to visit the property he proposed to purchase, and to settle down there or elsewhere as an independent farmer. Plenty of shrewdness and caution had Duff, and everyone was convinced that he would make his way in the world, even with a less solid sum to back him than his ten thousand pounds. He had read much and learned much about the country his thoughts had always centred on, and there seemed no reason to doubt that he would make his way. But Madeline's heart yearned over his isolated condition, and the lonely home he would have out there; and as there would be no need for him to 'rough it' very much,

and as Lenore was coming to be mistress at Cottesmere Farm, she had asked to accompany him, to take care of his house and to make a home for him; and Duff had gladly and gratefully accepted the offer, for the only thing he had dreaded in the new life was the loneliness of an empty house after the bustle and noise of the farm.

Then Marjory had been seized with the love of adventure, and had begged to be allowed to come too, 'just to help to settle Duff, and to see what another country looked like!' Marjory had been shut up all her short life in her quiet home, and there seemed no reason why her innocent wish for a change should not be gratified. So she was to join the outward-bound party, and thus the loneliness and pain of a general parting was spared to Duff, and everything went forward in a happy spirit of glad anticipation. As Marjory's sailor-cousin 'Jack' was first mate in the vessel which was to take them out, and as both Madeline and Marjory were to have the same fortune bestowed upon them as had been given to Duff, it seemed probable that neither of them would return as residents to Cottesmere.

Dora would remain on in the old home, doing her quiet works of love and charity amongst the sick and poor around. She was very quiet and very gentle in her manner and reserved with all

except Lenore, to whom she seemed able to confide freely all her sorrows and hopes and cares. Lenore had learned the whole history of the last strange summer, and her heart went out in womanly sympathy towards one who had given up so much for the Master's sake. Sometimes, as Lenore looked in love and tender pride at her husband, she would say to herself:

'Could I have given up as Dora has done? Could I have sacrificed my earthly love and happiness as she did? God gives wonderful strength to meet such strong temptations. His grace is sufficient for our needs; but not even His great love seems *quite* able to fill the blank in our lives, although it takes the sting from the wound. Poor Dora! how much she has suffered, and how nobly she has come out of the trial, like gold tried in the furnace!'

Terence was about to leave the Army. He was negotiating the purchase of a small property about five miles from Cottesmere; and in the anticipation of becoming a landowner and taking a more important social position than had ever been his before, some of the gloom and depression which had hung over him of late had begun to disappear. Since his talk with Lenore some few weeks back, it had seemed as if he was endeavouring

to lead a less selfish and a more useful and loveable existence.

'How wonderfully the way has opened out before us, Lenore!' said Philip, as they sat together upon the cliffs on the last evening of their stay at Auckness. 'A year ago all looked so very dark before me. I believed I had lost you, and with you all the brightness of my life. Money was scarce, and the question of Duff's future and the boys' education a constant source of anxiety. You were amongst strangers, occupying a position which I could not bear you to do, and everything looked dark and cheerless before me. It only shows how wonderfully God's love works for us, and how implicitly we may always trust His mercy and goodness. Ah, Lenore, how can I ever thank Him for all He has done for me in giving us to one another!'

'We can give ourselves, our lives, our wealth to Him for His honour and glory,' answered Lenore softly, as she leaned upon her husband's shoulder, and looked out over the sparkling sea with eyes deep with feeling. 'We can live to Him; we can try to show Him by our love, and in our lives, all the love which our lips can never speak. Let us try to live very near to Him, Philip, to follow as closely as we can in His footsteps, and to be His faithful soldiers and servants to our lives' ends.'

'We will, my precious wife, my helpmeet,' answered Philip with tender steadfastness; 'and may the Eternal God enable us to live as we would wish to live, and to consecrate our lives to His service.'

'He will be that, Philip—our refuge and strength,' said Lenore softly, 'and underneath are the everlasting arms. We need not doubt their power to carry us through the storms of life to the haven of perfect rest above.'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

COMING HOME.

IT SEEMS,' said Lenore to her husband, as she looked from the window of the railway carriage upon the wooded parks and green terraces of Langdale Hall, 'it seems as though there were happier and brighter days in store for all of us except poor Dora.'

Philip and Lenore were travelling homewards at length, after finishing all that they had to do in Scotland. Several van-loads of furniture had preceded them to Cottesmere, and in the train in-which they were now travelling were Mrs. Boghey's strong bay horses, her luxurious carriage, and the beautiful little horse she had bought for Lenore to ride. The previous night had been spent by the travellers in London, and now they were whirling through the bright summer sunshine towards their own well-loved home.

There was no station nearer than Chiveley, yet the line passed within two miles of Langdale and Cottesmere, and as Lenore looked out at the former

place in passing the thought of Dora's troubled life struck her with fresh force.

Philip woke out of his reverie and looked out.

But before he had time to answer there came a terrific crash, followed by a terrible sensation of grinding, and swaying, and upheaving, which for a moment robbed Lenore of all consciousness of passing events.

When she recovered from the stunning effects thus produced, she found herself clasped in her husband's arms, and it was his voice, trembling with anxiety, that met her ears:

'My darling, are you hurt?'

'N—no,' answered Lenore slowly and wonderingly, 'I think not. Philip, what is it?'

'An accident. We have run into something. We had better get out; our carriage is a good deal shattered. My darling, are you sure you are not hurt?'

'Yes, quite sure,' answered Lenore, recovering her self-possession. 'I was only stunned by the crash. I am not hurt; and you, Philip?'

'I have escaped too; but I hear cries and groans from other places. I must go and help those who need it. See, Lenore, this door will open. You sit down on the top of the bank there. I shall know where to find you when I have done what I can to help.

Philip strode off to the front, where help was most needed, and Lenore climbed the embankment, and looked down upon the scene below with frightened eyes. Their train had run into a goods train in front, and the engine and some of the foremost carriages were crushed and shattered almost to pieces, and the rails for some yards were torn up. All the passengers were crowding out, and round the spot where the damage was most severe, a small but dense crowd was assembled, and Lenore could not see what was going on, although she knew that the injured must be receiving release and assistance.

Her head swam and she felt like one in a dream, as she wandered up and down the top of the embankment where Philip had told her to remain, and exchanged questions and comments with the frightened and excited travellers who had issued from the carriages.

Reports were brought from time to time of an encouraging kind. Not very many people had been badly hurt. The engine-driver was the worst. Nobody was killed. Some navvies were coming, and the train would be able to proceed as soon as the line could be cleared and a fresh engine brought up. These and a number of similar reports were brought up by those who ventured to the scene of action to inquire; and the general

panic and agitation began to subside. Some people, on hearing that the line was properly blocked, began to return to their carriages, and to discuss the whole affair with calmness, and even a certain amount of satisfaction.

Still Philip did not come back, and as he was now on the farther side of the train, Lenore could not even see him, nor could she understand what was detaining him.

By-and-by she saw that the carriage they had brought with them had been taken out, and the horses put in, and she saw it drawn with some little difficulty up the opposite embankment, on the top of which lay the high road to Cottesmere, which was hardly two miles distant.

'Philip thinks it would make me nervous to have to go on in the train,' thought Lenore, 'and so he has had the carriage taken out. How good of him! It will be much the quickest and pleasantest way of getting home.'

The next moment Philip came striding towards her, and his face was very grave.

'Lenore,' he said, 'Forrester was in the train.'

'Yes?' she said, and looked at him, knowing there was more to follow.

'He is very badly hurt. I am not sure that he is not dying now.'

'Philip!

'There is no doctor for miles round, and no decent house near to take him to. I have taken out the carriage and horses—they have hardly felt the shock, being so far back—and I am going to drive him straight to Langdale.'

'Not to Langdale, Philip,' said Lenore quickly and earnestly—'to Cottesmere. It is nearer—take him there. Langdale is shut up and empty—no rooms aired, no servants to nurse him. Take him home, and we will nurse him ourselves. Send somebody off at once, on my little horse, for a doctor. Let him be at Cottesmere to meet us when we arrive. Dora will have gone to Chiveley, to meet us there. She will be spared the shock. Let us take him home, Philip, and at once.'

He looked into her earnest, pleading face, and gave a quiet assent.

'So be it, Lenore. It will make your home-coming a sad one, but it shall be as you wish.'

'Not sad when you are with me, Philip,' she answered gently, as she followed him across the lines; 'not sad when we are helping others—doing as we would be done by. The sadness would come if we were to act selfishly; only that could mar our happiness.'

'God bless you, Lenore!' said Philip with quiet emphasis; and then he led her to the spot where the carriage was waiting.

'You had better get in. I will send off a messenger for the doctor, and then I will have Forrester brought here. Poor fellow, I am afraid it will go hard with him.'

Lenore sat still with clasped hands and wide-open, anxious eyes. It was a strange home-coming for the young wife—a curious fashion of entering into her husband's house, bringing with them a sick man and a stranger to nurse.

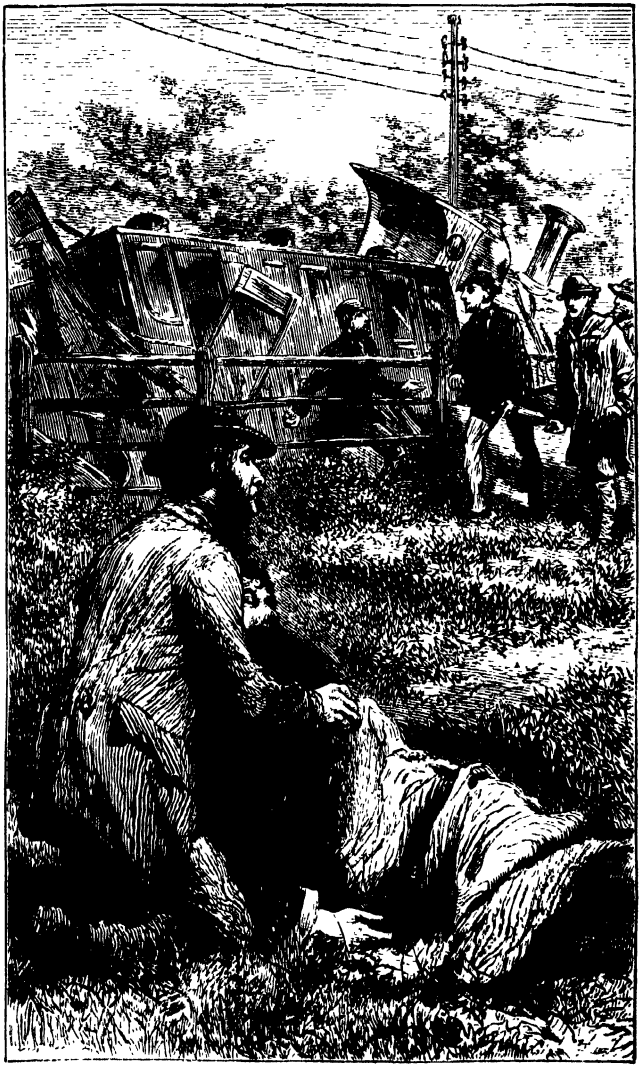
Philip was not long gone this time. When he returned he was not alone. Six men accompanied him, bearing upon a stretcher a rigid and motionless form, which they laid down, stretcher and all, across the wide and roomy carriage.

The face was all that was visible– a still, white, handsome face, that looked as if it were carved out of a piece of marble.

'He is quite unconscious still, Lenore,' said Philip, as he mounted the box. 'In all probability he will remain so for long enough ; but just watch him, in case he seems inclined to come round.'

The strange drive was speedily accomplished, and as one who moves and speaks in a dream, Lenore found herself standing within the porch of Cottesmere Farm, giving lucid and brief directions to the wondering servants as to what was to be done.

Marjory, Madeline, and Duff were in London,



selecting outfits. The boys were at school. Dora had gone down to the station to meet the train; so the house was empty, save for the presence of the servants.

The doctor drove up in his gig just as Lenore's orders to the servants had been given. These were carried out under her direction with the utmost celerity, and by the time that the injured man had been carefully lifted from the carriage and conveyed upstairs his room was ready to receive him.

Then, leaving Philip and Mr. Hunt together with the patient, Lenore wandered quietly over the house alone.

How familiar it all was, and yet how different! Lenore had been several weeks absent, and many changes had taken place since then. Painters, paperers, and decorators had been at work, and had left brightness and beauty behind them.

But before she had had time to look round her, she saw that Dora was hastily approaching, with a white, troubled face. She hurried out into the porch to meet her.

'Oh, Lenore!' cried Dora, 'how thankful I am to see you! I have been so miserable! Where is Philip? Is he hurt?'

Dora's face was pale, and her eyes dilated by anxiety. Lenore hastened to reassure her as to their safety.

'I heard there had been an accident,' continued Dora; 'and it was so dreadful waiting for the train to come, for they said the injured would be brought there in it; and when it did come, you were not there, and I could not find out anything, except that a lady and gentleman with a carriage had driven away, and that the gentleman was hurt. I knew you were bringing a carriage with you. Where is Philip? Let me go to him. Is he much hurt?'

'No, dear, not at all. We both escaped most wonderfully.'

'But they told me——'

'It was not Philip, dear; it was one of our fellow-passengers. Poor fellow, he was quite unconscious, and could give no account of himself. He seemed so bad that it would have been cruel to leave him to the mercy of ignorant railway porters, so we just brought him here with us.'

Dora's face cleared and she drew a deep breath.

'That was good of you. I am so glad it was not Philip. I have been so wretched. But the poor man, Lenore, where is he? Can I do anything? Do you know I have developed quite a talent for nursing these past months? It will come in useful now. Is it a working-man? Third-class carriages generally suffer most.'

'No, it is a gentleman—to judge by his clothes,

answered Lenore guardedly. 'Mr. Hunt and Philip are with him. We will wait and hear what they say. How nice you have made the house, Dora, and how well the things from Auckness look in it! I'm afraid you had very hard work.'

'I enjoyed it,' answered Dora brightly. 'I like hard work, and I was very happy. It is pleasant to see things going happily around one. Dear old Duff is so delighted at his prospective farm. I never knew before what a sacrifice he made in giving up his little fortune to save the family honour and to pay Terence's debts. And Madeline has been brighter and more full of life than I have ever seen her, and Marjory is like a child in her eagerness and interest over every detail of the new life. The idea of seeing a fresh country seems to give her the utmost delight, to say nothing of the prospective voyage.'

Lenore smiled, feeling all the while as if tears were readier than smiles. Was the whole family to participate in a happiness from which Dora alone was shut out? Was it to be her fate to witness the realisation of the hopes of others, whilst her own life was desolate? Was fresh grief already in store for her, whilst she was rejoicing in the happiness of others?

Dora fancied that Lenore was tired, and she left her in order to hasten on the preparations for

tea. Lenore, thus left alone, could no longer contain herself, but made her way upstairs, and on the first landing met Philip coming down in search of her.

'Well?' she asked breathlessly.

Philip shook his head. His face was very grave.

'Hunt thinks very badly of him. He is terribly injured—one leg and one arm broken, a hand crushed, and other injuries not so easy to treat. We have telegraphed for further advice; but I believe all has been done that can be.'

'And you think he will die?' asked Lenore, very low.

'Hunt believes him too much injured to rally; but he may live days—even weeks, I believe—unless he is more hurt than appears as yet.'

Lenore breathed a little more freely.

'Is he conscious?'

'Not yet; but he will probably become so later on, unless the brain has suffered. Hunt fancies there is a slight concussion, but he believes he will come to himself presently. He will remain with him until the London doctor comes.'

'Philip,' said Lenore, 'what are we to say to Dora?'

'Does she know nothing?'

'She does not know who it is. I could not tell

her, fearing, as I did, that every minute might bring the news of his death.'

'Poor girl,' said Philip musingly, 'poor Dora! It seems as though there was nothing but trouble and sorrow in her life. Lenore, I think we will not tell her to-night— not, at any rate, until we have heard what view a more experienced surgeon takes of the case. Till he has been, let her remain in ignorance.'

Lenore was only too willing to do this, for she dreaded making known the melancholy truth.

It was a strange, dream-like evening she passed, sitting beside Dora in the old-fashioned drawing-room, whilst Philip divided his time between them and the sick man, whose name was never mentioned between them.

The surgeon from London arrived about dusk, and was some while shut up in the patient's room. Lenore's anxiety grew more and more intense.

'I think I will go up and see if I can learn anything,' she said by-and-by, in as light a tone as she could.

When she reached the top of the stairs she paused, and in a few minutes the two doctors came out together, and Philip, catching sight of her, came out too.

'They are going to consult together. Will you

go into the room for a few minutes? Then I can speak to Mr. —— before he goes.'

'Is there anything to do? Is he conscious?'

Philip shook his head.

'No, only just stay in the room. There is nothing to do.'

Lenore stole quietly into the quiet room.

Gordon Forrester lay like one dead upon the bed, his face as colourless as the pillow upon which it rested, and as calm and free from lines of pain as the face of the dead.

Lenore stood looking down upon the noble head, a strange expression upon her face.

'And God made man in His own image,' she murmured, 'and man denies the God who made him.'

She stood a long while beside the bed, one thought chasing another through her mind, but this one ever recurring again and again:

'Will he die in the darkness in which he has lived? Is the shadow of death falling already upon him? Will it be to him a horror of great darkness? Will God's face be turned away?'

Suddenly, whilst she was thus pondering, the dark-fringed lids suddenly lifted themselves, and a pair of keen black eyes looked into hers.

'Where am I?' asked Gordon Forrester in the old decisive tone, in which there was no trace of feebleness or bewilderment.

'You are at Cottesmere Farm, amongst friends,' answered Lenore quietly.

'I do not know you,' he said quickly.

'I am Lenore—Philip Egremont's wife.'

He looked keenly at her.

'I understand. Is Dora here?'

'She is in the house.'

A sharp contraction crossed his face.

'I came to ask her to——but that is nothing. This cursed railway accident has put a stop to all that. Am I dying?' The question came as coolly as if the matter were of small importance.

'I do not know,' answered Lenore, speaking steadily, although she trembled.

'I am in danger?'

'I hardly know not immediate.'

'Do not be afraid to speak, Mrs. Egremont. You need not be tender over me. I know the game is played out at last. I am not afraid of the oblivion of death. Sometimes I have wished for it. I should like to have seen Dora; but 'tis no matter, and she is too holy to be contaminated by a sinner like me. Tell her——'

And here the voice, which was unnaturally firm and strong, broke altogether, and Forrester relapsed into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AT THE GATES OF DEATH.

'How has he passed the night, Philip?' asked Lenore of her husband the next morning.

Philip looked pale and haggard, and his face told by itself a bad tale.

'Restlessly and miserably, in pain of body and mind. Ah, Lenore, it is a fearful thing to see a human soul stand at the very gates of death, without one hope of the life to come, without one thought of God's love, to bring comfort and help.'

Philip passed his hand wearily across his eyes, and Lenore's glance was full of tender sorrow.

'Philip, *must* he die?'

'I fear he has no chance. The doctors say he *might* live, almost by a miracle, as there is no absolutely fatal injury; but he is so much shattered, so terribly hurt, that recovery is all but hopeless, and nothing but the most perfect quiet of both body and mind can save him. His brain has been working all night long without intermission; his active mind will not rest. He is killing himself by his incessant and feverish restlessness.'

'Is anything troubling him?'

'I believe his own state before God is troubling him. I believe he is reaping all the desolation and despair of his own terrible creed. He is standing face to face with death, and I believe he is realising that death will not be the simple annihilation he has always thought or professed to think it. A future of some kind is spreading mysteriously before him, and there is no light shining upon it. All is as dark and shadowy as the grave itself.'

Lenore's eyes had grown deep and dreamy with feeling.

'I know what it is, Philip; I have seen something of it. It is terrible to witness; but fear and pain are better than that dreadful indifference. God is very merciful. Light may come. There is time—the end is not very near?'

'I trust not; but he is minimising his time and his small chance of recovery by his restlessness and silent misery. His rambling talk, when the fever was on him, was much of Dora. It might quiet him to see her. In any case, I think that she ought to be told now.'

'I think so too. She might do more for him than any of us can do. But you look tired out, Philip. You must have some breakfast, and then you must rest. Who is with him now?'

'Campbell. What a fortunate thing we let her

come here! She will be a treasure to us now. She seems to have a genius for nursing. Both doctors have remarked it.'

'Yes, poor Campbell has had only too much to do with sickness and suffering. I think now she is almost more at home with it than with happiness and joy. She will indeed be a treasure to us.'

Campbell had been for nearly a week an inmate of Cottesmere Farm. She had remained at Auckness, after Mrs. Boghey's death, to take care of the house; but when it was dismantled and put up for sale, she had felt desolate and homeless beyond all endurance. She had no relatives of whom she knew anything, and she had made no friends. Her life had been wrapped up in her mistress, and she had loved none but her and Lenore. When she learned that the old establishment was to be broken up, she implored, with tears in her eyes, that Lenore would permit her to enter her service, as there seemed nobody else in the world to whom she could turn.

Lenore consented gladly, knowing what a loyal and faithful heart she thus gained, and Campbell had accompanied the Auckness properties to Cottesmere, and was already established there as a trusted and trustworthy maid to its young mistress.

'Shall we go into the garden, Dora?' said Lenore, as they rose from rather a silent breakfast.

Dora looked up quickly, and followed without a word. She saw that something was weighing upon the minds of Philip and Lenore, but what it was she had no idea. The fact that there was a stranger lying upstairs in an almost dying state was enough to account for much, but she did wonder that they spoke of him so little and so guardedly.

Lenore's face was pale and grave, and she walked along in thoughtful silence, whilst Dora looked at her from time to time, and presently inquired :

'Is something troubling you, Lenore?'

'Yes, Dora.'

'I am sorry. Can I help you?'

'Our trouble is more on your account than on our own.'

'On my account?'

'Yes. Do you know, Dora, that the man upstairs is very dangerously ill?'

Dora was surprised at this sudden change of subject, but she answered :

'Yes, I know he is. Do the doctors say he will die?'

'They do not say he absolutely must die ; but they think it probable that he will die.'

'Do you know who he is, and where he comes from?

'Yes; he is able to speak now.'

'Should you not send for his friends?'

'I believe, Dora,' answered Lenore significantly, 'that there is only one friend he wishes to see.'

Dora looked at her earnestly.

'What do you mean?'

'I mean, that I believe his only wish is to see you again.'

The colour died out from Dora's face. She stopped still, and faced Lenore with dilated eyes.

'Tell me who it is!'

The question was almost voiceless. The lips alone formed the words.

'Gordon Forrester!'

For a full minute there was silence. The sisters stood looking into each other's faces, without trying to put their thoughts into words.

'I will go to him,' said Dora at length. 'Take me to him, Lenore.'

They ascended together the shallow stairs; together they entered the darkened room and stood beside the bed.

Forrester's eyes opened slowly, and a sudden light flashed into their dark, hopeless depths.

'Dora!'

'Gordon—I am come to you,' she said quietly, speaking his name for the first time.

His eyes were fastened upon her with an

unutterable yearning, in which love and sorrow and despair were strangely blended.

'You would not help me to live, Dora,' he said; 'will you help me to die?'

He stretched out his uninjured hand feebly towards her, and Dora took it gently in both of hers.

Then Lenore quietly stole from the room, signing to Campbell to follow. No third person's presence should disturb the solemn sanctity of that strange and sad reunion.

Lenore found ample occupation for hands and head in the readjustment of household matters.

Life at Cottesmere was not to go on quite in the old grooves, now that money was plentiful and the household diminished.

Some changes should be made now. Lenore was determined that Philip should at last occupy the position that was his by right, as head of the Egremont family—one of the oldest families in the county.

She had no wish to leave the old house they both loved so well—no wish to change it for a grander residence, which her fortune would have enabled her to purchase and to keep up. But she was steadfastly purposed that the old home and the old life should be greatly modified and changed, according to ideals of her own

The broad pasture lands should be turned into park; hedges should be removed and trees planted; and the shining Mere, about which Philip so much loved to ramble, should no longer be surrounded by a tangled mass of underwood and briars, but should be made beautiful without losing any of the charm of its wildness. The gardens should be laid out now according to those old ideals over which she and Philip had spent many happy hours of discussion in past days. The smooth terraces and shady avenues, the rose garden and greenhouses which had been dreamed of 'when the ship came in,' should now become realities, and Philip's home should be made fit for him within and without.

Lenore's busy brain was full of tender plans for Philip's happiness and Philip's good, as she went about her work that day. Not even her sympathy and sorrow for the two she had left together upstairs could drive out of her heart the sunshine of the joy of her deep love for her husband. She could not but be happy this first day spent in his home as his wife; she could not but make plans and dreams of which he was always the hero – the centre figure, round which all must revolve.

Nearly three hours had passed before Dora came down from Forrester's room. She came to Lenore in the little study, where with loving hands the young wife was putting finishing touches of

beauty, and her face was pale and her eyes dark with suppressed emotion.

'Dora, dearest Dora!' said Lenore quietly and tenderly, and put both arms round her neck in a caress that spoke more eloquent sympathy than words could do.

Dora heaved a deep sigh—almost a gasp.

'Lenore!' she cried, 'Lenore, must he die?'

She dared not hold out hopes.

'I fear there is but little chance of life.'

Dora shuddered, and Lenore's arms held her more closely.

'Dear Dora, it is the hardest trial that can come to us, to lose those whom we love. I know I cannot comfort you. Only One can do that.'

'It is not that, Lenore,' said Dora with deep-drawn breath—'not that—I could bear the parting—bear anything, if only——' Here she shuddered again, and her voice died away. By-and-by she looked up and spoke more steadily, though her face was white and haggard, and from time to time contracted with mental pain.

'I can bear my own grief, my own loss; but his dark despair is too terrible. He feels the need of help and comfort now; but he has turned his face from God so long, and now it seems as if God had turned His face from him.'

'Seems, Dora, only seems,' answered Lenore,

with the deep earnestness of faith and certain hope shining in her eyes. 'God's face is never turned away from His children who are groping from darkness into light.'

'I know, I know; but it is very hard to see him in such black darkness,' cried Dora sadly.

'The approach of death lifts the veil from most eyes, unless they are wilfully blind. He feels already that death cannot end his spiritual life—that is the first step, the rest must follow. Help him, Dora, help him all you can. We will all pray for him.'

'Do so!' she cried earnestly; 'prayer is so powerful; I have found that out long ago. I will help him—I must. He will talk to no one else. Sometimes I feel as though my faith *must* save him—God seems so near, so ready to come to him. I *know* that my Redeemer liveth——' Dora turned away her face, working with the intensity of her emotion; and Lenore breathed a silent prayer for her and him whom she loved.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MAN AND WIFE.

'IT is useless to urge me now. I have no strength; my mind is weak and bewildered; I cannot think, much less reason,' said Forrester faintly. 'The sound of your voice, the touch of your hand seem to bring heaven near, but as soon as you are gone the black darkness comes and swallows me up. Ah, Dora! if you would have been my wife, you could have led me whither you would, but you would not undertake the task. I was too wicked for you—too hardened a sinner.' And he laughed a short, bitter laugh.

'Not that, Gordon, not that,' answered Dora gently, though face and voice betrayed the pain his words gave her. 'Your words are not just, nor are they true. I should not have led you; it is you who would have led me. You best know at what goal you would have landed me.'

'But you would have been my wife,' he said with restless irritability. 'That would have atoned

for all. I should have known what happiness was. I could have died in peace.'

'Could you?' she asked.

He looked up into the face above him, which had grown pale and wan with three long days of anxious watching. In his eyes that face was more beautiful than any other in the whole world.

'If you were my wife,' he said with slow deliberation, 'I could conquer death in the might of my love. Love and hope, and the certainty of future happiness would give me strength to live. I have nothing now to live for, and I shall die.'

Their eyes met in a long, strange gaze, the meaning of which was hardly understood by either. Dora's face turned red, and then more pale than before, and her clasped hands trembled a little.

'Gordon,' she said softly and clearly, 'if hope and love can save you, let them. Hope and love on; I will do the same. You must not feel that you have nothing left to live for, if it is anything that I can give.'

He was looking steadily at her.

'You mean, you love me, Dora?'

'Yes.'

'You mean that if I live, you will be my wife?'

'Yes.'

A sudden light leaped to his eyes, and then died slowly out.

'You think so now, Dora,' he said slowly and sadly; 'you think that I shall be a different man from what I have been, if I recover from this illness. Do not build upon that. I have no hope yet of being otherwise than I am—what men term an atheist.'

'I believe you *will* be a different man, if God raises you up again,' answered Dora steadily; 'but that is not why I give myself to you. I will marry you if you still love me, whatever your views are.'

'Last year you would not.'

'Last year I dared not.'

'You feared me then?'

'Yes; I feared you would lead me into your land of darkness—I believe you would have done so then.'

'And now you fear that no longer?'

'No.'

'Why is that? Am I weaker or are you stronger?'

She looked down upon him with a faint, sweet smile which he hardly understood.

'Both, I think.'

He gazed at her and moved restlessly upon his bed. She seemed like an angel of light to him, in her womanly tenderness and serenity. She seemed immeasurably above him—as an angel of God.

'You bid me hope, you bid me love!' he cried with more of despair than of hope in his voice, 'and I cannot—I cannot. You pity me, now that I lie here helpless, and pity is akin to love, but it is not love itself. When health and strength come back you will speak and think differently—I cannot believe you will ever be my wife.'

'Gordon!' she said, with gentle reproach in her tone.

'I cannot,' he answered wearily, 'and the doubt will haunt and help to kill me. No, Dora, let us forget the words we have just spoken; let me die in loneliness and indifference. Had you been my wife, I think I could have lived for you; I think your love could have so rested and soothed me that I could have battled with death itself; but it was not to be. I was not worthy of you, and now I will die alone.'

A quick flush mounted to Dora's face and as quickly died away. It was several minutes before she spoke, and he had closed his eyes wearily and turned his head somewhat away.

She took his hand in both of hers, and touched it with her lips.

'Gordon,' she said tenderly and steadily, 'I will be your wife now.'

His eyes flashed open and fastened upon her, in an earnest, wondering gaze.

'You will be my wife now?' he repeated.

'Yes,' she answered steadily.

'You will marry a dying man?'

'I would marry you even if I knew you were dying, if I could thus make the end more happy or more peaceful,' she answered in the same quiet way. 'I will marry you now, if you will have it so, and will tend you, and nurse you, and live for you, and you will battle with sickness and with death for my sake, as well as for your own; and it may be that God in His mercy will raise you up again.'

The light of hope and of love was already brightening the weary eyes, but not all at once could Forrester grasp at the happiness within his reach.

'You are an angel, Dora,' he said with slow emphasis. 'I cannot tell you one tithe of what I feel towards you—it would be impossible. But your family will not permit it; why should they? What am I to them? They will not permit it, so let us think no more of it.'

'Philip and Lenore will not oppose it,' answered Dora quietly. 'I can answer for them. Besides what other people say matters little. You are more to me than all the world beside. What you decide shall be done. I will be yours if you bid me. I am of age. I have the right to give myself to you.'

'Ah, Dora, Dora!' he cried passionately, 'your words give me power and hope—you are my very life. But can I accept so great a sacrifice?'

'Sacrifice!' she repeated gently, 'what sacrifice? My heart is yours already. What sacrifice can it be, that our love is sanctified by that holy bond? You must indeed doubt my love, if you can use such a word.'

'Doubt your love! No, Dora, I cannot do that; but I must think for you, who will not think for yourself. Suppose I die? I may do so, likely enough. Ought I to condemn you to an early widowhood—you who will hardly be a wife?'

'I cannot mourn for you more deeply than I shall do in any case,' answered Dora quietly, though her voice shook and her lip quivered. 'Oh, Gordon, to lose you would be like losing life itself. Why should I not have the right to mourn in the eyes of the world? Would there be any sacrifice in that?'

That pathetic, tremulous tone settled the question.

Forrester ceased to raise obstacles to the realisation of his fondest dreams. He opened his heart to receive the love so fully and freely offered, and, looking into her tender, tearful eyes, the world was forgotten—all was forgotten in the paradise of their deep love.

He stretched out his hand with a mute gesture more expressive than a caress.

'Dora—my wife—come to me. This makes atonement for all.'

Lenore was in the garden, waiting for Philip to come in from his supervision of farm improvements, which had already been set on foot, when she saw Dora approaching slowly, and the expression upon the girl's face arrested her attention. There was something inexpressibly sweet and sad in her look, but the sorrow was not that of hopeless despondency, rather of a love so deep as to bring with it actual pain.

'Lenore,' she said, 'I was wanting you. I wanted to find you alone.'

'What is it, Dora? He is not worse?'

'No, I think not, I trust not. Lenore, we want to be married now—as quickly as possible. Please will you tell Philip, and will he do what is necessary? You will be my friend in this, Lenore?'

The young wife looked at the girl, and sudden tears sprang to her eyes; but Dora had not appealed to her in vain.

'It shall be as you wish, dearest,' said Lenore, kissing her tenderly. 'I will tell Philip about it; I will answer for him—we will both be your friends.'

Three days later Gordon Forrester and Dora

Egremont were married, in the quaint old bedroom where he lay helpless, perhaps dying, in Cottesmere Farm.

Philip and Lenore and the young doctor alone were present, the latter on account of the patient's critical state, for the excitement, it was thought, might cause a relapse, and medical help be needed.

It was a short and solemn service which joined in one those two lives 'till death should them part,' whilst all the while the angel of death seemed hovering very close above them, ready almost at any moment to claim his prey.

Dora was quite calm and serene, and plighted her troth with unfaltering voice, and Forrester's low tones were hardly less firm than hers. A deep calm seemed to have fallen upon both, a peacefulness and rest born of their own deep love, and of the actual knowledge that all uncertainty was over, and that they were joined together by a tie too strong for any human power to break.

After the holy words of mutual dedication had been spoken, all stole quietly from the room, leaving the husband and wife alone together.

'My wife!' said Forrester, and clasped her hand in his, seeming to need no other word to express his feelings. 'My wife!'

She bent and kissed his lips. Kisses had not been so frequent between them as to lose their

sense of nearness and tenderness; this one was almost solemn in its meaning—the first kiss after marriage, such a kiss as could be given but once in a lifetime.

'What God has joined together, let not man put asunder,' she said in a low, clear voice. 'Gordon, will you love the God who has given me to you and joined our lives in one?'

'My heart is full to overflowing of love,' answered Forrester slowly. 'Dora, wife, if such love as yours exists upon earth, such angelic goodness and self-sacrifice; I can almost believe it must have its counterpart elsewhere—in the God in whom you trust. Pray to Him, Dora, if He can hear prayer, that He will at last reveal Himself to me.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A UNITED FAMILY.

IT was the first day of September, and the golden sunlight bathed the world in a flood of glory.

A large party was gathered upon the lawn before Cottesmere Farm—a family party larger now than even in the old days, for more than one new member had been added to its ranks during the past year.

It was the eve of the departure of the Australian travellers. Their journey had been postponed somewhat by the exigencies of outfit and what not, to say nothing of Marjory's anxiety to wait for 'Jack's ship,' which had had to give place to another, and to wait a few weeks to repair some damage a storm had inflicted. This delay had given time for letters from Australia to reach them, and, as far as it was possible to judge, the farm Duff was thinking of buying was in a most satisfactory state, and would suit him to a nicety.

He and his sisters were in excellent spirits. Madeline's regrets at leaving the old home were far

fewer (seeing Lenore was now its mistress), than those that would have troubled her had Duff been going out alone, to lead a solitary life in a strange land. Then, Marjory's companionship would insure them both against any kind of dulness, for her spirits were unfailing, her delight at the thought of the new and adventurous life unbounded, and as she could be almost equally useful and suggestive to Duff as to farm matters and live-stock, as she could to her sister upon household affairs, there seemed no reason why the Australian home should not be a very bright and happy one.

'I can hardly believe I am really going at last,' said Duff, leaning back in his chair and looking round him with a smile. 'And in such style too —very different from the one I used to picture. Lenore, I've never thanked you, and, what's more, I don't feel as if I ever could; but you shall see I will not play ducks and drakes with your gift.'

'Not my gift, Duff—Mrs. Boghey's legacy,' returned Lenore with a smile. 'It was her own wish that you should all share what was willed to me. She made that quite plain.'

'Well, whatever way you like to look at it, I'm very much indebted to somebody,' returned Duff. 'And it seems to me pretty clear that Lenore's the person most concerned in the matter.'

'You deserve to realise your ideal at last, Duff,'

she answered, smiling. 'You were so good about your disappointment of past days.'

'Well, I can never regret that any more,' said Duff heartily, 'for if I had gone out then it would have been uphill work, and I should have been alone. Now, with your "legacy," and Madeline and Marjory to make it home for me, I shall have everything heart could wish, and I consider myself a very lucky fellow.'

'I wish you'd say something of the kind before Terence when he comes,' said Philip. 'I think it would please him.'

'I will with pleasure,' assented Duff heartily. 'Poor old Terence! I believe I was rather down upon him in my thoughts, even if I didn't say much. I'm glad he will be here to-day. I thought him looking much better and jollier than he has been doing for a long while, when I met him in town last week. Perhaps he is not so unhappy in his married state as we had imagined.'

'I do not think he is unhappy at all,' answered Lenore. 'You know, we have hardly seen anything of them yet, because they have been away, and the house they have bought has been undergoing repairs, and so on, and they are only just settled in it now. But Terence's letters have been very bright and hopeful, ever since he really cut his connection with the Army and his associates there,

and escaped from his father-in-law's influence. His legacy has made him feel independent again, and when I saw them, they both seemed wonderfully happy and fond of one another.'

'You have seen them both then?'

'Yes, Philip and I spent a day there last week; helping them to arrange the house and to get settled.'

'And what is she like?' asked Marjory eagerly, and both sisters drew near to listen to the answer. 'Is she very vulgar?'

'No,' answered Lenore decidedly. 'She is not vulgar at all.'

'Oh, I am glad!' cried Marjory gladly; and Madeline added, more gravely.

'So am I. It seemed so dreadful to think that our Terence should make a low marriage, which would render his whole life miserable. Tell us something about her, Lenore. What is she like? Does she care for Terence? Will she try to make him happy?'

'I am sure she does and will. She is far, far nicer than I expected, and will make him, I think, a very good and sensible wife. She has plenty of firmness as well as affection.'

At this point an interruption occurred, which for a while put an end to the discussion of Terence's affairs.

A couch was standing upon the lawn, as though it had been wheeled out for someone who had not yet arrived, and now there slowly issued from the house the tall, gaunt form of Forrester, who leaned rather heavily upon his wife's shoulder, supporting himself on the other side with a stout stick.

Philip sprang forward to assist him, and in a few minutes he was comfortably settled upon his couch, and looked round with great satisfaction, for this was the second time only that he had been able to get out of doors at all, and he had never been so far as the shaded lawn before.

'Well,' remarked Duff, 'a fine scarecrow they have made of you amongst them, Forrester. You've had a pretty good spell of your bed, to judge by the looks of you.'

'Eight weeks, and a variety of broken bones,' answered Forrester lazily. 'No, I suppose the effect is not becoming; but my wife saves me all trouble in the adorning of my person, so that I do not have recourse to a glass in which to plume myself upon my charms.'

'You should have seen him three weeks ago, Duff,' said Dora laughing; 'then you might have had something to remark upon.'

'A nice kind of bridegroom you make, old fellow,' remarked Duff, who was leaning over the head of the couch, surveying the prostrate form of

his friend with a glance of honest commiseration, though he continued to chaff him gently and lazily. 'A very pretty kind of young man to make a lady an offer of marriage.'

Forrester smiled, and a twinkle in his eye showed that his old love of teasing had not deserted him. Holding his wife's hand more closely in his, he answered Duff's sally:

'I rather fancy it was the lady that made me the offer. Very obliging, was it not?'

'Humph!' said Duff. 'Well, there's no accounting for taste.'

'You don't see the attraction?'

'Well, no, I can't say that I do.'

'What! not in the prospect of being left a handsome young widow, with house and lands at disposal? But you see I cheated wife and doctors and all, and now she has to put up with the encumbrance of a lame scarecrow of a husband to wait on. But, to do her justice, she puts up with the encumbrance very resignedly.'

'Gordon!' exclaimed Dora gently, half pained by his words, despite the pressure of the hand that held hers.

Duff laughed and said:

'But you won't be lame always?'

'I hope not; but they tell me it will be a precious long while before I am good for anything

again, although I have done so wonderfully well these past weeks. It would have been a lively look out, if I hadn't had the forethought to take to myself a wife. As it is, I am marvellously contented to lie like a log and be waited on.'

His eyes sought Dora's, and she smiled again, for these words made atonement for the last.

'And to-morrow,' continued Forrester, 'my wife and I go at last to Langdale, which is now in order to receive its mistress. Lenore, won't you be very glad when this great exodus to-morrow is over, and you and Philip are left to enjoy your home at last in peace? You can hardly have felt yet to have entered upon your married life. All has been trouble and turmoil so far.'

Lenore advanced smiling.

'I do not think we have had anything to complain of so far, Philip and I; and we shall still have Hector and Archie left, even after the "great exodus." Are you sure you feel equal to the move to-morrow, Gordon? You must not do anything to throw yourself back.'

Whilst Forrester answered Lenore, Duff drew back and said in low tones to Philip:

'Did it never strike you, old fellow, that if Forrester there had "hopped the twig," as seemed so probable, that is just what the world would have said of Dora's marriage?'

'What?'

'What he said just now in chaff—the rich young widow with property and fortune. It struck me directly I heard of it. I suppose you and Lenore were too unworldly, and too much in sympathy with the romantic side of the situation, to think of such a thing.'

'Not exactly that,' answered Philip; 'that side of the question did strike us both, but we decided to hold our peace. The question of money and property never for a moment crossed Dora's mind. She was simply wrapped up in her devotion to him, and it seemed only cruel to put the idea into her head, to harass and trouble her. Both doctors agreed that nothing could save him whilst the feverish restlessness was wearing him out, and it seemed as though nothing but the certainty of Dora's love, which only marriage would give, could bring to him any peace of mind. At any rate, when they were made man and wife, all that exhaustion and fever left him, and the doctors say, without hesitation, that the marriage saved his life. Therefore I cannot think we did wrong, although I knew all along that, if he should die, our motive and Dora's would be misconstrued.'

'All's well that ends well,' said Duff with a laugh. 'I believe you did right; but, except for the lucky accident of Forrester's having no near

relatives, very unpleasant things might still be said by the ill-disposed.'

'I am aware of it,' answered Philip, 'but I do not believe we shall be much troubled in that way. Forrester would pretty soon put his foot down if he ever heard a word, and I doubt if Dora would vex herself, whatever was said. Her husband is all in all to her. What outsiders say or think would be nothing, in her estimation, so long as he was happy.'

No more could then be said, for Hector set up a shout of—

'Here's Terence!'

This caused a diversion, and all eyes were eagerly fastened upon the pair who now advanced.

It was the first time that Mrs. Terence Egremont had visited Cottesmere, and none of the family, save Philip and Lenore, had ever seen her.

She was a fine, well-made woman, with dark, handsome eyes and a profusion of dark hair, which grew low down upon her forehead, and gave a somewhat Jewish character to her rather pronounced type of features. Her dress and bonnet were creamy white, rather elaborately trimmed with costly lace, but there was nothing out of taste in her costume.

She was very well received by the party assembled there, and Terence looked on, evidently

gratified and grateful. His wife's manners were good, and she went through the trying ordeal of introduction with an ease and self-possession hardly to be expected of anyone so situated. Lenore's tact covered all awkward pauses, and very quickly conversation flowed as readily and easily as it had done before.

Tea was carried out, and under its social influence the party waxed merry. Duff's prospects were discussed with zest, and he made it plain to all how well worth waiting for he considered this chance to be.

Terence looked gratified, and, leaning over to his brother, said in a low voice:

'Duff, old fellow, I am more glad than I can say about all this; but, all the same, I don't consider myself absolved from making restitution for my dishonesty in past days. Julia tells me it was real dishonesty, and I believe she is right. No, don't interrupt me. We have talked it over, my wife and I, and the sum which you gave up to pay my debts four years ago is going to be paid in to your account at your bankers, with interest and compound interest. When that is done, I shall feel that my last debt is paid, and that what we have is ours to enjoy.'

'Nonsense, Terence!' cried Duff quickly. 'I

have enough, and more than enough, for all I want. I will not allow you to do any such thing.'

'Yes, you will, Duff,' returned Terence, 'I am sure you will, when I tell you that in no other way can I ever feel to rid myself of a very heavy burden of shame and self-reproach. Of course, it is a very poor kind of restitution, I am quite aware of that, made at a time when it costs me so little, whilst your sacrifice cost you so much; but it is the only one that I can make, and I am sure you will not deny my right to do what I purpose, nor refuse to allow me to shift this burden, which fills me with disgust at myself every time I think of it.'

'Well, if you put it in that way, I suppose I must,' said Duff reluctantly. 'But I don't half like it, and I have plenty without. I don't need it one bit.'

But Terence insisted; and when Philip heard, he certainly approved the plan, as being in accordance with his own ideas of justice, and a better understanding was established between the brothers on the eve of their separation, than had ever existed before. Brighter days seemed dawning for all.

CHAPTER XL

THE LAST.

IT was a bright day in June, the second anniversary of Philip and Lenore's wedding-day.

Lenore herself, hardly one whit changed by the two years of married life that had passed over her head, stood at her husband's study window, looking out with a thoughtful smile upon the beautiful scene without. Two years had worked great transformation in the gardens of Cottesmere (now no longer called Farm). Philip's ideals of past days had in the main been realised, and the place was deservedly called the most charming and picturesque in the county, and would become increasingly so with each year's growth of shrub and creeper and tree.

'It is lovely, very lovely,' said Lenore softly to herself, 'and such a happy, happy home!'

Her face had lost nothing of its former sweet serenity, which had only deepened with time, and had gained an added charm from the more tender curves of the firm lips and the steadfast gentleness

of the dark eyes. If Lenore had been beautiful in past days, she was far more beautiful now.

Slowly and dreamily she moved from the window, crossed the slippery parquetry work which now made the flooring of the square hall, and mounted the fine old oak staircase.

She traversed one long passage, and, opening a door at the end, entered a large, low, wainscotted room, into which a flood of summer sunshine was streaming through a great oriel window.

Her entrance was greeted by a crow of delight from a six-months-old baby, who was sitting upon the lap of a grave, pale-faced woman in a black dress and white apron and cap.

Lenore paused at the door, and gazed at her child with a mother's peculiarly proud, sweet smile.

'Is he not a bonny boy, Campbell?'

'Ay, ma'am, indeed he is that—the best boy in the world!' and Campbell's face softened wonderfully, and she gazed down into the laughing, rosy face of Lenore's child.

The young mother took her boy from his nurse's arms, and sat down upon the low, wide-cushioned window-seat to fondle and play with him.

'Isn't he growing like his father, Campbell? I think he will be his very image, don't you?'

'Ay, ma'am, he is like his father and like you too. I can't say which he will take after most.'

'Oh, it must be after Philip! I have made up my mind to that. If ever he has a little sister, she may be like me if she chooses, but my boy is to grow up like Philip. I have quite decided that, baby,' she said, pressing her lips upon the child's round shoulder and speaking half earnestly, half playfully. 'Baby, do you hear? You are to grow up just like your father—like him in body and like him in mind—brave and good and tender and true—a noble, unselfish, God-fearing man. Oh, baby, baby, you do not know yet what a happy boy you are, to have for your father the very best man in all the world!'

Sudden tears sprang to Campbell's eyes as she caught the sound of these murmured phrases.

'Eh, ma'am,' she said, drawing a long breath, 'you speak the truth—the bairn does not know how much he has to be thankful for—a good father and a good mother. Ah, dearie me, if my poor dear mistress could have but used the words you have just spoken! Poor lad, his father's sins were his ruin. He took after his father, and broke his mother's heart, and died in misery and disgrace. Oh, my poor mistress! my poor mistress!'

'Her troubles are over now, Campbell,' said Lenore gently. 'She is at rest, and God's mercy is very great: can we not hope and trust that mother and son are together at last and at peace?

His hand seemed heavy upon her in this life. Surely we can trust that His love will make amends a thousand fold in the next.'

'Yes, yes,' answered Campbell, checking her tears. 'I do believe it. I am foolish to weep for her, when she is at peace. But when I see you with your child, so full of hope and joy, it brings back the time when she had a child to love and fondle, yet could only fear and shrink from the future. She divined but too well that his end would be shame and disgrace, hers misery and despair; you can look into the future without misgiving, your heart is full of hope and confidence.'

'Yes, Campbell,' answered Lenore with shining eyes, 'I have hope and confidence in the power of a mother's ceaseless prayers, and in the influence and example of a father such as God has given to my boy.'

'God grant that he may grow up like his father!' said Campbell earnestly; and Lenore uttered a quiet 'Amen.'

She was alone for a while with her child, this sweet summer's afternoon; but she was not alone long, for soon a light footfall sounded without, the door opened, and somebody looked in.

'Dora!' cried Lenore in joyful surprise.

'I am back, you see, Lenore. Gordon and I have both seen enough of London gaieties for one

season, and I said I must be back to see you on your wedding-day and wish you joy. Almost a superfluous wish, I think. And the boy—how he has grown, and what a sweet child he is! Baby, come to me. Isn't he just like Philip when he laughs? Aren't you proud of him, Lenore?'

Lenore's smile was sufficient answer. She was eager to hear news of others.

'How is Gordon? Is his lameness quite gone?'

'All but; he never limps unless he is tired, or from habit; and his stick is more for ornament than use, I tell him. We are going abroad next month, to some German baths that have been recommended, and then Gordon says he means to come back and shoot over the Scotch moors with the best of them.'

'I hope he may,' answered Lenore, smiling. 'And you are still quite happy, Dora?'

'Oh, yes,' she answered quickly, adding, after a moment's pause, 'I do not mean that those fits of depression and gloom have quite gone. They come over him every now and again, and at times the old doubts and darkness seem to close round him. But it is not often so, and the light comes back very quickly now, and I know so well how to soothe and cheer him that I do not grow depressed myself. It has been a long, hard battle, Lenore.

It was not as I expected, one victory once and for all ; but, oh, it has been worth the fighting. It has made him such a far nobler, stronger man than ever he could have been without. Sometimes his simple, manly faith puts mine to shame now, and makes me think of Philip. Yes, we are very happy, Lenore.'

Lenore's answer was another smile. After a brief pause she spoke again :

'And now tell me some more. Tell me about Terence and Julia. Have they made their town house as pretty as their country one ?'

'Quite, I think. Julia is really very clever and nice. She is a capital hostess, and they have such a nice set of friends, and give most charming little parties. Terence is just his old, merry, fascinating self, only more manly and unselfish and thoughtful ; and their little Lenore is the very sweetest, loveliest child I have ever seen, not even excepting this bonny boy, if you will pardon me for saying so.'

'Well, I suppose I must allow Terence's daughter to have more beauty even than Philip's son,' answered Lenore laughing. 'Tell me about the mite. Can she walk and talk ?'

'Oh, yes ; she trots about the house and prattles and laughs the whole day long. It is so pretty to see Terence with her. He used never to care for children ; but he simply idolises his little girl, and

would spoil her dreadfully if Julia would let him, but she can adore the child without over-indulging her. I don't think Terence and Julia did need any link to bind them more closely to one another; but, if they did, I am sure they would find it in their sweet little daughter, Lenore.'

'That is all very delightful; we shall be pleased to have them back when the season is over. We have missed our visitors from Langdale and Heron's Nest all these weeks.'

'You do not look as if you had pined in solitude,' returned Dora, laughing. 'And now tell me, what news from Australia?'

'Very good indeed! The farm is more thriving than ever, and Duff is quite a great man out there by this time. Marjory is to be married in a few months, and Jack has some naval appointment there which will give him much more time ashore than before. Madeline will divide her time between the farm and Marjory's little home, according to circumstances; and Archie is to go out to Duff very soon, as it is thought he will learn the business best upon the spot, now that his school-days are over, and he is still bent upon a farming life in the Colonies. Most likely Duff will get married before very long, and, in any case, there will be a comfortable home for the boy to go to, and a warm welcome awaiting him.'

'And quite a colony of relatives out there. Well, I hope he will get on as well as Hector seems likely to do.'

'Yes; is he not coming out well? There seems no doubt as to his passing his examination brilliantly, and getting his Indian Civil Service berth. How well all the boys have done, Dora! How wonderfully all our paths have opened out before us!'

Dora's visit was not a long one; she had only driven over for a brief glimpse at Lenore upon her wedding-day. When she had departed, the young wife walked quietly down the terrace steps and across the sweep of velvet lawn, towards the wooded belt that hid the shining Mere from sight, for it was there she was to meet Philip when the sun began to decline.

She heard his horse's steps approaching with a dull thud over the turf, before she caught sight of him. She heard him dismount and give some order to the groom, and then there was the sound of retiring horse-hoofs upon the turf.

Philip had been unavoidably absent since the previous morning, on business connected with Hector's examination, and had been unable to pass his wedding-day with his wife, but had promised to be at home by six o'clock and to meet her beside the Mere.

His steps came crashing through the under-

wood, and Lenore advanced to meet him with outstretched hands.

'Philip!'

'Lenore! My wife!'

It was a very quiet and a very loving meeting. They had been separated only for thirty-six hours, yet there was as much of welcoming love on either side as if the hours had been weeks or months. Some love dwindles and cools with time, but the love which alone is worth the name, increases in fervour and in volume as the days pass by, and knows no change save that of growth. Such a love was that of Philip and Lenore.

Such news as there was on either side was told and discussed. Every trivial detail of home life was sweetened and sanctified by the perfect unanimity of soul that existed between the two who ruled there.

'You must come in now, Philip. You must have something to eat, and you must see baby. He is so sweet!'

'Like his mother.'

'Like his father—they all say that.'

He put his arm round her shoulder as they walked towards the house.

'Our wedding-day, Lenore.'

'Yes, husband.'

She took his hand and kissed it, that was all.

They needed no great demonstration to tell their love.

'We have been very happy together.'

'Yes, Philip.'

'And our life looks very bright before us.'

'Yes, Philip.'

'God has been very good to us, Lenore; and even if the future should bring trials and cares of which we do not dream now, we can trust Him through them all, knowing that the everlasting arms will never be withdrawn from us.'

THE END.

LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

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